

E-Books Thursday 11th June 2009

Chair: Oisín McGann

Panel: Samantha Holman (Director of ICLA); Peadar Ó Guilín (author); John MacNamee (bookseller and President of European Booksellers Association); Georgina Byrne (Librarian, South Dublin Libraries).

Oisín McGann

Born in Dublin 1973, Oisín McGann spent his childhood there and in Drogheda, County Louth. He studied at Ballyfermot Senior College and Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Design, and went on to work in illustration, design and film animation, later moving to London to work as an art director and copy writer in advertising.

He now lives back in Ireland and works full time as an author and illustrator. He has written and illustrated numerous books for young children, including the Mad Grandad series, The Forbidden Files Series, as well as two short retellings of Irish legends aimed at reluctant readers, The Goblin of Tara and The Evil Eye (due out in the summer). He has also produced seven novels; The Gods And Their Machines, The Harvest Tide Project, Under Fragile Stone, Small-Minded Giants, Ancient Appetites and Strangled Silence and his upcoming novel, The Wisdom of Dead Men, (due out in September). He is currently working on a number of new projects.

Sam Holman

I have been executive director of the ICLA for the past 8 years in which time we've seen a huge increase in the demand for digitised content and a move from the use of paper to intranets, virtual learning environments and smart boards in education. ICLA is responsible for licensing the use of paper and digital copies for use in education under the Copyright & Related Rights Act 2000. We are also involved in distributing Public Lending Right to Irish authors and in providing information to rightsholders about the proposed Google Book Settlement.

Peadar Ó Guilín

Peadar was born in Cork and now lives in Dublin. He speaks four languages and has worked as a tour guide, traveling around Ireland for four years with French and Italian visitors to these shores. He is also a failed stand-up comic and rejected academic.

In September 2007, Peadar Ó Guilín published his first novel, The Inferior, which the Times Educational Supplement called "a stark, dark tale, written with great energy and confidence and some arresting reflections on human nature." Foreign editors liked it too, and over the coming year it is to be translated into eight languages, including Japanese and Korean. He has also worked on the DFC comic, as creator of Sneaky: The smartest elephant in the world. He is currently advising two Science Fiction magazines on the production of ebook versions of their publications.

John MacNamee

I have been a bookseller since 1986 and have developed the bookshop from 650 sq feet initially. We now occupy a 6500 sq ft building completely re-built in 2007 and

operate as an Eason franchise. I have been involved in organising many festivals locally (Bealtaine)and nationally (World Book Day).

I am President of The European Booksellers Federation, an organisation which represents 27 member states with an office in Brussels.

I am a member of the Booksellers Association Irish Branch since 1992 and have served as Chairman and secretary in that time. I am also a member of the advisory council BA UK and Ireland .

Bookselling for me is a pleasure as I can reach to every single person in the community, whether they are readers or not and can find a book which will interest them.

Georgina Byrne

I will be taking part in the discussion on digital publishing in June. I am a librarian and we will be coming at this from my experiencing of setting up a digital book service from our website. This service is really popular - people downloading digital books to their MP3 players and blackberries etc - and I will be happy to discuss the learnings we have gleaned from this experience.

I am currently County Librarian with South Dublin Libraries. In a former life I taught English but I have for many years been working in public libraries and have worked in community libraries across Dublin. I believe very passionately in the role that public libraries play within communities and that for many they serve a s 'living rooms' for communities where the world of books is available for free in the most democratic way. The library service of South Dublin serves Tallaght, Clondalkin, Rathfarnham and Lucan and as such serves a range of citizens with many needs and challenges. Promoting reading to parents of young children (many with their own literacy issues) is a major focus of the work of our team. For people with poor literacy 'hearing' a book (an audio book on their MP3 player) is often the only way they will interact with the written word.

The challenge for librarians from the Google generation greatly interests me also - from the democratic access point of view as well as from the issue concerning the veracity of information gathered online.

Oisin: Welcome everyone.

We are here to talk about new media and publishing to find out what we can do with how things are changing and how to stay ahead. We would like to welcome the panel this evening and thank them for taking time to be with us.

Each of the panellists will speak about their experience of ebooks and digital publishing.

Samantha:

In October 09 Google and the American Association of Publishers came to a litigation settlement. 7 million books were already digitised 3.5 million of which are still in copyright. They are available online in different formats without right or owners' permission.

Although this is a good settlement in principles, there are a number of problems. Illustrators are only included under the settlement where the author and illustrator are the same person. All other visual works are not included. There is also a flaw with regards to school books. Small payment to download institutional subscriptions. Like music, people will download it illegally. People will use it and we will vote with our feet. However, this does not relate to any books published after January 2009.

The settlement will have an effect on contracts. Important for authors to know exactly what is in their contract with regards to technological reprints etc. There will be big changes in the sector with regards to copyright law. But will it work?

Publishers produce 3 types of books. Reference books will be perfect in the e-book format, and school textbooks. There will be products which will make school work better, for example, a study-orientated e-reader. Textbooks could be downloaded onto the e-reader. This has already been tested in Ballyfermot, although it is expensive. Both teacher and students break them, but over a 12-year period, in comparison with school books, this would be a much cheaper way of producing textbook material. Similarly at University level, we already have virtual learning environments. E-readers and e-books will fit in well to this environment. The other 2 types of books are the culture category and the trash category. Books which people don't want other people to see they are reading, for example, books read on the bus, or holiday reads, e-readers are more anonymous. The e-reader also helps with holiday reads. Luggage restrictions make the e-reader a lighter way to bring several books on holiday as it is only one small machine.

The books which will survive in print form are the up market books we like to keep on the shelf. They will survive longer in print market. We need to look at books sector by sector to see how each will have a part in the future.

An author's contract over the copyright over a book needs to be looked at more closely. PLR for downloaded books is not included in the settlement. Audio and e-books are not included. Important to catch up and lobby.

Websites like scribd.com, a 'youtube' of documents are already up and running with many documents uploaded illegally. It is technically a file-sharing website but many Children's books, including Lemony Snicket have already been downloaded in huge numbers and only recently removed.

Peadar:

The reader has a choice of spending €10 to read a book on the page or €240 (for the reader) + €10 (for the books) to read on the ereader.

There are, however, massive advantages to buying and using the e-reader.

The 6-year-old child has a huge amount of books to carry, which are out of date at the end of each school year, are very used, and are very hard to sell.

It is also useful to the professional for example, the lawyer. He has a huge set of documents and expensive books which are quickly out of date and very space consuming. Medical documents are similarly quickly out of date, and the e-reader also allows you to annotate your documents. Editors themselves would no longer have to carry around bulky manuscripts.

For everyone else it can also be very useful, as this new technology allows the author to engage with the reader during the editing process, however, could it destroy the whole future of reading as a past time?

All new books will be digitised and anyone can buy a new book as a digital edition. Thousands of books which were previously unpublished can now be published, even though most of them may be of a very poor standard.

The new digital age will not be able to stop people putting out material with fake reviews on Amazon, not in a bookshop, on the same level as previously 'publishable' books.

This creates a threatening situation. Readers will buy any books at random of which many are very poor quality. For example, in the 1980s most bookshops had a large horror section because of those few very successful horror writers. There was then an explosion of horror books being published and it wasn't until 5 years later when the public stopped buying such masses of horror books.

It is therefore a concern that if books are all appearing at the same level, people will not trust books to give a pleasurable experience anymore.

John

Thanks to CBI for the platform for this discussion.

The landscape in bookselling is quite scary at this time. There are huge possibilities in the future, but there are huge dangers as well.

In 2003 I hated Google and I still hate Google, but they are very good at what they do. The initial talks in 2003 with Google, the organisers of information and knowledge for the world, they indicated that they were not interested in becoming booksellers or publishers but were only interested in making their money by ad clicks. In 2005 they suggested that they might become booksellers, which we recognised would have a big impact on the established bookselling community. In 2008 Google became intent on becoming booksellers and publishers which made booksellers and publishers very nervous. This gives Google a huge amount of power over the knowledge economy. Who will be the police of this industry?

Adults know not to believe everything they read off the internet, but children do not. It could be quite dangerous if such a huge amount of information is left unvetted if we do not mistrust google.

Where does the future lie for booksellers? Are they valuable? Do publishers recognise them? Will communities see them as valuable as libraries?

Booksellers are terrified of the future because they are too conservative. They could perhaps be intellectual content providers. The booksellers service could be for books, e-books or multifunctioning devices, although this is likely to be 2 or 3 generations away. Key to staying in business will be to deliver services to the consumer by supplying both the book and the digital copy at a €10 and €4 charge respectively, thereby adding value to the market rather than taking away from it.

It is hard to guesstimate where the industry will be, but by 2020 it is likely 20% of content will be used in a digital format, with 80% still in print. The bookseller cannot afford to lose 20% of business and to remain financially viable and therefore must prove to publishers they are still valuable. The possibilities for the bookseller are enormous, although, as an industry this will require a lot of work to encourage new ideas for the digital platform.

Google do not understand or care how the industry works. The Booksellers Association of UK and Ireland discovered that 14 of their publications have been digitised without permission which gives them the right to take class action against Google. We want to put a marker down in Europe. Google will be fought and will not be allowed to be the only purveyor of knowledge in Europe, the UK and Ireland.

Georgina

The book budget for libraries allows us to buy a huge amount of books. In 2005, South County libraries used some of their budget to provide audiobooks for the high proportion of visually impaired in their area which allows the individual to listen to books through their mp3 player. They were fortunate to get money to research a downloadable book service via their library website. They recognised that a huge leap had to be made and that it was essential that a mechanism was in place which was easy to use and it was free. The set up must be seamless, so that only the rights had to be managed.

Using the American based company Overdrive, they were provided with a digital book service. South Dublin Libraries have now set up a download area, a virtual library of 3,000 books with varying formats, and provide samples of e-books and downloadable audio. It was piloted for 6 months and launched in January last year.

There are some problems, for example, that most of the books are American. This is because the company used is American, but it is notable that there are less European books. The audiobooks are read with American voices, but the BBC and Harper Collins are bringing a new Euro-flavour to the collection.

The system has been very successful. It is sustainable and is available 24/7. The books can be borrowed for 7, 14 or 21 days. It is a green service. We have found that the most popular e-books are non-fiction, art and travel, but the most popular audiobooks are fiction. Children's books are very popular including digital picture books. Gill and Macmillan are now on board with a Junior Cert trial with Connect school project where all children have laptops; school children and teachers love it.

Although there is still a poor collection, it is seamless and operates well. Children love e-books.

Sam

With regards to visually impaired readers, Brazil have brought to the international table the problems of visually-impaired exceptions at national levels. There are broad exceptions in Ireland, but with regards license schemes, audio books bring up the question of performance fees. There is a plan for an International Treaty for access to work for the visually impaired which is not currently in place.

Oisin

(Demonstration of a mobile phone folding out into an e-reader.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4tdtzyjFnY>

The screen is too small at the moment but they are working to solving that problem.

Q

What is the capacity? 100-200 books?

Sam

Memory cards can carry 100-200 each, but they are getting bigger.

Georgina

and colour is already on its way.

Oisin

Authors create and promote. Do we need to think of new ways of creating and promote books?

Peadar

It should not necessarily change the creative content but there is an author who is trying to change it by writing a book online and allowing people to log on and see all the different drafts of his book. They read, leave comments and tidy it up so that he is creating versions 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 etc. but it is now out to buy. This has also generated a lot of publicity for the book as he is the only established writer producing a book this way.

Another author changing creative content is a sci-fi writer whose material is all available for free as pdf as well as from a shop.

Q How does that affect his sales?

Peadar

This is not how he makes a living, but the publicity has generated a lot of sales. To read a book on a laptop is unpleasant, but if people like the first chapter then they are more likely to go out and buy it.

But the problem lies in the development of the improved e-book screens which in some cases make it easier to read than an ordinary book. By supplying the book in pdf he is effectively giving the book away for free. In the future this may help or harm sales.

Siobhán Parkinson

What are the issues over contracts with authors?

Sam

The e-book settlement needs to be debated so the author has choice over works, rights, display, variations and territories. Generic Irish contracts contain a clause about rights, but new issues arise in the digital market regarding books which are out of print. The author needs to request the rights to revert.

Google will be good for authors but they need to change the technical clause in their contract, read it carefully, or update it, and follow it up.

Oisin

All contracts vary but most are vague on electronic rights. Agents will negotiate these and reversion rights especially if the digital age raises the question, will anything ever be out of print?

Sam

Therefore it will now be known as 'in commerce', according to Google's definition. Agents will have written to all of their clients to assure them they will be looking after the Google issue. This is their way of getting their percentage.

John

What about the issue of territorial rights?

Sam

Restricting access to sites is very easy using ip addresses.

John

But Amazon already breaks these rights.

Sam

It is easy to resolve on a technological level.

John

The Publishers Association have launched a new protection scheme to check if illegal documents are available and then issue proceedings to ip addresses and threaten court action.

Sam

Only works in certain countries. It is different in each country depending on law.

John

We need European law.

Q

Publishing on the internet is good for opinion and publicity, but are e-books interactive enough for children? Does it take away from the experience and imagination involved in opening a book?

Sam

We can't be sentimental, we need to be pragmatic. In reality, this age group are already engaging in creative writing in new mediums such as twitter and blogs.

Oisin

Writing is actually more accessible to this generation. It's not the best writing, but writing in new ways. The mobile phone is used to type and write a story. Children are more empowered. The publishing industry is a time-consuming way to get published and is hard to break into, so this new way is perhaps not all bad.

John

It costs 150 million to put ebooks in primary schools, but we're already cutting budgets. We're lucky to have children's books now, and to have an opportunity to hook kids with new technology.

Oisin

Print is a technology too, but technology is moving forward.

Georgina

The two technologies are parallel at the moment, which may not last, but, again, we can't be sentimental about it.

John

Who's to say that the future isn't the two technologies alongside each other?

Q

The newspapers have been more affected, as we've seen in the large shift in which publishers have lost profit. Publishers will be in a difficult position in less than 10-15 years. There's no model yet to capture that lost revenue. Book publishing is going to experience the current crisis of newspapers.

Oisin

Publishing is going to be in jeopardy like the music industry, with music being downloaded illegally.

Sam

Copyright is the answer, but that is slowly leaving. The author should set a price, not like iTunes with all songs being .99. There is a market for it, publishers need to give public access; they need to catch up. YouTube is all user-generated content. Creators and publisher need to capture the future. It's good that we're looking forward.

Peadar

Publishers are making the same mistakes as the music industry, because they are feeling less relevant. But publishers are more tied to published books than the music industry is to songs that are released. Publishers began to use agents as filters, and stopped accepting unsolicited work. Editors don't edit as much as agents do. Agents could become the new gatekeepers. Publishers are afraid.

Sam

They're afraid of piracy.

Peadar

They're starting to become paranoid about piracy. Some formats of digitisation are just punishing the purchaser.

Sam

It's a matter of access control versus copy control. It's all about digital rights management.

Oisin

Georgina, how difficult is it to extend software to the other libraries?

Georgina

Anyone can jump onto it and create their own. Librarians are worried and frozen. Students no longer care to discern information. Access to information is at a critical crossroads. 40% of people the library serves have no internet except at the library. If everything was digitised, there would be many challenges for public libraries. Customers are still borrowing print.

Oisin

There are a lot of levels in publishing. Publishers are looking at threats. How are levels going to blend for the booksellers? The book as it stands is only one media.

John

Booksellers aren't threatened. Consumers will have trouble deciding on books to purchase. We still need bibliographic skills to help the public. People come in for advice now. They can't find everything on their own on the internet. It's sophisticated and complicated. We'll get to the point where we'll be providing books in parts and different platforms. For example, we might just end up selling the chicken chapter of a cookbook. Booksellers and librarians will still be needed as gatekeepers if they can stay in the field for long enough.

Sam

Microsoft will possibly challenge Google.

Oisin

The web is chaotic. Google will lose control of their products. The biggest threat will be to copyright. But it will be too fragmented to keep control.

John

They will need the correct information to get access.

Peadar

It may not be that bad. Forums for books ask for information on titles and authors.

John

Those are booksellers answering the forums.

Oisin

When a book isn't in stock, but the digital file exists, this machine can print the book out for you from scratch in 15-20 minutes. It comes out as a proper book with a binding and everything. This will present problems for rights reverting. (Espresso Book Machine) Link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q946sfGLxm4>

John

For Valentine's Day, people can personalize Shakespeare sonnets with their own cover page.

Sam

How's the quality of the binding from that machine?

Oisin

It's not bad at all.

Georgina

How much does the machine cost?

John

£55,000 approximately

Oisin

Amazon can put those books on digital files. They already have.

John

They plan to increase the font, make it bold, etc. You'll only be charged for the paper, not for the rights to the book.

Oisin

Amazon can send it to you, too. Or Lightning Source prints it and will send it out locally. (demonstration of scanner) Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oOXXpxzETA>

John

They can send the physical copy of the book to Tennessee, digitise it, and send it back in digital form. The booksellers can begin to become publishers.

Georgina

You can digitise hard copies, too. They'll translate them for the library, and the community that comes to the library.

Oisin

It's a really good tool for people that don't speak English.

Georgina

Exactly, it provides digital titles in many different languages for all the people served by the library.

Oisin

On one side of the issue, this machine ensures that books will never decay and never be lost. It also scans the text as text, not as a picture, so the text can be altered.

John

Google is finding that they can merge multiple scans in order to perfect the quality of the book.

Peadar

The New York Times is using people to decipher words that have been scanned badly. People can go in and predict what the word is supposed to be. That way, they can figure out the text in scanned books that are unclear.

Oisin

How are children's books going to be affected differently by all this?

John

There will be advantages, but I hate the idea of their only option being to read off a flat screen. We need to bring in motor and hand-eye coordination. There are digital advantages, because they can be engaging and interactive. The child can be part of the book. But we need to keep some sort of hard copy page present.

Oisin

Typing is becoming the downfall of children's handwriting.

Sam

Children's books will survive longer because other people will buy them. Grandparents and aunts and uncles will buy those books for the kids in their lives. However, some of the older generation is jumping on to technology already.

Oisin

Television is also becoming a leveler of literacy. Kids that are having a harder time are learning more vocabulary, but kids that are more advanced seem to be declining because of it.

Q

Many TV programs are being derived from books now.

Sam

Illustrations in books are coming from the TV programs though, instead of the original illustration.

Oisin

We should be using TV as promotions to make reading fun for kids. Anyway to get them to read is good. TV and print are becoming less distinct entities.

John

Kids are learning so much for TV as well as books.

Sam

As long as books are present used as presents, it's worth it to buy them.

Oisin

Writers and publishers aren't language experts either. Certain books might be marketed to a different audience than it was intended for. Certain children's books could just go over their heads.

Georgina

Children have sentimental ties to their books to, even after they've grown up.

Oisin

So, now that children are regularly researching on the web, are they learning to verify the sources they find?

Peadar

That's hard to do when you can't even trust what newspapers are telling you.

Q

Do you think that there is starting a cultural shift to accepting plagiarism?

Peadar

Newspapers are losing money. 60% of news is not investigative, it's just from other sources.

John

Has everyone noticed how many grammar and spelling mistakes are showing up on recent CVs?

Sam

Yes I have. We used to toss those CVs right away, but no one does that anymore. There are issues about when a change in spelling or grammar becomes acceptable.

Q

All of that is part of cultural shift between generations.

Oisin

Mobile phone novels are a perfect example of that. They're presenting literature, and novels, in a completely different platform.

Q

So we're shifting to e-books, and shifting away from landlines. Are we getting to the point where we'll always have access to information, such as through WiFi?

Oisin

Kindles download books using a mobile phone connection, not just WiFi. So anywhere that you get service for your phone, you can use a Kindle.

Q

Kids are also using technology as a tool. They know when new books are coming out, and they're telling their parents, instead of the other way around.

John

It's very important to not try to sell anything but your brand. Children are very aware consumers.

Sam

Salt Poetry Press is currently £50,000 in debt. Using the poets on fire forum, the poetry press asked for help to prevent its closure. They asked each person to buy one book. They had 8,000 sales in 3 days, and made £55,000 in 3 weeks, and that was only from their posting on a forum. The generation on Facebook isn't the only generation online. Those poets didn't want a poetry publisher to go out of business, so they took action and bought them back in.

Oisin

Sci-fi books are suffering from fan fiction. Fans take their favorite characters from books and start writing their own stories about them. Some authors are becoming interactive about it, though. It's a big step for children's literature. It's much easier to sell books to kids, so I think children's literature will come out as anything from the digital age. It's a good idea to remember that print wasn't always understood either. (Monks trying to convert from scroll to book) Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHx-SjgQvQ>