

## Hugo Setzer Keynote

London Book Fair, Freedom to Publish Seminar, 12 March 2019

### **Paying the Price: Is Truth to be Trusted, or Just an Outdated Trend?**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen

Thank you so much for joining us for this second Freedom to Publish Seminar at London Book Fair. Thank you Jacks for making space in your programme to deal with this issue, to give us the opportunity to take a step back from licensing and rights, and to consider something at the core of our business that the lucky among us must not take for granted: our freedom to publish.

Today's world feels unstable. In Latin America there have been elections recently in Colombia, Brazil and Mexico, the latter two raising real concerns because of the populist nature of the winning candidates. And then there are the non-elections in Venezuela and the resultant worst humanitarian crisis in a century in that country.... In the United States we have had the longest US Government Shutdown in history and a State of Emergency declared by the president, which is now being contested by the Congress and courts. In Europe we have not only the ongoing saga of Brexit but also European elections with the real possibility of extremist parties taking more seats in the European Parliament. According to a recent article in The Economist, a climate of hate is emerging in France. In Africa there have been contested elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a worrying situation in Zimbabwe. The world is divided. I feel like I'm surrounded by (negative) noise.

But I know that every time I have this feeling I can turn to books. Books that I can trust. Books that can tell me the truth.

However, as the title of this panel makes clear, truth is no longer a simple matter. It is now a contested term.

Our title also suggests that there is a price to pay.

At our freedom to publish event here last year we heard from Mark Stephens how libel and defamation laws, both civil and criminal, are misused around the world. The price we pay for those laws? Silence and self-censorship.

Yet look at the publishing industry in Turkey or other countries where many publishers, teachers, writers and journalists are paying the price for exercising a freedom of expression that we take for granted. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 68 journalists are currently in jail in Turkey. Other reports suggest Interpol red flag notices are being abused to harass publishers outside Turkey, like Prix Voltaire laureate, Ragip Zarakolu.

In places like Bangladesh, we see publishers paying the ultimate price for the freedom to publish: their lives.

Despite the prices I have just mentioned, our previous Prix Voltaire long- and shortlists show how publishers are standing up to corruption and shining light into the shadows in countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Hungary, Turkey, Iran, Hong Kong and Bangladesh.

Freedom to Publish is an area where there are so many cross overs with freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The quest for the truth sees many journalists also pay the price. My own country, Mexico, has been described as the deadliest country for reporters outside of a war zone. Since 2000, at least 144 journalists have been murdered according to Mexico's National Human Rights Commission. But Europe is not immune either: look at the case of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia who was first threatened with libel and then killed in a car bombing in October 2017.

But how do we know about these things? We used to trust our news sources. However, as our title asks: **Is truth to be trusted now?**

There is an idealistic vision of the truth that appeals to us. Crime novels are successful because we like finding out the truth of whodunit.

Yet in real life, and our complex world, the truth is rarely an absolute thing. Either black, or white. In many parts of the world, there is constant pressure on publishers. Works are banned. Publishers self-censor. Some publishers are painted as deceitful.

This goes to the heart of the matter. Who do we trust? In a world full of overwhelming amounts of information and increasing amounts of fake news, how can we establish “the truth”? What we believe is the truth, often depends on whom we trust.

This is my first speaking opportunity since taking over as IPA President in January and I can hear the echo of my predecessor in the title of today’s session.

In science for example, there are rigorous processes to ensure that results are reported accurately. The reputation of publications and scientists depend on peer review. This is an important part of what makes scientific publications trustworthy.

Publishers have had the responsibility to act as the gatekeepers of information for many hundreds of years, each publisher opening and closing various gates while competing with other publishers for audiences, and each gate letting through diverse and sometimes contradictory versions of the Truth. Whereas, according to Franklin Foer in his book *World without mind*, in Amazon’s vision of the future, there is just one gate: theirs.

Back in 1638, the original House of Elzevir published the final work of Galileo despite the ban by the Inquisition on his writings. Nearly 400 hundred years later, the Guardian reports on a study that suggests believers in the flat Earth theory are increasing thanks to You Tube videos.

And this brings us nicely to the final part of our title.

### **Is truth an outdated trend?**

The way we find out about our world has changed so much over the last 30 years. The internet has been a boon for free speech but also a place where the seeds of lies are planted. It is the largest repository of information but at the same time a huge garbage bin.

I mentioned that publishers have borne the responsibility of accuracy and truth for hundreds of years. Today's online platforms, the new distributors of information, are not handling this responsibility well. In fact, their business models are often built on them not being responsible at all.

There is increasing consensus that leaving these platforms unregulated poses a great risk to democracy. But as the discussions on the European Copyright Directive have shown us, such regulation is challenging to draft and we hear complaints from other regions of fake news and anti-terrorism laws that over-reach into the realm of freedom of expression.

### **Conclusion**

The truth is not outdated. If anything, the reaction to the challenges I have just mentioned demonstrate that society is still keen to understand our complex world. In fact, increasingly keen.

Non-fiction sales spiked last year. The book is seen as a trusted place for information.

Our industry bears that burden of trust and does so proudly. We have earned it over centuries.

We must stand together to make sure the price to pay is not a publisher or author's silence, much less their life.

Thank you.