



SFB 1385 Virtual Roundtable
“Culture v. Commerce in the UK Publishing Industry”
Hosted by Chiara Bullen
(research fellow with the sub-project [A02 Literature and the Market](#))

Literature is often seen as something abstract and culturally 'valuable', operating far from the logic of law and the market. Brouillette and Doody note there is a 'historically shifting but nevertheless persistent division between art and commerce...which the literary has so often symbolized,' (2015). Greco, Rodriguez and Wharton observe that the publishing industry is both a 'cultural endeavour' and 'a creative enterprise', a 'double helix filled not with strands of DNA but with great books, great ideas and an outpouring of titles that engulf the channels of distribution,' (2006). However, the 'strands' of culture and commerce do not always exist harmoniously within the publishing field.

This virtual roundtable will feature three fifteen-minute presentations from Cat Mitchell (University of Derby), Dr Audrey Laing (Robert Gordon University) and Jasmin Kirkbride (University of East Anglia) highlighting the tensions within the UK publishing field that have arisen due to the conflict between commerce and culture in 21st-century book publishing. The presentations will be followed by a moderated discussion and Q&A.

Speaker Bios and Abstracts

Cat Mitchell is a Lecturer in Publishing and the Programme Leader for the Creative Writing and Publishing BA at the University of Derby. She has an undergraduate degree in English and Related Literature from the University of York, and an MRes in Social Research from the University of Derby. Before working in academia, she worked in the publishing industry, including four years at Penguin Random House. She is currently researching disability in publishing, and in 2021 published the Access Denied report, which investigated barriers for disabled job seekers and employees in the industry.

Abstract: Within debates on the conflict between art and commerce sits the topic of diversity. There is a growing culture of overwork in the publishing industry, driven in part by commercial forces that lead to an ever-increasing number of titles being published, with fewer workers to support these publications. This workplace culture has a knock-on effect on diversity, which potentially also impacts both the artistic and commercial enterprises of publishing houses. This talk will specifically focus on how workplace and wider industry culture impacts disability representation, both in workforces and in publishing output.

Dr Audrey Laing is a lecturer at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, in the School of Creative and Cultural Business. Having worked in chain bookshops for more than 10 years, Audrey drew on her bookselling experiences to undertake a PhD, focusing on bookselling culture and consumer behaviour. Since then, Audrey has continued to research the book trade, publishing articles which explore bookselling online; bookshops as a third place; how authors use social media, and most recently the role of independent bookshops in Scotland.

Abstract: This presentation explores the cultural contributions made by independent bookshops in Scotland to community life, while acknowledging the many challenges encountered by



independents as they navigate policy at local and governmental level, as well as the perennial economic difficulties facing independent bookshops. The paper proposes strategic recommendations which address these ongoing difficulties within the industry.

Jasmin Kirkbride is a writer, editor and academic. Her Hugo-nominated short fiction has appeared in places including [Tor.com](https://www.tor.com), and she has also published poetry, nonfiction, and peer-reviewed papers. She is currently undertaking a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of East Anglia (UEA), exploring hope in climate fiction. She continues to work part-time as a freelance editor and an Associate Tutor at UEA. www.jasminkirkbride.com | @jasminkirkbride

Abstract: Revisiting her 2020 paper 'Understanding our place: publishing's role in the reading ecosystem under neoliberal economics', Jasmin will explore how the capitalist handling of the pandemic in the UK has affected the professional of authorship and author incomes. She will then reflect personally on how these affects have interacted with her own work and her specialist subject, climate fiction.

Works Cited

Brouillette, Sarah and Doody, Christopher. 2015. 'The Literary as a Cultural Industry' in *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries*. London: Routledge.

Wharton, Robert M., Albert N. Greco, and Clara E. Rodríguez. 2006. *The Culture and Commerce of Publishing in the 21st Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.