

Lecture Spotlight: We're pleased to present...



Jane Henderson

Post-Dispatch Book Editor

LECTURE: How to Get a Book Reviewed/What to Expect

on Thursday, January 21

from 7 to 8 p.m.

**at Barnes & Noble-Ladue
8871 Ladue Road, Ladue MO 63124**

Free and open to the public! Please [register to attend](#):

Get [map and directions](#).

Jane Henderson is book editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. She grew up in the St. Louis area and graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with degrees in journalism and English literature. She cut short her work as a grad student in English to go to work as a copy editor for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat during its dying days in the mid-1980s. After working for three years in the newsroom of the Hartford Courant in Connecticut, she returned to St. Louis and has been an editor and writer with the Post-Dispatch's features department for 20 years. She and her two children live in south St. Louis.

Five Questions for Jane Henderson, Post-Dispatch Book Editor

Spotlight: St. Louis was recently named one of the most literate cities in America. How do you think that reflects on the writing community here?

Jane Henderson: That was a weird little study. St Louis City is not part of the county,

which might have skewed some of the measurements they used. There may be some legitimacy, there may not be.

However, St. Louis has a long literary history of which it deserves to be proud and it has nothing to be ashamed of now. A lot of good writers, such as Jonathan Franzen, cull from St. Louis experiences. From Laurell Kay Hamilton and Ridley Pearson to academic and serious literary writers, we have a wide range. I think St. Louis deserves to be proud.

S: Which books are most commonly reviewed by the Post-Dispatch?

JH: We choose books based on author reputation, a local connection or if the book seems new or interesting.

Before I became book editor, our policy was not to review self-published works, which used to be known as "vanity press." However, the world of publishing has changed dramatically. Now there are decent books being self published and our view has changed. Although we can't include them all, we will sometimes review a self-published book with a local connection.

S: From reviews on Web sites to word of mouth through social networking, there is no end to the ways a new book can get feedback from readers. How does that change the role of a professional book reviewer?

JH: I'm not sure what's going to happen. I'm worried about the possibility that newspapers will stop publishing reviews. But at the same time, it's great that you can read a lot of different assessments of books.

Personally, I prefer to read reviews by people who I recognize and I more or less trust. You can read hundreds of reviews on the Web but you don't really know if those people have agendas. You don't know who they are or even if the reviews are done under their real names.

S: The digital age is also changing the way we read. How should writers respond to that?

JH: I don't know that it should change the way people are writing, although a few years I read an article that hit home for me about how long biographies have become. The theory was that it is so easy for people to write on computers that they are writing to excess.

New technology is going to influence books but I see all kinds -- massive thousand-page books and tiny books that really should be an essay in a magazine. It's hard for anyone to say "A book should be this" or "A book should be that." I think there will just be all kinds and all forms.

S: What influences a book's commercial success? Does a book's success ever surprise you?

JH: There are books that I'm not crazy about which become commercially successful but I don't know if that's surprising. Books that are successful have to appeal to a wide number of people and might not be to my taste.

It doesn't concern me if a book sells well or not. I never think of myself as promoting something when I write reviews. I see it as reporting on something that has already been published. But in general, successful books are inherently appealing, whether that means they are something new or well-written. It is hard for unknown writers to get publicity because they are up against so much competition. Luck is a factor.

Check out Jane Henderson's blog: www.stltoday.com/blogzone/book-blog