

DearAuthor.Com Behaving Badly

By Holly Lisle

The charming correspondence I have had with [the pseudonymous] Jane Little at DearAuthor.com, who believes frank lying about someone is a protected form of free speech.

You'll notice that in this entire exchange, I have never threatened Ms. Little once. I have never suggested suing or seeking to have her site shut down. I have, in fact, done nothing but ask for a much-deserved apology and a retraction.

—Original Message—

From: Holly Lisle

Sent: Saturday, December 09, 2006 10:52 AM

To: jane@dearauthor.com

Subject: Contact from Dear Author Website

Holly Lisle wrote:

To whichever Ja(y)ne wrote "Holly Lisle Hates the Chains":

It does astonish me that, since you not only misrepresented what I said but flat-out lied about it, clearly with the intent of damaging my livelihood, and I pointed this out clearly, you have neither printed a public retraction nor an apology.

You do owe me both.

Holly Lisle

Website: <https://hollylisle.com/>

On Dec 9, 2006, at 12:06 PM, Jane wrote:

Dear Ms. Lisle

We will be printing neither a public retraction nor an apology.

Under the laws of defamation, libel is only considered to be actionable when the statements that were made were untrue, not a comment/opinion, or otherwise privileged.

The quotes were taken directly from your blog post and the statements that were made on the DearAuthor blog were either true and/or opinion which is protected free speech.

Further, for a public figure such as yourself, the bar is much higher for proving defamation by requiring a showing of actual or legal malice, depending on the jurisdiction.

If you have specific parts that you believe were not accurate, feel free to point those out and we will take that into consideration.

Thank you,

Sincerely

Jane Litte

—Original Message—

From: Holly Lisle [mailto:holly@hollylisle.com]

Sent: Sunday, December 10, 2006 10:21 AM

To: Jane

Subject: Re: Contact from Dear Author Website

On simple lies made by you which are clearly contradicted in my post, Ms. Little, I can carry the burden of proof all damn day. Witness:

1. to state "Holly Lisle Hates the Chains". Flatly false. I never said it, I never implied it, and the fact that you managed to infer

it only compounds the extraordinary number of other lies you told in the same article. All listed below.

2. "Lisle says that her career is being killed by Chain Bookstores." My statement, in fact, was exactly the opposite. "I'm not in danger of having my career killed at the moment," from the first post in the series.

<https://hollylisle.com/writingdiary2/index.php/2006/11/29/the-tonk-need-rescue/>

3. Next flat-out lie: "In Ms. Lisle's fantasy construct, the white hats are the Indie Booksellers and the black hats are the Chain

Booksellers." My exact words were "To understand why chain bookstores are the Villians of Bookselling." Unless you are in fact

a bookstore, you were not figured anywhere in my equation, and neither was any other bookseller.

4. Next lie: "Amongst the dark lord's sins are the failure or refusal of the bookseller in the chain to read the book; to want to respond to the market (ie promising sales); or even to actually want to sell books." What I said was: "The computer spits out the fact that Midlist Writer's New Novel sold 900 copies, so Corporate Buyer, who almost certainly hasn't read the book, hasn't talked to a single reader about the book, and looks at the book as no different than Cans of Tuna, Brand A, will order 900 copies of Midlist Writer's Next Novel." You are not a corporate buyer, either, so neither you nor any other bookseller was insulted by this –and neither were corporate buyers, who do skim some books, but who mostly listen to pitches from publishers' sales representatives, and who, as a result, regard about 99% of the books they purchase as simply product. They have no emotional involvement with them.

5. Your next lie states that I suggested indies were a good sales point for romance: "Gandalf's minions, the Hobbits,

cheerfully

handsell all books. They never scoff at a romance readers inquiry about midlist authors like Caroline Linden or Carla Kelly. They never deem romance books as trash; instead the Hobbists value all the book readers the same." My words were: "In an indie bookstore, a human being will notice that five copies of Midlist Writer's New Novel sold out of six ordered. Indie Owner will say, "Wow. That's excellent." Indie Owner will reorder, say, three or four or more copies, and he or one of his booksellers might read the book, may suggest it to people who he knows to like that sort of thing, and when supplies run out, will reorder it again so that copies stay on the shelves." I said nothing whatsoever about romance. Romance, and Wal-Mart, Target, etc., are completely irrelevant to my discussion because publishers have to pay about a dollar a copy to put books in the racks at those venues, and the specific book I was talking about, again introduced the previous post, which you clearly did not read, is a FANTASY novel, and in MY world, Wal-Mart, Target, etc. don't exist as markets at all because MY book, which is fantasy, will never have a shot at those readers. Mentioning them is pointless.

6. Next lie: "Lisle goes on to say that Local Chain booksellers do not order books once they run out in the store and that they are prohibited from doing so and that midlist books have no chance of selling more than their original order." What I said was: "Even if they are not, though-even if Local Chain receives seven copies and sells six, Local Chain WILL NOT REORDER THE BOOK unless it sells above a set number chain-wide. Most midlist novels are ordered in quantities too small to ever reach this number, and unless a miracle happens, are essentially stillborn. From the day the first copy of the first novel ships, these series have no chance (barring the aforementioned miracle) of selling more than their initial

order." Again, unless you personally are a local chain, you are excluded from this portion of the discussion, as is every other human bookseller, because here I am discussing the chains' automatic replenishment system, which most books NEVER qualify for. Never do I state OR imply that booksellers are prohibited from reordering books. And most midlist book don't have any chance of selling more than their original order. There are too many books and simply not enough human booksellers in the system to overcome the computerized order-to-the-net algorithms that destroy so many careers. You state: "A book may be re-ordered according to the discretion of the local chain bookseller," and this is absolutely true. Out of all the books in the fantasy section, how many have you personally gone to bat for? Are all the booksellers in all the chains going to bat for that same book? What about all the fantasy novels you never got around to reading—any chance one of those might be worth saving?

7. Next lie: "Bookstores, says a manager of a local chain bookstore, receive arcs and promotional items from authors to help cull their book from the pack." "Perhaps Ms. Lisle should have spent time cultivating relationships like those."

I have.

8. "I find it hard to believe that an author whose sell through rate is 90%+ could ever lose a contract with a publisher." Believe. If you had read the post clearly, you'd find that even though the first book sells through at 90%+, the second book is ordered in lower numbers, "to-the-net", and therefore gets proportionately less shelf space, and leaves readers who bought the first book not finding the second, and does not sell to readers who cannot find the first, and therefore has a lower sell-through. And the percentage worsens for the third book. All three books can have wonderful reviews from readers, from reviewers, and the third can even be repeatedly called the

“best book of the series” and there will be no contract for a fourth. I’ve been through this cycle with four publishers now. In each case, the computerized “ordering-to-the-net” system has decreased numbers that should have grown, and has eventually led to me moving to yet another publisher, yet another segment of the genre, and even to yet another genre.

9. Last lie: “Pretty sure that when you call Indie Booksellers the HEROES and Chain Booksellers the VILLIANS that your words were taken and consumed appropriately.” Never said it. Never implied it. In the economies of scale with chain computerized replenishment and ordering to the net, the human component, the bookseller, isn’t plentiful enough to make a difference for more than a handful of writers. Lora Leigh may have gotten her miracle, but Barry Hughart, a World Fantasy winner, didn’t. He never got a second chance. Alis Rasmussen, who eventually got a second chance as Kate Elliot, didn’t. And so far, I haven’t either. And neither have hundreds of other good writers whose books were never lucky enough to catch a bookseller’s eye.

The post was about ordering-to-the-net (which is why that was its title, actually), and in your entire dishonest rant about me, you

never addressed the ugly realities of ordering to the net to those of us whose careers don’t have a Wal-Mart to save us.

I still think both a retraction and an apology are in order, and I think I’ve presented enough facts to back that up.

Holly Lisle

From: jane@dearauthor.com

Subject: RE: Contact from Dear Author Website

Date: December 10, 2006 5:17:37 PM EST

To: holly@hollylisle.com

Ms. Lisle

Thank you for your email. Unfortunately, we have a differing opinion on the law that governs free speech and the limits imposed by the doctrine of defamation. As I am sure you are aware, the Supreme Court of the United States has required those bringing an action for defamation to prove that there is something more than opinion that is being challenged. Additionally, you know that commentary and interpretation is considered protected. If you decide to pursue this, I would rather discuss this matter with your attorney rather than engage in a continuing discussion of what the law permits regarding opinions.

The only "fact" that I see we have mistaken is regarding the health of your career. We will certainly print an apology and retraction in the following form. I will post this tomorrow morning.

Holly Lisle has contacted me and accused us of engaging in libel. She has claimed that we have lied and misconstrued her original post in the post that was published last week. We suggest that you readers, if you have any question in your mind about what she said, read her blog posts [here](#) and [here](#). Dear Author does not believe in succumbing to intimidation and threats. We know that the First Amendment and subsequent case law interpreting the First Amendment protects us from challenges to our right to post our views and opinions. We remain committed to protecting this site from censorship and from any attempts to stifle our legitimate voice.

We did get one fact wrong. In the original post, I stated that Holly Lisle's career was in danger. Holly Lisle has kindly informed us that she is in no danger of having her career killed at the moment. I suggest that all readers who feel so compelled to read her books can feel comfortable getting them at a Used Bookstore or their library or borrowing it from a friend or other reader through a source

like paperbackswap to test out if Lisle's writing is to your liking.

If you wish to post the below itemizations, I would be happy to link to that as well.

Best

Jane Litte

All articles in this series, in order:

- The Tonk need a rescue
- Selling to the net
- Bookseller furor
- Hughart, Rasmussen, and little guys versus the juggernaut
- DearAuthor.com Behaving Badly

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