

sliced barnyard animals appeared in *Sensation*, now fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars.

More *Sensation*-type deals are inevitable, says Szánto. The best way for museums to keep from becoming “galleries in disguise, mere means to augment the value of private

collections,” he believes, is to give up any “anachronistic belief in the purity of the [museum] project,” openly acknowledge the “business side” of their operations, as newspapers and other publishing companies do, and develop ethical guidelines to keep it from becoming dominant.

## *Follow the Pattern*

“Architecture is a vernacular art,” asserts Roger Scruton, editor of *The Salisbury Review* (Spring 2000).

*Although there are the great projects, and the great architects who succeed in them, both are exceptions. We build because we need to, and for a purpose. Most people who build have no special talent, and no high artistic ideals. For them, the aesthetic is important not because they have something special or entrancing to communicate, but merely because, being decent and alert to their neighbors, they want to do what is right. Hence modesty, repeatability and rule-guidedness are vital architectural resources. Style must be so defined that anyone, however uninspired, can make good use of it, and add thereby to the public dwelling space that is our common possession. That is why the most successful period of Western architecture—the period in which real and lasting towns of great size were envisaged and developed—was the period of the classical vernacular, when pattern books guided people who had not fallen prey to the illusion of their own genius.*

*This does not mean that creativity and imagination have no place in architecture. On the contrary. We depend upon the stylistic breakthroughs, the innovations and discoveries that create the repeatable vocabulary of forms. Palladian windows, Vignolesque cornices, the classical orders, the Gothic mouldings—these great artistic triumphs become types and patterns for lesser mortals. Our best bet in architecture is that the artistic geniuses should invest their energy as Palladio did, in patterns that can be reproduced at will by the rest of us.*

## *Publishing’s E-Savior*

“The Rattle of Pebbles” by Jason Epstein, in *The New York Review of Books* (Apr. 27, 2000), 1755 Broadway, Fifth floor, New York, N.Y. 10019–3780.

Thanks to the World Wide Web and other new technologies, book publishing is on the brink of “a vast transformation”—and none too soon, argues Epstein, an industry veteran who recently stepped down as editorial director of Random House. Providentially, he writes, “these technologies have emerged just as the publishing industry has fallen into terminal collapse.”

Bertelsmann, a German-based media conglomerate, and four other corporate empires now

dominate book publishing in the United States, he notes. Bertelsmann, for example, owns such well-known imprints as Random House, Knopf, Doubleday, Bantam, Pantheon, Dell, Crown, and Ballantine. “By liquidating redundant overheads,” says Epstein, “these corporate owners hope to improve the low profit margins typical of the industry.” But they are likely to be disappointed.

Publishers have committed themselves, he says, to “an impossible goal”: turning out “a

constant supply of best sellers” to satisfy Borders and Barnes & Noble, the dominant bookstore chains, “whose high operating costs demand high rates of turnover” of titles. Most worthwhile books “are not meant to be best sellers,” Epstein points out, and though more such worthy books may be published today than ever before, they stay in print only briefly. Publishers once “cultivated their backlists as their major asset, choosing titles for their permanent value as much as for their immediate appeal.” Bestsellers were “lucky accidents.”

The million-copy sales of a handful of “name-brand” authors, such as John Grisham, have fostered the illusion that book publishing is “a predictable, mass market business,” Epstein says. Between 1986 and 1996, the share of all books sold represented by the 30 top bestsellers nearly doubled. But of the 100 bestsellers in roughly the same period, 63 were turned out by only six authors. This concentration was “a mixed blessing to publishers,” he observes, since profits are often gobbled up in the effort to keep “name-brand” writers.

To reach their mass readers, such authors real-

ly need only routine publishing services—printing, advertising, and distribution—which, in the likely event that publishers sooner or later cease to exist, Epstein speculates, could easily be provided by independent contractors.

With the emerging digital technologies, he says, writers and readers “will no longer need publishers or traditional booksellers to bring them together.” Recently, a Stephen King short story sold exclusively online resulted in 400,000 requests to download it in just the first day. But readers will still need help separating the literary wheat from the chaff, Epstein believes, so “distinguished websites, like good bookstores,” are likely to emerge. “On the infinitely expandable shelves of the World Wide Web, there will be room for an infinite variety of books.” None will ever have to go out of print.

Though distribution of books will radically change, “the essential work of editing and publicity” will remain, says Epstein. And book publishing may become again what it once was: “a cottage industry of diverse, creative, autonomous units.”

## *The Sins of Hawthorne’s Fathers*

“Hawthorne’s Puritans: From Fact to Fiction” by Deborah L. Madsen, in *Journal of American Studies* (Dec. 1999), Cambridge Univ. Press, 40 W. 20th St., N.Y. 10011-4211.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) was merciless in his fictional portrayals of merciless Puritans, those upholders of dour orthodoxy, hot in pursuit of witches and heretics. But Madsen, an English professor at South Bank University, London, argues that Hawthorne did the Puritans, and one colonial family in particular, an injustice.

Hawthorne’s own 17th-century ancestors, as he frankly admitted, had been among the real-life Puritan zealots. One was a long-time magistrate of Salem, William Hathorne. (Nathaniel added the *w* to his surname when he began to write.) William Hathorne, says Madsen, was “a notorious persecutor of Quakers,” operating “a system of spies or informers who reported to him individuals who neglected their church and civil duties.” Hathorne’s son John was the “‘hanging judge’” of the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692.

After *The House of the Seven Gables* appeared in 1851, telling of the cursed Pyncheon family, Hawthorne acknowl-

edged—in response to complaints from members of a Pyncheon family (who spelled their name without the *e*)—that the Pyncheon name had been inspired by the name of their ancestor, Judge William Pyncheon (1590–1661), one of the 26 patentees of the Massachusetts Bay Company and the founder of Springfield, Massachusetts.

How odd then, suggests Madsen, that novelist Hawthorne paid no heed to the fact that Judge Pyncheon was cut from very different cloth than his own ancestors—“something of a thorn in the side of colonial authorities.” When he presided over an early witchcraft case in Springfield, the judge seems to have “simply performed his duty,” she says. In 1650, he was found guilty of heresy in connection with a book he had written about Christ and redemption, and arranged to return with his wife to England.

If Hawthorne knew about the real colonial Pynchons and their like, why did he ignore the varieties of Puritanism and portray it instead as a monolith (with heretics being only