

Publishing on the Prairie

University Press offers more than expected

BY JEFF RANDALL
Senior staff writer

Generally speaking, if you pick up a book and see the word "Nebraska" anywhere on it, you might expect a colorful history of crop rotation, an exposé on bison conservation or another historical account of the Oregon Trail.

Then again, that's probably not a book from the University of Nebraska Press. Unbeknownst to most Lincoln residents, the University of Nebraska Press is much more than your average university book factory.

As the second-largest state university press in the country, it is also a renowned publisher of books in numerous genres dealing with countless subjects.

And outside of the typically Nebraskan subjects such as Western Americana and Native Studies, the University of Nebraska Press has made a name for itself as one of America's leading publishers of translated fiction.

"There are a lot of things we do here that we realize aren't necessarily recognized by people in the community," said Erika Kuebler Rippeteau, publicity manager for the University of Nebraska Press.

Among those things are extensive lists of published books covering everything from baseball history (including Brett Mandel's "Minor Players, Major Dreams") to a newfound series of guides to Civil War battlefields.

"The genres and subjects that we've become known for have come about gradually," Rippeteau said. "There aren't many that we've instantaneously excelled in."

Another well-known segment of the University Press' work has been Bison Books, which specializes in reviving out-of-print books and providing new editions of popular past works.

Bison Books recently started its latest venture, a series of science-fiction reprints being published under the name Bison Frontiers of Imagination. Included in this series is Edgar Rice Burroughs' classic 1924 novel, "The Land That Time Forgot."



Resident Writers

A recurring look at Nebraska literary culture and the people who create it.

"Science fiction tends to be under-appreciated as a genre," Rippeteau said. "But there are several excellent authors and fascinating stories that we thought should be re-introduced to readers."

A byproduct of such a high reputation might often be a lack of local authors and local interest. But at the University of Nebraska Press, editors try to make sure that doesn't happen.

"When we are looking at potential manuscripts, we always say the work itself is pre-eminent," Rippeteau said.

"But we do have a soft spot for regional work, particularly outside of academia.

"If somebody turns in a memoir or other personal manuscript, we would undoubtedly give a longer look at something with a Nebraska connection."

And that "soft spot" extends beyond publishing. The University of Nebraska Press also sponsors programs that bring well-known authors to UNL.

This spring, the husband-and-wife writing team of Michael and Linda Hutcheon will come to town as part of the Lincoln Lecture Series. The Hutcheons are best known for books that examine the connection between medicine and music, particularly in opera. They will give three lectures at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery April 6-

8. But lectures and reprints aside, the University of Nebraska Press gives something else to Lincoln and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: a little bit of prestige.

"Having a publishing house in your city is a mark of culture," Rippeteau said. "We're not New York or Chicago, but at least we have something in common with them."

Ones to watch for

The University of Nebraska Press and Bison Books will publish more than 80 titles this spring and summer. The following are some highlights of the catalog:



"The House of Joshua"
by Mindy Thompson
Fullilove

This memoir examines the impact of place on people on a daily basis, particularly when they grow up. Fullilove is an associate professor of psychiatry and public health at Columbia University and a research psychiatrist for the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

"Childhood"
by Patrick Chamoiseau
(translated by Carol Volk)

Another memoir, this time by Caribbean author Chamoiseau, takes a look at growing up in poverty. This is his second book published by the University Press.

"The Origins of the Jump Shot"

by John Christgau

This book is a historical study of the players who transformed basketball from a stationary sport into an active one. Subtitled as "Eight Men Who Shook the World of Basketball," "Jump Shot" also attempts to unravel the mystery of who really invented the shot that now is a part of every player's arsenal.

"Take Two and Hit to Right"

by Hobe Hays

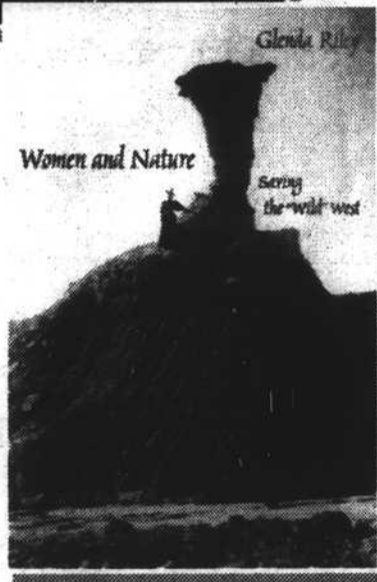
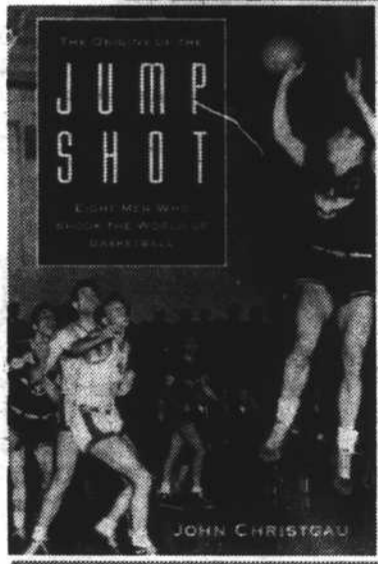
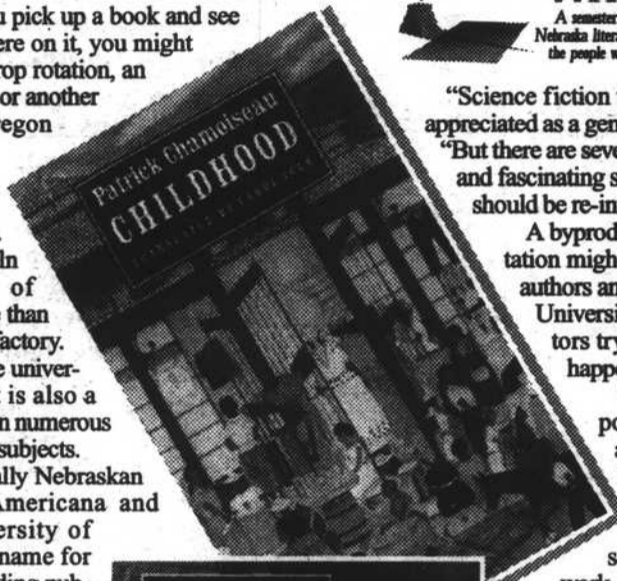
Another historical account of the sporting life, this book is written by semi-pro player Hobe Hays, who played for the University of Nebraska and slugged it out for years in the Cornhusker state's baseball circuit.

"The Collected Short Works, 1920-1954"
by Bess Streeter Aldrich
edited by Carol Miles Petersen

This short story compilation covers the work of Nebraska author Aldrich, one of the country's most widely read authors in the first half of the 20th century.

"The Land That Time Forgot"
by Edgar Rice Burroughs

As one of the most influential science-fiction tales of all time, this reprint of "The Land That Time Forgot" has a lot to live up to. The commemorative edition compiles all three parts of the Caspak trilogy into one volume.



'Message in a Bottle' should have stayed corked

BY SAM MCKEON
Senior editor

Film Review
The Facts

Title: "Message in a Bottle"
Stars: Robin Wright-Penn, Kevin Costner, Paul Newman
Director: Luis Mandoki
Rating: PG-13
Grade: D
Five Words: Throw "Message" back to sea

"Message in a Bottle" is the worst kind of romantic tearjerker.

For one, it's just plain bad, with a filmmaker who didn't have a clue as to how to convey a message. For another, it's a rip-off, with a story that unfolds in implausible fashion, changing into the absolutely ridiculous by the end.

"Message" wants to be a powerful drama of love lost and found. Based on a novel from Nicholas Sparks, it stars Robin Wright-Penn as Theresa Osborne, a researcher for the Chicago Tribune who's recently been divorced because her husband cheated on her.

She hops up to Cape Cod for a few days where she clears her mind and finds a message in a bottle on the beach. It's from a man, writing a letter to his dead wife, and of course, it's woven like the poetry of a lovelorn 12th-grader. It's signed "G."

Theresa takes the letter back to the

Tribune, where every woman swoons, her boss steals it for a column, she gets mad and then decides to track down the author because the letter is so romantic.

Problem here. When Theresa reads the letter the first time, the director, Luis Mandoki, decides to edit several frames together of Theresa on a plane, at home and at work. The letter loses all its impact. An audience can't be expected to watch new locales and listen to emotional dialogue at the same time. It's one or the other.

Now that the letter scene has been botched, she eventually finds the author, Garret Blake (oh yeah, that's a movie name.) He's a boat builder on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, a place, where apparently everyone has lost their Southern accent.

It's beautiful there, and Garret (Kevin Costner) has holed himself up in his work, remembering his dead wife, Catherine, and arguing with his father, Dodge (Paul Newman).

Inevitably, Garret and Theresa fall in love, and for two folks who have been hurt so much, they get together fast. Of course, Theresa already knows Garret's a closet romantic. But she doesn't tell him she knows about the letters.

But their relationship, like most of the movie, isn't believable—Costner's character, especially. And Wright-Penn, for as hard as she tries, can't create a character that has any flaws. Not one. Why did her husband leave her? Who knows? Wright-Penn conveys nervousness as Theresa, but not vulner-

ability. Newman is granted all the good lines, and he fires them off with a cranky grandeur, stealing every scene he's in. It's funny to watch him and Costner together on screen, because they don't even live on the same planet of acting. But Newman's character has little impact until the end.

Eventually, Garret finds out about the letters of his Theresa found, and there's a falling out of sorts. He misses his wife too much. Oh, but he does love Theresa so much. Could they get back together?

It all leads up to an ending that is so bad, so poorly planned, so completely out of left field that it negates the little momentum "Message" had going for it up to that point.

The conclusion fits in with Costner's "Waterworld" more than it does this movie. It's a complete emotional rip-off as there's nothing at the end of the film that answers the events that transpire. A 10-second voice-over isn't going to cut it. If the entire movie

had been a dream, it would have been a better ending.

If this is the ending in the book, the director should have changed it. But then again, Mandoki botches almost the whole film from start to finish. Like a spoiled child, he can't decide which toy he wants play with next. There's always music in the movie, or a swift edit, or a completely unnecessary shot of the Chicago skyline. Mandoki refuses to let one scene stand by itself.

You feel bad for Wright-Penn, because she tries to create a full-bodied character and you do like her. But Costner acts as if he's on cruise control— who wouldn't be if you had lines like "Do you like meat?"— and wastes his scenes. Paul Newman is Paul Newman, and this time, that wasn't enough.

What would've been enough? After that ending, nothing. As the credits rolled, no one in the theater was crying, but smiling. They thought they had seen everything, but "Message in a Bottle" trumped them all. Don't go see it. Please.