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Canadian Channel Features All Books, All the Time

BY CHANNING JOSEPH -- 4/7/2003

BookTelevision, which claims to be the world's first and only 24-hour station devoted to literary concerns, is continuing its second season exploring the evolution of reading and literacy. Owned by Learning & Skills Television of Alberta, with offices in Toronto and Edmonton, the channel is now available throughout Canada on digital cable. The station's Web site is www.booktelevision.com.

Not surprisingly, the station carries such book-centered shows as *The Word News*, a daily book news program, and *The Electric Archive*, author interviews and profiles. It is also seeking to stretch the definition of "literary" by airing programs such as *Homicide: Life on the Street*, based on the critically acclaimed book *Homicide* by David Simon (Ivy Books, \$6.99). That program boosts its literary quotient by weaving in snippets of commentary about the book's author and characters.

The channel's creator, Daniel Richler, is also its editor-in-chief and supervising producer. BookTV's budget, said Richler, is "scandalously small," and the station's staff includes fewer than 20 people. But BookTV is achieving moderate financial success for a new specialty station. Richler joked that in its first season, with most of its funding coming from cable subscribers' fees, the station "did turn a profit of about \$27."

Richler hopes to forge partnerships with publishers and booksellers, who he says have not taken full advantage of TV. He wants BookTV to be "a publishing house for literary advertising. We want to become useful to the publishing industry. The cost of advertising on BookTV equals the cost of advertising in a small newspaper."

"It's peculiar," he said, "but people don't have the imagination to picture a book channel. Potentially, this is the most exciting channel ever because there isn't a subject that there isn't a book about."

Since its September 2001 launch, the station has tackled such controversial topics as the plight of imprisoned writers and publishers in Turkey and the controversy surrounding Quebec's "language police," who insist all businesses in the province use the French language. The station also covered a conference at Canada's York University on the philosophy of literacy, and Richler plans to form alliances with other universities to broadcast creative writing classes. BookTelevision is also piloting a new erotica show, tentatively titled *Polymorphous Perversity*.