

ISSN 1369-6572

Bookdealer

the trade monthly for books, features and news

No. 1792

MAY 2008



Andrew Robinson reviews V.S. Naipaul's latest biography *The World is What it Is*

The Alembic Press by Claire Bolton

Braithwayte King's column 'Books in the Real World'

'Bids and Pieces' with Ian McKay

DOMINIC WINTER BOOK AUCTIONS

Britain's Leading Independent Specialist Auctioneers

CuChullaine O'Reilly warns Bookdealer readers of a massive storm ahead for all those involved in the book world. The social and financial concerns involved are so immense that 'the resulting level of outrage is akin to the first hours of the Revolutionary War' as independent publishers, authors and even average book readers denounce tactics that are monopolistic and totally unethical.

In Defence of Literary Liberty

By CuChullaine O'Reilly

Prologue

FOR MOST of human history there has been a treasure akin to precious jewels and rare metals. That cherished commodity is literature.

Although Gutenberg's revolutionary printing press freed mankind from the quill pen more than five hundred years ago, it has until now remained beyond the scope of the average man or woman to define themselves as publishers, save a classic from underserved obscurity, breathe life into an author's dream or participate in the creation of one of mankind's most revered objects, the book.

Yet I am an average man, my wife an average woman, and, thanks to an incredible series of recent technological events, we have created the largest treasure trove of equestrian exploration and classic travel books in mankind's history, nearly 300 books in eight languages. These valuable, historical masterpieces have been made available and affordable at the rate of a book a week for five years.

All of this has been done by two insignificant people, aided by secondhand computers and armed with the most powerful publishing weapon mankind has ever seen – the Print On Demand process.

And everything we have created is now in peril.

Equestrian Explorers Create a Literary Legacy

AS THE 20th century came to a close, publishing remained under the control of traditional vested interests composed of a small clique of publishers, a cadre of agents loyal to the status quo and a

limited number of bookshops. It was a seller's market where authors and readers suffered. Yet those of us alive at the cusp of the third millennium witnessed the end of that world and those practices, for the publishing process we were born with has been swept away in a storm of unpredicted literary abundance.

In the last few years stunning technological advances have created a fundamental shift in the availability and dissemination of human knowledge. It has allowed private individuals to form small publishing houses, for example our Long Riders' Guild Press, and witnessed the creation of focused literary collections aimed at a micro-targeted online audience. These new methods allow our small company to turn a manuscript into a finished book in ten days and ensure that our titles never go out of print. Ultimately they are contributing to mankind's greatest literary renaissance.

POD Changes Publishing History

THE LONG RIDERS' Guild Press has managed this thanks to a new process of book manufacturing known as Print On Demand, or POD, wherein books are digitised, electronically stored in a computer, and then printed as and when the book is ordered. Thanks to this technological advance, a publisher no longer has to print thousands of copies of a book and then wait for them to be sold. Instead the titles can be printed one at a time, or by their thousands, as the market requires.

This new technique completely alters the economics of getting a book published as new authors, or experts appealing to

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small audiences, are no longer held hostage by big publishing houses trying to appeal to a mass market.

Not only is POD efficient, it is the most environmentally friendly publishing process ever invented, as these books are neither pulped nor ever out of print. At the LRGP we are proud to say that, since every title is printed as and when it is needed, every book in our collection is a wanted book and not a twig is wasted.

Sadly, all of these literary accomplishments have been placed in unprecedented danger by a former trusted ally.

The Role of LSI

BEFORE I REVEAL the surprising identity of the party which threatens everything we have created, allow me to tell you about the company whose belief in a more independent literary universe created the biggest explosion of written variety in history.

Known as Lightning Source, or LSI, this Tennessee-based company pioneered and perfected the POD process. When The Long Riders' Guild needed a printer to help us create our equestrian exploration collection, we were invited to visit LSI's original 20,000-square-foot plant. What we saw left us amazed, as we witnessed book orders arriving electronically from distant parts of the world and being transferred from desire into printed matter in less than ten minutes. A blind man could have seen that history was swirling around him.

To give you some idea of how powerful, and appealing, that concept is to other humans, allow me to explain that this original 'little' plant has now expanded to more than 300,000 square feet. It never closes, never sleeps, employs an ethnically diverse international crew, serves more than 4,000 publishers, protects nearly half a million precious titles in its computers and has printed more than forty million books!

Moreover, because literary desire has no geographic definition, the demand for LSI's POD printing process has now encouraged it to open similar plants in other parts of the United States, and in Europe. Like the LSI mother ship, these satellites are busy printing mankind's knowledge as fast as curious humans can ask for a title.

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All the POD books printed by LSI are distributed by its sister corporation, Ingram Books, one of the world's most trusted names in literary allocation. This unique partnership ensures that books are supplied not just to the world's traditional bookstores but also to mainstream publishers, a host of online booksellers (like The Long Riders' Guild Press) and even to that noted internet marketing power-house known as Amazon.

Yet, despite its departure from the traditional publishing model of the past, its extraordinary growth and the extent of its international influence, LSI enjoys a reputation for professional excellence and personal courtesy regarding its customers' needs.

'I've had over five thousand books printed by them at this point and I've only had one customer complaint on quality,' wrote one satisfied publisher.

It is that sort of remark and loyalty from its publishing clients that have earned LSI the reputation of being a democratising influence on the book trade, one that allows the former audience to become historic participants in citizen publishing.

Yet it is not LSI which has brought the literary world to the brink of disaster.

As Abraham Lincoln said, 'Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character give him power.' And power is what lies at the heart of this tragic tale.

Amazon's Act of Infamy

UNTIL NOW a symbiotic relationship has existed, one wherein the author, publisher, LSI and the Amazon internet website all shared in the POD benefits. Everyone had his part to play: Amazon's role was to offer independent publishers the opportunity to present and sell their titles online before an international audience.

That relationship changed for the Long Riders' Guild Press on April 5 when we learned that Amazon had created not a day, but an act of literary infamy. This occurred when the corporation, which had previously prided itself on its reputation of corporate benevolence, launched an unprovoked and unannounced attack on the collective literary achievements of millions of authors and thousands of publishers.

The groundwork for this act was laid in 2005 when the internet marketer purchased a small POD publishing company called Book Surge. Amazon then began trying to entice publishers into changing sides. When these efforts were rebuffed, Amazon retaliated. They began by contacting LSI's Print On Demand customers, some by phone, others with innocent sounding e-mails. When they responded, the publishers were told that, unless they started using Amazon's in-house POD printer Book Surge, instead of LSI, the internet retailer would punish them by disabling the 'buy' button that allows customers to purchase books from the Amazon website.

As word of this Boss Tweed style book grab began to circulate in the literary world, publishers felt betrayed and manipulated, especially when they realised that Amazon's new policy was designed to ensure that all publishers wishing to sell through the Amazon website must use Book Surge or face severe financial loss and possible ruin.

Amazon pitched this demand for global control as a customer service matter, a means for more speedy delivery and a way to help the environment. There are indecorous terms for such claims, but let's agree to call them 'spin' out of politeness.

A Monopoly by any other name

IT IS THE DOOM of men, and arrogant corporations, that they forget.

For example, back in the 1930s the American movie industry made a bold bid to seize control of the country's theatres. Luckily the nation's lawmakers decided during the ensuing court battle that allowing movie makers to control movie distribution violated the same principles which Amazon is trying to subvert today.

Therefore, though Amazon may have neglected to study the past, history is standing by to remind us that there can be no appeasement with a tormenting bully. Just as China has underestimated the anger of the world over its draconian suppression of Tibet, Amazon has miscalculated the costs of its own oppressive actions.

Nor will a handful of brave publishers, such as Kent Larsen in Utah, allow this

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threat to proceed unopposed. 'If Amazon has the power to make a move like this and force small publishers to accept it, what moves will they make in the future?' he advised his readers and authors.

This is why the world's legislators must realise that Amazon's actions are a matter for immediate concern in democracies based on the principles of freedom of speech. Yet neither free speech, nor its sister literary liberty, can hope to survive in the suffocating choke hold of an internet-driven monopoly.

Global leaders should also be aware that my on-line dictionary defines 'monopoly' as 'a market in which there are many buyers but only one seller'. These leaders should then consider the rule of thumb stating that anything over 25% is a monopoly. Then they must ponder what it means to their voters and readers when Amazon, 'the world's largest online retailer with nearly \$15 billion in annual sales in 2007', already controls 90% of the nation's book deliveries.

It was because of previous encounters with corporate tyrannies that the United States government passed the historic Sherman Antitrust Act. That law was designed to ensure a level playing field for all competitors.

A Call for Global Legislative Leadership

IT MAY surprise you to learn that there is an equestrian twist to this tragic series of events.

The tiny Long Riders' Guild Press, which publishes the works of the world's equestrian explorers, is headquartered in the sleepy little town of Glasgow, Kentucky. Meanwhile, on the other side of the state which proudly bills itself as the 'Horse Capital of the World', Amazon maintains one of its largest national distribution centres in Lexington.

We believe that Amazon's threat to disrupt or destroy the production of The Long Riders' Guild equestrian titles poses a threat to Kentucky's legendary horse heritage. Consequently we are seeking an immediate investigation into these recent events by this state's governor, senator and congressman.

Likewise, not only do we intend to inform President Bush of our dilemma,



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but we shall also be seeking to ascertain the feelings of presidential hopefuls Senators Clinton, McCain and Obama.

Because my wife Basha retains her British passport and is thereby entitled to participate in the political systems of both the United Kingdom and the European Union, we shall be contacting and seeking the legislative protection of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Member of Parliament George Osborne, and the EU's Minister of Culture.

We call upon these trusted leaders:

- to protect us and the valuable wisdom we have struggled to bring to the world from the unjust incursions of a corporation blinded by greed and bent on world domination;
- to instigate their own immediate investigation into Amazon's actions;
- to respond publicly and quickly to the fears and concerns of their voters and readers.

The Ethics of Publishing

IT WAS Chris Anderson, the noted author of *The Long Tail* and editor of *Wired* magazine, who cautioned his readers: 'Fundamentally, a society that asks questions and has the power to answer them is a healthier society than one that simply accepts what it's told from a narrow range of experts and institutions.'

Unlike traditional publishing, which often takes two years to bring a book to market, the speed of the Print On Demand system allows participating publishers to translate today's ideas into tomorrow's books. For this reason alone, the vital freedom of expression provided by the POD method should never be forced to submit to political pressure or yield to financial constraints.

Anderson's admonition against placing our trust in a monolithic, infallible institution could have been invented to describe the corporation which has now abdicated its role as a trusted leader, flouted its ethical obligations and imperilled the values of the book world.

Great literature is fundamental to human existence, intellectual enlightenment and political resistance. Thus to acquiesce to Amazon's demands is to place these sacred trusts in the soiled hands of

corporate clones who have defined their own company as 'relentless' and whose stated primary goal is to 'protect sales'.

With leadership like that, it shouldn't be surprising that the Amazon corporation has made the fundamental mistake of believing that, like them, everyone involved in publishing is in it for the money. That jaundiced view crashed into an immovable object when it encountered the Long Riders' Guild Press, which was designed to unite all men, not enrich a giant corporation.

When we launched this little publishing company our goal was to create a lasting legacy that would keep vitally important equestrian and travel books alive forever and guarantee the transfer of this valuable knowledge to future generations.

We have always believed that publishing great books is a responsibility which brings with it obligations. While we acknowledge the possible financial rewards involved in creating our various literary collections, we deem that publishing the wisdom of the world brings with it the need to acknowledge the interests of the authors and their readers. That is why we created and adhere to this Code of Publishing Ethics – see www.classictravelbooks.com/ethics.htm.

The Long Riders' Guild Press will not sacrifice its principles for profit, nor be bullied into silence by a corporation whose true colours are now plain for all to see.

Because our future deserves a destiny of literary liberty, from this point on the Long Riders' Guild Press will be transferring all of our book links to alternative internet sources such as Barnes & Noble, so as to render our company 'Amazon Free'.

CuChullaine O'Reilly has spent more than thirty years studying equestrian travel techniques on four continents. He made lengthy trips by horseback across Afghanistan and Pakistan before leading the Karakorum Equestrian Expedition. He was thereafter made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Considered the world's expert on equestrian exploration, CuChullaine is one of the Founding Members of The Long Riders' Guild, the publisher of the world's largest collection of equestrian travel wisdom, the director of the equestrian academic research organisation LRGAF, and the author of Khyber Knights, The Long Riders, and The Horse Travel Handbook.