

Reading Without an ISBN

by Ann Bogle

I had thought I would give a reading at Garrison Keillor's Common Good Books in St. Paul on July 22 at 4 p.m., but now it isn't clear. The goal is to perform along with Jason Lee Norman--who is touring with his book of 22 very short stories named for countries in the Americas, called *Americas*--a selection from my own collection of 24 very short stories called *Country Without a Name*. The symmetry excites me. We have also invited editor, writer, and poet Jefferson Hansen to join us in the reading. In my mind, Garrison Keillor was the beneficence behind it who wanted to see us read there. I had not imagined the man or woman who plans events.

The image of the store clerk formed in my mind when this message from Jason came in, "Perfecto! Thanks so much, Ann. The guy at Common Good is a little nervous about getting people out to the event. I'd love to prove him wrong. He was also asking if any of your books have ISBNs you could pass along."

Every bookstore clerk I've met in Minneapolis/St. Paul graduated with an M.F.A. from Iowa. I have fallen out of the habit of mentioning where I went to school (Madison, Binghamton, Houston). I mention other things. My pride in the details remains strong. I wrote to Jason:

"No, mine don't, but tell him I can buy an ISBN for \$125 if it will make him feel better, better not say that, though to me it's funny. You could tell him that I can afford to buy singly-issued ISBNs (higher in price than bulk-rate ISBNs), that it's not an out-of-pocket issue and more a market-based aesthetics one. My collections of short stories would be considered short even if they were collections of poetry. I have published with Argotist in the UK who do not sell their titles but offer them free on the Internet. *XAM: Paragraph Series* (Xexoxial Editions) does have an ISBN, listed as Lulu at

Available online at «<http://fictionaut.com/stories/ann-bogle/reading-without-an-isbn>»

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Amazon, but who buys it there? The home base for that collection (of prose poems) is Xexoxial Editions, publisher of Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein and Hannah Weiner. Tell him that he can possibly find ISBNs for issues 6, 8, and 10 of *The Quarterly*, where my first short stories appeared. If you do, you had better also tell him that I didn't sleep with Gordon Lish to get the stories published. I sent the stories to the slush pile and didn't meet Gordon Lish until much later and didn't sleep with him then, either, and he didn't rewrite me, though he did talk plentifully, albeit briefly, about his morning's sex. Jeff hasn't replied to my text yet. He is very good at getting the word out, so I hope he can join us on July 22 at Common Good Books. Jeff's books undoubtedly have ISBNs. I'll get the links for you as soon as I hear from him, soon."

Then I wrote to Jason, "I want to post this as a short story (our last two-three FB messages). Would that insult integrity? To me it's about the whole market-based thing surrounding literary inquiry. Chance brought us together, with these books almost ideally suited to be read next to each other. Does the bookstore guy realize that?"

And: "One of the stories in my ebook will appear in *Gargoyle* next summer, and it mentions Keillor's bookstore. There is a long delay between writing and print publication, as the bookstore guy may realize. If we read as planned, I'll read the story set for *Gargoyle*, the long version, which is about 7 pages, called 'Dreams from the Station.'"

Jason replied: "I'm loving all these messages. Let's not worry anymore about this bookstore guy. I'm going to try my best to get enough people to come see us read, that'll shut him up. I'm really looking forward to being there and meeting you."

And I replied to Jason: "I want to post the messages as a story. Would that agree with you? Then, if the Fictionaut readers like it (my present story there based on letters rose to #1 this week), we

can use the story to advertise the reading."

If Jason says "yes," I will append his message [here].

"Sure. Go ahead," he writes. "Sounds good to me."

TBA

