WOMEN OF MYSTERY: NANCY DREW REVISITED

A Conversation with Melanie Reyhak and Laura Lippman

with Moderator David Ferriero

September 14, 2005

7:00 PM

South Court Auditorium

JEAN STROUSE: Good evening and welcome to the New York Public Library. I'm Jean Strouse, the Director of the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, that's upstairs here on the second floor of the Library, and I'm delighted to welcome you this evening on behalf of the Center and our cosponsors for this program, Live at the New York Public Library, about which you'll hear more in a couple of minutes. I hope you noticed near the elevators as you came in two cases of material on display from the Stratemeyer Syndicate Papers. The Library owns these papers and, as you will soon hear, the Syndicate published all the Nancy Drew books as well as the series about the Hardy Boys, the Rover Boys, the Bobbsey Twins, to name only a few. For tonight's event Melanie Reyhak, whom you'll meet soon, and Bill Stingone, the Curator of Manuscripts at the Library, have chosen a selection of items relevant to the story *behind* the Nancy Drew stories, and I'd like to thank them both. Actually one of the things in that case is a game, a board game about Nancy Drew that Melanie bought on eBay, so that does *not* belong to the New York Public Library. It's actually got neat little cars, Nancy's little coupe or roadster that you can see on the shelf that's now on display.

Other people who deserve our gratitude for invaluable help in setting up tonight's programs are Myriam DeArteni, Pamela Leo, Adriana Nova, Jessica Fee, Danielle Schmidt, and our colleagues and cosponsors from Live at the New York Public Library, Paul Holdengräber, Louise Carroll, and Kimberly Irwin. If you didn't see the Stratemeyer material on your way in, take a look as you leave, it's on your left as you walk towards the elevators, but it's pretty clear, so you probably did see it. Also as you leave, you'll be able to buy books by tonight's two writer speakers, Laura Lippman and Melanie Reyhak, and the authors will sign copies. Tables with the books are just to the left as you walk out of this door. And one final housekeeping detail. At the table to the right, you will find a list on which you could leave us your e-mail addresses, and we promise not to deluge you with mail, but we'd love to be able to contact you quickly when there's a new exciting program coming up, so please do leave us a way in which we can reach you electronically. Now Paul Holdengräber will tell you about the fabulous programs he's put together coming up soon with Live at the New York Public Library, and then I'll be back.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you very much. In so far that I did, I did not grow up reading Nancy Drew. **(laughter)** I always say that I have holes in my culture so it can breathe and **(laughter)** this is one blatant lacuna I have. I actually didn't know about Nancy Drew before, exactly **(laughter)** but this is why I am here tonight for the sole reason I wish to be enlightened, educated, informed, all the things that libraries do very well, I think. So I'm delighted to be learning something *totally* new tonight. I don't know what I was doing during that time when one does read Nancy Drew. I do know but I won't tell you. **(laughter)**

But in any event what I would like to talk to you a little bit about is a program that I put together here called Live from the New York Public Library, which is a new name we've given to the Public Education Program, partly because when I came here everybody was referring to PEP, and though I have a lot of pep, I thought maybe the name wasn't quite right. So it's called Live from the New York Public Library, and we have all kinds of events happening. Many, too many, perhaps, since I never seem to be going back home.

Two days ago we had Harold Bloom. This Saturday we are celebrating the renewal, or the revitalization, of the *Paris Review* under the new directorship, the new editorship of Philip

Gourevitch and it will be not only Philip but also Salman Rushdie and also Miranda July, and next week, you will have received those programs, I invite you to come and hear Richard Posner and Geoffrey Stone as they debate an issue which I think is very important regardless of where you find yourself on the divide, and there probably is a true divide—they will be talking about the Patriot Act. And I've asked them to think a little bit about the Patriot Act as it affects libraries and it certainly does.

We also have Adam Gopnick and Pascal Bruckner, a French essayist I like very much. They will be talking about the subject which is endless, the subject of vulgarity, and we also have Howard Zinn and Wally Shawn and later in the month of October, we have an event with John Hope Franklin and President Clinton and tickets are not yet available and I know many people want to befriend me so that I will give them tickets to that, but I encourage you to go online or call the fourteenth of October to hear that very interesting conversation about race in America with President Clinton and John Hope Franklin. Many other events. I invite you to join our e-mail list. I can't quite promise you what Jean promised you. I probably *will* bombard you with messages simply because there are a lot of events that are happening. It's a pleasure to collaborate with the Scholars program here, and now I turn it over to Jean again. Please come to Live from the New York Public Library, and thank you for coming today.

(applause)

JEAN STROUSE: Okay, now, thank you Paul, we come to tonight's program. I will introduce the moderator, David Ferriero, who will introduce the two writers. The three of them will talk for about forty-five minutes and then take questions from the audience. David Ferriero is, now here comes an awesome title, the Andrew W. Mellon Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Research Libraries at the New York Public Library. Before he started this job, he was the University Librarian and Vice-Provost for Library Affairs at Duke University, and before that he'd been a librarian at MIT for thirty-one years, ending up as Acting Co-Director of Libraries before he moved to Duke. In addition to all these lofty distinctions, he is, as you will soon see, a delightful, smart, witty, wonderful person, and the New York Public Library is extraordinarily lucky to have him.

But it is actually his life before he became a professional librarian that qualifies him to moderate this panel tonight. David grew up in Beverly, Massachusetts, with two sisters, one older and one younger. He read his way straight through the Hardy Boys and Tom Swift books. His Irish uncles had the entire sets. His younger sister belonged to an informal neighborhood group, an association of girls, sorry, who shared their Nancy Drew books and one day David found one lying around and started reading. “I loved it,” he told me last week, but since he was a boy and these were books for girls, he couldn’t tell anyone. **(laughter)** “It was awful,” he went on. “My sister, my kid sister, stomped through the house yelling, ‘Ma, I can’t find my Nancy Drew.’ For me,” he said, “to be exposed reading Nancy Drew would have been like getting caught reading porn.” His sister, taking lessons from Nancy Drew, of course did sleuth out where her book was and where all the subsequent titles ended up since David read the entire series. Probably like many of us, he stayed up way too late at night reading by flashlight under the covers. His secret was safe inside the family, but he says he did not confess to this addiction in public until he was an adult with a career related to reading. In fact this morning he gave me an item from the Internet dated 2002 in which he said that he’d grown up devouring the adventures of the Hardy Boys while his younger sister read all of Nancy Drew. **(laughter)**

The truth, he now admits, is that he preferred the action in the Nancy Drews to those in the boys’ series, since the Nancy books were much more suspenseful page-turners, as most of you here tonight already know. To prepare for tonight’s discussion, David read not only Melanie Reyhak and Laura Lippman, he also reread many of the Nancy Drews and he says the thrill of his early experience with them came immediately flooding back. But I will let *him* tell you about that and about tonight’s two speakers. It gives me great pleasure to turn the evening over to David Ferriero.

(applause)

DAVID FERRIERO: Thank you, Jean, for that public outing in front of so many of my colleagues. My role is to facilitate a discussion and based on my last half-hour, I don’t think I’m going to have much of a role to play because these two have hit it off already. Let me give a little information about each one of them. Melanie Reyhak is a writer whose essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, both the magazine and the book review, *Vogue*, *The Nation*, *Salon*, and others. Her poetry has been published in the *New Yorker* and the *Paris Review* and in addition she serves as the Assistant Poetry Editor of the *New Republic*. Undergraduate degree from University of Pennsylvania and an MA from Boston University. She was a MacDowell Colony Fellow in 1997. Many of you in the audience know Melanie as a recent resident of the New York Public Library's Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, where she was the Mel and Lois Tukman Fellow two years ago, researching *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her*, using our wonderful Stratemeyer Syndicate Archive, which was a gift to the Library from Simon & Schuster.

And, as Jean mentioned, there's a small sampling outside in the cases. Three very important pieces that I'm just—whoever picked them, congratulations, because they're very important documents. One is Edward Stratemeyer's diary, open to the page when Harriet is born, on December eleventh. The second is a letter to Edward Stratemeyer from Mildred at that point Augustine, volunteering her services to write for this new girls' series, and the last piece is just stunning—it's Edward Stratemeyer's memo, outlining the whole concept of the girls' series and suggesting that one of the names may be Nan Drew, so good work in picking those items. You should all also know that as of today, just two weeks after the book has been released it is now number thirty-three on the New York Times bestseller list. **(applause)**

Laura Lippman, Baltimore's finest crime writer, honed her writing skills, power, and powers of observation and imagination as a newspaper journalist. Her debut Tess Monaghan book was published in February of 1997. In the course of the next eight years Laura and Tess have won every major award the mystery community has to offer—the Anthony, the Edgar, the Shamus, the Agatha, and the Nero Wolfe. Raised in Baltimore, Laura cranked out her first novel at the age of five, in caveman language, complete with illustrations. A graduate of Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, she began her journalism career as a summer intern at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, then went on to the *Tribune-Herald* in Waco, Texas. A stint at the *San Antonio Light* gave her the opportunity to take a writing class with Sandra Cisneros and to think seriously about fiction writing. Actually her first published fiction, under a pen name—

LAURA LIPPMAN: Talk about being outed.

DAVID FERRIERO: Was in an erotica collection from Harper-Collins in the early nineties. Returning to Baltimore, Laura has been reporting for the *Baltimore Sun* and writing about a book a year while working fulltime. Two standalone books, *Every Secret Thing* in 2003 and this year's *To the Power of Three*, demonstrate Laura's emergence as a major voice in crime fiction. Dealing with tough subjects—infanticide in the former and a school shooting in the latter. Laura describes her work—and I love this—as PI novels written by Joanna Trollope or Cathleen Schine after a one-night stand with Robert Crace or Robert Parker. **(laughter)** So why don't we start by, "Who is Nancy Drew?"

MELANIE REYHAK: Well, whoever she is, I'm sure she is very impressed with your powers of sleuthing. That was more information than I could possibly have imagined you would have found out. Nancy Drew is—I mean actually needs no introduction—but she was America's first fulltime girl detective. She didn't have anything else to distract her from it. She was smart, she was a good driver **(laughter)** and I think one of my favorite things that I came across about her was in the first book in the series, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, where's she's described as having a way of taking herself very seriously without seeming to take life seriously at all, which I think is something we all probably aspire to and fail at, as so many of Nancy's qualities are, so.

DAVID FERRIERO: And Tess?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I mean, in a lot of ways Tess Monaghan is a descendent of Nancy Drew. I was thinking about that on the way up here today. Nancy was clearly a huge influence on the first group of women who wrote American female private-eye fiction, Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, Marsha Muller, and, without Nancy, they wouldn't exist, and without them neither I nor Tess Monaghan is here. So she is someone I've often called the accidental detective who fell into it, she's far less perfect than Nancy, but almost as good a driver.

(laughter)

MELANIE REYHAK: I think maybe a better driver, but she gets into much worse situations than Nancy ever does, so.

DAVID FERRIERO: You told me when we met in my office a couple of weeks ago that you wish you had been able to spend more time with Edward because, if my memory is right, you had fallen in love with him.

MELANIE REYHAK: Right. My husband is here. Shhh! **(laughter)** This is Edward Stratemeyer we're talking about, who was the founder of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, who dreamed up Nancy Drew for those of you who have not had had a chance to look at my book. He thought of her and he tragically died twelve days after the first books were published so he never had a chance to see what a success she was, and he appears in my book, sort of the first maybe sixty pages, which is not very much, but he was such a wonderful combination of things. He had this incredible imagination and this amazing business sense. He seemed to always be two steps ahead of what the publishing world was thinking about doing next, and, as a result, he was extremely successful and a wonderful father to his daughters, and I think a very devoted husband, and just the kind of sort of Renaissance man who is very hard to find and even in the sort of dusty pages of an archive he came immediately alive to me and, you know, maybe my next book will be the Edward Stratemeyer biography, because there's certainly lots of material to work with.

DAVID FERRIERO: There's been a lot written about Nancy Drew from a feminist perspective and I suppose you could—while I haven't seen a lot of literature, Tess Monaghan would also probably qualify in the same category. Is that a conscious part of what you're thinking about?

LAURA LIPPMAN: Absolutely. I referred before to the women who came first, and I've always thought and have said frequently that the women who broke in who sort of created the idea of the modern American female PI, they were like the first women who were going into workplaces in the sixties, they had to create characters who were better than everyone else who were, you know, very much *perfect* because they were breaking through barriers, and so they had to be stronger, they had to be smarter, they had to be tougher, and they had to be careful about showing vulnerability, and if you read Paretsky and V. I. Warshawski or you read Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, they are just—Marsha Maher's Sharon McCone, who is, you know, who flies her own plane and owns her own business, these are really accomplished women, just as the women who came before me in the newsroom tended to be the smartest, toughest, never let them see any weakness and I was what you called a second-wave feminist, and by the time I came along it was "Well, okay, if you have to cry go and do it in the bathroom." There are many days when you have to cry at a newspaper job. **(laughter)**

So the idea was, and I think you saw a group of writers come along after Paretsky and Grafton and Muller who were interested in writing much more frail characters, who had the freedom to write these more frail characters because someone else had done the hard work. And so Tess Monaghan was meant to be strong, yes, by all means empowered, but really imperfect. She's not a very good private detective when she starts out, and even by book six, someone's saying to her, "you know, you hold your gun like it's a hairdryer." **(laughter)** She's meant to be very human, very real, and you know, but of course at the same time, she lives in a world when it's very seldom said, "Oh my goodness, a female detective," and she doesn't have to worry as much about some of *those* issues. She's accepted at face value where she goes.

DAVID FERRIERO: And in the early days of Nancy Drew, was that, do you think, based on what you've learned about Edward Stratemeyer, that that was part of his thinking, that he was looking for dealing with the status of women?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I think maybe on a very minor level. He certainly, in spite of having created this very independent girl detective, did *not* think that that was the right thing for proper young women to do, for example, he would never have allowed either of his daughters to become a private detective, or really to do anything other than get married and have children, which is what they did until he died. I think the moment at which Nancy Drew was created, it coincided with the moment when girls were first being discovered as readers for books, which is very much the opposite of how we think of children as readers now, when I think everyone thinks boys are the difficult ones, so I think he realized that the moment was ripe to create this kind of a girl and he also knew from the amazing amounts of fan mail that the Syndicate got that girls were reading boys' books and that they were ready for a character who was going to go out and do all of this stuff that the boys in their books were doing so he just sort of put it all together in the marketing, the girls as consumers, and it all turned into Nancy and he was right.

DAVID FERRIERO: Talk about that fan mail, because that's an interesting piece of the archive here, the letters that girls wrote to Carolyn Keene.

LAURA LIPPMAN: The letters they wrote to Carolyn Keene were—I don't know, I mean, I have memories of writing letters to my favorite authors as a kid, but I maybe was not quite so passionate about it, just because I had so many books to choose from. I think in very much the same way that Nancy Drew functioned as a role model for these girls, Carolyn Keene was somebody that they could grow up to be. She was a writer, she had all these big ideas about what girls could do. So, even though Carolyn Keene wasn't a real person, she had this very mythic status. And little girls wrote to her, they asked for advice, they had of course all kinds of suggestions about what they thought Nancy should be doing and what they *didn't* like, and why was Nancy wearing this instead of that and really the next book—they are wonderful, wonderful letters. They're just unadulterated childhood *ego*, for lack of a better word, and I think that the Syndicate took them very seriously, they really paid attention to what these girls were saying, which was a wonderful thing to see, when I was reading all of the letters.

DAVID FERRIERO: And Laura Lippman says that it's been a quiet week e-mail-wise. "I usually receive several fan e-mails daily and about 99.9 percent of them are wonderful." Tell us about the others.

(laughter)

LAURA LIPPMAN: I'll tell you about one I got. And this is an amazing exchange and this is something—I have a lot of male readers, and 99.9 percent of them are wonderful. But if I'm going to be patronized and condescended to, I can almost always predict the gender of the person should they sign the e-mail and I sometimes save up my e-mail, the work-related e-mail, and wait to do it in a burst, and so I was doing some that had gathered up over a week and probably the most frequent question I get now, when I write a non-Tess novel, the question I get over and over, “Where’s Tess? When’s she coming back?” It was one of those, “I like the new book, but when is Tess coming back?” And I wrote and said, “Tess will be back next summer. The book is almost done.” I guess the gentleman I wrote was online, because he wrote back and he asked a follow-up question, and I answered it, because *I* was still online. He then replied, “Okay, now stop wasting your time online and get back to work,” **(laughter)** “that’s a good girl.” **(oooooh)** But, you know, this is someone who’s apparently willing to part with $24.95 to buy one of my books, so I just wrote back, “thanks!” **(laughter)**

So between that and there are people—again, most people make such lovely, gracious, tactful suggestions for how to correct the really egregious mistakes I’ve made in the books, it’s really, these e-mails, but every now and then someone comes along who just has to lecture me and you get things wrong, it’s really, you wish you didn’t, but if people ever realized how many facts were in a book, it’s just sort of, these are the 3,947 things you got right, but let me tell you about this thing you got wrong on page 19, it’s really bugging me, so those are the e-mails that sort of set me back, but again most of it is so nice, and some of it is just you know, beyond nice, it makes you feel very humble and grateful. This year, a woman came to me and said, “My niece has ovarian cancer, she’s in the hospital, and she reads your books and they’re the only thing that really make her even temporarily happy. Would you write her a note?” Of course I did. I was just overwhelmed to think that something that I’d written could give even somebody in need even an hour of respite from the situation, it’s you know a pretty wonderful thing most of the time.

DAVID FERRIERO: Has fan mail influenced character development, plot development?

LAURA LIPPMAN: Not at all. Because for one thing it’s not in agreement. I could probably put a poll up on my website about Tess’s boyfriend and it’d be split pretty much half and half, get rid of him, keep him.

DAVID FERRIERO: Yeah, what’s going on with that?

(laughter)

MELANIE REYHAK: I was going to bring that up too, actually. We're going to have to talk to you afterwards.

DAVID FERRIERO: Tess's boyfriend is a guy named E. A. Ransome, and his nickname is Crow, and the E. A. stands for Baltimore's most famous person, poet, Edgar Allan.

LAURA LIPPMAN: Our most famous *dead* literary figure. Our claim to fame is that he died there.

DAVID FERRIERO: Where was he born?

LAURA LIPPMAN: That's a mistake I made, in my very first book. He was born in Boston, grew up in Virginia, died in Baltimore. I didn't feel quite so bad when I saw a journalist make that mistake the other day and also had him being born in Virginia. But no I couldn't possibly, since I couldn't please everyone, I don't take a lot of advice about what the characters should do. Every now and then someone says, "When are you going to deal with this bit of Baltimore arcana?" "When are you going to write about screen painting?" and I sometimes sort of say, "One day, that's a good idea," but for the most part I have to kind of chart my own course.

DAVID FERRIERO: That's an interesting question. How much does real life influence plot or character in terms of what's going around? Because that was an issue, I think, over the years with Nancy Drew plots.

MELANIE REYHAK: Oh, yeah, well the short answer to that is not at all. **(laughter)** There were moments along the way when I think the Stratemeyer Syndicate tried to sort of allude to things that were happening but only very large things, like World War II, they finally realized, was not an entirely escapable event, **(laughter)** although even then, they were very hesitant to actually mention the war. They would do things like they had Nancy studying to get a pilot's license in one of the books that came out during that time, and you were just supposed to *understand* that this was perhaps in the hopes that she would go overseas with one of the women's Air Force corps. Or Ned, her long-suffering boyfriend, was always in Europe in those books **(laughter)** but never fought in the war. So there were certain things that they tried to integrate and later, in the fifties and sixties, when a lot of the books were revised, they started updating some of the slang and the clothing but really for the most part the world of the Nancy Drew books exists *elsewhere*. It's a world of very easy black and white and these people are good and these people are bad and good always wins out over evil, so there's not a lot of complication to deal with, on that front.

LAURA LIPPMAN: I would have to say that my real life—there's a lot of emotional subtext in my books. The last Tess book that appeared, which was called *By A Spider's Thread*, was based on a true story that I knew of back when I was a newspaper reporter about a man who came home one day and his wife had taken their three children and fled. And he found out, much to his surprise, that that's not actually against the law in Maryland. He's married, there was no separation, and so joint custody was presumed. His wife had the right to take their children and so he had to get divorced in absentia and find his children despite not having a lot of funds, and this was pre-Internet, and, at the time, there was someone in my life who had been through a divorce and was at that part where a lot of things were uncertain. Was his ex-wife going to remarry? Was she going to move? *By a Spider's Thread* was just the story of divorce told larger, with, you know, with crime and murder woven into the story, but it was the basic story of all the fear and anxiety you have when you're not sure that you can control your child's destiny, that your ex-wife or husband may take them to another city, may have a boyfriend or a girlfriend of whom you don't approve. And I was really writing about that because I was watching someone close to me go through it. I'm happy to say in real life, it was resolved very easily and very well, but, so that emotion plays into the book.

There's always something on my mind. I've always said all of the books have a secret story that they're about. The second Tess book, *Charm City*, is very much about female friendship. I'm not sure that most people take that away from that. But I know. The very first book was about the loss of your dream vocation. What do you do when it turns out you're not going to be who you thought you were going to be when you grew up? You know, when you're not going to be a firefighter, you're not going to be a ballerina, Tess wasn't going to be a reporter, what was she going to be? In *Baltimore Blues*, virtually every character in the book has had to face that question. Some had faced it happily, some not so happily, but no one is who they had planned to be vocationally. So but that's sort of for me. I don't put it out there in a big way, but there's always *something* and a lot of it's pulled from my own life.

DAVID FERRIERO: And how much for both Nancy and for Tess, how much did the writers assume kind of the persona, Mildred, for instance?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I'm very much like Nancy Drew.

(laughter)

LAURA LIPPMAN: The question is asked, and it's an understandable question. I tell people that Tess has become over the years like my spunky younger sister. She's much braver than I am, she also has far less impulse control than I do, which makes her a more interesting character to write about in a book. Certainly there is an intellectual and an emotional overlap. The biographies are not very similar at all. I went out of my way to create for Tess parents that would never be confused with mine. But yes, emotionally, intellectually, our taste in music, our taste in books. The big difference between Tess and me is that I am not allergic to shellfish. **(laughter)** And every now and then, you write the whole food stuff, the whole food stuff is just really to get me going and okay, I never enjoy writing anything more than what Tess is eating and every now and then I make a mistake and give her a fried oyster sandwich, and I think, well, I would like that, but I'll have to sub it out because Tess would now be in the hospital in anaphylactic shock.

(laughter)

DAVID FERRIERO: How do you keep track of that?

(laughter)

LAURA LIPPMAN: How do I remember that she's—I always remember that she's allergic to shellfish.

DAVID FERRIERO: All those details. Because for the Syndicate, they had developed kind of an outline, kind of principles.

MELANIE REYHAK: Right, they had a sort of a resumé. Actually, it included the fact that she does not like squash. So you might want to follow that.

LAURA LIPPMAN: And there was some color she preferred to wear—lots of blue. You know, the question is I don't do it as well as I should, I should have these complete—I have to reread my own books all the time, which is really terrifying, that's the last thing you want to do. But you have to go back and say, "Who was that guy and what did he do," and so on, but for the most part Tess's biography is pretty well imprinted on me. I don't forget a lot about Tess.

DAVID FERRIERO: For Nancy, is there a difference between the Mildred-written Nancy Drews and the Harriet?

MELANIE REYHAK: Mm-hm, yeah. I think—Harriet and Mildred were the two main writers for the series, for those of you who don't know. And they had very—while their sort of core idea of who Nancy was the same, that she was brave and smart and not very concerned with boys, like the rest of the girls in the series, they had very different ideas about her behavior in the world, which I think directly reflected who each of them was. Mildred was a very spunky sort of tough newspaper reporter, actually, and she really made it her business in life until the day she died in her nineties to, you know, carve out a spot and then stay there and she wasn't going to leave until she got the story or she met the deadline or whatever it was, and her Nancy very much reflected that. She could be a little bit catty and she wasn't afraid to talk back to police officers and things like that and then once Harriet got a hold of her, Harriet gone to Wellesley and had been brought up very much to believe in sort of feminine virtues, I guess, for lack of a better word. And she sort of toned down those things in Nancy. Not to the point of making her unappealing but her Nancy sort of paid attention to cops when they told her to go home from the scene of a crime or never drove beyond the speed limit, so I think there are opposing schools of thought about which Nancy is better or why you should like one Nancy versus the other, but it really remains true that throughout there is something in her that doesn't change, which I think is the secret to her longevity.

DAVID FERRIERO: There was a man who wrote four of them.

MELANIE REYHAK: Walter Karig, he wrote three, actually.

DAVID FERRIERO: Difference, could you tell?

MELANIE REYHAK: There is actually is not that much of a difference, primarily because Harriet and her sister Edna rewrote the books after he wrote them. **(laughter)** Which, I mean they did a good deal of that anyway, but there was a period during the Depression when Mildred in her sort of typical hard-headed way said that she was not going to take less than a hundred dollars to write a book, just because, you know, it was beneath her dignity, so there they were left with this very successful series without its writer. And they got this guy Walter Karig, who I believe was writing the Deep-Sea Dave, or Fearless Dave, Fearless Dave the Deep-Sea Diver series for them. And they put him on to this series and he actually, from what I could tell from his letters in the archive here, he seemed like a very good choice, he was quite a loquacious fellow, but they assigned him three of them, but I think the amount of work that they had to do to make them the way they wanted them to be was so much that soon after they went back to Mildred and offered her more money and decided that it was just easier to get her back and have less work for themselves.

DAVID FERRIERO: These were the instructions that they gave him when he was writing these three and for those of you who wanted to know which three, it was *The Mysterious Letter*, *The Twisted Candles*, and *Larkspur Lane*. *Twisted Candles* and *Larkspur Lane* are two of my favorites.

MELANIE REYHAK: Yes, the sign, *The Sign of the Twisted Candles*.

DAVID FERRIERO: He was told, “You will notice that the story contains adventure and characterization, but that the idea of the secret oil well is kept from being too prominent. While girls like action in their stories, they are not interested in the details of things like these, as boys are, and therefore such ideas are merely used as background.”

MELANIE REYHAK: That was very Harriet, I think had it been Mildred she would have been right there with the oil well. Nancy would have gotten very dirty but somehow managed to come out of it in a nice clean suit.

DAVID FERRIERO: This is Banned Book Month, week, month in libraries. Were Nancy Drew books banned in libraries?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I yearn to be banned. **(laughter)**

MELANIE REYHAK: I would say Nancy Drew books were not—well, they were never banned legally, I guess is the word that I’m looking for, yes, but yes, there were lots of librarians, in fact, even before Nancy Drew, who despised the Stratemeyer Syndicate books, and thought that they were just absolutely the worst kind of garbage you could feed your child, and Edward Stratemeyer, of course, loved this, because when the books were taken out of the libraries, that meant that more people just went out and bought them, so he made a lot of money off this. And there has been really pretty much for the last century this constant back and forth about whether or not series books deserve to be read, and it seems to just go in cycles and every once in a while there’s a big flare-up and then it goes away. But um, yes, certainly there is a history of—

DAVID FERRIERO: They’re back in.

MELANIE REYHAK: Yes, they’re back in.

DAVID FERRIERO: But no problems with Tess.

LAURA LIPPMAN: No, no, I mean I've managed to offend an individual reader here and there. It's interesting. What usually happens is people have a hard time making a distinction between what characters on the page are saying and what I actually think, and I get these furious e-mails, you know, "Why did you have to say that horrible thing about West Virginia?" **(laughter)** So well, "I didn't say it, this character said it, and actually the point of her saying it is to show that she is bigoted in ways that escape her own very PC attention." One writer felt that I was too political in a book and wrote me and said, delivered the rather contradictory message, "Just shut up and write." **(laughter)** Still working that one out.

But, no, I would say that the only ban that my books have ever come under is I am much shyer about my friends' children reading my books, I don't think my books should be read by anyone under fifteen, with the exception perhaps of *To the Power of Three*, which I think is actually *very* appropriate for teenage girls and doesn't have the language, sort of graphic scenes that would keep—but some of my friends have had their kids reading the books as early as eleven or twelve, so that's their choice, so, no, not even close, not yet, I keep waiting, I keep hoping.

DAVID FERRIERO: Libraries are very important to you.

LAURA LIPPMAN: Oh, yes.

DAVID FERRIERO: We have a lot of librarians in the audience, but you talk—in just about every Tess she uses the library.

LAURA LIPPMAN: She does. I don't think there has ever been a Tess book in which she has not gone to the library to do some part of her research. I am the daughter of a librarian. I'm the daughter of a children's librarian, who was very sensitive to librarian stereotypes, she would actually cut the *New Yorker* cartoons out and she actually had a little collection over the years, and so one of the most conscious homages in anything I've ever written is Tess's aunt, Kitty Monaghan, former librarian, current bookseller, who's just the sexiest person alive. She's beautiful and she has a wonderful personality and she's just, you know, filled with joy and that was very much for my mom because she is really—she was tired of the, you know, bun, glasses, “hush,” kind of, and a lot of the books celebrate librarians to the point—one of the books, it’s a bit of a spoiler, one of the books features a librarian as a very bad person.

DAVID FERRIERO: Librarian gone bad.

LAURA LIPPMAN: Very bad person.

(laughter)

DAVID FERRIERO: In the Edgar Allan Poe Room.

LAURA LIPPMAN: Yes, and it’s set in the context of the very real library system in Baltimore, the Enoch Pratt, but Carla Hayden, the head of the Pratt system, said, “I loved it,” because again it was sort of smooshing down these librarian stereotypes. I mean, libraries are really *vital* to my existence, to my day-to-day life, I mean, I probably spend—each book has meant some time researching in libraries, and the library’s been part of my life since I was six years old. And you go down there and you get that first card, and it was a weekly pilgrimage in my family, a really big deal to go to the library.

DAVID FERRIERO: And we know about you.

MELANIE REYHAK: Right, this library. I owe my very existence on this stage to this library. I mean, I would say, like Laura, that libraries were part of my life since I was little, and I went every Saturday and got my allotted eight books or whatever it was, and read them all by Sunday afternoon and pulled on my mother’s sleeve to take me back to the library please. And certainly having a fellowship here at this library only renewed my love of and awe for libraries, and especially this library, which in spite of my having grown up here, always seemed a little imposing for obvious reasons, and having the chance to be here for a year and really dive into the collection the way that I did, was wonderful for my book, of course, but just also personally for me to have that experience of being in an archive and to sit upstairs in an office and, you know, be thinking about chapter nine and thinking, “Oh, you know, I would really like to do some more research about girls' basketball in Iowa," which was one of Mildred's pastimes, and to, you know, call up in the collection, there are seven hundred books in this library on girls' basketball in Iowa, and to really be able to unlock the power of a library this great was an incredible experience, so I am devoted to the New York Public Library forever.

DAVID FERRIERO: Well, and I hope you've realized how much the staff loves this kind of experience, because it gives us a chance to learn more about the collection, and having a scholar like you working with us is very exciting for us.

MELANIE REYHAK: And I should say that the staff, especially the staff in the Rare Books Reading Room, who never once complained about seeing me there every single day asking for the same boxes over and over and over again were wonderful to me—I think they went out of their way to make me feel like less of a harried, neurotic writer than I actually am. I'm sure they've seen a lot of ugly things in there over the years.

(laughter)

DAVID FERRIERO: That's another program.

MELANIE REYHAK: Yes.

(laughter)

DAVID FERRIERO: Can you talk a little bit about race in the Nancy Drews over time. I was startled, actually, when I was rereading the first four, to see some stereotypes that I, of course, hadn't retained, and you deal in several places with the race issues, so why don't we start with you?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I live in a city that is 66 percent African American, and for the first two books in the Tess Monaghan series I sort of ignored it, which was legitimate in that Baltimore suffers from what's known as hypersegregation, and there's a way to live your life so that you actually have very little interaction with the other race. For years it's been two races. Baltimore has now suddenly seen a huge surge in its Mexican American and Latin American population, which is changing things somewhat, but that's very recent, very new, and finally, it's like, you can't keep writing these books and not deal with race, and I think part of the challenge was to deal with it very directly, which I did in the third book in the series.

Now the books kind of go in and out. Race isn't *always* at the forefront, certainly in a book like *By a Spider's Thread*, that's about Baltimore's Jewish community, so it's not part of that. I'm working on a book right now that in a lot of ways I feel is a karmic debt, because the fact of the matter is that homicide in Baltimore is the story of young black men who are murdered and whose deaths are recounted in one to two paragraphs in the next day's newspaper. It's just—we have, we're on a pace to have 260 to 275 homicides in 2005, so about every thirty-six hours, and 80 percent of these cases are young black men. And I felt, I've got to write a book about *that* kind of homicide, it can't always be the millionaire's daughter who disappeared, or the man who was murdered standing next to Poe's grave, I have to write about the authentic homicide experience in Baltimore, and that *has* to be a story about race, and it's been a pretty interesting experience, you know, thinking about it and talking about it and getting a friend of a friend, a kid named Deondre McCallagh, to help me just with things like slang, getting things like that right, and researching that part of Baltimore life. So as long as I'm writing about Baltimore, I have to write about race, and, as I said, I skirted it for two books, but it's just—it's there.

DAVID FERRIERO: And how much of your Southern background feeds into that?

LAURA LIPPMAN: Well, the Southern background, it really feeds into the next book. I am—and it feeds more into Crow's life than into Tess's life. People who have been reading the books very carefully, they know some things about Crow's family, that he comes from Charlottesville, Virginia. A couple years ago, my mom began doing a lot of work on our family tree, and around the same time, as a reporter, I interviewed Edward Ball, who wrote *Slaves in the Family*, and Edward Ball wrote about the essential myths that you have when your ancestors were slaveholders. The myth in Edward Ball's family was "We were *good* to our slaves," and his research found that well, that just wasn't true and perhaps not actually possible, to be good to one's slaves as long as they remained slaves.

In my family we knew that there were slaveholders and the myth was, well, there weren't very *many* slaves, it was really not a big deal, and my mother's research found that in the 1850 census that her great-great-, I guess my great-great-great grandfather, owned forty-three slaves, which is a lot. That's one of the larger—I mean, it's not a huge plantation, that's a lot. And I had my mother write out that information for me and I keep it in my datebook. So I look at it every day and I think, "What do you do with that? What do you do with that information? How do you think about it?" And so I've brought *that* information forward into the next book and given Crow not the *exact* same dilemma, but a similar dilemma, that he's wrestling with in much of the book in private.

MELANIE REYHAK: I think race in a different way was also a very big problem for the Nancy Drew books and for all of the Stratemeyer books. Certainly when they started, as you mentioned, there were a lot of very crude and ugly stereotypes and not just—they were sort of ethnic, racial, anything you can think of, and then there came a point in the late fifties when the publisher, you know, sort of said, this isn't going to fly anymore, and they kind of didn't know how to deal with it, and so they made a sort of, in a way, even worse choice which was to just wipe out all of the characters who were anything basically other than, you know, Nancy Drew prototypes or clones, so all the villains were white, everyone was white, pretty much, and at the same time I think because their hearts were in the right place they made an effort to start a series about a black family, the Tollivers, but unfortunately the Stratemeyer Syndicate sort of formula, which was to create these fictional worlds where everything always worked out in the end didn't really work out so well in an African American family in the sixties, so the series was a failure almost immediately, and they sort of couldn't understand why young black children couldn't relate to these books about a very happy black family in which there was no turmoil and no racial politics or anything like that, so it was a huge problem and they never really figured out how to deal with it.

LAURA LIPPMAN: In some ways, modern crime fiction is still wrestling with that, still working out, you know, well, we can't have all the villains be African Americans, but at the same time then the solution becomes all of a sudden you just saw a huge number of sort of white southern bubbas became the villains in crime fiction because they were a very good reliable villain. But it sort of goes back and forth as people try to find a way to tell stories that are authentic but not offensive and I've actually, I've seen some portrayals of African Americans in modern crime fiction that are just would make you cry at sort of the backward thinking.

DAVID FERRIERO: Before we ask for questions, tell us about *nom de nekkid*.

LAURA LIPPMAN: Is that my version of a porn name, when I said *nom de nekkid*? Well, you know we were actually doing this at Bauchercon recently and there's some debate. The people from the UK insisted that it was your childhood pet and mother's maiden name, and I said, "No, no, no, it's childhood pet and street that you grew up on and then your *soap opera* name is your middle name and your mother's maiden name," I'm very strict on that. So I think I can't remember what Tess's *nom de nekkid* was, this comes up in *In Big Trouble*. We came up with mine was Dreamy Valley, but my soap opera name was really spectacular for a while—it was Madeline Keswick, I thought that it was so perfect.

DAVID FERRIERO: Mine is Whitey Walnut.

LAURA LIPPMAN: Which one is that?

DAVID FERRIERO: That's the porn name. Okay, it's over to you now. Over to Jean Strouse.

JEAN STROUSE: Before we started, Laura told a very interesting story about one of the writers of Nancy Drew. Do you want to just tell it?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I'd love to tell this story. Last year I had the honor of editing the Mystery Writers of America Annual which is given out at our Edgar dinner and I approached a woman named Chassie West, Chassie is a wonderful writer who has been nominated for the Edgar a couple of times for the books she's written under her own name, but Chassie had also worked as Carolyn Keene, and I wanted her to write about *that* in particular, and she consulted her contract from the Stratemeyer Syndicate, or I guess it's now Simon & Schuster, and it was pretty strict, there was a lot of stuff she couldn't reveal about it. So she said she would write instead about how she overcame her ambivalence about being Carolyn Keene because, for years, you know, people would say, "You're a writer,"—this is just the nightmare, you're a writer, you're somewhere, you're on a plane. "Oh, you're a writer? Have I heard of you?" and you just want to cut to, "No, you haven't, trust me you haven't, you've never heard of me, you have no idea who I am," and so what really frustrated Chassie is that no one had heard of Chassie West, but everyone had heard of Carolyn Keene, and she had, as I said, some ambivalence about that, and then one day a friend's daughter was sleuthing, as a very good Nancy Drew reader would be wont to do, was sleuthing on the Internet trying to find out information about Carolyn Keene, somehow Googled her way to Chassie's web page and she was so excited, she said, "Mom, did you know that Carolyn Keene was an African American?" And I just thought that was the most wonderful story and it's the thing that really reconciled Chassie—it made Chassie feel wonderful about being Carolyn Keene, that this little girl—it changed everything for her, so that was a pretty cool story.

Q: Before I read Nancy Drew stories, I read a series called Ruth Fielding, and were there a lot of girls' series besides that?

MELANIE REYHAK: Yeah, there were lots of girls' series before Nancy Drew and Ruth Fielding in fact was not only done by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, it was the first series that Mildred Augustine, or Benson, one of the main characters in my book, before Nancy Drew, went to work on for Edward Stratemeyer, it was the first thing he assigned her. So yeah, she came in I think at *Ruth Fielding and her Great Scenario*, I don't know if you read that one, in 1927. But as I said at the start, all of those series—Ruth, for those of you who don't know, which I'm sure is everyone except me and . . . she sort of had a big Hollywood career happening, and all of her mysteries involved someone stealing her screenplay or . . . there were lots of interesting doings, but she had this whole other career and she also unfortunately was the victim of the terrible mistake by the Syndicate, which is that they married her off, which was always a disaster for their girls' series, and they didn't get it right until they thought of Nancy, so, yes, I have heard of Ruth Fielding.

(laughter)

Q: What do you mean that it spoiled it when they married her off, nobody would read it anymore?

MELANIE REYHAK: Yeah, little girls were apparently not very interested in heroines who fell in love and got married. It was over for them.

DAVID FERRIERO: This was the formula, the Stratemeyer formula that was developed. "A low death rate but plenty of plot," **(laughter)** "Heaps of action and polka-dotted with exclamation points and provocative questions. No use of guns by the hero, no smooching."

(laughter)

LAURA LIPPMAN: I'm falling down in a lot of categories. **(laughter)**

Q: Question. I read, I must say, all the Nancy Drews when I was about twelve years old—

DAVID FERRIERO: Oh, good for you.

Q: —for lack of anything better, and I loved them all. None of them—none of these series, Tom Swift series, Bomba the Jungle Boy, Jerry Todd and the Upper Ladder club, these were all part of the stable—were available in libraries and no librarian worthy of the title would have admitted any of these. When one goes into a contemporary library, what you have now are shelves and shelves and shelves of soft core porn for women. I think they've replaced in many degrees—

DAVID FERRIERO: You mean the romance novels?

Q: Amanda Quick type novels, Victoria Holt, one could go on practically endlessly, and they all sell tremendously, and in chatting with my own local librarian—suburbia—says, “You know, I’ve got to follow the customer. These sell, this is what people want, and that’s why we carry them, and that’s why we need more shelf space.” To a certain degree, as a first-generation American, librarians, rather than parents—my parents didn’t read English, we had three books, all told—the librarians sort of shaped my definition of what was appropriate material to read and implicitly study. They don’t seem to perform that function, or maybe my definition of the function is too narrow and too dated. The library is very different. It is a popular meeting place and increasingly as you look at the use of tapes and so on, to say nothing of the soft core porn, they have been caught up in the market fervor.

DAVID FERRIERO: I can’t, you know, I can’t . . . **(laughter)** oh, gee. I’m responsible for the research libraries.

(laughter)

LAURA LIPPMAN: I was going to say, as someone who broke in writing soft core porn, **(laughter)** I’m not sure about that actually, my mother still works as a volunteer at the South Coastal Library at Bethany Beach, I just had the pleasure a couple of weeks ago of sitting down and having a long conversation with Dennis Lehane, who’s just forty years old, and he grew up, he was actually first-generation American, and he grew up in a household with no books and certainly in the Boston neighborhood where he grew up in the seventies, it was librarians who were putting books in his hands. So I don’t, I mean—

DAVID FERRIERO: And librarians are still doing that, still putting books in kids’ hands, but we’re catering to a wide audience, and what *you* describe as soft porn may not be soft porn to other people. Most contemporary fiction, I would challenge you, you could make the same argument about. I wouldn’t, but there’s a fair amount of sexual activity in just about everything that is published today in fiction.

Q: I think the problem is that most people line up now going to the library and use the computers. There's very little reading of books. I mean, I see it in my local library and it just appalls me.

DAVID FERRIERO: We do have a lot of people who are using the Internet, of course. I think we're the last place in the city where you can get free access to the Internet. But there's still a lot of people reading and a lot of people checking out books. I make it a point every day to wander around the Library to see what people are doing, and I spend time across the street over at Mid-Manhattan to see what people are doing and we have a booming business, checking out books, reading books. I pay a lot of attention to what people are reading on the subway when I'm commuting, and looking for property marks to see whether they're coming from the New York Public Library or not **(laughter)** and I am pleased to say that we have a lot of readers in this city. It's wonderful to see.

Q: Just a follow-up. Do you have statistics now on circulation levels in the library and how they've changed over the last ten to twenty years?

DAVID FERRIERO: Yes, we do, of course we have those statistics, but, as I said, we don't circulate anything here in this library, but for the branches, yes, of course we do. And is there anyone here from the branches who can say what the trends are in circulation? Mary Kay?

MARY KAY: I'm retired.

DAVID FERRIERO: I know you are, just recently. **(laughter)** Go ahead.

MARY KAY: I think they are going up gradually, little by little. A lot of that circulation of course *is* DVDs and other kinds of nonprint media, but we still do have a good circulation of books.

DAVID FERRIERO: And the way I look at it is, people are reading. I don't care what they're reading. People are reading.

Q: Melanie, could you talk about what has happened to Nancy Drew today? I get the impression from the end of the book that it's just as a character been dumbed down and made unrecognizable.

MELANIE REYHAK: You'll never catch *me* saying something like that about Nancy Drew. Well, I think, you know, as David is saying about the library, Simon & Schuster is catering to a very big audience now and there are a lot of other series books and girls' books and they, in order to have her ride into the twenty-first century, she can't be this sort of roadster-driving, high-heel-wearing beauty that we all know and love. I mean, I would argue that she may be, she certainly is very different in some ways but Simon & Schuster has made an effort actually to make her personality more the way she was in the beginning. There was a period in the eighties when she sort of lapsed into total teenybopper horrors and I think she is actually a very serious, solid girl again, which is nice to see, and she has sort of all the accoutrements of the twenty-first century, you know, Internet access, and digital everything and she drives a hybrid car **(laughter)** so I wouldn't say that she is sillier, but I think it just depends on what you like. I mean, of course we're all devoted to the old Nancy but it will be interesting to see what happens with this one.

Q: This is about Tess. I wonder how old she is. How many men read her?

LAURA LIPPMAN: I don't have any breakdown. Tess has a lot of male readers. I'll tell a slightly risqué joke at the public library. I said when I started off, "I'm going to write a female detective that appeals to men," and people said, "How are you going to do that?" and I said, "I'm going to give her really large breasts." **(laughter)** I think first of all men are very open-minded in their reading, and they like Tess and so I do have a lot of male readers. I have no idea what the breakdown is, but it's clear because I hear from them a lot and in terms of how Tess has been aging, this is one of the things I have to reinvent every time I write a book. I have to reinvent the Tess calendar. In Tess's world, I started writing these books, they started appearing eight years ago, but only about four and a half years have gone by, and yet, the most recent Tess book is clearly set in March and April of 2005, so it's consistent. So I don't write a lot about current events, but there are just very sort of subtle references if you know what day opening day was and you know that the Yankees played the Boston Red Sox, you know, that's consistent with the timeline in this book. So she's aging, not as rapidly as I am, and one of the things that comes up with those of us who are writing series fiction, how much are you going to put these characters through? How open-ended is this series? Can Tess go on forever? And one of the things I struggle with is that I believe I stand between Tess Monaghan and normalcy, that if she wants to marry Crow and have a family, I'm the person who keeps that from happening **(laughter)** because I really, I just, there have been some really interesting books with women with young children working both as amateur sleuths and as private eyes or even police officers, more and more, but I just always, the day you see a car seat in the back of Tess's vehicle, it's over. **(laughter)** It's just—I can't do it, I can't do Tess with a baby, and yet could I be mean enough to not let her have one? **(laughter)** So we'll see, we'll see where it goes.

Q: I'm just wondering how you came to Nancy Drew. What inspired you to write the book?

MELANIE REYHAK: Well, I really came to Nancy Drew as an eight-year-old and I think that when it happens that young, it never goes away. But I heard Mildred Benson's obituary on the radio, she just died, in the spring of 2002, and I just got very interested in her story, she had a fascinating life, both in relation to Nancy Drew and otherwise, and then I sort of, with a little prodding, discovered that there was this whole second story, which is the story of Harriet Adams, and then the book just sort of came together from there, these two women and then the one that they created and how their lives and the fictional life dovetailed, both with each other and with American history over the last century, so.

LAURA LIPPMAN: As for writing mysteries, I was outed at the beginning of this for having my first short story appear in what would be called a collection of erotica, and the woman who edited that collection, Michelle Slung, was someone who said to me, not as direct advice to me as a writer, but just in general, she said, "It's really interesting about women. So few women I know have the confidence, the hubris, whatever you want to call it, to sit down and say, 'I'm going to write the Great American Novel,' matter of fact, a lot of them freeze up at that idea, but so many women can say, 'I'll write a mystery, I'll write a romance, I'll write science fiction,'" and that sort of through what she called "the mask of genre," women writers often found themselves, so that idea really took seed with me, and when I finally had an idea for a book that happened to be about killing someone, it was like, “Okay, this is a mystery, I can do this.” And I read mysteries for pure pleasure, I was a huge fan of James Cain and Carl Hiaasen, and I was reading Sara Paretsky, and that was what I did for fun. It was very natural.

Q: I’m a girl from Iowa, but I didn’t play any basketball, **(laughter)** I played the flute, I think, but they wouldn’t let me play basketball.

MELANIE REYHAK: You can still learn how here, there are a lot of books.

Q: I was amazed to hear about how many resources there are available—did you say 600?

MELANIE REYHAK: Well, I mean, that may have been a slight exaggeration.

(laughter)

Q: I called my mom in Iowa, who’s ninety, a couple weeks ago after I had made reservations for this, and I told her I was coming to this gathering, and she said, “Oh, I think we have bunch of Nancy Drews around here,’ and so the next time I go home we’re going to try to search them out. She asked one question—I haven’t read your book yet, I will—which I have a feeling is probably in the book. How many total Nancy Drew mysteries were written?

MELANIE REYHAK: In the original series, fifty-six, but I mean, then, there are now I think 175.

Q: (inaudible)

DAVID FERRIERO: No one I knew—

MELANIE REYHAK: Did you have a secret club?

DAVID FERRIERO: In fact, you are the first guy I knew who's ever admitted to me that he read Nancy Drew.

MELANIE REYHAK: You know, I don't actually know. I think there were considerably fewer boy readers of girls' books, than girl readers of boys' books, but I don't think anybody really kept any numbers, they just kept sales figures, so.

Q: How have formulas for children's literature have changed since the time of the original Nancy Drew? What elements of the Stratemeyer formula would work, do you think, and be successful commercially for young girls or boys for that matter today? As a corollary, is there any Nancy Drew in Harry Potter?

MELANIE REYHAK: Is there any relation between them? No, actually, that's something people have asked me a lot, I think, about Harry Potter. I think probably reading Harry Potter is a very different experience than reading a Nancy Drew book. I mean, Harry Potter books are very involved and they have all this magic and you know Nancy Drew books are really about solving the mystery, we were talking about this last week, that even when you read them now it's like you're dying to get to the next, you have to know, what's going to happen, what's going to happen. I think that formula—I mean, you know, I can't say, I don't write children's books now, but I would imagine that the kind of formula for a series, and, maybe, Laura, you can speak to this, since you're writing a series, probably hasn't changed that much in its basic principles. I mean you want there to be sort of beginning, middle, end, and if it's a mystery you need to have certain things resolved by a certain point, and I'm sure every series has its set complement of murder, discussions about food, and I think every series has the parts that make up each book, and I think the readers who read series want to see all those things in each book, that's what holds the series together, so.

LAURA LIPPMAN: There is one kind of timeless overlap between Nancy Drew and Harry Potter and that's the concept of a set of three, a set of three with a very clear star. And that was actually something in writing *To the Power of Three*, that had been formulated by reading Nancy Drew and by reading Maud Hart Lovelace's Betsy, Tacy, and Tib stories is that I fascinated by this alien world in which three girls were friends and never fought. **(laughter)** What planet was this happening on? **(laughter)** But in Harry Potter although you have two boys and a girl, again it's a group of three where one of the three is clearly the *star*, is the one that everyone's just *gaga* about all the time. I reread some Nancy Drews a couple of years ago when I was reviewing the Nancy Drew television film for the New York Times. And I was kind of impressed both in the books and in the film by how often people gush about Nancy's brilliance. That's really what George and Bess are there for, is to be the little Greek chorus attesting to Nancy's specialness, and I think in Harry Potter to the extent, I've only read one and a half, I have to say, I'm not the biggest Harry Potter person in the world, but again, the others are there to remind us that Harry is brilliant, Harry is important, Harry has this huge destiny, and that they are there as supporting characters, so I do think it picks up on that one little thing.

Q: Melanie, I have to admit I'm one of those men who hasn't read Nancy Drew, however, I have a daughter who is eight. My question is, going on the assumption that the original of something is usually better than the latter-day recreation of something. If you were going to break in an eight-year-old to somewhere in the Nancy Drew series, would you go with the originals, do you think that a contemporary eight-year-old would find anything there to grab on to or not?

MELANIE REYHAK: I think it depends on your eight-year-old. I think there are children, and I was certainly one of these children, who love the strange words and the weird clothes and all these things that are so clearly from another era and then I think there are children who probably would find that stuff really boring and red ten pages and not go on with it. The only thing I would say about the originals is that you would then have to be prepared to deal with talking about all the racial stuff but I certainly think that the books are—with that one very large exception—much better reads than anything that came after them. So that didn't really answer your question.

DAVID FERRIERO: Thanks to Melanie, thanks to Laura, thanks to all of you for coming.

(applause)

JEAN STROUSE: And thanks to David for moderating. A couple of quick things. Don't forget you can buy books on your left, please leave us your e-mail address on your right, and for those invited to the private Eisenberg reception afterwards, it's a little hard to get to, it's on the Trustees' Room on the second floor, and the guy who takes you up in the elevator will be able to explain to you how to get there. Thanks very much for coming, everybody.