



Community of Literary Magazines and Presses

Virtual Roundtable: Repackaging Backlist Titles

The following represents a redacted transcript of the CLMP Virtual Roundtable “Repackaging Backlist Titles” with Judy Hottensen, Associate Publisher for Grove Atlantic – held on Tuesday, February 9, 2016 at 3:00 PM (EST) via Google Hangouts.

FEATURED SPEAKER

JUDY HOTTENSEN is the Associate Publisher of Grove Atlantic, since 2011. Before that she served as Publisher of Weinstein Books. Hottensen had worked previously at Grove as Director of Marketing and Publicity from 1992 to 2005.

PARTICIPATING PUBLISHERS

Erika Dreifus (Fig Tree Books)
J.K. Fowler (Nomadic Press)
Ruth Greenstein (Turtle Point Press)
Gillian Hamel (Omnidawn)
Danika Isdahl (Sarabande)
Stephen Knezovich (Creative Nonfiction)
Bruce McPherson (McPherson & Company)
Ethan Nosowsky (Graywolf Press)
Michael Reynolds (Europa Editions)
Janaka Stucky (Black Ocean)

STAFF

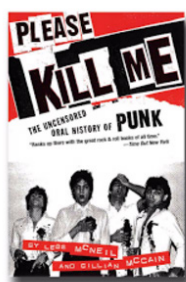
Montana Agte-Studier (CLMP)
Paul Legault (CLMP)
Jeffrey Lependorf (CLMP)

Transcript

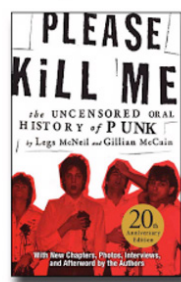
Paul Legault (CLMP): Welcome! This conversation will focus on all aspects of reprinting backlist titles and strategies you can employ to get old books in front of a new audience.

Judy Hottensen (Grove Atlantic): Hi everyone! I am Judy Hottensen, the associate publisher at Grove Atlantic. Our website is www.groveatlantic.com. Part of my job at Grove is to manage the backlist, so I am here to answer any questions you may have. The images here focus on some of the key examples that we have for ways to really freshen up books that are lasting and enduring. I am using examples that are recent as well. *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain is a perennial seller for us, but it needed some updating and new photos.

Please Kill Me 20th Anniversary Reissue



1996

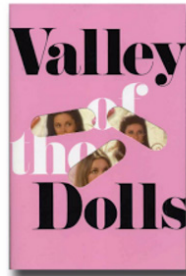


2016

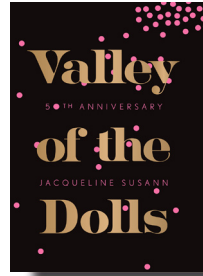
The 20th anniversary of the original pub is happening this year, and we took that opportunity to include a new afterword, four new chapters, and new photos. With a book like this, a lot has changed and evolved (The Ramones have died, for example). In this case, the cover still looks quite similar, don't you think? But we just tried to freshen it up and make sure that people knew it was a celebration and also had some new material.

Ethan Nosowsky (Graywolf Press): That 1996 cover is such a classic. How do you balance your sense that the first cover is “right” and the logic of making something “fresh”? Is the purpose simply to declare that this is a new edition (and in this case you actually have new material)?

Valley of the Dolls 50th Anniversary Reissue



1966



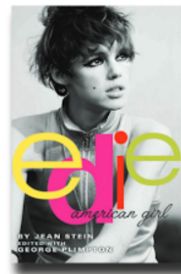
2016

Hottensen: Here's another example of a classic. 50 years since the original publication and we are trying to re-establish the relevance of this book and trying to find a younger audience. This new cover is a placeholder because we have made a real attempt to “reveal” the new cover in the media – and we have succeeded! *The New York Times* is going to do a story on the new cover. But again, we are including new archival material.

Eddie Reissue



1994



2015

Another iconic book example is this one, a classic that we just reissued (with no anniversary, just a hunch that it needed a new look). Do you have specific questions about projects that you are contemplating or working on that I might be able to advise?

Nosowsky: Here you have a book with new material, and a book that is essentially making news, and a perennially notorious book. How do you approach backlist promotion for your, well, run of the mill books? What are effective kinds of promotion for you that get bookstores to reorder books that might be selling steadily but modestly? Though in this last case, that is nicely pro-active with Jean [Stein]’s new book just out.

Hottensen: Often when sales start to slow a bit, it prompts us to revisit. Yes, for sure! Reviews are just coming in for Jean’s book. The next images coming up will be a good answer I hope for both of these questions.

Michael Reynolds (Europa Editions): I'm also interested in knowing what you think about re-packaging select backlist titles as a series. At Europa we get a lot of mileage out of our brand, and while we'd like to start repackaging the backlist, we're keen to keep some degree of uniform design, etc.

Hottensen: The Burroughs backlist is of course a staple for Grove. But we found that the sales increased incrementally and the stores became much more interested in stocking the series of books when they were all repackaged. Of course it took some work on the interiors as well, and that can be time-consuming and tedious.

William S. Burroughs Reissues



The above is a good example with the Burroughs 50th anniversary – a hardcover with extra text and a box.

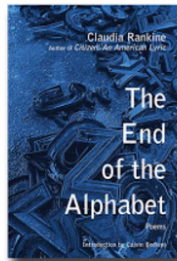
Reynolds: Do you tend to publish up (readers editions, collector's editions, soft to hard cover) or down (less expensive editions) when you repackage the backlist? Or is it title by title? Did you release the repackaged Burroughs titles all at once? That would seem to open more doors to promotional and publicity opportunities.

Hottensen: We did three at a time and at the same time we made sure our stock was low. Stores like the multiple titles, and it helps them to take more.

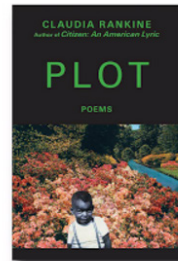
Bruce McPherson (McPherson & Company): Do you ever use the release of e-book versions to promote backlist? Are you able to get media attention for backlist e-books; if so, how?

Hottensen: Yes, we have released e-books as a motivator for print backlist. And depending on the titles – they should be pretty well-known or have some literary or other relevance to the media.

Claudia Rankine Reissue



2015



2015

Here is another example. We published Claudia Rankine's poetry! Ethan, Graywolf has the brilliant front list title that prompted us to reissue the poetry and we don't have huge numbers on these, but for us this was a brilliant way to get these back into the marketplace.

Nosowsky: And a backlist title that we probably ought to repackage ASAP!

Hottensen: Let us coordinate on this. This is a great example of publishers working together, which we all need to do.

Janaka Stucky (Black Ocean): I'm also curious about the timing of a reissue. Our best-selling title (which has already had three printings) is coming up on its 10th anniversary. We'd like to repackage it into a volume with the same author's second book: so, 2-in-1 repackaging. How do we time that, letting the original editions go out-of-print without losing out on sales / impact of the launch?

Hottensen: I think ten years is a fine time to work on a reissue. Sometimes... However, the accounts like to stick with lower price points (2 in one is sometimes hard). I find that it's nice to really ask the accounts *how* many they might take before going through the motions.

Legault: What are the benefits of timing a reprint with an anniversary? Of course media attention is one advantage.

Hottensen: An anniversary gives reviewers and feature writers a chance to go back to the books they remember or like, which is especially good if there is a back story.

Jeffrey Lependorf (CLMP): Judy, you mentioned *Edie* earlier; that was selling fine, but it just seemed like time to freshen it up. What goes into that kind of decision?

Hottensen: The sales are a major factor. If it is completely dying off, we might have to reconsider.

McPherson: Have you ever created omnibus editions? Say, of a mystery or other genre? Or is that mode passé?

Hottensen: Bruce, yes we have. And we have had success with nonfiction titles like PJ O'Rourke, or Mark Bowden. A collection of pieces more than an "Omnibus," I guess. Basically, if you have a writer who is publishing other places, it's great to have some content ready to go.

Nosowsky: You have a big backlist and I'll bet a good amount does not exist yet in e-book format. How are you prioritizing conversions?

Hottensen: Ethan, great question! It's a monthly meeting amongst all of us and we all go in different directions to try to keep the conquest. Yes, there are priorities – some of them include what kind of material is available, how much will it cost to recreate material, but we believe that all our content is good content, and are trying to get everything up that we possibly can.

Legault: You don't prioritize nonfiction over poetry? For formatting reasons and/or popular demand?

Hottensen: Poetry is one question I would like to ask you all about! We just digitized E. E. Cummings and I have never felt so lost.

McPherson: Have you had to renegotiate contracts to include ebook rights?

Hottensen: Oh, yes we have! Every single title older than 16 years or so we have had to send amendments. The clauses before then were all so vague. Do you all have these issues?

Nosowsky: Absolutely.

Hottensen: Does anybody have any advice on poetry for me? How do you format and make sure the line breaks work?

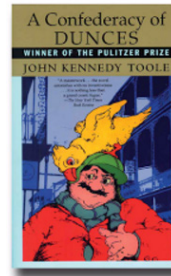
Stucky: Are you seeing demand for poetry in an ebook? We are not.

Nosowsky: Ha! I should have my colleague Jeff Shotts here. But I feel like Copper Canyon was putting a bunch of money into figuring out how to display them. You generally need a fixed page.

A Confederacy of Dunces



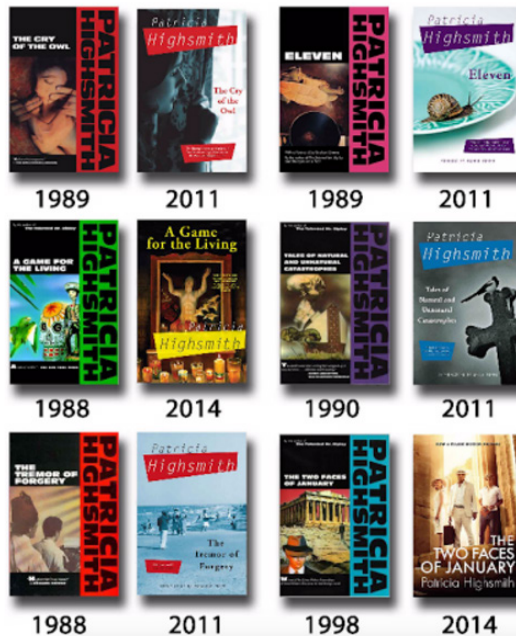
1980



1987

Hottensen: Let us look at *Confederacy of Dunces*. This is the one we don't dare change, yet to me it is begging for help! The earlier one is the hardcover that was published by LSU press. What do you think? Would you mess with this brand?

Patricia Highsmith Reissues



Changing the *Valley of the Dolls* cover also took some real guts! Here's another Grove backlist staple, Patricia Highsmith. See new versus old covers. I am not really sure why we have resampled except that the older ones look more . . . academic?

Nosowsky: Classic covers! And I worked for Bob Giroux, who rejected it despite Percy's recommendation. But I'd wonder how the sales are for that book. I'll bet a whole younger generation doesn't know it. I'd go for it!

Hottensen: Can I quote you on that?

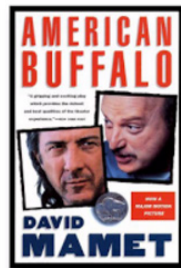
Nosowsky: Only if it works in retrospect.

Hottensen: Back to the Highsmith, of course there are the movies too that have forced new covers as well.

Ruth Greenstein (Turtle Point Press): Why is the last Highsmith different in design?

Hottensen: Because it was a movie that wasn't particularly successful. I wish we had *Carol*.

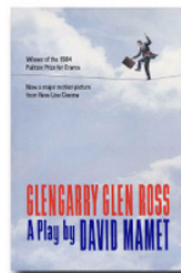
David Mamet Reissues



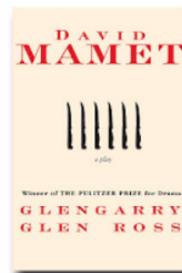
1966



2014



1996



2014

Let's move to drama. I spend a lot of time with this on our backlist. David Mamet's plays have been movies, and you can see we get stuck with these old movie editions that never die out. Here we came up with a new classic design that hopefully will last for another 20 years. The movie obviously dates the books and makes them not nearly as accessible. Plus, I think even for academics these books stick out more.

Nosowsky: Side question: do you ever just give up on that stock, thinking that a non-tie-in edition will sell better?

Hottensen: Yes we do, but with pain!

Legault: How do you go about putting together the supplementary materials? For example, who (original author, scholar, literary friend) would you recommend approaching for an introduction?

Hottensen: We generally start with the author, relatives, estates. We think about who can make the book the most relevant, so with Burroughs we used the scholar. We could have gone for the most likely beat poet, but we thought that this restored text needed context. For *Valley of the Dolls* we thought of Lena Dunham.

Legault: What motivates a reader who owns the first edition to purchase a reprint?

Stucky: Neurotic compulsion?

Hottensen: I think the reader must have a real passion for the book to begin with. But of course the fresh version can apply to those who loved the book – but also those who have never read it. I think you get both.

Legault: Also, I'd like to ask which of you (editors) have a specific project from your backlist that you would like to reprint? Any other questions?

McPherson: Have you ever had to relaunch a fairly obscure author whose work you love?

Stucky: Kidding of course. I'm a completist myself. Along those lines: I'm wondering if visual repackaging or additional content has a more dramatic effect on the success of a reissue, or if it should be both?

Hottensen: Janaka, definitely both. If you can afford the time, energy and money, keep that backlist alive!

Nosowsky: Getting back to promotion: Aside from repackaging, is there anything you do to remind bookstores of books on your backlist?

Hottensen: Ethan, yes! We have done major backlist promotions and put them in our catalogues and edelweiss. Essentially pointing out the titles that we believe all or some should have in stock.

Erika Dreifus (Fig Tree Books): Here's a question: Are there any CLMP/group efforts to collectively promote reprints? How often do we see an article "10 Great Recent Reprints You Should Know About"? Not often enough, right?

Nosowsky: Erika – how about BuzzFeed? It's perfect for that.

Lependorf: Erika, sounds like a great thing to pitch to *Entropy* or *Huffington Post*, etc. We can follow up after this talk if you have ideas about how that could happen.

Hottensen: Ethan, yes, a special promotion and discount that lasts about three months.

Nosowsky: How often do you try something like that? Every few years? Once a year?

Hottensen: Once a year or once every two years.

Legault: We've reached the end of our time together; thanks so much for joining us.

Hottensen: Thanks everyone and please feel free to contact me at jhottensen@groveatlantic.com with any questions. Let's share ideas!