
Title: The Shelf-Life of Books: An Exploration of the Lifecycle
and Longevity of Books in the UK in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This thesis, situated within the field of publishing studies, investigates UK trade non-fiction print book sales between 2001 and 2015. It uses mixed methods to analyse the market for books, the bookselling function, and the corpus of longselling non-fiction titles. The research articulates and defines longsellors as distinct from bestsellers as well as quantifying how many new titles published between 2000 and 2015 achieve above-average sales longevity (beyond one year), and explores in qualitative terms what distinguishes these books.

The research employs a range of theoretical models and frameworks to explore the phenomena of longsellerdom including: descriptive statistics, Darnton's Communication Circuit, Bhaskar's theory of framing and amplification, Anderson's long-tail economics, and Bourdieusian sociology of literature.

From the Nielsen BookScan dataset, a subset of longselling works was identified. This subset of longselling titles is an original contribution to scholarly knowledge that serves to fill the lacunae into works of non-fiction as a genre of publishing.

The qualitative research components included interviews with actors within the bookselling and publishing industry; consideration of the backlist and the mechanism by which works might become longsellors. Case studies of five longselling works are provided to explore in detail some of the factors that have contributed to longsellerdom namely, *Testament of Youth* (1933) by Vera Brittain; *Cider With Rosie* (1959) by Laurie Lee; *In Cold Blood* (1965) by Truman Capote; *The Story of Art* (1950) by Ernst Gombrich; and *The Right Way to Play Chess* (1950) by David Pritchard.

Key findings from this research are that: longsellerdom is incredibly rare and distinct from bestsellerdom; there are some genres (e.g. self-help), topics (e.g. war) and forms of writing (narrative non-fiction) that appear frequently in the list of longsellors, indicating these areas of writing and publishing, when successful, can be enduring and lucrative.

Keywords: UK publishing; UK bookselling; longselling books; trade non-fiction; sales lifecycle and longevity; backlist.

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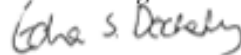
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Thesis Glossary & Abbreviations

AI – Advanced Information sheet, usually a one-page document containing the key sales information for a book (also known as TI – Title Information sheet).

API – Application Programming Interface.

ASP – Average Sales Price (after retailer promotional discounting has been applied).

Backlist – Established titles (more than a year since publication) as opposed to frontlist.

EPOS – Electronic Point of Sale.

FRBR – Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records models the entity and relationships between intellectual work.

Frontlist – Newly published titles (less than a year since publication) as opposed to backlist.

In Print. Retail and legal status for products that are actively published. It means a title continues to be kept in-stock and should that stock run out it will be replenished by the publisher. See also 'OOP – Out of Print'.

IP – Intellectual Property.

ISBN – International Standard Book Number: A unique numeric identifier given to each new *format* (hardback, paperback, epub), or new revised *edition*. The ISBN identifier is a 12 digits long number, (prior to 2007 9 digits long). Widely adopted by the commercial publishing industry.

ISTC – International Standard Text Code: A unique hexadecimal identifier developed to identify a work (as defined above). This 'parent' code addresses the issues of identifying related works with differing titles, confusing non-related works with similar or identical titles, and is an ISO standard developed to aggregate all related 'child' ISBNs automatically.

Long-tail – a commonly observed distribution of sales volume by product. Where a small quantity of products sell in high volumes, and a larger (potentially infinite) quantity of products sell in low volumes.

NBA – Net Book Agreement. Price maintenance legislation (1900-1996) which prohibited retail discounting of books.

OOS – Out of Stock. Retail status for products that are not in stock at the distributor/wholesaler.

OOP – Out of Print. Retail and legal status for products that are no longer published. The publisher-author contract often includes a clause that states the copyright will revert back to the author should a title go 'out of print'. See also 'In Print'.

PLM – Product Lifecycle Management.

PRH – Penguin Random House

POD – Print on demand.

Qual – Mixed methods shorthand for qualitative.

Quan – Mixed methods shorthand for quantitative.

RRP – Recommended Retail Price, listed price of sale to consumers.

TCM – Trade Consumer Market: the term used by the data aggregator Nielsen BookScan to describe the UK retail market and shorthand for the resulting dataset. Conceptually, this also refers to the panel of dedicated bookshops and non-specialist retail channels that sell book products to the general public and share data with Nielsen BookScan.

Time series – set of data indexed over equal intervals by time. For example, book sales data.

TNF – Trade Non-fiction.

Dedication

To my father who saw me start this journey, but is not here to see me finish it.
And, to my mother who taught me how to boss an Excel spreadsheet.

Acknowledgements & Thanks

Thanks to my husband Neil, who I blame for most things including not giving up on this PhD, and thanks to Meg Gamble my SUAW buddy for all the hours on Zoom, with baba on boob, through pandemics and troughs of disillusionment.

I am most grateful to my funder SGSAH and my supervisors Prof. Claire Squires and Dr Simon Rowberry. This thesis is the better for their comments and suggestions but any areas found lacking are entirely my responsibility.

Thanks to all the people who contributed to this research via interviews, emails and phone conversations adding insight and detail to publishing practice and publishing histories. To the kind archivists and librarians who dug into files and pulled out extra details for me, or recommended further sources that I should consider.

Thank you to Dr Lucy Warwick and Dawn Cockcroft for proof reading chapters in various states of completedness and to my colleagues at University of Stirling, and Oxford Brookes University for their positive comments, support and camaraderie over the years. I cannot mention everyone here but am compelled to name those sadly no longer with us: Christine Fowler, Librarian and Booker Prize expert, Dr Sally Hughes, Senior Lecturer and expert in museum and gallery publishing, and Kate Howie, Teaching Fellow in Mathematics.

Preface

Before launching into the thesis contents, I would like to go back to the very beginning, to how this research project was initially conceived, and reflect on the way it has progressed over time. I do this here for a combination of reasons: to offer transparency to the process of post-graduate research; acknowledge some of the challenges and the limitations along the way; acknowledge the patience and support from my supervisors Prof. Claire Squires and Dr. Simon Rowberry and the University of Stirling; and the generosity of my funder SGSAH.

The seed of the idea for this research was sown in a pub in Oxfordshire around 2012, when I was lecturing in Publishing, at Oxford Brookes University and Digital Book History at the School of Advanced Studies, University of London. I was chatting to Katharine Fry, Buyer for Blackwell's bookshop, and wondered how many books actually sell beyond a few years and make the jump from frontlist to backlist, and within the bookshop what proportion of space was given to the new and established titles? From this, a lengthy discussion arose about the typical longevity of books and how non-fiction tended (in our opinions) have greater longevity than fiction, depending on the topic of course as some areas of non-fiction date incredible fast. We speculated about which books would feature as the longest-selling and whether there would be any surprises in there, perhaps flying under the radar but selling modestly well for a very long time. This conversation stayed with me, and the idea spent a couple of years scribbled on a Post-It-Note stuck to the wall of my home office in Oxford under the heading of 'stuff to research'. I have forgotten the other research questions on that Post-It-Note, because the one that always shone out and ultimately made it to the top of my PhD proposal list was this question of longevity.

When considering a PhD topic, one needs to find something that is big enough to write about in depth, but not so big that it cannot be completed within the time frame. I felt the scale of this research project was always quite ambitious,

there are hundreds of thousands of books out there, but not unrealistic because I was going to narrow things down systematically and find those longselling books. Another factor to consider was access to the data needed to complete the research and here in the UK we are fortunate enough to have the Nielsen BookScan dataset available covering print book sales made through shops from 2001 onwards.

In 2015, I was encouraged by Professor Claire Squires to undertake this research at the University of Stirling and was delighted to be supported in my application for funding to Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities (SGSAH). At the time, I did not fully appreciate what it meant to be entering a doctoral training programme, but as I reflect on it now the opportunities provided by SGSAH have been world class. My research and career over the past ten years have been enriched by summer schools and conferences, funded research trips, opportunities to publish and promote my research and the research of my cohort. SGSAH provided a community and opportunities.

Usually the timeframe for a PhD is three or four years of full-time study but in the case of this research project there was a baby girl to accommodate and a global pandemic to survive, so the timeline has been stretched beyond my expectations and the progress unevenly distributed. I did not know at the outset that the PhD I started in October 2015 would not be ready to submit until 2024.

In terms of how it unfolded, the initial literature review and a large chunk of the book sales data and longseller analysis were undertaken in late 2015 through to early 2017, at this point I took a nine-months maternity leave from the research to be with my daughter. Then in 2018, following my return from maternity leave I picked up the PhD on a part-time basis and conducted the bulk of industry interviews and began the process of writing up the thesis chapters. The chapter summarising the bookseller interviews was edited into a journal article published in *Logos* in 2023 under the title 'The Window of Opportunity: Success and failure in UK bookselling'. By the beginning of 2020, I was set to return to the data analysis and write up those (very data heavy

chapters), having become quite distant from them. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 caused further obstacles and delays, and again SGSAH provided generous forbearance via extensions to funding and deadlines. I had started the case study analysis for *Right Way to Play Chess*, *Cider with Rosie*, and *In Cold Blood* before the pandemic so by the time I came back to research *Testament of Youth* and *The Story of Art* my methods were more refined and it felt necessary to circle back and revise parts of the earlier cases. At the end of 2020, Goodreads shuttered its API and changed its user licence to tighten up scraping of review data. Thus, some of the reader response data came from Goodreads and some from Amazon reviews depending on whether they were collected pre- or post-pandemic.

While the delays in completing this PhD research meant I could have extended the sales analysis beyond 2016, there was a good reason for keeping it set to this interval and not repeating large chunks of quantitative analysis. Crucially, the list of longselling titles that I have identified and from which the detailed case studies were selected have not been impacted by these delays. The works were originally published in the twentieth century and continue to be longsellers today. However, one event in particular since I conducted my interviews is worth stressing here; the sale of Blackwell bookshop chain to Waterstones in 2022 means that the UK book retail market is further consolidated. While some Blackwell's-branded bookshops still exist the specific purchasing processes and mechanisms are potentially changed.

Thesis Structure

This thesis outlines the SGSAH-funded research project and findings undertaken between 2015 and 2023 with the University of Stirling. It is an exploration of shelf-life in contemporary British publishing and is an in-depth study of the commercial, organisational and publishing contexts underpinning the consumer (trade) book market between 2001 and 2015. It is divided into four parts and nine chapters outlined below.

Part 1: Introduction and Context

Chapter 1: Introduction to Topic & Methodology

In chapter one, the research aims are outlined along with some key terms of reference. The rationale for the PhD and is explained in terms of lacunae followed by the methodology and research methods. This section provides an overview of the mixed methods approach, and how each research question will be addressed via either quantitative analysis (such as book sales data, consumer retail price indexes), or qualitative data (such as case studies, interviews and sentiment analysis). It concludes by situating the research within the scholarly context of publishing studies and digital humanities.

Chapter 2: Context, Models and Theory

In chapter two, the business of publishing, product lifecycles and shifting importance of frontlist and backlist titles are discussed to provide a contextual picture of the consumer publishing and retail landscape. This chapter outlines the theoretical orientation of the research via the communications circuit, Bourdieusian theory, and Bhaskar's theory of publishing as framing and amplification of intellectual property.

When discussing successful books within the fields of publishing, book history, or even literary criticism the term 'longseller' is not commonly referenced. Thus, the chapter expands on the long tail economics of the publishing industry, and goes on to assess the theory and definitions of bestsellers as a way of moving towards a definition of longselling works.

Part 2: Quantitative research methods and findings

Chapter 3: Quantitative methods

Chapter three details the quantitative methods. The main dataset for sales analysis used in this research is the UK Trade Consumer Market (TCM) as captured by the data aggregator Nielsen BookScan. This data source will be explained however it is necessary to note that it is specific to physical books, sold via UK retailer outlets, and that this research is focused on the time period 2001 to 2015.

Chapter 4: Non-fiction in Numbers

This chapter presents the quantitative data findings and analysis. Within book retail, trade non-fiction is broken down by the data aggregator (Nielsen BookScan) into three tiers of subcategory known as 'product class'. The quantitative data are analysed via descriptive statistics in three sections: firstly, macro analysis of the non-fiction market as a whole; followed by consideration of the top-5000 bestselling titles; and lastly analysis of the identified longselling subset. The sales data are explored by product class (genre/category of book), publisher and author. Some groups of products date more quickly than others, and the expected/typical longevity of titles' stock turnover rate differs from product class to product class.

Part 3: Qualitative research methods and findings

Chapter 5: Qualitative Methods

Chapter five details the qualitative methods: relating to the interviews with industry stakeholders (booksellers, publishers, agents). It also provides some contextual discussion of the UK book sales channels, bookshop chains and the typical locations in which bookshop are located.

Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity

Chapter six presents the findings of the interview data thematically and the window of opportunity for books to succeed or fail. It places this within the context of the British bookselling industry and considers factors that can

influence book sales such as customer drivers, location, seasonality, promotion and the legal and structural framework of the retail spaces.

Chapter 7: Longselling Case Studies

Chapter seven presents five longselling case studies (*Testament of Youth*, *Cider with Rosie*, *In Cold Blood*, *The Story of Art* and *The Right Way to Play Chess*) providing in-depth analysis of the work and relating these to sales longevity and longsellerdom. Each case explores the publication history, adaptations, reader opinions, and the sales progress of analogous titles published around the same era in history. The objective is to identify and explain why these titles have been successful and endured against all odds.

Part 4: Discussion

Chapter 8: What makes a longseller?

Chapter eight reflects on the five case studies and wider literature to discuss the characteristics of longsellors, cultures of publishing and the systems within and without publishing that have supported longevity. It draws on Bourdieusian theory and Bhaskar's theory of publishing as framing and amplification as well as other relevant literature.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and areas of further research

Chapter nine provides a summative conclusion to the thesis and aims to present: how each research question was addressed, the overall implications of this research, industry relevance, and recommendations for areas of future research.

Part 1: Introduction and Context

Chapter 1: Introduction to Topic & Methodology

Chapter 2: Context, Models and Theory

Chapter 1: Introduction to Topic & Methodology

Section 1.1 (p.19) presents the research questions and rationale for an exploration of shelf-life in contemporary publishing. From this naturally arise a number of key themes and lacunae that the research will address, in particular the limited amount of scholarly work focused on the non-fiction book market sector. Thus, *section 1.2 (p.28)* details the research questions and overall design of the mixed methods approach. *Section 1.3 (p.33)* signposts where in the thesis each research question is addressed, before moving on to situate the research within the context of publishing studies and digital humanities in *section 1.4 (p.37)*.

1.1 Introduction

UK book publishing in the 21st century is an industry based on new product development (Greco, 2015, p. 179), with over 200,000 new and revised titles published in 2015 (Publishers' Association, 2016). Short term, these books compete for retail space, consumer attention and sales. This can be thought of as 'a tournament for survival' (Greco, 2015, p. 179) functioning in an 'economy of surplus' (Nybacka, 2008, p. 7). The question that begs to be asked, and forms the basis of this PhD, is how many of these books are successful long term and why?

Research Questions & Topic

By any measure, the UK produces a substantial number of books. In 2016, at the outset of this research project, the UK had the highest per capita output in the world, 2,875 titles per million inhabitants and outputs the third largest number of new titles by volume, behind China first and the US second (c.440k, 305k, 184k respectively) (IPA cited by Flood, 2014). The number of new and revised titles published each year has risen steadily since the end of the Second World War (Clark and Phillips, 2014; Squires 2007 p.25; Todd 1996 p.59) when paper rationing constrained the output of British publishers. From an almost standing start of 6,000 new titles in 1943, it took UK publishers only a decade before they were outputting over 20,000 new or revised works per

year. By 1996, this figure had risen to over 100,000 (Squires, 2007 p.25). The latter half of the twentieth century, overshadowed by the Cold War, economic recessions, and concern for the survival of the printed book, has nevertheless seen steady growth in the output of new titles year-on-year. In line with expectations of the information age and the introduction of new digital formats, the first fifteen years of the 21st century has seen new and revised titles double again to over 200,000 (Publishers' Association, 2016; Nielsen 2024a).

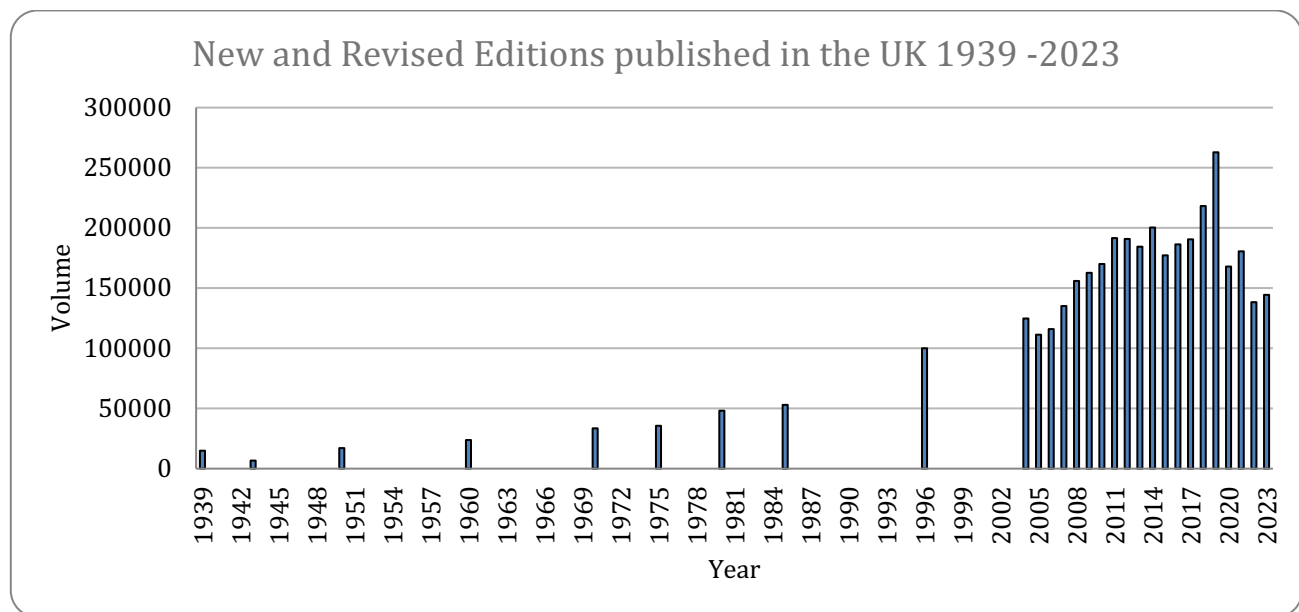


Figure 1: Vol. of New Titles Publishing in UK by Year (various sources: Clark and Phillips, 2014; Squires 2007 p.25; Todd 1996 p.59; Publishers' Association, 2016; Nielsen BookScan 2024a)

In 2014, an average of 450 new titles were published per day. In the same year, the UK population stood at 64 million. This then equates to one new title published for every 320 citizens per year.

These statistics alone invite many questions: who is writing all these books? How many more people are involved in the design and refining of these products? How and why does the machinery of publishing manufacture and distribute at such a vast scale?

However, this research is more interested in the next stages of the supply chain. What happens when these new titles are added to those already in print; the millions of titles which make up UK publishers' back catalogues known as

the backlist? How are all these books, both new and established, squeezed into bookshops (physical or otherwise)? How are they merchandised and sold? How long is the window of opportunity for them to succeed or fail? What does success look like in modern bookselling terms – and which authors and titles have achieved this? In the so-called age of abundance (Anderson, 2006; Phillips, 2014, 2019; Nybacka, 2008), which books have persistent sales and why?

Central to many of these questions are bookshops and booksellers, their decision-making processes, and the function they serve in bringing books to consumers. The high street bookselling industry in the UK has battled long and hard to remain relevant in the face of many challenges: consolidation and mergers of the 90s and 00s (Bloom, 2008, p.21; Thompson, 2012; Todd, 1996 pp.121-8), loss-leading supermarkets, followed by unrelenting competition and strategic discounting from the online retailer Amazon. The peculiarities of book retailing will be examined as compared to retailers of other products. However, one of the most notable differences among these is that they stock thousands (sometimes hundreds of thousands) of individual product lines, supplied by thousands of unique suppliers. With increasing numbers of new titles published each year and limited shelf-space available, physical bookshops act as what Anderson (2009, pp. 108–9) describes as ‘post-filters’, narrowing the selection of products on offer. Further to this process of filtering is the curatorial role of booksellers, a creative function encompassing more than simple selection (Bhaskar, 2016).

As with all research there are constraints to the scope of work that can be completed in the given time. Implicit in academic scholarship is a responsibility to uncover new information and progress understanding. With this in mind, titles with obvious longevity will be excluded from the scope of study such as the Bible, the Koran, or the Tanakh, along with classical works from antiquity, and those firmly within the public domain (no longer subject to copyright) at the point the research was conducted.

In terms of the analysis of longsellingdom (a term I shall go on to define in *Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory*) within this thesis it is helpful to differentiate a book's sales lifecycle as the duration of time publishers, authors and illustrators are profiting from book sales, as distinct from the product lifecycle or, duration of time the physical book product remains in use. There is no doubt that books have commercial resale value beyond bookshops and physical shelf-lives beyond the bookshop shelf, however these areas (while interesting) are beyond the scope of this thesis. The primary reasons for this are that a) revenue derived from resale does not typically make its way back to the publisher or rightsholder, and thus tend not inform or influence future editorial decisions, and b) on a more practical level resale data is much harder to obtain. The following section expands on the research methods that *are* available and suited to this investigation.

This research will define and explore longselling books and quantify the commercial longevity (or shelf-life) of books in the UK in the 21st century. An objective of the thesis is to identify longselling titles that have had particular resonance with the UK readership, and investigate the characteristics of these titles' success. More specifically this research aims to:

- Define longsellors as distinct from bestsellers.
- Quantify how many new titles published between 2000 and 2015 achieve above average sales longevity (beyond one year), and explore in qualitative terms what distinguishes these books.
- Determine how the average sales lifecycle of books has changed since the turn of the 21st century.

From this some broader research questions will be addressed:

- What is the function of bookshop and bookseller in product sales lifecycle?
- What trends can be found within categories of trade non-fiction titles (equivalent to genres of trade fiction)?
- How do new formats, production methods, e-commerce, and permanent availability of stock affect sales lifecycles?

The main dataset for sales analysis used in this research will be the UK Trade Consumer Market (TCM) as captured by the aggregator Nielsen BookScan. This data source will be explained and evaluated in greater depth later in the thesis, however it is necessary to note at this stage that it is specific to physical books, sold via UK retailer outlets, from 2001 to present.

Lacunae: Filling the gaps

In order to address the research questions listed above, a working definition of the term longseller is clearly required. To some extent, scholarship of bestselling literature (Bloom, 2008; Feather and Woodbridge, 2007; Sutherland, 2007, 1981; Vanderbilt, 1999), can be used as a benchmark to guide research into the phenomenon of longselling books. However, bestsellerdom (to borrow Sutherland's term) resists simple definition. It has been studied from a number of different perspectives (literary studies, book history, marketing and business studies) each discipline offering up, in true social-constructionist fashion, its own qualifications, definitions and explanations (Archer & Jocker, 2016; Bloom, 2008; Escarpit, 1971; Miller, 2000; Sutherland, 1981; Waldfogel and Reimers, 2015; Vanderbilt, 1999). These will be discussed in more depth in *Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory*, and distinctions made between the works that have been labelled as bestsellers so that a working definition of longsellors can be established. It might very well be the case that some longselling works are also bestselling works, but this research aims to dig deeper into the data and consider the long-term performance over time and the distinctions between bestsellers and longsellors.

A significant number of scholars have approached the study of bestsellers from the starting point of literary criticism or literary studies and the result of this is a large body of research focused on works of fiction rather than non-fiction (Archer & Jocker, 2016; Bloom, 2008; Collins, 2010; Escarpit, 1971; Helgason, 2014; McCracken, 1998; Pawling, 1984; Sutherland, 2007, 2002, 1981; Todd, 1996; Vanderbilt, 1999) and within these studies literary fiction (rather than mass market) works receive the greatest attention. However, in the UK, three

in every five book purchases are works of **non-fiction**. These sales account for over 60% of trade consumer book sales by volume (Nielsen, 2016c), therefore this research aims to address the lacunae and consider the significance of consumer non-fiction. Non-fiction has traditionally been thought to have greater longevity than fiction and is touched upon by some scholars (Feather and Woodbridge, 2007; Greco, 2015; Moretti, 2007; Schiffrin, 2001; Sutherland, 2007, 2002, 1981) yet there has not been any large scale or comprehensive exploration of the commercial shelf-lives of non-fiction books.

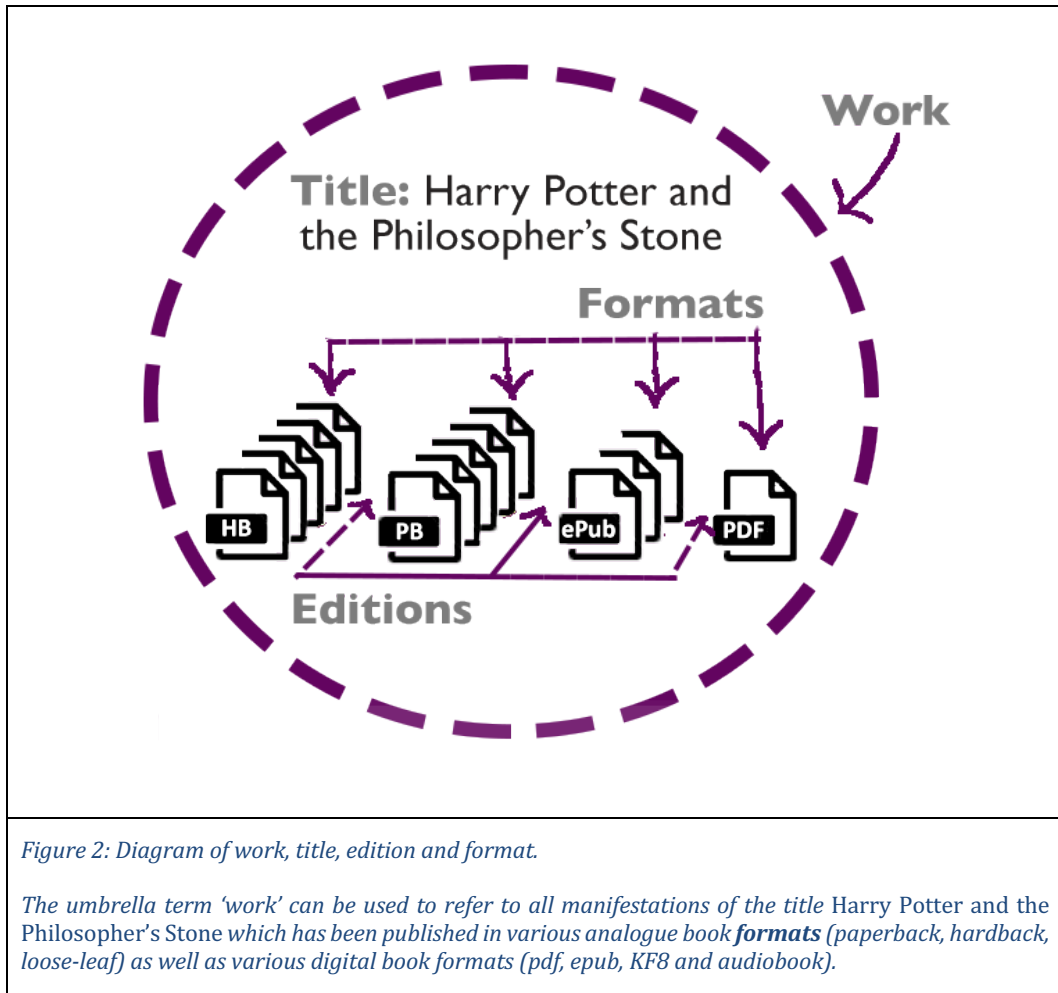
Much of the existing scholarship on bestselling or popular works targets output within the twentieth century or earlier. Prior to the arrival of modern market data aggregators like Nielsen BookScan, bestseller lists were typically derived from bookshop charts published in newspapers and magazines. Research into bestsellers therefore tends to start with the premise that a title appears in the charts and focuses discussion on why a title, author, genre or style might have appealed to the population at that point in time. There is little discussion of the lifetime sales performance of work as a whole across all formats and editions, or indeed much discussion of the influential role of the retailer in selling the books. Furthermore, there is little discussion of the extent to which the publisher, author or other agency within the communications circuit can extend the lifetime sales of a bestselling work.

Therefore, other aspects of this research that differentiates it from much of the existing corpus of work on bestsellers are: the analysis of the **bookshops'** function within the publishing supply chain; the discussion of the process of stocking bookshops; the investigation into the mechanism by which a work can transition from frontlist to backlist stock; and the involvement of actors within the supply chain.

In summary, this research project aims to address gaps in scholarly knowledge by offering: an articulation of longsellerdom as distinct from bestsellerdom; analysis of sales trends within the under-researched category of non-fiction books; specific non-fiction case studies; and consideration of the role actors play within the communications circuit (e.g. author, agent, publisher,

bookshop and reader) in the continued success of longselling non-fiction works.

Key Terms of Reference



As stated, definitions of longseller and bestseller will be developed through a review of literature in

Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory. However, to avoid ambiguity while explaining the topic there are some terms with multiple definitions that warrant clarification from the outset. **Book** is (ironically) not a particularly accurate noun for describing the output of the book publishing industry. It can mistakenly imply that the medium is physical, and the format singular. In reality, an object typically referred to as a 'book' can assume a myriad of shapes, sizes and containers, only some of which are physical. Within this thesis, to avoid ambiguity or confusion, the term '**title**' rather than '*book*' is used. So in practice I might write: 'the top-5000 chart contained only 4980 unique titles, as the hardback and paperback formats of some titles secured high enough sales to feature in the chart independently'.

Edition is another term with multiple meanings within and without the publishing industry. However, two of the ways it will be used here are to indicate firstly an updated version of a published work (often academic) such as '*Inside Book Publishing*, 5th Edition' where one edition includes new or revised content when compared to the previous edition; and secondly, where a title is visually repackaged for different consumer groups such as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* which has sold in dozens of editions (adult edition, children's edition, illustrated edition). For the purpose of this research, the various *formats* and *editions* of the same *title* will be referred to collectively as a **work**. This is of particular importance for the study of longselling titles, where the aggregated sales of multiple editions of over time might paint a different picture to the study of individual editions. Therefore, during data analysis, sales records for all editions of the same title were aggregated. Sometimes a new edition of a work will be issued with a unique ISBN, but publishers do not always issue a new ISBN to backlist titles, as will be evidenced within *Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies*.

It is convention when citing specific titles to include the date of the edition in parenthesis to avoid ambiguity around which edition is being used; for example, *Inside Book Publishing* (2008) indicates the fifth edition. In some parts of the thesis, the date used will be the publication date of the earliest British edition, for example *Testament of Youth* (1933). However, it is

occasionally necessary to discuss all editions collectively as a work, and here the date of the specific years of publication has been omitted, because this is not a citation or reference to one single source but rather a discussion of the work in a broader sense spanning editions, publishers and formats.

Counting New Titles

In *Figure 1*, the estimates for the sum total of new and revised titles in the UK from 2001 onwards are based on ISBN (International Standard Book Number) registrations. This is a unique numeric identifier given to each new *format* (hardback, paperback, epub) or new revised edition of a work allowing metadata to be digitally linked to a product and its clones. While new books and new editions *should* be issued with a new ISBN, it is worth noting that reprints of editions that have merely sold-out of stock do not require a new ISBN (Nielsen Bookdata 2016). Also, in some cases the publisher might choose to recycle an ISBN over multiple repackaged editions of the same work. That is to say where the jacket design has been updated but little else within the body text.

Using ISBN data as a measure of creative output is problematic for a number of reasons: In response to the proliferation of ereading devices and (such as smart phones, tablets, and dedicated eInk ereaders) there was a period of mass digitization by trade publishers converting their backlists into ebook formats. Therefore, a portion of ISBNs registered as ‘new titles’ since 2008, can be attributed to new formats rather than an increase in the creative output of publishing in general. Secondly, growth in new titles pre/post World War II following the paperback revolution might have skewed earlier measures predating the invention of ISBNs. Thirdly, at the same time as the paperback format has become more popular, the hardback format has decreased in popularity (Forsyth and Birn, 1997 p.37). Finally, not all works have been allocated an ISBN, exceptions include: Amazon only self-published works which instead take ASIN; rare and antiquarian books predating the adoption of ISBNs; handmade and fine press books that are not sold through traditional retailers.

Given the caveats mentioned above regarding the counting of new and revised titles, one question which remains difficult to answer is how much of the increase in new titles recorded over the early part of the twenty-first century really equates to growth in unique works, and how much is multiplicity of formats? However, this thesis will be focused on slightly different questions namely, how many titles of the new titles published each year make the transition from front to backlist, how many remain there, and for typically how long?

The next section outlines the structure of the research and the methods used to best answer the research questions. It is followed by an overview of the UK publishing landscape at the point this research was undertaken and an introductory discussion of publishing models and theory which shaped the project.

1.2 Methodology

This section outlines the overarching mixed methods approach and specific methods applied within this doctoral study of longsellerdom. It begins with a brief discussion of the approach and a summary of the ways that mixed-method projects *can* be designed to combine the statistical with rich qualitative data before going on to map *how* the research actually was designed. The chapter goes on to discuss data sources and their limitations, starting with arguably the most important source of data for this research project, the Nielsen BookScan dataset. Thus, the latter part of the chapter provides a sense of what that dataset can (and cannot) be used for and the parameters of any query interrogating the various data sources.

The interdisciplinary, and multi-paradigmatic nature of publishing studies is both a positive and negative factor when designing a research project. It allows for theory and methods to be drawn in from a variety of fields without being prescriptive. However, the danger with such an inclusive framework is confusion about the best methods to use and ‘mission creep’ (Johnson, 2012). For the early career researcher, the decisions of which methods to use and where to demarcate the boundaries of the project, in turn raise questions

around issues around what resources, skills and knowledge are required to investigate a topic using the identified method.

Visualising Mixed Methods Research

This research project adopted a mixed-methods approach therefore consideration needs to be given to how this shapes research design and implementation. One of the benefits of mixed method research is that it is a comprehensive methodology that can be used sequentially, concurrently or iteratively moving from either qualitative to quantitative as necessary (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018, p. 65; Hitchcock, 2016). This allows findings from one strand of the research to inform the next and also for triangulation of results. Within the context of this study, an example of this would be speaking directly with booksellers or librarians with the intention of identifying longselling non-fiction titles that were not obvious from interrogation of sales data and vice versa.

Mixed methods research topology offers three types of fixed design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018, pp.77–84):

Convergent - where quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously and brought together at the end for analysis and explanation;

Explanatory sequential - where the quantitative data are first collected and analysed to identify trends, outliers and/or other case studies and qualitative research is then used to find possible explanations for the quantitative observations; and

Exploratory sequential – where qualitative data is collected first and quantitative data subsequently used to develop and expand upon the qualitative findings.

In addition to these three core types of mixed methods an ***embedded*** design can be used to describe the collection and inclusion of quantitative data to shed light on a particular qualitative aspect of the research, for example the inclusion of sales data analysis within a specific case study.

A number of factors pointed towards the adoption of the explanatory sequential design for a significant portion of this research project. Firstly, immediate access to the Nielsen dataset meant that the quantitative data could be collected and processed from the outset. Secondly, the explanatory sequential design lent itself to finding examples and outliers using quantitative methods and then explaining them as case studies following qualitative investigation (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018, p. 78). Thirdly, it allowed for a range of theoretical frameworks to be used. Using an explanatory design to address some of the research objectives still allows for other mixed methods designs to be explored. Therefore, a convergent workflow (where qualitative and quantitative primary data are collected independently of each other and brought together) was adopted where necessary e.g. when interviewing actors within the publishing communications circuit about the sales lifecycle of non-fiction works.

Table 1: Alignment of research questions to methods and design type. summarises the research aims, methods and mixed-method design. It is followed by a preliminary discussion of each of the core research aims in turn and the research methods that were employed, along with some samples of the type of quantitative data available and techniques for analysis. In terms of priority, research aims 1 to 3 are the primary focus of this thesis, while 4 to 6 are related but secondary areas of interest.

Table 1: Alignment of research questions to methods and design type.

Research aim	Data Source and Methods	Design
1. Define longsellors as distinct from bestsellers.	Conducted initially via a review of relevant literature and secondary sources. Later developed within the case study analysis, findings and conclusions.	Qualitative + Quantitative Convergent
2a) Quantify how many new non-fiction titles in print between 2000 and 2015 achieve above average sales longevity (beyond one year).	Using the Nielsen BookScan UK dataset as the source dataset. Descriptive statistical analysis of the trade non-fiction product class overall and the identified longselling subset more specifically.	Quantitative -> Qualitative Explanatory Sequential
2b) Explore in qualitative terms what distinguishes these books.	Having identified a longselling subset from the Nielsen BookScan analysis a selection of (significant, surprising, outlying) cases were studied and combined with sentiment analysis. This used a range of source data (secondary literature and archival materials, Nielsen BookScan data, interviews, customer reviews) to explore the factors that have contributed to sales of the identified works.	Quantitative + Qualitative Convergent / Embedded
3. Determine how the average sales lifecycle of books has changed since the turn of the 21st century.	Using descriptive statistical analysis of the Nielsen BookScan dataset and concurrently industry interviews with booksellers and buyers.	Quantitative + Qualitative Convergent
4. What is the function of bookshop and bookseller in product sales lifecycle?	Industry interviews with booksellers and buyers were conducted and thematically analysed.	Qualitative
5. What trends can be found within categories (product classes) of trade non-fiction titles?	Using descriptive statistical analysis of the Nielsen BookScan dataset in addition to biographical notes about the books & their authors, marketing and advertising, online review comments.	Quantitative -> Qualitative Explanatory Sequential
6. How do new formats, production methods, e-commerce, and permanent availability of stock affect sales lifecycles?	Identifying different manifestations of a work (book, play, TV show) and effect on longevity with case studies.	Qualitative (as part of case study) Explanatory sequential

1.3 Delivering Research Aims

The following section considers each of the core research aims summarised in

Table 1 and outlines how and where each is addressed within this thesis.

1. Define longsellers as distinct from bestsellers.

The first research aim follows a Convergent (Qualitative + Quantitative) design. The literature reviewed in

Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory explores the established definition of bestsellers in qualitative terms and proposes a distinct definition of longseller. In *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity*, interviews with industry stakeholders provides primary research data and analysis with which to explore how bestsellers and longsellors are perceived from both publishing and bookselling perspectives.

2a. Quantify how many new titles in print between 2000 and 2015 achieve above average sales longevity (beyond one year)

The second research aim is split into two parts following an Explanatory Sequential (Quantitative -> Qualitative) design. Part 'a' is concerned with interrogation of the quantitative data available to establish average and above average sales. This strand of research, presented in *Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view*, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset focuses on the Nielsen BookScan data source to identify in quantitative terms a list, aka subset, of longselling titles.

2b. Explore in qualitative terms what distinguishes these books.

Having identified a list of longsellors, part 'b' follows on to explore a sample in qualitative terms via selected case studies. The five case studies are presented in *Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies*. In addition to a description of the publishing history of the longselling work each case study considers the author's profile, commercial context and factors influencing its reception and ongoing success. These include collection and evaluation of: marketing and promotional data (book reviews and news articles); reader response data (discussion and commentary from readers via social media, digital library platforms); editorial and bibliographic data (tracking of licensing); and scholarly data (adoption of text within schools and via curricula).

Where possible the investigation of these titles was expanded to include primary data such as surveying and interviewing: booksellers; publishing functions: editors, sales reps, marketing; authors; librarians and readers (or purchasers).

3. Determine how the average sales lifecycle of books has changed since the turn of the 21st century.

The third research aim was approached from two directions following a Convergent (Qualitative + Quantitative) design.

Section 2.1 The Business of Publishing defines and discuss the threshold where a new title is considered to shift from frontlist to backlist and the shortening of the window of opportunity. However, it is apparent that ‘average sales lifecycle’ is a relative rather than absolute figure, and one that is presumed to have changed over time. Thus, the Nielsen dataset is explored and the data used to visualise the sales longevity of new titles in quantitative terms in *section*

4.2 Importance of the Top-5000 Bestseller Charts

4. What is the function of bookshop and bookseller in product sales lifecycle?

Separately, the commercial context of book sales and their longevity was investigated in qualitative terms through interviews and correspondence with those responsible for selling books on a day-to-day basis. These findings are presented in *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity*.

5. What trends can be found within categories (product classes) of trade non-fiction titles?

Trends within the trade non-fiction market as a whole and as compared to the longselling subset are explored in *Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset*.

The findings from all strands of the research enquiry are brought together for discussion in the penultimate *Chapter 8: Discussion* and the conclusions summarised in *Chapter 9: Conclusion*.

This section has outlined the research design and signposted where in the thesis each research question is to be addressed. The next section outlines the theoretical orientation of the research and situates it within the scholarly context of publishing studies and digital humanities.

1.4 Theoretical Orientation

As outlined above, this research investigated what constitutes a longseller and what characterises longsellerdom through a mixed-methods approach. From the quantitative perspective, data mining and statistical analysis were used to carry out ‘distant reading’ of UK book sales data and identified longselling titles and trends related to them. The methods underpinning these are that of market segmentation, descriptive statistics, and time series analysis and thus an empirical orientation was necessary. On the other hand, qualitative research methods permit a closer (if not close) reading. These included interviews with booksellers, publishers and other stakeholders, as well as archival research. These data are used to explore the bookselling environment and specific publishing histories in greater depth as well as the meaning of these works to readers. Such a focus on the histories and circulation of longselling works and their position as a popular cultural phenomenon calls for a more interdisciplinary theoretical orientation than an empirical approach can offer. Thus, it is here that publishing studies and book history offer up a number of useful cultural and economic theories. The benefit of this is that the research need not be viewed at all times through one particular theoretical or paradigmatic lens.

Given the mixed methods approach and the different avenues of enquiry, rather than having one chapter of this thesis ring-fenced as *the* ‘literature review’, the findings from each discrete research task will contain an introductory section; it is here, at the point in the thesis they are required, that the discussion of pertinent literature and theory will be included.

Nevertheless, there are some overarching theories and models which provide useful scaffolding for any research project in publishing studies to use and these are discussed in [Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory](#).

However, prior to this the final sections of this chapter will briefly discuss the orientation of the research in terms of the field of publishing studies and digital humanities, both of which underpin the research findings presented in this thesis.

Publishing Studies

My own industry experience in publishing, bookselling and teaching publishing at higher-education level means this research is self-consciously grounded in publishing studies. As many have stated, publishing studies is an emergent academic field orientated, in part, towards professional training, but also encompassing a wider community of scholars and corpus of academic research (Eliot, 2012; Maxwell, 2014; Murray, 2006; Nybacka, 2008). Undergraduate and Master's courses typically combine transferable business knowledge and skills (e.g. project-management, finance, marketing, production, sales and distribution) with subject-specific knowledge and skills relevant to the business of book, journals, magazine or newspaper publishing. The topics taught are wide-ranging and include, commissioning and editing (Davies, 2004; Ginna, 2017); design and typography; book production (Bullock 2012; Bullock and Walsh, 2013) and digital production (Burke 2013; Hall 2022; Jennings, 2012); sales and marketing, (Baverstock and Bowen, 2019; Forsyth and Birn, 1997; Johnson, 2022; Clark and Phillips, 2020; Squires, 2007), contracts, copyright and licensing of IP (Owen, 2010; Stokes, 2009); as well as issues relating to scholarly publishing such as open access, peer-review, and impact (Anderson, 2018; Baverstock et al, 2020; Clark and Phillips, 2020, pp. 1–3; Greco, 2020; Guthrie, 2011; Hall, 2022;).

In addition to the practical and commercial aspects of publishing, the field also shares ground with book historical approaches (Darnton, 1982; Davis, 2019; Eliot and Rose, 2008; Eliot, 2012; Finkelstien and McCleery, 2005, 2006; Noorda and Marsden, 2019 p.370-397; Phillips and Bhaskar 2021,) and critical theory covering the cultural and linguistic aspects of editing (Hall, 2013; Greenburg, 2014;); as well as media ethics and the cultural significance of publishing.

While framing publishing education in the twenty-first century, Maxwell (2014), notes that the field spans 'academic and methodological boundaries and tend[s] to resist attempts to pigeonhole publishing in one or another university faculty unit'. Maxwell adopts an educational perspective, and as

such, his evaluation of publishing studies within academia stresses the applied and vocational aspects of both teaching and research. He further suggests that universities are uniquely positioned to foster publishing innovation and applied research within industry.

In contrast Murray (2006, p.3) cautions that publishing studies as a discipline must 'reconfigure itself as a critical –rather than merely a descriptive or vocational – field' calling attention to the 'lack of theoretical and methodological rigour'. Thus, the challenge for any publishing-based research is identifying and adapting appropriate theory and methods of critical analysis from other disciplines, in a structured, rather than haphazard manner.

In *Marketing Literature* (2007, p.57) Prof. Claire Squires sums up neatly the terrain that publishers navigate, and that publishing research might evaluate:

[W]hen a publisher makes an offer for a text, the financial and cultural calculation of value begins with the advance level, but the sum is revised throughout the course of the text's life, as sales are made, as the text progressively acquires readers and readings, and as the mechanism of canon making roll into place. Cultural value is consequently mutable and shifts over time and under the aegis of different agencies. The transformation of text into book and product entails overlapping interpretations, incomplete translations, and a continual shifting of meaning from text to written and consumable object and back again.

This study of contemporary book sales lifecycles and longevity might indeed prove to have commercial relevance and potential applications within the publishing industry. However, arguably of equal importance are the cultural and socio-economic insights that might be uncovered through the study of contemporary non-fiction work, their 'cultural capital', and the economics of their distribution and consumption (Nybacka, 2011 p.98).

A further objective of this research project is to develop methods of quantitative analysis that could benefit publishing education. Students of publishing studies are often 'self-identified' bibliophiles, entering the field from literary studies perspectives (Maxwell, 2014, Murray, 2006, p. 6), drawn to book-related careers as opposed to having a passion for editing or marketing (Maxwell, 2014). However, the publishing industry of the twenty-first century is increasingly in need of data, coding and quantitative skills

(Barnes, 2015; Bell, 2015; Tribelli cited by Greenfield, 2013) as well as new organisational structures better able to compete in an age of digital disruption (Schumpeter, 1976 p.71-75; Waldman, 2010; Hall, 2013; 2022 p.152-186). One of the motivating factors in researching this sales longevity is to understand and develop data-driven research techniques that can be applied to standard publishing metadata/bibliodata (information about the title) and paradata (surrounding or related to the title) – so that the knowledge and skills can be disseminated within the field and pedagogy of publishing studies.

Given this skew towards qualitative skills and methodologies within publishing studies, it seems relevant at this point to consider how other fields within the humanities have adopted data-driven or mixed methods approaches.

Digital Humanities

The concept of ‘distant reading’, pioneered by Franco Moretti (2007), holds at its core the sentiment that the macro-perspective of trends *across* literature is as worthy of scholarship as the micro-perspective offered by the close reading of a single text (Jockers, 2013). While distant reading is still considered controversial and meets some resistance from some literary scholars, a distant reading approach fits within the broader trend of digital humanities scholarship. The most prominent criticisms of distant reading revolve around the reduction of literary work to data (Glaubitz, 2018 pp.20-27) which *can* result in a loss of analysis the specific, nuanced and complex voices that make up the corpus. Another criticism proposed by Ascari (2014, pp.1-19), is that Moretti’s approach is presented as ‘more objective’ than other forms of literary criticism, while Ascari judges distant reading to be ‘pseudo-scientific’ rather than scientific. However, none of these criticisms deny there is a valuable contribution being made by data-driven approaches, they rather caution against overstating the importance and weighting of the findings.

This research project was designed to use distant reading techniques as a starting point to direct further, closer, investigation into specific longsellers via the case studies and other qualitative methods.

A further observation of digital humanities research is that it often goes beyond inter-disciplinary to extra-disciplinary research including a wide range of non-academic professionals (Underwood, 2011). In the case of this publishing research these extra-disciplinary actors include publishers, booksellers, data aggregators, or print suppliers all carrying out quantitative analysis of stock movement, sales performance, or marketing efficacy. The implication is that the researcher needs to find a methodology which is capable of dealing with such a range of data, actors, interactions, motives, subjective perspectives and values. Mixed methods research accepts dialectical pluralism, and provides a 'metaparadigmatic standpoint' (Johnson, 2012, p. 752). This may be particularly relevant to inter-disciplinary research where meta-paradigm might be required to combine philosophies, values and theory between disciplines (Hitchcock, 2016; Johnson, 2012, pp. 752–3).

This chapter has provided the initial rationale for undertaking this research project, outlined the aims and objectives, and signposted how each of the core research questions were approached, using which methods, and where within the thesis each research question is addressed.

The next chapter, moves on from describing how the research was planned and structured to expand upon the business of publishing and how it has changed and evolved over the twentieth and twenty-first century. This provides context for the subsequent discussion of models and theoretical frameworks that are most relevant to research within publishing studies and adjacent fields.

Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory

This chapter provides an overview of the UK consumer (trade) book publishing market, discussion of the economics of this market sector and the historic importance of frontlist (new titles) and backlist sales. The synopsis of the commercial landscape is followed by an overview of key theory, models and frameworks relevant to publishing studies in general and literature relevant to this research project in particular are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the scholarly knowledge pertaining to *bestsellers* and puts forward a working definition of *longseller*.

As previously outlined, this thesis presents three fairly distinct segments of research: firstly a deep dive into UK non-fiction book sales in numbers informed by Nielsen data from which the highest charting titles are analysed and a list of the most successful longsellors is derived; secondly a discussion of the retail landscape informed by interviews with booksellers and other industry actors; and thirdly a detailed case studies of five longselling titles. Thus, this is not the only chapter where theory will be introduced. Later in the thesis, further scholarly paradigms are brought in where they make most sense, namely where they expand upon or provide a suitable lens to interpret the quantitative or qualitative research findings.

2.1 The Business of Publishing

This section outlines the composition, structure and recent history of the trade publishing industry. It then goes on to consider the impact this is thought to have had on sales lifecycle and longevity from a commercial strategic perspective.

The book publishing industry can be sub-divided into the following major market sectors (Clark and Phillips pp.4-10, 2019; Greco, 2015, p.169).

- Trade or Consumer: general public
- Academic: higher education
- Educational: schools and FE colleges
- Professional (e.g. legal, business intelligence)

- STM (Science Technical Medical)

Some overlap can be found between these types of publishing, however broadly speaking they have distinct product functionality (fiction might entertain, textbook might educate, and statutes might inform) consequently there are different sales channels and routes to market for the respective sectors.

This research into the shelf-life of books focuses on the trade consumer market, and works of non-fiction in particular, thus the next section goes on to detail some of the key characteristics of this sector of the market.

Trade Consumer Publishing

The trade consumer sector covers the fiction and non-fiction books sold to consumers through bookshops and other retail outlets. Guthrie (2011) summarises features of the trade consumer book market as follows: It is split between frontlist and backlist (new titles and old titles); is economically mature with a history of over 300-years of consumer bookselling; is governed by discretionary purchases; and therefore competitive; finally the trade consumer market is highly swayed by black-swan events (e.g. rare, unpredictable and high-impact). This means that, the overall market performance can be significantly impacted by phenomenon such as unforeseen bestsellers. Of course not all bestsellers are unpredictable, some high-profile authors and big books are fairly certain bets, but some books can take the market by surprise in a significant way.

The following section will provide further context and explore some of the features of trade publishing highlighted by Guthrie in more detail. It will also consider the concept of product lifecycle as applied to book publishing.

Frontlist and Backlist

Within the publishing industry there is a distinction between new titles known as the frontlist and older, more established titles, known as the backlist.

[...] the editors need to ensure they keep up a level of activity that will keep the publishing program moving. Publishing houses continuously publish titles. They need to do this when titles come off the frontlist as readers move

on to something new, so fresh titles are needed to replace them. Signing up titles that will last and create a healthy backlist is obviously the ideal, but there are significant amounts of publishing that are “for the moment”; as the trend moves on, editors are constantly searching for the next title. Their decisions can make or break a small publishing house: if a title succeeds the operation can continue, but with a run of poor titles any profits made by the bestsellers quickly get eaten up. (Hall, 2013, p.21w)

Despite the risks associated with bringing new titles to market this conveyor belt of new content is where the rewards are assumed to be found. Rosenthal (2004, p.43-44) notes that the frontlist is where ‘trade publishers focus all their energy and marketing dollars’. The aim of these marketing efforts is to push ‘the newest books and potential blockbusters’ into bookshops and draw readers into the retail space (either physically or online) to buy them within the first few weeks of publication whereas:

Backlist titles are books that remain in print for years and continue to sell at a steady rate. Some backlist titles, classic novels for example, out-sell most frontlist titles year after year. Most trade publishers derive a significant portion of their income from backlist titles; for some, it’s the backlist that earns the majority of the profits and supports the frontlist. A strong backlist is the backbone of a successful publishing house, whether large or small, and when publishers acquire each other it’s usually to get their hands on the backlist (Rosenthal, 2004, pp.44-45).

Rosenthal (2004 p.44) talks of the status quo in 2004, explaining how following a ‘five week window’ of promotion a new frontlist title is given ‘four months [...] to prove itself. This is about how long most bookstores will give a new title to start selling.’ By 2008, King (2008 p.31) describes the frontlist window of opportunity as having contracted to three months (90 days). Thompson (2012) also observes a shift to quarterly ‘sales cycles’ and even more frequent sales rep visits to bookshops.

Thus, the key to differentiating frontlist from backlist would appear to be time elapsed since publication, often described as the ‘sales window’. Within this there are two points that determine whether a frontlist title goes on to become a backlist title, the first being **a) time allowed for book to fail**. Frontlist titles are given a period of time to sell before being withdrawn from the shops. Thompson (2012 p.266-268) believes this period to be as little as six weeks for fiction titles while other product classes (e.g. non-fiction) can be

allowed longer. This is a retailer-controlled cut-off point, beyond which the products are returned (as is usually the case with bricks and mortar retailers) or no longer actively promoted (if an online retailer); and **b) time allowed for books to succeed.** Conversely, books are considered frontlist for 12 months (Guthrie, 2011, p. 19; Veysey, 2016), after which titles that continue to sell well become part of the backlist. This is a somewhat arbitrary publisher-controlled cut-off point and serves the purpose of freeing up time for new frontlist titles to be promoted by the sales team.

Some titles are intentionally published with an understanding that they have limited long-term appeal (e.g. books about a specific Olympic Games). In these instances, a shorter than usual window of opportunity exists for sales to be made (in some cases just a few months) after which point the content becomes out-dated or irrelevant. Although it is desirable to have strong backlist titles, the reality of modern publishing is that short-term objectives can be prioritised ahead of long-term objectives. Therefore, one of the aims of this research is to quantify the current sales window for new titles in addition to explaining the factors affecting sales longevity.

Product Lifecycle

Central to this research of contemporary book publishing is the investigation of product life and sales longevity within the primary retail space. Marketing offers up the well-established *product lifecycle* model for conceptualising the stages of a product's sales life, alongside strategies for merchandising products during the respective stages (Kotler, 1965; Levitt, 1965). A typical bell-curve distribution of sales against time (see [Figure 3](#)) is divided into four recognisable stages: *introduction*, *growth*, *maturity* and *decline* (a fifth stage, *phase out*, is often added at the end).

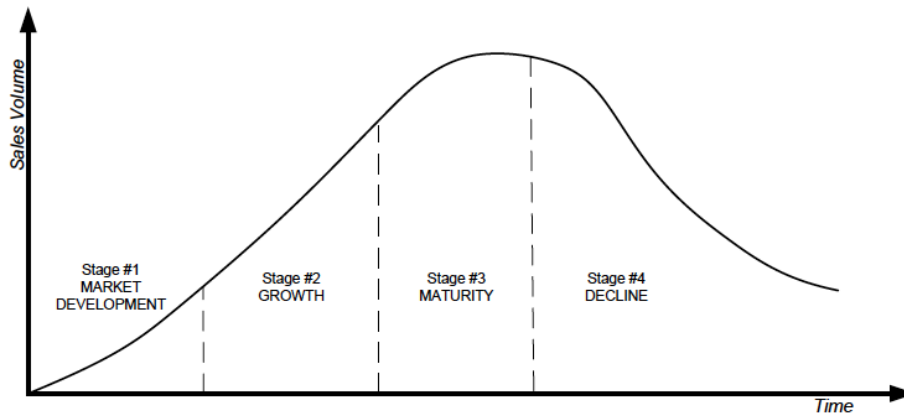


Figure 3: Product Lifecycle Theory after Levitt - 1965 (Cao & Folan, 2012 p.12)

In *Marketing for Books* Forsyth and Birn (1997 p.36-38) describe how product lifecycle theory can be used within publishing in terms of not only product management but also author, genre and format development. The commercial rationale is that profits can be maximised by accelerating growth, extending maturity and decelerating decline. Forsyth and Birn (1997 p.36-38) overlay product lifecycle theory to the following four aspects of publishing:

- *Products* - New titles should be launched into retail outlets quickly. They can be heavily promoted early on and kept in the public eye. By updating covers and revised editions, product life can be extended.
- *Authors* - Newcomers can have their career fast-tracked via awards. Their brand promoted through events and development of series identity. Interest may be extended or revived through collectors' editions and boxsets.
- *Genre* - Interest in subject areas can grow, peak and decline such as popular science or green living.
- *Formats* - New formats can rise in popularity. Usually this has implications for existing formats (as observed with the rise of ebooks and decline of physical formats).

Further to this, it is observable that the first two areas, products and author, are internal factors that can be strategically selected and/or managed by a publisher. However, trends in genre and format innovations are external,

macro-environmental factors, which publishers must react to in a timely fashion.

Although originally conceived as a sales-and-marketing model, the successful implementation of product lifecycle theory requires cooperation from non-marketing departments within organisations. This includes prior stages in the supply chain (upstream of the organisation) such as acquisition of raw materials and production cost assessment as well as subsequent stages in the supply chain (downstream of the organisation) such as obsolescence, disassembly and recycling (Cao and Folan, 2012, p. 23). Product design and engineering functions within organisations have therefore also adopted product lifecycle theory adapting it where necessary. The expanded concept of product lifecycle encompasses the *cradle-to-grave* philosophy of production management, in which a company evaluates the implications of sourcing the materials to be used in manufacture (cradle) as well as the disposal or repurposing of them once a product has reached the end of its life (grave) (McDonough and Braungart, 2009).

When cradle-to-grave thinking is applied to publishing, upstream considerations might include: the origin of wood used for paper; the methods of paper manufacture and the volume of water used; the sourcing of pigments and chemical constituents of inks used in printing; along with energy efficiency, freight miles and human resource factors. While downstream considerations would likely include: distribution networks and proximity of printers to intended market; physical durability of book according to its intended purpose and expected lifespan; remaindering, pulping and recycling of surplus stock; and again energy efficiency, freight miles and human resource factors.

A clear distinction can therefore be made between marketing lifecycle and engineering lifecycle. The marketing lifecycle refers to a 'focused-view' of the product, market demand and forecasted consumption of stock over time. The engineering lifecycle is concerned with the macro-view of the production and disposal: how a product and its clones can be designed and manufactured in a

cost-efficient way, making best use of materials, and causing the least environmental impact (Cao and Folan, 2012, p. 33).

This investigation into the sales longevity of contemporary works will explore the topic from both the marketing and engineering perspectives. It will take into consideration how production and distribution innovations such as print-on-demand (POD) and ebooks affect sales life. However, the research and analysis will be weighted more heavily towards the factors affecting the sales and marketing lifecycles such as authors, branding, product repackaging and reformatting, and popularity of subject areas.

There is perhaps a problem with the biological metaphor of 'lifecycle' and the language it invokes; 'life', 'growth', 'maturity' and 'death'. It implies that the stages of the product lifecycle are fixed, and that decline, and death are inevitable 'facts of life'. In reality books, physical or otherwise, are transient containers of human thought and imagination. Books made of physical substrates like paper can wear out and fall apart. When a book-shaped container becomes damaged beyond repair, or the file-format becomes obsolete, the intellectual content can be duplicated or replicated into one, or many, new containers. In terms of relevance to this research project, it seemed most appropriate to aggregate sales data across formats and editions in order to evaluate the cumulative sales of an entire work since its first publication (as opposed to format-by-format or edition-by-edition).

Historic Importance of the Backlist

There is an architecture to the UK publishing industry today, shaped by the way nineteenth- and twentieth-century publications were brought to market iteratively over time, in various formats.

By looking at the book publishing industry in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it can be observed that horizontally integrated media conglomerates stand on the shoulders of earlier independent or family-owned publishing houses (Thompson, 2012, p. 102). Historically, those businesses are likely to have been vertically integrated; composed of bookselling, printing and publishing operations. It was typical for one company to acquire the

hardback rights to a title and bring that edition to market, while another publisher exploited the paperback (reprint) rights. This resulted in multiple publishers driving forward sales of their particular format (serialisation, periodicals, hardback, paperback) via their respective specialist sales channels (bookshop, newsstand, book club, library). (Clark and Phillips, 2014, pp. 29–33).

By the end of the twentieth century, most UK publishing houses had closed or sold off any printing and bookselling arms of their businesses. In addition, mergers between publishing houses brought the majority of hardback and paperback publishing together under one roof. Where previously there were multiple businesses with vested interests in promoting the sales of a title over the long-term in various formats (hardback, paperback, serialisation), today the fate of a new title is generally left in the hands of one publisher per geographic region (Owen, 2010, p.117). The end result is that a) contemporary publishers have many titles to try and push into as many sales channels as they can, as quickly as they can, and b) each individual title gets fewer stakeholders invested in its longevity and fewer chances at success. These functional and structural changes within the publishing industry go some way towards explaining the shortening of product life. The next section will discuss the impact of this restructuring in particular through mergers and acquisition in more detail.

Growth Through Backlist Acquisitions

Publishing, like many other 21st century industries, is now dominated by a handful of global conglomerates. In *Merchants of Culture* Thompson (2012, pp.102–112) describes the phases of industry consolidation which began in the 1960s with ‘synergistic mergers’, and subsequently ‘acquisition based mergers’ continue through to the present day. Arguably, the most recent unions of large publishing houses (such as Penguin joining with Random House) fall into an entirely new phase of ‘powerhouse’ mergers (Rankin, 2013) - designed to attract authors and strengthen the organisations negotiating power relative to internet monoliths like Amazon, Apple and Google.

As many have observed (Clark and Phillips, 2019 p.29; Guthrie p.13, 2011; Smith, 2012, p.26; Squires, 2007; Thompson, 2012), market consolidation and attempts at commodification turned out to be less lucrative than some stakeholders expected. Guthrie notes

[...] an ignored backlist was a poor use of an extremely valuable asset. While the corporations sought to turn the book model into 'a global supermarket of books', books remained a discretionary purchase and as such were resistant to wholesale changes. Book buyers could be herded towards products with advertising and clever product placement in other media, but readers would not necessarily do what was expected of them (Guthrie, 2011 p.13)

It has long been debated by scholars and booksellers alike that books possess 'a moral, political and aesthetic nature' and as such are not your typical supermarket product (Miller, 2006, p.84). Bookshops hold many thousands of unique product lines, and unlike food, clothing or other interchangeable commodities books on superficially similar topics cannot necessarily be substituted. For example, if a supermarket wants to source strawberries out-of-season over the calendar year, they can do so by using multiple suppliers from different regions of the world and hunt around for the best quality product for the best price. Whereas someone looking for Alex Ferguson's autobiography is unlikely to accept another football biography as an adequate substitute. This not to say that substitutions are never accepted by book consumers within some genres, like crime and romance, readers' appetite for more stories can be voracious (Ramsdell, 2012. p.20-22) and fairly agnostic about the author or publisher. The 'discretionary purchase' descriptor used by Guthrie is also significant, as it hints at the inherent uncertainty of success in editorial decision-making. A significant portion of trade consumer titles are bought for leisure or entertainment, rather than necessity. They are not just competing against other books, but also other forms of entertainment like computer games, sporting activities or nights-out with friends. Not knowing which books will capture readers' attention and be *very* successful, should encourage publishers to hedge their bets and invest in many heterogeneous titles published by a variety of authors.

In the chapter entitled, 'Organizational Structures in Publishing' within *The Oxford Handbook of Publishing* Frania Hall neatly articulates the issue:

Product development rests in bringing in new content from talented individuals. This content has to sell a certain number to cover its costs; after that, to support the organization and bring in profit, it is hoped the title will succeed. It is, however, dependent on a market with changing tastes and consumer behaviours. Spotting where success will come from next therefore proves a challenge as publishers aim to identify a contemporary zeitgeist and publish accordingly, and/or jump on a bandwagon of a particular trend (whether vampire romance, erotica, or adult colouring books). The Pareto rule can often play a part—80 per cent of the income comes from 20 per cent of the books—so for many publishers signing enough books to ensure at least some will become bestsellers is critical. In some specialist markets the opportunities are more predictable but the long-term development of successful titles that will last in a backlist is still a challenging activity. (Hall, 2019 pp.290-309)

Later chapters in this thesis will present quantitative data that indicates the Pareto rule is likely an understatement when it comes to publishing's reliance on the longselling backlist – a very small fraction of titles contribute financially in the long term.

Guthrie (2011, p. 12) further observes the effects of conglomeration. Rather than gamble on the chance of stumbling on a hit 'corporations decided to focus most of their efforts on [existing] bestselling star authors, promoting them heavily in periodical media outlets and on television (some of which they began to acquire).' He proposes that conglomeration within the book publishing industry transferred 'the focus from incremental backlist sales management to explosive frontlist sales promotion (2011, p. 12).' It follows that there could be a causal link between acquisition of lists built by other publishers and the erosion of the historic drivers for organic growth. Why should publishers invest time and capital supporting and developing new authors, their skills and ideas – when the work of proven authors can be acquired or licensed from other publishing companies? With the scale of the mergers and sizes of the lists being absorbed, it is easy to envisage how strategies to exploit these acquired assets would need to be *en masse* rather than at a level of individual title-by-title. In addition, the publisher's commitment to the author of an acquired backlist work is likely to be less than

the commitment from the publisher that originally discovered and signed the author.

Shift to Frontlist, Big Books and Bestsellers

Industry consolidation and growth through acquisition put increasing stress on rationalised sales teams. The largest corporations at the time might have had 5,000 new (and unique) titles per annum to sell into the retail chains and independent bookshops. However, by 2016 Penguin Random House output over 15,000 new titles per year (Bertelsmann, 2016). Thompson (2012, pp.189-190) observes that publishers responded to the demands of increased product lines in various ways: a) raising the number of selling cycles from two per annum to three or more, b) prioritising titles within each sales cycle and promoting them accordingly, c) collecting feedback from sales reps on titles that were well-received by the trade and responding quickly with promotion. He concludes that by focusing sales efforts on a selection of titles, the 'big books', other more modestly selling 'small books' must inevitably be neglected. The ideal publishing scenario, from a financial perspective, would be to only publish big books and bestsellers – ignoring the small books that 'breathe-up valuable oxygen' (Thompson, 2012 pp.189-190).

In summary, a significant shift in new product development, from organic to acquired growth, has been observed as a result of the consolidation of the UK book publishing industry (more acutely in larger publishing conglomerates). A further consequence of this consolidation is thought to be a higher volume of frontlist titles promoted by individual sales reps, narrowing of the sales window, and reduction in the time allowed for titles to succeed. Thus, this research into product lifecycle and longevity of books will investigate the relationship between publisher, content and sales.

2.2 Models & Frameworks

The following section explores three key theories and relates their relevance to this research into longselling works of non-fiction. Firstly, the *communications circuit* proposed first by Robert Darnton and later adapted by Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires which introduces the key actors and their roles within the value chain; secondly, Pierre Bourdieu's *theory of culture* which proposes a sociology of literature and how literature and culture influence one another; and thirdly, Michael Bhaskar's *theory of publishing* which presents a definition of publishing that is particularly helpful in the analysis of longsellerdom.

Communications Circuits & Value Chain

Within the study of publishing and book history historian Robert Darnton's communication circuit (1982 p.65-83 see [Figure 4](#)) is one of the most prominent models used to describe and analyse research. This model prompts consideration of the various actors involved in the creation, processing, dissemination, and consumption of book content and suggests a cyclical flow of content and ideas through society as well as the socio-cultural forces present. Darnton's original model was conceptualised to analyse book circulation and society in 18th century France, yet it has been applied to other historical periods and places (Afolabi and Zolkepli 2023; De Fremery 2011; Ghersetti & Metcalfe, 2012; Kuitert, 2003; Salmi-Niklander 2006; Thacker 2022).

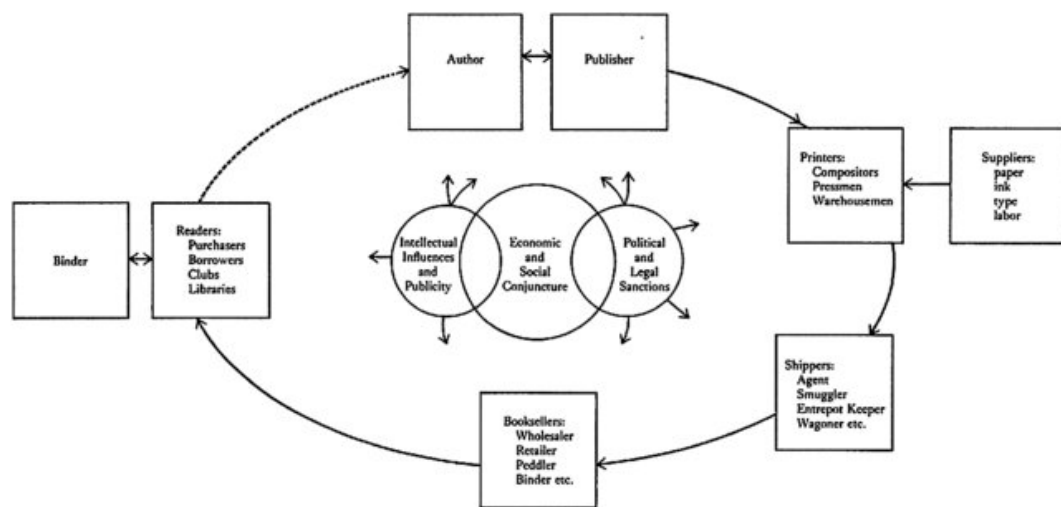


Figure 4: The communications circuit (Darnton 1982, 68). © MIT Press-Journals 1982

In 2013, Ray Murray and Squires published revisions of the communications circuit updated for the digital age in that they includes contemporary publishing scenarios that include digital actors and technologies within the circuit such as literary agents, freelance publishing service providers, digital devices and software. An important differentiation in these revisions is that they facilitate: analysis of communication circuits that cut-out or disintermediate traditional actors; and reflection upon alternative power dynamics within online publishing systems such as the now well-embedded self-publishing and fanfiction reading communities (Buchsbaum, 2022). As Pecoskie & Hill (2015 p.609-626) observe within fanfiction ‘the reader may, in fact, play a much more prominent role and have an extensive impact on the creation process.’

In *The Content Machine* (2012, p.105) Michael Bhaskar argues that Darnton's communication circuit is intended as a model for *book* history and is therefore insufficient to model publishing, which in its broadest sense, extends beyond books to other formats and media (both now and historically). Bhaskar builds on criticisms proposed by Adams and Barker (in Finkelstein, 2006) that Darnton's circuit omits financial risk, to this he adds the criticism that

Darnton's diagram is a flat, two-dimensional, circuit which masks the multiple copies of a work in circulation. Bhaskar (2012, p.105) explains:

The circuit metaphor disguises the most important element of the printed book: there exist many copies going to many booksellers, thus ensuring the text is more widely distributed than otherwise. Publishers are almost by definition.[sic] Interested in multiple circuits for a given title rather than a singular circuit for a book. The focus for Darnton is on the book more than Adams and Barker suggest.

Rather than imagining the publishing value chain as a horizontal plane, I propose that one can visualise the model as a spiral of influence and power flowing *from* the publisher as gatekeeper at the narrow top, down to the readers at the wider base, like a helter-skelter. The author manuscript is disseminated from the hands and eyes of a few gatekeepers, to the hands and eyes of the widest possible audience. If the publication is successful, it ideally picks up speed and momentum along the way.

The publisher's acquisition of a manuscript could be perceived as the point in the circuit where the cultural status of an author's manuscript is elevated and the work conferred with cultural capital. However, it is also possible for celebrity authors or brand authors to elevate the status of a work through their existing social or cultural capital (irrespective of whether a manuscript is written by the celebrity or a ghostwriter). Darnton's dotted line between reader and author (authors are also readers) implies that readers have some indirect influence over the conceptualising, evolution or iterations of a work but that their influence is diffused, or less tangible than the influence of other actors in the chain. Nevertheless, within the context of *longsellerdom*, it is the collective actions of thousands and in some cases millions of readers over time who maintain, reinforce and convert the cultural capital of a particular work into something longer lasting, namely symbolic capital.

Both Darnton's original model, and Ray Murray & Squires' updated communications circuits are of particular benefit to this research where I consider book histories, such as the cases presented in [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#). How a longselling work of non-fiction came to be originated and published is only part of the story; as well as the power

structures and role of gatekeepers within the publishing industry such models allow for the cultural and political influence of actors to be evaluated. The communication circuit as a feedback loop also serves to tease out some of the iterative processing, such as repackaging and new editions that might have contributed to a particular work being successful as a long-term phenomenon.

Bourdieuian Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture provides a useful analytical framework with which to inspect longselling works over time and in particular, the notions of *habitus*, *capital* and *fields of production*.

Habitus can be understood to be the combined result of inherited and lived-experience distilled into a set of values and behaviours. The theory suggests that all interactions with the world, at the individual and group level, are guided by a grammar of socially constructed rules:

Habitus is defined as 'subjectivity conditioned by structural circumstances' (Bourdieu, 2005), and explains how the individual agent has a broad motivation, including interrelations which may not be visible nor seem relevant from the outside (perhaps not even to the agentic subject themselves). (Spjeldnæs and Karlsen, 2024 p.294).

As such habitus can be used to contextualise which objects and experiences people value, enjoy and find meaningful according to their subjective opinions. In other words, habitus is responsible for the forming of tastes. In this sense, environment, nationality, class, education, wealth and upbringing all inform habitus at individual and societal level; in a similar way that language, accents and dialects are shared by groups of people, so too can attitudes and behaviours be collectively adopted, internalised and acted upon within a population

Habitus is particularly relevant to this research into longselling works in that it theorises *how* tastes might be transferred from one generation to the next, suggesting that this is achieved via (among other things) family traditions, school curricula, religious and cultural rituals. Thus, it is pertinent to the analysis of long-term trends and inspection of institutions and mechanisms by

which books achieve longevity, in addition to the role of various actors within the value chain.

In *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*, Jennifer Smith Maguire (2014, p16) explains how Bourdieu's theory conceptualises taste as follows:

Tastes are social; they are acquired through conditioning relative to social origin and trajectory (e.g. class position, education and upward or downward mobility), and are experienced as if they are natural and personal. Notions of 'good taste' and 'good culture' are oriented around the dominant group, but - in being socially constructed rather than inherent - are subject to negotiation by groups seeking to improve or defend their social position. Both because they are experienced as natural and because they are stratified in legitimacy relative to the dominant group's 'good' taste, expressions of taste unite people (who do and like similar things and tend to come from similar origins) but also separate them from others with unlike tastes and origins.

This suggests that countries made up of diverse populations, education systems, socio-economic backgrounds and multiple faith are unlikely to be homogenous in habitus or tastes. Could longselling works therefore be important signals of intrinsic universal appeal? Might these phenomena cut across class, social groups, and be in some ways markers of unity? Or, alternatively might they be a signal of institutionalised taste, a form of cultural stagnation and hegemony?

The concept of habitus also offers an attractive theoretical perspective as to *why* certain *symbolic goods*, might experience popularity within and across generations. Here Bourdieu's theory suggests that through recognition, prestige and respect objects can accrue *symbolic capital*, meaning that they are perceived to have value beyond their economic or commercial worth. Habitus is thus the social conditions, and *fields* are the hierarchies and structures that assert and maintain symbolic capital with society. Using Bourdieusian theory suggests that the significance of a longselling work and position maintained over time is made possible by symbolic capital - an inheritable and accruable quality - and as such it provides a useful basis for qualitative analysis.

A relevant aspect of Bourdieu's theory is the distinction between fields of *restricted production* as that of elite or high culture (made by creators exclusively for other creators) in contrast to *mass production*, that of non-elite

or low culture (made by creators for non-creators) (Bourdieu, 1985 p17). Some of the longselling works identified and discussed later in this thesis are both demonstrably accessible with mass market appeal (low culture) and also recognised as critically-acclaimed (high culture) suggesting a false dichotomy. However, Bourdieu did not present high and low culture to be binary opposites in fact he advised against such oversimplifications (see [section 2.3](#)).

Other useful concepts to consider here are those of doxic, canonical, and classic works. The adoption of a work into the canon by scholars is a process of legitimation described by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) as orthodoxy, or doxa. This is linked to the concept of habitus (individual subjective taste); doxa in this sense, is the collective and 'pre-reflexive knowledge shaped by experience' (Deer cited Grenfell, 2014 p.115). Once something is considered canonical its legitimate status is accepted unquestioningly and remains widely unchallenged. Bourdieusian theory presents this as a dominating act:

Doxa is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view, the point of view of those who dominate by dominating the state and who have constituted their point of view as universal by constituting the state. (Bourdieu cited by Crossley 2005 p.69)

Institutional structures such as the British education system provide a mechanism for canonical works to be perpetuated and it is likely therefore that any study of longseller will also identify works that are considered canonical or 'classics'.

Although Bourdieu's theory of culture offers a compelling conceptual framework, it is not without its limitations. Primary criticisms of it are that it is androcentric (i.e. assumes a typically male perspective and assumes males' social experience) and that is overly deterministic regarding the impact of social structures on shaping taste. Other criticisms include over-emphasis on the rigidity of class and social structures (Elliot, 2021 p.71-75) as well as lacunae (omissions) of gender and race power dynamics within the sociology of culture (Fowler, Bridget. 1997 p.135).

Furthermore, Spjeldnæs and Karlsen (2024 p.292-307) illustrate that recent shift in media consumption and production, dramatically reshape human behaviours, habits and attitudes. Thus, how and what society values and reads, is not only shaped by the traditional Bourdieusian fields of production but also by technology and algorithms. This leads on to questions regarding *how* cultural habitus might evolve or be augmented within society? What are the mechanics of transferral of cultural and symbolic capital between generations in societies where AI and algorithms are powerful influencers (if not the most-powerful influencers)? And how, or why, do some works remain longselling despite cultural and technological disruptions, evolutions and revolutions?

Framing and Amplification

The third lens for considering the role of publishers within the context of longsellerdom is outlined by Michael Bhaskar (2012) in *The Content Machine: towards a theory of publishing*. In his thesis, Bhaskar systematically interrogates the defining role of publishers and the defining actions they undertake. His aim was to find a description of publishing, in its broadest sense, that still rings true across various periods in history and the broad array of formats and media that can be said to ‘be published’.

Bhaskar’s conclusion is that all publishing may be defined as acts of *filtering*, *framing* and *amplifying* content according to *models*. He states:

Frames and models are integral to filtering and amplification: framing and modelling occurs at all stages of these processes and supplies us with, respectively, the *how* and the *why* of publishing. Filtering and amplification occur *through* frames and *according* to models (2012, p.104).

Here, ‘frames’ are ‘that which content fills’ and as such confer a broader meaning than the book-, ebook-, or website-shaped container for content, they extend to include the paratextual and contextual framing of content within publishing. In this, Bhaskar builds on the ideas of Gérard Genette (1997) suggesting a key aspect of publishing is in how a work is ‘*presented*’ to the market via the jacket, blurb, marketing materials and other additional elements intended to help an audience determine whether a book is for them, or not. Whereas, ‘models’ refer to publishers’ strategies (including, but not

exclusively meaning, business models) and it is through models that Bhaskar addresses the topic of risk that he (and Adams and Barker) commented was notably absent from the communications circuit as Darnton envisaged it.

Filtering, framing, amplification and models prove useful when considering longsellerdom because the theory goes beyond the institutional systems (fields of production), and beyond the actors in the communications circuit model (whatever their status, relationships or accrued capital), and suggests the researcher look at the specific evidence of publishing happening. That is to say, actions, outputs and events that have demonstrably filtered (curated), framed, or amplified the reach of a work. Using Bhaskar's theory allows for analysis of initial acts of discovery and gatekeeping, editing and revising, design, production and marketing, exploiting of the IP via rights as well as it allows for the ongoing long-term amplification over time.

In summary, the communications circuit provides a useful list of actors along the value chain which can assist in the mapping of publishing histories and longselling case studies in particular. The cultural theory of Bourdieu and concept of habitus and capital assist in qualitative analysis of longsellers providing prompts for exploring the *whys* and *hows* of establishing longevity. While the concept of field provides the situational plane, *where* did actions take place and within which institutions was longevity determined? Beyond this, Bhaskar's theory of publishing is particularly helpful when it comes to assessing the specific function of the publisher in the framing and amplification of longselling works. Framing and amplification help address questions around *what* publishers did/do in terms of the designing, packaging and marketing of longselling works and also *for whom*?

The Long Tail of Publishing

As outlined in [section 2.1 \(p.42\)](#), the book publishing industry was reshaped by the mergers and conglomeration of the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, the book retail landscape was also undergoing dramatic changes. Thus, the following section considers some key factors relevant to this study of bookselling namely product lifecycles, long-tail economics and the rise of

ecommerce. These concepts are particularly relevant to the bookselling function discussed in *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity*.

Traditionally, bricks and mortar retailers must balance the constraints of shelf-space when selecting the range of stock against the size of the local population. When shelf space is finite, it makes sense for retailers to focus on the titles that sell in the highest volumes, those with the broadest mass-market appeal. As previously highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2, during the latter half of the twentieth century, publishers were outputting more and more new titles, and pushing them in to bookshops via increasingly short sales windows. Physical bookshops simply could not stock all the new titles, alongside the backlist staples and therefore had to be selective. Anderson's (2016) Long Tail distribution graph below illustrates the core advantage offered by ecommerce booksellers, such as Amazon, which became established at the end of the twentieth century. In essence, they found competitive advantage in offering a wider range of stock online, than traditional bookshops.

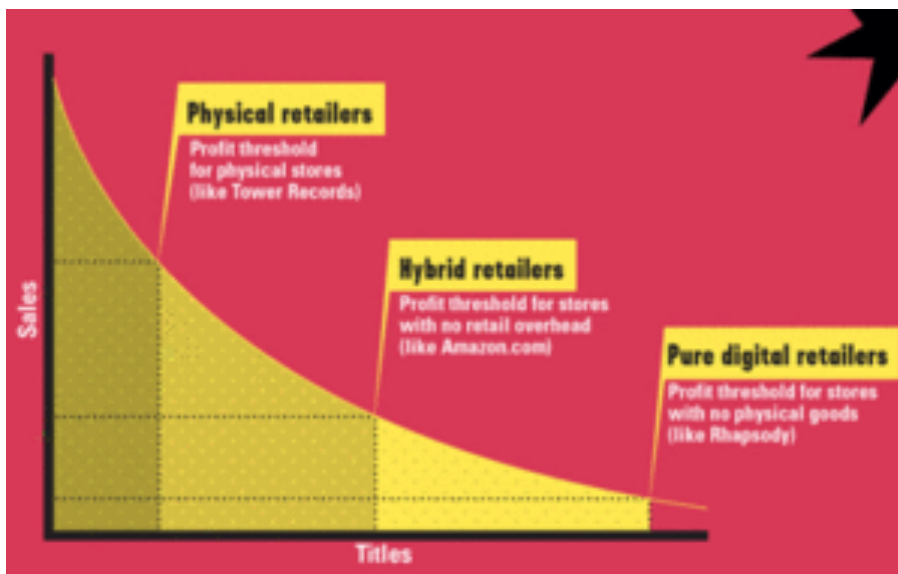


Figure 5: Long-tail distribution, no. of titles achieving sales vol (source Longtail.com, 2016)

Anderson describes the distribution as follows:

This is simply the natural consequence of what's called a 'power law' distribution, a term for a curve where a small number of things occur with high amplitude (read:sales) and a large number of things happen with low amplitude. A few things sell a lot, and a lot of things sell a little. (The phrase comes from the fact that the curve has a $1/x$ shape, which is the same as x raised to the -1 power.) (Anderson, 2009 p.121)

The curve drops down rapidly, but continues almost infinitely, therefore the area under the curve at the high-selling end, or the head, is smaller than the area under the curve towards the tail. Applied to the bookselling industry as a whole, the value of all the low-volume niche 'non-hit' books, the ones that sell in small quantities, exceeds the value of all the 'hits', the books that are popular and sell in large quantities.

What is truly amazing about the *long-tail* is the sheer size of it. Again, if you combine enough of the non-hits, you've actually established a market that rivals the hits. Take books : the average Barnes and Noble superstore carries around 100,000 titles. Yet more than a quarter of Amazon's book sales come from outside its top 100,000 titles. Consider the implications: If Amazon statistics are any guide, the market for books that are not even sold in the average bookstore is already a third the size of the existing market--and what's more, it is growing quickly. If these trends continue, the potential book market may actually be half again as big as it appears. If only we can get over the economics of scarcity (Anderson, 2009 pp.22-23).

Usually, the *Long Tail* model is presented as asynchronous, however Anderson suggests that time can be plotted on a third z axis, allowing the speed at which a product achieves these sales to be considered, and states that it would also follow a power law distribution (Anderson, 2009, p. 142). Therefore, searching for longsellers is undoubtedly an exploration of the long tail, but is it also an exploration of bestsellerdom?

2.3 Approaches to the Study of Bestsellers and Popular Fiction.

Before moving on to definitions of bestseller and longseller, it is useful to briefly consider some of the approaches, themes and issues drawn from key literature on this research topic.

When books are put under the academic lens, they can be inspected from more than one perspective; for example, as art, material artefact, cultural product, or communication device. In order to identify a suitable framework for this study a range of approaches typically applied to bestsellers were reviewed. For simplification these approaches can be broadly split into literary studies, book history and publishing studies. Within any of these fields it is possible to investigate bestselling or popular literature through analysis of the meaning and significance of the text itself; through the material object, its production, marketing, circulation and readership; or through the wider commercial and

cultural context. Broadly speaking literary studies is more likely to involve textual analysis (McCracken, 1998; Miller, 2006, p. 8; Schreibman et al., 2004, pp. 88–9), while book history and publishing studies are more likely to include analysis of the commercial machinery and distribution.

In the case of textual analysis, stories and narratives provide an ocean of content for socio-political inference. Encoded meaning can be derived from the text, and popular fiction has been argued to represent a reflection of the society from which it was born (Pawling, 1984 p.3). However, literary theorists are wary of inferring too much about readership tastes in popular fiction from the text alone:

Bourdieu warns of two dangers that may emerge from academic taste for popular culture. The first is that 'popular' taste is defined simply as the opposite or negative of high art and as a consequence, there is no real attempt to study its conditions of production, form and reception. The second is the mirror image of the above where 'popular' taste is celebrated uncritically because it is supposed to stem from a mythical version of the 'people' (McCracken, 1998, p. 34).

In terms of the machinery of publishing, many have discussed the pivotal role that marketing plays (Baverstock, 2015; Clark and Phillips, 2014; Squires, 2007). While marketing is certainly instrumental in the success of many new titles, McCracken (1998, pp.30-31) warns there is no marketing and distribution formula that can make a book *become* a bestseller. There is a general consensus that when novels prove hugely successful, it is as much a cultural phenomenon as a commercial one. The exact timing of when a book is launched into a market, is as important as the literature itself. Bloom (2008 p.37-38) further notes on chronology that any 'attempt to revive a writer because of perceived historic interest, intrinsic worth or mere nostalgia always ends in modest or poor sales'.

Todd (1996), and Squires (2007) have contextualised contemporary popular fiction from book history and marketing perspectives; inspecting the various cogs within 'the machine' (McCracken, 1998, p. 40) namely: authors, agents, booksellers, publishers and readers modelled by Darnton's communications circuit (Darnton, 1982) and its contemporary iterations (Ray Murray & Squires, 2013). Alongside the actors sit other significant activities which

Murray (2006 p.17) labels as 'cultural forces' such as literary prizes, retailing and promotional campaigns, book clubs, reading groups and word-of-mouth. The communications circuit is therefore a particularly useful model within book history and publishing studies.

There is recognition within the field of book history that *all* book artefacts are worthy of study be they cuneiform tablet shopping lists, or letter-pressed political pamphlets (Eliot and Rose, 2008). At a 2012 conference on the development of book history and publishing studies as disciplines, Prof. Simon Eliot argued that 'too much book history is still concerned almost exclusively with literature' stressing the need for the expansion of research into areas of non-fiction (Eliot, 2012). Whether the topic is approached from a literary studies, book history or publishing studies perspective, using qualitative or quantitative methods, most of the scholarly work on popular and bestselling books is concerned with works of fiction, and the circumstances of their success as literary works, or cultural phenomena (Bloom, 2008; Escarpit, 1971; Heald, 2007; McCracken, 1998; Pawling, 1984; Squires, 2007; Sutherland, 2002; Todd, 1996; Vanderbilt, 1999). With a few exceptions (Schiffrin *Business of Books*, Feather and Woodbridge *Bestsellers in the books industry*), very little has been written about contemporary non-fiction works. Thus, this research into longselling trade non-fiction aims to address this gap.

Novelty, and the Bestselling Novel

John Sutherland, a major contributor to our understanding of bestsellers and popular fiction, has published numerous titles tackling this topic –*Bestsellers; Popular fiction of the 1970s* (1981), *Reading the decades: fifty years of the nation's bestselling books* (2002), *Bestsellers: A very short introduction* (2007). He has done much towards the mapping of contemporary literature (predominantly fiction) and its place within society. Sutherland argues that 'what is useful about such culturally embedded works [bestsellers] is what it tells us about the book trade, the marketplace, the reading public and society generally at the time they have done well.' (Sutherland, 1981, p.5) Many other scholars have built upon the foundations of Sutherland's work from

sociological, literary studies, and book history perspectives (Bloom, 2008; Feather and Woodbridge, n.d.; Helgason, 2014; Todd, 1996; Vanderbilt, 1999), and a common factor within studies of bestsellers, is an emphasis on their short-term rise and fall in popularity. The quote below hints at Sutherland's initial motives for studying bestsellers, as well as highlighting the paradigmatic shift that has taken place within literary studies (and more widely within academia) over the past three decades.

Above all, criticism has great difficulty in coming to terms with the ephemeral product; there is no good criticism of the bestseller for the same reason that there is no good criticism of television; the thing is never around long enough to be engaged with. (Sutherland, 1981 p.4)

Academic perceptions of popular media, have clearly evolved since Sutherland wrote these words, however the idea that bestsellers are characterised by novelty is echoed in Vanderbilt's *Making of a bestseller: from author to reader*.

[T]hese sorts of books [bestsellers] are just what they are intended to be: great entertainment, great reads. They are also books with a short life, books we don't care too much about a year or two after publication. (1999 p.134)

The theme of contemporaneity persists in Bloom's more recent analysis, *Bestsellers: popular fiction since 1900*, and is evidently a defining characteristic of bestsellerdom:

All art is subject to the vicissitudes of history, and literature (because the vernacular changes) more so than most. The bestseller is the one style of book that both succeeds and is destroyed by its own appeal to a singular and momentary contemporaneity (Bloom, 2008 p.37).

Sutherland acknowledges that there is a 'temptation' to position literary works along a spectrum, with ephemeral bestsellers as polar opposite to classical works (Sutherland, 2007, p. 27). However, this is a false dichotomy that assumes classics are permanent and invulnerable to changes in taste and trends.

In *Reading the decades: fifty years of the nation's bestselling books* (2002) Sutherland's makes it clear that his analysis of 'bestselling' fiction is concerned with 'fastsellers':

A note on terminology used: particularly the terms 'bestsellers', 'longsellers' and 'fastsellers'. 'Longsellers', as I define them, are Sue Lawley's 'desert

island books': Shakespeare, the Bible and the Oxford English Dictionary. 'Bestseller' is something of a misnomer as it is conventionally used. The books which sell the most copies in a year, every year, year-in, year-out, are boringly predictable: The Highway Code, telephone directories, train timetables, catalogues. A true 'bestseller' list would be duller reading than what it was made up of (p.8, 2002).

This makes for quite a useful provocation. It may very well be true that *The Highway Code* is dull to read as a work of literature, however there is still cultural relevance to the fact that the UK is a nation of (aspirational) motorists in spite of rising fuel costs, heavy regulation, and growing environmental concerns. Furthermore, this could prove an interesting case study into how and why public sector publishing has been privatised. What once was Her Majesty's Stationery Office, a journal of record and to this day one of the largest publishers in the UK by volume, is now The Stationery Office (TSO), a subsidiary of global printing and distribution company Williams Lea, with an annual turnover of over £500 million. (TSO, 2016)

This is by no means a criticism of Sutherland's philosophy. To study the literary outliers, the books that shine bright in a 'singular and momentary contemporaneity', it is necessary to first exclude the steadysellers. This comment is merely intended to highlight that there are still cultural insights, and publishing narratives, to be found behind the seemingly mundane. Moreover, any investigation of fastsellers is self-consciously focused on understanding a title's popularity at a specific point in time; why did it resonant so dramatically with the population in that particular socio-political or historic context? Whereas a study of longsellers is concerned with understanding why a title has continued to hold relevance and remained popular over time.

In *Merchants of Culture* (2012) Thompson talks of the difference between aspiration and reality of hyped-books and frenzied marketing activity:

Big books are not bestsellers for the simple reason that, for most big books (though not all [...]) at the time when they are being sent out by agents and bought by publishers and are being treated as big books, they have not yet been published and no one knows whether they will actually become bestsellers. [...] So big books cannot be bestsellers. At most they are hoped-for bestsellers, which is not at all the same thing. The difference between a

big book and a bestseller is the difference between aspiration and reality.
(pp.193-194)

If a strong backlist provides stability for publishers as Rosenthal suggests, it becomes somewhat of a contradiction that scholars of bestsellers and popular fiction, often speak of the limited life span of books. According to Cao and Folan (2012) there are certain features that are noticeable in products that sell in high volume at the beginning stages of the lifecycle.

In *Marketing Literature*, Squires (2007 p.26) highlights the tension between cultural and commercial value, and discusses the issues pushing modern publishing in the direction of commerce. Mass readership, book returns policies, and prompt access to sales data feature amongst the factors driving publishers towards a short-termist approach and favouritism for novelty. In addition, industry commentators, authors and the mainstream press alike (Howie, 2014; Lea, 2016; St. Claire, n.d) have reported on the impact that the shift towards 'big books' and commerce has had on authors' careers. While bestselling authors can earn huge amounts from book sales, those that have not been so successful, the debut and midlist authors, cannot survive on their earnings. This is particularly problematic for an industry that is striving to be more inclusive and publish more underrepresented voices (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018 p.385-406).

Not every book can be a bestseller, but those that are not still generate a lot of revenue from the retail perspective, if not the individual author's. Anderson's long tail, (outlined in [section 2.2 p.60](#)), explains the commercial rationale for small volume sales supplied to niche markets via digital production, online retailing and on demand distribution mechanisms. In essence, the numbers of titles, selling in small quantities, to niche markets is worth more in total than the value of the few books that sell in huge quantities to the mass market. Arguably, these advances in supply-chain logistics should mitigate against the fears of publishing short-termism. The ebook format offers a distribution channel free from the limitations of the returns window.

Perhaps then it should come as no surprise that little focused scholarly research has been carried out on the longevity of contemporary book

publishing, and even less on the books that fall within the category of trade non-fiction (that is to say non-specialist books which are sold through high street retailers, but are not works of fiction or exclusively academic texts).

Defining Bestsellers

As writing on the topic of bestsellers is far more prevalent than on long sellers, it is logical to review these definitions first, and from there establish a working definition of long seller.

Mott's (1947) early definition of bestseller offered within *Golden Multitudes The Story Of Best Sellers In The United States* factored in longevity and demography. Mott (1947, p.6) articulates the rationale for a population-tracking threshold neatly:

But is a weekly, or even a yearly, leader necessarily entitled to the accolade of "best seller"? Not a few of the yearly leaders since 1895 have fallen below the half-million figure in total sales. In a dull year the top book may sell fewer copies than those which occupied second and third place the preceding year. Or it may not be a dull year at all, but a year lacking in a particular pace-setter. Shall we, then, insist on the limitations of the calendar and declare that we must have one best seller, or ten or twenty best sellers, every twelve months, regardless of total sales.

He therefore defined a 'best seller' to be a work with sales volume of equal or greater than 1% of the population, over the decade in which it was published. Or as Sutherland puts it 'An ordinary book which succeeds to an extraordinary degree' (Sutherland, 1981, p. 6). By this definition, Mott identified 124 works published between 1776 and 1900 as best-sellers (Sutherland, 2007 p.5) but purposefully omitted 'Bibles, hymnals, textbooks, almanacs, cookbooks, "doctor-books", manuals and reference books' (Mott, 1947, p.9).

This concept of a critical mass of sales over a period of time seems a useful starting point for a definition of long selling works. This research could identify thousands (if not millions) of obscure or niche long selling titles that have only sold a handful of copies over decades, but these data points are not culturally significant, they are merely noise. Of more statistical and cultural interest are the popular backlist titles that consistently sell year-in year-out, for these form the foundation upon which the industry is built and demonstrate persistent

demand. However, an important aspect of Mott's definition (and where this research differs in its objective) is that it applied an absolute threshold '1% of population over ten years'; a high bar to ensure the titles that made his list were *the* superlative books of their time. Mott's definition used a decade-long *durée* as part of the calculation not because he was interested in the longevity of a work per se, but to ensure the methodology by which the 'best' books were identified was fair and really to ensure that weaker titles did not sneak onto the list by virtue of not having any strong competition in any given year. Therefore, this research does not adopt a per capita threshold as a criteria for inclusion in the longseller dataset, but the concept of thresholds is still important as I shall go on to discuss.

Escarpit's (1966, p.177) definition of a bestseller plots sales volume on one axis and time on the other. Although he does not consider demography, he clearly differentiates between the following types of book sales:

- **Fastseller:** Significant spike in initial sales followed by a drop-off and eventual decline
- **Steadyseller:** Consistently steady, without a significant spike.
- **Bestseller:** Significant spike in initial sales followed by consistently steady sales (a hybrid of the first two).

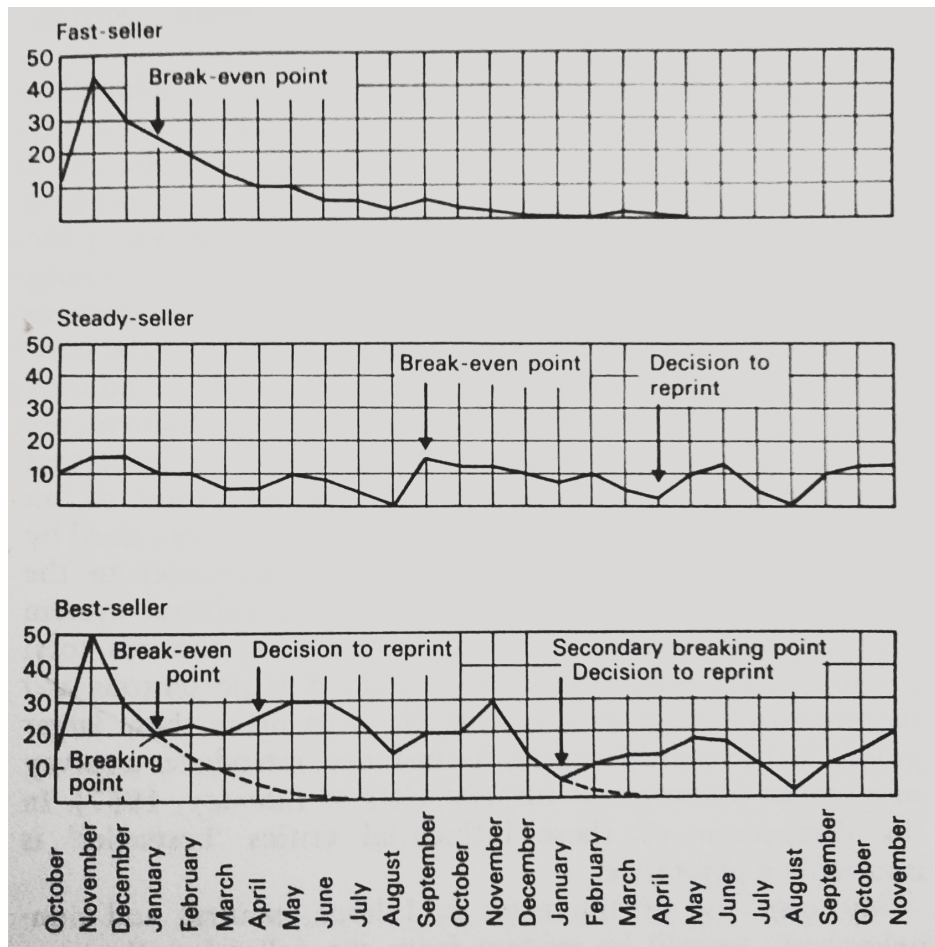


Figure 6: Graphic of Fastseller, Steady-seller, Bestseller (source: Escarpit 1966 cited by Sutherland 1981 p.7)

Within his early work *Bestsellers: Popular fiction of the 1970s* (1981), John Sutherland considers the range of descriptors; best-, fast-, steady-, long- as offered up by Mott and Escarpit above. He acknowledges the plurality of definitions and concedes the terms are somewhat fungible. However, as his study of the topic progresses over the years, *his* interpretation of 'bestseller' becomes concretely defined as 'fastseller', placing the long-slow-steady seller firmly apart from bestsellerdom.

Fundamentally, there is only one factor that need determine a bestseller - namely sales volume. Yet as Bloom (2008 p.28) points out in *Bestsellers: popular fiction since 1900*, there are other factors that can be used to qualify book sales. These include:

- price (if a million copies of a book were given away for free should that count as a bestseller?)

- format (how should paperback, hardback, ebook versions of the same work, or new editions be accounted for?)
- population size
- rapidity of sales

(NB. To Bloom's list one can also add genre, or subject category)

Industry Definition of Bestseller

Bestsellers can also be defined in more applied commercial terms, as simply the titles which appear on bestseller lists. It is this definition that is relied upon by Archer and Jockers in *The Bestseller Code*:

From the beginning, the list—which were printed in each major city and typically reported the top six sellers of the month—were about two things that were new to the book world. The bestseller lists were about sales as the only criterion for inclusion, and a proxy recommendation system for what to read next. These recommendations were based not on the choices of a select few reviewers or publishers, but on the choices of fellow readers. The readers' choice was, and still is the only vote (2016, p.4).

This articulation of the bestseller list as consumer choice made visible is appealing in its simplicity. The people buy books, sometime the books are 'mass-market', sometimes the books are 'Pulitzer prize winner', nevertheless the bestseller list is the natural result and represents a 'balanced truth' that can be perceived as a democratic expression of consumer interest.

However, given the commercial value that is generated through appearing on the bestseller lists. It is a system worth scrutinising further. In her article 'The Best-Seller List as Marketing Tool and Historical Fiction' (2000) Laura Miller details the uses and abuses of bestseller-list in the US. Bestseller-lists have received criticism in terms of how they are compiled, and Miller explains the historical context of best-seller lists, what they capture, what they do not capture, how they are created, their impact on book sales, and how, or why, they can be manipulated.

Miller focuses heavily on the US market and more specifically the *New York Times* bestseller list and the proprietary methods used to produce them. The *New York Times* provides the disclaimer that the list 'does not purport to be an objective compilation of information but instead [i]s an editorial product

(p.297)', By 'editorial product' Miller means the bestseller lists are derived from weighted surveys that are merely informed by sales data. Rather than a purely statistical representation of actual sales across the US, these weighted surveys are collected from various chains, online and independent booksellers and used to select and rank titles according to the *New York Times*' own proprietary methodology.¹ Crucially, Miller highlights the fact that although 'they appear to be straightforward devices that objectively provide us with interesting information about the actions of culture consumers (p.286)'. Bestseller lists are marketing tools used by publishers, authors and booksellers because of their power to significantly influence consumer behaviour. Implicit in this is an incentive to manipulate the *New York Times* list for commercial gain.

It is evident that people buying books are heavily influenced by the *New York Times* lists as sales rocket when titles are listed. Retailers and consumers are more interested in books that sell 10,000 units in a week, than those that sell 10,000 over a year, so as Sutherland (2008) clarifies bestseller charts are really reporting 'fastsellers' rather than 'bestsellers'.

A feature therefore of fastseller lists is that they position titles relative to other books released at a similar time, rather than acknowledging absolute sales in the way that the music industry does with platinum albums.

What is a Longseller, and How is it Distinct from Bestseller?

It is necessary to establish a working definition of longseller within the context of this study. As previously discussed, what counts as either bestselling or longselling success in publishing terms can be relative within, and between, subject categories; Fiction has various subgenres (literary, crime, science, romance, etc.) and non-fiction has many subcategories (biography, travel, cookery, and so on). Each of these subdivisions can be mapped by market size and volume year-on-year.

¹ Comprehensive book sales data is collected from US retailers by a subsidiary of Nielsen BookScan – however the New York Times continues to use its own surveying methods and proprietary weighting.

Therefore, for the purposes of this research, longseller will be broadly defined as: **a work (product in all print formats and editions), that has sold in significant quantities, over a prolonged period of time (beyond average), within a specific subject category, in the UK TCM (Trade Consumer Market).**

When discussing successful books within the fields of publishing, book history, or even literary criticism the term 'longseller' is not commonly referenced. There are however other terms in use which imply commercial longevity, such as: all-time-bestseller, evergreen, cash cow and cultural longevity, such as: classic, or canonical works.

John Feather and Hazel Woodbridge have conducted some of the only quantitative studies of UK book sales to assess both fiction and non-fiction concurrently. They concede that longsellers are the 'true bestsellers' but otherwise take a similar approach as Sutherland:

The key consideration here is that the concept [bestsellers] is concerned with new publications, not with what is sometimes called a 'longseller', a title which is in print for many years, perhaps even for decades or centuries. The true 'bestsellers' could be argued to be Shakespeare or certain official publications (such as the UK Highway Code which is required reading before taking a Driving Test), or religious books such as the Bible or the Qur'an. These books are all of great commercial significance, but they are typically not recorded in the published lists. (Feather and Woodbridge, 2007 p.210)

In summary, the study of bestselling books and the ways scholars define them through the literature discussed above is certainly a useful starting point. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference in the question being asked by these scholars versus this doctoral research project. With bestsellers the question is why has this book become exceptionally popular at this particular time? With longsellers it might be asked why has this book continued to be popular over a prolonged period of time? And what can this tell us about the publishing industry and our academic understanding of text-based culture?

Conclusion to Part 1

To recap, Chapter 1 introduced the research questions underpinning this project on the sales longevity of non-fiction books as well as providing a clear list of aims and objective for the project. It outlined the mixed methods approach and situated the research project within the field of publishing studies.

In Chapter 2, an overview of the publishing context within the UK was given and the importance of the frontlist, backlist and product lifecycle explained. The chapter introduced key theories and frameworks relevant to publishing studies and bookselling and explained how these relate to the study of longselling works specifically. Chapter 2 concluded with a review of the definition and scholarly interrogation of bestsellers and bestsellerdom and provides a working definition of longseller and longsellerdom.

Together these chapters have: demonstrated a gap in knowledge on this topic; provided a strong rationale for researching non-fiction books as opposed to fiction, and longsellors as distinct from bestsellers; outlined clear aims and methods to address them; introduced the methodology and theories used to conduct and frame the research.

Parts 2 and 3 present respectively the quantitative and qualitative findings and initial analysis.

Part 2: Trade Non-fiction in Numbers

Chapter 3: Quantitative Data Sources and Methods

Chapter 4: Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset

Chapter 3: Quantitative Data Sources and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This part of the thesis deals primarily with the quantitative components of the research and presents the findings. In *Chapter 3*, the data sources and methods used to conduct the quantitative analysis are explained. These methods underpin the analysis presented in *Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset*, the non-fiction TCM between 2001-2015 is analysed and the subset of longselling titles presented.

Quantitative analysis of the Trade Consumer Market (TCM) was conducted with the aim of answering research questions 2a and 3 which relate to quantifying the typical sales longevity, identifying longsellors, and establishing changes in sales lifecycles, as well as research question 5 which is concerned with trends in subject categories.

These three research questions were predominantly researched through interrogation of the Nielsen BookScan dataset and therefore this chapter expands below on the data available via this source and descriptive statistics used to summarise the market and historic trends. Although the Nielsen dataset is a secondary source, many of the output tables, charts and statistical interpretation of the data are the result of primary research and demonstrate original analysis and insight. Particularly in terms of the longselling subset, I added supplementary fields to the existing bibliographic data held by Nielsen, pertaining to the publication date of the earliest edition of a work (EPPD) as well as author gender and nationality. As such, these supplementary data are original contributions and only exist together due to this study of longsellerdom.

In service of transparency, for the benefit of other researchers who may wish to replicate, or further, the findings of this study the following section will go into some of the finer details of the Nielsen dataset and available reporting.

3.2 Data Sources

Overview of Nielsen BookScan Dataset

The primary quantitative data source that was interrogated in this research was the Nielsen ‘trade consumer market’, or TCM, a term used by the data aggregator Nielsen BookScan to describe the book sales dataset they collect from retailers.

The available dataset is limited to **physical book formats** (paperback and hardback), sold via **UK retail** outlets, **from 2001** onwards. For clarity, the following are excluded from the dataset:

- digital formats: i.e. ebook and audiobook formats;
- direct sales made via publishers’ own channels: i.e. bulk sales to libraries and schools and export sales;
- products which have not been allocated an ISBN: i.e. self-published works, using Amazon ASINs as the only product identifier;
- transactions made before 2001;
- second-hand book sale.

Nielsen collect these data to track and analyse the volume and value of print book sales in the UK over time, along with some other factors such as market share and average sales price. Nielsen BookScan sell this information back to publishers and booksellers as business intelligence, and more widely the data is used by publishing industry bodies (e.g. the Publishers’ Association, the Booksellers Association) to provide top-level industry statistics. These data are also used by magazine and newspaper publishers such as *The Bookseller* to provide weekly bestseller charts.

In addition to numeric sales data, the Nielsen BookScan TCM dataset includes descriptive and categorical data; there are three tiers of subject category known as ‘product class’ to subcategorise the titles. These are particularly useful for analysis of sales trends, therefore these product class categories are used by publishers and booksellers to position books both literally on the shelves and figuratively against similar and competing titles.

Illustrated below are the market trends for the first tier of product class:

F Adult Fiction

S Adult Non-Fiction: Specialist (e.g. specialist audience: academic, professional, science, technical and medical)

T Adult Non-Fiction: Trade (e.g. generalist audience: biography, history, self-help, travel writing)

Y Children's, Young Adult & Educational

Z Unclassifiable (e.g. notebooks, diaries, calendars, book bundles)

These two charts provide an overview market volume ([Figure 7](#)) and value ([Figure 8](#)) data between 2001 and 2015 and highlight the commercial importance of trade non-fiction to the UK book market as a whole.

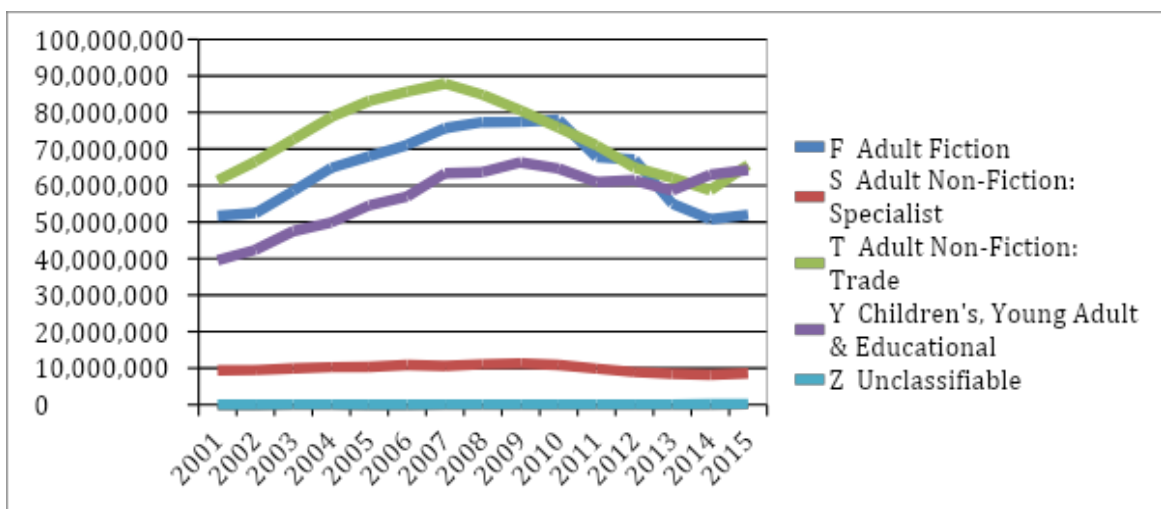


Figure 7: UK TCM Book Sales by Volume 2001 - 2015 (Nielsen 2016a)

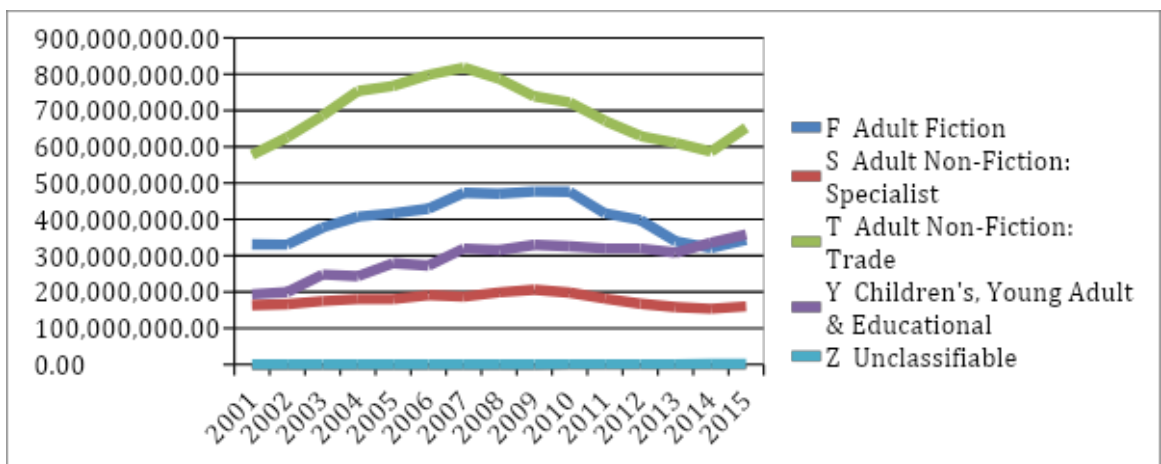


Figure 8: UK TCM Book Sales by Value 2001 - 2015 (Nielsen 2016b)

It is worth noting in these figures the significant downward turn for most categories between 2008 and 2014; adult fiction decreased 34% by volume

and 32% by value, adult trade non-fiction decreased 31% by volume and 26% by value, and adult specialist non-fiction decreased 26% by volume and 23% by value. This period of decline coincides with the launch of highly portable digital devices such as the Sony e-reader (in 2008), Amazon Kindle (in 2009) and Apple iPad (in 2010) and the concurrent mass-digitisation of backlist titles to ebook formats. As indicated, the dataset used for this research project is limited to print formats (paperback and hardback), therefore sales of ebooks and other digital products are excluded from the analysis within this thesis.

This research project was limited to ***T Adult Non-fiction: Trade*** (charted in green in [Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#)) which is comprised of 18 second-tier subcategories. Beyond the classes listed below sit over 150 third-tier product sub-classes:

- T1. The Arts
- T2. Dictionaries & Reference
- T3. Literature, Poetry & Criticism
- T4. Biographies & Autobiographies
- T5. History & Military
- T6. Religion
- T7. Politics & Government
- T8. The World, Ideas, Culture: General Interest
- T9. Family, Health & Relationships
- T10. Mind, Body & Spirit
- T11. Travel
- T12. Humour, Trivia & Puzzles
- T13. Atlases, Maps & Travel
- T14. Sport
- T15. Food and Drink
- T16. Personal Development
- T17. Leisure and Lifestyle
- T18. Transport

These product class descriptors are assigned by the publishers in the form of bibliodata. While they should accurately reflect the contents of the work, some titles do not fit neatly into a single subject classification, and as with all human-generated data, categorical errors (where the wrong category has been assigned) do occur. So there may be titles within the specialist non-fiction class that also appeal to the trade non-fiction consumer market and vice versa.

In terms of how these categories are used within the publishing industry the TCM classes are used for market analysis, tracking and charting book sales

against similar tiles. Booksellers might use the TCM classes as a rough guide for laying-out stock on the shop floor, but equally booksellers use their own judgment to position books wherever they feel customers are most likely to find them. *A Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* provides a useful example of this, as it appears to have been primarily classified as ‘T7. Politics & Government’ yet it is evidently also an autobiographical work, and could quite easily have been labelled as ‘T4. Biographies & Autobiographies’.

The Nielsen dataset is a versatile research tool, in addition to the type of top-level market size information presented in [Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#) the database can also be queried directly to generate custom reports. There are two main types of report that can be obtained the **TCM chart** and **TCM timeline**.

TCM (Bestselling) Chart

The TCM chart allows up to 5000 titles (or rather ISBNs) to be ranked by sales volume thus; it is essentially a bestseller chart. Various parameters can be set by the analyst when running these reports to narrow or broaden the returned results. These include sales period, product class (category), author, publisher group or imprint, publication date, format (paperback or hardback), and the resulting table is a bestseller chart which includes sales value (at point of sale) recommended retail price (RRP) and average sales price (ASP) after promotional discounts. An example of a TCM chart is provided (see [Table 2](#)) in this case it shows the highest selling (by volume) trade non-fiction titles in 2001. From this type of report, additional data can be derived such as ‘average discount applied’ or ‘weeks since publication’.

TCM Timeline

The second type of report, TCM timeline (see

[Table 3](#)), can be used to drill down and view the individual sales performance of a title over time. The ‘periods’ are equivalent to 28 or 29 days and as such there are 13 periods in a calendar year. The period value ‘200101’ refers to the first 28-day period in 2001, ‘200102’ refers to the second 28-day period, and so on with ‘200113’ being the last in the year. This means that each period is approximately equal in length for the purposes of time series analysis. The TCM Timeline data table provides lifetime sales of a work and these can be visualised as charts plotting volume (or value) by period (see [Figure 9](#)).

The sales data provided by Nielsen BookScan are associated to an ISBN. As explained in [Chapter 1](#): , a work of non-fiction may have been sold in various editions (paperback or hardback) and thus be linked to multiple ISBNs, as is the case with Bill Bryson’s *Notes from a Small Island* (first publishing in 1996). However, as illustrated in [Figure 10](#), it is possible to combine the sales data from multiple ISBNs using a pivot table in Excel and to aggregate sales of all edition over time in a single time series chart.

Table 2: Example of UK TCM Chart – tabular data parameters (Nielsen 2016c)

Position	ISBN	Title	Author	Imprint	Publisher Group	Volume	Value	RRP	ASP	Binding	Publ Date	Product Class
1	9780752837505	Child Called It, A	Pelzer, Dave	Orion (an Imprint of The Orion	Orion Grp	596,342	£2,806,397.24	£6.99	£4.71	Paperback	4 Jan 01	T4.0A Autobiography: General
2	9780718144845	Happy Days with the Naked Chef	Oliver, Jamie	Michael Joseph	Penguin Grp	528,615	£7,001,830.43	£20.00	£13.25	Hardback	3 Sep 01	T16.0 Food & Drink: General
3	9780007110919	Billy Connolly	Stephenson, Pamela	HarperCollins Entertainment	HarperCollins Grp	368,894	£4,829,649.81	£17.99	£13.09	Hardback	1 Oct 01	T4.1 Biography: The Arts
4	9780340766057	McCarthy's Bar: A Journey of Discovery in Ireland	McCarthy, Pete	Sceptre	Hodder & Stoughton Grp	306,643	£1,815,352.56	£9.99	£5.92	Paperback	15 Mar 01	T8.5 Travel Writing
5	9780851121246	Guinness World Records:2002		Guinness World Records	Guinness Publisher Group	304,835	£3,166,428.06	£18.00	£10.39	Hardback	28 Sep 01	T2.0 Encyclopedias & General Reference

Table 3: Example of a TCM Timeline – tabular data parameters (Nielsen 2016d)

ISBN	Title	Series	Author	RRP	Binding	Publ Date	Period	Period End Date	Volume	Value	ASP
9780552996006	NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND		BRYSON, BILL	£8.99	Paperback	Aug 1, 1996	200101	p/e 27-JAN-2001	4,684	£36,195.90	£7.73
9780385600736	NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND		BRYSON, BILL	£8.99	Paperback	Aug 1, 1996	200102	p/e 24-FEB-2001	4,559	£33,788.07	£7.41
	NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND		BRYSON, BILL	£8.99	Paperback	Aug 1, 1996	200103	p/e 24-MAR-2001	4,232	£32,464.37	£7.67
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...to 201513	...	...	...	...
	NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND		BRYSON, BILL	£8.99	Paperback	Aug 1, 1996	200104	p/e 21-APR-2001	8,258	£63,536.75	£7.69
	Notes from a Small Island		Bryson, Bill	£12.99	Hardback	Sep 2, 1999	200101	p/e 27-JAN-2001	50	£641.05	£12.82
	Notes from a Small Island		Bryson, Bill	£12.99	Hardback	Sep 2, 1999	200102	p/e 24-FEB-2001	25	£287.07	£11.48
	Notes from a Small Island		Bryson, Bill	£12.99	Hardback	Sep 2, 1999	200103	p/e 24-MAR-2001	25	£304.60	£12.18
	Notes from a Small Island		Bryson, Bill	£12.99	Hardback	Sep 2, 1999	200104	p/e 21-APR-2001	69	£852.76	£12.36
	Notes from a Small Island		Bryson, Bill	£12.99	Hardback	Sep 2, 1999	200105	p/e 19-MAY-2001	21	£255.89	£12.19
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...to 201513	...	...	...	...
									479,245	£3,900,556.70	

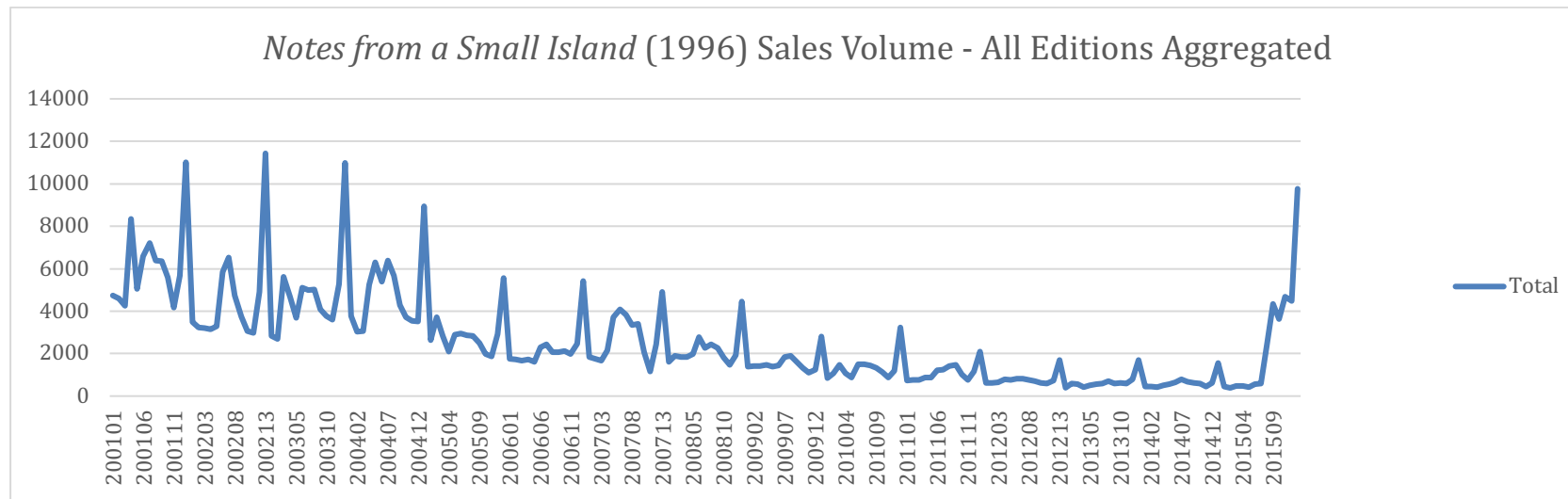


Figure 9: Example of timeline chart Notes from a Small Island (1996) Sales Volume – All Editions (Nielsen 2016d)

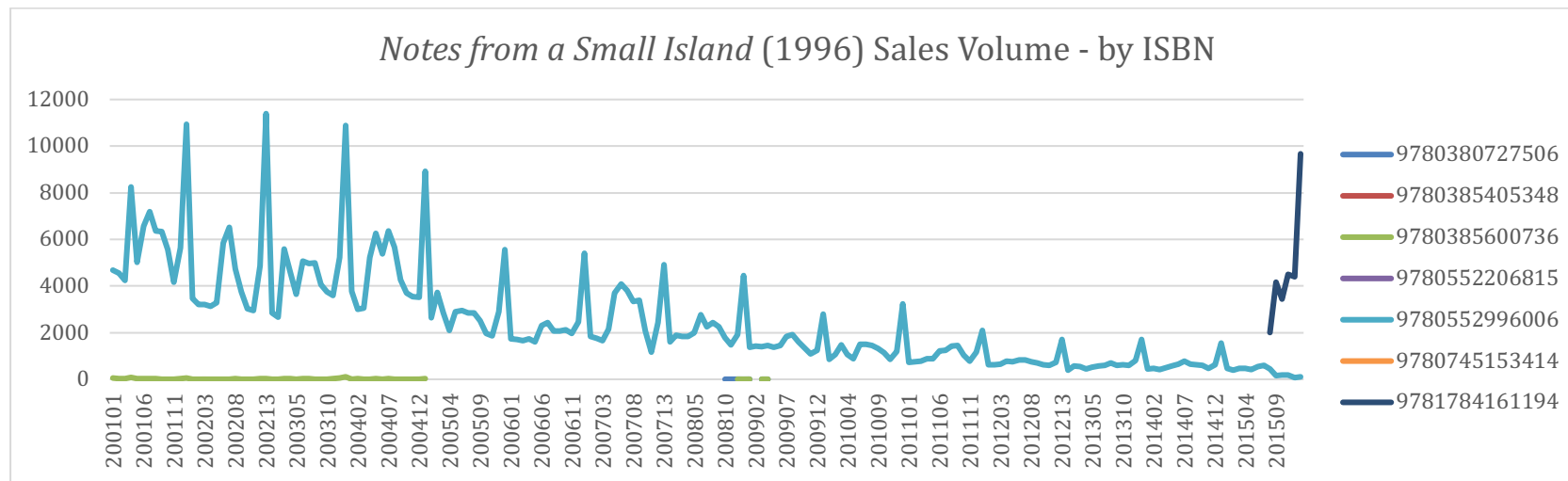


Figure 10: Example of timeline chart *Notes from a Small Island (1996) Sales Volume – by ISBN (Nielsen 2016d) Limitations of the Nielsen BookScan Dataset*

It is worth noting some of the limitations of the Nielsen BookScan dataset. These include the level of accuracy and consistency with which bibliodata are supplied. As it the case with most sources, Nielsen BookScan is not one-hundred percent accurate and inevitably contains some erroneous data. Often bibliographic errors are introduced at source, meaning that publishers have supplied incomplete or inaccurate metadata for a list of titles. Common errors, which were obvious during the data processing, included low or no Recommended Retail Price (RRP) data, and impossible or implausible publication dates.

The sales data collected by Nielsen BookScan are collected via electronic-point-of-sale (EPOS) systems from physical book retailers, as well as non-specialist book retailers such as supermarkets, garden centres and gift shops and via automated feeds from online retailers. Therefore, the captured data can also be subject to errors in sales processing made by the retailers (e.g. in physical retail spaces this might include manual miskeying of ISBNs or mismatching barcode to product). There are some weeks of sales missing from the Nielsen dataset during the covid lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, where bookshops were closed. The covid-lockdown dates fall outside the 2001-2016 period; thus it did not affect this analysis, but could have impact on future research. However, it is worth stressing that the Nielsen BookScan database is at the heart of the UK book supply chain process, thus the supply of incorrect bibliographic data from publishers to Nielsen BookScan could potentially affect product visibility and sale performance. Therefore, there exists a strong incentive for publishers to carefully check and correct any bibliographic errors at their end which would result in a loss of sales (key fields include RRP and publication date). However, there is less incentive to include or carefully scrutinise other bibliodata points which are part of the ONIX standard but not essential to sales (Bell and Markou, 2017).

As demonstrated in [Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#), because the market for consumer ebooks was relatively small prior to 2008 the Nielsen dataset provides

consumer sales data with reasonably good, but not perfect accuracy. From 2008 onwards, the dataset experiences a structural break with introduction of ebook to the market. Thereafter, the absence of ebook sales makes it harder to determine and analyse sales trends across all formats and manifestations of a work. It is possible that a title might be wildly successful as an ebook and sell in high volumes, despite having low print sales. Nevertheless, print is widely reported to account for the majority of sales in revenue terms, c.90%, (Publishers' Association 2017) and Nielsen data is by far the most accessible and comprehensive dataset we have to work with.

It would have been preferable to include the ebook formats within this study however this was not feasible. Ebook sales data are captured by Nielsen (where an ebook has a unique eISBN) and by Amazon (where an ebook has an eISBN or a proprietary ASIN) thus data historic sales data is collected and maintained by Nielsen for a panel of ebook retailers, but these data are not available to third parties.

For the purpose of reporting bestseller charts, *The Bookseller* magazine use an alternative methodology to quantify ebook sales whereby the largest big-five publishers supply unverified ebook sales data and analysts at *The Bookseller* then extrapolate the full ebook market size based on those publishers' share of the market (Jones, 2014). This methodology of publisher-supplied data and extrapolation has obvious limitations in terms of reliability, accuracy and precision and therefore this research study could not feasibly include ebook sales within the analysis.

However, as the primary focus of this study is to explore why some works have continued importance and significant sales *longevity* the omission of the relatively recent ebook format does not feel at odds with the research aims.

Referencing Datasets and Data Sources

Where exclusively the Nielsen BookScan T1: Trade Non-Fiction product class between 2001 and 2015 was the source of analysis then it will fall within the parameters below and be referenced according to the normal convention of author and year or Dataset 1.

- **Dataset 1:** T1. Trade Non-Fiction: Top-5000 Charts; Year ="2001, 2002, 2003, [...] 2015" (Nielsen, 2016c) – (n = 15 x 5000)

Where Nielsen BookScan data was supplemented with my own original research and statistical analysis then it will be referred to as Dataset 2.

- **Dataset 2 (Subset of 1 + additional data points):** T1. Trade Non-Fiction: Longselling Subset (Nielsen, 2016e; Markou, 2016) (n = 178 including poetry and plays).

Finally, data from the Office of National Statistics was used to create a deflation price index.

- **Dataset 3:** UK Consumer Price Index data (ONS, 2023)

Excluded from Analysis

For clarity the following product classes, formats and types of sale were not included in the analysis.

Specialist Non-Fiction

The *S Non-Fiction: Specialist* product class is typically used for academic, scholarly, technical and professional publications. While a study of the specialist non-fiction product class would uncover insight into trends within niche publishing sectors the focused of this research project was on consumer (mass market) works.

Children's Non-fiction

The *Y Children's, Young Adult and Educational* product class was not included in the analysis as the products sold to the children's market tend to be fact books, drawing books, annuals and educational support resources (e.g. learn to write the alphabet, numbers, etc...) (Nielsen, 2016f).

3.3 Method for Establishing Longevity, Longsellers & EEPDs

The Nielsen TCM charts rank titles in position 1 to 5000 by sales volume. Each line of the chart is indexed by the ISBN and lists other key details such as author, titles, publisher, product class and crucially (for a study on longevity) **publication date**. However, in Nielsen TCM terms 'publication date'

only tells us when the title with the given ISBN was published, not the original publication date for any earlier editions of the work. Thus, to identify longselling works it was necessary to first narrow down the list of titles with longevity within the 2001-2015 period, and once this had been established to discover when those titles were originally published. This was done firstly via a TCM Chart comparison process, followed by the creation of a database of Earliest Edition Publication Dates (EEDPs) for all titles of interest. The methods for these two processes are outlined below.

Chart Comparison Process: Determining the Longselling Subset

The method used to find titles with longevity was to take the TCM Top 5000 bestselling chart for 2001 and compare it with the TCM Top 5000 chart for 2002 and every subsequent year until 2015. The aim of this process of comparison was to find titles that appeared consistently in all TCM charts. Because editions of a work appearing on the 2001 list in hardback and 2015 in paperback will not share the same ISBN, but do share the same title, using the book's title as the criteria for search and comparison can return better results than using the ISBN. This was achieved using a VLOOKUP formula in Excel. VLOOKUP is a function that will scroll vertically through lines of data looking for a cell that matches the specified input data.

Data Cleaning and Processing

Prior to parsing the data with the VLOOKUP formula the columns of title text were stripped of all non-alphanumeric characters such as quotation marks, colons or semicolons.

Some books are released annually with the year of publication in the title for example '*AA Big Easy Read Britain 2001*' thus all dates in year format were replaced with 'yyyy' to ensure the title comparison would still match these titles with previous/subsequent editions.

False Positives

There were also false positives to consider, such as where two works share exactly the same title but have different authors or publishers. Fortunately,

these were limited to just a few occurrences of books with titles like '*London*' or '*Bread*' and as such were easily omitted from the final results via a secondary parse of the data comparing title the titles and publisher fields.

False Negatives

Spot checks were performed to check the VLOOKUP was not missing any matches due to inconsistencies in title spelling or syntax. This was achieved by sorting the 5000 titles from 2001 and 2015 alphabetically, placing the columns side-by-side and using conditional formatting to highlight cells that matched then manually scrolling through the columns. This did pick up a few instances where the series title sometimes appeared in the title field, and sometimes did not 'e.g. *Berlin Berlitz City Guide: Berlitz City Guides*' vs '*Berlin Berlitz City Guide*'. These types of inconsistencies were identified and global find and replace used to remove the superfluous text.

The chart comparison approach, using 2001 and 2015, might also have missed titles that dropped out of the charts temporarily during 2015, or re-entered the charts after 2001. Thus, once refined the comparison process was replicated using all fifteen years of chart data to see if any potential longselling titles might have been missed. This revealed a few instructional art titles towards the bottom of the charts from Dover Publishing which appeared in the top-5000 consistently but dropped out every few years (possibly due to stock availability and the scheduling of reprints).

While efforts were made to ensure that longselling non-fiction titles were identified it is still possible that some works have been missed particularly if multiple editions were sold under multiple ISBNs. In such cases, individual sales may have fallen short of the top-5000 chart (under approx. 1,800 units per annum) but aggregated sales of all editions would have been significant (over approx. 1,800 units per annum).

Determining Typical Longevity

The method employed for establishing typical longevity was broadly the same as above. Namely, comparison of the top-5000 titles charting in 2001 with the

top-5000 titles charting in 2002, 2003, 2004 and so on but here the aim was to quantify how many years each title remained in the top-5000 bestselling chart. This process was repeated using the top-5000 from 2002 as the starting point and quantifying the number of titles that remained in the charts over the following 14 years. The resulting data table overlays the findings from each year to demonstrate the overall trends in longevity for the top-5000 titles in terms of counting how many chart for one year, two years, three years, and so on. As 2023, is the last complete year of sales data the titles first charting in 2010 only have 13 years of data to compare, and every chart thereafter has one fewer year of data.

In terms of limitations, the top-5000 sample is restricted to the most successful titles published in any given year. To feature in the top-5000 charts a title needs to sell approximately 1,800 units per year, roughly 34 books per week. This is quite a high benchmark, but it is not possible to query beyond the top-5000 titles within each product class. However, these titles with the highest initial sales are also most likely to gain visibility and continue to sell and feature in the chart.

This method was not capable of quantifying the sales longevity of the long-tail of non-fiction publishing, that is to say titles that sell in small quantities, below 1,800 units from the outset, and/or year-on-year. Nevertheless, the findings discussed in *Chapter*

4.2 Importance of the Top-5000 Bestseller Charts show distinct trends in terms of sales longevity with very little variation between 2001 and 2015. It is unlikely that titles which sell in low volumes (upon initial publication) experience a longer sales lifecycle than the highest-selling books, but it should be noted that there is a gap in the data and a different trend could exist for the long-tail.

A further limitation of the chart comparison method was the lack of access to historic sales data before 2001 to identify longselling titles. It is possible for some works to have performed consistently between 2001 and 2015 in terms of sales but still have spent some time out-of-print at some point (ergo not quite meeting the definition of a longseller in terms of consistent appeal to the

population between publication and present). Nevertheless, it was not possible to seek out historic sales data for all 178 titles from the respective publishers' and author estates to establish whether titles within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] had never been out-of-print.

EEPDs: Earliest Edition Publication Dates

The date of publication (pub date) listed on Nielsen refers to the date that particular edition was published. While this is useful, the publishing cycle of revising issues and assigning a new ISBN means that the listed publication date often obscures the true longevity of a work. When searching for longevity, a more useful data point is the date the work was first published, therefore other sources were referenced to establish this.

A number of resources were explored in the pursuit of collecting accurate EEPDs. These included ONIX metadata (used to populate sites such as Amazon with bibliographic data); MARC records (used to populate library catalogues); WorldCat (global network of library content) and Google Book preview function (database of library content scanned by the Google Book Search project). Although both ONIX and MARC records have fields that relate to 'first date of publication' this information is rarely supplied by publishers. EDiTEUR, the organisation managing the ONIX standard, estimates that less than 5% of records include a 'first date of publication', and those that do are unlikely to be accurate (Bell and Markou, 2017). The explanation for this given by EDiTEUR's Executive Director, Graham Bell, is that only fields with commercial relevance, expected to 'enhance sales', get completed by publishers to a high level of accuracy.

An alternative technique was to query WorldCat for all the known linked editions of a given title. This is possible using the WorldCat xISBN web service, which allows ISBNs to be input within a URL string in a web browser. The resulting webpage returns a list of all related editions of a work on the WorldCat database, plus some basic information including year of publication. A short Python script was used to iterate through a csv list of ISBNs. This process automated the retrieval of all known (linked) editions from WorldCat xISBN,

and stored all the results into one output file. Once a list of all editions of a work was obtained in the format shown in [Figure 11](#), the data could then be tabulated and the edition with the earliest (i.e. minimum) publication year identified.

```
In [1]: from urllib.request import urlopen
import csv

with open('ISBN_eds_100.csv') as f:
    f_csv = csv.reader(f)
    for row in f_csv:
        isbn = row[0]
        html = urlopen('http://xisbn.worldcat.org/webservices/xid/isbn/{0}?method=getEditions&for
        print(isbn, "\n", html)
```

```
9780192810892
1970,eng,Repr. ed,9780192810892
200u,eng,,9781438500362
1992,eng,,9780486270517
1971,eng,Unabridged republ. of the 1789 ed,9780486227641
1990,eng,5. impression,9780198319528
1977,eng,,9780195199772
1992,eng,,9780486276335
2011,eng,[Rev ed.],9780198310785
1971,eng,Facsim. ed.,9780486213958
```

Figure 11: WorldCat script run in Jupyter Notebook

Initially, the WorldCat xISBN query was used to obtain earliest edition publication dates for the 178 titles that were identified as longsellers. An accuracy test was carried out to see how closely the WorldCat earliest listed edition agreed with dates sourced manually, by reviewing the ‘first published in...’ statement on the copyright pages of books using the Google Book preview function. Comparing the dates sourced via these two methods allowed a level of accuracy to be determined for the automated WorldCat xSBN process. For the most part the WorldCat dates were either the same or within a few years of the manually obtained dates. However, there were some instances where WorldCat dates differed by over 10 years, and other titles where no linked editions could be identified in the catalogue and therefore no date could be found. A possible explanation for disparities is that WorldCat references all editions globally (rather than just UK publications) and that some types of publication (e.g. dictionaries and reference works) are not linked in the database to earlier editions.

At the time the research was conducted Google Books did not offer up a way to query the date a book was first published via API (Application Programming Interface). Because accurate EEPDs were essential to the analysis of longevity the EEPD were manually sourced using the date listed on the copyright pages of

each book via the Google Book preview function. This had the added benefit of being able to check the copyright page was of a British edition of a book.

Analysis of the NEPDs and EEPDs also exposes a fundamental limitation to this research, in that it is reliant on the metadata supplied by publishers and held by Nielsen. The publication date field is important in a retail sense, it alerts booksellers to the upcoming frontlist titles prior to launch, but it is not always accurately supplied by publishers or maintained within the Nielsen database. For the purposes of this research it is enough to be able to identify the titles as both commercially successful and longselling. But for future-research was to be carried out into the depths of the long-tail backlist then care would need to be taken. The less commercially successful the title, the lower the likelihood that the metadata is accurate.

At the time, this research was undertaken efforts were made to find a reliable bibliographic database that contained the original first publication date of a given work (sources included Onix records, MARC records, Worldcat API, and Google Book API) however no accurate source was available, thus the EEPDs were obtained manually via 'sweat of the brow'. The method for doing this was fairly rudimentary but effective, using Google Books preview function I searched for the book titles plus 'originally published' or 'first published' to bring up the copyright pages of the works and transcribed the dates indicated for UK first publication.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the Nielsen BookScan data source as well as its parameters and limitations. I have explained how categorical (product classes) and time series data can be used.

In terms of addressing the research questions, the quantitative analysis employed a chart comparison method to answer the research question 2a: quantify typical longevity and research question 3: to identify how many non-fiction titles in print between 2000 and 2015 achieve above average sales longevity (beyond one year).

In addition to quantitative analysis of the trade non-fiction market based on the Nielsen data source, I also conducted my own primary data collection to establish the earliest edition publication dates for the longselling subset and other bibliographic data beyond those included in the Nielsen BookScan dataset.

The next chapter presents the findings and analysis of the quantitative data on trade non-fiction. It starts with a macro view of the market as a whole, narrows in focus to review the importance of the top-5000 titles, before finally honing in on the subset of longest selling titles.

Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset

Introduction

The quantitative analysis presented within this chapter specifically addresses the core research aims of this thesis namely to quantify typical sales lifecycles for trade-non-fiction titles, to identify trends in the non-fiction market and to identify representative and unusual longselling works and authors within the UK market. The analysis uses descriptive statistics to identify trends observed within the Nielsen data and via primary research.

It is somewhat of a long chapter, in terms of the structure, the chapter is broken down into four key sections. Each section considers a more granular segment of the data:

- *4.1 The Macro-level: T1. Trade Non-fiction 2001 - 2015 (p.98)* offers a macro-level view of the trade-non-fiction market between 2001 and 2015 [Dataset 1]. This macro-level analysis presents descriptive statistics regarding trade-non-fiction titles such as the market size, value and trends in distribution across subject categories (product class), publisher group, author and publication date and considers the key findings drawn from the data;
- *4.2 Importance of the Top-5000 Bestseller Charts (p.112)* describes and analyses in quantitative terms the importance of the top-5000 non-fiction charts within the same period, their value contribution and observations about longevity and popularity;
- *4.3 Longselling Subset (p.128)* presents and interrogates the original research findings, namely the longselling subset (Dataset 2) containing the titles which appear in the top-5000 charts across the fifteen-year period (2001-2015);
- *4.4 Longsellers by Decade (p.146)* provides a chronological review of the longselling subset grouped by date the works were originally published.

Some initial observations of the trends within the longselling subset are identified and discussed.

The oldest and most-recent works are listed in [section 4.3 Longselling Subset](#) and their significance considered, but not interrogated in as much depth as the rest of the longselling titles published between 1900 and 1970. It is from within this list of early- to mid-twentieth-century longselling titles that the case studies were selected (see [Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity](#) and [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#) (e.g. *Cider With Rosie*, *A Testament of Youth*, *In Cold Blood*, *The Story of Art* and *The Right Way to Play Chess*).

Thus, the purpose of reviewing the macro-level trends in the trade non-fiction market is to provide context of the book market, and commercial environment, over the 2001 – 2015 period. Similarly, the performance of the top-5000 bestselling titles serves as a comparison to evidence the distinction between what it means to be a bestselling versus a longselling work. Beyond this, the broader market data serves to inform the more granular detailed analysis of the longselling subset and the selection of case studies.

4.1 The Macro-level: T1. Trade Non-fiction 2001 - 2015

In this section, I provide a macro-level overview of the market for consumer non-fiction books in the UK (aka T1). I present summary data and commentary regarding the number of titles sold as well as trends in the volume and value of books sold between 2001-2015. I also present price indexing data from the Office for National Statistics between 2008-2015 to establish whether the trade non-fiction market has experienced deflation in value in comparison with other similar products.

Due to the data-heavy nature of this chapter, it is useful to signpost some of the key findings. The analysis which follows in section 4.1 suggests that:

- Between 2001 and 2015, the market for non-fiction books as a whole grew in both volume and value terms from 61.4m to 65.6m units and £577.2m to £652.2m respectively. In other words, around 4.2m more books were bought in 2015 than in 2001, and more in revenue generated;
- Between 2001 and 2015, the number of new and revised titles brought to market increased almost threefold (167%) from 274k to 729k. This dramatic growth in the number of new and revised editions (with a unique ISBN) demonstrates how the market for books has become increasingly saturated over the time period;
- Between 2008 and 2015, the average sales price of non-fiction books as a whole has not kept up with comparable products and the retail price index. The relative and absolute value of non-fiction has been eroded over the fifteen-year period and indicates deflation in real terms.

Key Statistics: Volume, Value and Size of TNF 2001-2015

One of the first things to reiterate regarding the UK consumer book market two external factors coincided at around the same point in time a) a global economic down turn in 2008 *and* b) the wide-scale adoption of the ebook format by the UK consumer market in 2009-2010. This affected all consumer book sales, but what follows is analysis of just the non-fiction books in print.

Table 4: T1. TNF Overview Sales Volume, Value and Size of TNF 2001-2015

Year	T1. TNF Title Count	(+/-)	T1. TNF Volume	(+/-)	T1. TNF Value	(+/-)
2001	274,310	na	61,415,541	na	£577,196,505.29	na
2002	272,700	-1%	66,578,709	8%	£626,001,380.70	8%
2003	272,898	0%	72,716,003	9%	£686,098,750.14	10%
2004	280,491	3%	78,758,653	8%	£753,419,328.33	10%
2005	306,010	9%	83,138,085	6%	£767,654,053.58	2%
2006	340,334	11%	85,665,348	3%	£797,827,931.18	4%
2007	433,777	27%	87,915,267	3%	£818,373,795.97	3%
2008	508,639	17%	84,820,033	-4%	£787,854,596.79	-4%
2009	606,445	19%	80,558,095	-5%	£738,808,299.54	-6%
2010	506,787	-16%	75,871,573	-6%	£722,701,602.36	-2%
2011	523,766	3%	71,012,754	-6%	£671,857,804.40	-7%
2012	556,447	6%	64,925,077	-9%	£629,944,517.31	-6%
2013	589,527	6%	62,086,455	-4%	£610,625,753.12	-3%
2014	647,204	10%	58,731,441	-5%	£586,496,535.02	-4%
2015	729,278	13%	65,613,047	12%	£652,171,072.66	11%
Total Swing		166%		7%		13%

T1: TNF Title Count (column 2 & column 3)

The ‘title count’ provided by Nielsen BookScan indicates how many titles with an ISBN sold *at least one copy* in each given year. Thus, it is a measure of the commercial interest in works that are in print and available to buy from UK retail channels (excluding second-hand bookselling activity²). Title count is relevant to the discussion here to show how dominant the top-5000 charting titles are in terms of market share in any given year.

Title count should not be confused with the absolute number of in-print³ titles available to buy, nor should it be confused for a measure of new titles output in a given year - there are millions of in-print titles that simply sell zero units and

² The TCM does not include second-hand sales within the dataset and therefore these fall outwith the scope of this thesis. However, second-hand copies of most titles are probably in circulation and might be bought or sold.

³ To reiterate briefly, ‘in-print’ has a technical meaning within bookselling systems and author-publisher contracts, it means a title continues to be kept in-stock and should that stock run out it will be replenished by the publisher. As opposed to ‘out-of-print’ which means the publisher no longer holds stock and will not reprint the title and the rights may revert back to the author.

therefore are not recorded within the title count. However, because publishing and book marketing is so dominated by the frontlist it is likely that high-volume publishing output will be loosely correlated with the count of unique (with a unique ISBN) titles being purchased. In other words, the more new titles publishers launch in a given year and squeeze onto bookshop shelves, the more diverse the pool of new books to choose from, and the more likely the market data will record an increased title count.

Within [Table 4](#), Column 2 shows the title count each year 2001-2015 and column 3 the percent increase year-on-year. The title count remained fairly flat between 2001 and 2003 with around 273,000 trade non-fiction titles finding a customer. This was followed by a period of rapid growth from 2004 until 2009 when the title count more than doubled to 606,445. In 2010, this trend was disrupted and the number of titles that sold at least one copy *in print* dropped by almost 100,000 titles (16%) to 506,787. Between 2011 and 2015, the title count saw growth again and this accelerated year-on-year from 3% to 16%. The previous highpoint of 606k titles counted in 2009 was surpassed in 2014 with 647,204 titles counted. By 2015, the long-tail of the market had grown and almost half-a-million more titles (166%) had sold at least one copy than in 2001.

One of the first questions that can be asked of the data in [Table 4](#) is: how can the general trend of growth in title count be explained? Some factors that have contributed to growth in title count worth considering are the rise of online retailing, print-on-demand (POD) technology and lower barriers to entry. Online catalogues have allowed e-retailers like Amazon to offer a wider breadth of stock and provide ongoing access to the long tail (Anderson, 2008). Also, the lengthening of product lifecycle due to print-on-demand technology, which enables titles that would have gone out-of-print to be kept in print, as well as the republishing of titles that had fallen out-of-print; the barriers to entry to publishing as an activity have been lowered by desktop publishing, POD and individual access to retail channels like Amazon. This in turn has resulted in an increase in self-published authors, professional self-publishing services, and self-published titles. These three factors combined; increased stock capacity via online retailers, lower minimum thresholds to print runs and longer product

lifecycles via POD, and explosion of self-published titles have facilitated the rapid growth in both published titles and in turn titles that have sold at least one copy per year in 2001 and 2015.

The drop in title count in 2010 is likely to have been caused by the arrival of the Amazon Kindle retail channel providing publishers with a route to market for selling ebooks and offering consumers a clear choice of format, either print or ebook, at the point of sale. Some publishers (and self-publishers) may have decided to convert backlist titles with very low print sales into ebook formats and let the print format fall **out-of-print** to remove the cost of holding inventory as physical stock (Clark & Phillips, 2020, p.237). As ebook ISBNs are excluded from the title count presented in [Table 4](#) this transferral of format could explain the sudden drop in print titles count. Other publishers may have opted to release new works exclusively as ebooks to minimise the risk and expense of printing stock completely. However, it is also possible that while niche titles could still be sought by consumers in print, some simply preferred the convenience and speed of buying the ebook format.

The overall increase in title count – in this dataset – cannot be attributed to multiple electronic formats as these are not included in the TCM data. However, the arrival of ebooks to the mass consumer market is also likely to have had a ripple effect, namely, in the era of digital conversion (1990 onwards) the full text of works entering the public domain and falling out of copyright have become easily accessible as a result of scanning projects like Google Book and Project Gutenberg (Langley and Bloomberg, 2007; Thompson 2021). This ease of access to full-text of classics in combination with self-publishing may have led to a subsequent increase in print editions being released (Flynn et al., 2019).

It is clear from [Table 4](#) that the breadth of choice has widened between 2001 and 2015 with over three times more unique titles finding a customer. However, the steady increase in title count does not correlate with an increase in value or volume sales within the non-fiction market as a whole. In other words, the number of books bought, and the amount of money spent by consumers does

not appear dependent on the breadth of titles available to purchase, at least not at the macro-level.

T1: TNF Market Volume & Value

Table 5: T1. TNF Overview Sales Volume, Value and Size of TNF 2001-2015

Year	T1. TNF Title Count	(+/-)	T1. TNF Volume	(+/-)	T1. TNF Value	(+/-)
2001	274,310	na	61,415,541	na	£577,196,505.29	na
2002	272,700	-1%	66,578,709	8%	£626,001,380.70	8%
2003	272,898	0%	72,716,003	9%	£686,098,750.14	10%
2004	280,491	3%	78,758,653	8%	£753,419,328.33	10%
2005	306,010	9%	83,138,085	6%	£767,654,053.58	2%
2006	340,334	11%	85,665,348	3%	£797,827,931.18	4%
2007	433,777	27%	87,915,267	3%	£818,373,795.97	3%
2008	508,639	17%	84,820,033	-4%	£787,854,596.79	-4%
2009	606,445	19%	80,558,095	-5%	£738,808,299.54	-6%
2010	506,787	-16%	75,871,573	-6%	£722,701,602.36	-2%
2011	523,766	3%	71,012,754	-6%	£671,857,804.40	-7%
2012	556,447	6%	64,925,077	-9%	£629,944,517.31	-6%
2013	589,527	6%	62,086,455	-4%	£610,625,753.12	-3%
2014	647,204	10%	58,731,441	-5%	£586,496,535.02	-4%
2015	729,278	13%	65,613,047	12%	£652,171,072.66	11%
Total Swing		166%		7%		13%

Column 4 shows the annual volume of units sold in years 2001 to 2015 and Column 5 the percentage increase/decrease in volume year-on-year. Column 6 shows the value of sales in years 2001 to 2015 and Column 7 the percentage increase/decrease in value year-on-year.

Between 2001 and 2007 the trade-non-fiction (T1.) portion of the market saw growth in volume from 61.4 million units to 87.9 million units and growth in value from £577 million to £818 million, but from 2008 to 2014 there was steady decline and it was only in 2015 the market volume and value saw a return to growth. The product classes and titles that contributed most to this recovery were:

T11 Leisure & Lifestyle, up £3m on 2014, increase was not simply thanks to one or two big titles but rather the craze for mindful colouring books in general

helped lift the market. Dozens of colouring titles sold over 20,000 units in 2015 (Nielsen 2017a). Nevertheless, the highest selling titles were *Millie Marotta's Animal Kingdom* (2014), published by Batsford which sold 486,000 units in 2015 and generated £2.4m in revenue. Followed by *Enchanted Forest: An Inky Quest and Colouring Book* (2015) and *Secret Garden: An Inky Treasure Hunt and Colouring Book* by Johanna Basford (2013) published by Laurence King Publishing Group which combined sold over 600,000 and generated £2.3m (Nielsen 2017a).

T13 Humour, up £1.2m on 2014, thanks to funny and nostalgic parodies of the Ladybird children's hardback series. The top three titles in 2015 were all within the Ladybird Books for Grown-ups series published by Michael Joseph. These were *How it Works: The Husband* (2015) which sold 236,000 units and generated £1.4m; *How it Works: The Wife* (2015) which sold 212,000 units and generated £1.2m; and finally *The Hangover* which sold 178,000 units and generated £1m. Launched just in time for the Christmas season these sales were achieved in the final three months of 2015 (Nielsen 2017a).

T8 The World / Ideas / Culture up £1m on 2014, this increase can be attributed to the publication of *More Notes from a Small Island: The Road to Little Dribbling* (2015, Doubleday hardback) by Bill Bryson which sold 280,000 units and generated over £3.25m in 2015. To give a sense of scale to Bryson's achievement the next highest selling titles that year were *H is for Hawk* (2015 Vintage paperback) by Helen MacDonald which sold 145,000 units and generated £0.9m and *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2015, Vintage paperback) by Yuval Noah Harari which sold 93,000 units and generated £0.6m in 2015 (Nielsen 2017a).

What the 2015, print book recovery illustrates is that growth (in 2015) for the print non-fiction market was largely down to the tangible benefits of the physical book. Mindful colouring leant into the needs of consumers to unplugged and unwind away from screens. Similarly, the *Ladybird Books for Grown-ups* were stocking fillers that ticked all the boxes of funny, nostalgic, affordable and crucially tangible gifts that evoke childhood.

According to Pichierri (2023 p.3), *nostalgia marketing* is an area that has gained increasing interest since 2004 and is comforting to consumers for a number of reasons:

[N]ostalgia represents a romantic glance to the past, often for the purpose of preserving individuals' identities (Kessous et al., 2015) and satisfying the need for interpersonal belongingness (Zhou et al., 2012). Furthermore, for many consumers, the attractiveness of nostalgia lies in its implied authenticity (Belk, 1990; Spaid, 2013)—its presentation of the past as a genuine refuge from the artificiality of the present (p.2).

For publishers, this offers up a wealth of opportunity in the cover design and layout of books using retro fonts and graphic styles to mimic earlier eras. Where publishers have a deep backlist of content there is the potential to revive series format, as Ladybird have done, and lean into the 'old-tech' that is the physical book.

Figure 12, *Figure 13*, and *Figure 14* illustrate the sales trends in non-fiction products classes between 2001 and 2015 from the highest volume sales to the lowest. Historically, the most significant product class was *T4 Biography and Autobiography*, and while this was still the highest selling category in 2015, the overall trend since 2008 was one of decline. The reasons for this is likely a shift in sales from the physical format to ebook or audiobook formats. Another dramatic downturn can be seen in the *T14 Atlas, Maps and Travel* category, which encompasses the A-Z road maps used for navigation. The market for these types of navigation aide has been almost entirely eroded by satnav devices and mobile GPS applications like Google Maps.

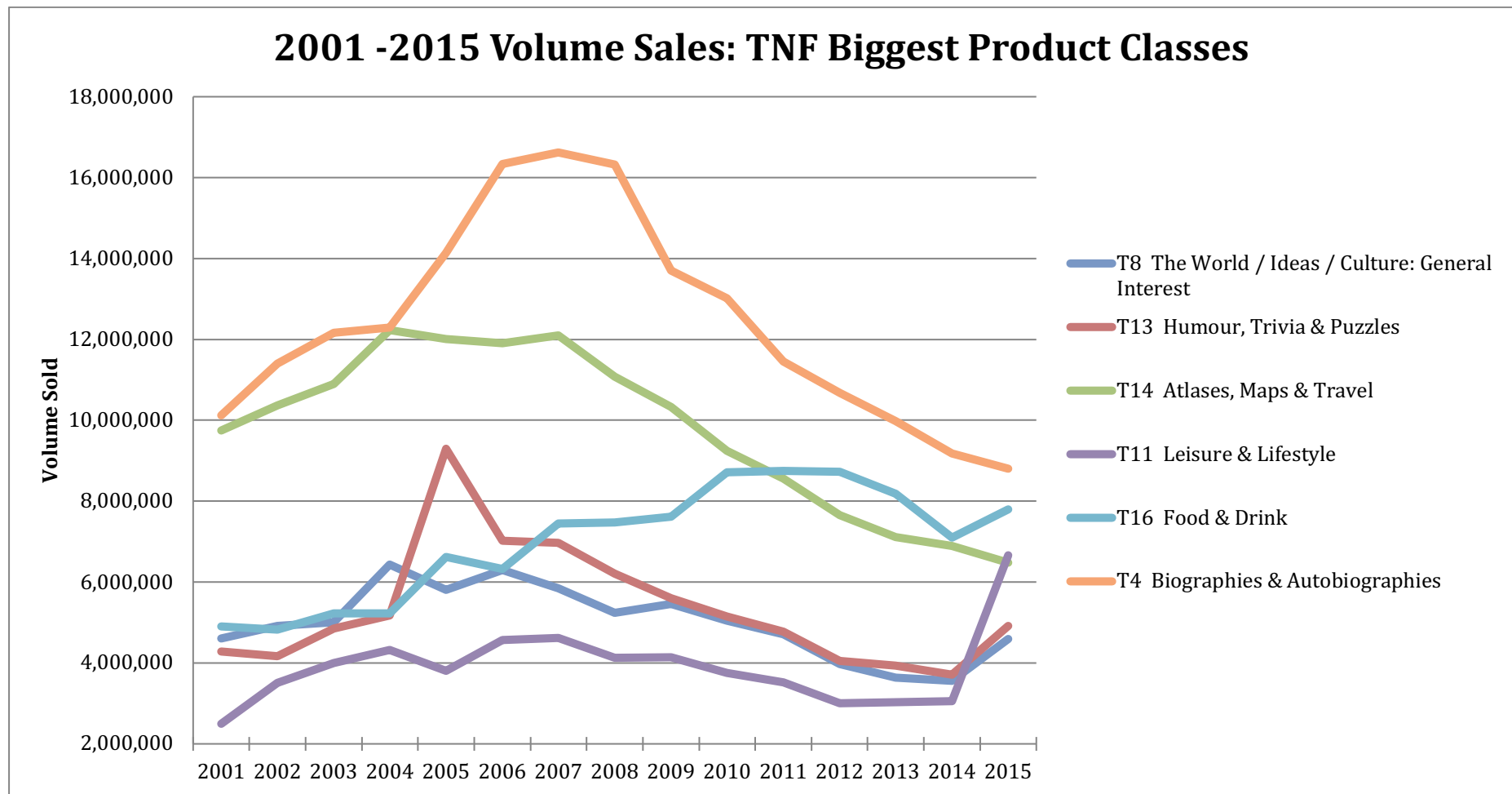


Figure 12: 2001-2015 Volume Sales TNF Biggest Product Classes (source Nielsen 2016g)

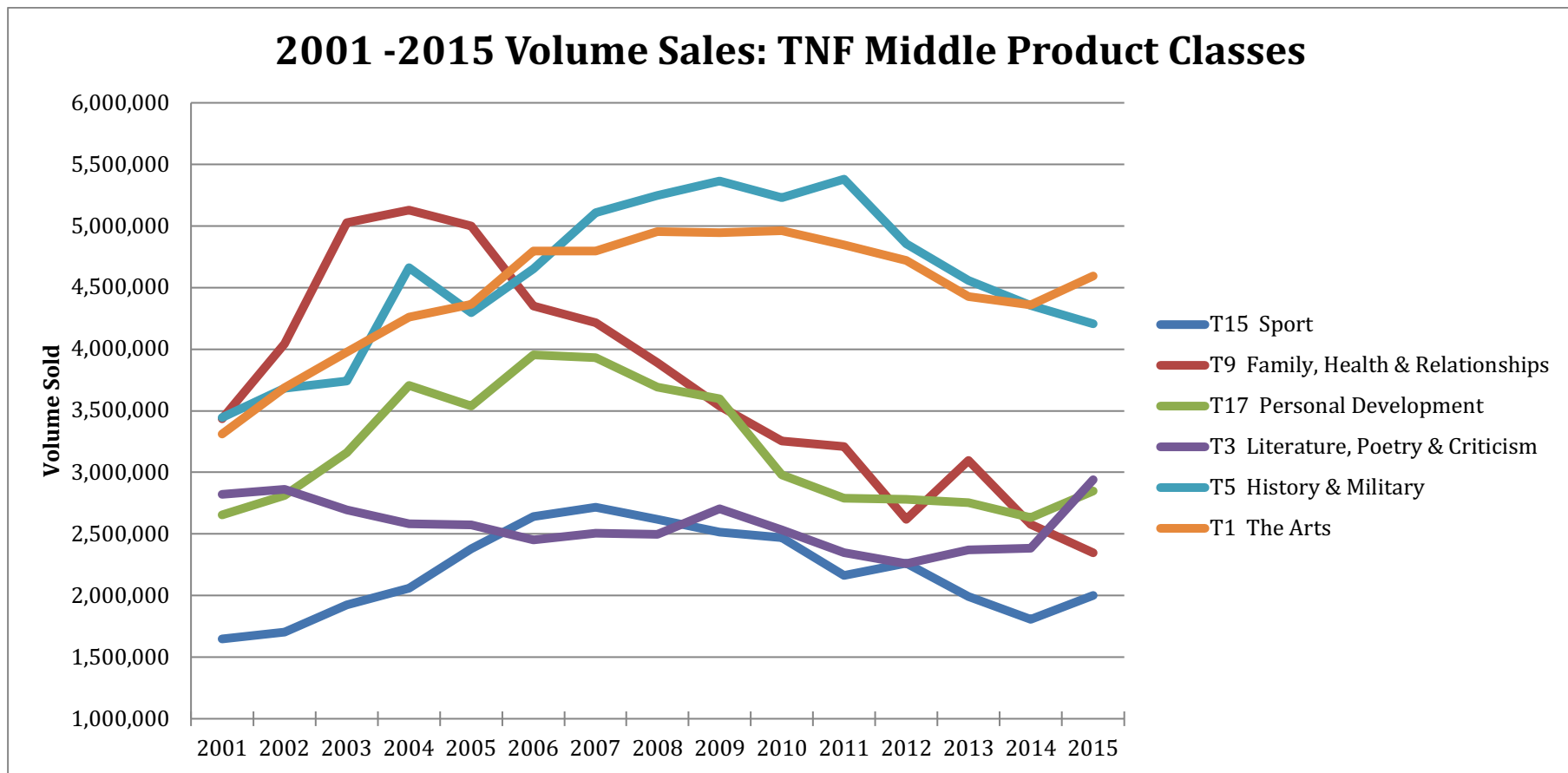


Figure 13: 2001-2015 Volume Sales TNF Middle Product Classes (source Nielsen 2016g)

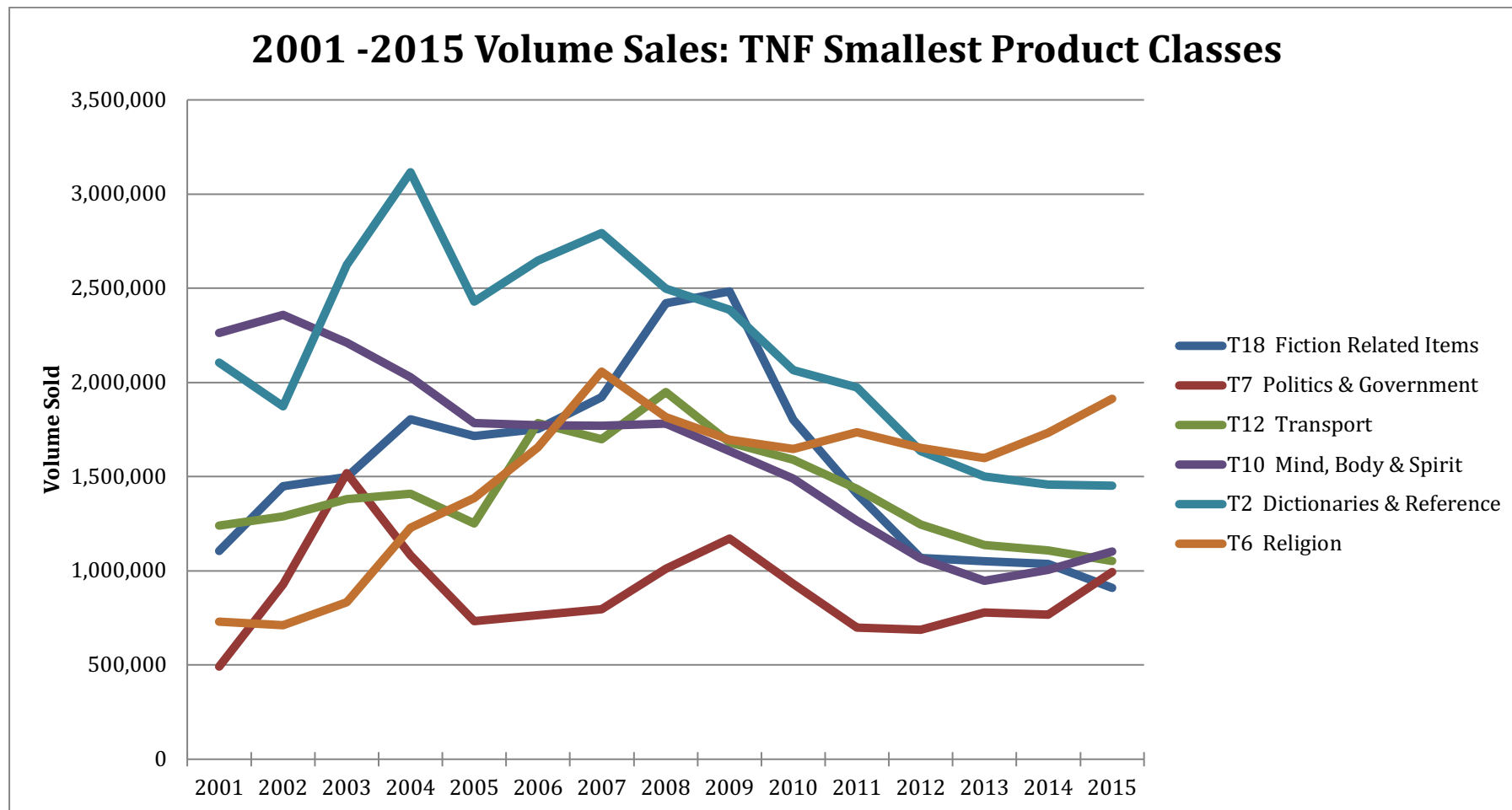


Figure 14: 2001-2015 Volume Sales TNF Smallest Product Classes (source Nielsen 2016g)

Deflation of Trade Non-fiction Books

Overall, during the fifteen year period 2001-2015, the volume of units sold rose 7% whereas the value increased by 13%. This indicates that the average sales price (ASP) across all titles categorised as T1. Trade-non-fiction rose, and indeed in 2001 the average price of a non-fiction title, was £9.40 and by 2015 it was £9.94 (*Figure 18: Average Sales Price of All (T1) vs. Top 5000 2001 – 2015*). However, this average price rise does not take into consideration general inflation within the UK economy and is not observed across all titles in the category.

Inflation typically means that prices have on average gone up and that pound-for-pound the money in shoppers' wallets buy slightly less today than it did yesterday. Thus, one would expect that inflation would result in a basket of products in 2015 costing the UK consumer more money than it did in 2001. Publishers would hope that the value of the products they sell keeps up with the percentage rate of inflation observed on similar products. So the following analysis compares the average sales price increase for non-fiction books against the consumer price index for goods categorised by the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), as books and newspapers for 2008 – 2015.⁴ The purpose of the consumer price index is to track the cost of a 'baskets' products over time where the basket consists of the same or closely equivalent items.

In the case of books, the ONS (2023) states in its methodology that:

Book prices are collected locally; the collection is carried out in a mixture of specialised book shops, stationers and major retail chains. The collectors are required to price both fiction and non-fiction books, in both hardback and paperback (three price quotes in total), from a list of bestsellers compiled by a market research company based on their Sunday Times subscription. [...] In all cases, the author's name, number of pages, position and details of the bestseller list used must be provided to enable the collector to decide on comparability when a new title has been chosen.

⁴ ONS price index data was not available beyond 2008 for the consumer good category of 'Books & Newspapers'.

Table 6 compares the level of inflation that was observed across the category of books and newspapers (CZEL⁵) overall, versus the level of inflation that was observed by the titles classed as T1. trade non-fiction in *Table 4*, and the level of inflation observed by the top-5000 bestselling titles within T1. trade non-fiction based on the average sales price.

The consumer price index in this table was calculated by working backwards from the latest date in time and comparing the current average price of products with that of the year before. The most recent data point is set at 100% and the difference between 100 shows the steps in inflation or deflation. The greater the step downwards to a number below 100, the more it can be said average prices rose each year (high inflation). In contrast, the smaller the step downwards, the less change in average price between that year and the year before (low inflation). If the index number rises above 100 (salmon-highlighted cells) then, it means that average prices were lower than the year before; and demonstrates deflation.

⁵ CZEL is not an acronym but rather a random four-digit identifier used by ONS for the category of items.

Table 6: Consumer Price Index for Books (Source: UK ONS / Nielsen 2016a, b, c)

Year	CZEL - Books and Newspapers (year-on-year) %	CZEL - Books and Newspapers (year-on-year)	T1 TNF market price index	Top 5000 T1 TNF market price index
2001	-	-	94.14811	101.1104
2002	-	-	94.19031	100.7215
2003	-	-	94.52098	100.3147
2004	-	-	95.85033	103.11
2005	-	-	92.62885	97.09617
2006	-	-	93.43665	99.1145
2007	-	-	93.39008	98.70705
2008	6.7	88.9	93.18864	97.2841
2009	-0.9	88.1	92.02532	94.8116
2010	3.9	91.5	95.72227	101.1549
2011	1.9	93.2	95.08102	99.58435
2012	-4.1	89.4	97.57214	101.8087
2013	2.7	91.8	98.92252	102.493
2014	7.4	98.6	100.4648	101.9248
2015	1.4	100.0	100	100.00
sum	2008-2015	11.1	6.811356	2.72

Crucially, the final row of [Table 6](#) (blue-highlighted cells) shows that between 2008 and 2015 trade-non-fiction book sales did not keep up with the level of inflation recorded for books and newspapers as a top-level category; books and newspapers recorded a sum total of 11.1 point increase, whereas trade-non-fiction products saw only a 6.8 point increase over the eight-year period. This means that while the average prices of books were going up in other sectors of the market (such as fiction, children's and specialist non-fiction as well as newspapers and magazines) the average price of non-fiction books did not go up as much. So in real terms there has been deflation of the trade-non-fiction book market. If just the top-5000 titles within trade non-fiction are considered then the deflation is even more dramatic, with an average sales value increase of just 2.7 points between 2008 and 2015. Indeed the average price for a top-5000 charting title in 2001, was higher than the average price of a similar book in 2015.

This means that while the cost of food, rent and utilities have been going up in the UK between 2001 and 2015 non-fiction books have not kept up with standard inflation and indeed the pricing of the most popular non-fiction books have gone down. This poses a problem for publishing companies in terms of profitability, which in turn makes it hard to support the financial wellbeing of employees. Publishing, in a similar vein to other creative industries, is highly competitive, despite the technical and intellectual skills required across all functions it offers low entry-level salaries and low chances of salary progression (Markou 2024; Book Careers, 2023). These issues are further compounded by the London locations of most of the large trade publishers. A 2024 report by Female Leadership in Publishing stated that nearly 60% of the publishing professionals surveyed found their salaries insufficient to live on and '97% have experienced burnout' (Wood, 2024).

In summary, I have shown that while the trade-non-fiction market saw growth in value terms between 2001 and 2015, the actual amount of money that consumers spend per book has not increased in-line with inflation (at least not between 2008 and 2015). This raises some questions that I shall pick up on later in the chapter, namely the likely causes of this deflation, but in brief what this means for publishers of trade non-fiction is that the value of the products they sell has been (and more than likely continues to be) eroded over time. With production and distribution costs on the rise thanks to global fuel prices publishers will find their profits margins increasingly squeezed, and perhaps one marginal advantage for the backlist is that the origination costs (namely the pre-press costs of creating books such as editing, design and typesetting) have likely already been recouped. But this advantage is not available to fledgling or small independent businesses that have not yet established a significant backlist. For these types of micro-business high overheads and pressure on cashflow can make their business model entirely unsustainable (Squires and Markou, 2021). Nevertheless, deflation is a challenge for all actors within the supply chain (wholesalers, distributors, booksellers); when average product prices do not track inflation, profit margins narrow across the chain and there is very little room to manoeuvre. It is a difficult problem to tackle for a number

of reasons: firstly RRP's are set by publishers and often printed on the jacket of books – so retailers cannot put prices up without publishers' cooperation; secondly promotional price matching - where book retailers lower their price in-line with competing retailers - is commonplace and incentivised by Google shop function and other price-comparison sites; and finally any group discussion or decision between retailers to keep prices at the highest point by mutual agreement, e.g. to not discount a title below the RRP would fall foul of price-fixing and antitrust legislation. However, one could argue that publishing pricing new titles at a higher RRP is the only commercially sustainable option.

Having considered the macro trends across *all* trade-non-fiction sales between 2001-2015, the next section presents similar data and analysis for just the top-5000 charting titles (by volume) for the same period.

4.2 Importance of the Top-5000 Bestseller Charts

This section presents summary data and commentary on just the top-5000 charting trade non-fiction titles between 2001-2015. These top-5000 represent the most commercially successful titles of the given time period; they are the short head of the power law distribution (as defined in [Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory](#)) curve as opposed to the long tail.

Similar to the previous section, below is a summary of the key observations to signpost the findings. The analysis of the top-5000, bestselling titles in section 4.2 suggests that:

- The majority of sales come from the top-5000 charting titles. These important books represent less than 2% of the titles that are both in-print *and* had sold at least one copy in a given year, yet accounted for 56-67% of sales volume and 52-63% of the market value between 2001 and 2015;
- The importance and the contribution of the top-5000 titles has been eroded over time in both volume terms and value terms. This trend is not simply a reflection of the number of new works being written and published each year, the absolute volume and value of the top-5000 titles has been in decline (see [Table 7](#)).

- Discounting is heaviest on the bestselling top-5000 titles (or perhaps it is that discounts and promotions secure higher sales performance);
- Between 2001 and 2015, the average sales price of trade-non-fiction fluctuated but ended up higher overall. The average sales price of the top-5000 charting titles followed a similar fluctuating trend however ended up lower overall. This correlation between high sales and low price implies that the market is price-elastic (in other words consumers are sensitive to and swayed by pricing when it comes to choosing books).
- The typical longevity of top-selling titles has remained constant. Thus, there are far more new frontlist titles competing for space in the charts, but similar levels of backlist titles it is harder for new titles to breakthrough;
- Irrespective of high initial sales and even bestsellerdom, very few titles only 178 of 5000 titles (3.5%) continue to rank in both the 2001 and 2015 Top-5000 charts.

The overall aim of this section of the chapter is to show how the top-5000 titles fare in comparison with the rest of the trade non-fiction market as a whole; to quantify what it means to achieve a spot in the bestselling charts; and to consider the longevity of these titles over time and the importance of bestselling (and longselling) titles to both retailers and publishers. It also serves as the foundation for *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity* in which the mechanics of stock selection, creation of a core stock list, and the balance of frontlist and backlist of stock are discussed in more detail.

Top 5000 within Trade Non-fiction

The data in

Table 7 below can perhaps be paraphrased as ‘non-fiction books have been devalued’ or ‘people don’t seem willing to spend as much on non-fiction books’. These statements are hardly surprising as everyone loves a bargain. However, books are not t-shirts, they are intellectual works with unique information contained within them that cannot always be easily substituted. In some

situations, a cookbook is a cookbook, and one might go into a bookshop with the purpose of browsing the shelves to find gift inspiration, looking for an attractive book at an attractive price. However, if one wants a specific cookbook by a specific author, or covering a specific type of cuisine then price becomes a secondary concern after content.

Table 7 presents the sales volume and value for the top-5000 bestselling titles the change year-on-year and the percentage contribution to the trade-non-fiction market as a whole.

Table 7: TNF Top 5000 sales volume and value 2001 - 2015

Year	Top 5000 as % of title count	T1. Top 5000 Volume	(+/-)	Top 5000 vol as % TNF	T1. Top 5000 Value	(+/-)	Top 5000 as % of value of TNF
2001	1.82%	40,720,710	-	66%	£366,274,742.07	-	63%
2002	1.83%	44,389,263	9%	67%	£397,730,875.33	9%	64%
2003	1.83%	48,079,353	8%	66%	£429,047,330.91	8%	63%
2004	1.78%	50,559,570	5%	64%	£463,411,768.50	8%	62%
2005	1.63%	53,451,746	6%	64%	£459,576,104.80	-1%	60%
2006	1.47%	53,129,143	-1%	62%	£466,104,566.65	1%	58%
2007	1.15%	53,445,963	1%	61%	£466,948,547.01	0%	57%
2008	0.98%	50,702,961	-5%	60%	£436,503,958.29	-7%	55%
2009	0.82%	45,874,464	-10%	57%	£384,636,101.38	-12%	52%
2010	0.99%	43,524,011	-5%	57%	£387,812,916.50	1%	54%
2011	0.95%	40,852,340	-6%	58%	£358,266,640.89	-8%	53%
2012	0.90%	36,884,642	-10%	57%	£330,538,077.93	-8%	52%
2013	0.85%	35,493,743	-4%	57%	£320,197,360.38	-3%	52%
2014	0.77%	33,000,153	-7%	56%	£296,042,455.87	-8%	50%
2015	0.69%	38,809,466	18%	59%	£341,456,080.04	15%	52%
Total Swing			-5%	-7%		-7%	-11%

Figure 15: Trade Non-fiction and Top 5000 by volume 2001-2015

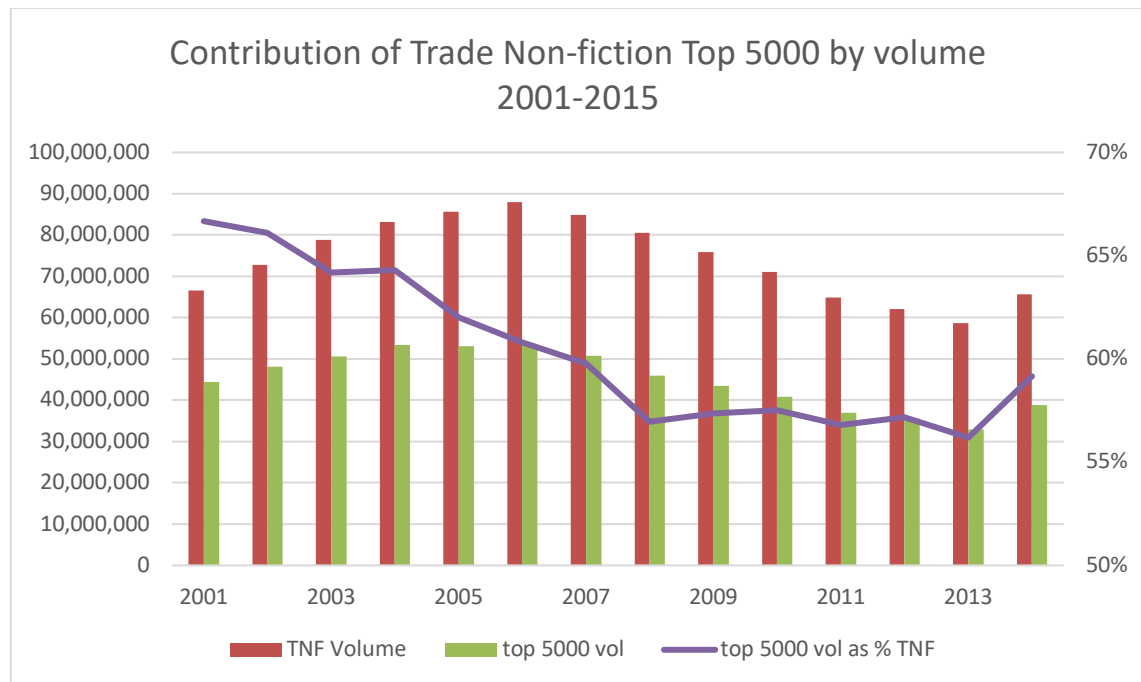


Figure 16: Trade Non-fiction and Top 5000 by value 2001-2015

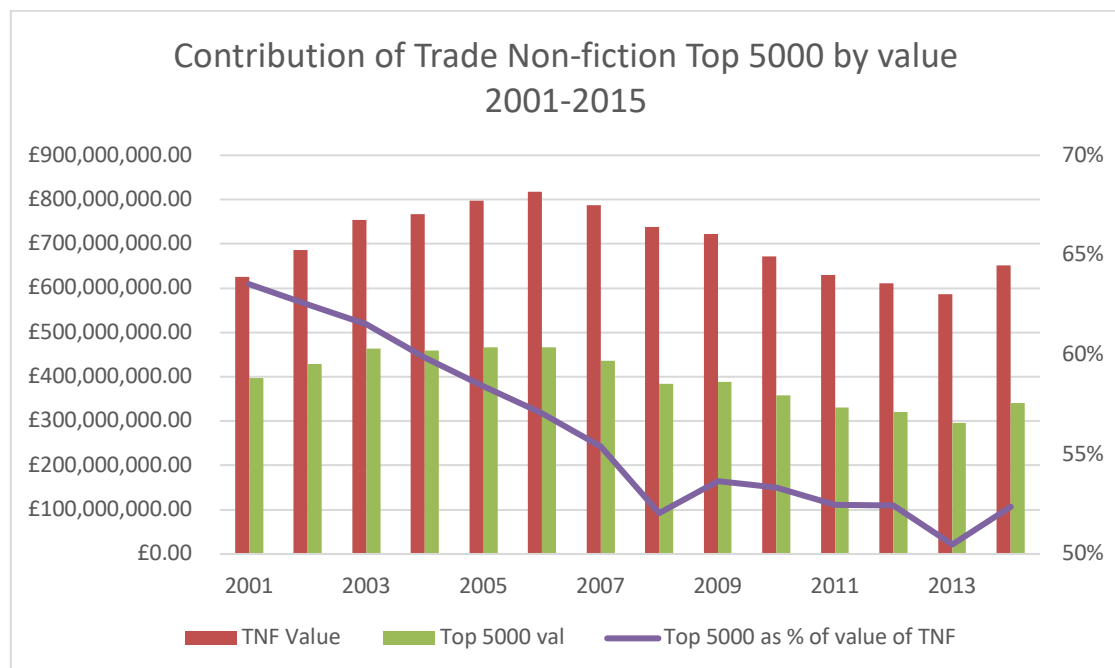


Figure 17: Percentage contribution of T1. Top 5000 by volume and value 2001 – 2015

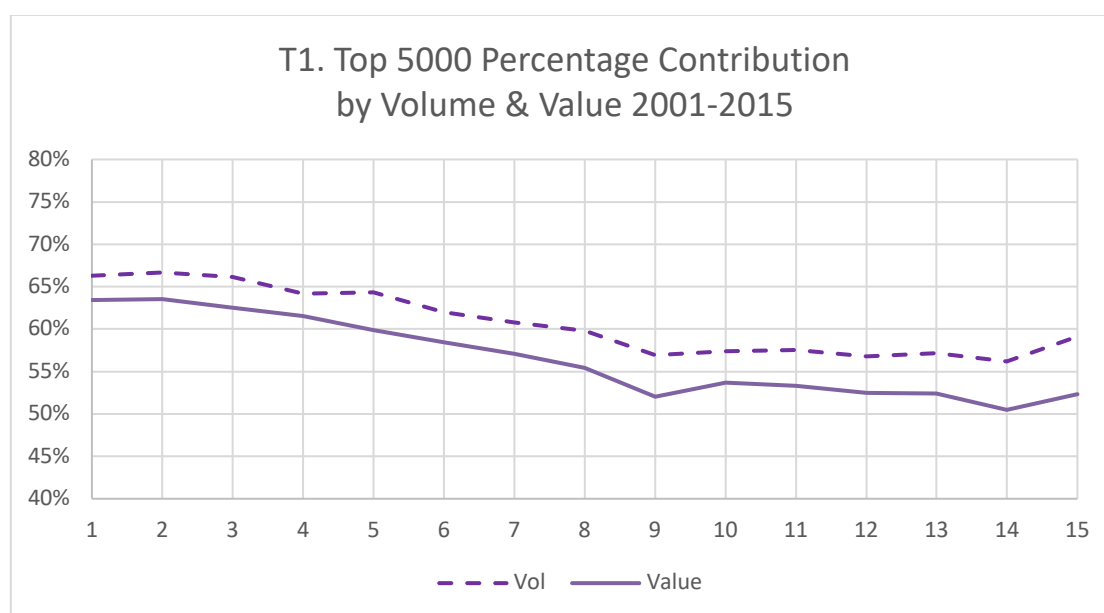


Figure 15: Trade Non-fiction and Top 5000 by volume 2001-2015 and Figure 16 (same by value) show that the market volume and value as a whole went up and then down between 2001 and 2015 ending at a position of slight overall growth in terms of the total market size. The top 5000 sales follow a similar general shape, with sales volume and value increasing up until 2007 and decreasing from 2008 onwards. However, unlike the market as a whole the overall contribution in both absolute and relative terms decreased over the fifteen-year period

Figure 17: Percentage contribution of T1. Top 5000 by volume and value 2001 – 2015 shows the percentage contribution of the top 5000 to the non-fiction market by volume alongside value, both decrease over the fifteen-year period. The total sales of the titles that make up the top 5000 non-fiction chart in 2015 was down 5% on the 2001 sales by volume (40.7m to 38.8m units). Whereas, the total value contribution of the top 5000 in 2015 had was 7% lower 2001 sales by value (£366.3m to £341.5m).

This lowering of value means that when it came to the most sought-after, new and popular non-fiction titles there was heavy discounting happening on price. Certainly by 2008, retailers like Waterstones and Blackwell's had well established ecommerce platforms (Squires, 2009 p.32-33) with very similar product catalogues on offer to each other, Amazon and other online book retailers such as The Book Depository. It also means that when it comes to the most sought-after, new and popular titles, there is limited opportunity for e-retailers to differentiate their value proposition beyond: promotional discounts (money off the RRP), shipping charges, and speed of delivery. Amazon was purpose built for speed and scale of logistics therefore the other booksellers necessarily had to compete online via price promotions. It stands to reason that the average selling price of trade-non-fiction titles would take a hit.

The reasons for deflation therefore include heavy promotional discounting by retailers (physical and online) to attract customers. In addition to this, these data suggests that consumers are swayed by price promotions and opt for discounted products when they make their buying decisions. The final factor relating to deflation is that publishers are reluctant to raise the RRP of books in their catalogues at regular intervals, or beyond a certain threshold, due to perceived price elasticity. The finding that 'people like cheap things' is hardly surprising but books are intellectual works with unique information contained within them that cannot always be easily substituted.

In 2001 and 2015 respectively, there were **269,310** (98.18%) and **729,767** (99.32%) titles that did not rank in the top-5000 chart; these long-tail titles sold

in small to modest quantities – more than one but fewer than 1,895 units – and thus had fairly limited niche appeal.

I have outlined above how the top-5000 non-fiction titles have contributed less value year-on-year to the growth of the trade-non-fiction market. Thus, it must be that the long tail (those titles outside the top-5000 chart that were) that were responsible for the value growth in the non-fiction market.

This is important to acknowledge because conglomerate publishers, such as Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Hachette, and Bonnier have larger backlists and therefore more long tail sales to exploit but a larger portion of big books within the heavily discounted top-5000, whereas independent publishers have small (or even non-existent) backlists and niche markets that mean they are unlikely to have many bestselling frontlist titles.

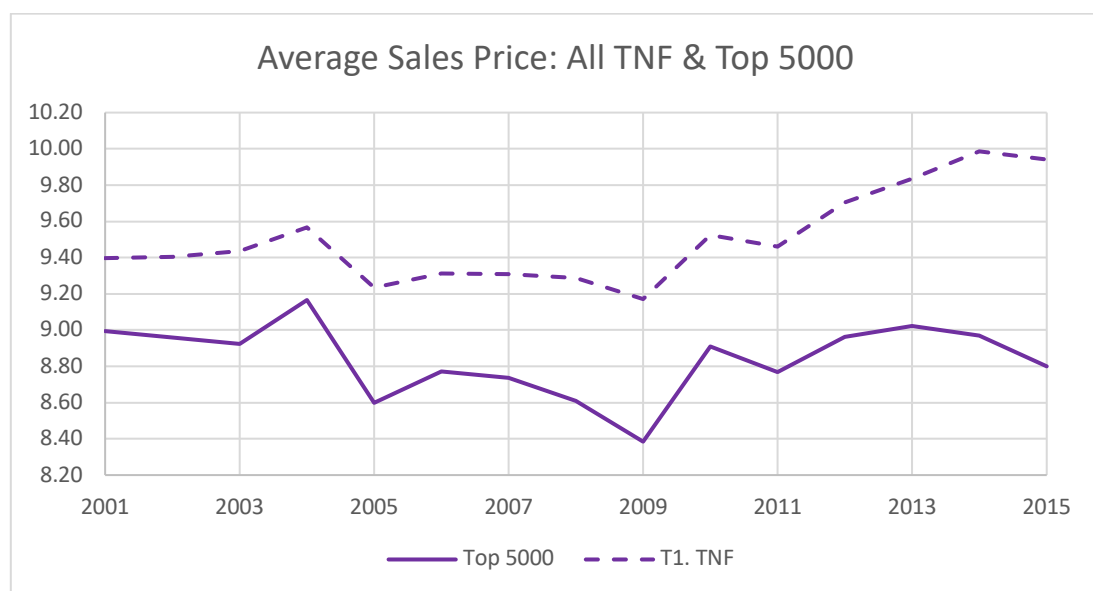


Figure 18: Average Sales Price of All (T1) vs. Top 5000 2001 – 2015

Figure 18 illustrates the increasing disparity between the average sales price for all of trade non-fiction and this means the long-tail ASPs must be dragging up the category average.

It is useful to note that the top-5000 chart in 2001 accounted for 1.8% of the title count yet a 66% share of the units sold (40.7m of 61.4m) and 63% of the value (£366.3m of £577.2m). In 2015, the top 5000 represented 0.64% of the title count and accounted for 59% of the units sold (38.8m of 65.6m) and 52%

of the value (£341.4m of 652.2m). While there is evidence that the total value of the long tail has increased over time, sales are also positively skewed towards the higher-ranking titles. This means that the top 500 titles in the chart achieved roughly the same sales as the following 4,500 titles. This is important because it goes some way to rationalising the commercial motives of publishers; it is more efficient and lucrative to focus marketing efforts and spend on promoting a few books to the mass market than thousands of midlist titles, or hundreds-of-thousands of long-tail titles to diverse niche market segments. On the other hand, if consumers are willing to spend more per-book on the backlist long-tail titles (evident from the higher average sales price) than the top-sellers then publishers, authors and illustrators stand to collecting more revenue per unit sold.

Some key observations from these statistics are that a) the top-5000 bestselling titles sell in lower quantities in 2015 than they did in 2001 (supported by [Table 9](#)) which reinforces the principle that success is a relative trait; b) the importance of the top 5000 has been eroded over time, consumers in the UK bought fewer top-5000 non-fiction books and they spent less money on the ones they did buy. This could mean the average price point of the bestselling trade-non-fiction titles has decreased over time, or that consumers are more price sensitive when it comes to product selection. In contrast, the size and value of the publications that fall outside the top 5000, namely the mid-list to long tail, have increased. Consumers are benefitting from the breadth of access to all in-print works available via online retailers. These factors combined lead towards the conclusions that publishers are becoming more reliant on the long tail (which is likely to be comprised of backlist titles) and less reliant on bestsellers and frontlist in terms of revenue contribution.

Relative Success

Below [Table 8](#) and

	2015 Vol	2015 Vol % of 5000	2015 Val	2015 Val % of 5000
Top-50 (1%)	8.3m	21	£66.5m	19%
Top-500 (10%)	20.3m	52	£167.7m	49%

Top-2500 (50%)	32.4m	84	£277.3m	81%
Top-5000 (100%)	38.8m	100	£341.4m	100

Table 9 offer some descriptive statistics of the top-5000 non-fiction charts in terms of the relative contribution and success for 2001 and 2015. These tables show just how important the bestselling titles are to publishers' bottom lines. *Table 8* indicates that the top 10% (ranked 1-500) within of the 2001 and 2015 charts accounted for approximately half of the top-5000's unit sales by volume and value. The other half of the volume and value coming from the remaining 90% of the chart (ranked 501-5000).

Table 8: UK TCM Trade Non-fiction 2001 & 2015 Sales Volume Percentage Contribution to Top 5000 Chart

	2001 Vol	2001 Vol % of 5000	2001 Val	2001 Val % of 5000
Top-50 (1%)	8.2m	21	£75.3m	20.5
Top-500 (10%)	20.4m	50	£179.4m	49
Top-2500 (50%)	33.7m	83	£301.1m	82
Top-5000 (100%)	40.7m	100	£366.3m	100
	2015 Vol	2015 Vol % of 5000	2015 Val	2015 Val % of 5000
Top-50 (1%)	8.3m	21	£66.5m	19%
Top-500 (10%)	20.3m	52	£167.7m	49%
Top-2500 (50%)	32.4m	84	£277.3m	81%
Top-5000 (100%)	38.8m	100	£341.4m	100

Table 9: UK TCM Trade Non-fiction Volume Sales Distribution 2001 & 2015

		Chart Rank		2001 Vol Sales	2015 Vol Sales
Max		1	Achieved unit sales of...	596,342	465,240
		50		68,898	80,522
		500		13,483	12,531
Upper Quartile		1250		6,841	6,172
Median		2500		3,911	3,502
Lower Quartile		3750		2,733	2,476
Min		5000		2,099	1,894
Total Volume				40,679,486	38,848,931

	2015 Vol	2015 Vol % of 5000	2015 Val	2015 Val % of 5000
Top-50 (1%)	8.3m	21	£66.5m	19%
Top-500 (10%)	20.3m	52	£167.7m	49%
Top-2500 (50%)	32.4m	84	£277.3m	81%

Top-5000 (100%)	38.8m	100	£341.4m	100
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Table 9 indicates the sales required to feature in a the top-5000 chart, the top-ranking title (by volume) in 2001 and 2015 sold 596,342 units and 465,240 units respectively, while the titles ranked at the bottom (5000th) in the 2001 and 2015 charts sold only 2,099 and 1,894 respectively. There is a large delta (difference) between the number of sales needed to hit the top spot versus the median 2,500th rank of the top-5000 chart.

These numbers appear quite dry but they represent millions of consumer decisions. If an author, or editorial team, wants to top the chart in a given year then they need to find half a million people (c. 0.8% of the UK population) willing to buy the book in that sales period. Yet to appear within the top-50, they only need to find 70,000 to 80,000 people per annum (c. 0.1% of the population).

An observation here is that titles ranking towards the lower end of the top-5000 chart in 2015 may have sold fewer units than those appearing in the chart in 2001. Therefore, it is worth asking are there any works that would not appear on the longseller list had a volume threshold been set instead of a ranked list? There are 511 titles at the bottom end of the 2015 chart (those ranked 4490-5000th) which did not achieve volume sales of at least 2,099 units (which was the minimum volume appearing in the 2001 chart). An exploration of the data shows that this does not affect the composition of the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. There are a couple of editions - *Diary of a Young Girl* and *The Crucible* - which sold fewer than 2,099 units in 2015, however both of these titles appeared in the chart multiple times (due to multiple editions being in print), and thus these works already featured in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] and combined sales, were in excess of 2,099 units.

To summarise the data presented thus far has shown that in real terms the value of trade-non-fiction books overall has been deflated, and that this deflation has affected the top-5000 titles more severely than the rest of the T1 product class. I have also demonstrated that the value contribution of the top-5000 titles has decreased over time implying their relative importance to publishers has

decreased. This in turn implies firstly, that the value growth of the T1 market can be attributed to the mid-list and long-tail and secondly, that the sales price of midlist and long-tail titles drags up the average for the product class as a whole (because less discounting; higher RRP; less price elasticity); the relative contribution and therefore importance of the mid-list and long tail has increased, thus publishers with a large backlist have an advantage over those without. But what about the sales longevity of the top-5000 bestselling titles?

Top 5000 and Longevity

This section aims to quantify the lifecycle of trade non-fiction titles to establish the typical sales longevity of works (in any print format hardback or paperback) within the top-5000 charts.

The data in [Table 10](#) are derived from the top-5000 titles each year from 2001 to 2015 and counts how many of those titles still featured in the top-5000 chart 1 year later, 2 years later and so on. Thus, for the title that charted in 2001 there is 14 years of chart data (2002-2015) but for the titles which comprised the 2010 chart there is only thirteen years of subsequent chart data. The counts, placed side-by-side for comparison, indicate trade non-fiction sales performance over time. [Table 11](#) provides the same data but as percentages of the initial 5000 sample. What [Table 10](#) shows is that that roughly three fifths of the top-5000 titles from 2001 still featured in the top-5000 chart the following year. The distribution, illustrated in [Figure 19](#) remains fairly consistent across the T1 dataset year-after-year, it does not matter from which year the top-5000 chart is picked (2001-2015), the number of titles that rank in the following year's chart is on average 2,894. The value fluctuates up and down by a standard deviation of 76, but there is no indication that typical longevity changes much year on year. If the number of titles that feature in the chart for three years is examined then a similarly consistent proportion of titles remain in the chart, roughly two fifths of the initial 5000 which is an average of 1,951. This demonstrates that irrespective of the structural break caused by the ebook revolution and other market factors (like the 2012 Olympics), commercial longevity for print books is predictably short lived. Only one fifth of trade non-

fiction (on average 1,095) titles still appeared in the chart after four years on, one tenth of titles remain significant over nine years (on average 503 titles) and ultimately only 4% of titles chart for 15 years.

Table 10: Longevity T1. Top 5000 (2001-2023) Number of titles still charting in subsequent years

	yr 1	yr 2	yr 3	yr 4	yr 5	yr 6	yr 7	yr 8	yr 9	yr 10	yr 11	yr 12	yr 13	yr 14	yr 15
2001	5000	3003	1953	1375	966	775	628	534	481	415	371	302	256	235	178
2002	5000	3001	1887	1260	965	757	630	557	475	408	326	268	254	229	174
2003	5000	2920	1797	1264	977	780	648	581	478	393	345	327	286	228	186
2004	5000	2801	1810	1314	973	805	695	589	495	423	389	343	266	227	203
2005	5000	2856	1903	1352	1040	871	718	611	505	464	390	288	252	227	215
2006	5000	2937	1935	1433	1169	930	762	631	578	484	357	300	260	238	206
2007	5000	2936	1968	1482	1142	898	753	658	540	390	323	276	248	226	175
2008	5000	2939	2011	1499	1179	959	834	703	499	426	356	316	288	216	207
2009	5000	2959	2021	1536	1193	1010	842	571	495	409	369	336	262	248	236
2010	5000	2946	1979	1494	1221	1015	674	570	489	425	395	302	283	258	
2011	5000	2916	1975	1555	1219	786	650	575	494	433	324	308	284		
2012	5000	2934	2132	1605	1041	852	722	625	518	382	392	361			
2013	5000	3137	2185	1384	1109	926	784	617	455	472	446				
2014	5000	2981	1758	1370	1132	948	726	532	544	518					
Diff +/- 2001 -2014	-	-0.74%	-11.09%	-0.36%	14.66%	18.25%	13.50%	-0.38%	11.58%	19.88%	16.82%	22.01%	11.02%	8.91%	11.44%
Ave	5000	2948	1951	1423	1095	879	719	597	503	432	368	311	267	233	201
Standard Dev	0	76	119	109	98	89	70	48	32	39	35	28	15	12	20

Table 11: Longevity T1. Top 5000 (2001-2023) Percentage of titles still charting in subsequent years

	yr 1	yr 2	yr 3	yr 4	yr 5	yr 6	yr 7	yr 8	yr 9	yr 10	yr 11	yr 12	yr 13	yr 14	yr 15
2001	100%	60%	39%	28%	19%	16%	13%	11%	10%	8%	7%	6%	5%	5%	3%
2002	100%	60%	38%	25%	19%	15%	13%	11%	10%	8%	7%	5%	5%	5%	3%
2003	100%	58%	36%	25%	20%	16%	13%	12%	10%	8%	7%	7%	6%	5%	4%
2004	100%	56%	36%	26%	19%	16%	14%	12%	10%	8%	8%	7%	5%	5%	4%
2005	100%	57%	38%	27%	21%	17%	14%	12%	10%	9%	8%	6%	5%	5%	4%
2006	100%	59%	39%	29%	23%	19%	15%	13%	12%	10%	7%	6%	5%	5%	4%
2007	100%	59%	39%	30%	23%	18%	15%	13%	11%	8%	6%	6%	5%	5%	4%
2008	100%	59%	40%	30%	24%	19%	17%	14%	10%	9%	7%	6%	6%	4%	4%
2009	100%	59%	40%	31%	24%	20%	17%	11%	10%	8%	7%	7%	5%	5%	5%
2010	100%	59%	40%	30%	24%	20%	13%	11%	10%	9%	8%	6%	6%	5%	
2011	100%	58%	40%	31%	24%	16%	13%	12%	10%	9%	6%	6%	6%		
2012	100%	59%	43%	32%	21%	17%	14%	13%	10%	8%	8%	7%			
2013	100%	63%	44%	28%	22%	19%	16%	12%	9%	9%	9%				
2014	100%	60%	35%	27%	23%	19%	15%	11%	11%	10%					

Average	100%	59%	39%	28%	22%	18%	14%	12%	10%	9%	7%	6%	5%	5%	4%
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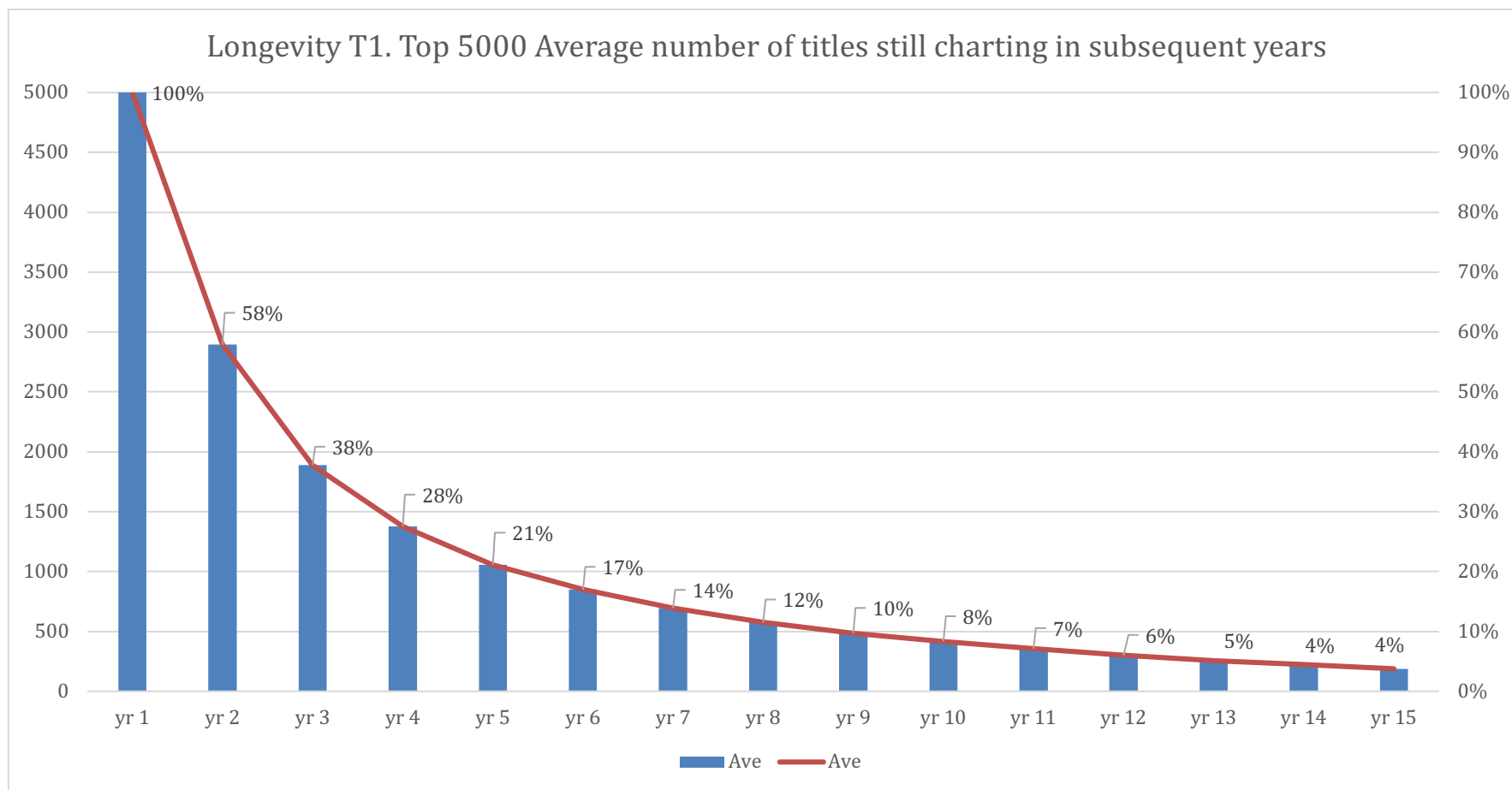


Figure 19: Longevity T1. Top 5000 (2001-2014) Average number of titles still charting in subsequent years 2001 – 2023 (Source: Nielsen BookScan 2024a)

As illustrated in [Figure 19](#) on average, three-fifths of the top-5000 chart is occupied by backlist titles, in other words those with over one year of publishing history implying the remaining two-fifths of the top-5000 chart are frontlist titles. This suggests that the curation of backlist titles within bookshops is dynamic and well-curated by booksellers with a constant churn of backlist titles, that sell well for 3 or 4 years eventually being swapped out for newer backlist titles. The mechanisms by which these decisions are made are explored in [Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity](#).

This section has demonstrated in quantitative terms what it means to appear in the top-5000 charts within any given year.

Understanding the top 5000 is important to this research because the longselling subset [Dataset 2] is derived from it. If in a given year an individual title did not manage to meet this minimum threshold of success then it will not be included in the data below of the subsequent analysis of titles. Consistent appearance in the top-5000 charts was a condition for being considered as a longseller within this study.

Having considered the title count, sales volume and value and what this might mean for longevity, the next section explores the range and distribution of publication dates.

4.3 Longselling Subset

In the previous sections, I have presented a picture of the trade non-fiction market data and the importance of the top-5000 titles within it. It was necessary to quantify the typical sales in order to find the titles that display atypical achievement.

This chapter goes to the heart of the research aims of this project to interrogate the books that feature in the longselling subset. It is here that I begin to address some of the project's core research questions; to identify the works that have achieved above average sales longevity and contribute original findings about longselling non-fiction titles, their authors, topics and what distinguishes these books.

To briefly recap, the longselling subset contains 178 titles which appeared in the Top-5000 chart every year between 2001 and 2015. As the previous sections of this chapter evidence, fifteen years of continuous sales is a significant achievement and something that only a small fraction of authors achieve. According to Nielsen BookScan (2016c), in 2001, the title count (books that sold one-or-more copies during the given time period.) was just over 274,000, and of these only 178 were in the top-5000 chart continuously for the fifteen-year duration (1 in 16,000 titles). These quantitative data provide a useful starting point for further research and analysis into particular authors and genres of longselling non-fiction.

An appearance within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] guaranteed the title had at least fifteen years of continuous sales but it was possible, indeed likely, that some works had a longer sales history. Therefore, the first step in processing the data was to go through the titles one-by-one, research and append the original publication date of the work. This was a crucial piece of the puzzle to obtain. Once the earliest edition publication dates were added to the data set, it was possible to plot a histogram and see the titles with the greatest longevity, decade by decade.

Distribution by Nielsen Edition and Earliest Edition Publication Date

This section begins by presenting the findings of my research into the earliest publication date of each work, and shows the distribution of titles by their Nielsen-listed publication date and by their earliest publication date to reveal more about their commercial longevity. It goes on to consider the product classes (aka subject category) and authors that appeared most frequently within the subset of longselling titles.

The histogram below (*Figure 20*) shows the distribution of the publication dates for the longselling subset [Dataset 2] of 178 titles using the publication year listed by Nielsen BookScan bibliographic data in the 2001 chart and the redistribution of those same titles according to the publication dates for the earliest edition of each work. For clarity, these are referred to as the:

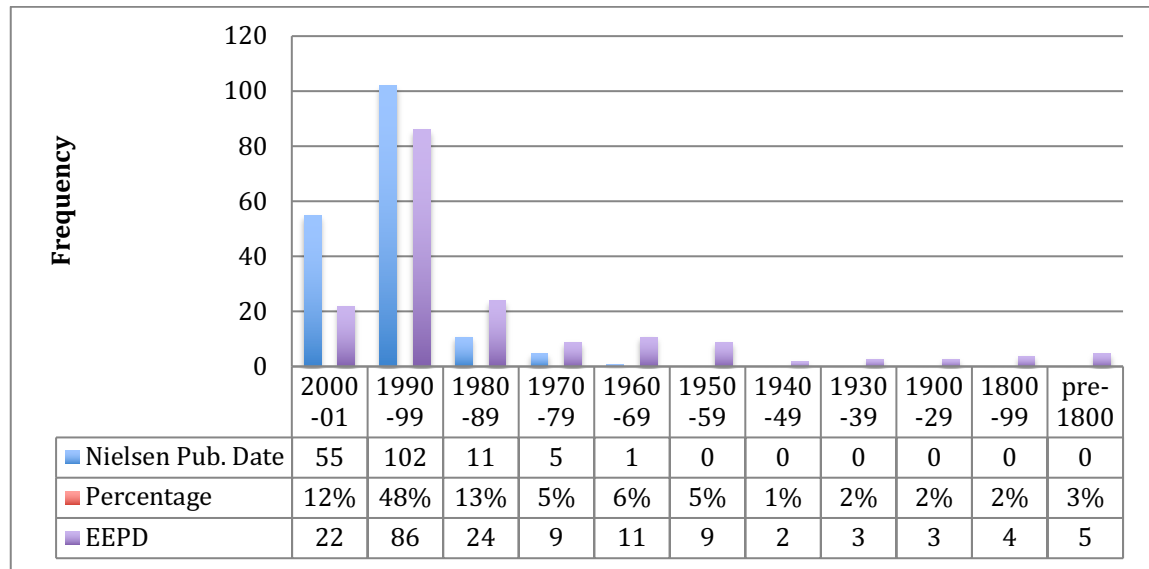
- NEPD – Nielsen Edition Publication Date⁶
- EEPD - Earliest Edition Publication Date

Essentially what this histogram aims to reveal is any obscured longevity of the works and in fact, when the EEPDs are compared to the NEPDs only 35 of 178 (20%) titles list the actual year of original publication.

When reading the histogram (*Figure 20*) note the date intervals are not all of equal size. Reading left to right, the first column only included titles published in the two-year period between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2001 (due to the chart comparison parameters). The next seven columns present the number of titles published in ten-year intervals between 1930 and 1999. The final three columns have been set at intervals to display fairly evenly the small number of titles that were published between 1900 – and 1929, 1800-1899 and pre-1800s respectively.

⁶ The publication date listed on the Nielsen database, not determined by Nielsen.

Figure 20: Distribution of titles by NEPD and EEPD



Indicated in *Figure 20: Distribution of titles by NEPD and EEPD* blue, the NEPD have a tightly clustered distribution ranging from 2001 and extend as far back as 1966 however, the vast majority (157 titles) have NEPDs listed between 1990 and 2001. Only 1 title is listed with a NEPD prior to 1970.

Indicated in purple, the EEPDs have a wider distribution ranging from 2001 to pre-1800. This demonstrates clearly that many of these works have a much longer publication history and at least 37 titles are editions linked to works originally published prior to 1970.

Using the EEPDs, it is clear the majority, 108 titles, were indeed first publishing in the 1990s and 2000s, and continued to have strong sales from publication through to at least the end of 2015. As a percentage of the subset this seems like a lot, but as a percentage of all the non-fiction titles published in the 2000s and 1990s, it is clear that these bestsellers have been extraordinarily successful.

In the first column, 33 of 55 titles with NEPDs of 2000 or 2001 were indeed new or revised editions of earlier works and of those 33 titles 11 had an EEPD that was at least ten years prior. Similarly, 16 of 102 titles with publication dates in the 1990s had earlier editions and 32 works had an EEPD that was at least ten years prior.

This was a really exciting finding, the longselling subset [Dataset 2] were certain to have experienced at least fifteen years of sales however, comparison of the NEPD with the EEPD parameters reveals that 80% of titles/works have an even longer publication history.

The full list of longselling titles are presented later in this chapter, however the sections below first briefly considers the make-up of the longselling subset [Dataset 2] according to product class (aka subject category).

Frequency of Product Class

Figure 21 charts the percentage of titles within each of the eighteen second level product classes for the T1. Top-5000 chart in 2015 (red) and the longselling subset [Dataset 2] of 178 titles (blue). The chart is sorted in order of least to most common according to the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. The purpose of this comparison was exploratory namely to see if there were any product classes which outperformed when compared with the wider market trends in 2015 and therefore which subject categories (if any) might have a higher proportion of longselling titles appearing within them. The Nielsen database uses three levels of product class, the classes listed in *Figure 21* are the second level classes, beneath them is a further level of sub-classes. For example, within *T8. The World, Ideas, Culture: General* are a further ten classes such as *T8.0 Popular Science*, *T8.1 Natural History General*, *T8.5 Travel Writing* and so on.

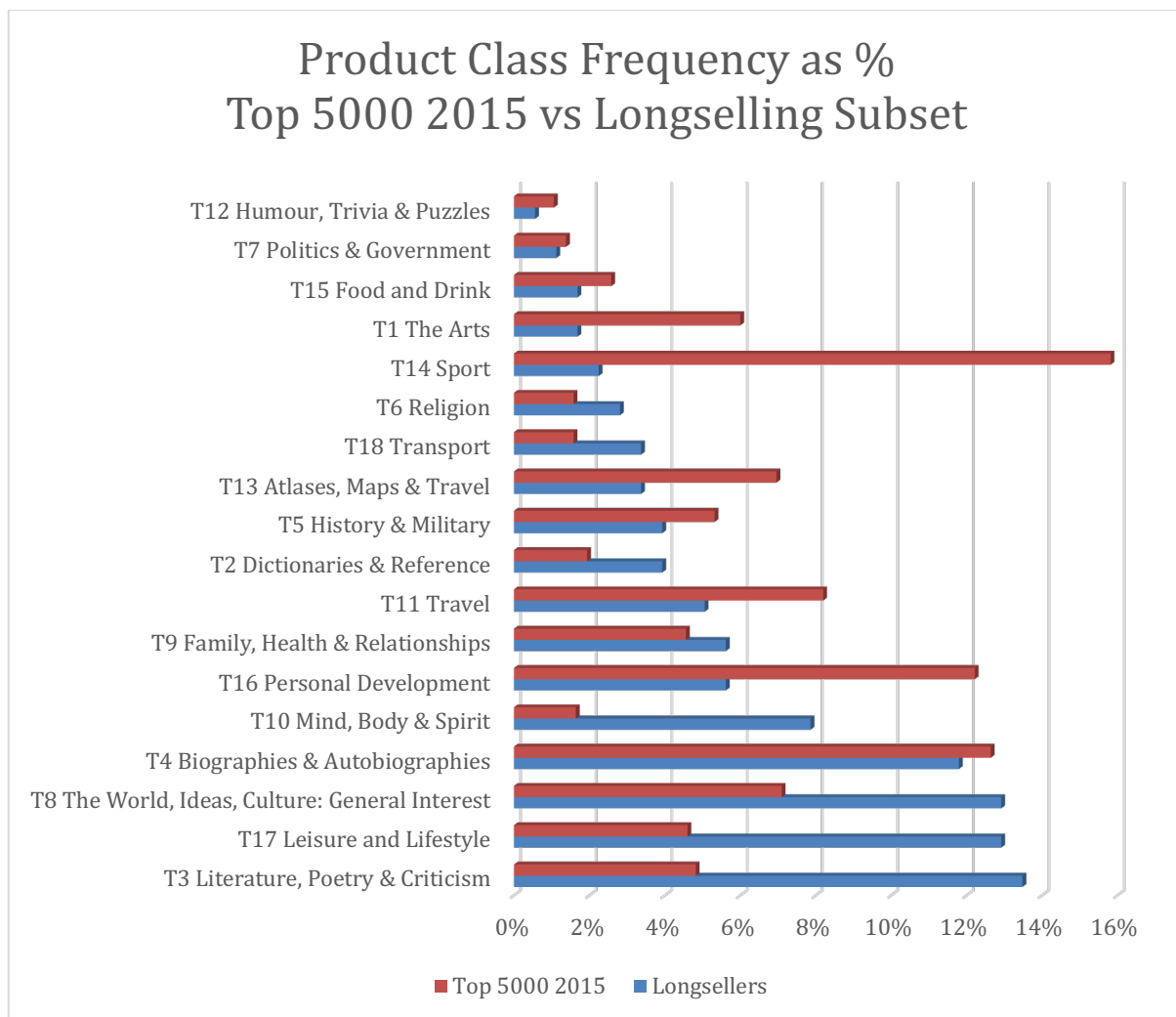


Figure 21: Product Class Frequency of Top 5000 2015 and Longselling Subset

Notably, the product classes which appear more frequently within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] than the top 5000 in 2015 are: T.6 Religion; T.18 Transport; T.2 Dictionaries and Reference; T.10 Mind Body and Spirit; T.8 The World, Ideas, Culture: General Interest; T.17 Leisure and Lifestyle; and T.3 Literature Poetry and Criticism. The over representation of these categories implies the titles listed within them are worth investigating further as part of the research in case there is something about the product class as a whole that resonates with audiences with particular longevity.

Table 12: Longselling titles in T.10: Mind, Body and Spirit

T10.0 Mind, Body & Spirit: General	9
Art of Happiness, The: A Handbook for Living	
Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue:(Bk. 1)	
Four Agreements,The: Practical Guide to Personal Freedom	
Little Book of Wisdom, The	
Power of Now, The : A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment	
Road Less Travelled, The	
Seven Spiritual Laws of Success, The: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillme	
Teach Yourself to Meditate: Over 20 Exercises for Peace, Health and Cla	
You Can Heal Your Life	
T10.1 Astrology & Fortune-telling	1
Book of Answers, The	
T10.2 Alternative Therapies & Health	1
Heal Your Body: The Mental Causes for Physical Illness and the Metaphysics	
T10.3 The Paranormal	1
Chariots of the Gods?	
T10.6 Spiritual Writers	2
Celestine Prophecy, The	
Prophet, The	

Table 13: Longselling titles in T.17: Self Improvement

T17.0 Self Improvement: General	4
48 Laws of Power, The: The Robert Greene Collection	
7 Habits of Highly Effective People, The	
Artist's Way, The: A Course in Discovering and Recovering Your Creative	
How to Talk to Anyone:92 Little Tricks for Big Success in Relationship	
T17.1 Careers & Success	5
Don't Sweat the Small Stuff: Simple Ways to Keep the Little Things from	
Now, Discover Your Strengths: How to Develop Your Talents and Those of	
Power of Positive Thinking, The	
Stop Thinking, Start Living: Discover Lifelong Happiness	
Who Moved My Cheese?:An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work a	
T17.4 Language Learning: Self Study	1
Spanish For Dummies	
T17.9 Popular Psychology	13
Emotional Intelligence :Why it Can Matter More Than IQ	
Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway: The Phenomenal Classic That Has Changed	
Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships	

How to Stop Worrying and Start Living	
How to Win Friends and Influence People	
I'm Ok, You're Ok	
Little Book of Calm, The	
Little Book of Confidence, The	
Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, The	
Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving	
Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think	
Self Help for Your Nerves: Learn to Relax and Enjoy Life Again by Overc	
Women Who Run with the Wolves:Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman	

Table 14: Longselling titles in T.9: Family and Health

T9.0 Family & Health: General	1
Treat Your Own Neck	
T9.3 Pregnancy & Parenting	3
7000 Baby Names: Classic and Modern	
Raising Boys: Why Boys are Different - and How to Help Them Become Happy	
Secrets of the Baby Whisperer: How to Calm, Connect and Communicate wit	
T9.4 Fitness & Diet	3
Calorie Counter: Collins Gem	
Eat Right 4 Your Type	
Light on Yoga: The Definitive Guide to Yoga Practice	
T9.5 Coping with Problems & Illness	3
Awaken the Giant within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental,	
The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Survive and Thrive When the World	
Treat Your Own Back	

Table 15: Longselling titles in T.16: Leisure and Lifestyle

T16.0 Food & Drink: General	7
Appetite: So What Do You Want to Eat Today?	
Ben and Jerry's Homemade Ice Cream and Dessert Book	
Delia's Complete Cookery Course:(v.1-3 in 1v)	
Mary Berry's Complete Cookbook	
Mary Berry's Ultimate Cake Book: Over 200 Classic Recipes	
Real Cooking	
Real Food	
T16.1 National & Regional Cuisine	1
50 Great Curries of India	
T16.2 Health, Dieting & Wholefood Cookery	1

Everyday Diabetic Cookbook, The	
T16.4 Wines	1
World Atlas of Wine, The	

Table 16: Longselling titles in T.6: Religion

T6.1 Christianity: General	1
Grief Observed, A	
T6.2 Christianity: Bibles & Liturgy	1
NIV Pocket Bible: New International Version	
T6.6 Non-Christian Religions	3
Buddhism Plain and Simple	
Islam: A Very Short Introduction: Very Short Introductions	
Little Book of Buddhism, The	

Table 17: Longselling titles in T.3: Literature Poetry and Criticism

T3.1 Poetry Texts & Poetry Anthologies	14
Beowulf	
Birthday Letters	
Collected Poems	
Iliad, The: New Prose Translation	
Mean Time	
Nation's Favourite Poems, The	
Norton Anthology of Poetry, The	
Poem For The Day One:366 Poems, Old and New, Worth Learning by Heart	
Selected Poems	
Shakespeare's Sonnets	
Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States o	
Waste Land and Other Poems, The	
Whitsun Weddings, The	
World's Wife, The	
T3.2 Drama Texts, Plays & Screenplays	7
Crucible, The: A Play in Four Acts	
Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and A Re	
Lady in the Van, The	
Macbeth	
Macbeth: Wordsworth Classics	
Romeo and Juliet	
The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus	
T3.4 Anthologies, Essays, Letters & Miscellaneous	2

Chicken Soup for the Soul:101 Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the	
Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul:Stories of Life, Love and Learning	

Self-help and Self Improvement Spanning Product Classes

Analysis of the longselling subset [Dataset 2] by product classes (as per the frequency chart and tables above) is a useful preliminary step. However, looking over the tables one genre in particular jumps out. The self-help and self-improvement genre spans product classes and can be found in mind, body spirit, self-improvement, popular psychology, family and health, as well as anthologies and essays. These types of titles can be found across a number of Nielsen BookScan product classes but considering them all, it is evident that self-help as a supra-genre is one area of publishing where the longsellerdom is particularly prevalent. There is not the space to explore every genre of non-fiction in depth however, because of the high-frequency of longselling self-help titles and their intersectional quality, the long-term potential for self-help books is expanded upon in the discussion at the end of this chapter ([p.142](#))

T3 Literature Poetry and Criticism

Figure 21: Product Class Frequency of Top 5000 2015 and Longselling Subset indicates that *T3 Literature Poetry and Criticism* has the greatest delta between the percentage of titles appearing in the longselling subset versus those appearing in the top-5000 chart. From this it can be concluded that poetry and plays are particularly longselling. Yet, poetry and plays pose a categorical challenge in that they are classified (by Nielsen BookScan⁷) as nonfiction, within the subsection of literary criticism, however in many of the works listed in *Table 17*: Longselling titles in T.3: Literature Poetry and Criticism these works more closely resemble of fiction in that they depict imagined events or thoughts. Often texts of poetry and plays are annotated with notes and literary criticism, and are stocked in bookshops alongside other scholarly resources.

⁷ And other classification systems used by the book trade such as BIC, and Thema codes.

The adoption of these resources within the UK school curriculum goes some way to explaining the high frequency of longsellers within the T3 category.

Where there are over-achieving product classes there must also be some that appear less frequently in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] than the rest of trade non-fiction as a whole. The subject categories that are under-represented are: T1. The Arts; T.14 Sport; T13 Atlases, Maps & Travel; T.11 Travel; and T.16 Personal Development. From this it can be inferred that these product classes *may* contain titles that are more appealing in the here and now. However, it does not require too much of a leap to hypothesise that titles on contemporary sports or travel destinations might not have long-term appeal.

It could also be that some contemporary bookshop categories and genres of non-fiction publishing are peculiar to modern living, and so a low proportion of titles within the travel product class simply reflects the fact that the market for books on international travel is far larger in the twenty-first century than it was in the early- to mid-twentieth-century thanks to more affordable international transport.

Frequency of Publisher

Table 18: Longselling Subset Publisher Frequency (2015 Value/Volume/Title Count)

Publisher/Group	Value (£)	Value %	Volume	Vol %	No. of Titles	% Titles
PRH	3,160,542	37.5%	385,149	35.7%	83	46.6%
Hachette Livre	1,489,841	17.7%	138,615	12.8%	26	14.6%
Independents	1,233,277	14.6%	219,773	20.3%	25	14.0%
HarperCollins	1,167,715	13.8%	162,083	15.0%	28	15.7%
Simon & Schuster	354,256	4.2%	38,764	3.6%	7	3.9%
Williams Lea Tag	344,837	4.1%	79,754	7.4%	2	1.1%
OUP	336,586	4.0%	51,290	4.7%	9	5.1%
Pan Macmillan	279,900	3.3%	33,932	3.1%	8	4.5%
Faber & Faber	200,258	2.4%	20,850	1.9%	7	3.9%
Wiley	77,331	0.9%	5,357	0.5%	2	1.1%
Bloomsbury	67,624	0.8%	8,049	0.7%	2	1.1%
Phaidon	67,048	0.8%	6,115	0.6%	2	1.1%
JPH	31,295	0.4%	3,511	0.3%	1	0.6%
Bonnier	28,211	0.3%	9,403	0.9%	2	1.1%
UK Gov	20,981	0.2%	2,759	0.3%	1	0.6%

Table 18 presents a snapshot of the publishing companies that benefitted from the longselling titles according to the 2015 Top-5000 chart. It highlights the dominance of Penguin Random House (PRH) Group in terms of share. In 2015, PRH published 83 of the 178 longselling titles (46.6%) and made over £3.1m from these backlist staples in that year alone. Together Hachette Livre, HarperCollins and Simon & Schuster accounted for 61 (34%) longsellers grossing just shy of £3m.

At the time the sales was recorded there were 25 titles in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] being exploited by 18 different independent publishers, and these collectively accounted for 14.6% of sales value. Together the independent titles contributed £1.2m in revenue to publishers such as Profile Books (£528k), WW Norton (£116k), Hay House (£91k) and Michael O'Mara (£83k).

Since 2015, three of those independent publishers were acquired: Souvenir Press was bought in 2018 by Profile Books (also an independent); Workman

Publishing Co. was bought in 2021 by Hachette Livre; and Abson Books was bought by Gemini Books Group in 2024.

It is worth noting that the publishing groups listed in [Table 18](#), are those that exploited the longselling works as intellectual property in 2015. However, it is likely that some (if not many) of the longsellers were originally published by imprints that were later subsumed by the conglomerates or larger independents. Indeed, when it comes to mergers and acquisitions, the existence of these strong backlist titles will have played an important factor in the decision-making as to whether to buy up certain imprints or not. The acquisition of longselling backlist titles is a strategy which solidifies competitive advantage for the big publishers. They are a quantifiable risk that require limited ongoing investment and like compound interest, generate a revenue stream that pays back incrementally overtime.

A further observation is that where longselling works *have (or in the case of Hay House had until 2023)* remained under independent control of the original publishing organisation, those business entities had evolved around a single idea or ideology and are *more than* book publishers. This is particularly, visible in the self-help and wellbeing space for example Hay House (founded by bestselling self-help author Louise Hay acquired by PRH in 2023), and Spinal Publications New Zealand (publishers of *Treat Your Own Back* and *Neck*) have developed a loyal customer base to whom a wide range of products and services can be marketed.

Frequency of Author

[Table 19](#) lists the authors with more than one work in the longselling subset [Dataset 2], it is sorted by number of *works*⁸ per author. It has already been established that commercial longevity is rare within non-fiction, and this data shows that it is rarer still for an author to have commercial success alongside

⁸ To reiterate the term *work* aggregates all editions and formats sharing the same title. So there may have been hardback and paperback versions of these titles, but they are only counted as one work.

longevity for multiple works. Within the subset of 178 longselling titles there were only 17 authors who had more than one work appearing in the list and only four of those had more than two titles listed.

The nationality (and residence) of these authors was almost exclusively British (10 of 17) or American (6 of 17) although some had joint nationality. The only author to have written more than one title within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] of another, non-Anglo-American nationality, was the Dali Lama (Tibetan).

Of the 17 authors with more than one longselling work, 13 were men and 4 were women so a ratio of 4:1. The top four authors in terms of frequency of longselling works were: Bill Bryson with 7 works, William Shakespeare with 4 works, D. G. Hessayon with 4 works and Nigel Slater with 3 works.

Table 19: Longselling Subset Author Frequency

	Author and Titles	Count	EEPD
Bryson, Bill		7	1989
	Down Under:Travels in a Sunburned Country		2000
	Lost Continent,The:Travels in Small Town America		1989
	Made in America:An Informal History of American English		1994
	Neither Here Nor There:Travels in Europe		1991
	Notes from a Big Country:Journey into the American Dream		1998
	Notes from a Small Island		1995
	Walk in the Woods,A		1998
Hessayon, D. G.		4	1980
	Flower Expert,The:The World's Best-selling Book on Flowers		1980
	Greenhouse Expert,The:The World's Best-selling Book on Greenhouses		1994
	Lawn Expert,The:The World's Best-selling Book on Lawns		1982
	Tree & Shrub Expert,The:The World's Best-selling Book on Trees and Shr		1983
Shakespeare, William		4	1597
	Macbeth		1888
	Macbeth:Wordsworth Classics		1623
	Romeo and Juliet		1597
	Shakespeare's Sonnets		1609
Slater, Nigel		3	1997
	Appetite:So What Do You Want to Eat Today?		2000
	Real Cooking		1997
	Real Food		1998
Miller, Arthur		2	1949
	Crucible,The:A Play in Four Acts:Penguin Modern Classics		1956
	Death of a Salesman:Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and A Re		1949
de Botton, Alain		2	1997
	Consolations of Philosophy,The		2000
	How Proust Can Change Your Life		1997

Author and Titles (cont.)	Count	EEPD
Beaton, Alistair	2	1999
Little Book of Complete Bollocks,The		1999
Little Book of Management Bollocks,The:Why be Human When You Could be		2001
Jeffers, Susan J.	2	1987
Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway:The Phenomenal Classic That Has Changed		1987
Little Book of Confidence,The		1999
Beevor, Antony	2	1991
Crete:The Battle and the Resistance		1991
Stalingrad		1998
Dalai Lama XIV	2	1995
Little Book of Buddhism,The		1999
Little Book of Wisdom,The		1995
Berry, Mary	2	1994
Mary Berry's Complete Cookbook		1995
Mary Berry's Ultimate Cake Book:Over 200 Classic Recipes		1994
Duffy, Carol Ann	2	1993
Mean Time		1993
World's Wife,The		2000
Canfield, Jack & Hansen, Mark Victor	2	1999
Chicken Soup for the Soul:101 Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle t		1999
Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul:Stories of Life, Love and Learning		1999
Hay, Louise L.	2	1984
Heal Your Body:The Mental Causes for Physical Illness and the Metaphys		1984
You Can Heal Your Life		1984
Carlson, Richard	2	1993
Don't Sweat the Small Stuff:Simple Ways to Keep the Little Things from		1997
Stop Thinking, Start Living:Discover Lifelong Happiness		1993
Larkin, Philip	2	1964
Collected Poems		1988
Whitsun Weddings,The		1964
Carnegie, Dale	2	1936
How to Stop Worrying and Start Living		1948
How to Win Friends and Influence People		1936

Bill Bryson is an American-British author (and editor). With seven works appearing in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] Bryson is evidently one of the most prolific non-fiction authors of the 1990s, Bryson's books have commercial appeal, a clearly-identifiable brand identity and sales longevity. Although born in the US, Bryson has spent most of his adult life living in the UK and thus his travel writing is written for the UK market (rather than being a US export). His debut work *The Lost Continent: Travels in Small Town America* (first published in 1989) is said to have pioneered a new style of travel writing, one that adopts observational humour, hyperbole and self-deprecation.

Between 1989 and 2000, Bryson wrote and published further six travel titles on America, Europe and Australia all of which feature in the longselling subset (listed in [Table 19](#)) categorised under the Nielsen tier-2 product class *T8: The World Ideas, Culture: General Interest* and beneath that the tier 3 product class *T8.4 Travel Writing*. During that same period he wrote two further works: *The Mother Tongue* and *Penguin Dictionary for Writers and Editors*) which are categorised as T.2 Dictionaries & Reference and do not feature in the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. Bryson's contribution is significant because it explains the aforementioned over representation of the *T8 The World Ideas, Culture: General Interest* product class illustrated in [Figure 21](#). If Bryson's seven travel titles are omitted the T8.4 product class would only contain four works, the longest selling of these (and the only published before 1989) being *In Patagonia* (1977) by Bruce Chatwin (also discussed in [4.4 Longsellers by Decade](#)).

The second most frequently featured author in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] is Dr. David Gerald (D. G.) Hessayon OBE, a British botanist and author of Cypriot decent. Four of his works feature in the Longselling subset [Dataset 2], the oldest EEPD listed for a work under the exact title of '*The Lawn Expert*' is 1980, however *The Expert* series dates back to 1959 which launched with the title *Be Your Own Gardening Expert* and a work entitled *Be Your Own Lawn Expert* dates back to 1961. Dr. Hessayon has an honorary degree from Leeds University in Botany and is in publishing terms an authority on the subject of horticulture and has published at least 24 works on gardening and related topics. One pertinent observation, that can be made of some longselling non-fiction more generally, is the commercial longevity of definitive and expert guides to fairly niche areas (see also case study for *The Right Ways to Play Chess* in [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#)

Discussion of Self-help

Although the genre really exploded in the 1970s (Rosen et al, 2003, p.401-402) there are enduring cases with notably impressive track records. *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) by Dale Carnegie is one of the earliest to

be found in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] as is a second title by the same author *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (1948); other particularly longselling titles are *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) by Dr Norman Vincent Peale; *Self-Help for Your Nerves* (1962) by Dr Claire Weekes; *The Games People Play* (1964) by Dr Eric Berne; *The Road Less Travelled* (1978) by Dr M. Scott Peck; *Feel The Fear and Do it Any Way* (1987) by Dr Susan Jeffers. With the exception of Dale Carnegie, all the authors listed above have a doctorate of some kind –although in the case of Peale it was a doctorate in Theology and the publication pre-dated his qualification (Rosen et al, 2002 p.399)– most were psychiatrists (M.D.s) but Jeffers had a PhD in Psychology. Thus, one could argue that popular psychiatry and popular psychology are if not synonymous, then certainly synergistic with ‘self-help and self-improvement). Nevertheless, the benefits of ‘self-help’ are that it is accessible both financially and situationally, and achievable without the close involvement of other people. The authorial expertise acting from a distance places the agency in the hands of the reader (Rose and Miller 1992 cited by Rimke, 2000).

In *Self-help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them* Dolby (2005) researched the content of many of these texts and hypothesised that self-help books adopt a winning narrative formula of ‘lack and lack liquidation’. Dolby (2005, p.4-5) borrows this descriptor from Dundes’ analysis of ‘North American Indian [sic] tales and states’:

When applied to popular non-fiction, this basic structure becomes, first, a suggestion that something is wrong with us, the culture that guides or programs us, or with our information about the world (lack); and second, a suggestion of what might be done to correct the problem (lack liquidation). As with our recognition of the basic structure of the urban legend, our recognition of this basic structure—a critique of the culture and a solution—allows us to come to the many books of popular non-fiction in an increasingly meaningful way.

The problem-solution framework is not only a successful basis for non-fiction book publishing, but it also underpins contemporary user-centred design thinking more broadly (Norman, 2013 ch.6). So in this sense, the authors of early self-help books were very much ahead of their time in the way they

placed practical solutions to readers' struggles at the centre of their writing, because fulfilling a need ensures relevance. Where the objective is to help people help themselves, the writing must be accessible, and cannot be overly complex or dependent on prior knowledge. Dolby (2005, p.4) also notes the formulaic structure of many self-help books which tend to include 'the pseudofable, the several steps program, [and] the definition of parts' and that they are written to appeal to 'everyone's taste'. In a sociology of literature sense, highbrow self-help would be self-defeating; to be effective, self-help works must transcend tastes, class and be universal in their utilitarian appeal. However, there can always be exceptions; such as Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2011), a modern title which Blackwell's Buyer, Katharine Fry, notes as a backlist staple of the future. Kahneman's opus, detailing the most significant findings of his life's work in neurology is written to be accessible yet it is still a dense and complex example of popular psychology with mass market appeal.

Another observation is that self-help and self-improvement are author-led genres of publishing; as implied by the number of doctors appearing in the longsellers listed above, author credentials can surely make a difference. It is likely that these credentials helped overcome the initial hurdle of 'publisher as gatekeeper'; author status offers intellectual legitimacy to the work and makes the project attractive to publishers.

Discussion of Travel Writing & Bryson

According to Bassnett (1999), the popularity of travel writing and appearance of authors such as Bryson in the best-seller charts is 'predominantly a British phenomenon, not even an English language phenomenon. The very category of travel writing is not universal, and there are many literary systems that do not distinguish travel writing as a distinct form at all'. Why then is travel writing as a genre so popular within the UK? There is perhaps a correlation between the level (and ease) of international travel towards the end of the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first century and in turn the trend for

holidaying abroad. However, thinking beyond the UK's consumer trends, travel writing as a genre is widely the focus of discourse analysis due to the 'direct link to be made between travel writing and the history of imperialism and colonisation' (Bassnett, 1999, p.1). Thus, where Bryson's contribution to travel writing has been explored by others (Bassett, 1999; Calzati, 2015; Lisle, 2006), it has been in terms of the discourse and politics of writing about culture/s but not in terms of the commercial longevity or phenomenon of Bryson's success as an author.

In *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* Debbie Lisle (2006, pp.1-30) positions Bryson's work as proffering a light-hearted '*cosmopolitan vision*' of global travel as opposed to the '*colonial vision*' perpetuated by earlier authors like Paul Theroux. Lisle contrasts these visions as two opposing discourses: contemporary authors who adopt the '*cosmopolitan vision*' typically appreciate and celebrate differences and similarities between cultures – placing themselves as traveller within a global community - they avoid any tone of cultural superiority as traveller. Although the '*cosmopolitan vision*' travel writing tends to be an improvement on earlier '*colonial vision*' travel writing, Lisle notes there can still be a failure by authors to acknowledge their privilege to be able to travel, or recognise the imbalanced power structures and global politics at play. Conversely, authors proffering colonial discourse: the romantic notion of the traveller reporting on the exotic and a bygone time of empire, power and superiority.

Conclusion

Having considered some of the basic descriptive statistics for the dataset in terms of the publication date distribution, product class, publisher and author frequency some findings are evident: a small fraction of non-fiction titles sell in high quantities (178 or 3.5% of titles sold in 2015 beyond 15 years) and an even smaller fraction of these have publication histories stretching much further; only 70 titles or 1.4% of titles sold in 2015 beyond 25 years.

The genres of self-help and travel writing appear more frequently within the subset than might be expected and warrant further investigation.

The final section of this chapter discusses the titles grouped by EEPD publication date with a focus on the longselling works within from the beginning of the twentieth century.

4.4 Longsellers by Decade

This section presents the titles within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] in chronological order of publication split into six clusters: classics that were published in the first half-of the twentieth century (1900-1949), followed on in decade intervals the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. There is a brief discussion of the titles originally published between 1980s and 2001.

During the case study analysis it became clear that school reading and curriculum played an important role in the longevity of certain works therefore the following tables are annotated according to the national curriculum for secondary schools in England and Wales introduced in 1999 (pertinent to the 2001-2015 sales period). This curriculum offered up a wider range of non-fiction options for schools to choose from, it avoids 'set texts' but does suggest some examples of non-fiction authors, poets and playwrights (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999 p.36; 2004, p.49 and p.145).

From within the longselling subset, Maya Angelou, Alan Bennett, William Blake, Vera Brittain, Gerald Durrell, T.S. Eliot, Philip Larkin, Laurie Lee, Arthur Miller and George Orwell are listed by name as examples of suitable authors within the curriculum document (although no specific works by these authors are named). With the exception of plays by William Shakespeare, the curriculum is fairly open in terms of which authors should be studied, allowing school teachers to pick from a list of 19 fiction author and 28 poets published before 1914. The authors published after 1914 named as 'examples' rather than a prescriptive list of required reading.

There is not the space in this thesis to consider in detail each of the 178 identified longsellers in Dataset 2, therefore in this section the quantitative

data analysis guided exploration of the longselling subset. In other words, data-driven observations served as prompts to drill into particular outliers, trends, outside influences and aspects of publishing practice which warranted more detailed investigation. As such it demonstrates the versatility of a mixed methods approach to research.

Titles Originally Published Before 1900: Classics and the Public Domain

It is worth reiterating here that the focus of this doctoral research is twentieth-century works, rather than older works which already established as classics. However, within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] there are a handful of titles that are known to date back further and have a direct equivalence to an earlier work, or have a derivative relationship to an earlier work.

The copyright term within the UK territory for 70 years after the death of the author. Thus, works written by any author who passed away in, or prior to 1945 entered the public domain in 2016 and are considered beyond the scope of this study. Conversely, published works written by an author whose death occurred in 1946 or thereafter, were still covered by UK copyright in 2016 and therefore will be considered within scope. There are some cases and indeed categories where a judgement had to be made as to whether to include or exclude them from the subset (for example where new translations or direct facsimiles have been created of much older classic works) and these will be discussed in this chapter.

Why is it important to delineate between works that are in copyright versus those in the public domain? The primary argument for delineation is that public domain works are generally already known to be classics, but also because in-copyright works are performing on a different playing field economically to those in the public domain as explained below.

The microeconomic pressures of in-copyright and public-domain works are worth considering here briefly in terms of supply and demand. For works that are within copyright, the author or licence-holder enter into a contractual agreement with the publisher in exchange for a share of the income. Supply of

IP into the market is permitted, or restricted, through exclusive licencing agreements granted by the author or their estate. In contrast, public domain works have no rights holder and can be freely reproduced, and sold within the UK market by one or more publishers simultaneously. Works within the public domain experience different commercial pressures. Firstly, there might be electronic versions of the work available freely at no cost to the end reader. Free competition can put pressure on publishers to maintain low price points. Secondly, the publishers of public domain works have no royalty payments to account for which in theory permits them better margins than licensed content, again allowing for a reduced cost of sales and lower price point. These two factors make public domain works notoriously price elastic.

Price-elastic products are ones where supply is unrestricted and there are competing titles available with very little to differentiate them; the theory of price elasticity (Cunningham, 2021 p.10-13) suggests that if one publisher were to increase the RRP of their products the consumer demand will simply flow to one of the other replica products offered by a competitor. In reality, there are points of difference between competing editions of public domain titles such as production values, critical apparatus and brand value. Indeed, luxury gift-editions of classics at a high price point are popular and publishers can have royalties to pay where contemporary translations have been produced, or annotations have been commissioned to provide further context and understanding of the original text.

What impact does the exclusion of public domain works have on the findings? The initial data analysis identified a subset of 178 longselling titles, this was reduced to 168 titles due to the exclusion of 10 ancient and post-classical era works; from Sun Tsu's *Art of War* (c500 BC) to facsimiles of works like William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1,789).

*

Table 20: Longsellers originally published before 1900 (sorted chronologically)

Title	Author	2015 Sales	NEPD	Approx date of origin or EEPD	Notes
Iliad, The: New Prose Translation	Homer (translators: Emile Victor Rieu (1950) updated and revised by Peter Jones (2003),	2,162	27/08/1987		c750-700 BC
Art of War, The	Tzu, Sun	6,893	26/10/1989	c500 BC	
Three Theban Plays, The: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus	Sophocles (translation by Robert Fagles)	3,183	31/05/1984	c400-450 BC	
Beowulf	Heaney, Seamus* (Translator)	2,983	02/10/2000	c700-1000 AD	Disputed date of original manifestation This translation copyright 1999
Macbeth: Wordsworth Classics	Shakespeare, William**	13,581	05/05/1992	1606-07	
Shakespeare's Sonnets	Shakespeare, William**	1,923	04/03/1999	1590-1605	Penguin Edition of The Sonnets and a Lovers Complaint dating to 1938
Romeo and Juliet	Shakespeare, William**	1,919	30/06/1994	1597	Penguin Edition of Romeo and Juliet dating to 1937
Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States o	Blake, William***	1,919	15/10/1970	1789	The Dover facsimile was first published in 1970.
Macbeth	Shakespeare, William**	2,597	26/05/1994	1606-07	
NIV Pocket Bible: New International Version		2,507	02/05/1996	-	

Included within the secondary curriculum for England under 'Examples of major poets after 1914'

***Included within the secondary curriculum for England under 'list of major writers published before 1914' from which two text **must** be selected*

**** Included within the secondary curriculum for England under 'Examples of major poets before 1914' from which two text **must** be selected*

The pre-1900 titles in [Table 20](#) illustrate neatly one of the methodological challenges of this analysis; how to draw clear boundaries between one original work and another adaptation or manifestation of that same work. The Penguin Classics edition of *The Iliad* (1987) ranked in the 2001 chart was originally translated by Emile Victor Rieu and was first published by Penguin in 1950. However, the version on sale in 2015 is a revised edition, published in 2003, and includes commentary and a new introduction by Peter Jones and Dominic Christopher Henry Rieu. How should the new prose translation of Homer's *Iliad* be considered given that there were multiple contributors and multiple (yet clearly derivative) editions? In this example, it is unambiguous that the parent work dates back to classical antiquity and the new prose edition – while significant in terms of the translator's original intellectual property – would not exist if it were not for the parent work (or any other subsequent manifestations that facilitated Rieu's translation).

On the other hand, Seamus Heaney's 'translation' of Beowulf, published in 1999 poses a categorical challenge. Scholars of translation studies (Bassnett, 2002 p.13; Chesterman, 2016 p.9) might rightly argue that Heaney's artistic intervention was so significant that this new edition should be considered an original work. However, from a library and information science perspective it can be argued that there is still a derivative relationship between an entirely new original translation and the work it is based on.

These classics are undoubtedly titles of great importance within UK culture (and beyond), however the significance of these works is already well-established and heavily studied. Therefore, the titles listed in [Table 20](#) were considered here but these works were not selected for more detailed qualitative analysis in later chapters.

The next section will discuss the group of titles published between 1900 and 1949.

1900-1949: The War Years

Table 21 Longsellers originally published in the 1900s to 1949s (sorted chronologically)

Title	Author	2015 Sales	NEPD	EEPD	Notes
Waste Land and Other Poems, The	Eliot, T. S.*	7,432	27/08/1995	1922	T3.1 Poetry Texts & Poetry Anthologies
Prophet, The	Gibran, Kahlil	3,167	12/04/1991	1923	T10.6 Spiritual Writers World bestselling poet. The non-dogmatic available to all faiths.
Mein Kampf	Hitler, Adolf	3,513	15/06/2006	1925	T5.4 Military History This controversial bestseller banned in many countries this text is sold within UK bookshops under the category of 'T5.4 Military History'
Testament of Youth	Brittain, Vera*	22,802 (+ 7192 29,994)	20/04/1978	1933	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military Autobiographic account of Brittain and living through the First World War. Film adaptation 2014, TV adaptation 1979. First published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. Sales comprise of two paperback editions one of which being a film tie in cover.
How to Win Friends and Influence People	Carnegie, Dale	28,251	31/03/1994	1936	T17.9 Popular Psychology One of the first bestselling self-help books ever published.
Homage to Catalonia	Orwell, George*	4,544	30/03/2000	1938	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military. Orwell's reflections on the Spanish Civil War
How to Stop Worrying and Start Living	Carnegie, Dale	6,278	03/01/1998	1948	T17.9 Popular Psychology Carnegie appears multiple time on list
Death of a Salesman	Miller, Arthur*	8,057		1949	(Stage play) T3.2 Drama Texts, Plays & Screenplays (a study guide on this play also features in the top-5000 chart. under T3.9T Literary Studies: Textbooks & Study Guides

*

**Named in the 1999 secondary school curriculum for English under 'Examples of non-fiction and non-literary texts'*

[Table 21](#) lists the eight longselling titles with EEPDs falling between 1901 and 1949. What can be said about these works? In contrast to the pre-1900 works, this cluster of titles are ‘of-their-time’ as opposed to being derived or translated from earlier works or classics.

There were no instances found of longsellers originally published between 1900 and 1921, thus the earliest work within this cluster is T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (first published in 1922 by Faber & Faber).⁹ *The Waste Land* is chronologically, followed by *The Prophet* by Gibran Kahlil, a book of poetry fables dealing with different elements of life and death. First published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1923, this world-bestselling title has a non-dogmatic style of spiritual writing and thus a broad appeal.

In terms of threads that connect the works thematically, four of the eight works either reflect on, or are in some way connected to the wars that shaped Europe over the first half of the twentieth century. *The Waste Land and Other Poems* and *Testament of Youth* are both a response to World War I (1914-1918) by Eliot and Brittain respectively; *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell’s response to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939); and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, a significant (if not the most significant) Nazi propaganda tool preceding World War II (1939-1945) and a work that was banned, or restricted access to, in Germany and many other countries. *Mein Kampf* is an interesting case as it initially appears in the 2001 top-5000 chart published by Penguin under the Pimlico imprint with all proceeds from the £25 paperback going to anti-discrimination charities (n.a., 2024). However, in 2008, the international Indian publisher Jaico Publishing House brought a cheaper £8.99 edition to the UK market. Jaico had seen a decade of strong sale of *Mein Kampf* in India

⁹. In addition to *The Waste Land* the 2015 Top 5000 non-fiction chart included other works by T. S. Eliot and related (descriptive/analytical) texts: *Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Waste Land* (2015); *The Poems of T. S. Eliot Volume I: Collected and Uncollected Poems* (2015); *Four Quartets* by T. S. Eliot (2015). These did not see significant sales across the fifteen-year period but it does highlight the value of related and subsidiary IP within publishing.

(Ahmed, 2010). By 2011, the Jaico edition had pushed the Pimlico edition out of the top-5000 chart.

It is common for publishers to commission titles and schedule frontlist publication dates to coincide with anniversaries and memorials of historic events. This was the case in 2014, which saw the centenary anniversary of the start of World War I. The marketing benefits of anniversaries are well-known: they cater to predictable interest in a topic, offer up tactical hooks for promotional activity, and allow book sales to be lifted by other related media scheduling (e.g. TV, radio and film). Significant memorial events also provide publishers and booksellers with a clear rationale for reviewing and refreshing backlist titles with new editions, covers, prefaces, and so on.

Of the four books on war within

1900-1949: The War Years

Table 21 Longsellers originally published in the 1900s to 1949s (sorted chronologically)

Title	Author	2015 Sales	NEPD	EEP	Notes
Waste Land and Other Poems, The	Eliot, T. S.*	7,432	27/08/1995	1922	T3.1 Poetry Texts & Poetry Anthologies
Prophet, The	Gibran, Kahlil	3,167	12/04/1991	1923	T10.6 Spiritual Writers World bestselling poet. The non-dogmatic available to all faiths.
Mein Kampf	Hitler, Adolf	3,513	15/06/2006	1925	T5.4 Military History This controversial bestseller banned in many countries this text is sold within UK bookshops under the category of 'T5.4 Military History'
Testament of Youth	Brittain, Vera*	22,802 (+ 7192 29,994)	20/04/1978	1933	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military Autobiographic account of Brittain and living through the First World War. Film adaptation 2014, TV adaptation 1979. First published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. Sales comprise of two paperback editions one of which being a film tie in cover.
How to Win Friends and Influence People	Carnegie, Dale	28,251	31/03/1994	1936	T17.9 Popular Psychology One of the first bestselling self-help books ever published.
Homage to Catalonia	Orwell, George*	4,544	30/03/2000	1938	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military. Orwell's reflections on the Spanish Civil War
How to Stop Worrying and Start Living	Carnegie, Dale	6,278	03/01/1998	1948	T17.9 Popular Psychology Carnegie appears multiple time on list
Death of a Salesman	Miller, Arthur*	8,057		1949	(Stage play) T3.2 Drama Texts, Plays & Screenplays (a study guide on this play also features in the top-5000 chart. under T3.9T Literary Studies: Textbooks & Study Guides

*

**Named in the 1999 secondary school curriculum for English under 'Examples of non-fiction and non-literary texts'*

, Vera Brittain's autobiography *Testament of Youth* is the oldest title within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] written by a female author and also the earliest work using a narrative (or creative) non-fiction writing style. *Testament of Youth* was first published in 1933 by Victor Gollancz Ltd, but the UK copyright is currently licensed by Virago (an imprint of Little, Brown owned by Hachette Livre). When sales of all the various paperback and hardback editions of *Testament of Youth* are combined between 2001 and 2015 the work sold just shy of 90,000 copies making it one of the bestselling and longest selling titles identified. In 2015, a film adaptation was released and Virago published a rejacketed tie-in edition of *Testament of Youth*. Book sales did see a dramatic spike coinciding with the film's launch.

Media attention in the form of a TV series on Brittain's life also gave *Testament of Youth* a boost in 2008. However, these results boosted by the TV and film tie-ins were exceptional, most years between 2001 and 2015 the sales ticked along at around 2000 units, just enough to keep it in the top-5000 charts. Something about this work was attracting consistent sales thus, it was selected as a case study and is explored further in [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#).

As previously mentioned in the section on author frequency, Dale Carnegie features twice in the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (first published in 1936) records some of the highest volume sales of all the identified longsellers making it arguably the most commercially successful longselling twentieth-century work of trade non-fiction. Carnegie's works *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) and *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (1948) are categorised under the T17.9 Popular Psychology product class. These are worth exploring in terms of post-war phenomena and also in terms of the evolution of 'self-improvement' as a commercial genre.

How to Win Friends and Influence People displayed notably high sales in 2015. Similar results are recorded between 2001 and 2015, across all editions a staggering 307,000 units of this work were sold in the UK alone, making it

quite possibly the most commercially successful longselling work published in the twentieth century. Carnegie is often cited as a founder of the self-help and business book genres, he is globally recognised as a bestselling author. Literature searches of scholarly databases return hundreds of articles prefixed with 'How to win friends and influence...' followed by 'policy', 'elections', 'industry', 'nations'. Demonstrating the book title itself is so embedded in common parlance that it has become a meme to be borrowed and recycled ad infinitum. However, for all this familiarity and flattery, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been focused on Dale Carnegie the man, (in comparison to many of the other authors within the longselling subset). Carnegie has a few short biographical entries in encyclopaedias, and on websites dedicated to his teachings, yet he does not appear to have an official biographer or be the subject of a long-form biography.

1950s: Lessons and Legacy

Table 22: Longsellers originally published in the 1950s (sorted chronologically)

Title	Author	2015 Sales	NEPD	EEPD	Notes
Story of Art, The	Gombrich, Sir Ernst H.	12,657 (7,393+ 2,657+ 2,607)	04/09/1995	1950	T1.1 Fine Arts / Art History Accessible illustrated introduction to art history
Right Way to Play Chess, The	Pritchard, David	2,528	17/11/1997	1950	T11.5 Hobbies, Pastimes & Indoor Games Accessible guide to chess for beginners
Diary of a Young Girl, The	Frank, Anne	8,481 (6,045+ 2,436)	27/03/1997	1952	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military First published in German in 1947. Probably the most well-known war diary written by a child.
Power of Positive Thinking, The	Peale, Dr Norman Vincent	2,300	29/05/1990	1952	T17.1 Careers & Success Self-help book providing anecdotal examples of the benefits of positive thinking underpinned by the Christian faith (Peale was a Dr of Theology and practising Pastor)
The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom	Rawicz, Slavomir	2,766	26/04/2007	1955	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military Autobiography detailing Rawicz' capture and imprisonment in a Russian gulag during WWII. Followed by his escape in 1941 and survival of the 4000 mile journey through Siberia, the Gobi desert Tibet and Himalaya's
My Family and Other Animals	Durrell, Gerald*	9,459	25/02/1999	1956	T4.0A Autobiography: General Autobiography about Durrell's childhood move to Corfu 1935-39. TV adaptations 1987 & 2016, film adaptation 2005
Crucible, The: A Play in Four Acts	Miller, Arthur*	8,244	24/02/2000	1956	T3.2 Drama Texts, Plays & Screenplays Stage play depicting the Salem witch trials
If This is a Man/The Truce	Levi, Primo	3,380	01/01/1988	1958 (1947 in Italian)	T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military Translated from Italian in 1958 by Giulio Einaudi
Cider with Rosie	Lee, Laurie*	11,003 (8,927+ 2,076)	03/09/1998	1959	T4.0A Autobiography: General Classified as biographical but also referred to in the paratext (bibliodata) as a novel, adapted for 1970s and 1990s TV series.

**Named in the 1999 secondary school curriculum for English under 'Examples of non-fiction and non-literary texts'*

[Table 22](#) presents longselling works originally published between 1950 and 1959. Of the nine titles, eight were authored by men, the only exception was *Diary of a Young Girl* (first published in English in 1952) by Anne Frank.

The American playwright Arthur Miller appears twice in the longselling subset [Dataset 2] as author of *The Crucible* (originally published in 1956) and *Death of a Salesman* (originally published in 1949). Both plays are loosely based on historical events (The Kennedy Centre, 2024) but it is questionable whether either would have been classified as ‘non-fiction’ had they been written as novels. Miller himself confesses he wrote the salesman ‘character’, Willy Loman, ‘as a person who embodies in him some of the most terrible conflicts running through the streets of America today’ (Miller cited by Roudané, 1987 p.31). *The Crucible* (1956) play depicts the Salem witch trials of 1692 and as such is *based on* historical events but also generally referred to as an allegory for the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era in which it was written (Poplin, 1962; p139-146). The inclusion of plays as ‘non-fiction’ raises an important categorical question about plays and whether the style, form and devices required of dramatisations (play, television series or film) are closer to historical fiction than non-fiction.

One of the most surprising titles to come out of this dataset is *The Right Way to Play Chess* (1950) by David Pritchard, a simple chess primer that was the only twentieth-century title categorised as *T11.5 Hobbies, Pastimes & Indoor Games* to feature in the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. It is seemingly unrivalled as *the* book to buy if one wants to learn chess. Thus, this title was selected as a case study in [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#).

Earlier in this chapter, [Figure 12 \(p.105\)](#) illustrates the popularity of the different product classes (categories) of trade non-fiction, and demonstrates that *T4 Autobiography and Biography* is consistently the most popular category between 2001-2015. The longsellers of the 1950s include four autobiographies: two works from this decade are categorised as *T4.2A Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military*, these are *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1952) and *The Long Walk* (Rawicz, 1955); both deal with the extreme conditions experienced

by European citizens during the WWII period, an often-studied topic on the British school, college (high school) and university curricula. A further two titles, *My Family and Other Animals* (Durrell, 1956) and *Cider with Rosie* (1959) are categorised as *T4.0A Autobiography: General*. These works both deal with the period between WWI and WWII and provide accounts of English family life (albeit transposed into a Greek island setting in the case of *My Family and Other Animals*) and childhood. Of these four autobiographical works the one depicting the least remarkable life events is *Cider with Rosie* and yet it records the highest volume sales, thus it stood out as a candidate for further investigation and is explored in more detail in [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#).

Anne Frank's account of her life in Amsterdam during WWII, hiding from the Nazis in a 'secret annex', is perhaps one of the most well-known accounts of the Holocaust and the most well-known child's war diary (Zapruder, 2002 p.2-12). *Diary of a Young Girl* has become the work with which all war diaries written by children are compared (Honeyman, 2011 p.73-86). In *Salvaged pages: young writers' diaries of the Holocaust* Zapruder (2002) discusses dozens more youth diaries written during the holocaust. However, Frank's writing was accomplished, and her voice resonated with American journalist Meyer Levin (Melnick, 1997 p.3-7, Zapruder, 2002 p.2-12), who having witnessed the atrocity of Auschwitz in the days following the end of WWII proactively sought an authentic voice 'to recount the story of the genocide of European Jewry. This teller had to be someone who had been there, who had endured the unimaginable, and who could thus form the words that the rest of the world might hear. (Zapruder, 2002 p.2)' Thus, Levin's self-conscious framing of Frank's diary (while seeking publication of the diary) was that it serve as a universal testament to the inhumanity of the holocaust (Melnick, 1997 p.4). To this end Levin was successful, *Diary of a Young Girl* is part of the corpus of war books adopted as canon, taught in schools and assimilated into the British (and global) collective memory of WWII (Zapruder, 2002 p.2-12).

However, when looking at children's writing on war more broadly it must be acknowledged that this framing of youth war diaries, as evidence of a pure,

uncorrupted, and universal 'truth' of war, can be problematic (Honeyman, 2011 p.73-86; Volochniuk and Markou, 2023). Scholars of WWI diaries have highlighted controversies arising from heterogeneity of experience and the role of the publishing function and education system in prioritising the narratives which shape the collective memory (Todman, 2005 p.157-160). This is a topic of collective memory is revisited in the case study of *Testament of Youth* (p.215).

1960s: Individualism and Introspection

Table 23: Longsellers originally published in the 1960s (sorted chronologically)

Title	Author	2015 Sales	NEPD	EEPD	Notes
A Grief Observed,	Lewis, C. S.	6,126 (3,082 +2,946)	19/07/1966	1961	T6.1 Christianity: General First published under the pseudonym N.W. Clark as Lewis by Faber & Faber. Inspired 1985 TV-movie Shadowlands, as well as a 1993 film of the same name.
Self Help for Your Nerves: Learn to Relax and Enjoy Life Again by Overcoming Stress and Fear	Weekes, Claire	2,771	08/05/1995	1962 (US 1965)	T17.9 Popular Psychology
Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships	Berne, Eric	6,577	02/05/2013	1966 (US 1964)	T17.9 Popular Psychology
Whitsun Weddings, The	Larkin, Philip*	3,106	11/09/1975	1964	T3.1 Poetry Texts & Poetry Anthologies
A Moveable Feast	Hemingway, Ernest*	5,672 (3,361 +2,311)	03/11/1994	1964	T4.5A Autobiography: Literary
In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences	Capote, Truman	11,060	03/02/2000	1966	T18.1 True Crime Vanguard of the true crime genre. Researched in part by Harper Lee. Film, TV, graphic novel & adaptations
Light on Yoga: The Definitive Guide to Yoga Practice	Iyengar, B. K. S.	2,441	02/04/2001	1966	T9.4 Fitness & Diet Considered a yoga bible. Iyengar was the founding father of modern yoga practiced and credited with disseminating yoga to the Anglophone world
I'm Ok, You're Ok	Harris, Thomas A.	2,158	05/01/2012	1967	T17.9 Popular Psychology
Chariots of the Gods?	Daniken, Erich von	2,418	27/05/1990	1968	T10.3 The Paranormal
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings	Angelou, Maya**	9,752	26/01/1984	1969	T4.5A Autobiography: Literary Autobiography of Angelou's life and racism in 1930s / 1940s. 1979 film adaptation

**Named in the 1999 secondary school curriculum for English under 'Examples of major poets after 1914'*

*** Named in the 1999 secondary school curriculum for English under 'Examples of drama, fiction and poetry by major writers from different cultures and traditions'*

Table 23 lists ten longselling titles first published in the 1960s. As with earlier decades, the majority of longselling titles from this decade were authored by men with the exception of Dr Claire Weekes' *Self Help for Your Nerves* (first published in 1962) and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (first published in 1969). Where the first half of the twentieth century provided longselling works born of the war years, national service and collective (traumatic) experience, longsellors of the 1960s are indicative of a shift towards individualism, introspection and self-identity via books on popular psychology, personal wellbeing, and self-help.

The drive towards self-determination is exemplified by Dr. Claire Weekes, an Australian scientist who retrained as a medical doctor (GP) in order to help soldiers returning from WWII. Unconvinced by the effectiveness of the prevailing Freudian schools of thought, Weekes developed her own method for treating patients with nervous disorders, the essence of which being that anxiety stems from fear, compounded by fear of fear (Hoare cited by Shute, 2019). In *Self Help for Your Nerves* (1962) Weekes (by this time in her late 50s) shared practical and proven techniques for reducing fear of fear and the accompanying anxiety. Prior to the publication of her self-help book, Weekes had a column in *The Sunday Sun* which she used to promote her fledgling travel-advice business (a side hustle that was quashed by the outbreak of WWII). Nevertheless, she had media connections and was experienced at self-promotion in the Australian and UK markets, which helped draw attention to *Self Help for Your Nerves* upon publication (Leckie, 2022 p.142-144). However, it was not until 1972, seven years after the US edition was released, that *Self Help for Your Nerves* reached the US bestseller list due to a critical mass of word-of-mouth recommendations and testimonies from many Vietnam War veterans (Hoare, 2019). Despite her medical and scientific qualifications, and despite the evidence that Weekes' self-help treatment was effective, the international psychiatric community gave little credit to Dr Weekes in her lifetime regarding her pioneering treatment (Shute, 2019). She challenged the systemic norms of psychiatric medicine in a number of ways: she was an Australian woman in a male-dominated field with a bias towards European

and American research paradigms; in addition, she had an unconventional career trajectory having come to medicine somewhat haphazardly later in life following a period as a travel writer and entrepreneur. These factors may have undermined her professional authority within the global medical community at the time, but not with the reading public who still to this day find value in her advice.

A common thread demonstrated by Weekes' and other longselling authors of the 1960s such as *The Games People Play* (Berne), *I'm Ok, You're Ok* (Harris, 1967) *Light on Yoga* (Ivengar, 1966), is the concept of self-determination. These works handover power and agency to individuals to understand internal psychology, confront their issues, take action, and change behaviours. Although *A Grief Observed* (Lewis, 1961) and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou, 1969) are not self-help or popular psychology titles like the titles listed above, both works are introspective and centre around the premise of confronting trauma, emotional pain and deal with existential questions in a profound and deeply personal manner.

Another point of note here is the prevalence of self-help works that are unlikely to have achieved longevity via school, college or university curricula. The exceptions are *Whitsun Weddings* (Larkin, 1964), *A Movable Feast*, (Hemmingway, 1964) *In Cold Blood* (Capote, 1966) and *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou, 1969) and possibly *A Grief Observed* (Lewis, 1961) at HE-level.

1970s: Celebrity Authors

Table 24: Longsellers originally published in the 1970s (sorted chronologically)

Title	Author	2015 Sales	NEPD	EEPD	Notes
Norton Anthology of Poetry, The	Various	3,351	25/02/2005	1970	T3.1 Poetry Texts & Poetry Anthologies
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West	Brown, Dee	3,931	03/01/1998	1970	T5.2 Regional History
World Atlas of Wine, The	Johnson, Hugh & Robinson, Jancis	3,298	07/10/2013	1971	T16.4 Wines
Rhyming Cockney Slang	No author	5,938	01/11/1971	1971	T13.0 Humour: Collections & General
Selfish Gene, The	Dawkins, Richard	10,480	16/03/2006	1976	T8.0 Popular Science
In Patagonia	Chatwin, Bruce	2,412	08/01/1999	1977	T8.5 Travel Writing
Delia's Complete Cookery Course:(v.1-3 in 1v)	Smith, Delia	9,141 (4,584 +2,504 +2,053)	05/03/1992	1978	T16.0 Food & Drink: General
Road Less Travelled, The	Peck, M. Scott	7,924 (4,272 +3,652)	15/03/1990	1978	T17.9 Popular Psychology

Table 24 lists eight longselling titles from the 1970s. Only one of these *Delia's Complete Cookery Course* (originally published in 1978) was written by a woman, although technically this is the original three volumes combined as one book.

In terms of notable trends, the longsellers of the 1970s are a bit of an eclectic mix however in this decade televisions became widespread in British households—with over 2.5m households owning a TV-set (Godhart, 2020)—and production companies brought leisure and lifestyle topics into daily programming. The impact of television media and its function in transforming authors into celebrities is visible in the examples below.

For thirty years, Delia Smith's titles, published under the BBC Books imprint, outsold all other celebrity cookbook upon publication. Smith dominated the top spot in cookery books with no other author's sales coming close until the early 2000s, when Jamie Oliver's TV show and books served up some stiff competition (Thomas, 1995; Nielsen 2024b). Smith began as a food writer in newsprint before her career as a TV cookery presenter took off with the BBC TV show *Family Fare* which first aired in 1973 (Cesiri, 2021 p.3011-313). *Delia's Complete Cookery Course* (three volumes) were unpretentious, and focused on the basics for and cooking for everyday occasions. They were accessible, both content wise and in that they were sold in British supermarkets where consumers were in the perfect mind-set for food inspiration.

Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson followed a similar trajectory; their writing on wine first appeared on the magazine stands and bookshelves laying the groundwork for TV opportunities (Robinson, 2024). In 1971, just ahead of the UK entering the European Economic Community (later the European Union) and the uncorking of European wine imports, *The World Atlas of Wine* was published (Correia et al, 2019). In 1984, Johnson and Robinson wrote and presented Channel 4's *The Wine Programme*, the first television show about wine, ensuring their names (and faces) would be associated with wine selection for decades to come.

In Patagonia (1977) by Bruce Chatwin was credited with bringing a fresh new structure to travel writing that was sensitive of other cultures (Greene cited by Lisle, p.107). The book was a bestseller and inspired many tourists to visit Patagonia. Chatwin was a charismatic person (Levy, 1997), who would have made a perfect TV travel presenter, yet he was never involved in an adaptation of *In Patagonia* (1977) himself. Chatwin died prematurely of AIDS in 1989 aged 48. However, the BBC did commission, and aired, a two-part documentary *In the Footsteps of Bruce Chatwin* in 2010 paying tribute to his life and the journeys detailed in his book. While the documentary provided an extra one-off spike of sales in 2010, it did not greatly impact the overall trend of steady sales year-on-year (Nielsen 2023).

The 1970's longseller with the highest sales in 2015, was *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins (originally published in 1976). The text provided a clear discussion of the new understanding of genetics in evolution. The continued sales are perhaps explained by the importance of evolutionary theory across scientific disciplines and thus its inclusion on many university curricula. In 1986, ten years after the first edition was published Dawkins published a new, revised edition of *The Selfish Gene* (2.ed 1986) and that same year presented a BBC Horizon documentary entitled *Nice Guys Finish First* expanding on the additional chapters. The BBC platform amplified Dawkins' profile as a scientific commentator (Cropper, 1986).

1980 to 2001 (relatively recent titles)

The longselling subset [Dataset 2] also contains relatively recent titles from the 1980s to 2001. There is not the space to consider all 122 works in tabular form here, however a few key titles are briefly highlighted below.

Significant longsellers of the 1980s include Alan Bennett's *Lady in the Van* (first published in 1989) which sold over 95,000 units in 2015, the same year as a feature film was released in UK cinemas. Even with the film release the sales are higher than typical for a play, but Bennett is listed on as an example of a suitable author for secondary school curricula so these two factors together (the film and the suitability for schools) might explain the sales spike. Other

titles from the 1980s indicative of the self-help category are Susan Jeffer's *Feel the Fear and do it Anyway* (first published in 1987) which sold 16,500 units in 2015. Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (first published in 1989) which sold 16,000 units in 2015, and Louise Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life* (first published in 1984) which sold 8,500 units in 2015.

Longsellers of the 1990s included *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson (first published in 1998 with 2015 sales of 17,000 units), and *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle (first published in 1997 with 2015 sales of 28,000 units). Here the high-volume sales of these two titles combined with almost two decades of sales history provides enough evidence to say these titles are exceptional. The Nielsen product classes relating to understanding and improving oneself (Popular Psychology, General Self-improvement, Careers & Success) and exploring one's spiritual and physical wellbeing (Mind Body Spirit, Alternative Therapies and Health) combined account for 18% of the crossover titles and 25% of the sales volume £260,000.

Another interesting title to highlight in the trade non-fiction crossover between the two years is *Lady in the Van* by Alan Bennett, which was first published as a book in 1990. This work only sold 2,100 units in 2001 and was in the bottom percentile of the top 4983rd of 5000 chart that year. However, by 2015, the aggregated sales of *Lady in the Van* totalled 113,500 units (across three editions) one of which ranked in the top percentile, 36th of 5000, for that year. Bennett's *Lady in the Van* was adapted for stage in 1999; for radio in 2009 when it was broadcast on BBC Radio 4; and as a film released in 2015. Thus, the increase volume in print sales correlates to the period when the work (previously defined as the product in all formats and editions) was publishing in multiple formats (book and play) and was experiencing success and critical acclaim in other mediums. In the 1990s, the time allowed for books to succeed (or fail) was driven by the sale-or-return window and so a revival of a product more than a few years after its first publication, is rare in lifecycle terms.

Conclusions to Part 2

The narrative form of non-fiction is found across the longselling subset [Dataset 2] via autobiographies, memoirs, and biographies in particular but not limited to these categories. Narrative form is visible within travel writing (Bryson); true crime (Capote's *In Cold Blood*). However, as discussed in this chapter the narrative form it is not the only stylistic form of writing that features in the list of longselling titles, there are also a large number of self-help books, beginning with *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Carnegie, first published in 1936) as well as more instructional guides such *The Right Way to Play Chess* (Pritchard first published in 1950).

The interrogation of the longselling subset also reveals some categories of non-fiction namely poetry and plays that stylistically span fiction and non-fiction. For example, *Our Country's Good* (1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker, offers an example of a work which appears within the longselling subset [Dataset 2] as a play (deemed non-fiction) but said play is an adaptation of a novel (deemed fiction) entitled *The Playmaker* (1987) by Thomas Kenneally.

Part 3: Qualitative research methods and findings

Chapter 5: Bookselling Landscape and Interview Methods

Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity

Chapter 7: Longselling Case Studies

Chapter 5: Bookshop Profiles & Interview Methods

A core aim of this research was to determine the factors that impact the time allowed for books to succeed or fail within the retail environment. Thus, the interviews summarised in *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity* explore the buying functions, promotional activity, merchandising and stock management processes common in UK bookselling. These very practical and logistical aspects of retailing, are brought to life by the qualitative data and discussed thematically. This chapter is a valuable component of the PhD thesis because understanding the typical book sales lifecycle and factors influencing sales opportunities is central to understanding the phenomenon of longselling works more broadly.

This chapter offers further context through the analysis and discussion of interviews carried out as part of the research. The sample predominantly focused on the book buyer function. A range of current and former booksellers were spoken to including representatives from Waterstones, Blackwell's, and Tate Galleries. The business structures and mechanisms that dictate book buying in the UK market are explored in terms of the time allowed for titles to succeed or fail. This research found that the sale-or-return purchasing model prevalent in the UK book trade plays a crucial role in dictating the window of opportunity for books to succeed or fail; the book-buyer gatekeeper function is pivotal and highly sensitive to local demand; and that local demand is fulfilled through the curation of predictable or proven products in combination with novel or speculative products - the level of purchasing risk is dependent on retail location and footfall. These findings are aligned with organisational buyer behaviour, retail location theory and buyer behaviour theory. It is this third research aim that is explored throughout this chapter.

5.1 Introduction to Interviews

This introductory section begins by outlining the rationale for interviewing, the process, the sample size and coverage outlining how and why the data was

collected. A short summary of UK book trade channels then follows, the purpose of which is to explain a little about the composition of the retail landscape in the UK, how it has changed over time and how the sampled bookshops and booksellers fit within the macro retail environment. This contextual information precedes *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity* in which the interview findings are discussed thematically.

5.2 Interview Aims & Methods

The interviews aimed to explore in qualitative terms how trade non-fiction titles are stocked, sold, or not sold within an increasingly competitive retail environment. The interviews provide insight into the day-to-day practicalities of how books reach the shelves of bookshops and for how long they remain there, they also interrogate the commercial, seasonal, and cultural factors that influence sales lifecycles and longevity. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a range of industry professionals with bookselling experience. For additional context a few publishers, and a literary agent were interviewed. Of particular interest in the discussions with interviewees were: the time allowed for titles to succeed and fail; drivers for promoting and repackaging backlist works; and the strategies used to manage backlist stock. The interviews, which each lasted around 60 minutes in length were recorded, transcribed and later coded manually using NVivo. The coding labels, known as nodes, were not predefined, rather they emerged from the data itself and the research objectives, namely the topics and themes most relevant to sales lifecycle and longevity.

A secondary aim of this portion of research was to act as a point of triangulation against the quantitative analysis of Nielsen BookScan sales data, both in terms of discussing the traits and merits of longselling titles that had already been identified, and also in terms of identifying titles that booksellers or publishers know to be evergreen longsellers. These conversations included some speculation around more recently published titles and their potential to become longsellers in the future.

A schedule of open-ended questions was designed to bring out the research topics in conversation and were altered slightly according to job title, the company size, or individual job function. The questions broadly covered:

- The interviewee's background and role
- The way stock is ordered/returned
- The way backlist titles are merchandised and sold
- The time allowed for titles to succeed or fail
- The impact of seasonality
- Specific examples of longselling titles

5.3 Sampling & Coverage

Booksellers

A range of participants were interviewed from within the UK book retail sector. The sampling targeted those with direct experience of the book buyer function, as the book buyer is generally responsible for selecting frontlist stock, planning national promotions and buying the necessary front- and backlist titles for those promotions. In addition, bookshop managers, responsible for merchandising and promoting titles at a local level, were interviewed.

The sample of seven included mostly career booksellers; five interviewees had current or prior experience of buying for national chains (three from Waterstones and two from Blackwell's), and four interviewees with current or prior experience of buying for small chains or single independent bookshops (Tate Galleries, Sam Read, Kew Books, Foyles).

List of Interviewees

With the exception of B06 all interviewees consented to being quoted directly and mentioned by name, B06 wished not to be named but consented to being 'identifiable' via reference to their roles and the stories that they told.

- B01: Simon Armstrong, Tate Galleries, Book Buyer and Founder of Armstrong Projects (offering editorial and creative services)

- B02: Sharon Murray, last role John Smith Regional Manager (former roles include Hammick's, Director of Customer Services; Blackwell's Head of Operations; Foyles General Manager; and Chair of the Booksellers' Association)
- B03: Will Smith, Sam Read, Bookseller
- B04: Scott Pack, Editor-at-Large Eye and Lightning Books (former roles include Commissioning Editor Harper Collins; Waterstones, Head Buyer; HMV Buyer)
- B05: Katharine Fry, Blackwell's, Buyer (former role Blackwell Bookshop Manager, Hull)
- B06: Anon. (referred to by the pseudonym 'Charlie Clark'), Waterstones, Scottish Buying Manager
- B07: Adam Hewson, Director of Hewson Books Ltd: The Kew Bookshop & Sheen Bookshop, London and also Head of Book Buying for The Royal Horticultural Society (former roles include Borders General Manager; Waterstones New Shop Opening Manager and Assistant Bookshop Manager)

Efforts were made to ensure the sample adequately reflected the UK market as a whole. Therefore, the geographic spread of interviewees in their current or prior roles covered: Hull, the Lake District, London, Oxford, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In addition to the booksellers, some interviews were conducted with UK publishers and an agent to provide general background and context. These included editors with direct experience acquiring, commissioning and managing trade non-fiction lists within large organisations such as Penguin Random House (Penguin Classics, Michael Joseph) as well as independent editors (Lightning Books). The agent's specialism was in heritage works managed by literary estates and this informed [section 8.5 Ownership and Oversight](#).

In terms of the limitations of this research, it is worth noting that data collected from these interviews are based on the individual knowledge and recollections

of ultimately a fairly small group of people. On reflection, there were some challenges identifying and securing interviews with a representative sample of booksellers, agents and publishers which mirrors the concentration of power and influence within the publishing communications circuit to a limited number of gatekeepers (Blake, 1999, p. 48-49; Waldfogel and Reimers, 2015). All the same, the sample was sufficient in size to offer up recurring themes and synergies when coding the discussions across all groups and contributes rich and valuable data to the mix of research methods. While a larger sample might have provided more specific details around the ways individual companies operate, or the way individual titles had performed, it was unlikely to reveal much more about the bookselling economic system in general terms or the factors influencing sales longevity of books. It is worth stating explicitly that some of the interviewees are personal friends or professional acquaintances to me as a former bookseller at Blackwell's, as lecturer in Publishing at Oxford Brookes University, and as a researcher at University of Stirling, I do not feel this raises any questions about the validity of the opinions shared during the interviews, however the sample was partly determined by my own personal reach and access.

5.4 UK Book Sales Channels

UK bookselling has already been discussed in earlier chapters, however this section briefly describes the environment, providing context to the interview data and sampling. It begins with an overview of the types of market channels, followed by a recap of the historical context, before providing a short description of the bookselling businesses sampled.

Figure 22 is taken with permission from *the Nielsen Books and the Consumer 2018* report (Bohme, 2019) it quantifies the market share according to retail channel and shows a number of points that are relevant to the research findings in terms of where consumers purchase books and how those decisions are made. Within the UK, books are sold through a number of channels which are broadly categorised by Nielsen and the UK Booksellers' Association (Bohme, 2019; BA 2020) as:

- large chain booksellers (e.g. WHSmith, Waterstones, Blackwell's, and John Smith's),
- independent bookshops and small chains (e.g. Tate Galleries, Hewson Books, Sam Read),
- internet-only retailers (e.g. Amazon),
- supermarkets (e.g. Tesco, Asda & Sainsbury's),
- other non-specialist retailers (e.g. garden centres, gift shops and retailers where books are not the main product range),
- and direct publisher-to-consumer sales.

Print book channels by sector (Volume, Jan-Nov 2018)

n

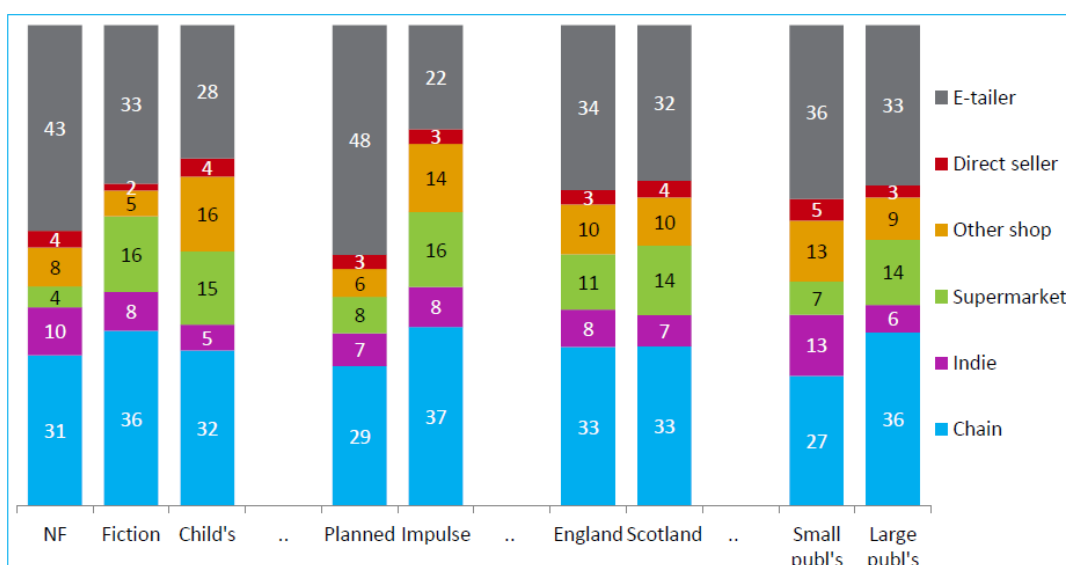


Figure 22: Bohme (2019) Nielsen Books and the Consumer 2018 – reproduced with permission

If Figure 22 is interpreted left to right, the leftmost columns indicates that a higher proportion of non-fiction titles are purchased online (43% of sales volume) than in high street chain (31%) or independent bookshops (10%) and that non-fiction as a category sees a higher proportion of sales made via e-retailers than the fiction or children's book category.

The next two columns along show the percentage of planned and impulse purchasing, here the chart indicates 48% of planned purchases are made with online retailers versus 29% via chains, and only 22% of sales made online are impulse purchases. This supports the assumption that customers who already

know what they want to buy, frequently do so online but also, that browsing and serendipitous discovery of books is much more likely in physical retail spaces than online.

Finally, the rightmost columns on the chart indicate that large publishers sell a higher percentage of their titles through chain retailers (36%) and supermarkets (14%) than online (33%). Conversely, when it comes to small and independent publishers the online sales channels are slightly more important than chains with 36% and 27% respectively. There are a number of factors that could contribute to this mix of sales channels for small publishers, but as discussed in chapter one long-tail economics allow for online retail catalogues to extend into millions of products, while chain retailers are restricted in terms of physical shelf space. Given these constraints, the question of how stock is selected and replenished by physical bookshops was explored during the interviews and some of the factors which influence these curatorial decisions around selection and prioritisation of stock are discussed in the bookseller findings section.

5.5 UK Bookshop Chains

Following on from the consideration of the retail channel mix within the UK market above, this next section provides an overview of the biggest physical bookselling chains in the UK so that the interview findings can be understood within the broader historical context.

In terms of the chain retailers, WHSmith has the largest number of stores, approximately 1,300 across the UK, many of which are located in transport hubs such as motorway services, railway stations and airports. Historically a newsagent, books only account for a portion of WHSmith sales, with the shops also stocking magazines, newspapers, stationery, games and confectionery. Similar to supermarkets, WHSmith focuses on the frontlist and does not hold a particularly wide range backlist titles if any at all (Fletcher, 2005; Thompson, 2012, pp. 54–58). It was for this reason that an interviewee with current experience at WHSmith was not sought.

Waterstones is the largest dedicated book retailer on the UK high street, with over 280 stores in the UK and Ireland holding a typical range of 30,000 consumer titles (Waterstones, 2020). It is this wide range of backlist **core stock** which places Waterstones at the centre of this enquiry into the mechanics of bookselling. The chain was privately founded by Tim Waterstone in 1982, but subsequently sold to WHSmith in 1993 and has changed ownership a number of times over the years; it was purchased by HMV Media Group in 1998 (a period explored during interviews with Scott Pack and Adam Hewson). In 2011, after periods of poor financial performance and pre-tax losses, Waterstones was bought by Russian oligarch, Alexander Mamut (Thompson, 2012, pp. 53–54). Under this ownership and the management of James Daunt, Waterstones was restructured into a more profitable business (Factiva, 2020), and in 2018 Mamut sold his majority stake to private equity firm Elliot Advisors (Campbell, 2018).

Blackwell's Bookshop is one of the next largest book retail chains in the UK, it was established in 1879, by Benjamin Henry Blackwell and is still privately owned by the Blackwell family (Blackwell's, 2019). Blackwell's Bookshop is part of a portfolio of international businesses centred around the academic publishing supply chain; in addition to the bookshops they operate Blackwell Book Services, a global library supply business¹⁰. At its peak in 2000, the Blackwell's Bookshop chain was 80 shops strong, however by 2010 this number had almost halved to 45, and in 2020 the Blackwell's chain had only 30 shops remaining (Dunnill, 2020). The decrease in store locations is indicative of the company's struggle to operate profitably (Wood, 2018). A number of factors including high rent for retail premise, and reduced spending by the core student market contributed to the closure of shops (Prescott, cited by Wood, 2018). However, the leaner business had turned a corner and in 2017 was seeing profits for the first time in a number of years.

¹⁰ Historically, there was also Blackwell Publishers, Blackwell Science and Swets Blackwell, specialising in academic books and journals, however all publishing operation were sold to John Wiley & Sons in 2007.

Up until the mid-90s, chain booksellers jointly held around 90% share of the market (Thompson 2012, p. 304); however the market has consolidated through mergers, chains such as Borders struggled to remain profitable, and the overall dominance of chain bookshops has been steadily eroded. In 2018, Nielsen's Books and the Consumer report indicated that chains only held 23% of the UK market by value (Bohme, 2019). This shift in the market has been attributed to a sequence of events, firstly the collapse of retail price maintenance via the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in the mid-1990s, which made heavy discounting and book promotions permissible and ubiquitous. This in turn opened up book retail to new entrants; the most significant being supermarkets which were able to deliver very high volume sales at low average selling prices - aka high discounts off the Recommended Retail Price (RRP). The dissolution of the NBA in the UK led to a period of substantial market growth, by volume and value, and the benefit to the book trade as a whole in terms of market growth is believed to outweigh the lowering of average price points.

Moving into the 2000s, chain and independent bookshops were left with fewer opportunities to profit on bestselling frontlist titles. The second key event that has eroded traditional booksellers' share of the market was the entrance of Amazon into the retail mix in 1995 and the e-retailer's increasing control of market share thereafter. The contemporary market share of retail channels is covered in more detail below, but as an indicative statistic, Nielsen reported that 53% of the trade consumer market was held by exclusively-online retailers in 2018 (Bohme, 2019). Although it is not possible for Nielsen to disclose the exact composition of the e-retailer panel (aka the companies supplying sales data to Nielsen) it is safe to assume that Amazon, are the largest exclusively-online retailer of books.

The combination of increased competition and lower average price points created a difficult retail environment for chain booksellers in the UK. Waterstones has undergone a number of different ownership structures, turning a profit for the first time in a decade in 2016 (Armitstead, 2017; Factiva, n.d.; Thompson, 2012, pp. 54–58). Blackwell's as a privately-owned

chain, was similarly short on profits but is supported, for better-or-worse, by its owner Toby Blackwell who has promised to handover ownership of the business to its employees in a cooperative structure (Finch, 2010). It is quite telling that when the UK Borders bookshop chain went into administration in early 2009, there was no competitor in the market either willing or able to buy the chain (BBC, 2009; Neilan, 2009; Thompson, 2012 p.55).

5.6 Bookshop Locations: Desirable, Atypical and Temporary Spaces

Given the importance of location, both in retail terms and the following interview discussion, it is worth noting that the initial bookshop locations in Waterstone's chain were chosen by Tim Waterstone specifically for their location, style and architectural character; the Reading Broad Street branch for example is a converted 19th century chapel (Thompson, 2012, p. 53; Waterstone, T 2019 p.184, 190, 192). Tim Waterstone always claimed he wanted to offer customers a bookshop experience substantially different to that which was offered by WHSmith, where he had previously been employed (Waterstone, 2019, pp.170–172). However, as the chain grew over the following four decades notably through the acquisition of other book retail chains Dillons, Ottakers, Books Etc and Foyles (Thompson, 2012, p.51-57, p.304) shop locations and quality of retail spaces were inherited, rather than strategically selected. Although many of the Waterstones bookshop locations are desirable retail spaces with continued high footfall, the epicentre of some high streets shopping centres have shifted over time as new retail spaces are developed. Over the years, both Waterstones and Blackwell's have experienced shifts in the high street and have either acquired or been left renting less desirable premises on the fringe of, or outside the shopping hub.

As discussed earlier, Waterstones is predominantly a high-street chain focusing on the general consumer market whereas Blackwell's is predominantly an academic bookseller. However, both chains do crossover between consumer and academic markets, and run some atypical bookshops. Waterstones for example, has the Gower Street (London) superstore which caters to the local university market and thus has a much wider selection of

academic titles than others in the chain. Also Blackwell's Broad Street (Oxford), Heffers (Cambridge) and Edinburgh South Bridge shops have a wider range of consumer titles than the typical university campus bookshops. Additionally, Blackwell's operates: a dedicated art and poster shop in Oxford; a rare books department in the Oxford Broad Street shop; as well as a large children's section at Heffers in Cambridge.

Some university campuses have such low sales beyond the start of the academic semesters that a permanent retail space is not warranted or sustainable. Thus, temporary 'pop-up' bookstalls appear to capitalise on the short-term peak in demand and are absent the rest of the time. Temporary book stands were also mentioned as common within the museum and galleries market. In interview, Simon Armstrong (2018) Buyer for Tate Museums & Galleries explained that publications linked to a specific exhibition must be made immediately available to visitors where they are. If the exhibition catalogue is not directly en-route when entering or exiting the exhibition space it is very unlikely that people will go out of their way to purchase a catalogue later on.

Having established the interview sampling, methods as well as the bookselling landscape within the UK, the next chapter present the interview findings.

Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity

6.1 Introduction

Having already considered some of the historical context for book retailing in the UK and the research methods employed, the body of this chapter provides an overview of the topics drawn out of the interviews with booksellers. Within the interviews, many of the booksellers shared their knowledge chronologically according to their own personal career history, however in the section that follows, those individual narratives have been interwoven into the thematic analysis as this made for a more logical and cohesive structure to present the findings.

One of the key observations arising from interviews with UK book retailers, and therefore the first theme to be discussed within this chapter, is where their organisations sit on a spectrum of curatorial risk; speculative or predictable purchasing decisions. This idea of a spectrum of risk is explained in detail below using interview data to illustrate the concept and this section is supported with reference to some secondary literature on organisational and consumer buyer behaviour. In short, a high volume of footfall passing through a retail space offers booksellers greater opportunity to experiment with a wider selection of unproven titles. Inseparable from the level of footfall (and impact on purchasing decisions) is the physical location of the bookshops and the mindset with which customers typically enter the space. These two factors – location of the bookshop and predictability of purchasing decisions – appear to be the most significant factors influencing the stock management methodology; ranging from manual curation and reordering, to algorithm-dictated ordering of core titles with automated replenishment. The second theme to be explored in this chapter is whether purchasing decisions are centralised or localised in nature. This section aims to explore the organisational philosophy – is the retailer a chain of branches with management and decision-making power held centrally? Or does a network of

individually managed bookshops benefit from some shared central management and scale of business, but with dispersed decision-making power? The third key point of discussion was the impact of the sale-or-return business model. Here, the standard economic terms and conditions of sale keep risk relatively low for booksellers, but rigidly dictate the window of opportunity for new titles to succeed or fail because unsold stock is sent back to the publisher. One element of the marketing mix that cannot be underestimated in terms of influencing book sales longevity is promotional activity, thus the fourth topic of discussion in this section considers the promotional and merchandising tactics employed by bookshops and whether they are applied to backlist and frontlist titles. The thematic discussion switches focus from the booksellers' perspective to explore the *customer* drivers, consumer buyer behaviour and seasonality of trade. Finally, the last theme to be discussed in this chapter is how commercial pressure and risk might impact a publisher's decision to keep highly-illustrated titles in print, and how a range of factors beyond consumer demand determine the sales lifecycle of these types of books.

6.2 Buyer Behaviour: Speculative or Proven and Predictable

Within the bookselling supply chain, and indeed most physical retail operations, there are two types of purchasing decisions taking place: those made by the business and those made by the customer. These are conceptualised within retail and marketing as **organisational buyer behaviour** and **consumer buyer behaviour** (Goworek and McGoldrick, 2015, p.110). Retail opportunities are generally considered to be the result of the product range being sold and demand within the local market (Clarke et al 1997).

Bookselling is a service industry and thus the buying function, which can consist of one person, or multiple persons known in marketing terms as the **decision-making unit**, is typically focused on ordering *complete* products such as books and stationery which are ready to sell-on to consumers, rather

than component parts for manufacture.¹¹ Books are supplied by publishers or wholesalers at a discounted price then marked up by the bookseller and resold at the Recommended Retail Price (RRP) usually printed somewhere on the book cover or jacket. Unlike supermarket retailing where one supplier of frozen peas can be undercut by another supplier offering more competitive prices; and unlike clothes retailers where a blue knit jumper can be outsourced to a different factory with cheaper overheads or value-engineered out of cheaper yarn; booksellers have limited capacity to substitute products, swap supplier or value-engineer the profitability of their stock. Therefore, book retailers must select and curate stock wisely to mitigate risk. The book-buyer's aim is to identify and order titles strategically in order to maximise profit, through the fulfilment of consumer needs or wants. Within bookselling, the buying function is necessarily dependent on, and highly-sensitive to, the type of customer that walks through their doors.

Drawn out of the interviews (see quotes below) came the observation that each bookshop's buying decisions could be described somewhere along a spectrum in terms of risk; at the one end sits proven and predictable products bought for a well-defined and segmented market with very clear wants and needs. These books might be backlist titles but could also be frontlist with a predictable appeal. At the other end of the spectrum are buying decisions that speculate on unproven products, which encompasses most of the frontlist (with the exception of new updated editions of previously successful titles and of course bestselling authors). I therefore propose the following diagram *Figure 23: Spectrum footfall vs purchasing strategy* as a way to illustrate the spectrum of footfall versus stock purchasing strategy.

¹¹ There are some roles within bookselling and stationery business dedicated to product development where component parts might first be purchased then assembled, customised or branded but these do not typically account for a significant portion of sales.

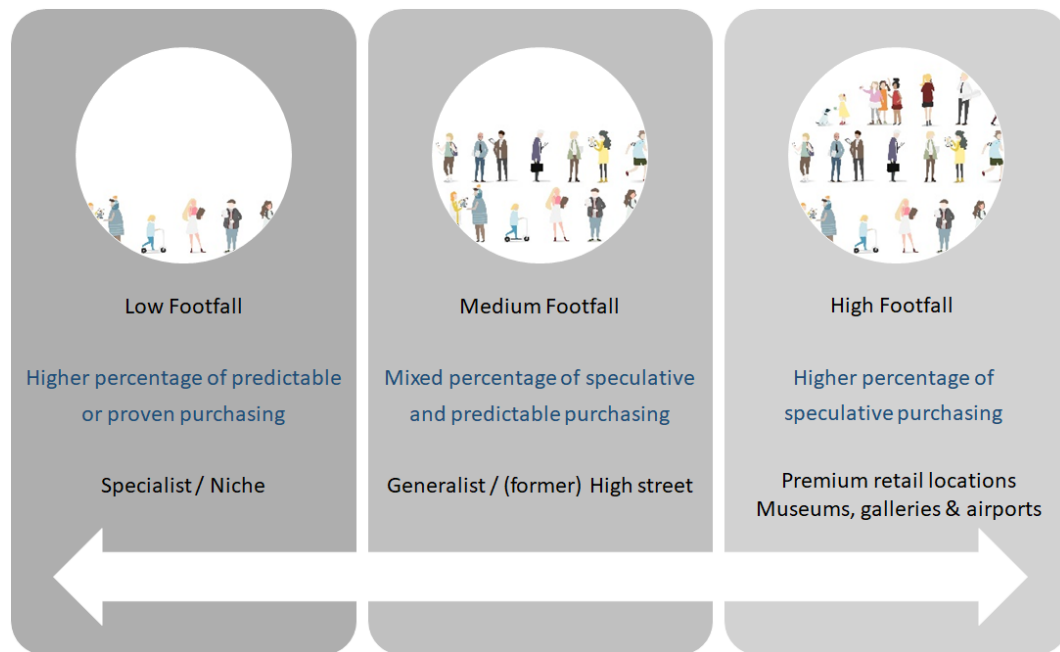


Figure 23: Spectrum footfall vs purchasing strategy (Source: Markou, 2023)

The interview sample can be used to illustrate this further, on one end of the spectrum of purchasing types, sit museum and gallery bookshops, where customer footfall is driven by visits to the art space as part of a cultural experience. Visitors' motivations to purchase items of course vary but can be broadly described as souvenir-, educational-, or gift-buying. Generally speaking, visitors buy books on impulse driven by want, as opposed to need. Where this purchasing style is combined with very high footfall, as is the case with the Tate Galleries (Armstrong 2018, Hughes, 2019), there is the opportunity for retailers to take risks on stock and offer customers a regularly updated supply of new and different frontlist titles.



Figure 24: Turbine Hall Shop Tate Modern © Rikard Österlund (reproduced with permission)

In interview, Simon Armstrong (2018), Buyer for Tate Galleries' four bookshops estimated that they speculate on approximately 5,000 new frontlist titles per year. There is no automated ordering in place, meaning new titles are all reviewed and hand-curated by Armstrong, only feasible because of the small size of retail space he is buying for. The Tate shops have space to display roughly 2,500 titles at any given time (see [Figure 24](#)). To put this in perspective a large high-street bookshop typically stocks 30,000 titles and a flagship store could hold in excess of 60,000 titles. Thanks to high footfall (millions per year), the stock-turnover rate at the Tate's shops is rapid; when a title's sales take off, the shops can easily sell 20,000 - 30,000 units. By most measures, these sales volumes alone would launch a title into the bestseller charts. However, not every new title ordered is going to be successful, thus to limit the risk of unsold or unsellable stock, the quantity of copies are kept to a minimum and reordered on a daily basis, keeping stock holdings low.

Publishers have begun to commission or develop books specifically for the museum and gallery market. One would be wrong to presume that the most lucrative opportunities lie in highly-illustrated exhibition catalogues or art monographs as these are expensive to produce. Instead publishers are

increasingly focusing their energies on repackaging classic books (think Penguin paperbacks) for the gift, souvenir, and children's markets; or books that hold current socio-political and cultural interest. Armstrong (2018) referred to these books of the moment as the 'sparks' which inspire art to be created.

On the other end of the purchasing spectrum are academic campus bookshops whose customers are motivated to buy through a very predictable need for the titles on their reading lists or around the disciplines that are studied by the highest number of students.



Figure 25: Blackwell's Campus Bookshop at Oxford Brookes University

With some notable exceptions (mentioned earlier), campus bookshops tend to be outside of the town centre, compact in size as illustrated by *Figure 25: Blackwell's Campus Bookshop at Oxford Brookes University* and their core customer base visits seasonally according to the academic year. In this environment, there is very limited opportunity to sell customers additional titles as impulse purchases as Murray explained:

[W]e wouldn't speculatively stock anything particularly on a campus bookshop because... that's not true, there was *very little* that we would speculatively stock but we might actually buy into a range of books like OUP's Very Short Introductions that are good for everybody. You do 3-for-2 on them and market them like any other generic book.

Katherine Fry (2019), buyer for the academic bookselling chain Blackwell's, confessed some surprise when she investigated the ratio of frontlist to backlist orders placed with their biggest suppliers. The split for the more trade-focused publishers is 50:50, but the highest proportion of backlist to frontlist titles that Blackwell's tend to order is 60:40.

If bookshops are positioned according to purchasing styles, accepting that each retail location is unique due to its location and size, the generalist high street book retailer (chain or independent) might sit somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Here in the middle-ground, is arguably where most bookshops sit, and for these businesses a balance must be found between the backlist and the frontlist to ensure that there is a sufficient range of stock to appeal to customers' planned and impulse purchases.

Interviewee Adam Hewson has gone through the processes of stocking newly acquired bookshops at a small, medium and large scale providing him with very clear views on stock-purchasing strategy for the typical generalist bookshop. Hewson has a background in chain bookselling at Waterstones, Borders and Books Etc but is now the owner of a small independent bookshop chain in London as well as a Buyer for the RHS bookshops. In interview, he expressed concerns about adopting too high a proportion of speculative titles (front- and mid-list) in a bookshop at the expense of the backlist. His bookselling experience has taught him that customers walk through the door expecting a core selection of backlist titles to be held in-store. If an expected title is not immediately available, customers can easily turn to online retailers, such as Amazon, to order it. Hewson believes that there is no reason to give away these 'potential sales to online rivals' and further stressed the importance of holding a good balance between backlist and frontlist stock. In his opinion, booksellers can still take some chances on debut novels and mid-list authors when it is a book they feel passionate about, or know will appeal to their customer demographic, or will receive a lot of positive reviews and media attention.

There's a reason why we pick those books, and the reason isn't just that they're new. [...] It's interesting, but *the* big message when I took over the

shops was to get in the books that the customers actually expected (Hewson, 2019).

Hewson's philosophy is underpinned by his experience opening stores for Waterstones in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Waterstones' strategy was to populate new bookshops with 60-75% core backlist stock and the remaining 25-40% with frontlist and local interest. This served a number of purposes. It minimised risk in the buying function by restricting the decision-making process to a limited number of people (perhaps ultimately even one person), and it freed up store managers' time. It ensured the same list of titles were ordered across the chain, maximising the order volume per title and in turn the collective purchasing power of Waterstones. Whether a shop held as little as 25% or as much as 40% of frontlist and local interest stock depended on the local customer demographic, levels of footfall, and how likely customers were to browse and purchase on impulse.

In terms of the purchasing strategies adopted by Waterstones chains today, Charlie Clark has a wide remit that covers selection and buying of new frontlist titles as well as management of core stock backlist for the 26 Waterstones bookshops located in Scotland. She therefore has a strong influence over the titles curated for, and promoted to, the Scottish book market within the Waterstones chain. This gives her a comprehensive knowledge of the output from Scottish publishers, therefore she also has a role in highlighting and promoting titles with strong UK-wide potential to the rest of the chain. In addition to buying, Clark is responsible for events management in Scotland, from author events to reading groups. She described core stock selection as slow and methodical, and frontlist selection as fast-paced and requiring very different skills. At Waterstones the frontlist selection process works on a rolling nine-month deadline. Scottish publishers are invited to submit the Advanced Information (AI) sheets for titles due to be published, Clark reviews them and places orders according to how many she believes each shop will stock. Within this decision is an acute awareness of the shop layout and knowledge of how big the sections are, and whether it will be displayed in multiple places (window, table, section). Clark stressed the buying process

undertaken by her colleagues in England is essentially the same as the one she adopts, namely they review new titles often months in advance, select those desirable for the chain and forward that list to regional buyers, like Clark, to adjust according to local considerations.

6.3 Centralised or Localised Stock Provision

All interviewed booksellers mentioned the importance of local curation of stock. For independents and small chains, the ability to know and respond to local market demands and seasonality is an obvious strength, and their position suggests that they have a curatorial advantage over larger, less agile, chain booksellers. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Clark, the interview data suggests that local buying is *as* important for national chain booksellers, as it is for the small chains and independent.

Up until 2019 when these interviews were undertaken, Waterstones was primarily still using an evolution of the centralised core stock model implemented by Hewson (2019) in the late 1980s. This stock model, known internally as ‘range’, prescribes a list of core stock for their typical high street bookshops across the UK and Northern Ireland (Clark, 2019; Pack, 2018). As previously outlined, this centrally determined core stock range is supplemented with locally relevant titles. In practice, this means that each store is expected to hold a minimum number of copies of each core title, when a copy is sold it initiates a call to replenish the stock automatically. However, as demonstrated by Clark’s role, Waterstones’ core range is not entirely centralised nor controlled by automation, it is edited on a month-by-month basis by regional buyers who assess the local buying and promotional needs.

Clark (2019) was keen to stress the importance of this human intervention and the need for well-read booksellers; no matter how sophisticated the algorithm there are always connections that only a (well-read) human could make between author, book, bookshop, location and the real- or imagined places described within books.

Academic booksellers Blackwell’s use a local core stock model ordering the books known to be relevant to a particular university market (Fry, 2019). This

is a labour intensive process requiring the campus bookshops to obtain and collate reading lists from the academics within the institutions they serve, prior to the start of the academic year (Murray, 2018). Katherine Fry is Buyer for Blackwell's with experience of bookselling and shop management for the chain. In terms of Blackwell's process, Fry explained that she becomes aware of new titles 4-6 months ahead of their publication date, the shop managers would only see them slightly later at 3 months ahead of publication. The batch window for returns opens three months after titles arrive in store, so as explained in more detail below, this window becomes the artificial deadline for books to succeed. At Blackwell's, the buying team review all book sales from the past twelve months prior to Christmas promotions. If a particular title *was* doing well for one or more of the stores, there is an opportunity for titles published in the first half of the year to get reordered as part of that promotion. Fry observed that in reality this is still often bookseller driven: these titles will have been championed and hand-sold in order to get noticed. She also commented on how the selection is relative to each subject category; for example, if there were few new titles published within a subject category in a given year, then the best title to promote might be one with a high price point that sold in modest quantities earlier in the year. The higher priced titles offers better profit margin and therefore a store can potentially make more gross profit by selling a few dozen copies of a book priced at £26.99 than they might from selling a hundred copies of a book priced at £8.99. This selection process, therefore relates to the deflation and price elasticity explained in [Chapter 4 \(p.108\)](#). Where consumers will tolerate a higher price point for a book, it is of course good business sense to promote higher priced books with better margins, nevertheless consumer trends in book buying suggest they are very sensitive to price.

Each academic bookshop's local core stock is necessarily specific to the educational institution that it caters to. However, Fry indicated that there is an iterative exchange of title data shared between bookshops because a known risk of localised ordering (for a chain book retailer) is that a title might fall

through the gaps, and not be reordered, resulting in ongoing lost sales that are invisible.

6.4 Sale-or-Return

The standard sale-or-return agreement between bookseller and publisher serves a number of purposes. It allows unsold obsolete stock to be removed from the retailers' shelves so that there is space available to replenish the shop with new stock. New stock, in this sense, might not necessarily mean recently published frontlist titles, but it could also mean backlist 'core' titles known to sell well.

An example of obsolete stock is having multiple copies of the same novel in hardback and paperback formats that are not selling months after publication (Pack 2018). Another example is an old edition of a title that has been superseded by a newer, revised, or repacked edition (Winder 2019).

A number of the booksellers interviewed commented on shelf space being a primary negotiating point for their dealings with publishers (Smith 2018, Pack 2018, Hewson 2019). Publishers want the latest titles to be ordered and given bookshop space and might be incentivised to accept 'old' books that had missed the returns window in exchange for new stock orders.

6.5 Window of Opportunity

The typical returns window for booksellers is between three and twelve months, while for larger bookselling chains, such as Waterstones, it can be extended to as long as eighteen months (given special circumstances). Many of the interviewed booksellers (Armstrong 2018, Fry 2019, Hewson 2019, Murray 2018, Pack 2018) identified the returns window as *the* mechanism which dictates how long new titles are given to succeed or fail. Ordinarily, surplus stock cannot be returned until at least three months after it was ordered (an exception to this being stock ordered in bulk for large-scale promotions such as Waterstones 3-for-2s). Thus, this is the minimum amount of time allowed for a title to succeed, as described by Fry:

It's very simple, I would say, the initial time a book is given to succeed, because you've got three months until the batch window opens and

therefore that is when you can return it. And so that effectively creates that artificial [deadline] if it hasn't started shifting by then you are probably going to [return it], because you've got the next thing coming through. That's when it's going to go back, or at least that's when it's going to come out of front-of-shop, or be reduced that [single] copy on the shelf if it hasn't done anything. (Fry 2019)

For all bookshops, even the biggest flagship stores, the positioning and merchandising of stock is a constant process. It is common to display the newest frontlist titles prominently in shop windows, front-of-shop, or on display tables. Newly published books do not occupy these prime locations for very long, as they must make way for the arrival of the new stock. In the case of small independent bookshop Sam Read, the 'new titles' window display is the only space available to hold frontlist stock. It cannot later migrate to a less prominent position at the back of the shop and linger there for a little while before being returned, because in the case of a small bookshop there is no unoccupied shelf space available (Smith, 2018).

In the following interview quote, Blackwell's buyer (Fry 2019) discussed how the relegated titles might not get immediately returned but they would certainly be re-shelved within their subject category or genre, displayed spine out to take up less space. The opportunity for these books to be discovered and 'succeed' in commercial terms lessens, yet there are still some second chances for titles to be actively promoted. Though, this is dependent on the booksellers proactively getting behind it, as noted by Fry:

Coming up to Christmas and our roundups, we then do a review of all the publishing throughout the year to then see, well hang on it didn't do anything at that point, but then it just bubbled away, and/or a bookseller got hold of it and championed it at that point. So there are later opportunities, but I think at that point it is very much bookseller driven, and it needs someone's passion behind it to hand-sell it to actually then get it back up again (Fry, 2019).

Fry went on to explain that at Blackwell's, hand-selling refers to a number of merchandising techniques both in store, on the website, and via email marketing campaigns. In addition to physically positioning the book where it is more likely to be seen (cover-out), shelf-talkers (recommendation notes from staff) are positioned on or in-front of the book to draw attention to it.

Bookseller recommendations even develop a following as customers learn to trust the taste of the named booksellers.

A challenge for the chain bookseller is to replicate local hand-sold success across the chain. This is partly to do with internal communications: success stories must be written up and shared routinely, but beyond that, it is difficult to transplant authentic passion for a title from one bookseller to another. Sales tactics can be employed; highlighting sales in one location and setting targets for others.

Clark (2019) provided a useful example of how she curated stock to support an upcoming historical crime fiction series set in Edinburgh, the first of which, *The Way of All Flesh*, was published by Canongate in 2018. She explains her process below:

I've looked at our core stock sale and picked out the true crime titles that we think has appeal to our customers over others that haven't dated too much. Because true crime is very much... it comes in, it sells very well, and it goes away again. But I've picked out some really key perennials, I've look at it by location. I've looked at the non-fiction and then I've looked at fiction titles that are based on true crime cases. An example, is the *Secret Life and Curious Death of Miss Jean Milne*, [2015] which is written by Andrew Nicoll. [...] It's set on a true case from Broughty Ferry, in Dundee. He's fictionalized that [the place], then he's used the true crime, the actual case, but sort of made up the ending because the case was never solved.

And so you have to know your books. You need to know what you're selling. And you absolutely need to be able to make those kinds of decisions to buy the books (Clark, 2019).

The Way of All Flesh, written under the pen name Ambrose Parry, was the first in a new series of historic crime novels to be published by Canongate, written by Marisa Haetzman and bestselling author Chris Brookmyre. The novel had been in the media trade news because TV adaptation rights had already been sold to Benedict Cumberbatch's production company SunnyMarch (Onwuemezi, 2018). Clark demonstrates a number of intelligence skills via this example which offer competitive advantage to the human curator over AI; firstly connecting debut author 'Ambrose Parry' to the established and bestselling crime author Chris Brookmyre; secondly by anticipating the potential future success of a TV series connected to Cumberbatch; and thirdly by identifying other historic crime titles with a Scottish setting (even when

those settings have been fictionalised) for the purposes of cross-selling. Given a little time and sales data, there might be some correlation between customers who buy Chris Brookmyre's titles and customers who buy Ambrose Parry titles, so the first of these three advantages could potentially be learnt by an algorithm. However, it is unlikely that artificial intelligence could preempt strong book sales on the basis of future TV adaptations or make connections between real and fictional locations. Thus, it is Clark's ability to pre-empt and anticipate the customers' wants early, while the initial window of opportunity to maximise sales is open, that offers advantage.

Although time given for a title to succeed or fail might seem like the same thing, Pack (2019) provided a neat example of a *big book* that failed fast. Prior to its publication, Edwina Currie's *Diaries 1987 – 1992* (2002) was sold-in to Waterstones by Little, Brown in large quantities. The publisher knew that the autobiography revealed an affair between Currie and John Major and was lined-up to receive a lot of PR and media attention. On paper, this book had all the ingredients of a strong seller: politics, sex, a high-profile author, extensive media coverage and public visibility, and Waterstones had placed a large order on promotional terms (meaning stock could be returned at any time). From day one it did not sell well, by the end of the second week Pack knew it was never going to sell in the quantities that had been forecast. Even considering the media coverage it had received and the promotional push that Waterstones had already given the book, it was taken out of the promotion and returned to the publisher.

Similarly, the metrics used to measure success and failure vary according to the retailer. Armstrong explained that the Tate gift shops might very well take things off the shelf much sooner than the 3 month returns window if the production quality was not as good as expected or the title was not selling as well as they hoped. To put this in context, if Waterstones was selling ten copies of a title per day, across the majority of its 400 retail outlets, then the title in question would almost certainly feature in the bestseller charts.

In the preceding sections, the organisational buyer behaviour arising from the bookseller interviews has been explored along with strategies for stock selection, and whether these decisions are made centrally, locally, and adopted across retail chains. From this it is apparent that in order for a new frontlist title to be considered within the standard buying process, marketing information must be supplied 6-9 months ahead of publication for buyers to evaluate. There was consensus across participants that once an order was placed, the returns window served as the mechanism which dictates the time allowed for titles to succeed or fail. Although never explicitly mentioned, it is evident that any title which becomes successfully embedded within Waterstones' nationally adopted core stock list (or indeed within any bookshops core stock) will then be given guaranteed shelf space, and in turn a higher chance of sales than titles which do not make it onto core stock lists. It is my hypothesis that the adoption of *The Right Way to Play Chess* (see earlier case study), into Waterstones core stock is the primary reasons for its position in the top 5000 chart, if a customer walks into Waterstones looking for an introductory book on chess then this is *the* book that customer will find on the shelf, and thus the one they buy.

Fry's observation about the sales performance being relative to the other books within a section for a given time period is also particularly important. Each bookshop section will have an expected rate of stock turnover, some categories of books always sell less rapidly than others, but few generalist bookshops can afford to only stock fastselling titles without falling short of basic customer expectations.

Following on from this, the next section will outline the interview discussions which elaborate further on catering to consumer demand and how this changes cyclically throughout the year.

6.6 Customer Drivers, Location and Seasonality

Consumer behaviour theory tells us that purchasing decisions are driven by either utilitarian need or hedonistic want (Bunyard, 2020). High-street bookselling continually faces competition from online retailers like Amazon

and its subsidiaries, such as ABEbooks, The Book Depository and Audible. Each year, e-retail channels increase their market share at the expense of traditional retailers reliant on physical footfall (Bohme, 2019). Should a customer know in advance that they want a title, or a list of titles, then there is a financial motivator to shop around for the best price online. Beyond this, ecommerce offers consumers immediate gratification and convenience: they can find and purchase a desired title at the exact moment their want, or need, arises. As a result, many potential customers need never set foot in a physical bookshop. How do high-street retailers mitigate against this and get customers through their doors?

The interview data indicates that one area where physical bookshops are able to best compete with online retailers is when customers are entering the space as part of a leisure experience or cultural activity; this is certainly the case with the Tate Galleries mentioned above. As a small independent bookshop situated in the Lake District, Sam Read also sees a high volume of tourist and holiday-maker footfall (Smith 2018). Kew Books bookshop, located close to Kew Gardens, benefits from both local and tourist footfall (Hewson, 2019).

Waterstones buyer for Scotland, Clark (2019), explained there are titles that are published very specifically with a Scottish target market in mind, such as tourist guides, local history, and sports but also there are titles (and gift products) that have UK wide potential. In her buying role Clark is keen to look out for books written by any author with some Scottish character, setting or connection; or a new title by an author whose previous title was connected to Scotland and therefore had a strong sales history in the Scottish market; or an author who is considered a 'Scottish national treasure'. This requires a deep understanding of the customer in Scotland (not always Scottish) and what they might be interested in purchasing. Clark describes how tourism and seasonality dictates her buying workflow for the 26 shops in the Scottish region:

For me as a buyer, I have to be very clear about the markets I look after... from autumn right through to Christmas it's gifting, that's where I see the biggest sales. Then the other side of that is the tourist market, which starts

around the time of the Easter holidays, depending on when it falls right through to August. So they are the two key kinds of markets I'm thinking about and trying to understand what books these people, our customers, are looking for (Clark, 2019).

Beyond this, a deep knowledge of books and sense of place came out of the conversations with booksellers. Clark (2019) stressed there is a need to understand links between authors, book, place and customer:

Let's say the 14th book in the Bob Skinner series, [...] is set in Dundee, but two thirds of the book and the action takes place in Kirkcaldy, which is North of Edinburgh. So, for example, if a shop in Fife, wants to do a local crime fiction display, they can identify the book [...] either through the author, or because of where the book is set, and so on (Clark, 2019).



Figure 26: Google map of Kirkcaldy within Fife and surrounding area.

It is examples such as this, which Clark used to support her assertion that human intelligence was absolutely necessary beyond algorithmic and default stock ordering.

Seasonality of books sales according to genre and location is an area for potential future research as it offers commercial relevance as well insight into local market preferences.

6.7 Promotions

Promotional activity is an important part of the marketing mix and one way that retailers can increase interest in front- and backlist titles simultaneously.

The pairing of backlist with frontlist, classic with contemporary, familiar with novel (and potentially lesser-known), is a strategy mentioned by many of the booksellers interviewed and promotions are often repeated to coincide with seasonal hook: 'New Year, New You', Valentine's Day, Summer Reads, Back-to-School, Christmas Gifts (to name but a few). It is worth delving briefly into retail history to provide further context here, In *Bestseller: Popular fiction since the 1900s*, Bloom (2008 p.20) claims that 'In 2005, it was Scott Pack and his purchasing team that determined the shape of the purchases of the book-buying public and dictated what could and could not profitably be published'. In interview, Scott Pack elaborated on his role at this time when he was sent in from HMV Group (the UK music and video retail chain) as it bought Waterstones to look at the way they bought in stock for promotions.



Figure 27: Waterstones 3-for-2 Promotional Display

Pack was responsible for trialling and rolling out 3-for-2 title promotions as a large-scale permanent offering, because this was the way music (CD) and video (DVD/Blu-ray) promotions were run at HMV. In a 3-for-2 promotion, book sales need to be proportionally higher by volume to make up for the 33% discount that was being given, and Pack (2018) confessed that they were

initially unsure whether this was going to be a financially successful strategy for books:

When I arrived, there was a small central buying team and they would do promotions where they would pick, let's say, 30 books for a 3-for-2. And that [strategy] was what I was sent to look at, because HMV ha[d] five hundred DVDs in a promotion, or a thousand CDs, and Waterstones ha[d] 30 books. Was that the right thing for [Waterstones], or would they make a lot more money if they had 300 books in a campaign, so that was the basic principle. When I started my job was to try out a couple of larger campaigns. Unsurprisingly, they made a lot more money for the business. So that sort of changed the way the business approached promotional buying (Pack, 2018).

Therefore, stock was purchased by Waterstones under separate terms to normal sale-or-return agreements and in exchange for ordering high volumes, Waterstones demanded a better trade discount (to allow for margin to be made on the promoted titles). Additionally, the returns window was removed and surplus stock could be returned at any time if it failed to sell through the 3-for-2. Thus, these promotions were a high-risk/high-reward strategy for publishers.

Blackwell's have backlist promotions regularly, and while some publishers support this (via increased discount), others believe the backlist will sell itself and instead only focus investment on the frontlist.

Armstrong (2018) spoke of positioning classic bestselling titles in front of customers at queue and till points to generate even greater sales than if they were somewhere less prominent. Here the bookseller's role is to remind browsing customers to buy 'books they have always meant to read but never got around to'. These backlist titles sell in such significant quantities that they allow for risk and a range of new titles to be stocked. Similarly, Fry (2019) offered up *Watching the English* (2004) by Kate Fox as an example that will sell well if placed cover-out on a promotions table, but not at all if returned to its usual section with only the spine visible. This demonstrates that it is not enough to merely carry a range of desirable titles in stock. Instead, retailers can, and do, carefully curate, promote and position stock within the physical retail space to maximise the sales potential.

Independently, both Pack and Murray mentioned that a successful 3-for-2 campaign will draw readers in with trusted titles they have heard of before, accompanied by a smaller selection of titles that are unknown to them but might be willing to take a chance on. The psychological rationale underlying this purchasing decision being 'I know these books to be good, so I'll trust your judgement with these other books that are unknown to me'.

6.8 Shift to Firm Sale

In 2018, Waterstones Managing Director James Daunt indicated he wanted to change the status quo; move away from sale-or-returns and shift to firm sale only (Cowdrey, 2018). When interviewed as part of this research Pack (2018) speculated that this move by Daunt was likely a bid to negotiate high margin discounts from publishers. Margin is something the bookselling chain could certainly use to improve profitability and gain competitive advantage. Beyond this, the sale-or-returns process is time-consuming, wasteful and ergo costly to both bookseller and publisher (in terms of labour, spoilage, and shipping). Shifting to firm sale, or dramatically limiting the amount of returned stock has clear benefits, but would potentially reduce the organisational buyers' appetite for risk; there would be no safety net for purchasing mistakes and less of an incentive to take chances on new titles.

Pack also observed that the music industry worked on a 6% rule, in that they could return up to 6% of stock purchased in a 12-month period. This led to a tight control on stock purchasing and rapid processing of the stock to be returned. In contrast, in the book industry there is the potential to return 100% of stock providing it is within the returns window. He noted that in practice this resulted in a more relaxed approach to returns (by bookselling staff in comparison to HMV staff) and slower processing times, often leading to missing the returns window altogether. He went even further to assert that the book and music industry retail processes were a product of the respective returns systems. [100% sale-or-return vs 6% returns respectively]. Pack (2018) recalled that in 1998, shortly after HMV bought Waterstones they valued the obsolete stock for all of HMV Group to be £150,000 and at

Waterstones it was £2m, almost 1% of the £300m that HMV paid EMI for the chain.

Risk [for bookseller vs publisher]

So far in this chapter, there has been some discussion of the factors driving investment in stock, the financial risk and potential rewards for booksellers when they choose to order a title. As noted within Bhaskar's theory of publishing (see *Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory*, there is of course, greater financial risk being undertaken by the publishing company when it invests in a new work. Even in the long-tail economy, there are commercial and legal incentives to sell-out of inventory and let a title fall out-of-print, especially if the market is niche, temporary and the production values (cost of production) high; as is the case with art monographs and exhibition catalogues.

Art History as a discipline of study is heavily reliant on exhibition catalogues to record and situate work within a historic and stylistic context. Armstrong (2018) went as far as saying art history is created through the mediating and publishing of exhibition (and auction) catalogues. He explains:

Publishing goes hand-in-hand with art and art galleries it's a whole culture. It's very important, the exchange between all the galleries in the world. That's how these things are, it might sound a bit weird, but it's essentially how art history is created. [It] is the printing of, and publication of exhibition catalogues (Armstrong, 2018).

Once an exhibition is over, there is unlikely to be much demand for the catalogue beyond art historians, collectors and archivists. Therefore, catalogues are usually produced as one-off impressions and then never reprinted because the risk of being left with surplus stock beyond the exhibition is too high. Production methods like short-run-digital and Print-on-demand (POD) are not viable ways of fulfilling long-tail demand for these titles because permission to use images of artwork is often only granted by the rightsholder with the stipulation that the reproduction accurately represents the original work, thus expensive full-colour lithographic printing methods must be used. Because of the substantial fixed costs of production, high volume

print runs are necessary to achieve economy of scale, and in turn keep unit costs to a profitable level.

The economics of illustrated art titles described above, and low incentive to reprint stock, makes Gombrich's longselling work *The Story of Art* (discussed in [Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies](#)), still ranked highly in the Nielsen TNF chart, even more impressive as it was first published by Phaidon Press in 1950, and contains over 400 pages of colour illustrations. But it also points towards the idea that in some subject areas, and on some topics, there is only space in the market - or to be more precise on bookshop shelves - for one bestseller, and its success perpetuates its own success to the point where it is very difficult for competing products to supplant it. Some ideas around publishers' role in extending or curtailing the longevity of a work will be explored further in the next section.

6.9 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has outlined some of the key mechanisms within the bookselling stage of the supply chain and gone some way to address the research question: what are the functions of bookshops and booksellers in the product sales lifecycle? It has done this by highlighting key themes which arose from the interview data, this included a brief introduction to organisational buyer behaviour and consumer buyer behaviour, and a use of a spectrum ([Figure 23](#)) to illustrate the connection between local market footfall and the balance between predictable and speculative stock range. From this spectrum, the levels of risk that a business can take on prudently, frontlist titles versus backlist titles, can be extrapolated (or at least rationalised).

The section on centralised or localised stock provision, explains the variety of processes performed by chain buyers, their role is one of product evaluation and selection and implicitly also rejection; not every new title can be given a chance. Buyers use certain criteria to decide which products to order, in other words give temporary shelf space to, and which to omit. The process explained by Clark and Fry, whereby they see lists of new titles six to nine months ahead of the publication demonstrates the timeline for selecting frontlist within the

chains. New titles need to meet certain criteria such as cost, quality and content suitability to the local market. As Clark stressed, this requires a mixture of product- and local area knowledge combined with pragmatic business sense. However, in terms of backlist, once a title is established on the locally- or centrally-determined core stock list - then it is guaranteed to be reordered when stock levels run low, thus ensuring the possibility of a longer sales lifecycle than those titles that are not part of core stock.

Another research aim was to explore how ecommerce and permanent availability of stock affect sales lifecycles. In terms of the impact of ecommerce, it is clear from *Nielsen Books and the Consumer 2018* chart ([Figure 22](#)) that planned purchases are more likely to end up in the basket of an online retailer than a physical bookshop whereas impulse purchases make up a greater proportion of the sales by volume within the physical chain- and independent bookshops. So the question then becomes, is a customer more likely to buy on impulse a book that is fresh and new, and of the moment e.g. the frontlist, or are they more likely to buy one that they may have been aware of for years, and never previously got around to purchasing e.g. the backlist? For it is these trends in consumer behaviour, which then dictate the proportion of bookshop space dedicated to front- and backlist titles respectively. It stands to reason that if more bookshop space is handed over to frontlist titles, then will be less shelf space left for core stock, and in turn the chance for a long sales life is reduced. Fry and Clark both provided examples of how promotional activities (such as curated lists of titles; 3-for-2 offers, events and recommended lists) can bring older stock back into a prime position and potentially offer front- and backlist titles a new opportunity to be discovered and purchased. But crucially, promotional activity is only likely to increase impulse purchases. Although these interviews were grounded in the experience of booksellers working in physical bookshops, it is worth remembering there is a flip side to the equation, in that Amazon, and other retailers with ecommerce (e.g. Waterstones and Blackwell's) can hold millions of titles in their online catalogue for people to browse and discover.

In the next chapter, the question of sales longevity is explored through the case studies of longselling titles identified via the quantitative analysis.

Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies

7.1 Introduction

The quantitative analysis so far has addressed *which* books and authors are longselling, but sales figures can only reveal so much, these sales data cannot explain *what* it is that makes them special or indeed *why* certain books continue selling decades after publication. This chapter will therefore transition from the wide-angled *distant reading* approach to a closer investigation of longselling works via case studies. It aims to explore in more qualitative terms how and why the respective works have seen continued commercial success.

Before presenting the five non-fiction cases in depth, I shall briefly explain the rationale for selecting each one, recap the methods used to research and compile these accounts. [Chapter 8](#) will go further to provide discussion and analysis arising from the specific case studies within the context of publishing.

As explained in [section 4.4 Longsellers by Decade](#), as this research is concerned with longevity beyond generational trends of twenty to thirty years (Moretti, 2007). Therefore, I looked initially to the oldest titles that were still within copyright to select as cases towards the first half of the twentieth century; these fell between 1933 and 1966. Rather than be prescriptive and choose titles from a particular epoch, cases were selected to illustrate a variety of stylistic forms, genres and publishing processes.

Very early on in the quantitative analysis it was clear that some forms of writing, which will be referred to as ***narrative non-fiction***, appeared frequently throughout the longselling list. Narrative non-fiction as a term is synonymous with other descriptors such as ‘creative non-fiction’, ‘literary non-fiction’ and ‘the non-fiction novel’. In the context of this research, it can be assumed to encompass all of these synonymous terms which might be applied to a range of genres such as biography, memoir, travel writing, histories and

literary journalism. Broadly speaking, the narrative non-fiction form can be characterised as: an accurate account of real events as opposed to imagined; told as a cohesive story with a beginning, middle, and end; written in a literary style that demonstrates mastery of the craft of writing (White, 1980 p.7; McCracken 1998 p.12; Greenberg, 2018). These non-fiction stories are real not imaginary, yet the narratives by definition are deliberately constructed through the inclusion and omission of details (White, 1980 p.7) to make for a compelling and meaningful read. Beyond this, the narrative form is generally accepting of the limitations of memory and record and thus permits some flexibility, or poetic license, to fill in unknowable details within the narrative.

I have selected three examples of the narrative non-fiction for further consideration as case studies all of which demonstrate the form in slightly different ways. These are *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain (first published in 1933); *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee (first published in 1959) and *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (first published in 1966) and the rationale for each is outlined below:

Testament of Youth (1933) is a first-person account of life before, during, and after the First World War. It was selected as a case because it is one of the longest-selling and also highest-selling work identified via the quantitative analysis and it also stands out as one of the longest-selling titles identified written by a woman. There may indeed be other significant works of non-fiction that pre-date *Testament of Youth* written by women¹² but these did not feature in the top 5000 bestseller charts continuously between 2001 and 2015.

Testament of Youth offers up a rich and unique publication history to explore, one that has been well documented by others such as Mark Bostridge who highlights in his introduction to the 2018 edition that Brittain wanted to write a book that was ‘as truthful as history, but as readable as fiction’. In this endeavour, Brittain’s objective was similar to that of Truman Capote’s writing

¹² Notably *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf which was published in 1929, but this is considered more an essay than a narrative work and spent some years outside of the top 5000 charts during the 2001-2015 time period.

of *In Cold Blood* (1966). Yet the autobiographical form of writing is akin to self-portraiture, and as such distinctly different in from documentary journalism in its vantage point, subject and purpose.

***Cider with Rosie* (1959)** was another work identified via the quantitative analysis representative of the narrative non-fiction form of writing. Author Laurie Lee, saw his perspective as unique because he 'belonged to that generation which saw, by chance, the end of a thousand years' life' (1959 p.200). He was almost twenty years younger than Vera Brittain (and to my knowledge their paths did not cross), yet both shared this self-consciousness of the importance of the times they had lived through and felt compelled to document what once was, and what was no more.

Of the three narrative non-fiction titles, *Cider With Rosie* is the most anecdotal and subjective in writing style, it is a personal memoir with Lee and the local area in which he grew up as the foci. It might not, at first glance, have as clear or overt relevance to British school syllabi as *Testament of Youth*, nevertheless, its inclusion on the O Level/GCSE reading list immediately after publication secured its position in the canon. Similarly, the TV adaptation of the memoir has contributed to the collective memory of English rural life and early-twentieth-century British culture.

***In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (first published in 1966)**

In Cold Blood (1966) is Truman Capote's documentary account of the Clutter family murder in Holcomb, Kansas 1959. One of the things that makes *In Cold Blood* distinct and warrants close study is that the book manuscript itself was an adaption of a four-part serialisation in *The New Yorker* magazine.

The work's continued sales and appearance in the non-fiction charts is a consequence of the unwaning interest in Truman Capote as a person and the creation of *In Cold Blood*. Indeed the origin story of *In Cold Blood* offers its own intriguing plot, compelling story line, honourable and villainous characters, and multiple tragic endings. As such, Capote and *In Cold Blood* have inspired numerous books, films, news articles and scholarly articles (Voss, 2011). The work appears on reading lists across a range of academic discipline beyond the

field of Literary Studies to Criminology and Gender Studies courses and is an A level set-text in England.

As a methodically researched piece of investigative journalism it is arguably the most objective work of narrative non-fiction explored in this chapter. It is also unique as the earliest, and only, instance of True Crime appearing in the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. Although Capote claimed to invent the non-fiction-novel genre *In Cold Blood* was not the first work to attempt to present true crime as a complete and well-researched narrative. By definition, True Crime as a genre is likely to include some sensational aspects to the story, so it is perhaps surprising that no other outstanding works of true crime were discovered within the longselling subset [Dataset 2].

If one were to walk into a bookshop it is conceivable that one might find the work of Brittain, Lee and Capote together in a display under the banner of 'classic non-fiction of the twentieth century'. Yet these works were selected because they offer up a range of topics, perspectives and styles of writing. In the case of *Cider with Rosie*, the writing is self-consciously subjective and poetic. If an analogy could be made to a particular school of visual art then it would be an Impressionist pastoral landscape rather than a self-portrait. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain aims to present the narrative of events more accurately and objectively than Lee, but she is by no means apolitical or unpartisan, her work expresses a grief and trauma much like the Expressionist and Dadaist artworks created in the aftermath of WWI. *In Cold Blood* sits apart from the other two narrative works in that it is long-form journalism, with meticulous detail, accuracy and objectivity as Capote's goal, akin to the artistic tradition of Realism and Neo-realism.

As explored in [Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset](#) the subcategories of trade non-fiction are wide-ranging. The following two case studies have been selected from the subcategories of Art and Games and Puzzles to showcase the diversity of subject and form that was found within the list of identified longselling titles. The rationale for each explained briefly below:

***The Story of Art* by E. H. Gombrich (first published in 1950)**

This work was selected as a case study for a number of reasons; in its first edition it contained over 300 images of artwork dating from antiquity to the first half of the twentieth century, it stands out as likely having the highest number of illustrations and thus the highest production values of any title within the longselling subset [Dataset 2]. As such it defies the typical lifecycle of an illustrated art book (described in [Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity](#)) where the publisher aims to mitigate the risk of unsold stock by selling out and not reinvesting in further impressions or editions. Gombrich was an exceptional author and wrote with accessibility in mind, specifically targeting the teen reader in the vocabulary and terminology used, without dumbing down the text. By doing so, *The Story of Art* appealed to a wide audience of art scholars. During Gombrich's lifetime, between 1950 and 1994, Phaidon published 16 editions of this work each with a new preface from the author. It was not until the 12th edition that the page layout of the work was revised. *The Story of Art* is itself a study of longevity and lasting achievement, and makes for an interesting meta-analysis.

***The Right Way to Play Chess* by David Pritchard (first published in 1954)**

This easily overlooked work was selected as a case study because it stood out as a thematic outlier within of the subset of longsellers, it was one of the only titles classified under the Games and Puzzles product class and chess, while popular, is not the first hobby or pastime that springs to mind when you think of the British population. The sales record of *The Right Way to Play Chess* is even more impressive when compared to the narrative non-fiction case studies as here, longsellerdom cannot be attributed to an adoption into the literary canon by the British education system. Its commercial popularity is not influenced by educational necessity (as the subject of essays, exams and scholarly criticism). Nor can it be said that sales were revived or reinvigorated by any direct media adaptations of the work itself. For these reasons it was selected for further investigation.

One might argue that *The Story of Art* could sit within the narrative non-fiction category as the 'story' in the title suggests, Gombrich was attempting to construct an accessible history of art. Although, it is undoubtedly far more than a chronicle of dates and events, its chapters can be read out of sequence without losing meaning and in this respect, it does not resemble a 'story' with a narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end. Overall, the selected cases represent a range of longselling works; they highlight different types of writing, author, publisher and publishing activity across the twentieth- and twenty-first century.

Having briefly outlined above the rationale for each case, the following section goes on to outline the methodological and theoretical approach of the studies, with reference to the overarching research aims and objectives. The cases were introduced above as narrative non-fiction or instructional non-fiction, however it should be noted that each work is a unique phenomenon, as such these case studies and the subsequent discussion do not attempt to reveal a recipe for success, or the DNA of a longseller (as Archer and Jockers do in *The Bestseller Code*), rather they have been chosen to illustrate which types of work have achieved longevity, and what makes their specific publication histories different and distinct.

The research aimed to provide a systematic framework to identify and discuss the factors which have contributed most to commercial success and longevity. Although I have spent time researching and evaluating these works and their reception in the UK across archives and news media, I have not set out to create a literary biography of any one author discussed in this chapter. Therefore, I acknowledge a limitation of the research presented within these cases are a reliance on key secondary sources, the work of other scholars and biographers, to map out the publication histories and historic sales trajectories. Significant sources include *Vera Brittain and the First World War: The Story of Testament of Youth* by Mark Bostridge (2014); *The Life and Loves of Laurie Lee* by Valerie Grove (2014); *Capote: A Biography* by Gerald Clarke (1988), *Truman Capote* by George Plimpton (1998); *Truman Capote and the*

Legacy of In Cold Blood by Ralph F. Voss (2011) and *Émigrés* by Anna Nyburg (2014).

Methodology

In terms of the methodology and framing of the works discussed in this chapter, each case study outlines the ***publishing*** history of the longselling works – and loosely appropriates the communications circuit as a structure for presenting the findings and considers the authorial journey, the publishing process, and the historic and contemporary performance and reception of a work including reader reviews. Thus, each case provides a short description of the book followed by an author biography and where applicable elaboration on agent representation, publishing history, contemporary reader response, sales and analogous titles, and adaptations. The cases adopt slightly different structures depending each work and factor most relevant to them. For example, reader reviews were more significant to the analysis of *Testament of Youth* than *The Right Way to Play Chess*.

With particular consideration of the paratextual elements as discussed in [Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory](#) put forward by Gérard Genette (1997). These include the *epitext*; relating to the text but not physically attached to it. For this, the research method involved consulting archival news sources such as *The Bookman* and *The Bookseller* and available publishing records. Where possible, I have obtained physical copies of multiple editions of a work and conducted comparative analysis of early editions with subsequent editions. Complementing the epitextual analysis are the *peritextual* elements, meaning those added to the manuscript to make it into a saleable book such as the cover, prelims, and endmatter. I was interested in the processes and actions carried out as part of the publishing function such as how the works came to be commissioned or acquired, the bibliographic data and marketing materials, analysis of editions, serialisations, adaptations and other exploitation of IP. The cases also bring in visual elements of cover/jacket art, and sales and marketing assets which serve as evidence of the framing, and reframing of a work over time. While the purpose of the cases is to provide qualitative

analysis, sales data between 2001 and 2015 have been pulled from Nielsen BookScan and presented in chart form for all editions of a titles, and analogous titles to illustrates trends and seasonality.

I do not attempt to map the socio-political landscape at the time or historic significance of the work per se, as Sutherland does in *Reading the Decades*. The historical contexts are important, and they may be a factor in the initial success of a work, but analysis of the historical context alone is not the goal of the following case studies because this research is focused on longevity and prolonged sales over time. I propose that longsellerdom, cross-generational appeal, and sales spanning multiple decades cannot be attributed solely to the initial historic reception of the work and that other significant factors are at play.

The methodology used to analyse the reader reviews followed a consistent process whereby each longselling work was located on Amazon.co.uk's product pages and a sample of reviews collected for analysis. Amazon reviews contain various standard fields such as: date; user name; five-star rating; a short review title that sums up the work in a few words (e.g. 'It's classic for a reason!'); and a longer freeform review of the product allows for more to be said about the book. However, not all of these fields are compulsory, some customers only complete the five-star rating and the short review field. As a researcher, it is possible to interpret the star-ratings as a general gauge of sentiment towards a work, either positive, neutral or negative, however the star-ratings do not present any meaningful insights into *why* the work resonated with readers. The samples selected for each case study was therefore made up of available reviews which contained at least some data within the longer freeform comment field, thus the overall sample size varies between case studies according to availability. In a handful of instances, (fewer than five per case study) a review was excluded from analysis because it overtly related to the retail or purchasing experience rather than the reading experience (e.g. the item was slow to arrive, damaged, not as described, bought as a gift) or because it overtly referred to other media adaptations such as the film version of *Testament of Youth*.

Where sentiment is discussed in a case study this is based on a comprehensive manual analysis of all available quantitative and qualitative data fields (that is to say the long freeform review field as well as the star-rating) some tests were conducted to see if sentiment could be determined using automated (machine learning) but the results were less accurate and precise than manual analysis.

The analogous titles' sales are derived from Nielsen BookScan data, the line charts show aggregated sales of all significant print editions of the work (and analogous works) over time. Where possible significant spikes were researched to establish factors that dramatically influenced sales for example: was a new edition of a title released; did the work feature in news media for some reason; was there a significant film, TV or theatre adaptation of the work? The analogous titles were mostly identified and selected on a case-by-case basis according to the quality and positioning of the works available in today's market, as opposed to any historic contemporary of the work. This approach was taken firstly because of the availability of Nielsen sales data (e.g. 2001 onwards) and also because, as this research has proven, very few titles published in the first half of the twentieth century remain in print today that it would be difficult in some cases to find analogous titles published around the same time. A guiding principle here was the question, if not this book then which other might a reader pick? And the answer to this question might be another book on a similar topic (either fiction or non-fiction), or a within a similar genre, school of thought, or literary sphere of influence.

Limitations

Case studies as a method, while valuable, do have some well-acknowledged limitations namely that as they deal with specific authors and publishing histories one cannot generalise too much from the findings, or derive insights that apply universally to all cases. It is sometimes possible to highlight correlation within, and between, case studies, but these similarities do not establish causation. For example, as I observe that Vera Brittain and Truman Capote both self-consciously aimed to write non-fiction works that were as engaging as fiction. But this does not mean that, *Testament of Youth* and *In Cold*

Blood became longselling works because their authors were determined to produce engaging works. After all, this is surely an ambition of most authors?

The selection of cases was reliant on secondary sources. In these cases, I have had to rely on the research of others, but have tried to mitigate this where possible by consulting multiple sources and checking facts via written correspondence with archivists and other sources.

A commonly accepted limitation of online review analysis is that the sample is limited and self-selecting (Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo, 2019 pp.248-251); that is to say they represent opinions shared by people who are naturally inclined towards commenting about the book via an online platform. These reviewers are not selected randomly from the population of 'all people who have read the book' and are likely to have strong opinions that can distort the true sentiment towards a work. Similarly, the analysis of reader reviews was done via manual coding which can lead to confirmation bias in terms of the themes identified or omitted by a single researcher. Beyond this, the method does not allow for follow-up questions to be asked or clarification to be made where the meaning was unclear, and is reliant on my interpretation of the data.

In summary, the following five case studies present primary and secondary research structured according to the key actors within the communications circuit. The cases map out publishing histories with an emphasis on the *publishing* context and seek to identify the paratextual evolution and framing of the works over time, management of editions, repackaging, and amplification of the works via mechanisms of exploiting IP accrual of cultural esteem such as translations, adaptations, awards, adoptions, and other significant accolades. In doing so, the research presents some of the key factors that are thought to have contributed most to their ongoing commercial success and longevity. Many of these factors expand the audience of a work beyond the printed book, or reinforce the relevance of the work beyond a single point in time, thus contributing to their enduring popularity. Following on from the case studies will be a chapter of discussion and analysis arising from the findings.

7.2 Case 1: *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain (first published 1933)

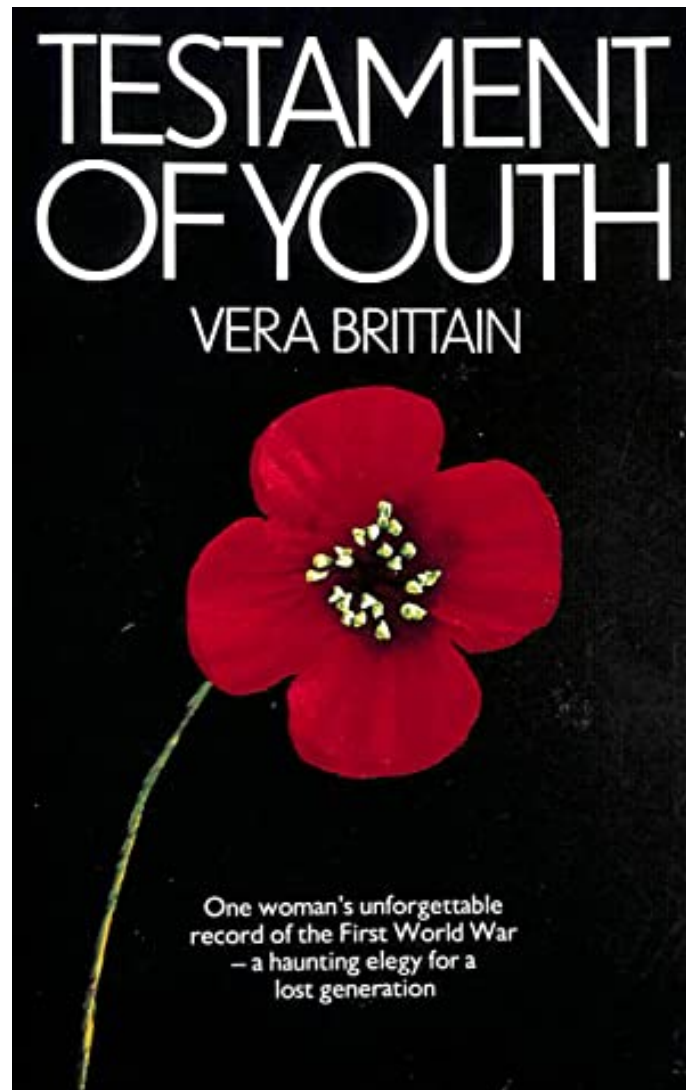


Figure 28: Cover image *Testament of Youth* Virago paperback (1978)

Description

Testament of Youth, first published in August 1933, is a memoir of the years 1900-25. Its primary Nielsen classification is T4.2 Autobiography: Historical, Political & Military. An account of war, from a woman's perspective, focused on the cost to human lives.

In 1914, after successfully gaining a place at Oxford University, Brittain's battle for equality in the eyes of her parents and society was overtaken by the outbreak of World War I. *Testament of Youth* recounts the story of Vera, her

brother Edward, her fiancé Victor, and their two close friends Roland and Geoffrey. All four young men died in service before the war ended in 1918. Ultimately, her personal loss of friends and family inspired her to write the account, but the memoir is also derived from Brittain's time spent as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurse during the war years in France, Malta and England.

Brittain's conscious intention when writing the book was for her story to be an argument for pacifism and to raise awareness of the realities of war. She felt her experiences were representative of the **lost generation**; young British citizens who had lived through, or died during, the Great War and that this was a story that needed to be told. She described it as 'a personal difficulty overcome, a grief survived, a philosophy evolved out of sorrow – these things are not ours; they belong to the collective effort of humanity (Brittain 1933 cited by Bostridge 2014).'

Author

Brittain was born 1893 and died in 1970, she grew up in a middle-class home in Staffordshire. She was Oxford educated and served as a VAD nurse during World War I. In the decade, following the end of the war, Brittain wrote various iterations of manuscripts based on her experiences during the war years yet presented as fiction. According to Bostridge (2014, p.123-125), the publishing appetite for books about the war was 'indifferent' during the decade after the armistice, however by the late 1920s works of fictionalised memoir by Blunden, Sassoon and Graves (detailed below) demonstrated that war books had an audience and indeed the public were hungry for more on this topic. While the experiences of women were not entirely absent from published works, they were certainly underrepresented, so *Testament of Youth* was timely and considered to be part of the 'war books boom' corpus of writing.

Prior to the success of *Testament of Youth*, Brittain had published many articles and three novels: *The Dark Tide* (1923) *Not without Honour* (1924), and *Honourable Estate* (1936). She had, by this early point in her career proven

herself as an accomplished author. She went on to dedicate her life to activism and pacifism.

Agent Representation

None (Bostridge, 2014 p.137); Literary Executor, Paul Berry who according to Withers, (2021 p.41) was instrumental in negotiating the reprint deal with Virago.

Publishing History

Testament of Youth first published in the UK by Victor Gollancz in 28th August 1933. According to Bostridge (2014, p137) in January 1933, an unfinished manuscript was hand-delivered to publisher Harold Latham of Macmillan (New York) while he was visiting London. Latham quickly read and committed to publish *Testament of Youth* in the US. An offer of publication soon followed from Victor Gollancz, the UK-based left-wing publisher established in 1928 (Edwards, 2012, p.70).

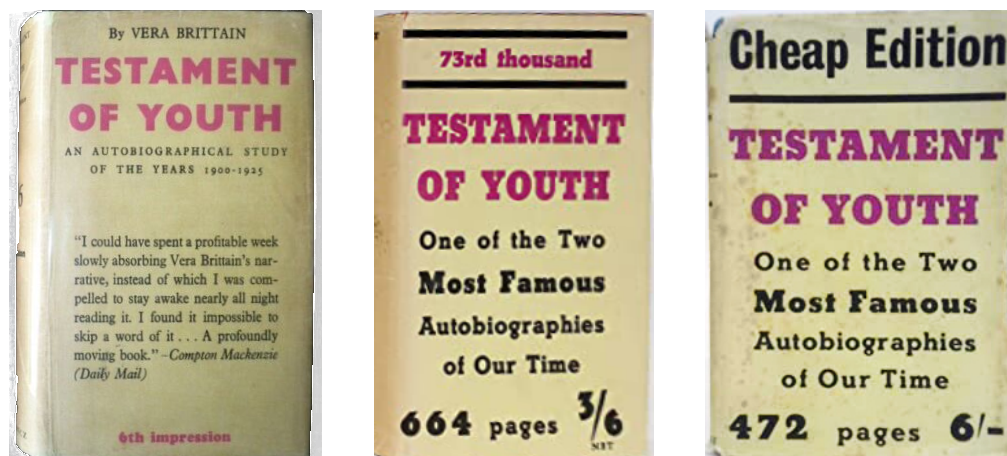


Figure 29: (left) Gollancz hardback first edition jacket 1933, (middle) Gollancz hardback jacket 1935, (right) Gollancz hardback cheap edition jacket 1939

Testament of Youth fitted with the Gollancz list and pacifist agenda and benefitted from the fledgling publisher's adoption of a radical approach to marketing (Roscoe, 2018 p.9-25). It was an immediate hit for both publishers and saw strong sales in UK (3000 units) and US (11,000 units) on the first day

of publication. The US sales are particularly significant as pacifist agenda and attitudes were less prevalent in US publications about the war (Nünning, 2012 p.69). In 1939, six years after publication and just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, UK sales in hardback had reached 120,000 units (Bostridge 2014 p.142).

Gollancz promoted *Testament of Youth* via the publisher's trademark use of marketing techniques which used bold jackets and newspaper advertising to catch the attention of potential readers. The cultural significance of the work was made explicit via the paratext; this included bold typographic messages on the jackets (seen in [Figure 29](#)). Following the initial success, the book jackets were used as a marketing tool to position the work as 'one of the two most famous autobiographies of our time'. By highlighting the thousands [of units] sold, and making superlative claims, Gollancz reinforced the message to readers that Brittain's work had cultural and economic relevance (or capital in the Bourdieusian sense) and was worthy of discussion alongside the other notable WWI writing of the late 20s such as the fictionalised-memoir *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves (1928), likely the *other* famous autobiography hinted to on the jacket, and *Undertones of War* (1928) by Edmund Blunden. As well as *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* by Siegfried Sassoon (1928); and the translated work *All quiet on the Western front* (1929) by German author Erich Maria Remarque (Bostridge, M., 2014 p.125, Watts. J., 1978 p.9). These men had fought in the Great War and used their writing to process and try to overcome the effect the war had had on them as well as bear witness to the experience of their fellow fallen soldiers (Potter, 2005 p.159).

Testament of Youth remained in print, in hardback, published by Gollancz until 1958 when the paperback rights reverted back to the author (Gollancz Archive, 2023) however according to Bostridge (in preface 2018, p.x) 'by the early nineteen fifties sales had stalled'. Brittain struggled to find anyone willing to republish the work in paperback, until in 1960 she secured a deal with Arrow Books to release an abridged version 'prepared by the author herself, but its impact as predicted, was minimal' (Bostridge in preface 2018, p.x). The loss of interest in such an important work was perhaps surprising

given that the fiftieth anniversary of war (1964-68) offered ample opportunity for its relevance to be discussed and promoted. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, the focus of the nation was on rebuilding in the aftermath of the Second World War, which was in many ways a very different war, thus *Testament of Youth* was partly a victim of its own prior success (having sold tens of thousands of hardback copies and saturated the trade consumer market) and partly not of the moment. The years post WWII were for another generation to reflect upon *their war* and come to terms with *their loss*.

Brittain died in 1970, steadfast in her confidence that one day her writing would experience a revival (Bostridge, 2014 p.161).

In 1978, Carmen Callil made public her intention to reissue *Testament of Youth* as part of a collection of non-fiction titles to be launched by the newly established feminist publisher Virago Press (Lowry, 1977 p.9). As Withers (2021, p.24) notes, *Testament of Youth* capitalised on the British national ritual of remembrance and aligned neatly with Virago's acquisition strategy, namely to focus on works with British, European and US appeal, magazine serialisation potential, that intersected the Health and Women's Studies markets, as well as offering backlist potential. In paratextual terms, remembrance is signified unequivocally via the single red poppy used on the cover of the 1979 Virago paperback edition.

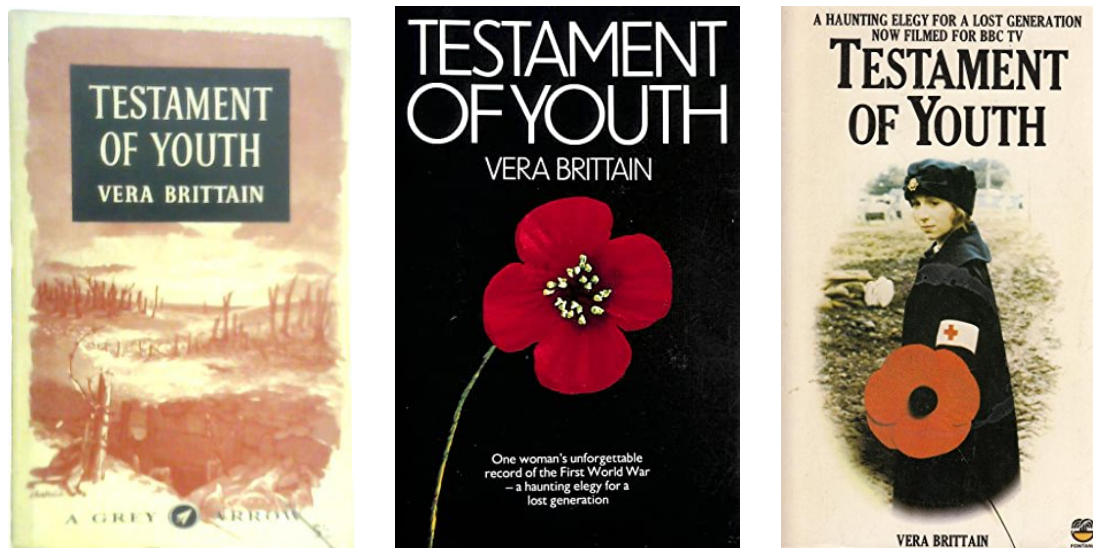


Figure 30: Left Arrow abridged edition 1960; Middle Virago edition 1978; Right Fontana TV tie-in edition 1979

The 1978 reissue, and indeed all later editions, include a preface from Brittain's daughter, the British politician Shirley Williams (dated August 1977) in which Williams writes of the impact the war had on her mother and frames the work as '[...] I think, the only book about the First World War written by a woman, and indeed a woman whose childhood had been a very sheltered one (p.10)'. The decision by Virago to include this in the peritext of its new edition is curious because the statement is patently incorrect, Brittain's was not the *only* book written about the war by a woman, there were other significant memoirs published that were written by women, nurses, offering their testimonies both during and after the war. Indeed Brittain's memoirs even referenced some of them (Bostridge in preface 2018 p.xvi; Potter, 2005 p.153-155). Brittain's was not the only narrative of WWI authored by a woman, however as a publishing phenomenon, the work was, and continues to be, unique. This point seems to have been picked up somewhere along the way, as the preface to the 2018 Virago edition states instead '*Testament of Youth* is, I think, the undisputed classic book about the First World War written by a woman [...]' (p.xxvi, 2018)'.

In 1979, *Testament of Youth* was adapted by Elaine Morgan into a five-part television series realising, albeit posthumously, Brittain's long-held desire to see her memoir adapted for the screen.

The Virago paperback republication saw the title back in the bestseller charts and it sold over 19,000 copies within the first three years (Withers, 2021 p.41). According to an article in *The Guardian* (Evans, S. J. 1986) Virago Press did not feel it had the financial resources to back the book alongside the TV serialisation and sold the paperback rights to Fontana for a fixed-term of six months. This meant there was a period when the Fontana TV-branded paperback priced at £1.95 and a larger Virago paperback edition priced at £3.95 were selling alongside each other. In that short window, Fontana was reported to have sold 250,000 units overall. The benefit of this deal to Virago Press was that the company received a lump sum from Fontana up-front for the paperback rights without overextending Virago Press' cash flow through investment in stock. In this sense, the publisher Virago minimised financial risk while still acting to amplifying the visibility of the work through the deal with Fontana.



Figure 31: Left to right Penguin Anniversary edition 2004, Virago Centenary paperback edition 2018, and Penguin film tie-in paperback edition 2015.

Virago brought out an anniversary edition in 2004 and a centenary edition in 2018 both included the symbolic poppy on the jacket and signpost the introduction written by Mark Bostridge.

Reader Reviews

A random sample of 100 Amazon reviews for *Testament of Youth* were thematically coded to explore common responses to the work (anon, 1999 - 2018). The data suggests a general consensus that Brittain's memoir is an **important historical account of WWI** and over 60% of reviewers explicitly mentioned this in their comments. Unsurprisingly, given the tragic events being recounted, the next most frequent thematic node related to the **emotional rhetoric** of the story, with 27% saying how emotionally moved they were by the memoir. Important and universal themes of **bereavement and grief** appeared in a quarter of the sampled reviews, with reviewers often saying they admired, or were inspired by, the way Brittain approached and overcame the challenges she faced. Connected to this, 12% of reviewers felt the book provided meaningful **lessons for today** such as: the decision-making that leads to war; insights into the life of a soldiers or nurses; the impact of war on the people and countries involved in fighting them; and how to deal with loss and overcoming adversity.

Another significant thematic node, appearing in 20% of the reviews, was the observance of **change within societies**, this was either the changes happening in the UK and Europe at the time, or the observance that things had changed between society then and society now.

For some contemporary readers, the young, idealistic Vera Brittain, was an **off-putting protagonist**; they found her character 'precocious', 'privileged' or 'snobbish'. Others were simply not interested in the details of her later life beyond the war years. It cannot be denied, that her position within UK society at the time was one of privilege; only an elite few studied within university colleges at Oxford and even fewer of those were women. Nevertheless, when one compares contemporary online review data of analogous titles, written by men with a similarly privileged background to Brittain who served in WWI,

they do not tend to receive comments scrutinising their personality or criticising their privileged class status (Markou, 2023).

Brittain's account of her life and *feminist struggles* warranted positive comment from 12% of reviewers and 11% indicated they were passionately re-reading the book for a second time.

What is particularly interesting to observe is that roughly one-eighth of reviewers were ambivalent towards the work. Their reviews contained mixed sentiment expressing positive admiration and recognition of the work as a historical record juxtaposed against negative remarks about the extent, writing style or attitude of the author as she had portrayed herself. While some reviewers commented on the 'beautiful and poetic writing' enjoying the 'elegant language' used by Brittain, an almost equal number of reviews conveyed a negative opinion of the writing-style finding it 'old-fashioned', 'longwinded' or 'needed editing' (at 600 pages it is certainly not a short read). It seems that *Testament of Youth* is for some readers' palettes akin to a bitter medicine, mildly unpleasant to consume but done so in the hope of some perceived benefit in the long run.

Some reviewers provided clues as to why as to why the book had been purchased these included: prompted to buy the books after watching the film or TV series adaptation or hearing the book mentioned on the radio, some indicated the book had been selected as a book club read, and others had bought the book as a gift.

Analogous Titles

- *Undertones of War* (Blunden, 1928) - non-fiction
- *Goodbye to all that* (Graves, 1928) - non-fiction
- *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* (Sassoon, 1928) - fictionalised
- *All Quiet on the Western Front*¹³ (Remarque, 1929) - fictionalised

¹³ The translation of *Im Western, nichts neues* (1929) from German to English was completed by Brian Murdoch

Of the five WWI titles compared in [Figure 32](#) *Undertones of War* (Blunden, 1928), *Goodbye to all that* (Graves, 1928) and *Testament of Youth* were intentionally presented as works of non-fiction. Whereas *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* (Sassoon, 1928) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Remarque, 1929) are presented as fictionalised memoirs, known to be heavily-based on the authors' experiences. Whether presented as works of fiction or non-fiction they are all considered to be classics from the wave of WWI memoirs (Bostridge 2014) published during the 'war-books boom' of the 1920s and 1930s (Todman, 2005 p.155). Blunden, Graves and Sassoon are frequently discussed together across scholarly disciplines; literature, history of war, medicine and psychoanalysis (Bostridge 2014, Brittain 1933, Greening 2015, Hemming 2005, Pickering 1986, Saunders 1983, Wilson 2003). Collectively, they authored some of the most widely-read books on the war to be brought to the UK market, and as such are thought to have disproportionately influenced the nation's collective memory of the war years (Todman, 2005 p.157-160). Yet it is Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* [*Im Western, Nichts Neues* (1929) translated from German to English by Brian Murdoch] which has the highest sales volumes consistently between 2001 and 2016.

In his preface to the Virago and Penguin anniversary editions, Bostridge (2018, p.xi) claims that *Testament of Youth* is 'the most widely read British autobiography of the First World War'. Although it is unclear what evidence unpins this statement, sales data since 2001 suggest that *Testament of Youth* was the most commercially successful book written by a woman about the war and the only one to enter the canon alongside the texts by men (Todman, 2005 pp.183-185; Schneider and Potter, 2021, p.9-10)

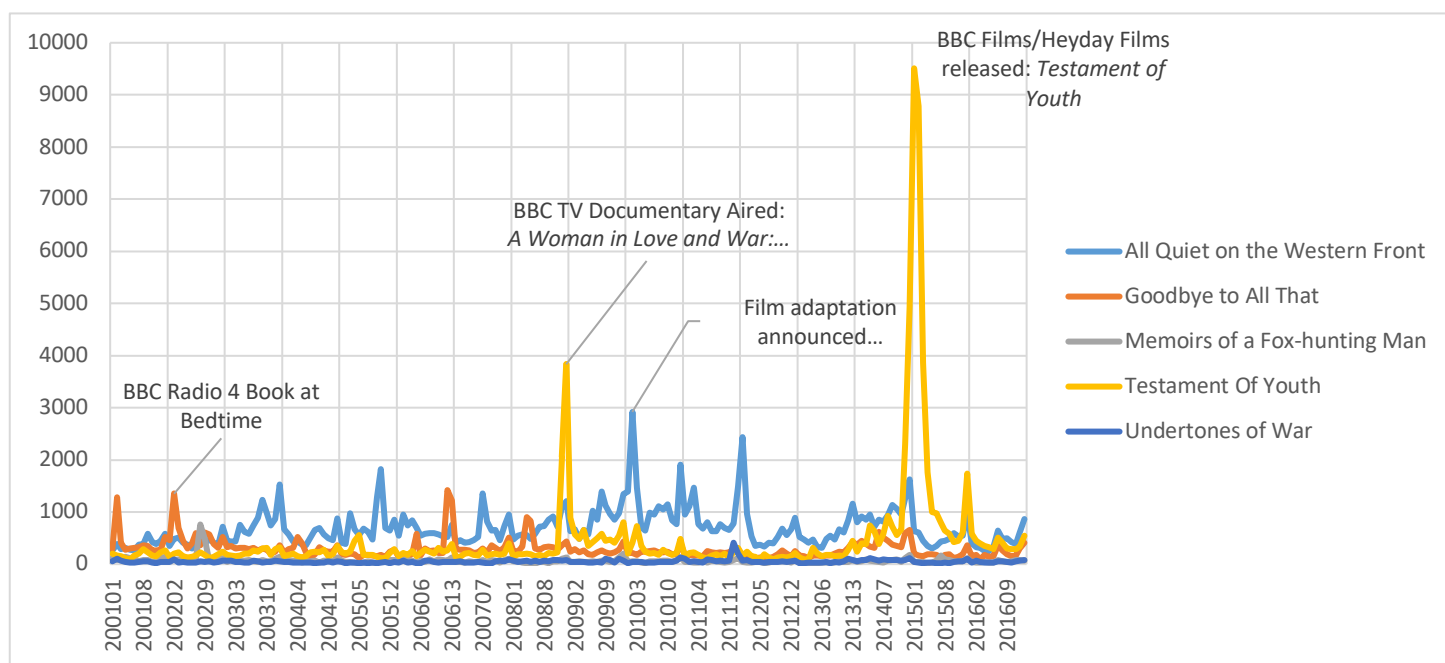


Figure 32: *Testament of Youth et al* Print Sales Volume 2001 - 2016 (Nielsen BookScan 2017a)

In terms of the sales trends, one can assume that the centenary anniversary of the start and end of WWI (2014 – 2018) provided the respective publishers of these titles an equal opportunity to promote the titles but *Testament of Youth* saw by far the biggest sales spike from November 2014 thanks to the Heyday Films motion picture release.

There was also a significant uptick in sales of *Testament of Youth* in December 2008 following the airing of BBC documentary entitled *A Women in Love and War: Vera Brittain* presented by Jo Brand which explored Vera's life through her work and letters.

When compared to the analogous titles in Figure 32 the baseline sales of *Testament of Youth* sit above *Undertones of War* (non-fiction) and *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* (fiction) but has fairly comparable and occasionally lower sales as compared to *Goodbye to All That* (non-fiction).

Adaptations

There is a clear impact of media adaptations (film, tv and radio) to the sales of these works in print format. The biggest spike for *Testament of Youth* occurred in November 2014 coinciding with the release of the film *Testament of Youth* starring Alicia Vikander as Vera and Kit Harrington as Roland Leighton. In

addition, Bloomsbury published a tie-in title in 2014 by Brittain's biographer, Mark Bostridge entitled *Vera Brittain and the First World War: the story of Testament of Youth* also featuring stills from the film on the cover.

Conclusion

This case study has considered the publication history of *Testament of Youth* as a work across various manifestation and edition. Its book sales lifecycle can be summarised over three eras, the initial success from 1933 into the 1940s; a lull in interest from early 1950 and reversion of rights to Brittain in 1958-1977; followed by the revival and canonization from 1978 to present.

The initial acquisition of *Testament of Youth* by Victor Gollancz was a key factor in the amplification of Brittain's work and message. Gollancz shared Brittain's views on pacifism, and was actively building a list of left-wing titles to promote the pacifist agenda, so in this their motivations were aligned. Beyond this, as a businessman Gollancz was an innovative disruptor within the publishing field, he saw the potential in mass marketing techniques, such as advertising in news media and using the dust jacket to promote the work itself. In this strategy, Gollancz quite literally annotated symbolic capital onto the books being sold (e.g. pointing to the sales record, benchmarking the book's status against the competition, and making superlative if not hyperbolic statements). These actions increased visibility of the work and pushed *Testament of Youth* into the literary landscape of the interwar period, which made up the fabric, aka habitus, of the era.

Indeed the publication history of this work might have ended in 1970 when the Gollancz edition went out of print and the rights reverted back to Brittain. Were it not for the decision by Carmen Callil at Virago to acquire the paperback rights to *Testament of Youth* and reframe it as a forgotten feminist classic it might not have persisted as one of the longest-selling contemporary works of non-fiction in the UK. As Withers (2021, p.41-44) points out the timing here is quite important because the Virago paperback edition aligned with the sixtieth anniversary of WWI, but there was more to it. There were a confluence of factors that came together to make *this* work one of Virago's bestselling titles.

To revive a work, and bring it back into the public's consciousness, it first needs to have been somewhat neglected or forgotten about. Furthermore, Brittain's death in 1970 made the Virago edition an act of remembrance to Vera Brittain the woman, the VAD nurse, the feminist and activist, *as well as* a testament to the lost generation. This simultaneously expanded its appeal to the consumer market and reframed its relevance to a new wave of feminists, historians and scholars.

The TV adaption in the 1970s solidified the position of the work in the collective consciousness as an important story relevant to a new audience boosting sales of all book editions. In the twenty-first century, Nielsen data shows that film adaptations as well as the BBC documentary of Brittain's life during the war also had a significant impact on amplifying the books visibility and increasing print sales.

In terms of continued relevance and why the work has experienced such longsellerdom, *Testament of Youth* covers a subject area that is relevant to a wide range of syllabi and scholarly perspectives (history of war and pacifism, feminism and literature). Although hundreds of books were published within the UK following World War I in the late 1920s and 1930s, Nünning (2012, p.69) notes that in 'Great Britain, these novels largely embodied a "pacifist view" as compared to titles published in Europe and the US'. Scholars of WWI (Todman, 2012) argue that a narrow selection of titles were adopted into the British education system and that these have disproportionately influenced the collective memory of war; *Testament of Youth* was one of these titles.

7.3 Case 2: *Cider With Rosie* by Laurie Lee (first published in 1959)

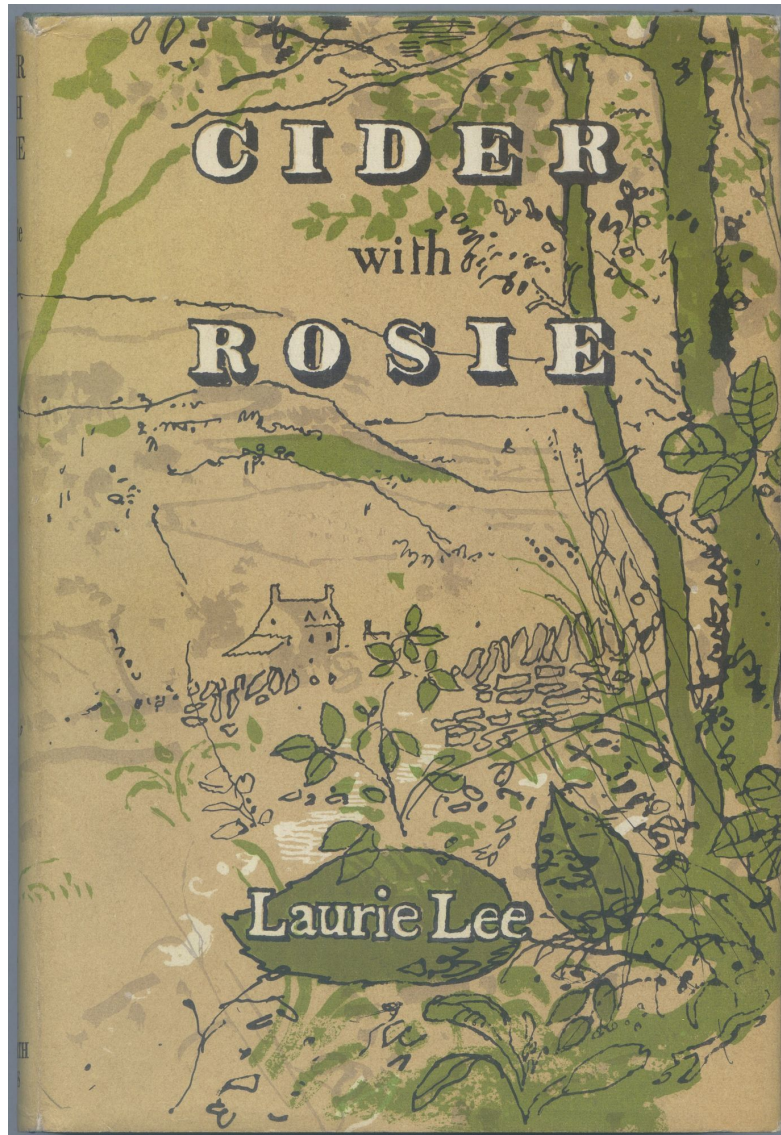


Figure 33: Hardback cover of *Cider with Rosie* (1959) by John Ward

Description

Cider with Rosie (1959) describes Laurie Lee's childhood growing up in Stroud in the countryside during the early twentieth Century. It is the first instalment of three books detailing Lee's life including *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* (1969) and *A Moment of War* (1991). Its primary Nielsen classification is autobiography, however, some editions of the book are labelled by the publisher as 'Classic Fiction'. While it is certainly a life-narrative, there is ambiguity over how it should be labelled. A note in the

prelims from Lee (1973, p. 8) states 'The book is a recollection of early boyhood, and some facts may be distorted by time' later adding 'his book was simply 'an attempt to give the *feel* of my early years, of a countryside and people.' Hence the disclaimer in the preface (Lee cited by Grove, 2014a, p.316)'.

Author

Born in 1914, the British author and poet Laurence (Laurie) Edward Alan Lee, was a man of humble origins who made a name for himself through his writing. Lee suffered from epilepsy and experienced poor health over his lifetime including blindness in later life (Barker, 2004).

Lee's early years in Gloucestershire were spent living exclusively with his mother, née Annie Light, and six siblings (three of which were from his father's first marriage). His father, Reginald Lee, left to serve in WWI shortly after Laurie's birth and afterwards lived in London with another woman leaving Lee and his siblings with very little in the way of financial support. Lee credited his mother for nurturing his creative and poetic nature, indeed *Cider with Rosie* is viewed by many as a love letter to her (Grove, 2014a p.11).

Lee left school at 16 and spend a short time as an accountant before quitting and living as a travelling busker with little more than a tent and violin (Barker, 2004). At 21, he sailed to Vigo, Spain 'on a whim' and spent the following years 1935-1938, travelling and living in Spain. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1938) he actively supported the Republicans and joined the International Brigade to back the cause, although was too 'physically weak' to be involved in fighting on the front line because of his epilepsy (Barker, 2004; Grove, 2014a p.87).

Prior to the publication of *Cider With Rosie* in 1959, Lee had successfully published a number of works of poetry, and was recognised as a talent by publishers and respected by his literary peers (Barker, 2004). Yet Lee's biographer, Valerie Grove (2014a p.302), notes that his earlier literary endeavours were '...eclipsed, like everything else, by *Cider with Rosie*, which

immediately afterwards took over his life and made him, at forty-five, seriously famous.'

As the title of Grove's biography—*The Lives and Loves of Laurie Lee*—implies, there was a significance to the women in his life, who were both muse and patron of his art (Grove, 2014a; 2014b, p54-57). Grove does not portray Lee as a womaniser or manipulator, but rather as a charming man who could 'seduce anyone' (Grove, 2014a p.410). This lovable quality combined with his artistic and musical talents endeared people to him. There was a precariousness to the way he lived as an itinerant busker and a vulnerability in his epilepsy, which meant women were drawn to him, took him under their wing, and supported him. Through his early career, the most crucial of these relationships was his love affair with (already married) Lorna Wishart (Grove, 2014b p.52-54).

Following the publication of *Cider with Rosie* (1959), Lee wrote, and had published two further autobiographical works that covered his later life including periods spent living in Spain prior to and during the Spanish civil war. These were: *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* (Lee, 1969); *I Can't Stay Long* (1975) and *A Memory of War* (1991).

Lee was unusual in that he experienced recognition and remuneration for his writing within his lifetime. Yet his later life brought increasing health challenges and he died of cancer in 1997 aged 82 (Barker, 2004).

Agent Representation

For some time after 1955 until 1969 Lee was represented by the literary agent Murray J. Pollinger of Pearn, Pollinger & Higham Ltd. This relationship ended after M. J. Pollinger's resignation, and Lee entered into a new contract with the agent A. D. Peters & Co. in 1969 (Laurie Lee Papers Archive, 1955 -1988).

The estate is currently managed by Curtis Brown who were involved in the promotion of Lee's body of work for the centenary celebrations in 2014 (www.laurielee.org, 2017).



Figure 34: Paperback cover of *Cider with Rosie* (1970)

Publishing History

First published by The Hogarth Press in 1959, the hardback edition of *Cider with Rosie* was illustrated with line drawings by John Ward.

According to the 'Laurie Lee Papers' Archive held at the British Library, Lee was in correspondence with John Lehmann of The Hogarth Press as early as 1947; at this time, Lee possessed a signed contract from Lehmann to write the autobiography that would eventually be published as *Cider with Rosie* in the UK and *Edge of Day* in the USA. The publisher insisted the name be changed because cider was not a well-known drink in the US, a decision that Lee fought against (Grove, 2014a, p. 308).

Grove credits Lee's lover, Lorna Wishart, with brokering the connection between him and his publishers:

[Wishart] sent his poems to her friends Stephen Spender and Cyril Connolly, who published him in *Horizon*. This contact led him to the publisher John Lehmann, then to his important friendships with Cecil Day-Lewis and Rosamond Lehmann (2014b, p.54).

Cider with Rosie (1959) was an overnight success in the UK selling 250 copies per day in its first week and Foyles Book Society placing an initial order of 100,000 units (Grove, 2014a p.304). It charted at the top of the Christmas bestsellers list that year (1959) and was still selling well in April 1960 when it appeared on the 'Best Sellers' list of the UK literary review magazine *Books and Bookmen*¹⁴ (1960a).

¹⁴ The *Books & Bookmen* best seller charts were informal lists of six titles supplied by three London shops, not exclusively bookshops.

In 1961, *Cider with Rosie* won the newly established W. H. Smith Literary Award, an accolade for which Lee received a prize of £1000 (Grove, 2014a, p. 316). This was a generous sum, equivalent to around £28,000 today and provided Lee with significant financial means for the first time in his life.

The title was reprinted eight times between 1959 and 1961, once in 1965 and again in 1970 (Lee, 1973, p. 4) implying that demand remained high beyond the first few years after publication and continued for the that followed decade.

There was some controversy around the 1959 first edition, which contained disputed factual details. Firstly, the Stroud Piano Company took issue with the implication that fires had occurred at their factory; and secondly, Anthony Kershaw, the son of a Mrs Tuck raised concerns that his mother was identifiable as Mrs Fluck (Laurie Lee Papers 1960). As a result, the publisher was sued for libel and books were reportedly banned from bookshops and libraries in Gloucestershire (n.a., 1960c, p.21) pending the court hearing. Ultimately, a revised edition was released omitting the offending passage, which had observed regular fires at a piano factory ‘seem[ed] to be a way of balancing the books’. Lee claimed he had no knowledge that a piano company even existed in Stroud and that the passage was ‘a jaunty little fantasy which mentioned pianos because I liked them’ (Lee cited by Grove, 2014a, p. 307). Hogarth’s public response was to apologise adding the disclaimer that the work was ‘a novel’ and was not presented as fact. These events may have contributed to the ambiguous labelling of the work as both fiction and non-fiction. In the end, the libel claims were successful and damages of £5000 paid out jointly by the publisher, Hogarth Press, and Lee (Grove, 2014a p.314). The libel suit tainted the success of *Cider with Rosie* for Lee and strained the relationship between him and his publisher John Lehman, as Lee believed Hogarth Press should have spotted the risk prior to publication.

This tension between Lee and Lehman precipitated the acquisition of the paperback rights to *Cider with Rosie* by the then independent publisher Penguin Books Ltd and a paperback edition was released in 1962 (Grove, 2014a p.349).

The significance of a literary work is often hard to appreciate immediately upon publication, yet the W.H. Smith Literary Award was an early signal *Cider with Rosie* had begun to inspire other art forms. In the summer of 1963, a stage adaptation written by James Roose-Evans and Sam Langdon was performed to the Queen Mother at Kings Lynn Guildhall (Driver, 1963 p.7). This was to be the first adaptation of the work for stage, yet other screen adaptations were produced by ITV in 1998 and by the BBC in 2015.

In summer 1969, *Cider with Rosie* was added to the reading list for O level exams (which later, in 1986, evolved into the GCSE qualification). Lee's biographer, Valerie Grove (2014a p.367), commented that the inclusion of *Cider With Rosie* on the O Level reading list resulted in an immediate and continued boost to sales. The national curriculum in England dictates that a selection of the titles on the reading list are studied within the secondary compulsory examination but they do not specify exactly which ones. Therefore some, but not all, students studying English over five decades since it was added to the reading list will have been asked to read this title as a set text forming a significant part of the assessment. Extracts from *Cider with Rosie* appear in the English Literature and English Language GCSE exam papers until at least 2017 (AQA, 2017; OCR, 2017; Pearson Edexcel, 2015).

In 1970, following the death of founder Allan Lane Penguin Books was bought by Pearson. Later that decade, in 1976, Longman (an imprint of Pearson) brought out another paperback edition of *Cider with Rosie* with a cover more orientated towards the educational market that the publisher was targeting. Subsequently, in 1987, a Penguin Jubilee Edition ([Figure 35](#)) was released.

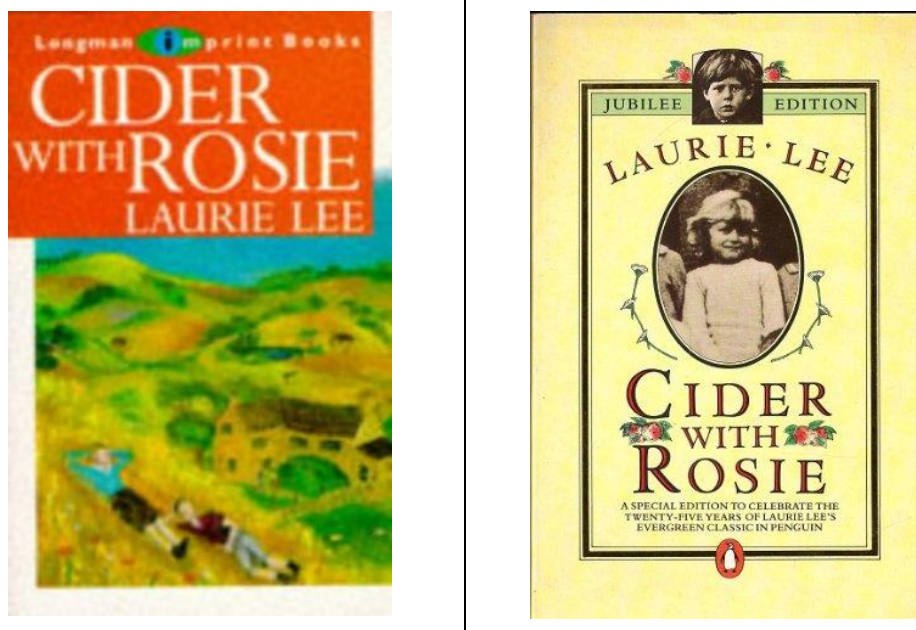


Figure 35: Paperback covers *Cider With Rosie* left (1976) right (1987)

For Lee the adoption of his work by the education system and the continued appeal of the work was clearly a source of ambivalence. In a 1986 interview for *The Times* Val Hennessy (p.10) asked Lee how he spent his days to which he replied:

I spend a lot of time answering letters from people wanting their poems published. Schoolchildren doing *Cider with Rosie* for O level write to me. My serious objection to being on the syllabus is the daft exam questions they set. But I won't say more on that topic (scowls sheepishly) in case they take me off the syllabus and my royalties dry up.

Hennessy's article goes on to say:

Obviously 'the royalties' keep the wolf from the door, not to mention the scotch on the rocks, the book having sold two million in paperback. Lee confesses it is a mystery to him that a book about rural life before it was 'raped by the combustion engine' still attracts readers.

Over the years, various repackaged editions of *Cider with Rosie* have been brought to market; eight paperbacks including a TV tie-in 1998 and four hardbacks emphasising the illustrations by John Ward.

The illustrations are included in the paperback editions, however viewed side-by-side it is apparent that some of the subtlety of Ward's original illustrations are lost when printed on the more porous paper stock typically used for paperback editions.

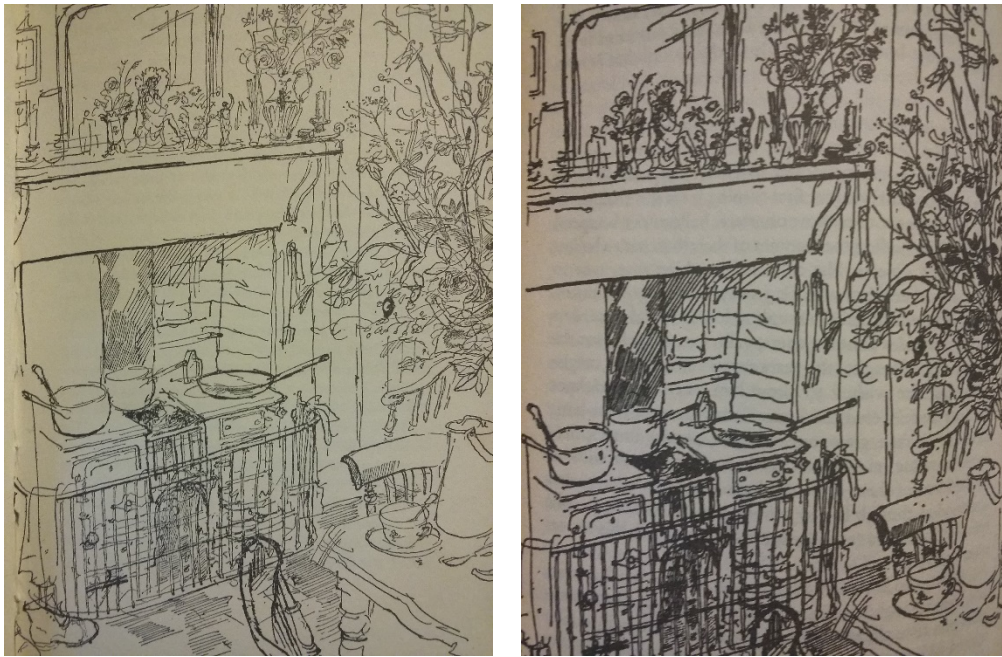


Figure 36: Laurie Lee's *Kitchen* by John Ward hardback 1970b ed (left) paperback 2014 ed (right)

Nevertheless, the analysis of reviews on Amazon, revealed the illustrations as one of the memorable features occasionally conjuring up nostalgic images of readers' own childhood:

That illustration of the kitchen brought back memories! To the right of the range is an armchair. It was on my father's lap in a chair just like that, by a stove just like that, that I learnt to read - before I went to school at 4, We also had a large, square table, which now lives in my brother's kitchen, some chairs, and also a skew (not a word that's heard much now - it's a Welsh settle) and I can remember many happy hours in that room. I might have to buy that edition just for the illustrations! (anon, 2016).

In 2014, as part of the centenary year celebrations Random House brought out a paperback edition under the Vintage Classics imprint sporting a new illustrated cover depicting wild flowers and haystacks. This repackaged edition contained additional paratext, a short introduction written by the musician and presenter Cerys Matthews. The introduction focused on Matthew's ability to relate Lee's description of childhood to her own, even though she was born in 1970 and grew up in Wales she found something timeless in Lee's writing; an evocation of childhood experience, and interpretations of people and places that resonated (Matthews cited in Lee 2014, pp.ix-xv). Despite the addition of a new introduction, the Vintage Classic edition recycled the same ISBN assigned to the previous Random House

paperbacks, illustrating how within industry practices a unique and revised edition is not always assigned a unique ISBN to identify it.

Reader Reviews

A random sample of 200 Amazon reviews for *Cider With Rosie* were thematically coded to see if any common response to the work could be identified (various, 1999 - 2017). The most frequently occurring remarks (25%) allude to the geographic setting of the narrative, namely the English or more specifically Gloucestershire countryside. Within these were discussions of the **sense of place, village communities** and **a lost way of life**.

Childhood nostalgia and **family relationships** were also frequently commented upon (20%), in addition to appreciation of the imagery and poetic language (20%) used by Lee to tell his life story.

Only a handful of reviews (2.5%) mention the **connection to GCSE or O level reading lists**, with disclaimers like 'Don't be put off by this being a GCSE title!' Two reviewers confessed that having read the book at a young age it held special memories for them because they found the passage with Lee and Rosie rolling in the hay arousing. They expressed surprise that this book was (and still is) recommended to schoolchildren as an exam text.

Analogous Titles

In the first instance I looked to find some other autobiographies published by around the same time which featured alongside *Cider with Rosie* on The New York Times Bestseller List and identified the following two titles:

- *Full Circle* a memoir by Sir Anthony Eden, former Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister of the UK.
- *Steps in Time: An Autobiography* by Fred Astaire, actor and celebrity.

However, there appeared to be no TCM sales data for *Full Circle* recorded between 2001 – 2015. This implies that *Full Circle* is currently out of print (OOP). As for *Steps in Time*, there Nielsen TCM data recorded no sales between 2001 and 2006 (implying it was not stocked), followed by very low sales between 2006 and 2015. While it might be possible to purchase second-hand

copies there was insufficient data to use as comparison. Nevertheless, these two analogous titles illustrate that achieving bestsellerdom, at one moment in time does not necessarily lead to longevity thereafter, even for very high-profile and celebrity authors.

Taking a slightly different approach,

Figure 37 presents the aggregated sales of *Cider With Rosie* against two other titles from within the longselling subset published in the 1950s which have a similar status within the English school curriculum (1999) as examples of suitable authors for study:

- *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell (first published 1956)
- *The Crucible* play by Arthur Miller (first published 1956)

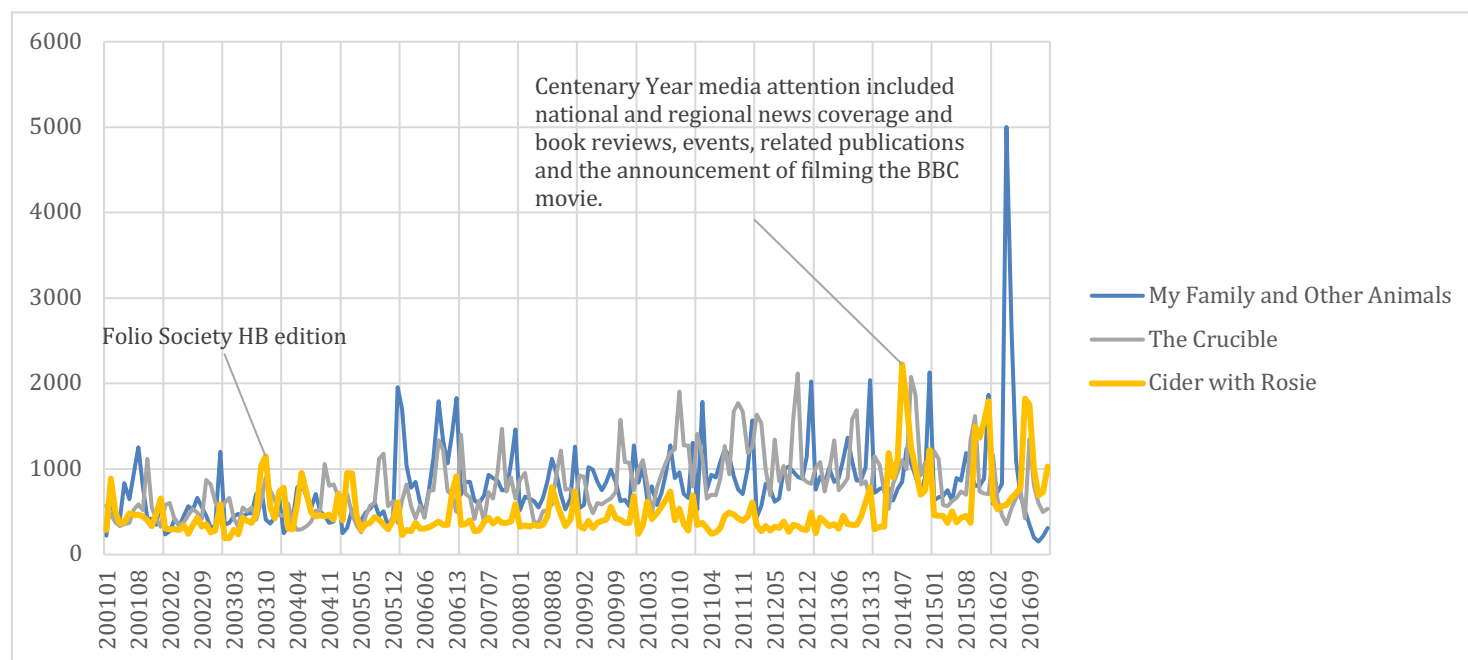


Figure 37: *Cider with Rosie et al Sales Volume 2001 - 2016* (Nielsen 2024c)

The national curriculum for secondary schools (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999 p.36; 2004, p.49 and p145) offered up a wider range of options for schools to choose the work they studied providing schools included two works of non-fiction published before 1914 and two published after. From within the longselling subset, Vera Brittain, Gerald Durrell, and Arthur Miller are also listed by name as examples of suitable authors within the curriculum document (although no specific work is listed).

Adaptations & Centenary Year

- 1963 James Roose-Evans' play adaptation of *Cider With Rosie*
- 1998 ITV TV movie adaptation of *Cider With Rosie* aired (Dec between Christmas and New Year) directed by Charles Beeson; starring Juliet Stevenson, Dashiell Reece and with narration by Laurie Lee
- 2014, Slad, village hosts a week of events celebrating Lee
- 2014 BBC Movie Announced
- 2014, *The Guardian* select as July's Reading Group book
- 2014 *Lives and Loves of Laurie Lee* by Valerie Grove published
- 2014 *One Thousand Laurie Lees* by Adam Horovitz published by The History Press (at the time based in Stroud offices)
- 2015 BBC TV movie adaptation aired (Sept) directed by Philippa Lowthorpe; starring Samantha Morton and Archie Cox
- 2015 Unseen essays discovered (Oct)

Conclusion

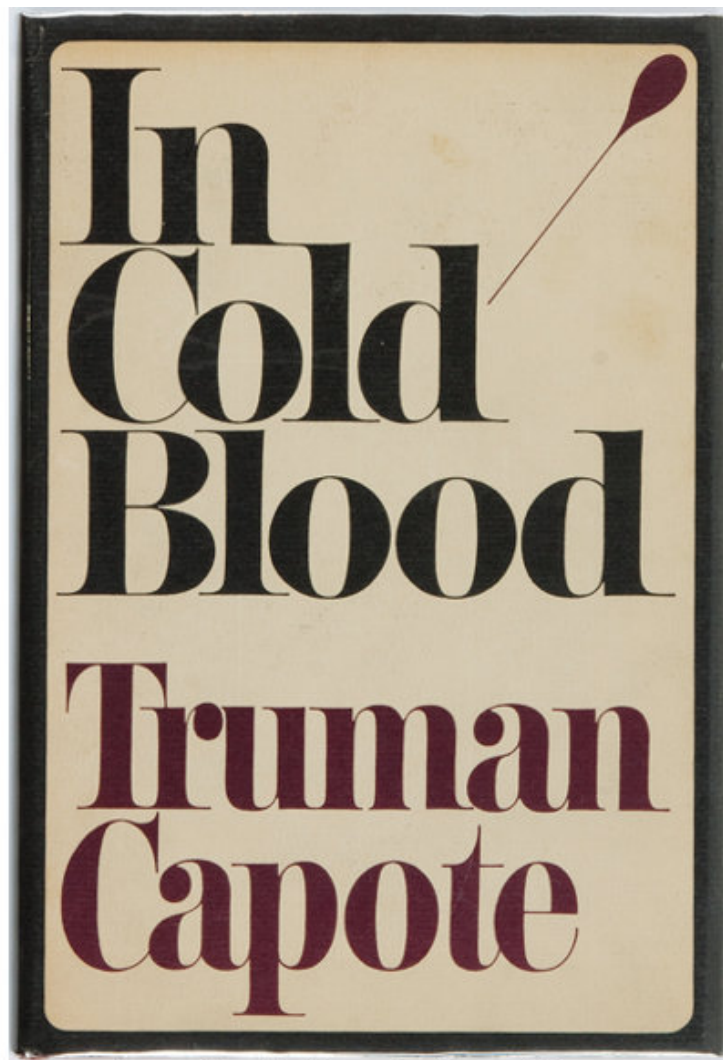
Although *Cider with Rosie* was published almost a quarter of a century after *Testament of Youth*, both books describe life in England (and Europe) in the early twentieth century and detail a first-person account of Lee and Brittain's early years circa 1917-1929. In some respects, Lee shared some experiences with Brittain, namely that they were both wartime volunteers; both spent time abroad witnessing first-hand wars fought on European soil; and both were relatively young when they did so. At least part of their lived experiences were seen through the eyes of a foreigner on foreign soil and as such their stories and reflections on life offer a perspective from without as well as within the UK.

This case study has highlighted the key factors that greatly contribute to the long-term visibility and success of *Cider with Rosie*. Lee's captivating storytelling and literary skills of course underpin the success of the work. Strong sales and the W. H. Smith Literary Award provided commercial and cultural capital early on in its sales lifecycle thus solidifying the reputation of Lee's work.

Arguably, the most crucial factor that contributed to the enduring visibility of the title was its inclusion on the English O Level (now GCSE) national curriculum from 1969. In the 21st century, Laurie Lee continues to be named as an exemplar of an author 'from the English literary heritage' in the *National Curriculum Handbook for Secondary Teachers in England* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004 p.49). This guaranteed a continuous readership and ensuring its place in the literary canon. The topic of rural life and focus on childhood experience made it suitable and relatable as recommended reading for school-aged children. Beyond this, Lee grew up with very little and shunned financial security to embark upon a life that was idealistic, adventurous and nonmaterialistic and as such he perhaps offers educators a model of literary talent and achievements that defies social background and wealth.

Collectively, the exceptional writing, critical acclaim, curriculum inclusion, and successful adaptations have made *Cider with Rosie* a longselling and influential title in the literary landscape. Its impact and visibility have persisted over the years, ensuring its enduring popularity and recognition.

7.4 Case 3: *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (first published in 1966)



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

Figure 38: Cover image *In Cold Blood* (1967)

Description

In Cold Blood (1966) details the murders of the Clutter family (mother Bonnie, father Herbert, daughter Nancy and son Kenyon) which occurred in Holcomb Kansas in 1959. *In Cold Blood* reconstructs the events leading up to the crime, the impact on the local community, as well as the investigation and ultimate capture and fate of the murderers Smith and Hickock. In doing so Capote provides an intimate objective portrait of the murderers without sensationalising the crime.

It is written in four parts as it was originally published as a serial for *The New Yorker* magazine.

Capote was interested in experimenting with narrative style and from the outset set out to write what he called a 'non-fiction novel' (Capote cited by Plimpton, 2006 p.198).

Agent Representation

It is unclear if *In Cold Blood* went through an agent as it was directly commissioned by William Shawn editor of *The New Yorker* and licensed by Joe Fox, editor at Random House.

Marion Ives was Capote's agent for his earlier work *Other Rooms, Other Voices* (1948) published by Random House NY.

Publishing History

An article in the *New York Times* reporting the unexplained murders caught Capote's attention and so he travelled to Garden City in Kansas accompanied by his childhood friend Nelle Harper Lee (at this stage *To Kill a Mockingbird* had been written but not yet published) who was invited to act as his research assistant on the project (Clarke, 2006 p.319). Capote spoke of wanting to write a 'non-fiction novel'; his intention was to produce a longform narrative about the lives of the murdered family and impact on the wider community for *The New Yorker*, who had commissioned the piece (Clarke, 2006 p.319). He and Harper Lee researched the Clutters in Kansas; together they adopted a note-free method of interviewing the local residents believing that the sight of a pen or presence of a tape recorder would 'inhibit candor' (Capote cited by Plimpton 2016, p.202; Clarke p.322). At the end of each day, the two would independently write-up their notes and compare versions to establish an accurate record. Harper Lee was instrumental in gaining the trust of local residents and persuading them to talk about their lives; her involvement in the project spanned the years alongside Capote yet her intellectual contribution to the success of *In Cold Blood* friend was not fully acknowledged or recompensed (Plimpton 1998 p.199-200; Voss p.190-191; Friedell, 2006 p.32).

The research and writing of *In Cold Blood* spanned seven years; to begin with Capote (and Lee) focused on the impact of the events on the community. In December 1959, two men, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, were arrested in Las Vegas for the Clutter murders (Clarke, 2006 p.324).

On April 14 1965, Hickock and Smith were hanged for the murders. Capote travelled to Kansas to witness the executions accompanied by Joe Fox his editor from Random House.

In September and October of 1965, Capote's much-anticipated work *In Cold Blood* was finally published in serial format over four editions of *The New Yorker* (De Bellis 1979 p.519). Clarke quotes Capote (2006, p.332) as being nervous about the length of the story:

[...] it is very tightly written, and really can't be cut (I've tried). Well, if I can't come to terms with Shawn [editor of *The New Yorker*] (and I can see that they might hesitate to devote 4 full issues to this enterprise –especially since it is not 'pleasant' reading, and not very 'entertaining,' as the word is used) my only regret will be that I have spent over \$8,000 on research, which I will not be able to recover. But I shall go right on with the book, regardless.

He need not have worried, as the 'four [New Yorker] issues broke the magazine's record for newsstand sales' (Clarke, 2006 p.360).

Soon after, in January 1966, the entire 'non-fiction novel' was published in hardback by Random House New York, with the paperback rights already sold to 'New American Library for an unprecedented half-million dollars (of which Random House had taken a third' (Clarke 2006 p.363).

It received much critical acclaim throughout North America (*The Times*, 1966 p.15) and was quickly published in the UK by Hamish Hamilton on 14th March 1966. According to an interview in *The Guardian* (Coleman, 1966 p.7), on the date of its UK launch it had already sold over 350,000 copies in the US. Capote claimed, in the same interview, not to know how much money he had made in royalties, and that he was not interested in making money at all.

There are a number of film tie-ins associated with *In Cold Blood*, Capote was heavily involved in directing a feature-length true-crime documentary released in cinemas in 1967-68 shortly after the book's publication. The books

and film were cross promoted in news media at the time and Capote gave television interviews discussing his ambitions for both.

Public Debate

After Smith and Hickock were arrested, Capote spent many years visiting the two criminals in prison and his remembered conversations were used to inform the non-fiction novel. Some perceived this to be calculated exploitation; Capote needed their stories to complete his book and their execution to give it a neat ending or allow its publication (Tyvan, 1966 p.21; Plimpton, 2016 p.217). Yet, biographers Clarke (2006) and Plimpton (2016) portray the ongoing relationship between Truman Capote, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith as far more complex.

Smith and Hickock were not initially informed that Capote had befriended them *because* he wanted to write a book, and although they both signed release forms allowing Capote to publish their conversations, they were never allowed to read the full manuscript or assess Capote's holistic depiction of them and their crimes.

Furthermore, there was no recorded evidence of the conversations between Capote, Smith, and Hickock to corroborate the story and the publisher did still need to mitigate any libel action that might be taken against them. At Capote's request rigorous fact-checking was carried out by Sandy Campbell of *The New Yorker* who claimed the work to be accurate (Clarke, 2006 p.351). Nevertheless, numerous challenges have been made to the veracity of certain facts, by residents, critics and academics. According to De Bellis (1979) over 5000 changes were made to the text in the few weeks between serialisation and the Random House publication. The volume and nature of these changes, many were direct quotes, raised questions about the reliability of Capote's 'remembered' facts.

Following the publication of *In Cold Blood*, a public disagreement occurred between Kenneth Tynan and Truman Capote via the pages of *The Observer* newspaper. Tynan questioned whether the work was 'morally defensible' and whether Capote did enough to support Smith and Hickock's legal defense

specifically on the point of their mental state and psychiatric evaluation pre-trial. Tynan (1966 p.21) wrote:

We are talking, in the long run, about responsibility ; the debt that a writer arguably owes to those who provide him—down to the last autobiographical parenthesis—with his subject-matter and his livelihood. And we are not discussing a third-rate crime reporter or professional ghoul; one does not waste space condemning trash. For the first time an influential writer of the front rank has been placed in a position of privileged intimacy with criminals about to die, and—in my view—done less than he might to save them.

The focus narrows sharply down on priorities: does the work come first, or does life? An attempt to help (by supplying new psychiatric testimony) might easily have failed; what one misses is any sign that it was even contemplated.

Tynan further implied that the author's stance regarding the criminals' defence was self-serving and opportunist in the expectation that Capote's book would be successful; stating that Capote stood to profit millions of dollars from the sale of his book. Tynan (1966 p.21) argued the book might have remained unpublishable, in a state of limbo, if Smith and Hickock had not been executed, as publication would have prejudiced the outcome of any ongoing legal appeals. Tynan also implied the publisher would be at risk of libel, questioning if informed consent had been granted by Smith and Hickock to publish confessed details (including the planning and carrying out of other crimes) given the men did not initially know that Capote was writing about them and they had not been granted an opportunity to review the entire manuscript.

Capote made a public response to these accusations:

[...] and as for the final reference to my having contributed to the cost of Hickock and Smith's headstones, Tynan seems to be scornful of this action. Why? If I had not done it no one else would; I was their sole financial support during the entire time of their imprisonment.

[...] Because in the original article Tynan claimed I could not have published my books because I could not obtain legal releases from the two murderers—that is, a release exonerating me from any possible libel action.

But what is the truth of the matter? This: I had legal releases, drawn by lawyers and signed before witnesses and notarised, from almost every person who appears in the book—including Smith and Hickock. Legally, there was nothing to have prevented me from publishing the book at any time.

The sole deterrent was that no one could judge with any certainty whether my book would help or hinder the case as it was being appealed through the Federal courts, and I was not willing to publish anything that might have

proved detrimental to Smith and Hickock's chances for a reversal. (Capote, 1966b p.21)

Although he publicly defended his actions, by his own admission Capote never really got over the experience of researching and writing the book, or perhaps more specifically the intimate relationship he courted with Smith and Hickock:

I supposed it sounds pretentious, but I feel a great obligation to write it, even though the material leaves me increasingly limp and numb and, well horrified—I have such awful dreams every night. I don't know how I could have felt so callous and 'objective' as I did at the beginning. (Capote cited by Clarke 2006, p.332).

Shortly after publication of *In Cold Blood* Capote was also reported to have said:

If I had realised then what the future held I would have never stopped in Garden City. I would have driven straight on (Capote cited by Arnott, 2007 p.4)

Capote may have ultimately regretted his choice of subject matter but he was not shy in promoting the book via news media and television interviews broadcasts in the US and UK. When Capote sold the film adaptation rights he did so retaining significant creative control over the production, insisting that it be shot in the same documentary style as the novel, using the real Kansas locations, the real town of Holcomb and even the real house in which the Clutter family was murdered (Capote, 1966).

In addition to the commercial success, *In Cold Blood* received immediate and continued literary recognition; it was added to Hart's 1966 *Oxford Companion to American Literature*. It had interdisciplinary relevance and provided much food for scholars to digest yet analysis of reader reviews indicate that *In Cold Blood* is not perceived as 'stuffy' or 'high-brow' only to be appreciated by literary critics and connoisseurs. Although *In Cold Blood* has been the focus of much scholarly attention Capote's work is accessible to the everyday reader; it is not dependent on expert guidance to appreciate its value. So it falls into a rare category of work that has accrued cultural, intellectual and commercial capital.

Looking through the news items (Arnott, 2006; Capote, 1966b p.1; Colman, 1966 p.7; Crosby, 1966 p.40; Kaminsky, 2006 p.4; n.a. 1966 p.15; Nadelson,

2006 p.4; Tynan, 1966a p.31, 1996b p.21), scholarly articles (De Bellis, 1979;) and books (Clarke, 2006; Plimpton 2015; Voss, 2011) that have been written about *In Cold Blood*, one thing in particular stands out – the person Truman Capote is discussed as much as his work. Accusations that Capote could have done more to save the lives of Smith and Hickock may not have made headlines for very long, but they form part of the legacy surrounding the book. The six years that Capote spent getting to know Smith and Hickock intimately came at a personal price, *In Cold Blood* was the last full-length literary work that Capote wrote. The search for reasons why this talented author's potential remained unfulfilled became a source of speculation and intrigue and as such, the backstory to *In Cold Blood*, and how it changed Capote, became the subject of many other creative works such as the biographical films *Capote* (2005) and *Infamous* (2006). In *Truman Capote and the Legacy of In Cold Blood*, Ralph F. Voss (2011) documents comprehensively the cultural legacy of the work including a list of 18 book, television, film and stage creations that were direct descendants of *In Cold Blood*.

In summary, Capote's non-fiction novel was both high profile and controversial at the time of publication and continued to inspire curiosity thereafter.

Reader Reviews

A sample of 150 Amazon reviews for *In Cold Blood* were thematically coded to see if any common response to the work could be identified (1999 - 2018). Overall the sentiment towards the work was very positive: 92% of reviews indicated that they liked the book or indeed loved it, only 6% showed some minor ambivalence and just 2% were negative (so a quite different picture to *Testament of Youth*). Many reviewers noted that the work was a known classic and felt the label was justified and the writing well-researched. In terms of the positive reviews, the most frequently cited reasons related to the writing style (43%), the reviewer's emotional response to the writing (33%), or a combination of both.

Aspects cited in particular about the writing style were the ***detailed characterisation*** of the Clutter family, Smith and Hickock, and other members of the Holcomb farming community; secondly the ***journalistic writing*** style that brought objectivity and a balance to the description of events; and thirdly the ***evocative conjuring of time and place***. The vast majority of reviews considered Capote's descriptive writing style to be a positive aspect of the reading experience, however the few reviews that were negative about the work cited overly-detailed description or boring prose as the reason.

True crime as a genre has the potential to use emotional rhetoric as a device but Capote's writing does not sensationalise the Clutter murders. Not all reviews mentioned an emotional response to the writing but where they did (around 15%) they described *In Cold Blood* using terms such as 'gripping and fascinating' or 'disturbing and remarkable' to describe the subject matter itself. The pace of the work was also notable; one fifth of reviews cited that *In Cold Blood* kept them reading with comments such as:

A persistent plot that won't release you from its grip. Definitely worth the read. Pace never lets up to the bitter end (Anon, 2015).

Given the perceived reputation of the work as a classic, and that it was written over half a century ago, there is always the danger of disappointment due to inflated expectations. Nevertheless, overall the sampled reviews implied readers were satisfied with the book and expressed that it met any expectations about Capote's writing; some even note the writing felt fresh and contemporary.

Sales

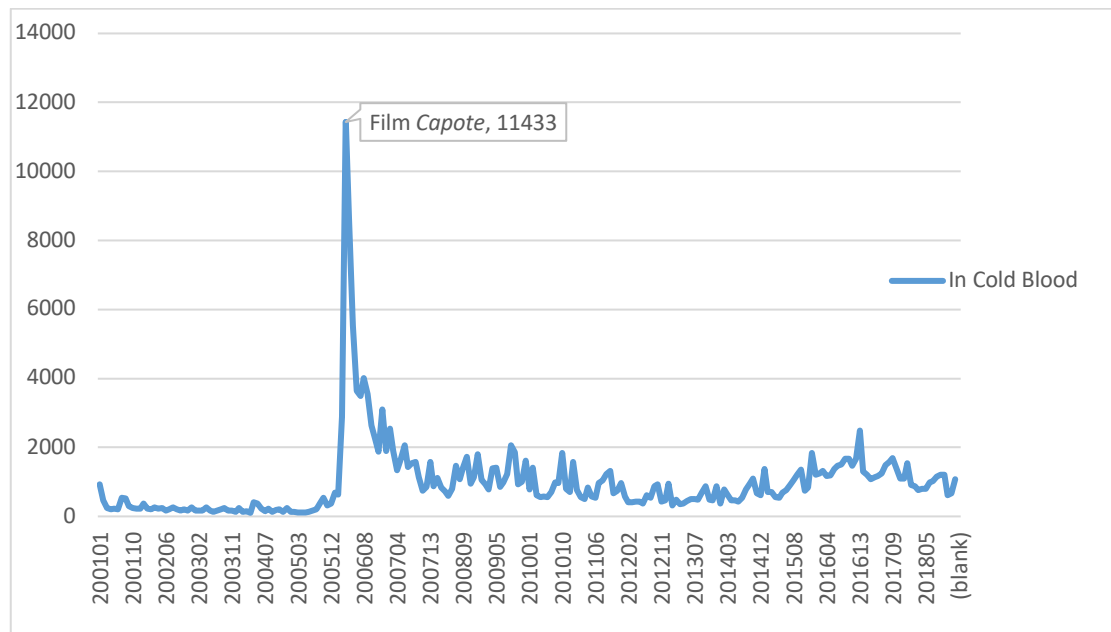


Figure 39: Sales Volume 2001 - 2018 (Nielsen BookScan 2019)

Analogous Titles

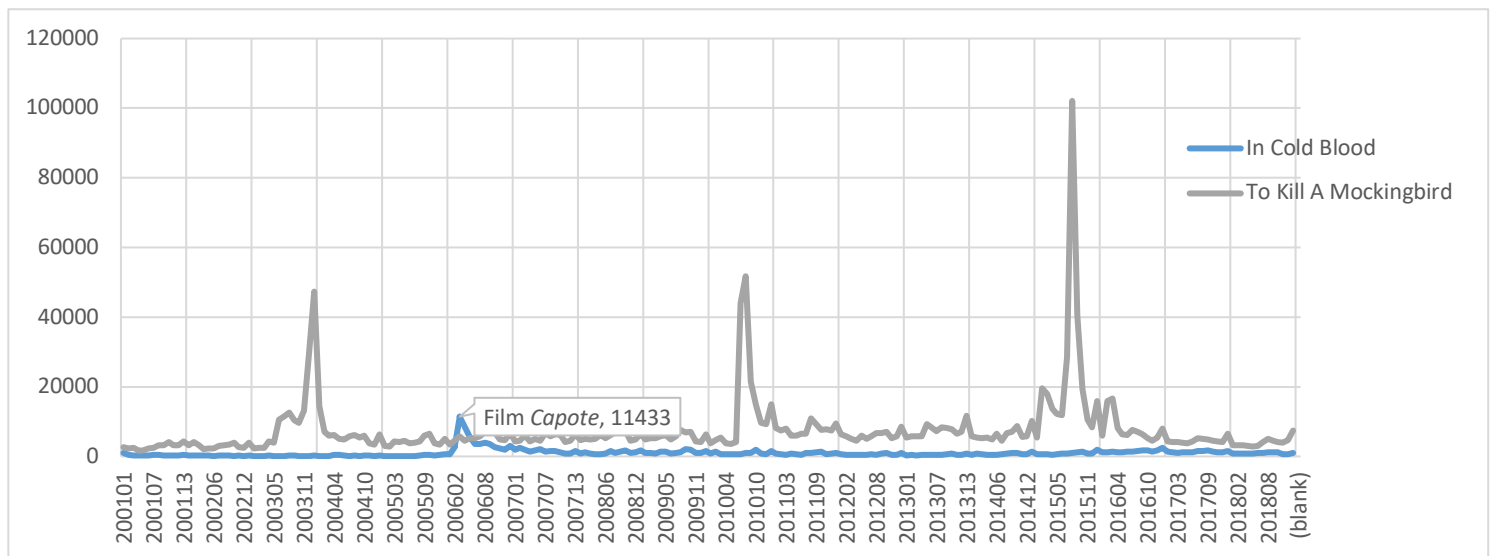


Figure 40: *In Cold Blood* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* Sales Volume 2001 - 2018 (Nielsen BookScan 2024d)

Adaptations & Derivative Creations

- Richard Brooks's commercial film of *In Cold Blood* (1967)

- Gordon Lish's novel *Dear Mr. Capote* (1983)
- Gerald Clarke's biography *Capote* (1988)
- Jay Presson Allen's one-actor biographical play *Tru* (1989)
- Richard Uhlig's documentary film *Holcomb: The Loss of Innocence* (1993)
- Mikel Rouse's opera *Failing Kansas* (1994)
- Bob Kingdom's one-actor biographical play *The Truman Capote Talk Show* (1994)
- Jonathan Kaplan's television miniseries film of *In Cold Blood* (1996)
- George Plimpton's oral biography *Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances, and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career* (1997)
- 'The Tiny Terror' Arts and Entertainment Network Biography series (1997)
- 'Murder: In Cold Blood' Arts and Entertainment Network American Justice series (1997)
- Norman McMillan's one-actor biographical play *Against a Copper Sky* (2002)
- Gerald Clarke's edition of Capote's letters *Too Brief a Treat* (2004)
- Bennett Miller's biographical film *Capote* (2005)
- Ande Parks and Chris Samnee's graphic novel *Capote in Kansas* (2005)
- Douglas McGrath's biographical film *Infamous* (2006)
- Kim Powers's novel *Capote in Kansas: A Ghost Story* (2007)

The most significant factors in the long-term visibility of this title are firstly that *In Cold Blood* was highly anticipated and controversial. The publication was delayed for a number of years until after the execution of Hickock and Smith so that it could not prejudice the court appeals (Capote 1966b p.21). Many people working within the news media, creative arts, and publishing industry had read the incomplete manuscript and hyped it to be a future bestseller (Clarke 2006 pp.348-9; Crosby, 1966 p.40). However, there were moral and ethical criticisms. Capote was accused of profiting from the execution of the men, and not helping them to secure a better, meaning more expensive, legal and psychiatric defence. (Tynan 1966 p.21).

Secondly, Capote was a talented author and screenwriter, with a vast network of contacts within the creative industries internationally (Clarke 2006 p.356-361). Thus, Capote's contacts, status and penchant for publicity fuelled interest in the work.

Beyond this, the gripping quality of the writing is frequently cited in contemporary reviews of *In Cold Blood*. Readers praise Capote's objective, journalistic approach alongside the detailed characterisation of the victims, murders and wide-community.

At the outset of this research project, I imagined that the quantitative analysis might uncover some hidden gems, works that sell well year-after-year, but were perhaps not so obvious that they were heavily researched by other scholars. Although many of the longselling works identified by the quantitative analysis are objectively well-known books that most people have heard of (if not read) *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote is the antithesis of the imagined hidden gem. Not only is it firmly established within the canon of twentieth-century American literature (having been written by one of America's most well-known authors at the time) but also the writing, publication history and significance of this work have been researched exhaustively by biographers, journalists and scholars. This level of attention has in turn concreted its cultural status.

As creators of narrative non-fiction, there are some parallels between Capote's approach when writing *In Cold Blood* and that of Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*. Firstly, Capote claimed that when he set out to write *In Cold Blood* he was aiming to create a 'non-fiction novel'. This aspiration was shared by Brittain who wanted to make her story 'as truthful as history, but as readable as fiction'. Thus, for both authors the end result was clearly articulated. They wanted to capture the truth of the real events and translate these using an accessible narrative style –one that was familiar to the intended audience.

Another similarity between the creation of *In Cold Blood* and *Testament of Youth* is the time Capote and Brittain respectively spent working and reworking the manuscripts prior to publication. In 1959, Capote might not

have started out with the intention of spending years writing the story of the Clutter murders, but the court proceedings meant that he spent over six years writing the work. Bostridge (2014, pp.113-138) details the various unpublished manuscripts that Brittain worked on between the end of WWI and the submission of *Testament of Youth* for publication and highlights the iterative process Brittain undertook.

7.5 Case 4: *The Story of Art* by E. H. Gombrich (first published in 1950)

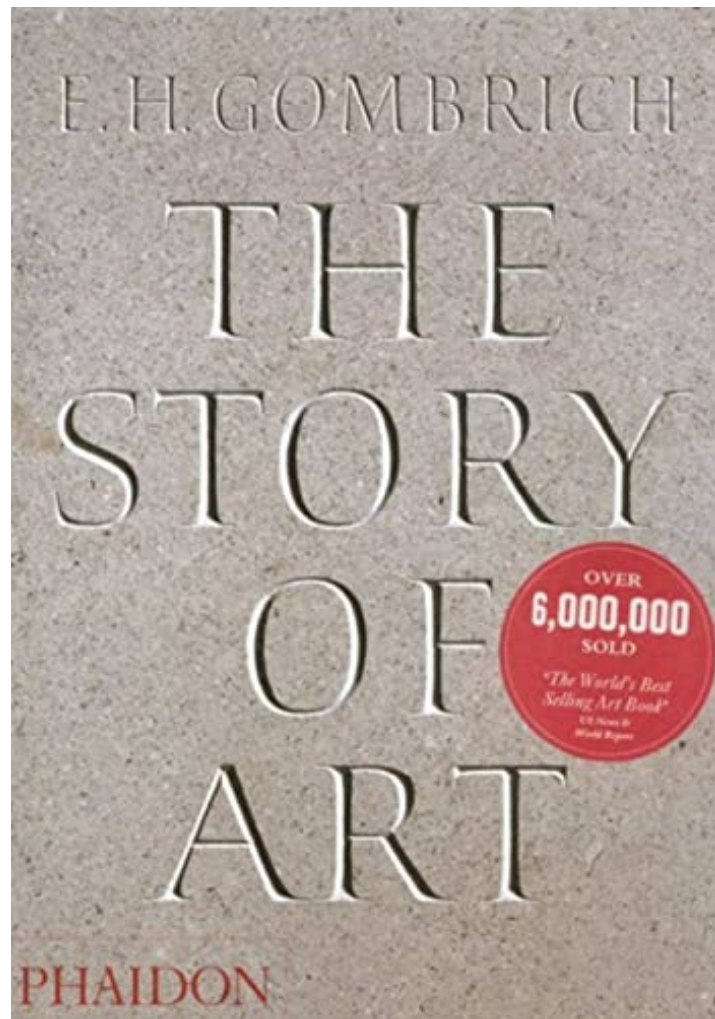


Figure 41: Cover image *The Story of Art* (1995)

Description

First published by Phaidon in 1950, *The Story of Art* provides a comprehensive chronology of the most significant artwork, artists, traditions and styles from around the world. Gombrich takes readers on a journey from prehistory up to the mid-twentieth century. The first edition contained 370 illustrations (monotone and full-colour) integrated with the text. *Integrated* means that the text and image sit on the same page rather than images being segregated to a plate section.

In his original preface, Gombrich signposts that the work was written with a teenage readership in mind; his emphasis was on accessibility as well as an

explicit intention to consider the psychology of art. *The Story of Art* uses clear language free from scholarly jargon, and Gombrich's discussion focused on the artists' intentions, the techniques applied, as well as the cultural and historic contexts. With this approach Gombrich self-consciously aimed to do away with any speculated or superimposed meanings or myths imbued upon art by historians or regimes. By adopting this unpretentious style, Gombrich makes the field of art history approachable and engaging for any level of readership and as such this book became the preferred student handbook for art courses.

Author

Sir Ernst Gombrich was an eminent art historian and scholar who held positions in world renowned institutions including as Director of the Warburg Institute and Chairs at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Cornell Universities (Onians, 2011; Podro 2001).

He was born in Vienna in 1909 to a wealthy middle-class family of Jewish descent, but his father (a lawyer) and mother (a musician) both converted to Protestantism before he was born in what Gombrich (1992) describes as an act of 'assimilation' (Onians, 2011). Gombrich's family home in Vienna was situated close to the Natural History Museum and the Art History Museum and is likely that visiting these two institutions that encouraged a knowledge of these subjects during his formative years. Significant moments of his childhood included the defeat and ultimate collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following WWI; these events left him (and many other Austrian children) malnourished. As part of a charitable initiative he and his sister were sent to live in Sweden for a year to recuperate their health and this experience of living with a family of more modest means at a young age stayed with him (Gombrich, 1992; L. Gombrich, 2018; Onians, 2011).

He did well in school, and up until 1931 Gombrich studied Art History at Vienna University's Institut für Kunstgeschichte under Julius von Schlosser, who Gombrich credited with driving forwards the discipline of Art History and challenging the antihumanist approach taken by some other art historians of the time such as Josef Strykowski (Marchand, 1994 p.106; Onians, 2011). By

the mid-30s, the rise of Nazism in Austria made it hard for those who in Gombrich's words 'were seen as Jews' to find employment and in 1936 he accepted an offer to move to London to join the Warburg Institute (Gombrich & Lawley, 1992). Gombrich was part of a wider diaspora of German-speaking artists, scholars and publishers that moved to England, explored in terms of their contribution at the time and legacies today (Nyberg, 2017).

Prior to moving to the UK, Gombrich was commissioned to write *A Little History of the World for Children* by Walter Neurath (who later founded the publishing company Thames and Hudson) (Onians, 2011). The book, in the original German language, became a bestseller in 1936, and was translated into many languages. It was not until 70 years later, in 2005, that it was first translated into English and published by Yale University Press as *A little History of the World* (Woodfield, 2011). This delay in bringing an English edition to market was not for want of being asked by publishers, however Gombrich was determined to translate the book into English himself, and thus held on to the rights (L. Gombrich, 2018). Even so, the English-language edition of *A Little History of the World* was a bestseller and Gombrich's accessible writing style so successful that Yale University Press developed a spin-off series of *A Little History* books on similar topics.

Gombrich's early years in England during the Second World War period were challenging; as an Austrian immigrant he was considered an 'enemy alien' and although 'exempt from internment' he and his young family were only permitted basic temporary accommodation (Onians, 2011). He was recruited to transcribe and translate German communications at BBC Monitoring in Evesham and '[...] often later pointed out, the exercise of trying to make sense of poor signals made him increasingly aware how much his ability to follow the text depended on his prior expectations' (Onians, 2011).

It was during the period immediately after the Second World War that Gombrich wrote *The Story of Art*, having returned to the Warburg Institute.

He was life-long friends with the philosopher Karl Popper, and was said to have been influenced by his works on intellectual freedom *The Open Society*

(1945) and historiography *The Poverty (of Historicism)* (1944) (Azatyan, 2010). Gombrich and Popper certainly both shared a humanist perspective and opposed the ‘racist historiography’ and ‘biologistic Germanophilia’ that gave credibility to Nazism (L. Gombrich, 2018; Marchand, 1994 p.106; Onians, 2011).

It must be acknowledged here that *The Story of Art* was by no means the *only* significant contribution of longstanding importance or continued relevance to be found within Gombrich’s body of work. The Gombrich Archive and Warburg Institute Archive contain hundreds of articles and thousands of other documents written by Gombrich (Onians, 20011; Woodfield, 2011). There is sadly not the space within this case study to detail the full contribution that he made during his lifetime which extended far beyond art history and education to wider scientific methods of enquiry around perception. When Sir Ernst Gombrich died in November 2001, aged 92, he left a substantial intellectual legacy.

Agent Representation

Gombrich did not have an agent and entered into the contract for *The Story of Art* with Phaidon unrepresented. The contract was renegotiated in 1948. Gombrich was persuaded (by his publisher) to lower his royalty from 5% to 4% in order to maintain a lower, more affordable, price point for the book while allowing for the inclusion of more illustrations (Nyburg cited in Crawford et al, 2017 p.365). Phaidon ultimately published the work at a higher price, and the publisher profited from the less generous royalty. This became a point of friction for Gombrich and his family (Gombrich, L., 2023).

Before his death he appointed his granddaughter Leonie Gombrich as Literary Executor of his estate.

Publishing History

The version of events published by Phaidon (2023) on their website is that Bela Horovitz, founder of Phaidon Press, bumped into Gombrich ‘on the top deck of a London bus’, and commissioned Gombrich to write an accessible

book on art history for the children's market. However, Gombrich argued that the topic was more suitable for teens than the younger readers. Horowitz is said to have shown several draft chapters to his sixteen-year-old daughter Elly in 1944, who told him it was 'absorbing' and he should 'publish it' (*The Times*, 2020). This implies that some early chapters must have preceded the end of the war however, it was not until 1945 that Gombrich was able to leave his post at BBC Monitoring, return to the Warburg Institute, and dedicate time to working on the project. Gombrich described the process of writing the book through live narration; a secretary was sent to his office by Phaidon, and to her he dictated the manuscript over multiple sessions (Gombrich & Lawley, 1992). Although Gombrich had illustrations in front of him as a reference prompt, the articulation of each chapter was not drafted in advance and flowed naturally from memory. This no doubt contributed to the accessible language used in the work as people rarely integrate complex grammar or longwinded terminology into spontaneous speech.

During Gombrich's lifetime, between 1950 and 1994, Phaidon published 16 editions of the work. In 2007, after his death, a new pocket edition was published. Each edition preserved the preface/s that came before and from these paratextual elements alone one can glean much about the publishing process and history of the work.

Gombrich (1950) includes details in the preface to the first edition of *The Story of Art* as to his aims and guiding 'rules' when it came to writing the work.

Over the years from 1950 to 1970, ten new editions were released with no substantial changes to the content or layout of the book. It was not until the twelfth edition where revisions were made. Even so, the book's page dimensions remained the same and a side-by-side comparison reveals the changes to the overall look and feel to be fairly minimal.

The preface to the twelfth edition helpfully elaborates on the original book design and layout process, which informed the written text and choice of illustration. Gombrich (1971, p.vi) states:

I still treasure the memory of the unconventional and resourceful way in which Dr Bela Horovitz and Mr Ludwig Goldscheider, the founders of Phaidon Press, achieved this aim in 1949 by making me write another paragraph here or suggesting an extra illustration there. The result of these weeks of intense collaboration certainly justified the procedure, but the balance arrived at was so delicate that no major alterations could be contemplated while the original layout was retained. Only the last few chapters were slightly modified for the eleventh edition, when a Postscript was added, but the main body of the book was left as it was.

From this extract, it is evident that extra content was written by Gombrich ad hoc to facilitate the page design, layout and typography; this resulted in spreads which integrated the images with the text in the most efficient and economical way for the publisher. After such careful and precise arrangement of text with image and image with text the publisher was reluctant to revise the layout until the twelfth edition when 'modern production methods offered a fresh opportunity' (Gombrich, 1971, p.vi).

The thirteenth edition offers some additional paratextual elements to readers, namely chronological charts indicating the time the art was created; and also some historical event or 'landmarks' as Gombrich describes them. The addition of the timeline does serve as a useful reference, but also hints towards the educational market for the book. In his *Desert Island Discs* interview with Sue Lawley (Gombrich & Lawley, 1992), Gombrich stated that although it made money for him, he would have preferred if the book had not been adopted as a revision aid for exams, as he wanted it to be used for pleasure (Glueck, 1989). It can be inferred from this that the publisher commissioned these additional pedagogic features to accompany Gombrich's text in order to better meet the needs of the intended readership, or at least allow for crossover between the trade consumer market of amateur art history enthusiasts and the education market of students studying for exams. Online reviews, confirm that *The Story of Art* was adopted as recommended reading on school reading lists. It is worth mentioning here that had *The Story of Art* been categorised primarily as an academic or educational work it would not have appeared within this interrogation of longselling consumer non-fiction.

Fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth editions introduced incremental changes to the text and the addition of a few extra illustrations of artworks but Gombrich

resisted discussing contemporary modern art (beyond the early twentieth century). It is perhaps a testament to the philosophical and objective approach that Gombrich's discussion of art remained relevant and timeless.



Figure 42: *Pocket* (2006) and *Anniversary* (2022) editions

The overall dimensions of *The Story of Art*, that is to say the width and height of the page, remained fixed for 55 years and sixteen editions. Until the 2006 pocket edition was published, this new format is 1,064 pages in length and contains a plate section of 411 images (over three-quarters of which are full-colour). It remains true to the sixteenth edition in terms of Gombrich's content, with the addition of a preface written by Phaidon's then owner, Richard Schlagman and some reference lists in the end matter. However, the dimensions were for the first time changed completely from the earlier editions of the book; adopting a smaller page size (roughly that of a Penguin paperback) with the illustrations separated from the text and consolidated into a single plate section. Two register ribbons are provided to allow readers to keep track of the images to which the text belongs. Lightweight 'bible paper' and the smaller dimensions do make it more portable than the previous editions but the trade-off is that it extends to over 1,000 pages. One might certainly contemplate carrying it around a museum or gallery, although to do so in a 'pocket' would require quite large and well-structured pockets.

Reader Reviews

A random sample of 200 GoodReads reviews for *The Story of Art* were thematically coded to see if any common response to the work could be identified (various, 2007 - 2017). Although the vast majority (69%) of reviews were deemed to be positive towards the book the remaining third of reviews sampled raised valid criticisms of the work around representation and bias.

In terms of the positive comments, an ‘accessible writing style’ and ‘engaging illustrations’ featured heavily among the reviews.

One astute reviewer asked the question ‘Whose story? Who gets to tell it for whom?’ (anon, 2023) and another simply wrote ‘The Story of White Man Art’ (anon, 2017). These two comments neatly articulate and encapsulate the most frequently cited issues with *The Story of Art* and variations of these sentiments echoed through the positive and negative reviews. Readers noted the book is written from a Western or Europe-centric perspective and they noted that only one lone woman artist is named directly in the most recent editions of the book. They highlighted that ‘the whole of art produced elsewhere in the world—Asian, Middle-Eastern, African, Australasian, South American—is either excised or condensed into one paltry chapter’ and in general, there was a sense that readers felt artefacts from these areas were not discussed in their own right, but rather considered via a Western, colonial and outdated lens.

On these points, these criticisms made by 21st-century reviewers are of course valid; the publishing history and origination of the work outlined above explains how very few changes or revisions were made to Gombrich’s text in the fifty years since he first dictated the content of the book. His knowledge and scholarship of art was acquired within, and influenced by, the European institutions of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Gombrich’s story of art was a product of *its* time and *his* habitus, therefore the narrative and curation reflects to some extent the biases of the historic canon. There was not then (nor now) equal cultural significance, economic value or emphasis assigned to art and artefacts made by women, made by marginalised groups or made by less politically powerful societies.

Arguably, some of these criticisms might have been addressed over the subsequent decades via revisions and updates to the book. Costly as this might have been in terms of time and typesetting for the publisher Phaidon, there have been dramatic shifts in society and art since the beginning of the twentieth century.

In interviews (Gombrich & Lawley, 1992) and the paratext to the most recent editions, Gombrich (dated 1994) made his case as to why he did not want to update the book to include more contemporary art. Yet he was not resistant to evolution of ideas on art theory. If one evaluates Gombrich's body of work, he does not come across as a man driven by elitism, or exclusion of particular artists, indeed his further writings such as *Illusion and Art* (1960) deal with the psychology of perception, truth, and stereotype. Within this, he demonstrated the importance of scrutinising what we believe to be reality, as opposed to accepting the perception of reality.

The Story of Art is an anachronism in comparison to modern writing, and perhaps best seen as a snapshot of art history—one that aids and provokes readers to reflect on twentieth-century biases and the need for more inclusive appreciation of art.

The omission of women artists acted as a provocation that prompted Katy Hassel to write *The Story of Art Without Men* which was published by Cornerstone in 2022 and went on to become the recipient of the Waterstones Book of the Year in 2023.

Analogous Titles

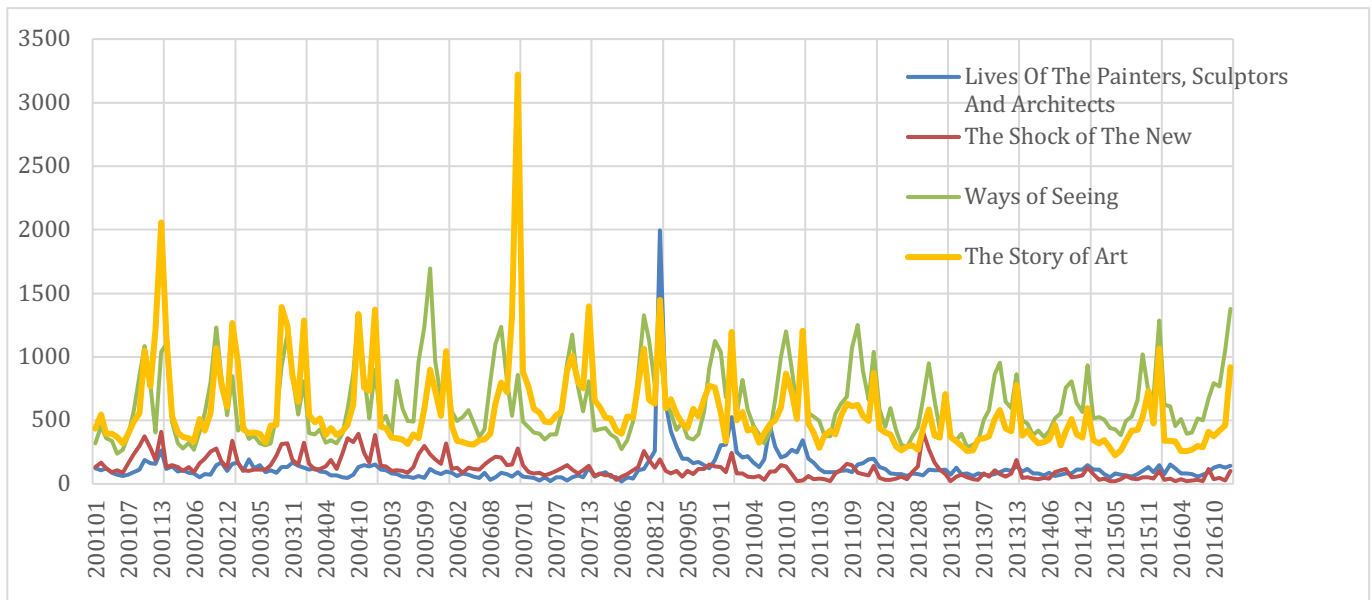


Figure 43: *The Story of Art et al Sales Volume 2001-2016* source Nielsen 2024e

Adaptations

According to Phaidon (2023), *The Story of Art* has been translated into ‘40 languages’ of which the Gombrich scholar J.B. Trapp (2000) has bibliographic listing for twenty-six. However, the literary estate has little evidence of this resulting in royalties for Ernst Gombrich himself over the first three decades of publication. It was not until Phaidon, struggling financially, was bought by Richard Schlagman in 1990 that a more rigorous accounting and royalties system was put in place and income for translation rights began to materialise (Gombrich, L. 2023).

Conclusion

Gombrich’s magic was in articulating complex topics in a way that appealed to the mass market and niche markets simultaneously without pandering to fashion or resorting to populist (with a small ‘p’) tactics.

The collaborative process between typesetter and author makes practical sense for a high-illustrated text, but this iterative back and forth is not an optimum way to work in most publishing sectors and indeed is quite peculiar to coedition publishing and packagers. The twelfth-edition preface highlights

the impact of technology on art-book production, the constraints of space and the comparatively high cost of manufacture (requiring heavy white art paper, multiple plates and coloured inks). These factors forced Horovitz, Goldscheider and Gombrich to both economise and avoid waste through careful design and layout. Of course, these principles make good sense commercially, but will have been inherited from the restrictions of wartime paper rationing which extended from 1939 through the post-war years to 1949 (Holman, 2008, p.83). During the period of paper rationing, restrictions were imposed on UK publishers in terms of how much paper stock was made available to them and surplus paper could only be obtained if the work was deemed by committee to be 'essential' in terms of the war effort. Thus, savvy use of paper will have been an essential part of the publishing process for almost a decade and likely heavily ingrained in Phaidon's workflow and practices.

Given the commercial expense of retypesetting, it is understandable why the work was not significantly updated, despite criticisms regarding the male and Western perspective, and omissions. The decision to not revise the core text does not seem to have impacted the desirability of the book in the 21st century and it still charts highly.

7.6 Case 5: *The Right Way to Play Chess* by David Pritchard (1919 – 2005)

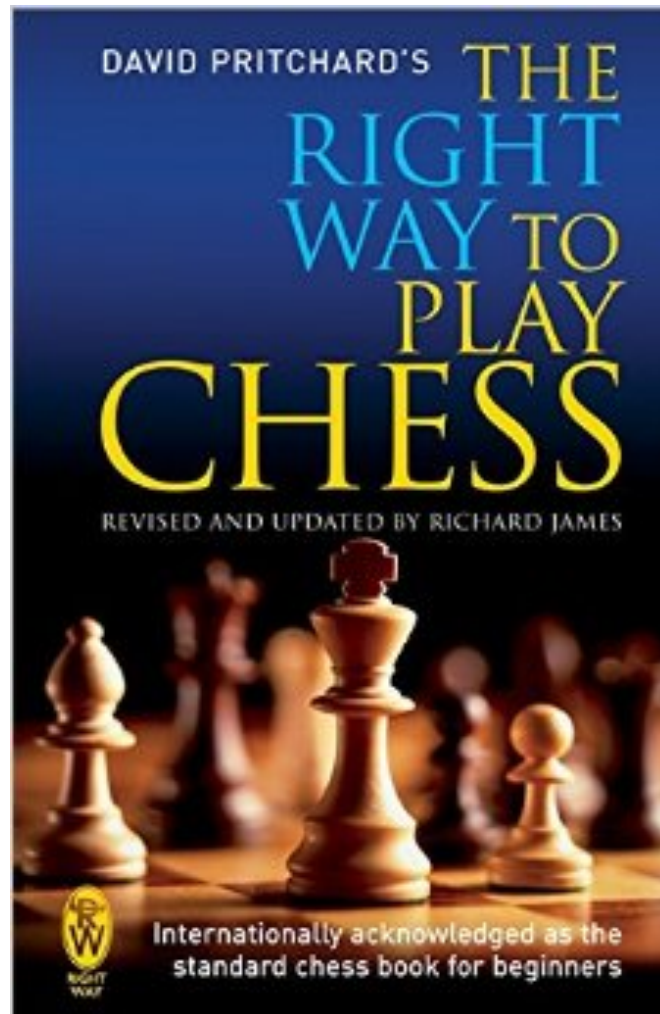


Figure 44: Cover image right way to play chess by David Pritchard

Description

First published in 1950, David Pritchard's *The Right Way to Play Chess* (Elliot Right Way Books) is an introductory level guide to the rules and moves involved in the game of chess. It chapters the opening, middle and end game along with example games and strategies for play.

In terms of the content, a number of readers, including the GM Nigel Davies (2010; Markou et al., 2017;), mention the section on castle formations and king safety as being particularly noteworthy.

Its primary Nielsen classification is 'T.11.5 Hobbies, pastimes & indoor games'

The 10th edition (2008) is available in paperback and ebook formats, and was updated by GM Richard James to include a chapter on teaching chess to children. In 2015, it ranked at 3,663rd bestselling out of 734,767 titles in trade non-fiction, placing it in the top 0.5% of books in print in the UK (Nielsen BookScan, 2016).

Agent Representation

None found.

Publishing History

First published in 1950, by Elliot Right Way Books in hardback as part of the Right Way imprint. Elliot Right Way books were an independent family-owned publishing company established by Andrew George Elliot in 1942 specialising in non-fiction instructional titles (n.a., 2017; Shaffi, 2014). Elliot Right Way Books was sold in 2007 by Malcolm and Clive Elliot to the independent publisher Constable & Robinson (Proudfoot and Markou, 2017a; Tivnan, 2007). In 2014, Constable & Robinson became part of Little, Brown Book Group who currently manage *The Right Way to Play Chess* as part of their backlist under the Robinson imprint although Nielsen continue to list it under the Right Way imprint for historic reasons (Proudfoot and Markou, 2017a).

According to Proudfoot, Publishing Director of Constable & Robinson (2017), Elliot Right Way Books carefully selected its authors in order to ensure they lived-up to the series name:

When I saw Malcolm Elliot recently he was impressing on me how he always tried to give readers a reason to buy the Right Way book rather than any other by choosing the right author, which in the case of David Pritchard he appears to have succeeded in doing with this chess title. Right Way also took great care in editing and shaping its books to give the sound instruction implicit in the company name. Right Way books are also, of course, inexpensive if no-frills (i.e., black and white, standard-format paperbacks).

The affordability of the book and market positioning may have played a role in securing the books commercial success however, Elliot's selection of author was most certainly a key factor. Not only was Pritchard incredibly knowledgeable about the game of chess, but he was also a professional promoter of games through his work as Editor of *Games & Puzzles* magazine,

Director of the Mind Sports Olympiad and President of the Chess Variants Society (*The Times*, 2006). *Games and Puzzles* magazine provided opportunity to reach a clearly defined market segment. David Parlett (2017), one of Pritchard's colleagues at *Games & Puzzles* magazine, confirmed that *The Right way to play chess* (along with the rest of the Right Way Series) was promoted in the magazine regularly throughout the 1970s, reaching an estimated monthly circulation of 20,000 readers.

PAPERFRONT PUZZLER PLEASERS
PUZZLES AND TEASERS FOR EVERYONE 35P
Written by Darryl Francis and edited by David Pritchard, both well known in this magazine, this brilliant collection of baffling puzzles with over 120 diagrams has a unique answer system to prevent you cheating: will tax your brain on words, numbers, logic and real life problems. Pit your wits against this stupendous book. 160 pages. 214 puzzles.

PROGRESSIVE BRAIN TEASING QUIZZES 35P
A pick up, put down and pick up again and again book, to test your knowledge and make you puzzle! From Animals to Astrology, Wales to World History, the 12 Questions in each subject group are in mounting order of difficulty: from easy to devilish to solve! Over 700 questions. 128 pages.

WIN PRIZE COMPETITIONS 35P
You can pull off the big wins! This brilliant storehouse of knowledge gives special emphasis to order of merit contests and slogans. *Competitors Journal*: "Full of fascinating facts and figures and sensible suggestions for tackling all types of contest..." *Daily Mail*: "The only standard work on the subject in this country..." 128 pages.

ALL BRITISH QUIZ BOOK 35P
The puzzle book which exposes some of the wonder of Britain's extraordinary heritage. 590 questions and answers on 59 subjects in this 128 page paperback—here's something for everyone. Test your family and friends—and yourself—hours of puzzling delight!

THE RIGHT WAY TO PLAY CHESS 35P
Tenth edition of this huge world seller by David Pritchard, editor of this magazine. 240 pages crammed with information, examples, moves, opening gambits, powers, and illustrative games. Over 100 diagrams. *Chess*: "The Best". *Sunday Times*: "Remarkable". *Illustrated London News*: "The Best".

BRIDGE QUIZ FROM A NEW ANGLE 35P
From two of Britain's leading players and writers, Pat Cotter and Derek Rimington, comes this unique, clear, concise guidance. Selected hands demonstrate bidding features used in modern Acot. Test your own bidding on these hands—try your play—then compare with the experts! 160 pages. Graphically explained answers. 87 questions.

PLEASE RUSH TO ME
TOTAL I enclose
is £.....
..... copies Puzzles & Teasers for Everyone
..... copies Progressive Brain Teasing Quizzes
..... copies Win Prize Competitions
..... copies All British Quiz Book
..... copies Play Chess
..... copies Bridge Quiz from a New Angle all at 35p.
Please add 7p per book P. & P.
Name
Address
Take to your local bookseller, or, if difficult, send direct to
ELLIOT RIGHT WAY BOOKS, 8-10 KINGSWOOD BLDGS., KINGSWOOD, SURREY, U.K.

Figure 45: Advert from *Games & Puzzles* Magazine 1975

Beyond this, Pritchard was an experienced publishing professional familiar with the world of writing, editing and marketing books. In an interview with Bodlaender (2000) on the Chess Variants website Pritchard implies that he even typeset the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Variants* himself, this being his best-known work, considered his magnum opus, in which he describes over 1400 alternative forms of chess.

Within the online chess community and forums, there are some ad hoc instances of *The Right Way to Play Chess* being recommended to beginners. However, it does not always appear in the experts' curated list of best chess books for those learning the game (Chess.com, 2017). It is possible the title continues to chart as a bestseller on reputation as an established, well-known classic rather than a contemporary favourite, but perhaps there is another reason for the

books continued success? Namely that *The Right Way to Play Chess* benefits from its availability via the Waterstones bookshop chain where it forms part of the core stock inventory. It is likely the *only* chess primer held in core stock

by branches of Waterstones (Markou et al., 2017). As evidenced by the Nielsen sales data below, the title sees most sales in the run up to Christmas each year, implying that these are gift purchases.

Proudfoot suspected that the Right Way series might not be as attractive to high street retailers as they once were; having been displayed prominently on dedicated spinners 'but continue to find buyers looking for straightforward, practical help online, many years after first publication' (Proudfoot and Markou, 2017b).

Many of our How Tos (so including old Right Way titles) books sell predominantly via Amazon, however, it seems you're right with regard to Waterstones as 8,989 copies of the most recent edition have gone from our warehouse to Waterstones, while 9,220 copies have gone to Amazon, so not too much difference there. (Proudfoot and Markou, 2017b)

If one looks online, *The Right Way to Play Chess* is certainly listed as a Waterstones.co.uk bestseller in their 'Hobbies, Quiz Books & Games' category and is the first title to be recommended on chess (see fig.2).

In terms of the international market, Proudfoot noted 'fewer than 500 copies of the most recent edition appear to have sold in other territories, though it's possible that there may have been some sales to other territories via Amazon.co.uk.' and that *The Right Way to Play Chess* is available as an ebook and has sold '3,858 copies of the ebook since 2013.' (Proudfoot and Markou, 2017b).

Books on Chess



Figure 46: First in Waterstones Recommended Books on Chess (Waterstones.com 2017)

In April 2017, at the time the research was undertaken, *The Right Way to Play Chess* ranked 11th in the 'Board Games / Chess' category on Amazon.co.uk, however six of the titles keeping *The Right way to play chess* outside of the top ten were either duplicate formats of the same title (*Deep Thinking* appeared 1st, 5th, 6th & 8th) or not really books about playing chess. *The Art of Learning* (ranked 2nd) and *How Life Imitates Chess* (ranked 10th) are authored by chess players but are more about brain training and philosophy than guides to chess as a game. When these titles are excluded then *The Right Way to Play Chess* would have ranked 5th on Amazon in terms of books about chess.

Analogous Titles

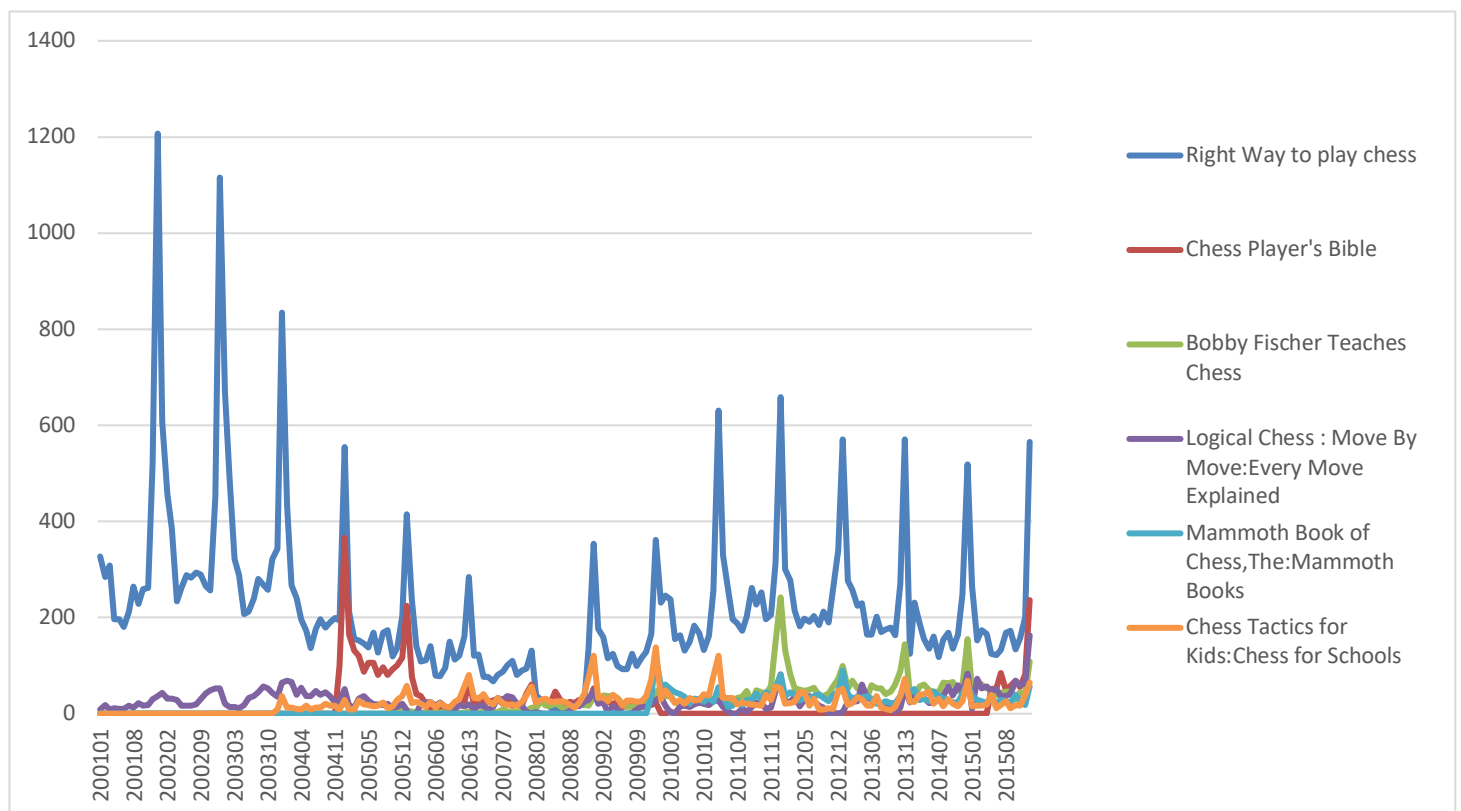


Figure 47: *Right Way to Play Chess et al Sales Volume 2001 - 2016 (Nielsen BookScan 2024f)*

Lockdown and The Queen's Gambit

In March 2020, UK high-street bookshops were mandated to close due to the Covid-19 lockdown forcing customers to shop online for books (if they were buying books at all). As a result, discoverability through keywords and other metadata played a crucial role in book sales. This shift to online book buying, resulted in customers having access to a broader catalogue of print products

online and additional product metadata such as customer reviews, media quotes and sales rankings. In October 2020, the release of the Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit* revived people's interest in chess. This set of events provided a unique opportunity to test the hypothesis that *The Right Way to Play Chess* was a longselling phenomenon because of its listing as Waterstones' core stock. The simple way to test this hypothesis was to compare Nielsen sales reports on for *The Right Way to Play Chess* and other analogous chess titles covering the time before, during and after the lockdown period and the release of *The Queens Gambit* TV-series. Waterstones does have an online presence, and as Proudfoot noted Waterstones and Amazon had been shipped (and presumably sold) roughly equivalent volume of stock between 2013 and 2017. Nevertheless, the bulk of online book buying in the UK goes through Amazon.co.uk. I suspected that without the physical advantage of being there on the shelf right in front of customers that the sales of *The Right Way to Play Chess* might have suffered due to Covid lockdowns, but benefitted from the Queen's Gambit.

Table 25: Volume Sales Right Way to Play Chess 2017 - 2021

	Volume sales												
Year / Period	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
2021	n/d	n/d	16	119	133	134	76	108	80	92	102	110	288
2020	115	93	90	n/d	n/d	n/d	96	64	72	67	98	66	868
2019	152	120	118	110	96	97	75	82	104	75	99	142	276
2018	178	167	138	119	114	110	90	111	104	124	148	151	364
2017	250	190	144	135	165	112	100	165	185	136	153	215	421

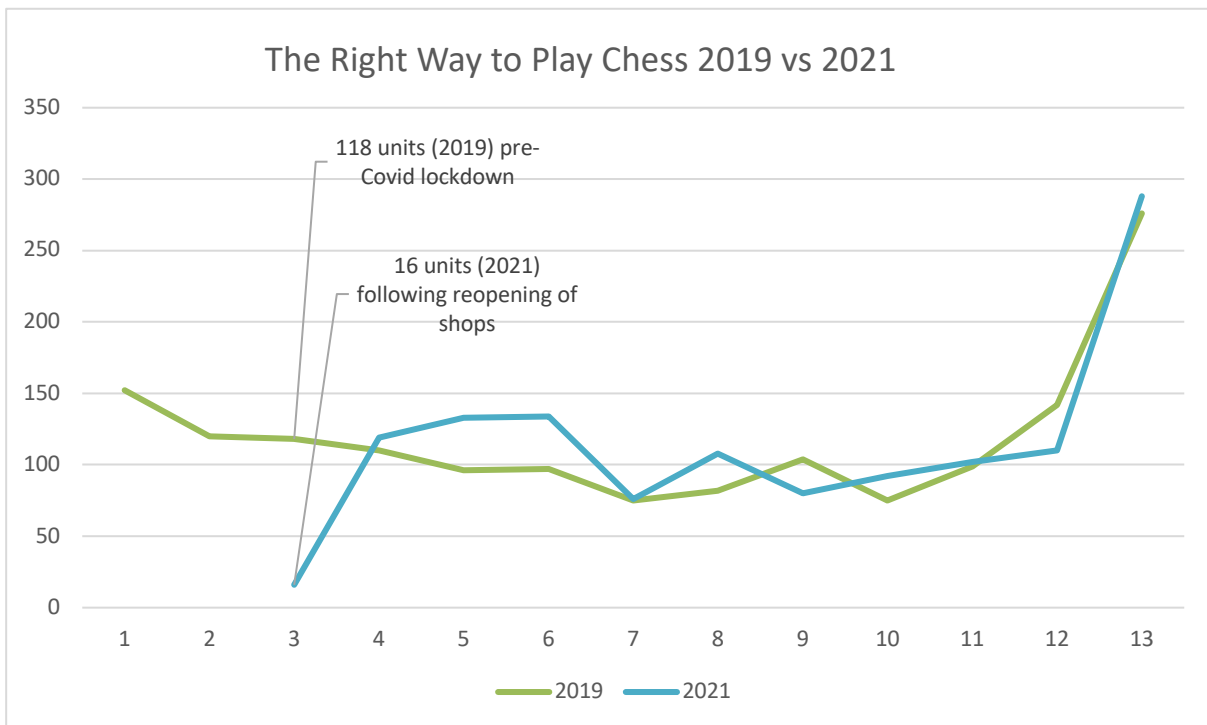


Figure 48: Volume Sales Right Way to Play Chess 2019 vs 2020



Figure 49: Volume Sales Right Way to Play Chess 2019 vs 2021 This period, while outside the scope of the current thesis, presents an interesting area for further research.

Unfortunately, the Nielsen data for the lockdown periods is not available; periods 4, 5 and 6 of 2020 and periods 1 and 2 of 2021 contain no data (n/d). However, it is possible to make a comparison of the volume sales in 2019 (before any Covid 19 lockdowns) versus 2020, and 2019 versus 2021 are provided in [Figure 48](#) and [Figure 49](#) respectively. The only evidence of a significant drop in sales proximate to a lockdown is period 3 in 2021 (around March) where usually over 100 units might be sold, however this could have been due to low stock levels following the 2020 Christmas spike. Sales were up 214% thanks to the Queen's Gambit reinvigorating interest in chess.

Conclusion

In summary, several key factors have greatly contributed to the long-lasting commercial success of this title. Firstly, the author, Prichard, was not only an expert in the field but also a champion chess player and a professional author and editor. His expertise and passion for games and puzzles allowed them to actively promote the title to a wide audience through *Games & Puzzles* magazine, with an estimated monthly circulation of 20,000 between 1972 and 1982. This exposure to a large and targeted audience increased awareness of the book and generated ongoing interest and sales.

The Right Way to Play Chess (1950) benefitted for over half a century from the consistent support of Elliot Right Way Books before changing hands twice in the following seven years when Elliot Right Way Books was sold to Constable & Robinson (2007), which itself was bought by Little, Brown Book Group in 2014. The repeated release of new editions of the title by successive publishers indicates a well-managed editorial strategy and a deliberate effort to leverage intellectual property. By continuously updating and reissuing the book, the publishers at Elliot Right Way and later Constable & Robinson extended the sales life of the work and reassured retailers of its market position.

Most significantly, in terms of factors that have contributed to longsellerdom is the title's inclusion within the Waterstones' core stock list. This retail adoption ensured that the book was consistently available and visible across hundreds of high-street branches. Even though there are (according to chess

players) better chess primers available, anyone browsing for an introduction to the game in their local Waterstones was unlikely to look any further than *The Right way to Play Chess*.

7.7 Conclusion to the Case Studies

This chapter has presented five cases illustrating the historical and contemporary factors that contributed to their long-term commercial success. The selected cases were positioned at the outset as falling within two distinct types of writing, either narrative non-fiction or more pedagogic or instructional non-fiction. Whether through the compelling narrative techniques of Capote and Brittain, the evocative storytelling of Lee, or the accessible yet authoritative approach of Gombrich and Prichard each case has demonstrated a unique journey into the UK's cultural heritage.

Although case studies have their limitations, on balance, they really serve as the heart of this thesis. Moreover, they offer a replicable template for book case studies that can be used and refined in future research iterations. Without the specific details and journeys of longselling works it is not possible to appreciate the achievement or the significance. The cases bring publishing stories to life in a way that numeric data cannot, and put people and their contribution at the fore. They highlight the collaborative nature of content creation and the human hours involved in the communications circuit. Indeed, quantifying this contribution, by mapping the hours spent on a project by all actors in the supply chain, is an area for future research that would be incredibly valuable to the industry as a whole.

Conclusion to Part 3

The qualitative research into the bookselling environment and individual longsellers has provided a wealth of rich data to explore.

Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity outlined the strategic decision-making processes made by booksellers including buyer behaviour and curatorial risk. It has identified the mechanism by which stock and inventory are managed and therefore *how* backlist titles, such as the identified longsellers, maintain their presence in retail spaces. *Chapter 7: Journeys to Longsellerdom: Case Studies* provided five detailed accounts of longselling non-fiction revealing the importance of specific actors and actions within the communications circuit. The role of publisher and paratextual framing of these works was highlighted, as well as the socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the ongoing relevance of these works. Together these chapters provided a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind longsellerdom and the qualities found within longselling works.

While there is no universal formula to the enduring appeal of longselling titles *Chapter 8: What Makes a Longseller?* builds upon the case study and the theory presented in *Chapter 2* to frame and interpret the findings collectively. This serves as a reflection on, and discussion of, the qualitative research ahead of the broader synthesis of findings in the final conclusion of the thesis in *Chapter 9*.

Part 4: Discussion

Chapter 8: What Makes a Longseller?

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Areas of Further Research

Chapter 8: What Makes a Longseller?

8.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the communications circuit was appropriated to provide a structure with which to consider longselling works via the actors, flow of content over time, and multiple editions, or iterations. This chapter brings together the findings from those five case studies. Key themes to do with longselling non-fiction are examined and explored using the theoretical frameworks established in *Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory*. The most significant of these are Bourdieu's sociological framework of habitus, field, and capital and Bhaskar's theory of filtering, framing and amplification. With these theoretical lenses overlaid across the actors within the communications circuit the relevance and interpretations of longselling works over time can begin to be unpacked.

In addition to consideration of the case studies the quantitative analysis in *Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset* and *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity* are brought together and longevity as a phenomenon discussed.

8.2 Narrative and Non-fiction

The author of narrative non-fiction has an opportunity to show negative events, ugly truths, negative perspectives of the world alongside positive events, as a counterpoint to nostalgia, romanticising the past, or putting forward wholly idyllic perspectives. Works of fiction *can* of course, be written to juxtapose negative and positive events and *can* be written using real events as the scaffolding or backdrop to a story. But works of fiction may also indulge in the creation of purely imagined events from any narrative perspective in a way that narrative non-fiction may not (or at least may not without inviting criticism). Thus, there is a particular challenge when recounting events accurately while making the story still compelling for the reader.

In *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Hayden White (1980, p7-8) proposes that '[n]arrative becomes a problem only

when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult.' (White, 1980 p.8). Yet, one clear thing that ties narrative non-fiction cases together, is that they each present a compelling story which has the weight of truth and veracity behind it, a story so intriguing, compelling, or powerful that it can be adapted to other formats such as films and plays.

Within the cases studied, Brittain strived over many years to perfect her narrative and to express the harsh realities of the First World War in a form that was most impactful and yet still appealed to the commercial publisher Gollancz. *Testament of Youth* has been bought and read by millions of readers over the past ninety years, yet reader reviews included ambivalent comments regarding Brittain's writing style, and indicates that it is not universally considered an *enjoyable* read. Capote on the other hand is generally praised for his engaging writing style despite the darkness of topic, murders and murderers, being reported. Then there is Laurie Lee who used a soft brush to cover negative topics, focusing on his understanding of events from a child's perspective, he includes descriptions of his absent father, the death of his sister and mother, a murder, and (separately) a suicide remembered from his childhood in the village. None of these topics are presented in gruesome detail but Lee certainly does not shy away from the negative events rather he leans into their lasting emotional impact on him.

The tension between truth and fiction arises frequently in the discussion of Truman Capote's authorship of *In Cold Blood*. Were there details in Capote's non-fiction account of the Clutter murders that strayed from knowable facts? Voss (2011, p150-191) lays out extracts from creators who dramatized scenes asking precisely these questions; discussions between Truman Capote and Nelle Harper Lee, about the inclusion of imagined details in a work of non-fiction. This makes for quite a maze of mirrors whereby adaptations and derivative works based loosely on 'a true story'—Plimpton and Clarke's respective biographies of Capote's life—present imagined accounts of Capote's reporting of a 'true story': the Clutter family murders.

True-crime writer and journalist Sebastian Junger (author of *A Death in Belmont*, 2006) speculates about the allure of ‘truth’ in non-fiction writing:

“One of the conceits of my profession is that it can discover the truth” Junger, who is a foreign correspondent for *Vanity Fair*, writes “sometimes it can, but often the truth simply isn’t knowable – not, at least, in an absolute way.” He adds: “But maybe the truth isn’t even the most interesting thing about some stories, I thought: maybe the most interesting thing... is all the things that could be true. And maybe it’s in the pursuit of those things that you understand the world in its deepest, most profound sense.” (Nadelson, 2006 p.4)

This articulation has a certain appeal to it, the human brain is prone to unconsciously fill in the blanks, make up a narrative, when information is not available and it does this in a rapid and reflexive way picking the most easily available explanation (Kahneman, 2003 pp.107-108). In the cases of *In Cold Blood*, Capote did the opposite, he spent years interviewing, researching and writing the story—filling in the blanks may have been part of that process—but according to Capote no part of the writing was unconscious. The result of this process was the creation of something subjectively profound and yet objectively enduring.

8.3 Doxa and Canons

In the chapter ‘The (In)Visibility of War in British Novels of the Twentieth Century’ in *Plots of war: Modern Narratives of Conflict* Nünning (2012 p.69-72) articulates the tension between subjective personal histories of WWI and the collective memory of the British nation. The corpus of work written about people’s experience of WWI was diverse and in Britain’s case, *Testament of Youth* formed part of a collection of memoirs and fictionalised memoirs written as a mechanism to promote a pacifist social and political agenda (Nünning, 2012).

As mentioned in [section 2.2 Models & Frameworks](#), canonical works are legitimised via the Bourdieusian (1984) concept of *doxa*; a collective and seemingly objective universal assimilation. Once established these works remain ‘widely unchallenged’.

Within the cases reviewed *Testament of Youth*, *Cider With Rosie*, and *The Story of Art* are evidenced to have crossed over into British literary canon and have been legitimised by the educational and academic institutions enforced (in part) by government policy and national curricula. Once instituted into such a doxic position, there is a general acceptance of the value of the work and the question of whether the work warrants such a status is rarely scrutinised. In the case of *The Story of Art* there is evidence of a shift from its canonical, doxic, status via evidence its position *is* challenged. The contemporary reader reviews indicate that art historians and general readers question the status of a work in which women artists are omitted and the European/Western/colonial perspectives of art history is perpetuated.

Although some readers did not enjoy Brittain's writing style, they still read it, in the belief that it was an important work with valuable lessons. But why was this the case? In terms of Bourdieusian fields Brittain gained social capital through a number of institutions that she was affiliated with; Oxford University where she studied, the British Red Cross (adjacent to the military) for whom she volunteered as a nurse, and the pacifist movement network which she was an active member of. Victor Gollancz leveraged these credentials and amplified Brittain's status through the marketing of the book, positioning Brittain's writing alongside other bestselling autobiographies of the time ([Figure 29](#)) and insisting that it become part of the canon. In terms of the Virago editorial and marketing strategies, Withers points to a framing of *Testament of Youth* (and other reissued works by women) as 'forgotten writers who you *should* know about, but don't' (2021, p.47). Moreover, Virago's Founder Callil was savvy to the mass appeal of 'remembrance cultures' which made *Testament of Youth* palatable to a broader audience, beyond *just* a feminist readership (Withers. 2021 p.42). Here, within the state-sustained doxa of remembrance, is where *Testament of Youth's* status has been secured. Predominantly, this has been achieved via inclusion on school curricula, but also through remembrance events, anniversaries and related media attention. In terms of the longselling case studies, for the most part the 'dominant' actor imposing a 'point of view' could be identified as the British education system.

Yet, in the case of *The Right Way to Play Chess* the doxic status is likely sustained by the adoption of the title as Waterstones core stock. This hints towards the power that prominent book retailers can wield in the sustaining of longsellers.

8.4 Amplification

As established in earlier chapters, most non-fiction books in print have a short window during which the bulk of their sales are achieved, typically tailing off after three years, and this applies to the bestsellers (highest charting) as much as it does to those that only see modest sales upon publication. *Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory* explains that in order to consider the lifecycle of a work in commercial and publishing terms, Darnton's communication circuit is a useful model to visualise how the content travels from author to publisher, retailer, reader, and (in many cases) returns back to the author and publisher for revision resulting in new editions of the work. Hence some factors to consider via these case studies were the actions of publishers through the value chain; and how have works evolved and IP been exploited through refinement or revisions of the content or the exterior packaging (look-and-feel)? In some instances, these revisions relate to the manuscript's core text itself, as is the case with *The Right Way to Play Chess* now into its eighth edition, but more often the revisions were made exclusively to the *paratext* or *paradata*. That is to say they do not relate to the core manuscript but rather the surrounding text and data such as the cover, title, quotes and endorsements, copyright page, preface, introduction as well as other physical or digital marketing assets create to promote and sell books (Genette in Davis 2019 p.31; Squires, 2012 p.75-76). This was the case for *Testament of Youth*, *Cider With Rosie*, and *In Cold Blood*. *The Story of Art* sits somewhere in between with few changes to the core manuscript for many of the early editions and some significant additions to the core text from the eleventh edition onwards.

In addition to the positive influence of packaging and paratext, Bhaskar's (2012) theory of publishing and model of filtering, framing and amplification is a helpful theory to apply. Each case study highlights the significant

amplifiers of each work that not only elevated its sales, though increased visibility and hype but also lengthened its longevity. Bhaskar suggests that publishers can amplify a publication's commercial and cultural capital through a range of activities. Hence, some factors to consider via these case studies are the act of publishers through the value chain. Specifically, I looked for evidence of the evolution of a work through repackaging and new editions, exploitation of rights (e.g. adaptation, serialisation, translations), recognition of the work via awards and prizes, and adoption of the work by educational and academic institutions.

One of the most significant amplifiers is the impact of adaptations of the text into other media forms (TV, film, stage). In *The Adaptation Industry*, Simone Murray explains:

The book is not the final, definitive repository of a celebrity author's identity (even if it is the first such iteration). Rather, books constitute only one of a number of potential media forms in which creative content can be embodied and through which authorial celebrity can continue to circulate publicly and replicate ad infinitum (p.36).

Although the above refers to *celebrity* authors, the premise holds true for all creators of written works and the intellectual property they produce. Murray also neatly weaves together elements of Darnton's circuit and Bourdieusian economics towards an integrated theory of adaptation, in which she articulates how cultural esteem and commercial capital attributed to a work (and its author) in one manifestation can serve as a positive feedback loop for all media:

In this analytical space structured by institutions, agents and the webs of relationships between them, attributions of cultural esteem may trigger significant commercial dividends and, contrariwise, commercial success has flow-on effects for cultural prevalence and evaluation (Murray 2012, p.6).

According to Murray (2012, p.15) by the late 1980s, the rights potential of a work was playing a significant role in the acquisition decision-making process and dynamic interconnection between media organisations. Thus, the exploitation of rights, and impact of adaptations as positive feedback loops are a key point for consideration within the case studies. The three narrative non-fiction titles discussed in this chapter have all been adapted for the screen or

stage, and indeed many of the identified longselling works presented in [section 4.3 Longselling Subset](#) will be familiar to present day audiences thanks as much to adaptations as the printed book. In terms of *In Cold Blood*, a film adaptation was clearly conceptualised by Capote alongside the written work.

Although the instructional non-fiction works such as *The Right Way to Play Chess* might appear less adaptable into other media forms than fiction, there are still ways in which related media might influence the popularity of chess by featuring the game (for example in the 1968 film, *The Thomas Crown Affair* and more recently *The Queen's Gambit* (2020) Netflix series).

The Story of Art was not adapted for screen, but a decade after its publication the BBC commissioned the TV Series *Civilisation* (1969) presented by Kenneth Clark on the topic of history of art, architecture and philosophy. This TV show was likely inspired in part by Gombrich's work; they were known to each other through the Warburg Institute (Rigamonti di Cuto, 2014). The TV series *Civilisation* (1969) was incredibly successful and launched a spin-off book, laying the pathway for subsequent TV series and publications on art such as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Robert Hughes *The Shock of the New* (1980).

Remarque's title *All Quiet on the Western Front* (although not one of the case studies) serves as a particularly interesting example in terms of being referenced by news media. The 1930s film adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* won an Oscar for best picture at the third academy awards and is frequently cited alongside other Oscar-nominated films with war settings (for example *Hurt Locker*, *Saving Private Ryan*) as a cultural point of reference. The Penguin paperback of Remarque's memoir saw an uplift in sales over the summer of 2010 following a press release announcing the actor Daniel Radcliffe (of Harry Potter fame) was to be starring in a new film adaptation optioned by writer and producer Ian Stokell. The irony here being that Radcliffe did not ultimately feature in Stokell's adaptation and the film took sixteen years to bring to realisation via Netflix (Stokell cited by Tsang, 2023).

Nevertheless, the mere discussion of an upcoming film in 2010, amplified sales of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in print formats (Nielsen, 2017a).

Literary prizes as highlighted by English (2005), Squires (2004, 2013 p.18-30) have the potential to amplify a winning work; such prizes can bring significant attention to a book, leading to increased sales and exposure. This amplification effect is particularly relevant when considering the potential impact of adaptations and the interconnectedness between media organizations. When a book wins a prestigious literary prize, it becomes a more appealing prospect for adaptation, further expanding its reach and potential audience.

8.5 Ownership and Oversight

Beyond the factors mentioned above, it is worth considering the legal framework and mechanisms of selling and distributing IP for the full duration of its copyright. As evidenced by the case studies, over a work's commercial lifetime, multiple publishing companies can be involved with bringing it to market, in its various manifestations; the license to publish different formats (paperback, hardback, serialisation, ebook) may be carved up and sold individually to different publishers and these rights can also be sold on or re-licensed to publishers. Twentieth-century consolidation of the book publishing market through mergers and acquisitions of publishing companies has resulted in catalogues containing thousands of titles changing hands, sometimes repeatedly over the course of decades (Thompson, 2010 p101-146). Similarly, commissioning book editors often change job function and move between publishing companies. When it comes to backlist titles, one is unlikely to find a continuous relationship between an author and their original publisher, commissioning editor, designer, or marketing team across the full duration of the work's publishing history. This is relevant because businesses are made up of people, the oversight of and accountability for the commercial exploitation of a backlist title can wane or be interrupted and thus backlist management, or indeed the absence of management, can be an important factor in whether a title stays in print. All five case studies provide evidence of this commercial flux but *Testament of Youth* (1933) serves to illustrate my

point. Brittain's manuscript began its publishing journey with serious backing from Gollancz and yet Vera Brittain ended up with the rights reverting back to her ownership and three subsequent publishers involved in the subsequent editions (Arrow Books, Virago Press, Fontana). Although *Testament of Youth* remained under the Virago imprint the publishing entity known as Virago Press has been acquired and rehomed many times over the past 40 years (n.a., Virago, 2024). Thus, it would be a complex endeavour to map out all the people whose actions contributed to the ongoing commercial exploitation of this intellectual property.

Where the dynamics within publishing companies can result in a work becoming distanced from the most heavily invested people over time, in the adjacent world of the literary agency the relationship bonds are potentially stronger. Curtis Brown is one of the UK's oldest literary agencies tasked with representing and exploiting works on behalf of authors and their estates up until the point they fall into the public domain. In interview (Brown, 2017), a Literary Agent responsible for heritage and estates explained there is a unique continuity of commercial relationship between a work and the agent who negotiated its publication. While the copyright license for a title might pass from publisher to publisher over the years, the agent (or agency) that brokered the original deal remains contractually bound to the proceeds from that work. An author might fall out with their agent and seek different representation for subsequent manuscripts, but they cannot 'sack' the agent from a pre-existing contract at least not without a significant breach of the agreement allowing for a termination clause to be acted upon.

One reason that some older works might no longer be available to buy is because the work fell *out-of-print* and the rights reverted back to the author, or author's estate. This is particularly significant for those twentieth century works published in the decades before the print-on-demand or ebook revolutions. The author-publisher contract often contains a clause that terminates the agreement when the books goes out-of-print, at which point the rights revert back to the author. In this instance, if the work has no author, estate, or agent to promote its relevance to a new publisher, then there is no

actor invested in exploiting the work, no one championing its merits or petitioning for it to be republished, meaning it is destined to fall into commercial obscurity. This is why the role of an agent responsible for heritage backlist works is so unique, there is a tangible commercial rationale for hunting through the agencies archives, assessing the relevance of the work to a contemporary audience and potential revenue to be gained from exploiting the rights (Brown, 2019).

8.6 Attention Spans

One of the greatest changes to media consumption in the digitally submerged twenty-first century, is the dramatic increase in things that are jostling for an individual's attention. Streamed TV, mobile phones, games consoles, home hubs provide a literally never-ending source of entertainment and distraction. The consequence is a reduction in the amount of time and attention available to dedicate to any one thing (Doyle and Roda, 2019). The compulsion to engage with these distractions is so great, that it can supersede an individual's agency: 'Attention regulates our interaction with the world, both at the individual and social level. (Roda, 2019 p.11)'.

It might seem like a tautology, but it is worth stressing, that in a knowledge economy such as professional publishing attention *is* investment and investment *is* attention. In a publishing sense being 'invested', would mean putting time, money and human resources in upfront to bring a product to market. In doing so, the publishing company exposes itself to a certain level of financial risk, and the fate of the business hangs on those book projects being successful. To be deemed successful a book project in all its formats and manifestations must make its way into the hands of thousands of readers. Thus, it stands to reason that the more people invested in bringing a title to market the more attention it will get from those invested parties, the greater the efforts made to promote and exploit it, and the better chance of recouping that investment.

Publisher and Editorial Attention

All of the publishing case studies, explored in this thesis were first acquired (or commissioned) and brought to market in the first half of the twentieth century, pre-demise of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in 1996, which meant that the retail price point upon publication and the beginning of the sales lifecycle could not be eroded by heavy discounting. It was also a period, pre-conglomeration, pre-internet and pre-direct-to-consumer marketing. Publishers of the early to mid-twentieth century were likely focused on developing and promoting a small list of dozens of titles via push tactics into bookshops. Crucially, these creative endeavours were permitted time, time to be research and developed, time to be written and rewritten, time for editorial feedback and iterations, time for the designed and laid out to be refined, time to be marketed and hyped, and time to gain reviews and media exposure, while being available on bookshop shelves.

For example, *Testament of Youth* benefitted from a number of factors: time spent writing, rewriting and editing multiple iterative drafts of the work; an intensive investment and strong bond of loyalty from their agent, editor and multiple publishing houses (Gollancz, Virago, Fortuna) each with specific interests in exploiting the IP.

In *A Poetics of Editing*, Susan Greenberg (2018) notes the importance of the editorial function, aka editorial attention, in securing longevity:

[...] the 'obstacle' of expert editing can help people think critically about what is being put into wider circulation, questioning what is otherwise taken as given. As we have seen, it is a process that can ensure survival on multiple levels. (p.203)

In acting as a bridge between the author and reader, editing ensures clarity of a work on multiple levels, in the grammar and syntax of the writing and in the framing of the work towards the intended prospective audience.

Conglomeration of the publishing industry and with it the publishing function has resulted in reduced attention from the commercial parties invested in bringing a product to market. The etymology of the word 'conglomerate' literally comes from the latin *conglomerare* meaning 'to be rolled or piled up

together in a ball'. Thus, piling up of intellectual property is exactly what one can see through the analysis of longselling titles by publisher (*in section 4.3 p.128*) with PRH and Hachette Livre owning 60% of the longselling IP. Editors in the twenty-first century are responsible for large portfolios, and attention, as evidenced (*p.112*) is prioritised towards new commissioning and acquisition. Thus, there is limited time, or attention, available to reinvigorate mid-list or backlist titles.

Marketing Attention: Pushing Books to Retail versus Pulling in Consumers

For a publisher, it is an easily quantifiable task to identify all the booksellers (chain, independent and online) operating in the UK market and to use marketing tactics to push books into shops. The number of booksellers is finite; there may be a thousand or so (BA, 2024) independent bookshops in total, but just a few dozen chain and online retailers that are responsible for the bulk of publishers' retail sales. If a chain retailer gets behind a new publication, then one successful instance of publisher-to-retailer communication can result in thousands of books sold.

However, in the twenty-first century publisher-to-consumer marketing activities are far more complex. Publishers have a wide array of online direct marketing, and social media channels to consider in their campaigning efforts and these might potentially be targeting the whole population, or large segments thereof. It is the role of marketing departments to segment and size the market in a meaningful and reachable way so that business-to-consumer communication can be planned and implemented. The goal is to cast the net wide and funnel consumers towards products, pushing them towards the places that a purchase can be made. However, *this* type of marketing, is potentially endless, hundreds (or for the big publishers) thousands of products, being pushed to millions of potential customers who might buy one, or two individual copies of a book. This is not to say that direct-to-consumer marketing is not powerful; CRM systems can be used to implement automated campaigns using adaptive-logic, analytics and key performance indicators to measure success. But direct marketing is a numbers game that begins with

grabbing consumer attention. In a world where everyone's inbox is bombarded with email marketing, and social media provides an endless stream of new distractions it makes sense for publishers focus their efforts on the biggest books with the highest forecasts of success.

What's in it for the Author?

Long-tail economics offered hope to the mid-list author, it demonstrated there was value and untapped opportunity in the niche markets and slower-selling titles, and that online bookselling (specifically Amazon) was the vehicle to unlock this value (Anderson, 2008). A slow trickle of sales over time per book (when multiplied by millions of books) is appealing to the online retailer, but for the individual mid-list author a trickle of sales does not equate to an income.

If the impact of long-tail sales is considered from an author's perspective in terms of the overall lifecycle of a work, Escarpit's graphs of sales performance ([Figure 6, p.70](#)) indicates there was a point at which historically decisions were made to reprint, or not, based on sales trends over time. There would have been a threshold where sales were too low to justify reprinting and in these cases books would fall out-of-print. The copyright of such books would then revert back to the author, as was the case with Vera Britain and *Testament of Youth*. When Gollancz felt there was no more commercial opportunity to exploit, the rights reverted to Brittain who was then able to pitch an abridged version of the work to Arrow. This edition was not particularly successful but it did represent continued commitment by an actor in exploiting the IP. Of course, in the case of Vera Brittain, her motivation was not unlikely to be financial, she was committed to the pacifist cause and an ideology far more meaningful than money. Nevertheless, modern contracts combined with print-on-demand technology and ebook editions, provide the conditions for an IP limbo to arise whereby a title never goes out-of-print and the rights do not return to the author or their estate.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This research project has used a mixed methods approach to explore longselling trade non-fiction within the UK market from a number of perspectives. It began with contextual information about the UK publishing landscape, models and frameworks relevant to publishing studies. It went on to establish a definition of longsellors via existing articulations of bestsellers before presenting the primary research and findings.

There were three core strands of primary research, firstly, an interrogation of the UK market's trade non-fiction book sales via Nielsen BookScan data and descriptive statistics to better understand the market trends and typical sales longevity and identify a list of longselling titles. Secondly, interviews with UK booksellers were conducted to better understand the way stock is selected and sold within physical bookshops, the window of opportunity for them to succeed or fail and the reality of how new frontlist titles might shift into the established backlist. And thirdly, case studies offer a deep dive into some of the oldest identified longselling works via their publication histories and contemporary reader sentiment

This multi-paradigmatic approach was not without its challenges; it can be hard with mixed methods to fit the multiple strands of analysis together seamlessly. However, within this thesis, the quantitative primary research findings offered opportunities to get a sense of trade non-fiction as a whole, and identify some of the overarching trends and commercial pressures acting upon publishing and bookselling such as long-tail economics, competitive landscape, price deflation and the impact of these on levels of acceptable risk.

However, the trade non-fiction market is the sum of individual title sales during a narrow window of time, 2001 to 2015. Thus, the case studies offered a closer consideration of the factors that had been instrumental to the continued success of the sampled longselling titles over a longer duration. From these qualitative data a range of models and theory were combined to

discuss the phenomenon of longsellerdom but most influential were Genette's model of paratextual analysis, Bhaskar's theory of filtering and amplification combined with Murray's adaptation theory, and Darnton's communication circuit. The cultural environment we inhabit, or in the Bordieusian sense the *habitus*, has the potential to influence and be influenced by longselling works.

When it comes to publishing, all works whether commercially significant or not, are brought to market by invested people; actors appear throughout the communication circuit from authors, agents, publishers, retailers, gatekeepers and influencer, to the consumers buying the books. Therefore, the case studies also contributed to a deeper understanding of the parts played by actors. Similarly, the interview data was instrumental in unpicking the mechanics of bookselling and outlines the activity and outcomes central to the process of frontlist- and backlist-stock management.

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach worked well as a research process. The initial quantitative data analysis derived from the Nielsen BookScan dataset allowed for the subset of longselling titles to be identified and the questions around typical longevity of trade non-fiction to be answered according to various parameters (e.g. category, author, and publisher). From these data, the qualitative case studies were selected to explore the phenomenon of longsellerdom in more detail. The sequential approach contextualised the trends in sales data and allowed for richer analysis to be conducted using publishing-specific models and frameworks. While the longselling case studies revealed insights into paratext and publishing strategies, it was the bookseller interview data which bridged the gap between why a specific title may have continued longevity and how that was sustained in commercial terms. The mixed methods approach integrates macro-level analysis with detailed analysis of book and publishing histories; as such, this thesis represents an adaptable and repeatable process.

What follows in this final chapter is a summary of the findings and conclusions as they relate to the original research questions. After which I outline some of the areas research might be expanded upon in the future beyond the

constraints of this project before finally summarising the original contributions to research delivered via this project.

9.2 How has this Research Answered the Question: Are Longsellers Distinct from Bestsellers?

Within *Chapter 2: Context Models and Theory*, I explored the question of whether longsellers are distinct from bestsellers from a range of scholarly and industry perspectives and will reiterate some of the findings here with a view of highlighting how longsellers are distinct and in turn the original contribution of this thesis.

In his pioneering twentieth-century analysis, Mott (1947) used a decade-long view of book sales as the basis for his definition of bestseller, but did so not because he was looking for longevity in particular. Rather he wanted to ensure that a wide enough net was cast to definitely capture the titles that had sold the most copies, reached the most people, and could therefore be deemed the *bestsellers*. I surmise that in the twenty-first-century, academics seem to have move on from the long view in favour of a more commercial definition of a bestseller, namely one that is concerned with rapidity of sales in the short-term. The academic and trade definitions of a bestseller have converged and are commonly understood to mean: a chart-topping fastseller; a measure of relative rather than absolute success; and because of the way sales are structured media reporting of bestsellers is typically format-specific (paperback, hardback, ebook, or audiobook) rather than aggregated across an entire work.

I shall expand upon how my research relates to these points below, but in short, my research was not attempting to identify *the* superlative, the highest-in-volume sales, nor the fastest-selling titles which have dominated the charts and later flooded the shelves of charity shops (although this may have incidentally been true for some of the identified titles). Rather, I was concerned with identifying non-fiction titles with prolonged sales (not fast, nor most) and in researching the consistency rather than novelty found within the twenty-first century sales records. In doing so, and by focusing on trade non-fiction, I

was studying a class and quality explicitly excluded by other scholars in their discussions of bestsellers.

Research Born of Bestseller Charts is Concerned with Chart-topping Fast sellers

At the very outset of this research project, it was necessary to establish if there was really a distinction to be made between bestseller and longseller. Is a longseller simply a bestseller that keeps on selling? Therefore, the first steps of this research were to consider the various definitions of bestsellers from scholarly and industry perspectives and to determine if long sellers had previously been defined, or researched, and if so in what way.

One of the earliest comprehensive explorations of bestsellerdom was *Golden Multitudes: The Story Of Best Sellers In The United States* in which Mott (1947) defines a 'best seller' as a book that has achieved sales of at least one percent of the US population in the decade following its publication. Three decades later, Escarpit (1981) proposed that bestsellers were a combination of the 'fast seller' with the 'steady seller' but plotted those 'steady' sales over a two-year timeline. By the beginning of the twentieth century Sutherland's (2002) discussion of bestsellers in *Reading the Decades* explicitly excluded the steady-long sellers on the basis that it is a separate, distinct and even 'dull' class of thing. In *Bestsellers: popular fiction since 1900* (2007) Bloom does go some way to addressing the methodological questions around defining bestsellers and brought in some discussion of the size of the population, the pricing of a book and the format being counted. Overall, the prior research suggests that although 'bestseller' can be defined by slightly different parameters, the consensus is that rapidity of sales and the title's presence on a published bestseller chart are the ultimate defining factors.

These defining factors stand to reason given that historically bestsellers must be identified primarily from archival sources such as *The Bookman* and the *New York Times* bestseller lists, or other newspapers or trade publications. Once identified, there are other ways of verifying and cross-referencing the data gleaned from published charts, for example via publishers' archives and accounts, but the most easily accessible starting point for research into

bestselling books is likely to be a systematic review of historic news media. However, newspapers have limited column inches and any bestseller charts published weekly, monthly or even annually, signalling what was hot and trending, were limited to a fairly small sample; particularly limited if considered in terms of the percentage of in-print titles at the time.

Therefore, a key distinction of this research into longsellerdom, presented in *Chapter 4.4 Longsellers by Decade*, is that it was not born of the top sliver of bestseller charts used in news media nor was it focused on the phenomenon of fastselling works. The Nielsen TCM data allow for a much longer dataset of titles to be interrogated and permits sales longevity to be established and quantified in a way that nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources do not. I also assert that the majority of non-fiction books have less than three years of significant commercial sales life in them. Therefore, this thesis has gone deeper into the sales data, and has established that of the 730,000 titles that sold at least one copy in 2015, only 168 titles (1 in approx. 4000) were found to have a sales presence of at least fifteen years or more. However, even within that longselling subset, most of the titles (108) were published after 1990, and only 60 titles can boast over 25 years of sales history.

In short, the quantitative data analysed presented in this thesis demonstrates that longsellerdom is statistically unusual and very rare.

The research presented in *Chapter 4* evidenced that bestselling trade non-fiction charts contain a high proportion of autobiography, biography and celebrity cookbooks; whereas the longsellers included a higher proportion of self-help and self-improvement titles. Notably, poetry and plays were absent from the bestselling list entirely, yet they account for one eighth of the longsellers. These findings are significant to industry as they highlight that while there are short-term gains to publishing big celebrity books, there is also potential and long-term value in other categories of publishing such as self-improvement, poetry and plays.

One further point to acknowledge here is that whatever the scholarly definition of bestseller, publishers know the performance of their backlist and

the marketing benefits of the words 'global bestseller' emblazoned on the jacket of a book. The longselling subset of titles born of this research project is unlikely to have been compiled by any prior research into bestsellers, however at a title-by-title level, most publishers will almost certainly already be aware of, and be capitalising on the marketing opportunities that a strong sales record offers.

Bestsellers are Concerned with Saturation, they are Relative not Absolute

In addition to the rapidity of sales, Mott and Bloom demonstrate it is possible to define bestseller by considering the sales of a work as a proportion of the market population, in other words to consider commercial success in terms of market saturation. However, the first issue with this is that the limited availability of historic sales data makes it hard to plot a three-dimensional graph of sales divided by population over time. Still, if saturation of a market over a period of time becomes the main factor in defining what is a bestseller, then some of the steady longsellers identified by this research would still not necessarily have sufficient sales to fall into such a category.

Although there is no single methodology used to define bestsellers one thing that tends to be true within the publishing industry charts (and certainly via Amazon sales rankings) is that the achievement of becoming a bestseller tends to be relative to the other books on sale at the same time rather than absolute. The shorter the period being considered, the more important it is to look at the competing titles to determine the achievement – are we looking at today's bestsellers, this week's or this month's?

In the book world, relative metrics are used to establish bestsellerdom, this differs to the music industry where absolute metrics –downloads, CDs, and vinyl sales– are aggregated and the silver, gold, or platinum album becomes a symbol of total sales achieved. Book industry charts and the academic research based on it tends not to aggregate sales across print, ebook and audiobook formats, because of a lack of available cross-platform sales data for such formats. Nor does it offer an equivalent of the silver, gold, or platinum album thresholds to highlight the absolute symbol of achievement.

The line that was drawn for the purpose of this study was to consider the number of titles that had reached a particular threshold of sales in any calendar year (c. 1800 units). This research suggests that while some longsellers may also have started out as bestsellers, their continued duration of sales and cultural relevance is a distinct phenomenon in its own right.

In [Chapter 2](#), I proposed the following definition of a longseller:

a work (product in all print formats and editions), that has sold in significant quantities, over a prolonged period of time (beyond average), within a specific subject category, in the UK TCM (Trade Consumer Market).

The grey area is in the qualifying of a period of time that is beyond average, because average implies a midpoint. The quantitative analysis demonstrated that fewer than half of titles that charted in a given year continued to sell in high quantities for more than two years, but ultimately this research found the extreme outliers, the titles that had charted for over 14 years, to be the most compelling examples of longsellers.

Within those extreme examples I found 37 non-fiction titles that were published prior to 1970. It is an interesting thought experiment to wonder whether selling one-hundred thousand copies of a book in 2023, is a markedly different achievement from selling one-hundred thousand copies of a book in 1953. This was not within the scope of this research but could be an area for future research.

To build on the initial definition of longsellerdom above, a longseller can be defined as a work that has sold in significant quantities over a prolonged period of time within a specific subject category and territory. Some longsellers may be classic or canonical works adopted on scholarly or artistic merit; however, other works can achieve longsellerdom on practical merit and/or resonance with fundamental human concerns (mental health, spirituality, and problem-solving). In addition, the visibility of a longselling work in physical and online bookshops is an integral part of sustained cultural relevance; therefore, the number of titles that can potentially become longsellers is limited (to far fewer than can potentially be bestsellers).

Are longsellers distinct from canonical or classical works?

Some of the longsellers identified and discussed within this thesis *can* be categorised as classic or canonical works but not all of them. The term ‘canonical’ suggests a superior literary quality, it implies something of high intellectual or artistic status deemed worthy of close reading and scholarship.

As outlined in [Chapter 4.4](#), the longselling subset contains a range of titles which have been adopted and assimilated into the cultural habitus predominant via compulsory and post-compulsory level curricula. Examples of canonical longsellers within the studied cases include *Testament of Youth* (Brittain, 1933), *Cider with Rosie* (Lee, 1959), and *The Story of Art* (Gombrich, 1950).

However, not all of the longselling subset can be neatly categorised as canonical or ‘classics’; *The Right Way to Play Chess* being one such work, but other examples can be found of titles where scholarly or literary merit are not a key factor in longsellerdom. Examples of works that do not fit the definition of canon include *Self Help for your Nerves* (Weekes, 1962), *Light on Yoga* (Ivengar, 1966), and *The Lawn Expert* (Hessayon, 1982).

Therefore, while some longsellers can be canonical or classics, others are defined not so much by the status assigned to them by institutions, structures and doxa but by their continued and consistent relevance and utility.

9.3 How has this Research Quantified Typical Sales and Longevity within Trade Non-fiction?

This research project from the outset was concerned with quantifying success in terms of longevity. I wanted to know how long a successful non-fiction title typically remained relevant for; and how many titles out of the hundreds of thousands being published each year become significant contributors to the backlist in the long term.

However, before a work can become successful in the long-term and enter into the habitus of a population it must first overcome an array of challenges in the short-term, the first and most significant of these challenges is visibility;

something about it must stand out. This research has demonstrated through analysis of the non-fiction market data that in the twenty-first century publishing output continues to grow and sustain what Nybacka (2011) describes as the 'economy of surplus'. In *Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity*, I explore the retail process which new frontlist titles must undergo. Where thousands of new books are grasping for attention, the odds are stacked against them, and the transition from front to backlist is a shift that is near impossible for anything but the most commercially successful titles.

In *The Content Machine*, Bhaskar (2012) proposes filtration and amplification as the key function of traditional publishers within the communications circuit. However, the reality is that the book market is still very crowded, even after all the carefully considered filtering. This research has demonstrated that an abundance of content crowds real and online retail spaces, and the window of opportunity for books to succeed is short. An oversaturated retail environment makes it very hard for even professional publishing companies to succeed in their efforts to amplify those signals.

The qualifier of 'timeframe' is often seen as the most important factor when it comes to public measures of success, namely bestseller charts. These focus heavily on the speed from zero to a few hundred or even thousand units per week. A key tactic adopted by publishers is to encourage readers to pre-order new titles in the days and weeks prior to the launch date. This activity can be seen as artificially extending the sales window, through pre-publication marketing. It also gives the publisher and bookseller unambiguous data upon which to base their physical stock ordering. Any pre-orders placed by customers sit on the booksellers' systems until publication date when the books can be dispatched. At that point a sale goes through their EPOS system and all sales are recorded by Nielsen within the early days of publication, slingshotting the title into the charts for visibility with the aim of grabbing enough PR and audience attention to achieve significant follow-on sales.

I have established that within academic discourses the term 'bestseller' is typically used as a proxy for the term 'fastseller', and it follows that scholarly research into bestsellerdom tends also to focus on fast-selling chart-topping works. The evidence I have presented demonstrates that longsellers can be distinguished from bestsellers in that they sell over a modest threshold per annum and continue to achieve these sales over a longer than typical duration, in this study a period of fifteen years continuous sales has been used to identify works that were originally published in decades prior to those recorded sales.

The quantitative data analysis revealed that to be featured in the UK TCM top-5000 charts for any given year, equates to the title achieving sales within the top percentile of sales for all works that sold that year alone. An increase of new and revised titles means that the long tail is always growing, and the percentage point of titles that can claim to be in the top 5000 is always a shrinking value. Nevertheless, the volume of units needed to chart is roughly the same and sits around 1,800-2,000 units per annum.

Table 6: UK TCM Trade Non-fiction Volume Sales Distribution 2001 & 2015

	Chart Rank		2001 Vol Sales	2015 Vol Sales
Max	1	achieved unit sales of...	596,342	465,240
Upper Quartile	1250	achieved mean unit sales of...	6,841	6,172
Median	2500	achieved mean unit sales of...	3,911	3,502
Lower Quartile	3750	achieved mean unit sales of...	2,733	2,476
Min	5000	achieved unit sales of...	2,099	1,894
Total Volume			40,679,486	38,848,931

9.4 How has this Research Explored in Qualitative Terms What Distinguishes These Books?

The quantitative data were used to explore longsellerdom from a number of angles. The case study analysis demonstrated that most of the sampled cases were bestsellers upon their initial publication e.g. *Testament of Youth*, *In Cold Blood*, *Cider With Rosie*, *Testament of Youth*. This analysis therefore leads on to the question: Are longsellers just bestsellers that keep on selling? Ultimately, the interrogation of the Nielsen data combined with my primary research has revealed that many, but not all, longselling titles were considered bestsellers upon publication. *The Right Way to Play Chess* was certainly not a bestseller when it was first published and this demonstrates that although there might be some overlap between bestseller and longseller they are not exactly the same class of thing.

There are other exceptions that were identified for example Dr Claire Weekes' *Self Help for Your Nerves* that had strong UK and Australian sales initially but only took off in the US market seven years after publication.

This research has evidenced that the phenomenon of continuing to sell over decades and having prolonged commercial relevance *is* a different quality and one that does not map to zeitgeist or fads indicative of one particular era but rather draws on more existential questions and conditions common to all humans such as relationships, anxiety, motivation, grief and loss, problem solving and puzzles. For this reason, perhaps one of the most heavily featured

topics within the corpus of longsellers are the military, political and humanitarian events that have shaped the last century (WWI, Spanish Civil War, WWII, Vietnam).

Looking through the longsellers from the first half of the twentieth century, in [4.4 Longsellers by Decade](#) it was evident that the British education system has significantly influenced the canon of works that were found to have longevity. Within this system, wars as critical global events, and their human cost were found to be a strong focus. There is clearly a structural leaning towards educating the nation about war, but how this relates to future publishing decisions is less clear. Publishers, in this respect tend to follow the curriculum rather than set it.

A question arising from the types of books appearing on the list is whether the importance of these works is born of inherent demand within the population or constructed demand from with the institutions and organisations that make up the British 'establishment'. By which I mean, how many copies of *Cider with Rosie* were bought because of a genuine interest in Laurie Lee's childhood and the quintessential British way of life? And how many copies were bought through necessity because it was on a school reading list? Similarly, how many copies of *The Story of Art* are brought by amateur art enthusiasts or gallery visitors and how many are bought by Art History and or Foundation Art students?

Looking to the future, there seem to be physical- and mental-health concerns that are endemic to a generation; be that overcoming the trauma of warfare or the overstimulation of the digital world. These problems prompt solutions and could be the focus of editorial strategy and acquisition, with a view to developing a strong future backlist.

9.5 What is the Function of Bookshop and Bookseller in Product Sales Lifecycle?

Book Retail Market

The aim of the interview data was to find out more about the process by which frontlist title become backlist, and the window of opportunity. To succeed or fail, to this end the focus was primarily on the book buying function, however there were also conversations conducted with editors and agents responsible for backlist titles and their authors.

Throughout both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, I have evidenced the importance of bookshops, and retail processes in relation to longsellors and core/backlist stock selection. Booksellers facilitate and reinforce the importance of certain works by keeping them on the shelves alongside new frontlist titles. This benefits the retailer (and sales of new titles) in various ways, but most crucially it meets certain consumer expectations and signals reliable 'taste' via stock curation. Beyond this, the case study of *The Right Way to Play Chess* demonstrates that booksellers have the potential to establish longsellors via their selection and merchandising decisions.

As outlined in [Chapter 6: Bookselling and the Window of Opportunity](#), central to the decision-making process when ordering titles is the positioning of the shop space and the daily footfall. Since the research was conducted there has been further consolidation of chain bookshops with the sale of Blackwell's bookshop chain to Waterstones (Bartholomew, 2022). The academic retailer had made significant inroads towards profitability and yet was struggling to become fully sustainable.

Looking ahead, it will be interesting to observe the impact of this consolidation on the book retail market. However, the merging of Blackwell's retail portfolio of 30 shops with Waterstones' is not in the same order of magnitude as the closing of 45 Borders bookshops in 2009 when MCR went into administration. From a publisher perspective one channel for increasing profit margin is direct sales; either direct to consumer, or direct to other businesses. At present, PRH

(the largest trade publisher in the UK) do not sell direct to consumer via their website. Doing so would put them in direct competition with their existing retail channels, however it would also offer huge opportunities to the publisher in terms of consumer data and analytics. I would go so far as to speculate that the reason this is not already happening is because of the terms and conditions of the agreement with Amazon and PRH.

Pricing

Again, the problem facing all actors within the supply chain including retailers is exacerbated by price elasticity. As evidenced in *Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset*, not only have the prices of trade non-fiction books failed to go up in line with inflation (as compared to all books and newspapers) but the average sales price of the top-5000 non-fiction titles in 2015 was actually lower than the average sales price in 2008. This means that despite general cost of living increasing in the UK, consumers were paying less for the most popular books of 2008 than they were in 2015. Given the top-5000 account for roughly 80% of the market's value this is pretty catastrophic for publishers and booksellers alike.

Although the Retail Price Index analysis in this thesis focused on the trade non-fiction market, the same issues apply to specialist (academic) non-fiction. Namely, that there is a perceived ceiling above which UK consumers will not pay for books. Textbooks and scholarly works in the UK, have always been priced quite low in comparison to other markets such as the US (Greco, 2020 pp.104-110). To give an example, a UK textbook aimed at undergraduates will on average demand a £30-40 price point, whereas in the US students expect to pay in excess of a one-hundred dollars for such a work. Not only are these the expected price points today, in 2023, but they were also the expected price two decades ago, in the early 2000s. The reluctance to allow for inflation in book pricing has also been compounded by the availability of the same texts by Higher Education Institutes, so students will substitute a book purchase with a loaned edition from the university library in either print, or more likely, electronic format.

Footfall

There has been a profound shift in the working patterns of the UK population since the Covid pandemic lockdowns were put in place. Venues with very high daily footfall like the Tate Gallery bookshops were closed and unlikely to have received much online business during that time. On the other hand, many office workers shifted to working from home and spending more time exploring and shopping locally. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how trends in working patterns and consumer behaviour impact book buying in physical bricks and mortar shops.

It would be interesting to review the market share of Amazon and worth clarifying if the Sale-or-Return system has any relevance for their business model. It is my understanding that Amazon is supplied stock on consignment, which means they are warehoused by Amazon but not legally owned by them until the point of sale to an end consumer. In this model, there is no speculative procurement of titles and no bulk return of unsold stock 3-9 months post purchase.

9.6 How has this Research Discussed Trends?

Self-help and Self-improvement have Longselling Potential

This thesis research found that self-help and self-improvement appear more frequently when it comes to the longseller list than bestseller lists for the same period. The self-help and self-improvement titles span Nielsen product classes however within this supra-genre, expert authors (particularly doctors) dominate. As Dolby (2005, p.4-5) notes, these works typically adopt a formulaic structure, employ the trope of 'lack and lack liquidation' and appear to transcend class and taste. Moreover, the instructional writing form and style lead readers to be active participants, whether that process be playing chess, learning yoga, or overcoming anxiety; the act of reading confers agency. The author is handing over the tools of change and placing them directly in the hands of the reader. These audiences are often not niche segments of the population; they might include anyone wanting to act to improve wellbeing,

understanding, or effectiveness and thus self-help and self-improvement books are widely read.

There are cases where backlist self-help works have bolstered the lists of independent publishers through consistent and predictable revenues, thus making these publishers' lists attractive to conglomerates like PRH and Hachette Livre.

Yet these authors need not rely on traditional publishing to mediate messages to an audience. In the twenty-first century, it comes as no surprise that the author-led self-help and self-improvement market has a tendency to disintermediate actors within the communications circuit and build entire businesses around intellectual property beyond books; through podcasts, online training programmes, and other direct-to-consumer channels. This poses a slightly worrying prospect for the future of publishers' lists.

9.7 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

This research was constrained by certain factors known at the outset and the chosen research process and methods (such as the limitations of the Nielsen dataset). There were also some limitations that arose after the project had begun that impacted access and research capabilities; in particular, archival visits were limited as a new mother researching through the global Covid-19 pandemic.

In the section below, I shall briefly discuss the limitation of the mixed methods approach while highlighting ways that the research might also be progressed logically beyond the original parameters.

Looking Beyond Trade Non-fiction as a Category

This study was particularly focused on the works listed as T1. Trade Non-fiction within the Nielsen BookScan product categorisation because the initial literature review identified non-fiction as an under-researched area by other scholars. However, the interrogation of the longselling subset revealed the lines are blurry when it comes to categorisation of works. Some trade non-fiction titles such as *The Story of Art* by Gombrich could alternatively be

classified as ‘T3 Specialist non-fiction’, which is the category typically applied to scholarly and academic texts. Similarly, some memoirs, such as Laurie Lee’s *Cider with Rosie* are written in such a literary style that even the publisher, Penguin, positions it as ‘fiction’ within its list. These categorical decisions are driven by marketing concerns (and ideally underpinned by market research) rather than any semantic or ontological rigour. Thus, labels are given to ensure the work is physically positioned in a bookshop where the customer expects to find it. To illustrate this, *Cider with Rosie* might have been labelled as fiction to avoid the legal challenges around representation of real people and places. Equally, it might have been labelled as such because it is beneficial for copies to be shelved close to the other set texts that appear on the English Literature reading lists. The key point is that there are some titles that appear within the ‘trade non-fiction’ category that might easily have been excluded if a more systematic ontology of text were constructed, and vice versa. However, the Nielsen BookScan dataset is still the gold standard. It captures 90% of retail sales and serves as *the* source of data used by industry analysts to track market trends annually (see Publishers’ Association, Booksellers Association, Mintel Reports, etc...). Using it allowed for a more accurate and comprehensive investigation than any other source might have done. Beyond this, using the Nielsen dataset also allows for replication of this study and/or comparison with other researched that uses the Nielsen BookScan dataset and class descriptors.

One clear area of future research, leading on from this would be to extend the research parameters to include specialist non-fiction and identify the longest selling titles across all non-fiction categories within the Nielsen BookScan dataset. Extending the research beyond trade non-fiction to all non-fiction would certainly bring in a lot of interesting data on the books and textbooks adopted by educational institution, however because those books are aimed at students, researchers and academics such a study would say less about the importance of certain titles to the general population.

Looking Beyond the Printed Book as Container

A further limitation of this research was that the Nielsen TCM dataset only includes print book sales. In the twenty-first century, people consume books across multiple print and digital formats and therefore to get a true picture of the popularity of a work (in all its manifestations) within a market one would need to include ebook and audiobook sales data (at the very least). This omission might not seem so critical, given that this research is concerned with longevity and that ebooks have only really made up a noteworthy share of the market since 2008 when the first-generation of ebook readers were launched. However, non-fiction content lends itself to digital formats, and during the period 2001 – 2015 the market for some categories of printed book completely collapsed. For example, the T.14 category which includes tourist guides, phrasebooks, maps and travel writing accounted for almost one fifth of the Top-5000 chart in 2001, but by 2015, the number of bestselling titles in T14 had halved and it only accounted for just one tenth of the top-5000 non-fiction titles. Does this mean that no one is travelling or reading about travel anymore? No, it just means that online formats like blogs, short-form media (e.g. TikTok and Instagram) podcasts, ebooks, and apps have replaced prior book sales on travel topics. Thus, it is possible that there were some titles, or genres of titles, which appeared in the top-5000 charts consistently in 2001-2008, but then after 2008 sales went digital, dropped off the charts, and were therefore not picked up in the longselling subset.

The key point here in terms of limitations of the study is that that printed books are not the only book format; there are ebooks and audiobooks to consider if the whole picture is to be assessed, and some longselling works may have been missed from this study.

Nielsen does collect ebook data, but it is not licensed to share it at this point in time, so it is possible that future research might be able to conduct a more comprehensive review if and when that dataset becomes available to researchers.

Looking Beyond Retail and Consumer Publishing

Related to the point above but with wider methodological implications, there are communities of authors who publish commercially in formats and via channels of distribution that are outwith the world of the ISBN and Nielsen BookData which were not possible to include in the analysis. The biggest of these markets is Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) but there are also writing platforms like Wattpad; crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter; and various custom fine presses.

Could there be some older works hidden in the KDP catalogue that had once been published traditionally, but have gone out-of-print and the rights reverted back to the author? Yes, it is possible, and with more time the Nielsen dataset could be compared to the Amazon KDP catalogue to check for these. However, it was beyond the scope of this research project.

It is worth noting that the Amazon KDP marketplace is now the sole publishing channel for a lot of self-published content, some of which might previously have been brought to market via mainstream publishing channels. Inclusion of the KDP data is therefore more significant to current and future research on bestsellers, than it was for my project on longsellers. Amazon's proprietary ecosystem is a rich resource: even without an ISBN identifier KDP-published works use structured metadata comparable, if not superior, to Nielsen data in its richness. Some KDP book metadata are accessible publicly via the online catalogue, some data are accessible to mine via the API. However, there are also commercial (sales) data available to KDP authors privately. Because of the size of the KDP market and catalogue, the continuity of access, and preservation of Amazon's data as an archive that will be most important.

There are also second-hand book sales, and the national library borrowing statistics which might offer further insight into the works with the longest commercial and cultural relevance beyond the initial retail transaction. These would make interesting avenues for research however as this project was grounded in Publishing Studies the circulation of works in the second-hand and library markets were not the main focus.

In summary, there were three main areas in which the quantitative research might be extended, some of which are more practical than others. These include looking at data outwith the trade non-fiction product category or the traditional book retail environments. As well as considering the longevity of other book formats to include analysis of audiobook, and ebook formats. A further extension would be to extend the research beyond the given time parameters of 2001 – 2015.

9.8 Other Areas for Future Research Suggested by the Findings

The section above outlines the ways the research project can be extended beyond its original parameters to include other semantic categories, formats, and channels of consumption. However, this research has also identified additional gaps in scholarly knowledge of non-fiction publishing and consumption which might warrant further investigation and I have outlined these below.

Deflation and Non-fiction Books

A small section of the quantitative chapter was dedicated to price elasticity within the UK book market and used retail price index data from the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS) to evidence the devaluation of books, which have not kept pace with inflation on other household items consumed in the UK market. This research project was concerned with the years 2001-2015 and the analysis of price index data based on a category described as 'CZEL Books & Newspapers' because this was the only category available for that time period. However, since 2015, ONS indices include data at a more granular level and fiction, non-fiction and children's titles prices are tracked individually. While there was some scholarly interest in the retail price index of books in the decade after the NBA was dissolved (late-90s to mid-00s) there is very little research or analysis of book retail pricing since then and certainly none (to be found at the time of writing) which interrogates the more granular data available within the ONS indices.

The Covid pandemic in 2020, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, have had a dramatic impact on the cost of fuel, paper and shipping. This has fed in

to a sharp increase in book production costs. The inability of book prices to keep up with inflation combined with rising costs has squeezed profit margins from both ends, and made publishing financially unviable for a number of small and independent publishers. The impact of deflation on the industry and the shifting goal posts for financial success would therefore offer plenty of scope for further research.

Breaking into the Industry: Sustainable Diverse Publishing

Publishing is a long-term business, and even a ten year-old company is youthful, given publishing's ideal financial scenario in deriving significant income from backlist sales and exploiting intellectual property for the duration of copyright. (Squires and Markou, 2021 p.434)

The quantitative findings in *Chapter 4: Trade Non-fiction Macro-view, the Top-5000, and the Longselling Subset* clearly demonstrate that a small quantity of authors and works are responsible for a huge percentage of the market sales value. Thus, another area for further research would be to investigate the pool of non-fiction authors who *are* selling enough books to make a living from their earnings. Within this are questions around what proportion of successful titles are written by new authors breaking into the industry, how diverse is the pool of authors that experience strong sales, how many are mid-list and how many are established brand authors with years (if not decades) of experience and thousands of loyal fans? This is important for the sustainability of smaller independent publishers as it is these businesses (often micro-businesses) that discover, support, and bring new authors and mid-list authors to market.

Here, the importance of physical bookshops, along with support from booksellers on the shop floor, cannot be overstated. The possibility of a breakthrough success is incredibly slim without retailer buy-in (quite literally) and 'in-store discovery' is still by far the leading reason why UK consumers buy books (Bohme, 2024). Books might go viral thanks to social media, and sell fast, but they cannot sell long, without retailer shelf-space. Within this thesis, the case study on *The Right Way to Play Chess* demonstrates that appearing as core stock can have a huge and ongoing impact on backlist sales and revenue.

Break-through successes are needed to ensure a strong backlist and sustainability of operation for independent publishers.

Noorda (2019) cautions against attributing the publishing of diverse voices to independent publishers without first inspecting their lists for the evidence, thus *also* (and perhaps separately), break-through successes are needed to allow underrepresented voices, and authors from a wide range of backgrounds, to experience long-term sales and make a living from their literary works.

Squires and Markou (2021 pp.420-438) discuss the issue of sustainability in more depth in our article 'An Ecosystem Model of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Publisher "Tiers": Publisher Size, Sustainability and Cultural Policy'. In this article we suggest that further research is warranted regarding 'the time period over which it takes [a start-up] to build a backlist'. This might indicate the timescale required to grow from a precarious Tier 1 (turnover up to £100k) or Tier 2 (turnover up to £1m) micro-business into a more financially stable publishing company with the means of affording the required infrastructure to grow the business further.

Drilling into Seasonality

An area that was beyond the scope of this research project and yet is potentially the most commercially useful would be to map the seasonality of each product class by calendar month in terms of how many units a title needs to sell in order to be the bestselling title within its product category. The bookseller interviews highlighted the relevance of seasonality in terms of organisational buyer behaviour; Clark and Smith both stressed the importance of the tourist market to book selection and the seasonality of footfall for bookshops in Scotland and the Lake District respectively. The quantitative data also indicated that travel writing and humour categories have the potential for particular longevity, both offering hooks for marketing around particular times of the year. An exploration of seasonality in this way would offer significant commercial value to publishers, because picking a niche category with limited competition *at that moment in time* can offer publishers

and retailers a great opportunity to market books in a less crowded and competitive space. Thus, picking the right moment to publish a title could significantly contribute to the chances of it getting noticed by retailers in the short term and increasing the likelihood of a title being considered as core stock in the longer term.

Big Data and Retail Innovations

This research was conducted analysing Nielsen BookScan's data which provides sales volume *per period*, where a period is roughly equivalent to a month. This level of granularity is not really detailed enough to be deemed '*big data*' however the retailers' Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) data is far more granular, capturing the exact time and date of sales, the location, as well as the other items in a shopper's basket. The Nielsen dataset at a more granular level might be used as a training set for machine learning to suggest product recommendations to customers based on the items they have purchased and other factors like their location, time of day, the weather, trending topics on social media or traditional media channels. Services are already offering sophisticated sales and marketing insights to publishers and book retailers across the UK (as well as other markets). For example, Edelweiss' Above the Tree Line offers genre and custom category trend analysis as well as identification of under- and over-stocked titles.

Beyond this, the proliferation of AI tools and software, make analyses of long-form content possible with the aim of matching books to readers in increasingly sophisticated ways. An example of such innovation is the recently launched Shimmr, a marketing AI tool that can be used to parse a manuscript and derive advertising and marketing copy based on the work. The founder Nadim Sadek (2024) states that: 'AI systems can be trained to consider the psychological profile of a book and match it to the frame of mind of a specific audience, ensuring a more effective connection between readers and books.' This type of commercial marketing tool has some synergy with the findings of Archer and Jockers disseminated in *The Bestseller Code* (2016, p.83-91), where the physical (emotional) responses of readers to literature were captured and

analysed to see if - and where in terms of plotline - a bestselling work was evoking an 'emotional visceral response'.

These types of innovations bring both opportunities and threats for the people employed in and around the publishing industry (and wider creative industries). The arrival of generative AI in particular has received mixed responses from industry stakeholders, primarily because of concerns about the technology being used to replace human labour within the value chain, but also rightsholders take issue with their IP being used to train large-language models without license to do so, remuneration or compensation.

These concerns around IP infringement are valid, however Chat GPT, Gemini (formerly Bard) and other publicly available generative AI tools are no longer the domain of 'big tech' and can be used by anyone. A boycott that refuses to adopt AI into publishing workflow is not going to prevent other opportunistic actors (within or without the industry) from using generative AI to 'write' competing 'doppelganger' titles, or aggressively market titles in a way that saturates traditional book marketing channels. There has reportedly (Knibbs, 2024) been an influx of ebooks uploaded to KDP by content farms skilled in creating copy that aligns with the keywords people search for most frequently using Google analytics. A sound understanding of SEO combined with the speed of generative AI opens doors for many.

Therefore, another area for further research might be concrete case studies on the ways in which publishers, retailers and other stakeholders within the publishing ecosystem can generate value from existing data and newly emergent generative AI tools.

In conclusion, I believe that some of the most fruitful areas for further research include: the science of seasonality and maximising the likelihood of topping the charts in a particular subject category; the pricing of non-fiction books in the UK and impact of deflation. Other areas for further study were identified; to widen the scope of the original research; to drill deeper into the data in some way; and to explore adjacent topics that arose from the findings.

9.9 Summary of Original Contribution

To summarise, in this thesis I have undertaken significant and comprehensive research into the under-researched category of trade non-fiction titles, and the previously undefined phenomenon of longsellerdom. Thus, I began by tackling the terms of reference with a review of existing definitions of bestsellers and created a distinct and original definition for longseller.

Through the quantitative research of UK retail sales during the years 2001-2015, I generated original research findings referred to as the ***longselling subset [Dataset 2]***. This dataset was extended beyond the initial Nielsen BookScan data to include the earliest edition publication date (EEDP) as well as author demographic data. These previously unexplored 178 longselling titles were analysed from multiple angles including authorship, gender, product class and publishers. To provide further context, the longselling subset of titles was compared to the wider trade non-fiction market trends. This included an analysis of the retail price index for trade non-fiction revealing the unique insight that non-fiction books as a market have not kept up with inflation and have therefore been devalued and that this deflation has impacted the bestselling titles most dramatically. A further unique contribution of the research was achieved via mapping the typical sales lifecycle and longevity of trade non-fiction titles in quantitative terms.

The qualitative research explored the window of opportunity for books to succeed and fail in terms of the physical availability within retail spaces and the buying function. Within this, I created an original model (*Figure 23 p.184*) for visualising retail-buyer behaviour as related to customer footfall.

Furthermore, this research compiled five original case studies of longselling works investigating their publishing histories and the role of actors, particularly publishers, in shaping these works through paratext, editioning, packaging, and exploitation of rights. The findings of the research were brought together via the summative discussion and through the lens of relevant publishing theories. In this analysis, I consider various amplifying factors such as educational adoption, awards, adaptations, cultural esteem and

commercial capital to provide a meaningful and nuanced understanding of
longsellerdom and non-fiction.

[88674 words including tables / 84427 words excluding tables]

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[5507 words]

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Professional Background

- Please could you tell me about your current role?
- How long have you been working in the industry?
- Have you worked for any other booksellers/publishers over the years?

Bookshop Profile

- To provide an idea of scale - roughly how many titles are stocked by your shop/s?
- If they have an online bookshop is it roughly equivalent to a flagship, average, small bookshop?

Frontlist & Backlist

- Can you talk me through the way(s) that a brand new title might end up stocked in your bookshop?
- Do you meet with reps in person or browse virtual lists?
- How frequently are reps visits, and how many titles are you presented with?
- Is any part of the frontlist order automated? E.g. might you take all new titles from a particular publisher within particular subject areas?
- Once a title has been stocked what happens next – e.g. what prompts reorder...?
- With non-fiction in mind, are you able to say how many frontlist titles become backlist each year?
 - Can you think of any recent examples?
 - What was special about this book?
- What happens to books that do not sell?
 - How long till returns are sent back?
 - Rough percentage?
- What do you feel about the time given to new titles to either succeed or fail?
- Are you able to estimate what percentage of stock is frontlist / backlist?
 - Would you say this ratio has changed over the year?
- Is there a core stock list for backlist titles that is generally kept available?
 - Is this list reviewed and amended – if so how frequently?
 - Can you think of any examples of titles that were recently added to core stock?
- Do backlist books just sell themselves?
 - Can you give examples of instances where the backlist is actively promoted and/or marketed?

Accessibility / Discoverability

- If online shop exists, from where is the online stock catalogue drawn?
 - Are there online trends that are the same / different to the bricks and mortar shops?

Longsellers

- In terms of trade non-fiction titles:
 - Are there any areas of trade non-fiction that you know contains a higher proportion of longselling titles?
 - what is special about this genre of publishing?
 - Are there any titles that spring to mind as particularly longselling?
 - what is special about this book?
 - why does it appeal to book buyers?

Seasonality

- As part of the life cycle of books I'm interested in the seasonality of different categories of titles. Can you tell me about the times of year that non-fiction titles are most- least- popular?

Closing

- Anything else to add that I have not asked you about?
- Is there anyone else you think I should speak to?