

**COST OF A CULTURE:
PUBLISHING PRACTICES AND FINANCIAL RETURNS
FOR FICTION AND NONFICTION**

by

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ABSTRACT

Changes in both the book publishing and bookselling industries are marginalizing the publication of fiction, leaving this essential facet of Canadian culture at risk.

This report examines differences between the publishing of fiction and nonfiction at Canadian trade publishing houses, in an attempt to explain why nonfiction is often more financially successful than fiction. Analysis of the processes used by the publishing departments at Key Porter Books, with additional examples from Penguin Canada and Pearson Canada, shows that costs are often lower for works of nonfiction. As well, fiction can be wildly successful, but the majority of it is a net loss for the publisher, while most nonfiction will make a profit. While Canadian publishers continue to support our national culture, it is important to understand that they do so in the face of commercial interests which encourage their publishing programs in other directions.

Keywords: Publishing Practices, Fiction, Nonfiction, Trade Publishing, Consolidation

Subject Terms: Publishers and publishing – Canada; Book industries and trade; Booksellers and bookselling – Canada; Literature Publishing – Canada; Book Industry -- Canada

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Canadian publishers' efforts to maintain a vibrant and varied national literature take place today in an industry and a market that seem hostile to the publishing of fiction. In this paper I examine processes and factors involved in trade publishing, including metamorphoses in technology, publishing, and book buying, to show that the indigenous publishing industry favours nonfiction over fiction. A lack of reliable information documenting the challenges facing works of fiction in the Canadian market increases the difficulty of publishing fiction to financial success. While many indigenous publishers produce important national literature, they do so despite financial and commercial motives which encourage their publishing efforts toward nonfiction.

The types of publishing that fall under the purview of this paper—fiction and nonfiction—occur within the category of general trade publishing, a term that is not well defined in literature about publishing. My argument primarily concerns trade publishing, a field that can be best defined by what it is not. Indeed, Statistics Canada charts Canadian publishing in four components: Educational; Children's books; Other trade, all formats; and Other (scholarly, reference, professional, and technical books); the second and third are considered trade publishing.¹ Trade presses publish the fiction and nonfiction hardcover and trade paperback that are not published by educational, academic, or reference

¹ Statistics Canada. "Book Publishing," *The Daily*, June 30, 2006, <www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060630/d060630a.htm> (29 November 2007).

publishers.² Their lists can include everything from biography to popular science, literary fiction to puzzle books. Publishers of genre fiction are a subset of trade presses. I will not consider them in this paper. They specialize in romance, science fiction, fantasy, and horror novels. The primary contrast that I consider is between literary fiction and general nonfiction, especially front-list titles.

While nonfiction books compose most of a trade publisher's output, the perceived importance of fiction and nonfiction in a list can balance, though their fiscal contribution rarely does. While examining the fiction/nonfiction divide within the context of a single trade publishing house and considering the differing strategies used in publishing fiction and nonfiction, I will illustrate that while literary fiction publishing has cultural capital that gives it an important non-monetary worth, current features of the Canadian publishing industry make publishing nonfiction a fiscally safer option.

The same departments and staff produce both fiction and nonfiction, but differences between these types of books cause aspects of the publishing process to diverge in significant ways. Specifically, the rationale behind and costs associated with fiction and nonfiction acquisitions differ significantly. This difference is even more marked when comparing publisher-driven houses with market-driven houses. During the production process, varying editorial techniques and standards, along with the difficulty in author communication, influence editing costs. While interior and cover designs have similar costs, book jackets are considered a key promotional tool by the post-production

² William Germano, *Getting it Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), <<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/288447.html>> (29 November 2007).

departments. An expanding variety of sales methods and venues, along with the potential for rights sales, affect the efforts of the revenue-generating departments, while the publicity and marketing departments assist by promoting books, though their tactics and efficacy vary for fiction and nonfiction. Differences between these two affect their publishing processes, and these processes can be examined with reference to aspects of publishing that fiscally encourage nonfiction publishing in the industry as a whole.

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Key Porter Books

From 1979 to 2004, Anna Porter was the publisher and guiding editorial force behind Key Porter's staunchly Canadian list. Well established as one of the leading figures in Canadian publishing, and fresh from a 10-year stint as President and Editor-in-Chief of McClelland & Stewart, Porter initially created Key Porter Books, a prime example of a publisher-driven house, to publish "mainstream books of national interest."³ Key Porter's extensive backlist includes seminal works of Canadian fiction, politics, sports, biography, conservation, environmental and social issues, photography, wildlife, children's literature, history, business, health, and cookbooks, and is typical of—if more extensive than some—Canadian trade houses. "Since coming into being, Key Porter has established itself as a pre-eminent publishing house, providing an invaluable vehicle for Canadian authors to bring voices to a national audience," said Jean Chrétien, prime minister of Canada from 1993 to 2003.⁴ Key Porter's survival in

³ Key Porter Books, "About Us," <www.keyporter.com/aboutus> (15 June 2005).

⁴ Ibid.

the notably uncertain world of small press Canadian publishing is all the more noteworthy considering that “in the [Canadian] book industry, approximately 75 percent of books purchased come from foreign-owned publishers or are written by foreign authors for foreign publishers.”⁵ The preponderance of foreign content is noticeable in many Canadian cultural venues—in 2004, 62.8 percent of the television programs watched by Canadians were foreign, mostly U.S., in origin,⁶ despite the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission’s requirement that 60 percent of television programming broadcast between 6am and midnight be Canadian.

As an intern at Key Porter Books from May to September 2002, I received a particularly good overview of its practices because the company was chronically understaffed. In each of the three seasons preceding the Fall 2002 list that I helped produce, the number of new titles on Key Porter’s list had expanded by five or more books without any addition to the staff. Under these circumstances I was asked to perform important and varied tasks unsupervised, while larger companies would not have found it necessary to give an intern as much responsibility.

Many of my contentions about the generic practices of the book publishing industry are drawn from my experiences at Key Porter. As Anna Porter is one of the most influential figures in the Canadian industry and has worked at and managed many of its most successful houses, it is plausible to extrapolate Key

⁵ Rowland Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened: Book Publishing in Canada*, (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing, 1997), 26.

⁶ Statistics Canada. “Television viewing by type of programme (Total),” 2004, <<http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/arts22a.htm> > (29 November 2007).

Porter's publishing practices and tactics to comment on broad industry practices and trends.

Additional material is based on the publishing practices at Pearson Education Canada and Penguin Canada, two houses that lean towards market-driven publishing, which are both parts of the international print media conglomerate Pearson plc. I have worked as a Production Editor, Developmental Editor, and Media Development Editor in the Higher Education division at Pearson Education Canada since October 2002. As a publicly traded, multinational corporation that has newspaper, magazine, online, trade, and educational publishing branches, Pearson is an appropriate secondary model to Key Porter's small press perspective. The differences in the fiction and nonfiction publishing practices of these two companies illuminate trends in the industry and clarify why nonfiction is less costly to publish, more easily marketed and sold, and, therefore, more profitable.

Trends in Book Buying and Publishing

Since the 1990s, numerous studies have found that reading and book buying habits are shifting around the world, though the most recent Canadian study shows that statistics about pleasure reading in Canada have remained constant.⁷

^{8 9 10 11} The reading of books, as opposed to other media, the choice of fiction or

⁷ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 138.

⁸ National Endowment for the Arts, "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America," Research Division Report #46, June 2004, <<http://www.nea.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>> (29 November 2007).

⁹ Statistics Canada, "What Canadian households spend on culture goods and services," *Focus on Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2006, Catalogue number 87-004-XWE2003004.

nonfiction, and the practice of reading itself are undergoing transformation around the world, though how and why books are bought in the Canadian marketplace are remaining more stable than in the U.S. and other countries.¹²

The business of Canadian trade publishers is affected by these changes; this can be seen in the context of publishing practices at Canadian trade publishing houses.¹³

An American study, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, a 2004 study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and published by the National Endowment for the Arts, found that while reading in general among the U.S. population declined by seven percent in the period between 1992 and 2002, reading fiction of any sort declined fourteen percent in the same period.¹⁴ According to this study, less than half of the adult American population now reads any fiction at all.¹⁵ This statistic is not borne out about Canadians. The Canadian Heritage study found that 79 percent of Canadians had read at least one literary work for pleasure over the past 12 months, though

¹⁰ Hill Strategies, "Who Buys Books in Canada: A Statistical Analysis Based on Household Spending Data," *Statistical insights on the arts*, Vol. 3, No. 4, March 2005, <http://www.hillstrategies.com/resources_details.php?resUID=1000080&lang=0> (29 November 2007).

¹¹ Canadian Heritage Department, *Reading and Buying Books for Pleasure: 2005 National Survey*, March 2005 <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pc-ch/pubs/lalpd-rbbp/index_e.cfm> (29 November 2007).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Statistics about fiction and nonfiction books are usually combined under the 'trade' heading, making these studies of limited use. However, by using studies that compare nonfiction with genre and literary works—the two categories of fiction—conclusions about how the public views and purchases these two types of books can be drawn.

¹⁴ National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading at Risk*, ix.

¹⁵ NEA specifically asked about literary reading rather than fiction reading, but their definition of literary—novels, short stories, plays, or poetry—includes all kinds of fiction, especially as they specifically state that popular genres such as mysteries, contemporary, and classic literary fiction are included and that "no distinctions were drawn on the quality of literary works."

only 44 percent read literary materials primarily.¹⁶ However, a Statistics Canada survey from the same period found that spending on cultural goods does parallel the U.S finding—only 49.7 percent of Canadian households reported buying books other than texts for school¹⁷ and a 1996 UNESCO survey of Canadian publishing, also conducted on National Library records, found just 2854 new literature titles that year in a total field of 19 900 new published books.¹⁸

The progression charted by Gayle Feldman in *Best and Worst of Times: The Changing Business of Trade Books, 1975–2002*, is also revealing. She found that before 1985, two novels and no works of nonfiction had sold over 1 000 000 copies in English. In 1995, three English novels and two nonfiction works sold over 1 000 000 copies. Now, in the 21st century, a million copies are not an unreasonable aim, in the United States at least, for either genre.¹⁹ Sales of nonfiction, according to this measure, seem to be growing more quickly than those of fiction. This is supported by the CCSP finding that production of nonfiction is expanding more rapidly than fiction. Indeed, a 1996 study of English-language Canadian book purchases found “that nonfiction titles outsold fiction 2 to 1.”²⁰ Thirty-eight percent of respondents volunteered that their reason for choosing a book was “interested in subject/topic/wanted to learn,” which supports the abundant nonfiction purchases recorded in the study. This difference in the

¹⁶ Canadian Heritage Department, *Reading and Buying Books for Pleasure*, 45.

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, “What Canadian households spend on culture goods and services.”

¹⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Book production: number of titles by UDC classes*, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/html/CultAndCom/Table_IV_5_America.html> (29 November 2007).

¹⁹ Gayle Feldman, *Best and Worst of Times: The Changing Business of Trade Books, 1975–2002*, <<http://www.najp.org/events/bestworst/summary.html>> (29 November 2007).

²⁰ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 132.

rate of growth in sales between these types of publishing is highlighted by the fact that the vast majority of fiction is sold by only a few authors. Albert Greco in his book *The Book Publishing Industry* writes that “in 1994, over 70 percent of total fiction sales were accounted for by a mere five authors: John Grisham, Tom Clancy, Danielle Steel, Michael Crichton, and Stephen King.”²¹ Stanford University professor Alan Sorensen found in a study of the *New York Times* bestseller list that “the most popular book in the sample, *Skipping Christmas* by John Grisham, sold more copies in its first 3 weeks than did the bottom 368 books in their first 6 months combined.”²² There are other fiction authors who also sell in the millions, but beside these few powerhouses, whose works are perpetual features on bestseller lists, sales of other fiction look very small. A new work of nonfiction by an unknown author, by this measure, has a better chance of financial success than an unknown author’s fiction.

Consolidation in the Canadian Market

One of the reasons why a few fiction authors sell most books today is because of extensive consolidation in the publishing industry. Over the past 20 years, book publishers have, in ever-increasing numbers, been bought by other publishers and media corporations, until the majority of books are published by international conglomerates. Rowland Lorimer documents this in *The Book Business in Canada*: “In the book industry, approximately 75 percent of books purchased come from foreign-owned publishers or are written by foreign authors for foreign

²¹ Albert N. Greco (2004). *The Book Publishing Industry*, (New York: Routledge, 2004).

²² Alan T. Sorensen, “Best Seller Lists and Product Variety, July 2006, <<http://www.stanford.edu/~asorensen/papers/bestsellers.pdf>> (29 November 2007).

publishers. Over 80 percent of those books are U.S. in origin. And over 80 percent of those are produced by large international conglomerates.”²³ Statistics Canada has found the same—“19 foreign-controlled publishers, who represented less than 6% of all companies surveyed, accounted for 47% of total revenues for the book publishers surveyed in 2004.... Their revenues from Canadian book sales reached \$808 million in 2004, 59% of the total of almost \$1.4 billion.”²⁴ Key Porter was acquired by Canadian distributor H.B. Fenn in 2004, and joined the ranks of publishing companies that now form divisions of larger companies.

The consolidation of publishers has led to a trend in fiction publishing that some have called the ‘death of the midlist’. It has been discussed extensively in relation to a variety of genre publications, but is equally relevant to the literary fiction market. In 1993, author Charles Platt updated a column that he originally wrote in 1989, entitled ‘The Vanishing Midlist’. In it he discusses a trend that he identifies in the science fiction publishing community towards only publishing established authors. He writes, “a typical midlist novel—the kind published by anyone who isn’t a best-seller—sells maybe 10 000 to 20 000 copies in the UK and 20 000 to 60 000 copies in the USA. The author gets a 10% cut of the cover price (plus or minus a couple of percent); the publisher probably makes a *loss* on the first two books by a new author, because nobody knows who they are.”²⁵ The Canadian market is about 1/10 the size of the U.S. market, so 2000 to 6000

²³ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 26.

²⁴ Statistics Canada. “Book Publishing,” *The Daily*, 30 June 2006, <www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060630/d060630a.htm>, (29 November 2007).

²⁵ Charles Platt, “The Vanishing Midlist,” *Interzone* #29, 1989, <http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sub/Charles_Stross/midlist.html> (15 June 2005).

copies are a reasonable, but economically discouraging, extrapolation of his numbers.

Companies contend with the small Canadian market in different ways. Pearson Canada has a strict policy of cost savings across its departments, from small print runs, in order to minimize warehousing costs, and proofreading onscreen in Adobe Acrobat to reduce printing, photocopying, and courier costs. Some companies have used the challenge of the small Canadian market to innovate; Coach House Books, for example, runs its own printing press in downtown Toronto and is experimenting in the field of online publishing. Other small presses, such as Arsenal Pulp Press and ECW Press, capitalize on their extensive exports. Despite these methods of continuing to profit in our small market, the declining opportunities for midlist authors illustrate the move away from risk in publishing.

The dearth of opportunities for midlist authors has also been exacerbated by bookstore consolidation. In 1996, *Publisher's Weekly* noted that the number of distributors had halved in the early 1990s and author Patricia Potter expands on this statistic:

One of the big problems today is the consolidation of wholesalers and book chains. Where there used to be 1,000 or more distributors, there are now less than 200 and apparently that number is expected to drop to 50. That means 50 people buying for all the grocery stores, drug stores, etc. in the country, and these folks buy entirely by computer numbers. A book does well, the next is bought. If it doesn't, good-bye author.²⁶

This trend has continued since the mid-1990s and publishers now sell primarily to only a few massive customers—the previous industry model of selling to a

²⁶ Patricia Potter "Laurie's News and Views: Issue #10" *All About Romance*, 21 August 1996, <www.likesbooks.com/10.html> (29 November 2007).

large number of small clients is defunct. In Canada, if a book does not sell to the Chapters/Indigo chain, it will never become a bestseller and it is unlikely that it will even make back its publication costs. In 2006, the primary sales representative for the Pearson Technology Group, a small trade division, had two clients: Chapters and Wal-Mart. The volume of sales to all other bookstores was small enough that the sales were handled by a sales assistant.

Booksellers are also consolidating in the United States, primarily into the Borders and Barnes & Noble chains. With two mega-chains, rather than Canada's one, and the larger market, the publishers there are less captive to a single buyer, though their options are still severely limited compared to the many independent bookstores in business 15 or 20 years ago. While the online marketplace does alleviate some of these concerns—Amazon (with its unlimited digital 'shelf space') will stock any book with an ISBN that is properly registered with them—the online market is still quite small, and does not compensate for the sales lost if a book does not appear in traditional bookstores. The Canadian Heritage study found that 18 percent of their sample had ever bought a book over the Internet, only 12 percent in the past year, and these sales amounted to 4 percent of all books sold in 2004.²⁷ Someday, perhaps, online publishing will lead to a fragmentation of the market as in the heyday of independent bookstores. Movements in this direction can already be seen in growing interest in online purchasing of books²⁸ and the growth of self-published books in the

²⁷ Canadian Heritage Department, *Reading and Buying Books for Pleasure*, 99.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 100.

Amazon catalogue and its acquisition of self-publishing companies BookSurge and Ingram/Lightning Source.

New types of entertainment are becoming available with advances in technology and these may be exacerbating the financial hardship of fiction publishing. By 2001, 99.2 percent of Canadian households had colour televisions, 91.5 percent had VCRs, 19.8 percent had DVD players, and 68.3 percent had cable television.²⁹ Furthermore, rental spending on videos and DVDs is expected to reach \$1.7 billion by 2007³⁰ and cable and satellite TV services consume the largest amount of household spending on culture goods and services, rising from 25.7% of total spending in 1999 to 31.9% in 2004.³¹ These numbers have no doubt increased since these dates. These items are, like works of fiction, purchased for their entertainment value. Modes of entertainment multiply every year and fictional stories are now broadcast as radio plays, acted on television, sold as DVDs or higher definition formats after being shown in movie theatres, or written into computer games. This expansion in available methods of entertainment may help to show why NEA found that fiction reading is decreasing dramatically; though the Canadian Heritage study found that while these activities do not seem to be effecting the amount that Canadians indulge in reading for pleasure year by year, 44 percent of the sample chose watching tv or

²⁹ Statistics Canada. "Television Viewing," *The Daily*, 1 October 2002, <<http://statscan.ca/Daily/English/021202a.htm>> (15 June 2005).

³⁰ PricewaterhouseCoopers, "Filmed Entertainment Industry in Canada the Fastest Growing in World," 13 September 2003, <<http://www.pwcglobal.com/extweb/ncpressrelease.nsf/docid/B8AC0264872F898085256D9B00634DB6>> (15 June 2005).

³¹ Statistics Canada, "What Canadian households spend on culture goods and services."

movies as their preferred leisure activity, while only 26 percent chose reading a book.³²

The Internet competes with nonfiction books as well as fiction, and around 7.9 million households (64%) had at least one member who used the Internet regularly in 2003.³³ People can use their computer to answer almost any question via a search engine on the World Wide Web, or by consulting an online encyclopedia such as Wikipedia, in addition to checking out the latest videos on YouTube. While computers are widespread, they are still a relatively new appliance in the home (widespread use of the personal computer began around 1980, and the World Wide Web was created in 1990). The Google search engine, probably the strongest competition for a nonfiction library, requires a computer and internet connection, which, while used by many, are by no means as universal as the television. However, in 2006, Toronto Hydro installed broadband wireless transmitters and receivers on every fourth or fifth streetlight in downtown Toronto, creating an enormous wifi hotspot.³⁴ The growth of the Internet seems to be impacting newspaper and magazine reading and television watching more than book reading for pleasure, though there is tenuous evidence that it may be lowering the number of books bought in Canada.³⁵

³² Canadian Heritage Department, *Reading and Buying Books for Pleasure*, 78.

³³ Statistics Canada. "Household Internet Use Survey," *The Daily*, 8 July 2004, <<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/040708/d040708a.htm>> (29 November 2007).

³⁴ Tyler Hamilton, "Toronto to Become Wireless Hotspot," *The Toronto Star*, 6 March 2006, <http://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&c=Article&cid=1141643034143&call_pageid=968332188492&col=968793972154&t=TS_Home> (15 June 2005).

³⁵ Canadian Heritage Department. *Reading and Buying Books for Pleasure*, 99.

While its current state favours nonfiction, the book industry is changing—we are in the midst of a fundamental shift in how publishing takes place, both physically and conceptually. Following in the footsteps of other forms of media, books are being influenced by the growing prevalence of online material. As the percentage of the population which is online expands, nonfiction books may face many of the fiscal challenges that have so far confronted fiction publishing. Methods for making books available will also have to shift to accommodate a generation growing up using computers and electronic sources for most of their entertainment and informational needs. The current trends are clear; the future, however, is open, and Canadian publishers need to strive not to become bigger companies with fewer, bigger books, not towards stagnation, but for innovation. The continuing growth of electronic media will allow the publishing industry to change in ways that will allow for another heyday of publishing, both fiction and nonfiction, and achieve a strong industry and continue to help build a vibrant Canadian culture. In addition to emerging technologies, some of the reasons why nonfiction is currently more fiscally successful than fiction are changes in the corporate structures and aims of publishing companies and, in some parts of the world, changing preferences among readers. There are other reasons that stem from the publishing practices used for works of fiction and nonfiction by Canadian publishers, beginning with a book's acquisition.

CHAPTER 2: THE EFFECT OF A PROFIT IMPERATIVE ON ACQUISITIONS

“Today most publishing imprints have dissolved within their vast media conglomerates....”

Jason Epstein, *Book Business: Publishing Past, Present, and Future*.

Rowland Lorimer writes in *Vibrant But Threatened: The Book Publishing Industry in Canada* that the publishing process “involves a selection, [and] constitutes a performance,” and that the actions of a publisher are first, choices made to communicate “an idea, a set of ideas, an opinion, [or] a viewpoint ... to the public,” and second, that “the material must be prepared and presented in a manner designed to have maximum impact.”³⁶ This view of the publishing process portrays the acquisitions phase—the choice—as an integral part of book production. Whether the original manuscript acquired is fiction or nonfiction has a profound influence on the way in which it is acquired. That process highlights major differences in how fiction and nonfiction are perceived by and treated in Canadian trade publishing, and demonstrates why the acquisition of fiction often has more associated costs than acquiring nonfiction.

The Role of the Publishing Board

The following model of acquisitions is drawn from my experiences at Key Porter, where the Publishing Board met regularly to discuss which books to acquire for publication. The composition of the board varies from company to company, but

³⁶ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened: Book Publishing in Canada*, 28.

at Key Porter it included the Publisher, Editor-in-Chief, editors, and representatives from the marketing, publicity, rights, and sales divisions. The members of the Board, no matter what its composition, are the gatekeepers who determine whether a book will be published by their company.

A Publishing Board, however, while standard at most companies, is an intermediate step in the acquisitions phase of the publication process. The origin of a submission can take several forms. Most submissions are to the slush pile (the repository for unsolicited and unagented submissions). The Key Porter slush pile was composed primarily of fiction, probably because fiction is both more widely written and less widely published. At all companies, it is rare that a slush-pile book will be selected for publication. They are typically read by the lowest ranked editorial employee or by unpaid volunteers, who decide whether to immediately reject the proposal or manuscript or pass it along to another reader, usually the editor of a list that includes that type of book. The slush pile is not an enviable place for a book. It will rarely be read promptly or completely, and readers of the slush pile know that their superiors expect them to reject the vast majority.

In order for an unsolicited manuscript to bypass the slush pile it is necessary to have it submitted by an agent known to the publishing house. Successful agents develop a relationship with publishers where the agent studies what kinds of books are of interest, while publishing houses discover, through experience, what kinds of books each agent can be counted on to supply for their list. Agents submit the majority of manuscripts and proposals that are eventually

accepted for publication. This method of submission is used for both fiction and nonfiction and how much of each a trade publisher receives depends, primarily, on the house's reputation, which stems from the fiction/nonfiction composition of their backlist and the reputations of their editors.

A nonfiction work can be acquired by an in-house editor who submits a proposal to a “work-for-hire” author (pre-approved by the publishing board).³⁷ In these cases, the merits of the idea are explicitly and solely related to its nonfiction subject matter—this process is never used for a work of fiction.

During my time at Key Porter Books, acquisitions were driven by Anna Porter. As founder and publisher her vision was central to determining the editorial direction of the company. While different editors were responsible for and proposed titles in different areas of the Key Porter list, any decision made at the Publishing Board meeting had to have Porter's approval. This led to far fewer works of fiction than nonfiction brought to the Publishing Board meetings by editors, who were aware both that most of the chosen fiction was brought to the board by Porter, and that little fiction would even be considered seriously for publication because it was not considered profitable.

Doubt about the viability of fiction in Canadian publishing has been present for many years—in 1967, Jack McClelland wrote to Alfred A. Knopf that “the sad truth is that in the Canadian market we should publish almost no new fiction. The market is getting worse, except for the odd person like Margaret

³⁷ Zsuzsi Gartner writes in a December 1994 *Focus on Editing* article entitled ‘Midwife to a manuscript...’ that “an editor can ... affect a book by ensuring it actually gets written, [though] this happens more in the case of commissioned nonfiction than fiction.”

Laurence."³⁸ This view is still widely held in Canadian publishing today—the John Wiley & Sons website informs aspiring writers that "it's much harder to sell a work of fiction [to a publisher] because most major publishing houses are reluctant to take a risk—investing time they don't have and money they may not earn back—on an unknown writer."³⁹ This understanding permeates Canadian publishing and may encourage a tentative attitude in most trade houses towards the acquisition of fiction, while the members of a Publishing Board have many more opportunities and options to acquire nonfiction.

Publisher-driven and Market-driven Acquisitions

In 2002, Key Porter Books was an example of a publisher-driven publishing house. At this type of house, the publisher acquires books that they believe are important, that communicate something profound or beautiful, or fulfill some other non-fiscal, but significant moral or aesthetic need.⁴⁰ Frequently, however, books that publishers want to publish aren't the ones that will make money. Therefore, another belief, held by even idealistic publishers, is that a book should be published because it will be financially successful and its sales will support them in making the books that they care about most. Anna Porter's firm control over the acquisitions policy of her company made Key Porter a remarkably pure example of the publisher-driven publishing model, in contrast to the often

³⁸ Jack McClelland and Sam Solecki. *Imagining Canadian Literature: The Selected Letters of Jack McClelland*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2002), 116.

³⁹ Sarah Parsons Zackheim and Adrian Zackheim, "Submitting Your Work of Fiction," adapted from *Getting Your Book Published For Dummies*, (New York: Wiley, 2000), <<http://dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-1845.html>> (29 November 2007).

⁴⁰ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 29.

primarily market-driven or blended publishing models used for acquisitions by many of the largest Canadian branch plant publishers.⁴¹

At some trade houses the list, especially fiction, can be strongly influenced by the personal tastes of the publisher. Acquisitions for and composition of a trade house's list can change dramatically when the publisher changes. For example, when David Davidar replaced Cynthia Good as Publisher at Penguin Canada, the content of their list was expected to change and so it did. The internal company announcement presented a list of authors that Davidar had acquired while publisher at Penguin India as a preview of the type of publishing we could expect at Penguin Canada. Articles referred to their editorial 'styles', and reflections of these styles in general company policy were publicly examined.^{42 43 44} This is a remnant of the cottage industry that book publishing was between the 1920s and 1960s⁴⁵ where personal choice was the hallmark of a list. However, upon closer study of the Penguin list, it is clear that only a few, high profile titles are still chosen in this personal way. Many trade publisher's lists, especially those at a publicly-traded company, now tend to be market-driven, and consists primarily of genre works and other almost risk-free books, such as those catering to the latest puzzle or diet craze.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² John F. Baker and Nathalie Atkinson, "New Faces: Author as Publisher," *Special Report: Canadian Publishing*, <<http://www.publishersweekly.com/index.asp?layout=article&articleID=CA339213>> (29 November 2007).

⁴³ Judy Stoffman, "Nine Canadian books now classics," *The Resume Expert's Smart Career Tips*, <<http://smartbizchoices.typepad.com/sbc/books/index.html>> (29 November 2007).

⁴⁴ Noah Richler, "First voices; A buzz for aboriginal fiction is fuel for one of our founding myths Newcomers building a critical mass behind Highway, King, et. al.," *The Toronto Star*, 4 April 2004, D12.

⁴⁵ Jason Epstein, *Book Business: Publishing Past, Present, and Future*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 7.

The publishing industry in Canada, as elsewhere, is increasingly filled with market-driven international conglomerates whose mandates are to maximize their profits. These businesses are accountable to shareholders, and thus, projections of how much money a book will make are of greater importance to those companies' acquisitions decisions. The market-driven model does not allow for publishing books based on personal preference as the publisher-driven model does. Sales projections and profit/loss statements back up an acquisition at a market-driven house⁴⁶ and their acquiring editors are drawn, as at Pearson Canada and Thompson Nelson, from the company's sales team. The market-driven model is appropriate for publishing companies that must justify their publishing decisions to shareholders or an executive board that is uninvolved in the publishing process because it allows for more concrete projections of a book's potential profit or loss.

Literary Value Versus Predictable Sales

Houses that primarily publish literary fiction tend to be publisher-driven because they cannot reliably project the size of their market or potential sales, while nonfiction publishers are often market-driven because of the relative simplicity in forecasting nonfiction sales numbers. There are certainly counterexamples to this generalization, but it illustrates a difference in how fiction and nonfiction are evaluated as they are being acquired.

During discussions about whether to acquire a work of nonfiction, the Key Porter Publishing Board placed greater weight on the opinions of the

⁴⁶ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 29.

representatives from the four revenue-generating post-production departments—publicity, marketing, sales, and rights—compared to discussions about the acquisition of fiction. This attention shows that the profit potential of nonfiction was the company's central aim, since these four departments had far less influence on fiction-publishing decisions. This shows a greater regard, on the part of the publisher, for the editorial quality of fiction than for its money-making potential.

The importance given to the financial performance of nonfiction is also shown at Pearson in the monthly reports we receive about the performance of each division. When Pearson's president presents the results for Penguin Canada, he lauds works of nonfiction for selling a certain number of copies, but fiction, primarily, for any awards it has won. For example, his monthly employee report congratulates a game manual that has shipped over ten thousand copies, but a novel that has been nominated for the Giller Prize. These divergent emphases are indicative of an industry-wide understanding that the majority of the money made in publishing comes from nonfiction—most poetry houses wouldn't last a season without a liberal sprinkling of cookbooks.

At Key Porter Publishing Board meetings, I found that there was a tendency to discuss fiction in terms of its literary value and quality, while nonfiction proposals were evaluated on their potential sales. For example, a proposal for a book about the Toronto Maple Leaf's 2002 drive to the Stanley Cup was vetoed based on a perceived lack of market potential (and because they only made it to the semifinals). Fiction, on the other hand, was passed

around the office and read by many employees before being discussed based on its perceived quality. The understanding seemed to be that to publish nonfiction with the primary aim of making money was necessary, but that publishing fiction with the primary goal of making money was immoral. Whether the board was tacitly equating quality of writing with potential sales for works of fiction was never clear.

The massive sales of a few best-selling fiction authors is widely recognized in the industry, according to Jason Epstein, who admits that publishers perceive a clear correlation in the fiction marketplace between how well an author is known and the sales of their books.⁴⁷ Albert Greco, from the Institute for Publishing Research, puts it this way: "People who read fiction want to read hits written by known authors who are there year after year."⁴⁸ This is also the case with some nonfiction authors, such as celebrities in other media and notable Canadian essayists like Pierre Berton, Peter Newman, Naomi Klein, and John Ralston Saul. Nonetheless, author name recognition is often not a primary concern when acquiring nonfiction, because publishers perceive that nonfiction sales can be based primarily on a book's topic rather than its author.⁴⁹

While the risk in publishing fiction is downplayed by the skewing of sales numbers by extremely popular authors, a serious peril, especially for public companies, is that the sales numbers are very difficult to project. The audience for a work of nonfiction can often be estimated by finding other measures of

⁴⁷ Epstein, *Book Business*, 19–20.

⁴⁸ Greco, *The Book Publishing Industry*.

⁴⁹ J.C. Simonds, "Fiction vs. Nonfiction redux," *SmallPress Blog: Your guide to independent publishing*, 2002, <http://smallpress.typepad.com/index/2005/02/fiction_vs_nonf.html> (29 November 2007).

interest in the subject of the book. For example, it is possible to find out how many people watch competitive bicycling on television, subscribe to *Bicycling World* magazine, or own racing bicycles that cost over \$5000. In this way a publisher can estimate a possible audience for their nonfiction book about bicycling. There is no such measure for a work of literary fiction, but this is the very information that is needed to justify publication in a corporate environment. This is the crux of the discord between fiction publishing and the demands of a public corporation.

Genre publishers, who only publish fiction—be it fantasy, science fiction, mystery, or romance—survive with a wholly fictional list because they circumvent the weak point in the selling of literary fiction. Fiction, generally, does not sell well without a familiar author name on its cover, because people do not know if they will be interested in a work of non-genre fiction prior to reading it; this is one reason for the emphasis on prizes, such as the Giller and Man Booker, in fiction publishing. Name-brand fiction authors, such as Grisham and King, bypass this challenge by practically becoming genres of their own.⁵⁰ Nonfiction is easier to sell to a reader because it is very clear that when they buy a book about bicycles, or World War II, or the dangers of globalization, or the Canadian political system, it will be reasonably close to what they are looking for—no topical guesswork involved. Genre publishing has managed to accomplish this same shorthand information presentation for works of fiction. If you buy a Harlequin romance you

⁵⁰ Epstein, *Book Business*, 19.

know very close to just what you are going to get. It is the same with a fantasy, science fiction, mystery, or horror novel.

Fiction, especially literary fiction, has a mystique that causes publishers to produce it year after year, despite downturns in sales. A national literature is considered crucial to a country's identity and fiction publishing is often, therefore, supported by governments around the world. The Department of Canadian Heritage's Book Publishing Industry Development Program claims to "ensure choice of and access to Canadian-authored books that reflect Canada's cultural diversity and linguistic duality in Canada and abroad."⁵¹ Also at a personal level, many people feel that publishing fiction is creating art—a work of fiction accomplishes something that, like acting or painting, is worth more than money. While attitudes toward non-genre fiction are reverent, there is also widespread understanding that nonfiction funds publishing companies. Whether a house is publisher- or market-driven, the acquisitions process balances staying in business with the ideals that cause someone to enter the unprofitable business of publishing in the first place.

Upon its acquisition by H.B. Fenn, Key Porter received a mandate to concentrate more on profit, where previously it functioned primarily to fulfill Anna Porter's editorial vision. The trend in Canadian publishing towards consolidation into international, media-based empires has resulted in an industry dominated by multinational conglomerates, which are further accelerating the use of the market-driven philosophy of book publishing. By extension, this is encouraging

⁵¹ Book Publishing Industry Development Program, "Homepage," 28 October 2007, <http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/ac-ca/progs/padie-bpidp/index_e.cfm> (29 November 2007).

the proliferation of nonfiction in the Canadian publishing industry, because nonfiction fits more easily into the financial model by which these firms operate. Acquisitions at publishing houses in Canada have, over the past 20 years, moved towards favouring sure sales over contributions to Canadian culture, though the latter continues to motivate many publishers. Thus, nonfiction has been gaining ground as the primary product of trade publishers, because it fulfills the needs of larger, profit-driven houses.

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION—CONTROLLING COSTS

Following their acquisition, books enter the production process. In this stage books are taken from manuscript or proposal to their published form by the editorial and design departments. The differences between producing fiction and nonfiction are more subtle in these departments than in those that oversee the pre- and post-production phases. Production departments, after all, make the actual physical object, which has certain indistinguishable parts—a cover, pages, and type or images—no matter what its content. However, the practices of the editorial and design departments during production can influence a book's eventual profitability both through costs they incur and through the quality and intent of the work that they do. Costs for these two departments can be similar for works of fiction and nonfiction, though fiction editing is widely held to be more difficult and some expensive processes are unique to nonfiction projects. However, editorial costs for nonfiction are easier to control than those for fiction and nonfiction jacket design can directly assist the revenue-generating tactics of the post-production departments and fiscally help support a company's decision to publish nonfiction over fiction.

Editorial

An examination of general editorial practices can help to show that while literary fiction publishing is more prestigious, nonfiction is, with rare exceptions, more

profitable and predictable. Higher editorial costs of both time and money for fiction stem from the perception that editing fiction is more difficult than editing nonfiction, that it requires a rarer skill set, and that it should therefore be remunerated more generously. This may cause publishers to favour nonfiction projects. Some works of nonfiction, however, can incur the additional costs of legal reads, permissions, extended approval processes, and the possibility of lawsuits because of incorrect information in the text—all concerns primarily associate with nonfiction. These costs, however, are by choice; the publisher can choose to associated them with titles that they have little doubt will succeed in the market and cover the additional cost, while the higher costs of editing fiction are across the board and cannot be confined to particular, high-profile projects.

Key Porter Editorial Processes

Not all editors at Key Porter were involved in the production of fiction. Clare McKeon, Editor-in-Chief, along with Anna Porter and three other editors, were responsible for overseeing the process in which their books were taken from concept or manuscript to completion; more specifically, either Clare or Anna was ultimately responsible for each project, while the day-to-day aspects of the book publication process following acquisition and substantive edit fell to another editor. Of the three editors broadly responsible for particular areas of the Key Porter list—Michael Mouland oversaw the illustrated books, Linda Pruessen, the health-related and children's books, and Peter Atwood, other general nonfiction and corporate titles—only Pruessen worked on any fiction. I was assigned as

editor to books that had been substantively edited by McKeon, both adult fiction and nonfiction titles.

As an intern, I primarily filled the role of a Production or Junior Editor, responsible for a number of projects from copyediting to approving the printer proofs. I also worked closely with the design and production departments and scheduled the activities of those departments for my projects. The books I worked on at Key Porter gave a good overview of the activities of the company. I was only peripherally involved with illustrated or children's books, but held primary responsibility for three works of fiction, and numerous works of nonfiction.

Like most general trade publishers, Key Porter produces significantly more nonfiction than fiction. During the 2002 Spring/Summer season no editor at Key Porter worked solely on fiction books: McKeon supervised all adult fiction along with assorted nonfiction projects, and Key Porter's editor of children's and medical books, Linda Pruessen, supervised all children's fiction. The other editors—Peter Atwood and Michael Mouland—worked only on nonfiction. In a total list of 57 books, only 3 were new adult fiction, 2 were adult fiction reissues, and 4 were children's fiction. However, the percentage of Key Porter's back list which is fiction is much larger—the list's 207 works of fiction far eclipse any nonfiction portion of their back list.⁵² So, while each year Key Porter publishes only a few works of fiction, what fiction they do publish stands the test of time better than much of their nonfiction. This is understandable considering much

⁵² Key Porter Books, "Fiction Catalogue," <http://www.keyporter.com/book_listings.aspx?Type=Category&CategoryID=FICT> (15 October 2007).

nonfiction is published in response to current events—notable and recent examples include biographies of contentious public figures, such as Conrad Black and O.J. Simpson, histories of sports teams when they win their league finals, and books about countries currently in the news, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. These books allow for relatively sure, immediate profits, because interest in the subject is high at the date of publication. That interest, however, can also be short-lived, delivering no sustained profitability and, indeed, no lasting contribution to Canadian culture. This practice flies in the face of older publishing wisdom, which holds that a publisher's continued financial health depends on its back list.

Substantive Editing

The editorial process for works of fiction and nonfiction are broadly similar. Once a submitted or commissioned manuscript has cleared the acquisitions stage and been accepted by the publisher, an editor collaborates with the author on a substantive edit, which works on the raw manuscript to ensure a smooth logical or narrative flow. A substantive edit addresses broad aspects of the manuscript—concept, structure and theme, plot and character development in fiction, perspective and depth in nonfiction, but does not concern itself with issues of spelling or grammatical correctness. Doug Gibson, former publisher at McClelland & Stewart, says that he maintained for years that there was no difference between substantively editing fiction and nonfiction. More recently, however, he has come to believe that "in fiction editing you are taking a leap of faith into the author's imagined world, in nonfiction you should properly be

standing back in the role of devil's advocate."⁵³ Thus, he intends his editorial comments on fiction to focus on elements that pull him out of the author's world, while he queries nonfiction points that are not adequately defended or supported. This perspective illustrates a basic difference between the editing required by the personal and individual nature of fiction and that used for the factual stuff of nonfiction.

The widely held belief that editing fiction is more difficult, and should therefore be more costly, can certainly be supported. McClelland & Stewart publisher Doug Pepper says that fiction editing is more "nerve-wracking," though many editors prefer it to nonfiction editing.⁵⁴ This unease while editing fiction may stem from the fact that it is usually clear what the editing of a particular work of nonfiction should entail—there are accepted standards about how information is most clearly communicated—and nonfiction authors usually have little objection to the process of clarifying the presentation of their material. When substantively editing fiction, it is more difficult for the editor to identify the necessary and appropriate aims of their edit. In their consideration of a novel's structure, characterization, and plot, the fiction editor must strive to retain and enhance the author's unique voice, which varies project to project and does not subscribe to a set of usual standards. Literary fiction is praised when it communicates in a new and unique way, it is a field that is always changing, and the editor has to keep up, changing with each project. While most editors are capable of editing in accord with the rules of nonfiction, far fewer work

⁵³ Zsuzsi Gartner, "Midwife to a manuscript, or is that catalyst, confidant, or psychotherapist?" *Quill & Quire* V.60, no.12, (December 1994), 1, 8+.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

successfully with fiction. Editors, both in- and out-of-house, who are consistently used for fiction, can usually charge more for their services as their skills are more highly regarded and sought after.

Unlike fiction, nonfiction can be sold to publishers as a proposal because the topic and perspective of the book can be clearly expressed. This illustrates the straightforward nature of many nonfiction works. Nonfiction written by an expert in a field who is not a practiced writer can even be rewritten by a substantive editor because the purpose of the book is unambiguous. "It's often assumed that a book is solely the work of the author and the editor simply checks spelling, etc.," wrote Garth Jones, an editor at New Holland Publishers. "But in my experience, an editor has to do a lot of the research and be involved in the creative process of building the source material for a writer to work from—especially when working in the illustrated nonfiction field."⁵⁵ Cookery, gardening, crafts, and 'How to...' books are frequent examples of this practice, as are many autobiographies of well-known figures. While the editing Jones describes is extensive and in-depth, this practice illustrates that many works of nonfiction are not as complicated to edit as a work of literary fiction that strives to be unpredictable, new, and unique.

In editing a work of nonfiction it is facts about the topic and the author's perspective on those facts that must not be distorted. This intent has sometimes been used by publishers to avoid checking facts, dismissing one of the few elements that could lead to extra costs in substantive editing of nonfiction. At

⁵⁵ Rebecca Wilson, "Working in Publishing: An Interview with Garth Jones, Assistant Editor at New Holland Publishers." <<http://www.bloc-online.com/about-writing/publishing/GJones.htm>> (15 October 2005).

Pearson we often work under the assumption that the author is the content expert and that our job as editors is to help them communicate information, not to police its validity. In response to the discovery that James Frey's autobiographical work, *A Million Little Pieces*, was partially fabricated, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that “[book] editors and publishers say the profit-margins in publishing don't allow for hiring fact-checkers,”⁵⁶ illustrating the emphasis on profit in the publishing industry today. Indeed, Pearson U.S. publishes some textbooks that receive no developmental editing at all—if the balance sheet for the project cannot maintain an adequate profit margin while paying the cost for an editor, it must do without.

Author Approvals

Another aspect of an editor's job is to effectively and productively communicate the aims of an edit to the author. While determining the aim of an edit is considered more difficult for fiction, so too is successfully communicating that aim to a fiction author. Authors can respond very differently to editing—Cynthia Good, former publisher at Penguin Canada, proposed in a seminar at Simon Fraser University that fiction writers are generally more sensitive about their work, while many nonfiction writers are journalists used to the process of deadlines and rewrites.⁵⁷ Indeed, some fiction authors have gone so far as to dispense with substantive editing of any sort. Anne Rice, the popular author of vampire novels, declined substantive editing on any of her novels following her fifth, *The Queen*

⁵⁶ Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg, “Publishers Say Fact Checking Is Too Costly,” *Wall Street Journal*, 2006, <http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB113858811205659673-1oPuv_I9jyv2P9k_u8qNN_3obQM_20070130.html?mod=rss_free> (29 November 2007).

⁵⁷ Simon Fraser University, Master of Publishing Program, Seminar, 2002.

of *the Damned*, due to her feelings about the art of her writing.⁵⁸ Sales of her books contributed enough to her publishing company's budget that they agreed to this condition in order to retain her on their list. In an Amazon.com review of her novel *Blood Canticle*, Rice wrote, "I have no intention of allowing any editor ever to distort, cut, or otherwise mutilate sentences that I have edited and re-edited, and organized and polished myself. I fought a great battle to achieve a status where I did not have to put up with editors making demands on me, and I will never relinquish that status. For me, novel writing is a virtuoso performance. It is not a collaborative art."⁵⁹

For various reasons, nonfiction authors are more likely to be open to all types of editing. First, their primary purpose in writing is to communicate information; they generally do not, like many fiction authors, think of their work as art. While nonfiction authors are, like all authors, attached to their work, many editors and publishers believe that they are primarily attached to the information that they are communicating, not the way in which it is presented, the particular words that they have chosen, but rather to the meaning of those words.

Another reason why the author approvals process may be easier with nonfiction authors is that they are more likely to be published in other media, such as newspapers or journals, academic or otherwise, and are used to the editorial process. The very short lead time for newspapers and the—relative to

⁵⁸ Anne Rice, "Homepage," <http://www.annerice.com/sh_MessagesBeach2.htm> (29 November 2007).

⁵⁹ Anne Rice, Amazon Review of *Blood Canticle*, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/discussionboard/discussion.html/ref=cm_rdp_st_rd/002-1375877-9298460?ie=UTF8&ASIN=037541200X&videoPreplay=0&store=yourstore&cdThread=Tx2995TQ1YT1YI2&reviewID=R1FLRH CYSK13PB&displayType=ReviewDetail> (29 November 2007).

book publishing—short lead time for journals, cuts down on the extent of author approvals in these media. Many writers for newspapers will not even see the editorial changes that have been made to their article before it is published.

There is a set of circumstances under which the approvals process for nonfiction becomes more arduous. Some works of nonfiction, for example, *Surprise, You're Wealthy* by Patricia Lovett-Reid, a vice-president at Toronto Dominion Bank, and *Never Content: How Mavericks and Outsiders Made a Surprise Winner of Maritime Life*, a corporate history of the Maritime Life insurance agency, must be approved by committees within the respective companies sponsoring their publication. This can lead to extended timelines and more work for the editor, both of which add to the publication expense.

Copyediting and Specific Nonfiction Costs

Once the substantive edit is complete and the major editorial decisions have been made, a book is copy edited. A copy edit checks grammar, spelling, punctuation, consistent use of capitalization, compounding, hyphenation, symbols, and internal consistency of information, among other things.

Occasionally, other elements, such as overuse of the passive voice or adjective clauses, are corrected if the substantive or developmental editor has noted this as a particular weakness in an author's writing. With minor adjustments, copy editing is a similar process for fiction and nonfiction.

Despite the greater expense of performing standard substantive editorial procedures on fiction, there are certain editorial costs that can be incurred concurrently with a nonfiction copy edit. Some nonfiction requires additional

steps such as legal reads or photo and permissions research, processes that take place before the manuscript is formatted into book pages, or expensive post-publication corrections. Some works of nonfiction skirt the edges of libel and must be read and approved by a lawyer before publication. In the Key Porter Fall 2002 list, both Francis's *Immigration* and *Seal Wars* (an autobiographical work by Paul Watson, a co-founder of Greenpeace) were read by a lawyer, who flagged assertions that could be grounds for lawsuits against the publisher or author. Canadian publishers must be more rigorous in scrutinizing these concerns than American publishers because Canadian free speech laws are weaker than those in the United States. Statements that would be protected under the American First Amendment have no legal protection in Canada. For example, the Canadian Criminal Code includes a law against hate propaganda, such as the advocacy of genocide and the public incitement of hatred against people of the various protected racial and religious groups. Legal reads of fiction are rare because they include the standard disclaimer: "All characters are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental."

When manuscripts include images or long quotations copyrighted by someone other than the author, the publisher must seek permission to use those items. Some publishers have departments dedicated to this task, while others hire freelance researchers to process these rights. It is very important that this be done prior to publication because if a permissions form is not signed before the copyrighted material is republished, the copyright holder is in an extremely strong negotiating position. In 1999, Key Porter published a book with photos of a native

artist's dream catchers without proper permission and an incorrect credit line. The artist, understandably, has been in court with Key Porter since they refused to apologize and scrap the stock of the book, or pay her sufficient reparations.⁶⁰

Financially, errors in nonfiction can be very serious for a publisher. While errors in works of fiction can almost always wait for a later printing to be corrected, some errors in nonfiction are serious enough to require an errata sheet to be printed and inserted, or a book to be despined and replacement pages tipped in, or, worst of all, for the stock to be recalled and pulped. In the Key Porter Fall 2002 list, a freelance artist's telephone number was printed in an illustration on the inside front cover of Dennis Lee's newest book of poetry, and there was a typo in a quote from David Adams Richards in the back cover copy of a novel. Neither of these errors was fixed until the second printing of the book. However, Maritime Life Corporation had ordered 1000 copies of *Never Content*, their corporate history, for their 100th anniversary celebration, so because a picture of the current President and CEO was accidentally left out, the large sale to the company was in jeopardy and an immediate reprint, with extra cost for the unscheduled printing, was rushed through production, and the original printing was pulped. Textbook publishing is filled with examples of this; by virtue of the fact that they are supposed to teach, it is imperative that incorrect information be corrected immediately.

⁶⁰ "Judge rules against Key Porter over use of artist's work," *Globe and Mail*, 6 September 2005, R1.

While there are some occasional extra elements in the editorial process for nonfiction, the process is still much more straightforward than the editing of a work of fiction where the needs of the manuscript are less clear. Like the other elements in the nonfiction editorial process, legal reads and permissions and photo research are conducive to a strict set of rules that can be applied across many works. While no one can say that lawyers are not expensive, they are also not necessary for the majority of nonfiction works. In terms of editorial costs, despite the occasional extra steps for nonfiction, there seems to be little financial difference one way or the other with respect to editing and costs arising from it, except that the costs for nonfiction seem easier to control on a project-by-project basis, allowing more spending where a project can support it and less where it cannot.

Design

The processes of design departments with regard to fiction and nonfiction, like those of editorial, do not influence a company's inclination to publish as much as the processes of the pre- and post-production phases. While money is spent differently in designing fiction and nonfiction books, the costs are not as noticeably in favour of nonfiction as they are in many other departments. While the interior design of a work of nonfiction is usually more complicated and expensive, cover designs tend to cost more for fiction. The aspect of design that most affects other stages in the publishing process is the use of cover design by post-production departments in marketing and selling a book, a tactic which is more useful for nonfiction.

Interior Design

Nonfiction interior designs are almost always more complicated than fiction interiors. The majority of adult trade fiction is straight prose without pictures, diagrams, or headings below the level of chapter. It, therefore, does not require complicated formatting and the designer of a fiction interior has only to choose the text font, and the various trim, margin, and leading sizes, in order to achieve the desired book length. A work of fiction can often simply be converted from a word-processing program, such as Microsoft Word, into a layout tool, such as QuarkXpress, and automatically flowed into the book's pages, with some minimal effort on the part of a formatter to catch bad word breaks, orphans, and widows.

Even the driest nonfiction has headings of various levels and will usually include graphical elements as well. A corporate biography, *Never Content*, was the least complicated nonfiction I have worked on and it had three head levels and a four-colour photo insert. Other nonfiction can be so complicated that it needs to be designed on a page-by-page basis, rather than simply formatted (at Pearson this is a process in which designer-specified rules about fonts and colours are mechanically applied).

From a designer's perspective, the most complicated nonfiction books to design are those that combine a large number of different elements. Many educational books fall into this category and the simplest higher education textbooks at Pearson include many levels of headings; bulleted, numbered, and lettered lists; at least one and usually more types of boxes; and many other elements, such as icons, charts, photos, and assorted pedagogical elements that must be designed specifically for each book. Trade publishers produce gift books

like *Christmas at Home with Rita MacNeil*, ostensibly a memoir of singer Rita MacNeil's Christmases, but also a compendium of recipes, songs, crafts, photos, drawings, and a CD, done in four-colour and to a nonstandard trim size. This book was still far less complicated than a 1104-page textbook, for which I was the Production Editor, called *On Cooking: A Textbook of Culinary Fundamentals*. The interior of a work of fiction is clearly less expensive to design than the typical work of nonfiction, due to the simplicity of dealing with only narrative text.

Book Jacket Design

Book jacket design is not as straightforward as interior design. This is because, while interior design does affect the cost to produce the book, it does not, as the cover design does, affect the efforts of any other departments. Considering jacket design only through the lens of how much money a design department spends on designing fiction and nonfiction covers, the scales may be tilted slightly in favour of nonfiction—the image for a work of nonfiction is usually easier to choose since the topic is often clearer. However, jacket design influences a book far beyond the expense of its cover image. The cover of a book can be a potent sales tool, but can also, if badly designed, consign a book to the remainder bin. The clarity of nonfiction jacket design is what makes it a valuable tool for the sales and marketing teams—it is easy to show the topic of a nonfiction book through the cover image, not so easy to communicate the essence of a work of fiction. Sales projections for nonfiction are based on careful analysis of the extent and preferences of a book's potential market; the cover image is a convenient way to inform the target market that a book will fill their

needs. As nonfiction sales depend primarily either on their subject matter or their author, the cover strives to clearly communicate that information.

Different types of nonfiction communicate different information through their cover images. For example, in its Fall 2002 list, Key Porter published nonfiction books with three different types of covers. One type depended on a celebrity associated with the book for its sales. These books, which included *Christmas at Home with Rita MacNeil* (MacNeil is a Canadian folk music singer-songwriter), *Broken Harts: The Life and Death of Owen Hart* (Hart was a Canadian wrestler in the World Wrestling Federation who died when a televised stunt went wrong in 1999), and *Little Kenny in the Kitchen*, by Food Network celebrity chef Ken Kostick, prominently displayed a picture of the celebrity on the cover of the work.

Another type of nonfiction book relies on both its subject matter and the fame of the author in that field to attract readers. In these cases the author or contributor's name is used as an additional method of attracting sales, rather than as the main attraction as with bona fide 'celebrity' books. Key Porter books of this type include *Seal Wars: Twenty-five Years on the Front Lines* by Paul Watson (a founder of Greenpeace and lifelong animal rights crusader), *Immigration: The Economic Case*, by Diane Francis (a columnist for the National Post), *The Great Canadian Feast*, a cookbook produced in cooperation with *Canadian Geographic*, and *The Homemaker's Menu Cookbook*, produced in cooperation with *Homemaker's* magazine. The covers of these books featured

the author or organization's logo, but these elements were smaller and less central to the design than the portraits on the books based purely on personality.

In a third type of nonfiction book, the topic is the central element and the author is not considered a selling feature. Since these books are expected to sell based only on their topical content, the author's picture is not on the cover and the title is larger than the author's name. In the Fall 2002 Key Porter list, this category included *Shamanism in North America*, written by Norman Bancroft Hunt (the cover featured a Native totem), *Hockey Dynasties: Blood Lines and Blue Lines*, written by Jack Batten, George Johnson, Bob Duff and Steve Milton (the hockey players from the Howe family, Gordie, Mark, and Vic, are featured on the cover), and *The Most Amazing Hockey Quiz Book Ever*, by Ron Wight (with an unidentified hockey player on the cover). These books have cover images that mirror their theme. Though *Hockey Dynasties* was written and edited by lesser-known sports journalists, the book also included a forward written by Gordie and Colleen Howe (Gordie Howe is a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame), and the Howes names appeared in larger print than those of the authors of the book.

For all three of these types of nonfiction, the cover image is chosen to communicate, as clearly as possible, the book's topic, be it a person or subject. This clarity of communication is difficult to accomplish on the cover of a fiction book because what a work of fiction is about is more amorphous. Fiction covers, therefore, reflect a wider variation in how the cover image relates to the book's content. Proverbially, you can't judge a book by its cover—there is really no way for a cover image to remark on the quality of writing in a novel—so for fiction

covers, designers try to choose images that evoke the feeling of the book, or picture the area where a story takes place, or illuminate a theme in the novel. For example, the cover of *Down the Coaltown Road*, by Sheldon Currie, featured a close-up of a woman's cleavage displaying a cross, evoking the novel's central issues—Catholicism and adultery.⁶¹

One way around this limitation of fiction covers is available to works where the author is famous for being an author. Books by famous authors (almost always fiction) have the author's name printed larger than all other text. On a Tom Clancy or Danielle Steele novel, the author's name is always larger than the book title because that name is the element that sells the book. Readers only use the title to ensure that they are buying a new book by that author, but their primary motive for buying the book is the author.

Book jacket design can take longer for fiction than nonfiction, but the difference in time is minimal. The real financial difference between fiction and nonfiction covers stems from their utility in communicating with the consumer. The importance of cover design to revenue-generating divisions like sales and marketing means that those departments can have significant influence over the design process, more so at a market-driven publisher such as Pearson Canada, less at a publisher-driven house like Key Porter. While design considerations rarely influence an acquisition decision, they can have a considerable effect on

⁶¹ Here, as in many other places, my contentions about nonfiction versus fiction do not apply to genre fiction publishing, which shares many of the advantages of nonfiction. A regency romance, a fantasy novel, and a science fiction novel all use a few types of images that signify their genre clearly to the consumer. The typical images—a man and a woman wearing period dress, a mythological creature, or a space ship or robot respectively—communicate a large amount of information about these books very quickly.

sales and marketing plans and performance. In this sense, some publishers consider cover design to be directly related to a book's sales. Because it is valued by revenue-generating departments, this aspect of production can receive greater resources in companies that emphasize sales over editorial. One of the reasons why literary fiction is considered difficult to sell and an uncertain investment by many publishers is because the cover of a work of literary fiction does not function as an elementary sales tool as it does for other types of books.

Design and editorial are two steps in the production process where the many elements that create a physical book come together. They are also where many of the costs that are associated with aspects of publishing both fiction and nonfiction are introduced. As a cost centre, production departments are not central to the acquisitions decisions at a market-driven house, but are rather responsible for producing the requested texts while controlling their costs. At publisher-driven houses many more decisions, especially in terms of acquisitions, are made by editors who also work on the book during production. However, while production processes are not considered, like acquisitions and sales processes, in relation to the return-on-investment for fiction and nonfiction, they still show financial differences between the two genres that can affect publishing choices made by Canadian publishers. Costs for nonfiction, while they can certainly reach and surpass those for fiction in specific instances, seem to be more readily controllable. Especially in the processes of the design department, we see again that many of the difficulties faced by trade fiction in Canadian

publishing and the Canadian marketplace stem from the simple fact that it is not as easily classified as nonfiction and genre fiction. This characteristic, along with the inability to make significant cost cuts in editorial, makes it difficult for these works to take advantage of the efficiencies stemming from the consolidation taking place in the book publishing industry.

CHAPTER 4: POST-PRODUCTION—COMMUNICATING WITH THE CONSUMER

After a book has been published, the four post-production departments—sales, rights, publicity, and marketing—deal with its dissemination to the public, where a book succeeds or fails—makes money or fades slowly out of print on the remainder tables. All four are considered revenue-generating divisions, so their tactics, unlike those of the production departments, aim to maximize sales rather than minimize costs. A publisher's sales department typically sells publications to various outlets through which they reach the book buyer. Sales people cultivate relationships with the buyers for bookstores and other bookselling outlets, such as discount and grocery stores. This process is less time-consuming now as consolidation has led to fewer, but larger, bookstore chains, though returns remain a constant uncertainty. Sales people also investigate nontraditional markets for their books. Rights sales are another revenue source for defraying or justifying the cost of producing a book. It is in this final stage of the book publishing process that a book proves whether or not it is financially viable.

Sales and Rights

Trade Book Sales

Book sales are essentially a two-stage process, where a book is first promoted and sold to booksellers by the publisher's sales team, and then, with the

bookseller as intermediary, promoted and sold to the book-buying public. While this model is similar to many other types of retail, it also has one central difference that has a profound impact on the business of selling books. In an arrangement first made to encourage bookstores to stock new fiction by unknown authors,⁶² bookstores return unsold product to publishers for credit against future purchases—shifting the majority of the financial risk, and the onus to encourage sales of any particular book, to the publisher.

While the total amount of available shelf space in Canadian bookstores has grown due to the advent of big box and online bookstores, consolidation has led to significant new issues that threaten publishers. The market into which Canadian publishers sell their books has been consolidating year after year, until the majority of the books are sold through a single chain—the behemoth owned by Heather Reisman of Indigo Books and Music, Inc., that includes Indigo, Chapters, SmithBooks, Coles, the World’s Biggest Bookstore, and chapters.indigo.ca. This consolidation forces trade sales representatives to sell to a much smaller audience, one that holds Canadian publishers captive. Unless the sales channels are carefully devised to use other methods, if Indigo does not stock a trade title, that book is very unlikely to be profitable.

Returns

The existence and extent of returns are pivotal to a publisher’s bottom line. They are one of the primary issues with which trade book sales tactics are concerned, because they can cause a book that appeared, throughout preproduction and

⁶² Epstein, *Book Business*, 95.

production, to easily be profitable, to become a fiscal loss. Originally only in effect for new fiction, returns now apply to both fiction and nonfiction books. According to Doug Gibson, returns leave even major houses in limbo as 70 per cent of their annual sales can be made at year-end, but no concrete financial data is available until the returns on books sold that quarter come back:

Returns of unsold books have been part and parcel of the Canadian book trade for many years, so much so that the cost of expected returns is calculated into the retail price of a book. Publishers must face the uncertainty of waiting until February to learn the size of returns from their most active financial quarter—the fall-return-to-school and pre-Christmas season.⁶³

In 2002, the consequences of bookstore consolidation became clear with a massive increase in returns from Chapters and Indigo. In an interview, Simon Dardick, publisher at Montreal's Vehicule Press stated: "In 1999, my book returns averaged about 24 per cent. Chapters was about half a per cent below that, so they were very good. But in the first four or five months of [2002], it jumped up to 65 per cent over-all, of which Chapters in one month was 98 per cent and in another was 101 per cent!"⁶⁴ All publishers in Canada, both of fiction and nonfiction, felt the dire effects of this increase. However, publishers have combatted this danger by expanding into new markets with different sales models, many of which are more appropriate for selling nonfiction. Examples of these markets include direct sales, both online and catalogue, and corporate sales. Education sales are also structured differently than traditional trade sales.

⁶³ David T Nicholson and Diana T. Nicholson, "Nicholas Hoare and the Chapters Case," *Wednesday-Night.com*, 4 July 2005, <<http://pages.infinit.net/westweb/Qspell-Books.htm>> (29 November 2007).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Other Sales Models

Trade publishers, such as Key Porter, often have a division called Special Sales that identifies and exploits markets than other traditional bookstores. In Fall 2002, Key Porter made special sales of the *Heinz Barbeque Cookbook* to the Heinz Corporation, of *Never Content: How Mavericks and Outsiders Made a Surprise Winner of Maritime Life* to Maritime Life Insurance Corporation, and of *Innovation: Insights from Canada's Leading Research* to a Canadian research institute. These institutions made large, non-returnable orders of these titles and used them as gifts for employees or clients. While Key Porter also placed these texts in bookstores, the decision to publish was based on the guaranteed sales.

Harlequin works partly on another model, as does children's publisher Scholastic. While they both sell many books through traditional bookstores, they also have significant mail-order sales—Harlequin through offers in their books and Scholastic through seasonal catalogues distributed in many Canadian school boards. Harlequin and Pearson have both built on-line ordering systems. Mail-order and on-line business is especially profitable because they require no expensive retail or display space. As well, there is no need for a bookseller discount on the text, so the publisher receives the full retail cost of the book with no returns.

The textbook sales model minimizes returns by calculating more exactly the size of a market. Textbook publishers arrange with a professor for their book to be used for a class. The campus bookstore then orders based on the number of students registered in that class. Following this, the process mirrors trade sales—if the students do not buy the textbook assigned for their class then the

bookstore can return them. Sell-through, however, is more common in textbook sales because students are required to have these texts for class, library copies are scarce, and textbook publishers frequently update editions to stifle the used textbook market. The textbook sales method predicts sales more exactly because the publisher knows how many potential sales exist and, once an adoption is confirmed, it is relatively simple to calculate the likely number of copies that will sell.

Coach House Books, a small Toronto trade house and one of the most innovative Canadian publishers, was, at one time, “the only literary press in the world with its entire frontlist online in unexpurgated form.”⁶⁵ While Coach House Books has led the way for general trade publishers in exploring nontraditional dissemination, most general trade publishers have lagged behind other types of publishers, especially educational and legal, in this regard.

While new methods of book selling are continually being invented and transformed, the standard method, through a traditional bookstore, still accounts for the vast majority of books sold. While a few more newly developed models have made inroads into how certain types of books are distributed, literary fiction is still confined primarily to books and mortar stores, with some sales through online equivalents like Amazon. Generally, fiction suffers from the same handicap in sales that it does in other divisions—because a work of fiction is difficult to describe, it cannot take advantage of many shortcuts, such as

⁶⁵ Darren Wershler-Henry, *Free as in speech and beer*, (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2002), 100.

acquiring through proposal, editing by rule, or selling by topic, that have evolved for other publishing types.

Rights

International and other rights sales is an area where trade publishers of both fiction and nonfiction can make income that is not affected by returns. The types of rights for a book are many, including volume rights sales “to a [foreign] publisher, to a book club, to a large-print publisher, to a publisher in a developing country for a low-price reprint, to a foreign-language publisher, digest and condensation rights, anthology and quotation rights, one-shot periodical rights, second serial rights, single-voice readings on radio and television, and reprographic reproduction rights to allow the reproduction of text in media such as photocopying,” or subsidiary rights such as “first serial rights, dramatic, film and television rights, and merchandising rights.”⁶⁶ While some publishers embrace rights sales more than others, no Canadian publisher can afford to ignore these non-refundable earnings. One major reason for Key Porter's success is their extensive foreign sales, many in the U.S. market through Firefly Books. For Lobster publisher Alison Fripp, “a book has to have foreign-rights or movie-rights potential, or scholastic potential—the possibility of spinoff... If we can't find two additional sources of revenue other than the bookstore, then we have to look very hard before we publish a book.”⁶⁷ However, while rights are helpful to a publisher's overall profitability, they are unlikely to turn an

⁶⁶ Lynette Owen, *Selling Rights*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 31.

⁶⁷ Nicholson, “Nicholas Hoare and the Chapters Case.”

unsuccessful book into a successful one. Rights sales follow success—both prepublication buzz and post-publication profits.

The Rights department is responsible for making an International Rights catalogue. At Key Porter, the Rights catalogue was much larger than the standard catalogue for Canadian booksellers and included books that existed only as proposals and that would not be published without a rights sale. Distributed to foreign publishers and at international book fairs, a company's rights catalogue says a lot about what they would like to publish, rather than what they have published. However, despite the extensive non-existent books in the Key Porter catalogue, all of the fiction included there was already in production. There were, therefore, significantly more options for nonfiction rights sales. On the other hand, while rights sales can be used more effectively to finance a nonfiction publication prior to its acquisition, fiction has more types of rights to sell. Nonfiction is primarily restricted to sales of the right to sell the book in another country, while rights to fiction can also be sold to television and movie studios.

While nonfiction articles certainly sell better than short works of fiction, due to the preponderance of nonfiction journals and periodicals that allow rights sales to a single article to many sources, this does not directly apply to book rights sales. There seems to be no research that shows a distinct advantage for either fiction or nonfiction book rights sales, either in terms of amount of dollars exchanged or likelihood of either type of book making some kind of sale. The nonfiction put together by packagers, which is almost entirely financed by rights

sales, and the existence of rights catalogues leads me to believe that sales of rights are more fundamental to a nonfiction acquisition, but this is another example of an aspect of the differences between fiction and nonfiction that should be studied further to help maintain our indigenous literature.

The sales and rights divisions are the most directly tied to the financial success of a book, but they rarely have any input into its content or composition. Their selling tactics are supposed to work regardless of content. Recent changes in book distribution, such as on-line sales and book selling in new settings, have caused the primary venue for selling literary fiction, the traditional bookstore, while still the most prevalent method of selling books, to become neither the most profitable, nor the most reliable, method of selling books.

Publicity and Marketing

Sales and rights teams are assisted by the promotional efforts of publicity and marketing departments. There is a wide array of tactics at the disposal of the publicity and marketing teams; some work for fiction, some for nonfiction, some for both. Events, such as Book Expo Canada and book signings and readings, promotional items, such as Advance Reader Copies and blurbs in back cover copy, and paid advertising in bookstores and periodicals, can be used to assist in selling a book. These items are combined to make up the promotional plan for a book, though the composition of a fiction and nonfiction plan will vary significantly.

The functions of publicity and marketing departments are sometimes difficult to separate, but they can be generally correlated to the roots of their names: publicity has to do with a relationship with the public, while marketing addresses a market. In other words, the publicity department's job is to make the general public aware of the book, issuing press releases, arranging author signings, readings, and interviews, doing whatever they can to promote public knowledge of the existing product. The marketing department's work is more directed, finding and identifying the markets that are most likely to be interested in the book, targeting the efforts of the publicity department, and arranging for advertising aimed at the markets that they have identified. A general trend is that publicity is supposed to be 'free' (not that there is no cost to the publisher to arrange an author reading, but they wouldn't pay either the author or the bookstore where the reading or signing takes place), while marketing departments will spend money to perform market research, print marketing materials, or place advertisements.

Depending on the company, the composition of the marketing and publicity departments varies dramatically. Key Porter had a very small marketing department, but more dedication to publicity—their president, Diane Davy, spent some time doing marketing work assisted by a single contract Marketing Assistant, but Key Porter employed a Publicity Manager, a Senior Publicist (both salaried), and a contract Publicity Assistant. Their small marketing department was a reflection of the lack of market research performed at Key Porter. Publishing decisions were made based on Porter's decrees and editors' opinions

and there was little critical examination of markets and audience. Penguin Canada has similar-sized departments, and Pearson Canada has no publicity department at all because their publishing decisions are made based almost entirely on careful consideration of the potential market. Each publishing proposal at Pearson includes a breakdown, generated with the aid of the marketing department, of how many students in Canada take a course each year in which the proposed text can be used, how many students are currently using which other texts, and which students are expected to switch to the proposed new book. These numbers are not guesses, they are collected through thorough canvassing of higher education institutions across Canada, and estimates of a book's potential are measured through pre-publication queries to professors in that market.

ARCs, BEC, and Reviews

A primary tool of publicity and marketing departments are bound galley or Advance Reader Copies and these ARCs are used for many different purposes. They are distributed to book reviewers and bookstore staff in hopes that they will read and recommend the book to book buyers. The rights and sales departments will often also use them as samples in order to sell a book before its publication date. Though not technically ARCs because they are unbound, Pearson Canada sends out manuscript copies to professors in order to encourage market interest by allowing user input into the development process. Penguin Canada makes ARCs for about 90 percent of their books, excluding only annuals, such as *Tax*

Planning 2007, while Key Porter produced only ARCs of their literary fiction in preparation for Book Expo Canada 2002.

Book Expo Canada is one of the most important events at which Canadian publishers can market and publicize their books to Canadian booksellers. Publishers buy display space at BEC in order to inform bookstores about their publication list for the next season. BEC includes many publicity and marketing events, from book signings to cooking demonstrations to industry parties, but most ubiquitously you will find ARCs and newly published books distributed by the thousands. When preparing for Book Expo Canada 2002, Key Porter made ARCs of the literary fiction that they would publish in the fall, but made none for their nonfiction titles. While Penguin adheres to its blanket policy for ARCs, Key Porter felt that the sheer amount of nonfiction being published would make it unlikely that a bound galley would encourage a review of a nonfiction book. Indeed, nonfiction editor Fredrica S. Friedman points out in her essay 'On Editing Nonfiction' from *Editors on Editing*, that "the number of nonfiction books published in hardcover each year [in the United States] outweighs the number of novels by almost eight to one: 38 500 to 5 500."⁶⁸ While these numbers are always smaller in Canada, proportions are comparable—the previously cited UNESCO study of Canadian nonfiction and fiction published found a percentage of 14.3 percent fiction, while the numbers above work out to 12.5 percent. As well, many of Key Porter's nonfiction books are art and photo books, which are

⁶⁸ Fredrica S. Friedman, 'On Editing Nonfiction: Multiple Majors in a University of Subjects,' *Editors on Editing*, (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

not published as ARCs because of production considerations such as paper quality and nonstandard trim sizes.

Based on ARCs given out at BEC, reviews of Key Porter's three lead fiction titles appeared in late Fall 2002 editions of *Quill & Quire*. Reviews occupy an interesting place in the marketing plan of a book because, while they are sought after because members of the publishing industry hope that reviews increase book sales, there is little evidence that they actually do increase sales.⁶⁹ However, because there are few marketing tactics that have been found to reliably enhance sales of literary fiction, publishers continue to court newspaper, magazine, and web-based book reviewers, for reviews that they mine for blurbs and hope will stimulate word-of-mouth enthusiasm among book buyers. The 1996 Lorimer study of book buying decisions shows that most typical marketing methods, including various methods of advertising in different media, are almost entirely ineffective at selling books, and that word-of-mouth is the most popular answer when book buyers are polled about their reasons for choosing a work of fiction.⁷⁰ Many marketing departments have attempted to manufacture word-of-mouth, or to run word-of-mouth campaigns, mostly without success, though in 2005, BBC News reported on books that had become bestsellers in this way. Their list included works of fiction such as *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, and *The Lovely Bones*.⁷¹ Nonfiction, on the other hand, was found in the same study to be chosen by respondents because

⁶⁹ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 133.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷¹ BBC News, "Word of mouth 'winner for books'," <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/4311303.stm>> (29 November 2007).

of their interest in its subject matter. This makes the marketing of nonfiction easier because it mostly entails making the buyer aware, through the title, cover, and advertisements in appropriate locations such as specialty magazines and websites, of the topic of the book. This is one of the fundamental differences between how fiction and nonfiction can be marketed that makes sales of nonfiction more reliable.

Blurbs and Back Cover Copy

Reviews of a book are one source for the blurbs that publicity and marketing departments use throughout their promotional materials. In addition to the blurbs that come from periodicals, often a publisher will send an ARC to authors or public figures with recognizable names, especially ones to whom either the publisher or the author has a connection, and request that they supply a positive statement about the book. These blurbs can take numerous forms, from straightforward praise to more complex discussions of the content. One type that is of particular use for the promotion of fiction is exemplified in the following blurb by Michael Dirda of the Washington Post, for a recent Penguin novel called *The Shadow of the Wind*:

If you love A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the short stories of Borges, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Arturo Pérez-Reverte's *The Club Dumas* or Paul Auster's 'New York' trilogy, not to mention Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and William Hjortsbert's *Falling Angel*, then you will love *The Shadow of the Wind* . . . Superbly entertaining.⁷²

This quotation was highlighted in the front matter of the book and, clearly, the publisher's intent is to use this passage to sell the book by comparing it to

⁷² Carlos Ruiz Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*, (New York: Penguin, 2005), ii.

other works. Back cover copy and other marketing materials for a work of fiction will sometimes describe the author's style in terms of another, more widely read, author, in order to attract the more popular author's fans to buy the book.

Houghton Mifflin editor Jane von Mehren suggests in her *Editors on Editing* article, 'What Editors Look for in a Query Letter, Proposal, and Manuscript,' that "You might compare your novel to that of another writer; is your work like Stephen King's or Anne Tyler's, Amy Tan's or Clyde Edgerton's?"⁷³ This tactic is one that marketers can use to help sell the fiction of an unknown author, a welcome one since fiction by new authors is difficult to effectively promote.

Paid Placement

Another marketing tactic is premium bookstore placement, where books are placed on tables near the entrance, as aisle end caps, and with face-out shelving. These placements are all available for a fee at many, though not all, bookstores. They can be especially effective because these placements are sometimes at the instigation of the booksellers (for example, the Recommended by the Bookseller tables at Indigo), and so it can be difficult to tell if a display is paid for, or is an unpaid endorsement.

Amazon has a well developed recommendations system that automatically suggests an additional book that you can buy with the book you are browsing. Some of these placements, called "Buy X, Get Y" listings are paid, and a paid BXGY override the database-generated customer preferences. Unlabelled

⁷³ Jane von Mehren, "What Editors Look For in a Query Letter, Proposal, and Manuscript," *Editors on Editing*, (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

premium placement can backfire as the Gamespot video game review website found in the firestorm of disapproval that resulted when a rival gaming site revealed that the articles featured at the top of the front page were not chosen by the site's editors, but were rather an unlabelled paid placement.

Karl Siegler, publisher at Talon Books, objects to payment for placement schemes as a matter of principle. He says that while Chapters orders relatively small numbers of Talon books, they sell most of them. "In an independent bookstore, the owner-manager decides what to feature and what not to feature, and they don't charge the publisher to do that," said Siegler. As well, Siegler says that if he buys placement, the Chapters' order for 50 copies would all of a sudden become 700, so they would have enough books to fill a display. But if 600 of those were returned he would still have to pay the full cost for the display.⁷⁴

Paid bookstore placement can be used to promote both fiction and nonfiction, and can be extremely successful when capitalizing on current events, new movies, or other things of interest to many members of the general public, but it is not very useful for promoting books that are strictly tailored to the needs of smaller segments of the market. The digital version used on the Amazon site, however, is appropriate for more specific markets as a book can be placed on a page with another book very similar to it. This is another point which makes the clear topical definitions of much nonfiction into an impressive selling feature—without that definition it is difficult to use the primary marketing tool of convincing

⁷⁴ Nicholson, "Nicholas Hoare and the Chapters Case."

the book buyer that their purchase is just like another purchase that they have made before and enjoyed.

Book Signings, Reading Series, and Other Events

One general type of promotional event enables the public to meet the author of a book. These are primarily book signings and readings. Both fiction and nonfiction authors participate in book signings—promotional events which typically take place at bookstores where members of the public have a short opportunity to talk to an author while their book is being signed. Book signings are normally arranged by a publisher's publicity department—they are the most common type of author event and one of the simplest to organize. While they consolidate popularity for authors who are already well-known, they can be disheartening for new or unknown authors who have not yet built a fan base.

More involved are public reading series, such as Toronto's Harbourfront Weekly Reading Series, International Festival of Authors, and ALOUD: A Festival for Young Readers, which arrange for groups of authors, typically three or four at a time, to read short sections from their books. Ticket costs are usually nominal and the authors answer questions and sign books after reading. Similarly, every year, Key Porter fiction author Beatrice MacNeil hosts a literary event entitled 'Reading Ceilidhs', at which published Cape Breton authors give public readings. While nonfiction authors do participate, these events are more suitable for fiction. A nonfiction book will usually have to be scheduled alone because it addresses a specific audience who will not necessarily be interested in books on a different topic. By contrast, an audience can be entertained by six or seven different fiction

excerpts, while assorted, unrelated nonfiction readings would not be of interest to many people.

Unlike fiction events, nonfiction promotional events can sometimes be arranged without the author's participation. This is very rare for fiction despite the wide-spread Harry Potter parties at each new release. Opportunities to sell a nonfiction book can exist even without arrangements by the publisher. *The Heinz Barbeque Cookbook*, for example, was sold at a barbeque hosted by Heinz, *Seal Wars* could easily have been promoted at environmentalist and animal rights advocacy gatherings, books on running can be publicized at the beginning or end of a marathon, and *The Group of Seven in Western Canada* was placed in the bookstore of the Glenbow Museum, which holds a large Group of Seven collection.

Other Nonfiction Resources

It is possible to recognize and quantify the market for a work of nonfiction in a manner unavailable to fiction; resources for tracking consumer interests and buying patterns are expanding. At Simon Fraser University, my class used the Print Measurement Bureau database to mine information about readers of certain magazines, subscriptions, reader interests, demographic and purchasing patterns, average income, and geographic area, among other things. This type of demographic material is being gathered at an ever increasing rate by a broad spectrum of companies including Google and Amazon. Google and other search engines use the search information they gather to target advertising, as do Gmail web-based email accounts. This information can help the publicity and marketing

departments target specific segments of the population, for example, by identifying a large potential market, or a smaller market concentrated in a particular area, helping the marketing team decide exactly in which periodicals in which areas it would be most efficient to advertise.

A nonfiction book buyer often goes to a bookstore knowing that they want a nonfiction book about a certain topic.⁷⁵ The responsibility of the promotions team in this case is simply to make the buyer aware of the book's existence and then let the subject matter speak for itself. People know what they are getting when they buy a nonfiction book. If the book says that it is about conflict between Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, then the book is about conflict between Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, and while there may be quibbles about the quality or coverage of this or that book, 90 percent of the buyer's decision making is already done.

The reasons customers choose particular works of non-genre fiction are ill-defined—customers usually don't go to a bookstore knowing that they want a book in which a dentist reminisces about his childhood on Cape Breton, or about a family in northern Ontario in which the father molests both his daughter and granddaughter, the latter going on to become a virtuoso violinist. It is difficult for publicity and marketing departments to sell a book that it has never occurred to the consumer to want. This is why genre fiction—mystery, romance, science fiction, and fantasy—sells many more copies than trade fiction, and the reason why Harlequin is the most profitable book publisher in Canada. While the plot

⁷⁵ Lorimer, *Vibrant But Threatened*, 132.

may change in a work of genre fiction, the consumer knows, within certain parameters, exactly product they are buying. Without that baseline recognition, the marketing of other fiction in general, and literary fiction in particular, is a much trickier business.

The four post-production departments, along with acquisitions, are considered the most closely linked to a book's financial achievements and the performance of publicity and marketing departments is fundamental to a publisher's financial success. While returns affect the financial results for both fiction and nonfiction, nonfiction has several alternate sales methods that help to bypass that difficulty. When combined with the more numerous marketing and publicity tactics available for nonfiction, and the general climate of the Canadian book market, it is clear that a work of nonfiction is more likely to be profitable than a work of literary fiction.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The trends in Canadian publishing examined here show a key component of Canada's culture—our national literature—under threat. The dangers are two-fold. First, the remaining indigenous Canadian publishers are, primarily, small and often marginally profitable, while the majority of the industry now consists of branch plants of international, publicly-traded corporations. Second, nonfiction publishing is generally more profitable than fiction publishing. Through this examination of publishing practices, we have seen that both lower production costs and more reliable and predictable sales contribute to this inequity. Looking at the needs and aims of many Canadian publishers, both the large and profit-focused and the small and insolvent, the clear financial advantages of publishing nonfiction are highlighted and illustrate an impetus that may lead publishers away from their production of a vibrant and varied national literature.

The financial dangers to Canadian fiction can be addressed both through innovations in publishing and through public funding. Technological advances are being made that lower the cost of publishing so that the potentially minor sales for fiction are no longer financially prohibitive. It is no longer only Canada's most cutting-edge houses that publish online or by print-on-demand, or sell their books worldwide over the web; increasingly publishers, both large and small, use these tactics in order to publish books they believe are important, which they might have found too financially risky before these options were available.

Another necessary component in the struggle to support a national literature is government funding. Simply put, Canada has a small population and, therefore, a small market. The Canadian government has recognized that publisher support is necessary for many years—in 1972 the Canada Council began the first major federal system of organized subsidies to the publishing industry.⁷⁶ They continue today along with the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP), which supports “the ongoing production and promotion of Canadian-authored books,” by companies that are “75% Canadian-owned and -controlled.”⁷⁷

While this report examined the differences between fiction and nonfiction publishing practices and found that the disparity between these practices contributes to the plight of fiction publishing in Canada, addressing this issue requires far more study than this paper provides. Canadian publishers publish important works of fiction every year, but they do this despite their processes and their market, not because of them. It is important to remember that publishers create art and celebrate culture, and it is equally imperative to remind them to continue to do so even while business circumstances drive the industry in other directions.

⁷⁶ Association of Canadian Publishers, “About the ACP,” <<http://www.publishers.ca/about-history.htm>> (29 November 2007).

⁷⁷ Book Publishing Industry Development Program, “Aid to Publishers,” <http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/ac-ca/progs/padie-bpidp/demande-apply/atp/atp_e.cfm> (29 November 2007).

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