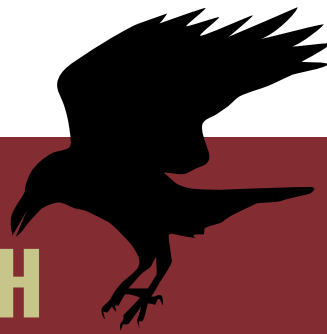


APRIL 2026

THE MARCH OF CRIME

SoCalMWA's monthly newsletter.



Publicity In A Shrinking Media Landscape

Approximately 4 million books were sold last year. How do you break through? If you missed the excellent March 22 presentation by Megan Beatie, Kim Dower, and Kathleen Carter on how to market your book, [watch it now](#). It's that important. All have been in the industry from the days when more outlets for publicity existed, and Megan delivered on her promise, "We're going to speak candidly about book publicity."

Here are some key points they covered.

Marketing is what you pay for. Publicity is what you can get for free. Books are getting limited coverage. Book space in traditional media is shrinking, and even some podcasters are adopting the pay-to-play trend. Authors should not ask, "Is it worth it?" Those 300 listeners may blossom and grow. Ask yourself who you are in addition to the author of your book? Entertain and inform in interviews. You never know what's going to connect. Think like an editor. Think like a producer. Who do you know? Authors sometimes *don't* know *whom* they know. You could have all the connections in the world and not know how to use them. That's where the publicist comes in.

What authors should do

Once you've written your book, look at it differently. Start thinking like a publicity person. Create a publicity folder. The public is wary of blurbs, yet they can make a difference, especially for a debut author, and especially if you have one blurb that's really strong. Get an author website, a URL, even if you don't have a book. You need consistent branding, so keep the same name across social media. Social media does not sell books per se. Think about who your audience is and what is comfortable for you.

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Let's Meet In Person



BY LESLIE S. KLINGER

We're going to start a new initiative in the Chapter, promoting local "meet-ups" of members. While our virtual panels—like the recent one on book publicity, by Megan Beatie, Kim Dower, and Kathleen Carter, available on our website—have been well-attended, our recent member survey confirmed that many of you would like to actually meet in person. To achieve that, we've gone over our membership roster and grouped people whose addresses are geographically proximate. As you know, our membership includes Hawaii, all of Southern California, Nevada, and Arizona, so the distances can be daunting!

You'll be receiving (or by now may have received) an e-mail that identifies Chapter members near you. We hope one or more of your "local group" will suggest some times and places to meet in person. Our intention is that these will be informal gatherings with no set agenda. (Back in the days when we were promoting a national slogan of MWA READS, I started a local gathering called "MWA DRINKS.") You might just socialize or do informal readings or agree on a topic to discuss at the next gathering. If you want, you can have speakers or visit a museum or bookstore or whatever moves you!

The idea is to supplement Chapter-wide programs with some local interactions. We'll see how this goes; it's a work-in-progress. The New York Chapter (covering, like us, several states) has achieved great success with the idea, fostering more than 75 local groups.

We're not giving up on larger gatherings. We're planning our annual "Books 'n BBQ" event for the summer, and of course, we're sponsoring a booth on April 18 and 19 at the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, on the USC campus, at which many of you will be signing. We'll have more virtual panels (two more are already set for April and May), and we're working with Sisters in Crime L.A. to put together another large craft-oriented panel at the Skirball, probably in late summer.

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The March of Crime

The March of Crime is the newsletter of the Southern California Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

Editor: Bonnie Hearn Hill

Opinions expressed herein are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mystery Writers of America Southern California Chapter.

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AI And Accountability

BY BONNIE HEARN HILL



I recently learned that Hachette Book Group withdrew horror novel *Shy Girl*, by Mia Ballard, following online allegations that the author relied heavily on artificial intelligence. The book, which was originally self-published in 2025, has also been discontinued in the UK.

This happened only after readers on Reddit, Goodreads and others pointed out passages they felt resembled AI prose. Ballard said she did not use AI but hired an acquaintance to work on the early self-published book, and that the friend did use AI tools. Regardless, the damage is done.

Obviously, writers need to be careful about how we use AI. If, like me, you also work as a ghostwriter, you might want to revisit your contracts and liabilities. If an author client of yours is accused, how vulnerable will you be? To further complicate matters, AI detection software isn't foolproof; detectors frequently flag Shakespeare's work.

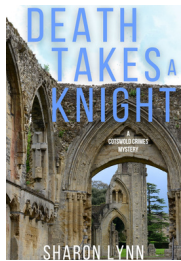
One approach to protect authors being undertaken by the Authors Guild is a "Human Authored" mark for books and a registration number for the copyright page free to members and with a \$10 fee per title for non-members. In March, the Authors Guild opened the system to publishers, who, once approved, will be permitted to license the certification mark for batches of titles with quantity discounts. Authors are limited to ten titles per year unless they obtain special permission. It's a beginning.

The UK's Society of Authors has recently introduced a "Human Authored" logo that authors can download to display on the back cover of their books.

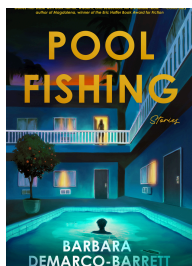
In my job co-anchoring a Central California TV book club, I read numerous books each month to come up with my five picks. Since taking over this newsletter, I've been discovering books by our members, new-to-me authors I might not have otherwise found. AI is here to stay, but so are people like our members who write our books the way we always have, the hard way.

Bonnie

OVER THE TRANSOM, MEMBER NEWS



Death Takes A Knight, award-winning author **Sharon Lynn**'s fourth book in *A Cotswold Crimes Mystery* series, was released March 31.



Barbara DeMarco-Barrett, author of the noir short story collection, *Pool Fishing* (Kelp Books, 2025), will moderate the panel, “From the Terrible to the Beautiful to the Surreal: Short Stories with Long Shadows,” at the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, at noon, Sunday, April 19, at Taper Hall 201.

Jenn McKinlay's *Paris is Always a Good Idea* is being adapted for the screen and is currently in production. According to *People* magazine, Lacey Chabert will star alongside Scott Michael Foster. The show will debut on Hallmark+ later this year.

The annual Community Helpers of the San Fernando Valley Author Luncheon will be held April 18 at the Hilton in Woodland Hills. Participating authors are **Elisa Fortise Christensen, Lee Goldberg, Dennis Palumbo, Laurie Stevens, and Gregory Urbach**. [Email](#) for tickets.

In March, **Elle Jauffret** was the guest lecturer at the California Writers Club of Orange County, where she spoke to 90 writers about combining multiple genre elements into a single novel. She will sign books at the *L.A. Times* Festival of Books on April 18, from 10 a.m. to noon, at Booths 360 and 363. She will also be one of the featured authors at the French Market, an event celebrating international collaboration between San Diego, CA, and Marseille, France, on April 24, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., in downtown San Diego. See details [here](#).

Jennifer J. Chow will be attending Malice Domestic. She and **Catriona McPherson** will be chatting with Lori Rader-Day at People's Book in MD on Thursday, April 23, at 6:30 p.m. Eastern; RSVP [here](#). On Saturday, April 25, at 2 p.m., she'll be participating in the “Served with a Side of Murder: Food-related Mysteries” panel.



Laurie Stevens will speak about her book, *The Return* and human consciousness versus artificial intelligence in Laramie, WY at Blue Mountain Books on April 29.



Sheila Lowe, pictured here with Margaret Mizushima at Left Coast Crime, will appear at the Santa Ana Women's Club presentation at the Elks Club, April 10, the Carpinteria Book Festival, April 12, and the Oxnard Library panel, April 18.

Nancy Cole Silverman will be a panelist at the 29th Anaheim Public Library Foundation Mystery Authors Luncheon, Sunday, April 19 at the Sheraton Park Hotel at the Anaheim Resort, 1855 S. Harbor Blvd. Included on the panel with Silverman are **Gary Phillips, Catriona McPherson**, and moderator **Adam Sikes**.



Several contributors of the newly released *The Savage Waves of Spring* anthology, including **Curtis Ippolito** and **Gary Phillips**, read from their stories at Book Passage in San Francisco on February 26 while attending Left Coast Crime.

From left, C.W. Blackwell, Phillips, Ippolito, Nik Xandir Wolf, and Joe Clifford



Georgia Jeffries will be speaking at the “Women of Mystery” Authors Luncheon with fellow MWA member, **Ellen Byron**, on April 18, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Mile Square Golf Course, 10401 Warner Ave. in Fountain Valley.

The event is hosted by the American Association of University Women, and reservation information is available [online](#).

Responsible Representation in Fiction

BY ELLE JAUFFRET

When developing memorable characters, few elements bring them to life as vividly as the way they speak. Speech patterns—whether accents or impediments—quickly establish background, personality, and history without exposition. However, as writers, we carry a significant responsibility: to represent diverse voices authentically rather than falling into the trap of stereotype or caricature.

The Power and Pitfalls of Accented Speech

In storytelling, accents serve as immediate shorthand. They can place a character geographically, hint at their cultural background, or suggest their social standing—all without explicit exposition. As our society becomes increasingly diverse and globally connected, representing this linguistic variety authentically becomes both more important and more challenging.

Research confirms the power of accents in shaping perception. Studies have demonstrated that listeners often make immediate judgments about a speaker's intelligence, socioeconomic status, and trustworthiness based solely on their accent. A 2010 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that participants "orientated themselves nearly exclusively on the spoken accent while categorizing people," with accent perception affecting key cognitive processes, including memory and social categorization. Other research shows that non-native accents can reduce "cognitive fluency"—the ease with which the brain processes stimuli—which can inadvertently affect credibility judgments.

[continued on page 6](#)

The Las Vegas Writers Conference will be held April 23-25, at Sam's Town Hotel & Casino, in Las Vegas.

The event will offer workshops on writing, marketing, and publishing, networking opportunities, a raffle, and one-on-one sessions with agents and editors.

Register on the [website](#).

[President's Rap Sheet](#) [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2](#)

I hope to see many of you at the Festival of Books. I plan to be at our booth all day on both Saturday and Sunday. Come on by! It's a great opportunity to meet readers and members, whether you're signing or not.

I'm also traveling to New York at the end of April, to moderate a panel for MWA-U on Tuesday of Edgars® week, featuring some of the Edgar® nominees, and to present the new MWA Hall of Fame at the Edgars® banquet.

I'll be back in NYC a week or so later for Thrillerfest, put on by ITW. Look for my report on those events in our next newsletter!

Les

[Publicity](#) [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1](#)

When you go to an event, buy your book, better yet, books there. Buy more than one.

Finally

Kim: “We really do get under the hood of a book like the hood of a car. We live with that book while we're working on it.”

Kathleen: “The longer we have to brainstorm ideas beyond the book, the better. Time is really important.”

Megan: “The relationship between author and publicist is very trust-based. You want to be sure they have the connections for your kind of books.”



Representation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

However, accented speech in fiction has often devolved into shorthand stereotyping. Consider how many villains speak with vaguely Eastern European accents, or how Southern (American) accents frequently signal a character is either unsophisticated or prejudiced. These portrayals perpetuate harmful assumptions about intelligence, trustworthiness, and capability based solely on how someone speaks.

Speech Impediments: Beyond the Stutter

Similarly, speech impediments in fiction have a checkered history. Too often, they're either played for laughs or used as simplistic character traits rather than as one aspect of a fully realized person. From the comedic lisp to the nervous stutter, these patterns have become tropes that rarely reflect the complex reality of living with a speech difference.

Poor Representation Looks Like This:

Phonetic spellings that clutter the page and make reading difficult: "Ze doctair vill see you now, ja?"

Inconsistent accent application that appears and disappears when convenient

Using accents only for "exotic" or minor characters while protagonists speak in "standard" English

Speech impediments that exist solely for comic relief or to indicate villainy

Stereotypical phrases repeated by characters from certain backgrounds ("Mamma mia!" for Italians)

Good Representation Looks Like This:

Stephen King's Annie Wilkes from *Misery* uses distinctive speech patterns that reveal character rather than geography. Her peculiar euphemisms ("cockadoodie," "dirty birdy") and old-fashioned phrasing reveal her mental state and isolation without resorting to dialect spelling.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's characters in *Americanah* navigate multiple linguistic worlds.

Their code-switching between Nigerian English, American English, and British English reveals complex identities rather than serving as mere exotic flavor. Toni Morrison's delicate handling of vernacular speech honors the linguistic traditions of African American communities without reducing characters to their dialect or making the text inaccessible.

Tips for Responsible Representation

Follow Stephen King's Rule of Restraint: In *On Writing*, King suggests indicating accent or impediment once or twice, then letting readers carry that voice in their heads.

Focus on Cadence and Word Choice: A character might reverse word order, use distinctive phrases, or favor certain expressions without requiring readers to decipher unusual spelling.

Study Real Speech Patterns: If writing a character with a specific accent or impediment, research extensively.

Ensure Fully Developed Characters: Characters with distinctive speech should never be reduced to just that trait. They deserve the same depth, complexity, and agency as any other character. Their speech pattern should be one element of their characterization, not their defining feature.

Respect the Reader: Heavily phonetic dialogue quickly becomes exhausting to read. Trust your audience to "hear" the accent without constant reminders, focusing instead on occasional distinctive words or phrases.

Before implementing any accent or speech impediment, ask yourself: Why am I including this? What does it add to the story and character? If the answer involves shorthand characterization, creating humor at someone's expense, or adding "exotic flavor," reconsider your approach. But if the speech pattern genuinely reflects the character's lived experience and contributes meaningfully to their development, proceed with careful research and nuanced execution.

Elle Jauffret is an award-winning mystery author whose work explores identity, perception, and the hidden power structures shaping who gets believed. A former criminal attorney and French native living in the U.S., she brings legal insight, cultural nuance, and sharp psychological tension to contemporary mysteries. Find her on her [website](#) or on social media.

CRIME CALENDAR



2026

Saturday, April 18, and Sunday, April 19, SoCal MWA at the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, on the USC campus in Los Angeles. To sign up, contact **Patty Smiley**.

April 25 at 1 p.m. Crime Scene: L.A. A Zoom conversation with crime writer Christopher Goffard, whose “Crimes of the Times” *Los Angeles Times* columns have spotlighted the Black Dahlia, the Zodiac, the Hillside Strangler, the odd disappearance of Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, and other famed cases that underscore the darkness beneath the SoCal sun. Interviewed by Chapter board member **Pat H. Broeske**. Be on the lookout for the Crowdcast link.

May 17, 1 p.m. Researching L.A. An in-person panel conversation about ... research and Los Angeles. At The Book Jewel in Westchester. Details to follow.

For events without links, save the dates, and we’ll send details as soon as they’re available.



If you know of an event that belongs on the Crime Calendar, email themarchofcrime@gmail.com with the info.

THE LAST WORD



“I entered Love Blooms, fully aware I completed its self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Tell-Tale Treats: A Magical Fortune Cookie Novel

by **Jennifer J. Chow**