

From: Gill James
Sent: 31 December 2005 17:51
To: Alan Shearman
Subject: HMV/Ottakar's merger inquiry

Dear Mr Shearman,

I share my concern about the demise of the independent bookshop with my fellow writers. Indeed, the merger of two publishing houses in the past made a drastic change to the livelihoods of writers, in particular the group to which I belong - children's writers. In effect, although the number of imprints remained, the channels in to them were narrowed. The same will happen with the merger of two large chains of bookshops. All the big chains have strict buying policies, which are mainly centralised, leaving only a little space for local decisions. Some of the buying policies involve deals with publishers, and although all of the big chains do this to some extent, at least they do it differently.

In the particular case of Ottakar's children's writers are particularly anxious, as Ottakars have been favourable towards children's and young adult's books in the past, and one would hope that whoever takes them on board would retain the same or similar policies. This would seem less likely if the HMV group did this, as it would seem likely that they would adapt the same buying and selling strategies as exist already at Waterstone's.

I am currently studying for a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Portsmouth, and part of my study involves looking at market constructs of the Young Adult novel, so I am grappling with these issues and have concluded that the state of the industry at the moment is leading to high quality Young Adult literature, but a literature which is not as diverse as it could be, nor meeting the need of its audience as much as it might be - especially in English speaking countries. There is a need, for example, to learn more from other cultures, so more books need to be translated into English. The HMV group has a poor record on accepting translations, particularly in Young Adult fiction, whereas Ottakar's has been more open to this. I would therefore urge you to examine carefully implications for a lessening in competition that a merger between Ottakar's and the HMV group would have.

I am a member of the Society of Authors and have thirty books in print, mainly educational materials, but also some children's and Young Adult fiction.

I hasten to add that this email contains my views and not those of the University of Portsmouth or the Society of Authors, though I suspect I would find much agreement amongst my colleagues in both institutions.

Best wishes,

Gill James

www.gilljames.co.uk

www.authorsden.com/gilljames