

From: Linda Newbery
Sent: 03 January 2006 16:56
To: Alan Shearman
Subject: HMV/Ottakar's merger inquiry

Dear Mr Shearman,

Like many people interested in reading and publishing, I am concerned about the potential takeover of Ottakar's bookshop by Waterstone's/HMV.

The effect of one retailer monopolising high-street book-buying is to narrow the range of publications available, through a concentration on a narrow range of proven sellers and those books given the most vigorous publisher promotions. Narrow, profit-driven bookselling can even affect publisher decisions as to what should be published, as I believe is already occurring with regard to children's picture books, since Waterstone's have drastically reduced the number of picture books they are prepared to take. This in turn makes it very difficult for new talent to be taken on, or for books which do not have instant wide appeal to be published at all.

We are increasingly familiar with the 3-for-2 offers, the discounted hardbacks, the celebrity books and TV tie-ins which are prominently displayed in shops. These factors mean that the best-sellers sell in ever-greater quantities, while other books, just as deserving, are not given shelf-space. But quantity does not equal quality, particularly with regard to book-selling. In the UK we have a marvellous range and depth of publishing, but this depends on the production of books that stand no chance of achieving high sales. This would be made even more difficult if Waterstone's were in a position to control not only over what is displayed and sold, but over what can viably be published.

Ottakar's is known for the enthusiasm and knowledge of its booksellers. Customers appreciate the fact that Ottakar's staff, rather than being bound by central buying policy, can choose and recommend their own favourites, and genuinely engage with customers in discussion about books and reading. It would be a tremendous shame if this were lost to the more ruthless sales-driven approach of Waterstone's.

I for one will be very sorry indeed if my local branch of Ottakar's is lost, and I hope your inquiry will conclude that Waterstone's should not monopolise book-buying on the high street.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Newbery