'The Passion and Pragmatism of the Small Publisher'
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At global book industry events such as the Frankfurt Buchmesse, the London Book Fair, or the Bologna Children's Book Fair, publishers of all sizes and from most countries share the same space. Some companies occupy more space than others, however, and while there is not always a direct parallel between stand size and company size (be it in terms of title output, financial turnover, market share or employee number), the physical space taken up by companies, plus the performative choices of design and location, replicate in many ways the size and power dynamics of the global industry, as my forthcoming work with Beth Driscoll explores.[i] While publishers inhabit the same publishing ecosystem, there are marked differentials between publishing companies, which are clearly on display at such physical events. This chapter examines the role and (self-)placement of small and independent publishing companies within a 21st century publishing environment, a literary marketplace which is increasingly dominated by large multinational conglomerate publishing companies, and which is both mediated and disrupted by global technology companies.

The growth of conglomerate publishing since the 1960s, and the changes it brought to traditional publishing practices, has by now been the subject of scholarly focus in a range of national and transnational contexts, not least in the respective national history of the book series.[ii] The chronicling of the shift from largely family-owned businesses in the first half the twentieth century to a landscape dominated by a small handful of very large companies has also seen a corollary rise in interest in the non-conglomerate sector – the independent, small publishers and presses which operate in the spaces left to them. These spaces are variably conceived in business terms as gaps in the market, or in socio-political and cultural terms as publishing content in which the larger companies are not interested.

The intervention made by this chapter is to focus first on the extent to which small and independent publishers articulate their practices as directed by passion or pragmatism, particularly in terms of expressing their motivations for setting up companies and in editorial decision-making. In so doing, I draw on a sample set of semi-structured interviews with commissioning editors from small and independent companies, as well as some commissioning editors working in larger companies who previously worked in independents. Given the small sizes of the companies surveyed, decision-making processes are very different to conglomerate publishing companies, where larger editorial and acquisitions meetings drive decisions. Decision-making processes can be swifter, and there is seemingly greater possibility for the role of personal taste, 'passion', and adventurous publishing from the editors. However, despite the sometimes positive narratives around the fleetness of independent publishers in terms of editorial decision-making and industry change, their small size (even if they have support from cultural funding agencies such as Arts Council England or Creative Scotland, in UK terms) intensifies risk and can be a barrier to digital innovation and growth. Small companies, if they are to be sustainable, also need a strong vein of pragmatism.

The chapter then interrogates whether small publishers identify themselves as operating against, or beyond the limits of, mainstream publishing, or whether they perceive themselves to be working within a broader ecosystem of 21st century publishing in which they co-exist with conglomerate publishers. This interrogation intersects with an industry and academic discussion about the nature of 'independence', a topic of growing scholarly interrogation, as the next section of the chapter details. The chapter also furthers a push towards a granularity in our understanding of independent publishing, which takes into consideration company size, market sector as well as motivation and ideological perspective.

As detailed above, there is a developing focus on independent and small publishing in academic research, both in Anglophone and broader perspectives. Numerous studies, including the various national histories of the book, chronicle the process of mergers and acquisitions from the 1960s and 70s onwards, the incorporation of formerly independent, often family, businesses as imprints in multinational conglomerate companies.[iii] In the UK

context (upon which this chapter primarily focuses), Finkelstein and McCleery discuss the result of these mergers and acquisitions being 'a small number of very large, cross-media global conglomerates and a large number of smaller companies operating at national level'. The top ten of the former grouping, by the turn of the 21st century, they continue, 'accounted for 65 per cent of all bookshop sales; the top five 55 per cent; and the three largest publishers – Bertelsmann, News Corporation and Pearson – controlled 45 per cent of the consumer market alone.'[iv]

The story of publishing concentration, particularly in its creation of global bestsellers and multimedia properties, is one outcome of late 20th and early 21st century publishing. As Finkelstein and McCleery go on to discuss, however, there is a concomitant story about the simultaneous spaces into which new independent presses grew:

> The 1970s also saw the rise for a period of a wave of independent publishing companies that challenged corporate developments and focussed on under-represented groups and interests. These were, in the main, new, start-up firms whose founders explored, and made successful headway in opening to the mainstream, previously ignored agendas and work in feminist, Scottish literature and gender areas.[v]

The relationship of current independent publishers to the 'mainstream' referred to by Finkelstein and McCleery is explored in greater detail later in this chapter. In definitional terms, Noorda argues that the term 'independent' publishing only came to be used in contradistinction to the rise of the multimedia conglomerate, 'necessitat[ing] a way to linguistically differentiate between the new mega publishing empires on one end of the spectrum and the small, independently owned and operated presses at the other end'.[vi] The definitional work comprised in understanding publishing 'independence' is important for this chapter, including the idea of 'ends' in Noorda's comment. The metaphor is one which follows Thompson's understanding of 21st century US and UK publishing as a polarised field ('a small number of very large corporations […] and a large number of very small publishing operations […], with a small and dwindling number of medium-sized players').[vii] Publisher size, as well as ideological perspective, is an important consideration when establishing an

understanding of 'small' or 'independent' publishing, as Noorda explores. Drawing on Miller's definitions in *Reluctant Capitalists*,[viii] Noorda outlines independence in terms of economic autonomy; size; and the company being 'guided by a particular philosophy'. These three attributes, as Noorda relates, are frequently 'interconnected and overlapping', and yet come from different regimes: one legal and organisational; one financial and quantitative; and one socio-political.[ix] Noël also articulates 'independence' as a triumvirate of dimensions, conflating Noorda's first two into legal and financial; and then adding the artistic and intellectual alongside the political.[x]

Much current research into contemporary independent publishing takes Noorda's first and second attributes (i.e. economic autonomy and size) as its starting point, but focuses upon the socio-political elements of the publishing practice which is enabled – or sometimes enforced – by the prior two attributes. The three attributes also explain, and help unpack, the occasionally interchangeable use of the terms 'independent' and 'small', with the former term connected either to economic autonomy or philosophical approach, and the latter more obviously related to size. Both Noël and Noorda note the slipperiness or 'elasticity' in the usage of the interchangeable terminology in existing scholarship, and note that even the attribute of size contains a lack of clarity in its definition.[xi] As Noël continues, independence is a 'polysemic' term, 'often defined in relative and generally negative terms'.[xii]

Quantitative metrics for establishing publisher size are highly variable, taking in a range of measures from the number of salaried employees (though as Noorda points out many companies are now reliant on a growing number of freelance workers; a precarisation of the workforce that might be at odds with some aspects of ethical behaviour in business that independents might otherwise promote[xiii]); revenue; market share; or the number of books produced per year (in either title output or overall units produced). The European Commission's definitions of company size combine turnover and employee numbers, sub-dividing smaller-sized companies into 'medium-sized' (fewer than 250 employees/E50m), 'small' (fewer than 50 employees/E10m) and 'micro' (fewer than 10 employees/E2m).[xiv] The UK Publishers Association details the publishing sector in a slightly more granular way, though still using turnover and employee headcount in its statistics for the number of VAT-

registered publishers.[xv] Even this brief indication of quantitative metrics suggests there is more work to be done, in terms of establishing definitions of 'small', particularly with regards to useful definitions which bring together quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as the variety of attributes of 'independence'.

Indeed, the terminology is so ambiguous that Noorda asks, rhetorically, whether 'lacking an agreed upon definition of *independent publisher* makes the term lose meaning, because, in a way, it is a term that can mean whatever the user wants it to mean.'[xvi] Definitional work is crucial here, not least in terms of publishers' assertation of their 'independence' via its third attribute, including – as Noorda explores – through the discursive practices of their mission statements. For the purposes of this chapter, I loosely use the term 'small' to discuss any non-conglomerate publisher, although some of the interviewees from my sample set derive from some of the 'medium-sized players' that Thompson perceives to be dwindling in number. This is done in order to address the central questions of the chapter: the shape of the mix of the motivating factors of passion and pragmatism, and the extent to which they identify themselves as operating against or alongside mainstream, or conglomerate, publishing.

Recent scholarship focusing on independent and/or small publishers, as well as publications from practitioners, establish a particular orientation towards and understanding of independent and/or small publishing. Two of the most vociferous pro-independence practitioner voices of the 20th century have been those of Schiffrin and Hawthorne. Schiffrin's *The Business of Books* and *Words and Money* chronicle his journey through the world of mergers and acquisitions as a New York publisher, and the broader impact of conglomeration and corporatisation on the literary marketplace.[xvii] He inserts the term 'market censorship' into his work in order to animate his thinking about the homogenising role of large publishers with regards to content production. In *Bibliodiversity: A Manifesto for Independent Publishers*, the Australian publisher Hawthorne furthers the statements of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers around the value of independent publishers in generating 'bibliodiversity', a system which 'contributes to a thriving life of culture and a healthy eco-social system'.[xviii] For Hawthorne, an independence of spirit, rootedness in local circumstance and cultural diversity (i.e. the third attribute of

independence) is dependent on economic and organisational independence, including economic independence from cultural policy funding. Using another natural-world metaphor, Hawthorne also states that 'Independent publishers often have a knack for anticipating cultural shifts. This is because they ride the fast-moving outer shoreline of the cultural river while the big publisher in the shallow mainstream.'[xix]

Hawthorne's metaphor is a version of the narrative of the fleetness of small and independent publishers in the face of both cultural and technological change. Ray Murray and I examined the disruptive changes brought by digital technologies to publishers large and small, concluding that even in 'a landscape dominated by large conglomerate publishers and […] by even larger technology companies […] it also offers space to start-ups, to independents with strong brand presence and innovative business approaches.'[xx] This 'space', created by the disruptive force of digital technologies, allies to the conceptualisation of post-1960s organisational and cultural 'space' accorded to independent publishing companies.

The growing body of recent scholarship addressing small and/or independent publishers largely concurs with an idea that they operate within a different 'space' to conglomerates or – in Thompson's terms – 'a parallel universe'.[xxi] Noorda articulates that corporate conglomeration creates a 'space' into which 'independent publishers fill a gap or territory that conglomerates are unable to occupy.' She further characterises the gap in the 'image of a publisher that is editorially driven, locally rooted, author friendly, diversity focused, relationship based, quality concerned, and community building.'[xxii] This set of qualities fall under the broader third attribute of philosophical independence. Stewart's interviewees (all literary rather than mass-market, genre, or specialist non-fiction publishers) position themselves as being 'more interested in aesthetic (rather than market) values'.[xxiii] Such self-fashioning is accompanied by 'boundary work', Stewart demonstrates, animated by 'a higher degree of aesthetic autonomy, thus distinguishing themselves from what they portray as technocratic, money-driven corporations'.[xxiv] Expressions of autonomy, particularly when focusing on the more literary end of the marketplace, fit within a Bourdieusian reading of contemporary publishing. Similar conceptualisations of the role and functioning of small publishers come via Stinson's interrogation of literary publishing in

Australia, in which he suggests that 'post-digital literary prosumption [that is, a market which 'blur[s] consumption and production'…]' is reminiscent of Bourdieu's formulation of 19th-century French avant-gardes.[xxv] Thompson expands Bourdieu's capitals to understand 21st century US and UK publishing, reading the 'plurality of fields' of publishing (i.e. different market sectors) through economic, human, social, intellectual and symbolic capital.[xxvi] In so doing, he seeks to differentiate the operations of conglomerate and small presses. And yet Bourdieusian accounts cannot fully explicate the practices and processes of publishers large or small, particularly with regards to their evaluative judgements or in their rhetorical self-presentation, as Stewart and Noorda both articulate.[xxvii] This chapter furthers both their arguments in seeking to understand small publishers' activities and self-presentation, through the interplay of passion and pragmatism, and via their varying attitudes to the 'mainstream'.

To do so, the rest of this chapter draws upon a set of nineteen semi-structured interviews I conducted with UK- based commissioning editors. Some of these editors, particularly from the smallest companies in the sample, were also owner-managers of the company, whereas others were employers in small to mid-sized companies. Their uniting feature is that all operate within non-conglomerate companies, and all have the role (if not necessarily the title) of acquiring books for their company to publish. The same sample set of interviews, including further interviews with commissioning editors from conglomerates, are drawn on in two other publications.[xxviii] I also draw on some interview data from editors in conglomerates who had previously worked in independent companies.

In methodological terms, the chapter is therefore based on publishers' own rhetorical positionings; their description of their practices and processes rather than the practices and processes themselves. I argue that these discursive positionings are both *part of* their practice, not least in an industry which trades on representation and brand development, and, moreover, is actively *constitutive of* those practices. Nonetheless, with understandings derived from broader industry analysis, I focus particular attention on where contradictions in the interviews (either internally, alongside each other, or to that broader industry analysis) might be useful in responding to my central research questions in this chapter. This approach aligns with that of Noorda, Stewart and Noël; Noorda seeing the use of the term

'independent' in publisher mission statements as a 'rhetorical choice', and in addition as 'rhetorical and communicative pieces that reveal how publishers would like to be portrayed (and not necessarily reflect what they are)'.[xxix] Similarly, Stewart argues that while the independent publishers in his sample 'are keen to situate themselves, rhetorically at least, in the cathedral' rather than the 'stock market', he also states that 'there is not necessarily a correspondence between what the publishers say and their genuinely held beliefs or modes of conduct'.[xxx] For Noël, independence operates as both a 'rhetoric' and a 'symbolic resource', actively constitutive in definitions of position-taking in publishing. However, where my primary research varies to some degree from Noël, Noorda and Stewart's is that the interviewees were part of a larger sample including editors working at conglomerate publishers, and I did not specifically set out to ask them about company size or structure (i.e. I did not explicitly prompt them to talk about independence), other than as a way of discussing acquisition decisions, or in terms of their careers, particularly if individuals had moved between companies of different sizes. In some senses, then, publishers were less primed to take rhetorical positions, although – as the interview data reveals – they frequently did.

In examining my interview data, I first explore the discursive position-taking of publishers through the prism of editorial choice-making, and in particular the extent to which the publishers within my sample of interviewees articulate their practices as motivated by passion or pragmatism. The former term is one identified by Noorda as having frequency in the mission statements of independent publishers which she examined.[xxxi] The IPG (the UK-based Independent Publishers Guild, a members' association for independent publishers), however, offers a much more pragmatic vision of its role in supporting independent publishers. The IPG's mission statement revolves around professionalisation; the promotion and celebration of 'cultural and commercial value' in UK independent publishing; and business- and tech-based support for seeking digital, export and global partner opportunities.[xxxii] Such a difference might relate to the IPG's supporting and networking role, rather than being a publisher as such. However, the statement flags up that pragmatism might be as an important a quality in an independent publisher as passion, although one that is less frequently indicated in their discursive practices.

In my interviews, the concept of passion was often tied up with affective relationships to the texts commissioning editors were considering for acquisition, an aspect which I explore in more detail elsewhere.[xxxiii] Such emotional pulls towards texts with potential to become books proved to be consistent across editors operating within companies from the smallest to those within conglomerate structures. However, the potential for editors operating within smaller companies to take decisions in which they needed to influence fewer – or no – colleagues, changed the dynamic of this passion, as well as the types of texts they were considering for publication. For example, one editor at a small, owner-publisher company, explicitly talked about the foundation of her company with two business partners, in terms of the books which were not being picked up by larger companies:

> We all had gripes. […] working at a literary consultancy and seeing what I thought were the best books in terms of literary merit [which] would simply not find a publisher, generally for commercial reasons.

One of the reasons this editor gave for the larger publishers rejecting the 'best books' was the lack of marketability of an author, due to them being older, or not being 'a pretty face'. This commercial tendency generated 'a lot of moaning' from this interviewee, but turned to the action of making 'sure things are still diverse', in order to 'add[..] to literary excellence' without an insistence on profit. Another editor discussed how within her (mid-sized) independent company, while making money on their books was 'nice', that she could also 'purely buy' on an idea of that the book was 'interesting', and 'should [be] published'. This same editor appreciated that she didn't 'have to follow any rules', meaning she could acquire titles that 'I would never have been allowed to buy anywhere else'. Another editor from a mid-sized independent similarly discussed how her company was 'not risk averse', whereas her experience of working within a large conglomerate was that it was.

Similarly, another owner-publisher editor talked about there being 'two ways of publishing. One […] where you feed the market what it wants, and one […] where you try and shape the market. And I'm definitely falling into the latter category.' The drive towards contributing something different to the market, and even shaping it, was distinct within smaller publishers, and particularly to the smallest owner-publishers who were – with provisos

discussed later in this chapter – able to enact their vision. Indeed, the second publisher talked about 'not just running a publishing house', but her company as a 'creative project'. Equally, another small publisher talked about their operation being 'wholehearted'. The editor who identified her company as contributing to 'literary excellence', also discussed how being 'small was a real virtue', generating a set of 'passionate supporters' in the same way as 'a microbrewery' might do. The editor who conceived of her company as a 'creative project' talked about a holistic sense of publishing, writing and events – including salon-style events in her own home – which created a close sense of literary community which derived from her own identity as reader, writer and publisher.

Throughout these accounts, there is a sense of small and independent publishers being unfettered, able to make their own decisions about literary quality, about what the market might be interested in, be ready to receive, or to have created for it, and a sense of quick decision-making informed by and very close to the tastes of the editor. This finding aligns with those of other scholars investigating the rhetorical positionings of small and independent publishers, including Noël, Noorda and Stewart. However, even the editors who envisaged their publishing practice as the most distinct from those of larger companies comingled their responses about the freedom of commissioning practices with the pragmatic dimension of what their size enabled them to do – or disabled them from doing.

One editor in a mid-sized independent, for example, talked about levels of risk and financial challenge in his company, compared to that in a conglomerate: 'we can't really take the hit that some of the bigger houses can, of the ones [i.e. books] that don't work'. This insight differs from a normative account, repeated by more than one publisher in my sample, that conglomerate publishers are 'risk averse' whereas independents are not. Several of the editors I talked to, however, discussed the need to balance their lists, both to ensure their reach to multiple potential market sectors, and also to enable them to spread risk. Such a finding aligns with that of Stewart, in his identification – particularly among mid-sized publishers – of a '*portfolio approach*' which balances aesthetic and commercial drivers.[xxxiv] This is an approach motivated more by pragmatic than passionate considerations. However, even before such a consideration of financial risk, smaller publishers are inhibited from acquisitions for a number of reasons – titles not offered to them by literary agents because

'of relative size and resources'. An owner-publisher talked about conglomerate publishers having 'the pick of the market', comparing the situation of a 'brand new start up', where 'your choice is much more limited, because one of the most difficult things to do is to find stuff that you can publish, and people who will trust you to publish it.' Another editor discussed about how, particularly in the early days of her company before it had established its reputation, that 'we were not going to get big authors; we were not going to get mainstream authors at that time'.

Lack of reputation, then, is one pragmatic issue with which smaller independent publishers have to contend. Not being offered what literary agents deem to be their most marketable properties means independents must develop distinctive strategies to those of conglomerate publishers. This distinction can be found either in picking up authors rejected by larger publishers, or seeking different authors and models of authorship entirely. However, the financial pressures of being small also curtail their cultural and socio-political mission. As an editor in the mid-sized company discussed, larger companies have more of a financial cushion such that they can – *if* they choose – take risks or amortise financial losses and successes across the company. The conglomerates' capacity for a portfolio approach is much greater, if they choose to take it. One editor talked about not being able to 'afford' to publish too many debut authors, whereas another discussed their seeming openness to (unagented) submissions was delimited 'because being small and independent, our resources are really tight in terms of people's hours'. Another discussed an innovative list they had established, and how a conglomerate started publishing in the same area but with a lower price point, 'a lot less then we could afford to produce them for'. This price competition mean that 'we were […] sidelined completely […] we didn't have the might of a large company […] to be able to market and publicise.' An entrepreneurial start-up editor talked about the difficulties and pragmatics of mission-led independent publishing:

> however […] lovely it is for new, small independent publishers to start up, and
> they're passionate about literary fiction and passionate about poetry and whatever,
> it's just not a sustainable business model really. […] it's so tough […] I think some
> people who are doing it are […] closing their eyes and hoping for the best because
> we do want those brilliant books out there. But it's unrealistic to think that you can

back the whole thing and make money out of it, and always make money out of it. So I can't see those ones that are small business that are trying to set up in the same model as big businesses; I just can't see how they can […] survive and thrive really. It needs to be a hobby, maybe more of a hobby business than a real job and then publishing maybe four books a year that they absolutely love. I just don't see how it can work.

The very real financial challenges for publishers, this editor would suggest, means that attempting to operate with the same business model as larger publishers is doomed to failure. Although such a forceful argument would need interrogation in order to prove its veracity – some of the companies within this sample, and other small and independent companies do operate with successful business growth strategies – the idea of the hobbyist publisher is one worth further consideration. It connects to the idea of passion-led publishers, with one owner-manager describing her operation as having to 'be a passion, I think, because it's a shrinking industry'. Such language suggests that the rewards from their publishing are derived from aspects other than the financial. In my sample, it was evident that – as Stewart also identified – the smaller, owner-publisher companies were more likely to articulate this motivation. However, at the same time the smallest of publishers also made evident the financial risk that they were undertaking in publishing, with little-to-no financial cushion. If the companies had no independent financial resources, and were reliant on business loans, cultural policy funding, and the limited income from the sale of their titles, there is – as Noël identified in her work with French independent companies – high potential for 'self-exploitation' which, she describes, 'is perceived as normal for people who are highly devoted to their work'.[xxxv] Financial pressures can also be extreme, with cash flow and capital a perennial problem, as identified by Ramdarshan Bold's study of independent publishers in the Pacific North-West.[xxxvi]

There is a conundrum in the operational management and rhetorical construction of small and independent publishers, who may be driven by passion but in order to achieve their goals need either to be highly pragmatic, have independent financial resources, or turn to self-exploitation. As Noël concludes, the 'discourse' of independent publishers, 'as well as

their way of doing business, is saturated with the contradictions of a fragile position as they have to avoid two ills: renouncing their principles or exhausting themselves.'[xxxvii]

How might this contradiction relate to small publishers rhetorical positioning vis-à-vis the 'mainstream'? All the publishers I spoke to explained the operations of their companies, and their commissioning practices within them, as in some way differentiated from those of conglomerates. Editors who had worked within conglomerates, were particularly cognisant of the difference, making comments such as 'There are books that I have bought here [a mid-sized company] that I would not have tried to buy at [a conglomerate] because they wouldn't have been able'. Other publishers – as articulated earlier in describing the motivation for setting up their company – saw their operations as quite intentionally setting out to be different from conglomerate publishing in terms of the choice of books and their sense of cultural mission.

However, for other publishers, the difference they perceived between their operations and those of conglomerate publishers were present, but articulated in more pragmatic or even commercial ways. For one mid-sized publisher, establishing and sustaining an independent identity was a process of brand creation: 'there's definitely a desire to re-establish the identity of the fiction list […] it's only going to be a good thing for us to be even more clearly defined as what we think [the company…] should stand for.' Another editor, working in a smaller publisher, was clear about what she perceived their contribution to be:

> I would say we're not trying to do something different in terms of what we publish but maybe how we publish. We want to make sure that authors have a direct contact with us. We're not faceless, you know. We're not out of reach. We will respond to them and they do get a lot of personal attention.

The editor went on to discuss how larger publishers can offer much greater marketing and promotion opportunities, a 'scale' they cannot aspire to, before concluding that 'we have to be imaginative and clever about what we can do.' Another publisher talked about her distinct literary list in comparison to the offerings of conglomerates, but used the word 'niche' to articulate it as a business proposition as well as an act of community creation:

> I set up [the company] because I saw a niche, it'll do good for the UK book market to have a bit more foreign fiction… I also […] felt, and still feel, confident that I can adequately address that niche, and address that gap, that I have things to offer that other people might struggle with, and in particular I know foreign literature, I know the foreign literature market […] That was my main drive. To add to the literary world […]'

Such an articulation is not necessarily an opposition to mainstream publishing, but rather finds a way to operate alongside the conglomerates and their output. Another small publisher, also operating at the more literary end of the market, also did not see her company operating oppositionally:

> do I see it in opposition to mainstream publishing? No. […] I think there are lots of problems from mainstream publishing and where isn't there problems? […] I more see it as complementary. I mean there are certain writers who I think have huge literary value who, for whatever reason, because there isn't enough space, because of monetary reasons, because every publishing house only has a number of slots, it doesn't matter if you're big or small, they're not being published. There's small presses – you step up and you can take one or two or three of those authors and actually give them that and that's your job. And I don't think that's in opposition. I think that's just adding to the mix […]

One editor talked about the desire for business growth within her company, a 'vision of the company expanding' which 'never saw us as being a small press, ever'. This *anti*-small press vision included the wish to be 'utterly professional, […] doing the best job we can. Spending money on production, and marketing, and on design, so our books look just as good as a book from any other publisher.' The intent, therefore, to 'grow, to expand, to extend the list', links to a desire to operate within the same market as larger players.

This entrepreneurial and growth mindset is a very different articulation of independent publishing from the vision of the small press situating itself in opposition to the mainstream,

or in the 'parallel universe' described by Thompson. Rather, it posits the small, independent publisher operating within the same market as the conglomerates, with certain restrictions and constraints – not least financial and reputational – but also with some potential for economic *and* cultural success, and for growth. This market-oriented perspective of the small publisher supports the shift in perspective in Davis's analysis of small publishers in Australia from one as 'beacons of hope' against the 'primarily commercial objectives' of most operators in the marketplace, to one in which – despite the self-declarations of publishers in a survey (by SPUNC, the Small Press Underground Networking Community) that they do not expect to make a profit – 'any independent who says they don't want to make money is probably being less than honest'.[xxxviii] Indeed, alongside Noël's discussion of the tendency towards self-exploitation and exhaustion of individuals running small presses, is the question of whether and how small presses can grow sustainably. Noël discusses how selling to another company, or coming to some other partnership arrangement, might be a form of economic dependence, but that it can prevent 'self-exploitation and amateur-type practices that leave them sidelined on the fringes of the publishing world'.[xxxix] In this vein, one of the publishers in my sample discussed the pragmatic arrangement her company has with a conglomerate which has a large but minority share-holding in her company, which then enables the independent's use of the conglomerate's offices, back office services (including photocopying, IT support) and the sales team (for a commission). Sustainable models for small publishers would benefit from further investigation, particularly in terms of publisher life cycle, growth and financial sustainability set alongside cultural and socio-political drivers.

The more typically drawn 'heroic' figure of the small press publisher draws on a 'romanticised vision', which is bohemian, often idealised and, in Noël's analysis, elitist.[xl] There is a through line in this vision from that drawn of accounts of 'the editor as hero' in the age of publishing conglomeration analysed by Brier.[xli] Brier's examination of the investment of industry accounts from the 1960s onwards in the role of the '"serious editor"' as a bulwark 'in the struggle to defend literature from the forces of capital, commercialism, and homogenization, assuming the role occupied by suffering artists in so many earlier accounts' finds its parallels, I would argue, in normative accounts of the oppositional role of the independent press, which becomes the latter day 'champion […] stand[ing] for, the

residual, symbolic, ostensibly noneconomic value of the book'.[xlii] However, accounts from editors themselves insistently problematise, and even sometimes contradict, such a rhetorical positioning of the editor. For example, one editor within my sample, recently moved (and arguably therefore in the first flush of enthusiasm at her new role) to working at a senior role in a conglomerate explained the emancipatory effects she felt in her new position, where her colleagues' commentary upon acquisitions were largely restricted to the expertise of their jobs roles (i.e. the book's potential in bookshop or rights sales, or marketing). This was something she relished, as it reasserted her expertise over decisions about the worth of texts, compared to her previous experience in a mid-sized, and culturally prestigious independent, in which she stated, laughingly, that 'every single fucking person had an opinion'. While in some ways her account might seem to reassert the primacy of the editorial role, it comes with a corollary assertion of professionalism, and against the more positive accounts of the 'reading culture' explained by an editor from a different mid-sized company. The differentiation made by the conglomerate editor is not to do with her role as any kind of bulwark, and more to do with expertise, authority and efficiency.

What the nuance of such an example might indicate, perhaps, is that individual career trajectories across small, mid-sized to conglomerate companies throw up unexpected accounts which differ from what might be anticipated. Similarly, accounts deriving from editors working in companies of all sizes do not always conform to the idea of independent publishers as oppositional to the mainstream, nor more than seeing them always working in an 'agonistic' manner which 'evokes the stakes of various struggles', as Noël puts it in a furthering of her examination of the 'polysemic' nature of the definition of independence.[xliii] This conclusion supports that drawn by Noorda in her examination of publisher mission statements, in which she states that her data is less supportive of a differentiation between independent and corporate publishers than the former might want to argue for. Nonetheless, she argues, the 'positive connotations' of (small) size and independence becomes a means of differentiation of themselves and their 'product offerings' from 'the corporate publishers that dominate market share in the industry'.[xliv]

What, then, might be concluded from this examination of small and independent publishers, an analysis which views their operations as passionate *and* pragmatic, and which sees the

majority – at least within my sample – not as directly oppositional but nonetheless differentiated from conglomerate and mainstream publishing? My findings further underline those I previously discovered with Ray Murray, that rather than Thompson's idea of a 'parallel universe', there is a 'complex ecology […] in which publishing companies, large, small and in between, have contrasts and similarities, and also tangible points of operational contact'.[xlv] Although some of the publishers in my sample did occasionally perceive their operations as motivated by a desire to work in a very different way to the conglomerates, there were just as many instances of small and independent publishers wanting to occupy and operate in the same space as the largest companies, while nonetheless feeling a range of constraints, notably financial, in so doing. This analysis countermands the prevailing Bourdieusian approach taken by many scholarly analyses of small and independent publishers, as it generates a more complex account which is not premised upon a series of oppositions. Indeed, in seeking to understand small and independent publishing through a framework invested in stratifications based on relative autonomy, economic dependence, and aesthetic criteria, it is highly probable that the samples chosen by researchers skew the results: participants are frequently drawn from more literary independent publishers, whereas an examination of the membership body of an organisation such as the IPG demonstrates that many small and independent companies do not have high cultural lists, but instead produce (for example), walking guides, cookery and joke books. This is not to argue that the independent sector does not provide a necessary corrective to the often more financially driven conglomerate sector, and takes on the very real marketplace challenges of producing literary fiction, poetry and short stories.[xlvi] Nonetheless, a more holistic sense of the multiple market sectors into which independent companies publish would provide a greater understanding of what it means to be a small publisher. As it is, there is a risk – in fact, a reality – that academic researchers are repeating some of the myth-making and romanticising accounts about independent publishers without interrogating their basis, or their applicability, to all independents. Furthermore, it is arguable that the difference between a mid-sized company, operating with significant overheads, staffing levels, and list sizes, is at least as far from a small, owner-publisher company as a mid-sized company is to a conglomerate. Although an interrogation of independent publishing through the optics of passion and pragmatism is thus a useful exercise, and a questioning of the rhetorical positioning by publishers with regards to ideas

of the 'mainstream' productive, I would conclude by suggesting that further investigations would benefit from greater interrogation of research methods, including of sample choice and sector orientation, and from a business-oriented understanding of size and sustainability in order to understand more fully the role of the small and independent publisher within the 21st century publishing environment.

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Century.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.

[i] Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, *Publishing Bestsellers: Buzz and the Frankfurt Book Fair* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2020).

[ii] See for the UK Andrew Nash, Claire Squires and I. R. Willison, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 7: The Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[iii] In addition to Nash, et al, *The Cambridge History of the Book Volume* 7, see, for example, John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006 2nd edn.) and Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[iv] David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland Volume 4: Professionalism and Diversity 1880-2000* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 181.

[v] Finkelstein and McCleery, *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland Volume 4*, 181.

[vi] Rachel Noorda, "The Discourse and Value of Being an Independent Publisher," *Mémoires Du Livre / Studies in Book Culture* 10, no. 2 (2019): 2, https://doi.org/10.7202/1060971ar.

[vii] John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 146.

[viii] Laura J. Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[ix] Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 4.

[x] See Sophie Noël, "Indépendance et Autonomie: Des Usages Rhétoriques de Quelques Notions Ambivalentes dans le Secteur du Livre en France," *Biens Symbolique,* June 27, 2019, https://www.biens-symboliques.net/339.

[xi] Noël, "Indépendance et Autonomie," 4; Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 5-6.

[xii] Noël, "Indépendance et Autonomie," 14.

[xiii] Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 5.

xiv See European Commission, "What is an SME?," https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en, accessed 13 August 2019. The current EU categorisations are as follows:

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

xv The Publishers Association, "The UK Book Industry in Statistics 2016", 4 has the following table derived from ONS statistics (via https://www.publishers.org.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?alId=24186 accessed 13 August 2019):

Turnover Size (£'000)	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
0-49	690	700	690
50-99	380	430	495
100-249	405	440	485
250-499	190	205	225
500-999	145	130	125
1,000-4,999	180	170	170
5,000 +	90	85	80
	2,080	2,160	2,270
Employment size			
0-4	1,560	1,650	1770
5-6	240	245	245
10-19	140	135	125
20-49	80	75	79
50-99	25	25	25
100-249	25	20	20
250+	10	10	10
	2,080	2,160	2,270

Source: UK Business: Activity, Size & Location 2015, Office for National Statistics, October 2015 (www.ons.gov.uk)

xvi Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 7.
xvii André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London: Verso, 2000) and *Words and Money* (London: Verso, 2010).
xviii Susan Hawthorne, *Bibliodiversity: A Manifesto for Independent Publishing* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2014). 2.
xix Hawthorne, *Bibliodiversity*, 54.
xx Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, "The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit," *Book 2.0* 3, no.2 (2013): 19, https://doi.org/info:doi/10.1386/btwo.3.1.3_1.
xxi Thompson, *Merchants of Culture,* 155.

xxii Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 3.

xxiii Simon Stewart, "Making Evaluative Judgements and Sometimes Making Money: Independent Publishing in the 21st Century," *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change* 3, no. 2 (2018): 3, https://doi.org/10.20897/jcasc/3991.

xxiv Stewart, "Making Evaluative Judgements," 4.

xxv Emmett Stinson, "Small Publishers and the Emerging Network of Australian Literary Prosumption," *Australian Humanities Review*, 59: (April/May 2016): 36, 35.

xxvi Thompson, *Merchants of Culture,* 4, 5.

xxvii Stewart, "Making Evaluative Judgements," 2; Noorda, "Discourse and Value."

xxviii See Claire Squires, "Taste and/or Big Data?: Post-Digital Editorial Selection," *Critical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (October 1, 2017): https://doi.org/10.1111/criq.12361, and the forthcoming "Sensing the Novel/Seeing the Book/Selling the Goods". I further detailed the interview process in the former article (28-29): 'I conducted the interviews (both face-to-face and by Skype) in the first half of 2016 with individuals who all had responsibility for selecting texts for publication within their company. Some worked within large or medium-sized publishing companies as senior or more junior employees, whereas others were owner-publishers at the helm of small independents. All undertook the role of 'commissioning', though their job titles varied from publisher, to publishing director, to editor. The individuals were predominantly female (c80%), very largely middle class (I asked interviewees about their own identity, so most self-declared their class or discussed it in terms of education and/or parental background), and all were white […]The interview findings are presented anonymously, although with indicators of the size and formation of the company within which they are operating.'

xxix Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 13, 18.

xxx Stewart, "Making Evaluative Judgements," 3, 4.

xxxi Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 17.

xxxii IPG, "Mission, Vision and Values," http://www.ipg.uk.com/about/mission-vision-values, accessed 11 September 2019.

xxxiii See Squires, ""Sensing the Novel/Seeing the Book/Selling the Goods".

xxxiv Stewart, "Making Evaluative Judgements," 8.

xxxv Sophie Noël, "Keeping Neoliberal Economic Principles at a Distance: The Case of 'Radical' Independent Presses in France," in Ulrike Shuerkens, ed., *Global Management, Local Resistances* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 231.

xxxvi Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, "An 'Accidental Profession': Small Press Publishing in the Pacific Northwest," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 95, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-016-9452-9.

xxxvii Noël, "Keeping Neoliberal Economic Principles at a Distance," 234.

xxxviii Mark Davis, "Literature, Small Publishers and the Market in Culture," *Overland* (19 March 2008), https://overland.org.au/?page_id=102.

xxxix Noël, "Indépendance et Autonomie," 17

xl Noël, "Keeping Neoliberal Economic Principles at a Distance," 223, 226.

xli Evan Brier, "The Editor as Hero: The Novel, the Media Conglomerate, and the Editorial Critique," *American Literary History* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajx045.

xlii Brier, "The Editor as Hero," 101.

xliii Noël, "Indépendance et Autonomie," 14.

xliv Noorda, "Discourse and Value," 19.

xlv Ray Murray and Squires, "Digital Publishing Communications Circuit, "10.

xlvi See, for example, the account in Arts Council England with Canelo. *Literature in the 21st Century: Understanding Models of Support for Literary Fiction* (2017), https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/literature-21st-century-understanding-models-support-literary-fiction.