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THE AUTHORS GUILD BULLETIN

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The Authors Guild, the oldest and largest association of published authors in the United States, works to protect and promote the professional interests of its members. The Guild's forerunner, The Authors League of America, was founded in 1912. The *Bulletin* was first published in 1912 as *The Authors League Newsletter*.

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“OVERHEARD”

“Now, I’m not as young as I used to be. And I’ve had my share of getting beaten up. I’m tempted, like Candide, to find a private garden to cultivate. But I may still have a little fight left, and I hope you all do, too.”

—Salman Rushdie, Authors Guild Gala, Gotham Hall, New York, April 7, 2025.

SHORT TAKES

* NEW SUPPORT FOR SMALL PRESSES

Independent presses were hit hard when Small Press Distribution unexpectedly closed in March 2024. SPD distributed books for about 400 presses. The Community of Literary Magazines and Presses stepped in to guide publishers through the process of finding new distributors, recovering stock from warehouses, and recouping financial losses.

All claims against SPD in the California court system were consolidated in October. *Publishers Weekly* reports that court filings revealed more details about the financial difficulties leading to SPD's closure. The nonprofit, founded in 1969 in Berkeley, CA, struggled during the pandemic, despite loans from the Paycheck Protection Program and Small Business Administration. Court filings showed that the SBA loan had not been repaid, \$316,000 was owed to publishers and \$26,000 to vendors, and the previous executive director had filed a claim for \$104,000 in unpaid compensation. A resolution is expected later this year, but claimants are not optimistic about receiving funds.

Last summer, the Poetry Foundation provided \$150,000 in aid to 31 small poetry presses affected by the change. Now, CLMP and the Mellon Foundation are stepping in with \$250,000 in grants through the new Small Press Future Fund. The fund will provide publishers with \$5,000, \$10,000,

and \$15,000 grants to aid in the transition to new distributors.

* NEW CRIME IMPRINT AT GROVE ATLANTIC

Grove Atlantic has launched Atlantic Crime, a new crime fiction imprint led by senior editor Joe Brosnan. The imprint plans to publish 18–24 titles annually, featuring both established authors and new voices, with its first releases scheduled for fall 2025.

* FABER ENTERS U.S. MARKET

In a significant move for the U.K. publishing scene, Faber has expanded into the United States market with Faber U.S., realizing plans that were first discussed a decade ago.

* DA CAPO PRESS RETURNS

Grand Central Publishing has revived the former Da Capo Press as a new music imprint called Da Capo, led by Brant Rumble and Ben Schafer, with plans to release 12 books annually.

* AUTHORS EQUITY PUBLISHES FIRST BOOKS

A newcomer to the industry, Authors Equity, has made waves with its innovative profit-share

model for authors. The publisher successfully launched with Seth Godin's *This is Strategy* and Joseph Nguyen's *Don't Believe Everything You Think*, offering an alternative to traditional advance payments.

* GHOSTWRITING EARNINGS REPORT

A recent survey by the American Society of Journalists and Authors and Gotham Ghostwriters revealed that one-third of ghostwriters earn over \$100,000 annually from ghostwriting books, highlighting the robust market for professional writing services.

* PUBLISHERS NAVIGATE AI RIGHTS

Major publishers are taking different approaches to AI and book rights. Penguin Random House has taken a strong stance against allowing its books to be used for AI model training, adding protective language to all copyright pages. In a contrasting move that sparked mixed reactions from authors and agents, HarperCollins became the first major publisher to license select nonfiction books for AI training, partnering with Microsoft and offering authors \$2,500 per title for a three-year period to use their nonfiction works, with authors maintaining the choice to participate.

* WRITERS SUPPORTING LA

In January, a group of children's book authors and illustrators launched Kidlit for Los Angeles, an auction to support wildfire relief efforts. The auction raised almost \$172,500 for four organizations. Items on the block included signed books, manuscript critiques, original artwork, gift certificates to bookstores, school visits, and even a one-week writing residency.

A group of adult authors and readers created Authors4LA, which held an auction for the American Red Cross's relief efforts in LA that raised more than \$42,800. An effort by a former preschool teacher, Carmela Beyer, raised more than \$43,000 to provide books to displaced children in the Altadena neighborhood and to help rebuild the libraries at five destroyed elementary schools.

Pre-existing emergency funds are helping writers in Los Angeles, including our sister organization, the Authors League Fund, and PEN America's U.S. Writers Aid Initiative. The Book Industry Charitable Foundation is providing significant support to booksellers, with direct aid to stores as well as employees. Countless individual writers and writing groups have also shared resource lists and donated to non-profits and fundraisers.

* BOOKSHOP TURNS FIVE

Bookshop.org celebrates its fifth anniversary as an online book marketplace supporting independent booksellers. Bookshop is a B Corp that launched in 2020 to provide an alternative to Amazon and other large retailers. More than 80 percent of its profits are distributed to independent bookstores. Readers can select specific stores to support or have their payments enter a pool of money distributed

to retailers. Bookshop is marking the anniversary by launching an e-book platform and app for readers. The platform will begin with more than a million e-book options, with more to come later in the year.

* NYPL STUDY ON LIBRARIES & WELL- BEING

The New York Public Library commissioned a study on "Libraries & Well-Being," with a report published in November 2024. Teams from NYPL and the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center surveyed patrons and found 92 percent of respondents reported feeling "calm/peaceful" after visiting the library. A strong majority of respondents found the library positively affected their ability to cope with the world, learn new things, and support personal growth.

The study used psychology's PERMA model—examining positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment—and found that libraries provide a unique environment that supports all five areas.

The numbers were notably higher for respondents living in lower-income ZIP codes, where, for example, 73 percent reported that library use encouraged a feeling that there are people in their lives who care about them, compared to 48 percent in higher-income ZIP codes.

LitHub summarized the study aptly: "If you're feeling unmotivated and unconnected, the library has now been scientifically proven to improve your well-being, the perfect antidote to all the push alerts and doomscrolling that's bringing you down." **AG**

Stay Current on Guild News

Don't miss industry news, updates on our advocacy efforts, and valuable resources for your writing business.

- * Follow us on X (formerly Twitter):
x.com/authorsguild
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facebook.com/authorsguild
- * Join us on Bluesky:
bsky.app/profile/authorsguild.bsky.social
- * We're also on Instagram:
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To ensure that your Authors Guild email messages always make it to your inbox, add president@authorsguild.org and staff@authorsguild.org to your email address book.

If you are a Gmail user, simply move one of our emails from your promotions tab to your primary tab.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

To my native Southern ears, the words “book banning” evoke a flood of historical facts and memories. Those words take me back to my childhood in the Jim Crow South, when resistance to the forces of integration led to books being labeled as dangerous and the purging of certain books from libraries. As the historian C. Vann Woodward observed about this time in our history, “Politicians who had once spoken for moderation began to vie with each other in defiance of the government.” I’m also reminded of my high school years in the 1970s when a teacher suggested taking away my copy of Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* because based on its cover—printed with the words “one of the most famous and daring novels of the twentieth century”—it did not seem like a book that would be giving me the “right” ideas. That threat only made me more defiant and led me to other books the teacher deemed dangerous.

University of Mississippi professor James Silver wrote a book called *Mississippi: The Closed Society* about the ways my home state sought to isolate itself from ideas outside its borders. Published in the wake of the murders of three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964, the book led to threats on Silver’s life and forced him to leave the university.

Today as you enter one of the gates to the campus of the University of Mississippi, there is a body of water named “Silver Pond” dedicated to James Silver’s memory. It is a physical reminder of the

way academic freedom can be encroached upon. Now that I teach at the university—which is also my undergraduate alma mater—I think of Silver each day as I pass that pond, since it reminds me of how the past lives in close proximity to the present. The issues Silver confronted—censorship, attacks on academic freedom, and book bans—are still very much with us. And they are issues that are important to me as I assume the presidency of the Authors Guild.

As a university professor, I see what I do as educating the next generation of writers and scholars. Not every one of my students will become a writer or academic, but I like to think that when I talk with students about my work, they will be inspired to pursue a life of the mind in whatever path they choose in the future. Yet I don’t see what I do as changing hearts and minds. All I ask of those who enter the doors of my classroom is to think for themselves and recognize the ways the past lives on in the present.

As president of the Authors Guild, I ask you to do the same. It is almost a cliché to say that we live in perilous times, but if we use history as a guide, maybe we can find a way through a period in our history that increasingly reminds me of my formative years in the American South. I have come to realize that by setting the South apart and marginalizing it as a part of the American psyche, we as a society have for too long neglected the power and magnetism of the region’s cultural and political

reach. My work as a writer has explored the silences of the Southern past and how they affect us all as Americans. I see my work as president of the Authors Guild as an extension of that work.

Please know that I stand against book bans and the forces of the past that seem to be hovering over our lives as writers and artists. I want the Guild to protect the work of all writers who seek to tell the truth. Of course, I am especially concerned about our members who are university professors, since they have been labeled as “enemies,” much like James Silver was in 1964. I also support the Guild’s advocacy work on artificial intelligence and protecting the ability of writers to make a living from their work. Whether you are self-published or by a university press or a commercial press, I firmly believe in protecting your work.

In her masterful memoir *Men We Reaped*, my fellow Mississippian Jesmyn Ward observed that “Life is a hurricane, and we board up to save what we can and bow low to the earth to crouch in that small space above the dirt where the wind will not reach.” As writers, academics, and creative people today, we are in the middle of a hurricane. Moving forward, the Authors Guild must do whatever it can to advocate for the rights of writers to navigate what will be tough winds and waters ahead. And I stand firmly with the Guild in its work to protect the integrity of writers and the written word.

—W. Ralph Eubanks

FROM THE HOME OFFICE



Dear Members,
As we approach the midpoint of 2025, the Authors Guild is now 16,000 members strong and counting, having more than doubled in size in the last decade. The more voices we represent, the louder we are and the more impact we have. Through your membership, you support and protect the vitality and diversity of our august profession.

Your support has allowed us to undertake extraordinary work this year in defense of free speech and the fundamental rights to read, write, and publish without censorship or interference. The assault on books has reached alarming proportions across the country, with coordinated campaigns targeting works that represent diverse voices and experiences. We are plaintiffs in seven federal lawsuits challenging unconstitutional state laws and actions that require book censorship in schools and libraries around the country. In all the cases in which there have been court decisions thus far, we have received very favorable decisions. Our legal victories in Texas, Arkansas, Iowa,

and Colorado enjoined book-banning laws and initiatives from taking effect. The written decisions each contained strong language that will serve as excellent precedent in future cases in defense of First Amendment rights. We continue to press forward with similar challenges in Idaho and Florida, where lawmakers have enacted particularly egregious restrictions on access to literature.

Even as we celebrate these important victories, we face new and troubling threats to free expression emanating directly from the Executive Branch. In response, the Authors Guild has launched a comprehensive Censorship Tracker on our website, documenting the alarming rise in First Amendment violations across the country. This resource tracks not just book bans but also instances where journalists are threatened for doing their job, where scholars' and authors' promised funding for the arts and humanities was cut and redirected, and where scholars and authors are intimidated or threatened with deportation for expressing their views.

In one of our most significant recent actions, the Authors Guild filed a class action lawsuit against the National Endowment for the Humanities over the abrupt termination of millions of dollars in committed grants. This unprecedented action by the administration has left countless scholars and creators stranded mid-project after forgoing other employment opportunities to pursue their NEH-funded work. Our lawsuit seeks to restore these

vital grants and affirm the constitutional principle that the executive branch cannot override congressional appropriations based on political preference, nor can it cancel grants that have been promised and relied upon.

We are also deeply concerned by the unprecedented firing of Register of Copyrights Shira Perlmutter, a respected expert who has guided the Copyright Office with impartiality through a period of rapid technological change. This firing took place two days after the administration abruptly terminated the Librarian of Congress (to whom the Register reports) a year and a half before her term was up, reportedly for having events around diverse books and books in the Library's collections that are inappropriate for children (even though the Library is not a lending library and only researchers and Congress can access the collections). The Library and the Copyright Office are not executive agencies; they are part of the Legislative Branch of government. These actions represent an unprecedented, dangerous usurpation of the Legislative Branch's authority by the Executive Branch. The Guild submitted a petition to Congress, signed by more than 6,500 individuals and organizations, objecting to the overreach and asking Congress to reinstate Register Perlmutter.

On the AI front, we are finally nearing completion of discovery in our lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft. All of the book and news cases against Open AI and Microsoft have now been joined in

the New York court where we filed. We are also closely monitoring and advising on the author cases in California against Meta and Anthropic, which are moving more quickly.

This winter, the Guild launched a certification process to designate when a book's text has been written without AI (other than a de minimis amount using apps such as grammar and spell check). It allows books that meet this criterion to use the "Human Authored" logo, helping readers identify authentic creative works. Additionally, we've partnered with Created by Humans to provide authors a secure platform for licensing their work to AI companies on fair terms. There has not been much federal legislative activity on AI this Congress, but the TRAIN Act, which would require AI companies to disclose whether authors' works were used in training datasets, has been reintroduced, and we endorsed it again. We also submitted comprehensive comments to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy this March, advocating for strong copyright protections in the national AI Action Plan.

As we face these unprecedented challenges, I am reminded of the power of our collective voice. The Authors Guild has never been stronger or more focused on its mission to protect the rights and livelihoods of writers. Your continued support makes this vital work possible.

As always, you can reach me at Mary@authorsguild.org.

—Mary Rasenberger
CEO

Give to the Authors Guild Foundation

If you love literature, please help us support the talented, dedicated authors who create it. The Authors Guild Foundation is one of the groups dedicated to empowering all U.S. authors. We fight for authors' rights and equip them with knowledge of the business to ensure that a rich, diverse body of literature can flourish in the United States.

A donation of any amount is meaningful, and there are creative ways to support the Authors Guild Foundation if you are not in a position to give today.

* **Make a Donation**

Your gift will support our advocacy work on behalf of all authors, our public educational programs, and our efforts to maintain a sustainable publishing ecosystem at a time when authors' rights, copyrights, free expression, and creative content are being challenged on so many fronts, and few authors are able to support their families anymore on writing alone. To donate now, go to authorsguild.org/donate. The Authors Guild Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and donations are fully tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

For information about giving from a donor-advised fund, donating stocks, and other forms of philanthropy, please send an email to foundation@authorsguildfoundation.org.

* **Join the Authors Guild Foundation Giving Society**

The AGF Giving Society was created to give appropriate recognition to those special friends who contribute at the highest levels to the Foundation. The importance of annual giving is critical to the mission and ongoing operations of the Authors Guild. Such support advances our ability to advocate for writers, protect creative freedom, and promote a

robust and diverse literary culture in America. To join today or to learn more about the benefits of AGF Giving Society membership, visit authorsguild.org/foundation/giving-society.

* **Make a Monthly Gift**

To sustain our ongoing efforts, when making a donation at authorsguild.org/donate, select "Recurring" to automatically renew your gift on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis with an end date of your choosing. Pledge a monthly gift today.

* **Join the Authors Legacy Society**

Be remembered as a champion of literature by joining the Authors Legacy Society. Whether it is naming the Authors Guild Foundation as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or gifting other liquid or nonliquid assets, we encourage you to consult with your financial advisor to discuss the options. For more information on the Authors Legacy Society, call **212.594.7931** or visit authorsguild.org/foundation/authors-legacy-society.

* **Bequeath a Copyright**

Authors can leave the copyrights to their works to the Authors Guild Foundation, allowing us to manage all or part of your literary estate. We actively seek to republish and license film rights to the works we manage, so your literary legacy can live on while benefiting our charitable work. Learn more about the Authors Legacy Society Estate Management program at authorsguild.org/foundation/estate-management.

* **Join Our Newsletter**

Stay updated on industry news and advocacy efforts by receiving the Authors Guild Newsletter via email. Subscribe online at authorsguild.org/newsletter.

GUILD COUNCIL ADOPTS NEW FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE: “NO WORD SHOULD BE BANNED”

As government agencies, educational institutions, and grant-making bodies increasingly implement language restrictions and word bans across multiple sectors, the Authors Guild Council has voted unanimously to formalize its opposition to this troubling trend. In March 2025, the Council added a new core principle to our organizational mission, affirming writers’ fundamental right to unrestricted vocabulary in the face of growing censorship pressures that threaten both creative expression and factual reporting. We believe that no word should be banned.

Words are the raw materials from which writers build their essays, novels, poems, and stories. Writers choose their words carefully, and the freedom to choose the right word is fundamental to good writing and to the freedom of expression that underpins any open society. Sadly, today we are faced with a new and intrusive form of censorship in the form of regulations on and elimination of certain words.

The list of banned words reflects a clear ideological agenda—troublesome enough in and of itself—but it also sweeps so broadly that it would impede ordinary careful expression of a host of ideologically neutral topics. Not only progressive neologisms such as “intersectionality” and “LGBTQ+” but also everyday words such as equity, bias, diversity, prejudice, inclusion, sex, and gender appear on lists of banned words.

Just as a sculptor must be free to choose from marble, bronze, or wood, or a painter to select from oils, acrylics, or watercolors, a writer must be free to choose the right word to convey not only specific assertions, but also subtle connotations, elusive inflections, nuances of emphasis, and hints of implication. Banning words—especially commonly used and wholly inoffensive ones—not only reflects unjustified prejudice as to how a word might be used, but it also biases writing in favor of clumsy prose and artless expression.

The Authors Guild stands for the inclusion of a rich diversity of written words. **AG**

AI LICENSING OPTIONS: WHAT AUTHORS SHOULD KNOW

The fight for authors' rights in the age of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence companies illegally copied authors' books from pirate e-book sites to develop their large language models (LLMs). They did this without obtaining consent from authors or publishers, much less providing them compensation. This means that authors and publishers have no means of controlling the uses of their books for training or in outputs that incorporate their works. That has led to the unrestricted use of LLMs to generate copycat books that mimic or incorporate authors' work. The Authors Guild seeks to move AI companies away from their current reliance on fair use to licensing regimes where rightsholders can say no to the use of their works or to engage in licensing on terms and conditions they believe are fair, including restrictions on output use.

Our Ongoing Fight

For the last two years, the Authors Guild has been fighting the flagrant theft of books and journalism by AI companies on all fronts. We have thus far:

- * **Initiated litigation** against AI companies for infringing authors' copyrights
- * **Lobbied for amendments** to copyright law that would clarify AI training on copyrighted works is not fair use and for AI transparency legislation
- * **Developed the "Human Authored" certification** that authors can use for texts that are human-written
- * **Recommended protective clauses** for authors' book contracts to prevent unauthorized AI use
- * **Collaborated with key stakeholders** including licensing agencies, lawmakers, and publishers to ensure authors' interests are respected in AI licensing

The Reality of AI Development

With hundreds of billions of dollars already invested in generative AI, and governments worldwide working to ensure leadership in AI development, it is clear that we will not stop the further development of generative AI and LLMs. We also know that LLMs need—and will continue to need—high-quality, human-authored, copyrighted books and journalism.

What we can stop, however, is the unlicensed use of copyrighted books and journalism and the subsequent unrestricted use of LLMs to create copycat books. How? By licensing—by enforcing copyright and bringing control over uses back to the rightsholders so that all professional copyrighted works used to train generative AI are licensed and thus controlled. This is true for past use as well as future uses. Unlicensed use needs to be converted to controlled, licensed use.

Understanding AI Licensing

There is naturally some confusion about what licensing would entail, especially as the market develops. A few points to bear in mind:

- * **Licensing enforces copyright.** Licenses come with limitations and restrictions, as well as compensation. Just as your publishing agreements are limited to the rights expressly granted and you can expressly withhold or forbid certain uses, so are AI licenses.
- * **Authors gain choice.** Replacing reliance on fair use with licensing systems gives authors the choice to not license at all. By establishing licensing as the norm, it will be even riskier for AI companies to use the works that authors have chosen not to make available for licensed uses.
- * **Technical solutions exist.** When a work is used to train an LLM, it helps to teach the LLM how to write and provides the LLM with

WHEN AI COMPANIES ARE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN LICENSES FOR COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL, AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS WILL HAVE THE POWER TO DECLINE LICENSING REQUESTS.

the information and expression in the work. LLM owners do have the ability to prevent the LLM from generating outputs that include or compete with a human-authored work.

- * **Authors have diverse interests.** Different authors have different interests when it comes to AI licensing, and we need to respect and support them all. Our surveys show varying preferences: 65 percent of Authors Guild members support a collective licensing system that would pay authors a fee for use of their works in training AI, while 38 percent would be willing to license their work if they could control output use and receive additional compensation for substantial use of their work.
- * **The licensing market is multifaceted.** A work can be licensed without feeding the big LLMs or allowing outputs that use your work. “Training-only” licensing means that the LLM owner must block any uses of your work in outputs.
- * **Specialized licensing options exist.** Authors can separately license rights just for research and reference uses, such as specific Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) uses, where the AI system queries a database in real time.

Your AI Licensing Questions Answered

Authors understandably have many questions about the licensing process. For example, you might want to know whether you're required to participate, how to navigate existing publisher agreements, or what happens if you choose not to license your work at all.

Get the Facts

Our comprehensive FAQ covers everything authors need to know about AI licensing, including:

- * Whether licensing is mandatory
- * What control you retain over your work
- * How licensing interacts with publisher contracts
- * Expected compensation and enforcement

Learn More

Visit authorsguild.org/ai-licensing for our complete guide and FAQ, or contact us at staff@authorsguild.org about licensing assistance.

The Licensing Landscape Today

A great deal of licensing has already occurred—dozens of news organizations as well as some academic book publishers have entered into licensing deals with AI companies. Meanwhile, startups and established licensing organizations are developing collective licensing solutions.

Our goal is to foster a licensing ecosystem where authors remain at the center with the power to authorize and negotiate fair compensation for AI uses. We want to ensure that the terms of licensing deals are fair for authors and that authors are given the tools to determine whether and on what conditions they want to allow use of their works, as well as tools to enforce their rights against those who are using their works without licenses.

Looking Forward

When AI companies are required to obtain licenses for copyrighted material, authors and publishers will have the power to decline licensing requests. And soon they will have tools to detect if any AI models are using their work without licenses and enforce their rights.

The Authors Guild recently announced a partnership with Created by Humans (CbH), a company building a licensing platform that will give authors control over licensing and an opportunity to earn revenue. We have taken a position as an official advisor to make certain that terms are fair for authors.

We will announce further details about our work to steer the path for AI licensing, including partnerships with other platforms aligned with our values that are offering services to assist in moving AI to licensed uses and to enforce rights.

This and any future partnerships are part of a multipronged approach to ensuring authors' rights and the future of human-created literature are protected. We are working on this from all fronts. **AG**

AUTHORS GUILD LAUNCHES “HUMAN AUTHORED” CERTIFICATION

AI-generated books are flooding online marketplaces and increasingly look like—and sometimes even read like—human-authored books. The reader may have no way of knowing if a book they come across is AI-generated or authored by a human. The Authors Guild believes that readers have the right to know if a text was written by AI or a human, and that writers should have the ability to distinguish their work in increasingly AI-saturated markets.

This year, the Authors Guild unveiled “Human Authored”—a first-of-its-kind official certification system that writers and publishers will be able to use in their books and in marketing to indicate if the text of a book was human-written.

The Human Authored logo and name will be registered with the US Patent and Trademark Office and supported by a registration system that will create a verifiable chain of trust between author and reader through a public database where anyone can verify a book’s human origins. The use of the Human Authored mark is restricted to books and other works where the text was written by humans, except for a *de minimis* amount of AI-generated text to accommodate uses of AI-powered grammar and spell-check applications and other minor AI use. Use of AI as a tool, other than to generate text, such as for research or brainstorming, does not disqualify a book, as long as the text was human-written.

The certification process is easy yet robust. Authors simply:

1. Log into the Human Authored portal
2. Submit their book details and verify the information
3. Sign the license agreement, agreeing to use the mark only as permitted
4. Receive a unique, numbered certification mark for use on book covers, spines, or promotional materials

Join the Member Community Forum

An entire community of writers is available at your fingertips! Our robust and active forum connects you with fellow authors discussing craft, publishing, contracts, and everything in between.

Whether you need advice, want to celebrate a success, or have questions about the business of writing, your peers are here to help.

- * **Join the conversation (community.authorsguild.org)** and discover what your fellow authors are talking about. The community is yours to foster!
- * **Manage Your Member Forum Email Preferences.** We know that some of you feel that the daily digests from the forum crowd your email. If you'd like to change your email preferences for the Community or unsubscribe from the morning digest, you can do so by visiting your forum profile and clicking My Settings > Email Preferences.

“The Human Authored initiative isn’t about rejecting technology—it’s about creating transparency, acknowledging the reader’s desire for human connection, and celebrating the uniquely human elements of storytelling,” said Mary Rasenberger, CEO of the Authors Guild. “Authors can still qualify if they use AI as a tool for spell-checking or research, but the certification connotes that the literary expression itself, with the unique human voice that every author brings to their writing, emanated from the human intellect. In a market increasingly filled with AI-generated content, readers deserve to know whether they’re experiencing authentic human creativity.”

Certification has only been available to Guild members and for books by a single author. The program is expanding to include books by multiple authors and books by non-Guild members. To date, over 2,000 titles have been registered.

Guild members who are interested in using the Human Authored certification for their work can go to authorsguild.org/human-authored to get started.

If you have questions (for example, where to place the logo, if books published outside of the U.S. are eligible, and more), explore the frequently asked questions section here: authorsguild.org/human-authored/faq. AG



AGENTS SEEKING AUTHORS

A Q&A with Literary Agents of Change

One of the most frequent requests we receive at the Authors Guild is guidance on finding and working with literary agents. The author-agent relationship is uniquely personal—agents not only champion your work and negotiate your contracts, but they also cushion rejections, celebrate successes, and share their valuable professional networks. While an agent can be instrumental to an author's career, the process of finding representation often feels daunting to many writers.

The Guild offers numerous webinars on crafting effective queries, researching appropriate agents, and nurturing productive professional relationships once you've secured representation. (Check off the "literary agents" box here: authorsguild.org/resources) In this feature, we've brought together a group of literary agents who are actively seeking new clients and building their lists.

The agents featured in this Q&A are current participants in Literary Agents of Change mentorship program. Literary Agents of Change (LAOC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming the publishing industry by cultivating a truly diverse workforce and creating more equitable pathways to literary agenting. Diversity includes socioeconomic class, neurodivergence, disability status, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity, recognizing that these aspects of identity often intersect and compound one another.

Meet Our Agents

Noelle Falcis Math (Transatlantic Agency): Noelle Falcis Math garnered a breadth of experience as a writer and editor before transitioning into agenting. She holds a BA and MFA in English and Creative Writing and has received fellowships or residencies from Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation (VONA), Tinhouse, The Seventh Wave, and The Lemon Tree House. In 2021, she completed the Los Angeles Review of Books' Publishing Workshop and Transatlantic Agency's BIPOC Mentorship Program. In 2023, Noelle

**DON'T WORRY ABOUT
TRENDS IN SUBJECT MATTER.
THE PUBLISHING PROCESS
TAKES YEARS, AND YOU
NEVER KNOW WHAT CAN
HAPPEN BETWEEN STARTING
YOUR DRAFT . . . AND THE
DATE OF PUBLICATION.
—PAULA WEIMAN**

transitioned into an associate literary agent and has been steadily building her list. See her wishlist here: transatlanticagency.com/portfolio/falcis-math-noelle.

Sheyla Knigge (High Line Literary Collective): After years spent sleuthing through the slush piles for colleague Victoria Marini, Sheyla is now building her own bookshelf of clients with stories from children's books to adult projects. The through line you'll find in Sheyla's list are projects she is utterly enamored with from start to finish. When she's not reading, Sheyla can be found in the mountains or in a tattoo shop. There's truly no in between. See her wishlist here: manuscriptwishlist.com/mswl-post/sheyla-knigge, and she also occasionally posts updates on her Instagram feed at instagram.com/sknigge.

Mason Rowlee (DeFiore & Company): Originally from rural Upstate New York, Mason Rowlee holds a BA in English, with a concentration in creative writing and journalism from Fordham College at Rose Hill. He previously worked as an assistant literary scout at Jenny La Plante, Inc., where he developed an eye for the types of literary and upmarket fiction and narrative nonfiction that also appeal to international publishers as well as

film production companies. Mason loves innovative, boundary-pushing literary fiction and nonfiction that amplifies traditionally underrepresented voices in publishing, particularly those by queer authors. See his wishlist here: defiliterary.com/agents/mason-rowlee.

Trinica Sampson-Vera (New Leaf Literary & Media): Trinica Sampson-Vera (they/she) is an associate agent at New Leaf Literary & Media. She is passionate about championing diverse voices and particularly loves speculative fiction, character-driven stories with unique hooks, #OwnVoices stories featuring Caribbean characters/settings, and stories that could best be described as "be gay, do crime." Before joining New Leaf, Trinica worked as an independent editor with Salt and Sage Books and Writing Diversely. See her wishlist here: manuscriptwishlist.com/mswl-post/trinica-sampson-vera.

Vicky Weber (Creative Media Agency): As an associate literary agent at Creative Media Agency, Vicky represents authors including Vikki Patis, Christine Alemshah, Tamara Haque, Annemarie Riley Guertin, Alexandra Hoffman, Julie Lew, Fabiana Muñoz, S.R. Ruiz, C.E. Santiago, and Sierra Yang. Vicky brings a unique background to the publishing industry, having experience as both an author and an educator. See her wishlist here: cmalit.com/vicky-weber.

Paula Weiman (ASH Literary): Paula Weiman (they/them) joined the ASH Literary team in 2023 as an agent after a career in literary scouting and educational publishing. Based in New York and with a background in foreign rights, they bring an international approach to selling their clients' work. Their goal is to help as many children as possible to see their experiences represented on the page for the first time. Their clients include Ali MacLeod, Bev Johnson, Janeen Hayat, Juniper Klein, Kate Porter, Miranda Leiggi, Sonia Sulaiman, and Sophie Cameron. See their wishlist here: manuscriptwishlist.com/mswl-post/paula-weiman.

AG: What drew you to agenting?

NFM: Story as a whole has always been the love of my life, and I've dedicated majority of my life to it—as a reader, as a writer, as an academic and later lecturer, as a cultural narrative practitioner, and now, as a publishing professional. While academia fulfilled many of my literary needs, I found that I desired more interaction beyond the boundaries of the institution, and after the sudden availability of remote work post-Covid, I was presented with an amazing opportunity to explore the industry. Since then, having gained full control of the narratives I enjoy reading, the authors I enjoy working with, and the categories I'd like to grow in, I haven't looked back! Being a literary agent has been such exciting work with so much creative and personal control over how one would like to build, shape, and expand their career.

SK: Originally my plan had been to pursue a career in editorial. It was right after the pandemic and, with everything remote, I thought this was my chance to break into publishing—Spoiler: it was not. After a few months of applying, one of my friends told me her agent was looking for someone to read through her queries. The first book I found was *Where the Dark Stands Still* by A.B. Poranek, and it grew from there. The idea that I get to help make people's dreams come true—to help bring to life books that reach the readers craving escapism the same way I had as a child? It's what keeps me so enamored with this industry.

MR: After working at a few different positions in publishing, I knew I wanted to work as an advocate for authors. I love having a role in each step of the publishing process and helping authors navigate each twist and turn.

TSV: Although I've always wanted to work in publishing, I saw myself on the editorial side of things. But after graduating college, I spent five years working in social services and transitional housing. This gave me a love of advocating (and contracts, believe it or not) that transferred perfectly to agenting!

VW: As a literary agent, I bring a unique background to the publishing industry, having experience as both an author and an educator. My passion for agenting stems from a desire to help

**WRITING TO MARKET
TRENDS MEANS YOU WILL
ALWAYS BE BEHIND THE
CURVE, SO INSTEAD, JUST
DO YOUR BEST TO TELL THE
STORY ONLY YOU CAN TELL.
—TRINICA SAMPSON-VERA**

authors navigate the publishing world, advocate for their work, and connect them with the right opportunities. I enjoy being part of the process that brings compelling stories to readers.

PW: I held roles in several sectors of the publishing industry before becoming an agent. I decided to pivot to agenting because I wanted to be in a position where I could really fight for the books I cared about and do everything in my power to ensure that they reached their readers on a large scale. The creative relationship between an agent and an author is very special, and I'm honored that my clients have trusted me to help them achieve their artistic vision.

AG: Which kinds of books are you most excited to represent?

NFM: I'm looking for projects that uplift essential voices from the margins and teach us how to better be human. I am eager to work with and prioritize authors of marginalized identities, and am particularly drawn to stories from Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander and Oceanic, and Indigenous perspectives. For fiction, I'm looking for literary, upmarket, and (especially) speculative fiction, including magical realism, fantasy, and science fiction. For nonfiction, I'm looking for projects that explore the intersections of the personal, the political, and the cultural.

TRUST, TRANSPARENCY, AND A SHARED COMMITMENT TO THE AUTHOR'S CAREER ARE KEY ELEMENTS OF A STRONG PARTNERSHIP. —VICKY WEBER

SK: Despite the current challenges facing the market, I am still wholeheartedly searching for middle grade. Particularly those stories featuring diverse characters. With a middle-grade reader of my own here at home, I really want her to be able to recognize herself in the pages. Outside of that, I really love stories with a romantic core, those that have a speculative or magical element. I'm really excited to find those stories that feel the same to my heart but perhaps a little fresher for the current market, if that makes sense.

MR: I'm interested in literary fiction, upmarket fiction, and narrative nonfiction, especially works that are written by and about queer people. I love anything with a unique concept, experimental writing, or a distinct perspective I haven't seen before.

TSV: I represent middle grade through adult, and I particularly love romance and speculative fiction (from cozy to high fantasy to grounded sci-fi to anything that blends genres). Above all else, I love representing diverse authors whose stories have not been traditionally uplifted in publishing. I love a character-driven story with a strong and unique hook!

VW: Horror (such as Gothic horror and supernatural elements), mystery and thrillers (especially psychological thrillers and historical mysteries), fantasy (including genre-blending stories with strong hooks), middle grade and young adult (with

unique settings and fresh perspectives), and picture books (often from author-illustrators).

PW: I represent a wide range of children's books and speculative adult fiction, usually with a more upmarket or literary style across categories. Right now, I'm looking forward to representing more young adult rom-coms, literary and psychological horror, heist novels, and picture books from author/illustrators with a dry sense of humor.

AG: How would you describe the ideal author-agent relationship?

NFM: My ideal author-agent relationship completely hinges on: 1) trust, 2) respect, and 3) communication, communication, communication! As the writer, my hope is that you confidently embody the position of driver in your editorial work and that you are open to considering my editorial suggestions. As the business, it is my responsibility to handle the publishing process from editorially strengthening a project, building out a submission package, and navigating a submitted project from query to acquisition and beyond.

SK: When I think of the relationships I have with my authors I very much think of it not as one where I work for them or they work for me, but rather where it is a very collaborative experience. I think because this is a business, sometimes we forget that we're all creatives. We're coming together to bring the best book to market and that requires a certain level of vulnerability, or, at the very least, comfortability that you can only build with trust.

MR: Honest, communicative, and respectful.

TSV: It's important to me that the working relationship I have with clients is a collaborative one founded on transparency, communication, and education. The industry can be so opaque, and I want to do everything I can to make sure authors understand and feel good about the decisions they're making.

VW: For me, the best author-agent relationships are collaborative and communicative. I believe in working as a team, where both the author and I share a clear vision for a project. Trust, transparency, and a shared commitment to the author's career are key elements of a strong partnership.

I'm hands-on in guiding my clients through the publishing process, from submission strategies to long-term career planning.

PW: The ideal relationship between an author and agent is built on trust and open communication. It's a professional collaboration where the author and agent form a team that relies on the agent's industry and market expertise to position the author's creative work favorably. A healthy rapport can be very friendly, very formal, or somewhere in between, but it's important that both parties are respectful of and responsive to each other.

AG: What advice do you have for authors?

NFM: Be prepared to love your work enough for the long run. What I mean by this is that it would do one well to be open to the possibility of many, many rounds of editorial revision. Completing a clean, compelling draft of a manuscript or proposal is, in many ways, the first step, even though it often feels like the end of a laborious endeavor. The reality is that you might need to go through revision rounds to land representation, and it's possible that you'll need to do more revision rounds with your agent to prepare the manuscript for submission. Just know that the end will certainly be worth it!

SK: My biggest advice I can impart to any writer is that they should find community. Writing can feel so solitary in comparison to some other industries or professions, and having people in your corner who are going through the same things—whether that be querying, the submission process, or even debut year—is integral to this work.

MR: Be bold and don't be afraid to go there! I am always most excited to see unique ideas and queries in my inbox—if you are interested in writing something with an outlandish concept, I would love to see that reflected in the query letter.

TSV: Writing to market trends means you will always be behind the curve, so instead, just do your best to tell the story only you can tell. Also, as much as it's important to be aware of what your peers are doing, comparison truly is the thief of joy (and creativity!) so know when to keep your head down and focus on your own work.

**COMPLETING A CLEAN,
COMPELLING DRAFT OF A
MANUSCRIPT OR PROPOSAL
IS, IN MANY WAYS, THE FIRST
STEP, EVEN THOUGH IT
OFTEN FEELS LIKE THE END
OF A LABORIOUS ENDEAVOR.
—NOELLE FALCIS MATH**

VW: Personalize your queries, research agents carefully, and make sure your manuscript is polished before submitting. Character development matters—stories stand out when they bring fresh perspectives and deep emotional connections. Publishing is a slow-moving industry, and rejection is part of the process. Keep improving your craft and seeking the right fit!

PW: Don't worry about trends in subject matter. The publishing process takes years, and you never know what can happen between starting your draft and querying, or even between a publisher acquiring your book and the date of publication. Focus on polishing your work, reading widely in the categories you'd like to publish in, and interacting with writers who are at a similar stage of the process. Those are the skills, knowledge, and networks that will carry you through the entirety of your writing career. **AG**

The Cruelty—and Possibilities— of 21st-Century Book Promotion

**MARKETING
STRATEGIES FOR
THE 99.99 PERCENT OF
AUTHORS WHO AREN'T
BESTSELLERS**

By Michael Castleman

Today, it's easier than ever to publish books—but harder than ever to promote and sell them.

When I've posted this on the Authors Guild (AG) Community Forum, some have lamented, *That's so depressing!* What's more depressing: authors are uninformed about the daunting challenges they face in marketing books today.

Meanwhile, the news about authors selling books isn't all bad.

Here's how I promoted *The Untold Story of Books: A Writer's History of Book Publishing*, published last July. My efforts cost \$16,000 over six months (500 free copies to my contacts plus shipping: \$6,500; publicist: \$6,500; marketing assistant: \$2,000; miscellaneous: \$1,000). I'm not saying my way is the only way, or the best way. You may well find success doing things differently. I look forward to reactions on the AG Community Forum.

Releases Now Average 2 Million Annually

In 1980, the year my first book appeared, American publishers released 45,000 titles. Since 2000, releases from Big Five publishers, indie publishers, pay-to-publish ("hybrid") houses, and self-publishers have averaged more than 2 million annually. During the entire 20th century, American publishers released 2.5 million titles. Today, that many appear *every year*. Which means that each new non-bestselling release has become a snowflake in Antarctica, unlikely to garner much attention, even when authors hire publicists, arrange bookstore events, nurture social media followings, appear on umpteen podcasts, and publish Substack newsletters.

Bestsellers still sell huge numbers. James McBride's *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store* (2023) has sold a million copies. But bestseller numbers are only around 200 a year, one title in 10,000. For the other 99.99 percent of authors, today's book glut has sliced sales thinner than a dust jacket—even when authors promote them relentlessly.

Americans buy around 800 million trade books annually. Divide that number by 2 million new releases, and the average title sells 400 copies. But bestsellers and backlist books (in print for more than a year) account for more than half of book sales. Account for those sales, and new releases average more like 150 copies.

Fordham University professor Albert Greco estimates that 79 percent of new releases—four out of five—sell fewer than 100 copies. Only 6 percent sell 1,000. Most self-published books sell in

ONLY 20 PERCENT OF NEW TITLES SELL 100 COPIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOUR BOOK SELLS 100, IT'S IN THE TOP 20 PERCENT. SELL 1,000, YOU'RE IN THE TOP 6 PERCENT.

two figures. Big Five releases have the best shot at notice and sales, but today, many Big Five titles sell only a few hundred copies.

Releasing a book? Keep your expectations low. Only 20 percent of new titles sell 100 copies. On the other hand, if your book sells 100, it's in the top 20 percent. Sell 1,000, you're in the top 6 percent.

Understand Amazon rankings. Amazon lists around 15 million trade titles in English (plus 2 million more every year). It's distressing when one's book ranks, say, No. 1,578,291. But books with rankings better (i.e., lower) than 1,500,000 are selling in the top 10 percent of Amazon's vast catalogue. If your book ranks better than No. 150,000, you're in the top 1 percent.

A Longer Runway

Before 2000, books had a year to, in publisher parlance, "find an audience." If they did, they went into more printings. If not, publishers pulled them out of print. To keep titles in print, authors were under pressure to promote them furiously from day one. That pressure continues today.

But ever since 2000, when publishing went digital, authors have gained one small but significant advantage. Books no longer go out of print. They've become digital files that can be maintained almost for free, and printed when ordered.

PUBLISHERS LOVE PRE-ORDERS. WITH TODAY'S NEW RELEASES SO DIFFICULT TO SELL, PUBLISHERS ARE NERVOUS ABOUT EVERY TITLE. HEALTHY PRE-ORDERS VALIDATE THEIR ACQUISITION DECISIONS.

With the pressure to keep books in print largely eliminated, authors now enjoy longer promotional runways. That extra time doesn't make promotion any easier. There's so much more competition today. But authors have more time.

Rule No. 1: Pace yourself. Upon release, commit to several months of intense efforts, but after that, you can promote your titles for as long as you have the time, energy, and money. Decide what you can comfortably manage, then persevere.

Value Your Personal Network

Publishing pundits hype strong social media presences, and some publishers insist on them. But your family, friends, and acquaintances are your best prospects. The people you know, who know you, are your most likely buyers, not casual eyeballs on Instagram.

In 2021, *Publishers Weekly* asked book buyers what triggered their most recent book purchase. Top of the list—recommendations from family and friends. Not podcasts, social media, or reviews. People you know are the ones most likely to buy your books, recommend them, and give them as gifts. The best way to sell books has always been face-to-face and word-of-mouth endorsements.

Writing is a solitary pursuit. Many writers are loners. But if you want to *sell* your books, cultivate a wide social circle. Collect all the email addresses you can. Be a good friend, and your friends just might buy your books.

Some authors fear that repeated exhortations to BUY MY BOOK might prove alienating. If that's how you feel, you're under no obligation to market to your list. But I have friends who are artists, filmmakers, and performers. They pitch me, often repeatedly. I'm fine with that. I don't always buy their work or attend their performances, but I never resent them. They're my friends, my network. I want them to succeed. Your people feel the same way about you.

I don't email my list daily, weekly, or even monthly. But a few group emails a year are fine. It takes several impressions for people to realize they've seen your message at all. That's why TV commercials are re-broadcast ad nauseam. Pitch your network, and then re-pitch.

When to Start Promoting?

Until 2000, before pub day, the name of the game was blurbs. The 99.99 percent of us who didn't pen bestsellers or win Pulitzers circulated bound galleys (advance reader copies), hoping for endorsements. But the heavy lifting waited until publication.

Pub day became irrelevant in 2014 when Amazon introduced its pre-order button. As soon as books have Amazon pages and pre-order buttons, that's the time to start promoting. How? By imploring everyone you've ever known to pre-order.

Amazon's pre-order button for *The Untold Story of Books* appeared in May 2024. I created a one-page PDF poster featuring its cover and my best blurbs that was easy to copy and paste into emails.

I emailed the PDF with brief personal notes to my carefully curated list of 1,000 names—family, friends, and associates. That was time-consuming, but time is money, and I could do this on my own at my own pace, no publicists, no marketing consultants.

I reaped 150 pre-orders, a 15 percent response. (My publisher tracks Amazon pre-order numbers, and told me.) It takes only 100 sales to lift books into the top 20 percent. Those 150 pre-orders catapulted *The Untold Story of Books* into the top quintile before pub day.

Most buyers pre-ordered during the week after my pitch. Those 150 copies sold in just seven days, which really helps Amazon rankings. *The Untold Story of Books*' Amazon rank topped out at No. 21,288. On that one blessed day, it ranked in the top one-quarter of 1 percent of titles.

When the book came out, I sent free, signed copies to my entire list, with a note: *If you pre-ordered, please keep this signed copy, and pass the other to anyone who might like it.* I hoped to jump-start word-of-mouth.

The Untold Story of Books appeared in July 2024. Upon release, its Amazon rank was No. 403,241. I re-emailed my PDF poster and lifted it to No. 76,671. How many books did that represent? Around 50, according to BookScan numbers, which I obtained by joining Amazon's Author Central.

My pre-order 15 percent response rate meant that among my contacts, 85 percent *didn't* buy. It's an old joke. Want to learn how *few* friends you have? Try selling them anything. Still, all those non-buyers were my people. Compared with the minions scrolling social media, my personal list continued to be the group most likely to buy my book.

Which brings me to Christmas. Books are traditional holiday gifts. Around one-third of annual book sales happen during the four weeks from Thanksgiving to Christmas. That's the period when promotion is most likely to sell product.

To push Christmas sales, I sent my PDF poster twice, once in November, and again in December. My pitch: "For the book lovers or writers (both published and aspiring) on your holiday list, here's an acclaimed, informative, amusing, low-cost gift."

Those two efforts took four full days of my time. They didn't produce miracles, but they helped keep sales on a pace of around 20 copies a week for the seven weeks from November 5 to

BOOK FESTIVALS DRAW BIG CROWDS, SO AUTHORS DON'T FACE EMPTY ROOMS. AND ON-SITE BOOKSTORES SELL PARTICIPATING AUTHORS' BOOKS, WITH SIGNING SESSIONS AFTER APPEARANCES.

December 24. Before my early November emailing, *The Untold Story of Books* ranked No. 251,421 on Amazon. After the emailing, it rose to No. 50,060. Before my early December emailing, it sat at No. 312,144, after No. 64,231.

I plan to resend my PDF poster on Memorial Day for summer reading, then again in November and December of 2025, and for as long as I have the time and energy.

Publishers love pre-orders. With today's new releases so difficult to sell, publishers are nervous about every title. Healthy pre-orders validate their acquisition decisions. In addition, sales forces use strong pre-order numbers to coax more copies into bookstores. That's important. Around two-thirds of the copies that make it into bookstores sell. My publisher, Unnamed Press of LA, is a small indie house, but it's nationally distributed through Publishers Group West. Its sales force used *The Untold Story of Books*' strong pre-order numbers to coax several hundred more copies into bookstores.

Blurbs, Strategically

Without blurbs, back covers look naked and authors look unprofessional. But do blurbs sell books? Don't bet on it. One of my mystery novels

THE PROBLEM WITH MANY PUBLICISTS IS THAT THEIR EFFORTS ARE SCATTERSHOT. THEY THROW EMAILS AT HUGE LISTS BUT LACK COHERENT STRATEGIES.

snagged an enthusiastic blurb from a famous rock star. That book has sold only a few hundred copies. Even celebrity endorsements rarely produce miracles.

How many books have you purchased solely on the strength of a few blurbs? Me, very few. Everyone knows most blurbs are shameless hype. Still, they can be used strategically. (*The Untold Story of Books* tells the amusing tale of the origin of the term “blurb.”)

There’s one moment when blurbs may make a difference. It happens in bookstores. If browsers are interested in a title, they pick it up and read the blurbs. Good ones just might close sales. Of course, bookstores stock only a tiny fraction of trade titles, and virtually no self-published books.

Something similar to bookstore blurb-reading is possible on Amazon and Bookshop.org—shoppers read reviews on those sites. But Amazon and Bookshop browsers don’t see back covers, so they don’t see blurbs. Consequently, publishers and self-publishers should turn all blurbs into “editorial reviews” on books’ web pages. Most potential readers don’t make much distinction between blurbs packaged as editorial reviews and customer reviews, so use your blurbs whenever possible. To see this in action, visit the Amazon page for *The Untold Story of Books*.

Eight months before pub day, when I had a final manuscript, I turned it into a PDF and

pitched every author I knew, including on the AG Community Forum. I distributed 75 PDFs, and within a few months, harvested 38 lovely blurbs. (A heartfelt thank you to all AG members who read and blurbd *The Untold Story of Books*.) A few of those blurbs grace the back cover, but they *all* appear as editorial reviews on the book’s Amazon and Bookshop pages, and as hype in several pages before the title page. Has that avalanche of blurbs sold many copies? God knows. But blurbs can’t hurt, and compared with the typical handful that grace most back covers, the three dozen attached to *The Untold Story of Books* might make a difference. Maybe.

Include every blurb in your media kit. Reviewers and podcasters expect to see a few, but not dozens. To snag attention, the more the better.

Websites?

In the late-1990s, the first books with websites sold so well that websites became imperative. But today, millions of books have them. Websites are like blurbs, necessary to appear professional, but no fast track to sales.

From the late 1990s through 2020, I supported my dozen releases with increasingly elaborate—and costly—websites. Did the bells and whistles help? Not that I could see. For *The Untold Story of Books*, I reverted to a simpler, cheaper website design. (The Authors Guild has a Sitebuilder service that will build a website for you!).

Publicist? Or Marketing Assistant?

I’ve hired publicists for all 19 of my books, but my strategy has evolved.

During the 20th century, I coveted print reviews, and my publicists prioritized print media. But since 2000, print reviews have withered—even in *The New York Times*, which, compared with 1995, now reviews half as many titles, fewer than 0.1 percent of all new releases.

I still covet print reviews, but these days, landing them is harder than ever. No legacy media

reviewed *The Untold Story of Books*. Fortunately, the book was reviewed by *Publishers Weekly*, which helps move copies into booksellers, and by *Library Journal*, ditto libraries.

The problem with many publicists is that their efforts are scattershot. They throw emails at huge lists but lack coherent strategies. These days, with zillions of email pitches raining down on book sites, most pitches become whispers in a hurricane.

For my latest, I invested \$6,500 in a publicist with a strategy. She focused exclusively on NPR radio stations and the several dozen producers she's gotten to know. NPR audiences include many authors and bibliophiles, perfect for my book. She booked me on 25 interview shows, most 30 to 60 minutes, including several that syndicate to other NPR stations. One interview went out to 250 affiliates. Did my radio strategy help sales? Who knows, but two people said they'd heard me on the radio.

The AG Launchpad includes a list of book publicists. But on the AG Community Forum, many authors have said that publicists aren't worth the money. If you hire one, expect to pay \$5,000 to \$15,000 for a campaign that lasts a few months. Keep your expectations low.

To promote *The Untold Story of Books*, I also hired a marketing assistant who pitched the 100 or so podcasts in my book's niche. He landed 25 interviews. Assistants are cheaper than publicists. They're also more willing to work part-time over the long haul, which fits well with low-budget efforts on today's extended promotional runway.

These days, publishers want authors to appear on podcasts. Sure, but keep your expectations low. Podcasts now number *3 million*. Say you appear on two dozen. Will that help sales? Possibly, but it's a crapshoot.

Social Media?

The first authors to market on social media sold tons of books. Now publishers want authors to have strong presences. Relentless social media posting helps some authors, particularly those

FOR MOST AUTHORS, SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS RESEMBLE BLURBS AND WEBSITES—NECESSARY, BUT NOT SUFFICIENT TO GENERATE MANY SALES.

who write romance fiction and mystery/thrillers, and develop a base of fans who hype their work. In the acknowledgements to one of her books, best-selling romance novelist Colleen Hoover thanked TikTok's BookTok. But for most authors, social media platforms resemble blurbs and websites—necessary, but not sufficient to generate many sales.

Even huge social-media followings don't guarantee sales. The pop star Billie Eilish received a \$1 million advance on the strength of her 98 million social media followers. Her book sold 64,000 copies—huge numbers today. But only one follower in 1,500 bought it, nowhere near her publisher's expectations. Figuring (generously) the publisher netted \$5 per copy, the house made \$320,000—and lost \$680,000.

Sure, post on Facebook, Instagram, BookTok, wherever, and solicit reviews on GoodReads. But for non-bestselling authors, personal networks are usually more strategic. Not to mention that compulsive social-media posting requires time and energy—and if you hire anyone, money—that might be better spent elsewhere.

My marketing assistant posted relentlessly for me on Facebook, X, and Instagram. Maybe that's sold some books—who knows? In the words of Barnes & Noble executive Shannon DeVito: "The only reliable connection between social media and book sales is that it's unreliable."

From Bookstores to Book Festivals

When authors publish debut books, family and friends throng their bookstore events. But with subsequent releases, attendance dwindles. And compared with 1990, we have only half the number of bookstores. For my latest, I did one event at one store, the SF Bay Area's No. 1 store for author events, Book Passage.

Instead of appearances at multiple bookstores, these days, I'm more into book festivals, which number around 100 annually from coast to coast. My assistant is pitching those within driving distance of my home. Book festivals draw big crowds, so authors don't face empty rooms. And on-site bookstores sell participating authors' books, with signing sessions after appearances.

Amazon Ads?

During the 20th century, for non-bestsellers, advertising was rarely cost-effective. Amazon has changed that. It offers cheap, highly targeted advertising. Authors can select keywords (or book titles in one's niche), and spend whatever they wish—\$1 day, \$5, \$10, whatever. As spending rises, your book pops up with increasing frequency when shoppers browse products that match your keywords.

For *The Untold Story of Books*, my keywords are: authors, writing, books, publishing, and the titles of popular books in my niche, notably, *The Business of Being a Writer* by Jane Friedman. As I write, I've invested \$125 and sold \$385 of books. Of course, my publisher reaps most of that income, but Amazon ads are working (modestly). I intend to continue experimenting with keywords and copy.

One tip: On Amazon, popular keywords such as "writing" are expensive. Book titles are usually cheaper.

You can also advertise using keywords on Facebook and Google. But most authors on the AG Forum say they've been disappointed. Still, for some, Facebook and Google ads might be worth a shot.

Beware Marketing Services. Many (Most?) Are Scams

Two million new books are released annually, with 80 percent selling fewer than 100 copies. That's produced legions of deeply frustrated authors desperate for attention. It's also produced online marketing services—NetGalley, Books Go Social, and others—that claim myriad connections to readers and reviewers. Do they sell books? Most authors on the AG Forum have not been impressed. I've never used marketing services. Repeatedly pitching to my own list and using Amazon ads feels more cost-effective. But FYI, here's a list of book-marketing sites: leehallwriter.com/2021/02/23/a-concise-list-of-book-promotion-sites.

Meanwhile, many of today's "marketers" are actually scammers. One phoned me saying that their "research team" had "run numbers" and "felt confident" they could sell "10,000 copies." All I had to do was prime the pump with \$1,800. Book-marketing scams have become so numerous that the AG *Bulletin* features regular coverage. Before you produce your credit card, ask the AG Forum about the "marketer" you're considering, or contact the website writerbeware.blog.

Persevere

Today it's easier than ever to publish books but harder than ever to promote and sell them. Still, if you sell 100, you're in the top 20 percent. Books no longer go out of print, which extends promotional runways. And book festivals, Amazon advertising, and repeat marketing to your personal list offer opportunities. Think strategically. Invest as much time, energy, and money as you can comfortably afford. Then persevere. **AG**

San Francisco journalist Michael Castleman, author of 19 books, has been a Guild member since 1981. His latest release is The Untold Story of Books: A Writer's History of Book Publishing, now in a second printing.

AUTHORS GUILD FOUNDATION HONORS ROBERT A. CARO, SANDRA CISNEROS, AND SALMAN RUSHDIE AT ANNUAL GALA

On Monday, April 7, the Authors Guild Foundation celebrated the power of literature and free expression at its annual gala at Gotham Hall. The event honored three literary luminaries whose groundbreaking work and activism have left an indelible mark on American letters.

The evening, hosted by *Saturday Night Live* star Ego Nwodim, paid tribute to Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Robert A. Caro, acclaimed novelist and poet Sandra Cisneros, and celebrated author Salman Rushdie.

Robert A. Caro received the **Preston Award for Distinguished Service to the Literary Community**. Caro, whose meticulous biographies of Robert Moses and Lyndon B. Johnson have redefined political storytelling, also served as Authors Guild president from 1979–81. He accepted his award through a pre-recorded video message.

“To receive this award from the community that has given me so much moves me deeply,” Caro said, emphasizing that the Guild’s work remains “urgent” as ever. He noted that many issues concerning writers decades ago persist today,



Salman Rushdie

REFLECTING ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD, CISNEROS DECLARED, “THE WORLD WE LIVE IN IS A HOUSE ON FIRE AND PEOPLE WE LOVE ARE BURNING.”

humorously adding that authors are still “waiting for their editors to get back to them.” Caro stressed the importance of collective action, warning that “authors can’t fight for their causes alone.”

Sandra Cisneros was honored with the **Baldacci Award for Literary Activism**, presented by author Xochitl Gonzalez. Through initiatives like the Macondo Writers Workshop, which

she founded to nurture socially engaged writers, Cisneros has created vital platforms for underrepresented voices, addressing pressing societal issues, including gender equality, cultural identity, and immigrant rights.

Reflecting on the state of the world, Cisneros declared, “The world we live in is a house on fire and people we love are burning.” Through her Macondo Writers Workshop, Cisneros has long championed underrepresented voices and literary equity.

Salman Rushdie accepted the **Champion of Writers Award**, presented by poet and photographer Rachel Eliza Griffiths, in recognition of Rushdie’s unwavering defense of free expression. “The sphere of culture is under attack as never before,” he said, referencing threats to cut funding for universities and reductions in support for arts and humanities. “Authors are the keepers of that story.”

Drawing from Voltaire’s *Candide*, Rushdie challenged attendees to consider their response to today’s challenges: “Is that how we are going to respond to the crisis of our time? Or are we going



From left: Xochitl Gonzalez, Sandra Cisneros, Mary Rasenberger, W. Ralph Eubanks, Salman Rushdie, Marie Arana, Christina Baker Kline, Deborah K. Wilson, & Rachel Eliza Griffiths. 2025 Authors Guild Foundation Gala, Gotham Hall, New York, April 7, 2025.



Sandra Cisneros and Xochitl Gonzalez at the 2025 Authors Guild Foundation Gala

to engage with it and fight?” He concluded with a personal note of resilience: “Now I’m not as young as I used to be. And I’ve had my share of getting beaten up. So, I’m tempted, like *Candide*, to find a private garden to cultivate. But I may still have a little fight left, and I hope you all do, too.”

Authors Guild President W. Ralph Eubanks affirmed the organization’s founding principle that writers must stand together to defend their works, while CEO Mary Rasenberger addressed the Guild’s continued advocacy against AI exploitation, book bans, and government censorship. “These are direct attacks on democracy,” she stated. “We cannot and we will not let this stand.”

Foundation Board President Marie Arana kicked off the second part of the program by emphasizing the evening’s deeper purpose: to honor “the fundamental right of writers to tell whatever stories they deem worthy, to tell the stories that define the world.”

The Authors Guild Foundation extends

heartfelt gratitude to Christina Baker Kline for her exceptional leadership as Gala Committee Chair, whose vision and dedication made this evening truly special. We’re equally grateful to our dedicated Committee members: Marie Arana, Brisa Carleton, Lucy Ferriss, Amity Gaige, Joanna Stone Herman, Patti Callahan Henry, Meredith Leshner, Steph Opitz, Susanna Porter, Roxana Robinson, Jessica Shattuck, and Rachel Vail for their invaluable contributions of time, creativity, and passion.

Special thanks to Spotify for Authors for hosting our vibrant after-party, and to co-chairs Steph Opitz and Randy Winston for their energetic leadership. We extend our appreciation to all emerging writers and mentors who served as hosts: Marie-Helene Bertino, Angela Flournoy, JP Infante, Mira Jacob, Marlon James, Emmanuel Lachaud, Jen Lue, Virginia Marshall, Isle McElroy, and Niv Sekar. Your collective commitment to supporting authors and the Guild’s mission made the evening truly memorable. **AG**

A GATHERING OF MINDS

The 2024 Words, Ideas, and Thinkers Festival Explored Why Writers Matter

This fall, against the backdrop of New England's autumn colors, the Authors Guild Foundation's 2024 WIT: Words, Ideas, and Thinkers Festival brought together writers, journalists, poets, and others to explore "The Power of Words: Why Writers Matter." The event ran from September 27–29 at Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts. The 2024 WIT Festival featured a special lineup of conversations with outstanding novelists, playwrights, journalists, translators, poets, critics, historians, and essayists. The three-day event featured thought-provoking discussions on literature, democracy, and the enduring impact of the written word.

As the only literary festival of its kind in the region, WIT draws attendees from across the country—from dedicated readers who traveled from as far as Oklahoma to local community members encountering these authors' works for the first time. Open to the public, the festival creates space for anyone interested in ideas and the exchange of perspectives in community, regardless of their prior familiarity with the featured writers. The festival's setting—nestled in a region that has inspired a diverse lineage of American writers, from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edith Wharton to W.E.B. Du Bois—provided a fitting canvas for these explorations.

Throughout the weekend, Shakespeare & Company buzzed with activity—author signings, food trucks, conversations, and a constant flow of attendees between sessions. Small groups formed on benches and beneath tent awnings, where vibrant discussions continued well into lunch.

The festival opened with Jennifer Egan and Joseph O'Neill taking the stage for a conversation about their craft. Egan revealed that she tries to make her characters "as different from me as possible," explaining how this enriches her storytelling process. O'Neill shared his fascination with how differently readers respond to his characters, a nod to the creative process of reading itself.

When scholar-translator Emily Wilson and literary historian Stephen Greenblatt joined

moderator Meghan O'Rourke, their discussion on classical literature captivated both seasoned readers and students alike. Wilson emphasized literature's timeless emotional resonance, noting, "These texts represent human emotion, fear, despair, joy—which are still emotions we experience today." Greenblatt added perspective on cultural evolution: "Shakespeare thought Achilles was a monster. . . . The interesting thing about our enterprise as readers is to figure out what the relationship is between our values and works that don't simply reflect what we think is the right thing." The session particularly engaged students from Lenox High School, who posed thoughtful questions about heroism in Greek literature.

Audiences filled the room when Tony Kushner and Rachel Maddow took the stage to discuss their collaboration on Maddow's *Ultra* podcast adaptation. Their energetic exchange about America's relationship with fascism featured Maddow's memorable declaration: "Laughing in the face of fascists is what we are all here on Earth to do." She emphasized democracy's ongoing nature, noting,

"There's no permanent victory in democracy." This popular session was livestreamed through CTSB to more than a thousand viewers.

In a special pre-event session at Berkshire Community College, Jamaica Kincaid and Ato Blankson-Wood celebrated James Baldwin's centennial with intimate insights into his work. Their conversation revealed Baldwin's world as if through the eyes of close friends, offering nuanced perspectives on his writing.

The conversation between Sherrilyn Ifill and Ruth Simmons, guided by moderator Richard T. Ford, delved into crucial questions about education, law, and democratic institutions. Simmons shared her leadership philosophy: "When I lead, I lead with my heart. I lead with my conviction. I lead with our belief in what we're doing, and it doesn't matter where we are." Ifill pointed to institutional decline as a key democratic challenge: "We are driven to the brink of democratic crisis not simply because of a demagogue, but because of the degradation of our core institutions that have to be healthy to uphold a democracy." Their years



From left: Cathy Park Hong, Sayed Kashua, and Alexander Chee



Jamaica Kincaid and Sandra Guzmán

of experience transforming institutions were evident in the precision and gravity of their insights.

Cathy Park Hong, Sayed Kashua, and Alexander Chee explored the relationship between language and identity through their personal narratives. Hong offered a glimpse into her current novel project, examining “who is responsible for the suffering of your mother?” Their wide-ranging conversation covered how BIPOC writers are reimagining English, with Kashua sharing perspectives on navigating Hebrew, English, and Arabic in his work. The discussion moved fluidly between the creative process and broader contexts, including writing during an ongoing genocide in Gaza.

When Sandra Guzmán and Jamaica Kincaid sat down to discuss gardening and writing, unexpected parallels emerged between cultivation and creativity. Kincaid read from her latest book, *An Encyclopedia of Gardening for Colored Children*, connecting the history of plants to human

displacement. The session took a philosophical turn when Guzmán observed, “We think we’re in charge of plants, but they are in charge of us”—an insight that captured the festival’s ability to uncover connections between seemingly unrelated subjects.

The chemistry between Ruth Reichl and Monique Truong was evident as they spoke with moderator Aleksandra Crapanzano about food’s place in literature. Reichl described the joyful immersion of writing her Paris-set novel: “I would say to my family, ‘I’m going to Paris,’ and it was very much like just disappearing into Paris and meeting these incredible people.” Truong reflected on how cooking provides immediate satisfaction that writing cannot: “There is this instant gratification that cooking gives you, that the novel will never deliver, or years later, will hopefully deliver. It’s a way to reward yourself.”

The festival’s final session featured Marie Arana and Luis Alberto Urrea in conversation with

Stephania Taladrid, examining Latin American experiences in literature with humor and passion. Urrea captivated the audience with stories of his family's storytelling traditions: "My aunt La Flaca taught us through parable, story, and sheer terror, because she had to control this unruly bunch of folks." Arana addressed the erasure of Latino contributions to American history: "It enrages me that people don't know that Hispanics have fought in every war that this country has ever prosecuted, including the American Revolution."

Beyond the main stage, the festival extended into surrounding communities. Urrea led a poetry workshop at Drury High School in North Adams, while Guzmán shared selections from her anthology at Festival Latino in Great Barrington. The weekend culminated with Mary Pope Osborne's reading at the Stockbridge Library, where families

gathered for a celebration of storytelling that demonstrated the festival's commitment to reaching diverse audiences.

A special evening gathering at a local hillside residence allowed participants to enjoy sunset views while discussing literature's vital role in society. Authors Guild staff spoke about the fight against book bans and protecting writers from AI exploitation. The evening fostered connections between authors and readers, with traveling poets creating personalized verse on vintage typewriters for delighted guests.

All sessions were recorded for the Authors Guild's digital platforms, extending the festival's reach beyond the Berkshires. Watch them here: authorsguild.org/witvideos.

Keep an eye out for an email from us about WIT 2025! Tickets will be available soon. **Ag**

The 2024 WIT Festival was supported by our generous sponsors and partners:

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AUTHORS GUILD ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday,
March 6, 2025

The Authors Guild held its annual meeting on March 6, 2025, at Scandinavia House in New York City and via Zoom.

President W. Ralph Eubanks opened the meeting and welcomed members. The first order of business was to approve the minutes from last year's meeting, which was done with a show of hands and virtual voting. Mr. Eubanks introduced proxies Diana Altman and Eugene Linden.

Mr. Eubanks delivered the President's remarks:

"It is almost a cliché to say that we live in very difficult and challenging times, but if we use history as a guide, maybe we can find a way through a period that increasingly reminds me of the time of my growing up in Mississippi during the American Civil Rights Movement.

"My work as a writer has been to explore the silences of the Southern past and examine how they affect each of us as American citizens. I see my work as president of the Authors Guild as an extension of my work as a writer. Please know that I stand against book bans. I want the Guild to protect the work of all writers who seek to tell the truth.

"As writers, academics, and creative people today, we are in the midst of a hurricane. Moving forward, the Authors Guild must do whatever it can to advocate for the rights of writers to navigate what will be tough winds and waters ahead."

Mr. Eubanks said Michael Gross and Cheryl Davis would serve as tellers and inspectors for the meeting. He asked those who had not yet voted to do so. He explained that, in lieu of in-person voting, full members who are participating virtually could complete the mailed ballot form, take a photo of it, and email the photo to staff@authorsguild.org. Mailed proxy votes received by the Guild as of that afternoon were already recorded with the teller and inspector.

Mary Rasenberger gave the CEO's report, starting with an overview of recent advocacy efforts:

"AI dominated much of our advocacy work in 2024. We felt that we had to be out front and steer how authors and their works are treated,

or authors would be left behind. AI has brought so many challenges and fears: how to prevent AI-generated copycat books, fears of AI books flooding the market, concerns that publishers will move to AI generation for some books, and distrust and anger over AI companies using your works without your permission.

“The AG also continued our work serving as an industry watchdog, keeping publishers and online distributors accountable. We had to deal with a spate of small publishers that stopped paying authors and a surge of outright scams. We continued advocating for freelancers’ rights in New York and California, and achieved legislation benefiting all freelance writers.”

Ms. Rasenberger said that the Guild reached 15,000 members in September 2024, with a 90 percent renewal rate. Our media presence grew substantially. We have sixteen local chapters. We have expanded marketing and publicity resources for members.

Kevin Amer, chief legal officer, then reported on the Guild’s AI advocacy work last year. The Guild is a plaintiff in a class action lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft. A separate case against Meta provided evidence that Meta used books illegally downloaded from a notorious pirate site to train its systems and was informed by publishers that authors hold the rights. We’ve endorsed bills in Congress that address AI, including the TRAIN Act, which would require companies to disclose their training data. Other bills we have proposed or endorsed would require labelling of AI-generated material, help facilitate collective licensing, and give authors the right to attribution to help stop copycat books created using AI. We are also supporting legislation that would establish a federal right of publicity.

Umair Kazi, director of advocacy and policy, spoke about the Guild’s new Human Authored Certification, which authors can place on their books to confirm that the work was written by a human, not AI. We also introduced four new clauses to our Model Trade Book Contract relating to AI, as well as guidelines for authors contemplating the use of AI. The Guild has a working relationship

with Amazon and Audible that allows us to escalate issues for our members. We continue our anti-piracy efforts.

Cheryl Davis, general counsel, reported that the Guild has expanded efforts against book banning, with lawsuits in six states. We’re also addressing the increase in scams targeting authors.

Michael Gross, director of legal services, reported that the Guild’s legal team handled 1,612 queries from members in FY2024 (October 1, 2023–September 30, 2024):

- * 383 book contract reviews
- * 111 agency contract reviews
- * 47 reversion of rights queries
- * 135 inquiries on copyright law
- * 25 inquiries regarding permissions and privacy releases
- * 41 First Amendment queries
- * 870 other inquiries, e.g., electronic rights, contract disputes, movie and TV options, piracy, finding an agent, attorney referrals

Mr. Eubanks then announced that voting was closed.

Robert Pesce, treasurer of the Authors Guild Foundation, reported that the Guild’s operating finances were in good shape, and we ended the year with a small surplus.

Marie Arana, president of the Foundation, reported virtually on behalf of the Authors Guild Foundation, the charitable and educational arm of the Guild, which advocates for authors’ rights, educates authors, sponsors literary programming, and raises funds to support the Guild’s programming and advocacy. She remarked that the Foundation brought on new staff last year: Bernard Schwartz oversees our literary programs, and Deborah Wilson is the executive director of the Foundation. The Foundation expanded its literary programs as a result. In 2024, we raised \$2,625,000, an all-time high. Ms. Wilson reported with more particulars, noting that the 2024 gala raised \$520,000. She said that the Foundation has expanded revenue sources

along with educational, professional development, and literary programming.

Mr. Eubanks reported that all candidates for the Guild's Council were unanimously voted in. W. Ralph Eubanks, Lauren Groff, Christina Baker Kline, Steven Levy, Chris Pavone, Peter Petre, and T.J. Stiles were reelected for three-year terms. Amity Gaige, Adriana Trigiani, and J Wortham were newly elected for three-year terms. An amendment to the Guild's constitution was approved, removing the numerical amount of member dues so the constitution doesn't have to be amended every time the figure changes.

Mr. Eubanks and Ms. Rasenberger took questions from members, after which the meeting was adjourned by Mr. Eubanks.

New Council Members:

Amity Gaige is the bestselling author of five novels, *O My Darling*, *The Folded World*, *Schroder*, *Sea*



Wife, and *Heartwood*. *Heartwood* was the April 2025 "Read with Jenna" pick on *The Today Show*. *Sea Wife* was a 2020 *New York Times* Notable Book and a finalist for the Mark Twain American Voice Award. *Schroder* was also a

New York Times Notable Book and was shortlisted for UK's Folio Prize in 2014. In 2018, Amity was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in Fiction. She lives in West Hartford, Connecticut with her family and teaches creative writing at Yale.

Adriana Trigiani is *The New York Times* bestselling author of twenty-one books of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Good Left Undone*, *The Shoemaker's Wife*, and *Lucia, Lucia*. Her work has been published in thirty-eight languages around the world. An award-winning playwright, television writer/producer, and




filmmaker, Ms. Trigiani wrote and directed the major motion picture of her debut novel *Big Stone*

Gap, adapted her novel *Very Valentine* for television, and directed the award-winning documentary *Queens of the Big Time*, among others. She is the host of the hit podcast *You Are What You Read*, where she interviews the great luminaries of our times. Ms. Trigiani was named Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia by President Sergio Mattarella of Italy. The Library of Virginia awarded her the Patron of Letters degree, their highest honor. Ms. Trigiani grew up in the mountains of southwest Virginia, where she co-founded The Origin Project, a year-round, in-school writing program that has served more than 25,000 students since its inception in 2014. Ms. Trigiani is honored to serve on the New York State Council on the Arts. She lives in Greenwich Village with her family.

J Wortham is a sound healer, Reiki practitioner, herbalist, and community care worker oriented toward healing justice and liberation. They are also a staff writer for *The New York Times Magazine* and co-host of the podcast *Still Processing*. They occasionally publish thoughts on culture, technology, and wellness in



a newsletter. Wortham is the proud editor (along with Kimberly Drew) of the visual anthology *Black Futures*, a 2020 Editor's Choice by *The New York Times Book Review*. They are currently working on a book about the body and dissociation for Penguin Press. They mostly live and work on stolen Munsee Lenape land, now known as Brooklyn, New York, and are committed to decolonization as a way of life. Read more of their writing at channeling.substack.com. 

Remembering Barbara Taylor Bradford (1933-2024)



The Authors Guild mourns the passing of Barbara Taylor Bradford OBE, an extraordinary literary icon and cherished member of our Council, where she advised on policy, championed authors' rights, and mentored emerging writers throughout her years of service. In 2007, she was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Queen Elizabeth II.

As a Council member, Taylor Bradford contributed invaluable wisdom to shaping Guild policies. Her generous spirit and enthusiasm were key tenets of her service. She was first elected by the membership in 1989 and served until 2013, when she became an honorary Council member. Scott Turow, former president of the Guild and ex officio Council member, added: "She was a believer in the Guild, in books, and writers, and was a generous friend to the Guild and the writing life." D.T. Max, who served alongside Taylor Bradford on the council in the 1990s, said, "She did a lot of important work for the council."

After establishing herself as a journalist at *Woman's Own* and the *London Evening News*, Taylor Bradford transitioned to a successful career as a novelist. Her debut novel, *A Woman of Substance*, was published in 1979 and told the compelling story of Emma Harte's rise from a Yorkshire servant to a retail magnate. The book captivated readers worldwide and launched an eight-part series that would span genera-

tions, solidifying Taylor Bradford's place as a prominent author.

A Woman of Substance was adapted into a successful television miniseries in 1984, starring Jenny Seagrove and Deborah Kerr. The adaptation drew record-breaking audiences, becoming the highest-rated program in Channel 4's history, and earned two Emmy nominations. This success paved the way for adaptations of its sequels, *Hold the Dream* and *To Be the Best*, establishing Taylor Bradford as a master of both page and screen storytelling. Over her career, she crafted multiple book series, including the Ravenscar trilogy, Cavendon Chronicles, and the House of Falconer series, while also producing thoughtful nonfiction works on subjects ranging from etiquette to Christianity.

While often dismissed as mere romance, her novels were revolutionary portraits of female ambition. Her heroines weren't just seeking love—they were building empires, taking control of their destinies, and claiming their power in the boardroom and the drawing room. Her impact resonated far beyond her prolific output of 40 international bestsellers. She created a legacy of stories that offered women of the era a different way of dreaming—not just of romance but of work, success, and financial independence.

Those who knew Taylor Bradford remember her as a remarkably charismatic presence—glamorous yet forever maintaining her Yorkshire warmth and authenticity. Like the heroines of her novels, she remained true to her roots even as she achieved extraordinary success, bringing the same professionalism to her literary work that she'd learned in her early days of journalism.

We extend our deepest condolences to Taylor Bradford's family, friends, and readers. She will be profoundly missed. **AG**



Illustration by Kaitlin Brito

Writing Animal Characters

**MASTERING THE
CRAFT OF AUTHENTIC
PERSPECTIVE,
SENSORY WORLDS,
AND CROSS-SPECIES
STORYTELLING**

By Sassafras Patterdale

“Hold very still, put your arm out, don’t make eye contact.”

It’s below freezing as I stand in the middle of a small concrete park in NYC’s East Village. My new friend, who lives in the park, is giving me instructions on how to befriend her animal companions—pigeons. NYU students rush past, avoiding direct looks at what must appear to be a bizarre ritual. In reality, I’m deep in the research process for what would become my novel *Lost Boi* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2015), which went on to become a Lambda Literary Finalist for Transgender Fiction. The novel is a queer, punk, and leather retelling of *Peter Pan*, and pigeons play a crucial role in the story.

THROUGH ANIMALS' SENSES, WE NOTICE DETAILS WE'VE LONG IGNORED—SCENTS CARRIED ON THE WIND, VIBRATIONS IN THE GROUND, PATTERNS AND WAVE- LENGTHS BEYOND OUR LIMITED RANGE.

Despite having passed them countless times on sidewalks, I'd never truly spent time with these birds. To write the pigeons and their caretakers accurately, that had to change. In the process, I imagined the world from their perspectives, I paid close attention to how their bodies move, and what makes them stir and scatter. Their place in our human world was also notable, a ubiquitous presence in a city like New York.

Animal characters offer writers a unique lens that illuminates our human experience while extending beyond it. Through their eyes, we see ourselves—our compassion, our cruelty, our complex societies—with startling clarity and without the usual defenses we bring to human narratives. These characters also invite us into experiences entirely their own: the territorial imperative of a wolf, the migration knowledge carried in a bird's bones, the sensory landscapes invisible to human perception.

Through animals' senses, we notice details we've long ignored—scents carried on the wind, vibrations in the ground, patterns and wavelengths beyond our limited range. These characters aren't just mirrors for humanity, they're essential voices from a world we share but experience differently, reminding us that no human story exists

in isolation from the countless other beings with whom we co-create our reality.

When I'm not writing fiction, I'm a certified professional dog trainer, which informs how I think about animal portrayals in literature. I've discovered that authentic animal characters—whether they're driving the narrative or supporting it—require the same depth, research, and attention we give to their human counterparts.

The Literary Tradition of Animal Characters

The literary landscape is rich with memorable animals that demonstrate the principles of effective characterization. These range from Jack London's Buck in *The Call of the Wild*—whose gradual transformation from pampered pet to wild creature follows the arc of authentic canine instinct while still engaging our empathy—to Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, whose first-person equine narrative revolutionized how readers understood animal welfare without sacrificing authentic horse behavior. Richard Adams created an entire leporine society in *Watership Down*, complete with mythology and language, yet his rabbits still move, think, and react as rabbits do—thumping warnings with their hind legs and freezing at signs of danger.

Contemporary literature continues this tradition with works like Sigrid Nunez's *The Friend*, in which a dog named Apollo helps a woman process grief. Though it's not narrated by the dog, Nunez portrays Apollo with canine authenticity:

"They don't commit suicide. They don't weep. But they can and do fall to pieces. They can and do have their hearts broken. They can and do lose their minds."

Helen Macdonald's memoir *H Is for Hawk*, the goshawk Mabel is portrayed with exquisite attention to raptor behavior and psychology:

"The hawk was a fire that burned my hurts away. There could be no regret or mourning

in her. No past or future. She lived in the present only, and that was my refuge.”

Karen Joy Fowler’s *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (in which a human family raises a chimpanzee named Fern as a third child) and Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* (which presents a complex elephant society from the elephants’ perspectives), further demonstrate how contemporary authors continue to create animal characters that honor their essential animal qualities while serving the narrative and emotional needs of the story.

This rich tradition of animal characterization across centuries begs the question: how can the human animal best capture life outside its kingdom of consciousness and experience? How do we authentically represent minds so different from our own, yet with whom we share this planet?

Approaches Across Different Genres

The approach to animal characters varies significantly across literary genres, each with its own conventions and possibilities. In fantasy, talking animals may possess fully humanlike consciousness, as in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, where animal demons embody aspects of human souls. Science fiction might explore uplifted animals with enhanced intelligence, as in David Brin’s *Uplift* series, raising questions about consciousness and rights.

Children’s literature often grants animals human speech and reasoning while maintaining their animal nature—think of Paddington Bear’s love of marmalade or Toad in *The Wind in the Willows*, who has an obsession with motorcars. These anthropomorphic touches connect with young readers while preserving something essentially “animal” about the characters.

Mystery novels featuring animal companions, such as Rita Mae Brown’s *Mrs. Murphy* series or Spencer Quinn’s *Chet and Bernie* mysteries, often use the animal’s heightened senses and different perspectives to provide clues the human

EACH GENRE CREATES ITS OWN CONTRACT WITH THE READER ABOUT HOW “ANIMAL-LIKE” ITS ANIMAL CHARACTERS WILL BE. WHAT MATTERS IS INTERNAL CONSISTENCY AND THOUGHTFULNESS ABOUT THESE CHOICES.

characters might miss. Literary fiction tends to portray animals more naturalistically, using their authentic behaviors to illuminate human themes, as in Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*.

Each genre creates its own contract with the reader about how “animal-like” its animal characters will be. What matters is internal consistency and thoughtfulness about these choices. A talking cat in a fantasy novel should still think and behave according to feline psychology in ways that make sense within the established world. Even when breaking conventional rules of animal behavior, the most compelling animal characters maintain some essential truth about their species.

Creating Distinct Animal Characters

New York Times bestselling author Kate Messner, who has written more than seventy books for kids, reminds us that “dogs don’t experience the world in the same way humans do. Their senses of hearing and smell are much keener, but they don’t see all the colors we do, and that’s important for writers to keep in mind, especially when they’re writing from a dog’s point of view.”

IF YOUR CHARACTERS ARE GOING TO RIDE HORSES, AND YOU'VE ONLY TAKEN A PONY RIDE AT A COUNTY FAIR ONCE WHEN YOU WERE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO PUT IN SOME WORK.

Despite these differences, Messner approaches animal character development systematically. “I create animal characters the same way I create human characters. Dogs are individuals, with unique personalities, likes, dislikes, and quirks,” she says. “No two poodles or pugs are the same, so I use the same kind of character brainstorming charts I do for human characters to make sure I’m really building out a dog’s personality.”

Susan Conant, author of the popular *A Dog Lover’s Mystery* series, identifies a common pitfall. “The major mistake I see when authors include animals in fiction is the failure to bring the animals to life,” she says. “Dogs and cats are not objects. If canine and feline characters remain two-dimensional, the story suffers.”

Balancing Anthropomorphism and Authenticity

Sometimes anthropomorphism is the point of a story. In that case, animals become stand-ins for human characters, with some animalistic qualities but primarily human behaviors. However, when animals aren’t meant to be “people in furry suits,” it’s crucial to consider their authentic experience of the world.

Messner points out that, “when dogs are dropped casually into a storyline, writers sometimes fail to consider the care and love they need on a day-to-day basis.” These missing details make animal characters less believable. The daily realities of feeding, exercise, veterinary care, and other aspects of animal husbandry should be acknowledged, even if they’re not the focus of the narrative.

The Essential Role of Research

You can’t simply insert an animal into a story and expect authenticity. Conant, a three-time recipient of the Maxwell Medallion, given by the Dog Writers Association of America, emphasizes specificity in animal characterization: “Dogs and cats of various breeds have distinctive behavioral characteristics as well as individual personalities.” She goes on to say, “If you don’t actually know Malamutes or Newfoundlanders or Siamese cats, get to know them.”

This is true for any kind of an animal. If your characters are going to ride horses, and you’ve only taken a pony ride at a county fair once when you were in elementary school, you’re going to need to put in some work to make sure that you are appropriately and accurately writing those equine characters.

Research has also been particularly important in Messner’s animal-centered books, including her popular *Ranger in Time* chapter book series. In these books *Ranger*, a Golden Retriever, has been trained as a search and rescue dog and is digging in his family’s yard when he unearths a magical old first aid kit that allows him to travel back in time to anywhere in history where people need help. “When I had the idea for this series of historical adventures, my first order of business was to read everything I could about real search and rescue dogs,” explains Messner. “What breeds are best at this work? How are they trained? And how exactly do they track missing people?”

As part of her research process, Messner relied on a variety of sources, noting that “training manuals for canine search and rescue teams were fantastic sources, especially *Search and Rescue Dogs: Training the K-9 Hero* by the American Rescue

Dog Association. I also spent time with my local canine search and rescue unit and participated in the dogs' training sessions to get a better sense for how they do their work. When I do school visits, kids love to see photos of Easton and Oakland, the real search and rescue dogs who served as the inspiration for Ranger!"

Conant advises immersion in the animal's world. "Hang out in the world you want to depict. Take your dog to training. If you don't show dogs, find someone who does and tag along," she says. "Volunteer with an animal rescue group or at a shelter. Breathe in the fur, and inhale dog odor or cat odor until it smells as natural as fresh air. And do not try to fake it! The reader who inhabits any of those small worlds will spot the fakery and toss your book aside, probably to a dog."

Technical Challenges of Animal Perspective

The technical challenges of writing from an animal's perspective differ significantly from writing about animals as observed by humans. When an animal is simply observed within a human narrative, the writer can rely on external description and human interpretation of behavior. However, when writing from an animal's viewpoint, authors must make crucial decisions about voice, sensory focus, and cognitive framing.

First-person animal narrators present challenges. Should they "speak" in human language while thinking in animal patterns? How much self-awareness should they possess? Authors must decide whether their animal narrator understands human speech completely, partially, or not at all. They must determine what concepts the animal character can grasp, and which remain beyond their comprehension.

The sensory palette also differs dramatically. A dog narrator might track a complex olfactory landscape nearly invisible to humans, while missing visual nuances humans take for granted. A bat character might "see" through echolocation, perceiving textures and movements rather than colors and static forms. Birds might sense magnetic fields

TOO ALIEN A PERSPECTIVE RISKS LOSING READER CONNECTION; TOO HUMAN A PERSPECTIVE SACRIFICES WHAT MAKES THE ANIMAL VIEWPOINT VALUABLE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

for migration or perceive ultraviolet markings on flowers.

Successful animal perspectives often balance authenticity with readability. Too alien a perspective risks losing reader connection; too human a perspective sacrifices what makes the animal viewpoint valuable in the first place. Finding this balance requires both research and artistic judgment.

Perhaps the most important revision strategy involves perspective. Messner suggests, "Always keep in mind that non-human animals aren't going to experience the world in the exact same way you do. They're going to be much more interested in the scent of that dead thing in the bushes or the burgers sizzling on the grill next door than the gorgeous pink-and-purple sunset over the lake. That's especially important when revising any story written from a dog's point of view. Make a separate revision pass, asking yourself on every page, 'Is this how the dog would perceive what's happening? Or is this my human perception?' and then revise accordingly."

Cultural Context and Ethical Considerations

Animals hold vastly different symbolic, practical, and spiritual significance across cultures, which

WESTERN VIEWS OF ANIMAL ETHICS ARE NOT UNIVERSAL, AND RESPONSIBLE WRITERS ACKNOWLEDGE THESE DIFFERENCES WITHOUT JUDGMENT WHILE STILL MAINTAINING THEIR OWN ETHICAL STANCE.

profoundly affects how they might be portrayed in literature. In Western traditions, certain animals carry specific associations—foxes with cleverness, owls with wisdom, wolves with danger or wildness. However, these associations can differ dramatically in other cultural contexts. In many East Asian traditions, foxes may represent supernatural tricksters or transformation; in various Indigenous North American cultures, owls might symbolize death or bad omens.

When writing animal characters situated within specific cultural contexts, research becomes even more crucial. Writers should approach cultural animal symbolism with the same care they bring to behavioral research. Jessica J. Lee, author of *Two Trees Make a Forest*, notes, “Animals exist within cultural ecosystems as much as natural ones. Understanding how a culture views certain animals—as sacred, as food, as working partners, as symbolic beings—shapes how characters in that setting would perceive and interact with them.”

This complexity demands ethical consideration. Writers should approach animal relationships from cultures not their own with humility, avoiding appropriation of animal symbolism that

might perpetuate stereotypes. Western views of animal ethics are not universal, and responsible writers acknowledge these differences without judgment while still maintaining their own ethical stance. When in doubt, consultation with cultural experts can help represent animal-human relationships in their full, nuanced complexity.

Practical Exercises for Developing Animal Characters

*** 1. Sensory Perspective Shift**

Choose an everyday scene (a park, kitchen, street corner) and describe it from an animal’s sensory perspective. If writing from a dog’s viewpoint, focus on smells and sounds over visual details. For a bird, emphasize movement patterns and aerial perspectives. Avoid attributing human thoughts or interpretations to the sensations.

*** 2. Character Sheet for an Animal**

Create a character profile for an animal including:

- * Species, breed, and physical characteristics like colors, size, texture
- * Natural behaviors and instincts relevant to the story
- * Individual personality traits that distinguish them from others of their species
- * Their relationship to human characters
- * Their specific needs, desires, and conflicts
- * How they communicate (both with other animals and humans)

*** 3. Research-to-Fiction Translation**

Research a specific animal behavior (how wolves establish pack hierarchy, how corvids use tools, how octopuses solve problems). Then write a scene incorporating this behavior naturally into a narrative without over-explaining the science.

* 4. Cross-Species Conflict Resolution

Write a scene where a human character and animal character want different, conflicting things, but neither can fully comprehend the other's motivations. How do they reach a resolution without the convenience of human language?

their novel *Lost Boi* were recently optioned. After many years in NYC, Sassafras now lives and writes with their giant dog in the Pacific Northwest.

* 5. Anthropomorphism Spectrum Exercise

Take a single animal character and write three different versions:

- * Full anthropomorphism (speaks, thinks like a human)
- * Middle ground (animal perspective but with heightened understanding)
- * Naturalistic (purely animal behavior and perception).

Reflect on how each version changes the story and reader experience.

Writing about animals is an incredible tribute to the living experience, a welcome escape from solely human perspectives, and a meaningful way to spend time with the creatures we love, fear, or want to better understand. When we bring animals to life on the page—whether as talking companions, silent witnesses, or something in between—we expand our ability to see the world through different eyes. In doing so, we not only create more diverse and engaging stories but also deepen our connection to the countless species with whom we share this planet. Perhaps in writing animals truly, we learn to see them truly, as well. **AG**

Sassafras Lowrey is a celebrated author whose books have been honored by the American Library Association, the Lambda Literary Foundation, the International Leather Association's writing awards, and the Dog Writers Association of America. Sassafras's work regularly appears in magazines and publications, and the film rights to

ADVOCACY NEWS

In recent months, the Authors Guild secured major steps against book bans with federal court wins in Arkansas, Iowa, Colorado, and ongoing challenges in Idaho and Florida, affirming First Amendment protections for authors, readers, and libraries. We've filed a class action lawsuit against the National Endowment for the Humanities for unlawfully terminating millions in promised grants, and submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court opposing religious opt-outs for diverse books in public schools. Our petition to Congress condemns the unprecedented firing of Register of Copyrights Shira Perlmutter, advocating for her reinstatement. On the AI front, our litigation against OpenAI and Microsoft continues to progress, while we monitor publishers' AI licensing proposals and support legislation requiring mandatory content labeling and greater transparency in training datasets.

* AUTHORS GUILD FILES CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT TO REVERSE UNLAWFUL NEH GRANT TERMINATIONS

On May 12, 2025, the Authors Guild and a group of scholars and writers filed a class action lawsuit against the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), its leadership, and officials within the Department of Government Efficiency ("DOGE") for unlawfully terminating millions of dollars in committed grants from

funds appropriated by Congress for the programs. The lawsuit was filed in federal court in New York City and is brought on behalf of all individuals nationwide who were awarded NEH grants that were cancelled without cause in April. The proposed class covered by the claims includes individual grantees under the Public Scholar, Fellowship, Summer Stipend, and other NEH programs. The plaintiffs are represented by the Washington, D.C., law firm Fairmark Partners, LLP.

As the authorizing legislation for the NEH and NEA states, "It is vital to a democracy to honor and preserve its multicultural artistic heritage as well as support new ideas, and therefore it is essential to provide financial assistance to its artists and the organizations that support their work." For nearly sixty years, NEH awards have provided vital funding for the humanities and arts in the United States, making it possible for historians, biographers, filmmakers, teachers, librarians, social scientists, and numerous others to take on projects from which our entire society benefits. Many books that have increased our learning as a society would not have been written if not for NEH grants.

In early April, the NEH abruptly sent a letter informing grantees that their grants were being terminated because the agency was repurposing its funds "in furtherance of the President's agenda." It cited various recent executive orders that have nothing to do with the agen-

cy's congressionally defined mission, including *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing* and *Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*.

By canceling current grants, the administration has left many grant recipients stranded mid-project, with the completion and publication of the planned books now in question, even though individual grant recipients were required to forego other employment or compensation opportunities during the term of their NEH award. Grantees were given no opportunity to appeal.

The Trump administration announced that the cancelled grant funds, amounting to tens of millions of dollars, would be diverted from more than a thousand projects throughout the country that bring history and learning to Americans where they live to a single sculpture garden, the National Garden of American Heroes, at a yet-to-be-determined location that most Americans likely will never be able to visit, as well as celebrating America's 250th anniversary in July 2026.

The administration's actions in canceling the grants were unlawful. The administration is not free to unilaterally cancel funds that Congress has appropriated for a specific purpose—here, humanities funding. Nor can it simply refuse to pay out funds that the government has promised to grantees—many of whom have made significant invest-

ments and major decisions in reliance on that promise—especially without any individualized consideration or opportunity for appeal.

President of the Authors Guild W. Ralph Eubanks said, “To suddenly redirect congressionally-appropriated funds away from hundreds of scholars and creators midway through their projects—leaving them financially vulnerable and professionally compromised—isn’t just administratively questionable, it’s morally indefensible. Many recipients structured their entire lives around these commitments, forgoing other opportunities and making significant personal investments.”

The Guild’s lawsuit asks the court to find, among other things, that these actions are a violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, the Constitution’s guarantees of the separation of powers and the freedom of expression, and that the actions exceed the congressionally granted authority of agencies. The lawsuit seeks to set aside the mass termination of grants, restore the funds to which the grantees are entitled, and require the government to operate the NEH consistent with Congress’s intent.

One NEH public scholar reported. “The NEH was my sole source of income for the second half of the funding period. The sudden termination of the award has caused severe financial and professional harm.” She describes how she “had to take on additional teaching responsibilities (two courses) during the 2024–25 academic year to partially replace the lost income from the terminated NEH fellowship. These courses are paid at a lower rate than the NEH would have provided, resulting in a net income loss while increasing my labor.” She adds that as a result, “I am experiencing housing strain, as I had budgeted my rent based on the original NEH award timeline.”

Dr. Nicole D. Jenkins, who has a contract with Princeton University Press for her ethnographic book-in-process, expressed great concern for her career stability: “I am scheduled to go up for tenure in February 2026, during the original grant period. The abrupt termination has significantly harmed my ability to complete this research, impacted my tenure timeline, and led to reputational, financial, and professional damage.”

* **FEDERAL COURT AGREES WITH GUILD, DECLARES ARKANSAS BOOK BAN UNCONSTITUTIONAL**

In a landmark victory for authors, readers, libraries, bookstores, and publishers, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas has declared Sections 1 and 5 of Arkansas Act 372 unconstitutional and permanently enjoined their enforcement.

This ruling came in response to a lawsuit filed on June 2, 2023, by a broad coalition that included the Authors Guild, local bookstores, library systems, publishers, and readers. The decision marks the culmination of a legal battle that began when the law was initially signed on March 30, 2023. It was blocked by a preliminary injunction in July 2023.

The law contained two particularly problematic provisions. The first (Section 1), would have subjected librarians and booksellers to criminal penalties for making certain books “available” to minors, which could only be avoided if they either removed books deemed unsuitable for the youngest minors from all their shelves or banned minors entirely from their premises. The second provision (Section 5) would have allowed any indi-

vidual to demand the removal of books they claimed were “inappropriate”—an undefined term not based on constitutional standards, which would then effectively permit local review boards to engage in viewpoint and content-based discrimination.

In its ruling, the court emphasized the law’s fundamental constitutional flaws, stating: “If the General Assembly’s purpose in passing Section 1 was to protect younger minors from accessing inappropriate sexual content in libraries and bookstores, the law will only achieve that end at the expense of everyone else’s First Amendment rights. The law deputizes librarians and booksellers as the agents of censorship.”

* **FEDERAL COURT BLOCKS IOWA’S BOOK BAN LAW IN GUILD LAWSUIT**

On March 26, 2025, Judge Stephen H. Locher of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa granted our motion for a preliminary injunction, blocking enforcement of Senate File 496 while our lawsuit proceeds.

The lawsuit unites a powerful coalition fighting for intellectual freedom, including publishers Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster; authors Laurie Halse Anderson, John Green, Malinda Lo, and Jodi Picoult; the Authors Guild; and students and educators from affected Iowa school districts.

Our challenge targets Senate File 496, which Judge Locher described as creating a “puritanical pall of orthodoxy” over school libraries by requiring removal of books containing “descriptions of sex acts” regardless of their literary, historical, or educational value. The law has already led to the removal of more than 600 books

from Iowa school libraries, including classics by authors such as James Joyce, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and many contemporary award-winning works.

The court specifically recognized that many banned books serve as crucial resources for vulnerable students, particularly those who have experienced trauma, and provide essential tools for young people to develop critical life skills around healthy relationships. Judge Locher found that Iowa already had effective mechanisms in place to restrict inappropriate materials, making the new law's sweeping censorship both unnecessary and unconstitutional.

* **FEDERAL COURT ORDERS BOOKS BACK ON SHELVES IN COLORADO**

The Authors Guild, the NAACP, and individual plaintiffs filed a federal lawsuit on December 19, 2024, against the Elizabeth School District in Colorado for removing books, based on their content and viewpoints, from school libraries. The lawsuit challenges the school board's decision to permanently ban nineteen books, many of which are highly acclaimed and widely taught across the country.

The banned books primarily feature works by or about people of color and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Many are award-winning titles that have been classroom staples for years, including *Beloved* by Toni Morrison—winner of the Pulitzer Prize—and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas—a No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller.

Beyond removing existing books, the board directed librarians not to order any new books for school libraries, banned classroom libraries entirely (causing teachers to cover their book collections with brown paper or take them home), and prohibited students from

sharing books with each other in school. It switched from Scholastic to SkyTree Books, a vendor that promised book fairs without any LGBTQIA+ content, Critical Race Theory, foul language, explicit content, or “dark magic.”

The board's actions appear politically motivated rather than educationally justified, with board members explicitly stating they were acting to impose “conservative values.” Our lawsuit argues that the board's actions violate students' First Amendment rights by restricting access to books based solely on the board members' personal political views.

On March 19, Federal Judge Charlotte N. Sweeney granted the Guild's motion for a preliminary injunction in the lawsuit against the Elizabeth School District in Colorado. The court has ordered the district to “immediately return the books to the library shelves” and has “enjoined [the district] from any conduct that violates this order.

* **AUTHORS GUILD JOINS PUBLISHER LAWSUIT AGAINST IDAHO'S BOOK BAN**

In a powerful stand against censorship, the Authors Guild has united with the nation's leading publishers and affected individuals to challenge Idaho's draconian House Bill 710, which was enacted in April 2024 to amend Idaho code Section 18-1514 and add Section 18-1517B.

The law bars schools and public libraries from making available books or other written materials that contain representations of nudity or sexual conduct that are “harmful to minors.” The “harmful to minors” language does not adequately incorporate the Miller Test, and the definition of “sexual conduct” includes “any act of . . . homosexuality.”

“This law is an unacceptable assault on intellectual freedom in

America,” said Mary Rasenberger, CEO of the Authors Guild. “By allowing vigilantes to ban books and explicitly target LGBTQIA+ content, this law doesn't just chill free speech—it freezes it solid. We will not stand by while Idaho effectively criminalizes important works of literature and diminishes the fundamental right of young people to read and learn.”

The dangerously broad definition of “sexual content” has already forced libraries to remove hundreds of vital works from their shelves, including beloved classics such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

* **AUTHORS GUILD ASKS COURT TO RULE FLORIDA'S BOOK BAN LAW UNCONSTITUTIONAL**

The Authors Guild, alongside publishers and authors, has taken a significant step forward in our legal challenge against Florida's controversial book removal law. On March 4, 2025, our legal team filed a motion for summary judgment in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida, arguing that the state's book ban provisions are so clearly unconstitutional that the court should rule in our favor without proceeding to a full trial.

The lawsuit brings together a powerful coalition fighting for intellectual freedom, including publishers Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster; authors Julia Alvarez, Laurie Halse Anderson, John Green, Jodi Picoult, and Angie Thomas; the Authors Guild; and students and parents from affected Florida school districts.

Our motion challenges Section 1006.28 of Florida law, which our filing describes as “an unprecedented assault on Florida school libraries” that has led to the removal of hundreds of books. The law targets two categories of content: any material that describes sexual conduct and any “pornographic” content, without clearly defining either term.

One of the most problematic aspects of the law is its failure to account for student age and maturity, applying identical standards to books accessible to high school seniors and elementary school students alike. Meanwhile, educators face severe penalties for non-compliance, including monetary fines and potential loss of teaching licenses, creating a climate of fear in schools.

* AUTHORS GUILD FILES SUPREME COURT BRIEF OPPOSING RELIGIOUS OPT-OUTS FOR DIVERSE BOOKS

On April 9, 2025, the Authors Guild, together with Penguin Random House and the Educational Book & Media Association, submitted an amicus curiae brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in the significant case of *Mahmoud v. Taylor*. The case addresses whether parents in Montgomery County, Maryland, can demand religious opt-outs when public schools include books featuring LGBTQIA+ characters and themes in classroom instruction.

The lawsuit involves parents who claim that exposing their children to diverse books violates their First Amendment right to free exercise of religion. These parents are seeking the right to remove their children from class when books like *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* by Sarah S. Brannen, *Love, Violet* by Charlotte Sullivan Wild, *Pride*

Puppy by Robin Stevenson, and *Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope* by Jodie Patterson are read or discussed.

Our brief argues that exposure to books featuring diverse characters and families does not constitute religious indoctrination or violate free exercise rights. We emphasize that these works serve crucial educational purposes by providing both “mirrors” for children to see themselves and “windows” into different experiences.

The brief also highlights the impractical nature of implementing opt-out procedures for integrated literature in the curriculum. Montgomery County previously attempted such a system but found it “administratively infeasible” since, unlike discrete units like sex education, these books are woven throughout the language arts curriculum with flexible teaching schedules.

This case represents a critical moment in the ongoing national conversation about book access and intellectual freedom. As our brief concludes: “The Free Exercise Clause is not a forcefield that permits some public school parents to shield their children from exposure to certain people or ideas. . . . Reading *The Communist Manifesto* does not require one to become a Marxist. And, no matter the epic poet Homer’s timeless brilliance, reading *The Iliad* does not compel worship of Zeus.”

* AUTHORS GUILD SUBMITS TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RHODE ISLAND FREEDOM TO READ BILL

On March 12, 2025, the Guild filed written testimony with the Rhode Island Senate Education Committee in support of the Freedom to Read Act (S0238), a

bill that would provide critical protections for authors, publishers, and educators against book bans. Among other provisions, the bill would prohibit censoring library materials based on the origin, background, or views of the author, consistent with longstanding Supreme Court precedent. This is essential to ensuring that books are not removed based on vague and arbitrary standards or without consideration of the work as a whole. It also would give authors the right to sue government bodies subjecting them to censorship, with the opportunity to recover attorneys’ fees and costs if they prevail. And it would ensure that library employees are immune from civil or criminal liability for good-faith actions performed in the course of their duties.

As we noted in our comments, book bans are “antithetical to a healthy democracy, which requires vigorous literary debate, a diversity of ideas, and a tolerance for discourse that some find offensive or challenging.” The Freedom to Read bill provides “vitality important safeguards against unconstitutional assaults on authors’ and readers’ freedom of speech.”

We look forward to working with other free speech organizations and the members of the Rhode Island legislature to ensure that the bill swiftly becomes law.

* AUTHORS GUILD PETITION TO CONGRESS CONDEMNS PURPORTED FIRING OF REGISTER OF COPYRIGHTS SHIRA PERLMUTTER

The Authors Guild is deeply troubled by the Trump Administration’s unprecedented and unlawful firing of Register of Copyrights Shira Perlmutter, just two days after

Specialized Support and Services for Authors

Authors League Fund

The Authors League Fund, established in 1917 by the Authors League of America, provides emergency assistance to professional writers and dramatists who find themselves in financial need because of medical or health-related problems, temporary loss of income, or other misfortune. Most of the writers helped by the Fund suffer severe health problems but have inadequate or no insurance; some face eviction; many are older writers whose income has ceased through no fault of their own. Over the years, the Fund has helped thousands of writers, with millions of dollars in assistance. Its mission is to provide a safety net—and a sense of community—to writers enduring financial hardship. Learn more at authorsleaguefund.org

Authors Registry

The Authors Registry is a not-for-profit clearinghouse for payments to authors, receiving royalties from organizations overseas and distributing them to U.S. authors. It was founded in 1995 by a consortium of U.S. authors' organizations: The Authors Guild, The American Society of Journalists & Authors, the Dramatists Guild, and the Association of Authors' Representatives. To date, the Authors Registry has distributed over \$33,000,000 to authors in the United States. Learn more at authorsregistry.org

the firing of Carla Hayden, the Librarian of Congress. This extraordinary action represents a transparent attempt by the White House to interfere in the operations of a nonpartisan Legislative Branch agency charged with providing impartial expert advice on copyright law to Congress.

Register Perlmutter has been a truly outstanding public servant, ably guiding the Copyright Office through a period of rapid and unprecedented change in the creative and technological ecosystems. She has been a model of an impartial, nonpartisan government expert, and Congress, the copyright community, and the country will be worse off for her departure.

Well-known as a brilliant copyright scholar and lawyer, Perlmutter had a stellar career in copyright law before coming to the Copyright Office. Starting at a copyright law boutique after law school, from 1990 through 1995, Perlmutter was a law professor at the Catholic University of America, teaching copyright, trademark, unfair competition, and international intellectual property law. While on the faculty, she was the copyright consultant to the Clinton Administration's Advisory Council on the National Information Infrastructure. She then moved to the Copyright Office as a senior advisor, then to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), where she worked on WIPO's treaties on copyright and the internet. She later held the position of executive vice president for global legal policy at the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) and, before that, was vice president and associate general counsel for intellectual property policy at Time Warner. Most recently, she served as chief policy officer and director for international affairs at the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Perlmutter also published many articles on copyright law and

co-authored a leading casebook on international intellectual property law and policy.

In her place, the administration (with no authority to do so) appointed Paul Perkins, a Department of Justice attorney with no apparent copyright expertise. It is unclear how he will lead an office of copyright experts who have devoted their careers to copyright law. Prior Registers have come to the position usually after decades of copyright law experience.

Ms. Perlmutter's firing was not only unjustified and ill-considered, but it is also an unconstitutional abuse of power, outside the Executive branch's authority. By statute, the Copyright Office sits within the Library of Congress and is part of the Legislative, not the Executive, branch. The Librarian of Congress appoints the Register, who is specifically directed under the law to "[a]dvise Congress on national and international issues relating to copyright" (emphasis added).

Per Article One of the Constitution, Congress has the sole power to legislate copyright law. The House Administration Committee and Senate Rules Committee oversee the Library of Congress and the Copyright Office within it, and the Judiciary Committees in both houses work closely with the Register and the Office, as copyright law comes under their jurisdiction. Leaders of these committees are traditionally consulted when appointing a new Register. As of this writing, it appears that no members of Congress were consulted.

The Guild has submitted a petition with thousands of signatures from individuals and organizations urging Congress to stop this power grab and restore Register Perlmutter to her position. Thank you to all who have signed. Continue to keep your eye on emails from us with further information, including calls to action.

* AUTHORS GUILD RETAINS BANKRUPTCY ATTORNEYS TO REPRESENT MEMBERS IN ALBERT WHITMAN & COMPANY BANKRUPTCY

Albert Whitman & Company, a children's book publisher, filed for Chapter 11, Subchapter V bankruptcy on April 25, 2025, after months of financial difficulties. This filing came despite previous meetings where the publisher dismissed bankruptcy rumors and attributed cash flow problems to book bans and non-renewal of foreign licenses.

The Authors Guild has retained bankruptcy attorneys from Royer Cooper Cohen Braunfeld LLC to represent its members in the bankruptcy process. They've also attempted to contact Albert Whitman executives and are directing members to Martha Martinez, the administrator designated to handle author concerns.

Under Chapter 11 bankruptcy, the company remains in control of operations while restructuring contracts and renegotiating with creditors. The Subchapter V filing Albert Whitman requested provides an expedited process with shorter deadlines and greater flexibility. Typically, Subchapter V cases resolve in under a year, though payouts to creditors take three to five years.

Authors are considered creditors in the bankruptcy process and may be owed unpaid royalties, advances, or other contractual payments. Authors should receive a notice of bankruptcy filing with instructions for submitting a proof of claim by the deadline ("claims bar date") to preserve their right to recover money owed.

Regarding rights reversion, the bankruptcy estate now controls all publishing contracts. If Albert Whitman rejects a contract during bankruptcy, the author gets a reversion of rights and can file a claim for damages. However, automatic reversion clauses in contracts are largely ineffective during bankruptcy proceedings, and all rights remain frozen pending resolution unless contracts are specifically rejected. Note that in bankruptcy proceedings, creditors often receive less than the full amount of their claims, even though the payout process can take 3-5 years.

Authors affected by the bankruptcy should contact staff@authorsguild.org with questions.

* UPDATE ON AI LITIGATION AGAINST MAJOR TECH COMPANIES

The Authors Guild's class action lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft continues to progress, with discovery. While the defendants appear to be employing delay tactics through overbroad discovery requests, our legal team is actively pushing back. A ruling on whether OpenAI's use of authors' books constitutes fair use is not expected until fall 2025 at the earliest.

OpenAI has attempted to consolidate all cases against it into a multidistrict litigation, a request that will be decided by the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation. Our legal team does not anticipate that this request will succeed.

In parallel, the Guild has filed a suit against Meta and Anthropic, which has been consolidated with the Savieri Lawfirm's suit among other cases in California that are proceeding on a faster timeline. These coordinated legal actions reflect our commitment to ensuring that AI developers respect authors' rights and properly compensate creators for the use of their works.

* PUBLISHERS BEGIN OFFERING AI LICENSING TERMS TO AUTHORS

As AI companies seek to license content directly from publishers, the Guild is closely monitoring these developments to ensure that authors' interests are protected. We are pleased to note some positive steps, including that publishers are acknowledging AI rights do not automatically flow through original publishing agreements, payments will be made directly to authors (not counted against advances), and these arrangements are being treated as entirely new agreements.

Publishers have begun reaching out to literary agents with proposed terms and have shown willingness to negotiate and apply agreed-upon changes uniformly across all affected authors. However, the Guild emphasizes that authors themselves—not just their agents—should be making the final decisions about licensing their work for AI training.

The Guild has taken a firm position that AI licensing rights are not subsidiary rights under existing publishing contracts. While many publishers are attempting to categorize them under "Other Digital" or "Other Electronic" subsidiary rights clauses, our position is that subsidiary rights traditionally involve licensing with third parties to publish a book in some format, which fundamentally differs from AI training uses.

* LEGISLATION TO ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY AND PROTECT FREE SPEECH

The Guild has endorsed the Transparency and Responsibility for Artificial Intelligence Networks

Act (TRAIN Act), introduced by Senator Peter Welch (D-VT). This legislation would create a subpoena process enabling copyright owners to require AI companies to disclose whether their works were used in training datasets.

Additionally, the Guild is supporting the Free Speech Protection Act, a bipartisan bill co-sponsored by Representatives Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Kevin Kiley (R-CA) in the House, and Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) in the Senate. This would establish the first federal anti-SLAPP (strategic lawsuits against public participation) law, creating an expedited process to dismiss baseless lawsuits intended to intimidate journalists and authors through costly litigation. While some states have anti-SLAPP protections, a federal law would provide more consistent and comprehensive safeguards for writers nationwide.

* U.S. COPYRIGHT OFFICE REPORT ON AI OUTPUTS

On January 29, 2025, the U.S. Copyright Office released the [much-anticipated second part of its ongoing study on copyright and AI](#), which began last year with a notice of inquiry that garnered more than 10,000 public comments, [including those from the Authors Guild](#).

Part one of the report was released in July 2024 and concerned AI-generated “[digital replicas](#)”—false audiovisual depictions of real people. The second part expands the scope of the Office’s inquiry into a crucial issue: copyrightability. A third, still to come, will cover copyright issues around the training of AI, including fair use and licensing.

We are pleased that the new report confirms the Authors Guild’s positions and analysis set forth in our comments, reply comments,

and oral testimony at Copyright Office roundtables—and it cites the Guild more than twenty times. Consistent with case law that establishes human authorship as a *sine qua non* for copyright protection and the Copyright Office’s prior registration guidance, the report finds that AI-generated material is not copyrightable. This applies to wholly AI-generated content as well as AI-generated elements incorporated in an otherwise human-authored work. On the flip side, a work that is partly human authored and partly AI generated may be copyrightable as long as there is sufficient human authorship. The elements that are AI generated are simply filtered out, like any other public domain material, in an infringement analysis.

The report concludes that giving AI outputs even a new *sui generis* type of protection would fail to advance the purpose of copyright, which is to incentivize human creators. Echoing the Guild’s remarks, the Copyright Office explains that giving AI outputs copyright protection may undermine the incentives for human creation.

* GUIDANCE FOR NATIONAL AI ACTION PLAN TO PROTECT WRITERS’ RIGHTS

In developing a national Artificial Intelligence (AI) Action Plan—a comprehensive strategy to guide AI innovation and regulation in the United States—the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the Networking and Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD) National Coordination Office (NCO) of the National Science Foundation (NSF) requested comments from interested parties on a broad swath of issues related to AI. On March 14, 2025, the Authors Guild submitted for-

mal comments on issues affecting authors in response. We focused on three main concerns.

First, our comments emphasize that while AI offers valuable benefits and can serve as a tool for creators, the current AI development models pose significant threats to authors and the creative economy unless guardrails are enforced. This is because the major AI companies have built their large language models (LLMs) by scraping and ingesting vast quantities of copyrighted works without authorization or compensation. These include hundreds of thousands of books obtained from pirate websites, plus millions of news articles and other professionally written content. This practice represents a massive transfer of wealth from creators to tech companies. Moreover, AI systems are now being used to flood markets with machine-generated content that directly competes with human authors.

Second, we explained that voluntary licensing is the appropriate path forward, not the adoption of new copyright exceptions. We urged the Administration to support voluntary, freely negotiated licensing arrangements between copyright owners and AI companies—a market that already exists and is growing rapidly. Publishers such as Wiley, Oxford University Press, and HarperCollins, and news organizations including the Associated Press, NewsCorp, and *The Atlantic* have already entered into licensing agreements with AI companies. Entities like Created by Humans have entered the marketplace to make it possible for self-published and trade authors who own their AI training rights to license to AI companies at scale.

To further facilitate these voluntary agreements, we recommended legislation in three key areas:

- * **Transparency:** Companies that make generative AI models commercially available should be required to disclose what copyrighted works were used in their training datasets and where they obtained them.
- * **Labeling of AI Outputs:** Content that is AI-generated or significantly AI-manipulated should be clearly labeled as such, allowing consumers to make informed choices.
- * **Antitrust Exemption:** Authors should be permitted to form their own cooperatives to collectively manage and efficiently license their works for AI training, similar to those that exist in the music industry.

Third, we argued that copyright or similar intellectual protection should not be extended to AI-generated works. Such protection would undermine the market for human-created works without providing any benefit to society. The tech companies developing AI already have ample incentives through existing patent, trade secret, and copyright protections for their technologies.

* INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

On January 28, 2025, the U.K. House of Lords voted to support copyright and creativity by passing legislative amendments requiring AI companies to “observe U.K. copyright law, reveal their identities and purpose, and let creatives know if their copyrighted works have been scraped.”

The vote was a response to—and a welcome victory against—a deeply troubling pro-

posal by the current British government to create a new “data mining” exception to U.K. copyright law that would expressly permit AI companies to use any copyrighted work to train their AI models for free and without permission. The only right that authors and other copyright owners would retain would be to opt out of training by some affirmative action (and it is not clear how that could be achieved).

Not surprisingly, the government’s proposal sparked outrage in the creator community, and we were pleased to see it squarely rejected by the House. It is the opposite of what is needed and what the Guild has been fighting for—clear law that unauthorized training of AI models with professionally created works is presumptively infringing.

The U.K. government simultaneously conducted a consultation process in which members of the public could submit comments on its proposal. On February 25, the Guild submitted comments expressing our full agreement with the comments filed by the Society of Authors, our counterpart organization in the U.K. Specifically, we argued that the government’s proposal to require creators to affirmatively opt out of having their works used for AI training would constitute a massive, unjustifiable transfer of wealth to the tech sector at the expense of the creative professions, both in the U.K. and around the world. **AG**

Pascal Hall Authors Series Returns for Fourth Season

We’re looking forward to returning to Maine this summer for the Pascal Hall Authors Series, in partnership with the Leshner Family Foundation and Maine Media Workshops + College!

The Pascal Hall Authors Series events are free, but space is limited and registration is required to attend.

The lineup includes:

- * **Karla Cornejo Villavicencio** in conversation with **Caitlin Shetterly** on June 18, 5–7 pm Eastern
- * **Emily Wilson** in conversation with **Barbara Weiden Boyd** on Wednesday, July 16, 5–7 pm Eastern
- * **Patrick Radden Keefe** in conversation with **Lynn Boulger** on Wednesday, August 6, 5–7 pm Eastern
- * **Amitav Ghosh** in conversation with **Palak Taneja** on Wednesday, August 27, 5–7 pm Eastern

Recordings from 2022–2024 are available, and include the following authors: **Andrew Sean Greer, Michael Chabon, Ayelet Waldman, Emily St. John Mandel, Gibson Fay-LeBlanc, Jia Tolentino, Morgan Lavoie, James Shapiro, Caroline Bicks, Stacy Schiff, Robin Lloyd, Sigrid Nunez, Christina Baker Kline, Neil Gaiman, Laura Miller, Lauren Groff, Ted Widmer, and Patricia O’Toole.**

Register at authorsguild.org/pascal-hall-author-series.

REGIONAL CHAPTERS UPDATE

In the second half of 2024, our regional chapters continued to host in-person events, creating more opportunities for members to meet in person. Some events were still held virtually, allowing for a more inclusive environment.

In May, Portland, Oregon, ambassador Bert Krages hosted an in-person get-together at Literary Arts for authors to meet, chat, and build community.

Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Las Vegas Chapters invited Connie J. Mablesen to speak at a virtual gathering, Legal Protection for Fictional Characters. Without characters, there is no story. So, how are characters protected under the law? Ambassadors Heidi Mastrogiovanni and Paul Peress (LA), Shay Vasudeva (Phoenix), and Teri Emory (Las Vegas), co-hosted this event.

Tampa chapter ambassador Kiki Ringer invited members for a happy hour and conversation at M.Bird rooftop lounge on May 23.

In partnership with The New York Society Library, the New York City chapter organized a panel presentation titled Members' Room Panel: The Writer with a Thousand Faces—Creative Imagination, Cultural Responsibility, and Inhabiting Different Worlds. Panelists included Roberto Carlos Garcia, Maité Iracheta, S.J. Rozan, and Jennifer Shyue. Catherine Martinez Torigian moderated. In-person and live-streamed, participants were invited to consider the significance of extra-experiential writing for their own creativity as well as its impact on the larger literary community.

Boston chapter co-ambassadors Stephanie Schorow and Nancy Rubin Stuart hosted a panel in June to discuss the grit and the gloss of self-publishing. Speakers Barbara Eppich Struna and Ken Halpern discussed the advantages and disadvantages of self-publishing, and how to increase your readership, among other topics.

On June 30, Los Angeles co-ambassadors Heidi Mastrogiovanni and Paul Peress gathered folks at The Fat Dog for a fun, casual happy hour to hear about everyone's latest writing updates and more.

After a summer hiatus, Rhoni Blankenhorn joined the Authors Guild as Manager of Regional Chapters, and fall events kicked off in Chicago. Ambassador Charles Grippio hosted a Zoom event on Ghostwriting for Fun and for Profit. Charles spoke about his own experience as a ghost writer and the dos and don'ts of the business.

In October, Tampa ambassador Kiki Ringer launched her Zoom Writers' Social, which takes place on the second Tuesday of every month. This series focuses on community building and discourse. Members come together to discuss what they're working on and support each other as writers.

Also in October, Detroit ambassador Weam Namou hosted the first of her Writing Ritual series via Zoom. On the second Wednesday of every month, Weam invites chapter members to join her for a writing ritual designed to inspire and empower writers at all levels. Attendees set their writing intentions, explore creative techniques,

and address professional goals. This series aims to help writers share, connect, and elevate their writing journeys.

Members in New York City met under the arch in Washington Square Park on October 20 for a Literary Tour of Greenwich Village organized by New York City co-ambassador Diana Altman. Tour guide Joyce Gold discussed the lives and stories of many great writers who lived or worked in the area, such as Walt Whitman, Edith Wharton, Louisa May Alcott, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

On October 23, co-ambassadors Wendy Wong and Connie Bennett gathered San Diego members at The Flower Pot Cafe and Bakery for a conversation, Revision Cycles: Knowing When Your Book is Done. Members were invited to network and make new friends.

Raleigh-Durham co-ambassadors Kelly Starling Lyons and Judy Allen Dodson organized The Business of Being a Writer: A Mini Conference on November 10 at Oberlin Regional Library in Raleigh, N.C., that consisted of several panels and social events. The Ins and Outs of Traditional and Self-Publishing included Kwame Mbalia, award-winning author and head of Disney imprint Freedom Fire; and Chelsea Bennett, education and community manager for Lulu Press. Khalisa Rae Thompson, award-winning poet, author, community organizer, and the theater and literature director for the North Carolina Arts Council, and Kima Jones, award-winning writer, agent, book marketer, and publicist, spoke about

Resources for Writers. Authors Guild director of advocacy and policy Umair Kazi spoke about What Authors Should Know About Al.

Co-ambassadors Nancy Rubin Stuart and Stephanie Schorow of the Boston Chapter held a Zoom session on November 11. Marketing Your Book to Success: Before, During and After Publication, featured international best-selling author Jennifer S. Wilkov, who discussed how to master the art of determining what belongs in your marketing platform—and what doesn't—before, during, and after your book has been published.

Chicago also hosted a marketing-focused event in November, Do It Yourself Marketing. Ambassador Charles Grippio invited marketing and social media expert Jenn Hanson-dePaula to give members insight on how to use social media to connect with ideal readers and sell more books.

On November 16, San Francisco Bay Area co-ambassadors Laird Harrison and MK Chavez hosted a Writer Recalibration at one of the city's major cultural institutions, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. MK led a workshop focused on renewing routines and establishing boundaries that nurture a sustainable writing practice. MK encouraged attendees to redirect the idea of recalibration from perfection and encouraged them to instead look for ways writing could fit naturally into their lives.

Los Angeles co-ambassadors Heidi Mastrogiovanni and Paul Peress invited members to SUPERBA Food + Bread Venice on December 8 to celebrate creativity and togetherness.

Chicago ambassador Charles Grippio invited members for a virtual meet and greet on December 10. This was an opportunity for members celebrate each other's accomplishments, and look forward to what's to come.

San Diego members gathered on December 11 at Barbarella

Restaurant for a holiday happy hour organized by co-ambassadors Wendy Wong and Connie Bennett. Attendees were invited to bring book recommendations to share and to display their own books for folks to peruse.

On the same day in New York City, The Authors Guild Foundation organized an event at McNally Jackson Seaport to celebrate James Baldwin's centennial, featuring Chukwudi Iwuji, acclaimed stage and screen actor. New York City co-ambassador Ginger McKnight-Chavers invited members to join her for a reception at the bookstore's coffee and wine bar.

Literary agent Danielle Egan-Miller, president of Browne & Miller Literary Associates, spoke with Chicago chapter members in January 2025 about how to get an agent, what agents want from authors, what authors want from agents, and how authors and agents can work together to further an author's career. Chicago ambassador Charles Grippio hosted this event.

Boston co-ambassadors Nancy Rubin Stuart and Stephanie Schorow organized an evening at Medford Brewing Company on January 29 with the venue's co-founder and Medford's Poet Laureate-elect Max Heinegg. Attendees enjoyed pizza and the chance to hear about Max's journey as a beer brewer and a poet/songwriter.

For a special feature of the monthly Writers Social events in Tampa, ambassador Kiki Ringer invited guest speaker Penny Wallace, a virtual operations coach and bookkeeper, to share tips for managing the financial and business side of writing. Penny appeared virtually on February 7.

Book critic Donna Seaman joined Chicago ambassador Charles Grippio in conversation on February 11. Donna discussed the state of book reviewing, including pre-publication magazines and

how books are chosen for reviews at *Booklist* and other publications. She spoke about how to examine reader-reviewer sites and social media book influencers.

In the month of Valentine's Day, Los Angeles co-ambassadors Heidi Mastrogiovanni and Paul Peress invited members to share love-themed selections from their work. Members gathered at Heidi's home to read their work and connect in an intimate setting.

Near the end of February, Philadelphia co-ambassadors Jaime Grookett and Leah Mele invited members to join them at a social event at Dock Street Brewery South. The event was hosted by Lynn Rosen, who encouraged attendees to meet friends old and new and raise a glass together.

San Diego members celebrated the beginning of spring with a brunch at True Food Kitchen. Attendees enjoyed bites and conversation, reconnected with fellow writers, and appreciated their growing community.

Our Chicago chapter got together for another meet and greet via Zoom in late March. Members caught up on the latest updates about each other's books, signings, and personal appearances, and shared ideas for future events.

We want to extend a warm welcome to our five new ambassadors who have come on to help lead their respective chapters: Daphne DiFazio and Scott Semegran will serve as co-ambassadors for Austin. Liza Achilles, Jeffrey Higgins, and Maria Levato are joining us as co-ambassadors in Washington, D.C.

If you live in or near a city with a regional chapter would like to join our mailing list to receive updates about chapter events, sign up and find more information at authorsguild.org/regional-chapters.

—Rhoni Blankenhorn
Director of Membership &
Regional Chapters

LEGAL WATCH

* NEW CENSORSHIP TRACKER SPOTLIGHTS ALARMING WAVE OF FREE SPEECH VIOLATIONS

The Authors Guild is closely monitoring a disturbing wave of executive orders and governmental actions that threaten not only authors' ability to create, but also to receive federal funding and support through institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities.

Unprecedented Assault on Free Expression

The current administration's actions represent an unprecedented assault on free expression across multiple sectors of American society. From campus speech to media access, from scientific research to historical documentation, the patterns emerging in our tracker reveal a systematic campaign to control and restrict protected speech.

The First Amendment was designed precisely to prevent the government from silencing views it disagrees with. Yet our tracker documents numerous instances where federal power is being weaponized to punish expression deemed unacceptable by the administration. Such weaponization endangers the foundations upon which our shared democratic values rest.

Executive Orders Restricting Expression

Several recent executive orders have implemented severe restrictions on language and expression. EO 14151 and EO 14173 prohibit federal agencies from providing funding to organizations with programs promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. EO 14168 restricts funding for entities that "promote gender ideology" and enforces a strict biological definition of gender. These restrictions affect writers applying for grants through the NEA, NEH, and other federal programs, potentially disqualifying applicants based on their viewpoint.

A federal court in Maryland has already temporarily blocked key provisions of the DEI orders, ruling they are "unconstitutionally vague" and "squarely, unconstitutionally 'abridge the freedom of speech.'"

Campus Speech Under Fire

Particularly troubling is the targeting of campus expression through immigration enforcement and funding cuts. In March and April 2025, international students at Columbia, Tufts, and other universities were detained by federal authorities for their protected political speech. Rumeysa Ozturk, a Turkish doctoral student at Tufts, was detained and had her visa revoked after co-authoring an opinion piece in the student newspaper. Mohsen Mahdawi and Mahmoud Khalil faced similar treatment—all

without criminal charges, solely for their protected political expression.

Simultaneously, the administration has weaponized federal funding to pressure universities into controlling campus speech. Harvard University (at least \$2.3 billion), Columbia University (at least \$700 million), Brown University (at least \$510 million), and the University of Pennsylvania (at least \$175 million) have all faced funding freezes explicitly tied to campus expression. The chilling effect of these financial penalties threatens academic freedom at its core, undermining the ecosystem that sustains scholarly inquiry and intellectual advancement.

Media and Information Access Restricted

The tracker also reveals alarming attempts to control media coverage and public information. The administration has tried to shut down Voice of America, initiated FCC investigations against critical media outlets, and seized control of the White House press pool from the independent White House Correspondents' Association. Behind these actions lies a concerning strategy to manipulate public discourse by controlling the channels through which information flows to citizens.

Attacks on Cultural and Research Institutions

On March 14, 2025, the administration issued an executive order tar-

getting the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), placing all 75 staff members on administrative leave. This agency administers approximately \$160 million annually to state library agencies—funding that constitutes between one-third to one-half of their total budgets and supports 125,000 libraries nationwide.

The same executive order also targeted the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a Smithsonian Institution research center that provides nonpartisan policy counsel on global affairs. With a stroke of the pen, vital resources for education, cultural preservation, and informed citizenship face potential elimination.

Similarly, the National Endowment for the Humanities faces devastating cuts, with recommendations to reduce staff by 70–80 percent and potentially cancel grants made during the previous administration. With an annual budget of \$211 million, the NEH provides critical support for humanities projects nationwide and directs 40 percent of its program funds to state humanities councils. Rural and underserved communities stand to lose the most as these funding streams run dry.

In the scientific realm, the NIH has begun enforcing bans on terms like “LGBT,” “gender,” and “equity” in grant applications and scientific publications. Researchers at Columbia University have reported halts in projects addressing marginalized communities due to these language restrictions. Beyond mere terminology, entire fields of research face erasure through linguistic constraints that distort scientific inquiry.

Beyond Partisan Politics: Fundamental American Values at Stake

Regardless of one’s political stance, the right to speak freely without

government punishment is fundamental to American identity and freedoms. The First Amendment protects all voices—from the right and the left—precisely because the founders understood that democracy cannot function without the free exchange of ideas and the ability to criticize those in power.

As writers, we have a particular stake in defending free expression. Our craft depends on the ability to choose our words freely, to explore controversial ideas, and to challenge prevailing narratives. But this is not just a writer’s issue—it is a foundational American value that affects every citizen’s ability to participate in democratic self-governance.

Taking Action

The Authors Guild is building coalitions with free speech organizations, press foundations, and civil liberties groups while simultaneously supporting legal challenges to unconstitutional executive orders. Our team is actively documenting patterns of speech suppression affecting authors and researchers through our comprehensive legal tracker of First Amendment violations.

We call on all writers, readers, and defenders of democratic values to join us in this critical work. The erosion of free speech rights occurs incrementally—measured not in grand proclamations but in quiet restrictions that collectively reshape the boundaries of permissible expression.

If you have been affected by these executive orders or speech restrictions, contact us directly at staff@authorsguild.org with details of your experience.

View the tracker here: authorsguild.org/advocacy/free-speech/censorship-tracker. AG

Legal Services Scorecard

From 5/2/2024 to 5/1/2025, the Authors Guild Legal Services Department handled 2,958 legal inquiries including:

654

Book contract reviews

204

Agency contract reviews

77

Reversion of rights inquiries

207

Inquiries on copyright law, including infringement, registration, duration, and fair use

57

Inquiries regarding securing permissions and privacy releases

71

First Amendment queries

1,688

Other inquiries, including translation contracts, electronic rights, literary estates, contract disputes, contract questions, periodical and multimedia contracts, movie and television options, internet piracy, liability insurance, finding an agent, and attorney referrals

MEMBER NEWS

* BOOKS BY MEMBERS

Larry Ackerman: *Jones of the Old Shoes*; **W.H. Adair:** *Deadly . . . as a Walk in the Park*; **Clint Adams:** *Live & Learn: A Retiree's Guide to Keep Going*; **Jane Meredith Adams** (and Dylan Scholinski): *The Last Time I Wore a Dress*; **Faith Addair:** *He's Just My Brother; Raising an Addict: A Memoir*; **Tanya Agler:** *The Triplets' Holiday Miracle*; **Walter Albritton:** *Living a Life Filled with Love: Impossible? No! Not if Jesus is Lord of Your Life!*; **Jacqueline Alcántara:** *Tíos and Primos*; **I.B. Alexander:** *Down Came Death*; **Yasmine S. Ali:** *The View from the Cliffs*; **Yasemin Alptekin:** *The Passage*; **Liz Alterman:** *The House on Cold Creek Lane; Sad Sacked*; **Andy Amendola:** *ABCs of INDYCAR Racing: My First Guide to INDYCAR Racing*; **Josef's BIG Dream:** *An INDY 500 Story*; **Steve Anderson:** *Show Game*; **Janice Angelique:** *A Bitter Sweet Memoir*; **Thembi Aquil:** *Empowered Abundance: From Debt to Financial Success: 5 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Money*; **Lynn Arceneaux:** *Crescent City Adventures: Unlock the Magic of New Orleans with Amaya*; **Mahendri Arundale** (Amina Rahman, illus.): *A Happy Body Is a Healthy Body: An Ayurvedic Cookbook Book*; **Jeffrey Ashkin:** *The Second Life of Jonathan Sendel*; **Rilla Askew:** *The Hungry and the Haunted: Stories*; **R. Aveen:** *Animal Listeners: The Awakening of Quinby Clark*; **Caroline Q. Baker:** *Fields*

on the Farm; Sound Goodnight: A Lyrical Journey Through the Safari; Wander Goodnight: A Lyrical Journey Through the Woods; **Rachele Baker:** *Vengeance in the Vines*; **Carolyn Banks:** *The Importance of Being Erica*; **Charles Baran:** *Rhoda Rage and the Goldfish Letter*; **Jonathan M. Barnett:** *The Big Steal: Ideology, Interest, and the Undoing of Intellectual Property*; **Patchen Barss:** *The Impossible Man: Roger Penrose and the Cost of Genius*; **Ruth Bass:** *The Triangle: A Tale of Love and Death*; **Yvonne Battle-Felton:** *Curdle Creek*; **George Beauregard:** *Reservations for Nine: A Doctor's Family Confronts Cancer*; **Erin Becker:** *Crushing It*; **Sara T. Behrman** (Melanie Mikecz, illus.): *The Sea Hides A Seahorse*; **Christopher Bell:** *Walking East Harlem: A Neighborhood Experience*; **Greg Belliveau:** *Blood Clan*; **Toni Bellon:** *L.E.A.P.: Linn's Emerging Adult Plan*; **Helen Benedict:** *The Good Deed*; **Marcia Naomi Berger:** *The Bipolar Therapist: A Journey from Madness to Love and Meaning*; **Ed Bernd Jr.** (and Jose Silva): *Creative Coincidences: The Next Phase of Human Evolution*; **Dana Lynn Bernstein:** *It's the Thought That Counts: Mastering the Art of YOU vs. you*; **Samuel Garza Bernstein:** *Starring Joan Crawford: The Films, the Fantasy, and the Modern Relevance of a Silver Screen Icon*; **Sandra Berris:** *Indelible Shadow*; **Perle S. Besserman:** *Fay's Men*; **David W. Betterton:** *Pleasantville Stories: Sex, Dancing, and Shooting U.S. Navy Jets (Growing Up in*

South New Jersey in the 1960s); **Tom Birdseye:** *There Is No Map for This*; **Tavi Taylor Black:** *Serabelle: Where the Wealthy Come to Play*; **Paula Blackman:** *Night Train to Nashville: The Greatest Untold Story of Music City*; **Roger D. Blackwell** (and Roger A. Bailey): *Objective Prosperity: How Behavioral Economics Can Improve Outcomes for You, Your Business, and Your Nation*; **Cynthia Blakeley:** *The Innermost House: A Memoir*; **Carla Blank:** *A Jew in Ramallah and Other Essays*; **M.E. Blaustone:** *For the Love of My Enemy*; **Jarol Boan:** *The Medicine Chest: A Physician's Journey Towards Reconciliation*; **Hal Bodner:** *In Sad Cypress*; **Shannon Bohrer:** *Judicial Soup: One Man's Wrongful Conviction and What It Means For Criminal Justice Reform*; **Betty Bolte:** *Snow on Magnolias*; **Edna Bonhomme:** *A History of the World in Six Plagues: How Contagion, Class, and Captivity Shaped Us, from Cholera to COVID-19*; **Kathleen Long Bostrom:** *Daddy, Tell Me a Story*; **Jenn Bouchard:** *Considering Us*; **Christy Bowe:** *History in the Making: A Focus on Five U.S. Presidents*; **Cynthia Brian** (Marta Maszkiewicz illus.): *Books in the Barnyard: Oh Deer!*; **Marlene Targ Brill:** *Jane Addams: The Most Dangerous Woman in America*; **Adrienne Brooks:** *Riding Nerdy*; **Sondra R. Brooks:** *Not Good Enough Girl: A Memoir of an Inconvenient Daughter*; **W.E. Brower Jr.** (and Allan J.D. McNeill, T.W. Komisar, and Cameron J. Scott): *Cobwebs & Curios*; **Beth Dotson Brown:** *Rooted in Sunrise*; **C.E.**

Brown: *Seeing Gray*; **Karen Bruno:** *Aliens, Campers, and Coffee*; **James Buckley, Jr.:** *Out of the Park: True Stories of the Greatest Players Who Changed the Game*; *Scholastic Year in Sports 2024*; 'Ster It Up!: The Story of Santa Barbara Foresters, America's Most Successful Summer Base'; *Who Is Lionel Messi?*; **Weldon Burge:** *Toxic Candy: Tales of Suspense, Fantasy, & Horror*; **Debbie Burke:** *Fruit of the Poisonous Tree*; **Jacalyn S. Burke:** *The Custodians*; **DA Butler:** *The Backyard*; **Regina Buttner:** *The Revenge Paradox*; **Lois Cahall:** *The Many Lives & Loves of Hazel Lavery*; **Wayne Caldwell:** *River Road*; **Stephanie Calmenson** (Shannon McNeill, Illus.): *How to Cheer Up a Friend*; **Stephanie Calmenson** (Hollie Hibbert Illus.): *Oodles of Poodles and Doodles: A Woofing, Wagging Book of Colors*; **Jodi Thompson Carr:** *Lunch Ladies*; **Les Carroll:** *This Troubled Ground*; **Evelyn Ann Casey:** *Candlewood*; **Julie Castillo:** *The Long Man's Pillow*; **Michael Castleman:** *The Untold Story of Books: A Writer's History of Book Publishing*; **Annie Cathryn:** *The Friendship Breakup*; **Susan Erickson Catucci:** *Madison Meets the Moon*; **Diana R. Chambers:** *The Secret War of Julia Child*; **Lisa Cheek:** *Sit, Cinderella, Sit: A Mostly True Memoir*; **Cherilyn Chin** (Tracy Nishimura Bishop, Illus.): *Lily Lu to the Rescue—Sea Turtle in a Tangle*; **Robert MacNeil Christie:** *Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*; **Margot Clark-Junkins:** *Following the Front: The Dispatches of World War II Correspondent Sidney A. Olson*; **Traci Claywell:** *Cinderella Claps Back: The Reckoning*; **Amber Clement:** *Fortune's Kiss*; **Craig Cline:** *GoldenRuleism: Living a GoldenRuleism-Guided Life*; **Mark Coggins:** *Geisha Confidential*; **Erica Colahan:** *The Oystercatcher of Southwark*; **Sneed B. Collard III:** *First-Time Japan: A Step-by-Step Guide for*

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Karen J. Young: *The Girl with the Magic Ponytails: French Tales;*

E. Lily Yu: *Break, Blow, Burn, & Make: A Writer's Thoughts on Creation;*

Jane Breskin Zalben (Thai My Phuong, illus.): *Gingerbread Dreidels;* **Julie McDonald Zander:** *The Reluctant Pioneer.*

* MEMBERS MAKE NEWS

Katherine Hall Page and **R.L. Stine** have been named the 2024 Grand Masters by the Mystery Writers of America.

Peggy Adler's audiobook *Trilogy: Three True Stories of Scoundrels and Schemers*, narrated by Peter Coyote, was the gold medal winner in the 2024 Independent Publisher Book Awards (IPPY) competition in the Audiobook: Non-Fiction / Personal category. It also won a gold medal from the Electronic Literature (eLit) Awards Competition.

Marlene Targ Brill's middle-grade biography *Jane Addams: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* was a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection.

Sneed B. Collard III's picture book *Border Crossings* won NCTE's 2024 Orbis Pictus Award for the best children's nonfiction book of

the year. It was also named a finalist for the High Plains Book Award.

Estella Gonzalez's *Huizache Women* was selected as a finalist for the Jesse H. Jones Award for Best Book of Fiction by the Texas Institute of Letters.

Barbara Gregorich received the 2024 Society for American Baseball Research's Dorothy Seymour Mills Lifetime Achievement Award.

Josiah Hatch's *Journey to St. Thomas: Tales for Our Time*, illustrated by Cathy Morrison, won the 2024 American Booksellers Association Award for Poetry.

Diane Hatz's *Rock Gods & Messy Monsters* won first runner-up in the 2024 Eric Hoffer Book Award's Science Fiction & Fantasy category. It was also named a finalist for the 2024 Da Vinci Eye Award, the 2024 First Horizon Award, and the 2024 Eric Hoffer Award Grand Prize.

Brett Ashley Kaplan received a fellowship from the University of Illinois Center of Advanced Study for her novel *Vandervelde Downs*.

Susannah Kennedy's *Reading Jane: A Daughter's Memoir* was named a the 2023 Foreword INDIES award winner in the Family & Relationships category. It also won a 2024 Bronze Independent Publisher Book IPPY, and was finalist in the 2024 National Indie Excellence Awards and the 2024 Kindle Book Awards.

Lin King was named the winner of the 2024 National Book Award in the category of Translated Literature for her translation of Yáng Shuang-zí's *Taiwan Travelogue*.

Michael Maloof's *Relentless* won the annual Adventure Writers Competition's Clive Cussler Grandmaster Award.

Steven Mayfield's *The Penny Mansions* won a first place ribbon in the CIBA Book Awards Mark Twain Competition. It was also a finalist for a Foreword Indies Award.

Chris McKinney was named *Honolulu Magazine's* Author of the Year.

Katherine Hall Page's *The Body in the Web* received the 2024 Maine Literary Award in crime fiction.

Michelle M. Pillow was awarded a \$500 grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC).

D. C. Reep's *Luke Under Fire: Caught Behind Enemy Lines*, co-written with E. A. Allen, received a 2024 gold medal for YA fiction from the Military Writers Society of America.

Candi Sary's *Magdalena* won the Eric Hoffer Book Award for General Fiction.

Martha Tolles's *Love and Sabotage* won the Silver Literary Titan Award.

Ledia Xhoga's *Misinterpretation* was shortlisted for the Center for Fiction's 2024 First Novel Prize.

Jane Breskin Zalben's *Gingerbread Dreidels* was a Junior Literary Guild Gold Standard Award Selection.

* IN MEMORIAM

Dorothy Allison, 75, died on November 6, 2024, in Guerneville, CA. Her acclaimed 1992 novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*, based on her own traumatic childhood in the working-class South, propelled her to literary stardom. In 1996 it became a movie on Showtime.

Tina McElroy Ansa, 74, died September 10, 2024, in St. Simon's Island, GA. In the 1970s she became the first Black woman to join the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* editorial team, then went on to a celebrated career writing Black literature, such as *Ugly Ways*, *The Hand I Fan With* and *You Know Better*. She founded DownSouth Press in 2007 to publish and promote "the literature of African American people that will enrich, enlighten and edify the world."

Paul Auster, 77, died on April 30, 2024, in Brooklyn, NY. He was well known for his postmodern take on noir novels, beginning with *City of Glass* in 1985, the first of his celebrated New York Trilogy. Though well-known in the U.S., he became incredibly popular in Europe, especially France.

James Carlos Blake, 81, died on January 11, 2025, in Venice, FL. He was well known for his violent novels covering the history of the U.S.–Mexico border areas, beginning with 1995's *The Pistolet*.

Caleb Carr, 68, died on May 23, 2024, in Cherry Plain, NY. He was a military historian and author best known for 1994's *The Alienist*, a bestselling historical mystery novel following a child psychiatrist investigating the murders of young male prostitutes in the late nineteenth century.

Millicent Dillon, 99, died on January 27, 2025, in Daly City, CA. She was a trained physicist who left the field in horror after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima at the end of World War II, becoming best known for her nonfiction chronicles of the eccentric American literary couple Jane and Paul Bowles.

Nikki Giovanni, 81, died on December 9, 2024, in Blacksburg, VA. She was a poet, activist, children's book author, and professor who was considered a star of the Black Arts Movement, which was associated with Black nationalism in the civil rights era. Among her noted works is *Black Feeling*, *Black Talk/Black Judgement*, a collection of poetry published in 1968.

Ella Leffland, 92, died on September 18, 2024, in San Leandro, CA. She was well known for her critically acclaimed historical novels on various subjects, with perhaps her most famous book being 1990's *The Knight, Death and the Devil* on Nazi leader Hermann Göring's path from World War I fighter ace to eventual suicide.

Alice Munro, 92, died on May 13, 2024, in Port Hope, Canada. She was a prolific writer of short stories and won the Nobel Prize in Literature for her 2012 short story collection *Dear Life*.

Thomas Rockwell, 91, died on September 27, 2024, in Danbury, CT. The son of the famous painter Norman, Thomas (who appeared in many of his father's paintings) became an author of popular children's books, most notably 1973's *How to Eat Fried Worms*, which received a movie adaptation in 2006.

Jane Rohrer, 96, died on November 2, 2024, in Philadelphia, PA. Her first book of poetry, *Life After Death*, was published in 2002. She was one of the first poets with a conservative Mennonite background to be published in mainstream U.S. journals and magazines.

M.J. Rose (born Melisse Shapiro), 71, died on December 10, 2024. After self-publishing her debut novel *Lip Service* in 1998, which sold over 75,000 copies before being acquired by Pocket Books, she became a publishing innovator. Rose authored nineteen novels including *The Jeweler of Stolen Dreams* and *Cartier's Hope*, founded AuthorBuzz marketing agency, and co-founded Blue Box Press. A founding member of International Thriller Writers, she shared her life with composer Doug Scofield for thirty years.

Michael Shatzkin, 77, died on November 7, 2024 in New York City after a brief battle with lymphoma. He was a visionary consultant in the publishing industry for more than fifty years, beginning at Brentano's bookstore in 1962 before founding the Idea Logical Company in 1979. Shatzkin pioneered digital publishing strategies, wrote the influential blog *The Shatzkin Files*, and authored works including *In Cold Type* (1982). In his later years, he focused on climate change through ClimateChangeResources.org.

Victoria Thompson, 76, died on August 23, 2024, in Long Grove, IL. She was the author of the best-selling Gaslight Mystery series, which reached twenty-seven books with the publication of *Murder in Rose Hill* in April 2024.

* DECEASED MEMBERS

Linda J. Armstrong
Vadim J. Birstein
Barbara Taylor Bradford
Joseph Stellario Catalano
William A. Cohen
Mary D. Curtis
Brian H. Dovey
Anthony J. Esler
Leonard Everett Fisher
Samuel C. Florman
James Gunn
Carol Hebard
James Spencer Hogg
Carolyn Janik
Sesyle Joslin
Robert Gary Kammen
Enrico Lamet
Patricia Lee Levine
Jerry Ludwig
William Mares
John A. Meyer
Arthur Mokin
Alan Moss
Dennis Must
Tom Savage
Lore Segal
Peter Straub
Helen M. Szablya
Dan Wakefield
Alina R. Wheeler
Julie Doran Whipple
Renee Winegarten

In Memoriam: Nelson DeMille (1943-2024)



The Authors Guild mourns the loss of Nelson DeMille, a dedicated member for forty-three years, up until his passing on September 17, 2024, at the age of 81.

DeMille's career as an author began in 1974 with the publication of *The Sniper*, the first in his Joe Ryker series, later republished under the pseudonym Jack Cannon. It was, however, his 1978 novel *By the Rivers of Babylon* that marked his breakthrough, establishing him as a formidable voice in the realm of suspense and thriller fiction.

Throughout his career, DeMille authored more than thirty novels and numerous short stories. His John Corey series, beginning with *Plum Island* in 1997, captivated readers worldwide, while *The General's Daughter* also achieved acclaim when it was adapted into a successful film starring John Travolta.

DeMille's contributions to the thriller genre were widely recognized, culminating in being named ThrillerMaster of the Year by the International Thriller

Writers in 2015. This accolade was a testament to his enduring impact on the field and his ability to consistently deliver gripping and thought-provoking narratives.

Beyond his personal success, DeMille was deeply invested in nurturing the literary community. He served as president of the Mystery Writers of America and held multiple honorary doctorates from New York colleges, reflecting the high esteem in which he was held both as a writer and as a mentor to aspiring authors.

DeMille's impact on the literary world extended beyond his writing. His novel *The Gold Coast* became the center of a significant legal case, *Randall v. DeMille*, that helped establish an important precedent for authors' rights. In a \$5 million libel suit, DeMille and his publisher, Warner Books, Inc., were sued by a plaintiff who claimed a character in the novel was based on her. The New York court's dismissal of this case before trial was part of an important line of libel-in-fiction decisions won by authors and publishers that reinforced authors' First Amendment rights and their ability to draw inspiration from real-life experiences without fear of legal repercussions. The fact that fictional characters share only certain characteristics, even unusual ones, with real people known to the author is not enough to support a defamation claim, allowing authors and publishers to have claims dismissed before legal fees accumulate and deterring others from bringing such claims.

A loyal, active supporter of the Authors Guild Foundation, DeMille was always a lively presence at the Foundation's galas. His commitment to supporting fellow authors and defending their rights was as much a part of his legacy as his gripping novels.

Nelson DeMille's contributions to literature and his advocacy for authors' rights have left an indelible mark on the literary world. He will be deeply missed, but his impact will continue to be felt for generations to come. **AG**

* PROGRAMMING

AUTHORS GUILD FOUNDATION PRESENTS:

The following events brought together authors and their readers, both in person and online:

- * **Leslie Jamison and Zoe Kazan**, McNally Jackson Books, NYC June 12
- * **James Shapiro and Ayad Akhtar**, McNally Jackson Books, NYC, June 19
- * **A reading of Ilya Kaminsky's *Conversations During Air-Raid Sirens* with Theater of War Productions and the actors John Turturro, Mare Winningham, Anthony Edwards, and Ato Blankson-Wood**, The Greene Space at WNYC, NYC; and Zoom), June 20
- * **Sarah Smarsh**, Strand Bookstore, NYC, September 9
- * **Garth Greenwell and Colm Tóibín**, Skylight Books, Los Angeles, September 12
- * **Xochitl Gonzalez and Claire Jiménez**, McNally Jackson Books, NYC, September 19
- * **Edwidge Danticat and Michèle Stephenson**, McNally Jackson Books, NYC, November 12
- * **James Baldwin at 100: A reading by Chukwudi Iwuji**, McNally Jackson Books, NYC, December 11
- * **Alice Oswald**, Strand Bookstore, NYC, February 10
- * **Sanaz Toossi and Heidi Schreck**, Roundabout Theatre Company, NYC, February 22
- * **Alice Oswald's "Weighing of Souls: A Lecture Performance,"** Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, February 26 and 27
- * **Agnes Callard and Elizabeth Bruenig**, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY, April 14

PASCAL HALL ROCKPORT, MAINE:

- * **Elliot Ackerman**, June 25
- * **Andrew Sean Greer**, July 23
- * **Emily St. John Mandel**, August 6
- * **Jia Tolentino**, August 27

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:

The Authors Guild launched live Q&A meetings with top book publicists as part of our members-only Launchpad program for marketing and publicity support.

Launchpad Q&A sessions are ticketed events intended for authors with forthcoming titles who want personalized advice to help promote their books. The Authors Guild Foundation has also been producing educational webinars in our ongoing series Agent Talks, Business Bootcamps for Writers, From Manuscript to Marketplace, and Money Matters. Most educational events are recorded and can be found at authorsguild.org/resources.

- * Launchpad: **Platform Building for Self-Publishing Authors**
- * Launchpad: **Marketing and Promoting Self-Published Books**
- * From Manuscript to Marketplace: ***Ninetails***
- * Business Bootcamps for Writers: ***What Agents Want from Querying Authors***
- * From Manuscript to Marketplace: ***Toward Eternity***
- * Ask the Authors Guild: ***How to Fight Book Bans***
- * The Black List: ***Info Session for Fiction Writers***
- * From Manuscript to Marketplace: ***Exposure***
- * From Manuscript to Marketplace: ***The Book of Wounded Sparrows***
- * Copyright Clearance Center Info Session: ***AI & Collective Licensing***

- * Money Matters: ***Tackling Your Finances: What Authors Actually Need to Know***
- * Business Bootcamps for Writers: ***Indie vs. Trad: Pros & Cons of the Publishing Paths***
- * Business Bootcamps for Writers: ***Rights Reversion & Self-Publishing***
- * Money Matters: ***Investing and Retirement Planning on a Variable Income***
- * Money Matters: ***Q&A: Tax Tips for Authors 2025***
- * Business Bootcamps for Writers: ***Author Mentorships: Getting the Most Out of the Experience***
- * Launchpad: ***How to Develop Your Platform: Q&A with Leah Paulos***
- * Launchpad: ***Mapping Out a Successful Book Launch Plan: Q&A with Dana Kaye***
- * Business Bootcamps for Writers: ***Trends in Nonfiction Proposals***

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New York, NY 10016

THE POWER OF AUTHORS & WORDS ACTIVISM

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2025

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Marilynne Robinson & Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde

M. Gessen & Michael S. Roth

Torrey Peters & Chase Strangio

James Lawler & Tim Weiner

Hanif Abdurraqib & Imani Perry

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins & Sanaz Toossi

Catherine Coleman Flowers & Dr. Peter Hotez



To watch the sessions live, register at authorsguild.org/witfestival