

Reading is alive and increasingly electronic

Dorene Internicola, Reuters

Times may be tough for neighborhood bookstores, but people are reading more than ever and e-books are nurturing bookworms who hunger for everything from blockbuster biographies to literary fiction.

"It's really been all good news this year. Reading is becoming more popular in general," said Chris Schlupe, senior books editor at Amazon, the biggest online bookseller in the United States.

"It's so easy to buy a book now," said Schlupe. "We're seeing reading grow across the population."

Amazon announced in May that between April 1 and May 19, for every 100 print books Amazon.com has sold, it has also sold 105 Kindle e-books.

The biggest non-fiction book of the season, electronic or paper, is Walter Isaacson's "Steve Jobs," a warts-and-all biography of the Apple Inc. co-founder, which appeared in October.

"He changed business, design, the world," Schlupe said of Jobs. "A lot of people are reading it on devices he designed."

Diane Keaton's "Then Again," in which the actress tells her own story alongside the journals of her mother, is another hit with readers.

Schlupe calls 2011 a great year for literature and sees a trend towards more literary books, noting strong offerings from veteran novelists and first-timers alike.

"We waited 10 years for (American) Jeffrey Eugenides' 'The Marriage Plot,' but it delivered," he said about the Pulitzer Prize winner whose last book was published a decade ago.

Schlupe also described "1Q84," the latest from award-winning Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, as "his masterpiece."

Literary fiction by first-timers, such as "The Art of Fielding," by Chad Harbach and Erin Morgenstern's dark fantasy "Night Circus" were also big sellers.

"It was a great year for debut novels," he said.

Financial journalist Michael Lewis' "Boomerang" leads a flurry of new books grappling with the world's economic woes.

"Books on the economy have always sold," Schlupe said. "Right now people are more interested in the economy so they're noticing the books."

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Schluep added that Scandinavian thrillers continue to fly on the wings of the late Swedish author Stieg Larsson's blockbuster series "The Millennium Trilogy."

The biggest industry trend he sees is for young adult series, such as the vampire novels of "Twilight" and the "Harry Potter" books.

"Everything is moving in that direction," he said about the younger market.

Schluep also expects more people to publish their own books.

"This is about a direct line between writer and reader," he said. "Publishing is changing and I don't have a handle on where it's going to be, but the movement is towards more people having more control."

Schluep noted that in early 2012 there will be a new biography of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II called "Elizabeth the Queen: The Life of a Modern Monarch" by Sally Bedell Smith.

"It could be big," he said.

Posted by Jason Lomberg, Technical Editor

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