

## The Rise of Self-Publishing, the Young Adult Novel, and Collections Development in Canada

By Melanie Grant

The self-published young adult novels of today, some of which burn their way up the best-seller lists, no longer carry the stigma of the “vanity press” that self-publishing one’s own work did just a few decades ago. Changes in the corporate structure of the traditional publishing houses in the 1990s and early 2000s, brought about by mergers, meant that publishing was treated like any other entertainment division: every endeavour had to be profitable, and the focus was on reliable bestsellers to feed the demand of the large chains of big-box bookstores (Dilevko & Dali, 2006).

First-time authors, even previously published authors without a huge following, found themselves out in the cold in this new, risk-averse publishing paradigm (Dilevko & Dali, 2006). In this environment, a new industry formed: author services publishers, also known as print on demand publishers (POD), with higher quality printing, more transparent and ethical business practices, and charging for services on a sliding scale, depending on how much attention the authors expected for their manuscripts (Dilevko & Dali, 2006). The three largest and most respectable author services publishers, Xlibris, iUniverse, and AuthorHouse, were beginning to make an impact on libraries at the time of Dilevko and Dali’s 2006 study, but the penetration of the library market was not yet extensive.

That was seven years ago, before the Amanda Hockings and E.L. Jameses, before authors became one-person social media marketing gurus and put their work online in e-book format, eventually to become a print book, or to become a bestseller for Kindles, Nooks, iPads, and Kobos. *Publishers Weekly* states that “[f]ifteen e-books with self-publishing origins are in Amazon’s Kindle top 100 overall for 2012 through November 1” (*Publishers Weekly*, 2012). Young adult fiction is making up an increasingly large portion of this self-publishing phenomenon. *Publishers Weekly Select*, the self-published books listing supplement, proclaims on the title page of its December 24, 2012: “A Record Number of Titles, Led by Juvenile Fiction.” Also included is an announcement that *Publishers Weekly Select* will begin to be issued six times annually instead of quarterly, given the ever-growing number of submissions (despite the \$149 charge to authors for the listing and potential review, perhaps negative (Strauss, 2012).)

The American Library Association’s fact sheet on “Marketing to Libraries” has pointed advice to self-published authors: if you want your book to be purchased by libraries, have it reviewed; however, many traditional book reviewing outlets refuse to consider self-published books (ALA, 2012). ALA’s fact sheet also makes note of the regular means by which librarians acquire books: vendors, a gatekeeper for authors and small presses. The steadily growing demand for e-books in libraries is proving to be a challenge with regard to self-published authors, as young adult fiction writer Saira Rao, who spoke with *Forbes* magazine journalist David Vinjamuri, discovered: “When we tried to get into Overdrive they said they really only consider publishers with at least 25 titles. So small, indie publishers like us who really value librarians for word-of-mouth—and self-published

authors—are de facto boxed out” (Vinjamuri, 2013). Vinjamuri’s solution was that libraries simply demand that Overdrive, 3M, and other e-book platform vendors accommodate self-published e-book authors; his additional suggestion was that library staff takes on the task of reviewing the piles of self-published e-books, share their reviews with other libraries, and create a list of solid recommendations for good reads for library patrons (Vinjamuri, 2013).

In the Canadian context, the gatekeepers, the vendors, appear to be welcoming to self-published authors and independent presses. Library Bound has a simple set of instructions for self-published authors to submit their books to be listed. Library Services Centre’s website has a prominent button on its main page for small presses, with detailed information for its “Small Press and Author Program.” Listing books and other materials with LSC comes with free cataloguing services. LSC’s webpage also states that libraries are encouraged to refer their local authors, musicians, filmmakers, and artists to LSC for this service, without needing to fill an order with this vendor.

Books by self-published authors of young adult fiction will still need to meet the same criteria of collections development set forth in the policy of each library system. Self-published books now have advantages over the vanity press productions of previous years, and are more likely to be taken seriously by readers. Services are now available to authors who choose to publish outside the traditional vein, such as editing and reviewing, and cataloguing and listing are available through supportive vendors. The internet and social media in particular assist self-published writers to raise their profiles, and their books can begin life as e-books and build buzz online. The ever-

growing ranks of hopeful writers will likely find helpful allies in librarians, and libraries will benefit from a wider range of younger writers and niche writers who can offer young patrons something that the traditional publishers perhaps cannot. Those beginning writers can provide role-models for aspiring writers among young adult patrons who will also struggle to find traditional publishers. Working to ease the barriers to get self-published books and e-books into libraries presents an opportunity for librarians in the literary community. Wading through piles of less-than-stellar work is not a fun job, but Vinjamuri’s suggestion for sharing reviews among libraries is an excellent one. With the explosion in e-books, publishing is changing rapidly; this is the time to adapt and the burgeoning young adult fiction market is a great place to start.

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