— Third Edition Fully Revised and Updated —

Bestsellers

POPULAR FICTION SINCE 1900

Clive Bloom

Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900

"Clive Bloom's Bestsellers will be an invaluable resource for both the student and the general reader of twentieth-century popular fiction. The book begins with a series of engaging and wide-ranging chapters on the principal publishing themes; but the bulk of the work comprises a very full series of pen-portraits of the best-known popular authors. For pleasure, and for study, Bestsellers will be a much-thumbed work of reference."

—Professor Dominic Head, *Brunel University, UK*

"Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900 is invaluable for university staff, students, and the general reading public (of twentieth-century fiction)."

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"There are few studies out there that combine so effortlessly a clarity and ebullience of style with first-rate, high-level academia. This is not simply a romp through Jackie Collins and Jeffrey Archer, but a surprising and illuminating discussion of those authors that have shaped the way literature is viewed in this country today."

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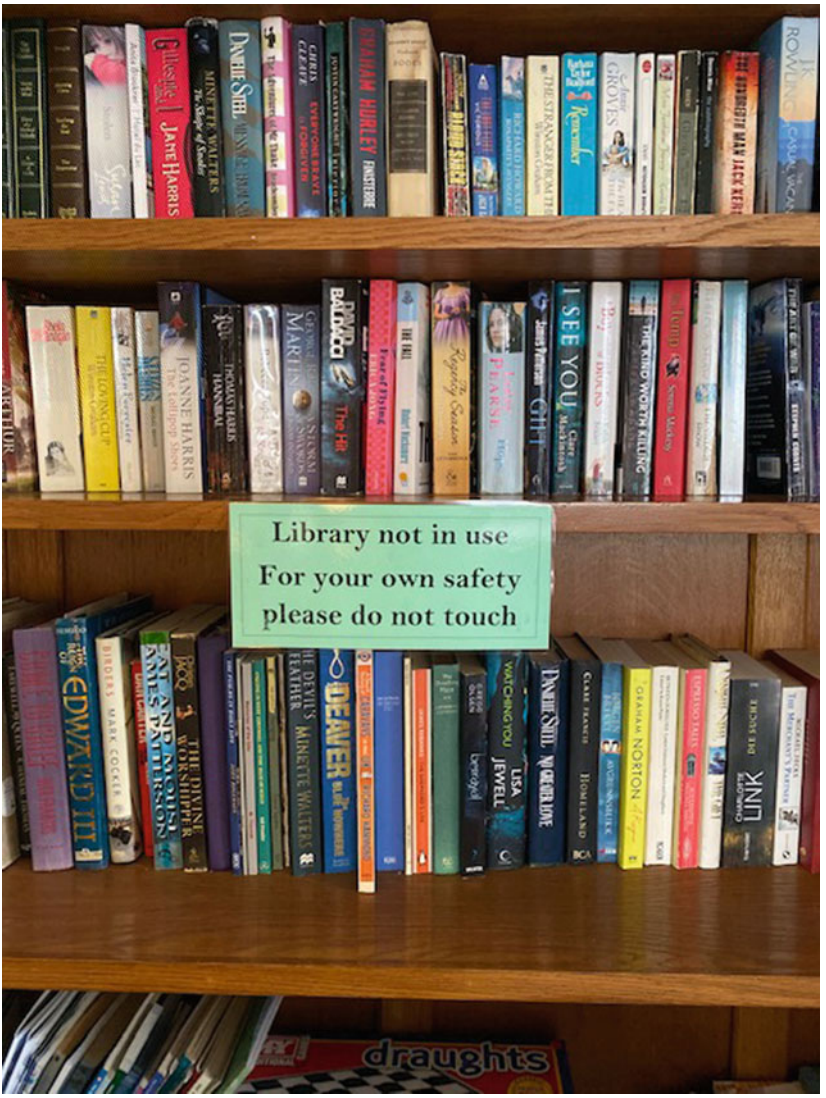

The dangers of reading:The Library of St Marty's Hall Hotel, Hugh Town (the Scilly Isles) taken during the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic

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Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900

Third Edition

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Clive Bloom
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For my Mum, Esther Bloom (1928–2020)

Preface to the Second Edition

Before the publication of the first edition of *Bestsellers* in 2002 information about bestselling novels was still clouded with contradictions and evidence was partial, scattered and sometimes merely incorrect. Factual evidence about how people read in Britain, and why, was still missing or was unavailable except in books from research library borrowing, books which were often difficult to find. Discussions of taste and value which had dominated English studies for almost sixty years were open to challenge and old prejudices had to be put aside.

Nowadays, even after the cultural history and reception of bestselling fiction has become a recognised area of interest, snobbishness still clouds our judgement about what makes up English Literature and creates distorted and repeated half-truths about how values circulate in a print economy which is commercially driven by publishers and booksellers. Even authors continue to repeat some of the cant against popular commercial fiction. Rarely do they have anything other than their own experiences, either good or bad, to go on.

In the first edition of *Bestsellers*, I attempted to provide proper information about the state of the last hundred years of reading—what reading actually meant and how books were bought and circulated. It was a study of the hundred years of the twentieth century and that century was passing, but just as it did new selling techniques began and new book sensations arrived, enough indeed to warrant the present volume which has been greatly expanded to cover the changes that have occurred as well as saying something about all the new authors that have appeared. Indeed for many years it was enough for literary critics to gather indicative authors to discuss the 'zeitgeist'. Today that is no longer possible as we know that reading habits are more eclectic and less literary than academics might wish.

When the book first appeared there were few creative writing courses in universities, now there are many and most use popular texts instead of 'classics' as teaching material. Whereas, a traditional English Literature course might

study Jane Austen and Henry James, writing courses use the latest bestseller to suggest what successful writing rather than 'literary' writing might look like. Major writers such as Martin Amis, Fay Weldon and Hanif Kureishi now have teaching posts, although Kureishi reputedly conducts his seminars in a café! Such teaching at best can release hidden abilities and prize-winning results or at worst it can create the repetition of publishing clichés and tired standardised plots simply because students are after that elusive bestselling book.

The present volume sticks to the format of the first edition, that is, an explanatory essay followed by a list of author entries from the start of the twentieth century to the present day. Where it differs is in the greater dedication to children's literature, the discussion of British Black and Asian writing, in the attention to the Scottish 'revival', in the investigation of television promotion and in more esoteric areas of enquiry such as 'Slash' fiction or web site promotion. There are greatly increased author entries which not only bring the story up-to-date but also have allowed considerable revision of earlier periods to include extra authors whose contributions were overlooked.

In the six years since the first edition (second edition 2008) some things have indeed changed. There is an even greater monopoly of booksellers on the high street and a restricted (and monotonous) list of authors that booksellers want to promote; Internet shopping has increased too, further restricting profit margins for publishers and also contributing to the restricted number of 'best-selling' authors, although a greater number of authors are available by this means.

Meanwhile, the appearance of television promotions on chat shows has apparently opened the market to a wider readership (or those who rarely read fiction), but in actuality has further restricted titles to a very short list of books which are dramatically discounted in bookshops and pushed to customers more and more likely to be led by the 'advice' of people like television 'magazine' show hosts Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan, whose own taste (or their researchers in league with the publishers) is debated (without criticism) by celebrities and then opened to a book club where there is further promotion of the title.

The current world of the British bestseller is vital, vibrant and ever changing. Its study can tell us much about the cultural climate of the nation and of the snobberies that ignore its production and thereby distort the history of English Literature. This book records many authors that are at present the height of fashion, but will fade all too soon, reminding us that even good books fade away.

London, UK Clive Bloom

Preface to the First Edition

Across the first seventy years of the twentieth century few records were kept of bestselling fiction, its authors, its readers, its production or its distribution. Those records that were kept were tidied away into box files and ledgers and left to gather dust until Hitler's bombs or American university bulk buying reduced them to an ashy or archival destiny. Only in the last quarter of the century did proper records, centrally available, make sense of the jumble of information that made up the bestseller market, and those were somewhat contradictory at best, given the guarded nature of accounting.

Many hours of research often brought to light problems to which there was no immediate solution—the record remaining fragmentary. Research into the history of publishing is now a thriving, if slightly esoteric, branch of literary history, but the literary history of the bestseller is in fact embryonic. Yet to undertake such a work is to gain an insight into one of the popular arts of an entire nation over a hundred years. To achieve this one cannot work alone and I am happily obliged to acknowledge a veritable army of researchers, helpers and well-wishers without whom this book would not have appeared. They are, in no particular order: Lynette Grypp; Ron Sutsko; Alison Main; Theresa Urbanic; Scott Eden; Meagen Ryan; Amy Crawford; Margaret Walsh; Courtney K. Sosnowski; Renée Ireton; Kimberley K. McGhay; Colleen Crowley; Kelly G. Puzio; Alexandra Matthews; Christina Grace; Laura Haden; Kristina Zurcher; Adam Manella; Denise M. Krotzer; Edward Dawson; Karen Lorenz; Annie Thompson; Anne Anderson; Allyson Luck; Meggan Newland; Kristina Peterson; Colleen Conway; Erin Kappler; Ed Dawson; Melissa Radey; Kathleen Scheibel; Kristen Doyle; Laura Anne Weiler; Courtney McDonough; Frank Chetalo; Katie Caspersen; Meghan Fitzgerald; Ryan Furmick; Tom Moran; Janine Bemasere; Sheryl Hahn; Tonya Lentzo; Marty Moran; Kathleen Sclef; Lindsey Hamilton; Lesley Belden; Beth Wladyka; Shaye Loughlin; Tara Lynn Jewett; Nora Mahoney; Malin Stearns; Sara Jost; Corinne Mahoney; Andrea Allocco; Allison Fashek; Jeffrey J. Harrington; Beth A. Burau; Anna

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A number of booksellers gave time and information, including: Books Etc.; Blackwell's; Foyles; Silver Moon Women's Bookshop (now sadly closed); Waterstone's; W. H. Smith. Publishers also gave time to be interviewed, including: Harlequin Mills and Boon Ltd; Pan-Macmillan Publishing; Robinson Ltd; and Virgin. Boots the Chemists and Harrods were kind enough to supply information about their lending libraries.

Like all research, this book remains provisional, a partial guide to the popular literary taste of a nation. It is a map of reading and as such may guide others to answers that I have missed, for which I hope it will prove helpful. It has been compiled from a number of sources: publishers' records; booksellers' accounts; library records; the pages of the *Bookseller*; Mass Observation; advertising notices; miscellaneous ephemeral sources; scholarly studies; market research conducted commercially as well as by academics; personal interviews. It is, nevertheless, intended as more than the sum of its parts. What is intended is not only to provide the most complete record so far of bestselling fiction in Britain but also to offer the sense of a cultural, sociological and aesthetic context, a landscape of one type of curiously specific phenomenon of recent times: the bestseller.

London, UK Clive Bloom

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Preface to the Revised Third Edition

> 'I think, I said, 'that I shall write an account of all this'.
>
> '…A book?', Phyllis asked.
>
> 'Well, I don't suppose it will ever be a printed book, with stiff covers and a cloth binding – but still, a book', I agreed.
>
> 'I suppose a book is still a book, even if no one but the writer and his wife ever reads it', she said.
>
> John Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes* (1953)[1]

Bestsellers is the story of the British imagination over the last hundred and twenty one years. This present volume brings the story of the bestseller from where the last edition left it, in 2008. Much has changed since then.

This new edition of *Bestsellers* brings the subject up to 2021. It might be asked why have a new edition at all, with the Internet, Wikipedia and Google and even 'Alexa' to do our searching for us, but even now, the truth is that no one site gives information on authors, gives clear guidance on publishing history and explains why international best-selling fiction (in this case in Britain) succeeds as it does. The comprehensive element is missing. This new edition seeks to fill that gap.

The core of this book is the triangulation between publishing, reading habits and bestsellers. The book looks at current book production, book-selling and bookshop strategies, self-publishing and television adaption, the new use of libraries as learning centres and internet providers and the use of media applications for reading (downloadable books, electronic print, Kindle

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and handheld devices). It also analyses the continuation of prizes, literary festivals and 'lists' of summer reads chosen by celebrities. *Bestsellers* explores the impact of technologies on reading and the reaction to technological improvements including children's reading practices and children's adaptions. This new edition will attempt to answer such questions as the nature of literacy in the twenty-first century and how books and print (and other reading modes) function as cultural collateral and as familial and social cohesion?

Bestsellers (2021) brings the story up to date, looking in detail at new reading habits, the new publishing industry, the relationship of print with technological change and significant changes of reading practice in the last ten years. It also integrates changes in fiction for different demographic groups including the LBGTQA+, black British and Asian book-reading communities and considers female authors, young adult authors and writers producing illustrated books for early readers (a significant growth area) as well as investigating non-English-language books (especially in the languages of the Indian subcontinent) currently read in Britain by older populations and it includes some observations on eastern European reading in immigrant communities. Thus, the last ten years show the vibrancy of the book market, the entrepreneurial and exciting directions publishers have taken and the breadth of reading habits that we all share, but it also exposes the fragility of the country's bookshops and the library system that many depend upon for their leisure reading.

Many years ago Queenie Roth, the formidable half of that famous literary double act 'Frank and Queenie Leavis' berated her university colleagues for secretly liking middlebrow fiction. She had done her research work in popular reading habits and so she knew what she was about. Standards had to be maintained against the mass media and against popular taste. For goodness sake, she asked in despair, what were academics doing with the likes of Edgar Wallace and Dorothy L. Sayers? What indeed. Civilization had gone to pot.

Queenie wouldn't have liked Judy Finnegan or her husband Richard Maddely two halves of the television couple known as Richard and Judy whose magazine formatted show aired at five o'clock on Channel Four and whose book club section ran between 2004 and 2008.

The television show was the most influential bookselling tool in the United Kingdom. The list generated by Richard and Judy's recommendations (the show finished in 2008) were the most powerful bookselling tool in the United Kingdom apart, perhaps from the Booker Prize. Queenie Leavis would never have bothered to buy a Richard and Judy discounted summer read (as then sponsored by Galaxy chocolate) nor would she have been able to relax on her pool-side lounger with a copy of Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* (a 'richly told story about family' and vampires) as she rubbed Ambre Solaire into her sun-kissed body. Khaki shorts, a cold shower and a copy of one of George Eliot's longer novels, perhaps. Times were harder then.

Literary criticism has always been a cocktail of snobbishness and insight and even now it is difficult to deal with the influence of shows like Oprah (who started it all) or the Richard and Judy programme on the reading public when

anything commercial is immediately suspect (and looked upon with green-eyed envy by academics who sell their books in multiples of ten). Literary criticism as practised in universities has never been about the public or how real people read and is, even now, tied to canons of literary taste that have changed relatively little since the time of I. A. Richards.

Is it any wonder that the extraordinary influence of Richard and Judy's Book Club's Summer Read and Christmas Special selection have had on the life of Britain as a literary nation and have been so ignored. This is even more surprising as the authors whom academics applaud at Hay On Wye or Cheltenhan made their money in the stack-'em-high- sell-'em-cheap marketplace of Waterstones or supermarket shelves.

The facts tell an incredible tale. *The Guardian* official UK bestseller list for December 2006 suggested from reported sales that 21 of the top 100 titles were by authors that have been selected by Richard and Judy. That represented 6.5 million copies or 26% of all book sales at the time: one in every five of the top 100 books sold in the United Kingdom was recommended by the show.

These figures followed the impact of the couple's Book Club of 2004. A particular highlight was Kate Mosse's *Labyrinth*, which as well as winning the Richard and Judy's Best Read at the British Book Awards, went on to become the biggest selling paperback of that year. Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveller's Wife* (greatly puffed in the United States) sold 45,000 copies in Britain after being recommended on the programme. Victoria Hislop's *The Island* (2006), which featured on the Summer Read for that year and went on to win the Galaxy British Book Award 2007, also hit the top spot in the literary charts, knocking aside another of the duo's recommended reads, *Sam Bourne's The Righteous Men* ([2006]; a DaVinci Code style novel) which went down to number three. The winner in that year's Book Club selection was *The Interpretation of Murder* (2006) by Jed Rubenfeld (Freud in Manhattan). It sold over half a million copies and went on to become one of the paperbacks of the year. Six of the other seven titles selected have all also sold over 100,000 copies, selection on the shortlist guarantees bestseller status.

Altogether between January 2004 and the end of May 2006, consumers had purchased 10 million copies of the 30 books appearing on the Richard and Judy Book Club (RJBC for those in the know) and spent over £58 million. Almost 30% of purchases or £16 million worth of goods were prompted by the appearance of the title on the television show and 41% of purchases were prompted by seeing the book with the R & J sticker in leading bookshops where heavy discounts and prominent displays leave room for little else.

Publishers were delighted with this windfall and were allowed to submit half a dozen tiles which were read by the Cactus production team as well as Richard and Judy before a selection was made on 'gut' instincts for a 'complete mix' and a 'great' read. Random House benefited most from the programme's promotional technique of picking celebrity readers and a book club to review what's on offer. Such sales accounted for over a fifth of all Random House profits since January 2004.

Booksellers too were hardly crying in their gin. Chain bookshops alone accounted for sales of just over half the titles which meant that independent bookshops had no choice but to follow, narrowing the choices on offer. Almost all the purchases were prompted by an appearance on the show. Commercial authors, on the whole, had to be television friendly. Less books, but more profit, meant that in 2008 even the supermarkets were cashing in with books sold alongside other groceries as a whim purchase when browsing the aisles, books heavily discounted in multiple deals of '3 for 2'. In 1926 publisher Stanley Unwin had announced that advertising was a waste of money. Times have certainly changed.

Yet it is in the readership figures that things get really interesting. So-called AB purchasers were heavy buyers of books in general, representing 17% of a sample population, but accounting for 28% of all books bought since January 2004. They meant even more to the programme's market, accounting for 37% of all Book Club purchases. A massive 44% of AB readers were prompted to buy specifically by a television recommendation or celebrity appearance and almost all AB readers were women, the books circulating between mothers and daughters, sisters and girlfriends.

Curiously, readers from the Midlands and the North of England accounted for over a third of purchases. Those living in the Midlands and Lancashire appear most influenced by the Richard and Judy's relentless literary bonhomie (Tony Robinson, on the programme as a celebrity critic, once said he didn't like a title and was treated like a leper when reviewing Victoria Hislop's book). Queenie Leavis may have predicted the future of publishing many years ago, but she showed that mixture of shrewdness and snobbery that has marked literary studies ever since and by turning her back on the reading public she missed an important lesson in humility.[2]

Although the television show was axed in 2008, the couple still continue their close relationship with the book industry and in 2010 joined up with W. H. Smith to produce a series of ongoing podcasts with popular authors. In 2020 the pair declared on their website that they were the United Kingdom's 'biggest book club' and invited followers to read more of their 'riveting titles' and to 'grab a cuppa and join Richard and Judy on the sofa for this brand-new podcast, and welcome to the Richard and Judy Book Club, exclusive to W H Smith!' or if so inclined to 'join the conversation and let [them] know what Book Club novels you've been reading recently by emailing'. Such cosiness suggests the intimacy and the community of the bestseller. According to the website message, the modern bestseller will not challenge you or spoil your afternoon, neither will it judge you or disturb you. This might be said to be the diametric opposite of Booker choices and the social differences between readers of both is implied in a language tinged with class and gender assumptions, most of which are probably correct. The club knows its audience. Indeed, in 2020, of W. H. Smith's leading titles Tim Weaver's *No One Home*, Gilly Macmillan's *The Nanny* and Christy Lettori's *The Beekeeper of*

Aleppo were all listed as 'bestselling', a self-fulfilling prophesy which draws in even more readers.[3]

So what then is a bestseller? As this book shows it is one that has either passed a considerable sales threshold (the figure having moved from 50,000 in the 1930s to 1950s to a hundred thousand in the 1970s, to a million or more nowadays). Some books and authors have phenomenal worldwide sales figures. J. K. Rowling has sold nearly 500 million copies of her Harry Potter series including around 50–55 million copies of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix; Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* sold 65 million, but *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* had sold an eye-watering 120 million copies by 2020. Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* (2003) broke all UK records and sold 80 million copies worldwide, but it seems also to be one of the fastest discarded books in history. Agatha Christie is still the most read British author with sales of over 100 million for one title, *Then There were None* (1939), the title having been conveniently changed three times. Christie, like Rowling and Tolkien (whose tale of a 'Hobbit' not only won scholarly plaudits but also tops the 'juvenile' reading list at 100 million copies) have a huge industry surrounding their works, jealously guarded by CEOs and corporate lawyers.

Older books too have phenomenal sales figures: Charles Dickens tops the entire list with around 200 million copies of some titles, but who finishes anything other than *Great Expectations* (novelised 1861) and *Oliver Twist* (novelised 1838) outside school lessons remains a moot point. H Rider Haggard's *She* (novelised 1887) is included in one list of classics as a 'forgotten book', but according to some accounts has sold over 85 million units.

As with earnings generally, the difference between the income of authors at the top of the bestselling list and the rest is significant and growing. This is partially through the monopolisation of advertising, media appearances (through adaptations for film and television, etc.) and Internet presence. It is hard to compete in a world where an author has to be an entrepreneur. One can certainly argue that this was always the case, as from at least the mid-nineteenth century appearances and packaging certainly helped writers like Dickens gain their controlling positions. Nowadays this has greatly increased the power of the leading names who have turned themselves into branded products. 1% of writers produce 13% of sales and this shows no sign of slowing with royalties set at the low level they have been for fifty years or more. Even successful writers such as Martin Amis and Bernardina Evaristo have to take positions at universities to supplement their income. The age of the writer-gentleman (if it ever existed) has come to a close—even M. R. James and J. R. R. Tolkien had their day jobs.

There are a growing number of writer millionaires, but a decreasing number of writers who can earn a living through writing alone: of the 40,000 also-rans in all categories of authorship most sell less than 3000 books per year. This, however, may be a very decent number of sales and something to be proud of, but it will not pay the bills. The world of celebrity writers started earlier

in the twentieth century with authors such as E. Philips Oppenheim enjoying a lifestyle that included the French Riviera, but even Oppenheim might be amazed at the money the top 50 authors earned in 2016. Their collective earnings went up by 21% to 199 million pounds out of an overall 6% growth in the book market to 1.5 billion pounds. Juliet Donaldson led earnings with her *Gruffalo* and *Stick Man* books with her 89 titles grossing 13.8 million pounds; David Walliams followed with earnings of 11 million pounds followed by J. K. Rowling with both the Harry Potter and the 'Robert Galbraith' series netting 8.3 million pounds. Children's books dominate the bestselling author list. Sales figures for 2016 show Donaldson's earnings had grown by 8.7%, Walliams' by an enormous 19.8%, Jeff Kinney had increased by 3.8% to earn 6.8 million, but E. L. James' erotic adult love story earned a whopping 5.99 million pounds and increased in value by an extraordinary 103.8%. On the other hand, celebrity biography and, interestingly, men's adventure took a downturn, suggesting the volatility that may occasionally be found in reading habits. Nevertheless, YouTube 'celebrities' such as Zoe Suggs and Alfie Deyes both sold large quantities of books to younger readers whose main source of reading interest may now be based in social media.[4]

Interestingly, there are a number of famous authors whose books may only have sold moderately well over the years and whose fame as authors may be decided by their television or film adaptations rather than the words on the page. Such may well be the case with John Galsworthy (b. 1867 d. 1933) a recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1932, who found fame as a playwright and whose *Forsyte Saga* was avidly watched on the television during the 1960s and clearly influenced *Downton Abbey*, but who is rarely, if ever read nowadays. The same may be said with less certainty in regard to Evelyn Waugh (b. 1903 d. 1966) whose *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) was one of the landmark television serials. The detective writer and scholar Dorothy L. Sayers (b. 1893 d. 1957), who earned a living writing advertising and lived very modestly, is often placed alongside Agatha Christie in terms of repute, but has never had the international sales or success with Lord Peter Wimsey as that of the creator of Hercules Poirot. Neither did Margery Allingham (creator of Albert Campion), one of *the grande dames* of the 'Golden Age' of the detective genre.

Children's authors such as Hugh Lofting (b. 1886 d. 1947) whose *The Story of Dr. Doolittle* (1920) is more loved in its film form, as is the case with P. L. Travers (b. 1889 d. 1996) whose tales of Mary Poppins had to be 'Disneyfied' to catapult her character to internationally iconic status, a wait of over forty years since her creation first appeared in print. Yet Travers really never had, nor has had, a large general readership as, perhaps, is also the case with Elizabeth Beresford (b. 1926 d. 2010) whose 'Womble' characters are far better known through television, merchandising and music. The same may be said for Shirley Jackson (b. 1916 d. 1965) whose gothic horror story, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) remains an influence on many modern horror writers such as Stephen King and a constant source of inspiration for television and film, but is not likely to have had many general readers. Horror and

Science Fiction are both markets where there are few readers who buy many books.

Bestseller status may mean that the book exceeded, by a considerable margin, the expectations of the author or publisher, guaranteeing continuing interest. Such books often fill the general 'fiction' or 'literature' shelves at shops such as Waterstones. Continuously in print, books like Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) or Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast (Titus Groan) series still command sales, but whether in the hundreds or thousands is debateable. Peake is nowadays a 'bestseller' only in accumulative terms and from mere longevity, and that might still be questionable. Elsewhere, whilst many readers will recognise the names of Mervyn Peake (b. 1911 d. 1968) and Frank Herbert (b. 1920 d. 1986), few will have ventured into the surreal world of *Gormenghast* (1950) or ventured into the realms of science fiction, both areas remaining niche markets, with the original film of *Dune*, recognised in its incarnation as a cult, rather than a popular, movie. Peake's brilliant work is weird and difficult to interpret, but it survives according to the laws governing 'quality' fiction which are still adhered to by publishers and booksellers and guarantee longevity, but small annual sales. Nevertheless, worthy books do not always survive. Other works have steady and consistent sales based on an assured and loyal readership. Such is the case with detective and crime fiction with Peter James, Ian Rankin and Val McDiarmid consistently selling tens or hundreds of thousands of books per year, and total sales running into millions.

Some authors are more problematic in terms of bestseller status. E. M. Forster (b. 1879 d. 1970) had in the 1960s and 1970s a monumental reputation, especially on university campuses as part of the 'EngLit' curriculum. His books were seen as cautionary tales regarding the nature of societal hypocrisy, imperial exploitation and homosexuality. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize fourteen times. Many of his stories, especially *A Passage to India* (1924) were adapted for the screen, but were his books ever read outside of the relatively small group of middle-class intellectual readers to whom he appealed (as with Henry James)? His decline in fame is shared with that of D. H. Lawrence and the decline of English Studies generally and the fading of those anti-Victorian values that epitomised the modernists of the early twentieth century. As with Lawrence and also Virginia Woolf, their world has long been superseded and their values are now less artistically interesting than they are historical pertinent. The fact that they critiqued their now 'lost' world may be the reason they have faded. It remains a matter of debate.

Fame is no guarantor of sales or of longevity either. Some longevity may be instilled in schools. One wonders if Aldous Huxley's (b. 1894 d. 1963) fiction, especially *Brave New World* (1932) would be so famous if generations of British grammar school children weren't brought up on the book? *Chrome Yellow* (1921) was not such a hit and it was his other non-fiction books, such as *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *The Devils of Loudon* (1952) which influenced a radical youth readership in the 1960s and 1970s. Equally important is *Lord of the Flies* (1954) by Nobel laureate William Golding (b.

1911 d. 1993), whose dubious moral and political message was force-fed to generations of school children cramming for exams. This is a bestseller by *force majeur* rather than reader choice. Even more problematic are the sales for novels like Anthony Burgess's *Clockwork Orange* (1962) which found belated fame with the Stanley Kubrick's film of the same name (1968). Burgess certainly seems to have made little money out of the book he wrote for cash and which he didn't like, but *Clockwork Orange* seems to have had both a post-film boost and consistent sales since to warrant an entry in the lists of bestsellers compiled here.

There is one route that might allow a writer a healthy income and which circumvents the traditional trawl through *The Artists' and Writers' Yearbook* to find an agent and possible publisher, and this is the advent of e-books called Kindle, which Amazon launched in 2010 (although the subject of e-book publishing had been under discussion since 2004 in publishing circles), which allow access to the publishing market by avoiding traditional methods (sending a manuscript and having it assessed by a professional editor and/or reader), time wasting delays and endless disappointment.[5] Kindle Direct Publishing books can be priced at just 99p and give a 30% profit to the author. The major opportunities for sales of some books and genres may now rest online.

Self-publishing no longer has the stigma it once had. Authors may begin successful careers this way, or increase their share of the market by opting for this route. Such publishing puts the emphasis on the author as entrepreneur and as editor and producer, using software provided by Kindle Direct Publishing which allows writers control over their material, editing decisions, font size and type and cover design (and for a small fee) advertising. Royalties are self-set and may be up to a third of the price of the product with a generous profit-sharing scheme under 'Kindle Select'. If an author is lucky this may lead to huge profits. Kindle is offering an alternative to traditional publishing as a direct rival using digital technology and 'hobbyist' techniques.

Struggling authors might get themselves lucky sales through word of mouth and get sales of between 1000 and 3000 units per day and end up with a large profit. Such was the case with Mark Edwards whose rocky start in e-book publication nevertheless led him a to six-figure salary in 2017, even after a strong book deal went sour.[6] Such self-publishing appears to give writers the autonomy they had always thought they needed (the relationship to the agent or publisher is always a neurotic one). Autonomy gives authors control over the creative process, but it usually needs the power of Amazon to help them succeed and an entrepreneurial author to push his or her work.

The dominance of Amazon in this arena cannot be underestimated. E-books appeared to be the end result of traditional publishing. Even Luke Jennings whose 1995 Booker prize nominated novel *Atlantic* (1995) vanished without trace had his career elevated to another level by the publication of four e-book novellas (2014–2016) telling the story of the assassin Villanelle. His *Killing Eve* series (turned into one book in 2018) has become one of the BBC's most watched series. E-books and Kindle have, however, become less

popular recently, levelling off in 2018 at roughly 30% of the market. The day of the e-book bestseller may be over or may just have hit a temporary low.

Nostalgia tinged with amused irony has allowed for a whole new idea in book production that combines rose tinted memories from the 1960s and 1970s with the ironic vision of today. Perhaps the most amazing success of the last decade was not from the hands of known authors, but from the little-known comedy scriptwriters, Joel Morris and Jason Hazeley who working for Penguin, revitalised the Ladybird list so beloved by the children of the 1960s and 1970s, thereby selling 7.3 million pounds of redundant illustration stock. Morris and Hazeley have been friends from school and had left to become successful comedy scriptwriters for both television and film. Nevertheless after their success with *Bollocks to Alton Towers: Uncommonly British Days Out* (2005), they found their next publishing project in the archives of Ladybird books now owned by Random House. These older illustrated books produced between 1940 and 1975 remain a memory for many, and were a gateway for learning to read and learning about the world. With their beautiful one-page illustrations the books are still prized as original, retro and comforting. Morris and Hazeley took the original illustrations and recaptioned them for a cynical, bored and overly knowing readership and Penguin put them in gift and card shops at prices that allowed for a younger readership who did not grow up with the original, and to create books that are designed for almost instant oblivion alongside greetings gifts and birthday cards.

Original illustrations to books like, *The Story of Railways*, *Coarse Fishing* and *Going to School* were now fashioned into books to be read for a laugh on the toilet and then passed on—nostalgia tinged with cynical irony. The first title was *The Ladybird Book of the Hipster* followed by *The Ladybird Book of Dating and How It works, The Ladybird Book of the Mum and the Dad* and the truly great *The Ladybird Book of the Shed* with its loving look at men of a certain age and their anxieties. The books have sold 5 million copies in two years, have been translated into Mandarin and earned 35 million pounds worldwide, beaten only by the likes of Julia Donaldson and David Walliams. These books are decidedly not the loved originals, bought with book tokens and stored in lofts or nowadays collected by those who clamour for 1970s retrospection and display them on shelves in apartments in Hackney. These books deliberately avoid gross or coarse humour or divisive subjects, but they are disposable accompaniments to a cynical age bereft of its innocence, laughter directed *at* rather than with the subject.[7]

Ultimately, the fate of most titles will be in the bookshop rather than a gift department stocked with novelty books (although bookshops have increasingly seen the advantage of stocking novelty impulse buys). Book tables in chain bookstores, with greatly reduced prices, encourage purchase but depress profits. Numbers may be kept up with convenient discounts. And certain publishers will appear to have leverage in so far as they are in financial cahoots with the bookselling chain. Thus, a book of little cultural or intellectual value may become a bestseller precisely because it is thrust under the public's nose