

ALCS NEWS

2011
SPRING

THIS WRITING LIFE AND MAKING IT PAY

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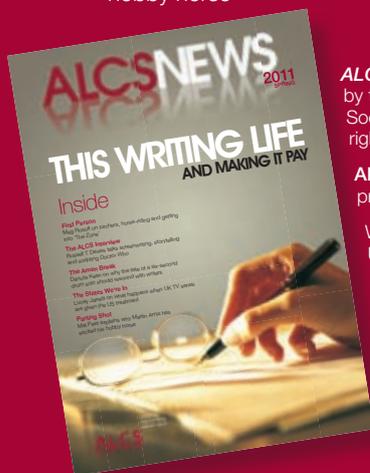


protecting
and promoting
authors' rights

ALCS

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ALCS News is published by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) Ltd, the UK collective rights management society for writers.

ALCS is dedicated to protecting and promoting authors' rights.

We represent the interests of all UK writers and seek to ensure that they are fairly compensated for any works that are copied, broadcast or recorded. We collect and distribute secondary royalties to British writers both in the UK and abroad.

ALCS is a non-profit company, owned and directed by writers.

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Onetwone Design
Tel: 020 7613 3386
www.onetwone-design.com

Printers:

Consider This UK
Tel: 01895 619 900
www.considerthisuk.com

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13 Haydon Street
London
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Information is correct at the time of going to press: May 2011.

Editor's Note



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The work of the once famous American humorist Robert Benchley (1889–1945) is now largely forgotten. Yet one of his sayings at least still deserves a hearing. The freelance writer, he wrote, is “a person who is paid per piece, or per word, or perhaps”. This definition, coined in the early part of the 20th century, has even greater resonance today, with writers' incomes under threat in ways that Benchley could never have imagined.

ALCS of course, remains committed to copyright as the best way to ensure that writers can continue to earn a living in the digital age. But I bet you never considered what the pulsating rhythms of a six second drum solo could teach you about its importance. I can promise you that you will do just that once you have read *The Amen Break*, Danuta Kean's feature in this spring issue of *ALCS News*, in which she argues eloquently against the claims of the open rights lobby.

Also arguing eloquently, but on a rather different subject, is our *Parting Shot* columnist Mal Peet, who took exception to Martin Amis' recent lofty remarks about children's writers. Having just read, with considerable admiration, *Life: An Exploded Diagram*, Mal's latest brilliant novel for young people, I'd encourage you to take this very funny article rather seriously.

I'm delighted to say that another of our best children's writers, Meg Rosoff, has contributed the *First Person* feature to this issue. Meg tells us quite simply how she writes now, but don't expect hints and tips about chair height and stationery brands. Suffice it to say that I'm now thinking of both taking up horse-riding and acquiring a lurcher.

And we're also thrilled to bring to you an interview with the man responsible for reinventing *Doctor Who*, and much more: Russell T Davies. I particularly enjoyed his advice on making it as a TV scriptwriter: “Write with passion and honesty and ignore boring advice.” We could probably all learn from that.

“Write with passion and honesty and ignore boring advice”

As ever, we welcome your comments on what you have read in *ALCS News*, and suggestions for topics you'd like to see included.

Finally, I'd like to pay tribute to my colleague Becca Wyatt whose untimely death just before Christmas shocked and saddened all of us at ALCS. Becca managed PR for ALCS, as well as PLR and many other arts organisations, and brought immense energy, insight and sparkle to her role. We miss her.

I hope you enjoy this spring issue.

Caroline Sanderson

The CEO Writes...

Welcome to the spring edition of *ALCS News* which we're publishing a little later than usual. We have altered the timing of the magazine to fit in between our bi-annual distributions so you'll now receive it in May and November. This gives us plenty of time to keep you informed about forthcoming payment dates, and remind you about anything you need to do to make sure your account is up to date.



© Matt Crossick

For the latest information about our next distribution dates, please see the *News and Views* section on page 7.

I'm pleased and proud to announce that we have collected over £30 million for writers in the last financial year; a record amount. As you will be aware, it is the policy of the ALCS Board and Executive to return any excess commission back to our Members, and I'm delighted to confirm that for the fourth year in a row ALCS will be doing just that.

Late last year, ALCS, in partnership with the Society of Authors, the Royal Society of Literature, and the 4,500 plus writers who signed a statement supporting PLR, put pressure on the coalition over threatened cuts to the PLR fund. The cuts weren't as drastic as they could have been, but, as you may be aware, a further, very worrying

decision was made: to abolish the current PLR body under the Public Bodies Bill, and to transfer it elsewhere. At the time of writing the new home of PLR is still uncertain although ALCS, with clear support within the Government, has been campaigning for an organisation with the interests of writers at heart to look after PLR in future. On page 11 Dr Jim Parker, Registrar of PLR, updates us on the current situation.

You'll also find further information about PLR in the *Rights and Licensing Update* on page 6, as well as details of the Government commissioned Independent Review into Intellectual Property and Growth (the Hargreaves Review).

The ALCS Board has been considering what can be done to support writers, affiliated organisations and charities in these difficult economic times and

has decided next year to set aside an amount equivalent to 0.25% of our commission fee to help these organisations. From April 2011 our headline commission rate was set at 9.75%. A Committee is being set up to review requests for funding, matched against clear criteria, and we are recruiting an independent Chair to oversee its work. We look forward to sharing further information about the Committee and the work that it will be supporting, and to launching this initiative at our next AGM in November. We believe it will grow into an important source of support for the writing community.

In March we heard that the revised Google Book Settlement had again been rejected by Judge Denny Chin in the US. What this means for the writers whose works have been digitised is, as yet, unclear, but the message conveyed – that Google should consider an opt-in approach

instead of asking individuals to opt out of the scheme – can only be seen as a positive one. As always, we will endeavour to keep you informed of changes as they happen, but please check our website regularly.

I'd like to conclude by mentioning the retirement of Mark Le Fanu as Secretary General of the Society of Authors. Mark stepped down at the end of March after 30 years. He has been not only a huge asset to the Society and to writers but also an absolute pleasure to work with. Mark is succeeded by Nicola Solomon whom we look forward to working with closely in the future.

As ever, if you'd like to share your views on any aspect of our work, we'd be delighted to hear from you.

With best wishes,

Owen Atkinson
Chief Executive of ALCS

Members Write: 'The Pen is Mightier'

In the last issue of *ALCS News*, we invited writers who still "scribble away in ink, writing great screeds by lamplight" to get in touch. And get in touch some of you did – in pen.

"My publications include around 30 academic articles, 8 books and 11 revised editions of the books. I have done all my writing in the evenings, with the aid of a small lamp by my shoulder that leaves the room in darkness, apart from a writing pad and a book next to it. I wrote with a series of fountain pens until I migrated from England to Canada in 1977 and switched to a series of cheap ballpoints, largely because I find

it difficult to get my favourite kind of ink over here. I find the noise of a typewriter disturbs my concentration and gives me a headache. Writing with pen and ink largely eliminates the temptation to revise the manuscript before submitting it for publication. I have always regarded second drafts as a waste of time that could be better spent writing something else."

Anthony Birch

"To me, and I guess to many other poets, novelists and creative persons, the necessary interaction between mind and page, and the ease and flexibility with which one can make alterations and revisions, and cross out without deleting etc., is only provided in producing a text by hand. I happen also to believe that the computer, if one lets it get out of control, increasingly becomes an expensive intrusion into one's professional and private life."

Alan Brownjohn

"I do NOT like my computer Although I have honestly tried. It needs to know so many things That my privacy's set aside.

I feel no warmth towards it And I'm sure it doesn't like me But I am getting quite a complex. My baby grandson plays with it happily.

So I thought I'd try again Its mysteries to unfold Because I do not want to be Out-done by a two-year old."

Jacqueline Pinto

How I Write Now

Meg Rosoff on lurchers, horse-riding and getting into 'The Zone'.



Photograph courtesy of Zoe Norfolk

I wake up every morning at 6:30am when the alarm goes off and then I go straight back to sleep. Sometimes I stagger out of bed, make my daughter a cup of tea and try to appear responsible as she goes off to school, resigned to her onerous burden of books and adolescence.

I do not write between 7.00am and noon. I do not stop when I hit 5,000 words. I usually do not hit 5,000 words.

Sometimes I walk the dogs. Sometimes I ride a horse. Sometimes I doodle about on the computer for hours doing not very much. Facebook, blog. Email, bills, junk. A trip to the post office can take a whole morning. So can lesser forms of procrastination. When things are going well, I can write and write and write. When they're not, I can waste time for hours and convert all the apples on the tree into tarts.

Most days, after about four hours of procrastination, I start to work. I ease into it cautiously, rereading what I did yesterday in order to get a running start for another jump in the pond. If I'm revising, I'll look back at the new chapter and cut a third of it (I often edit other

people's books as I read, cutting out the unnecessary – to my eyes – third). My goal is to communicate information in as few words as is gracefully possible.

Sometimes I write in bed. Sometimes I write at my desk. The lurchers always like to be nearby, in case of... in case of... lack of lurchers.

When I'm starting a book, I usually start with something small. An idea. A character. A situation. If I'm very lucky, I can see a vague arc reaching through and across something-something-something-blah-blah-blah-swish-swish-swish to a satisfying ending of sorts. I usually have an idea of the end, even if it turns out not to be the end after all.

Once I have a teensy launching pad of some sort, I pack my mental baggage and set off on the journey.

Along the way I get hopelessly lost. I get blisters. I sit down under a tree and cry and wish I'd never started in the first place. Occasionally everything goes beautifully and the sun shines and the road is clear and straight. But more frequently I come to a

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horrible dead end or realise I've taken the wrong road, or fall into a deep pit with sharp sticks at the bottom, or just look around and see nothing at all familiar and wonder if I've stumbled into someone else's book. I often think of the poor 19th century American settlers, heading for California and arriving at the brink of the Grand Canyon. (Talk about having to retrace your steps and go the long way round!) The brink of the Grand Canyon is a place that is very close to my heart. Sigh.

I'm terrible at plot, so when I'm lost in a dark wood, I'm not much fun to talk to. My husband and daughter know this. My sense of

direction is very bad, and when I can't find the bleeding path, it puts me in a bad mood. Occasionally I ask for directions – my friend and fellow writer, Sally Gardner, who produces plots the way magicians pull rabbits out of hats, is my secret weapon. I save her for when I'm utterly desperate, and then I describe my problem in two or three sentences, after which she thinks for about 12 seconds, and then says: "Well, of course, you must do *this*." And much of the time, she's exactly right. Other times, when I threaten to give up altogether, my husband wanders along with a cup of tea and whispers that the path is actually just over there, behind that hedge.

It's not all bad. Sometimes, a character will surprise me, and those are the best days of all. One character in my latest book, *There Is No Dog*, said something so surprising that I leapt up and stumbled around the house in a state of shock. Eventually, I sat down again and reread what I'd written with utter disbelief. Lord, I thought, I wasn't expecting *that!*

There's quite a lot of writerly talk about 'The Zone', but I never quite understood it. Now that I've written five books, I think I'm beginning to get it. I always described the process of writing *How I Live Now* as feeling as if I were taking dictation – despite it being my first novel, the book seemed to come direct from my narrator's mouth in a gushing stream of consciousness story. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened on anywhere near the same scale since, though I've had pieces of books emerge from a kind of trance, bubbling up from a deep place where the ideas live. They're the paragraphs or chapters or sections that I never rewrite. And they're also the paragraphs and sentences that appear in reviews. I'm not the only one who benefits from that deep place – the reader feels it too.

“There's quite a lot of writerly talk about 'The Zone', but I never quite understood it. Now that I've written five books, I think I'm beginning to get it”

Unfortunately, you can't really force yourself into 'The Zone'. You have to relax and breathe and untether your brain, and wait for it to happen. Think of it this

way – you go to bed at night, you close your eyes and surrender your conscious mind entirely. And what happens? Your brain begins to make up stories. The stories I dream are sometimes gorgeous, full of odd characters, people, and places from a past I haven't thought about in years, with conversations and images and symbols that (if I remember them when I wake up) sometimes seem ineffably lovely, or dramatic, or disturbing. I once spent three years with a wonderful Jungian therapist, and found that once you begin talking about dreams, your subconscious allows you greater and greater access to them. Maybe it doesn't like being ignored. Or is like a muscle that needs flexing.

In *There Is No Dog*, there was far more breaking rocks in the hot sun than floating about in some nice temperate subconscious zone. *Dog* was the gulag of books. Struggling halfway through yet another new draft, I asked my friend and mentor, KM Peyton, whether a book that's a bastard to write is necessarily a bastard to read. I dreaded the thought that people would find reading it akin to trudging up Everest with a piano lashed to their backs. Kathleen thought for a moment. “No,” she said at last. “I don't think there's any relation at all.” I hope to God she's right.

Some books are definitely harder than others to write. Some drift out into the world like music on a summer breeze. Others wedge their tough little leathery feet either side of your pelvic bone and point blank refuse to be born. But I never give up on a book, and they all find their way into the world eventually. With some it's a beautiful experience. Others narrowly escape being drowned at birth.

What follows is not a change of subject.

I took up horse riding at the age of 50. I hadn't ridden in more than 35 years, and even then, not

properly. For anyone who thinks horse riding involves sitting on a horse, kicking it to go fast, and pulling on the reins to slow down, may I say that it is fantastically more complex than that.

“Some books are definitely harder than others to write. Some drift out into the world like music on a summer breeze. Others wedge their tough little leathery feet either side of your pelvic bone and point blank refuse to be born”

It involves great strength, balance, lightness, decisiveness and humility. It requires a willingness to partner, to communicate, to trust – but never to relinquish responsibility or trust too much. Two of the most important concepts associated with riding are 'throughness' and 'connection'.

The United States Dressage Federation defines 'throughness' as: “The supple, elastic, unblocked, connected state that permits an unrestricted flow of energy from back to front and front to back”. Synonymous with the German term 'Durchlaessigkeit' or 'throughlettingness', 'connection' is defined as a state “in which there is no blockage, break, or slack in the circuit that joins horse and rider into a single harmonious unit; the unrestricted flow of energy and influence from

and through the rider to and throughout the horse, and back to the rider”.

Now think, for a minute, of the subconscious mind as the horse and the conscious mind as the rider. If the rider is too strong, too stiff or unsympathetic, the horse becomes inaccessible and difficult to control, or dull and resistant. The object of dressage is to create a fluid exchange of understanding and energy between horse and rider; an advanced dressage rider is often described as asking questions that the horse answers.

In writing, this powerful flow of energy cannot be faked, any more than it can in riding. A book written from the conscious, controlled mind will feel as stiff and lifeless as an insensitive rider on a resentful horse. Or a singer's voice coming from the head rather than the chest and diaphragm. Or a ball thrown from the elbow. Writing (like riding, or singing or playing a musical instrument, or painting or playing cricket or thinking about the universe) requires the deep psychological resonance of the subconscious mind. It requires *connection* and *throughness*, and only then will the reader feel the surge of power that a clever borrowed voice never achieves.

Last words? Beyond *throughness*, beyond *connection*, beyond hard graft, there is one other detail worth mentioning. Or as Hollywood director Alexander Korda so deftly explained: “It is not enough to be Hungarian. One must also have talent.”

Meg Rosoff's novels for young adults include *How I Live Now*; *Just in Case*, which won the 2007 CILIP Carnegie Medal; and *The Bride's Farewell*, which is on the shortlist for the 2011 Medal. Her latest novel, *There is No Dog*, comes out this August.

© Meg Rosoff

Rights and Licensing News



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UK rights update

The Hargreaves Review of Intellectual Property and Growth

Since the last edition of *ALCS News* the Government has commissioned the Independent Review of Intellectual Property and Growth led by Professor Ian Hargreaves. This is part of the Government's wider Blueprint for Technology programme and is linked to the Treasury's agenda for economic growth. The review's terms of reference focus on identifying barriers to innovation and growth within the UK IP framework and how these could be addressed by reference to other international systems, notably the fair use approach found in US copyright law.

Evidence for the review has now been gathered and the ALCS submission can be found on the Lobbying and Submissions page of our website. Our approach in the submission can be summarised as follows:

- We highlight the pivotal role of writers – as innovators – in sustaining economic success across the creative industries, while noting the inherently precarious nature of their profession
- We stress the role of secondary-use remuneration in supporting writers to develop their careers, and quote a number of personal testimonies
- We note that the UK copyright exceptions framework has enabled licensing schemes to develop that achieve the necessary balance between access and reward, with particular reference to the education and business sectors
- We observe that these structures are built on a set of wider international principles and highlight the potential problems associated with a move towards the US fair use approach

- We point out areas where the UK framework may be reworked to better achieve the access/reward balance in light of digital developments

We anticipate publication of the review's findings shortly after the local elections in May. Please refer to our website for further updates at www.alcs.co.uk

Public Lending Right

The last edition of *ALCS News* also reported on measures in the Digital Economy Act to expand the Public Lending Right (PLR) scheme to include audiobooks and ebooks. Sadly, these plans were suspended during last autumn's Spending Review, which also resulted in cuts to core PLR funding. ALCS and PLR have been working together to develop greater synergies between our two organisations to offset the impact of these cuts and deliver a simpler, more efficient service to writers.

Despite these efforts the Government announced that the PLR office would be abolished and its functions transferred to another public body under the powers included in the Public Bodies Bill. ALCS has made representations to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in support of PLR and its work. ALCS has also appeared before the Culture, Media and Sport Committee enquiry into the impact of funding cuts on the arts, along with PLR Registrar Jim Parker and author Stella Duffy to highlight the importance of PLR to writers. The subsequent report from the CMS Committee, published on 28th March, recommended that legislative changes be put into place to enable ALCS to administer the PLR fund in future. We have no further information on this at the time of writing, but will keep Members up to date via our website as and when developments occur.

By **Richard Combes**

European Community rights update

EC Digital Agenda

Earlier this year a report on the digitisation of cultural works in Europe was published by the Comité des Sages, a group of writers and publishers tasked with furthering the aims of the European digital agenda. The report supports a legal instrument to deal with orphan works and also addresses the wider issue of works that are out of commercial circulation, highlighting the requirements of cultural bodies like libraries and archives to digitise works and make them available to users.

ECJ Ruling on Private Copying

Private copying schemes operate in most European countries providing compensatory payments for authors and other copyright owners from the sale of electronic devices and media that copy and store works. Through its network of international agreements, ALCS collects private copying fees and distributes them to UK writers.

Last October a ruling from the European Court of Justice (ECJ), following a referral by a Spanish court, considered the principles underpinning the private copying system.

The ruling confirms these schemes are an appropriate way of striking a 'fair balance' between a consumer's right to use products for their intended purpose and an author's right to be compensated in light of the exceptions that preclude licensing such use. The ruling also clarifies that the schemes need to reflect compensation for acts by individuals, not professional or corporate entities using the same products to make copies for their business.

The ECJ's affirmation of the principle of fair compensation for private copying emphasises the anomalous position of the UK in having no equivalent regime to secure this balance, a point we have raised in our response to the Hargreaves Review.

Licensing update

Since the last edition of *ALCS News* we have signed the following new agreements:

- An agreement with SFP-ZAPA on the collection of fees due for statutory secondary-use remuneration of audiovisual works in Poland
- Two agreements with LITA on the collection of fees due for statutory secondary-use remuneration of literary and audiovisual works in Slovakia

- An agreement with DILIA under which ALCS will collect fees due to UK writers from the PLR scheme operating in the Czech Republic
- An agreement with LATGA-A, the society for Lithuanian authors, relating to cable retransmission and private copying sources

Richard Combes is Head of Rights and Licensing at ALCS.

News & Views

ALCS February 2011 distribution

The latest ALCS distribution took place in February, when ALCS paid out £18.7 million to over 55,000 Members, another record amount. In total, for the financial year 2010/11 we paid out £25.2 million to our Members, an increase of £1.8 million on 2009/10.

Next ALCS distribution

The next distribution is due to take place in late August 2011. We aim to make BACS payments on Tuesday 16 August, with statements sent out later that week. We aren't always able to get statements out at exactly the same time as the payments, but you can always log in to the Members' area of the website and download your statement. The website is always kept up to date with news on the latest distribution, so please refer to it regularly – www.alcs.co.uk or sign up to the Members' area of the website if you haven't done so already.

Update your details!

Please make sure all your work, address and bank details are up to date in good time for the next distribution. It's vital you do so: following the last distribution at least 580 Members failed to receive payments because they had forgotten to update their bank details, which leads to increased administration costs for us too. We need your help to ensure we are as efficient as possible so we can return any surplus monies to you. If you have any questions about your payment or statement, please check the 'important information' sheet sent out with the statement for some helpful hints.

A new source of income: claim now for your newspaper articles

In 2008 ALCS signed an agreement with the Société Civile des Auteurs Multimedia to collect fees due to UK authors under the terms of a statutory scheme dealing with the reprographic copying of UK newspapers in Belgium. This means that ALCS will now pay freelance journalists in the UK their share of this income from Belgium for works written for UK national newspapers. Claims can still be made for next year's distribution for articles published between 1998 and 2008. For more information on how to make a claim, please visit www.alcs.co.uk

ALCS AGM 2011

Thanks to all who joined us in the Clothworkers' Hall back in November. We were delighted to see so many familiar faces and to have such a well attended reception.

We also thank Baroness Ruth Rendell of Babergh, renowned crime writer and Secretary of the All Party Writers Group, who joined us, and whose delightful stint as guest speaker ensured that the evening's business finished in good spirits.

This year we will be holding our AGM outside London for the second time. We'll be visiting our Members in Scotland at

The George Hotel in Edinburgh on 24 November 2011. Invitations will be sent out in October, and we hope to see many of you there.

If you would like to receive details of the AGM by email rather than by post, please email us at subscribe@alcs.co.uk or use the Members' area of the website (www.alcs.co.uk) to log your preference.

New Board members

We are pleased to announce that Tony Bradman and Carol Lee were successful in the ALCS election held last December, and both return to the Board for a further three-year term. We are also delighted to welcome new Board member, Jonathan Turner. Thanks to all those Members who took the time to vote. We'd like to also thank departing Board member Edel Brosnan for all her hard work over the years. We wish her the very best of luck in the future.

ALCS out and about

We aim to meet more of our Members around the country again this year, and will be holding a series of focus groups in different parts of the UK to seek your views on the services we provide.

We have already visited Members in Nottingham in April this year. Thanks to those who attended the sessions and for giving us valuable feedback on how we can improve our services. In September we'll be in Bristol and in November we'll be dropping by to meet Members in Sheffield. We'd be delighted to see you there so please get in touch

if you are interested in coming along by emailing lucy.jarrett@alcs.co.uk

We welcome your thoughts on all aspects of our services and communications. Email us at communications@alcs.co.uk

For further information on ALCS events, you can check our website at www.alcs.co.uk

Marlborough LitFest

For the second year running, ALCS is sponsoring the Marlborough LitFest. Another exciting programme of events is planned from Thursday 22 September to Sunday 25 September 2011. So far Michael Holroyd, Anne Sebba and Helen Castor along with many other renowned writers are set to make appearances. Tickets go on sale shortly; please check the website for more information: www.marlboroughlitfest.org

The ALCS Interview

Russell T Davies in conversation with Lucey Jarrett.



1 What or who inspired you to become a scriptwriter?

After all these years, I still haven't got a good answer to that. I loved all sorts of shows when I was young – and not just *Doctor Who*! I can remember being so thrilled by *Pennies From Heaven*. There was so much fuss about that lipstick scene with Gemma Craven in episode two, and then, when I watched it, I saw the most sad and beautiful scene. It gave me an insight into a marriage that I could never have imagined at that age. Brilliant stuff.

But really, you might as well ask me about everything I ever watched or read! It all goes in, it's all useful, even the stuff you hate. You work through all of it, and keep and discard the bits that fit you or don't fit you. And it never stops. I could still see something now that completely changes my opinions on men or women or life or whatever.

2 Can you tell us about your experience of breaking into scriptwriting? Are there any areas or genres where you believe it's to get a 'foot on the ladder' in order to pursue a career as a TV writer?

I never really believed writers existed; it was like dreaming of going to the moon. But I worked in TV anyway, as an assistant producer, then director, etc., and gradually I came into contact with writers, and realised they were ordinary people. (This was before I realised they are all, in fact, mad.) And soon, working with writers was the only part of the job I liked. It took me a while – till my late 20s, really – but I

worked out where my instincts were heading. Eventually, I got my first proper writing credit, in 1991, for a BBC children's thriller called *Dark Season*, and it meant more to me than anything. Than anything, ever. So then, the path I needed to take was clear.

Oh my God, 1991 – I've only just realised, right now, that's 20 years ago. Blimey. It must be time to give up soon.

But as for getting your foot on the ladder... well, I'm wary of using anything just to get in. You should love those shows anyway. A lot of people use soaps – and something like the BBC's *Doctors* has a rare and unsung programme of finding new writers – but you should go to that show loving medical drama in the first place. They'll smell a cynic a mile off. It's the same with children's – that's often suggested as a way in, and it does have a lot of opportunities, but often there's an assumption that children's TV is 'easier'. Which isn't true at all, it's very specialised and highly demanding. But, nonetheless, both are high-volume areas that need a high turnover of writers.

Ah, but that's boring advice, isn't it? That's like saying 'learn to walk before you can run', which is bollocks. Start running straight away. Run past everyone else. If you hate soaps and children's and want to write a 20 part epic about the life of Nelson Mandela, then write it, and if it's good, it'll get made. I seriously believe that. Good stuff gets made in the end. So write with passion and honesty and ignore boring advice.

3 The re-launch of *Doctor Who* was obviously hugely successful and we have now seen a sharp increase in programmes which incorporate elements of fantasy and horror. Why do you think the series has such enduring appeal and why has there been such resurgence in this genre?

Oh well, 5,700 books have been written about *Doctor Who*'s appeal, and no one's nailed it yet. Which is why the programme keeps reinventing itself and recharging itself and will never die. So I'm not going to weigh in – even after working on it, I really don't know. As for the resurgence of fantasy in Britain... well, these things are cyclic. If it hadn't been the return of *Doctor Who*, it would have been something else. Sci-fi and fantasy were always strong in the cinema; it used to amaze me that TV didn't notice that. And the fact that technology can now begin to realise so much visual imagination must help too.

4 You are currently in America filming the new season of *Torchwood*. With the current trend for British programmes being remade abroad, any chance of *Doctor Who* stateside?

Oh, not on my watch! Maybe someone will, one day. Good luck to them!

5 Getting new drama commissioned these days is increasingly difficult; do you find that you need to pitch similar ideas to your more established work in order to be successful?

No. Not at all. I followed *Queer As Folk* with *Bob & Rose*, the story of a gay man falling in love with a woman. Then *The Second Coming*, about the return to earth of the son of God. Then a Welsh drama. Then family sci-fi with *Doctor Who*. I've probably pitched the opposite to my previous work. I think journalists tend to categorise and pigeon-hole people, because it makes an article more linear. Newsprint doesn't welcome a subordinate clause. But in my experience, commissioners don't categorise writers, and that's all that matters





6 In an industry where budgets and ratings control programming, to what extent is the continuing success of reality television making it harder for new scriptwriters to find work and establish themselves?

I don't agree with this at all. When reality TV is good, it tells brilliant, vivid, unique stories. When it's bad, it doesn't, but plenty of dramas fail that test too. So it's no good moaning about it – you're howling at the moon if you think entire genres such as reality are going to disappear off television one day. Watch them instead; try to see why so many people like them. And as a result, I simply don't believe it's making it harder for new writers to find work. Surely there are more dramas, on more channels, than there ever were in the 1960s and 70s?

7 Do you worry that a growing army of 'invisible viewers' online will have a negative effect on getting new series commissioned at a time when ratings are so important?

If you mean illegal downloads, then I just don't know. Instinct tells me that if everything's free, then the market will collapse. But maybe that's because I'm in my late 40s, and can't properly comprehend the new models of fiction and production coming into existence. I'm not kidding, I've never made an illegal download of anything in my life, partly because I don't know how, and partly because I think the police will arrive at my door. Am I the last man who pays for everything?

8 Do you think that the digital environment and the multimedia nature of many works ultimately offers more exciting opportunities for writers, or does it mean a lack of control over the end product?

It's very easy to say that things are falling apart and that it's not the same as it was in the old days, but that's just the voice of the old. Nothing will stop people telling stories. Nothing. So in the end, I don't worry about that stuff. I just think of my next story.

9 And finally, what three pieces of advice would you give to an aspiring TV scriptwriter today?

- (1) No one's waiting for you, get on with it.
- (2) Why are you still reading? Get on with it!
- (3) Someone else started at (1) and is now ahead of you, dummy.

Russell T Davies is a TV producer and screenwriter whose works include *Queer as Folk*, *Bob & Rose*, *The Second Coming* and, more recently, *Doctor Who*.

Lucey Jarrett works in the Communications Department at ALCS.



Photo courtesy of Russell T Davies

The States We're In

Lucey Jarrett on what happens when UK TV series are given the US treatment.

The news that BBC2's recent comedy hit *Episodes* has been recommissioned for a second series was met with delight by fans and the television industry alike.

For those who haven't seen it, *Episodes* is the hilarious story of an English husband and wife writer team who relocate to LA to have their successful British sitcom *Lyman's Boys*, about an English grammar school, remade in America. Gradually, however, the entire premise, plot, characters and concept are changed to fit an American audience, and the show becomes completely unrecognisable from its British counterpart. The final US version is about a hockey coach, stars Matt Le Blanc of *Friends* fame, and is retitled – depressingly – *Pucks*.

Does *Episodes* represent the truth about US remakes of UK originals? Well, not entirely. When *Queer as Folk* got an American remake back in 2000 it was not unusual for a British programme to be remade abroad (see our interview with *Queer as Folk* writer Russell T Davies on page 8). Shows like *Man about the House* and even *Love thy Neighbour* had already been treated to stateside makeovers. However, when the US makers of *Queer as Folk* initially opted to keep the script and characters from the original version, before going on to create their own further down the line, they started an enduring trend for US remakes. *Fitz*, the American version of Jimmy McGovern's psychological thriller *Cracker*, followed hot on the heels of *Queer as Folk*, and in a similar vein.

The US remake of *The Office* was a huge hit. It took the first UK series and called it *The Office: An American Workplace*. It then moved in a different direction from the UK original after the first season and

developed its own storylines. Its huge popularity has led to eight US seasons for the show, far surpassing the UK's modest two.

The show's original UK creators Stephen Merchant and Ricky Gervais are fans of the US version, with Gervais recently filming a cameo in the season finale as David Brent. "After series one, the episodes are all original and they've done an amazing job," commented Gervais.

His co-writer Merchant has even directed an episode of the US version; an experience he thoroughly enjoyed: "I've never had more fun than being in the writers' room and seeing a pool of very talented people throw ideas around," he says. "They're working flat-out all the time. It's not like being stuck in a room with Ricky Gervais wanting to take a nap under his desk because he's had too many sandwiches for lunch."

"I've never had more fun than being in the writers' room and seeing a pool of very talented people throw ideas around"

But why remake successful programmes rather than just show the originals? Several reasons. In a recession, it's undoubtedly easier to play it safe and make television that viewers will identify with culturally. Furthermore the language and character traits of the originals



Courtesy of Flat Trick Productions

may be so culturally tied to a British audience that they are untransferrable to the destination country. Straight UK-US transfers are also hindered by the low number of episodes per series produced for the UK, which are traditionally much shorter than American seasons. They are seen as much less likely to draw in big audiences, the US view being that shows build with familiarity.

Unlike the fictional writers of *Episodes*, lured to the US to work on their series, many UK writers seem happy to stand aside and let US writers take charge. *Being Human* creator Toby Whithouse says of his US remake:

"Aside from not knowing the US marketplace, my main reason for wanting to just let them get on with it was time. Getting the UK version of Being Human right is a 24 hour job in itself. But worryingly it looks like my policy of non intervention worked, because the show has been a big success and has just been recommissioned for a second season. I'm genuinely very happy with the finished piece. They haven't mistreated it in any way, though they've made it completely their own. For me, it's really exciting. At first I was watching the US version through my fingers. But once I realised that this was a show made with just as much love and thought as ours, it was actually a really enjoyable experience. Inevitably they have to tell the stories

differently because their seasons are so much longer. By the end of their second season they'll have made more episodes of Being Human than we will have in four."

If cultural senses of humour are likely to diverge, then political sensibilities almost certainly should too. However, Paul Abbott's *State of Play*, a political thriller centred on Westminster about a newspaper's investigation into the death of a young woman, was a huge success when the action moved to America in the form of a big screen blockbuster starring Russell Crowe. Abbott's Channel 4 series *Shameless* has also been stateside, and has just been commissioned for a second season. He admits to being "pleasantly surprised" by it: "The casting is supreme. Every six weeks I go over to LA to work on it and in the meantime they load the rushes on to the web for me. I've had quite a lot of input."

Programmes currently being touted for overseas remakes include *Footballers Wives*, *House of Cards* and *The Vicar of Dibley*. While they may never be seen over here, there is always the hope that US success will result in the original being screened again in the UK. Good news for viewers and even better news, in royalties, for writers.

Lucey Jarrett works in the Communications Department at ALCS.

Public Lending Right: The Future

Jim Parker on what the coming months hold for PLR.

Last October we learned from our Government sponsor department (DCMS) that the PLR organisation was to be abolished as part of a Government review aimed at reducing the number of quangos. PLR itself – the legal right that authors have to receive a payment for the free lending of their books by public libraries – was not under

threat. And DCMS Ministers have provided PLR with a funding settlement for the next four years which compares favourably with other publicly funded bodies. PLR's funding will be reduced by 15% (taking into account inflation) over the next four years, taking us from the current figure of £7.2 million to £6.9 million in 2014/15.

What is at issue is who or what will manage the PLR scheme when the present office is wound up. DCMS Ministers have looked at a number of possible homes for the PLR operation inside and outside Government.

The timing of the handover of PLR responsibilities is linked to legislation going through Parliament. The Public Bodies Bill will give the Government powers to change the primary legislation of bodies like PLR to facilitate their abolition or merger. The Bill is going through

the House of Lords at the time of writing, after which it goes to the House of Commons. So there is still some way to go before the legal changes associated with moving responsibility for PLR to another body can be finalised.

Whichever body assumes overall responsibility for PLR, we will want to ensure a smooth transition with minimum impact on the PLR operation. Colleagues here at the PLR office have asked me to say a big thank you to all the authors who have been in touch in recent months out of concern for our future. We hope there will be scope to keep the present PLR team together under the new arrangements and we will let everyone know as soon as we get a decision from the Government on PLR's future.

Dr Jim Parker - Registrar of PLR, May 2011.

Note from ALCS

A report by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee published at the end of March (see the *Rights and Licensing Update* on page 6) recommended that ALCS should administer PLR in future. We have welcomed the recommendation that a body with the interest of writers at heart would be appropriate for this role and are lobbying Government to this end.

To view our press release, please visit our website at www.alcs.co.uk



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Pleased To Meet You: Dr Julian C Hughes, medical writer

Interviewed by Jade Scully.

What is your day job?

I'm a consultant in old age psychiatry at North Tyneside General Hospital, and honorary professor of philosophy of ageing at the University of Newcastle. I spend three days a week seeing patients and two doing academic stuff, which ranges from teaching to research.

On what subjects do you write?

I write in the field of ethics and philosophy, in connection with ageing and dementia.

Where have you been published?

My books are mostly published by Oxford University Press, but also by Jessica Kingsley and Quay Books. I have also written a lot of journal articles, and I am sometimes asked to write for non-professional journals too.

To what extent have digital developments changed the market for your writing?

In the academic world everybody's very keen on open access on the web. I think part of the reason is that each time someone clicks on something you have written it boosts your citation rate. Academics are, of course, very keen on that.

How did you hear about ALCS?

It was either through Oxford University Press or through the university. I think eventually I received a personal letter.

For what sort of uses of your work do you receive ALCS income?

It's mainly for photocopying fees paid by higher education institutions and the NHS for journal articles, book chapters and books. There are also some fees from the business sector.

How important are your ALCS payments to your overall income?

As a proportion of my overall income they are not huge. None the less, the payments seem amazingly high given that I did not even know that I was entitled to them. The payments might even exceed the royalties paid by the publishers on some of my co-edited or co-authored books.

What does the future hold for your area of writing?

There's no doubt that writers in my field are going to have to continue to produce as many good quality publications as possible; that's what universities measure things by. I suspect that the open access thing is going to be pushed because people want to get as much citation as possible by making their work easily available.

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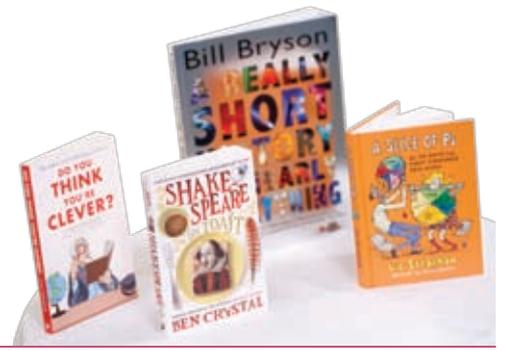


ALCS is currently holding £700,000 in undistributed royalties in the medical sector. Please tell writer friends about us as we could be holding money for them. To search for royalties, go to our website at www.alcs.co.uk

There is a full version of this interview at www.alcs.co.uk/news

Jade Scully works in the Communications Department at ALCS.

The Really Short History that has Nearly Everything



Caroline Sanderson is entertained – and scientifically informed – by the 2010 Educational Writers’ Award winner.

“I grew up convinced that science was extremely dull – but suspecting that it needn’t be...”

So writes Bill Bryson in *A Really Short History of Nearly Everything*, the winner of the 2010 Educational Writers’ Award. It’s a wittily illustrated version for younger readers of Bryson’s adult bestseller *A Short History of Everything*, and dull the science most certainly is not. In less than 200 pages, young readers are taken on an engrossing and remarkably comprehensive journey through the history of our universe and life on earth, from the Big Bang and the birth of our planet, to climate change and what the future might hold for us all.

The Award judges – writer, broadcaster and former teacher Stewart Ross; school librarian Maggy Campbell; and secondary school teacher Louise Gerrard – were unanimous in their choice. The panel commented:

“Deeply engaging, A Really Short History of Nearly Everything triumphantly links an informal approach to profound content, without being in any way trivial or condescending... The language

is fresh and appropriate for younger readers, the illustrations are charming and helpful, and the design uncluttered and accessible. It is in short, a very rare creation – a non-fiction book for younger readers that may be classed as literature and that fact, coupled with the genius of being able to explain the concepts behind life, the universe and everything in such an accessible and entertaining way, makes this book a winner.”

The Award was presented at the All Party Writers Group’s winter reception at the House of Commons by Lord Hill, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools.

In his acceptance speech, Bryson said that he was “honoured. Any initiative that encourages young people to read is obviously to be applauded.” He also paid tribute to his co-author Felicia Law, who adapted and edited his original book.

A publisher and prolific children’s author, Law first read *A Short History of Everything* on holiday, and recognised immediately that it offered a new and child-accessible

‘twist’ on many topics routinely covered in children’s reference books: “Bill Bryson’s ‘take’ on the familiar business of volcanoes, galaxies, gravity exploded with inventiveness, chattiness and humour, doing for science what he did in his travel books: hunting out the quirky, revelling in the anecdotal, and ‘dishing’ the dirt on history wherever it seeped out!” Law approached Bryson’s publisher with a proposal to create a version for younger readers, an idea which, happily, appealed all round.

“Atoms are tiny – very tiny indeed. Half a million of them lined up shoulder to shoulder could hide behind a human hair”

Commenting on the main challenges of adapting the work of an author with such a distinctive style, Law says:

“It was easy to see which sections of the book would defy any attempt at simplification (genetics is easy; quantum physics is not, for example), but key to non-fiction publishing for the young learner is always that balance between simplification and accuracy. Bill’s easy style made this less of a challenge, but there was always a natural trepidation at ‘abusing’ his language which is so rich in extended phrasing and linguistic ‘pottering’. Deciding how to interpret the occasional irreverence was also difficult but fun. And I think that the illustrations by Yuliya Somina, whose cheeky and edgy style so complements Bill’s own, allow the humour to come through in double measure.”

How does she feel about winning the Award? “Overjoyed! The book stayed true to Bill but it has now reached a different audience which means he has too.”

The Educational Writers’ Award is currently the only UK award to focus on educational non-fiction. It was created by ALCS and the Society of Authors in 2008 to “celebrate educational writing that inspires creativity and encourages students to read widely and build up their understanding of a subject beyond the requirements of exam specifications”. Also on the shortlist for the 2010 Award, which focused on books for 12-18 year olds, were *Shakespeare on Toast* by Ben Crystal, *Do You Think You’re Clever?* by John Farndon and *A Slice of Pi* by Liz Strachan.

Caroline Sanderson is a freelance writer and reviewer, and the editor of *ALCS News*.

What does she feel are the qualities in Bryson’s writing that made the transition from adult to educational children’s book so successful?

“Bill does what the best teachers do – he weaves story into fact. Facts that are ‘too big’ to comprehend are suddenly totally accessible. Take for instance the relative distance between the planets of the solar system which is fed to us on distorted charts and so lodged inaccurately in the visual memory. Bill unravels that one with ease, within an exciting story.”



Felicia Law and Bill Bryson after winning the Educational Writers’ Award at the House of Commons in December 2010.

© Matt Crossick

The Amen Break

Danuta Kean on why a six-second drum solo provides a stark vision of what the future could hold for writers.

Six seconds. Count it: one, two, three, four, five, six. That is all it took for Gregory C Coleman to play a drum solo that would change music in ways that no one who sat in the studio with him 42 years ago could imagine. He was recording the drum break as part of *Amen, Brother*, the obscure B-side to *Color Him Father*, a Gold Record earning 1969 hit for Coleman's soul group The Winstones.

Why do those six seconds matter to Members of ALCS? Because those six seconds are used by the open rights lobby to justify wholesale theft of copyrighted material. They are used to denounce anti-filesharing penalties in the Digital Economy Act. They are quoted in submissions to the Hargreaves Review – the Government's Independent Review of Intellectual Property Law and Growth, which is due to report as I write.

You may not know of 'the Amen Break', but you will have heard it. Open rights activists use it as an example of how copyright theft inspired a culturally significant movement, in this case hip hop and its multiple spin offs. You will also know it as a staple of television and radio ads, used to sell everything from jeans to jeeps.

A few people have made a lot of money from those six seconds. Starting with Louis Flores, who featured it in his influential 1986 *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* bootleg series, it has been sampled by myriad high-earning musicians in chart hits and cult classics. But Gregory C Coleman and Winstone's frontman Richard L Spencer, the copyright holder of *Amen, Brother*, have not seen a penny. It is a point the Open Rights Group (membership 22,000 of which 1,400 pay a contribution) boasts about in its submission to Hargreaves: "Nobody asked permission, no

permission was granted, and no copyright royalties were paid," the ORG submission notes without irony. "Genres based to a large degree on the remixing of the 'Amen Break' sample spawned countless hits, many musical movements and significant critical acclaim. The sampling and reuse of existing works can lead to new markets opening and significant social value from the experimentation and creativity it engenders."

"It is a point not lost on ALCS Members, myself included, who have seen their work stolen and misappropriated by others to drive traffic to websites, sell off-the-page web advertising, profit from unauthorised syndication or simply sell pirated books"

But the problem with using the failure of Coleman and Spencer to enforce their copyright as justification for relaxing Intellectual Property (IP) controls is that it fails to acknowledge how either felt watching others grow fat from their labour. According to comments left by Spencer after an article about 'the Amen Break' appeared on Peter Forret's music

and technology blog, they were less happy than the open rights lobby would have us believe.

An anonymous poster claims "it's the music not the money that's important" – an argument frequently flung at creators, as if demanding payment demeans art. It does not, as Spencer eloquently points out: "If you have the money then the music can be important. But if you are watching everyone and his mother making money from your stuff, then the money becomes very important."

It is a point not lost on ALCS Members, myself included, who have seen their work stolen and misappropriated by others to drive traffic to websites, sell off-the-page web advertising, profit from unauthorised syndication or simply sell pirated books (one bestselling novelist I know has lost an estimated £225,000 in sales of illegal copies of her best known title).

Open rights activists counter that we have copyright law on our side, and are in a position to protect our Intellectual Property. But that is based on an assumption that we are able to enforce the law. Most are not. The British Association of Journalists (BAJ) in its submission to Hargreaves sums up the dilemma faced by ripped off writers: the mechanism for enforcing IP rights is cumbersome and expensive for individuals. Instead of a relaxation of the law, what we need are better mechanisms for enforcing it. "Our members are sole traders, businesses whose assets are the creative skills and knowledge of the individual and their creative products are the literary works and photographs they generate," the BAJ wrote in its response to Hargreaves. "The laws of copyright are the only way of protecting them against wholesale plundering of their wares as soon as they come into existence."

© Krystina Fitzgerald Morris



For Spencer and Coleman, who died in 2006, the sheer volume of theft made it impossible for them to pursue payment from those who misappropriated their work. If anything, the lesson of 'the Amen Break' is not how it encourages innovation, but a stark vision of how individual creators will be unable to maintain control over their work in a digital world.

A fundamental flaw in the claim that copyright infringement leads to innovation is the argument that without it parasite works and subsequent movements created through them would not exist. It shows an astonishing degree of solipsistic thinking. One may as well say that without the initial theft, the pirates would have been forced to create original works of their own and an even better musical movement would have followed. Such arguments belong in the bin with other 'what if' theories of history.

They also fail to address the fundamental right of a creator to say how and where their work is used. There is an assumption among open rights activists that misappropriation is always by creative innovators pursuing new forms of artistic expression and those who seek to stop it are big businesses protecting their profits.

This argument can be dismissed on two levels. First, big businesses need profits to pay for innovations that lead to the wider dissemination of the material they produce – a simple rule of capitalism is that it needs ever-expanding markets to maintain profits. For book >>

>> publishers – large and small – that means money used to create digital product and platforms for authors' work, as well as marketing and related activities to inform readers of what is available. Second, the assumption that impoverished fellow creators fuel copyright theft is an unsupportable generalisation – by far the biggest use of 'the Amen Break' has been by advertising and record producers, both bank rolled by big business.

Besides, the money writers (whether freelance journalists like myself or authors) make from our work has a more fundamental value: it pays for us to live. If we have done the work, why should we be shamed into giving it away free? To say so is to adopt the attitude of the factory owner to sweat shop workers: it is exploitation, based on a complete disregard for the creators' rights.

It also risks limiting fulltime creative occupations to those who are economically and leisure rich. Are open rights activists really in favour of returning to the age of the Victorian gentleman artist? Do they really want to undermine the creative input of those outside the elite? That is the inevitable consequence of unsupported creativity.

Of course those in the open rights movement claim digitisation demands new profit models. But they have yet to present any that work on the scale of copyright. Even with Spencer the limp solution from the hip hop community to his complaints has been "come to conventions and talk to us". It's like asking a man to beg a thief for his property back and receiving a hand out in return.

Danuta Kean is deputy director of the Creative Enterprise Centre at Brunel University and Books Editor of *Mslxia*. She is also a freelance writer and publishing analyst.

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ALCS, Young People and Copyright



As part of our campaign to educate young people about the importance of copyright, ALCS has continued to sponsor and support a number of events and programmes.

Copywrite! with the National Schools Partnership

Our new programme Copywrite! has been devised with the help of the National Schools Partnership with the aim of educating 11–14 year olds about the importance of copyright and Intellectual Property (IP). It is designed to be used as part of the Key Stage 3 curriculum in English, Citizenship, Drama and ICT to help students understand why copyright is so important, and the dangers inherent in a 'copy and paste' culture.

Teachers can access lesson plans that encourage creative thinking and writing while highlighting the social and moral context of copyright. Insights into the effect plagiarism has on individuals are given in video interviews with four professionals from writing and publishing, including novelist Sophie Kinsella, TV scriptwriter Toby Whithouse, journalist Danuta Kean, and publisher Richard Charkin. Our thanks to all of them for taking part.

You can view this excellent online resources at www.copywrite.org.uk And if you work for a school and would like to register, please visit www.nationalschoolspartnership.com/copywrite

ALCS Sponsors Delegates for 'The Network'

We are pleased to announce that in 2011, ALCS will be sponsoring five delegates – all aspiring scriptwriters – to take part in 'The Network'. This is an annual event for young people, which takes place alongside the *MediaGuardian* Edinburgh International TV Festival each summer. Delegates are selected on various criteria, and invited to take part in four days of master classes and workshops, with the aim of giving them a head start in the TV industry.

For more information on 'The Network', see www.mgeitf.co.uk/home/thenetwork.aspx

'Once upon a time' with the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals

ALCS has devised a story writing competition for children participating in the 2011 CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals shadowing scheme. The annual competition that ALCS has run for young shadowers over the last five years has grown in popularity, with last year's poetry competition attracting hundreds of entries. This year entrants are being asked to rewrite and bring up to date one of three fairy tales. Former CILIP Carnegie winner and 2011 shortlisted author Meg Rosoff has kindly agreed to judge the competition, with the winner and runners up announced in early June.

ALCS has also designed information packs to give children and teachers participating in the shadowing scheme practical information about copyright. See our website, www.alcs.co.uk



Parting Shot: Ye Gods!

As a children's writer, **Mal Peet** is used to condescension. However....

A few weeks ago, in a television programme, Martin Amis put a host of backs up. Most, but not all, of these backs belonged to my fellow writers for the young. Asked by his chum Sebastian Faulks if he had considered writing a book for children, Amis repeated his assertion that he could do so only if he incurred brain damage. I was surprised. Not by the assertion, obviously, but by all those raised hackles. Surely Amis' condescension could not have come as a shock. Were we not already deeply familiar with Olympian Disdain Syndrome, pandemic among our great 'literary' novelists? Sneering is, after all, one of its common symptoms. Not long ago Howard Jacobson, who still refuses to recognise that being male and Jewish in contemporary Britain is unremarkable and not of itself especially interesting, took a gratuitous sideswipe (just like that one) at 'would-be serious' children's writers. Will Self is of course *sui generis*, being professionally disdainful about anything with, or without, a pulse. Children's writers are inured – or so I'd thought – to being on the receiving end of this kind of hauteur. Hence my surprise at the ruffled feathers; the bilious blogs.

In part, I guess, the rumpus was a response to the smug assumption behind Faulks' question: that Amis – or anybody else, really – *could* write a children's book if he had nothing better to do. And indeed Olympians, in moments of remission or impecuniousness, have been known to knock out a kids' book, thinking it an easy

way of making a bob or two. (This delusion is, by the way, a symptom of another nasty but common disorder known as Rowling's Chorea.) Almost always, these efforts are feeble but the reviewers genuflect and the gods return to Olympus rubbing their hands together and muttering "That'll show yer." This can, of course, occasion resentment in certain quarters.

"I'm used to condescension. Immune to it. Acid off a duck's back, mate"

As a writer of Young Adult Fiction (whatever that is) I'm used to condescension. Immune to it. Acid off a duck's back, mate. However, the Amis fuss has excited my hobby-horse, and it needs a little canter.

In terms of sustaining a literate and literary culture, the books we put into our children's hands are immeasurably more important than the latest works of high-profile novelists. I have no trouble believing that Amis Junior sprung from the womb clutching Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in one hand and Nabokov's *Ada* in the other, irritated by the obstetric interruption of his reading. But most children need literary nurturing, and the quality of that nurture is crucial if they are to grow into readers of Ovid and Nabokov. And, of course, Amis.

The press regularly publishes Jeremiads on the subject of our children's downward spiral into illiteracy. Our schools are failing. The book is dead. Print is obsolescent. We are evolving into a race of pasty-faced strangers to the sun with overdeveloped thumbs and atrophied legs and minds. Nevertheless, something between a fifth and a quarter of all UK book sales are of children's books. Worth something like £800 million. And most children's books are purchased for them by adults.

The past 20 years or so have seen a truly remarkable flowering of writing for the younger reader. I won't name names because I'll get reproachful emails from those I omit, but there are children's and teenagers' writers out there who are producing challenging, experimental and beautiful work. True, there's also a lot of dross about vampires and suchlike, but when I look back at what was available to the young me in the 1950s and early 60s, I grieve. I feel like poor old Larkin (or Amis Senior) lamenting the arrival, too late, of bold and bare-legged young totty. And when, as I do (I can't help myself) I read the adult books shortlisted for the big prestigious prizes I find myself thinking "Really? This is 'ground-breaking?'" My editor would never let me get away with toss like this."

These things considered, the discrepancy between the importance of children's literature and its coverage by mainstream media is weird. Grotesque. A couple of column inches here and there in

Image Courtesy of Mal Peet



the national press. The Jeremiahs appear to see nothing inconsistent in their moaning about children's literacy and their lack of interest in children's books. Since the demise of *Treasure Island* there is nothing on BBC radio. Nothing on any of the 10,000 TV channels. Then Channel 4 finds occasion to give the subject 30 seconds of Sebastian's middle-brow ramble through the pastures of literature, and what does it do? Gives the precious moment to Martin Amis who uses the opportunity to trash children's literature on the altar of his own ego.

It's the squandering of that rare opportunity that – forgive me – really pisses me off.

Mal Peet is the author of several novels for young adults, including *Tamar*, winner of the 2005 CILIP Carnegie Medal, and *Exposure*, which won the 2009 *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize. His latest novel, *Life: An Exploded Diagram*, comes out this June.

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