

Publishing and Culture

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Edited by

Dallas John Baker, Donna Lee Brien
and Jen Webb

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter One.....	1
Publishing and Culture: An Introduction	
Dallas John Baker, Donna Lee Brien & Jen Webb	
Chapter Two.....	18
Publishing and Truth in the 21 st Century: Truthiness and Celebrity	
Publishing	
Donna Lee Brien	
Chapter Three.....	41
Publishing and the Law: Copyright and Globalisation	
Francina Cantatore	
Chapter Four.....	65
More Than Economics: Cultural Value and the Australian Book Industry	
Paul Crosby & David Throsby	
Chapter Five.....	85
Publishing and Identity: Gender, Sexuality and Race	
Dallas John Baker	
Chapter Six.....	104
Publishing and Nationhood: Negotiating the Field of Indian Writing	
in English	
Roanna Gonsalves	
Chapter Seven.....	121
“Now it is Time for You to Act”: Ethical Editing of Indigenous	
Writing in Settler Societies	
Robin Freeman	

Chapter Eight.....	138
Love, Forgery and Strange Desires: Textual Editing as Research Practice Sharon Bickle	
Chapter Nine.....	153
Books as Art (in Australia): Love, Not Money, and a Measure of Independence Caren Florance	
Chapter Ten	169
Beyond the Codex: Book Design in the Digital Age Zoë Sadokierski	
Chapter Eleven	184
Publishing and Technology: The Digital Revolution, Democratisation and New Technologies Nick Canty	
Chapter Twelve	199
Publishing and Innovation: Disruption in the Chinese eBook Industry Xiang Ren	
Chapter Thirteen.....	220
Platform Games: The Writer, the Publishing Industry and Debates Over Non-Print Book Formats in the Twenty-First Century Nick Earls	
Chapter Fourteen	240
Publishing and its Discontents: Authors, Incomes and Alternative Models Jen Webb & Paul Munden	
Chapter Fifteen	258
From Guilds to State Censors: Early Modern Stationers, Regulation, and Printing Plays Laurie Johnson	
Chapter Sixteen	272
The World is Changing, Again: Peer/Expert Review, Legitimacy and Academic Self-Publishing Kerrie Le Lievre	

Chapter Seventeen	287
Welcome to the Real World: Publishing Preparedness and Quality Control in <i>The Matrix</i> Fandom Shayla Olsen	
Chapter Eighteen	302
Publishing and Community Development: Clunes Booktown Tess Brady	
Chapter Nineteen	320
How Nice is Too Nice? Australian Book Reviews and the “Compliment Sandwich” Emmett Stinson	
Chapter Twenty	341
Fiction Publishing in Australia, 2013–2017 David Carter & Millicent Weber	
Chapter Twenty-One	359
A Marginal Business: Surviving in Australian Poetry Publishing Shane Strange	
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	375
Magazine Publishing: Products, Communities and Contexts Rosemary Williamson & Donna Lee Brien	
Contributors.....	398
Index.....	407

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CHAPTER ONE

PUBLISHING AND CULTURE: AN INTRODUCTION

DALLAS JOHN BAKER, DONNA LEE BRIEN
AND JEN WEBB

What is Publishing Studies?

Publishing Studies is a discrete scholarly discipline focused on the culture, practice and business of publishing: the production, distribution, publication and reception of books, journals, magazines and other publications. The focus is not on the written word, as it is for those sibling disciplines, English Literature and Creative Writing, but on the various social, cultural and economic practices associated with the processes and products of publication.

Although publishing in one form or another is almost as old as human culture,¹ and although it has dealt with processes of standardisation since the fifteenth-century Gutenberg Revolution, both the nature of Publishing Studies and the methodologies it uses are still evolving.² To date, the focus of Publishing Studies has been on industry factors such as readerships, markets, work practices within the industry, the history of books and new technologies. These aspects of publishing are important, but recently Publishing Studies has evolved to embrace a wide range of other concerns, including the social and cultural aspects of publishing, and its place and value in communities as well as economies. Publishing Studies is now also

¹ According to Nicolas Barker, “there are more books surviving for every period of the world’s history than of all other objects put together” (Barker 1993, 179).

² Several key texts are useful references in approaching Publishing Studies. Examples include: John B. Thompson 2010; John Thompson 2005; Jacob Epstein 2002; Kelvin Smith 2012; Michael Bhaskar 2013; Giles Clark and Angus Phillips 2014.

exploring publishing as both a creative practice and a research activity. This new approach to publishing enables scholars to exploit creative practices, including publishing, in building new knowledge about a subject or activity, and in exploring how *making* can equal *knowing*. Publishing scholars who are also academics in universities have, in addition, begun to consider the pedagogy of publishing: how the subject area might best be taught, and what research methodologies might be best for tertiary study in publishing, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

This volume touches on topics as diverse as the histories of specific aspects of publishing, the economy of publishing, associated legal domains, the affordances of contemporary technology, modes of publishing, book design, communities of interest and of practice, and both traditional and alternative publishing processes and practices. The aim of this book, as of Publishing Studies in general, is to explore and rethink publishing as a commercial and cultural practice, and as a field of study, an academic discipline. The sections of the book introduce, and reflect upon, the various themes and methodologies emerging in contemporary Publishing Studies, including its social and cultural significance, its histories, economic and theoretical contexts, and the professional and creative practices associated with this domain.

An outline of the history and processes of publishing

Publishing has been facing dramatic changes over recent decades, spurred on by globalisation and the digital revolution. Among the most significant transformations are: the democratisation of publishing through self-publishing; significantly expanded commentary on publishing through social media; the rise in the popularity of writers' festivals and events; the evolution of literary awards and prizes as public and media events; the emergence and rapid growth of online book review and fan communities; and increased polarisation of the book industry (see Sapiro 2010). The emergence of a whole culture of events, practices and processes around books and writing means that scholars of publishing need to understand it as a social and cultural practice as much as a business. For those in the industry the scope of the change can be described as occurring in three domains that have been undergoing simultaneous and ongoing transformation for a decade:

- the product—that is, the advent of e-books and other digital formats;
- the process—that is, the shift in publication workflow from a linear to a more dynamic and technology driven process;

- the business model—that is, changes in the relationships, sources of revenue, regulation, profit margins and the composition of those involved in the industry (Hewitt 2015, 2).

In attempting to understand these broad changes to publishing, Pamela Hewitt (2015, 2) suggests considering the following questions: “What’s the best way to understand and discuss such rapid and massive change? How can we keep track of the changes when they are happening on so many different fronts?” The premise of this book is that these questions are best answered by gaining a sense of how the processes and practices of publishing, and published materials themselves, are inflected by, impacted on, and reflected the culture in which they are produced and circulated. Though the publishing sector is becoming increasingly commercial, it has a long history of being directed to other ends—personal, social, cultural—and thus has always been “a part of exchange culture” (Webb 2009, 29) in the broadest sense. Consequently, for publishing studies, no matter whether a text is read on paper, a computer screen, a tablet or a smart phone, consideration of the social, cultural and economic context of the publication remains central.

What is publishing?

As Baker (2013, 1) notes, when

we think about publishing, most of us think immediately of books, of objects made of paper with glossy covers. Then we might think about the various tasks publishers undertake to transform a raw manuscript into the beautiful and pleurably tactile objects that we find on library or bookstore shelves, or on our eReaders.

A purely functional definition of publishing would be that it is a process by which information, ideas and stories are made public, by packaging them as text and visuals in some kind of artefact or object such as a book, magazine, or electronic reading device (Davies and Balkwill 2011). The physical object, and the places associated with them such as libraries, universities and bookstores, “often give us a picture of publishing as an understandably, and even admirably, ‘bookish’ profession” (Baker 2013, 2). Many see publishing as a quiet, reflective, creative and artisanal process (Baker 2013), and this picture is not altogether inaccurate. However, the contemporary publishing environment encompasses a range of tasks, skills and roles well beyond these more obvious, traditional ones. Indeed, a large number of the books produced today are composed of digital information and bytes, and

not of paper at all. Publishing, and the roles associated with it, have changed dramatically in the last decade or so (Davies and Balkwill 2011; Guthrie 2011; Epstein 2002).

Given these dramatic changes, it is worth asking a somewhat philosophical question: “What is publishing?” Over the past decade, answering this question has become more complex. The simplest possible definition of publishing is “making public”: that is, disseminating information to an audience. The *Macquarie Dictionary Online* (2013) states simply that publishing is:

1. to issue, or cause to be issued, in copies made by printing or other processes, for sale or distribution to the public, as a book, periodical, map, piece of music, engraving, or the like.
2. to issue to the public the works of (an author).

Professional publishing used to mean preparing printed material for sale, an activity largely carried out by publishing houses that chiefly sold books to bookstores and libraries (Hewitt 2015). This model is still the mainstay of the industry, and though it is rapidly changing to incorporate digital publishing and distribution, and the process of delivering words printed on a readable surface remains current (Hewitt 2015). Consequently, it is important to understand traditional publishing practices and processes because they represent the core of publishing production and distribution, even as it goes through a technology-driven metamorphosis. This volume therefore includes traditional terms, but those terms now often refer to a dramatically different context: namely, a publishing sector and book culture that is dynamic and technology-focused. In the collection of essays published in this volume, Nick Canty’s chapter sets out key principles of publishing in a digital age; Xiang Ren discusses the profound transformations in the Chinese publishing sector, with the rapid expansion of e-books and other digital formats; and Zoe Sadokierksi explores the question of book design in a post-codex context.

Art, science or business?

Davies and Balkwill (2011) pose the question “Is publishing an art or a science?” They outline the shifting perception of the publishing industry over the last half century or so, from one of the publishing industry as a “gentlemanly [sic] and leisurely affair, devoid of crude commerce, and a refuge for creative and sensitive people” to one of publishing as a business on a global scale (Davies and Balkwill 2011, 2). The definition of publishing

from the *Macquarie Dictionary Online*, quoted above, similarly does not really address what publishing *is* in a philosophical sense, which relates less to what publishing *does* (producing and disseminating ideas in print and online) and more to what publishing *means* to us, or how we might engage with publishing as a practice.

Discussions and debates about the ontology of publishing arises from the systemic changes that the industry is undergoing. Some of the more recent of these changes are driven by technological innovation (Davies and Balkwill 2011), particularly the advent of the Internet and the rise of the e-book. These technological innovations challenge the very nature of publishing as an industry that produces physical objects that are sold in stores (Hewitt 2015; Baker 2013). Other changes are social and economic in origin and have led to an industry that is simultaneously more diverse (there are many more publishers and only some of them fit the convention of middle-class white men) but also narrower in focus (profit is now often the primary goal of commercial publishing). Irrespective of the various changes that sparked this debate, the question of what publishing might be in the future is pertinent.

The changes outlined by Davies and Balkwill (2011), along with other shifts brought about by the globalisation of the book industry (Galliand 2011), have produced a publishing environment that has been described by some working in the field as in a state of decline, principally in terms of paper book sales (Nawotka 2013). Other industry commentators see these changes as a challenging situation that forces publishers to reinvent themselves in order to survive, often in ways that disadvantage writers (Brauck, Höbel and Voigt 2013). Other commentators, notably in academia, see these changes, particularly those driven by new technologies and the greater access to publishing processes that these technologies enable, as opportunities. Galliand (2011, 8), for instance, argues that:

The practice of reading, use of content, and finality of writing are all in a state of flux. The various media used for reading replicate and sometimes “distort” content to make it conform to their standards, but they can also give rise to original creations. The space and time given to books are shrinking; books are forced to compete with an increasingly-diverse supply of cultural products and social practices (e.g., social networks). There are without question fewer points of contact between consumers and books. Nonetheless, books seem to retain their symbolic weight and capacity to influence. They still represent the world of ideas—the public sphere. Now consumed on various media, books generate vast cultural universes that influence the collective imaginaries of entire generations on a global scale (think here of the Harry Potter saga)—which is a new phenomenon, perhaps the beginnings of a “global culture”.

The current state of flux of the publishing industry need not be interpreted as a totally negative situation, as is noted by a number of scholars (Hewitt 2015; Baker 2013). It is possible to discern in this situation a range of opportunities for smaller, non-corporate publishing entities whose focus is creative rather than financial (Baker 2013). Galliard's (2011) view of publishing suggests that, although usually seen as a business, can be approached as an art. This book approaches publishing in this way, as a communicative art that connects readers with writers. More to the point, the book frames publishing as a series of social and cultural practices. In this way, as creative writing academic Graeme Harper (2012) argues, publishing can be seen as a human-focused event. Tess Brady's chapter about the passion of a local community for book culture, Caren Florance's discussion about art, and Roanna Gonsalves' work on the cultural field of publishing in India, point out the gaps in the logic of publishing-as-industry, and reinforce understandings of its importance to culture and everyday life.

Even so, it is clear that publishing is an art that is often managed as a project and undertaken as a business (Baker 2013). Publishing requires a business-like approach to the various stages required to bring a raw manuscript to completion as a book. Part of this project management approach does include financial management and marketing, even if profit is not the end goal of the process (Baker 2013). Such issues are taken up by Paul Crosby and David Throsby in their chapter, which focuses on the Australian book industry; and Shane Strange discusses the role of small publishers especially for that most "uneconomic" mode of publishing—poetry.

What can publishing be for me?

How the publishing industry is conceived will inform how individuals and institutions engage with it, not only in terms of the kind of role they seek to play but also the end objectives of the whole process. Given that ideas about publishing inform the questions asked about publishing and how it is discussed, they will also inform the kinds of knowledge produced through analysis (Baker 2013). If publishing is conceived of purely as a business then, obviously, the questions asked and answered by those studying it will focus on its economic features. But if publishing is positioned as a communicative or language-based art, then analysis and discussion is likely to focus more on the social and cultural significance of publishing and its products in terms of how humans create, engage with, consume and understand books and other published materials, whether physical or digital

(Baker 2013). This is examined in chapters by Dallas John Baker and by Robin Freeman, who address the cultural aspects of publishing with particular reference to gendered identity and to editing of Aboriginal writing, respectively. It is also examined by Sharon Bickle, who traces the creative interaction between editor and text in her discussion of the “Michael Field” story; and by Emmett Stinson, who discusses the relationship between reviewer and text.

If a goal in learning about the publishing industry is to understand how and why certain texts—“blockbusters”—make huge profits, we might approach publishing from its position as a business and develop the appropriate questions and methodologies to answer those questions. But social and cultural factors are equally important in understanding why people buy books, and why they choose certain books in particular (Baker 2013). Two of the authors in this collection take up these questions, with Donna Lee Brien exploring truth and celebrity in contemporary publishing, and Shayla Olsen attending to fan culture and fan fiction writing and publishing.

Tracking changes: Recent events in publishing

According to Davies and Balkwill (2011, 23), in “less than 100 years publishing has changed from a craft industry led by individuals who owned their publishing houses and followed their interests and enthusiasms, to one now dominated by giant international publishing corporations”. This shift towards a corporate publishing model has had profound effects on every aspect of the book industry and book culture. Before examining this shift more closely, it is important to acknowledge a sense of the book history that preceded it.

Writing, and the production of books and other texts, has a very long history. The history of books covers more than five thousand years, but most of that history has little influence over modern publishing, and therefore our coverage of it will be brief. In this volume, Laurie Johnson tackles a specific aspect of book history: early/modern stationers, discussing an era of significant change in publishing models. But book history extends back to the ancient world, when writing was done on solid surfaces—clay tablets, stone—or more malleable materials—papyrus, bark, vellum (Webb 2009, 31). For most of that history, writing and publishing was the output of a single individual or small collective, but woodblock printing, developed before the Common Era, introduced a technical innovation between the author and the surface. The oldest extant printed book, and the first indication of printing produced for reading rather than for ritual or record-

keeping, is the Diamond Sutra, a woodblock-printed work which, according to its colophon, was completed in 868CE (Soeng Mu 2000). The quality of the printing in this work suggests to scholars that there was already a well-established production process in this mode, but only fragments of texts predate this script (Brokaw and Kornicki 2013, xxi).

What we now think of as the book came into being in the second century of the Common Era, with copies being made by hand; but, at least for scholars who adopt an expanded definition of the book, it begins very early in history. That history is traced in a number of key texts that record, analyse and discuss the making of documents, from the cuneiform texts of the Sumerians (around 3,500 BCE)—which was primarily a record of financial transactions (*ibid.*, 112), through the Egyptian hieroglyphic documents from c3,000BCE, to the Gutenberg revolution of 1450 that ushered in the modern age of publishing.³ Since then, the term publishing has come to encompass the production of printed materials such as fiction and non-fiction books, periodicals including popular and specialist magazines and scholarly journals, and also the issuing of literature and other works in digital form.

Arguably, the most significant influence on contemporary publishing has been the process of globalisation (Baker 2013). Globalisation is a term that has been in use for at least half a century, but the underlying concepts and impacts are much older than that. Initially it was a descriptor for the increasing economic and political networks that required nation-states and geographical regions to collaborate on (usually) trade and security. Subsequently, attention was directed to communication and cultural practices that were inflected by, or that served to shape, globalisation (Schirato and Webb 2003, 8). There remains disagreement among scholars as to whether it is a “real” effect and, if so, the scale of its reach and impact (Held and McGrew 2000, 2). There is also deep scepticism about the apparently positive aspects of globalisation, with scholars pointing to the associated employment shocks, ecological crises, and financial collapses, as well as the risks to national sovereignty (Beck 2015). But for governments, informational specialists, and financial and economic institutions, the networks afforded by digital technology, and the related radically increased speed of communication (Schroeder 2018), mean that it must be taken into account.

In terms of publishing, a very significant impact of globalisation is the problem of how to manage intellectual property (Forsyth 2017). Copyright and moral rights are governed by national legislation, but also involve

³ Useful accounts are found in: David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds. 2002; Solveig Robinson 2013; Nicolas Barker 1993; Robert Darnton 1982; Igor Kopytoff 1986.

international treaties and globally-oriented production practices, which is addressed in the chapter by Francina Cantatore, who traces the pattern of legal frameworks and legal decisions about publishing in the contemporary context. This congeries of law and practice also governs readers' access to published materials, since the books found at a local bookstore arrive there as a result of a complex system of relationships, legal and commercial contracts, and both linguistic and cultural factors that facilitate, or alternatively inhibit, exchanges between individuals and entities across the globe. Those involved include authors, literary agents, editors, book designers, translators, publishers, printers, reviewers, marketing specialists, distributors, wholesalers and then, finally, the retailers and buyers. It is quite common for a book to be written in one part of a country; represented by an agent living somewhere else in that country or in another country; edited by another person in yet another location; contracted by a publisher based in one or many locations; and then printed in one or several countries, possibly by a number of independent printers. Once printed, the book is then distributed by a series of separate companies, in various regions, that transport the books for sale to local retailers (many of which are national or multinational chains). This means that seemingly "free choice" reading habits are influenced by corporations and commercial networks that are located at a great distance from each other, and from readers.

Some in the publishing industry argue that globalisation has been a negative force that undermines the capacity of small, independent publishers to produce books of aesthetic value (to them) that can compete commercially in a globalised marketplace (Epstein 2002). Others argue that globalisation as a process brings people together, irrespective of what Australians refer to as "the tyranny of distance". When viewed from this perspective, globalisation can be considered a powerful initiator of positive cultural, social and economic exchange between individuals and nations (Galliand 2011). However, many scholars dispute this; for Zygmunt Bauman (1998, 2–3), "Globalization divides as much as it unites, it divides as it unites", and its effects mean that across all national and social categories, the condition is one of radical inequality. Inequalities are growing, with the gap between the wealthy and the poor—whether considered on an individual, community or national scale—expanding year by year (Held and McGrew 2007).

In the world of publishing, one negative effect of globalisation is that it has produced inequalities between large, multinational commercial publishers and small, local publishing houses with a more artisan-like approach (Baker 2013). Globalisation in publishing has also meant that the greatest number of books that are published in the West are written, and

produced in, a few English-speaking countries, mostly the United States and the United Kingdom (Bode 2012). It could be argued that the globalised publishing system is geared primarily to provide profit for corporations in the USA and Europe, rather than to contribute to local book cultures or to satisfy local writers or readers' needs (Baker 2013). This is indicative of one of the most significant changes to the publishing industry as a result of globalisation, which is outlined by Jen Webb and Paul Munden in their discussion of the global publishing industry and the responses some writers (particularly poets) have made in reaction, or resistance, to the business model that has resulted in the swallowing up of smaller independent publishing houses by large, multinational media corporations.

At this point, the greater majority of all publishing activity in the world is controlled by just five or so multinational corporations, which are major media companies whose core business is typically television and cinema, not books. The Australian publishing environment reflects this global trend. Recent statistics (Bode 2012) show that multinational publishers made up 74 per cent of all fiction publishing in Australia in the decade between 2000 and 2009. The trend towards multinationals has also swept through the retail book sector (Epstein 2002). As Epstein writes:

The retail market for books is now dominated by a few large bookstore chains whose high operating costs demand high rates of turnover and therefore a constant supply of best-sellers, an impossible goal but one to which publishers have become perforce committed (2002, 6).

The negative effects of this corporate publishing trend include the disappearance of small, independent publishing houses and bookstores; the flooding of the book market with books written by American or British writers; and an increasing difficulty for writers outside of the USA and Britain to find a publisher for their writing (Carter and Galligan cited in Bode 2012, 80). David Carter and Millicent Weber's chapter explores what this means for Australian fiction publishing, while Rosemary Williamson and Donna Brien turn their attention to magazine publishing in the contemporary environment.

To date, the internationalisation of the book industry has depressed the number of books available from outside the two dominant publishing nations (USA and UK), which could have occurred had publishing remained in the hands of smaller, more regionally-based publishing houses (Bode 2012). This is certainly true for Australian books. With the advent of the multinational publisher, it has become "harder in general for Australian books to find a major publisher" (Carter and Galligan cited in Bode 2012, 80). Even so, the digital publishing revolution has begun to make a positive

impact on the numbers of Australian books entering the market. But, as Marie Lebert (2009, 3) notes, the “book is no longer what it used to be”. The electronic book (or e-book) came into being in 1971 with the initiation of Project Gutenberg, an Internet-based digital library for books from the public domain (Lebert 2009, 3). Public domain books are those whose copyright has expired. The e-book has been called both the death knell of traditional publishing, because web-habituated readers increasingly want their books for little or no cost (Dionne 2011), and the saviour of independent publishing because technological change has made it possible for small presses to release work, secure global distribution and garner a worldwide audience.

The publishing industry’s response to the advent of the e-book was similar to its response to the Internet: a mixture of curiosity, reluctance and, in rare cases, passion (Lebert 2009, 3). Booksellers began online trading, often without regard to national borders, cautiously at first, merely selling hardcopy books for delivery to the buyer’s home (Baker 2013). The one concession retailers made to the opportunities opening up due to digital technologies was to provide excerpts of books on their websites (Lebert 2009, 3). Amazon was the first major online bookstore to wholeheartedly embrace the e-book and has come to be the most dominant force in the online retailing of books in digital format, controlling fifty-five per cent of the e-book market (Milliot 2013).

Publishers are now so routinely releasing e-book versions of their books that it is rare today for a book to be published solely as a hardcopy. The advantages of digital publishing to multinational publishing corporations are many, including: reduced production cost (no paper, typesetting or printing); rapid global distribution; no warehousing costs; and no need for physical stores or bookstore staff (Hewitt 2015; Baker 2013). The advantages on the editorial side of the publishing process are also significant, and include aspects such as the ease of indexing, making corrections and updating editions (Hewitt 2015). Another advantage is that e-books need never go out of “print” (Epstein 2002), making them almost “eternal”, which echoes Sherman Young’s argument about the “heavenly library”: a “searchable, downloadable, readable” collection of all books (Young 2007, 151), making communication and exchange of ideas, images and information available to all.

Despite these advantages, commercial publishing houses remain wary of the digital publishing of new, original writing, and most have not fully embraced it (Edidin 2013). This is probably because, as Hewitt (2015) argues, digital publication raises some difficult questions: how will publishers maintain profit margins in a digital environment, in which

readers expect inexpensive content? What is the role of the publisher in such an environment, in which printing and distribution have been jettisoned? One of the key challenges to traditional publishing that the digital revolution poses is the fact that, in a digital environment, writers (and their agents or managers) can cut out the publisher and sell directly to readers (Epstein 2002). This direct-selling model has already been embraced by a number of successful authors who have jettisoned their publishing contracts and embraced self-publishing (Epstein 2002). For instance, Stephen King has experimented with this model, offering his book *Riding the Bullet* (2000) directly to readers from his own website (Epstein 2002). This model of publishing must send a chill down the spine of corporate publishing CEOs, especially because it is a model supported by some of the major online retailers (such as Amazon) and is gaining momentum (Epstein 2002). It must be acknowledged, however, that authors such as King already have an established readership to which to sell. Attracting such readers and, thus, “breaking into” the (digital) market remains a challenge for new authors (Baker 2013). This is discussed further below.

Despite the death knell sounded by some industry commentators, the e-book has not brought traditional publishing to its knees. As John Thompson argues, “few industries have had their death foretold more frequently than the book publishing industry, and yet somehow, miraculously, it seems to have survived them all—at least till now” (2010, vi). It is indisputable, however, that the e-book has contributed to a general decline of hardcopy book sales in the commercial publishing sector (Publishers Weekly 2012). The drop in commercial book sales aside, digital publishing offers many opportunities and benefits to book culture, mainly in the realm of independent, non-corporate publishing.

Self-publishing

Perhaps the most significant change to the publishing landscape as a result of technological change is the phenomenon of self-publishing (Baker 2013). The chapter by Nick Canty discusses this in the context of the digital revolution and democratisation. Books by self-published authors made up 7 per cent of all Australian novels published in the 1990s and 4 per cent of all those published in the 2000s (Bode 2012). Over the past few decades, a number of self-publishing commercial success stories have emerged, with some American self-published authors achieving sales in the millions, far outstripping the modest sales of many literary works published in the conventional way (Baker 2013). As an example, take the self-published books by Amanda Hocking (who writes in the teen paranormal romance

genre) which achieved sales exceeding 1.5 million in just eighteen months (Pilkington 2012). Sales like these totally eclipse those made by some esteemed literary figures over their entire careers.

One of the reasons behind the success of self-published books, especially e-books, is the marketing opportunities available as a result of the Internet, such as online writing and book communities including so-called “fan sites”, blogs, games and social media; as considered by Nick Earls in his chapter on non-print formats. Communication between readers and authors has become easier through email, online chat forums, blogs and social media networks (Lebert 2009), enabling self-published authors to create and/or connect with substantial online communities through which they distribute, market and promote their writing (Lebert 2009). If anything can be taken from the commercial success of self-published works, it is the importance of marketing to a book’s success in the digital age (Baker 2013).

An ongoing criticism of the self-publishing phenomenon is that it floods the market with low quality, poorly edited books (Taylor 2013). Although rarely supported with evidence, it can be argued that most traditionally published works undergo a more rigorous process on their way to publication than do many self-published works (Baker 2013). Even so, commercial publication—especially in the contemporary environment—does not necessarily guarantee quality, with some commercially published works poorly edited and containing spelling, syntactical and grammatical errors.

A persuasive counter-argument to the position that self-published works are of lesser quality than traditionally published ones is the simple fact that some of the greatest works in literature were self-published (Baker 2013). Charles Dickens published his novels chapter by chapter in his own magazine (Epstein 2002), Walt Whitman’s ground-breaking *Leaves of Grass* was self-published, and many (if not most) of Shakespeare’s plays were self-produced (Epstein 2002, 29). Other significant literary figures whose writing was self-published include Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Marcel Proust (Baker 2013). This shows that self-publishing does not necessarily equate with careless publishing. Some highly regarded writers have left publishing houses to self-publish in order to regain greater creative and financial control, one such example being David Mamet (Taylor 2013). Many authors who choose to self-publish employ editors, proofreaders and book designers who are just as qualified as those working in corporate publishing houses. The one notable and somewhat irrefutable advantage that traditionally published books have over carefully self-published works is the considerable marketing power held by large multinational publishers (Davies and Balkwill 2011). This

advantage, though key to commercial success, has nothing to do with quality: a topic taken up by Le Lievre, in her chapter on peer review and editorial processes in the independent or self-publishing of academic monographs.

Conclusion

This book approaches publishing as a cultural practice, and as a communicative art, although recognising that this is an art that is often also a commercial undertaking. Publishing, despite usually being seen as a business, can be considered as a cultural practice in the same way that sport, food and music are cultural practices. Publishing is in a state of flux. Technological change means that people can decide for themselves how to engage with book culture and often can do so without publishing houses acting as intermediaries. This means that the role publishing plays in many people's lives is different from how it once was, and often now allows more direct participation. As a result, contemporary publishing is significantly more diverse and a much more fertile field of research focussed on mapping these changes and their influences.

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CHAPTER TWO

PUBLISHING AND TRUTH
IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
TRUTHINESS AND CELEBRITY PUBLISHING

DONNA LEE BRIEN

Introduction

Although truth and falsity have been issues of contention and debate in relation to publication for as long as written works have been circulated, discussions about postmodernist relativity together with a series of high-profile deceptions and hoaxes in the later decades of the twentieth century and early years of the new millennium ushered in new waves of anxiety around the idea of “truth” in publication. The most prominent of these include Misha Defonseca’s *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years* (1997), James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) and Margaret B. Jones’s *Love and Consequences: A Memoir of Hope and Survival* (2008), all of which were published as non-fiction, but found to be exaggerated or wholly fabricated. The revelations that what were published as “true stories” were, instead, fraudulent, underscored the wide understanding of the “pact” that exists between a published author and his or her readers—and upon which the reputation of publishers, and publishing as an institution, is largely built. Recent descriptions of this pact—that the author of a published work was who they purported to be and, when writing non-fiction, that such authors would be “telling the truth” in their narratives to the best of their abilities (Brien 2002, 2004, 2006, 2009)—are based on Philippe Lejeune’s similarly described and enduringly influential “autobiographical pact” (1975). For instance, Geoff Dyer, author of a 1997 speculative biography of D. H. Lawrence, stated:

Each time a writer begins a book they make a contract with the reader ... A contract for a work of non-fiction is ... precise ... The writer says, I am telling you, and to the best of my ability, what I believe to be true. This is a

contract that should not be broken lightly ... Break the contract and readers no longer know who to trust (2015, online).

This suggests that this sentiment is enduring. However, other developments have added to this discussion. American humorist Stephen Colbert's 2005 re-coining of the nineteenth-century word "truthiness", which had originally been used to denote "truthfulness", to signify how something could "seem" or be "felt" to be true, even if was clearly not so, and despite contradictory relevant evidence, facts or the use of logic (Rogak 2011), encapsulates a new complexity around truth in twenty-first century publishing. The most extreme aspects of this are perhaps best signified by the phenomena of falsehoods being purposely posted on the Internet, and then repeatedly republished, to both attract and misinform readers.

Truth in publishing

As noted by Dyer above, truth in publishing is related to the sense of trust readers, as consumers, have in the products of the publishing industry. Debate about whether literature can, or should, represent life in any "real" or "true" way have raged since the days of ancient Greece in the work of Plato and Aristotle, who raised arguments of whether literature is representative (Plato) or mimetic (Aristotle). This topic has been reprised through the ages until, in 1998, Fleming proposed that, the very:

Question of whether written works are true, false, or in between, as well as the question of what we should make of our answer to that question, are central to Western considerations of the arts (1998, 334).

Influentially, post-structuralist and other prominent twentieth century literary theorists suggested that ideas of the "author" and any authority they held over the text's meaning once it is in the hands of readers were slippery, and even outmoded, ways of thinking. Yet, despite the wide adoption of many aspects of such theorisation, the concept of "truth" and its representation remains the subject of much deliberation.

Such discussion seems to become most inflamed when addressing the so-called "literature of fact"—non-fiction and its various sub-genres—where telling the "true" story of an actual event or life remains the most widely accepted definition of what, as has been observed, one of the few literary forms which is defined by what it is not; that is, not fiction. Although, like Dyer, most non-fiction writers attest to following this definition, when questioned, most also acknowledge that they utilise various narrative strategies which could be described as "fictional" or "literary".

These stylistic approaches are not, however, usually seen to contradict, or conflict with, the “truth-telling” goals of non-fiction narratives. Their use, instead, recognises that all non-fiction narratives have to be rendered—that is, life has to be translated into text. This is vividly described in the important work of Hayden White on how reality is shaped in narrative (for example, 1980) and Natalie Zemon Davis’s work on crafting stories from historical records. About using French sixteenth century letters of remission, for instance, she noted that “the artifice of fiction did not necessarily lend falsity to an account; it might well bring verisimilitude or a moral truth” (1987, 4).

This issue has been much reprised in the following decades and has been at the forefront of discussions about the genre of creative non-fiction. Despite using literary devices (such as description, dialogue and the creation of a series of scenes), creative non-fiction is uncompromising when it comes to dealing with factual data and seeks to be both “scrupulously accurate” (Gutkind 1997, 15) and “verifiable” (Gutkind 1996, 16). To achieve this, the creative non-fiction writer must not falsify factual elements—names, dates, places, descriptions, quotations and so forth—and must, moreover, strive not to “misconstrue the inherent truth of the experience” (Gutkind 1997, 121) being narrated. This focus on not corrupting the factual truth of non-fiction narratives, however, also recognises the reality of interpretation. As biographer Michael Hicks stated in his study of Richard III:

Facts cannot lie, but they can be interpreted differently ... our facts do not come to us unvarnished, but are loaded, slanted, and embedded in narratives ... Almost every so-called fact comes with its accompanying bias. (1991, 69–70)

This neatly summarises this point, despite musings that:

In the twenty-first century, the boundaries dividing “fact” and “fiction” have become so blurry that new terms such as “fictional memoirs” and “non-fiction novels” are constantly being coined in order to define them (Nelson 2018, 48).

Readers of non-fiction engage with the work principally because they are seeking factual or other truths (Brien 2004). While not naïvely accepting everything the author presents on face value, or expecting a text to be a mirror image of reality, readers actively participate in this process of truth construction. Kendall L. Walton describes how such works communicate “*understanding* ... in a sense that goes beyond the acquiring of factual information, although the imaginative activities the work inspires in readers

also help to make the factual details of the historical events memorable [sic]" (1990, 93). Walton continues to describe how a reader's:

Imaginings may be enhanced by the knowledge that what he [sic] imagines is true, by his [sic] realization of the reality of the setting of a story and its characters and events (ibid., 93–4).

In the series of literary scandals that have erupted since the 1990s, the foundational issue is usually a clear question about an untruth being presented to readers: whether the author has transgressed the genre under which they have published their work; and presented fiction as non-fiction; and/or claimed an authenticity for the work due to an authorial identity which is later revealed to be feigned (Brien 2002, 2004, 2006, 2009). There are also cases where historians, scientists and journalists have been exposed for falsifying or inventing their data (Fritze 2009). As a result, recent discussions about truth in publishing revolve around expectations that, and how publishers ensure that non-fiction writing is based on, and represents, what has really happened, in terms of actual events and places, and real people, with an acknowledgment of the limitations of such representation including a recognition of the silences, contradictions and biases in the archives (Thomas, Fowler and Johnson 2017) and the vagaries of individual and collective memory (Radstone 2005).

The perception of a publisher's central role in accepting only quality manuscripts, editing and fact-checking those texts, and then deciding under which descriptor the resulting books will be published, puts the publisher or publishing house in the role of guarantor of the non-fiction text. In *Inside Book Publishing*, for instance, Giles Clark and Angus Phillips describe how publishers go well beyond the somewhat tautological dictionary definition of publish as "to make public" in terms of the practical function that printers fulfil of physically producing the work (2014, 1). Amidst this lengthy list of activities—from researching the market for a potential work to protecting the published item against various kinds of illegal reproduction—publishers, instead, in Clark and Phillips description, are involved in a range of activities that could be classed as quality assurance such as those that "add value to authors' works and protect the value of their copyrights ... commission authors ... [and] confer the authority of their brand on authors' works" (ibid., 1). Clark and Phillips indeed describe how a publisher also "assesses the quality of the author's work" (ibid., 2) and ensures that it appropriately fits into the genre under which it is published. This idea of publishers offering quality assurance underpins the assessment of "superior" and reputable publishing houses as compared to those of more dubious reputation, although time and cost restraints have led to a

recognition that “the public is probably less well served in terms of quality control than in decades past” (Horowitz and Curtin 2015, 311).

The Kardashians

Celebrity can be attributed to individuals through relationships (as happens with royalty or famous people’s family members) or earned via talent, accomplishment or behaviour (as with artists, film stars, musicians, sports people, other professionals such as high profile scientists and even criminals and other wrong-doers), but is most commonly today attributed via the media, as with reality television participants and many others (Driessens 2013; Giles 2000; Rojek 2012; Turner 2004, 2006). On celebrity via media prominence, Graeme Turner suggests that some celebrities “claim no special achievements other than the attraction of public attention” (2004, 3) or, as Laura Wright summarises, “for no apparent reason other than the fact that they are famous” (2015, 130). Olivier Driessens redefines such celebrity as a kind of capital, extending Bourdieu’s field theory and explaining “the convertibility of celebrity into other resources, such as economic ... capital” (2013, 543). In Driessen’s reconceptualisation, a celebrity’s capital or their “accumulated media visibility through recurrent media representations”, what can be summarised as their “recognizability [sic]” makes this a type of capital in itself and not a form of social or symbolic capital (*ibid.*, 543). This is how the Kardashian family became celebrities. The first to attract public attention through media exposure was businessman and lawyer Robert Kardashian, who was highly visible as OJ Simpson’s friend and defense attorney during Simpson’s 1995 murder trial (Reed 2003). This was cemented by his daughter Kimberly (always now known as Kim), initially through her relationships with Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie and, then, due to the leaking to the media of a video of she and then-boyfriend, the entertainer Ray J, having sex (Halperin 2016, 124). Later that year, the reality television series *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (Seacrest et al. 2007–current) premiered. The success of this series with viewers led to Kim, her sisters Kourtney and Khloé, and other members of the extended family (including half-sisters Kendall and Kylie Jenner, the result of mother Kris’ marriage to Olympian decathlete, Bruce Jenner) becoming celebrities. As a result, several spin-off series have been developed and launched (see, Seacrest et al. 2009–13, 2011–12a, 2011–12b, 2014). Both in acting roles and as herself, Kim especially has also appeared in other television shows and series and has had a number of cameo roles in feature films.

This screen visibility pales, however, in relation to the family’s, and especially Kim’s extensive online and social media presence, which