

# Human IT

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## **Busy Being Born or Busy Dying**

**The Internet and new combinations of traditional professional  
functions in the book trade**

by [Johan Svedjedal](#)

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## **Functions in Other Professions in the Book Trade**

Referring to the discussion of functions in publishing, the descriptions of functions

involved in other professions in the book trade can be briefer – always with the reservation that these professions have evolved and changed over the past few centuries. These developments are the results of professional specialization resulting from two interwoven courses of events in capitalist societies: technological evolution and the division of labor. What follows is a selective account of the main characteristics of these professions during the twentieth century and with the focus on the book trade.

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The compositor's main function is to set up the text for printing – using the available technology from moveable type to desktop publishing programs. This process generally involves some editing of the manuscript, not only concerning the layout of the page (size of fonts, headings, type of quotation marks, and so on), but also correcting mistakes in spelling and perhaps even grammatical errors. The compositor also proofreads the text, checking for mistakes during the transmission of the text from manuscript to type.

The printer's main function has traditionally been to manufacture printed sheets in multiple copies from the typeset text using a printing press. These copies have been ordered by another person in the chain of production, generally the publisher or the author, who has taken the financial risk and, nowadays, the legal responsibility for the content of the work.

The bookbinder's task has been to bind (stitch or glue) these printed and folded sheets together, enclosing them within a protective cover.

Typesetting, printing, and binding can be provided by the same company, but these activities can also be performed by specialized firms. Generally, there is little literary selection involved in these processes – the decision to take on a job is not made with reference to the literary merit of the work in question. In other words, the gatekeeping function is undeveloped and weak.

When the book is manufactured, various processes remain for selection, distribution, and selling. Ideally, the book is reviewed by a number of people, writing in newspapers as part of the "public sphere" (to use Jürgen Habermas's concept). They contribute to the selection process, first by choosing what to review and when, secondly by their opinions. Reviewers tend to think of themselves as intellectuals and examiners, which is largely true. But they also function as marketers and advertisers of literature, since the very act of reviewing means that information concerning a book is divulged to the public. At the same time, the reviewer is a deputy reader, summarizing his or her reactions to a work, thereby partly exempting the reader from the necessity of reading the work in order to know what it is about. All in all, the reviewer is a powerful gatekeeper, not only in his or her direct relationship with the reading public, but also indirectly, since booksellers and libraries can base their decisions on reviews (either in newspaper or in trade magazines).

The wholesale bookseller offers books from many publishers, often warehousing the books for fastest possible delivery, but selling only to retail booksellers, not to the reading public. In general, there are relatively few selection processes involved in wholesale bookselling, since many wholesalers take books from every publisher who meets their contractual obligations (often payment per title and per copy). However, retail booksellers can unite in groups or nationwide chains, functioning on a central level

as a wholesale bookseller.

The retail bookseller sells books to the public, generally in his or her own shop. They can have very different influences on the selection process. On the one hand, there are booksellers deciding title by title what books to buy from the publisher. They often have to pay for the book when it is ordered, but, lacking the right to return unsold copies, might be somewhat wary of stocking too many titles or copies. Such booksellers can – and must – exercise important selective functions. This system has dominated in, for example, Great Britain. On the other hand, there are booksellers working within a sale-or-return system, bound with publishers in collective agreements. Such booksellers have to accept copies of the books the publishers decide to send to them, but have the right to return unsold copies and receive credit with the publishers. This system, imported from Germany and Denmark, provided the dominating trade terms in Sweden from 1843 to 1970. It was called *kommissionsystemet* (the commission system) and largely put the selective powers in the hands of the publishers.

Most retail bookselling blends these two systems in various ingenious ways – publishers using various discounts to tempt the booksellers to order books from their lists, but at the same time dissuading them from returning unsold copies. In most cases the bookseller performs various other functions in order to sell the book: archiving (having in stock for immediate delivery), displaying (on shelves or in the window), marketing (advertising, organizing readings, and so on), reducing prices. From the customer's point of view, the bookseller can perform various other service functions – suggesting the best title in a field, searching trade bibliographies (printed or databases), ordering copies not in stock. Most of these activities also involve selective functions: deciding which title to display most prominently, resolving which is the best book for the customer on a given subject, and so on.

A more modern form of bookselling is the book club. These book clubs have important selective powers. Some of them choose one main title every month and market it as a quality choice (The Book of the Month concept), while others offer packages of several titles. Normally they also offer books from a backlist, sometimes containing books from several years ago. There are book clubs for new books as well as reprint clubs. Most book clubs sell books from many publishers, but some clubs are owned by a publishing house, or publish books under their own imprint. Earlier book clubs often sold their books through retail bookshops, but the modern clubs generally use direct selling, marketing by mail and shipping their books directly to the customer. The clubs draw members by reducing prices on books, providing a cheaper and easier way for the customer to buy attractive titles.

At the public library, books are archived, displayed, and lent to the public. Since far from all new books are bought by libraries (and the ones selected are bought in different numbers) the libraries have important selective powers. The selection process is continuous, since the old collections have to be culled to make room for new books. Furthermore, the librarian helps the borrower choose the best book in the field – the librarian being thoroughly trained to use various bibliographies for this purpose. The library also performs various important tasks for the dissemination of the culture of reading: organizing public readings by authors, lending book collections to kindergartens, and so on. Compared to other agents in the book trade, the library's

main function is to act as a spacious archive, holding both new books and older ones which are out of print. Generally, these books are lent for free to the public (although there may be charges for interlibrary loans).

At a commercial level, the archival function is filled by booksellers dealing with old books, ranging from simple secondhand booksellers to antiquarian booksellers, specializing in rare and expensive books.

At the end of this process is the reader whose traditional functions quite simply have been to buy or borrow the printed book, carry it home, and read it, returning it or keeping it in his or her own private library.

Various educational institutions combine several roles, not only teaching the skills of reading and writing but also exercising selective powers in various ways. One is to decide which works to include in their teaching. Another is to archive information about authors and works and thereby ensure literary survival. A third is to teach literary competence (to use Jonathan Culler's concept again) to pupils and students, thereby providing a foundation – or a sounding board – for new creative talents, new authors. One main function for schools and universities is to perpetuate the literary culture. At the same time, they clearly provide an important educational market for publishers and authors.

Summarizing the processes outlined above, the main individuals and institutions involved in the book trade may be arranged in the "book chain" depicted below. Needless to say, there are various feedback mechanisms and selective functions involved in all links in this chain. Furthermore, several of the individuals and institutions can occupy several places at once – for example bookseller Sylvia Beach (of Shakespeare & Company in Paris) publishing James Joyce's *Ulysses*, or authors Leonard and Virginia Woolf buying their own printing press and publishing works like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* under the imprint Hogarth Press.

*The traditional book chain: individuals and institutions in the book trade*

Main Function	Individual/Institution
CREATION	Author => Agent => Publisher =>
MANUFACTURING	Designer => Compositor => Printer => Binder =>
DISTRIBUTION	Bookseller => Book Clubs => Library => Educational Institutions =>
CONSUMPTION	Reviewer => Reader

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## **Beyond the Book Chain: a New Model of Functions in the Book Trade**

More or less detailed models along these lines have been designed by other scholars – for example, Lars Furuland's model of "the literary process" (originally published in 1970), Robert Darnton's "the communications circuit" (1982) or Thomas R. Adams'

& Nicolas Barker's "the book cycle" (1986) <sup>37</sup> – and the main conceptual difference between their models and the one above is that I tend to link literary agents and publishers more firmly to the act of creation, not seeing them as mere mediators of finished works.

Such models of "the book chain" (or whatever concept one chooses) are convenient flow charts used to depict the literary process. They also clarify the place of different professional groups in the sequence of this process. However, they tend to have less to say about what functions these groups perform – what they actually do when they do things with literature and books. In the following section, I will suggest a new way of describing the literary process, using a more detailed account of the functions involved in the book trade. This calls for a conceptual shift, a focus on functions instead of individuals and institutions. The result is represented in [Table 1A](#).

Such a shift shows that many functions overlap at crucial points and, consequently, that the stages in literary production, distribution, and consumption are not at all discrete. The "publication" of a book, for example, is not only an act performed by the publisher. In a very concrete sense, a book also is made public – that is, the public is made aware of its existence – by retail booksellers, book clubs, reviewers, and libraries. Many other instances of such functional overlapping have been touched on above, for example the publisher's creative influence, and the contributions to marketing made by critics and libraries.

The extensive model suggested in [Table 1A](#) can be used to describe important features in professional profiles in the book trade, but also gives a more detailed account of the life cycle of a literary work and a book. It is important to stress, however, that my aim has been to make the model as handy as possible, and that it is far from exhaustive on any of these two points. Instead, I have tried to highlight the major and distinctive functions, not subdividing them more than necessary. This inevitably means that important parts of the professional profiles throughout the book trade will not be mentioned – for example linguistic competence, accountancy skills, service-mindedness, social flair, and so on. It should also be noted that the model tries to distinguish between functions usually filled by an individual or an institution ("strong functions") and functions only sometimes filled by them ("weak functions"). Needless to say, this distinction is not absolute; it is more a question of traditions and habits within the book world.

The creation of a literary work is a joint effort between author and publisher, involving stages such as *financing* the creation, the *idea* for the work, *writing*, and *rewriting* – all mainly filled by the author, but sometimes partly or even mainly by the publisher. The selection process is generally in the hands of the publisher, involving *acceptance* and *suggestions for alterations* in the manuscript. Editing of the manuscript involves both *accidentals* (spelling, punctuation) and *substantives* (structure of sentences, choice of words). <sup>38</sup> Typically, a publisher's editor performs both kinds of editing (in collaboration with the author), while the typesetter/printer restricts editing to accidentals in the form of glaring spelling errors. Proofs are generally read by typesetter, editor, and author. <sup>39</sup>

The manufacturing of published texts nowadays may take some *programming* – not

so much basic coding and converting files, but more specialized skills in markup coding and different programming languages, for example for publishing on Internet platforms. Producing printed books involves other functions such as *design*, *typesetting*, *printing*, and *binding*. Traditionally, most of these functions have been provided by the typesetter/printer, leaving only the design to the publisher. But in the more computerized modern publishing industry, these functions are divided between author, publisher, and printer. For example, modern authors do much of the typesetting by writing their works as computer files.

Publishing the book involves both *financing* the manufacturing of the book and the act of *publication*. Traditionally, the publisher meets the manufacturing costs, but the author can also take over this function, either by waiving his or her remuneration or by paying the costs – paying for the printing of books, for burning CD-ROMs or for the right to use a computer server. The act of publication means not only that the process of manufacturing is finished, but that the work is made known to the public. Hence, not only publishers are responsible for this, but also to some extent wholesale and retail booksellers, book clubs, critics, and libraries.

The selling of the book begins with prepublication marketing. One of the main functions of the publisher is to *sell the book to various distributors*, most principally by selling it to retail booksellers and book clubs. These distributors then take over most of the post-publication marketing, such as *displaying*, *advertising*, *selling by mail order* and using strategies like *price-cutting* to undercut other agents. Of course, the publisher often pays for its own advertising, while the book clubs traditionally have had mail order as their unique business concept. Even though they have no commercial interest in the process, critics and libraries are also involved in post-publication marketing, making the books known by writing about them, displaying them and cataloging them (in many cases in searchable databases on the Internet).

After publication, the work is assessed by various agents, all estimating the literary value of the work and at the same time adding value. There are two aspects of this assessment, one short-term (*consecration*) and the other long-term (*canonization*). Fundamentally, this process begins with the author deciding to publish the work (consecrating it with his or her own name) and continues with the publisher's acceptance and the critic's evaluation of the book. In the short term, a book club may help to consecrate a book, while institutions like libraries and educational institutions (schools, universities) are more involved in the canonization of the work – by including them in their collections, curricula, and course reading lists and by making them the subject of seminars and research. <sup>40</sup> The end product of this relentless culling process is the select group of works known as classics.

When a work is published, the prospective audience needs to be able to find information about it – author, title, publisher, subject, price, ordering address. Such information is to be found in stock lists (such as *Books in Print*) and in bibliographies. Traditionally, such publications have been used mainly by booksellers and libraries, where the staff has been trained to use them. Consequently, most information retrieval has been *staff aided*. At libraries, readers also have the chance to retrieve information on their own, using reference books and catalogues. With the advent of the Internet, much information retrieval can be done without actually visiting institutions such as

booksellers or libraries. Instead, the user has various on-line facilities in the form of digitized versions of publishers' catalogs, stock lists, and bibliographies.

The last phase in a literary work's life is the storage and archiving of it, from both the *short-term* and *long-term* perspectives. The book in itself may be seen as a way of archiving a literary work (fixing it in printed text in a certain number of copies), but then the book itself must be archived in order to keep the work available. Some publishers fill the archiving function, warehousing the books themselves, sometimes for many years or even many decades (one typical instance is academic books published by university departments). Other agents that archive books are wholesale and retail booksellers, book clubs, readers (in their own book collections), and libraries, mainly public libraries but also libraries in educational institutions.

These are the main stages and the major functions in the book trade. All of the functions are, of course, not involved in all publishing projects, but the model is general and flexible enough to be applied to the publishing of texts in traditional codex format, as well as in digital format on CD-ROM or the Internet. When discussing the "book chain" – or "the literary process," "the communications circuit" or "the book cycle" – it should always be remembered that different individuals and institutions often perform the same functions. Since these functions are combined in different ways, there is scope for new professional groups that are using digital technology to create new professions and competing with established agents in the book world.

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## Quality Control

The book trade is a commercial enterprise, using division of labor for the production, distribution, and consumption of books. This means industrial efficiency. But this is not cost-effectiveness in purely economical terms. During all stages, there are strong elements of quality control, where different agents, wholly or partly independently of each other, use selective and editing powers. Many of these processes have already been described in some detail (authors being taught about literary excellence by educational institutions and literary markets; manuscripts being edited by publishers, printers, and other readers; proofs being read by author, publisher, and printer; books being graded after publication by booksellers, book clubs, critics, libraries, and educational institutions), and where quality control goes in, speed is pushed out.

Traditionally, the book trade outwardly seems a comparatively languid business, often taking a full year to turn a completed manuscript into a printed book. Initial investments are high and the middlemen are many. But now, technological changes seem to hold the promise that the industry of literature can be organized in new ways, leapfrogging middlemen and reducing costs at one fell swoop.

In the age of digital production, the old professional functions remain vital, but are combined in new ways. Most typically, the author acts as publisher, manufacturer, and distributor when he or she makes a work public on the Internet by storing it on a server that is linked to other computers. Furthermore, there are automated or semiautomatic "authors" – programs that generate narrative works or compile accounts out of

available information. The reader who uses computers is endowed with real possibilities of filling functions previously reserved for others – retrieving information (through databases), designing page layout (through web browsers like Netscape) and printing the works (on desktop laser printers). There are new kinds of printers, publishers, and booksellers working on the Internet: Print On Demand businesses, free-for-all publishing sites, virtual bookshops selling by direct mail.

Obviously, all these enterprises can be described as systems of functions, combined in their own unique ways, but still showing a family resemblance with each other, as well as with functional structures in traditional institutions outside the Internet. (See [Table 1B.](#))

In the digital environment, publishing takes different routes depending on whether the emphasis is on manufacturing, marketing or publishing. One is to use digital technology to manufacture printed books – for example by desktop publishing or Print On Demand. Another way is to use the Internet as a new channel to market printed books – to publish advertisements and other kinds of marketing materials, perhaps even selling books directly to the customer. A third method is to publish works directly in digital form – as CD-ROMs or on the Internet. These works can be everything from traditional sequential alphabetical texts to multimedia products more resembling games than narrative fiction.

In short, there are several continuous scales in what may be labeled "digital publishing": from the codex format to multimedia documents, from marketing to selling by mail order, from sequential non-ergodic non-hyperworks to multisequential ergodic hyperworks. In the following, I will focus on how the Internet is used for publishing, printing and marketing new literary material in Sweden, and round off the discussion with some aspects of the Net as a new kind of "public sphere."

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## **Publishing on the Internet**

The Internet has mainly been used as a publishing platform in its own right in Sweden as in other countries. Quite simply, the Internet is a place to make the written word public. There are several Net-based projects for publishing Swedish literary classics. In this section I will restrict the discussion to the publishing of new literary material on the Internet.

Most of the people publishing their own literary material on the Internet in Sweden must be described as amateurs, i.e., the vast majority are not professional authors and most of them are probably not published in paper form (printed magazines or books).

<sup>41</sup> Some of these authors may aspire to a literary career, using the Internet as a stepping stone to get into print. But most seem to be writing for other purposes – such as to play with literary genres, express themselves, show off their linguistic dexterity, to try and forget a romance that went wrong, and so on. As a result, cyberspace swarms with poems, short stories, even novels, all written by authors unknown to the general book-reading public.



To a literary connoisseur, these works may seem devoid of any real literary merit. They lack artistic devices such as startling metaphors, surprising rhymes or sophisticated narrative structures. Most of these works would probably be unpublishable in the world of print – actually, many of them give the feeling that one is having a peek at the reject pile from a large publishing house. In many ways, these works seem to be wanting in form, content, and originality. Even to quote them at length in print, without any comments, would be devastating criticism.

However, literary form and originality are hardly the main points about these works when considering their literary significance. For one thing, although lacking artistic power, they remind us that literature still has a prestigious place in human communication. The very fact that so many people use literary forms to express themselves seems to be a hopeful sign for literature. After all, here are dozens and hundreds of people – most of them presumably young – using poetry and short stories to shape their own experience of life, their inventions, and imaginings. Beyond the question of literary value, this indicates a high evaluation of literature itself. As long as the Internet continues to be filled with literary material, the Net cannot be a real threat to literature.

One should note that most of these works are traditionally textual rather than hypertextual – that is, the authors do not freely use links and imaginative structuring of different elements. Instead, the typical Swedish cyberpoem is rather like a printed poem, albeit published on the Web instead of on a printed page. Marshall McLuhan once argued that the meeting between two media was truly revolutionary, since it gave birth to new art forms, generating what he called hybrid energy. "The moment of the meeting of the media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses."<sup>42</sup> This is perfectly true in theory, but in practice such a meeting is a prolonged and often belated process. The form made possible by the Internet (digital ergodic hypertexts) is still yet to be exploited by most of its authors.

Most of these Swedish works are published on homepages. Typically, a young person describes himself or herself, using photographs and a short biographical sketch, providing links to other favorite domains, and throwing in some poems or a short story. Reading these often gives the sense of being invited to somebody's home – or entering it like a spy. The main function seems to be to express the individuality of one person, using literature as one means among others.

However, many writers have larger literary ambitions. On some homepages, literary material predominates. There are sites which resemble e-books with several literary works linked to a table of contents. There is a multitude of such personal sites, but the actual number is difficult to estimate. They are planets of their own in cyberspace, difficult to find but interesting to visit. At a conservative estimate – based on searches with AltaVista on words like "dikter" and "noveller" (poems and short stories), limited to domains using the suffix .se – there are now several thousand sites containing literary material.

Such sites contain literature that has never passed a gatekeeper. This is literature never sifted by traditional institutions in the literary system such as publishing houses, critics or

libraries. These works truly form an alternative literature, a cybersphere outside of the world of literary institutions.

But to escape the institutions is also, paradoxically, to lose contact with the audience. Nowadays, the main problem for the Internet author is not being published (that is easy and cheap), but being seen. The tide of literary material is so overwhelming that it is not a question of publish and be damned, but of publish and be drowned. Therefore, institutions of some kind are necessary, if only as guides to the Netsurfer. And so, a number of "publishing" institutions have established themselves. Nearly all are noncommercial sites, meaning that only a handful of Internet publishers will charge money for reading. It is a moot point if there really is any serious editing of material on such sites. In fact, many of them pride themselves on publishing everything they get and doing so in unedited form.

I will give two examples of noncommercial sites of this kind. [43](#)

In many ways the site called Wet Warlock is a typical Internet publishing project. On this site, short stories by several authors are published. There is also a collective serial story, "Betong." Presumably, the works submitted to Wet Warlock are read by the webmaster and accepted or rejected, but in reality there can be very little editing. The stories are filled with spelling mistakes and grammatical inconsistencies.

Wet Warlock is a part of the Sirap.net (the logo says: "Sirap. We loathe reality"), run by Nicklas Andersson. Born in 1977, out of work and living in the Swedish countryside, he describes himself on his homepage as interested in, among other things, science fiction, rock music, and American TV series such as *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, and *The X Files*. Sirap.net has various links and subpages – for example, Andersson also publishes a diary and a lexicon of "keywords" (i.e. his thoughts on various subjects).

Like the whole of Sirap.net, Wet Warlock is very much of a personal project, a vehicle for getting Andersson's own stories published. But he also invites other authors to submit their work. "The Wet Warlock is a nonprofit site, in both Swedish and English, where you can read short stories from various people. But to read the stories is just a small part, you can also submit your own and get them published, for the benefit of others." Works are reformatted and published in the same layout. Authors are asked to attach a short biographical sketch, which is published on the list "Vem som är vem" ["Who's Who"]. There is no information concerning processes for acceptance and editing – if there are any.

Wet Warlock may be described as a part of male youth culture, rather than a branch of mature quality fiction. The literary heroes seems to be Stephen King, Stephen Donaldson, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Terry Pratchett. Most of the authors are young and the majority of stories are in the genres Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Horror. Of the ten or so authors published on Wet Warlock all are male, only two are over thirty years of age, while three are under twenty. There are twenty-five short stories, divided into the genres Fantasy (12), Science Fiction (2), Horror (6), and Various Genres (5). In addition, there are three longer serial stories, written in installments by several authors. The most ambitious of these serials is "Betong" ["Concrete"], published in twenty-two installments.

Nicklas Andersson is the most prolific author, the writer of eight of the short stories. He specializes in Fantasy. A young man who signs himself "Mattias" (age twenty) has published five stories, mainly Horror. The other authors are behind one or two stories each. All the stories date from 1997 or 1998; four of them are published in English. Some stories are written in collaboration by members of the group RAJ; none of the stories seems to have been edited.

The impression after reading through Wet Warlock is that there may be one or two accomplished storytellers there, but that most of the stories mainly show that their authors know the basics of their genres. This should not be read as an unkind verdict of the kind of effort that Wet Warlock represents. Instead, it is a reminder that Wet Warlock is not set up to satisfy professors of literature, literary critics or even a market. [44](#)

A site of another kind is "Novell på nätet" (Short Story on the Net), containing hundreds of contributions published in the last two years. According to the presentation, this site also is idealistic and free-for-all:

*Short story on the Net started as an idea in June 1996. The thought was to encourage creativity. Far too many creative and intelligent people have received these despicable 'No, thank you-letters' from publishers, only to put their writing aside for the rest of their lives. Our objective is to publish everything we receive. To be published is among the high points of life for an author or a poet and we hope in this way to encourage a lifetime of writing.* [45](#)

The site – which has received numerous awards and nominations – is run by Michael Ländin and Hélène Fredholm, who also run an Internet company called FL-internetföretaget, specializing in building Internet sites, e-mail campaigns, and other forms of marketing as well as other services. These services form a large web called FL-Net.

Glancing through the archive of published works so far, the impression is that "Novell på nätet" does not attract authors who are published in books or magazines. Neither Ländin nor Fredholm has published any books themselves, nor have they published any works on "Novell på nätet." In short, they seem to be more interested in the Internet and business than in becoming authors themselves, and the idealism expressed in their presentation may have a hidden agenda. Presumably "Novell på nätet" is used, at least partly, to attract creative people who are interested in the Internet, perhaps with the general aim of drawing their attention to FL-Net or even with the hope of getting them interested in working for the company as link-pilots, designers or writers. So the idea behind "Novell på nätet" seems to be twofold: to provide a publishing platform and then scout the space for promising talent, usable outside the arena of fiction. [46](#)

There are several more sites like Novell på nätet and Wet Warlock, places where authors can get fiction published. [47](#) In many ways, such sites act as traditional publishers, albeit with a different set of functions than publishers from the world of ink and paper. Most of all, sites like Wet Warlock and Novell på nätet seem to mix functions from publishing and printing, with a touch of the noncommercial archiving

functions of a library (see [Table 1B](#)).

These sites do not generally contribute to the creation of the works – with the exception of collective serials like "Betong" – and there seems to be very little prepublication selection, editing or proofreading. On the other hand, these sites do the necessary programming, freeing the authors from this work. They also provide much of the manufacturing in the form of design and some of the typesetting (although the authors already contribute with their own digital files). Also, these sites finance the publication of the works by paying for the server resources. Since these works are written for reading on the screen, printing (if needed) is a task for the reader. There is very little marketing (the typical form is getting the site linked to other sites) and scarcely any amount of consecration (when all material is published, there is no status conferred by acceptance); however, the sites are responsible for the archiving of the material.

As the examples show, publishing on the Internet means that old functions are combined in new ways, both stretching and constricting the boundaries of the concept of publishing. As far as writing goes, however, no Swedish Internet publisher has yet acquired the prestige necessary to make the acceptance and publication of a work into an act of consecration, of adding value to work through the reflected light of the publisher's aura.

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## **Print On Demand - Publishing Somebody You Love**

Throughout history, the letter culture has sought new ways to store information in cheap and safe ways. The inventions of printing and moveable type were major breakthroughs in this respect. Digital technology has simply continued the process. Texts are no longer stored on paper rolls, but on floppy disk, and many other forms of digital technology are used to facilitate the manufacturing of books.

One major effect of this is the rise of a new professional group in the book trade, the typographically skilled programmer. Desktop publishing programs are generally so user-friendly that writers and editors can learn to handle them, at least if they acquire graphic skills (leading to unemployment in the printing business). But someone has to produce these programs. While typesetters are a vanishing professional group, programmers are a rising one. At the same time, the process goes from a distributed system of competence to a highly centralized one. In the past, every typesetter carried his own "program" for typesetting within himself. Nowadays, a large part of this program is provided by the desktop publishing program, written by a limited group of people.

"Print On Demand" uses new technology to manufacture printed books faster and cheaper. Basically, the business concept is that modern printing presses can manufacture simple books relatively cheaply in small editions – provided that costs for typesetting are low. The cost-reduction of typesetting is achieved in several ways. One is to scan already printed book pages as graphics files, another is to use desktop

publishing, a third to lift files from information retrieval systems (in-house or public databases). Again, the typesetter loses out, while traditional printers meet new competition.

"Printers on demand" may be a new professional group, providing certain professional skills in the manufacturing of books – for example knowledge in how to combine different types of files into something that looks like a unified book. From an institutional point of view, however, it seems safe to assume that integration processes will merge Print On Demand with the traditional printing business, giving birth to even larger printing houses with equipment for both traditional printing and printing on demand, with both typesetters and desktop publishing workers. This integration process is more a question of investments in machinery than the need for new professional competence.

Print On Demand obviously offers new opportunities for authors who wish to bypass traditional publishers. Self-publishing – or "vanity publishing" – means that the author publishes a book without the aid of a publishing house. The author pays for the production of the books and has to arrange the distribution – sometimes selling the books himself, sometimes using a wholesale bookseller, sometimes reaching an agreement with a retail bookseller or even publisher. In most cases, the author warehouses the books himself.

Self-publishing has a long tradition in Sweden. Before modern publishing houses, many authors had to pay for the printing of their own books and arrange the distribution. But even during the period of the modern publishing industry, self-publishing has formed a substantial part of the output of literature. Some figures showing this are available for fiction publishing in the original, i.e. the output of new titles (not counting reprints and new editions).

At least 6.8 percent of new prose fiction by Swedish authors in 1916-1940 was published by the author. The actual percentage was probably larger, since many of the remaining titles were published under imprints which published just one single title during this period – there is obviously good reason to suspect that these imprints were just fancy names for the author's own publishing venture. In poetry, the percentage of self-published titles is traditionally much higher. In the 1930s, roughly one third of new poetry books by Swedish authors were self-published! <sup>48</sup> In the period 1965-1970, roughly three percent of all fiction titles (including translations) were self-published. The corresponding figure for poetry was roughly somewhere between ten and twenty percent. <sup>49</sup>

Self-published fiction is a heterogeneous category, a motley crew of experiments, simple rhymes, and autobiographical outbursts. There are well-known examples of modernist authors being rejected by publishers and paying their own way – for example the poet Erik Lindegren published his *mannen utan väg* (1942) at his own expense, soon to have it acclaimed as a modernist classic – but in the majority of cases, a self-published title is of concern only to the author and a limited group. These are titles on the fringe of the commercial book-market, published for the author's own satisfaction, but seldom sold in large editions or reviewed in the papers.

Various agents in the book trade have created channels for self-publishing, sometimes working as facilitators for authors and sometimes making a profit themselves. One major Swedish agent in the early part of the twentieth century was Jules Ingelow (1891-1975), who ran his Svenska Allmogeförlaget from 1926 to 1973. Ingelow accepted virtually every manuscript offered to him, but only on the condition that the authors paid for the printing and publication, while Svenska Allmogeförlaget undertook the arrangement of marketing and distribution. The output of books was large and Svenska Allmogeförlaget was among the major "publishing houses," especially during the first decades of its existence. But in reality, this "publishing house" was mainly an aid to self-publishing – there were no distinctive publishing functions like financing and prepublication selection. <sup>50</sup> In more recent years, a company called Författares bokmaskin (founded in 1972) has filled similar functions, providing facilities for typesetting and printing for authors who are unable to find a publisher or who want to control the publishing process themselves. Authors pay for the production services of Författares bokmaskin, which is partly financed by the Swedish Council of Culture (Kulturrådet).

\*

Woody Allen once defined masturbation as sex with somebody you love. By the same token, self-publishing may be said to be publishing somebody you love. Clearly, many interesting works have been published this way, enriching the literary culture and sometimes correcting publishers' mistakes. However, an inherent problem in self-publishing is that when the selection process is invalidated – the author making the publishing and editing decisions – much of the quality control work is leapfrogged as well. Who is acting as creative influence? Who is correcting mistakes in spelling, grammar, style, and plotting? Who is editing the text? Well, maybe somebody is substituting for the publisher: a friend or a relation of the author's. But then, some publishing functions are not abolished, just placed in somebody else's hands. If not, self-publishing means that most external quality controls are excluded.

Quite clearly, Print On Demand is a new technology offering the same functions as Svenska Allmogeförlaget and Författares bokmaskin. Depending on the amount of editorial work and marketing skills, these printing houses can and will compete with publishers. Publishers, of course, can use Print On Demand as a cheaper method of manufacturing books. But authors and printers both tend to see the publisher as an unnecessary middleman taking a part of their own profit. This can lead to a new division of labor in the literary world – the dividing of many of the traditional publishing functions between author and printer. Presumably, the author will take care of creation, pre-publication selection, editing, and typesetting, while the printer provides design, printing, binding, publication, and some marketing.

This is what happened in Sweden when three well-known authors joined forces with a firm specializing in Print On Demand, Arkitektkopia. On January 20, 1997, authors Peter Curman (former chairman of the Swedish Society of Authors), Jan Myrdal and Lars Forssell (Member of The Swedish Academy) launched a self-publishing project using Print On Demand to manufacture their own books. However, their project was something more than just printing books in a new way. Instead, the launching of the project was an occasion for hitting hard against the Swedish book trade in general and

publishers in particular.

The hidden agenda was a protracted debate between authors' and publishers' associations concerning remuneration for digital publishing – should digital rights be included in the standard contract, or entitle authors to an extra fee? By publishing their own books these authors pointed out that new technology for cheap self-publishing was available and that publishers, consequently, ought to remember the imminent risk that they in the future might be scrapped altogether from the publishing process. The rhetorical strategy in the press release of the three authors was to flatter publishers in words, but simultaneously marginalize them by mentioning only a few of their functions:

*Publishers tread water. They have terminated agreements with both writers and booksellers; they've even changed their name, in Swedish, from the Swedish Book Publishers Association to the Swedish Publishers Association as an adjustment to new technology – but have made no progress at all.*

*We now demonstrate, in cooperation with Arkitektkopia, how one with the aid of the Internet and modern printing equipment in less than two minutes can transform binary digits in a database into complete books; two or two hundred copies, depending on how many you need at exactly that moment, and at a very favorable price. The Japanese call this "lean production."*

*This does not imply that we're starting up a new publishing house; it is advantageous for us to be able to make use of properly staffed publishing houses managing design, marketing, distribution, and so forth. Our aim is to just point publishers to what can be achieved. They've got to take this to heart and reach the new agreements that new technology calls for. The alternative is that present day publishers become as obsolete as lamplighters in their day. [---]*

*We do not regard publishers as our enemies, we extend our hand to them. If they fulfil their obligations to bring our books to market we, on our hand, will fulfil our obligations to write them! [51](#)*

The crucial idea behind this reasoning was to conceal four central publishing functions: creative influence, editing, selective, and consecration powers. Thus, the publisher was reduced to an errand boy, hired to bring authors' books "to market." The press conference attracted major media coverage. Curman, Forssell and Myrdal really had placed Print On Demand on the Swedish map. After this publicity stunt, several companies invested in Print On Demand technology, offering to print small editions at competitive prices (typically between twenty-five and three hundred copies) and providing some traditional publishing and bookselling functions.

Books-on-Demand, one of these new agents, is run by Mart Marend. It is a combination of printing house and publishing house. An author can get a book printed, bound, and distributed, as long as he undertakes to provide laser-printed and camera-ready originals. But Books-on-Demand also offers to design and make-up texts. Furthermore, Books-on-Demand undertakes to market and advertise the book. It also

offers to sell the books using online methods. (The author has the option to market, advertise, and sell the books himself, if he so wishes.) It should be emphasized that Books-on-Demand does not offer to edit texts or to remunerate authors (other than with the profits from their own books).

Prices are competitive, judging from the marketing material. From camera-ready originals, Books-on-Demand offers to print three copies of a 120 page book for SEK 1,146.25 , charging SEK 76.5 per extra copy. Two hundred-fifty copies would cost SEK 20,041.75, or about \$ 2,500. If Books-on-Demand undertakes to make layout, make-up and camera-ready originals, as well as distributing review copies, the initial cost would rise to SEK 6,838.75 but in return would comprise ten copies for the author and ten review copies. The cost for 250 copies in this case would be SEK 22,903.75, or just under \$ 3,000. [52](#)

Books-on-Demand maintains that the project is not competing with other agents than traditional printers. Humbly the marketing material insists that "A clear demarcation of Books-on-Demand's activities is that we are neither a publisher nor a bookseller." [53](#) But in reality, Print On Demand projects like Books-on-Demand freely cannibalize both publishers and booksellers. Traditional publishing functions (typesetting, design, warehousing, marketing, advertising, etc.) are transferred either to the "printer" or to the author. Traditional bookselling functions (distribution, selling, and advertising) are divided by the "printer" and the author in similar ways. (See [Table 1B.](#))

Why is Books-on-Demand protesting so loudly that it is neither publisher nor bookseller? One reason may be a limited understanding of what these institutions actually do. Since Books-on-Demand does not finance the production of books, is it not therefore by definition a publisher? Can Books-on-Demand really be a bookseller if it only sells the books the firm has printed itself? This kind of thinking may lie behind the reluctance to admit how many of the publishing and bookselling functions firms like Books-on-Demand actually offer at full service.

Another reason is probably that Books-on-Demand – and other Print On Demand firms – are disinclined to irritate publishers. These publishers are, in the nature of things, prospective customers, for example using Print On Demand technology to produce advance copies. But the main reason, I suspect, is that the very concept behind Print On Demand businesses is to persuade authors that this is something apart from the traditional publishing process. What is the use of marketing yourself as a publisher if the customers you are trying to attract wish to avoid publishers? Publishing somebody you love is not the same as loving publishers.

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## Fotnoter

36. More detailed accounts of the manufacturing of books are to be found in standard works like Philip Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) and Geoffrey Ashall Glaister's *Encyclopedia of the Book*. 2. ed., with a new introduction by Donald Farren (New Caste & London: Oak Knoll Press & The British Library, 1996). The encyclopedia also contains descriptions of job profiles in distribution. [Äter till texten](#)



37. Lars Furuland, "Litteratur och samhälle. Om litteratursociologin och dess forskningsfält," *Litteratursociologi. Texter om litteratur och samhälle*, red. Lars Furuland & Johan Svedjedal (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1997), 16-49, p. 40-41 (first publication of model in 1970). Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?," *The Kiss of Lamourette. Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990), 107-135, pp. 111-12. Thomas R. Adams & Nicolas Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," *A Potencie of Life. Books in Society. The Clark Lectures 1986-1987*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: The British Library, 1993), 5-43, p. 14. [Åter till texten](#)
38. The concepts "accidentals" and "substantives" are standard terms in textual criticism. See W.W. Greg, "The Rationale of Copy-Text", *Collected Papers*. Edited by J.C. Maxwell (Oxford, 1966), 374-391. [Åter till texten](#)
39. A more thorough discussion of some of these editing functions is given in the section "Authors and Publishers." [Åter till texten](#)
40. The concept of "consecration," see Bourdieu 1996. [Åter till texten](#)
41. See the discussion in Johan Svedjedal, "Det skönlitterära nätet. Internet och svensk skönlitteratur," *Medialiseringen av Sverige*, red. Anders Björnsson & Peter Luthersson (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1997), 29-40 [Åter till texten](#)
42. Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, edited by Eric McLuhan & Frank Zingrone, (New York: Basic Books, 1996) [Åter till texten](#)
43. The sites were examined in September 1998. [Åter till texten](#)
44. The address to sirap.net: <http://www.sirap.net> Nicklas Andersson's homepage, <http://www.sirap.net/nicke/index.html> The quotation: "The Wet Warlock är en ideell site på både svenska och engelska där du kan läsa noveller från allt möjligt folk. Men att läsa novellerna är trots allt bara en liten del, man kan även skicka in egna och få dem upplagda, till andras stora glädje." (<http://www.sirap.net/warlock/info.html>). [Åter till texten](#)
45. "Novell på nätet startade som en idé juni 1996. Tanken gick ut på att uppmuntra kreativitet. Alltför många kreativa och intelligenta människor har fått dessa eländig[a] 'nej-tackbrev' från olika bokförlag för att sedan lägga sitt skrivande åt sidan för resten av sitt liv. Vår inriktning är att publicera allt som kommer in till oss. Att bli publicerad tillhör bland de största ögonblicken i livet för en författare eller poet och vi hoppas på detta sätt uppmuntra ett fortsatt skrivande livet ut." (<http://www.fl-net.se/novell/info.html>). [Åter till texten](#)
46. On the company, see <http://www.fl-net.se> ; advertising of jobs on <http://fl-net.se/fl/jobbb.html> [Åter till texten](#)
47. See for exempel the section "Vem publicerar på Internet?" in Erik Peurell, "Elektronisk publicering av litteratur och Print on demand. En inventeringsrapport från projektet 'Nya vägar för boken' ", <http://www.kur.se/fou/rapporter/ELPUB.HTM> [Åter till texten](#)
48. Prose fiction, Johan Svedjedal, *Prosa mellan krigen. Förstagångsutgivningen av svensk prosafiktions i original i bokform för vuxna 1916-1940*, *Litteratur och samhälle* 18:2, 1982, pp. 22-3. Poetry, Hans Olof Johansson, *Svensk lyrik 1931-1960. En översikt av originalutgivningen i bokform*, *Litteratur och samhälle* 5:63, 1969, pp. 2988-9 and 3031, Table 10. [Åter till texten](#)
49. See Lars Furuland & Hans Olof Johansson, "Utgivningen av skönlitteratur 1965-1970," *En bok om böcker. Litteraturutredningens branschstudier*, SOU 1972:80 (Stockholm: 1972), pp. 226-265, p. 233, Table 9.4; Johansson 1969, pp.266-275, 269, table 10.2. [Åter till texten](#)
50. See Ann-Sofie Einarsson, *Svenska Allmogeförlaget och Jules Ingelow. Ett folkligt förlag och dess skapare*, Uppsala 1993, *Litteratur och samhälle* 29:1, 1993. [Åter till texten](#)
51. <http://www.books-on-demand.com/old/thebeginning.htm> [Åter till texten](#)
52. <http://www.books-on-demand.com/processen/kalkyl.htm> (September 1998.) [Åter till](#)

[texten](#)

53. "En tydlig avgränsning av Books-on-Demands verksamhet är att vi varken är ett bokförlag eller en bokhandel." <http://www.books-on-demand.com/presentation-sv.htm> [Åter till](#)

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