

## BOOK LAUNCH CANCELLED BY PANDEMIC

..... written by invitation from the owners of Broadway Books in Portland, Oregon .....

As you see, this newsletter features books by authors who'd been scheduled to read from their books at the store in April, May and June. Some of the books are novels, some are collections of poems, stories or essays; some offer advice, directions, and instructions. The writers of those books – I am among them – were disappointed. You probably know disappointment is not rare for writers; rejection is part of the deal. *This* experience, however, is something else. And that's why, when asked to write about my response to having my book's grand opening cancelled because of the global pandemic, I said *yes*.

What *does* it feel like, for writers to have our work fall into silence just when it was going to be heard, to be known? What's the emotional experience in such a situation? Well, at first there was that disappointment. Now I'm disheartened, missing you, missing that chance to talk with you about my book's connections to all we're struggling to understand. Recently I thought of these two questions: "What did these stories mean when I was writing them? What will they mean when you are reading them?" Live events at bookstores – actual, not virtual – foster questions like that, and some answers.

Independent booksellers welcome conversations that celebrate books, notably small press books not promoted by corporate publishers. At bookstore events, writers interact with readers *for real*, not through what E.M. Forster called "the machine." Moreover, in bookstores, we *browse*, discover books we weren't looking for, hold books in our hands – opening

them, paging through, having experiences we learn from and take delight in, discovering over and over that books, all of them necessarily written some time before we read them, are inevitably related to our present moment – and its speedily emerging future. We want to talk about that discovery, together.

Certainly, connecting online can be useful – indeed, *it better be*, given the fact that we, writers and readers and booksellers, must do that, as the saying goes, “for the foreseeable future.” But we know it’s *less* connected – less personal, less human. Though we can watch and listen to each other on our various screens, and even enjoy that, the experience is definitively *less*. Even when well done, it’s insubstantial compared to actual connection. Actual connection is what we get at bookstore readings.

The books that writers were going to bring you in April, May and June contain words and thoughts we were eager to talk about with you. That didn’t happen. Luckily for all of us though, the store is here, the booksellers are here, our books are here – and writers who are local might even turn up in line with you at the farmers market. If it’s me – masked, six feet away from you, waiting for broccoli or mushrooms or some blue, green and brown eggs – you can ask why *Hello. This is Jane.*, my story collection sparked by pre-Roe underground abortion work, has all that stuff about tattoos in it. And if that happens, along with my answer I’ll tell you how disappointed I was.

..... Judith Arcana, end of June 2020