International Dateline

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The Little Brother Is Growing Up: The London International Book Fair by Richard Abel

oughly twenty-five years ago, several small UK book publishers mounted a tiny book trade show in a mutual effort to boost their sales. As small specialist publishers, theirs was an up-hill battle not only to receive a hearing from booksellers but for space on bookstore shelves in the face of the near overwhelming marketing capabilities of the large and/or established houses. The thought was that such a special show might compensate in some measure for their relative lack of marketing clout. The first show was held in a meeting room of a London hotel to which the UK bookselling community was invited.

Each year, for the next several, their trade show, soon bearing the grandiose title, The London Book Fair, was declared a success. But the mounting of the succeeding Fair always seemed problematic. Only with an enormous exertion of time and effort by a thin handful of dedicated individuals did the next stagger into being. Despite all the difficulties and the problematic issue of the Fair’s continued existence, an increasing number of UK publishers took space and increasing numbers of booksellers attended.

In time, thanks in part to its scheduling roughly six months after the internationally indispensable Frankfurt Book Fair, overseas book publishers, first from Europe and then from North America, began to use it as a rights trading venue. Thus, those publishers possessed of a sense of not only the reality but of the importance of the international trade in books could assemble on a common ground twice a year to engage in the time-honored convention — one dating back to before the emergence of the printed book — of exchanging books and rights in books.

The British Booksellers Association has “from time immemorial” mounted a publishers’ exhibit in connection with their annual meeting. British publishers exhibited not so much to sell books but rather as a public relations gesture and a token of fellowship with their bookselling compatriots. As with the American Booksellers Association annual meeting, the BA meeting was a movable feast being held each year at a different location.

Within the last several years two notable developments came together to reshape the London International Book Fair and give it its present form. First, Reed Exhibitions purchased the Fair from its previous owners. The mere fact of the purchase by an international organization devoted to presenting trade fairs was a significant statement of the worth of the Fair and of its stature in the book trade. The Fair was henceforth to be operated as one of a number of profit centers by a professional company versed in the arcane principles of promoting and mounting trade shows.

Secondly, the BA last year decided to hold its annual meeting in conjunction with the Fair. This decision led, in turn, to two major outcomes: the BA annual meeting was permanently fixed in London, and what were two yearly publishers’ parades of their lists have been reduced to one. The expectation seems to be that much more of the dealing between the UK publishers and their bookstore outlets, both domestic and foreign, will be conducted in this augmented venue.

So the LIBF has evolved into a quite remarkable annual event and has taken on the principal characteristics of its counterparts in Germany and the US. This is to say all have become a primary place for the domestic book-trade of each country to conduct much of its business and secondly all have, by virtue of the operation of pressures of the international market, become significant venues for the international trading of books and rights to books. Both the UK and the US marketplaces will remain minor players in the international rights game relative to the central role of Frankfurt. But they will continue to play an increasingly important part as consequential seasonal way stations between the annual in-gatherings of the book tribe at Frankfurt.

The LIBF was the largest such event to date. Some numbers: 923 publishers were exhibiting; attendance was up about 4% over last year to 1,200 plus; something on the order of 20% of both exhibitors and attendees were from overseas. The Fair remained remarkably busy for the entire three days unlike the longer Fairs where many of the principals seem to wear out after the fourth day — retreating home or to less hectic surrounds. Virtually all publishers concerned with rights seemed to be well satisfied with the deals initiated or tied up at the LIBF.

The UK publishers were almost uniformly disappointed in the volume of orders placed by domestic booksellers. So it was for some a mixed bag relative to expectations.

UK librarians attended in large numbers. Most seem to use the LIBF as a showcase where much of current British book output can be quickly reviewed and its suitability for acquisition assessed in a setting where comparative judgments are facilitated. The Blackwell library group mounted a wine and cheese soirée for librarians which succeeded in choking traffic on the balcony gallery for several hours. No report from the large adjoining Penguin exhibit as to whether visits to their booth increased or were reduced thanks to the crowd of librarians — some well into their cups before the shindig closed.

An unrelenting procession of seminars, workshops and presentations were offered in adjoining rooms. They ranged from meetings devoted to throwing out definitions for the emerging EDIFACT EDI format to the display of virtual reality software games. Most were well attended. There were only occasional lapses into the kind of hype and glitz which seem a continuing and disturbing feature of the ABA Convention.

The LIBF is a remarkably comfortable book fair to work by comparison with Frankfurt. This is clearly the consequence of fewer exhibitors and attendees. One need not run obstacle courses formed of hopelessly jammed crowds to get to another building for the next half-hour appointment. The easier pace seems to produce in its wake an easier negotiating atmosphere which is always welcome.

I have never understood why North American library acquisition

continued on page 71
Celebration of Maori Language, Book Awards and More . . .

by Gita Gunatilleke (Head of Collection Management, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand) 
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Te Taonga te Reo 1995 is Maori language year and various celebrations are taking place throughout New Zealand this year. Photographs of the Maori Biographies from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography are the subject of an exhibition which successfully traveled to several libraries. Librarians and booksellers have welcomed new and revised publications including Maori Language kits which have become available this year. Just to confuse us librarians who select titles for collections, there are two Maori-English, English-Maori dictionaries of modern Maori by P.M. Ryan. One is a revised edition of a 1989 work and has over 15,000 entries, and the other a much larger work has over 40,000 entries.

Yes, it is that time of the year and entries are piling up for New Zealand’s Book awards. Whai Ngata, one of the three 1995 Montana judges states that Maori writing features strongly in Montana Book Awards. All those concerned with Maori culture and language have been pleased to see the impressive number of entries for books written by Maori and about Maori which have entered the competition. They include a number of titles by award-winning author Witi Ihimaera, regional and district histories, portraits of women, autobiographies, and a Maori-English dictionary.

The short list has appeared for the NZLIA’s 1995 Children’s Book awards which are scheduled for Friday 23 June and will be part of New Zealand library week. This year there was also a new supreme award called the ‘AIM Book of the Year’ which recognized the strength of children’s writing in New Zealand. The winner of the prize of NZ$5,000 went to Maurice Gee for his picture book Fat Man and was selected from all four categories of Picture Book, Junior Fiction, Senior Fiction and Non-fiction.

In February 1995 ‘Nga Whakaatuaranga’ a joint project between Victoria University of Wellington and the Waitangi Tribunal was launched. ‘Nga Whakaatuaranga’ is the microfiche edition of the Tribunal’s Records of Documents and Submissions of registered claims heard or reported. The first series covering claims WAI 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17, 22, 27, 32, 33 and also 150 (includes Wai 26) is now available at NZ$795.00 per set + 33.50 packing and postage. For further information and order forms please contact me on email or Fax (04) 4712 070 (NZ).

The Emergence of Pan-Asian International Book Fairs
by James Horton

James Horton is the founding editor & publisher of the quarterly journal, New Asia Review. He is also the author of the book, published by Frobus, Venture Japan: How Growing Companies Can Tap Into Japanese Venture Capital Markets. He can be reached at his publishing cottage based in Westport, CT at (203) 222-9734 or e-mail AsiaReview@aol.com.

a few months ago, I attended the Tokyo International Book Fair, an occasion now on a par with the Frankfurt Book Fair in financial importance and international foreign rights developments. Held in Makuhari, a suburb an hour by train from downtown Tokyo, the fair attracted thousands of Japanese and over 900 exhibitors, with almost 400 from overseas. Most of these attendees seemed not the least bit distracted about any seismic geologic faults. In the wake of the tragic Kobe earthquake experienced earlier in the year, the Japanese booksellers seemed to take much solace in the international turnout for their annual book fair.

Although Japan continues to experience its regular tremors and financial reversals, these facts remain rock solid: there is a New Asia and it is the epicenter of the 21st century. This Asian Pacific region with 60% of the world’s population continues to increase its literacy rates. Furthermore, the nations of Asia are averaging a growth rate of 7.5% each year. Asian savings are increasing by $550 billion annually. At this recent Tokyo book fair, I personally observed the direct correlation between improving literacy rates and a demand for books and multimedia products.

In 1994 at this same fair, the Asian Pacific Publishing Association-continued on page 72
tion was formally created by 11 of the major book publishing
countries. This association’s agenda is to establish multilateral
cooperation among these countries in Asia. So far, activities of
APPA include a training course for publishing personnel in editing,
printing, binding, distribution and more. Also, APPA awards a
prize for the best translation of an Asian book and co-published
works.

Although both the Association of American Publishers and
the International Publishers Association have failed to endorse
this new body, my own quarterly journal, New Asia Review, intro-
duced in 1994, fully intends to trumpet APPA’s successes and
showcase future international book fairs in Asia. In fact, NAR
received the recent endorsement from the Hong Kong Book &
Magazine Publishers Association to produce a special Hong Kong
Book Fair guide for this year’s upcoming program to be held in
July.

The Tokyo International Book Fair has acted as a lightning
rod for other Asian countries to develop their own book promotion
fairs, attracting formal publishing representatives from Korea, In-
dia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia and even China. This fair
established in 1984 began as a domestic festival to promote books
on the mass Japanese market. As the publishing industry developed
and business opportunities grew in the Asian countries in recent
years, more cooperation among publishers and related organiza-
tions became inevitable. Although it is not as large as the Frankfurt
Fair, it does embrace one of the largest information centers in Asia
Pacific and continues to serve as an international model for other
Asian book fairs.

Japan has one of the largest publishing industries in the world.
Presently there are more than four thousand book publishers who
publishes forty-eight thousand new books and over four thousand
magazines. According to Takao Watanabe, chairman of the To-
kyo International Book Fair, “despite the recent economic recession
experienced in Japan during the past three years, the publishing
industry is still enjoying a gradual increase of sales and the total
turnover last year was $25 billion (U.S.).”

From my own observations as well as from discussions with
book publishers in attendance, I have found that Tokyo offers an
attractive venue for foreign rights negotiations. Katsuyoshi Salto,
Foreign Rights Manager for Diamond Inc. (Japan), an interna-
tional book & magazine publisher, stated “that during this exhibi-
tion we actually made deals for several contracts selling rights.”

Besides the various Import Book Bargain corners, there were
many multi-media products displayed, including CD-ROM, digital
publications and various electronic publishing software. New Asia
Review will continue to review these new products in our quarterly
journal.

The conditions for the creation and expansion of a pan-Asian
book publishing sphere continue to improve. Coupled with the
increased literacy rates and with the extension of copyright protec-
tion particularly to China will lead to more ties between North
American and Euro-based publishers with their Asian colleagues.
The continued development of Asian international book fairs will
foster formal international cooperation well into the 21st century.