



## Publication Day

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**L**ONG GONE ARE THE TIMES when a book would *only* be available in shops on Publication Day. Yes, proofs of your book *might* have been sent out to professional critics and booksellers; but the public would only be able to buy it on that day. Now, things are very different. Electronic proofs go out to bloggers and general readers as well as to people in the industry. Two months before my most recent novel was due to be published, it appeared on Google Books, in almost its entirety. It was a shock to find a truncated form of my beautiful book already out there, floating in the ether. I now find my books listed for secondhand sale before they have even had a chance to be bought *firsthand*.

My first children's novel was published in 2008. I had signed the contract in 2006; at the age of twenty-four, I had not been used to waiting so long. In my journal, I counted down the days: 600 till publication! 450! 97! I imagined the thrill of seeing my book on the shelves. I thought about the reviews, the delighted calls from friends. Stephen Spielberg would phone, offering millions for a film deal. The world would change.

On publication day itself, a frosty day in January, I struggled into the offices of the *Literary Review*, where I was working, and sat down, *brimming* with expectancy. Toiling at this magazine should have alerted me to the pitfalls of publishing: every day, several large sacks, each containing dozens of books, would be dumped in front of me. The ratio of books received to books reviewed was *enormous*.



Nevertheless, I sat waiting, for the phone to ring, for a bottle of champagne or some flowers, even for an email from my editor. Did those things come? They did not. Life rolled onwards, the world continuing, largely indifferent.

Publication day, linked so closely with publicity, used to be marked with a launch party. A piece about it might get into a newspaper diary. My second novel brought a launch party in a night club off Piccadilly. It was well attended; but I noticed everybody kept looking over my shoulder and whispering.

Had some literary giant gatecrashed? No; it was the footballer Rio Ferdinand, who had presumably wandered in by accident. I asked him if he knew this was *my* launch party. He didn't. He signed my book. It was only much later that I realised this was the wrong way round. We got the diary piece, though.

Every time publication day jostles round again, I find myself seeking to mark the occasion, to formalise the birth of another tome. When I receive my finished copies, I perform a small ritual: I reverently place the new book on a special shelf, where it joins its brethren; I stand and contemplate; and then, I return to work.

Spend too much time thinking about publication day, and you forget about the most important thing: writing, and writing something better than everything you've written before.