



Publication Day

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THE DAY A BOOK is published is experienced very differently by the writer and by the reader.

For the writer, publication day is the moment their book, which has often been many years in the making, emerges into the world. The writer is, in some ways, waving goodbye to their newly published book as it sets off on its own.

In contrast, the reader is waving hello, seeing the book for the first time. For the reader, the book is a new thing which appears to have fallen from the sky, come from nowhere, winked into existence in a bookshop, an online listing, a review column.

For the writer, the book is both painfully over-familiar – thanks to sustained contact time during conception, execution, and inevitably a huge amount of editing – and it's oddly distant, because by the time a book is published, the writer might well have been separated from the book for many months. Traditional publishing is still a slow-paced endeavour. Writers tend to be asked to submit their manuscripts to their editors twelve months before publication day. There will be editing after that, of course but the writer's leave-taking often begins at the point they submit, and by the time the book is published, many will be deeply engrossed in their next project.



And that's the moment when the book requires promotion. So the writer reacquaints themselves with their formerly much-attended work and makes much noise on social media, perhaps does radio interviews, goes to speak to audiences in bookshops and libraries. They must cast aside whichever exciting project they are now working on, often reluctantly, to go back in time, just as the reader is taking the book forward, into their lives. Pity the poor writer who struggles to remember why they wrote the just-published book in the first place, how the characters came to be, even what their names are.

With my first novel, I did an event not long after publication day for a book club who had read my book. When answering questions, I got two characters' names mixed up and forgot the name of their village, to an audible gasp from the audience. The readers at said event were horrified, and shocked — how could I not know every last detail about this novel which had just arrived, freshly minted, into the world? How could I not be immersed in it as they were?

To share the truth with the reader is hard: writers move on and we often have to do so quickly, for economic reasons as well as those of sanity. The paradox of time on publication day is difficult to convey: the book the reader sees as new, the writer knows is old. On publication day, both states are simultaneously true, but only one side of the equation shifts position. The writer will smile, say how *thrilled* they are to share their new book with you.