

## Literary Life

Books in odd forms, embarrassing reading, freedom of speech... all feature in Mark Sanderson's survey of the literary world

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By Mark Sanderson

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Three things to do with books – apart from reading them. An anonymous author in New York has been plastering lampposts in the East Village with pages of a whodunit called, with disarming honesty, *Holy Crap*. As the story starts, the narrator appears to be a new parent: “Most babies aren’t beautiful when they are born,” a nurse informs them. “It takes about a month to get cute. But your baby is beautiful. The most beautiful baby.” Directions are provided so that interested readers can find the next lamppost and the next page – if it hasn’t already been torn down or blown away. Litter or literature?

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, Shelley Jackson has created a new version of her short story, *Skin*, a single different word of which was tattooed on to 2,000 volunteers in 2003. Two hundred of them have now been videoed speaking their individual word allowing Ms Jackson to edit them into a new 895-word story (she reuses many of them). One of the original participants has already died. “Injuries to the tattooed text, such as dermabrasion, laser surgery, cover work or the loss of body parts, will not be considered to alter the work,” the everso-serious-minded author/artist told the *LA Times*. “Only the death of words effaces them from the text. As words die the story will change; when the last word dies the story will also have died.”

Finally, in Chicago, Brian Dettmer, turns old encyclopaedias and dictionaries into sculptures. As he explains on his website ([www.briandettmer.com](http://www.briandettmer.com)): “Nothing inside the books is relocated or implanted, only removed. Images and ideas are revealed to expose alternate histories and memories.” The amazing results are rather like those fascinating medical models that reveal the workings of the human body.

Nowadays hundreds of people attend readings by Robert Crais, whose latest thriller, *The Sentry*, has just been published. It wasn’t always thus. An embarrassing three people once turned up for one of his earliest events. Two women sat at the front and one man, who refused to move, sat at the back. When Mr Crais approached the women they said they had no idea who he was and confessed: “We’re just taking the weight off our feet.”

Regular readers of this column may remember Karin Colvo-Goller, who objected to a negative review of her work on the website *Global Law Books*, and sued its editor Joseph Weiler for criminal libel. The very principle

of free speech seemed to be at stake. However, a French court has now not only dismissed the case but also awarded Mr Weiler €8,000 in damages. A rare victory for common sense

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