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Abstract

When we read a book, we rarely give much thought to the format in which that book is published. But had the book not presented itself to us in a format that suited our taste and our pockets, we would probably not have picked it up. That’s basically what publishers do: they strive to position their books in the right form and with the right price so that they will find their intended readers. In the summer of 2018, during my professional placement at Simon & Schuster Canada, I learnt how format decisions impact the fate of books, and how the company made successes of certain books by changing the format from hardcover to trade paperback. This report is a culmination of my observations and learnings and is based on interviews I conducted with key members of the staff and data and information provided by Simon & Schuster Canada. The subject of print book formats is complex. My hope is that this report throws light on the state of formats as it stands today in Canada.

Keywords: Simon & Schuster Canada; formats; print formats; paperback; trade paperback; hardcover; mass market; publishing; commercial fiction
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Dedication

To my parents, Sushama and Vijay Desai.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The history of publishing is punctuated with several “revolutions”: the mass market revolution that started in the 1930s\(^1\), the hardcover revolution that started in the 1990s\(^2\), and the ebook revolution that started in late 2000s.\(^3\) In the 1950s, when the trade paperback was introduced, it became so popular that there was a “paperback revolution.”\(^4\) In Canada, this revolution continues. It is distinguished by the choice of the trade paperback format as the first format in which many publishers are publishing their books. The number of “revolutions” that have come and gone – there are rumblings of an audiobook revolution now\(^5\) – point towards the fact that publishing has been in a constant state of flux, responding to the evolving tastes of people and advances in technology. Book formats today are highly dynamic, and the choice to go with one or more over others depends upon a variety of factors, such as genre, target audience, sales channels, and price. Today, when publishers are competing with social media and various forms of online entertainment for readers’ attention, being shrewd about what format to release a book in is becoming all the more crucial.

The focus of this report is to show how print formats are used by publishers today to attract larger audiences and how the trade paperback format is increasingly becoming the format of choice. In doing so, my focus will be on the books published by and

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\(^3\) Mike Shatzkin, “Four years into the ebook revolution: things we know and things we don’t know,” The Shatzkin Files, September 25, 2011, https://www.idealog.com/blog/four-years-into-the-ebook-revolution-things-we-know-and-things-we-dont-know.


strategies adopted by Simon & Schuster Canada (S&S Canada), where I spent three months over the summer of 2018 doing an editorial internship.

1.1 Internship at Simon & Schuster Canada and germination of the idea

My professional placement at S&S Canada was from May 1, 2018 to July 31, 2018. As an editorial intern my work involved a range of editorial and administrative tasks. I read and gauged the potential of manuscripts sent to the company; I wrote reader’s reports, jacket copy, and book club guides; created and proofread tip sheets; checked proofs of books; and was involved in a number of tasks specific to certain upcoming titles. As part of my administrative duties, I mailed books, applied for literary awards on behalf of S&S Canada, updated the company’s online inventory management system called ‘The Shelf’ and sat on weekly editorial, publishing board and production meetings. It was during these meetings that I realized what a key role format decisions made in S&S Canada’s publishing strategy. Some of the company’s major successes – which will be discussed below – involved changing the formats of books acquired for the Canadian market and selling them at a price point that made sense for Canada. This was done because the company knew that the domestic reader would not accept the same book in its original format and price. For example, a book released in hardcover in the United States for $27 translated into the same book being priced at around $35 or $40 in Canada, because of the exchange rate. Knowing this price point to be too high for the Canadian consumer, S&S Canada’s strategy was to convert the book into a trade paperback and price it at $24.99, which when discounted became less than $20.

A lot of the format discussions in the meetings had the same end-goal: to figure out what price point the reader could afford for a particular book and what that price point translated into in terms of format. The objective was to always find ways in which the company could bring a book and a reader together. Being cognizant of the format to
which readers are more receptive has been one of the main ways in which S&S Canada has managed to stay profitable. To understand how S&S Canada arrived at this point, it’s worthwhile to delve into their history as a distributor and publisher.
Chapter 2: The journey of Simon & Schuster Canada

2.1 Brief recap from past to present

Simon & Schuster (S&S) started its operations in Canada as a company called Distican in Markham, Ontario. Distican was a Canadian-owned distribution company that had a warehouse and sales and marketing teams that sold and marketed S&S books. In 2002, S&S Canada acquired Distican, closed the warehouse and became, primarily, a sales and marketing business. This is when S&S Canada’s current president and CEO, Kevin Hanson, was brought in to head the company. One of the first things Hanson noticed was that although the warehousing operations had ceased, the mentality among the team members was still as distributors of books and not as publishers of books. His decision to make the team feel a sense of ownership to the books irrevocably changed the way the company did business. To date, even if S&S Canada only has distribution rights to a book, they think strategically about the way that book is sold and marketed in Canada, sometimes going so far as to change the covers, so that even if the books did not originate in Canada, the selling and marketing was completely done in Canada.

Twice a year, the company even has a ‘Made in Canada’ event, where the entire company has an offsite meeting to discuss the upcoming releases and the sales and marketing strategies for those books. This is as much to ensure everyone is in the loop and on the same page as it is to inculcate and strengthen the aforementioned sense of ownership towards the company’s books.

Some of the authors S&S Canada published to great success in the first decade were Stephen King, Kathy Reichs, Kate Morton and Rhonda Byrne. From the early days, in

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6 Kevin Hanson (President and Publisher, Simon & Schuster Canada), in an interview with the author, June 2018.
7 Hanson, interview.
spite of the fact that most of the authors S&S Canada published were American and many of the sales channels the company worked with were also American, the company looked at new ways of doing things in the Canadian marketplace, distinct from the US market. So even if they were selling the same books as their parent company in the US, they marketed them differently and that’s what made them more of a publisher of books rather than just a distributor of books. In 2013, S&S Canada was granted permission by the Canadian government to start their domestic publishing program. So the company added acquisition and editorial staff and started publishing Canadian books. In their endeavour to publish Canadian authors and serve as a platform for Canadian voices, the company published books by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Charlotte Gray, Gord Downie, Will Ferguson, Wendel Clark, Amanda Lindhout, Clara Hughes and more. Their recent successes have included titles by Rupi Kaur, Amy Stuart, Ruth Ware, Iain Reid, Fredrik Backman, and former Chief Justice of Canada, Beverley McLachlin. In October 2018, S&S Canada’s book The Patch: The People, Pipelines and Politics of the Oil Sands by climate-change activist Chris Turner won the National Business Book Award, and two other books – Learning to Breathe by Janice Lynn Mather and Ocean Meets Sky by the Fan Brothers – were nominated for the Governor General’s Literary Awards.

2.2 Mandate and Unique Selling Proposition

In June 2018, six out of the 10 books on The Globe and Mail bestseller fiction list belonged to S&S Canada. These included three books distributed by the company – Stephen King’s The Outsider, Lisa Jewell’s Then She Was Gone, and Lauren Weisberger’s When Life Gives You Lululemons – and three books published domestically – Ruth Ware’s The Death...
of Mrs. Westaway, Rupi Kaur’s *The Sun and her Flowers*, and Beverley McLachlin’s *Full Disclosure*. It was a milestone for the young company and showed that it had its finger on the pulse of what people liked to read. Although not officially stated or documented, the mandate of S&S Canada is to “publish books from the perspective of the reader” rather than the writer. That means that not only do they publish books bearing in mind their intended readers, and listen to and evolve with the reading tastes of the Canadian audience, but are also cognizant of the spending habits of the consumer. For a publisher like S&S Canada, it is imperative to think about how much money a consumer is ready to spend on a book because in Canada, S&S Canada is not a “price-setter,” because most of their books are imported. The publisher S&S Canada imports from sets the price for a hardcover and then S&S Canada are the “price-takers,” because they convert that book into Canadian dollars and this has a significant effect on the market and how consumers engage with their books.

Hanson has observed that in Canada, the “street price” – the price for a book the consumer is willing to pay – is usually +/- $20 or +/- $10. Consumers will pay $10 for a trade paperback, because it is affordable and books priced thus will sell significantly. According to Hanson, it is basic economics: price goes up, volumes go down. He feels that the reason people don’t understand why Canadian demand varies is because “Canadian price points are varied, because we don’t control the price, because the exchange rate dictates what our price is on top of the US price. That’s why this market is a price-taker, not a price-setter.”

Hanson realized that the only way S&S Canada could be a price-setter was to convert the first format of a book and set a new price. That is how the company became a price-

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12 Hanson, interview.
13 Hanson, interview.
14 Hanson, interview.
setter, by changing the format, which then changed the price. S&S Canada has been doing this consistently with most of the authors they distribute and publish. Even if a book doesn’t originate in Canada, the company changes the formats – from hardcover to trade paperback – so that the book can be optimally priced to attract a wider readership in Canada. By thinking about the price-point format at which a reader will best engage with a writer, S&S Canada has managed to successfully transition from being a price-taker to a price-setter and find an audience for the diverse authors on their roster. The case studies contained in this report serve to illustrate this point.

**2.3 Small, but big**

S&S Canada is the Canadian arm of S&S, a company owned by the CBS Corporation in New York, one of the “Big 5” publishers in the world and the biggest US-owned publisher in the world. As such, S&S Canada has the infrastructure of a big multinational company but acts like a boutique publisher in Canada. The office is located on a single floor in Toronto’s historic Old Town neighbourhood. All the team members sit close to each other and the senior management practices an open-door policy. They release around 30 to 40 titles each year and those titles get the backing and support of all the departments in the company. Nita Pronovost, the Vice President and Editorial Director of the company, puts it down to “a group acquisitions mentality,” wherein the members from each team strategize together, right from acquisitions through pre-publication, publication and post publication. There is no internal competition as there are no imprints within S&S Canada, bar ‘Phyllis Bruce Editions,’ the imprint of senior editor Phyllis Bruce, which leans towards literary fiction and non-

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15 Hanson, interview.
16 Nita Pronovost (Vice President and Editorial Director, Simon & Schuster Canada), in an interview with the author, June 2018.
17 Pronovost, interview.
fiction. The company’s “granular” way of publishing ensures that everyone knows what is going on with the domestic and import titles being published.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{2.4 Canadian book publishing program}

S\&S Canada’s domestic book publishing program was started in 2013 and it comprises four verticals. It involves discovering and promoting Canadian talent, bringing Canadian authors to the world, publishing hockey books, and commissioning and developing books in-house. It also includes the S\&S books imported from other markets and repackaged and published for the Canadian market, like Anthony Doerr’s \textit{All the Light We Cannot See} and Jennifer Egan’s \textit{Manhattan Beach}. The program also includes inter-company acquisitions: books acquired by S\&S Canada and another S\&S company and republished in Canada. Lastly, this program comprises books acquired from other publishers and released in Canada, like Rupi Kaur’s \textit{Milk and Honey} and \textit{Chicken Soup for the Canadian Soul}.

\textsuperscript{18} Hanson, interview.
Chapter 3: Book formats

3.1 Primary and secondary formats

When we talk about formats, we usually talk about first and second or primary and secondary formats. The primary format is one in which the book is first published and the secondary format is one into which the book is later converted and republished in the same market. The reason books are converted into a secondary format is so that publishers can offer a book at a cheaper price point so that it becomes more accessible and finds more readers. Chapter 6 delves further into the conversion of books from the first format to the second format. Traditionally, books would be published in hardcover (the first format of a book) and then 10 months to a year later they would be published as a mass market paperback or as a trade paperback (the second format). This is no longer strictly the case. In Canada, what format a book will be published in has depended a lot on the fluctuating value of the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the US dollar. Where the conversion was usually from hardcover to mass market when the exchange rate was closer, today it is trade paperback to mass market or another type of trade paperback.\(^{19}\) Although, it should be noted here that fluctuations in the exchange rate is not the only reason the hardcover format has fallen out of favour in Canada. According to Pronovost, genre fiction books such as mysteries, romances and commercial blockbusters constitute “disposable reading.” These are books that people read and pass on to others or books that people read when they’re on vacation, with the intent to neither keep the book nor display it on their bookshelves. So, for such books, they prefer formats that are lighter and cheaper. Readers don’t want a hardcover for these genres; they prefer function over longevity.\(^{20}\) Today, except for libraries that like

\(^{19}\) Hanson, interview.
\(^{20}\) Pronovost, interview.
hardcover books because their binding ensures durability, consumers often prefer not to carry something bulky around, especially when a version of the book is available with similar attributes as the hardcover and is also lighter and less expensive.

### 3.2 Performance of formats

For S&S Canada, the decision to go with trade paperback as their primary format for most – not all – fiction titles has been arrived at after years of experience in the business and looking at what the numbers tell. Figure 3.1 is a pie chart of the net sales of different formats in terms of units sold in 2017 for S&S Canada and Figure 3.2 is a pie chart of the net sales of different formats in terms of revenue generated in 2017 for S&S Canada.

**Figure 3.1: Net Sales of formats in terms of Units Sold in 2017 for S&S Canada**

![Pie chart showing net sales in units for different formats in 2017 for S&S Canada. TRADE PAPER is 47%, HARDCOVER is 16%, EBOOK is 14%, BOARDBOOKS is 8%, MASSPAP is 12%, PAPER OVER BOARD is 3%.]
As one can see from both figures 3.1 and 3.2, the trade paperback format has sold more copies and generated more revenue in 2017 than other formats.\textsuperscript{21} Elsewhere in the publishing industry in Canada, the domination of the trade paperback is also evident.

\textbf{Figure 3.3: Units Sold of formats from 2009 to 2018}

\textsuperscript{21} Data retrieved from Simon and Schuster Canada documents.
Figure 3.3 shows the performance of various formats in terms of units sold over a 10-year period across the publishing industry in Canada. The wave-like, undulating pattern of the bars that represent the formats indicates dips and rises in the formats’ performance. The wave-pattern for hardcovers doesn’t show drastic ups and downs, with units sold for 2018 at just over a million. For trade paperbacks, the dips and rises are more pronounced, with units sold for 2018 at just over two million. Since this data was generated in September 2018, there might yet be changes in the units sold of these two formats because of holiday season purchases. On the whole, the trade paperback seems to have consistently sold better than other formats.22

3.3 Raincoast Books report on the ‘C-Format’23

The performance of formats (in terms of units sold and revenue generated) and aspects that affect the sales of books – such as the changing buying habits of consumers, developments within the book retail industry, and innovations in publishing technologies – impact not just publishers, but also businesses dedicated to the distribution and sales of books. To get a distributor’s perspective on print book formats in Canada, this report approached Raincoast Books, the Vancouver-based book distribution company, because in March 2018, they concluded an internal study on formats aimed at specifically studying how books imported into Canada and converted into the trade paperback format performed vis-à-vis the hardcover. This report by Raincoast Books was conducted by their sales data associate, Hamish Clark, and is called ‘C-Format Title Research Report.’ The objective of the report was to show the

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22 Data accessed from Simon and Schuster Canada.
benefits of releasing a book in Canada in the C-Format. Below are the findings from the report, used with permission from Raincoast Books.

‘C-Format’ is an industry term used by distributors in Canada to mean the ‘Canadian’ format of the book. The ‘C’ stands for ‘Canadian’. What this format refers to is the international trade paperback edition of a book that is designated for publication in Canada. What is important to know is that this edition of a book is published concurrently with the “cloth” or hardcover format of the book released by the publisher in their domestic market. An example of the C-Format is Jennifer Egan’s novel *Manhattan Beach*. This novel was published in the US in hardcover by Scribner – an imprint of S&S – in October 2017. In Canada, the C-Format of the book was released by S&S Canada at the same time. Within the distribution business, a book like *Manhattan Beach* would be referred to as the ‘C-Format’. What distribution companies like Raincoast had noticed was that when a book was imported into Canada and released as a trade paperback as opposed to hardcover – like it was in its home territory – it sold well. Observing the fact that more and more publishers were changing the format of an imported book for Canada, Raincoast decided to investigate and the result of that investigation is this report on the C-Format.

For the report, Clark collected data of 100 fiction titles that were released in the C-Format between June 6, 2011 and March 6, 2018. His findings tell us a lot about why the C-Format has established itself as the format of choice today for publishers like S&S Canada, which publishes a lot of imported titles. One of the criteria that Clark looked at when analyzing the performance of C-Formats was what is called “gap percentage.” Another distribution term, a gap percentage is the percentage of US sales of their books that Canada sells. So, for example, if a book sells 10 copies in the US and 1 copy in Canada, then the gap percentage of Canadian sales is 10%. Clark did a study of the gap percentage between the performance of C-Formats in the Canadian market and
hardcovers in the American market. For this study, he analyzed sales data of the 100 fiction titles in the first 13 weeks of their release and over their lifetime. In the first 13 weeks of their release, he found that the gap percentage between C-Formats in the Canadian market and the hardcovers in the American market was 58%. This was an impressive figure considering that traditionally, the gap percentage in terms of market and sales size of Canada was just 10%. Clark then analyzed the sales data of the titles over their lifetime and he found a 67% gap percentage between C-Formats in the Canadian market and the hardcovers in the American market. According to Clark these findings suggested that not only could the international trade paperback edition of books “multiply sales up front but these sales [could] endure across the lifetime of a title.”

Clark also studied the number of copies of books sold in the C-Format in Canada as opposed to the number of copies of books sold in the hardcover format in Canada in the first 13 weeks of their release. And what he found was that “the average first 13 weeks sales of a C-Format was 8,890 copies while the average for the cloth copy was 345 units.” This number was particularly impressive because it placed “this hypothetical average C-Format title in the ranks of some of the bestselling titles in Canada.” The conclusion of the report was that for a publisher that imported a lot of books into Canada and published them for the Canadian market, publishing a book in the C-Format – or in the trade paperback format – presented a value proposition that was difficult to deny and perilous to ignore. In light of such findings, one wonders why we should bother to print books in any other format at all. In the next chapter, I will talk about each format specifically in relation to S&S Canada.
### 3.4 Sales channels and formats

For a publisher, even before it can persuade a customer to buy a book, it has to first convince the channels that stock their books – the retail partners – to buy them. The sales channels then are the first “customers”; they’re the conduit via which sales are generated. Naturally, for any publisher, their sales channels are extremely important and many publishers develop a very close working relationship with them to make a book a success.

#### Figure 3.4: The main sales channels of S&S Canada in 2017

The pie chart in Figure 3.4 shows the main sales channels for S&S Canada in 2017.\(^{24}\) There are, of course, many more channels than these, but these are the main ones for that year.

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\(^{24}\) Data retrieved from Simon and Schuster Canada documents.
When it comes to formats, sales channels have a very important role to play. For instance, for S&S Canada, Indigo is a very important sales channel, as is evident from Figure 3.4. Being in the business of selling books and interacting with book buyers on a daily basis gives Indigo a good sense of what’s selling and what’s not. So, even when a publisher like S&S Canada might consider the obvious format for a non-fiction memoir to be hardcover, Indigo – after observing that the trade paperback format is what customers prefer – can recommend the publisher to not publish in hardcover, but instead go for trade paperback.²⁵ Bookstores also suggest changing the format from hardcover to trade paperback because the size of trade paperbacks makes it easier for the stores to display more copies on shelves. For a publisher, the prospect of shipping more books to stores and potentially selling more copies is enticing enough to change the format of a book.

Some sales channels prefer books only in certain formats and are not likely to accept books in any other format. For instance, Costco is a very important sales channel for most publishers in Canada. The consumers who shop at Costco generally do not purchase hardcover books. The price point of hardcovers is perceived as too high, and Costco’s consumers generally want “disposable reading” rather than shelf longevity. Hence, Costco prefers the trade paperback format over the hardcover.²⁶ Another peculiarity of a sales channel like Costco is that the retailer treats every item in the store – whether it’s a pound of chicken or a book – as a Stock Keeping Unit or an SKU. Their policy is to keep fewer SKUs that sell fast and well.²⁷ So, to convince Costco to dedicate an SKU for someone like Stephen King is relatively easy, because King has a dedicated following and those followers assure his books become bestsellers. But to convince Costco to take books by a midlist author is difficult because of the unpredictability of

²⁵ Adria Iwasutiak (Director of Publicity and Canadian sales, Simon & Schuster Canada), in an interview with the author, July 2018.
²⁶ Pronovost, interview.
²⁷ Hanson, interview.
sales of those books. So, increasingly, publishers do what are called “assortments”: they combine books by multiple authors – often according to their trim size and genre – so that they can all be part of a single SKU and get the same shelf space in Costco. S&S Canada has tried this successfully with the books of Canadian novelists Susanna Kearsley and Genevieve Graham. Both Kearsley and Graham write in the genre of historical fiction and both their books are published in trade paperback with the same trim size so that they can be assorted together and offered to Costco. And sometimes, publishers assort books to the benefit of certain authors, as when books by a midlist author, by virtue of being assorted in the same SKU as a book by a more prominent author, get pride of place on the same table and hence get more visibility and sales traction.

Another reason publishers are cognizant of the specific needs of a channel is because the channels help make books bestsellers. For instance, channels like Costco and Walmart are known to be very good retailers for women’s fiction. These channels are able to drive large volumes at certain price bands, for instance, between $10 and $15. Bearing in mind how these channels discount, a publisher has to sell them fiction between $20 and $25, so that after discounting, the books will fit within the store’s preferred price bracket. That is how these channels drive volume and publishers are able to get their books on bestseller lists. In the end it all depends upon whether the channel is worth the effort, and if a publisher thinks it is, then they will be willing to draft a strategy bearing that channel in mind.

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28 Iwasutiak, interview.
29 Pronovost, interview.
30 Hanson, interview.
Chapter 4: Formats and S&S Canada

4.1 Hardcover

Like the mass market format before it, the hardcover format seems to have come full circle. John B. Thompson, in his book Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century, talks about the “hardcover revolution” that swept across the industry in the late 1990s and 2000s. One of the reasons for this revolution was the merging of mass market and hardcover houses. Since the mass market format was introduced in the US in the 1930s, it grew exponentially with publishers like Pocket Books, Bantam, Dell, Fawcett, and the New American Library doing brisk business and working independently from the hardcover houses. Hardcover houses were perceived as literary and prestigious, but their publishers, nonetheless, depended on mass market houses because the sales of paperback rights was their principal source of revenue.31

However, in the 1970s, things started to change. Mass market houses became so big that they bought hardcover houses so that they could expand both their publishing programs and their supply chains.32 The publishers who had a background in mass market books applied some of the same strategies and techniques to make hardcovers a success, such as designing bold covers and marketing hardcover books like mass market books. This was also the time big chain bookstores started doing business and one of the first things they did was discount hardcover books aggressively. This meant that the price difference between hardcover books and mass market books narrowed and sales of hardcover books and revenue generated from them overtook those of mass market books.33 By the 1980s and 1990s, hardcover publishing, according to Thompson,

31 Thompson, Merchants of Culture, 36.
32 Thompson, 38.
33 Thompson, 40.
was the “financial foundation of the industry.”\textsuperscript{34} That was the time when whether it was a fiction or a non-fiction book, it got a hardcover release. Things are not the same anymore. And the clue to that might be something Thompson mentions in his book. Talking about the decline of the mass market format, he says, “The shrinking of the market for mass-market paperbacks in the 1990s and 2000s went hand in hand with the expansion of the market for trade paperbacks, as more and more hardcover books were put into trade paperback format rather than being repackaged as mass-market paperbacks.”\textsuperscript{35} The trade paperback format was introduced in 1953 in the US, and the conversion from hardcover to trade paperback became common practice. But because the trade paperback was a durable format, its popularity grew and it started giving competition to hardcover as the first format in which books were published. Even literary fiction – long the staple genre for hardcover – was starting to get published in trade paperback. Speaking of this in a \textit{New York Times} article in 2006, writer Edward Wyatt wrote about how “even critically acclaimed literary novels [had] a short shelf life in hardcover, with one-half to three-quarters of the books shipped to stores often being returned to the publisher, unsold.”\textsuperscript{36} When a book failed in hardcover, stores would limit their order for the paperback edition of the book and future books written by the same author. More and more publishers started publishing paperback originals. In 1984, Vintage Contemporaries, an imprint of Random House, published Jay McInerney’s \textit{Bright Lights, Big City}, considered “the seminal novel of the 1980’s” in trade paperback.\textsuperscript{37} In 1999, Jhumpa Lahiri’s \textit{Interpreter of Maladies} was also published in trade paperback and won the Pulitzer Prize.

\textsuperscript{34} Thompson, 38.
\textsuperscript{35} Thompson, 40.
\textsuperscript{37} Wyatt, “Literary Novels Going Straight to Paperback”.

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At S&S Canada, the hardcover format is reserved mainly for non-fiction books or literary fiction titles. But that’s not a given. Last year, one of the company’s homegrown books, an anthology of true stories of Canadian war veterans called *Everyday Heroes* was released in trade paperback. But the second book in the series, *Everyday Hockey Heroes*, an anthology of stories by both professional hockey players and fans, is in hardcover, perhaps because that book is seen more as a collectible and gift book. Hockey books, particularly those that are published during the pre-holiday season, are usually published in hardcover. Hardcover is the preferred format for gift books in other genres as well. The quality of hardcovers is better and consumers don’t want to give books as gifts that might not look good or could be perceived as being cheap.

From S&S Canada’s list of titles for the upcoming season only four are hardcover: three non-fiction titles and one graphic novel. In August 2018, they released a psychological thriller called *Foe* in hardcover, partly because the book’s author, Iain Reid, tends to skew literary. And although the book has made it onto the bestseller lists, its full potential in Canada will probably be realized in trade paperback. The decision to go with hardcover can be a tricky one in the Canadian market. British author Paula Hawkins’s novel *The Girl on the Train* was published by Penguin Random House Canada in trade paperback in January 2015. At the time Hawkins was a little-known author and hence, *The Girl on the Train* was published in trade paperback. To publish an unknown author of a genre fiction novel in hardcover would have been a monetary risk. *The Girl on the Train* was a massive success in the burgeoning genre of “grip-lit” (short for gripping literature). It was also adapted into a movie. So, when it came to Hawkins’s second book *Into the Water*, the publisher felt that Hawkins’s brand warranted a higher price point and hence, they published the second novel in hardcover.38 This was also assuming that the popularity of the first book would cast

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38 Pronovost, interview.
some of its afterglow on the second one. Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case. Perhaps the second book just wasn’t as engaging as the first one, but it didn’t sell nearly as well as the first book.

However, in spite of the fact that hardcover books are not selling in the kind of huge quantities they once did, the format is still relevant. In the US and UK, hardcover is still the preferred format for first editions of books. According to Philip Jones, the editor of The Bookseller and co-founder of FutureBook.net – in an interview with The Guardian in February 2018 – a hardcover book is still “a mark of quality and a demonstration of intent on behalf of the publisher [to] show booksellers and reviewers that this is a book worth paying attention to.” According to Jones, some literary critics, even today, review a book only if it is published in hardcover. The size of hardcovers also makes them stand out in book shops and command more attention. What’s more, the sales of hardcover books, reportedly, grew 11% in the UK in 2017 and according to sales data aggregator NPD BookScan, hardcover fiction brings in about £70m annually, which is roughly 20% of the printed fiction market. So while hardcover might be less popular in Canada, it’s still an important format and for the reasons mentioned above, it is still the format in which publishers sometimes choose to release the first editions of their books.

4.2 Trade paperback

The trade paperback format was founded in 1953 by legendary publisher Jason Epstein. While working at Doubleday – then an independent publishing company and now an imprint of Penguin Random House – Epstein founded a trade paperback imprint called Anchor Books. In Book Business: Publishing Past Present and Future, Epstein recollects the
start of his publishing career as a trainee at Doubleday. A voracious reader of books, Epstein would frequent his favourite bookstore in New York, Eighth Street Bookshop, but would be unable to afford the hardcover books sold over there on his $45 a week salary. With the encouragement of the store’s owners – who agreed that paperback editions of their books would sell well – and with the approval of his superiors at Doubleday, Epstein launched Anchor Books, an imprint that would offer people “intellectually oriented series of paperbacks” that were far better in quality than mass market books. Mass market books were “printed on inexpensive paper called ground wood that turned brown upon contact with light, and their covers were coated with a kind of cellophane that peeled away with use.” The trade paperbacks launched by Anchor were printed on more expensive and “durable acid-free sheet that retained its whiteness somewhat longer and… the covers [were printed] on heavy stock in a matte finish.” Sold for 65 cents to $1.25, these paperbacks were an immediate sensation and other publishers followed suit with quality paperback versions of their books. Epstein soon discovered that he had been the creator of a “paperback revolution.” Books started being printed in trade paperbacks and backlisted in them instead of mass market. Today, the trade paperback continues to be used as both a frontlist and a backlist format for books. I will be talking about the trade paperback as a frontlist or first format later. As a backlist format, this paperback measures 5.5 x 8.5 inches (although sizes can vary); it does not have flaps or effects on the cover and the paper quality – while still being good – is not as superior as the paper quality of first format trade paperbacks.

41 Epstein, Book Business, 52
42 Epstein, 47
43 Epstein, 64
44 Epstein, 64
45 Epstein, 64-65
S&S Canada first achieved success with the trade paperback as a backlist format back when they were selling and marketing the titles of S&S and its imprints and one of their first successes with the format was author Kathy Reichs. It might be worthwhile here to examine how they used this format to make the author successful in Canada.

4.3 Kathy Reichs

American crime writer and forensic anthropologist Kathy Reichs is most famous for creating Temperance Brennan, the heroine of over 20 bestselling novels in the ‘Bones’ series, and the TV show based on the novels called Bones. Reichs was already an established name in the US and was published by S&S imprint Scribner in hardcover when S&S Canada decided to publish her around 2005. This was eight years before they started their domestic publishing program, but instead of just importing Reichs’ titles to Canada, S&S Canada devised a strategy to make her books appealing to the Canadian reader. Hanson had observed that, historically, Canadian sales of hardcover books as a percentage of the total sales of hardcovers in North America were in the 7-10% range compared to 15-20% range for mass market paperbacks. For Reichs, he thought that there had to be a price point between the high-30s (typically, for hardcovers) and the low-10s (typically, for mass markets) that would appeal to the price-conscious Canadian reader. And so, he came up with an “in-betweener” trade paperback that was priced at $19.99. S&S Canada released Reichs in hardcover as the first format because this was back in the days of the “hardcover revolution” and she was a brand-name author. The US released Reichs in hardcover and then went straight to mass market a year later, but S&S Canada released an “in-betweener” trade

47 Brendan May (Senior Editor, Simon & Schuster Canada), in an interview with the author, June 2018.
48 Hanson, interview.
49 Hanson, interview.
50 May, interview.
paperback six months after the hardcover and was able tocapitalize on the residual demand for the book and also hold a position at the front of the bookstore. They also entirely repackaged Reichs’ backlist by changing the covers, giving the entire ‘Bones’ series a cohesive look and releasing a backlist trade paperback priced at $16.99. So, the first format hardcover would be priced at $32, the second format trade paperback at $19.99, the third format mass market at $10.99 and then the book would be backlisted in trade paperback at $16.99. The idea, according to Hanson, was “to find different tranches of the same thing… and to experiment price points to see if there was a readership in that price range.” The strategy worked because thanks to S&S Canada’s decision to release the “in-between” trade paperback and promote the books strategically, the company was able to increase Reichs’ readership in Canada. Figure 4.1, on the next page, is an instance of publicity material that details Reichs’ bestselling numbers in Canada.

51 Hanson, interview.
52 Hanson, interview.
53 Data retrieved from Simon and Schuster Canada documents.
Figure 4.1: A publicity poster for Kathy Reichs

Figure 4.1 is an instance of the publicity material used with permission from S&S Canada, when the company repackaged many of Reichs’ books in the ‘Bones’ series with new covers and a cohesive look. The books sold very well, as one can see from the sales figures mentioned against some of the titles.
4.4 Trade paperback as first format

Epstein’s brainchild evolved from being a better alternative to the mass market to basically being an alternative to the hardcover itself. The trade paperback being discussed in this section differs from the trade paperback mentioned in the previous section by being a format that is of superior quality and hence used as the first format in which books in Canada are often published. Today, this trade paperback has become the de facto first format for S&S Canada and many other publishers. Books published in this format possess some of the same attributes as the hardcover. They are the same trim size as hardcovers: 6x9 inches. They often feature French flaps that enable the jacket copy to be distributed in much the same way as it is on the dust jacket of the traditional hardcover; many feature effects on the cover like embossing, foil stamp and matte lamination, to make it more attractive; and heavy paper stock, often with features like deckled edges. In terms of their look and feel, they rival hardcover books because they’re equally attractive, while at the same time their cost ensures that price-point sensitive readers will buy them. For S&S Canada, offering books in this format has meant that they are offering Canadians a book which is like the hardcover but without a hardcover’s price tag.

S&S Canada introduced books in the trade paperback format back when they were selling and marketing S&S titles in the 2000s, before they started publishing domestically. To make the imported titles find a wider audience in Canada, S&S Canada would often change the format from hardcover to trade paperback. It wasn’t always smooth sailing, though. The kind of cachet and prestige associated with hardcovers that exists today was even more prevalent a decade ago. Initially, S&S Canada met with resistance from the imprints that had published the books originally
in hardcover. Agents and sometimes the authors themselves were opposed to the format change. This was also because royalty rates received by authors on trade paperbacks were 2-3% lower than hardcover. So, authors—at first—balked when they were told they would be published in trade paperback. But, when the book worked as a trade paperback, the volumes sold definitely made up for the percentage lost in royalties. And, for S&S Canada, changing the format was a way to grow the readership of an author in Canada, something they had been doing even before they started their domestic publishing program. Back when they were marketing S&S titles, S&S Canada saw their import program as their domestic program and really thought of what they would do had they published the books they were marketing. They were the industry leaders when it came to changing formats. Seeing their success with imported titles, many other publishers followed suit and changed the format of their imported titles from hardcover to trade paperback. For Hanson, changing the format was a way to “think global, act local. My job is to see things through the eyes of the local reader and that’s the Canadian reader and that reader with the Canadian dollar, is going to interpret how to buy based on what they can afford. The implication is that local affects price and it affects formats.”

S&S Canada’s decision to release books in trade paperback has helped them make successes of authors like Jennifer Egan, Kate Morton and Fredrik Backman. The next section is dedicated to discussing the work of these three authors as well as Ruth Ware, the British author of psychological thrillers, who failed as an author in Canada once, before S&S Canada decided to take ownership of her. Ware’s case serves to illustrate the point that a combination of variables – one of them being format – is sometimes needed to truly break out an author.

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54 Pronovost, interview.
55 Hanson, interview.
Chapter 5: Case studies

5.1 Jennifer Egan

Jennifer Egan is a highly respected author of literary fiction. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 2011 for her novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.\(^{56}\) After a hiatus of almost six years, Egan’s next novel *Manhattan Beach* was published by Scribner in the US in hardcover in October 2017. It was on the National Book Award longlist and hailed as one of the best books of 2017.\(^{57}\) S&S Canada wanted to publish her in Canada, but considering that Egan was a literary author who was being published in hardcover in the US, changing the format was a challenge. In the Raincoast Books study mentioned earlier, Clark observed that while the trade paperback format was often used to publish first-time authors, the format was also popular when it came to established authors because publishers saw its longevity and used it as a means to increase an author’s readership. When it came to Egan, S&S Canada knew that while *Manhattan Beach* was a literary title, it was also a commercial one and one that was very different from the critically acclaimed *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Since the difference in the genres of the two novels was already a barrier against old fans returning to Egan, S&S Canada didn’t want price to be yet another barrier and hence, they decided to publish *Manhattan Beach* in trade paperback.

However, Egan’s agent was not receptive to the idea because she thought publishing the book in trade paperback would diminish her star author’s esteem. That’s when Hanson had to intervene and explain to the agent that in Canada, the format did not


\(^{57}\) Wikipedia contributors, “Jennifer Egan”
dictate the esteem of the author. Moreover, *Manhattan Beach* as a book was commercial enough and its readership potential wide enough for it to be distributed in channels like Walmart and Costco, where there was a possibility to grow Egan’s audience considerably.\(^5^8\) Before S&S Canada decided to publish *Manhattan Beach*, Egan’s readership in Canada was disproportionately small for the North American market, and Hanson felt that had to do with the format and the price point at which her books were sold. So he made those arguments to the Egan’s agent, who agreed and S&S Canada grew her readership three-fold.\(^5^9\) By publishing *Manhattan Beach* in paperback and making it available at an affordable price point, S&S Canada made a literary author like Jennifer Egan more accessible to readers who would otherwise be intimidated to pick up her book in hardcover, because of the higher price point and the perceived seriousness of a literary book published in that format. S&S Canada was working with Egan for the first time, but even with authors they have worked with before, the company has changed the format of their books. One such author is Kate Morton.

### 5.2 Kate Morton

Australian author Kate Morton has written six novels that have sold over 10 million copies worldwide.\(^6^0\) She writes in the genre of historical romance and mystery. S&S Canada started publishing her in both trade paperback and hardcover in 2009. They were successful in growing Morton’s readership in Canada, assuming nearly half of the North American sales for the author.\(^6^1\) Then the hardcover sales started declining.

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\(^{58}\) Hanson, interview.  
\(^{59}\) Hanson, interview.  
\(^{61}\) Hanson, interview.
Figure 5.1: Units sold of Kate Morton’s novels

![Graph showing units sold of Kate Morton’s novels](image)

Figure 5.1 is a visual representation of the performance of Kate Morton’s five novels in terms of units sold over the years in the trade paperback and hardcover format.  

62 ‘TP’ in the chart stands for trade paperback and ‘HC’ for hardcover. As one can see, the sales of the hardcover books are nowhere as good as those of the paperbacks. Observing the sales of her books published up to 2016 convinced S&S Canada to release Morton’s latest book *The Clockmaker’s Daughter* in paperback, even when the book was being published in hardcover in the US. Morton had a market in Canada, but S&S Canada knew that they had to package and sell her books in a way that was distinct from the US market. So they made a case to Morton and her agent that going with the trade paperback format for *The Clockmaker’s Daughter* would enable S&S Canada to ship more copies of the book into the market and have fewer returns. They agreed and the book was released in October 2018. In one month alone, it sold over 34,000 copies and was on all the bestseller lists, even capturing the gift market for the holidays.  

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62 Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.  
63 Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.
5.3 Fredrik Backman

Swedish author Fredrik Backman is famous for his slice-of-life, feel-good stories about ordinary people. His most popular novel, *A Man Called Ove*, is the story of a cantankerous old man who forms an unlikely bond with a young couple that moves in next door. The book was an instant bestseller in Sweden and stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 42 weeks.\(^{64}\) It has been adapted into a Swedish film and is going to be adapted into an English one as well.\(^{65}\) The book was published in Canada by Hachette, first in hardcover and then in trade paperback, and did moderately well.\(^{66}\) This was surprising given the popularity of *A Man Called Ove*. After Hachette had published three of Backman’s books, S&S Canada signed a three-book deal with Backman. For the publisher, Backman had under-performed in Canada relative to the US by a significant amount. Whether that was because Hachette had not changed the format or localized their publishing strategy for Backman was conjecture, but as a percentage of North American sales in terms of units sold, Backman’s Canadian sales were just 3%.\(^{67}\) In 2017, S&S Canada published Backman’s next novel *Beartown* in trade paperback. The book about a small town with big ambitions for its local hockey team has sold over 60,000 copies to date and Backman’s Canadian sales in North America have gone up to 20%.\(^{68}\)

According to Hanson, the success S&S Canada has experienced with Backman can be attributed to understanding the local market:


\(^{66}\) Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.

\(^{67}\) Hanson, interview.

\(^{68}\) Hanson, interview.
I optimized my price points so that Backman could do well in Canada. So, even though I might say I cannot publish a trade paperback at $17 that Americans would, I know that Canadian consumers will pay $25 for a trade paperback and the market dynamics will facilitate that and it’s good business in that format. That’s why the authors and agents see the logic in it, so long as the volumes justify the shifts, and they do.69

After publishing Beartown in trade paperback and mass market, S&S Canada published its sequel Us Against You in August 2018. The book had already had a US release in the summer of 2018, but S&S Canada preferred to wait and give the book a fall release in keeping with the book’s wintery cover and its hockey theme. Backman’s next, a book of short stories called The Deal of a Lifetime, releases in November 2018. It remains to be seen how these books perform. But since they are priced optimally and released strategically, I expect Backman’s Canadian share in the North American market to continue rising.

5.4 Ruth Ware

The case of British psychological thriller writer Ruth Ware is different from that of the authors discussed above. It’s a case that goes beyond just formats, because Ware was published in Canada in trade paperback. So, with Ware, it’s not just about in what format a book gets published, but rather how that format is presented. It’s an example of how rethinking the entire publishing strategy can breathe fresh life into a book that had once been written off.

Ware’s first novel In a Dark, Dark Wood was published by Penguin Random House UK in 2015. It was a Sunday Times bestseller and was shortlisted for the British Book

69 Hanson, interview.
Industry Awards’ ‘Book of the Year.’\(^{70}\) The same year Penguin Random House Canada distributed the book in Canada and it performed poorly. Considering the buzz around Ware and the book, this was surprising. In the US, *In a Dark, Dark Wood* had been acquired by S&S imprint Scout Press. Scout Press published their version well before S&S Canada re-released Ware. Scout’s book became an instant *New York Times* bestseller and featured a distinctive black-and-white cover that was strikingly different from the UK package.\(^{71}\) The book got optioned for a film by actress Reese Witherspoon’s production company.\(^{72}\) In Canada, because *In a Dark, Dark Wood* had already been published, S&S Canada had to buy the rights from Penguin Random House Canada to publish the book once again in the country. Confident that they would be better able to serve Ware, S&S Canada also bought Canadian rights for three of her other books, two of which were not even written. They released *In a Dark, Dark Wood* with the American cover in an attractive trade paperback with French flaps in July 2016. Interestingly, Penguin’s version of the book had been priced at $22 and S&S Canada priced theirs at $24.95; but in spite of this price increase, the S&S Canada re-release sold almost 37,000 copies in one year.\(^{73}\) The difference in number of copies sold before and after S&S Canada took on Ware was dramatic. In retrospect, if one were to try and put a finger on the reason Penguin failed with *In a Dark, Dark Wood*, one could speculate that it was perhaps the fact that they retained the UK cover instead of using the Scout Press cover that had helped make the book a sensation in America. But this is conjecture and any publisher that also distributes hundreds of books a year will be the first to admit that there are books that slip through the cracks and don’t get as much attention as they


\(^{73}\) Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.
deserve. With *In a Dark, Dark Wood*, it was a case of one publisher failing to realize the potential of one book and another recognizing that potential and taking the book and its author under their wing. This is what happened with S&S Canada and Ware. With some aggressive marketing and publicity – which included Ware going on a book tour in Canada, making appearances on TV shows and signing the books in stores – S&S Canada completely turned things around for Ware in Canada. Her books have subsequently made their way onto the bestseller lists and have been staff “picks” in many retail stores. The success of Ware’s books prompted S&S Canada to even release a three-book limited edition box set in the fall of 2017. Since they started publishing her in 2016, in just two years, the publisher has sold almost 310,000 copies of Ware’s books, making her one of the most successful authors on their list.74

**5.5 Format changes and more**

While changing the format is a crucial part of the strategy for a book, sometimes more is needed than just that. The massive success of Ruth Ware’s books made S&S Canada realize the benefits of truly catering to the tastes of the local audience. In 2017, they undertook to publish the works of British author Santa Montefiore. Montefiore is a prolific author who works primarily in the genre of historical romance. Worldwide, she has sold over six million copies of her titles. Since 2001, she has published 19 books, many of which have been distributed in Canada, but not very successfully.75 When S&S Canada decided to publish Montefiore’s “Deverills” trilogy – a historical romance family epic set in Ireland – they decided to publish her in trade paperback as opposed to hardcover, like she was in the UK. Also, in the UK, the covers of all Montefiore books were identical, watercolour-colour sketches featuring the heroine looking into the

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74 Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.
distance. And while they worked for the audience in the UK, S&S Canada realized they wouldn’t work in Canada. So they decided to change the cover of the books in the trilogy. The inspiration for the covers came from the work of one of Montefiore’s friends: Oscar-winning screenwriter Julian Fellowes, the creator of the extremely popular period drama series *Downton Abbey*. Taking the show as inspiration, S&S Canada revived the trilogy with a new format and new covers – and with a blurb from Fellowes – and released the first book in the “Deverills” trilogy spring 2018. And as the sales of the books stand today, Montefiore has never sold better than she is now in Canada.\(^{76}\) This repackaged books worked because S&S Canada had observed that historical fiction sales in Canada were trending and they knew that packaging in the vein of *Downton Abbey* would bring Montefiore a whole new readership. The performance of the books has given S&S Canada the impetus to address Montefiore’s backlist and release it in Canada in a new format and, potentially, with new covers.

\(^{76}\) Pronovost, interview.
Chapter 6: Mass Market format and conversions

6.1 Mass market paperbacks

The mass market format as we know it today began in 1935 when Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin, started reprinting popular books in cheap mass market paperbacks which were sold at train stations and department stores in London. In North America, mass markets debuted in 1939 and were the brainchild of Robert de Graff. While working at S&S, he started an imprint called Pocket Books which introduced, for the first time, pocket-sized editions of beloved books that were priced at a mere 25 cents. Taking a page out of Lane’s book, de Graff put his pocket books everywhere: newsstands, subway stations, drugstores, and thus started a revolution. What was dismissed as a fad by hardcover publishers turned into an industry and mass market houses grew and prospered alongside hardcover houses. Initially, mass market houses depended upon the hardcover houses because they were the ones that owned the rights to books that were to be converted to mass market paperbacks. In Book Business, Epstein explains how that changed when mass market houses started soliciting manuscripts themselves and published the books of certain authors directly into mass market as “paperback originals.” The genres of these books were standard, usually westerns, mysteries and romances. But they did well and some of the successful authors that had loyal readers were eventually sought out by hardcover houses and got published in hardcover. Even so, mass market publishing flourished and according to Thompson, it was “the financial driving force of the trade in the publishing business” in the 1950s and

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78 Menand, “Pulp’s Big Moment”.
79 Epstein, 106.
80 Epstein, 107.
1960s. Then the tide turned. The trade paperback format was founded in 1953 and books started being converted into trade paperback instead of mass market. Then the mass market and hardcover houses merged and as mentioned in chapter 4.1, due to heavy discounting by big bookstores, the price differential between mass market and hardcover books became lesser and lesser. People could thus afford to buy hardcover books and the shelf space for mass market books reduced. In the mid to late noughties, ebooks and electronic reading devices entered the market. New authors of commercial fiction, authors who self-published and authors of genre fiction gravitated towards the ebook format because of its affordability and high return on investment. This also dealt a blow to the mass market format because mass market originals started declining.

Today, the mass market format stands on shaky ground. According to NPD BookScan, sales of mass market books have been dropping every year. In 2013, they made up 13% of total print books sold, but by 2016, the figure dropped to 9%. And according to the Association of American Publishers, “dollar sales of mass market titles fell 30% in 2015 compared to 2012.”

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81 Thompson, 38.
Figure 6.1 shows the percentage of the market share of the trade paperback, hardcover and mass market formats since 2009. Currently, the mass market format occupies just 8% of the market share. This is in keeping with BookScan’s findings that revealed the market share of mass markets to be declining.

At S&S Canada, mass market is still a format that is first considered while converting a title. Some of their recent mass markets have even gone on to become bestsellers in that format: Ruth Ware’s *The Woman in Cabin 10* has sold over 30,000 copies; *In a Dark, Dark Wood* has sold over 16,000 copies and *Beartown* has sold almost 14,000, all in mass market alone. But there has been a definite slowing down of the format in general. Michael Turnbull, director of sales for wholesale at S&S Canada, talks about how by the middle of 2017, S&S Canada had published 50 mass market titles; by the middle of 2018, that number was 25. So, the decrease in sales could be attributed to the simple fact that

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84 Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.
85 Data accessed from Simon & Schuster Canada.
the company was publishing fewer titles in the mass market format. In spite of this, mass market remains an important format for the company. When a book is in mass market, it is possible to get it into certain sales channels like drugstores and grocery stores which still have mass market sections and would not take a book in any other format. According to Hanson, mass markets are also important because they contribute to the overall brand building of the author:

Mass markets are a way for me to build authors. A lot of publishers don’t do that. They’ll do trade paper and mass market for movie tie-ins, which is a mass thing and they can put the books everywhere. You have to be prepared for big returns on mass markets. The economics of that are fragile and it’s a very temporary format. For me, it’s almost a form of advertising. It doesn’t make much money, but it’s a way to foster the value of the brand.

So, although sales of mass markets translate into the smallest profit margin of all the formats for a publisher, they are important. Mass market continues to be seen as a “gateway” format, that is, the format that first gets people to read a particular author, or the format that first gets people to start reading in the first place. The recent plateauing of sales of ebooks in the last couple of years is seen as an encouraging sign for print books in general, and mass markets in particular, because the cheap price of ebooks was seen as the major threat to mass markets. And the fact that the places where mass markets are sold and the people who usually buy them haven’t changed is also encouraging. A May 2017 report about the health of mass market books by Publishers Weekly revealed that they continue to be sold more in brick and mortar stores than on

86 Michael Turnbull (Director of Sales for Wholesale, Simon & Schuster Canada), in an interview with the author, July 2018.
87 Hanson, interview.
88 Deahl, “Is Mass Market Dying, Or Just Evolving—Again?”
Amazon or other online book retailers. Women, the report found, continue to be the major consumers of mass market books. For publishers like S&S Canada that see women as their primary audience, this is an encouraging sign to continue converting first format books into mass market. It’s worthwhile here to look at how formats conversions are timed and the role mass markets play in them.

6.2 Timing of format conversions

After a book is released in its first format, at some point the publisher has to decide whether they are going to convert that book into a second format. The book is usually converted into a less expensive format – such as a trade paperback without flaps or a mass market – to exploit any residual demand that the book might have and to drum up interest in a forthcoming book by the same author. The typical schedule is to release the second format of a book around 10 months to a year after the first format and approximately three months before the release of a new book by the same author.\(^90\) This is so that the publisher lets the first format get enough time to be in the market and sell enough books, and when it seems like the sales are slowing down, they introduce the second format, build an audience in that format, generate renewed interest in the author and then release the new book.\(^91\)

With S&S Canada, the conversions are usually from trade paperback to mass market and the publisher times the release of the mass market editions a few months before an author’s new book. For instance, after releasing three books by Ruth Ware in trade paperback with flaps – *In a Dark, Dark Wood*, *The Woman in Cabin 10* and *The Lying Game* – S&S Canada released the mass market editions of the first two books as a way to

\(^{90}\) Pronovost, interview.
\(^{91}\) Turnbull, interview.
expands Ware’s readership and gently nudge the reader to buy her next book, *The Death of Mrs. Westaway*.

**Figure 6.2: Timeline of the conversion of Ruth Ware’s books**

![Figure 6.2 Timeline of the conversion of Ruth Ware’s books](image)

Figure 6.2 is a visual representation of the conversion cycle for Ruth Ware’s books. As can be seen, the second formats are timed such that they generate interest in an upcoming book. For *In a Dark, Dark Wood*, the plan is to release a third format of the book – a trade paperback without flaps in January 2019 – because of continuing interest in the title, which will, in effect, be the backlist format for that book.

Even if an author does not have a new book coming up, it makes sense to release a book of theirs in the second format so that the author is in the reader’s mind. In such a case, though, the timing of conversion of books might not strictly be as mentioned above. If the first format book is selling well, the publisher might decide to wait it out and release the second format later. Another advantage of releasing the book in a second format is so that they can include supplementary material, such as a reading group guide at the

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92 Data retrieved from Simon and Schuster Canada documents.

93 Turnbull, interview.
end of the book. This guide includes additional content such as an interview with the author, a short biography, excerpts from upcoming books and even questions and activities related to the book that are meant for book clubs.
Chapter 7: Future of formats and Simon & Schuster Canada

For years the publishing industry has been touted to be on the precipice of oblivion. If it wasn’t ebooks marking the death of print books, it was social media killing reading as a pastime. Some say the ebook revolution might have ended, but the audiobook revolution might have just begun. The future no longer appears to be what people are reading on their phones or tablets, it’s what they’re listening to on their audiobook apps. Through all the upheavals and storms that have ravaged the industry, print books have survived. Using a combination of marketing savvy and smart thinking, publishers have managed to keep the printing presses running. In the Canadian publishing space, S&S Canada is a relatively new entrant and is still growing their list. But if the authors in their repertoire, the bestsellers on their name and the awards they have won and been nominated for tell anything, it’s that they know what they’re doing. One of the company’s biggest strengths is its ability to be agile and adapt to the changing publishing environment. S&S Canada is flexible about the format in which a book should be published and engage their retail partners in decisions so that they – along with people in the company – feel involved and a sense of ownership to the end product.

Based on what the numbers say, the trade paperback format seems to be the format of choice for commercial fiction in Canada. This is true both for books imported into Canada and published originally here. But S&S Canada knows better than to be complacent about it. In the US, hardcover is still the first format for fiction titles. They are priced higher, but if a book is released in hardcover and becomes a major bestseller, the profit margin for the publisher is also high, which means that, at least momentarily,
a publisher can breathe easy and not worry about overheads. But if a book is released in hardcover and fails to make a mark, that is problematic.

For a publisher like S&S Canada, which imports a lot of books from the US, the unfavourable exchange rate makes it imperative to publish the book here in trade paperback. Even literary fiction is not an exception, because books that win major literary prizes also struggle to sell when they’re published in hardcover. Would these books have sold more had they been published as trade paperbacks? Perhaps, but it’s tricky. If a book published as a trade paperback does very well, the publisher wishes they had published it in hardcover, but if they publish a book in hardcover and it fails, they wish they had chosen trade paperback, a format into which they would have had to convert the book in any case. Things are far from black and white. Will there be a day when the US adopts the trade paperback as the first format? If they do, how will that affect the books imported into Canada? Will it affect S&S Canada’s publishing strategies if they no longer have to convert formats? It remains to be seen. S&S Canada prides itself in being nimble; considering, discussing, reacting and adapting to change without too much deliberation or waste of time. As long as books exist, whether it is hardcover or trade paperback, ebook or audio book, the endeavour will always be to use the format to bring a writer and a reader together.
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