

Books help you

Humor books appealing for their readability

By KARLA K. MARTIN

Reporter

Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain did it with style. It was at times a little cruel, at times intensely critical, but it made people laugh.

Humor, of course, is with us always, but it changes with the times, and so do the books it comes in.

The humor books of today, which include everything from comic strips to hardback novels, often rely heavily on drawings and pictures.

"Humor books have got to appeal to a very short attention span," says Mike Crouchet, who buys humor for B. Dalton Bookseller Company in Minnesota. "It has got to be something you can open up at any page and start reading."

Crouchet makes the purchases of humor books for the over 704 B. Dalton stores in the

United States.

He says that what makes humor books popular is their readability and timeliness.

"They're topical items," he says. "They're fads, and don't last for long."

Crouchet says the current best selling humor books include "How To Live To Be 100 Or More" by George Burns; "Beyond the Farside" by Gary Larson; "Garfield" by Jim Davis; "Bloom County" by Berke Breathed; "Motherhood, the Second Oldest Profession" by Erma Bombeck and "While Reagan Slept" by Art Buchwald.

Crouchet says these books, which sell for \$3 to \$6 each, will probably be kept in stock for two to eight months, or as long as sales continue.

"Sales right now are definitely not up," Crouchet says. "It's a very over-published field because humor books are inex-

pensive to make."

He compared the books to the gum, cigarettes and magazines that are placed beside the cash registers at supermarkets.

"They are all impulse items," Crouchet says. "When you walk into the bookstore, you don't have your mind set to buy them."

Crouchet, who described his job as one that "keeps me laughing," says that humor has a different appeal to everyone.

"It's a gut reaction to people," he says. "It's a hit and miss operation."

Crouchet says the new trends in humor books are hard to predict, but that most of the books will be trivial.

"The future will consist of getting the most off-the-wall, unheard of, unpredictable and craziest things we can," he says.

In an age of vid-kids where television rules, it may be hard to believe that anyone reads anymore. But somebody out there has to be reading, because books are selling as well now as they ever have been.

The big sellers are science fiction and romances in the fiction category. A reader can escape from college hassles into the dreamy world of fantasy.

You can live the excitement

of being royalty, or maybe a sexy harem girl. You can skyrocket out of this world into billions of stars, and journey to unexplored planets.

Want to stay with reality, then maybe non-fiction is for you. How-to books are the most popular. With these books you can learn how to fix your car, your apartment or even your body. You can enhance your love life or just put romance into it. With books, anything is possible.

Classics rarely read for leisure

By KIMBERLEE NORRIS

Reporter

Few students make it to college without reading a few classics — either on their own or through the coercion of an enthusiastic English teacher. But Texas A&M students who read classic books simply for fun seem to be in the minority.

When did you read your last classic?

"It must have been in high school," says Rob Clark, a junior petroleum engineering major.

"It's been a long time ...," freshman Brenda Setser says.

"I don't think I've ever read a classic," says Mike Barrios, a sophomore industrial distribution major.

Many students are confused by the term "classic."

"I read '101 Uses For a Dead Cat' last semester — I thought that was pretty classic," sophomore David Briar

Mark Busby, an associate English professor and undergraduate advisor, says a book can be described as a classic if it has been around for a while, and has established a sound reputation.

"Distinguishing between a classic and other books is like making good wine — the scum rises to the top and is cleared away, and what's left are your classics," Busby says. He says that the classics deliver a message to one generation, but have lasting value, so they can speak to following generations.

Authors such as Shakespeare, Homer and Plato come to mind when listing classic writers, but Busby says contemporary authors such as Joseph Keller — "Catch 22," Ken Kesey — "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," and John Irving — "The World According to Garp," can be considered writers of the classic vein.

In the College Station area, most of the classics purchased by students are bought because they are required to read them for classes.

"Probably 90 percent of my classic buyers are students," says Linda Rice, manager of Book Land in the Post Oak Mall. She sells more Shake-

speare — "Hamlet" and "King Lear" — than any other classic.

Other store managers agree. Kelly Drewyer of Hastings Books says her big sellers for students are books by Shakespeare, Hemingway and Steinbeck.

"George Orwell's '1984' has sold well, primarily because people are curious about it," she says, "but otherwise my classics go to students."

Bobbi Garner of Bobbi's Books says most her classics are sold to students for required reading, but some are sold to older readers.

"I think some classics are well-written, but not really interesting — too dry," she says. "That's why they lose their younger audience."

Garner says most readers develop favorite reading types, like science fiction or romance, and stick with them.

Busby listed several books he considers classics — including William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury," Ernest Hemingway's "Farewell to Arms," F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Great Gatsby," Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath," and Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn."

"Of course that's only a partial list," he says. "There are many, many other classics that give an insight into human nature."

Busby says the current interest in Orwell's "1984" could be attributed to the book's title, but that George Orwell's message is not tied to any specific time frame.

"Orwell simply reversed to numbers of the year he wrote the book — 1948 — to produce his title," he says. "The title is not the book's significance. '1984' is a description of the world's progress as Orwell saw it then."

Busby says he would never limit anyone to reading only classics. He encourages students to read widely and discriminantly, developing a standard.

"Read whatever you enjoy, whatever interests you," he says, "but above all, read."

Best seller lists provide a reader guide for books

By SALLY SCHWIERZKE

Reporter

Grocery lists, most admired lists, best dressed lists, worst dressed lists. Lists are everywhere — in magazines, newspapers, text books, everywhere. Perhaps the most widely read list is the best seller list.

Best seller lists are available weekly in newspapers, magazines and, more often than not, in local book stores. Both the New York Times and Time Magazine publish their own best seller lists.

The first best seller list was published in 1895 in a literary magazine, The Bookman. The list was confined to fictional works.

Publishers Weekly began printing best seller lists in 1912, but its lists included non-fiction as well, at least until 1913. From 1914 to 1916 only fiction best seller lists were published. Then in 1917 Publishers Weekly reinstated its non-fiction best seller lists with seven titles plus 10 war books. In 1922 Publishers Weekly gave 10 titles to the non-fiction list, and now both the fiction and non-fiction lists contain 10 titles.

Publishers Weekly prints each week what it believes are the most scientifically accurate lists possible of what is currently selling in the book stores,

Arnold W. Ehrlich, editor-in-chief of Publishers Weekly wrote in a 1978 book about his publication. Its list includes only those books distributed through trade, book stores and libraries, not those ordered through mail order houses or book clubs.

Some critics continue to complain that best seller lists represent common and even vulgar popular taste, Ehrlich wrote, but Publishers Weekly will continue publishing the lists.

Early best sellers included historical romances and Zane Grey westerns. Today crime and suspense novels and the ever-present love stories are the most common fictional best sellers. A religious novel occasionally breaks into the list. The difference in today's love stories is that the authors can be more sexually explicit — and usually are.

Non-fiction outsells fiction by 2-to-1, but the novel is gaining ground.

Topical non-fiction is the biggest seller on the non-fiction list.

Books on war and politics were popular during World War II.

Today, the "how-to" and "self-help" books have become more popular. With the growth of television and movies, theatrical memoirs and gossipy auto-

biographies are appearing on the best seller lists more often.

Best sellers usually are by authors who have had a book on the list before, according to an article by Daisy Maryles, senior editor of Publishers Weekly. If Michener comes out with a new book, it will be at the top of the list, she wrote.

Publishers Weekly sends its lists to newspapers and book stores around the country, including Samson's Bookery in College Station.

"I think more people buy books because of the author rather than how they are rated," says owner Peggy Samson.

Mary Bassett, a clerk at Hastings' Books and Records, on the other hand, has noticed a difference, and thinks that people are influenced by the best seller lists. The list at Hastings is based on the number of books sold in all their stores and is computed at the company headquarters in Amarillo.

Waldenbooks receives its best seller lists from the New York Times, which bases its list on the number of copies sold in 2,000 bookstores across the nation.

"I do believe that people are interested in what is on the list," says Mary Hardin, manager of Waldenbooks in Post Oak Mall.