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THE LITERARY MARKET IN THE UK

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
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The Literary Market in the UK

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Contents

List of Figures	iii
Preface	iv
Contributors	v
The Present in Perspective: Mapping the Literary Market Today <i>Christoph Reinfandt</i>	1
British Publishing and the Rise of Creative Writing: A Personal View <i>Blake Morrison</i>	19
Discounted and Digital: British Publishing in the Wake of the Net Book Agreement <i>Amrei Katharina Nensel</i>	35
The Impact of Digital Publishing on the Literary Market <i>Sophie Rochester</i>	55
The Postcolonial Writer as Commodity <i>Ellen Dengel-Janic</i>	69
The Ever-Changing Rules: Acquiring, Editing and Publishing Literary Fiction in the UK <i>Interview with Alex Bowler</i>	81
Literary Reviews: Past, Present, Future <i>Interview with Erica Wagner</i>	101
The Reception of Literary Fiction in the Digital Age: The Democratisation of Reviewing in Reading Groups <i>Interview with Irene Haynes</i>	109

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Market-Marketplace-Matrix	10
Figure 2: The Circuit of the Book	38
Figure 3: The Publishers' Profit Margin in Relation to Sales Revenue	42
Figure 4: Number of Titles Published in the UK	46
Figure 5: Market Share of UK Book Retail Sales by Type of Outlet by Value	48
Figure 6: Market Share of UK Book Retail Sales by Type of Outlet by Volume	49

Preface

The Literary Market in the UK collects material which emerged in the wake of a highly successful lecture series of the same title, presented at the University of Tuebingen in summer term 2011. Given the enthusiastic response to the lecture series,¹ a book project was entertained for a while until unforeseen circumstances, other commitments, and, most of all, the intensity of change in the publishing world made it impossible to produce anything well-rounded, systematic and fast enough in the old medium of the book that could possibly do justice to recent developments in the literary field; the plan, alas, had to be abandoned. Viewed with some distance, however, it seems that some of the material that was gathered and produced in this context might be of some value for future research, and so the present e-publication presents a mixture of academic essays and interviews with actors in the literary market in the hope of offering coordinates of systematic access and a glimpse of the rapid changes under way in the world of publishing in the UK between, roughly, 2010 and 2014. Thanks are due to Lisa Peter for coming up with the idea for the original lecture series, organising it, and conducting the interviews; to Ellen Dengel-Janic for her support in organizing the lecture series; to all contributors for their patience; and to Amrei Katharina Nensel for stepping in and helping to salvage at least parts of the project.

Christoph Reinfandt

Tübingen, January 2017

¹ Most of the lectures have been archived on the *Tübinger Internet Multi Media Server TIMMS* and can be accessed under <http://timms.uni-tuebingen.de/List/Browse#ni000004000002022> (Philosophische Fakultät > Neuphilologie > Englisch Seminar > Lecture The Literary Market in the UK SoSe 2011).

Contributors

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Irene Haynes founded bookgroup.info in 2002 with Clare Chandler. Since then it has become *the* independent site for book groups in the UK. She is also on the panel of Exclusively Independent, the scheme with the backing of Arts Council England that aims to bring independent bookshops and independent publishers together.

Blake Morrison is a poet, novelist, and a Professor of Creative Writing at Goldsmiths College, London. In the 1980s and 90s, he worked for the *Times Literary Supplement* and as a literary editor for *The Observer* and *The Independent on Sunday*. His books include two memoirs, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?*, which was made into a film, and *Things My Mother Never Told Me*; two collections of poetry, *Dark Glasses* and *The Ballad of the Yorkshire Ripper*; an account of the James Bulger murder case, *As If*; and three novels, *The Justification of Johann Gutenberg* (a fictional portrait of the 15th-century printer), *South of the River* (a 'state of the nation' novel set during the Blair years) and *The Last Weekend*, a psychological thriller published in 2010.

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Sophie Rochester worked in communications for publishers 4th Estate and Jonathan Cape before moving to the digital agency Good Technology in 1999, joining Colman Getty as Associate Director in 2002 working on, among other things, the digital development of the Man Booker Prize Website and communications strategy, The Poetry Archive and Oxford University Press's *Dictionary of National Biography* online. In 2009 she founded *The Literary Platform*, initially as a free online resource dedicated to exploring the interface between literature and technology showcasing ground-breaking projects, and then as a specialist consultancy. In 2010 she launched, supported by Arts Council England, the National Lottery funded *Fiction Uncovered* – now the Jerwood Fiction Uncovered Prize – an ongoing programme dedicated to celebrating the work of British fiction writers.

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The Present in Perspective: Mapping the Literary Market Today

CHRISTOPH REINFANDT

Any attempt at outlining the contours of the literary market today will immediately be confronted with that elusive institution, the publisher. As a rule, the publisher does neither write, print, bind nor sell books, but is nevertheless placed squarely in the midst of things: accepting or commissioning manuscripts from authors, preparing them for printing, arranging the actual production of books through printing and binding, taking care of cover design as well as advertising and promotion, and finally organising the distribution of the finished product to booksellers who will then sell it to individual readers and institutions (for a systematic introduction to the field of book publishing cf. Clark/Phillips 2008). All of these activities have become absolutely essential for literature after it detached itself from the original activity of writing through the invention of printing, establishing the possibility of a literary marketplace for selling and buying printed matter in the process. And what is more, all of these activities have to take place before a single copy can be sold (cf. Fletcher 1996, vii-viii). Without publishers willing to provide this financial advance, the whole network of activities that we call literature would not be possible, and so it is no exaggeration to point out that the basic coordinates of the literary market were established through this mode of print-based publishing. In recent years, however, these coordinates have been severely affected by the technological shift towards digitalization, and the literary market today is very much in transition.

Given the risks that publishers have faced with their prefinancing obligations even in what seems in retrospect fairly stable conditions based on material objects, it is clear that the activity of publishing will only flourish if it can rely on social rules and conventions which lend stability to its precarious and to some extent virtual status between authors and booksellers. And while this becomes even more pressing in the digital age, the emergence of new rules and conventions seems to be forever lagging behind. Generally speaking, the one most important institution which protects the publishers' investment from the vagaries of the material and also the digital marketplace in which books are bought and sold is copyright law in the larger context of intellectual property law: the publisher does not, in the literal sense, buy a book from the author, but rather the rights to publish a book by the author. One could say that

the publisher buys an 'ideational object', i.e. the thoughts of the author in the 'documented form' of words arranged into a text (cf. George 2012, 92). Only the publisher who has bought the rights is legally entitled to turn the ideational object into material copies in book form, which are then published and subcontracted for sale to the public through booksellers. Accordingly, the codification of the relationship and mutual obligations between authors and publishers in copyright law is "the cornerstone of publishing in a free-market economy" (Fletcher 1996, viii). In the U.K. the relationship between publishers and booksellers was regulated by the so called Net Book Agreement (NBA) from January 1, 1900 until fairly recently. The NBA fixed the prices at which books were to be sold to the public by the booksellers and threatened booksellers offering discounts with exemption from future supply by the publishers. The legal demise of the NBA came only in 1996, and the dissolution of the specific regulatory environment for British publishing that had held sway throughout the twentieth century (cf. Stevenson 2010) created a new dynamics in the field. What is more, in recent years this dynamics has been additionally fuelled by the possibilities and challenges of digital publishing: What used to be a fairly sedate mode of existence has increasingly turned into life in the lion's den, as one recent German observer (Hamann 2013) puts it.

How, then, can the lion's den of the contemporary literary market be charted if its main characteristic is persistent and fairly intense change? The present chapter will rely on two strategies. The first is to provide some historical background: Not all the challenges facing authors, publishers and readers today are completely new, and a sense of perspective with regard to where the lions come from and how they have been fought or appeased before may be helpful. The second strategy is to introduce a number of basic co-ordinates and concepts which may enable us to identify the current inhabitants of the den and their relations to each other. Here, a fundamental distinction has already been established: As we have seen, the publisher is the central mediator in the complex set of cultural practices that transforms ideational into material objects which are then sold to institutions and the reading public, and it is individual readers in either public or private settings which transform these material objects back into ideational objects through acts of reading. This central distinction between ideational and material objects is reflected in the distinction between the literary market on the one hand and the literary marketplace on the other: the first is the more inclusive concept which covers the ideational dimensions of the cultural practices involved, while the second is the more restricted concept concerned with the material side of things, i.e. the production, selling and buying of books as objects. While the centrality of literature in modern culture and its slow relegation to a more marginal position in recent years can only be addressed with reference to the inclusive ideational register, the reasons for many of the changes affecting literary culture can actually be found in the material dimensions of media change and convergence on the one hand and in the ever-changing economic contexts on the other.

In order to provide an angle on the historical provenance of today's literary market the chapter will begin by discussing the problem of popularity in the context of modern book culture in its precarious relation to emerging competitive media environments. From the eighteenth century onwards, we will see, the relationship between the ideational literary market on the one hand and the material(istic) literary marketplace on the other was fraught with problems which were mostly centred around the gap between aspirations along the lines of William Wordsworth's ideal of 'man speaking to man' as formulated in his famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) on the one hand and the lack of success and genuine popularity that became the hallmark of true literature in spite of these ambitions on the other. The second part of the chapter will then introduce the theoretical framework most frequently drawn upon in studies of the literary market, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the 'literary field'. The section will establish a systematic account of the dimensions of production, distribution, reception and processing which can be observed on the material level of the literary field, and then discuss the ideational consequences of these dimensions in terms of the cultural distinctions which emanate from them. A final section will then discuss how recent developments such as, first and foremost, digitalisation, but also the rise of the literary agent, the retail chains' forays into bookselling, and the ongoing corporatization of the publishing business affect the theory of the literary field, and what all this implies for the contours of the literary market today.

1. Literature and the Marketplace

Even a casual glance at the history of English literature suggests that genuine popularity in the empirically verifiable material sense of outright commercial success or at least a socially inclusive appeal is rather the exception than the rule and certainly not the defining feature of literariness. Those examples which may come to mind are either anchored in the world of the theatre beyond the core literary activities of writing, publishing, selling and reading, such as, for example, the social inclusiveness of Elizabethan theatre or Shakespeare's enormous popularity in 19th-century America (cf. Levine 1998), or they are fraught with suspicion and scandal in registers beyond literature, such as the huge success of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) with all its spin-offs in the mid-eighteenth century (cf. Keymer 2001; Keymer/Sabor 2005). In fact, the earliest hints of a perceived gap between the material obligations of the emerging literary marketplace on the one hand and the ideational aspirations of a notional literary market on the other can be found in the legitimization strategies of the earliest novels. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), for example, opens with a preface in which Defoe poses as the editor of Robinson Crusoe's autobiographical life story. In giving reasons why readers should read the book he clearly panders to the marketplace by first insisting on the tale's spectacular and entertaining qualities: "The wonders of this man's life exceed all that [...] is to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of greater variety" (Defoe 1994,

7). Only after this appeal to the reader's baser instincts does the preface turn to the morally exemplary qualities of the text and its aspirations to truthfulness. And similarly one would assume that readers' interest in *Pamela* was more directly sparked by the promise of an interior view of a young woman's mind and boudoir than by the morals of *Virtue Rewarded*. These were deemed dubious by many contemporaries anyway, as direct responses like Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1741) or Eliza Haywood's *The Anti-Pamela; or Feign'd Innocence Detected* (1741) indicate. However, even critical interventions such as these did to a certain extent cash in on the original's commercial success, too. All this would seem to indicate that genuine literary (as opposed to commercial) ambition had to maintain certain standards beyond appealing to the masses, and while both Defoe and Richardson tried to do so on religious and moral (and thus basically non-literary) grounds, Henry Fielding finally shifted the argument towards aesthetic criteria when he legitimized the new genre of fictional narrative in neoclassical terms as a "comic epic-poem in prose" (Fielding 1984, 25) in the preface to his novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and proceeded to let the authorial narrator of his novel *Tom Jones* (1749) exclude the less educated parts of the potential readership by including the adjective 'eleemosynary' in the very first sentence of the book: "An author ought to consider himself not as a gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary treat, but rather as one who keeps a public ordinary at which all persons are welcome for their money" (Fielding 1994, 27). While acknowledging the newly established marketplace for literature and inviting, in principle, everybody to the feast offered by the novel in return for payment, payment alone was not enough: prospective readers would also have to bring an adequate education and know that 'eleemosynary' means 'given as an act of charity', so that literature's reputation may remain intact even under market conditions.

Too much genuine popularity, that much is clear even at this very early stage of the emergence of modern literature, endangers aspirations to the status of literature proper, too much success in the marketplace undermines a text's potential value in the ideational literary market. And while the emerging new genre of the novel saw a period of intense experimentation with regard to the possibilities of representing extreme or even irrational emotions in the second half of the eighteenth century, 'literary fiction' remained in the long run beholden to the distancing and purifying mechanisms of what Ian Watt in his classic study of *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) calls 'formal realism' as reasserted and exemplified by Jane Austen, while sentimental fictions and the Gothic novel were slowly relegated to the non-literary realm of generic popular fiction, as a satirical recipe published in the *Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797* indicates:

Take – An old castle, half of it ruinous.
A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.
Assassins and desperadoes, *quant. suff.*

The Present in Perspective: Mapping the Literary Market Today

Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering places, before going to bed. (Greenblatt 2006, 602, emphases in original)

Such novels and their mass distribution, the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge points out grudgingly only slightly later in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), endanger the practice of reading in any serious literary sense: “[A]s to the devotees of the circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their *pass-time*, or rather *kill-time*, with the name of *reading*” (Greenblatt 2006, 606). However, the literary marketplace has drawn a substantial part of its material sustenance from the revenue generated by (among other things) all kinds of genre fiction ever since, while the literary market, on the other hand, has, in spite of being deeply enmeshed with these more material market mechanisms and in spite of its structural affiliation with notions of entertainment that people enjoy in their spare time, continuously negotiated the commercial margins of its own cultural aspirations. Accordingly, the history of the English novel in the twentieth century has vacillated between a commercially viable realist mainstream on the one hand and forays into modernist experimentalism on the other. Only from c. 1980 onwards has it finally settled into a postmodernist compromise between the two directions as the hallmark of ‘literary fiction’ (cf. Eaglestone 2013, 30-36).

This discrepancy between popularity and aspiration becomes even more obvious in the case of poetry, whose viability in the marketplace could never be taken for granted. While deeply implicated in what has been called *The Birth of the Modern Mind* (Oppenheimer 1989), modern poetry was from the early sonneteers onwards confronted with a fundamental problem: Why would the staging of an individual speech act based on individual experience be of interest to readers? And, more generally: why should it be considered collectively valid and culturally authoritative? In a first reaction against the individualisation of love, religious experience and other matters discernible in Shakespeare’s sonnets, the metaphysical poetry of John Donne or some of John Milton’s poems, the neo-classicists of the early eighteenth century tried to solve the problem normatively by insisting on the impersonal models of poetry inherited from antiquity in strict adherence to an imitation model of authorship. Here, the reception of poetry called for an audience of educated cosmopolitan readers. The marketplace for poetry was accordingly limited in range and reach. The poetics of sensibility, on the other hand, strove for an emphatic representation of individual subjective experience including the at times quite extreme and particular emotional states normally excluded from neoclassical or rationalist discourse. As this project was not feasible in the context of the imitation model of authorship, it led to a re-vitalisation of the inspiration model of authorship, which had long been relegated to the side lines of legitimate culture. This reorientation, however, posed obvious problems in terms of cultural validity and authority, which were tentatively solved with the help of the notion of genius who is singular and universal at the same time. On this basis the Romantics tried to reconcile both orientations under modern conditions, facing the paradox of having to

acknowledge every man's (and woman's) potential for being a poet or even a genius while at the same time insisting on distinctive features of literariness.

William Wordsworth's famous preface to the 2nd edition of his and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) addresses this conundrum head-on by formulating, for the first time, a programme for a new kind of poetry that draws on the raw material of a "selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" (Wordsworth/Coleridge 2007, 57). It purports to find particularly useful samples of this language in "[l]ow and rustic life" because "in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil" (60), which Wordsworth deemed less corrupted by processes of modernisation than, for example, urban life. The origins of literature are here no longer located in the normative tradition of neoclassicism but rather in a popular culture idealised as folk culture (on the broader implications of this move cf. Storey 2003). The flipside of this idealisation, however, is Wordsworth's (and many other intellectuals') persistent fear of the popular as it actually exists, and for long stretches the preface addresses the question of how to transcend a reality of ephemeral appearances by means of literariness in order to open up the dimensions of Truth, the Good and the Beautiful. The central ingredient in this attempt to create an ideational surplus value is, somewhat surprisingly for a Romantic writer, reason. Right from the opening of the preface the *Lyrical Ballads* are presented as "an experiment [...] to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men [...] that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may *rationaly* endeavour to impart" (56f., my emphasis). Reason is called upon to make sure that the language use of real men can be represented without undue emotional excess, and the medium of this smoothing is metre. Wordsworth points out

that the language of such poetry as I am recommending is, as far as is possible, a *selection* of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a *distinction* far greater than would at first be imagined, and will *entirely separate* the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for *the gratification of the rational mind*. (69f., my emphases)

In a characteristic sleight of hand Wordsworth here domesticates the world as it is by means of reason, which imbues the real language of men with literariness through metre so that it can be "purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust" (61) while avoiding the "danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds" (81).

Modern literature in its (post-) Romantic emphatic sense thus calls for a transformation of the world as it really is into a 'purer' sphere of representation, and this normativity runs counter to the demands of genuine popularity. Somewhat paradoxically, the poet (and by extension the literary writer) has to be (in George Orwell's later phrase) 'more equal than others',

or, as Wordsworth puts it in the preface, “not differing in kind from other men, but only in degree” (78), and this quality of difference does not always sell easily in the marketplace. By 1815, for example, Wordsworth’s early hopes based on the democratic potential of his new kind of poetry had clearly cooled down in the face of lacking public enthusiasm, and he pointed out that in view of “these unfavourable times” public acknowledgement could only be anticipated through the “judgement of posterity” (Wordsworth 1896, 215). And Walt Whitman’s confident declaration that “The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it” in the preface to the first edition of his *Leaves of Grass* (1855) became a miffed “The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferred till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it” only one year later in the second edition and vanished completely from a reprint of the preface in 1882 (qtd. in Railton 1995, 13/26).

2. The Literary Field

What does all this entail for literature in the marketplace? To be sure, literature is not really popular and thus poses problems for all attempts at marketing it. What it offers instead is cultural distinction, which, however, does not easily translate into economic validity and even runs counter to it occasionally – so much so, in fact, that Pierre Bourdieu in his analysis of “The Field of Cultural Production” speaks of “The Economic World Reversed” (Bourdieu 1983). Every analysis of the literary field will have to take this doubling of material and ideational dimensions into account. Beyond mere “economism”, Bourdieu points out,

[t]here is a specific economy of the literary and artistic field, based on a particular form of belief. And the major difficulty [for the academic observer – CR] lies in the need to make a radical break with this belief and with the deceptive certainties of the language of celebration, without thereby forgetting that they are part of the very reality we are seeking to understand, and that, as such, they must have a place in the model intended to explain it. (Bourdieu 1993, 35)

Any academic description of the literary and artistic field, and, more generally, any “Sociology of Culture” as Bourdieu envisages it, will find itself in a “Struggle against Charismatic Beliefs” that threaten to undermine its accuracy (Broschetti 2006, 138). It will thus even find itself treated warily in the humanities which are sometimes implicated in these beliefs that have been variously described as *The Romantic Ideology* (McGann 1983) or the ideology of liberal humanism (cf., for example, Barry 1995, 11-31).

Before we delve deeper into such a model intended to explain the literary market, however, some broader cultural coordinates shall be briefly touched upon. The “particular form of belief” that Bourdieu identifies in the quotation above can be described as an effect of modern print or book culture. If one follows a recent research trend that conceptualises both the Enlightenment and Romanticism as ‘events in the history of mediation’ (cf. Siskin/Warner 2010, 1 and *passim*), it becomes clear that literature is deeply enmeshed with these two dominant

discursive formations of modern culture, addressing problems of representation (mimesis, realism, Enlightenment) with a strong bias towards subjective experience (Romanticism; on the role of communication media in the formation of modern societies in general cf. Thompson 1995). This specific combination of Enlightenment and Romantic concerns literally underwrote the “particular form of belief” that transformed material objects into ideational objects in modern literature and established its own brand of virtual reality (cf. Otto 2011), which, despite its very specific hegemonic tendencies in terms of socio-cultural location (white, male, middle class etc.), tended to universalise its speaking position(s) and the experience(s) represented through them (‘man speaking to man’ etc.). For a long time, this transformation of individual speaking positions into either emphatic or at least general subjectivity through writing and print was the main work of modern literature, and remnants of its basic contours remain active even today: the Romantic genius may have been downgraded to author or even mere writer performing the indispensable author function (cf. Foucault 1977), but despite Roland Barthes’s (in)famous declaration of “The Death of the Author” in 1967 (cf. Barthes 1977) readers have retained their fascination with the lives of authors, and marketing authors is as much part of the publisher’s business as marketing books (cf. Squires 2007). On the other hand, there is an increasing awareness of the fundamental opacity of language, writing and print, which, in spite of many literary forms aiming at an effect of seeming transparency (the realist novel being the prime example), becomes ever more visible once alternative media formats (and especially visual ones like photography and film) become available. Towards the turn of the twentieth century and with modernism at the latest, the particular form of belief characteristic of the economy in the literary field begins to develop a more emphatic awareness of its linguistic and formal mediation, which is in turn supplemented by an increased awareness of literature’s conditioning through writing and print once digitalization provides an alternative.

Such media-historically induced changes in what has been called ‘the metaphysics of text’ (Chaudhuri 2010) affect the ideational status of literary works in the economy of the literary market fundamentally, while their material status in the economy of the literary marketplace does not change in a fully parallel fashion: a text aspiring to the condition of literature will these days have to acknowledge the specialisation of literary discourse in an emerging and converging media environment through an increased degree of self-reflexivity, but the reader may not always primarily be interested in such markers of literariness, and entertainment, emotional gratification or an appreciation of convincing representations of experience or the world may figure just as prominently (and legitimately) in influencing readers’ buying decisions. In other words: modern literature’s coordinates of production and reception have been drifting apart ever since Romanticism established originality, innovation and a certain degree of reflexivity as the prime criteria of literariness, which in turn led to increasingly difficult texts and an increasing alienation of the common reader in a development which reached its apogee in

modernism. Ever since, literariness and marketability have been at odds in spite of postmodernism's more relaxed pluralist and eclectic attitudes which, as critics like Leslie Fiedler (1969) have influentially pointed out, seemed to be closing the gap between the literary and the popular.

So how can this complex layering of ideational and material conditions be explicated systematically? The one approach which figures most prominently in academic studies of the literary market/marketplace interface is indeed Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field (cf. Bourdieu 1993 and 1996. See also Höss 2007 and Ahern/Speller 2012). There are good reasons for this preference: With his background in (empirical) sociology Bourdieu ideally combines an interest in the material conditions of production, circulation and reception with an attempt at coming to terms with the ideational processes which run counter to a merely economist logic. In the first register, Bourdieu's theory of the literary field retains a focus on agents (such as authors, publishers, printers, booksellers, reviewers, scholars, translators, readers etc.) and institutions (groups, coffee houses, salons, clubs, academies and universities, publishing houses, shops etc.) as necessary points of methodological access. At the same time, however, the approach acknowledges that these agents are not fully autonomous individuals but rather part of the ideational logic of the field, which supplements the dimension of economic capital with a dimension of cultural capital that is, like the individuals acting in the field, semi-autonomous. In this second register, a symbolic logic counteracts the power of economic processes and establishes possibilities of social distinction which are not based on economic success but rather on the ideational dimension of taste (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Cultural capital comes in three forms: In its 'objectified state' it retains its link to the economic marketplace through cultural goods which can be bought, sold, enjoyed and displayed; its 'embodied state' manifests itself in long-lasting dispositions of the human mind and body; and in its 'institutionalized state' it relies on educational qualifications (from primary school to university degree) 'guaranteed' by the state (cf. Bourdieu 1986). This differentiation indicates that the power of cultural capital is partly exteriorized in goods and institutions and partly interiorized in what Bourdieu calls the habitus, i.e. an agent's

'feel for the game', a 'practical sense' (*sens pratique*) that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules. Rather it is a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions. The habitus is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes a 'second sense' or a second nature. [...] [T]he dispositions represented by the habitus are 'durable' in that they last throughout an agent's lifetime. They are 'transposable' in that they may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity, and they are 'structured structures' in that they inevitably incorporate the objective social conditions of their inculcation. This accounts for the similarity in the habitus of agents from the same social class [...] Finally, the dispositions of habitus are 'structuring structures' through their ability to generate practices adjusted to specific situations. (Johnson 2003, 5)

The Present in Perspective: Mapping the Literary Market Today

Through the varieties of habitus available to agents at a given historical moment in very specific situations, the literary field “exercises a ‘prism effect’ on all external determinations and refracts them according to its own logic” (Broschetti 2012, 17; on ‘prismatic effects’ cf. Viala 1988). As a result, the literary field establishes itself “as a relatively autonomous space” (Sapiro 2012, 31).

This relatively autonomous space affords various modes of involvement for agents, and the extent to which these modes are affected by either material or ideational constraints varies. So how can these possible roles of agents be systematically charted? While many observations of the literary field work with the triad of ‘production’, ‘distribution’ and ‘reception’ (cf. for example, Stedman 2006, 174), it seems necessary to follow the lead of the Empirical Study of Literature school and add ‘processing’ (cf. Schmidt 1982) in order to account for the institutionalised feedback beyond mere reading from other fields such as the mass media (reviewing, literary formats on television, film adaptations of literary texts), academia (lectures, research articles, monographs), education (school curricula) and, last but by no means least, prizes and awards, which provide crucial markers of distinction in the circulation of cultural value (cf. English 2005). All of these factors contribute heavily to the formation of habitus within the literary field, but they also follow their own agendas quite independently from literary concerns. Summarily, a tentative matrix for charting the roles of agents in the literary field in their specific relation to the ideational constraints of the literary market on the one hand and to the material restraints of the literary marketplace on the other could take the following shape:

[Market]	Production	Distribution	Processing	Reception
ideational	author		scholar	reader
↓	literary agent		teacher	↑
↓	editor	publisher	reviewer	↑
material	Printer/binder	marketing	prizes, awards	↑
[Marketplace]		bookseller	mass media	customer

Figure 1: The Market-Marketplace-Matrix

In this matrix, every text has to run its individual course from the author’s ideational aspirations through the vagaries of material production and distribution to its specific fate in the realms of processing and reception, and while material constraints are never fully absent they are perhaps least pressing in the ideational realm of individual reading in a reader’s spare time (or in the research of a tenured academic). In the meantime, the text finds itself in a force field in which a high degree of cultural capital seems more often than not to coincide with weak economic profits while conversely a lower potential for cultural capital holds out the promise of high(er) economic profits, so that resistance to commercialisation becomes the hallmark of the

literary market while the literary marketplace has to endorse commercialisation in order to become viable in the first place. The publisher, then, who is placed squarely in the midst of things, faces the challenge of having to negotiate different and at times mutually exclusive 'key resources', which John B. Thompson, in a more differentiated take on Bourdieu's basic distinction between economic and cultural capital, identifies as economic capital (financial resources), human capital (a well-trained and motivated work force), social capital (networking, contacts) and intellectual capital (rights to content) on the one hand and symbolic capital on the other (cf. Thompson 2012, 5-8). And the latter, while "intangible", is

enormously important for publishing firms. For publishers are not just employers and financial risk-takers: they are also cultural mediators and arbiters of quality and taste. Their imprint is a 'brand', a marker of distinction in a highly competitive field. Publishers seek to accumulate symbolic capital just as they seek to accumulate economic capital. [...] No major publisher would willingly embrace the idea that their sole purpose in life is to publish schlock (even if they accept, as some do, that they need to publish some schlock in order to do other things). (8)

This striving for distinction in the register of cultural capital is by no means completely detached from the other key resources because

[i]t strengthens [publishers'] hand in the struggle to acquire new content because it makes their organization more attractive in the eyes of authors and agents. [...] It strengthens their position in the networks of cultural intermediaries – including booksellers, reviewers and media gatekeepers – whose decisions and actions can have a big impact on the success or otherwise of particular books. A publisher who has established a reputation for quality and reliability is a publisher that agents, retailers and even readers will be more inclined to trust. And it can also directly translate into financial success: a book that wins a major literary prize will very commonly experience a sharp upturn in sales, and may even lift the sales of other books by the same author. (8f.)

As Thompson concludes, "[a]ll five forms of capital are vital to the success of a publishing firm, but the structure of the publishing field is shaped above all by the differential distribution of economic and symbolic capital" (9). Accordingly, "most publishers are janus-faced organisations: they must compete both in the *market for content* and in the *market for customers*" (11, original emphases). Both the market for content and the market for customers have their specific relations to the ideational literary market on the one hand and the material(istic) literary marketplace on the other, as the co-ordinates for assessing symbolic cultural capital were strongly influenced by Romantic fashionings of modern authorship. To this day, the various notions of authorship which underwrite the practices of literary agents, publishers, booksellers and readers coincide in their insistence on an idea(l) of cultural creativity which is autonomous because it is – ultimately and in spite of all evidence to the contrary – based on the subjectivity and individuality of the author figure with its resultant intellectual property rights and its specific positioning of the author in what James F. English calls the 'economy of prestige' (English 2005). On the other hand, Claire Squires is not alone in perceiving an increasing commercial pressure on Bourdieu's taste-based cultural capital in today's competitive market for books: "A publisher in this period would, arguably, base his or her decision to publish neither on bald

economics nor on cultural value alone, but rather calculate the appropriateness of the text to the market that will receive it [...]" (Squires 2007, 57).

3. Contours of the Literary Market Today

So far we have seen how Bourdieu's theory enables us to distinguish key roles for actors in the literary field along with their historically emerging ideational attitudes as manifested in their habitus which in turn affects all material inter- and transactions. The theory thus combines material and ideational dimensions in a dynamic fashion. Focussing on the publishing business (including agents, publishers and booksellers, but relegating authors and readers as well as the whole area of processing to the side lines), James B. Thompson has recently described what he calls the 'logic of the field' in the first decade of the twenty-first century along these lines. Wary of the implications of the term 'logic' Thompson offers the following methodological qualifications:

To describe this dynamic as the 'logic of the field' is not to say that the field is logical – there is much about this dynamic that could be regarded as illogical, irrational and inefficient, not to mention wasteful. The logic of the field is an analytical and explanatory concept, not a normative one. [...] [It] is simply a summary way of describing [...] a set of processes and preoccupations that interrelate in definite ways and that, taken together, create the context within which those who work in the field of English-language trade publishing [...] do what they do. (Thompson 2012, 294)

Having said that, Thompson nevertheless insists on what might be called contingent evolutionary determination, i.e. the idea that once something happens it is the necessary outcome of a multi-dimensional systemic evolution which heavily influences all decisions of actors but does not fully determine them. As one agent interviewed by Thompson puts it succinctly: "It's a system that sort of feeds on itself. [...] And it's a form of evolution. Though in this particular instance there is no intelligent design" (294).

As Thompson's study is the by far broadest survey of the changes affecting the publishing business in the twenty-first century, it provides reliable co-ordinates for mapping the literary market today (for a charting of the developments leading up to the turn of the 21st century cf. de Bellaigue 2004). According to Thompson, there are three clearly recognizable tendencies *within* the publishing business itself: the distributional role of the bookseller is severely affected by the growth of the retail chains (26-58), the position of the author in the literary field is reasserted by the rise of the literary agent (59-100; see also de Bellaigue 2008), and the publishers themselves go through a process of consolidation by means of letting themselves be absorbed into huge publishing corporations (101-146) or by means of huge mergers such as, most recently and prominently, Penguin and Random House in 2013. In their mutual interaction, these three developments lead to an increasing 'polarization of the field' (147) in which 'small' (publishers, retailers ...) seems to be a thing of the past while 'big' is the order of the day. Similarly, there is a preoccupation with identifying potentially 'big books' (188) either

on the basis of an author's 'track record' (198) and 'platform', i.e. "the position from which an author speaks, a combination of [...] credentials, visibility and promotability, especially through the media" (204), or on the basis of a title's similarity with 'comps' (202), i.e. comparable books which have already proven successful. Taken together all these factors and all kinds of hunches constitute what Thompson calls "the web of collective belief" (205) that holds sway in the publishing business. To illustrate the widening gap and polarization between best-selling 'big books' and non-selling 'small books' one can look at some sales figures from well within the period observed by Thompson: By 2006, more than four million copies had been sold of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* or J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels each. Compared to that, even bestselling novels endorsed by TV or major prizes could at best go up to 200,000 or 300,000 copies while for all other novels, a figure (well) below 1,000 copies was common (Clee 2006). Given this discrepancy, it is clear that it becomes increasingly difficult to mind the gap between the publishers' and the corporate bosses' expectations, a conflict of interests whose consequences Thompson addresses under the headings of 'extreme publishing' (i.e. the squeezing in of potentially gap-filling titles at very short notice, cf. 223-237) and 'shrinking windows' (of actual visibility in shops and the media, cf. 238-291). And, finally and somewhat paradoxically, within this huge gap there is what Thompson calls the 'squeeze on publishers' margins' between the escalating advances negotiated by literary agents on the one hand and the escalating discounts negotiated by the retail chains on the other (311f.).

As if all this was not enough to create 'trouble in a trade' which seems to be 'facing an uncertain future,' as Thompson's final chapter headings put it (cf. 377/403), there is also a broader tendency *outside* the publishing business itself: the digital revolution. In fact, the publishing industry has been transformed by digitalization on all levels, not just on the level of product where the debates about 'the downs and ups of ebooks' figure prominently (314-326), but also in terms of the business's 'operating systems' (information and data flow, communication, decision making, cf. 326f.), 'content management and the digital workflow' (the tendency towards processing and storing all content in digital form against long-standing routines and techniques of proof-reading, correction etc., cf. 327-332), 'sales and marketing' (the rise of Amazon, e-marketing, the possibilities and dangers of digital sampling, cf. 332-334), and finally (and most importantly) 'content delivery':

There is one basic characteristic of the book that makes this fourth level possible: the content of the book is separable from the form. This is a characteristic that the book shares with other products of the media and creative industries – films, music, newspapers, etc. – and is the reason why the impact of the digital revolution in these industries is potentially so much more disruptive than it is in, say, the refrigerator business. In essence, the digitalization of content dissociates content and form. (334f.)

And this, obviously, disrupts the old order of anchoring and processing ideational objects in the material world. Where for hundreds of years the printed word had been the only domain of the publisher (cf. Chappell 1972), now a multitude of formats less materially graspable than

the physical book are added to the fray, creating their own problems (archiving and distribution standards, infrastructure, piracy, the danger of price deflation; cf. Thompson 2012, 352-376) and potentials (ease of access, updatability, scale, searchability, portability, flexibility, affordability, intertextuality, and multimedia potential as discussed in Thompson 2012, 339-352). How all this will ultimately play out remains, for the time being, anybody's guess, and neither reports from global business consulting firms (cf. Bain & Company 2011) nor pioneer theorists (cf. Bhaskar 2013a) nor expert observers like John B. Thompson or, more recently, Franca Hall seem to be able to give a firm prognosis, as their final words on the matter indicate:

How books will be produced and delivered, who will do what and how they will do it, what roles the traditional players will play (if any) and where books will fit in the new symbolic and information environments that will emerge in years to come – these are questions to which there are, at present, no clear answers. (Thompson 2012, 409)

Is the behaviour of the publishing industry that we can see now [...] simply a route to a final goal, a fully transitioned digital publisher? Or should we, rather, see this as the way it is from now on; publishers will need to be constantly changing and innovating, continuously responsive to an environment that is continuously moving? In this case, publishers will need to be quick in adopting new methods of working in order to be agile in the digital age. As they move into these bigger digital environments, they may also need to spend more time explaining why they remain necessary. Publishers, who have traditionally been modest about their brand names and perhaps a little distant in their own direct contact with their customers, need to assert themselves and explain what it is that they do; and also continue to show, as they have always done, that they can do it extremely well. (Hall 2013, 189)

But then again, the most recent statistics seem to suggest that the share of ebook sales in the field of literature could reach a plateau at c. 25% of total sales (as opposed to 50% for genre fiction; cf. Hamann 2013), giving publishers a slightly firmer grip on their future prospects. It is also worth remembering, however, that according to a statistics from 1998 (i.e. before the full impact of the digital revolution) which is still available on the website of the U.K. Booksellers Association ("Price of a Book – Who Gets What?"), the manufacturing costs of physical books and the publishers' overhead for storage and distribution amount to only 15% and 9% respectively of the price of a book as opposed to 8% each for Royalties and Distribution/Marketing respectively and 55% of Trade Discounts to wholesalers and booksellers, so that even a full replacement of physical books with digital copies would only create limited leeway for adjusting publishers' calculations.

As for the ideational dimension, some statistics seem to suggest that its main indicators (author reputation 52%, personal recommendation 49%, reviews 37%) still have a slight advantage as 'Primary Factor[s] in Book Purchase Decision[s]' over marketing parameters (price 45%, cover art/blurb 22%, advertising 14%). On the whole, however, the various statistics collected on the U.K. Booksellers Association website under "Influence on Book Purchasing" (May 2012, incorporating statistics from 1999 to 2012) demonstrate an uneven mix of ideational and material prompts which cannot be readily deciphered with regard to prevailing trends except

The Present in Perspective: Mapping the Literary Market Today

that online presence seems to come at the cost of a decreasing significance of bookshop browsing while supermarkets seem to have evened out. Even a merely casual glance at these statistics of the current situation makes it quite clear that the literary market today is not only challenged by changes in “the underlying technology” but also and perhaps more so by questions of “organisational design and consumer behaviour,” which are, as one astute observer of the scene points out, “more nebulous and in some ways harder to shift than tech” (Bhaskar 2013b, n.p.). And even if one acknowledges with Michael Bhaskar that the “need to make money” has always proven to be the most “powerful incentive to shape products and businesses in ways that will be sustainable and desirable in the long term,” it is still to be hoped that the ideational dimension of the literary market may continue to play its part in providing sustainability and desirability as incentives for publishers’ strategies in the literary marketplace.

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British Publishing and the Rise of Creative Writing: A Personal View

BLAKE MORRISON

(based on a lecture presented in May 2011)

The other day a student of mine emailed to ask advice. He is a creative writing student doing an MA at Goldsmiths College, where I teach, and a short story he had written had just appeared on a website along with the work of the thirty other students on his course. A literary agent had got in touch with him after reading his story: the agent had been impressed by it and wondered if he had any more stories or, even better, if he might be working on a novel and could send an extract from it. The student is indeed working on a novel and his question to me was: should he send the agent something now or wait until the novel, still in its early stages, was more advanced. My advice was to take the latter option - best finish the novel, or at least finish a first draft, before sending it on. He had pretty much reached the same conclusion but needed reassurance that he was doing the right thing.

This anecdote illustrates at least three interesting aspects of British literary culture and publishing today:

1. The rise of creative writing programmes, mainly but not exclusively within universities, and the growing demand for and popularity of them, even at a time when books' sales are falling and writers find it increasingly difficult to make a living from their writing.
2. The extent to which literary agents and publishers now look to these creative writing programmes to find new talent, and the extent to which when they have found a writer whom they want to represent they will shape and edit his or her work.
3. The role the Internet plays in the dissemination of work. It was a college website that brought this student to the attention of an agent, and should he go on to publish a novel in, say, three to five years' time, it is possible that the majority of those reading it will do so on an e-reader or iPad or Kindle.

There are other aspects of this story I might mention, too, including the student's age – he's in his 50s, and has had a career as a journalist, but came on the course because he wants to write a novel, and in this he's not untypical of those who go on creative writing courses, who may be new to creative writing but are not necessarily young and in their early 20s; his gender

– this puts him in a minority (two out of three of our students are women); and the fact that the agents asked if he was writing a novel, which they did for sound commercial reasons, since collections of short stories don't sell well in the UK, whereas novels potentially do or can. Still, it is those three elements I mentioned - the rise of creative writing programmes; the role of literary agents; and the place of the Internet in publishing – that seem to me most significant here, and which make British publishing in 2011 a very different world from the one in which I published my first books in the 1980s.

Can creative writing really be taught? I remember asking myself that question, when I first became aware of these programmes. But in fact there is nothing new about the phenomenon. Creative writing coursework was offered at the University of Iowa as early as 1897, and in 1922 Iowa became the first university in the United States to accept creative projects as theses for advanced degrees. Traditionally, graduate study culminates in the writing of a scholarly thesis, but, under this new provision, works including a collection of poems, a musical composition, or a series of paintings could be presented. Thus, Iowa pioneered the Master of Fine Arts degree, the MFA. Later, in 1936, the Iowa Writers Workshop was set up, the basic premise of the writing workshop being for a published writer to lead a discussion of work written by a member or members of the class; workshop students share impressions, advice, and analysis, and thus receive honest and immediate feedback about their writing and (it is hoped) become not only better critics of their own work but better writers.

That is the principle, and in 1970 Britain adopted it too, many decades behind the US as usual, when Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson set up an MA in creative writing at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UEA. One of the first students to sign up for it was Ian McEwan, who has said that in his day it was almost entirely a matter of getting on, unsupervised, with your own writing – no workshops or group sessions, just an occasional drink in the pub with Malcolm Bradbury. But McEwan was given a kick-start by the UEA course, as were, later, Kazuo Ishiguro, Anne Enright, Tracy Chevalier, Louise Doughty and Andrew Miller to name just a few of the better known names among the dozens who have gone on to be published novelists. Angela Carter, Rose Tremain and WG Sebald all taught on the UEA programme at some point. And its success led other universities to set up similar programmes. The idea of workshops was certainly established enough by the mid-70s for me to set one up – for poets – at Goldsmiths College, even though I was only in my early 20s and not yet a published poet. That class, like many others, was a non-degree evening class, and you could find such classes all over the country – small groups of writers getting together with a tutor to discuss their work. Postgraduate degrees in creative writing took longer to catch on but by the 1980s there were a small number, in the 1990s more and more were inaugurated, and by the end of the first decade of this century almost every university in the country offered an MA in

creative writing, with several more, including Goldsmiths, offering PhDs or undergraduate degrees in creative writing as well.

This is not just a university or college phenomenon. There are also shorter residential courses on offer – notably from the Arvon Foundation, which was established in 1968, with the poet Ted Hughes an active patron, and which now has four different writing centres – in Devon, Yorkshire, Shropshire and Scotland – to which aspirant writers can come for five-day courses in a variety of fields, each course being tutored by a pair of published writers. Specialist courses in writing – both residential and non-residential, short-term and long-term – are offered in many other places too: at local libraries, at literary festivals, in schools, in prisons. Far from supply exceeding demand, new programmes spring up each year. The publisher Faber & Faber now runs courses for both poets and novelists; so does the Guardian newspaper.

Critics and reviewers sometimes remark – usually disparagingly – that so and so's work 'reeks of a creative writing course', as if to suggest there's some standard model taught throughout the system. That is not the case – the other writers and I who teach at Goldsmiths aren't working to a shared model or ethos or set of beliefs, though we do share certain prejudices, perhaps, and there are certainly a number of creative writing mantras – 'Show don't tell', for instance, or 'Write about what you know' – which you tend to hear wherever you go. I think if pressed we would probably say that all we are trying to do is help students to write well, or write better, which also often means getting them to read more widely, so as to find examples or precedents for the kind of writing they seem to want to do. When we come to assess or grade student work, there is usually a surprising consensus. I have to say that when I first took up my post at Goldsmiths in 2003, this was the aspect of the job that most worried me: marking. But we all pass judgement on texts: reviewers do, those who give out prizes do, solitary readers and members of book clubs do. And the students we have – most of them mature (the youngest in their early twenties, but we have also had a couple of eighty-year olds) – are less concerned with the grades they are given (which after all do not affect their career prospects in the way that undergraduate degrees do) than they are with the written comments that accompany them.

Perhaps it would help if I explain how the Goldsmiths creative writing MA – which resembles most of the others in the UK – actually operates. Applicants first send in samples of their work, and if the writing (in our view) shows promise, they are then asked for an interview and, if that goes well, offered a place. There are 30 new students each year, roughly half of them 'full-time', which means they complete the course in a year, and the rest part-time, which takes two years. The only formal teaching takes place on a Wednesday, when there's a two-and-a-half hour general morning workshop – the 30 students are divided into three groups of ten and each group has a published writer who's on our staff (a poet or novelist or memoirist) to act as chair. Typically the group might start by looking at an extract from a novel, memoir or poem by an established writer before moving on to discuss work by a couple of members of

the group – all such texts having been circulated a week before, so that everyone has had time to read them. The cynical view offered by Louis Menand in the *New Yorker* is that workshops are “designed on the theory that students who have never published a poem can teach other students who have never published a poem how to write a publishable poem” (2009). Menand goes on to speak of the workshop as ‘a combination of ritual scarring and twelve-on-one group therapy where aspiring writers offer their views of the efforts of other aspiring writers.’ At Goldsmiths, I like to think, the workshops are much more than group therapy and the scarring is limited, because it is understood that developing writers need encouragement as well as honest feedback. For me the justification for workshops is simple: most of us as writers are blind to our own faults, and it often takes an outsider – an honest reader, or, better still, a fellow practitioner – to spot these faults; once pointed out we usually see them at once, having conveniently repressed knowledge of them while we were getting the writing done. People in workshops tend to form alliances and to come to know whose opinion they trust – not just the tutor’s but that of others in the group who ‘get’ what they are up to. This filtering out of opinion is a necessary process, because there can be times, especially early on in an MA programme, when conflicting views are flying about and a student will feel besieged and bewildered. The hope is that by the end of the year a writer will feel more self-aware, better able to judge for himself or herself what is working and what is not and be able to stand at a distance from the text.

The morning workshop – more group editing than group therapy – is an essential component of the course. So are the four hour-long one-to-one sessions each student will have, with two different tutors, over the course of a term. In the first term, visiting writers come each Wednesday afternoon to speak of the writing process and offer inside knowledge on the various challenges it throws up; and in the second term, there is a smaller specialist workshop, so that students can opt for poetry, fiction or life writing with a visiting tutor. In January each student submits two pieces of 5,000 words for appraisal; in May, the same again; and in September, a 20,000 word portfolio or small collection of poems. With each of these submissions roughly a quarter or fifth of the words will be taken up with the students explaining what they were trying to achieve, what genre they were working in, what writers they were influenced by, and so on. These are critical commentaries rather than academic essays – the principle being that without a degree of detachment one cannot expect to become a good writer. In truth, I have some doubts about the necessity for critical self-analysis of this kind; not all students are suited to it, however good their writing might be; at worst it is a token nod to the academic institutions and disciplines or learning within which the creative writing MA is framed – a legitimization of what, on its own, might look too frothy for Academe. Still, the bulk of the 40,000 words that students produce in the course of their MA is creative work. And since 40,000 words

is half the length of the average novel in the UK, you could say that by the end of a year each of our MA graduates is potentially halfway towards finishing a book.

Do creative writing degrees lead to publication? Not necessarily or even mostly; the numbers do not add up. Let us say that there are 80 MAs in creative writing currently being taught in the UK, with an average of 20 students on each, and with some universities offering undergraduate creative writing as well, and PhDs (where you complete a book, not just write half of one), plus those Arvon, Faber and other Guardian courses, there may be as many as 2,000 writers coming off courses and degree programmes *each year*, all of them hoping to get their work published - which is simply not going to happen. Can such courses be justified then? Do they not raise expectations too high? After all, the qualification itself, an MA, and the close friendships invariably formed in the course of it, are not the point. But for some students what counts is the opportunity to make writing – something they may have just dabbled with in the past - a bigger part of their life, and they come away from the course having learned the basis of narrative and characterization, or having absorbed techniques such as point of view or free indirect style, or if they are a poet having experimented with forms such as the pantoum or villanelle. In other words, they acquire skills they did not have when they started the course and, at the very least, see their work appear on a college website or in an anthology of student work.

Still, other students are more ambitious than that, and to my mind it is not enough to offer students the chance to share their work with other students, or be published by a small university press, in some small self-enclosed circle, as seems to happen in the US. I want the best of our students be taken on by mainstream commercial publishers. With some, though our programme is only just over a decade old, that has already happened. Two of our former students, Ross Raisin and Evie Wyld, were among the twenty chosen by Granta magazine as the Best of Young British Novelists in 2013 (that is, under the age of forty). Another had an €80,000 advance for a book-length narrative poem about the dramatist Christopher Marlowe. Over a dozen have had books come out, whether small poetry pamphlets or novels or memoirs. Every term there are now a couple of launch events at college, when we invite former students back to read from their new publications. And I would feel we were not doing our job if we did not have this measure of success.

Of course, there are still some writers who make their way without having gone on a creative writing course of some kind but whereas once they were the majority now they are becoming the exception. That is in part because literary agents and publishers have begun looking to creative writing programmes to find new talents. At Goldsmiths, towards the end of the year's course, we invite an agent, a publisher's editor, and a former student who has had his or her work published to sit on a panel and talk to our students. (We do this late on in the year because for the first half of the course we want students to concentrate on developing

their writing skills, not to be distracted by the practicalities of getting published.) Solid pragmatic advice is given that day – about how much work to show to an agent, and how to present it, and on the pros and cons of publishing in certain journals or on certain websites. But it is also interesting to watch what happens in the informal food and drinks session which follows. One of my first students at Goldsmiths was taken on by an agent after a conversation she struck up with him that day; she has since published three novels. A cynic would say that her being young and attractive did no harm, but if he had not been impressed by the work she sent him, he would never have taken her on. Still we did effect a useful introduction that day. And now the website of student work is doing a similar job – agents are logging on, reading what is there, and getting in touch with writers they think have potential.

I know that in some countries – the Netherlands, for instance – agents are a comparatively recent phenomenon. But in Britain and the US they have been around for some time. A. P. Watt, whose agency still exists, began working as a literary agent around 1880, and within a couple of decades others had followed suit. These days agents play a vital role – not just in doing business deals but in creating literary reputation and in editing authors' texts.

It might be useful here to mention my own experience. I was taken on by an agent in the 1980s, on the basis of some reviews I'd written, or poems I'd published, or because of the literary editor's job I did – I'm not sure which but I was far from having a book ready to come out. I was fortunate, because my agent was Pat Kavanagh, later the wife of Julian Barnes, and one of the great agents of our time until she died five years ago of a brain tumour. From my own time Robert Harris, Ruth Rendell, Joanna Trollope, Margaret Drabble, Clive James and Andrew Motion were among her clients – and before them Arthur Koestler, Rebecca West and Tom Wolfe. She also represented Martin Amis for a while, until he defected after being poached by the US agent, Andrew Wylie, sometimes referred to as the Jackal.

Pat was old-school. When doing deals, she believed in authors submitting finished books to publishers, not synopses or opening extracts, and she believed in doing separate deals for each book, not in two- or three-book contracts. Andrew Wylie and others like him are new-school. They are bullish on behalf of their authors, and by getting huge advances for them sometimes become celebrities in their own right. Typically, they take 15 or even 20% of what an author earns, not just the 10% agents from A. P. Watt to Pat Kavanagh used to take. Authors do not mind agents taking those sort of percentages so long as they get a better deal – and usually they do. Indeed, sometimes they succeed in getting their authors huge advances, more than an author could realistically hope to earn from sales. I find a pleasing sense of justice in this; there has been a history of publishers exploiting writers, of not rewarding them properly, and if agents have not altogether put a stop to it then they have made it more difficult. It is hard to love the new guard nevertheless – their swagger and aggression sometimes rub off on those they represent, and give authors a bad name, as if we were all fat cats, as rich as

bankers, when in reality even quite well-established authors find it hard to make a living from their work and sometimes have to be bailed out by charitable organizations such as the Royal Literary Fund.

In the UK, for literary fiction as for other books, the convention is for publishers to offer authors an advance, based on the number of copies of a book which they estimate the author might sell. Say your contract means you earn 10% on a book selling in hardback at £15 - the author's share being £1.50 for each copy. If the publisher thinks 5,000 copies will be sold, then your advance would rightly be around £7,500. But usually the paperback is also part of the deal. In the UK the tradition is for novels to come out in hardback first. There are various reasons for this: sales to public libraries used to guarantee, say, 2,000 hardback copies straight off, though public libraries are now closing; then there are collectors of first editions or people who simply like owning hardbacks; and of course a publisher makes more money on a hardback than on a paperback. From time to time a case has been made for novels to go straight into paperback but as yet that's still the exception, so paperbacks generally come out a year after the hardback, and with them the percentage of royalties an author will earn is smaller, usually 7.5%, and so is the cover price (at least half the cost of the hardback). But sales are larger, so let's imagine that a novel in the UK does reasonably well, and sells 5,000 copies in hardback, and 15,000 in paperback – this would be what's called a midlist title – then a reasonable advance for the author would be £15-20,000, and if sales exceed expectations, and he or she 'earns out' the advance, then he or she will make money on individual copies sold, i.e. so-called royalties. *But* if he or she has a good agent then the advance might be as large as £50,000, and if the book doesn't sell that many, well, there's no penalty, it is just good business by the agent. I once heard an agent say that he'd be ashamed and feel like a failure if any book by an author of his earned out its advance – i.e., if the sales were so healthy that the author earned royalties on top of his or her advance. In other words, some agents screw publishers. But then some publishers screw authors. And in reality there is a penalty when an author falls well short of earning out an advance – it means the next advance will almost certainly be smaller.

Could authors manage without agents? A few have done so, in the past, and if you are an academic, say, writing a work of non-fiction, you still could, just about. But even academic historians and literary critics tend to have agents these days, certainly the more successful ones. And if you are a novelist you more or less have to have an agent, for the simple reason that most publishers will not look at novels unless they come through an agent. There used to be in publishing what was called the slush pile – the unsolicited manuscripts sent in by unknown authors. Often the slush pile would be left for some junior person to deal with, since it was not expected there would be anything worth finding on it. Now in most publishing houses the slush pile no longer exists. Only books submitted by agents – which have in effect been

already filtered out and judged worthwhile – are considered for publication. And no agent is going to take on a novelist unless he or she has realistic prospects of publication. Agents are not philanthropists; however well-read or high-minded (and many are), they need to make a living, and ideally they will make a killing as well. When Andrew Wylie prised Martin Amis away from Pat Kavanagh – and ruined the friendship between Amis and his old friend Julian Barnes – it was not just as a feather in his cap, to add prestige to his agency, it was because he thought he could earn Amis better advances than he had been getting through Pat, which also meant earning serious money himself. 15 or 20% of a half-million pound advance (which is what Amis got for his next book) *is* serious money, especially, when like most agents, you have a dozen or more other authors solidly if less spectacularly earning money for you.

The rise of agents like Andrew Wylie is symptomatic of what happened in the late 80s and 90s when literary fiction began to sell in large numbers, or certain names did. The market is less buoyant now, and the advances are more modest, but still agents have a role to play, and it's not just a business role but an editorial one – it is no coincidence that many of today's agents in the UK began life as publisher's editors. To strike a personal note again: When my agent Pat Kavanagh died, I had just finished the draft of a new novel. Looking for a new agent from within her company to act for me, I was advised to send it to four of them, and see how they reacted to it, and how well I liked them – then I could make my choice. It was like speed dating: five minutes with each. The novel had a lot of half-buried references to *Othello* in it and of the four only two spotted the fact. That narrowed the field. But as important as textual criticism to my thoughts were a) choosing an agent who didn't have too many established names to look after already, and would have time and energy to give to me, and b) who understood the kind of writer I was, and wouldn't be pushing me in the wrong direction. The agent I chose – a woman – was the one I got on with best, and one of the reasons I got on with her is that she had prepared three pages of comments on and queries about my novel. I hoped she would get a fair deal for me as well but what I chiefly valued was her editorial input. In fact, what I wanted from her was the same sort of input that I offer my students on the MA course – if I teach them anything useful it is not so much how to write but how to redraft what they have already written.

Agents did not use to have this function. Pat Kavanagh, being of the old school, was not one to comment on or interfere with a text. For the first novel I wrote, a historical novel about Johann Gutenberg, she did send a page of notes. But with my poems – which was all I wrote when she first represented me, and which cannot have earned her more than a few pennies – she used to send a postcard on the day of publication, and nothing else. (I valued the card because otherwise the day might have passed without being marked in any way.) And with the prose I wrote, whether in memoirs or in novels, her highest compliment would be to say it made her cry, or sometimes laugh. I did not need any more than that. I was used to

having good editors. With Pat I looked for something else – emotional and moral support, subtle guidance in matters of taste, and of course a hard-headed business brain to do the best for me, financially, that she could.

I was used to having good editors, having been spoilt in this regard from the start: when I studied for an academic PhD at University College London in my early 20s my supervisor, Karl Miller, was someone whose background was in literary magazines, not teaching. He had edited the weekly journal the *Listener* and later went on to co-found and co-edit the *London Review of Books*. For my undergraduate degree in English, the smallest number of people in a tutorial I had experienced was four – these days it would be far larger. The system of individual supervision was not offered outside Oxford and Cambridge and I am not sure that as an undergraduate I would have benefited from it. But Karl taught me its value. Twice a term on Friday afternoons, when the English department was deserted, we'd meet to discuss the latest draft of my PhD (later a book), and I'd emerge from his office several hours later, badly shaken but determined to write better next time. Editing is not just about putting in semi-colons (though Karl was fierce about those), but about engaging with content and ideas; it means seeing the blindingly obvious flaws that the author – through vanity or laziness - has missed. Nabokov called editors “pompous avuncular brutes” (Herbert Gold 1967). But my own experience bears out Frank O'Connor, who compared his editor William Maxwell to “a good teacher who does not say ‘Imitate me’ but ‘This is what I think you are trying to say.’” Karl helped me see what I was trying to say. Which was different from putting words in my mouth, but required just as much intervention and engagement on his part.

I cannot remember the editor of my first two poetry books, Andrew Motion, playing a large part in determining their form and content; it was enough that he encouraged and supported me. But I do know that my next editor, Bill Buford at Granta Books, had a vital role to play in shaping my work. He had heard that my father had died and that I was writing about him, and wanted to see what I had written so far; liking what he saw, he ran extracts in the magazine *Granta*, then bought the book for the companion publishing house. To him I owe the title of my memoir *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* (it was one of several candidates but had not been my first choice) and the place of the opening chapter (which I'd put second but which he could see was the best way to start). With that book, and with the early drafts of my next one, about the Bulger case, he was tough, even savage, but immensely thorough and usually right.

The editors of my subsequent books, Frances Coady, Ian Jack and Alison Samuel, were less interventionist but equally helpful. Alison retired after publishing my most recent novel, *The Last Weekend*, so the notes she gave me on it are really the last experience I will have of her editorial prowess. I like to think that at my age I know what I am doing and that when I hand in a book it is in a fit state. And *The Last Weekend* was more or less in a fit state,

enough for a less engaged editor to have left it as it was. Not Alison, who had 16 pages of notes. Some of these notes were what you'd call line-editing – they pointed out inconsistencies, misspellings, clichés, ungrammatical sentences or what might be called 'infelicities' - phrases that grate on the ear. But a couple of points were larger. They touched on the character of the main protagonist, the narrator, and how attractive and engaging I should make him. This is a major talking point in contemporary fiction. You will see reviewers complaining that they could not get on with a novel because the main character is not attractive or none of the characters appeals. Do characters have to be likeable? No. Think of *Iago*, or *Macbeth*, or *Faust*. This was not Alison's point, though. The question for her was why the lowly and self-deprecating narrator of my novel should be attractive to his rather posh and successful best friend. Alison had ideas about useful adjustments I could make and I was grateful for her input. The input was not intended to make the novel sell more copies but to make it a better novel – two different things, which sometimes go together but often do not.

There are still some brilliant editors in publishing today. I have just been writing an afterword to accompany a reissue of my book about the Bulger case, and the line editing has been scrupulous – a model of judicious attention. Which is not to say that I agreed with every point or suggestion being made, but they were all worth thinking about. So good editors do still exist, and writers need them. But it is harder for them to have the autonomy that, say, Maxwell Perkins enjoyed when taking on Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe, let alone to spend the acres of time that he did improving typescripts. The rise of marketing departments is often blamed for this; editors say that when they like a manuscript, they first have to persuade the marketing and publicity department (who will read it too) that it is worth publishing. But publishers do need to sell books, and always have done, and many an author has been helped by smart promotion. What has changed is that editors are no longer the people expected to identify and nurture a young talent. That role has now passed to literary agents and, before them, to the creative writing tutors through whose MA programmes and residential courses the majority of today's new writers emerge.

The fact that editors don't have the time they used to have to give to authors brings me to the third and final element in this talk, the state of British publishing in a modern era. I would like to mention, in brief, various aspects of the current scene: among them, publishing houses and conglomerates, ebooks, libraries, literary prizes, reviews, bookshops and blogs.

In the UK, in recent years, these have been dominated by international conglomerates such as Random House (owned since 1998 by Bertelsmann), Penguin (formerly owned by Pearson plc but now part of Random House), HarperCollins (owned by Rupert Murdoch's news Corporation), Pan Macmillan (owned by the Georg von Holtzbrinck publishing group in Stuttgart) and Hachette (owned by Hachette in France). Within each of these houses are a series of smaller imprints, which once had an independent existence but have gradually been

absorbed – among them, Jonathan Cape, Chatto & Windus, Picador, Harvill and Virago. As well as these conglomerates, there are also a number of independents, notable among them Faber & Faber, Canongate and Granta (though Granta is now owned by Sigrid Rausing, from the family who invented tetrapak). There are sound financial reasons for conglomeracy: we live in a multi-media age and global village. But the fear is that the strong individual character of independent imprints is slowly being lost.

Clearly one problem publishers face is the arrival of the ebook, This isn't quite as grave a problem as that faced by newspapers, who are struggling to find ways to make money as their circulation shrinks and growing numbers of readers access newspapers for free, online (the exception being papers like the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, which have introduced a pay-wall). Publishers do have a paywall: to download a book onto your Kindle from Amazon takes only seconds but you do (mostly) have to pay for it. Still, the price is generally cheaper than what you pay for a printed copy – which means less of a return for authors and publishers alike. And though readers of my generation (those over fifty) swear by printed text, and lovingly enumerate the physical pleasures of holding a book in our hands, we are, if not dinosaurs, certainly Neanderthals. The future is the ebook, there seems little doubt of that, and its potential is enormous, and still to be realized and tapped. I imagine that in ten years' time when I'm reading a new novel, there'll be numerous formats for me to choose from: the old-fashioned printed word; the plain text ebook version; and the special feature ebook version, where, for example, with any quote from a song in the text you'll have the option of clicking and playing it, or if there's a reference to a film there'll be a short clip from it; or perhaps there'll be a specially created youtube-like piece of footage which enacts a scene from the book - all this, along with an author interview, and editors, critics and agents talking up the book as well, and even extras such as manuscript pages from an earlier draft. In other words, for the ebook version of a novel there will be the kind of additional features that are commonplace with DVDs, which you can access or ignore as you choose.

If you do not have a good bookshop nearby, and you are in a rush to have a book, it is natural to turn to Amazon. And if your shelves are full already, and you want that book *really* quickly, in a matter of seconds, you will more than likely want to download it onto your iPad or Kindle. A key turning point in human history came in 2011 when the total of people alive on the planet – seven billion – was estimated to exceed the number of people who had ever lived. And another turning point came in 2012 when Amazon reported that its ebook sales now exceeded its sales of print books – for every 100 of the latter it sold 105 of the former. The costs of e books are so cheap, compared to printed books, and will go on getting cheaper, for obvious reasons: you do not need jacket designers, publicists, a sales force, a warehouse where the books are kept, and so on. And it is not just the matter of cost, it is the power to have a book at a moment's notice. When my wife discovered that her book club was only a few days away,

and that the local bookshop didn't have a copy of the book she was due to read, and that the London library didn't have one either, I turned to Amazon: I could order the book for £10 and it would with luck arrive in 48 hours, or I could pay £5 and the ebook would be on her Kindle in seconds.

Bookshops have suffered as a result of the new technology. As with publishers, they divide between the conglomerates and the independents – Waterstones, WH Smith and Borders, on the one hand, and little high street shops, along with Foyles and Daunt Books in London, on the other. The arrival of Waterstones in the 1980s was a great boon to authors and publishers alike. Many of the stores had managers who knew their stuff and organized events, and put an individual stamp on the shop when they set out their wares. That era has passed. And perhaps the extent of autonomy the stores enjoyed has been exaggerated. I was thrilled when in 1994 my book *And When Did You Last See Your Father* was chosen as the Waterstones 'Book of the Month' – it meant having pride of place in every one of their stores nationwide and helped a book that would otherwise have had a low-profile existence become a best-seller. What I did not know is that to be selected like that comes at a price for the publishers; they have to put up the money for the promotion, these days, I would guess, to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds. So when you walk in to a bookstore and see a book being heavily promoted, you should realise that is not because the bookstore manager has read it and loves it but because the publisher is paying for the privilege. Every novel has its promotional budget, usually quite small, but the more commercial the author the more money will be put into getting the book in the shop window, or in a prominently placed dumpbin.

Literary Prizes are another way to sell books. In Britain it has become increasingly important to win or at least get on the shortlist for the big-money prizes – notably the Man Booker prize (which has traditionally been open to writers from India, Africa and Australasia as well as the UK, and which from 2014 has been open to American authors as well), the Bailey's Prize for Women's Fiction, formerly known as the Orange Prize (open to women from all those countries, plus the US), and, to a lesser extent, the Costa Prize (open to Brits only but including poetry, biography and children's books as well as fiction). There are many smaller prizes, but these are the ones that count, not so much because of the prize money they offer - £50,000 in the case of the Man Booker – but the sales they generate. The lives of those who win them are transformed, and international celebrity guaranteed. I am all for prizes, but just as publishing conglomerates pose a risk to independence and autonomy, and Amazon is putting small local bookshops out of business, so the weight the big prizes carry poses a risk to the many who fail to get shortlisted. The only interest the media tend to show in books is when there is a prize involved. And the interest always focuses on the famous who did or did not win out. Competition is well and good, in its place. But the only competitiveness serious writers feel is

with themselves – to write a better book than last time or at least (as Samuel Beckett would put it) fail better.

The literary pages in newspapers are another way for books to get attention. It is sometimes said that these have shrunk in size. But when I was editing the *Observer* book pages, back in the 1980s, we had only two or three pages – whereas now it has more than that, and the *Guardian*, *Times* and *Telegraph* all have separate book sections. Their presence suggests we are still a lively book culture, but how far reviews themselves have an effect on sales is doubtful. More crucial is something that publishers admit is indefinable, ‘word of mouth’ – news of a good book excitedly being passed around for no apparent reason (since many a good book does not cause the slightest stir). These days there are other ways to help a book along. For six or seven years, the Richard and Judy television show fulfilled that function; any book chosen as one of their titles went straight into the bestseller charts. Now the show has been shunted to a more obscure channel, there is no such effect. But the medium of twitter has sometimes done wonders for a book – if a celebrity recommends a title, his or her followers go out and buy it. And there are blogs as well. There has been a debate in Britain as to whether blogs are not more important than reviews these days, and taking over the role of critical judgment. That seems unlikely to me. But blogging is an inescapable part of the current landscape.

Libraries are another casualty of the digital revolution. The year before last, one in five of professional librarians in Britain lost their jobs - 700 out of 3500. And many libraries have closed because of cuts being made by local authorities, which take the view that they’re no longer relevant to today’s society. ‘Child abuse’ the playwright Alan Bennett has called the closures, thinking back to the formative part that books played in his own childhood. Many authors have joined campaigns to save public libraries but their efforts have had little effect. My local library in south London has been half-rescued, after being taken over by a charity for the aged, with room made available for a limited range of the books that used to line the shelves of the local authority-run library. But the stock is smaller and a public space has gone.

How you regard the digital revolution that has driven all these changes – as a catastrophe or heaven-sent opportunity – will depend to some degree on your age (the older we are, the slower to get our heads round the new technology) but far more on what kind of temperament you have. Half glass full or half glass empty? I had telling examples of both positions recently. On one day I talked to a children’s writer and small publisher who was glass brimming over – he was about to produce an ebook version of the children’s classic *The Wind in the Willows*, which would allow kids to touch the screen so as to activate music, animate the illustrations, move the protagonists around, and so on – an interactive experience with a classic. The next day I was discussing the relationship between journalism and literature. In the audience was Nick Davies, a prominent investigative journalist, the man who exposed the phone

hacking scandal in the *Guardian*. In his opinion, the Internet is destroying journalism, publishing and the music business, partly because it is a free for all with no quality control (people can post whatever they like) and partly for financial or business reasons – if consumers can download everything for free, or almost free, how are authors, journalists and musicians to make a living?

I am very mindful of this last point. For 15 years I made my living working on the books pages of newspapers, as an editor. Will anyone be able to do that in the future? Have printed book reviews by specialist reviewers not had their day, now that websites and blogs allow anyone and everyone to have their say? And since 1995 I have made my living in part from freelance writing – of journalism but also books. The last three books have been what is classified literary fiction. (Once upon a time it was called fiction, full stop, and calling it literary fiction is already marginalizing it, even if it enjoys a prestige as a genre that science fiction and romantic fiction lack.) Could I look forward to a lifetime career as a writer of literary fiction if I was starting out now? I doubt it. In the 1990s, advances were generous, in part because of the power wielded by the new breed of hustling literary agents. Those days are over now. Advances have fallen. Sales overall have not fallen to the same extent, but the revenue from books is so much smaller. I doubt that a young novelist today could hope to survive except by having a day job. No harm in that, perhaps. Many writers in the past have worked – as journalists, teachers, doctors, civil servants and so on. But a significant number of them enjoyed independent wealth – they did not need to work, because they were privileged by birth. I hate to think that we might be returning to such an era: fiction as the product of the leisured classes.

I do not think the digital revolution spells the end of publishing as we know it. But nor am I a technophile, eagerly welcoming every advance and dismissing those who loved printed texts as Luddites. It is sometimes said, for instance, that the great thing about the new digital age is that it is wonderfully democratic – that with the middlemen (the publishers, editors and agents) cut out, everyone will get be published. Now we can all have blogs, and put our poems and novels online, or self-publish ebooks; it is cheap to do so. And we all know of great books that have been turned down by publishers - famously William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, rejected by twenty-odd publishers before Faber accepted it – as well as others we don't know of that have perhaps undeservedly slipped into oblivion. But I would hazard that for every one of those there are a hundred that have been *deservedly* turned down. Books to my mind are a collaborative process, a team effort. We tend to forget this in academic circles, where the author is seen as a romantic genius, an originator, ploughing a lonely furrow. But every author needs help – an extra pair of eyes, a friend and mentor, under whose critical gaze the book passes and thanks to whom it can be revised and improved before it goes public.

Authors are often rude about the failings of their editors and agents. But they would be lost without them. And by the same token, the publishing scene in Britain would look very

British Publishing and the Rise of Creative Writing: A Personal View

different without the presence of creative writing programmes, through which most of today's poets and novelists now emerge.

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Discounted and Digital: British Publishing in the Wake of the Net Book Agreement

AMREI KATHARINA NENSEL

“The Wild West” is the title of one chapter of Thompson’s *Merchants of Culture*, a study of the publishing business in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The title refers to the discounting practices in the British book industry, which has experienced a rise in discounts that publishers offer to the retail sector after abandoning an agreement to fix resale prices for books, the so-called Net Book Agreement. Its abolition in the 1990s had a lasting impact on the development of trade practices, prompting the comparison to the lawless Wild West (Thompson 2012, 292–311).

Publishing in the UK is a small and yet diverse, competitive but also interdependent industry. This chapter attempts to give an overview of its history and recent developments within the industry with a particular focus on the book trade. For the purpose of this chapter, all activities involved with the publishing industry will be viewed and discussed as commercial endeavours in the literary marketplace, not taking into account the higher ideals that are associated with it in the ideational literary market.¹

With a brief excursion into the history of British publishing this chapter demonstrates how the rise in specialised professions and the evolution of the book into a mass medium eventually led to the introduction of the Net Book Agreement which is seen by many as the most important stabilizing force influencing the book trade in the twentieth century. This, as well as the agreement’s demise and the ensuing developments within the British publishing industry are presented with a focus on book retailing.

After the abolition of the Net Book Agreement the industry was shaken by another cataclysmic event, the emergence of digital publishing. Recent developments within the market

¹ See Reinfandt’s “The Present in Perspective” (the first chapter) on the distinction of the literary market (ideational) and the literary marketplace (materialistic/commercial).

are therefore analysed against the backdrop of both the abandonment of resale price maintenance and the emergence of digital publishing to show the underlying trend towards concentration of ownership and market share in the industry.

1. From Quills to Steam Engines: Publishing between the 15th and the 19th century

The Beginnings of the British Book Trade

Publishing as the oldest media-related industry in Britain became central to British culture shortly after the first mechanical printing press was brought to England in 1476. However, the origins of the bookselling business as we know it today can arguably be traced back even further to the development of a commercial book trade for manuscripts between the twelfth and the fourteenth century. In this period, stationer's shops in towns such as Oxford started to meet the universities' growing demand for books by manufacturing them in greater numbers than the monasteries had been able to produce up to that point. For the first time in the history of the book in England this meant that laypeople took on a significant role in the production, sale and acquisition of books (cf. Eisenstein 2005, 103; Clanchy [2009] 2009, 194; Feather 2006, 9–10).² It is with this development in mind that Hellinga argues: "Without a rising demand for texts produced in highly legible, well-manageable codex form,³ Johann Gutenberg might not have persisted in developing his ingenious inventions, or promising trials might have met with indifference" (2009, 208). With the invention of the printing press, the growing demand for books could be satisfied more easily, as identical copies of a work could be produced at a significantly quicker rate than by scribes hand-copying them. However, compared to the production of manuscripts, the initial investment and necessary technical skills, as well as the amount of labour and planning involved before the printing of the book was considerably higher (Hellinga 2009, 211).

² It must be noted that usually only members of the richer classes, the clergy and institutions such as universities were able to afford manuscripts which were still very labour intensive (and thus expensive) to produce (Feather 2006, 9–10).

³ The term "codex" simply refers to "folded sheets held together in a binding" (Feather 2006, 9). Hellinga elaborates a little more on this process as she explains: "To make a codex, sheets of paper or vellum are folded together to form quires, which are sewn together to form volumes, which can be protected by a binding of various degrees of solidity" (Hellinga 2009, 209–10). This practice of binding a book is still in use today, however, today the term codex is most commonly used to refer to old, bound manuscripts rather than printed books in general ("codex" 2005, 287).

Due to the higher fixed costs⁴ associated with a print run,⁵ it was only profitable to produce a book if the print run (and consequently the sales) exceeded a certain number of copies. Then again, selling more than a handful of copies required a marketing and distribution system – in short, as a consequence of the invention of print “the existing book trade had to be reinvented” (Hellinga 2009, 217; see also Feather 2006, 19). The following quote from *A History of British Publishing* illustrates these beginnings of the vernacular book trade in England:

The English trade in printed books during the first century of its existence can be characterised as a combination of two strands. The first was the import and distribution of continental books in Latin, largely consisting of classical and theological texts, with some Roman law and contemporary scholarly works in Latin. The second was the production in England – almost entirely in London – of a comparatively small number of books in English which were then sold through retailers in the capital and – to a much lesser extent – through stationers and booksellers in the provincial towns and at fairs and markets. Few if any of these vernacular books were exported, not least because the English language was virtually unknown outside its native land. Although the import trade – then and for many decades described by contemporaries by the significant name of the ‘Latin trade’ – was probably far more important in economic terms than the vernacular book trade, it was nevertheless from the latter that the publishing industry developed. (Feather 2006, 20)

That the production of books was largely concentrated in London, the political, economic and social centre of England, is hardly surprising, given that the book trade could not rely on a well-established distribution system that would have guaranteed printers in remote locations to sell a sufficient amount of copies to justify the high initial costs of a print run. While London has remained the publishing capital of the United Kingdom (Feather 2006, 82–84; Key Note Publications April 2011, 21), most other traits of the trade as it is described above were subject to substantial changes over the following centuries.⁶

⁴ Costs that remain unchanged by the number of produced items (output) are fixed costs. In contrast, variable costs typically increase and decrease with the output.

⁵ The print run refers to the number of books produced at one time. Since the typeset pages would usually be disassembled after the planned number of copies had been produced, printing of further copies would require almost the same initial expenditure as the original print run.

⁶ The gradual evolution into the book trade as we know it today took place over several centuries and can only be briefly sketched in this article. For a detailed analysis of these developments see: (Feather 2006), (Raven 2007), (Eisenstein 2005), (Finkelstein and McCleery 2012) and (Robinson 2014).

The Rise of Specialised Professions

In order to discuss the development of the publishing industry in more detail, a model of the most important players involved in the production and sale of a book in contemporary British publishing will be used to outline which new specialised occupations came into existence as a consequence of the invention of print. Figure 2 is a simplified version of the circuit of the book, based on Feather’s adoption of Darnton’s model of the communications circuit.⁷ This model of the different agents in the book trade can be used to illustrate how the roles have become more differentiated over the course of several centuries since the introduction of mechanical printing. It shows the agents most typically involved in producing and selling a (print) book in today’s publishing environment and indicates the most relevant interactions between them: After an author has written a book (often at the request of the publisher) the text will be prepared for publication by the publisher and is then produced by the printer (and binder). The printed copies are shipped to the distributor (or wholesaler) who delivers copies to booksellers

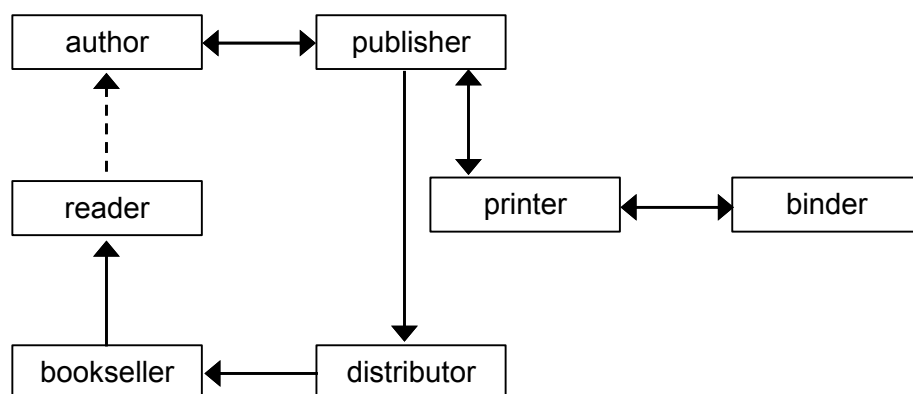


Figure 2: The Circuit of the Book
 Source: Feather 2009, 232–34; Darnton 2006, 12

from whom readers may purchase them.⁸ Even though the agents involved in this process and their interactions might vary⁹ – in fact, Figure 2 could be expanded upon to include a variety of subagents, especially within the publishing house – this very general overview is particularly useful to outline the historic developments that had to take place in order for this model to come into existence.

⁷ Reinfandt’s “The Present in Perspective” (the first chapter) includes a matrix charting the roles of agents in the literary field.
⁸ This is only a rough sketch displaying the typical publication process a new title from a generic contemporary publishing house will undergo. Depending on different publishing practices and business models, some of the agents in Figure 2 might not be involved; for example if a publisher, or a self-publishing author, sells the publication directly to the ultimate consumer, effectively cutting out other subsequent agents such as the bookseller.
⁹ See part two of *The Book in Society* (Robinson 2014) for a detailed overview of the different agents involved in the “book circuit”.

In the fifteenth century, the term 'Stationer' was "generally applied to anyone who made, bound, or sold books" (Raven 2007, 12) and the natural successor of this in the printing age was an entity that unified the roles of the publisher, printer and bookseller. This entity was first referred to as 'stationer' and then as 'bookseller' while the term 'publisher' only came into use in the early nineteenth century. From the seventeenth century onward, the 'printer' had become a separate profession which was only rarely combined with publishing or bookselling activities any more. The final separation of booksellers and publishers (in the modern sense of the word) did not happen until the eighteenth century (Feather 2009, 233–34).

The roles of the printer, bookseller and publisher as we know them today emerged gradually until the nineteenth century while the role of the 'binder' was subject to an almost contrary development:

For a long time binding was considered something apart from printing in the process of bookmaking. Right up to the twentieth century, it was always possible to buy a set of unbound sheets from the publisher, to be bound at the cost of the purchaser (a fact emphasized in Darnton's diagram). But long before the invention of printing there were connections between stationers and binders, and in the fifteenth century it must have been as easy to buy a printed book bound or unbound [...] Not until the nineteenth century was binding automatically integrated into the process through which the book went on the way to the ultimate purchaser (Adams and Barker [2006] 2006, 55).

As Adams and Barket point out, the binder acted as a separate agent according to the outline of the process in Figure 2 with direct links to the ultimate consumer as well as the bookseller (in today's sense of the word) and has only been fully integrated into the process of book production before distribution in the nineteenth century.

The diversifications into more specialised professions were most likely the result of pure necessity and due to economics of scale. As the trade developed over the centuries, and with improved technology, infrastructure and increasing numbers of literates, the combined role of publisher, printer and bookseller became less attractive than specialised professions. The numbers of copies produced and sold greatly exceeded those of books that had been produced and sold by a single entity in the manuscript age. This in turn required a distributional system, a factor that ultimately led to the rise of specialised wholesalers. Furthermore, the new printing technology required a specific set of skills and high initial investments in printing facilities. Since the machinery and the skilled labourers were a valuable commodity, taking on print jobs was sensible and eventually led to the separation of the role of printer and publisher/bookseller (Feather 2009, 237–45; Finkelstein and McCleery 2012, 47–48).

The Emergence of the Mass Market

The nineteenth century was characterised by two strands of development that coincided and heavily affected the size and structure of the British publishing industry. First of all, it saw the

development of mechanised printing, semi-mechanised case binding and papermaking (Raven 2007, 325; Feather 2006, 98–99). Secondly, the growth in market size as Britain developed into a literate society increased the demand for printed works (Feather 2006, 86). Both of these developments together, the advances in printing technology and the growth of the market, led to a revolutionary rise in production volume: “British publishers began producing around 100 new titles every year to 1750, a figure that had increased six-fold by 1825. By 1900, title output reached 6,000 per year” (Guthrie 2011, 7).

The drastic changes that took place during the nineteenth century are best illustrated by comparing the situation at the beginning and end of the century. Banham describes the publishing practices up to the beginning of the nineteenth century as a ‘craft’: “Papermaking, punch-cutting, type-casting, composition, inking, and binding were all done by hand, and printing was still a process using a wooden hand press – little had changed since the end of the fifteenth century.” By the end of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, in the wake of the industrial revolution, the printing of books had become almost entirely mechanised (Banham 2009, 273). Indeed, when Feather outlines this development it becomes apparent that the developments in the nineteenth century go beyond merely taking up new technology and selling books to a wider market:

The British book trade in the nineteenth century became a modern industry in every way. It took advantage of mechanised systems of production, developed highly efficient distribution arrangements based on the most up-to-date means of transport, and evolved a division of labour both between and within its various branches (Feather 2006, 95).

The entire publishing industry was subject to a complete re-organization with the overall result that printed works could be produced and distributed more efficiently and were available at lower prices than ever before, particularly during the second half of the century (Eliot 1994, 59–77).

The flipside of these developments was the fact that, with larger print runs and a wider market to sell to, publishers started to diminish their profit margins in favour of a greater turnover. This development caused problems for the booksellers who were competing by undercutting each other’s prices. As a consequence, many booksellers faced severe financial problems and several went bankrupt in the second half of the century. Others were simply no longer able to stock titles that were not guaranteed to sell fast enough in order to avoid cash-flow problems. Feather argues that the trade was in a “serious crisis” and that this in turn confronted the publishers with the very real possibility of being cut off from the market as there were not enough bookshops to move the stock they produced (Feather 2006, 101). Publishing for the mass market thus came at the cost of rendering bookselling significantly less profitable, a development that caused severe problems for the industry.

2. Paperbacks and Conglomerates: The 20th century and the Net Book Agreement

Profit Margins and Discounts

Very simply put, “[t]he aim of a book publisher is to publish and sell at a profit” (Clark and Phillips 2008, 67). Naturally, the need to operate profitably exists not just for the publisher but for all agents involved in the publishing process. The diversification of professions that take part in the production chain also meant that book sales had to sustain all the emerging specialised professions and that the individual agents had to agree on payment for provided services or on a system that allowed them to share in the profits. Eventually, the industry settled on the system still mainly in use today which requires the publisher to take the risk of publishing and producing (or rather paying for the production of) a title whose copies are in turn sold at a discount to distributors and then on to booksellers who essentially share in the profit in case they are able to make sales. The risk, however, remains with the publisher as booksellers may return unsold copies to them in order to claim a refund of their cash outlay.¹⁰

The profit margins of agents in the publishing industry largely depend on costs they have to cover and the price at which they can sell their services or products, which includes the discounting practices to which they have to adhere.¹¹ There are two main types of discounts that should be discussed here: trade discounts and discounts on recommended resale prices of books. The latter are given to the ultimate consumer and are mostly used with the intention to increase sales of a particular title or to increase the overall sales and/or market share of a bookseller or other retail outlet. Trade discounts are discounts on the recommended resale price that publishers and wholesalers give to other agents involved in later stages of the distribution or selling of a title. In most cases a publisher will set a recommended resale price for a book and then sell the produced copies at a discounted rate¹² to the wholesaler who will sell it at a slightly higher – but still discounted – price to booksellers. The profit margin of each agent is the difference between the costs of the product and the price at which it can be sold on to the next agent. For example, a bookseller would deduct the cost for running a bookshop and the cost for the trade-discounted titles from the turnover to determine the profit.

The figure below outlines how the total revenue generated from a publisher's sales might be offset by the various costs the production and distribution of a title incurs. The given

¹⁰ Booksellers may also place a ‘firm order’ which does not allow them to return copies but might enable them to negotiate better discounts (Clark and Phillips 2008, 200).

¹¹ Arguably discounting practices do not directly affect the profit margin of printers and binders as these businesses provide services and generally do not share in the profit generated by the sales of a title.

¹² The discount is negotiable and depends on several factors which include the type and genre of the title as well as the balance of power between the buyer and the seller of the copies (Clark and Phillips 2008, 249).

percentages are loosely based on Clark and Phillips but should by no means be understood as anything more than an illustration of how a publisher's profit might be calculated.

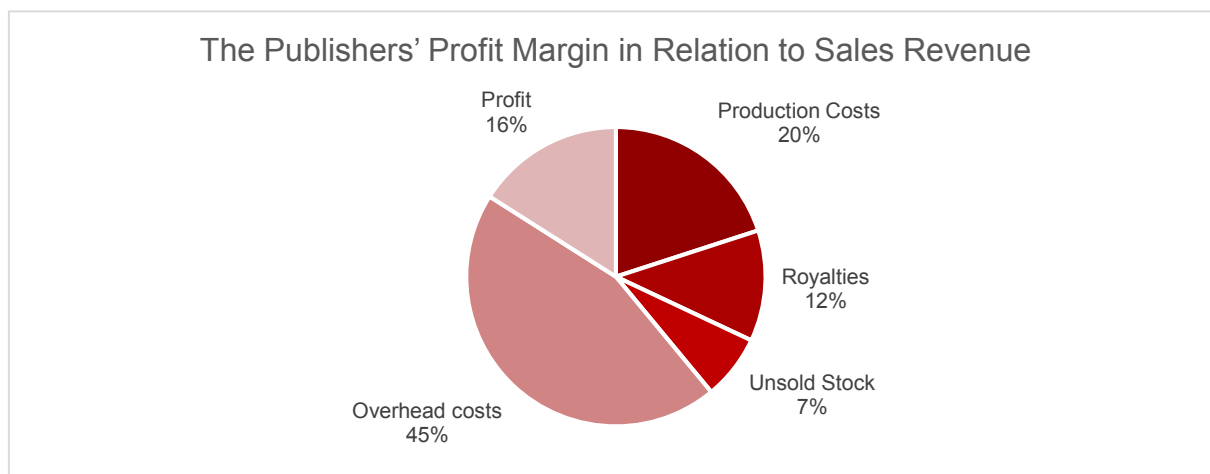


Figure 3: The Publishers' Profit Margin in Relation to Sales Revenue
Source: Example based on Clark and Phillips 2014, 117

The relative share of production costs depends greatly on the type of publication (the production of a picture book is costlier than that of a paperback novel for example) and on various other factors such as whether the title is also or exclusively published in a digital format. For example, royalties for ebooks are usually significantly higher than royalties on print titles (25%). Moreover, since ebooks are subject to the value-added tax (VAT), 20% of the overall revenue would have to be deducted to account for that. Unsold stock would however not need to be factored in for a solely digital publication. Depending on the structure of the publisher and the type of publication some of the overhead costs (editorial, marketing, sales, distribution, etc.) might also be outsourced and vary greatly (Clark and Phillips 2014, 117). Publishers will usually calculate whether a particular title might be profitable based on the expected revenue before the decision whether or not to produce this title is made. Since most of the cost – such as the outlay for a print run and the publisher's overheads – have to be paid regardless of whether a title fulfils its sales prognosis it is vital for publishers to be able to calculate the discounts that will be given to booksellers and the consumers as accurately as possible to ensure they remain profitable.

After the industry had become increasingly differentiated and conquered the mass market, book prices dropped and competition became fierce in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, the option to fix resale prices (and thus secure the profit margins of publishers and booksellers) was very appealing to the publishing industry. In an attempt to remedy the situation, the industry adopted the Net Book Agreement at the beginning of the twentieth century (Raven 2007, 330).

The Net Book Agreement

The Net Book Agreement (NBA), which was effective from 1900 until the mid-1990s when it was gradually abandoned and finally ruled illegal by the Restrictive Practices Court in 1997 (Francis Fishwick 02.05.2008), “was the principal support upon which the whole structure of the British publishing industry rested for almost the whole of the twentieth century” (Feather 2006, 152). It was essentially a contract between publishers and booksellers in Britain that enabled resale price maintenance and thus protected profit margins for both publishers and booksellers (Feather 2006, 101–3). The impact it has had on British publishing is illustrated by the fact that John Feather calls the NBA “the cornerstone of the whole structure of British publishing in the twentieth century” (148).

In 1900, the NBA was initiated by the publishing industry to prevent price wars between booksellers. It allowed publishers to set a ‘net price’ for a title at which the booksellers would sell it. If booksellers did not comply and sold a book at less than the net price, publishers would cease to supply that bookseller on ‘the standard conditions of sale of net books’ (giving a 30 to 40% discount on the net price). Adhering to this agreement was beneficial to both parties since it guaranteed booksellers’ and publishers’ profit margins (152).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, bookseller chains who held a significant percentage of the market share at the time abandoned the agreement as the result of an on-going debate since the 1980s (226). The reason for challenging the NBA was a simple economic calculation: “[I]t was assumed that the increase in the volume of sales that would be generated by discounting books would more than compensate for the cost of the price cut and the erosion of the market that would ensue” (Thompson 2012, 302). As a result, the agreement to maintain the resale price of books, which had endured throughout the twentieth century, collapsed and booksellers were free to sell books at discounted prices.

Protecting the Trade

The Net Book Agreement framed all developments that took place during the twentieth century in the British publishing landscape. In general, it had the effect of protecting profit margins and preventing booksellers from engaging in price competition which would have caused a shift of market share towards larger retailers by forcing smaller independent booksellers out of the market. The lack of competition, however, was not necessarily beneficial for customers, as fixed book pricing theoretically allowed publishers to set prices higher than they needed to be (Feather 2006, 158).¹³

¹³ See Stevenson’s *Book Makers: British Publishing in the Twentieth Century* for an in-depth discussion of the rise and fall of the NBA and its formative influence on the British book trade (Stevenson 2010).

The twentieth century brought many changes for the structure and practices of the industry, aside from the continuity of the product, the printed book,¹⁴ and these changes affected the business structure of the industry as a whole, publishing formats, production techniques and profit margins along with discounting practices. Particularly the economic environment created under the administration of Margaret Thatcher had a lasting impact on the publishing industry (Stevenson 2010, 249). One of the major changes in the industry in the twentieth century was the rise of conglomerates that had a centralizing effect on the compartmentalised structure of businesses involved in publishing and bookselling and meant a turn away from the dominance of small and family businesses (Feather 2006, 220). The central aspect of this change might very well be the entry of “new players [. . .] accountants, professional managers, shareholders, holding companies, and all the apparatus of modern business” (227). Globally acting conglomerates such as Pearson, Bertelsmann and Random House arrived on the scene in the second half of the century and eventually, a “handful of large international publishing groups came to control over half the home market” while “medium-sized firms [became] a rarity” (Clark and Phillips 2008, 15). Clark and Phillips attribute this to the deregulation of financial markets and argue that the consequent “increased availability of long and short-term equity and debt financing allow[ed] the large players to take over medium-sized publishers, and small publishers to expand or start in business” (15).

This development also had a strong impact on bookselling, namely advancing the concentration of UK bookselling that had formerly consisted of WHSmith, the major chain bookseller, a variety of small independent chains and a large number of independent bookshops. New chains, principally Waterstone’s and Dillons, entered the market in the 1980s and brought with them a new business model, that of “large well-stocked bookshops, stocking up to 50,000 titles, three to four times the size of many independents” (Clark and Phillips 2008, 20). The market entry of these new competitors caused small independent bookstores to lose market share and led to a renegotiation of the trade discounts offered to the chains since they now controlled a significant portion of the market. A parallel development was the rise of trade wholesalers supplying independent bookshops and small independent chains which lead to a further increase in trade discounts given by publishers. Overall, these developments illustrate the fact that large chain booksellers and wholesalers became more significant in terms of market share and consequently caused a shift of bargaining power away from publishers (20).

¹⁴ The first notable ‘new media publishing’ or ‘multimedia publishing’ efforts took place in the 1990s with the emergence of CD-ROM titles. Experimenting with this new format in consumer publishing cost many publishers dearly; many argue this caused publishers to be cautious about adopting new formats and technologies as they gained more and more importance during the first decade of the twentieth century (Clark and Phillips 2014, 50).

The rise of the mass market paperback in the twentieth century further contributed to the rising importance of the book retail industry. Even though, in addition to very short 'self-covered'¹⁵ titles that had been around for quite some time and a few paperbacks that had been published in the 1870s, it took the founding of Penguin Books in 1935 and the ingenious underlying business model¹⁶ to introduce the format to the mass market. Penguin relied on large print runs at low production cost due to the paperback format and calculated a recommended resale price so low that 17,000 copies had to be sold for the title to break even (Banham 2009, 288–89). If the strategy works – and for Penguin it did – it means a significant gain in market share. Overall, throughout the century the concept of selling large quantities, especially large quantities of a single title, gained momentum, effectively introducing the term 'bestseller' to the wider public. Bestselling lists became a permanent feature of the book market,¹⁷ a development that further illustrates the concentration effects taking place in the twentieth century.

3. Negotiating New Terms: The Introduction of New Technologies and the Book Market after the NBA

So far this chapter has given an overview of the developments that lead up to the NBA and its demise at the end of the twentieth century. Now it is time to evaluate the book market in the aftermath of the abolition of resale price maintenance for books. This section begins by evaluating the post-NBA market and reviewing important developments that took place since books were no longer being sold at fixed prices. However, these changes can only be understood against the backdrop of the impact digitisation has had upon the publishing industry and in conjunction with the concentration processes that had already begun during the twentieth century. The introduction of digital printing, digital media formats and new reading devices has reshaped the market drastically over the last few years and, contrary to some expectations, it further increased the concentration effects.

¹⁵ 'Self-covered' refers to titles with a cover that is printed on the same paper stock as the inner pages. Pamphlets, booklets and brochures are often bound with such a cover to save on production cost and weight at the expense of durability and longevity.

¹⁶ Lane modelled his first Penguins on the English-language reprints published by Albatros to be sold outside of the British empire (Banham 2009, 288).

¹⁷ For a short German introduction into the bestseller phenomenon see Antonello (2008, 12–17). Marjasch (1946) and Faulstich (1983) have provided two of the most notable early contributions to the field, paving the ground for further research into this sub-discipline. The most comprehensive recent addition to research into the bestseller phenomenon is probably the anthology *Hype* (Helgason, Karrholm, and Steiner 2014).

Flooding the Market with Titles

One of the most striking characteristics of the British publishing industry today is the immense number of titles that are being published every year.

Figure 4 has been compiled from several Keynote Reports and the 2016 Statistical Handout of the Publishers Association and depicts the development of title output between 1990 and 2014. Due to the fact that Nielsen Book Data¹⁸ has only been available from 2000 onwards, the earlier figures provided in the Keynote Report on Bookselling in 2000 rely on data provided by the Whittaker Information Service and The Bookseller, which were collected using a slightly different methodology. However, the numbers are sufficiently comparable to demonstrate that the number of new and revised titles published in the UK has significantly risen since 1990, namely from roughly 64,000 to more than 200,000 in 2014, which means the number of new publications has tripled in this time span. The increase in title production since 2000 amounts to roughly 50%.

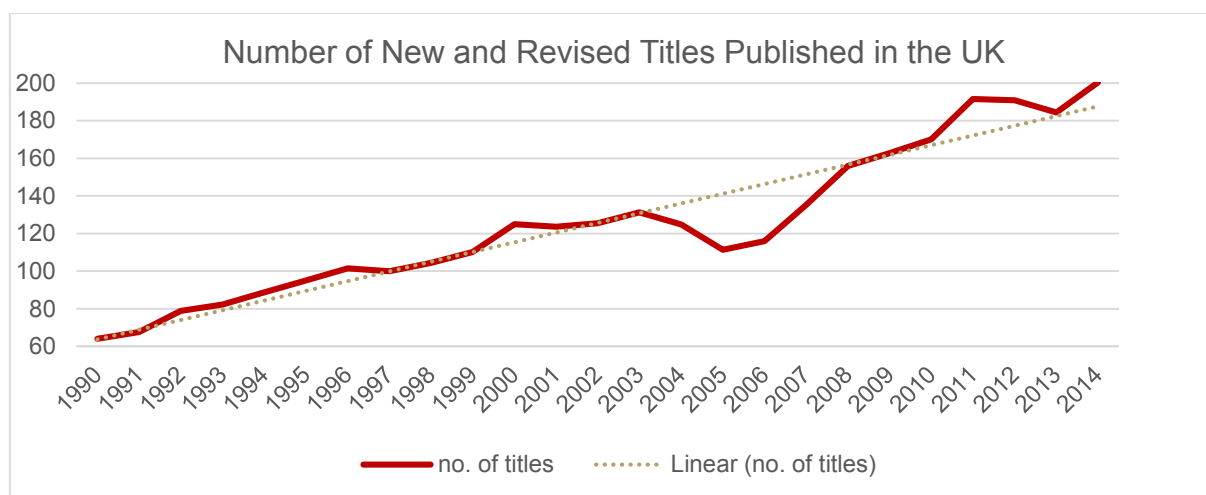


Figure 4: Number of Titles Published in the UK
 Sources: Nielsen, Whittaker Information Services, and The Bookseller taken from Key Note Publications 2000, 9, 2007a, 13; The Publishers Association 2016b, 6

This significant increase in title production was not matched by growth in market value. On the contrary, the UK book market has been slowly declining in value since 2007. Even though directly after the abolition of the NBA the book market increased its value over several years

¹⁸ One of the main sources of data on the book market in the UK is Nielsen Book, a service that aims to catalogue the majority of book sales and provides the industry with most of the referenced figures and statistics that are being quoted today. Nielsen collects the sales data (it records both the recommended retail price and the actual price paid by the customer) by title as they are catalogued in the retailers' databases and allows its users to analyse the data by geographical area, type of retailer, author, etc. However, the service only began in the late 1990s (Feather 2006, 211) and is consequently not available for the years leading up to the abolition of the NBA. Its data relies on information provided by most of the major retail outlets such as bookshop chains, amazon.co.uk, supermarkets and major independents. It does, however, not monitor all retail outlets and sales of books, in particular direct sales are not monitored.

from an estimated worth of 2.86bn in 1997 (Key Note Publications 2000, 8) to 3.52bn in 2007 (Key Note Publications 2010, 9), once the inflation rate is factored in the real growth between 1997 and 2010 only amounts to 3.4% over the course of 10 years and can clearly not match the rise in title production.¹⁹ After 2007 the book market has been on an overall decline²⁰ until it reached its current value of 3.3bn in 2014, stagnating in 2015 (The Publishers Association 2016b, 1). Compared to the market value in 1997 and factoring in the inflation rate it should have been worth over 4.1bn; the loss in real terms amounts to roughly 25% (Trading Economics 2016). All in all, it can be concluded that the overall market value has declined since the abolition of the NBA while the title production has increased significantly.

Obvious factors such as the economic crisis and recession will most certainly have had a large impact on these developments. However, Keynote also attributes the decline in the market to technological advancements and points out that in the period of nominal market growth in the early twenty-first century, the emerging practice of price-cutting by retail chains and supermarkets prevented further growth in market value (Key Note Publications 2004b, 3). This not only illustrates that the practice of price-cutting, which is a direct result of the abolition of the NBA, has hindered market growth but also points at one development that has gone alongside the decrease in market value, i.e. the shift in the market share of retail outlets.

New Outlets

The changes in the structure of bookselling outlets have had a significant impact on the UK book industry during the last few decades and can be seen as the most dominant factor influencing the industry in the twenty-first century, further intensifying the concentration processes that begun in the second half of the twentieth century. The growing agglomeration of publishing houses increased the importance of book distributors and retail chains since they allowed publishers “to sell in bulk and dispose of a large percentage of a print run more or less at the time of publication” (Feather 2006, 225). This caused a shift in bargaining power and the instigation of discounting practices that favour larger outlets over e.g. independent bookshops.

The development of market share by outlet between 1998 and 2014 is outlined in Figure 5 (by volume) and Figure 6 (by value) below to illustrate how the importance of retail outlets shifted during this period away from bookshops, other specialist shops and direct sales. Both figures show clearly that online retailers have recorded the most significant growth in market share and became the main source of purchase, controlling nearly 50% of the market in 2014.

¹⁹ Based on the market value in 1997 and accounting for the yearly inflation rate the book market in 2007 would have to have been worth roughly 3.4bn for it to not have lost in real value (Trading Economics 2016).

²⁰ The value of the UK book market rose about 4% in 2012, a development which is largely attributed to the increase in sales generated by the romance series *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James.

Aside from supermarkets, an outlet for books that also increased its market share both in terms of volume and value until 2012 but has been on the decline ever since, all other outlets have lost market share to Internet retailing. Bookshops were hit particularly hard, their share declined by roughly 20% in value between 1998 and 2014.²¹ The category bookshop comprises both chains and independents. It seems noteworthy that, even though both types of shops have suffered losses both in market share and in their numbers, especially independent bookshops have had to close down in the last few years. Their number dropped below 1000 in 2014, a loss of roughly one third of independent bookstores over the course of less than a decade (Singh 2014). Internet retail of books and book retailing in supermarkets is largely done by business chains and conglomerates such as Amazon and Tesco, which goes to show that the reallocation of market share in the book retail industry is, simply put, the outcome of yet another concentration process.

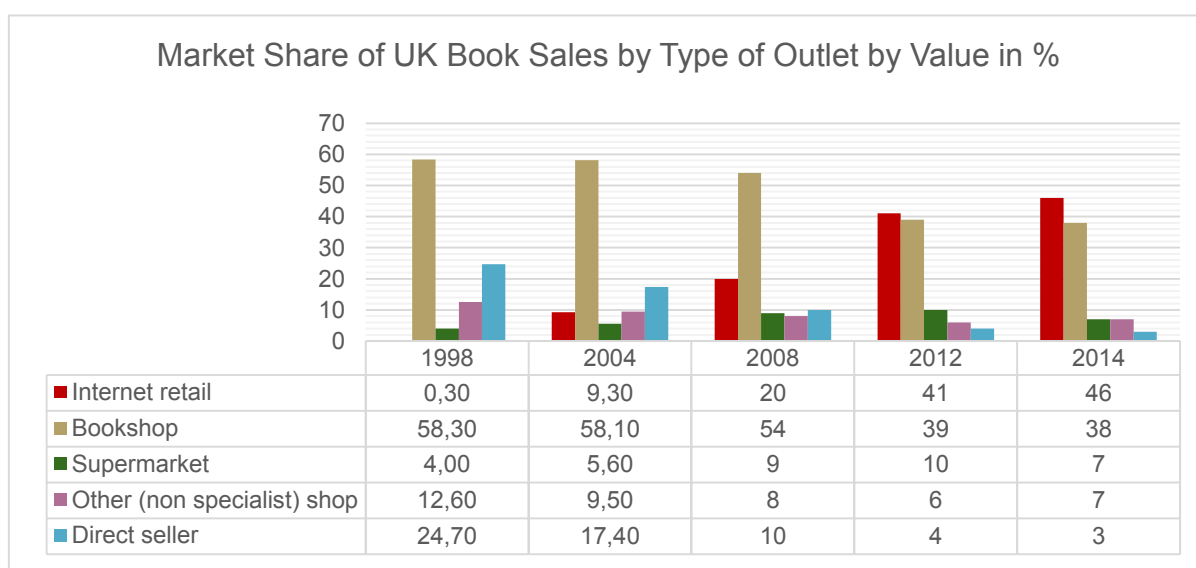


Figure 5: Market Share of UK Book Retail Sales by Type of Outlet by Value in %, 1998-2014
 Source: Books and Consumers Reports BA Reports Library 2015; The Publishers Association 2016a, 124; Key Note Publications 2007b, 30, 2004a, 28

²¹ It should be noted that the market share for bookshops is higher in terms of value than it is in terms of volume, indicating that the average sales price for items sold is slightly higher.

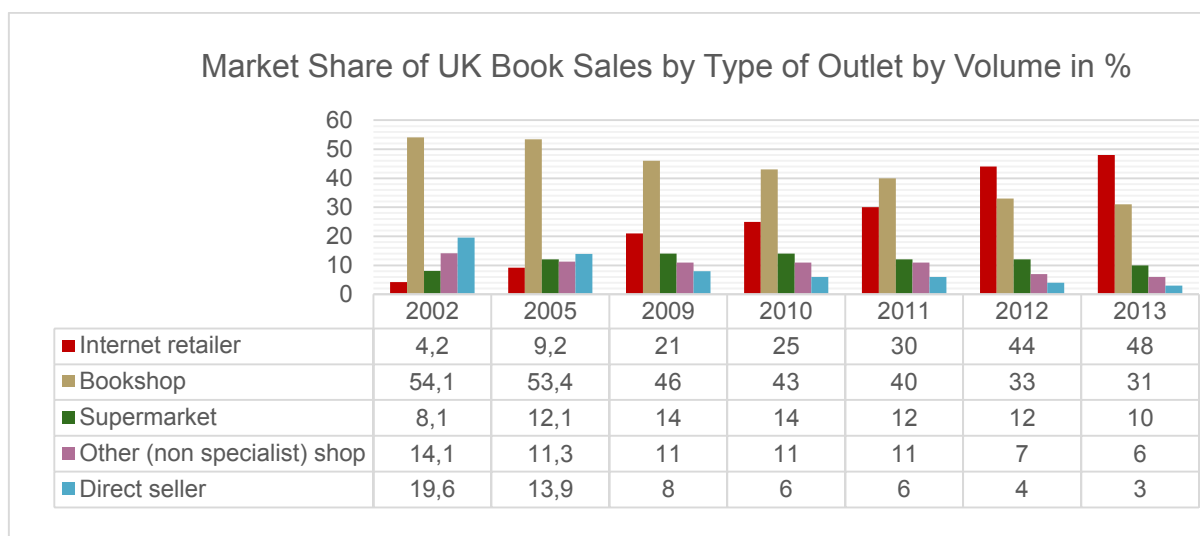


Figure 6: Market Share of UK Book Retail Sales by Type of Outlet by Volume in %, 2002-2013
Source: Books and Consumers Reports BA Reports Library 2015; Key Note Publications 2004a, 30

These developments can most certainly not be attributed to just one cause but it can be argued that the abolition of the NBA was a prerequisite and major contributing factor. The ability to cut prices redefined the rules for competing in the bookselling market and allowed big players such as supermarkets to gain market share with their model of buying a small number of titles in bulk and selling them at a fraction of the price they would have cost in a bookstore. Even though the rise in Internet retailing of books in the UK coincided with the abolition of the NBA, it should not be interpreted to be the result of the abandonment of resale price maintenance for books.²² Arguably, abandoning resale price maintenance could have sped up this development but all in all, the success of online retailing should be seen as the result of the increasing digitisation and a general change in buying habits.

The Impact of Digital Publishing

Aside from the fact that online bookstores have come to dominate the UK retail market, digitisation has also changed publishing practices, created new business models and new products. Innovations such as operating systems, digital production methods, digital marketing and retail as well as digital printing and e-publications have significantly changed the publishing environment over the past few decades. While “publishing has been operating in a digital environment for decades” (typesetting for example developed during the 1970s, and word processing in the 1980s; (Hall 2013, 7–8)), it was the recent emergence of digital products such as ebooks and

²² In 2014, Internet retail held roughly 16% of the book market in Germany (Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels 09.06.2015, 5). Given that the German book market still operates with resale price maintenance for books, it seems likely that abandoning resale price maintenance in the UK will have increased the rate of growth for online retail but it stands to reason that even under the NBA Internet retail would have come to dominate a significant portion of the market.

apps that seemed to cause the greatest stir and gave rise to a series of – ironically – books and articles predicting the death of the book.

Even though innovations that changed the publishing practice itself such as the ability to produce, edit and store content in an electronic format have laid the groundwork for the production and distribution of electronic books, ebooks only really started to take off once dedicated reading devices by Sony (in 2004) and more importantly Amazon (the Kindle in 2007) were introduced. Before this, ebooks had been a niche product mainly utilised in non-consumer publishing since they required a computer or laptop to be read. It took the introduction of a hand-held device that was exclusively created to enable a reading experience resembling that of a printed book to open the consumer market to electronic books. The downside to e-readers, however, is the fact that they cannot reproduce illustrations or pictures in a sufficient quality (or size) to compete with printed books featuring such content. This problem was addressed by the development of smart hand-held devices with full-colour displays such as smartphones and tablets, the first of its kind being Apple's iPhone in 2007. The subsequent success and rapid adaptation of mobile devices and tablets (the iPad was launched in 2010) have introduced even more options for reading, selling and producing books, including publications with sophisticated illustrations, video or interactive content (Hall 2013, 32–35).

Several aspects of electronic publishing brought about changes in the publishing industry. First of all, there is the need for an altered publication process, depending on the type of electronic content that is to be published. This can range from simply formatting the edited text into an appropriate file format (such as epub) to programming an app for an interactive book, producing additional content specific to electronic devices such as a map or a game, or even creating content that is to be consumed on various platforms as is the case with transmedia storytelling.²³ Secondly, there is the need to find one (or several) distributional channel(s) to sell the digital product.²⁴ There are several options of selling digital products such as the dedicated stores offered by the companies selling e-readers (e.g. the Kindle store or the Kobo store), via a website that was specifically set up for the author, series, publisher etc. or even as an electronic download that can be purchased directly in a brick-and-mortar bookshop – or anywhere else for that matter. However, the question of where to sell is actually tied to the third change in publishing practices, the need to market a digital product. The main problem

²³ For further reading on the concept of transmedia storytelling see Jenkins' *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) and the more recent *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013).

²⁴ Obviously the product could also just be offered as a free download. It should be noted that profitable business models can be based on offering free content to collect (and sell) user data or sell advertising space.

with selling a digital book is the need to direct the customer to the outlet where it can be purchased and downloaded. The deviation from the traditional printed form means the book is no longer sitting on a shelf in its physical form waiting to be picked up. While even getting the printed book on the shelf was the result of marketing efforts, the fact that there is no physical shelf on which a consumer might encounter the digital publication while browsing shows how the marketing needs and techniques for a digital publication have changed and that they are somewhat less straightforward simply due to the fact that the market for digital publications is still relatively new and in a state of flux. Marketing tools such as advertising, commissioning reviews, buying 'shelf space' in the chosen outlet(s), and promotional videos consequently gained even more importance when the need to market e-publications arose.

All in all, these changed practices meant that publishing houses needed to adapt their business models and skill sets if they wanted to enter and compete in the digital publishing market. It also meant a chance for companies that had not previously been involved in publishing but in an industry that required a matching skill-set, such as the gaming industry, to enter the book market more easily. The mere possibility of being able to publish an ebook quickly and easily and the option to use dedicated software and platforms to do this²⁵ gave rise to a number of publications using out-of-copyright titles and spurred a rise in self-publishing. On the one hand, this shows how accessible the market for digital books is since financial outlay for sales and distribution can be significantly lower and the risk of returned stock does not exist. On the other hand, it speaks to the fact that a problem that has already been discussed with regard to the market as a whole, namely the immense number of titles that are being published on a yearly basis, has become even more acute with regard to the digital market. The large number of free titles, backlist titles and newly published titles by publishers all over the world that is available via the dedicated ebook stores due to the global nature of digital publishing²⁶ intensifies the problem of discoverability²⁷. This development will be further exaggerated given that digital publications 'stay on the shelves', meaning that the publications remain in the store's database instead of being returned to the publishers as unsold stock or simply disappearing off the shelves of bookstores once they are out-of-print. It is therefore becoming increasingly hard to raise awareness of a title in order to generate sales without a (often costly) commitment to online marketing, something that large conglomerates are more likely to do. Furthermore, readers are often bound to use their e-readers' proprietary ebook

²⁵ Hall discusses the creation and publication of digital content and the driving forces behind it in her chapter on "Content and the new market players" (2013, 172–80).

²⁶ Digital publications are marketed globally, even though most ebook stores differentiate between countries due to variations in discounting practices, taxation and foreign rights contracts.

²⁷ Rochester deals with the issue of discoverability in more detail in the next chapter on "The Impact of Digital Publishing on the UK Literary Market".

store (Kindle uses this practice) or chose to do so out of convenience. Faced with a plethora of choices the reader is likely to base buying decisions on book recommendations by the store or even within ebooks which increases the probability of purchasing another title from the same author, publisher or imprint or a title that is featured on the store's bestseller list. All in all, even though the entry into the book market was made easier by digitisation, this cannot be interpreted to mean that digital publishing counteracted the existing concentration effects. On the contrary, given the need to (often expensively) market titles to consumers and taking into account the fact that the market is dominated by a few key players, the concentration processes within the digital book market are evident and irreversible.

With regard to all the predictions that have been made about the digital book market it also seems important to contextualise these developments and show to which extent the digital publishing business has cannibalised the traditional (Price 2012). After a period of constant growth of digital sales, particularly sales of consumer ebooks, we have witnessed a recent stagnation in the growth of the digital book market in the UK. While sales for physical books decreased by 5% and digital sales increased by 19% in 2013, this trend continued slightly weakened in 2014 with a decrease in physical book sales of 5 % and an increase in digital book sales of 11%. In 2015 then digital book sales actually decreased by 2% while sales of physical books remained constant. It is generally expected now that digital publications have reached a plateau (at currently 17% of UK Publishers' total digital and physical book sales) and will not continue to grow as fast as they used to in the years directly after their introduction to the market (The Publishers Association 2016b, 1, 2014, 1).

In recent years the industry had to demonstrate its capacity for adapting to the changing publishing environment. The abolition of the Net Book Agreement and the resulting discounting practices as well as the shift away from traditional outlets and the rise of digital publishing have sped up concentration processes and reshaped the industry fundamentally. In all likelihood, the next decade will continue to see print publishing alongside digital publishing as both publication techniques are widely used and have their specific advantages and disadvantages. There is currently no indication that printed books will eventually become obsolete. However, there is no telling in what form future generations will publish and read books as technologies facilitating the production and consumption of digital content evolve and mature. The publishing environment will likely continue to be subject to further changes at a faster pace than it has been before the end of the twentieth century and the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and to experiment with new technologies will be key for the success or failure of agents operating in the publishing industry.

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The Impact of Digital Publishing on the Literary Market

SOPHIE ROCHESTER

In May 2014, the writer and commentator Will Self wrote that in the digital age, not only was the physical book in decline, the idea of 'difficult' reading was being challenged. In his view the future of the 'serious' novel would become a specialist interest:

I believe the serious novel will continue to be written and read, but it will be an art form on a par with easel painting or classical music: confined to a defined social and demographic group, requiring a degree of subsidy, a subject for historical scholarship rather than public discourse. (Self 2014)

A rapidly changing market place as a result of digital technology has severely disrupted the traditional publishing process. Not only has it disrupted the way publishers disseminate books, but also the way readers find and share information about books. While some genres have benefited from, or in some cases even been propelled by this disruption – namely fan-fiction – literary fiction has been faced with specific challenges. Traditionally, literary fiction writers would be nurtured over a number of books, enabling them to hone their craft until they delivered their best-selling novel. In the digital age, a decrease in literary fiction review coverage in the media – exacerbated by online media, a decline in bricks and mortar bookshops and libraries – intensified as a result of online retailers. At the same time the rise of self-publishing has also contributed to the squeeze on what publishers have traditionally called the 'mid-list'. These changes, alongside a decline in the number of bookshops, the reduction of shelf space in those shops, a rise in online sales and fewer people reading physical books, have changed the ways in which readers discover literary fiction. Nevertheless, digital technology has fuelled a wave of creativity across the traditional publishing industry and led to a surge in new kinds of publishers. Emerging born-digital publishers, ready to take new risks, might in fact inaugurate an interesting era for literary fiction writers, without necessarily spelling the death of the novel.

1. The Arrival of Digital Publishing

The impact of digital publishing has been felt across the world's book publishing industries acutely since the turn of the last century. In 2003, e-reader technology was introduced to the mass market, with Sony launching its Sony Libre e-reader in 2004 and Amazon launching its

first Kindle in 2007. With their ability to provide an entire library at readers' fingertips, e-readers revolutionised reading.

In the 1990s, British publishers had experimented with the adoption of the CD-ROM format but strategies built around ebook publishing did not really begin in earnest until the following decade. *PerfectBound*, the HarperCollins ebook programme that began in early 2001, was set up initially in the US by a team of 3 people and is an interesting example. In the UK, *PerfectBound* attempted to make ebooks and all digital projects part of their IT department, but ended up running the programme across divisions with a production person from the IT department, an editor, a designated publicist and a marketer from other departments (Hollis 2014). Although not yet fully formed as an ebook imprint, *PerfectBound* can be seen as the first mainstream ebook publisher in the UK. At the time, there was discussion of the impact of e-ink with most book publishers anticipating that the right hand-held device would be the game changer, but none considered this something they would have to develop themselves. Instead, there was much debate around a software that could work on every device.

Consequently, publishers did not get their own e-ink device off the ground and by 2007 the first versions of Amazon's Kindle were launched in the US. This set the tone for the following years – the role of publishers was reduced to that of content providers, and by 2010, Amazon's Kindle had been available in the UK for about a year, and Apple's iBookstore had just been launched. The publishing landscape was rapidly changing and, propelled by the Kindle Direct Publishing platform, self-publishing was on the rise. An increasing number of writers were considering cutting out publishers from the publication process, while publishers and literary agents were launching ebook-only imprints. At the same time, bricks and mortar retailers were having a terrible time, hit by recession and the impact of online shopping. Borders UK had closed in 2009 and by 2010 HMV, then owners of UK high street retailers Waterstones, were struggling, and independent bookshops were "closing at a rate of two a week" (Flood 2010). By 2011 it was clear that Kindle's dominance of the ebook market was an issue for publishers, predominantly because it meant that the ebook retailer giant had a much greater understanding of what was happening in the ebook market through its sales data.

In the context of this changing marketplace, in which readers were beginning to consume books across a range of mixed media formats, experience and share their passions and motivations through the ever morphing lens of offline and online perspectives, and in which sales were moving from physical stores to online channels, publishers began to form strategies and structures to deliver the necessary shift towards being a direct to consumer business. Ever since, the traditional process of author to literary agent, to publisher, to retailer, to reader has become increasingly disrupted. The new publisher certainly looks very different today – it could be an agent (e.g. Curtis Brown literary agency teaming up with Pan Macmillan's new Bello

imprint) or a crowd-funded community (Unbound). Literary agents are able to operate as publishers, publishers can reach readers directly and crucially writers are now able to publish directly to publishing platforms such as KPP (Kindle Publishing Programme).

2. The Impact of the eBook Market on British Fiction Writers

British fiction writers are justly renowned worldwide, but digital publishing has severely impacted the market, with writers, literary agents and publishers wanting to ensure that we are able to sustain this excellence, to nurture talent and ensure that our best writers are supported and celebrated. Some of the UK's best-known writers, including Julian Barnes and Hilary Mantel, wrote for many years before achieving bestseller status. Hilary Mantel wrote her first novel in 1985, but it was her thirteenth book *Wolf Hall* that went on to win The Man Booker Prize in 2009, some twenty-four years later. Traditionally, publishers would nurture a writer's career over such a long period before a 'break out' work of fiction. However, commercial pressures on publishers have compromised this nurturing process, and writers are increasingly expected to make an immediate impact with their first books or risk being dropped. While books have to increasingly compete against other media for a slice of audience time, book review coverage now tends to focus on new writers or established writers. Michael Prodger, previously Literary Editor of *The Telegraph*, explained the situation in 2010:

Review space in newspapers is undergoing a lengthy and painful squeeze at the moment which makes the odds of deserving but little-known novelists receiving reviews even longer than previously. Traditionally it has always been the big names that have received the majority of attention but with some space left for lesser lights. This is now changing, of necessity, to an established novelist monopoly. (Prodger 2010)

With even literary editors admitting that review space had now become 'an established novelist monopoly' it was becoming increasingly difficult to promote literary fiction from emerging and deserving novelists. While this group of writers, often called 'mid-list' in the trade, is generally recognised as the one that needs nurturing to develop prize-winners, it is also the one most at risk from the current changes in the digital publishing landscape.

In an article for the *New York Times* in 2014, co-publisher of Or Books, Colin Robinson explored the impact the digital age is having on our ability to long-distance read, concluding: "Today, with our powers of concentration atrophied by the staccato communication of the Internet and attention easily diverted to addictive entertainment on our phones and tablets, book-length reading is harder still." Robinson believes that this new reader behaviour is, in turn, impacting on the choices publishers make when commissioning or retaining authors:

Faced with a dizzying array of choices and receiving little by way of expert help in making selections, book buyers today are deciding to play it safe, opting to join either the ever-larger audiences for blockbusters or the minuscule readerships of a vast range of specialist titles. In this bifurcation, the mid-list, publishing's experimental laboratory, is being abandoned. (Robinson 2014)

Meanwhile, individual grants for writers from public funding sources have also become scarcer and more competitive, with mid-list writers competing for smaller pots. Simultaneously, author advances from publishers have drastically dropped with *The Independent* reporting in 2009 that “authors are starting to see their advances reduced by anything up to a quarter of what was paid to them two years ago” (Rooney 2009).

Nicola Solomons, chief executive at the Society of Authors, stated in a *Guardian* article in 2014 that “[p]ublishers are not investing in authors in a way they would have once, to see if they will take off after their fourth or fifth book, if their first or second were steady, but didn't go through [to a huge readership]” (Rankin 2014). The need to support the UK's mid-list writers has become increasingly important in the face of issues of discoverability in the digital publishing environment. As a growing number of readers choose to buy their books online, keyword search terms have become increasingly significant. While the non-fiction writer of a military title might benefit from this, for fiction writers this means that their titles are increasingly hard to find unless the reader is searching by author name, in which case the author needs to be well-known or established. E-retailer ‘shop windows’ do little to remedy this issue.

The Discoverability of Fiction in the eBook Environment

The issue of ‘discoverability’ in the eBook environment is an on-going challenge for both publishers and self-published writers. In general, the following questions are crucial for the literary market: How do readers find fiction and what they are looking for when they walk into a bookshop or a library? How do reading groups choose their titles and what is important to events and festival organisers when they decide who to book? But in the digital environment, it is even harder to establish how readers find the books they want. While online activity can help books to be discovered and offer a direct-to-reader platform, visibility and distribution via high street retailers is still very powerful.

In an interview in *The Independent* in 2011, James Daunt, then incoming Managing Director (M.D.) for Waterstones, demonstrated how readers were straddling both on- and off-line environments, making the point that “plenty of Daunt customers use Amazon and have Kindles, but they still come into my bookshops” (Bevan 2011). This sentiment echoed a presentation by Evan Schnittman, then Bloomsbury (US)'s M.D. of Sales and Marketing, speaking at the London Book Fair 2011 about the unexpected success of US retailer Barnes & Noble and their Nook e-reader: “This is something you should pay very close attention to [...] there is potential for digital in a Bricks & Mortar retail environment” (Schnittman 2011). Of course, publishers already knew about the importance of discoverability in the bricks and mortar environment, in which they had to negotiate how to get their titles onto the front table of high street bookshops. The problems of discoverability in the online environment, however, are massively amplified with titles buried simply for being too many steps away for readers to find. These

problems lie with the complex algorithms of e-retailers and search engines. For non-fiction titles this has led publishers to think much more carefully about search engine optimisation and the way in which metadata within books affects search chances. For literary fiction this is a much more complex issue.

This issue of discoverability has changed the way book publishers try to communicate to readers. By 2013 many of the major UK publishers had reconfigured their traditional publicity and marketing teams into broader communications teams, ensuring that digital communications expertise ran across both departments, and new roles were created to develop audiences via social media. In January 2013, for example, Pan Macmillan (UK) announced the “creation of a single marketing and communications department with a renewed focus on holistic promotional planning and campaigns, digital marketing and direct reader engagement” (“Pan Macmillan” 2013). The new marketing and communications structure saw the creation of three broader ‘communications’ teams each incorporating marketing and publicity functions – Fiction, Non-Fiction and Children’s. In addition, it created new roles for digital specialists, including Marketing and Communities Director, Head of Web Development and an Online Publicity Director. Other publishers have also restructured in a bid to better understand its readers and communicate more directly with them.

Self-Publishing

Traditionally published UK fiction writers are now in competition with a greater number of writers looking for reader attention, as a surge of self-published writers has come onto the market. In a survey from June 2013, more than a fifth of all genre ebooks sold in the United Kingdom were self-published, and the success of the originally self-published *Fifty Shades of Grey* demonstrated that self-published works are here to stay (Flood 2013). Self-published writers appear to have been quicker off the mark than publishers to really experiment with price promoting in the Kindle store to get titles to chart, and they were more adept at managing their online profiles and at developing the direct-to-reader market that publishers are so keen to nurture.

In the last couple of years, major UK publishers such as Pan Macmillan started to look to the self-published pool as a place to spot and develop talent, signing writers such as Amanda Hocking, an American YA (Young Adult) vampire author, and Kerry Wilkinson, the best-selling self-published British author. In addition, UK publishers including Random House and HarperCollins began to launch their own digital imprints in the hope that these might appeal to new writers and to those who have self-published digitally in the past, particularly since those writers were often hoping that digital publishing might eventually lead to print publication as well.

In sum, self-publishing is now mainstream and will continue to be so as more non-genre writers opt to self-publish in their struggle to secure the advances with increasingly risk-averse publishers fearful for their bottom line, as margins are squeezed further. We are now in an era where we will undoubtedly see continued convergence of self-publishing and traditional publishing with more blended business models and services offered by publishers (and agents) to writers seeking to self-publish. The formation of the Alliance of Independent Authors, a non-profit association for self-publishing writers, is now giving a voice to these authors, helping them, for example, with aspects such as print distribution via high street retailers, as their website specifies (cf. "Alliance").

3. New Gatekeepers for Fiction

One of the other major impacts of the digital on the publishing system is how the gatekeepers of fiction are changing and shifting in power. Digital technology and social media influence how literary judgments are made, particularly for fiction. There are now new decision-makers and influencers in the print and digital publishing world that did not previously exist. As the national newspaper reviews pages were reduced in size, many literary editors made the shift to running book reviews online. Some publishers – and authors – simply saw these first as less important than their print counterparts, but it soon became clear that online publications were developing huge online audiences of readers. The online reviewing site of the *Guardian*, *Guardian.co.uk/Books*, was the first to appoint its own 'online literary editor', and by 2008 was boasting a readership of 1.5 million users, at that time more than four times the readership of the print newspaper (cf. Rochester 2009). In addition to creating affordable reviewing space, the online national books sections began experimenting with a multitude of ways to promote an author – by recording audio and video interviews (demonstrated by *Telegraph Books Online* in 2009), sample chapters, cross-references to back-list titles, links to related titles, reviews with no shelf-life, informed comment and – very importantly – the chance to link easily to online book retailers. The online books pages began to be seen no longer as the poor cousin of the print edition, but as the future of the way books were reviewed and promoted. Simultaneously, we witnessed the rise of the book blogger. Major book bloggers such as *Dove Grey Reader* started to build impressive audience figures, becoming a staple on book publicist mailing lists.

Meanwhile, reading and writing continues to change; with multimodal platforms and social media playing a big part in the way readers' consume and share books, and in the creative process of writing. Readers and writers continue to gather in online communities and begin to appear as the new gatekeepers of fiction, with a new kind of reader/writer or 'prosumer', emerging as a dominant force. 'Prosumer' is the term coined by futurologist Alvin Toffler in 1980 to illustrate a more "proactive consumer" who was "predicted to each become

active to help personally improve or design the goods and services of the marketplace, transforming it and their roles as consumers” (“Prosumer”).

At this point, publishers began to comprehend that in order to sell more books they needed to better understand where these audiences already existed online, and devise ways to engage with and market to these readers. Thus, the gatekeeper role played by the newspaper and magazine literary editors, commissioning editors at literary publishers and book prizes, is currently being disrupted by the mass of readers growing more verbal and powerful online every day. *Wattpad* is an interesting example of a community of writers and readers, reviewing each other’s work and with the community creating excitement about authors online, and asking readers to “join the conversation about the stories you read: message the writer and interact with other people who love the story as much as you” (“Wattpad”). This power shift is having an impact on how ‘quality’ writing is defined in the digital age, with the power of popularity and monetisation of writing seemingly usurping craft and quality (cf. Sennett 2008). This so-called ‘democratisation’ of reading raises complex questions about the way that writing is judged and we will no doubt see many more years of debate about the way readers discover new fiction.

4. New Strategies in Publishing

In a bid to reach readers directly, many publishers have experimented with developing their own reader-facing platforms. The most successful of these have looked and behaved as if they were publisher-neutral. In 2012, both Penguin US (*Book Country*) and Macmillan US (*Heroes and Heartbreakers*) described their direct-to-consumer websites as ‘publisher agnostic’ in order to widen their audience as far as possible. Regular audience analysis is a key part in developing these online communities and in understanding sales drivers, with new roles being created within publishers dedicated to data analysis. Besides changing the way publishers communicate and sell to their readers, by 2009 digital technology had also led to a proliferation of experimental business models from publishers.

Some of the most innovative digital publishing projects launched in recent years have been deemed ‘ahead of the reader’ Our understanding of what a reader expects from a ‘book’ now is changing all the time, and foreseeing what a reader is ready to handle now – in a year’s time, in ten year’s time – can be hard to [achieve]. (Rochester 2012)

At the same time, the relationship between the reader and the writer is changing too and becoming more interactive. Writers like Jeff Norton, an author and producer, are experimenting with bold new narrative development processes that ask beta-readers to help develop the next stages of the story. For his book *MetaWars*, Jeff Norton worked with school children before finalising his manuscript, incorporating their feedback to define the final storyline. Mike Jones’ Portal Entertainment (SXSW, Start-up Weekend London in September 2011 and Most Innovative Company) has started making immersive narratives where the audience takes part in the story. The question remains as to how traditional publishers fit into this much more direct

involvement between the writer and the audience and, most importantly for them, how a direct relationship between reader and writer can be monetised?

5. A Period of Experimentation

The publishing industry is currently facing a huge challenge: not only does it have to nurture its print market, which still makes up for the majority of its business, but it also has to nurture a new ebook and digital product market. Meanwhile, it is constantly reminded to keep one eye on the future and on the nature of storytelling itself – all in a very tough economic climate. As the BBC's Technology Writer Bill Thompson put it in 2012:

We're figuring out how we want to use (these devices) and how all these screens fit together. There is a whole load of experimentation: people are trying out different things to see what sticks and what works. Just like the book evolved over hundreds of years, so the way we use these screens is going to evolve (probably over five years instead of 500 years) but it is going to evolve really quickly. (Thompson 2012)

With the launch of the iPad in the UK in 2010, a period of rapid experimentation by UK publishers followed, who were interested in looking to understand the app market, and subsequently invested in other digital experimentation. Some of the most notable of these came out of the Touchpress/Faber collaboration which saw successes such as *The Solar System* and *The Thick of It* apps. Literary audiences appear to be enjoying digital literature experiences too: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* app from the same collaboration is just one of the great examples of digital innovation in literature, bringing the poem back to life through audio, video and photographic enhancements and reaching a much wider audience, with the app breaking even in six weeks (original estimates had assumed a break-even point of 12 months on sales of 120,000; cf. "The Waste Land iPad app").

However, the app market has proven a difficult one for publishers to break into, because they are faced with new competitors such as games developers. Despite some breakout success stories most traditional book publishers have failed to see a return on investment on their app development projects. The issue with quality digital publishing projects is that the production costs are high, and notably much higher than the kind of budgets publishers are used to paying from either editorial or marketing angles. These experimental digital projects might also not yield any profits. To date, the most successful publishers have worked in partnership with developers and created share-of-revenue business models, where the producer takes on board the full costs of production while the publisher only takes royalties once the producer has earned their fee back, in order to get their foot in the digital innovation door.

Other examples of experimentation include innovation in business models, partnerships, in form, creation of IP in-house, development of digital product, in trialling lists DRM (Digital Rights Management)-free, in nurturing communities around genre rather than imprint, and more. Publishers are working hard to understand the future markets. Over the last couple of years we have also seen the emergence of a new generation of independent publishers who

place the reader relationship at the heart of everything they do, such as Unbound, And Other Stories, and UnGlue.it. Unbound, a crowd-funding model enabling writers to build up audiences and funds to publish their works, have the ability to move more quickly than traditional publishers, and they claim that a book can feasibly be funded and published within two weeks. The new world order, according to John Mitchinson, Unbound's founder, is catering directly to readers: "It's an incredibly powerful feeling when you start to connect directly with readers" (Mitchinson 2011). Unbound's 50/50 profit share is also claimed to be fairer to the author than deals offered by conglomerate publishers.

6. Experimentation in Storytelling

Despite fears that reading is in decline, storytelling is still everywhere as a core component for television drama, film, videogames and advertising. These other industries, now competitors to publishers, have been experimenting much longer with taking storytelling across other digital platforms. Like television programmes that have tried to extend the life of the series into social media channels and beyond, there have, however, been some attempts from traditional publishers too to bring a story from the book into other more interactive media. For example, Faber & Faber experimented with John Lanchester's *Capital* by drip-feeding gentle interactions with the themes of the book into email inboxes of potential readers on a daily basis, and Random House UK launched *Black Crown Project*, an interactive storytelling game, which worked with original content commissioned by a Random House editor. As Stuart Dredge points out in *The Guardian*, "The point about Black Crown is that it's not a whizzy piece of technology applied to so-so writing and a predictable storyline. It's a great book that happens to be published in a different format" (Dredge 2013). One challenging thing for publishers though is that no sooner than a new concept of digital innovation in publishing has been announced, it is almost immediately declared 'dead' by someone for whom it did not work. For example, Evan Schnittman, then MD Marketing and Publicity for Bloomsbury US, declared enhanced ebooks and apps 'dead' at the London Book Fair in April 2011 (Schnittman 2011), but we went on to see many financially successful iPad projects long after that – notably the Brian Cox iPad book app, though a non-fiction title, which reportedly sold 20,000 copies in the first three days (Dredge 2012). Similarly, at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2011 much discussion centred on social reading platforms, but by February 2012 at an event called BookCamp in New York a speaker was already dubbing social reading 'over'. It is this seesaw of enthusiasm surrounding digital publishing initiatives that adds to the general confusion for decision makers. Publishers are under pressure to make radical adjustments to business models but the impact of these changes requires equally radical company restructurings which take time and planning. For traditional publishing houses the shift to digital is more complex because they have to change

existing structures, which gives start-ups some advantage in flexibility as ‘born-digital’ enterprises.

6. Outlook and Conclusion

Despite the major disruption, many UK publishers have been excited by the potential of digital publishing, and the tools it gives authors and publishers to experiment with new content and interacting with their readers in different ways. British fiction writers themselves are excited by the possibilities of not only reaching their readers more directly, but also in working with technology to extend their creative practice. In 2012, The Writing Platform project surveyed British writers, and nearly 70% were interested in experimenting with collaborative writing projects. This indicates that the next decade will see further disruption, with new kinds of fiction writing on new kinds of technologies. How the commercial publishing sector builds its business around this writing will be fascinating to see. And similarly, it will be interesting to see how established publishers will continue to commission fiction. There is fear from many midlist authors that writers will be expected to develop their own audiences before a publisher will take them on, or continue to buy their fiction. Speaking in a Guardian podcast in July 2014, Kate Pullinger explains:

I think there’s a real crisis in the mid-list. The London Book Fair this year [...] showed a real trend toward the established, huge sellers and then books by new writers, but these days it seems that books by new writers are by new writers who also come with a ready-made audience. So, it’s the new novel from the person with the cookery show, or it’s a new novel from someone who is a broadcaster of some kind. (Pullinger 2014)

Does this spell a future where publishers are seeking to lower their publishing risk by looking for new voices and stories that are already pre-sold or road-tested? If so, this might strike fear into the heart of midlist writers, and readers, of literary fiction and introduce a shift-change in the notion of ‘discovery’. However, the digital era has also enabled a wave of smaller publishers to establish themselves, ready to discover the great literary fiction that might not be getting into the right hands at the major publishers. A great example of this is Galley Beggar Press, which describes itself as “an old fashioned publisher for the 21st Century”:

Old fashioned because we believe in the beauty of books and the printed word, in the importance of nurturing authors and paying serious attention to editing, and in the vital importance of art as well as commerce.

21st Century, not just because that’s where we are, but because we also believe in the fantastic potential of ebooks to reach new audiences, to spread our writers’ precious words around the world and to revive and revitalise books that would otherwise either be out of print or lost on the backlist. (“Galley Beggar Press”)

Set up in 2011, the publisher has already had huge success with Eimear McBride’s novel *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, a novel rejected by every major UK publishing house in the past decade, which went on to win major literary prizes and become a best-seller (cf. Maughan 2013). Contrary to Will Self, Eimear McBride is confident that literary fiction novels will still find readers in the digital age, whether published by traditional publishers or by smaller publishers,

The Impact of Digital Publishing on the Literary Market

saying: “There are serious readers who want to be challenged, who want to be offered something else, who don't mind being asked to work a little bit to get there” (McBride 2014). The ways in which readers find this fiction, and how publishers commission this fiction, and how writers sustain a career in writing might mutate and change in the digital era, but for now it looks like literary fiction is here to stay.

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The Postcolonial Writer as Commodity

ELLEN DENGEL-JANIC

On an increasingly diverse global publishing market, processes of differentiation and distinction have become popular marketing strategies. The marketing of postcolonial authors (authors who are residents of, or immigrants from, former British colonies) frequently relies on strategies that emphasise their cultural roots and/or national affiliations. Moreover, as Graham Huggan (2001) and Sarah Brouillette (2007) have argued, postcolonial writers are labelled as 'authentic' and 'exotic'. Arguably, publishers are often tempted to use authenticity to sell a book as an 'exotic object/product'. Authenticity and exoticism have to be, therefore, carefully examined and thoroughly questioned as strategic labels in the global publishing industry.

In the public sphere, there are a small number of postcolonial writers who are hailed as the spokespeople for their respective cultures and/or nations. The case of Salman Rushdie is especially interesting with regard to the creation of a writer's public persona and authority on cultural issues and political controversies. When Rushdie gained celebrity status and thus greater visibility for South Asian writing in general, he opened up the literary field to other writers from South Asia. South Asian literature began to be considered as culturally valuable and, at the same time, as widely popular and thus marketable. One might argue that the celebrity status of such writers as, for example, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy has been intentionally created by the publishing industry, the media and the literary establishment that in Bourdieu's terms are "dominant agents" in the field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993, 100). Taking her cue from Bourdieu, Sarah Brouillette claims that the writers themselves also contribute to the making of their public reputation and thus unwittingly respond to the image of the postcolonial writer. This chapter will therefore focus on both the publishing industry's strategies as well as the writers' roles in the creation of the publicly revered, yet controversial, figure of the postcolonial writer and his/her status as a commodity. While ethnic writers are often considered marginal, they have by now entered the mainstream via their creative works (cf. Ferguson et al. 1990). After providing an analysis of the publishing strategies that contribute to, and capitalise on, the postcolonial writer as a commodity, this chapter will also sketch the

larger cultural context that constantly reworks ideas of centre/margin in the way that it determines who is admitted into the mainstream and who remains on the margin.

1. A Short Definition of Postcolonialism

Recently, the term 'postcolonial'¹ has become a rather debated one. It is, of course, possible to employ it as a purely temporal designation: basically, the term postcolonial would describe the era after empire. Also, it might be used spatially when applied to the former British colonies or the commonwealth. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin were among the first literary scholars who propagated postcolonial studies. They postulate:

We use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 2)

One does indeed need to ask whether it is useful to look at the continuity of preoccupations and a constant reference to European imperialism instead of focussing on current problems and crisis in the socio-political-economic realm. Present-day problems might be caused by local politics as much as they are tied to the inherited imperial global structures.

Other critics in the field often employ the term in a political rather than a historical context. Stephen Slemon, for example, argues that:

[...] the concept proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-colonized nations, but rather when it locates a specifically anti-or postcolonial discursive purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations. (Slemon 1989, 3)

Postcolonial criticism is therefore mainly concerned with the uncovering of past and present hierarchical systems that rely on an ideology of supremacy and hegemony of one culture over another. In this critical tradition, literature and other cultural products are viewed as a critique of hierarchical systems and unequal power relations. Thus "[...] texts which are anti-colonial, which reject the premises of colonialist intervention [...] might be regarded as post-colonial insofar as they have 'got beyond' colonialism and its ideologies" (Slemon 1989, 5).

Despite Slemon's persuasive take on postcolonial texts, one might still be cautious when stretching the term too far by de-historicising it to a certain extent. Aijiz Ahmad, for example, cautions against the over-generalisation of the term postcolonial:

But I have seen articles in a great many places, in the special issue of *Social Text* on postcoloniality, which push the use of the term 'colonialism' back to such configurations

¹ The term 'postcolonial' is used, in contrast to other usages, without hyphen in order to emphasize its continuing concern with colonial rule and its aftermath.

as the Incas, the Ottomans, the Chinese, well before the European colonial empires began; and then bring the term forward to cover all kinds of national oppressions, as, for example, the savagery of Indonesian government in East Timor. 'Colonialism' then becomes a transhistorical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the world or another, so that everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later, at one time or another, of being colonizer, colonized and post-colonial – sometimes all at once, in the case of Australia, for example. (Ahmad 1995, 9)

Ahmad criticizes the hijacking of the term 'postcolonial', as well as 'colonial', and its displacement in other contexts, which, at first sight, are very different from the nature of European colonialism. From this contention, Ahmad concludes that the critical attempt of postcolonial studies is in fact undermined by the remaining centrality of colonialism and that the cultures that have suffered from its influence are caught in what he calls an "infinite aftermath" (Ahmad 1995, 6).

As convincing as Ahmad and other critical voices might be, for the purpose of this chapter I would like to retain the concept of postcolonialism and mainly refer to it as a particular colonial legacy. This legacy continues to influence Western perceptions of non-Western cultural production and the publishing industry is apt in utilizing these perceptions for their marketing strategies. One of these marketing strategies' key features is the label of 'exoticism'.

The 'exotic', according to Graham Huggan (2001), is not an inherent quality of someone or something, instead it should be seen as a particular perception of unfamiliar cultural artefacts. What is more, exoticism always relies on de-contextualisation. In the process of 'exoticisation' cultural objects are domesticated by their introduction into Western homes and lifestyles. Books whose authors or contents are labelled as exotic can easily become such commodities that help to obscure their context of production and consumption as well as provide an imagined access to different cultures.

What makes labelling books as 'exotic' particularly problematic is not only the fact that they are perceived and consumed by Western readers as mere commodities but, according to Huggan, that "[...] the West is consuming these products in an economic climate in which, to paraphrase Ahmad, the colonialisms of the past are perhaps less significant than the imperialisms of the present" (Ahmad 1992, 222; cited in Huggan 2001, 16). If, as I implied earlier, the Western consumer's craving for exotic objects extends to the literary market the label of 'exoticism' attached to postcolonial and South Asian writers needs to be examined more closely.

2. A Paradigmatic Case: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was published in 1981 and catapulted its writer to fame by winning the Booker Prize. Its reputation stays undiminished and winning the Booker of Bookers Prize in 1993 and 2008 has undeniably proved its importance. Western readers continue to be fascinated by the magical stories revolving around, and creatively constructing,

Indian history of the last century.² Rushdie's use of magical realism functions hereby as a strategy to render Indian history as an exotic object that neatly fits Western notions of India: vast and spiritual, complete with mythical gods and heroes, demonic goddesses, astrologers and fortune tellers, plus gurus and yogis. The magical realist³ story is told by Saleem Sinai, born at the precise moment that India gained Independence binding his fate and family to the history of the newly independent nation.⁴ Not only does Saleem's personal history become the allegorical story of the nation but his and his fellow midnight's children – each individual in the possession of a different supernatural power – represent the diversity of the Indian subcontinent. Saleem functions in this multitude of voices as an interpreter of different cultural and regional identities:

Telepathy, then: the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience - before I began to act - there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, for the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil [...] beneath the polyglot frenzy in my head, those other precious signals [...] broke through the fish-market cacophony of my voices [...] the unconscious beacons of the children of midnight, signalling nothing more than their existence, transmitting simply: 'I.' From far to the North, 'I.' And the South East West: 'I.' 'I.' 'And I.' (Rushdie 1981, 168)

An image of India is produced that is both magical and realistic in this passage: Rushdie's description of the Midnight's Children Conference as a cacophony of voices filtered through the consciousness of his telepathic narrator-protagonist bears witness to India's continuing struggle to come together as a nation despite its regional, linguistic, and cultural differences.

Saleem as a narrator can of course be seen as an alter ego for Rushdie himself who attempts to depict India's history in the novel. Notwithstanding the fact that Rushdie amply uses such elements of self-referentiality, fragmentation and intertextuality as his aesthetic means, the notion of India as an exotic 'other' remains undamaged. Agreeing with Graham Huggan on this point, I regard Rushdie's portrayal of India and its history in *Midnight's Children* as a form of "strategic exoticism" (Huggan 2001, 20). Rushdie inserts passages that manifest both exotic elements and gestures of self-consciousness:

But despite these signs of ill-omen, the city was poised, with a new myth glinting in the corners of its eyes. August in Bombay: a month of festivals, the month of Krishna's birthday and Coconut Day; and this year - fourteen hours to go, thirteen, twelve - there was

² See also Nico Israel's discussion of "early postcolonial novels" in the context of Britain's increasingly multicultural society, on the one hand, and the institutionalisation of postcolonial courses at the universities, on the other (2005, 91).

³ According to Alejo Carpentier magical realism consists of a layer of history and a layer of magical narrative including marvellous, strange and unreal events or characters. Quite often, Carpentier states, these layers are produced by different cultural belief and knowledge systems (Carpentier 1949).

⁴ Josna Rege, for example, argues that "Rushdie's novel celebrates the creative tensions between personal and national identity [...]" (Rege 342).

an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary, into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth - a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God. (Rushdie 1981, 112)

Repeatedly, Rushdie's emphasis lies on the mythical nature of India as an imagined country. India as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) of Bangalis, Punjabis, Madrasi's and Jats comes alive through the celebration of festivals. By this ritual enactment of the nation its imagined nature becomes more tangible and in a way 'real'. Yet, the mention of "Krishna's birthday" and "Coconut Day" add authentic flavour to this fantasy of the Indian nation as it is inaugurated in the city of Bombay.

3. Authenticity as Marketing Strategy

In her book *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, Sarah Brouillette argues that an important aspect for the marketing of South Asian writers is authenticity. South Asian authors, according to Brouillette, are translators of an 'authentic exotic otherness' which they render palatable for the global literary market. Far from assuming authority over their own work, however, authors are labelled by publishers, reviewers and other players in the literary field whether they agree with the label or not. At the same time, they must in a way respond to the image that is created for them by their publisher and the media. The role of the public perception of the author is what Brouillette places at the centre of her analysis of the global literary market as she claims that "[...] literary production is influenced by the development of authorship as a profession and by the process through which writers consume images of themselves and reinterpret those images in order to negotiate and circulate different ones" (Brouillette 2007, 2). Authors' reputations and their careers become inadvertently a 'paratext' (cf. Genette 1980) in the reception process. Most notably, postcolonial writers who, according to Brouillette, are especially compromised figures, often insert self-conscious gestures into their texts. Huggan sees such strategic 'exoticism' as "the escape route [...] which means: either working within this framework of representations and subvert it or 'redeploying it' and consciously using exoticist images" (Huggan 2001, 32). Both Huggan and Brouillette concur on the fact that aspects of 'strategic exoticism' can be found in current postcolonial literature across the globe and that although Western readers might indeed indulge in exoticist images and stories they might be also aware of the purposeful 'spicing up' of the novels in question.

Graham Huggan in turn asks the question whether postcolonial writers are aware of the fact that they are representative or taken to be representative of a whole culture, nation or

ethnicity in the minds of an international readership (Huggan 2001, 26). This leads him to the follow-up questions:

To what extent does the value ascribed to them and attributed to their writing depend on their capacity to operate not just as *representers* of culture but as bona fide cultural *representatives*? And is this representativeness a function of their inscription in the margins, of the mainstream demand for an 'authentic,' but readily translatable, marginal voice? (Huggan 2001, 26).

Rushdie's case proves again pertinent here as he is undoubtedly regarded as a cultural representative. In an interview for the *Paris Review* (2005, No. 186), for instance, Rushdie is immediately asked about his relationship with Kashmir, the place of his birth. Only after having established the 'authenticity' of his origins, the interviewer continues to discuss more general topics. Rushdie's persona and work are by now recognized and respected within mainstream media, yet, his vital connection with Kashmir, India and Pakistan make him a 'marginal voice'⁵, albeit one that is 'readily translatable'.

4. Salman Rushdie and the Booker

Salman Rushdie, by winning the Booker Prize, gained recognition and visibility in the West: the literary establishment valued Rushdie's writing, drew attention to it and established him as the father of the postcolonial South Asian novel. Thus the Prize highlights the fact that it is a certain kind of writing that is appreciated by the literary market and that is circulated for consumption. Such a 'valuing' process is highly complex and one needs to look into three main factors: firstly, readers' interests are created and directed at Prize-winning writers and readers' expectations are simultaneously formed, or modified by reading, secondly, publishers are eager to re-produce and publish similar books and market them as potential prize-winning books, thirdly, writers are aware of the awarded works and respond to both publishers and readers' expectations. These responses, however, do not necessarily have to be positive or imitative of current trends, they can also be original and self-conscious and as I already mentioned, 'strategically exotic'.

Not only is the Booker prize one of the most prestigious literary prizes that guarantees international attention and greater sales figures for the winners and their publishers but it also promotes and establishes a literary canon of its own. Both cultural and financial value are automatically attributed to the few texts selected each year (even a novel that makes it to the short list promises to be a success) (Huggan 2001, 108). Without doubt the Booker has contributed to the change in the perception of literature written in English. Over the past thirty years, approximately a third of the winners were from commonwealth or postcolonial countries.

⁵ Marginal, in this case, refers to the centre/margin dichotomy – placing South Asia on the periphery of world politics – which is still mostly valid in the Western imagination.

However, the Booker's demonstration of interest and appreciation of non-British writers or novels with non-British subject matters functions, at the same time, as a containment of cultural diversity (Huggan 2001, 110). By awarding and distributing acknowledgement of cultural difference – by giving the prize to Nigerian, Australian, Maori, or South African writers – as has been the case over the last decades, the Booker partakes in the paternal gesture of a former imperial power. In this process, the awarded books become valued exotic products that are selected for the consumption by a predominantly Western readership.⁶

5. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Arundhati Roy's tremendously successful and critically acclaimed novel *The God of Small Things* will serve as an example of the valuing process of the Booker Prize after Rushdie has already established the postcolonial writers as a treasured authentic voice of postcolonial countries. How the label of 'exoticism' has contributed to the marketing and selling of Roy's novel and has changed Western perception of postcolonial writers will be of concern here. *The God of Small Things* revolves around the story of twins who are punished for the tragic but accidental death of their cousin by being forcefully torn apart at the age of nine. The story is set in the southern Indian state of Kerala and portrays a caste-ridden, class-divided and oppressive society that ultimately destroys individuals who dare to cross socially sanctioned boundaries. Roy boldly shows an act of socio-cultural transgression when she depicts the sex between the twins' mother and Velutha, an untouchable, as well as a desperate attempt at re-union of the twins in an incestuous experience. An analysis of the narrative strategies and mode of storytelling itself does not reveal much of an experimental or postmodern writing style similar to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Instead the novel's achievement lies in the use of language to represent the world-view and emotional reality of two nine-year olds.

Roy's novel is an exceptional case in the recent history of publication as in 1997 Roy's publisher sold it in eighteen countries prior to its publication (Mongia 2007, 103). The economic success of the novel and its immense popularity are tied to specific marketing strategies. One of which is the design of the cover. The Random House edition and most subsequent editions have a cover, which, in the hard-cover version, has an iridescent book jacket, turning the book itself into a prized object that evokes an image of lushness and sensuality.⁷

⁶ It is interesting, perhaps even paradoxical, that some of the Booker Prize winning novels actually present a revisionist history (cf. Huggan 2001), and very often what is under revision is the British Empire: J.G. Farrell, *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Ruth Praver Jhabwala's *Heat and Dust*, Paul Scott's *Staying On*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the book cover see Mongia 2007.

The Postcolonial Writer as Commodity

Mirroring the visual impression of the book's cover design, the reviewers did not shy away from unabashed exoticism:

After you turn the last page [of this] glowing first novel, you find you're still deep inside it. You can smell the pickled mangoes and the sweet banana jam, hear the children singing as their uncle's car carries them home to disaster. The details don't fall into place until the end of the book but making our way there, we move through such a landscape of sensory imagery that we seem to have lived the tragedy long before we can understand it. An outstanding novel. (Shapiro 1997)

A tantalising mix of Indian exotica, mysticism and history on a domestic and national level [...] a remarkably assured novel, ambitious in scope, innovative in style, filled with moments of quiet beauty [...] its wonders and wonderings are, for me, unparalleled. (Yahp 1997, 5)

Exotic images abound and reviewers do not seem to tire of clichéd descriptions. Matching the look of the book cover a critic writes: "*The God of Small Things* is lush and humid with a tropic density of language" (Chimonyo 1997). Seemingly, the impression of the reading experience the critics convey appeals to the senses rather than to the mind as is apparent in the expressions used: "tantalising mix", "smell of pickled mangoes", "the landscape of sensory imagery", etc. All these vivid sensory responses to the novel testify to the fact that postcolonial (Indian) writers in English are expected to provide an exotic experience of foreign yet now familiar modes of perception. Huggan has aptly captured such effects of "familiarisation":

Difference thus risks dissolving in alternative kinds of sameness, in a process of homogenisation which nonetheless remains incomplete. This process, I would argue, bespeaks a new-found form of the exotic: difference is appreciated, but only in the terms of the beholder; diversity is translated and given a reassuringly familiar cast. (Huggan 2001, 27)

Cultural diversity and difference as presented by Roy, is turned into a palatable sensory experience, and thus successfully 'homogenized' while its marketable exoticism has been retained. It is indeed the marketing and selling of the book as exotic object that shapes and perpetuates the responses of reviewers and readers alike: the act of labelling as 'exotic' has influenced the perception and reception of the book and the critical reviews foster reader expectations and habits of 'consumption'. Similar to other products from India and other postcolonial countries, books are perceived as appealing and desirable exotic commodities. Aspects of marketability and commodification have overwritten postcolonial literature as a body of work with a decidedly anti-colonial and critical impetus.

In addition to the above-mentioned marketing strategy, the writer herself, Arundhati Roy, became a celebrity overnight and was, almost like an exotic trophy, 'displayed' at international festivals and book fairs. This fame was, according to Mongia, "unprecedented for an Indian novelist" (Mongia 2007, 104). Roy's later decision to become a writer-activist could be regarded as a reaction to the publicity hype around her book and her person.

6. The Next Generation: Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga

Two recent success stories in a way continue the tradition of postcolonial novels in English by Indian writers and employ the by now well-established 'strategic exoticism' of novelists such as Rushdie and Roy. Kiran Desai won the Booker in 2006 for *The Inheritance of Loss* and Aravind Adiga secured the prize in 2008 for *The White Tiger*, both writers share their Indian origins and intermittent residences in the West.

Kiran Desai grew up in India before moving to England at the age of fourteen. She was educated in India, England and the US. Her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), set in the mid-1980s in a Himalayan village, presents a largely stereotypical image of India yet also dismantles them to a certain extent. On the one hand, there are cast-type figures that inhabit the novel such as, for example, two anglophile old Indian ladies, and a Judge who is the perfect mimic man, living in the nostalgic reminiscence of his grandness and importance as a servant of the British Empire. Well-established elements from Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* find their way into Desai's novel: her female protagonist Sai is a young woman leading a secluded life has a hidden affair with a young local Gurkha activist. Similar to Roy's critique of the caste system, Desai admonishes the social inequalities of the Gurkhas (Nepalese indigenous people) and depicts their struggle for a sovereign state. Her political stance remains unclear, however, as Desai caricatures both parties involved in the struggle such as the anglicised Indians as the former elite, and the violent Gurkha leaders who want to dominate current politics. These characterizations bordering on satire in combination with extensive descriptions of the beauty of the Himalayan landscape resonate with *The God of Small Things'* at times nostalgic representation of the Keralan backwaters. Lush and beautiful landscapes as a backdrop for transgressive, violent and melodramatic events surrounding the characters seem to leak into contemporary novels worthy of the acclaim of a Booker Prize.

At first glance, Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008) has nothing in common with novels like *The God of Small Things* or *The Inheritance of Loss*, yet it showcases in a different manner what is termed 'authenticating of experience'. Adiga was born in Madras (now Chennai) and grew up in Mangalore. He left India to study English literature at Columbia College, Columbia University in New York. *The White Tiger's* narrative is centred on Balram Halwai's life and his opinions on the rise of India as a global player. Addressing the Chinese ambassador, who is scheduled to visit India, in the form of letters, this first-person narrative also indirectly addresses the Western reader. The episodic and oral style is the most obvious narrative feature and the novel is lacking more complex narrative strategies and techniques. *The White Tiger's* success and popularity needs to be seen in the attempt to show 'the real India' with its poverty, violence and struggle for survival that has been made popular by such films as *Slumdog Millionaire* (Dir. Danny Boyle, 2008). Similar to the slum tourism that is provided by the film, *The White Tiger* contains a young man's experiences as a servant and driver who

belongs to the lowest rank in Indian society. *The White Tiger* is also – similar to *Slumdog Millionaire* - a from rags to riches story that traces the journey of a socially agile village boy who climbs his way up the social ladder. It seems that Western readers' craving for authenticity calls for stories about the slum and village poverty as this is reductively associated with 'the real India'. Today, Western tastes and public acclaim demand such an 'authentic' Indian experience, which has perhaps outdated the nostalgic image of India as a lush and exotic place.

7. Conclusion

In the literary field today, UK publishers draw on the creative talent of South Asian writers and certainly value their work. At the same time, the literary market and its agents capitalise on the public's undying fascination with different cultures and traditions. Exotic places and unfamiliar stories are thriving in neatly packaged and lavishly designed books from the former colonies of the British empire. Postcolonial studies that have been established at universities worldwide from the late 1980s onwards, view literature from former colonies to be successful at 'writing back' (cf. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 1989) to the imperial centre as well as creating critical and revisionist counter-narratives to the imperialist ideology and worldview with Britain as the mother country and the colonies as dependent children waiting to be educated and civilized. The literary market, however, regards the creative output from the former colonised countries as profitable products catering to Western readership's penchant for new and exciting stories. Huggan, drawing on Ferguson, affirms such Western tastes that are satisfied by present market strategies and distinguishes between marginal cultures and the mainstream:

The vital, independent cultures of socially subordinated groups are constantly mined for new ideas with which to energize the jaded and restless mainstream of a political and economic system based on the circulation of commodities. The process depends on the delivery of continual novelty to the market while at the same time alternative cultural forms are drained of any elements which might challenge the system as a whole. (Ferguson et al. 1990, 11; cited in Huggan 2001, 22)

Thus marginality becomes a value in itself and publishers can make use of the 'continual novelty' which writers from the margins can supply.⁸ Such freshness of subject matter delivered by postcolonial writers might indeed 'energize' mainstream culture and confront Western readers with opinions, beliefs and customs different from their own. Therefore, as a Western reader or critic one might want to look out for publications which are not simply produced to fit current trends and demands for exotic otherness but instead be willing to engage with books that cannot be easily 'translated' into familiar terms and commodified for a global market but challenge some of the pigeonholed impressions of non-Western cultures.

⁸ In *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), Huggan devotes a whole chapter to the value of marginality in which he discusses Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and Hanif Kureishi.

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The Ever-Changing Rules: Acquiring, Editing and Publishing Literary Fiction in the UK

ALEX BOWLER, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR AT JONATHAN CAPE

Interview by Lisa Peter, May 24, 2011, Tübingen

Mr. Bowler, could you sketch the history of editing and publishing concerning Random House and the founding of Jonathan Cape?

Jonathan Cape is an imprint within Random House. The main offices are in New York, but there are offices all over the world. Random House is an absolutely colossal enterprise. However, when Jonathan Cape began publishing in the last century, in the 1910s and 1920s, publishing was still a 'gentleman's profession'. In the past, English men with appropriate means published the books of artists they enjoyed – either out of vanity or out of interest. This continued into the 1960s with Jonathan Cape. By this time, Jonathan Cape was still independent, a small publishing house with about twenty to thirty staff in Bedford Square in London. And in Bedford Square, there were lots of other great publishers at the time, like Chatto and Windus, which were all separate. Then came the age of the corporations. The corporations bought the imprints, and all the imprints were brought together in a conglomerate.

Were all the imprints at Random House consolidated when you started working there?

When I started at Random House about six years ago, I knew what the imprints were, but when I first walked into the office, I was impressed to see all the people from different imprints in one place – on one desk, there was Jonathan Cape, on the one next to it worked the people for Chatto and Windus, and another imprint and another imprint. Random House in the UK is split into several divisions. The division I work for is called Vintage, which gathers all the literary imprints, such as Cape and Chatto. Thus, the structure that I work under is very different from the old days, and this is essential for understanding how the role of the editor in England has changed.

Can you tell us about your job history before Jonathan Cape and your reading habits?

I did an English degree and I graduated ten years ago. When I finished my degree, I hated books and I never wanted to read a book again. I just wanted to do something else. So I went out into London and looked for work. I found work teaching English and I found work working for charities, and then I was very lucky and I found an incredibly interesting job at the House of Commons. I worked there for a couple of years, and it was only then that I started to read again – and I immediately knew that I couldn't keep doing what I was doing at the parliament forever. As fun as it was, it wasn't the right thing. So I started reading books again and got very, very deeply into it and thought, 'I've to change my profession.'

So that was the point when you decided to go into publishing?

Yes, I wrote directly to the publisher of Jonathan Cape and he offered me work experience. It seems to me that this is how everybody gets into publishing. It may not be the same in Germany, it may not be the same in America, but it is certainly the case in England. It doesn't matter how good a degree you have, if it's a Master's or a PhD, they will say 'Come into the office' and they will make you work for free for as long as they can, and if you hang around long enough, and you're in the right place at the right time, there might be an opening and you might just get it. It's incredibly competitive because you're up against everybody else who wants those work experience placements as well. I was very lucky: a job at another publisher, at Yale University Press, came up extremely quickly. I took that job offer, but within two weeks another job at Random House came up and so I switched back. Basically, that was my route into publishing.

In retrospective, how would you judge those years of 'not reading books'?

Well, both being at university and not reading books were absolutely pivotal to what I do now, to actually being an editor.

Is your career path an exception then?

No, I think that's probably what publishers are looking for nowadays when they hire an editor. In my opinion, there's a stereotype of the English editor. Everybody went to Oxford or Cambridge University, it's probably a man, white skin. I think that's the stereotype and people are trying very hard to change that. The fact that I didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge, and have done some strange things in London and didn't like books and had come back to liking books, was important. Not just because it made me slightly different from the usual editor, but because it also meant that I started to read books not as an academic, not in a completely analytical way, that I was actually reading them for pleasure again. And that's the most vital thing an

editor must understand: that books generally and literary books in particular are entertainment. We compete for people's leisure time and against people who are watching DVDs or listening to music. That's where we have to sell our books in order for them to be successful. So, I think for an editor it's really important to have had this experience in actually coming to books as pleasure, not coming fresh from university.

How would you describe the job of an editor nowadays?

It's a really simple job when you think about it. I have to acquire books. I have to read a lot of manuscripts, decide whether I think we should publish them, convince the agent that I should publish them, and then in fact publish them. It's a really simple thing. But within that simple process there are a myriad of complications. I think that the English editor has to have a split personality, because the English editor, and I think it's certainly the same for American editors, has to do a lot of what we call 'schmoosing'. That means: a lot of networking, a lot of lunch. This is absolutely pivotal. We have to be in the right place and talk to the right people to make sure that we get hold of the right books. We have to convince authors that we are the person that should be publishing their books. That's one side of what being an editor entails. We have to be a great actor, in that sense, but then we also have to be able to go very, very deep into a manuscript and shut out the world and concentrate only on that manuscript. Those two elements are essential and really hard to combine – I find it almost impossible to do both at the same time. It's a constant struggle.

So how does acquiring a manuscript actually work?

This is something that has changed as well: almost all the authors are acquired through agents. It used to be that a writer would write their book, usually in longhand or on computer, and send the manuscript in and we would trawl through manuscript after manuscript from people we didn't know. Nowadays, the so-called 'slush-pile' has migrated to the agency. The literary agent is the person who is reading the slush-pile and finding the good stuff. The agent will be making money from having found the good manuscripts and selling them to us. So all the submissions I see come from agents, and while I don't know every agent in London, I have a working relationship with, let's say, thirty or forty agents, who are luckily not all submitting things at the same time. This gives you some idea of the kind of networks that are out there and the amount of material that is available in the trade.

What kind of books are you looking for when you acquire a manuscript?

The kind of books I'm meant to buy at Jonathan Cape – and I'm quite lucky, I can kind of buy what I like – would fall under the rubric 'young British voices'. So we have famous people like

The Ever-Changing Rules: Acquiring, Editing and Publishing Literary Fiction in the UK

Matin Amis and Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes, but my job is, I suppose, to find the next generation – the people who are in their early thirties now – and to try to bring them onto the list. And it's important that agents know that this is what I'm trying to do, otherwise we waste a lot of each other's time because I just get send books which aren't right for me.

Is there any other way to buy a book apart from via an agent?

The other people that I buy books from are American publishers. Over in New York, an American agent will sell a book to an American publisher and very often the American publisher will buy World-English rights, i.e. publishing rights for every territory where the language is English including the UK. This is then handled by the foreign-rights-department at the publisher, not the agent. So the other people I have to know apart from the agents in the UK are the editors in America, the agents in America, and the foreign-rights-people in America, because I need to know which agent is going out with things, who's bought it over there, and then I need to know who I'm actually going to buy the book off. There are hundreds of people that you need to have some idea of what they're doing around the world.

How can you stay in touch with all these people?

I suppose, this is where the importance of lunch comes in. Two or three times a week you go out for lunch or you're going to parties at night or you're having drinks with agents and you trade information. You want to know which things they've seen recently on the slush-pile, or what they've found beyond the slush-pile. You want to hear about that book, then you'll have to form an opinion if it's for you, and then you'll have to put yourself as the editor in a prime position to get that book, as the agent will be having lunch tomorrow with another editor, and then another editor, and another editor.

So the competition between editors starts quite early on?

Yes, even before the book has been submitted, all the editors are trying to make sure they're first. There's always negotiation. That's why lunch is absolutely essential to English publishing. Really important work does happen there. The other thing that ties in with lunch is that the editor has to be something of an actor. I've said that I'm looking for young British authors, so I suppose I have to seem like the kind of editor who is interested in young British authors or who would attract young British authors. You have to be saying the right things to them. You also have to stand out – this is a really important thing.

How do you manage to stand out among all the editors then?

I'm very lucky: I'm very tall and have scruffy hair, so I actually look slightly different from other people. That makes them say, 'Oh, yeah, that tall editor with long hair.' You really pay attention to tiny little things: When I tucked my shirt in about three years ago for work, my boss told me to un-tuck it because it could be a bad career move if I made myself too smart. So you will have to try and keep to a certain identity and image because it makes you easily identifiable and also means that you are inhabiting a certain market. Actually, that's an important thing that happens during lunch as well; you're not just trying to get those books, you're also saying who you are, even in the silliest way, at the same time.

Let us consider the actual process of acquisition. What happens when you think that a book is interesting?

Ok, let's go through the process. I have lunch and it is a good lunch. And I *know* that there is this interesting book and it is maybe going to be two months until it is ready, that's what the agent tells me over lunch. Maybe a month later I will send a little email and say to John, 'John, how's that book coming along?' in a very subtle way. And he will say, 'It's fine. It will be with you in two or three weeks.' And then you will be clearing your desk, getting ready for this submission to come in. Let's say it comes in. You'll read it, and then you'll probably hate it, and that's not an exaggeration: Of the hundred manuscripts I read, there'll be one or two I'll be interested in taking on, even from agents. And that is partly because of the nature of our list. We have very big names on our list. We have a very strong list. We don't need to bring in lots and lots of new material.

So what are your criteria for actually buying a book?

We just need to bring in the books which are very, very good and which we think we can do things with. The combination of these two criteria is problematic and occasionally makes me very sad: Just because it's a good book doesn't mean that we should buy it. Some author will have spent four or five years writing a book and it will be very good indeed, but you'll know it won't sell, and you can't give a book a slot on your schedule in the year if you don't think it's going to make money. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, such as when you are buying a book that's just good after the agent has shown you a chapter of fifty pages for a second book which makes you think of this first book as a kind of 'clearing the throat': If a first book isn't going to work or hasn't worked, the author was just clearing their throat, before the second book comes along and then they'll be singing loudly. I suppose that's the idea of the turn of phrase. So that's when we would buy a book when it's just good. But generally the key

thing is that we can see how to sell the book and it doesn't take a genius to see a good book that you can sell, it's just completely obvious.

Obvious?

Obvious as in really exceptional writing. Or the story will be so engrossing or it will have an easy publicity hook somehow by dealing with something that's happened in current affairs. There was a very big book last year by Emma Donoghue called *Room*. It was translated everywhere. It was on the Booker shortlist. It sold, I think, hundreds of thousands of copies and it was acquired for hundreds of thousands of pounds on the advance that was paid to the agent. It definitely was a very good book, but what excited people was that it was about a child who had been born essentially in captivity, very like the Fritzl-case in Austria. You could immediately see that this was going to cause a storm, even if the book wasn't brilliant. People were going to write features and were going to talk about it to one another. So, it doesn't take a genius to see that's going to work. The problem is that because it doesn't take a genius to recognize a good book that is going to sell, every publisher will want that book.

Are there any other criteria?

Besides a book being good, when we might buy it, and a book being easy to sell, when we'll definitely try to buy it, there are a couple of other things. Sometimes books are bought even though they're not very good – for political reasons, for example. It may be to keep the agent happy, or it may be because we've had a long relationship with the author, or somebody the author knows, even. Another circumstance which affects the buying of books and which I think a lot of publishers are thinking about at the moment – is about identifying your brand. So some people will pay more money for a book than they should because they think it will contribute to their list's identity and standing. There were very big American authors who have gone to another publisher recently, and it's quite clear that the publisher who has bought these books has paid far too much money, but is doing it to say 'I am the proper home for these big names in contemporary American fiction.' That way, even if they lose money there, their logic is that they will attract new authors, it will help the list. So there is a kind of PR-angle sometimes to the acquisition of a manuscript.

How do you proceed after you came across a manuscript you really liked? Who is actually involved in the decision of buying a book?

Let's say, I have a manuscript that's come in from an agent and I think it's not only good, but I can see how to sell it. I can't just say, 'Yes, I'm going to buy it' – it doesn't work like that. Maybe back in the sixties and seventies the publisher or editor could just say, 'Yes, I want to buy this.'

Now, I read the manuscript and then I go to my publisher, very quietly and gently, and say, 'I think this is very good. You should read it.' The publisher makes all of the decisions, but at the same time you have every other department reading it, and most importantly, the sales department...

So what does the sales department actually do?

Usually it is quite easy to say what they do – they sell books to bookstores. However, in the UK there is currently a special situation with bookshops on the High Street. We only have one chain bookstore – Waterstones – so they have a monopoly. And our sales department obviously has to have a very good relationship with Waterstones because they have to convince them to take nine-, ten-, fifteen-thousand copies of a book because they will be able to sell them. We also have to go to independent bookshops, but Waterstones are the big sellers. So, our sales people know the market, they know Waterstones, they know Amazon, who are a big customer as well, and they know how many copies Waterstones are likely to take. Therefore, I have to show the sales department the manuscript so they can quickly read it and estimate, 'Okay, this will sell six-, seven-thousand copies in hardback, and ten-thousand copies in paperback.' Essentially, they are crunching numbers. They give those numbers to me, I feed them into a computer, and it tells me how much money I can pay for the book in advance royalties. That means I might buy a book for ten-thousand pounds, and when the author has sold enough books to have earned those ten-thousand pounds back, he or she will start to get a royalty on top. For example, ten percent per copy after they've earned back their advance. So, that's the maths that's happening in-house in a slow process that can take up to two or three weeks.

Now that you've got the numbers from the sales department, the whole acquiring process of the book can start?

Let's say all goes fine, then I would make an offer, and assuming that no other publisher was interested, the deal would basically be done. That rarely ever happens, however, because, as I said, people know a good book when they see it.

What happens instead?

People recognize a good book and a book that's going to sell well, so at least two or three publishers will be interested in buying it. This is where the agents make a lot of money. Let's say that I make the first offer to the agent, but he will know that the book is good and he will say to the other publishers, 'Oh, I've had an offer. An offer's come in. Are you still interested?' And the other publisher will panic, read very, very quickly and then they will make an offer. And

then a third publisher will read and panic and make an offer. What happens then is called an auction.

How does that work?

For example, I'll start with an offer of ten grand, somebody else will offer twelve, someone else might offer sixteen. I get told that someone offered sixteen; we just go up and up and up. And sometimes you only have a few hours to decide. It's basically trying to force the hand, it's a gamble. The reason it shoots up is that it's easy to see the books you can sell but it's very, very hard to find them. There aren't many. So when they appears, we all leap down and really fight for them. That's what happens in an auction.

Are there any other strategies in order to acquire a book?

Sometimes, when there is more than one publisher interested, we have to do what's called a 'beauty-contest'. Very often everybody will actually know that the book is a good book, and that it's going to cost more than what they can offer, given that they are not going to sell more than, say, ten-thousand copies. Every publisher knows that, so everybody stops at roughly the same level. The agent then takes the author round the publishers and this is what is called a beauty-contest. There's never a beautiful person in the room. What we do is we try to impress the author. Some people do crazy things in this process, and, apparently, that's part of the role of the editor now.

What 'crazy' things do editors actually do to impress the author?

For instance, well, I don't do this, but some people will bake cakes for the author. Some person, and this is very weird, wrote the author's name in rice on a table. I don't know if that's a true incident or not, but I've heard that rumour. Some may bring flowers, or everybody in a meeting, including the most important person in the company, would be wearing a strange outfit inspired by a figure a character in the book. For example, if it's a book about policemen, your sales director would come as a policeman. It sounds terrible, but it seems to work for some people. We don't do it. We have risen above that in Jonathan Cape so far. So these are things that editors are doing now. Gone are the days of visionary one-man-publishers, or even gentlemen. We are now people who put rice on a table to try and convince the author to come. It's that competitive at the moment. And people are always trying to find innovative ways to attract people.

Buying a book means buying the rights as well?

Yes, buying the rights is the other thing to take into consideration when we buy a book. I'm often buying American novels from the foreign-rights-department at American publishers. Sometimes I buy World-English-rights and sell them to America. So when I make an offer for a book, it's not just 'Is the book any good?', but it's actually 'Where will this book sell?' or 'Is there a chance that we can make a lot of money selling the book into America?' But very often when we try to get the World-English-rights, the agent won't let us have them because the agent is as clever as we are and knows that the book is going to sell in America. So they want to make that money themselves. So something we have to consider is which territories we're trying to buy. But because we're Random House this is something that's changed as well. Random House is a big company; we have offices in New York and all around the world. Sometimes we make global offers – that's something that wouldn't have happened in the past. It would have been very hard for an independent publisher to very quickly, let's say within 24 hours, team up with another three or four publishers around the world and make an offer to one agent. But we are able to do that now. So last week I read a book on a Friday, spoke to the American editor last thing on the Friday, they read the book over the weekend and we made the offer first thing on Monday. So, you can work incredibly quickly and do things globally as well. That's something that's changed and that's another reason why I need to know everybody in New York as well as everybody in London, so that we can make those kinds of offers.

Considering advances – what is the average height of an advance today?

I've spoken about some big figures like four-hundred-and-fifty thousand and four-hundred-and-seventy-five thousand pounds, but what I should say is that for debut fiction at the moment a really good advance is five thousand pounds – which is terrible if you have spent four or five years writing the book.

What would you say is the reason for this?

It's essentially because the market is so very, very bad at the moment. It depresses me when I start talking about how little money authors get paid. About five years ago it would have been about twenty, twenty-five thousand pounds for a good offer, but unfortunately that's changed now. However, like I said, if there's an auction it can just shoot up to hundreds of thousands of pounds all within a week. And if I do a big deal in London, you can bet a lot of money that within a week news will have got out that I've done a big deal and I would talk to what are called 'scouts' in London.

Scouts?

Scouts are people who are employed by foreign publishers in London to find out what's going on in London. They are actually among the people who I have lunch with. So, I'm having conversations with scouts and they will know that this big deal is being done and they will write reports very quickly to the publishers all around the world. Quite often those publishers won't read the book. They will just read the reports, see a positive report and see another positive report from a scout, and they will pay a lot of money almost blind. So, not only are we buying our own book, but we are also doing the agents of another publisher quite a lot of favours. When we do pay a lot of money it means that there's a ripple effect around the world.

So we can say that after acquiring a book you got the first part of the job done. What happens next?

Let's say we acquired the novel and now we have to do the publishing. I suppose the best definition of publishing is that we have to identify the market for the book, to identify who the readers are going to be and take that book as effectively as we can to the market in the best possible shape.

How do you do that?

From my point of view, the first thing that I will have to do is to edit the book. I do lots and lots of different levels of editing. You see, on the one hand my job is that I am 'buying' people, I'm buying young British authors, and then I edit their work. But on the other hand I'm also working for authors who have been bought years and years ago for multiple contracts, who will always write books for Cape. I was not their original editor, but I will have to edit them as well. So as well as editing my own books I have all this other editing to do.

But let's talk about a book I have bought. I want to try and get this in as strong a shape as possible. And very often, even though I pay a lot of money for a book, it needs a lot of work. It can be a process of about six months. That sounds like a colossal amount of time. It sounds like it's just you working on the book for six months, but that's not true. We go through different levels of edits. I think the average number of edits for me would be four. So I usually take a novel through in four drafts.

Could you maybe explain what these different levels of edits entail?

Sure. I get the raw text, and the first edit would be what's called a 'structural edit'. Structural edit essentially means that you're shifting parts around, you're changing characters, you're cutting large parts of the book out. You're doing all these things, and you're calling them suggestions. So you mark up the manuscript. It will take a long time, up to a couple of weeks, the

structural edit, because you're really thinking about it. You then have to try and articulate these marks you've made – like this big horrible red cross through fifty pages. You have to be able to explain why you've done that. I think that's what most editors find most difficult because it's actually done by instinct very often – something feels wrong, something feels out of place. But you have to go to the author and explain your reaction to the book. So what happens is that you send your manuscript and you send your notes, which are your explanations of the marks or extra things that you weren't quite able to articulate. These notes sometimes run up to twenty pages. It's a colossal amount of work going into the first stage.

What happens after you sent this to the author?

It can be that you don't hear from them for a week or so. When they phone you up it's a little tentative at the beginning of the conversation because you're a bit nervous that they hate all of your ideas and everything you said about the book, and they are a bit nervous that they may have to completely rewrite the book as well. So what happens is that very slowly people will come into the office and we will spend the whole day talking through the notes. What happens is that you will never get all of these notes, they never all happen. You know, fifty percent is good. But the author reacts and goes away and rewrites. And that's the most exciting thing because that's kind of – 'magic' is the wrong word because it's not, it's more precise than that, but they react to your work and they come back, maybe two months later, with the second draft. It is the most exciting thing because this is the text that you have interacted with – interacted with, but you've not been creative with it. I think that's a big mistake that some editors think they're some kind of artists. But you're not, you're just reading the book as a reader would, and try to reorganize things slightly. It's a very workman-like job, I think.

What happens after you have received the second draft?

Well, you read the second draft, and then you've got more red marks, because you had more thoughts, but this time the notes are maybe eight or nine pages. You politely let the author know about that, send the notes off, have a slightly shorter conversation, and then you get to the third draft. The third draft is usually more or less there, structurally. From then on you're really editing for language. You're making sure that every sentence is doing what it needs to do, and then authors agree with that or they don't agree with that, and then you've got your fourth draft, essentially. That's, hopefully, hopefully, nine months before publication. This doesn't mean that the book is ready; it just means that the actual manuscript isn't going to be drastically altered. I should say, however, that this is only for fiction. Non-fiction is a slightly more complicated process from there on.

This kind of editing is for books you bought. Is there another kind of editing for those 'big' names you spoke about earlier on?

Yes, indeed. There you are really concentrating on the language, just looking for mistakes, just being very, very delicate. You are just paying a lot of attention, and I will spend as long doing that as I would on a structural edit for one of my own books. It can be that I spend two weeks sitting at home going sentence by sentence, making sure everything is absolutely perfect in the book. Again, that means that you have twenty pages of notes, but here the notes are very different. They won't say, 'I think this character should die,' it says, 'Page eight, line two: Should there be a repetition of "of"?' So, that kind of really basic editing, and it is important that you start to build up trust with these authors. After that trust is established you'll be able to point out more fundamental things you're slightly worried about, but it's a different kind of editing with people at that level.

Roughly, how long does the whole editing process of a book you have acquired take?

To give you an idea, the average number of hours I put into a book that I've acquired is probably 150 hours of editorial work, I'd say. And I think that's a lot. I'm lucky that I have the time to edit, and I do edit very thoroughly. It's very disappointing for editors, of course, because nobody ever knows the work you did. People will only ever know the mistake you left in. And people will always write about the problems you left in the book. The thing to see is that I don't find it possible to go into that depth of editing at the same time as having to have lunch and acquire books, and I'm not sure many people do.

Do you think this is one of the main difficulties of an editor's job?

Yes, and I would even say that it is that thing which makes being an editor a kind of schizophrenic occupation, but it actually works, and it actually manifests itself in your timetable as well: You will actually go into what I call 'stealth mode' or 'under the radar' for roughly two weeks. You'll disappear, you will not be in the office, you'll be editing. And then you'll come out again for your two weeks of lunch, and then you'll go back to doing the editing. That's how I balance my work and I think that's how a lot of people do it.

Let's say the book is edited now, it is in its final stages and no essential changes will take place from that point onwards. What happens next?

Well, editing is stage two and that means we're only half-way through the publishing process. The next step is to bring the book from being a manuscript that I've edited to being produced as a bound book. So it goes to another editor, the copy editor, who checks grammar, checks if the geography is correct, etc. etc. Afterwards, it goes to a typesetter, so that it starts to look

like a book. It's still a manuscript but it looks like a book. It then gets proof-read, because typesetters invariably put new errors in when they're typing up or scanning the manuscript, with sometimes disastrous consequences. Finally a proof-reader gives the green light and then we press 'Print'. So, that's what happens on the production side. I have a little story about typesetters.

Do you know the Jonathan-Franzen-story? Jonathan Franzen changed the name of one of his characters, I think he changed the name Matt to Ray. So the typesetter at the last minute, just to make sure the change had been made, ran what's called a global search or a global change, so that for every instance of M-A-T-T it was replaced with R-A-Y. The word 'matter' became 'rayer'. All the way through the final book. I'm not sure if these words were the right words, but it was definitely what happened on a global search. And there's nothing you can do, you've sent it off to print. You've done all of your work and then you've got stock.

Is there anything you can do against this horror scenario?

Well, usually, we can charge the typesetters to get the stock poled, but once a finished book arrives, we don't read it, because we think we've done our work, and it's good. Then next, the book goes to the author and the author sees these mistakes, and that's a complete disaster for us. What is even worse, if the author doesn't see the mistakes, then the readers and the reviewers see them. So, that's something we're always watchful of. And again, as the editor you will have to deal with all of that. The production director will actually be the person who shouts through the phone to the typesetters, but it will be you who is shouted at by the author, by the agent. You're the person who is fighting fires all the time, trying to please people, explain the situations.

So that's how a book is made. But who actually decides what the book will look like?

It is the editor who has to brief the jacket, that is to say, to suggest what the front cover is going to be. This is a really difficult thing, because not every editor reads a book and immediately knows what jacket it's going to be. That means you're stuck. So that's the first problem. The second problem is of course that sometimes authors have a very clear idea of what they want on the front cover – which may look like a very bad idea to their editor.

I see. What do you do to satisfy both parties?

Well, you have to deal with what the author wants on the cover and then come up with your own interpretation of what should be on there until you've actually worked out what it's going to be between the two of you.

Why is a cover so important?

It is what's going to touch the reader who should be reading this book. So, you see, it's just an advert for the right reader, even if what's on the front cover isn't in the book. So the people who get really involved, besides the designer, are the sales department and also the book shops. They want to have a big say on how our books look now because it's going to be in their shop and they're the people that, in the end, will have to sell it. So it's absolutely imperative, they think, that the book has a selling jacket, and this is where there are massive arguments.

Massive arguments?

Yes, because the polar opposites in a publishing house are the sales department, who want sales, sales, sales, and the art department, who are artists. The two don't always come together very nicely. We are very lucky at ours that they do, but this is a constant problem, I think, for all editors, because you're the person in the middle trying to sort this out – trying to please the design department and please the sales department. And this manifests itself at jacket meetings and it's the same in every publishing house.

What does a typical jacket meeting in your publishing house look like?

Our jacket meetings are every Thursday. You get a phone call, rather nervously, from the designer who says, 'Can you please come down to the board room?' and you go down to the board room and the designer is sitting at the end of the table with a little pile of printouts. Next to the designer is the sales force, all the way up on one side, on the other side of the table are the editors for the books. We'll go through the schedule of what's being published and the designer will say, 'Yes, we got a jacket for this one,' shows the jacket – there'll be two or three different jackets, and there's this silence for a minute where everyone's kind of thinking, 'What do I think?' Or everyone's too nervous to say that they don't like it or something like that. And this is where the fights happen. It's like 'I think, this is a beautiful jacket,' 'I think, this is a terrible jacket' and they manifest themselves at those meetings and you have to go away with that information and try and make sense of it. It's really hard because you're dealing with two completely different approaches to how a book should look and how a book should be sold.

Are there any other problems with jackets?

The other problem with jackets has to do with copyright quite often. Say, we've all agreed on a jacket and then we've even got the author and the agent to agree to it. Say, that's all happened. We then have a real problem sometimes, actually sourcing the image. For instance, there's a photograph on the front. We have to find out who the photographer was, who the

model was, etc. etc. We had a really big problem with a major author of ours two years ago. The front cover that we had approved and which was about to go to press was a picture taken by a friend of the author's, who is a famous photographer. The book was about the seventies and sex, basically. The front cover was a girl naked reclining over a sofa, with her hair down, black and white, tasteful. We're about to go to press when we get a letter from the model, from the person who is naked. Because what happens when we approve our jacket in-house it goes into all of our systems, you can see it on Amazon, you can see it anywhere in the world online. So she'd seen this picture of herself and though we'd been told by the photographer that it's all fine it transpired that the woman was now a devote Muslim and at the time the photograph was taken she was underage as well. So we had a massive problem, we were about to go to press and we needed a jacket now as well, as we had to drop this jacket. She wanted to go to court because we'd put the picture of her up all over the world.

How can you react to such a dilemma?

Again, of course, it falls to the editor to phone the author saying: 'We need a new jacket. Why don't we take one of the jackets that we had before?', because we had two or three jackets in the first place. So we had to get the jacket ready immediately because it had to go to press, phone the author, convince him to take the jacket he didn't like, which we managed to do. Second, we had to try and stop the lady going through legal proceedings with us, which is an incredibly hard thing to do. You can take advice from your legal department, but the editor is the person dealing with that as well.

Let's now say that we haven't had any of these problems and we have a beautiful jacket and we have a wonderful book. There are no typos, the typesetter has done nothing crazy, and the lady on the front is forty years old and is absolutely fine with being on the cover of the book.

So what's the next step then?

More or less nine months before publication there is what is called a launch meeting. I'm not sure this is the same at every publisher, but I think it is becoming the standard practice. The whole division gets together, so all of the editors and every single department that will be selling your book and that will be working on getting your book to the market. And what happens here is there's a little podium in our main conference room at Random House, and each editor has to get up and is given three minutes –the head of marketing has an egg timer and he tells you you've taken too long and then you have to wrap it up very, very quickly – you have three minutes to pitch your book.

Why don't you have more time to pitch the book?

The reason you do it quickly is because this is exactly what your team will have to do from now on. The people you're talking to is your publicity department, your marketing department and your sales department. The publicity department is going to go out. They're going to get you reviews in the newspapers, they're going to get your author interviews, they're going to get your author appearances at festivals, etc. etc. They're going to get them on television, if we're lucky, or the radio. But they'll have to make a lot of phone calls, and the people they're phoning get these phone calls every day, so the book has to stand out and it has to stand out very, very quickly, and that's why you have to be able to do your pitch in three minutes. You're basically teaching everybody in the room how to do the pitch. It is exactly the same for the sales department. They will have to go to Waterstones and Amazon and independent booksellers and they will have to say, 'This book is xyz.' Boom. Like that. And then the marketing department is the same. They're trying to buy advertising space and time, and they need to know exactly what they're pitching, so they know where they're trying to pitch it.

So, you could say that the launch meeting is quite important...

Yes, I'd even say that it is the most important meeting that happens at Random House and you have to be very good at it in order for your books to stand out, because, as I told you before, with the size of our company, just within our division there are, I think, four imprints, four hardback imprints. And in a spring month we'll all be doing six, seven books each, so, we'll all be going out at the same time, looking at twenty-eight books competing against each other – and that's all within one division in one publishing house.

Do you know how many books are published each month?

I don't know what the numbers are, but it's definitely hundreds. You have to work very hard for yours to stand out and this is the point of the pitch meeting.

Can you elaborate on this, please?

What do you do at a pitch meeting? To make your book sell in three minutes you have to pretend that it's something it isn't. You're not saying that it's better than it is or anything like that, but you have to condense it down into the simplest, most affecting way, something that's going to be memorable and sometimes you find yourself saying things you feel uncomfortable saying, but it actually really works for the book. So, I had a book, and it's actually my favourite book this year, and I'll just tell you very quickly about it – it's an Irish novel, it's set slightly in the future, but there's no technology in the future, that doesn't matter. It's set in the future west-coast of Ireland and it's in a city where everything that could have gone wrong has gone wrong,

and the city is now broken up into gangs. There are essentially fights between these gangs who want control of the city. It's very, very basic. But the writer is a genius. He's been in the *New Yorker Magazine* already, he's won loads and loads of prizes, he has incredible quotes from other authors. He's Irish and he's a very good writer. He does interesting things with language. So, in your head, you say, 'Joyce', even though it's not right, in your head you say 'James Joyce'. And then there are battles going on and he's not interested in the depth of the character, he tells his story in a very filmic way. So you think, 'I need a film that's got violence and gangs in it.' Next, you're just going to put the two together and you find yourself saying, 'This book is as if Joyce had sat down and written *Sin City*.' You know *Sin City*? But you just feel sick of what you just said. And you walk out of the meeting and you hear them all going, 'Ah, Joyce and *Sin City*. Joyce and *Sin City*.' And it works, it absolutely works. So, I felt terrible about this line and they all took it to their bosoms, they all loved this line.

So these tag lines are then used for marketing purposes?

Yes, what we do is this: we make proof copies, which are cheap paperback copies that we send out to reviewers before we make finished copies. And this is the key marketing device and it's very important what copy you have out there in order to get the book attention. When I was about to go on holiday, the front cover, it didn't have a title, it said, 'Joyce writes *Sin City*'. And before I went, I thought this needs to be cut and I put a big cut through it and went on holiday, came back, and they hadn't cut it, because they loved it so much. And it made a really big difference. Waterstones stocked absolutely thousands of it, it was selected for Waterstones and Levin, etc. etc. It's the line that people used to describe the book to each other. I don't think it represents the book, but the point is, it's got the book out there and it just about means the right people read the book, because it's Irish, it's 'language' and it's got a kind of filmic violent feel. So, all of those things are actually in there, even though you misrepresented the book, but it's actually something you have to do as an editor.

So, let's say now we had our launch meeting, you did this great pitch, and all of the teams are ready now to talk only about the book to the rest of the market out there. Is that where your job is done?

In an ideal world that would be the case. Unfortunately, that's just not the case now. Maybe it was the case five or six years ago, but it's definitely not the case now.

What's the reason for this?

It has nothing to do with our publicity department or our marketing department not being very good, they are very good – it's because of the problems with the market at the moment in the

The Ever-Changing Rules: Acquiring, Editing and Publishing Literary Fiction in the UK

UK. We're not selling as many books as we want to and we only have one High Street customer, which is a real problem. The other big thing that's happening now is, because of the recession, and I suppose also because of the Internet – we all know this – newspapers are in trouble. Advertising space is worth so much, and the areas that are getting hit are the culture pages, where our books used to get reviewed.

But books are still getting reviewed...

Yes, but fewer books are getting reviewed and also the culture sections are getting lighter and lighter. They're not what they were, where people would go and read the book reviews, people who loved books and wanted to buy books – that's where they would go to basically pick what they were going to buy that week. People migrated away, and the book columns have shrunk and become lighter and lighter. It's a real problem for us. And the other thing is that if you get one good review it doesn't mean anything. I had a full page review in the Observer, which is our Sunday newspaper and the review said, I don't completely remember it, but it essentially said, 'This is the best book I've ever read.' And we sold fifty copies that week because of it, whereas I think five years ago we might have sold a thousand on the back of that review. So, something is wrong in the market.

And what can the editor do about that?

It puts pressure on you as the editor, because you're the person who has put that advance down on the line at the very start of the process. You need the book to sell because that's a part of your career, you know, that's a part of yourself, as well. You love that book, that's why you went for it. You can't let the book die. So, now, we're just much more involved right up to publication and this is where a new sort of networking has come in. More lunch again, but this time it's not with agents, this time we're talking to journalists, we are talking to the booksellers ourselves. It's not just the sales force and the publicity force doing that work now. If we really want attention for our book we go out and do it ourselves. So, *C* by Tom McCarthy, which was a big book for us last year, I really wanted it to stand out, so I wrote directly to the head of Waterstones with the jacket to make sure that he knew about this book and that it was coming directly from the editor, not the sales force. I then got on my bike and I cycled around all our bookshops in London and did what the sales rep does: actually hand-sell the book. You just talk to the people in the bookshop about the book and hope that they will stock it. More of us are starting to do this work ourselves.

So is this the standard procedure nowadays?

Only on very rare occasions, but that is what's happening, it's a shift that's occurring. It's not just work before publication, but even afterwards you're at parties, just making sure your book is being spoken about in the right circles. The work you're doing on a book just never stops. And it's even the same when something wins a price or does really well. You just have to keep working on it. Tom McCarthy was shortlisted for the Booker last year, and with that comes a whole new level of problems and publicity issues.

What sort of problems and issues?

For instance, the press... the press quite liked Tom because he's quite an experimental figure and he says things they find difficult to swallow, which is great news for a publisher. However, two weeks before the Booker was announced, Ladbrokes, which is the big betting shop in England, stopped taking bets on the Booker prize because somebody had put £20,000 on Tom McCarthy to win. This was a big news story and it meant that Tom was going to win the Booker prize. Everybody had decided. Then a news story started – I don't know why – that it was Tom who had put the money on himself. I don't know why, apparently it was meant to be a prank. He didn't do this, let me add. But they made this a news story and it's something we had to try and control. So it fell to me to try and control this news story that was just made up and wasn't real at all. And it was a nerve-wrecking situation because we thought we were in with a really good chance of winning the prize, but now it was almost certain that we weren't going to win because the favourite never wins anyway. But those kinds of situations constantly keep coming up with the books that are out there. It's your job. You are the first port of call for actually protecting your author, rather than the other departments. Sure, you have the benefits of all these other departments, they will guide you, and they will help you. And they'll actually have a lot of say on how the book is packaged and which books you buy and for how much money – in the end, however, I think it is always the editor's head on the line.

Let's take a look at the future – digital publishing is a massive thing at the moment.

Well, we had this big moment when the Kindle came out properly at Christmas last year, and in January the ebook sales were absolutely huge. So we had broken our digital budget for this year within the first two-and-a-half months of the year. We were already selling six or seven times what we thought we would of ebooks. In America now, it reached the critical mass where the Kindle-editions were outselling physical editions on Amazon. We've had instances with our crime novels recently where the same is true, the ebook edition is selling more than the physical copy. We've reached a really important moment now in publishing. Everybody accepts this.

Is this the death of the book as we know it?

We don't know if it means the death of the physical book or if it just means another way of selling books. I think it means another way of selling books. Anyway, it's a big debate at the moment.

What consequences does this have for publishing?

If there's going to be a shift from physical books to digital books the two departments that will be most affected are the production department and the sales department. The sales department are the people who go sell physical books to the book shops, but you don't go to Amazon and say, 'Take a hundred files of this book.' They just take the file, no one needs to sell them that file. So, that part of the publishing house could be in danger and of course, the production department are endangered as well. A publisher is all about distribution. That's the big thing we offer. 'We can get your book into your shop, we can get thousands of copies there.' All a writer needs now is a file that they can probably create themselves... I read people's files on my Kindle, they just send me a word-file and I can read it and it reads exactly the same as a Kindle-document.

So the big conversation topic at the moment is what is going to happen to publishers?

It's a little crazy because the favourite thing of the British publishers, apart from lunch, is to talk about how the world is going to end for publishing. It's always the end for publishing. I'm sure, it's not. But at the London book fair we had a very interesting debate about 'Will publishers soon be irrelevant?'. Cory Doctorow, who edits a website called Boing Boing, which has a very technological focus and very forward thinking, had put forward the notion that publishers would be irrelevant very soon.

In what direction is the publishing house headed in your opinion?

We work for the author. That's what a publishing house does and will do. The author writes a book and he knows it's quite good, but wants it edited, he wants it really pulled into shape, he wants a professional set of eyes on it, so that's where I come in – so, I'm okay. And then it needs a publicist and a marketing person who actually know the market and the trade in order to get that book attention. The problem remains that with the Internet and digital publishing there's just billions and billions of things out there. You won't stand out – unless you have somebody who's doing that work for you. That's maybe what publishers will become. Essentially it's very interesting for me as a young editor to ask myself: 'Will I be an editor at a big publishing house or will I be a kind of freelance editor who is hired by certain authors?' I don't know. No one does.

Literary Reviews: Past, Present, Future

ERICA WAGNER, AUTHOR; LITERARY EDITOR OF THE TIMES, 1996 - 2013

Interview by Lisa Peter, September 14, 2012, London.

You have been responsible for the books' section of *The Times*, one of the biggest national newspapers in the UK, for more than 15 years now. What would you say has changed most in terms of reviewing?

The space that I have had to actually review books has varied greatly over the years. I have been doing my job since 1996, when we were still a broadsheet. I started out with one broadsheet page, then I had two broadsheet pages, then the books pages have been in different sections of the newspaper. Between 2004 and 2006 I had a weekly book section, which with 20 pages plus four pages of puzzles was the most space I have ever had. These days, paper is very expensive so now the books pages are within the Saturday Review and at the moment I have four tabloid pages. That is a great contraction and makes the choices I have to make even harder. I came into my job, really, from the publishing side. I was very young when I started my job and did not have a background in journalism. Now I am very much a journalist but my focus has always been on books and on serving books. It is hard not having a lot of space, those choices I have to make are invidious and it is very difficult when I have to tell publishers that there is nothing I can do.

How many books normally arrive in your office per day?

I have never counted an actual number but I would say I probably receive between 30 and 100 books every day at *The Times*. They are delivered in those big grey mail sacks; almost always two of them, sometimes even four. The physical work of just opening them is not insignificant.

How do you choose the books that are going to be reviewed?

What happens now, coming into autumn, which is the busiest period, there are things you have to review: Salman Rushdie's memoir of the fatwa is an immovable object and J. K. Rowling's first novel for adults is an immovable object. If you are also serving the readers, you cannot say 'Oh, well, there is something else that I'm more interested in.' Because part of what we do

is give people a handle on what everyone is talking about, which is why we would run a piece about *Fifty Shades of Grey*, even if we think it has no literary merit. But it comes in a book form, so we will write about it. A lot of my job is making those choices, both to serve the books, but also to make the books pages interesting in themselves. If there are five fascinating history books coming out in one week, you do not want all history books in the pages because you need to have something for everyone. The other thing I try to do, because I do not have a lot of space, is move books towards other sections where I think there might be a feature in it, for example in the features section, the weekend section, or the magazine. I try and spread the coverage around.

What are your tasks as the literary editor? Is your main focus organising the reviewing process?

I write myself; I have a column; I do interviews, mainly. I do few reviews these days, mostly because I like to meet people and talk to people. The other important thing about my job is matching the right reviewer to the right book and that is a lot of fun if you get it right. Not only the 'big names' that you might be able to get – because one of the great strengths of *The Times* is the great writers that we have on staff. I think one of the reasons why people read *The Times* is because they like those voices; they want to know what those voices think. David Aaronovitch reviews a lot for me, Ben MacIntyre, all of our great writers – I like to have them in the books pages. They are wide-ranging people of catholic tastes. So that is the other part of the job. Sometimes you will review a book that you might not want to review initially, maybe because it is a bit marginal. But if I know just the right person who would write a beautiful piece on this, I will do it, that is my work. I am also a writer of books myself, therefore I think about it from that side.

What happens if you are not able to find the right reviewer? For example, if a review does not really work out or if it is a very negative one.

That does not tend to happen. I have a group of people, not just writers in *The Times* but also freelancers, whom I trust. Sometimes I will try new people, but mainly I am working from a group of writers that I know and trust. I might edit a piece, I might change it or say 'That's not quite clear to me, could you rephrase that' but I almost never – now – get a piece that I cannot use. That is a waste of everybody's effort. For the book of course it is a shame if a review is bad, but those are the breaks. I am not trying to guarantee any particular kind of review.

Do you have more freelance reviewers nowadays than permanent staff?

It is more staff now, which is partly due to budgetary reasons. But you can either say I have four or hundreds of reviewers because I have a huge contacts book. It is not every week that I want to review a book about oceanography, but if I do, there is someone who might only write a piece for me once every three years but whom I still think of as one of my writers. So, it is a lot of people and networking. I always keep my eyes open, if I read someone's name I do not know I sometimes think 'Oh, maybe that's someone who could write for me.'

You said selecting is one of the hardest and biggest part of the job. Are there any criteria that you look out for when selecting?

No, but I know most of the books coming in, a lot of my job is forward planning. I have a list that I make myself from catalogues. I go through all the publishers' catalogues, I go through *The Bookseller* and *Publisher's Weekly*. I keep my own forward planning list that goes up until in about six months' time from now. So, I was actually expecting most of the things I am opening. You kind of get an eye for this, and publishers' reputations still matter. There are publicists I trust and there are editors I trust. It is about building up relationships because I do not have a lot of time to look at things and publicists know that. They have a lot of books to sell but you want someone to say 'Really, of all the books on our list, this, this is really the one! I think it's right for you and I think it's right for your readers.' It is all about trusting different people's judgement at different stages of the game.

Is there some independent criteria, something like 'we have to do independent publishers' or 'we have to do the big names'? Do you have to keep track of which publishers you review?

You want to do the big names because that is the conversation, but I do not keep a tally of how many books I review per publisher. I do not have to justify which publishers I put on my list. I review for *The New York Times* occasionally and they are incredibly strict about who can review which book – you can't ever have met the person whose book you are reviewing, which is hard for me because I meet a lot of people! As an editor, of course, you have to be careful – if someone I do not know at all suggests reviewing something, I am suspicious and then want to know why he or she is interested in this.

Do you think this sensitivity is one of the major differences between the US and the UK?

Yes, I think it is and I am afraid this is the reason why the literary press is much less lively in the United States. I am from New York originally, but it is more fun here.

Do reviews actually travel across the Atlantic, does that influence the reviews over here in the UK and vice versa?

I think they are quite independent. If you look at *The New York Times*' Sunday book review section's ads for books, the blurbs are from American authors and press, maybe *Publishers Weekly*, and the quotes on the covers will only very rarely say *The Times* here in London or *The Telegraph* or something. It seems to be quite separate, for better or for worse.

How about Europe? European publishers love to quote Anglophone reviews on their jackets.

I guess that is also because in Europe everyone reads things that are translated. Without wanting to generalise, I think Europe is more outward-looking. I think English-speaking countries are ... we are happy on our own. I still think that unless something breaks through, like Scandinavian crime, it is hard to penetrate that insularity.

Do other reviews from other national newspapers or from other media influence the reviews that you do?

Sometimes there is something that I have not done and I think 'Oh, I don't need to do that' but then I will go 'Oh, everybody's doing that, maybe I should, I need to find the space for this'. They do not influence me in terms of the nature of the opinion.

There is quite a lot of competition here between papers, everybody wants to be first. And of course a lot of books, like for example Salman Rushdie's books, come with embargos. Somebody buys the serial or gets an interview and no one is allowed to run the story before that. You either have to sign something that says you agree not to review it before this day or if they are really worried you just do not get it until the serial appears. I do not believe in breaking embargos because it does not help anybody. If I agree to run something on a certain date I will stick to it because I hope that someone else will stick to it as well if it works the other way. So there is quite a lot of competition, if you think 'Oh, everybody at the *Telegraph* or some other newspaper runs it' then we better do that too, within reason of course.

The way you explained how you work with the publishers and with reviewers, it seems to be a system that is very much based on personal relationships and on the trust that you build up. Does it happen that a publisher says 'I am not sending any copies to this and that newspaper anymore' because of such a breach of contract?

Well, it has not happened to me! (laughs) I suppose you would have to ask publishers that question because it has not happened to me. I would think the answer is probably 'no' because

finally they want their books covered. You just have to try and maintain those relationships. Any business is about relationships.

Do you have any idea how influential the book reviews actually are?

I think we like to think that they are more influential than they are. The only thing, in my experience, that is truly influential in terms of taking books to the level of sales is me saying to you 'You have to read this and not because I'm a journalist but because I am your friend' – word-of-mouth. The books in England that have become huge, from Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong*, *Harry Potter*, to David Nicholls' *One Day* – none of those are books that have had marketing campaigns behind them. Eventually they did but not at first; they are real readers' books. There is a famous phrase about how Hollywood works by William Goldman, who is a screenwriter and novelist: 'How does Hollywood work? – Nobody knows anything'. It is the same in publishing, nobody knows anything. *Fifty Shades of Grey* – out of nowhere, right? Those kinds of huge things cannot be picked. Book reviews have nothing to do with it. They are perhaps influential in the literary world but I think not much in terms of sales. Again though, you would have to ask a publisher.

So what is their function then? Why still do it?

I think they are a little bit influential in terms of sales and they can help build momentum. Early on in my career, when I was first at *The Times*, the editor of *The Times* was Sir Peter Stothard. He is now the editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* and was chairman of judges for the Booker Prize in 2012. He worked very closely with me in my early days at the paper and once he wandered into my office and picked up a book that was about Carl Jung and something else, an academic book by Oxford University Press, and he said 'You know, that's exactly the kind of book that I would never want to read, but I would quite like to read 500 words about it.' That is why every piece has to stand on its own as a piece and be interesting to read. You are allowing people to be part of a conversation. I have just received an early copy of Salman Rushdie's new book. It is 700 pages long. Now, I am genuinely interested and I know it will be amazing, but I appreciate that there may be people who want to feel that they can talk about it without reading those 700 pages. That is another thing that book reviews can do, and at a sort of higher or different level, that is why I read something like the *New York Review of Books* or *London Review of Books*. They do books that I would never review and never read but I feel like I can have a little bit of a grasp of evolutionary biology or how the Supreme Court works by reading those publications.

Is that something that makes a good review for you, that it stands on its own feet and has a distinctive style?

Yes, again, without being intrusive. Different reviews need to do different things. But yes, they all have to work as pieces and I'm fortunate to employ good reviewers.

So how do you think this is going to go on in the future? Many books are now reviewed on Amazon and those reviews are usually not particularly good —

Often they are fake, which comes as no surprise to most of us who have been paying attention. I think most people are not deluded about that. I suppose I think it is a distraction to worry about the form. Let us say I was in the transport business at the beginning of the 20th century. You might be wondering how people would get from New York to California – they would take the train. There were these new things called airplanes but they could not fly very far, they were very expensive, and there were not many of them. So you might bet that no one would ever fly in an airplane, but you would have been wrong. In a way that does not matter, people will always want to get from New York to California and I think it is the same with criticism and with reading. The form is secondary and I think we are in a phase of being distracted by conversations about form. People wanted to hear stories since we have learned to make fire. I think that is just a defining characteristic of being human that will never change. Business models may fail; for example there used to be a lot of monks employed [in publishing]. They are not employed anymore and no one is sad. At the time when the printing press was invented some people probably were sad, but you have to take the long view with this thing. I do not know what the future is. I am both anxious for my own job and for the status of the industry, but in the longer term I am not anxious because I think the level will be found. As much as people are saying 'Books are going to disappear, it's all going to be ebooks', one company that is doing really well at the moment is *The Folio Society*. This is because, if people are going to buy books, they should be beautiful books. Again, people are not going to stop wanting stuff and some of that stuff is books. Maybe that means publishers will do only a few printed copies. When you want a thriller at an airport it may be best to download it because then you are not burdened with some cheap paperback you'll want to get rid of. If you want Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* to keep, you might get it from the Folio Society, and it is a gorgeous thing. Again, I think that will find its level, too.

How does it work with online reviews in particular? Most of these reviews are reader reviews and not written by professional reviewers. Do you think that is going to influence reviewing in any way?

No. You look at reviews of, for example, *The Catcher in the Rye* or *Great Expectations*, and it is mainly people saying 'This is a crappy book! I thought this was boring!' It is nice that they have a forum, but this is different, it is just different from what we do.

I think all the online reviews are there because people can do it, I do not think it is because other people like to read it. If you want to have a letter published in the *Guardian* – I am using the *Guardian* as an example because their website is not moderated as ours is – you write to the letters' page, and then there is a letters' editor, so it is a very narrow gate you have to pass. You have to be good enough, just like us professionals. However, anyone can post anything on their website, because it is not moderated, and you can still say 'Ha! I'm published!' So I think with online reviewing, of which there is a lot, there are serious book blogs like *Dove Grey Reader*, which is a really wonderful literary blog, but there is very few of them, just like there are very few really good books. It is hard to do whatever form you are doing it in. I do not think Amazon reader reviews will suddenly change how we all do this. I really do not.

Is there one review or are there any reviews that you still think about as one of the funniest or greatest or weirdest reviews you have ever had, so a review that stood out?

Yes, there is one, a piece by Margret Atwood – someone I admired for years before I actually met her. I discovered through another source a Canadian poet and a translator called Robert Bringhurst, who has only very recently been published here – I like to think in part thanks to this piece that was published ten years ago. Some years ago, Robert Bringhurst came across a collection of transcriptions of Native American poetry from the Haida people who live on the northwest coast of what is now called Canada, and this was work taken down at the very end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century by an anthropologist. Most of the work that was transcribed by anthropologists at that time was taken down in English, i.e. was translated by someone as the speaker was speaking, but this young anthropologist invented an orthography for this Native American language. He also almost uniquely named the poets he was listening to, and he took down their stories. The manuscript mouldered for a hundred years in the American Museum of Natural History until Robert Bringhurst found it and translated it. When I came across these stories they really changed the way I thought about literature; they are amazing. The first volume is called *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* and is published by *Douglas & McIntyre* in Canada. And these books were not new books, but sometimes you know you have to do something. So I said to Margret Atwood 'If you ever wanted to write anything about these books, I will publish whatever you wrote.' And she wrote me a piece we published in February 2003 with the headline 'Uncovered: An American Iliad' which is really

Literary Reviews: Past, Present, Future

what I think it is. It is wonderful! That is the piece I would point to, because it both is an extraordinary piece and to me it is the sort of apotheosis of what I am talking about, of bringing something to people's attention that they would otherwise not know of. It is a very privileged position to be in and to me that is the most important thing. You do not get to do it very often, because there are not many of these books, and so I feel very fortunate to have at least once been able to do that. [N.B. Since this interview was done, *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* has been published in Britain, in an absolutely beautiful edition by The Folio Society, as it happens.]

The Reception of Literary Fiction in the Digital Age: The Democratisation of Reviewing in Reading Groups

IRENE HAYNES, FOUNDER OF BOOKGROUP.INFO

Interview by Lisa Peter, September 17, 2012, London

You said that you have been doing the website for about ten years now. What was the original idea when you set out?

Well, I am part of a reading group and my colleague Clare Chandler, whom I work on the website with, came up with this idea. Ten years ago the Internet was fairly new, so she suggested that we, as a book group, start a website for reading books. Here [in the UK] we have the three for two table in the bookshops which means if you buy two books you get one book free. Obviously only the books they want to promote were featured, therefore we decided it might be an idea to give book groups wider choices and suggest other books from, say, independent small publishers. The rest of the book group declined, so Clare and I went ahead and did it by ourselves. It has actually nothing to do with our original book group; it is just the two of us working on our own.

So, that is where the idea came from: to put something on the Internet for book groups to widen their reading choices. Then we thought that we could have a directory on there as well, where people can actually look for a reading group. If you want to find one, for example in Edinburgh, you can look it up on our site and see if any book groups are available there. It is wider than just suggesting reads, it is about how to set up a book group and how to find a one. We feature festivals, events, independent bookshops and we try and push the independents as much as we can.

You also do reviews on the website, is that the sort of second thing that came later?

Yes we do reviews but that was the first thing that came. However, we do not call them reviews, well we do on the site, but in our newsletter we call them recommendations because we do not actually give negative reviews. We only recommend rather than – that is to say what you read is a review of the book but it is a recommendation to readers rather than just a straight review.

What happens when you pick up a book and you say 'Oh, let's have a look whether that might be something for a book group!' and then one of your readers reads it and comes up with a negative review?

Well that is fine, there is a place on the site where they can do that. At the bottom of each review – or recommendation – there is a comments box where people can say whether they thought it was good or bad or if they are indifferent, basically, whether they agree with us or not.

And who actually gives the recommendations, do you have some freelance writers that work for you? I mean obviously you cannot do all of it yourselves.

We do most of it ourselves I have to say, but we have reviewers who are all people we know or who have been recommended to us. So, we do not just take reviews from anyone. One of the reasons for that is that we cannot really pay people because we do not make any money of this site aside from a tiny bit from advertising. That is why they have to be people we trust. One being my daughter, who is a writer, her husband does some for us as well – but when you look at the site you wouldn't know it's all this nepotistic (laughs). It has to be that way; it has to be people we trust! Clare's mother, who is an octogenarian, does amazing reviews for us. We have a couple of Cambridge graduates who approached us and said 'Can I write for you?' and we replied that we will not be able to pay them but we can write them recommendations if they apply for jobs and they collect a bit of experience. So we send them books and they can decide whether they think it is appropriate for the site or not.

How do you get the reviewing copies? Is that something that publishers now sent to you?

Yes, we get books from publishers. My house is just a bookshop now. We have fantastic relationships with publishers because they see the benefit of us. Book groups are huge in the UK. I don't know about Germany, but I think they started in America, as a popular form, a new form of book club but there have always been reading groups everywhere and the history of it is quite interesting; they have grown exponentially in the last ten years, they have just exploded. Book groups are a huge phenomenon in this country. I was on Radio 4 Woman's Hour recently. This interview was in response – not a great response I would say, because the person who wrote the article was not actually there – to an article by a woman who wrote for the *Daily Mail* saying that reading groups were just middle class women in living rooms, basically getting drunk, and not talking about the book. She is a writer; it was obviously a little piece of creative writing that she was doing, she just brought up every cliché in the book. We know for a fact that they are not just women – the majority probably are middle class women – but there are

The Democratisation of Reviewing in Reading Groups

massive library movements in this country as well, something which is really under threat [due to the lack of funding for libraries]. And library groups are huge! In Brighton, for example, there are about thirteen different book groups from one library.

But let us go back to your original question about how we get books from publishers. So they see the value in people like us because now book groups are so huge they are not just selling one book to one person they are selling to a whole group of people since everyone has to read that book. We started by approaching them and saying 'We fancy the new Rose Tremain, would you send us a copy?' and they said 'Yes.' and we got the books. We also give away books on the site so they give us the books to give away. And since that it has grown from us approaching them to them approaching us and saying 'There is a book coming out we think might interest you. Would you like a copy?'

Is that for books of a certain topic, for example all targeted at a certain reading group? You said most of the readers are female, are they going to send you books they think might be of interest to reading groups?

Some of the publishers just do not get it, they are still sending us chick-lit saying 'Would you like to read this?' And we will say 'No' and refer them to the page on the site for publishers which tells them that what we like to review is high-end literary fiction. And it does not have to be – I mean I suppose all books are in a sense – issue driven. About the word "issue": publishers will approach us saying 'This book covers so many issues that might be of interest to women' but it is much wider than that, it is broader than that. I find that, even though there are very good books from the larger publishers, some of the most interesting books come from the small independents, the ones that just do not get through.

So that is basically how we work with publishers and the nice bit of it is that we get invited to all sorts of events which is a good way of networking and meeting people. Literary agents who work for certain authors have contacted us and quite a lot of publishers now use PR companies for certain authors so we have PR companies who get in touch with us. We work with one woman, an independent PR, who works for small publishers and individual authors. We have asked her why she is working with X and she'll say that they [the publishers] find him or her too difficult in the publicity department. So she gets these difficult authors to work with which is really interesting.

You also do author interviews on the page? Are these interviews that are, sort of, suggested to you by the agent or do you actively approach them?

Yes to the latter, we decide on the book of the month, which this month is *Sex and Stravinsky* by Barbara Trapido. We will then enquire of the publicist, here it is the publicist – it can also be the publicity department, if she would be interested in doing an e-interview which is usually

only half a dozen questions. They'll ask the author and 99.5% of the time they will say 'Yes of course we do'. Obviously they want their book to be promoted and then we will just do the interview via email. So it always ties in with the book of the month and then we will have a competition related to that book as well so people can win copies of it. That happens every month and we get some pretty good authors on there, people like Marilynne Robinson for example, who we interviewed before any of the big newspapers got her, which was brilliant.

Do you always do recent books or can it also be something that was published a couple of years ago?

The book of the month will always be a fairly new or recently published or newly out in paperback one. We try to do paperbacks but since Amazon has reduced the price of everything so much we just do hardbacks now as well, but we try to do paperbacks. While the book of the month will usually be a recently published one, the other reviews or recommendations could be anything really.

Also classics for example?

Yes sure, the month before last, we did five books by one author, Elizabeth Taylor. She is an early-20th-century British writer who is completely – I would not say underrated because she is quite well known – but she is not widely known. She deserves to be widely known and Virago reissued all of her books. We knew of her because we had reviewed some of her books before so we decided to do a whole month on her, which made the interview thing a lot easier, we just did a profile on her, since she died many years ago. She was like a modern classic that we did, so yes, we have done quite a few classics.

How do you select the titles when publishers send you so many titles and you can only review about five books?

It is so hard. It is like a publisher receiving manuscripts; you can only go by the blurb that you get with it. I usually try to read the first few pages and then decide, but there are quite a few that I have dismissed that turned out to be really good, which is a shame. Also, I am just not able to read halfway through and then say 'No, get rid of it!' So it is quite hard to choose, basically.

You said that you want to showcase the independent publishers and people or names that are less known. When you get a book by one of the big names, is that sort of a criteria to say ‘No, I’m not going to do that?’

No, not at all, we cannot do that because some of them are just too good, though some of them are disappointing as well. I recently read the new William Boyd which I was disappointed in and we have never interviewed him. But I just felt we cannot do him now with that book, it would not be right. It is like when they win the Booker Prize after years and years of being rejected, then the book that wins is never the one that should have won it. Like Harold Jacobson, he won it for *The Finkler Question* and it was not his best, it is a shame really. But no, we have never dismissed the big names.

So it is the book that comes first?

The book definitely comes first.

Do you have a sort of quota of how often you do the same publishing houses?

Well, we try not to use the same ones too often but our reviewing matters. If they sent us the books they are the ones we are going to read. There is a small publisher called Quercus which has another branch called MacLeHouse – they are not a huge publisher. They sent us lots of books and lots of those books are really good, so Quercus are probably the ones getting a disproportionate amount of the books on our site. Then again, sometimes there will be a publisher where we get along really well with the publicist, they just get what we are about, sent us lots of books and once that person will leave it all falls apart. That happened with Canongate, which are a fantastic publisher in Edinburgh, small, very well thought of though. So we do not see many Canongate books now at all, but again we will maybe go and pick up a book in a book shop and then contact the publisher and say we picked this up and would like to put this on the site. So obviously it is a two-way thing but they do like us, I think, because there is nothing like us in the UK or on the Internet, really. We put our hands up to being very old fashioned because we are not much different from when we started things and have only recently gone on Facebook and Twitter. I was doing the tweeting and just got so fed up with it, I thought I cannot bear it. I have been getting tutorials from my daughter because I hate doing anything I do not understand and I need to understand how the threads work. I find it is good for sharing things and picking something up. If we go to events we tweet something so that all the publishers know that we have been there and we put books which we have covered on there as well, but we are a bit behind the times. What we would really like is for each of the book groups that is on the website to have their own blog on there. Quite a few of them have

their own blog that we can link to our site, but we would actually like it to sit on our site and then we can see what they are reading as well.

How much do you actually know from all of these reading groups and how many reading groups do you have on the website?

Thousands, I do not know... mostly in London, a massive number in London. What we know about them is what they tell us. Some of them put their own blog on the website, so we have a look at that to see. You can see from that what they are up to, what they are reading and what their demography is as well, which is fairly interesting. That was really useful when I did that interview on the radio because I could say that they should go and look on the website. We have got gay reading groups, we have got Christian reading groups, we have got crime reading groups – they are not all just women in their sitting rooms. And I think the more open they are, the more diverse they are. Of course in a small village they are just going to be a bunch of people that know each other and just get together. Clare, with whom I do the website, moved down to Cornwall and lives in a small village where she joined a reading group that is incredibly formal. There are about twelve of them and they have a chairperson and so on. But she finds it quite refreshing, I think. We have got two people in our book group, the one that I am still a member of – in fact I think I am the only original member now – who have defected from another book group because they felt that it was too chitchatty and they were not talking about the books enough. So that is quite nice. Yes, and the politics are quite interesting.

So do you think your recommendations have a lot of impact on the reading groups? Do you get any feedback from them?

Yes, we do get a bit of feedback but it is very hard to say. We have noticed in the past that the feedback we get is not from the publisher but from the authors themselves because they track their things on Amazon and we will get authors saying that they noticed a spike after their book was on our website. To be honest, I think for the bigger publishers once a book is out, it is out of their way, they do not care anymore. We have actually contacted book groups on our website on behalf of authors, something I also did for my daughter. She lives in Brighton and I contacted Brighton book groups for her to say that she would go and talk to them and take part in their meeting. Libraries do that as well, they get an author to talk about his or her book. My daughter has been quite surprised by the kind of depth with which people want to talk about a book; it is not just superficial. They are really interested because a lot of people are also would-be writers so they want to know how to get published. There are so many publishers that cover all these different publishing houses that bought up many small publishers and so they are all part of this one thing, but it is not always that obvious to someone from the outside. I do not know how much the Kindle has changed reading habits. I suspect quite a lot because some

books are very, very cheap on them. One of my daughter's colleagues, an author of the same publisher whose book has been sold for 99p, I think was quite pleased because he says more people can have access to his books.

One of the things that really makes me irate about the publishing world here is the rise of the celebrity author. So your name is such-and-such or you are married to so-and-so, and your book goes straight into the charts. That is pathetic, I cannot bear it. You are either an actor or a writer, decide! I just find it very irritating because there are so many people out there that want to have their books published and cannot.

I talked to a couple of publishers and they said that they had to publish celebrity fiction because they could make money from that and finance all the other books they really want to publish. Sometimes they just know that they have really got a good manuscript but that it is not going to sell, so they say let's do it anyways.

It was interesting, the very first person we interviewed, an author called Russell Hoban, who died very recently – quite elderly – was published by Bloomsbury. We have been reading his books for years and years; they are quirky, funny and brilliant. We went to see him at his house in Fulham, he is one of the few that we have done a face to face interview with. He was saying about *Harry Potter* how Bloomsbury had reissued all his books with lovely new covers and how it is the *Harry Potter* effect. So yes, they used the money from that to promote Russell Hoban about whom they felt that he was amazing. His most famous book is *Riddley Walker*. Yes, so he was reissued by this Harry Potter thing.

When you do recommendations, do you think that is something that might threaten professional reviewing in the national newspapers or is it just a parallel development?

I think it is parallel now blogging has become so universal. There are loads of sites where people just recommend books and they are not professionals. I do not think it is threatening in any way at all to be honest. I know that Ian McEwan spoke at a board where he stated that blogging is killing proper reviewing but that seems very diva-ish to me.

Do you think readers trust semi-professional reviews as much as they do the professional ones?

Yes, I think they do. At the end of the day I think they make up their own minds, do they not? I think you have to be careful with things like Amazon because obviously it is people who write them under pseudonyms or they get their friends to write them all day long. But if something is good enough it will come through. I get quite bored by some of the professional reviewing to be honest, they intellectualise too much I think.

In your opinion, do publishers, when they are considering manuscripts for publication and think about how they are going to promote them, already have reading groups as a possible target group in mind?

Yes, I think for some books they do, definitely. And I think writers are even writing that way. They are thinking 'Oh, this might be good reading group discussion material.' On our site we do something called book group of the month, where we send the featured book group a list with questions which they fill out and send in. And it is interesting to look at what they read, what they enjoyed and what they did not. I will be interested to see what we are actually reading this month for my book group, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving. I have never read any of his books, a sort of in the 1980s big American writer. I always meant to read this book. It is full of religion and that will be really interesting because we have several atheists and several Catholics, so that is going to be fun. There might not be a book group after that [*laughs*].

Where do you want to go with the website in the next couple of years? Do you want to do more social media?

Yes, more social media. We have tried several types of things, we have tried doing our own events, running events. But that was just too difficult. There are too many other people doing it anyway, so we gave up on that. I think we will just keep going the way we are going and expand it a bit. We have got a sort of worldwide network anyway obviously. We have got some groups from other countries, it might be quite nice to expand the franchise.

Is that groups from Northern America, Australia ...?

No, groups from everywhere, groups from Poland, a group from Kathmandu, Australia, Canada, USA obviously, United Arab Emirates, France... there is only a few groups there but it is quite interesting that they have picked up on us. It is just a bit of fun, really.

The other thing we thought we could do is go to a few of the many book festivals in the UK and actually have a kind of book group info or book group discussion while we are there. And they are all quite up for that but you have to fund it all for yourself. It is just all about money and funding. We originally started the site with an Arts Council grant which is brilliant. And it was because we were new and different that we got that grant. They would not give us one again, so we just have to rely on a bit of advertising money every now and again. We want to provide each group a service, a blog without ticks, and would pay a web developer to do that. Just bring it up to date really. But we know that people like it the way it is, we do the odd survey every now and then where we ask if they choose their books through our site and they do. So it makes it worth doing it as long as people are saying that it is fine. I think one of the things we should do is to develop the London page. I feel that it should have a site all to itself because

The Democratisation of Reviewing in Reading Groups

there is so much going on in London, so many groups that it could be quite an interesting thing. We look at our statistics every month and the referrers to our site are from things like *Time Out*. And if *Time Out* can do it on their own, surely we can pick up on that and get this going in London. We did have a rival site at one point called 'Not Just Another Book Group'. They were based in London and they only did London. But they went bust because they were asking people to pay to register their group. We just said from the start that we are never going to do that because then people just will not do it. We are not going to ask the visitors to pay for anything. I think that has been in our favour, definitely. It is quite hard keeping the hackers and spammers at bay as well, but we have got someone down in Brighton who does things like that for us.

It's definitely a very interesting project. I just found the site via Google without really looking.

We are top on Google and we are just book group. I find it astonishing that we have not had any real competition. It is absolutely astonishing that other people have not set up a much better site. I mean it is not a great website, we freely admit that. People like the simplicity as well, we are quite pleased with ourselves. And as I have said, the reward for us is being invited to nice events like the Orange Prize. That was fantastic, I met Sarah Waters and that was the year Marilynne Robinson won it. It was a brilliant event. Publishers also invite us to things, in fact in October we're going to a Random House event.

We noticed that last year, with the lecture series, when we invited several people like a publisher or a literary agent, and a professor for publishing here from UCL, and they all knew each other.

Yes, everyone knows everybody else. Everything we go to, even our very small tiny fraction of this, we always see people there that we know. And the publicity people, I mean we are dealing with this part of the publishing world, the publicity people all move jobs so they all know each other because they got somebody else's job or whatever.

That is something that doesn't happen in Germany to such an extent, because we are a federal republic and we do not have one cultural capital centre. It does not work like that, I mean we have got lots of publisher's in Stuttgart; we have some of them in Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne, Hamburg and Berlin. So, it is actually very difficult to get everybody to meet.

I had not actually thought of that, that is not very bright of me. Thinking of Scotland, I think Canongate is the biggest publisher in Edinburgh, I cannot think of anywhere else in the UK

other than the big universities, which are obviously in Oxford and Cambridge. I cannot think of any publishers, at least not the big ones that are based outside of London. That is incredible, is it not?

What do you do with all the copies that do not make it onto the page?

I used to keep them for a while. I have got a pile of ones where I am a bit uncertain if I am going to read them. The ones I am never going to read, go to charity shops, friends and relatives – they use me as a library. But I cannot give people books for Christmas or anything – they will just think I have not bought them, unless they are non-fiction. We do occasional non-fiction but not very often. I cannot think of the last one we did. We did one by George Monbiot, who is a big environmentalist, but it is mostly high and literary fiction, sometimes short stories, I do not think we have ever done a biography. I have a horrible memory, I cannot remember any titles. It is horrible when that is your job; it is like me, trying to say I recommend that book and cannot remember the title and cannot remember the author.

I found it very interesting that you are so close to the common reader, which is something that you do not tend to get in the business.

I think some of the bigger publishers now are putting together panels of reading groups. And they bring them in. And this is actually how we made some money recently. One of the bigger publishers asked us to advertise on our monthly newsletter. They were forming a kind of reading group and they needed readers to come along to their offices. They would give them these books and then ask them to bring the books back and tell them what they thought about them.

I know that children's publishers do that and have, say, teenage readers as guinea pigs.

That is what some of the bigger ones are starting to do with the adults, actually... you would think they would have started doing that years ago, would you not?

It is interesting that they want more opinions on manuscripts and not just the agent saying that it is good material or the editor saying that it is promising.

There are quite a few books recently that have been picked up by reading groups. And they got them through recommendations to each other. I think *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* by Louis de Bernières was one of them, it was the reading groups that have really pushed that book. There is also a book called *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, reading groups have really gotten that one going. It happens occasionally by word of mouth through a book group forum. I thought it was quite interesting as well, there is a Foyles book shop just down here. If you go in here and in all the big book shops now they have a table where they have their staff

The Democratisation of Reviewing in Reading Groups

do their picks. Now, I always like to look at that rather than the three-for-two tables. We also thought of trying to get book shops to do a book group info table but I do not think we are well enough known for people to be trusting enough.

And of course you do not have that many independent book shops left, it is probably a bit difficult to get Waterstones to do it.

They are really cheeky, they are always emailing us and asking if we could advertise this event for them and we will say 'Yes, if you pay us.' Or people emailing us and asking if they could have the book group list on our database. Er... no! But what we *do* do for people, and we have done this for quite a few, authors, publishers and so on, is to send out an email on their behalf and have them pay us for that. We would not give out the database because we cannot due to data protection. But nobody in this country has cash anymore, so everybody wants something for nothing.