

Literary watcher weighs success as forecaster



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THEATER REVIEW
Gather 'round, ladies and gentlemen. This is my Day of Reckoning.

Remember way back on May 20, when I ventured out on that literary limb? I named four not-yet-published novels — Scott Turow's "Pleading Guilty," Stephen Coonts' "The Red Horseman," Jack Higgins' "Thunder Point" and Barbara Kingsolver's "Pigs in Heaven." And I said we'd see each of them "on bestseller lists before summer's end."

I then invited interested parties to check back here in September to see how my predictions went. There was the possibility, of course, that said interested parties might just get the chance to watch me eat my words.

So on this fateful day, do I find myself a condemned woman?

Well, yes and no. As it turned out, each novel did find a spot on either or both the New York Times and Publishers

Weekly lists by the end of August. By then, Turow's legal thriller, "Pleading Guilty," had made a continuing appearance on each list for approximately 12 weeks. Ditto for Kingsolver's "Pigs in Heaven," a timely story about a struggle for custody of an adopted child.

Higgins' "Thunder Point," featuring his old hero, Brig. Charles Ferguson, had fared all right, appearing on one list or the other throughout the month of July. Coonts' post-Soviet "The Red Horseman" popped up on the NYT list for a short while toward the end of June.

As the eternal optimist commented during his plunge from the tip-top of the Empire State Building: "All right, so far."

You may remember that I didn't stop at forecasting bestsellerism for each book by summer's end. Nooooo, not me. I went on to predict that these novels would make "some of the splashiest literary hits of 1993."

So much for quitting when you're ahead.

As I write this, you'll not find "Thunder Point" or "The Red Horseman" on either list.

"Pleading Guilty" was disappeared from the Publishers Weekly list and has dropped out of the top ten in the New York Times.

"Pigs in Heaven" stands about midway, where it has remained for several weeks now. (Of the predictions I made, I expected "Pigs" to make the least impressive showing. Now, as things look from here, it may possibly out-do Turow's expected blockbuster in terms of staying power.)

I expected Turow's latest thriller to hold a spot among the top ten bestselling novels for much longer than 12 weeks.

I expected "Thunder Point" and "The Red Horseman" to appear among the top ten soon after publication and stay there for several weeks. Neither book ever

made it past number 11.

In comparison, as of Sept. 1, Robert James Waller's sensational seller, "The Bridges of Madison County," has been firmly entrenched on the list some 60-plus weeks; John Grisham's "The Client" more than 20.

Laura Esquivel's offbeat "Like Water for Chocolate" also has held on to a spot in the top 15 for more than 20 weeks. (Although a place on the list doesn't indicate exactly the number of books sold in any given week, of course, it is usually safe to assume that it has held to a top spot substantially longer than another title, it has sold better in the long run.)

And so, here I am, nibbling on a word here and a word there, smiling sheepishly, and vowing never

to test my powers of prophecy in print again.

You really should keep an eye on Tom Clancy's "Without Remorse," though. Also, Larry McMurtry's "Streets of Laredo." Also John le Carré's "The Night Manager." And, of course, Elmore Leonard's "Pronto," due out in bookstores soon.

Last Words: Friends of the Plymouth Library has scheduled a writers' workshop for middle-school students Nov. 4, 11, and 18 at Dunning-Hough Library in downtown Plymouth. The event will be co-sponsored by Poets & Writers, Inc., through grants from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and the Lannan Foundation.

Twenty students will be invited to participate.

Applicants must submit a written statement, stating why he or she wants to participate in the workshop. A statement from an adult telling why the student would benefit from the experience should accompany each application for admission.

The workshops will be led by area authors Barbara Hood Burgess and Thomas Sullivan.

Deadline for submitting applications is Oct. 7.

For information, call the Plymouth Library; 453-0760.

Victoria Diaz of Livonia tracks the books and literary industry. You can leave a message for her on a touch-tone phone by dialing 953-2047, then her mailbox number, 1854.

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