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A History of Books

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A History of Books

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In the time of Eumenes II of Pergamum, in Asia Minor (197–159 BC), vellum or parchment, made from dried animal skin, was first used in the form of two-sided leaves for writing on and reading. Eumenes created the Library of Pergamum, a great advance in the ancient world.

The earliest prototype of the book, the vellum codex, appeared in Greece and moved on with history to Rome, where, initially, a technique of wax inscriptions on bound wooden boards was used. Known in Latin as a codex from caudex, or tree trunk, the codex progressed to using vellum for leaves. Around 400 AD, the codex began to overtake the papyrus scroll as the main publishing technology and product of its time.

The Papyrus Scroll

The papyrus scroll was the first light, versatile, portable method for publishing script and images. Invented in ancient Egypt some 5000 years ago, papyrus scrolls were woven from papyrus leaf. Strips of the leaf were soaked in water and lain side by side and then over again at right angles. The material was then left in the sun to dry, the resin of the leaf fusing the cross strips. After the drying process, the sheet was polished and then was ready for use.

A papyrus scroll had a life of about 200 years, but only if carefully preserved in a dry place and climate. Humidity affected the longevity of papyrus. The scroll was still used extensively in the Mediterranean basin until about 1100 AD. Conceptually, the scroll lives on in roll-up maps and design documents, and in published lists such as the electoral roll.

The First Paradigm: From Vellum Codex to Print Book

First appearing commercially in the bookshops of ancient Rome, the vellum codex was developed for the publication of religious tracts, creative texts, the expression of ideas, history and learning. From 400 to 1000 AD, book production grew quickly throughout the Mediterranean basin. The book figured prominently from 700 to 1300 AD in the Arabian empire stretching from Teheran to Cordoba. Due to all the handwork involved in creating books they soon became symbols of status. The tenth century Grand Vizier of Persia was said to be so proud of his book collection that he travelled everywhere with 117,000 handwritten and bound volumes, loading them alphabetically onto 400 camels, which were taught to walk in alphabetical order. At that time only 500 volumes existed in Paris.

During the Middle Ages, central and northern Europe caught up with cultural developments. Scriptoria (scribe or scrivener shops) sprang up throughout Europe. Hand-produced books were extremely arduous work and took months, sometimes years, to complete. Books were made to order on the sell and produce business model. Books were available and affordable usually only to clerics, wealthy merchants and the aristocracy, the only members of medieval European society who had any real use for them.

In the mid-fifteenth century, book production became mechanical in Europe for the first time. Already a sophisticated cottage craft industry, book production leapt forward with Johann Gutenberg's invention of the first viable industrial prototype and machine for mass printing. Moveable wood block and sand-cast type printing techniques had existed in Korea and China centuries before, but it was Gutenberg's invention that revolutionised publishing. In a stroke of huge paradigmatic proportions, this technological shift created the world's first mass-market business model, though it was many centuries before books began selling on a truly mass scale.

Combining wine press technology and jewellery techniques (moveable metal type pieces), the Gutenberg press reduced manuscript production time and costs by a massive 90%. Printers could now print copies in

numbers they believed they could sell (the produce and sell model), rather than producing books requested by order. Economies of scale now affected production decisions. Instead of being only for the powerful and wealthy few, books were now potentially available to a very wide readership. An invigorated European book trade began the search for increased custom, growing its power in the process.

Other social improvements were needed to expand the book trade, however, not only a leap forward in technology. Literacy needed to grow, and this took centuries to mature across Europe. At the dawn of the sixteenth century in England, only 10% of women and 30% of men could read to any level of proficiency. Initially, literacy tests were rudimentary, based on whether men or women could sign their names. It was only in the mid-nineteenth century, when working-class Britain began to participate in the explosion of literacy enabled by printed books, that mass sales of books became a reality.

At first, even though the printing press was welcomed, some wealthy Europeans were determined to maintain the handwritten tradition as well. Manuscript production continued against the odds right up to 1600. But by that time, printers were already able to produce over 1,200 printed sheets a day. Printers stopped imitating manuscripts and developed new formats and styles. Faced with the overwhelming success of the print book, the craft of handwritten manuscripts disappeared.

The 42-line Gutenberg Bible, itself a product of the manuscript tradition, was the initial default design. Basic book form was a work in progress and design changes came relatively slowly, but the trade in books changed radically, almost overnight. With the sell-through model, timeliness, cost and speed of information distribution to market became the driving factors of the whole trade.

The growth of printing in England followed continental Europe by a quarter of a century, but the English book trade made up for lost time. With the importation of the printing press into England in the mid-1470s, books arrived at a time of historical and cultural flux. Books helped England emerge from its isolation. At the time very few Europeans had visited England. Few continental Europeans spoke or even knew of English. The new printing press and growth of English books was the first step in an exponential growth in importance of the English language throughout the world.

1475–1533: The Early English Trade

William Caxton was the pioneering English print book trader. Caxton's first publication, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, was produced in 1475, compiled from the French original by Raoulle Fevre, first printed in France in 1464. Caxton had begun translating the text in 1468. Other printers, such as John Lettou, also set up in London at the time. In 1482, Lettou and his new partner, William de Machlinia, printed England's first law book *Tenores novelli*, a significant milestone in UK publishing history. Since then, anglophone legal publishing has grown into one of the most important and profitable sectors.¹

The multi-tasking Caxton (translator, printer-publisher, bookseller), with his assistant Wynkyn de Worde, prepared, printed and sold books from a base near Westminster Abbey. Caxton published 80% of his books in English, among them the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400). After Caxton's death in 1493, De Worde moved their printing establishment to Fleet Street, beginning the long tradition of the print trade in the area around St Paul's Cathedral.

The early English book trade was given significant Crown support from one of the most reviled figures in English history, Richard III. In his short but influential reign (1483–1485), Richard III promoted the trade by exempting books, publishing skills and printing paraphernalia from the anti-alien trade statute of the time. Trade from larger and much more economically active European nations, such as Italy, were always threatening to swamp England, and the Crown's exemption of books from import sanctions was important not only for printers and book traders at the time, but also gave a strategic boost to English letters, language and culture.

Authorial rights in England took a different route to the developing trade in continental Europe. The first recorded issue of authorial rights in the world was the Senate of Venice's grant of rights in perpetuity in 1486 to Antonio Sabellico, for his *Decades Rerum Venetiarum*. By contrast, power in the English book trade was

firmly vested in the printer and bookseller, not the author. English authors had to wait nearly 250 years before their rights were recognised in English law.

1533–1694: The Age of Control

Due to his own private, religious and political concerns, in 1533 Henry VIII reversed Richard III's trade exemption for books. This brought to an end the early free trade era. Henry VIII instituted a system of Privy Council oversight of books throughout England. When it became clear that the task was too onerous for the Council, members of the Stationers' Company, a scrivener guild in existence since 1403, put themselves forward as possible managers of the process. In 1542 the Company petitioned Henry for the right to oversee the trade. Henry refused the request. The Stationers must have been a little aggrieved by this rebuff as Henry had already granted a Royal Charter for printing to the University of Cambridge in 1534.

After Henry's death, his daughter and successor to the throne, Mary, concerned with creating robust Roman Catholic controls over printed materials, gave in to the Stationers' relentless lobbying. In 1557 Mary granted the Stationers' Company a sweeping Royal Charter over commercial printing throughout England. The Stationers were granted industrial privileges and a trade-wide monopoly that they guarded jealously for 150 years. In effect, Mary provided the Stationers with a sixteenth-century royal edict to print money.

The Stationers' Company shaped the early English book trade like no other force in history. Members held rights throughout the land described as rights in copy – tangible ownership equal to perpetual property rights under English common law. Apart from the scholarly and religious publishing rights granted by charter to the University of Cambridge (and later the University of Oxford in 1586),² the Stationers' position was virtually unchallengeable. The hold over the trade was absolute and except for a few isolated events of piracy, and the mid-seventeenth-century revolutionary confusion when Stationer power lapsed, the Company's control over printing ran more or less uninterrupted from 1557 to 1694.

The enduring legacy of the Stationers' Company is embedded in the UK's publishing traditions and practices – the idea that publishers have the final say, not the original authors of literary works. This differs from most continental traditions, where authors in some countries can withdraw their works, even after publication, if they so choose.

During the reign of Charles I (1625–1649) Crown monopolies and edicts grew very unpopular. Along with other traditions and practices, the Stationers' Company's monopolistic printing powers were challenged by the Long Parliament in the early 1640s. The loathed Star Chamber was abolished and, by inference, all its decrees. A tumultuous decade saw civil war, the execution of a king and, in publishing, wild, chaotic pamphleteering. Private or self-publishing exploded on to the scene. Throughout this revolutionary period, the Stationers' Company stood quietly aside, maintaining its position, if not its entire powers.

With the conviction for treason and beheading of Charles I in 1649, Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector (king in all but name). New printing continued to flourish, but still the Company was not abolished, its 'suspended' powers remaining intact. With Cromwell's death in 1658, the Commonwealth faltered. Cromwell's son was unable to establish his authority and the Stuarts regained the throne in 1660. The Licensing Act of 1662 returned all its prior publishing status, power and functions to the Stationers' Company.

The seeds of liberalism and desire for fundamental democratic and systemic changes in English society, however, did not die with the revolution. The Jacobean were swept again from power in 1688. John Locke and other liberals seized the moment, soliciting support for printing and other reforms from the new Dutch-born King, William of Orange. In 1694, the English Parliament refused to renew the Licensing Act. The Stationers' monopoly was suspended again, this time, it seemed, for good. The Stationers, however, were not a spent force.

1694–1774: The Rise of 'The Publisher'

The world's first copyright act grew out of the continuing chaos in the book trade. On 10 April 1710 The Statute

of Anne was passed by Parliament, introducing the concept of copyright terms for authors for the first time. The Statute provided 14-year terms for new works, renewable for another 14 years upon application, and a one-time term of 21 years for works under existing terms of ownership, or for those categorised as 'orphan' works (written by authors who could not be identified or who were dead).

The Act seems to us now as if it was a revolutionary political move made by the early eighteenth-century English Parliament to establish authorial rights. The main intention of the statute, however, was to bring control to an unruly trade. The 1710 Act was not introduced as a system for advancing authorial rights, even if many liberals of the day championed the idea. Authorial rights came about almost to the trade's surprise.

A new player, the publisher, was now needed to run the trade, a metamorphosis of the printer-bookseller figure. The publisher was the new 'middle-man', buying works from authors, managing the preparation of books for publication and finding ways of getting books to the reading public. Initially, members of the Stationers' Company ceded this main central part of their power, but they still did not believe history had abandoned them. Wealthy stationers had political support and they were still the printers and booksellers.

The 1710 law established a registration process of copyright for published works, a service the Stationers oversaw and for which they charged a fee. Significantly, though, the Company could not refuse registration. If for some reason they did, copyright could be established by a direct announcement by the author in the general press. Monopoly conditions in the trade were now legally, if not wholly, over.

The unhappy Stationers fought on for the reinstatement of their powers by other means. Company members began to challenge the new copyright law in the courts, setting out to establish a common law property rights precedent over statute law. Initially the courts supported the Stationers. The issue was finally settled in a dramatic 1774 House of Lords' ruling in *Donaldson v. Becket*. Eleven law lords, in a majority vote of one, supported statutory superiority in published works. Common law rights remained for unpublished manuscripts. In a rousing speech that had his fellow lords on the edge of their seats, Lord Camden denounced 'the patents privileges, Star-chamber decrees, and the bye-laws of the Stationers' Company: all of them the effects of grossest tyranny and usurpation'.³ This decision by the House of Lords cemented statute control over copyright law. The age of direct Stationers' Company control over the trade was now truly gone for ever.

The House of Longman

An early example of a modern British publisher was Thomas Longman I, who founded a family business in 1724. With an outlay of £2,282 9s 6d, Longman bought a premises in the Paternoster Row near St Paul's Cathedral. The house included a new and used book production and warehouse on the ground floor, with living quarters on the first floor. Longman bought it from printer and publisher, William Taylor, paying a separate sum of £230 18s for Taylor's copyrights. In October of the same year Longman was made a Freeman of the Stationers' Company.

A published title that Longman did not acquire in his purchase of Taylor's copyrights, was the *Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*, by Daniel Defoe. Taylor had earned £1,000 profit from the original publication, with copies initially selling at five shillings each. *Robinson Crusoe* was reprinted many times, going on into sequels. The book's success made Taylor the envy of other publishers in London at the time. Finally, in 1753, Thomas Longman was able to buy a ninth share in the rights to the tenth edition of the sequel to the original *Robinson Crusoe*. Publishers of the day bought shares in each other's productions, in much the way a film producer or studio might buy a share in a film production these days. The struggle Longman had in getting his hands on Defoe's classic works did not seem to hurt him or the Longman 'house'. Longman went on to be one of the three great names in British publishing, with two and half centuries in the business of books.

1774–1935: The Era of the Publishing Firm

'The publisher' soon became synonymous with the publishing process, growing into the central role within the entire anglophone book business. Copyright law granted the solid judicial support the trade had been lacking,

with the levers of control no longer centred in printers and booksellers. The new publisher and authors were now the two ends of an axis on which the whole business revolved.

The United States caught up with English copyright law by passing its own Act in 1790. The US law reflected much of what had been established by the Statute of Anne, providing terms of 14 years, but the US law went one crucial step further, by enshrining freedom of expression in the first amendment of the US Constitution.

After the French revolution of 1789, the French passed a copyright law, *droit d'auteur*, in 1793, extending copyright terms to life plus five years. The French legislators grappled with issues such as the public domain, and the social and cultural responsibilities of publishing, differing from the thrust of English copyright law, with its emphasis on business.

In the UK, family-owned firms began to flourish. The early great names of English publishing, Longman (Thomas Longman, his nephew Thomas, and his son, Thomas Norton, 1724–1842), the first John Murray (1737–1793) and Macmillan (brothers John and Daniel 1843–1896), became synonymous with publishing in this period. The word ‘publisher’ described the person at the helm of the firm, and the house. Decisions and control were taken by editorial departments. Editors represented the views of publishers, dealt with acquisitions and filtered out ‘dubious or commercially unsound material’. During the nineteenth century a gentrified and prosperous British publishing industry grew into an integral part of the British establishment. The provision of information was ‘in safe hands’.

Even if the book trade was a modest enterprise by comparison to the commodities trades of cotton or wool, the nineteenth-century growth in publishing showed it was more than just a good business. It was culturally and politically important as well. Publishing's growth was spurred on by:

- steam power improvements in printing technology
- new techniques in paper production
- mechanical typesetting and illustration methods
- improved paper costs (falling from 20% of a book's cost in 1740 to 7% in 1910)
- the use of cloth casing instead of leather binding.

The industry grew rapidly in efficiency and profitability. Population growth throughout the industrially revolutionised world grew massively, doubling in Europe and rising fifteen-fold in the United States. New education policies helped facilitate a rise in literacy and with it an expanded reader base. Book publishing spoke to the cultural idealism of nationhood as well as commercial and political interests. With the rise of the novel, 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.

London was the world's capital of English language publishing, but in the United States a thriving industry had also grown up. In Philadelphia, Boston and New York, ‘anglomania’ spread throughout the trade. English books were much sought after, servicing the new expansion in reading needs in the former and extant North American colonies.

Piracy was alive and well on both sides of the Atlantic. With no international copyright agreement in place, American publishers would wait dockside to pick up new English books as they arrived by ship. The industry grew and with it cross-Atlantic conflict. Illegal American editions of British books filled the US market, with books sometimes going on sale on the American east coast the same day the book had arrived by ship. Piracy also occurred in Britain, with Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* selling well over a million illegal copies on British streets.

In the mid-nineteenth century, British publishing was overseen by a handful of ‘leviathan houses’. The industry was corralled into a system of trade policies enforced by the big houses, an arrangement described by *The Times* as ‘imperious’ and ‘absolute’. Smaller houses, such as Chapman's (the first publisher of Charles Dickens with *Pickwick Papers* in 1836), pushed for lower, or even a free setting of, book retail prices. The ‘rule’ of the day, set by powerful publishers, was that book retail prices were 15 shillings. Booksellers were ‘allowed’ to buy books for 10 shillings, giving them a profit of 5 shillings on each sale.

There were also great and often unexpected market successes, occurring by good luck more than ingenious planning. John Murray III, who was less than convinced by the value of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*, needed a lawyer with no publishing expertise, George Collock, to convince him to print 1,000 copies of Darwin's seminal work, instead of only 500. The book sold out in a few days. In 1881, less than three weeks before Benjamin Disraeli's death, Longman paid the remainder of a record-breaking advance of £10,000 to the former prime minister for his novel *Endymion*. The novel went on to create a market sensation.

Trade publishers were thriving, but so too were academic publishers. The book business was now a large and diverse industry. The world's largest academic publisher, Oxford University Press, officially became an exported brand in 1896, opening its first American office in New York. Books were catching on with vast sections of society, crossing economic and social boundaries, filling the book shelves of the expanding middle class. The formation of the UK Publishers Association in 1896, a cartel operation to protect the established houses, set the trade's rules and practices. The formation of the Association led directly in 1900 to Macmillan's successful promotion of the Net Book Agreement (NBA), a minimum price arrangement. Meant to 'promote trade stability', in effect the NBA was a profits guarantee for the major houses. Protecting books was a popular move. A judge presiding over the NBA decision made the now famous statement that 'books are different'. Unofficially, the book trade was, from then on, in Britain at least, not just an enterprise but 'officially' a protected cultural activity. To the principle that books are a business first and foremost was added the notion of cultural value. The Association's move helped the trade achieve galloping growth in the twentieth century. Society, it seemed, had a duty to protect and promote the book trade like no other enterprise.

The United States did away with price controls in the trade in 1910, while the NBA remained in place in the UK until 1997, demonstrating that while there were shared origins, the two global leaders of the anglophone book business also had fundamental trade differences.

As the twentieth century progressed, the low-entry barriers to the trade attracted a constant stream of new small companies. The Great Depression opened up some cracks in the industry's formation and structure, but the trade also responded well. The Great Crash of 1929 soon brought cuts in consumer spending and led to a sudden decline in the American book business. This hit UK publishing hard as British publishers could no longer rely on North American sales to boost their businesses. Publishers on both sides of the Atlantic started dreaming of new ways of trading in books. Reprint book clubs grew up. In 1932, British publisher Harold Raymond invented the Book Token, allowing book consumers to exchange a token for a book. Booksellers were opposed to the idea at first but when it became a big hit at Christmas and the practice spread to other countries, almost every UK bookseller signed up to it. But more was needed. The 'recession proof' book trade was suffering. A policy of sale and return was created, allowing booksellers to stay in business. Shops could order and hold publishers' books on credit for up to 90 days. Unsold books were returnable for a full credit. The policy was implemented for the tough economic times, but curiously remained after economic growth returned.

1935–1970: The Paperback Revolution

Even more innovation was needed to keep the trade in good health. A 'new' paperback idea came about just as the world was emerging from the worst of the Great Depression. Paperbacks had already appeared in many forms from the nineteenth century onwards, but the paperback market of the 1930s introduced a whole new way of distributing paperbacks, and in the process created one of the UK's biggest names, Penguin Books.

Penguin's founder and owner, Allen Lane, borrowed his idea from a German imprint, Albatross, which had been set up in 1931 by an investor, Kurt Enoch, in Leipzig, Germany.⁴ Albatross produced cheap 7½ inches by 4¼ inches format English-language paperbacks for the continental market. National Socialist political pressures forced Albatross to cease trading, and the German imprint's demise left the way open for the new Penguin.

Lane had to look no further than Albatross for ideas. The German company's simple designs and book size, lack of cover illustration, colour coding of jackets by genre, all ended up in Penguin's overall design. Lane even employed Kurt Enoch as Penguin's New York-based chief of Penguin's early US operations.

Coming from a strong publishing family, Allen Lane, at the time of creating Penguin, was still Publishing Director of The Bodley Head. With the means to find the necessary capital and an understanding of all aspects of the trade, Lane began Penguin Books with Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* and nine other titles. Lane's greatest coup was to sell his paperbacks at very low prices. Convincing the UK high street store Woolworth to stock the Penguins, Lane priced the paper books at sixpence, one-twelfth of the UK hardcover price of six shillings. Sixpence fitted Woolworth's slogan of 'nothing more than sixpence'. Lane's business model meant he had to sell 18,000 copies of each title before break-even was reached. With Woolworth on board, within a year the Penguins were selling in the millions.

There is some dispute over which side of the Atlantic took the paperback revolution to its full potential. Penguin was the first to achieve mass sales, but the company had no real presence in the USA. Lane hesitated over what to do in the US market. His inflexibility with American colleagues on cover design and his aversion to populist literature selling methods meant the US market was not explored early by Penguin when it was in a perfect position to do so.

Pocket Books, created by Robert Fair deGraff, made the first big paperback move in the American paperback market. Noting how Penguin succeeded in the UK, and backed by Simon & Schuster, Pocket Books began selling its titles at 25 cents. The first copies, placed in department stores such as Macy's and Liggett's, sold out in 24 hours.

Meanwhile Lane still couldn't make up his mind. What did America want – high-brow titles or pulp novels? He wouldn't budge on his policy of no cover art. Fair deGraff, on the other hand, felt sure that to compete with pulp novels he had to decorate his books. Meanwhile, Allen Lane argued with the men he hired to advise him – Ian Ballantine, a 22-year old Columbia University and London School of Economics graduate, and Kurt Enoch, the founder of Albatross, who had already succeeded with a paperback imprint. Feuding inside Penguin US meant that Pocket Books was free to build on its initial success, cutting not only into pulp sales, but also affecting the revenues of mainstream US publishing.

The Second World War stimulated paperback sales on both sides of the Atlantic. Soldiers needed reading materials to fill in the lull between fighting. The US Council on Books in Wartime, created in 1942 from a group of trade book publishers, librarians and booksellers, set out to help the war effort, positioning books as 'idea-weapons'. Special low-cost paperbacks were sold to the Army and Navy at the cost of manufacture (six cents a copy) plus 10%. The books were made strictly for overseas distribution only, keeping them out of the US home market. Authors and publishers each received one-half of a cent per copy sold.

The book trade saw a huge paperback market suddenly opening up. Marshall Field bought Simon & Schuster and Pocket Books in 1944, and sought to buy another paperback house to cement his market plans. He chose Grosset & Dunlap, which effectively would give him a vertical monopoly – a first-print hardback, a hardback reprints and paperback reprints publisher under one roof. Seeing what Field was trying to do, Random House's Bennett Cerf blocked the purchase by organising a consortium of publishers – Little, Brown, Harpers, Scribners, World Book Encyclopedia, and Book-of-the-Month Club – to make Grosset & Dunlap a better offer. Each partner of the Random-led consortium agreed to invest \$370,000, with Book-of-the-Month taking two shares at \$740,000, offering Grosset & Dunlap more than \$2.5 million. As Dunlap wanted out of the business, his partner Donald Grosset (who had earlier turned Fair deGraff down) accepted the consortium's proposal. Cerf then convinced Curtis Publishing Company to distribute the new paperbacks.

The new venture, Bantam Books, gave its new chief, Ian Ballantine, start-up capital of \$1 million, with Curtis and Grosset & Dunlap each investing \$500,000 and Ballantine adding another \$100,000 of his own money (the breakdown of ownership of Bantam: Grosset & Dunlap and Curtis (42.5%), Ballantine (9%), Random House (3%)). Ballantine's Bantam bird logo acknowledged Kurt Enoch's Albatross (rather than Penguin) as the bird that led the way for all. In the meantime, Enoch, deciding he couldn't continue battling on alone with Lane without Ballantine, left Penguin US, buying out Lane's US office operation. Enoch formed The New American Library of World Literature (NAL). NAL initially produced paperback reprints of classics and scholarly books, together with pulp and hard-boiled detective fiction, later adding hardcovers to its list.

The US paperback market was expanding fast. Back in the UK, Lane kept up his own expansion plans as

well, starting Penguin Classics and opening Penguin's first Australian office, in 1946. In 1949, the Canadian paperback publisher Harlequin was founded. At first in direct North American competition with Pocket Books, Harlequin produced westerns and mysteries, branching out in the 1960s to concentrate on romances. In 1952 Bennett Cerf removed Ian Ballantine as Bantam's chief. Ballantine and his wife formed Ballantine Books and went on to build a large science fiction list, publishing the works of authors such as Arthur C. Clarke.

In 1953, a young editor, Jason Epstein, convinced the management at Doubleday to let him start an up-market paperback imprint, Anchor Books, aiming the new paperback enterprise at college students and young professionals.

The paperback industry was now well established, perhaps too well established. With the post-war worldwide economic boom, many paperback imprints flooded the market and growth stalled. At the same time, paperbacks drew criticism from conservative forces for their 'racy content', but it wasn't long before the business bounced back from both setbacks. In the 1960s the market boomed again. University cafés were filled with arguing students armed with dog-eared paperback existential tracts and the novels of Camus, Sartre, Carlos Castenada, Hesse, and the 'beats', Kerouac and Ginsberg.⁵ Paperbacks became essential fashion accessories, a subject for pop songs even. Like other 1960s Zeitgeist factors – folk, blues, rock and Pop Art – the paperback was an epitome of intellectual and cultural 'cool'. Paperback book sales exploded throughout the anglophone book world, the trade growing on average at 10% annually through to the early 1970s.

1965–Now: Conglomerate Publishing

From the mid-1960s onwards book publishing began to leave its cottage industry status behind as book publishing firms began to be absorbed into multinational cross-media corporate empires. Motivated by publishing revenues and profits accumulated in the paperback boom, and the looming promise of a computer-led revolution in learning, corporations started the process of reconfiguring and dismembering old-style publishers.

Radio Corporation of America (RCA) set the ball rolling in the USA by buying the respected and successful trade publisher Random House for \$40 million. IBM, ITT, Litton, Raytheon, Xerox, General Electric, GTE and CBS followed suit, acquiring other established publishing houses. The conglomerates began a race to own and control information and leisure book assets and markets. In the UK, famous names and imprints – Jonathan Cape, Chatto & Windus, The Bodley Head and Hutchinson – all changed hands. Many great brand names, such as Longman, eventually disappeared altogether.

Marketing and sales decisions began to replace editorial management as the main focus of the business. A lull in takeovers came in the mid to late 1970s, due to an economic downturn, but then a new phase of acquisitions started up all over again. In 1980, RCA sold Random House to the Newhouse magazine empire. CBS bought into publishing and then sold out again. Simon & Schuster bought the textbook publisher, Prentice Hall. In the UK Pearson, which merged with Longmans in 1968, bought Penguin in 1970. Other multinationals entered the fray. Australia's News Corporation bought Harper & Row in 1987, then Collins in 1989, forming HarperCollins in 1990. Holland's Elsevier merged with the UK's Reed. The German giant Holtzbrinck bought Macmillan. Time Warner, the world's largest media corporation, bought Little Brown and created Warner Books. Germany's Bertelsmann absorbed Bantam, Doubleday and Dell, becoming the biggest trade publisher in the United States when it bought Random House from Newhouse in 1998.

The conglomerates reshaped book publishing, shifting the focus from incremental backlist sales management to explosive frontlist sales promotion. The corporations decided to focus most of their efforts on bestselling star authors, promoting them heavily in periodical media outlets and on television (some of which they began to acquire). On the surface and on paper this almost seemed a sound approach. Fewer authors each selling larger numbers of books would cut costs substantially. The books business, however, did not always readily pan out as if it were selling supermarket products. When the new owners took a closer look at their acquisitions and their markets, they didn't seem quite as attractive. Initially attracted to the potential that book publishing offered integrated media investment, executives realised that early expectations for synergy-reformation of the entire model had been overly optimistic. The book industry could be rationalised but not

changed completely. More books could be produced by fewer authors and midlist authors could be forced to disappear, but an ignored backlist was a poor use of an extremely valuable asset. While the corporations sought to turn the book model into 'a global supermarket of books', books remained a discretionary purchase and as such were resistant to wholesale changes. Book buyers could be herded towards products with advertising and clever product placement in other media, but readers would not necessarily do what was expected of them.

In the 1983 edition of *The Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian numbered 50 dominant companies. In 1987 that number was down to 29. In 1997, it had fallen to ten. In 2000 it was six. Finally, in 2004, five big media companies were left.⁶ From the 1990s onwards, new international treaties and changes to national media regulations progressively dismantled most barriers to media conglomerate plans. Globalisation and diversification have left the media giants in charge of the book markets.⁷ All the major media markets are now interdependent. Competition morphs into co-opetition,⁸ in markets filled with synergies, collaborations and cross-overs.

Some corporations grew weary of books and sold out; others came into the industry to take their place. In the twenty-first century the book trade throughout all its sectors is now largely arranged in oligopolies – a handful of cross-media conglomerates sharing 50–80% control of all book markets in all sectors. There are also tens of thousands of small presses in existence, which provide an array of books, but the overall shift from the single dedicated book publishing firm to cross-media corporation ownership is now an accomplished fact.

The corporate consolidation of publishing is clearly the most significant event in recent times. Fifty years ago media markets were national and quite separate. Media markets are now conglomerate-led and global in scope. The decline of the dedicated, middle-sized publishing firm seems irreversible. Content now is synergised, re-used widely in diverse locations and contexts. For some observers this means less diversity of content owned by fewer entities. Another point of view maintains that the conglomerate-led globalisation of markets provides a more cost-efficient and effective industry, giving consumers what they want when they want it.

Compaine and Gomery argue that any threat presented by the corporate consolidation of publishing has been overstated, that ownership is fluid and ever-changing. Competition is open and fierce and will continue to be.⁹ Robert McChesney takes the opposing view, stating that consolidation is a threat to democracy. He argues that large corporations' control of markets is based on political favours, stimulated by political donations; the control exerted by 'transnational giants' such as Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Sony, CBS-Viacom, Lagardère/Hachette, GE (NBC) and News Corporation ultimately distorts markets, to the detriment of product diversity and democracy.¹⁰ Financial contributions in the United States by big companies to the political process between 1998 and 2004 were over \$1 billion (56.2% for the Democrats, 43.2% for the Republicans).¹¹ While political contributions seem not (at least then) to be biased by ideology or party, money is clearly a stimulus towards favourable legislative treatment for the biggest donors.

The first decade of the twenty-first century in publishing has also been consumed by digital developments in content provision. The main preoccupation of the late twentieth century was who would own book publishing? The big concern of the twenty-first century is now how will the book survive?

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2 Queen Elizabeth I awarded a third printing charter to the University of Oxford University in 1586.

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4 Together with John-Holroyd-Reece and Max Weger.

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6 Bagdikian, Ben H., *The Media Monopoly*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1983.

7 'The founding of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, and media privatization push by the IMF and other international regulatory bodies helped to denationalize the processes of media production and distribution.' Quote from Arsenault, A. H. and Castells, M., 'The Structure and Dynamics of Global Multi-Media Business Networks', *International Journal of Communication* 2, 2008, pp. 708–709.

8 '... [T]he business strategy of multi-media conglomerates as "American Keiretsu," an adaptation of the traditional Japanese practice of co-opting competition by creating structures of collaborations with rivals.' Quote from *ibid.*, p. 722.

9 Compaine, B.M. and Gomery, D., *Who Owns the Media?: Concentration of Ownership in the Mass Communications Industry* (3rd revised ed). New York, Taylor & Francis, 2000.

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11 John Dunbar, 'Networks of Influence', in R. Rice, Ed., *Media Ownership*, Cresskill, NJ, Hampton Press, 2008.

- penguins
- Stationers' Company
- publishers
- bookselling
- copyright
- printers
- trade

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