

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Old, Dead Paradigm

Chiwan Choi · Thursday, November 1st, 2012

With the recent news that Penguin and Random House were merging (which led to [this great conclusion](#) by John Scalzi), I have heard many people — writers and readers alike — let out a collective and exasperated, “Great, now the Big Six has become the Big Five and we have even less options!”



But really, when were those actually options for 99% of the writers out there? And for readers, do you even care which publishing house put out a book before you consider purchasing it? I mean, when’s the last time you were interested in picking up a book and saw that it wasn’t published by Random House so you decided against it? Ever?

I was having lunch the other day with a writer friend about her manuscript. I get into these conversations quite often with incredibly talented writers and each time, I feel lucky to share with what little insight I have. Inevitably, the question comes up and my answer more often than not is:

Yes, I think you should self-publish your book.

It’s 2012. Nothing is like it used to be. But we still hang on to this antiquated model of the publishing industry. We still frown upon self-publishing. Vanity press, we call it, emphasizing the word vanity with such disdain. We act as if Joyce and Whitman and Thoreau and [other notables](#) never self-published. Furthermore, when we see musicians putting out albums through their own labels and filmmakers making their own films on their own or painters and sculptors creating without a gallery backing them, we applaud their drive, their decision to control their art.

But with writers. Nope. If you self-publish, you must not be too good. Listen, as a publisher running a business, I am not sitting here saying that the publisher is obsolete. What I do believe is that once writers learn it’s all bullshit, that they’re the ones who hold the most valuable commodity, then not only will it open up so many more possibilities for them, but it will actually create more opportunities for small independent publishers like Writ Large Press. Writers will be able to focus on finding a publisher that suits their wants and needs. Small presses will be able to showcase their strengths — whether it’s design, PR, just all around street savvy — to neutralize the multi-million dollar budgets of Big Media and compete in a level playing field.

In the past few months, a handful of different people have pointed out to me one of the most important things that I need to do as a small press to get our books reviewed by serious reviewers is to get rid of this seemingly meaningless end page.



That barcode on the last page is a tell-tale sign of a “self-published” book, I have been told. This means it’s not legitimate enough for reviewers. So our options are either exacto those pages out (messy and unconvincing) or spend a chunk of up-front money to order a batch from a different printer without that barcode page.

There are many problems with the *rules* of this game.

First off, that’s more cost, unnecessary cost just to feign an arbitrary rule of legitimacy. Our writers aren’t self-published obviously. But because of the POD printing service we use, we have *The Mark*. We can’t in good conscience spend more money just to play a game of pretend with reviewers, costs that will be counted against the author’s royalty payment. Lose-lose situation.

Most importantly, the idea that the presence of a barcode on the last blank page is more important than the content contained in the rest of the book is ludicrous. Once again, in music and films, we have come to accept that quality work comes from the independents, the artists unchained from corporations. We are a point where we actually expect the product that released by the majors to be bad.

Yet in literature, where we should be elevating the quality of content over everything else, we have somehow ended up so backwards in our thinking.

It’s about time we change that.

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