

The Industry Matters

By Maya Reynolds

The past three months have been good ones for writers of erotic romance. Everywhere we went there was chatter about the growing interest in and acceptance of erotic romance.

This buzz reached critical mass on April 6 with an Associated Press story that was widely reported and reprinted. Entitled “Erotica Finds Home in Mainstream Publishing,” the story quotes Beth Bingham, a buyer at Borders Group, saying that they started carrying erotica and erotic romances in 2004. “It came from customer interest . . . Customers would come in and specifically ask for it. It’s now a growth category in our romance department.”

Indeed. Since 2000, erotic romance has exploded onto the public consciousness, beginning with Ellora’s Cave (www.ellorascave.com) and spreading online to dozens of other e-publishers like Red Sage, Loose Id, and Liquid Silver. The movement became an epidemic when traditional print publishers got into the act. Kensington started its second erotic romance line in January while Avon Red and Harlequin Spice will debut in the next two months.

Agent Kirsten Nelson talked about erotic romance in her Pub Rants blog of April 10 (<http://pubrants.blogspot.com/>). Kirsten said, “For all you writers out there, the word on the RH street is erotica and more erotica. Hot, hot, hot. In more ways than one. . . If you write

for Ellora’s Cave or some of the other erotica e-publishers, now is probably the time to concoct bigger stories, polish off that tightly written erotic novella, land an agent, and formally make the leap if that is of interest to you. You won’t find better market timing for this genre.”



A milestone was reached earlier this month. Since 2003, Ellora’s Cave has been the only electronic publisher with high enough sales figures to satisfy RWA’s criteria to be a “recognized publisher.” That designation is reserved for: “a royalty-

paying publishing house that (1) does not offer subsidy or vanity contracts to RWA members, (2) has been releasing books on a regular basis via national distribution for a minimum of one year, and (3) has sold a minimum of 1,500 hardcover or trade paperback copies or 5,000 copies in any other format, including print on demand, of a single Romantic Fiction book or novella or collection of novellas in book form.

On April 7, Gail Northman of Triskelion Publishing, another e-publisher, announced on the EPIC (Electronically Published Internet Connection) loop that her company has now received RWA “recognized publisher status.”

Sure, RWA’s criteria are weighted against e-publishers, but they’re weighted against publishers of mass market paperbacks like Dorchester as well. Note that #3 requires “a minimum of 1,500 hardcover or

trade paperback copies or 5,000 copies in any other format.” That means that an e-publisher or a publisher of mass market paperbacks has a steeper slope to climb to become “recognized.”

Instead of joining the voices complaining about RWA’s retro stance, let’s look at the directions in which the wider world of publishing is moving.

The public is very familiar with novels that become movies and movies that spawn novels. Tie-ins between books and films date back to 1919 when film pioneer D.W. Griffith first adapted Thomas Burke’s collection of stories, “Limehouse Nights,” into his production of “Broken Blossoms.” Since that time, the film and publishing industries have developed a symbiotic relationship where each benefits from the success of the other.

Random House (a division of Bertelsmann AG) has been a visionary in terms of looking toward other cross-media partnerships, specifically, audiobooks. Since May, 2000, RH has had a strategic alliance with Audible, Inc. That initia-

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tive established “the first-ever imprint to produce spoken word content specifically for digital distribution.” (Audible press release) Random House also invested in Audible, and the RH CEO took a seat on Audible’s Board of Directors.

Random House’s competitors soon followed suit. Holtzbrinck (which owns St. Martin’s Press and Tor) became part of another joint venture with Audible.

Pearson Education (which, with Penguin, is another division of Pearson) agreed to a strategic alliance with Audible to provide audio study guides to be downloaded to the iPods and Mp3 players carried by students.

In June, 2005, Harlequin signed an exclusive marketing and content licensing agreement with Audible to create digitally distributed audiobooks.

Random House has now taken another step down the path of cross-media partnerships; this time, with satellite radio. Beginning February, 2006, XM Satellite Radio has been broadcasting the Random House Hour on its Sonic Theater channel. According to Publishers Marketplace, “Each episode will air two 30-minute readings from different books; the books will be read in their entirety over a succession of episodes.” As this column is being written in April, they’re featuring Christopher Reich’s “The Devil’s Banker” and Tess Gerritsen’s “The Apprentice.”

Meanwhile, Dorchester Publishing is accelerating its efforts to capture a larger share of the younger market. They recently announced two new initiatives. According to the “Romance Writer’s Report,” Dorchester is planning a new line for 2007. These romances will each feature a heroine aged 18 to 25 stolen from her normal life into an alternate universe “that challenges all she thought she knew.” The books will sport covers resembling the popular manga graphic novels.

The April 13th edition of Publishers Weekly reported that Dorchester has also partnered with Cupid.com, an online dating service. Starting in May, the two companies will host “speed dating” events in five American cities for 20- to 30-year-olds. These events will include free giveaways of Dorchester books.

Dorchester Editorial Director Alicia Condon was frank about her goals: “Our purpose in forming this partnership with Cupid.com is three-fold . . . First and foremost, it’s a wonderful opportunity for us to participate in helping people make real-life connections. Second, we hope to re-educate readers about the romance genre . . . And last but not least, it’s a chance for us to foster reading among those in an age bracket that publishers have long had trouble reaching.”

Pay attention to that last sentence: “An age bracket that publishers have long had trouble reaching.”

Dorchester is not targeting Baby Boomers or Gen X with these projects. They’re focusing on Gen Y.

The Generation Y consumers were born between 1980 and 2001, and

are also known as the Millennials or the Net Generation. They are the last children born in the twentieth century, but the first children to grow up in a digital world dominated by the Internet. Their entertainment choices are much broader and more diverse than any previous generation’s. They’ve grown up with access to PCs, cell phones, digital cameras, Instant Messaging, DVDs, Mp3s, Tivo, PlayStation and MySpace. They are more at home in front of a laptop than they are with a library book.

The publishing industry has already recognized that it will need to adapt in order to appeal to this new generation of readers. These young people like computer graphics, colorful manga, and interactive social



networking opportunities like MySpace. Above all, they demand immediate and group access to whatever they are doing: sharing music, watching a film, playing a videogame.

Perhaps the Annenberg Center for Communication had the Gen Y readers in mind when it started a new project, which it calls The Institute for the Future of the Book (<http://www.futureofthebook.org/>).

The Institute, under the auspices of the University of Southern California and funded by the MacArthur and Mellon Foundations, is engag-

ing in some very ambitious research. Their latest initiative, called Sophie, is a plan to reinvent the book.

Sophie is a social engineering experiment that goes far beyond an electronic book read on a computer screen. Sophie is an attempt to create documents that can live and breathe on the Internet and where readers can interact with each other and with the author. Publishers' Marketplace described the project this way: Sophie "will make it easier to create electronic books that incorporate today's technologies to 'present a reading environment' and 'enable readers and writers to have conversations inside of books.'"

Given such visions, romance writers in general, and RWA in particular, need to think beyond the book as they have known it. The future is closer than we think.



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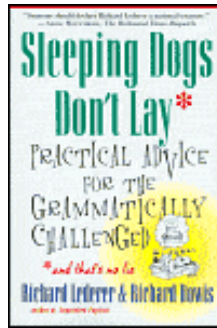
Her "Witch Vampire?" won both the grand prize in the Romance Junkies contest and the RWA "Where the Magic Begins" contest. Berkeley has requested the full manuscript. She also won second place in the JERR/EC contest with her novella, "You've Been A Bad Girl!" Kensington and Ellora's Cave have both requested that manuscript.

Maya writes about publishing, new trends and the writer's life in her blog. You can read it and previous "Industry Matters" articles at

www.mayareynoldswriter.blogspot.com



• Book Review •



Sleeping Dogs Don't Lay: Practical Advice for the Grammatically Challenged

By Richard Lederer and Richard Dowis
St. Martin's Press, 2001 (paperback)
Reviewed by Christina Lynn Whited

Either I must have fallen asleep in English class, or the stress of adult life has finally cleared the slates in my brain, but I don't remember all the particulars of the "Parts of Speech" in the English language.

Sometimes the tongue of my keyboard gets twisted around, and I can't make it straighten out without a little help. Since I don't remember those obscure or complicated names, like "double genitive," I really appreciate a grammar book that lays it out quickly and easily for me, especially if it does so with humor. Enter "Sleeping Dogs Don't Lay* Practical Advice For The Grammatically Challenged *and that's no lie" by Richard Lederer and Richard Dowis.

I found it on the shelves of the local library when I was trying to find out exactly what tense the flashback sequence in my Young Adult/Time Travel should be written in. Past perfect progressive, my keyboard and my thinking were already threatening to rotate at just the sound of it. Although a second book provided the necessary information, Sleeping Dogs gave me the reasoning behind the choice. Anything written in a "perfect" form has already been "perfected," or completed in the past. If it continues to have an impact on the future, it becomes "progressive."

Aha! Now I can look forward to writing flashbacks, a necessary part of any of my novels, which often involve past-life memories, without running back to the grammar books or getting my keyboard tied in knots.

Another aspect of this book that I like is the index. To writers, an index is invaluable, especially when you need to know it NOW. When a needed factoid can't be retrieved without re-reading a quarter of the book, a useable index comes to the rescue. This index is written in clear, everyday language, and has entries such as beside/besides and who/whom. To me, such grammatical errors stick out like calloused thumbs when I am reading the works of others but, when writing my own works, often slide like silk through smooth fingers. Lederer and Dowis make it easy to track such problems in anyone's work, including my own.

I especially enjoy their list of "fumblerules," which they collected over almost fifty years. I would like to share some of these rules that may be of particular interest to writers of romance.

- #3 A writer must be sure to avoid using sexist pronouns in his writing.
- #11 A writer must not shift your point of view.
- #26 Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!
- #41 And don't start sentences with conjunctions.
- #46 Be more or less specific.
- #49 Profanity sucks.

This is a very good, easy to use grammar book for those of us who find ourselves occasionally, or perhaps daily, "grammatically challenged."

Christina Lynn Whited is a channel, healer and a teacher of metaphysics. As a non-denominational minister, she performs weddings and baptisms. She writes paranormal romance, YA and non-fiction. Her work can be seen at <http://www.circleofintention.com>. This article originally appeared in the April 2006 issue of The Heartline Herald, newsletter of the New Jersey Romance Writers.

