

**Saving the Slush Pile:
The Importance of Unsolicited Manuscript Submission
Policies for the Continued Strength of the Canadian
Publishing Industry**

by
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Submission Policies for the Continued Strength of
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Abstract

Harbour Publishing and Douglas & McIntyre are two Canadian independent publishers that accept unsolicited submissions, which means that anyone, anywhere, can submit a manuscript for their publishing consideration without going through a literary agent or internal referral. On the surface, independent publishing house policies that allow unsolicited submissions may appear to be an inefficient and time-consuming practice; however, this report will analyze such policies and argue that their benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Unsolicited manuscript policies protect authors and provide them with increased agency, benefit publishing houses by introducing a greater depth and variety of manuscripts, and strengthen the entire Canadian publishing industry with increased mobility and creating more space for books written by and for Canadians.

Keywords: acquisitions; submissions; editorial; query; Harbour Publishing; Douglas & McIntyre

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Part 1.

An Introduction to Book Acquisitions

1.1. Introduction

In publishing, acquisition refers to the process of purchasing the rights to a book from the current copyright holder for the business purpose of reproducing and disseminating it to the public. Acquisition is as crucial to the publishing industry as food is to a restaurant, for the entire publishing process must begin with a manuscript. Each publishing house has its own specific in-house policies for receiving book submissions. Some publishing houses accept unsolicited manuscripts submitted by authors directly through email, online submission websites, or mailed hardcopies, while other houses require books to be pitched to them through a literary agent (a third-party liaison on the author's behalf).

1.2. Terms Used in Acquisitions

Slush pile: An informal term used in the publishing industry that refers to the general body of manuscripts that are submitted to publishing houses and/or literary agents for consideration. Slush pile manuscripts are unsolicited, which means they are not requested based on previous interactions nor sent by referral through a shared contact. Unsolicited manuscripts are provided through a cold query from the author.

Query: In publishing, a query letter is a component of the submission package that a prospective author sends to literary agents or publishing houses in hopes of having their manuscript acquired. A query letter summarizes the book's contents, provides a brief author biography, and positions the book in the current market according to genre and comparable books. "Query" is often used in the verb form to denote an author in the process of submitting materials for consideration (e.g. "a querying author").

Editorial reader: For simplification purposes, this report will refer to publishing house employees who read, critique, and assess the viability of prospective manuscript

submissions for publication as editorial readers. There may be multiple editorial reads of a prospective manuscript from several different employees in the publishing house, though the first editorial reader in an organization is often an intern or editorial assistant.

Literary agent: The primary role of the literary agent (often shortened to just “agent”) in the publishing field is to act on behalf of the authors each represents, providing support, guidance, and a certain level of manuscript editing. In addition to supporting their author clients, an agent acts as the liaison between author and publisher, making sales pitches to editors and negotiating publishing contracts to include better rights and advances for the author. In return, the agent receives a commission from the author’s book advance and royalties. Literary agents have to be very selective about taking on new clients, so the percentage of authors who are able to secure literary representation is estimated to be as low as 1 in 6,000.¹

Acquisitions editor: In the context of publishing houses, the role of the acquisitions editor is not just to provide manuscript editing services, but also to purchase the rights to books for publication. The duties of acquisitions editors differ greatly from the roles of structural, stylistic, and copy editors, who are often freelance contractors hired to work on individual book projects. Acquisitions editors do assist with shaping and polishing the book itself; however, they are mainly focused on the acquisition of books, ultimately building a fleshed-out roster for upcoming publishing seasons. Throughout the process of acquiring a manuscript, the acquisitions editor must devise profit & loss sheets, collaborate with the design and marketing teams, ensure that the books selected for publication are not too similar to one another, and weigh the overall risks and benefits of acquiring a new book. The smaller the publishing house, the more hats the editors tend to wear. Freelance editors who do not have acquisitions responsibilities, meanwhile, work with the author and the publisher to polish the individual book they are contracted for without having to concern themselves about the sales viability of that book.

¹ Malatesta, Mark. “The Chances of Getting a Book Agent.” *The Chances of Getting a Book Agent | How to Improve Your Odds of Getting a Literary Agent*, August 11, 2019. Literary-agents.com/odds-of-getting-a-literary-agent/.

1.3. Publication Pipelines

The traditional pipeline for book publication currently resembles a chain:

Author >> Agent >> Editor >> Publication

In this chain, the agent uses their industry connections on behalf of the author to sell the manuscript to a publishing house. Agents tailor their pitches according to the tastes and preferences of the acquisitions editors they know through publishing events and shared contacts. For many authors, getting agent representation is the first step to publication.

Some authors choose instead to represent themselves in the publishing industry, either due to their own preference or because they cannot acquire agent representation. Such authors send their own proposals and query letters directly to publishing houses that have unsolicited submission policies. For publishing houses that accept unsolicited submissions, the chain for individual authors submitting on their own behalf can be shortened by the agent link:

Author >> Editor >> Publication

These chains simplify the acquisitions process, as many literary agencies and publishing houses employ interns and assistants to review prospective manuscripts before forwarding the manuscripts with the most potential to their supervisors. With dozens of factors and different checks to pass, it is little surprise that many authors prefer to shorten the chain by self-publishing:

Author >> Publication

Each publishing house, large or small, has a finite number of spots available for new books to publish each season. The acquisition process requires a combination of practicality and hope. Acquisitions editors must feel personal passion for the individual manuscript, while at the same time they must consider the probable profits and the current market for books of that subject/genre. Although some publishing houses specialize in a particular genre of fiction or field of non-fiction, most publishing houses acquire a varied

range of books so as not to release a season of books that are too similar to one another. For example, if a publishing house releases two cookbooks in the same season, they would have to ensure that each title appeals to different target markets instead of competing for the same niche. The market for bookselling is already so competitive that it would be a setback for one book to compete with another on the same publisher's list.

At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, books are released in two seasons: spring and fall. The exact number of books to be published in a given season varies depending on a number of factors, including company cash flow, returns, grant funding, and the staff resources available that season, which accounts for maternity/paternity leaves, medical leaves, vacations, and other instances of temporary or long-term absence.²

This report will delve into the benefits and drawbacks of each acquisition method. However, it will not attempt to establish a single method as superior to the others. Each publishing house — and each individual acquisitions editor — will have a preferred process for receiving submissions. This report will instead analyze the role each submission method has in shaping the publishing industry in Canada, ultimately arguing that having multiple channels for acquiring books, especially the acceptance of unsolicited manuscripts, is crucial for the protection of Canadian authors and fostering the continued strength and survival of the Canadian publishing industry.

² Anna Comfort O'Keeffe, online interview with author, February 9, 2022.

Part 2.

Manuscript Submissions at Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre

2.1. Introduction

Harbour Publishing and Douglas & McIntyre are two separate publishing houses that are jointly owned by Howard and Mary White. The companies share an office and many facilities but have individual mandates and publishing rosters. Although they are separate legal entities, they will be referred to collectively as Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre for the purposes of this report except when their acquisition processes differ.

Harbour Publishing was founded in 1974 by Howard White, a pioneer of Canadian and British Columbian literature whose publishing career originally began with the creation of the Raincoast Chronicles. The Raincoast Chronicles was a magazine that focused on stories and articles about British Columbia, and it coined the “raincoast” term for the British Columbian coast.³ Harbour Publishing was founded as a direct result of the Raincoast Chronicles’ popularity: “Many of the stories that started out as articles in the Chronicles grew into books and so the White family was more or less forced to get into book publishing to deal with them.”⁴ Harbour Publishing is located on the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia, a region of industry and culture combining a history of logging and mining with one of the highest per-capita populations of artists in Canada.⁵ After more than four decades of success, Harbour Publishing’s mandate continues to focus on publishing the works of notable British Columbian authors, with a particular emphasis on books that centre on the industry, history, and lifestyles of British Columbia.

³ “Raincoast Chronicles.” Harbour Publishing. Accessed March 1, 2022. harbourpublishing.com/collections/raincoast-chronicles.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ “Art & Museums.” Sunshine Coast Tourism, February 28, 2022. sunshinecoastcanada.com/things-to-do/art-museums/.

Douglas & McIntyre was founded in 1970 by Jim Douglas and Scott McIntyre. In 2013, the company declared bankruptcy and was divided up, with its various imprints (Douglas & McIntyre, Greystone Books, and New Society Publishers) sold to new owners. Howard White, already an experienced figure in book publishing, purchased Douglas & McIntyre. The company continues to function as an independent publishing house with a mandate to release a strong and varied list of Canadian fiction and non-fiction.

While their editorial teams are separate, as Howard White is the publisher of Harbour Publishing, and Anna Comfort O’Keeffe is the publisher of Douglas & McIntyre, the two publishing houses collaborate closely in all departments from production to marketing and publicity.⁶

Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre both accept unsolicited submissions, which means that any author from anywhere in the world can submit their manuscript for publishing consideration via one of the available channels. However, both publishing houses have mandates to publish Canadian books, so international authors are the exception rather than the norm. Harbour Publishing is specifically focused on topics regarding British Columbia,⁷ whereas Douglas & McIntyre has a wider mandate to publish voices and topics from across Canada.⁸

As of the autumn of 2021, Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre were collectively accepting unsolicited submissions through four different channels:

1. Submittable.com
2. CanSubmit.com
3. Email
4. Hardcopy

⁶ Anna Comfort O’Keeffe, online interview with author, February 9, 2022.

⁷ “Submission Policy.” Harbour Publishing. Accessed March 1, 2022. harbourpublishing.com/pages/submission-policy.

⁸ “Submission Policy.” Douglas & McIntyre. Accessed March 1, 2022. douglas-mcintyre.com/pages/submission-policy.

2.2. Submittable

Submittable is a third-party website that is not specific to publishing, but it is often used as a submissions portal for manuscripts. One benefit of Submittable is that it can be customized by the publishing house, with options to specify fields, collect attachments, and organize new submissions with specific tags for genre.

Submittable is currently used to receive submissions for Douglas & McIntyre. Harbour Publishing does not accept submissions through Submittable.

The Submittable platform is convenient for both publishers and authors. Authors can log into their personal accounts to check and keep track of their submissions, reassuring them that their manuscript was properly received and is still under consideration. Unlike email, which doesn't necessarily include a message of receipt, Submittable sends confirmation emails at every step of the account creation and manuscript submission process for the author's records. This ensures that submissions are not lost.

On the publisher's side, the editorial department can log into their administrator account to view each submission, which is sortable by date, genre, or other customizable criteria. The administrator can also send messages to the author or to other editorial staff in their office, which contains the threads of all correspondence related to submissions in one central hub.

2.3. CanSubmit

CanSubmit is a submissions website that functions similarly to Submittable. The main difference between the two websites is that CanSubmit was developed in Canada specifically to be used by book publishers, while Submittable is international and intended to be used in other industries from education and journals to NGOs. Like Submittable, CanSubmit allows for the reader to send template messages, to sort submissions, and to contain all correspondence to and from the author in one place.

CanSubmit is currently used for receiving submissions to Harbour Publishing.

2.4. Email

Until the autumn of 2021, the Harbour Publishing submissions policy invited authors to submit their manuscripts via email, though only to Harbour Publishing (not to Douglas & McIntyre). Once the submission was received by email, the details were manually logged into a spreadsheet with fields for the book’s information: the word count, genre, a summary of the book’s plot/outline, author contact information, and then any subjective notes that the editorial reader would add later after reading the manuscript. This method required a great deal of manual labour from the logger, who was typically an intern or co-op student. This method also meant that the information about the book and the manuscript itself were stored in separate places. CanSubmit and Submittable, in comparison, store all the metadata about the books — including the manuscript file — and any correspondence to and from the author for each submission in one central portal.

Besides inefficiencies, an additional drawback of receiving submissions through email is that the publishing house’s submissions email address is often used to receive questions and other inquiries from authors, which increases the chance that a submission may be lost among the myriad emails received. Many agents and publishers, unable to respond to every submission, communicate a “no response means no” policy on their website. This policy relieves pressure to respond to every submission, ensuring that agents and publishers are better able to focus on their current workload, but it leaves authors without the reassurance that their submission has been reviewed or received at all.

Harbour Publishing ceased the receipt of submissions via email in autumn 2021, joining Douglas & McIntyre in only inviting electronic submissions through CanSubmit and Submittable going forward. The phasing out of the email submissions channel will continue for months or even years, as the hundreds of manuscripts logged up until that point must still be sorted, read, and responded to.

2.5. Hardcopy

In the age of electronic communication, it is becoming increasingly rare for authors to submit their materials by mailing a printed hardcopy, and even rarer for publishers to

accept hardcopy manuscript submissions at all.⁹ At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, hardcopy submissions are still accepted but not directly encouraged, as the submissions page for each website links instead to Submittable (for Douglas & McIntyre) and CanSubmit (for Harbour Publishing). If an author researches the office address or reaches out to inquire for it, then they can mail their manuscript directly.

The main issue with hardcopy submissions is the lack of efficiency. Hardcopy submissions are subject to all the same perils as email submissions, but with the added possibility that some hardcopy submissions could fall — sometimes literally — through the cracks. With hardcopy manuscripts, an envelope could be lost at any stage of the mailing process, from shipping, to delivery, to cataloguing. Lacking the electronic trail that CanSubmit, Submittable, and even emails have, hardcopy manuscripts are much more difficult to keep track of.

Hardcopy submissions also require substantial storage considerations. The physical copies of prospective manuscripts must be stored until a decision is made on them. If accepted, an electronic copy is requested from the author, and the hardcopy manuscript is placed in permanent storage. If rejected, the hardcopy is recycled, or returned if the author included a self-addressed stamped envelope with their original submission. In the meantime, with a backlog of months (if not years) of undecided submissions, the manuscripts still under consideration must be stored in the publishing house, accessible for review.

At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, the main purpose of accepting hardcopy manuscripts is to accommodate submissions from people who have access to any level of technology. Accepting hardcopy submissions ensures that any author can present their voice to the world, even if all they have is a pen and paper. However, both publishing houses recommend that authors do not send an original manuscript without making copies first.

⁹ Brewer, Robert Lee. *Novel & Short Story Writer's Market 2019*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 2018.

2.6. The Review Process

At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, as with many publishing companies and literary agencies, a co-op student or intern serves as the initial editorial reader, and is the first point of contact for unsolicited manuscripts. Agent-represented manuscripts, on the other hand, usually have the benefit of a direct connection with the acquisition editors.

The editorial intern is usually the first reader in a publishing house's internal chain of review. The intern does not make final publishing decisions on any manuscript, whether to accept or to reject. Instead, the intern must summarize and review each prospective manuscript and deliver a report to the acquisitions editor with their analysis and recommendations. At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, there are two types of reports that an editorial reader will be asked to write: short reports and full reports.

Short reports consist of a brief overview of the first few pages or chapters of the work. They typically span no more than a few sentences, capping out at a few paragraphs. The short report begins with listing the objective attributes of the work, including the genre, the premise or subject summarized in a single line or two, and any notable facts regarding the author or the context of the work. After the objective attributes, the editorial reader must then summarize their subjective thoughts as concretely as possible. General and vague descriptions are less useful than specific and actionable critiques. A comment along the lines of "It was good" or "I didn't like it" is not helpful to the rest of the editorial staff unless it is accompanied by an in-depth analysis of what aspects of the text evoked those feelings in the editorial reader.

The short reports are typically used for low-commitment submissions, such as the general unsolicited slush pile. Given the high number of submissions received on a weekly basis, it would be impractical to complete a full-length reading and report of every submission received. The short report is thus a crucial tool for summarizing the book in a brief, digestible message so the acquisitions editor can determine whether the manuscript has potential for publication. If a manuscript shows potential, it passes to the next stage of the review process: the full report.

While the short report is a helpful tool, it does not delve too deeply into the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript, as it is focused upon the premise or the first few chapters. That is where the full report — alternatively known as a long report — is utilized. The full report will generally consist of a page or more of in-depth analysis. It is written when the publishing house receives a manuscript under serious consideration, such as when a full manuscript request is made of an author, or when a literary agent pitches one of their client’s forthcoming books. The full report is used to succinctly analyse and review whether the manuscript would be a good fit for publication, and also to determine how much editorial attention the manuscript will require. The editorial co-op student at Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre writes these reports to be reviewed by the head publishers of both companies, as well as senior staff in marketing and sales. The publishers will then read the manuscript themselves to determine whether they agree with the full report summary, and ultimately decide whether to reject or accept the manuscript for either company’s publishing roster.

The full report begins with a summary of the plot, if fiction, or an overview of the subject, if non-fiction. It might list books that have a similar subject matter or style, so as to provide the context of any competitive works already in the market. Comparison titles — or comps for short — are important for indicating whether there is a market for that subject matter. Equally crucial is the commercial performance of the comps: did they sell poorly, indicating that there may be low interest in the topic? Or did they sell too well, and have thoroughly occupied the market? Comp titles must be carefully chosen, for comparing a fiction book to a runaway bestseller such as *The Da Vinci Code* indicates a limited and unrealistic knowledge of the current market. Comp titles are also important for indicating where a book would physically be shelved in a store, for a book that is comped to both a science fiction novel and a romance novel will lead to confusion about which genre it falls into.¹⁰

Like the short report, the full report also includes a summary of the author’s credentials, platform, and/or previous writing experience. Non-fiction submissions require

¹⁰ Lipton, Jacqui. “The Dreaded ‘Comp Titles’: What Are They and How Do You Use Them?” Raven Quill Literary Agency, January 5, 2021. ravenliterary.com/what-are-comp-titles-how-to/.

more emphasis on the author's existing platform than for fiction authors.¹¹ For non-fiction, the author must be a knowledgeable authority on their subject matter. A non-fiction author can show quantifiable credentials with a specialized post-secondary degree, through holding a leadership role for a relevant organization, or by having many years of direct experience with the topic.

Authors are increasingly expected to have built an existing audience platform even prior to publication, whether that means a large social media following, a newsletter or blog they contribute to, or their previous books that have loyal readers.¹² A pre-existing platform is not a strict requirement in most cases, as publishing houses have publicity and marketing teams on staff to promote authors. Regardless, a pre-existing platform for an author is nothing but a benefit when it comes to determining whether to acquire a book or to refuse it.

After a brief summary of the objective details of the book, the full report then delves into the construction of the manuscript. The analysis for fiction includes examining plot elements such as: is the plotline overdone; is the ending satisfying; is the pacing too fast or too slow? In addition, character development, dialogue, setting, and other elements are also analyzed for craft and depth.

For non-fiction, the editorial reader analyses the research and arguments made by the author to determine the credibility of the book, bearing in mind that the editorial reader is not a subject matter expert compared to the author. It is crucial for non-fiction books to fill a particular niche, and the book proposal must show there is a gap in the market that is not currently filled by an established book.

The most critical weakness of this stage of the review process is the subjectivity of one individual reader's opinions. The first point of contact is usually an intern, assistant, or co-op student, who is generally less experienced than established literary agents or

¹¹ Amir, Nina. "Demystifying the Nonfiction Book Proposal: Platform." Write Nonfiction NOW!, August 26, 2011. writenonfictionnow.com/demystifying-the-nonfiction-book-proposal-platform/.

¹² Kautzman, Kevin, and Natasa Lekic. "Author Platform: How to Build It." NY Book Editors, January 2020. nybookeditors.com/2020/01/author-platform-is-it-relevant-how-to-build-it/.

acquisitions editors. The editorial reader will be reading and assessing submissions from a wide variety of genres, some of which they may have never read before. As a result, a book in a particular genre may seem new and fresh to an unfamiliar reader, but derivative to an experienced reader. The inverse is also true: a reader who dislikes science fiction will, consciously or not, find more negative aspects to critique in a science fiction novel regardless of how well-written it may be.

To provide an effective analysis, the editorial reader cannot make a judgment on a book for arbitrary reasons. The more tangible their critical comments are, the more effectively they can summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the book. If the criticisms are small or could be easily corrected with a structural edit, a manuscript may still be considered for publication. The editorial reader should try to acknowledge any conscious or unconscious biases they may have about the genre or subject matter while reading.

The length of a manuscript is an important factor for whether it will be acquired by a publishing house. A typical commercial fiction book can range from 50,000 to 100,000 words, which results in a book of approximately 200 to 400 printed pages. The exact page count will depend on typesetting and layout factors, such as margins, page size, typefaces, and fonts. This report will not delve into the specific word count guidelines and standards for each genre, but the guidelines vary. Many aspiring authors view popular long books such as the later *Harry Potter* books and the *Song of Ice and Fire* series with the assumption that such high page counts are standard.¹³ However, the reality is that most books published with 500 or more pages are written by established authors. A debut that exceeds the industry average word count by a large margin is extremely rare. Books with higher page counts require higher production costs across the board, from editing to printing to shipping, and so publishers are wary of acquiring longer books unless they are projected to sell exceptionally well.

Inversely, books must consist of a minimum length to be marketable. A novella may have lower printing and production costs, but other aspects, such as cover design, layout, advertising, and publicity, have costs comparable to a full-length novel. However,

¹³ “Word Count.” LitRejections. Accessed March 1, 2022. litrejections.com/word-count/.

customers generally expect to pay less for a novella than they would for a novel, perceiving the short length to provide less value.¹⁴

Every publisher and literary agency with unsolicited submission policies has specific submission instructions to request that authors attach a certain quantity of the manuscript for review. Common guidelines range from five to ten sample pages, to the first three chapters, to the entire manuscript, and vary across the board. Neither Harbour Publishing nor Douglas & McIntyre list specific guidelines for submissions, so a submitting author may include the entire manuscript or just a few sample pages according to their own preference. Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre also do not require the manuscript to be complete to be submitted, and there are additional fields in the CanSubmit and Submittable questionnaires for the author to indicate whether the manuscript is complete or when they anticipate it will be.

When an author submits their entire manuscript at once, it is more efficient for the publishing house. With a full manuscript already included in the initial submission, the editorial reader can review as many or as few of the pages as needed to make their report. If only a short sample is included, the editorial reader is more likely to read to the end of the provided pages. If the entire manuscript is included, then the reader must determine their own point for cutting off reading if it becomes clear that the manuscript is not viable for publication.

If the author includes a short sample that shows promise, the editorial reader might end their short report with the recommendation to request the rest of the manuscript from the author. A request for more materials is not made lightly, as it increases author expectations. After requesting a full manuscript, it is generally expected that any future rejection or communications will be personalized instead of drawing from a template. If the full manuscript is already included in the original submission, the editorial team can

¹⁴ Charman-Anderson, Suw. "The Novella Economy: Making Novellas Profitable." *Forbes*. *Forbes Magazine*, August 29, 2013. forbes.com/sites/suwcharmananderson/2013/08/29/the-novella-economy-making-novellas-profitable/?sh=4d0471221778.

review the entire piece at once to determine whether there is a place for it in their future publishing seasons.

While submitting a full manuscript is more efficient for the publishing house, it is arguably less efficient for the author, as it provides no benchmarks for what may or may not be working in the manuscript. For example, if an author submits only the first chapter as a writing sample and receives no requests for more material across any of their submissions to publishing houses, they can determine that their first chapter is not engaging and revise accordingly. If they submit the full manuscript, any number of factors may lead to a rejection, as the manuscript itself may not be well-written, or it may be a well-written manuscript in a flooded market, or the publisher's roster may already be occupied by a book that is too similar. Moreover, the author receives no indication of where the editorial reader may have cut their reading short, and so they have less information for diagnosing what may be currently unpublishable about their manuscript.

Some publishing houses and literary agents request an exclusive submission, which means that the author can query their book only to that particular house/agency and not to any other parties until the original publishing house or agent makes a decision. Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre do not require that submissions be exclusive (as of the time of this writing), but their submission questionnaires inquire about whether a submission is simultaneous or not.

Exclusive submissions are a contentious topic in the publishing industry. Janet Reid, a literary agent with more than 25 years of industry experience, argues that exclusive submissions are not in the author's best interests, and will adamantly advise any authors she comes into contact with not to accept exclusive submission terms.¹⁵ The reasons Reid provides are that an exclusive submission with a single agent or publisher will tip the already-weighted power dynamics further in the agent or publisher's favour, and she states

¹⁵ Reid, Janet. "You Didn't, Oh Gadzooks, You Did." Jet Reid Literary, April 8, 2017. jetreidliterary.blogspot.com/2017/04/you-didnt-oh-gadzooks-you-did.html.

that an author should be submitting widely to find the best fit for their manuscript rather than to the first agent who will make an offer.¹⁶

If an author receives an offer of publication or literary agent representation, it is polite but not required for the author to notify agents or publishers with outstanding submissions still pending. Doing so will allow other agents or publishers to decide whether they wish to make a competing offer, or to step aside and remove the author's materials from their list of manuscripts to read.

Submitting a fiction manuscript is straightforward: it begins with a query letter, which is a one-page document that summarizes the book, listing the premise, genre, word count, relevant comparison books, and author biography in brief. Separate from the query letter is the book synopsis, which lays out the entire plot outline and character development arcs in a short, two- to five-page format. While the query letter summarizes the book's premise with the kind of brief and enticing description one would find on the back cover of a published book, the synopsis covers the entire book's plot and structure from beginning to end, with every plot twist unveiled. Not every publisher or literary agent will request to see the synopsis, but its purpose is to show that the author knows how to pace and construct a book. The summary also ensures that the book does not contain an unpalatable twist, such as a category romance novel that concludes without the genre-requirement of the Happily Ever After ending.¹⁷

The final component of most fiction submissions packages are the sample pages. Some authors attach what they perceive to be their best-written pages instead of the actual first pages of the book. However, instead of working to the author's benefit, doing so reduces the impact by removing the context of the pages within the book. Ideally, the author should be confident in their entire novel before submitting for literary representation or publication.

¹⁶ Reid, Janet. "You Didn't, Oh Gadzooks, You Did." Jet Reid Literary, April 8, 2017. jetreidliterary.blogspot.com/2017/04/you-didnt-oh-gadzooks-you-did.html.

¹⁷ Friedman, Jane. "How to Write a Novel Synopsis." Jane Friedman, January 9, 2022. janefriedman.com/how-to-write-a-novel-synopsis/.

A non-fiction submission differs substantially. While a fiction book is expected to be fully written and polished by the author prior to submission, non-fiction books are often acquired by publishing houses based on only a proposal and a few sample chapters. The novel, being a work of creativity and imagination, can change drastically throughout the process of being written, while non-fiction books have a firmly established subject. If the non-fiction book is not yet completed at the time of purchase, the contract must outline the publisher's expectations in terms of tone, subject matter, audience, and such. The non-fiction proposal provides an in-depth analysis of the target audience, the book's niche, and the author's current marketing connections and plans for promotion.

Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre employs an editorial co-op student to complete the initial reading and reporting of unsolicited slush pile manuscripts. Managing the slush pile is just one of myriad duties that co-op students are assigned, and the bottomless nature of the submissions system means that reading slush pile submissions often falls to the lowest priority. Ideally, the co-op student may aim to complete one to three short reports per day between their other tasks. If this were a consistent rate, up to 200–600 manuscripts could potentially be reviewed each year. However, the publishing industry has crunch times and busy seasons, which inevitably slows down the process of reviewing incoming submissions.

Rejections are an inevitable reality of the publishing industry at any stage. Even the most successful authors have collected rejections from agents and publishers. Only a small number of books can be acquired by a publishing house out of the hundreds or thousands of submissions they receive each year. It is almost impossible to send out a personalized rejection note with every refusal, so most publishers and agents have a boilerplate template. A template rejection should employ neutral and non-specific wording, as it must not inadvertently insult the author. It should also avoid leaving room open for the author to ask for specific feedback on their writing, for time is always a scarce commodity in a publishing house, and succinct refusals are justified by the necessity of processing many submissions in a short period of time.

Once a manuscript is accepted for publication and the contract is signed, it proceeds into a publication pipeline. Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre schedules a timeline for each book, queueing the manuscript up for production from the initial substantial edit stage through to layout, design, copyediting, proofing, and more. Each book's timeline will vary, as some books (such as a non-fiction manuscript with tables and other features) will require more layout work from the book designer. At every stage of the process there is potential for delays, so the overall timeline must include breathing room to account for setbacks. Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre release their roster of books gradually over the season instead of all at once, enabling them to focus their efforts on each book release one at a time.

After a manuscript is accepted for publication, it is treated with the same level of care and attention during the production process regardless of whether the manuscript originated from an agent submission or from the unsolicited slush pile.

Part 3.

Other Acquisitions Processes

3.1. Introduction

Many publishing houses do not accept unsolicited manuscript submissions. Maintaining a slush pile requires substantial logistics and resources, including processing and storing manuscripts in electronic and/or hardcopy formats. If an online submission website is used, additional costs are associated with website upkeep and service subscriptions. Labour costs must also be factored in, which may include hiring staff to complete the initial readings. Keeping on top of a slush pile requires many hours of reading per week, often with an unspoken expectation that acquisitions editors carry out the reading in their free time during evenings and weekends.¹⁸ To save time, many publishing houses forgo running their own slush piles, opting instead to accept agent-represented manuscripts only.

3.2. The Importance of the Literary Agent

“Agents act as both scouts and filters — they sort through what’s out there and actively search to find the authors and proposals that are most likely to be published.”

—Jennifer Croll, Editorial Director at Greystone Books¹⁹

The main benefit for publishing houses in only accepting agented manuscripts is that the time, money, and resources spent on administering a slush pile of unsolicited manuscripts is outsourced to literary agents instead. Relationships between literary agents and publishers are built over years of book acquisitions and interactions at industry events. Agents and editors get to know each other well, enabling the former to tailor their sales

¹⁸ Brewer, Robert Lee. “Do Literary Agents Work on Weekends?” *Writer's Digest*. *Writer's Digest*, March 6, 2020. writersdigest.com/publishing-insights/do-literary-agents-work-on-weekends.

¹⁹ Brewer, Robert Lee. *Novel & Short Story Writer's Market 2019*. Cincinnati, Ohio: *Writer's Digest Books*, 2018.

pitches to suit the preferences of the latter. This streamlined process alleviates a large amount of work for acquisitions editors at publishing houses.

Literary agents can also play a diplomatic role in facilitating interactions between authors and publishers. Agents are less “possessive” over a work than the author, so they can approach negotiations during the acquisition and production processes with a neutral mindset. Agents sort through miscommunications and allay tensions that may arise during negotiations for higher royalties and better rights sales during the contract phase.²⁰

Literary agents find most of their clients by hosting their own slush piles of submissions, reading “hundreds of email queries, tens of writing samples, 2–5 manuscripts a week” in addition to their other work duties.²¹ Many agents accept submissions by email, while others use a popular submission website called QueryManager.com. Much like Submittable and CanSubmit, QueryManager allows for each individual agent to customize their questionnaire fields.²² A typical query submission form will inquire about the book’s word count and genre; whether it has been published or agented before; the author’s biography and any optional social media links; a summary of the book’s plot; and sample pages.

While there are thousands of literary agents across the world,²³ the ratio of aspiring authors to agents is thousands to one. Agents can effectively maintain a limited roster from ten to over a hundred authors at a time,²⁴ depending on the particular agent, which means they can only take on a few new clients per year. The pool of agents based in Canada is much smaller, with an estimated thirty literary agents operating across the country in 2022.²⁵ It should be noted that authors can be represented by literary agents from any

²⁰ Glatch, Sean. “Literary Agents: What They Do and How to Find One.” Writers.com, April 27, 2021. [writers.com/literary-agents](https://www.writers.com/literary-agents).

²¹ Moore, Mary C. “The Art of a Great Book.” Mary C. Moore, January 5, 2015. marycmoore.com/index.php/2015/01/05/the-art-of-a-great-book/.

²² “Query Manager FAQ.” QueryManager. Accessed March 1, 2022. querymanager.com/faq.php.

²³ “Search for Literary Agents.” QueryTracker. Accessed March 1, 2022. querytracker.net/literary_agents.php.

²⁴ Lawton, Wendy. “How Many Clients Does an Agent Represent?” Books & Such Literary Management, June 12, 2012. booksandsuch.com/blog/how-many-clients-does-an-agent-represent/.

²⁵ “Literary Agents.” The Writers' Union of Canada, February 25, 2022. writersunion.ca/literary-agents.

country, so the relatively small number of agents based in Canada is not necessarily a roadblock for Canadian authors. However, it creates unspoken pressure on Canadian authors to write a book that will appeal to agents from the United States or United Kingdom, which means a book focused on a unique or niche aspect of Canada may not be met with the same enthusiasm from foreign agents. By accepting unsolicited submissions, Canadian publishing houses create more space for Canada-specific stories.

For authors, having an agent means gaining a strong supporter in the publishing industry. The standard commission for an agent is 15 percent, and according to Jane Friedman — an editor and expert with more than twenty years of publishing experience — authors should be wary of agents who charge higher fees than the standard 15 percent.²⁶ Agents earn their commission by handling contracts to protect the author’s intellectual property and negotiating for higher advances and royalties for the author. The literary agent is a helpful mediator who handles the publishing industry details and the author’s interests so that the author can focus instead on their writing. However, given the ratio of authors to agents, it can be extremely difficult for authors to find literary representation.

It is important for authors to decide whether they wish to query literary agents first or to submit directly to publishers, as the acquisition process becomes complicated if they submit to both simultaneously.²⁷ Agents prefer that authors do not submit their manuscripts to publishers themselves, as doing so can result in an early rejection from a publishing house for a book that might be later picked up by an agent and polished into a more marketable state. Publishing houses of every size receive hundreds to thousands of submissions per year, so the acquisitions editor rarely has the time or resources to take a second look at the manuscript even after it has been revised with the agent’s guidance.

On a similar note, self-published books are rarely acquired by literary agents or publishers. Unless the self-published book sold thousands of copies, it is substantially more

²⁶ Friedman, Jane. “How to Find a Literary Agent for Your Book.” Jane Friedman, February 26, 2022. janefriedman.com/find-literary-agent/.

²⁷ Friedman, Jane. “Should You Submit Your Work to Agents or Editors?” Jane Friedman, January 10, 2017. janefriedman.com/query-agents-editors/.

difficult to present the book as marketable if it sold poorly or even averagely. Instead, authors are advised to write a new, different book to query in the future.²⁸

3.3. Acquiring Books from Previous Authors

Authors are not committed to publishing houses in the same way they are to literary agents, but publishing a book with a house creates a relationship with the editorial, production, and marketing staff. If the production process was pleasant for both parties and the published book sold as expected, it is not uncommon for authors to be published multiple times by the same publishing house.

An option clause, otherwise known as the Right of First Refusal, is commonly written into book publishing contracts. It stipulates that the author is legally bound to share their next written work with that publishing house first, preventing the author from shopping it around to other publishing houses at the same time.²⁹

The option clause does not guarantee the publisher will make an offer on the book, nor does it require the author to accept any offer that is made. The option clause is intended to give publishers the first look at their previous author's next project, providing an opportunity to offer on the manuscript before any other publishing houses get the chance to see it. It is important for authors and publishers to know the details of the contract and negotiate the clause to suit their interests, as the exact requirements and time frame of the clause can vary. The option clause is often specific to genre: for example, a clause may require the author of a mystery book to show the publisher their next full-length work of mystery fiction, but it is not applicable if their next book is literary fiction.

Contract negotiation is a crucial aspect of the literary agent's role, as a knowledgeable agent will know the common standards of the trade and efficiently work in their client's best interests. An unagented author can negotiate their own contracts, but they

²⁸ Faust, Jessica. "You Can't Hide a Self-Published Book." BookEnds Literary Agency, March 31, 2020. bookendsliterary.com/2020/03/31/you-cant-hide-a-self-published-book/.

²⁹ Faust, Jessica. "Your Option Clause." BookEnds Literary Agency, November 17, 2010. bookendsliterary.com/2010/11/17/your-option-clause/.

should first research the legalities to ensure they receive a deal that is not overly in the publisher's favour, nor should they demand terms that are outlandishly unusual.

Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre do include an option clause in their standard contracts, but if an author requests to waive the option clause then it is usually not disputed, as the ideal publishing arrangement starts from having both parties be eager to work with the other.³⁰

The option clause benefits the author by directly referencing their previous connection with that publishing house, and it benefits the publisher by giving them the first opportunity to offer on a new book from an established author.

3.4. Impact

At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, there are no concrete ratios or statistics for how many books on a given season's roster will have originated from the slush pile, from agented submissions, from previous authors, or from other sources. In the fall of 2021, three of the eight books on Harbour Publishing's roster were acquired from unsolicited slush pile manuscripts. In contrast, Douglas & McIntyre didn't publish any manuscripts from the slush pile in the spring of 2021; the six books they published that season were acquired through agented submissions, previous authors, etc.³¹

The success rate of the unsolicited manuscript slush pile can thus vary widely, from a significant percentage to absolute zero. This raises the question of whether publishers should maintain a slush pile at all, given the time and resources it requires. However, the next part of this report will explore a range of benefits the slush pile provides to individual publishers and authors, as well as to the publishing industry as a whole.

³⁰ Anna Comfort O'Keeffe, online interview with author, February 9, 2022.

³¹ *ibid*

Part 4.

How Unsolicited Manuscript Policies Strengthen the Publishing Industry

4.1. Introduction

According to Jane Friedman, about 80 percent of books acquired by publishers in New York (the main hub of the publishing industry in the United States, and the world) are sold by agents.³² Creating in-house policies to accept only agented submissions may appeal to publishers for the reasons discussed in the previous sections — namely, saving both time and resources that would be otherwise devoted to maintaining a slush pile. However, Canadian publishing houses should continue to accept unsolicited manuscripts for the continued strength of the Canadian publishing industry.

The Big Five — referring to the publishing houses of Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, and Macmillan — collectively own approximately 80 percent of the U.S. trade book market share.³³ They generally do not accept unsolicited manuscripts, so authors who do not have a literary agent are essentially locked out of submitting their works to the largest publishers in the world. Although most of the Big Five have Canadian branches, their parent companies are based in the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom.

An agent must be passionate about a book and believe in the author’s future career before they will sign them as a client. However, ultimately their decision to represent an author will hinge upon whether the agent can see a strong publishing market for the book.³⁴ Agents are driven to sell their clients’ books for the best possible deals on royalties, advances, and rights. They will hone the proposal and help the author to revise the book so

³² Friedman, “How to Find a Literary Agent for Your Book.”

³³ McIlroy, Thad. “What the Big 5’s Financial Reports Reveal About the State of Traditional Book Publishing.” *Book Business*, August 5, 2016. bookbusinessmag.com/post/big-5-financial-reports-reveal-state-traditional-book-publishing/.

³⁴ Glatch, Sean. “Literary Agents: What They Do and How to Find One.” *Writers.com*, April 27, 2021. writers.com/literary-agents.

that it appeals to the widest range of publishers available. In contrast, publishing houses acquire books according to their individual mandates, and so they may have a niche that is too specific for most agented books to fall into. Jane Friedman summarized the variation of book markets as follows:

There are different levels of commercial viability: some books are “big” books, suitable for Big Five traditional publishers (e.g., Penguin Random House, HarperCollins), while others are “quiet” books, suitable for mid-size and small presses. The most important thing to remember is that not every book is cut out to be published by a New York house, or even represented by an agent.³⁵

According to the Writers’ Union of Canada website, “approximately eighty percent of published Canadian writers do not have agents”³⁶, showing that unsolicited manuscripts and other submission methods make up the majority of the Canadian market. The Canadian publishing landscape would thus change significantly if many independent publishing houses discontinued their in-house unsolicited manuscript policies. While there are many reasons to accept agented submissions only, there are a comparable number of reasons why unsolicited manuscript policies benefit independent publishing houses and strengthen the Canadian publishing industry as a whole.

4.2. Royalties and Advances with Independent Publishers

The subject of author advances and royalties informs the acquisitions process. Author advances are factored into every potential book’s profit & loss statement, but the exact amount of the advance varies upon a number of factors. Kate McKean, vice-president at Howard Morhaim Literary Agency, commented the following about book advances:

The total advance depends on so many things, including the quality of the work, the sales potential of the work (not the same thing!), the author’s platform and/or previous sales, the zeitgeist, the “market,” how many other editors are interested (if any), how similar books have performed for the publisher and/or other publishers, and many, many other things. Because

³⁵ Friedman, “How to Find a Literary Agent for Your Book.”

³⁶ “Literary Agents.” The Writers' Union of Canada, February 25, 2022. writersunion.ca/literary-agents.

there are so many factors, there's no "average" book advance. \$1,000 is rare. \$1,000,000 is also rare.³⁷

Publishers Weekly reported \$5,000 as a high advance from a small publishing house, while other houses paid as little as \$1,500.³⁸

Exceptionally high book advances are typically the result of auctions. An auction is held when two or more publishing houses want to publish the same book, and so the author's agent will communicate back and forth in a round-robin rotation with the acquisitions editors involved until they settle on the highest bid.³⁹ For an editor to go to auction on a book, they must perceive the book to have very high sales potential. High advances are determined by how many copies the publisher believes they can sell, and usually apply only to books that can be featured in airport bookshops and celebrity book clubs.

The largest book deal in history was made in 2017, when Penguin Random House purchased the rights to print both Barack Obama and Michelle Obama's individual memoirs for an advance that was rumored to be in the realm of 65 million dollars.⁴⁰ This deal set the stage for a string of publications that were anticipated to (and did) sell millions of copies worldwide. The book advance is an investment by the publisher, and enormous advances like this one garner large media attention, ensuring publicity for the books long before publication.

As the industry standard for a literary agent's commission is 15 percent, agents are motivated to pitch and negotiate for the largest advance possible. The agent doesn't get paid until the publishing contract is signed, which means that everything they do up to that

³⁷ McKean, Kate. "An Agent Explains the Ins and Outs of Book Deals." *Electric Literature*, November 27, 2019. electricliterature.com/an-agent-explains-the-ins-and-outs-of-book-deals/.

³⁸ Deahl, Rachel. "Smaller Presses, Bigger Authors." *PublishersWeekly.com*, November 8, 2010. publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/45082-smaller-presses-bigger-authors.html.

³⁹ Dionne, Karen. "When Books Sell at Auction." *HuffPost*, October 27, 2011. huffpost.com/entry/book-auctions_b_935645.

⁴⁰ Milliot, Jim, Rachel Deahl, and Francis Hoch. "The Obamas' Book Deals Spark \$65 Million Mystery." *PublishersWeekly.com*, March 3, 2017. publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/book-deals/article/72949-the-obamas-book-deals-spark-65-million-mystery.html.

point is an investment of time that might not pay off for months, years, or at all. Their unpaid tasks include reading and revising their clients' manuscripts, corresponding with editors and authors, and promoting their clients' published books, all while keeping up with their slush pile queries to make sure they don't miss out on a new author with great potential. The 15 percent commission doesn't translate to pure profit for the individual agent, as there are substantial overhead expenses associated with running the literary agency.

Because of such commercial constraints, many literary agents are reluctant to pitch their clients' work to small publishing houses that don't offer high advances.⁴¹ A \$1,000 advance for the author would result in a mere \$150 commission for the literary agent. While the author benefits from the prestige and credits associated with being published, the agent may not be compensated sufficiently for all the work and effort they have invested in the book. Therefore, agents are motivated to focus their submissions toward larger publishing houses. Smaller publishing houses, meanwhile, offer benefits to authors beyond the monetary, so they can welcome unsolicited submissions and negotiate directly with prospective authors.

Publishing houses in Canada are partially motivated by provincial and federal government grants. The late acquisitions editor Daniel Menaker stated that: "Every list — spring, summer, and fall — has its lead titles. Then there are three or four hopefuls trailing along just behind the books that the publisher is investing most heavily in. . . . Approximately four out of every five books published lose money. Or five out of six, or six out of seven."⁴² While these numbers may appear bleak, government grants enable publishers to continue their work despite the unpredictable financial situation of publishing. Grants provide a practical motivation for Canadian publishing houses to acquire manuscripts from Canadian authors.

⁴¹ Friedman, "How to Find a Literary Agent for Your Book."

⁴² Menaker, Daniel. "What Does the Book Business Look Like on the Inside?" *Vulture*, November 16, 2013. vulture.com/2013/11/daniel-menaker-on-publishing-industry-insanity.html.

Not all books are automatically eligible for government grants. For example, the BC Arts Council stipulates that eligible books must: “Be an original title and/or first edition (i.e. no reprints) in one of the following genres:

- Fiction
- Non-fiction
- Drama
- Graphic novel
- Poetry
- Publications in the above genres for children and young adults”⁴³

Publishers are motivated by such grants to release books that are not necessarily predicted to sell well. Grants give publishers the flexibility to pursue risks and publish unusual and niche-specific works.

4.3. Unsolicited Submission Policies Protect Authors from Publishing Scams

There is a dark side to every industry, and publishing is no exception. Scams and fraudulent schemes have existed for decades to take advantage of naive or desperate authors. It is for this reason that maintaining unsolicited manuscript submission policies is important. If all authors were required to find a literary agent to get their foot in the publishing industry door, then the number of fraudulent scammers posing as agents would increase. In the traditional publishing industry, it is standard that authors should not have to pay for any of the basic publishing processes. Therefore, it is the sign of a predatory organization if a literary agency charges a “reading fee” or similar payment just to review the submission. Legitimate literary agents make their commissions when the book is sold to a publishing house, not from charging authors for services.

⁴³ “Project Assistance: Book Publishers: BC Arts Council.” BC Arts Council | Government of British Columbia, September 16, 2021. bcartscouncil.ca/program/book-publishers-2/.

Writer Beware is an organization that seeks to protect writers from both the common and the more unusual pitfalls of the industry. The publishing industry is a small field, and while the limited size of the industry can have its drawbacks, it is a benefit for noticing fraudulent behavior and protecting authors from predatory organizations. Writer Beware warns authors to guard against the following deceptive and exploitative tactics employed by scammers pretending to be literary agents, as described on their website:

- Requiring a reading fee with a submission. In the distant past, some reputable agents did charge reading fees—but this practice was so extensively abused that most professional agents’ trade groups prohibit it for members. . . . Reading fees are uncommon these days, but if you encounter an agent who requires them, it’s a major warning sign.
- Requiring an upfront “marketing” or “submission” or other fee on contract signing. This is the most common kind of upfront fee. Reputable agents do not charge anything upfront.
- Requiring writers to buy a critique or manuscript assessment. Reputable agents don’t make the purchase of services a condition of representation.
- Referrals to an editing service owned by the agency. This is a conflict of interest—if the agent can make money by recommending editing, how can you trust that the recommendation is being made for your benefit?
- Pressure to use the agent’s own paid editing services. Again, a conflict of interest. Some dishonest agencies are no more than fronts for editing schemes.
- Running a contest that’s a scheme for funneling writers into paid services, such as a (sic) editing or vanity publishing.
- Pressuring clients to buy “adjunct” services—website design, catalog space, book cover mockups, illustrations, presence at book fairs, and more. The more money an agent makes this way, the less he or she is going to care about earning a commission by selling your book.
- Placing clients with fee-charging publishers. A kickback may be involved—some fee-based publishers pay finders’ fees—or the agent may own the publisher. Good agents only deal with publishers that pay their writers.⁴⁴

With a wide range of scams and predatory organizations in existence seeking to take advantage of desperate or unknowledgeable authors, the importance of having

⁴⁴ “Literary Agents.” SFWA, February 4, 2022. sfwa.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/agents/.

multiple varying channels for submission increases. Publishing houses that accept unsolicited manuscripts give authors increased agency and many more options for finding a publisher for their book than if literary agent representation was required across the industry to submit to publishers.

4.4. Unsolicited Submission Policies Create Publishing Mobility

Publishers that accept unsolicited submissions have the potential to acquire books much more rapidly than via agents. Authors searching for a literary agent often take months or years to secure representation, and even longer to complete the revisions process with the agent. Only then can the book go on submission to acquisitions editors. By using an unsolicited slush pile, publishing houses can find the newest and freshest ideas in order to navigate industry shifts and get books to readers faster than if they only accept agented submissions.

For the purposes of this report, the term “trend” will refer to the temporary popularity of a topic, and the term “industry shift” will refer to a lasting change in how the publishing industry operates. Authors cannot effectively write books for a trend — such as the trend for vampire romance books that skyrocketed in popularity in the late 2000s — nor can publishers release books for a trend. The publishing industry moves too slowly, taking upwards of one year (and often longer) from acquiring a book to its release day, not to mention the time it takes to write the book in the first place. However, a trend is different than an industry shift, which is what is occurring with the push for diverse books, particularly from OwnVoices authors. Far from being an ephemeral and temporary trend, the need for diverse books has instead shown a lasting desire for stories and perspectives that have been historically underrepresented.⁴⁵

Similar industry shifts have occurred in the past with the creation of new genres. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling was instrumental in pushing the Young Adult category into the mainstream, separating books for ages 13–17 from the Children’s Fiction

⁴⁵ Flood, Alison. “Campaigners Hail ‘Seismic Shift’ in Diversity of Us Children’s Books.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, March 22, 2019. [theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/22/campaigners-hail-seismic-shift-in-diversity-of-us-childrens-books](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/22/campaigners-hail-seismic-shift-in-diversity-of-us-childrens-books).

umbrella.⁴⁶ As the young protagonist aged from childhood through to adolescence, the audience for the series grew up as well, and sought books written for their age group. While vampires and paranormal romances were temporary trends spurred by the runaway success of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, they changed the industry with the realisation that there is a commercial market for books featuring young women as protagonists. The financial success of *Twilight* forged a path for other woman-helmed projects such as *The Hunger Games* to be widely accepted in popular culture.⁴⁷

One trend that was expected to be an industry shift but which turned out to be temporary was the invention of the New Adult category. New Adult books are aimed at the 18–25 age bracket, just older than the Young Adult age range of 13–17. The New Adult category was initially embraced with enthusiasm in the early 2010s, but it met with resistance and eventually fell out of favour.⁴⁸ As of 2022, there are fewer than 100 agents in the QueryTracker literary agent database who represent New Adult literature, compared to almost 700 agents who represent Young Adult.⁴⁹

While the New Adult phenomenon appears to have faded, the opposite effect has occurred with the desire for more diversity. In Booknet Canada's 2021 updated report *On Diversity*, Canadian readers were polled for their interest in diverse books. According to the poll, 84% of the readers polled answered that publishers should publish more books by a greater variety of authors,⁵⁰ including new perspectives from authors of historically underrepresented races, genders, sexualities, ages, classes, and more. The types of diversity that Booknet's polled readers most want to see more of in their books include mental health

⁴⁶ Zhao, Allison. "The Rise of YA Fiction." *Acta Victoriana*, April 23, 2020. actavictoriana.ca/literature/the-rise-of-ya-fiction/.

⁴⁷ Klein, Sara. "Twilight: Changing the Business and Culture of Contemporary Cinema." *Twilight: Changing the Business and Culture of Contemporary Cinema | Forbes and Fifth | University of Pittsburgh*, 2015. forbes5.pitt.edu/article/twilight-changing-business-and-culture-contemporary-cinema.

⁴⁸ Davis, Jennifer. "What Ever Happened to New Adult?" *Ooligan Press*, December 14, 2020. ooligan.pdx.edu/new-adult-update/.

⁴⁹ "Search for Literary Agents." *QueryTracker*. Accessed March 1, 2022. querytracker.net/literary_agents.php.

⁵⁰ "On Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers 2021." *BookNet Canada*, January 2021. booknetcanada.ca/on-diversity-a-survey-of-canadian-readers-2021.

challenges (46% of readers), multicultural or immigrant experiences (46% of readers), and working-class perspectives (45% of readers).⁵¹

Michael Pietsch, the CEO of Hachette Book Group, stated the following regarding the lasting demand for more diverse books:

Publishers have stated the ethical, creative, and business need for change, and have acknowledged that the efforts they'd made in years past to employ and retain more people from underrepresented backgrounds were not successful. There is a genuine commitment to acquiring more books by traditionally underrepresented writers and investing in multicultural marketing strategies to reach a broader diversity of readers.⁵²

The importance of this industry shift cannot be understated: with a proven market for diverse books and indications that the market will only grow stronger in future, more agents and larger publishers will acquire diverse books for reasons of profit, not just their own moral mandates. However, as the industry moves so slowly, with books purchased years before their publishing release date, the changes made today in the workflow of agents will take years to manifest in bookstores. By remaining open for unsolicited submissions, independent publishing houses have immediate access to review submissions from underrepresented voices.

At Harbour Publishing / Douglas & McIntyre, the driving reason to accept unsolicited manuscript submissions is the potential to find great literature from anyone, anywhere, anytime.

⁵¹ "On Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers 2021." BookNet Canada, January 2021. booknetcanada.ca/on-diversity-a-survey-of-canadian-readers-2021.

⁵² Pietsch, Michael. "Michael Pietsch Looks at Publishing's (Near) Future." PublishersWeekly.com, December 10, 2021. publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/88114-michael-pietsch-looks-at-publishing-s-near-future.html.

Part 5.

Conclusion

Although maintaining a slush pile of unsolicited manuscript submissions requires additional time and resources from a publishing house, it is in the best interests of not only individual publishing houses and authors, but of the Canadian publishing industry as a whole.

Publishing houses benefit from the increased mobility, allowing them to find and publish books much faster and in more specific niches than through having literary agents pitch their authors' books for general audiences. Authors benefit from the increased variety of options available for submitting their work. Being empowered to submit their own manuscripts directly to publishing houses gives authors many additional options for publication, reducing the likelihood that desperate authors may be preyed upon by fraudulent organizations. It also ensures that literary agents are not the ultimate gatekeepers responsible for shaping the literary landscape, allowing agents to focus their efforts on selling books with high commercial viability.

The entire Canadian publishing industry is strengthened by unsolicited manuscript policies, as they allow for Canadian author voices to be discovered and published even if there is not a strong commercial market for that book's particular niche. Literary agents and larger publishers are motivated to sell books aimed at a general reading market for higher profits, whereas independent Canadian publishers are supported by government grants to publish books that fit their cultural mandates, heedless of how well the book will sell.

It is for these reasons that independent publishing houses should be encouraged to maintain slush piles for unsolicited manuscript submissions. Such policies benefit every party in the publishing industry production chain, from authors to literary agents to publishing houses, and ultimately to the eventual readers who can enjoy the varied and diverse array of Canadian books published in every genre and category.

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