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Caveat emptor

by [Stefan Beck](#)

On *How to Sell*, by Clancy Martin; *Lowboy*, by John Wray; *Sag Harbor*, by Colson Whitehead; and *How It Ended: New & Collected Stories*, by Jay McInerney.

“Make it new,” Pound said, but this commandment is quoted far more often than it’s heeded. Why make it new when you can just call it “new and improved”? Who cares that your product is full of sawdust and faulty wiring? The billboard says it’s for those who think young, and so good cats ask for it by name! There’s nothing a little marketing can’t fix. One of the books discussed herein will be promoted with an “Author Viral Video.” Long gone are the days when literature was a talisman against this kind of stupefying influence.

It was with a mixture of chagrin and perverse delight that I read the blurbs on a debut novel called, of all things, *How to Sell*.^[1] Jonathan Franzen: “[V]ery hard to stop reading.” Zadie Smith: “A funny, unforgiving novel about how we buy and sell everything.” ...

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