

2014

ATG Interviews: Frances Pinter, Knowledge Unlatched

Katina Strauch

Against the Grain, kstrauch@comcast.net

Tom Gilson

Against the Grain, gilsont@cofc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina and Gilson, Tom (2017) "ATG Interviews: Frances Pinter, Knowledge Unlatched," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 18.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6703>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Founder and Executive Director, Knowledge Unlatched

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Knowledge Unlatched is not your first pioneering effort. Early in your career you founded Pinter Publishers, believed to be the first British publishing company owned by a woman. Can you tell us about that? Your career has been marked by a number of other publishing achievements. Of which are you most proud?*

FP: Founding **Pinter Publishers** at the age of 23 was an accident. I was an American living in London, finishing off a PhD and wondering what to do with my life. I knew I wanted to stay in London but was also aware that I was unlikely to get a work permit. At the same time I ran into the young **Mahmood Mamdani** (now an eminent professor at **Columbia**) and encouraged him to write a book on his experiences of being a Ugandan Asian thrown out of his home country by the dictator **Idi Amin**. I had the crazy idea that if I set up a publishing company I'd get a work permit and at the same time help **Mahmood** by publishing his book. Everything then fell into place.

In the middle of my publishing career I was given the opportunity to work for **George Soros**. My brief was to do whatever it took to help develop the new independent publishing sector in the 30 countries of the former communist block shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. We focused on the higher education requirements and in those heady days of the nineties helped transform availability of good books. I'm very proud of having played a role in that transformative period.

ATG: *Knowledge Unlatched has been described as a "Global Library Consortium" model for supporting Open Access books. What does that mean? When asked by librarians and publishers unfamiliar with the project, how do you explain Knowledge Unlatched?*

FP: It took a long time to come up with a succinct answer to this question. It's best described in our recently produced animated infographic <http://www.knowledgeunlatched.org/ku-in-60-seconds/>. We describe it as a cost-sharing model. By covering the upfront fixed costs that are incurred in getting a raw manuscript to first digital copies, libraries are working with publishers to enable books to go open access in a sustainable manner. The funding comes from the acquisitions budgets but when stretched the budgets go further because of the lower costs per book per library.

ATG: *We understand that you first unveiled your vision for the "Global Library Consortium" approach at the Charleston Conference in 2010. What factors contributed to you forming that vision? How did the vision evolve and become Knowledge Unlatched? Did anything gleaned from the*



2010 Charleston Conference contribute to that evolution?

FP: It's hard to believe that it was such a long time ago that I first came to Charleston. The idea was, as you say, described as a "Global Library Consortium." I didn't even have a name for it back then. Meeting librarians in the lovely setting of Charleston gave me an opportunity to understand their concerns. At that point PDA was considered by some to be the solution to library budget problems. I understood then that the cost of supporting open access would have to be justifiable in terms of price and not just because it was a good thing to do. The questions asked at that plenary session helped me shape this initiative to sit alongside others. I really believe that there is no one solution to getting to OA. There will be many routes to OA operating alongside one another. **KU** is one route; single institutional support for authors will be another. Funds out of research budgets similar to APCs (call them Book Processing Charges – BPCs) will be another.

But the vision came earlier in 2006 when I met **Larry Lessig** and thought there must be a way of utilising **Creative Commons'** licenses in a way that enables open to sit alongside other formats.

ATG: *How did you get your start-up funding? Do you have any sponsors or investors?*

FP: The first supporters were three Australian universities, **Queensland University of Technology**, **University of Melbourne**, and the **University of Western Australia**. I received a grant from the **Open Society Foundation**, who has been very active in the Open Access movement. A further grant was kindly provided by the **British Library Trust**. Office space was made available free of charge at the Big Innovation Centre in London.

ATG: *We notice on your Website that you list a Board and an Advisory Board. How are they different? What are their individual roles? Do they interact in any way?*

FP: The main Board has the legal responsibilities of running the Community Interest Company. A C.I.C. is a form similar to a 501c3. It was introduced just under ten years ago into the British legal system as a way of encouraging social entrepreneurship. The board began with no librarians or publishers. Instead the board was made up of people with legal, financial, and marketing skills. Recently **Tom Cochrane**, once a librarian but recently former Vice Chancellor at **QUT**, was invited to sit on the board in recognition of the early support from Australia (and because he's a great thinker on OA issues). The Advisory Board is made up of experts and influencers representing the stakeholders in this area.

ATG: *So far 13 publishers are participating and there are 28 new books that are part of the collection. What were your most effective arguments in convincing publishers to take part? What type of resistance did you encounter? What are publishers' biggest concerns about Knowledge Unlatched?*

FP: The most effective argument to participate is that sales of monographs are dwindling. Yet, the academic community does not want to see this long-form publication die. Neither publishers nor librarians could square this circle alone. So something needed to be done that made better use of the funds available and the OA route actually squeezes out costs and reduces risks associated with this kind of publishing.

Resistance came in two forms: ideological and practical. The first line of argument was that books are not made for free so why should they be free? This was easy to deal with because no one is suggesting that the publisher's input should not be recompensed. It's just that payment is made in a different way.

The second argument was around workflows. How disruptive would **KU** be? Well, the devil is in the detail and we tried to design workflows that bolt on to what exists and not make too many demands on publishers (or indeed librarians). A few new steps have had to be introduced but it is incumbent on us to show that the benefits outweigh the effort to make a few adaptations to processes.

Publishers were mostly worried about OA versions "cannibalising" their sales. This fear is diminishing slowly as evidence is beginning to show that great books sell better and lousy books sell less well. People still want print and other digital versions.

ATG: *What criteria did you use when selecting publishers for inclusion in KU? What standards for scholarship and overall quality did they have to meet?*

continued on page 53

FP: We asked librarians what kinds of publishers they wanted to see in the group. We insisted that books be peer reviewed. Then we wanted to see a broad representation of university and commercial presses, large and small presses, and a geographic spread including North America, UK, and Continental Europe. In future we'll be broadening the range, but insisting on top quality control.

ATG: *Can you download KU books onto your personal computer or mobile device? Are there any plans to offer print-on-demand?*

FP: Yes, you can download the books on your computer or mobile device. Print copies are available through the normal channels from publishers.

ATG: *Once the books are ordered and "unlatched," how are they delivered to the library for patron use? Does Knowledge Unlatched have its own platform? Are they delivered via the publisher's platform?*

FP: The books will be hosted in three locations. **HathiTrust**, **OAPEN**, and the **British Library**. Larger publishers may choose to host the books on their own platforms, though smaller ones won't have platforms themselves. **Knowledge Unlatched** does not have a platform. More information about the status of any individual book can be found on our site. While some books were newly available in March when we were able to announce the unlatching, a few were not yet published and information about these is updated regularly.

ATG: *Evidently you worked with LYRASIS, JISC Collections, and the Max Planck Society to facilitate library sign up. Can you describe that process? What other strategies did you employ to get library buy-in? What role did pricing play? How many libraries have jumped on board?*

FP: Our relationship with each of these bodies was different. **LYRASIS** was the sales agent for North America. And we benefited greatly from **Tom Sanville's** advice. **Lorraine Estelle** of **JISC Collections** made it possible to advertise the collection through their channels and provided billing services for the UK. **Ralf Schimmer** of the **Max Planck Society** kindly held a one-day workshop for key librarians in Germany to workshop through the model with me.

Social Media played an important role in promoting the Pilot Collection, too. I spent a lot of time at conferences presenting the concept. In the end there was one main message. Libraries can do good by supporting open without it costing them any more than it would do staying closed and buying books unit by unit, whether print or digital.

The average cover price for the hardback of each of the books in the collection is \$95. Of course, some are available at less in paperback, and libraries receive discounts via vendors and aggregators. Once we knew that the average Title Fee per book was \$12,000, we thought the price of \$60 per book would be acceptable and then we thought we could rally 200 libraries

against the grain people profile

Executive Director, Knowledge Unlatched
2 Palmer Street, London SW1H 0AD, United Kingdom
Phone: +44 7740434499 • <frances@knowledgeunlatched.org>
www.knowledgeunlatched.org

Dr. Frances Pinter

BORN AND LIVED: Born in Venezuela, lived in Australia, United States, Hungary, United Kingdom.

EARLY LIFE: Nomadic.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Publisher and passionate about scholarly communications.

FAMILY: Very patient husband.

IN MY SPARE TIME: None.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Too many to list.

PET PEEVES: Not enough hours in the day.

PHILOSOPHY: Continue to be dazzled by human ingenuity.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Working in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the '90s — opening up access to global scholarship through publishing and helping libraries through a difficult time of transition.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Very different from the one we have now. I'd like to see real progress with sustainable open access. The fruits of reducing barriers to knowledge will be tremendous. 🐼

to join up. In the end 296 libraries came on board, bringing the average price per book per library down to just under \$43. I'm hoping that in the future more libraries will join thus bringing the cost down even further for future books for each and every library.

ATG: *As we understand it, the Pilot Collection is being purchased in its entirety by these libraries. Correct? Is there any way to purchase individual titles?*

FP: For the pilot collection we chose to offer it as a single collection that included a number of subject areas rather than on a single title basis simply because the task of selecting and tracking was more complex than we wanted for the pilot. Going forward we intend to offer smaller subject-based collections, and thereafter hopefully title by title.

ATG: *The first phase of the project has ended and sign-up for the KU Pilot Collection has now closed. If you were rating it like you would rate a book on Amazon, how many stars would you give it? Why?*

FP: It really is not for me to rate the project. It would be like an author writing a review of their book, wouldn't it? I'm profoundly grateful to the libraries and publishers who took a risk with this new concept. There are small areas of execution that need improvement and we're working on them. Everyone is being very patient as we iron out a few bugs.

ATG: *From what you have learned so far from Knowledge Unlatched what would you say are the key elements in a financially sustainable open access model for offering large numbers of scholarly monographs? Do you think they are attainable on an industry-wide scale? If so why?*

FP: At the end of the day the academic community will decide whether monographs are worth having. I believe they will continue to need the long form publication for complex arguments, theories, and discussion of research. As I said earlier, I doubt that there will be one route to open access. However, we need to be clear who pays for the work that needs to be done to get the content out of the author's head, turn it into a readable form, and make it available to readers anywhere in the world. With a handful of transparent models and much clearer understanding of costs than we have now we can move away from selling books unit by unit which incurs so many unnecessary costs. Monographs generally do not make large amounts of profit for anyone. If the publishing process is streamlined on the one hand, and we can show that by making the content open there is greater readership, then sustainability can be attained.

With regard to the latter point, metrics on usage of open books are only just coming in from other projects. As you know, I am also the CEO of **Manchester University Press**. There my predecessor placed 80 titles on the **OAPEN** platform three years ago. These were mainly backlist titles that had already recovered their investment. In the first two years the average download per book per month was 69 copies. Far more usage than any of the few hundred copies sold in print to libraries. But what was even more astonishing was that in the third year the average number of downloads per month per book was 138. The OA version was hitting markets we hadn't reached and interest was growing not declining. I really believe that with closed books, print or digital, we are only skimming

continued on page 54

the market. By finding sustainable business models for OA, readers will find the content.

ATG: *We understand that later this year Knowledge Unlatched will move into the second phase, scaling up and involving more libraries and publishers and increased selection. Can you elaborate? Will the project expand and include science publishers and books?*

FP: We are only just now formulating the plans for how we can work with more publishers and deliver more books. A report on what we've learnt through the pilot will be ready in May by which time we'll have established a Library Steering Committee and will be working on setting up the Library Collections Committee. I began this project with Humanities and Social Sciences because their monographs were in the most trouble. But there would be no reason not to include Science books. Ultimately KU is a channel and by working together publishers and librarians will decide what to use it for.

ATG: *We've also been told that there is even a phase three in the offing. What will that involve?*

FP: I've always seen KU in three phases. Just like any other initiative we have to find our route to sustainability. The first was the Pilot — now competed. The second is scaling up. This not only means having more books, it means having the right systems in place —

against the grain publisher profile

Knowledge Unlatched

21 Palmer Street, London SW1H 0AD
Phone: +44 7740434499

OFFICERS: Dr. Frances Pinter, Executive Director; Dr. Lucy Montgomery, Deputy Director; Leon Loberman, Operations and Technology; and Judy Luther, North America Consultant.

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS: Affiliated to Library Publishing Coalition.

KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: We are setting up a library consortium to enable open access publishing.

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: Publishers and Librarians.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 4 (some part-time). 🌱

most likely through a variety of partnerships. There doesn't seem to be much point in reinventing the wheel when others have very nice ones running along. We'll be introducing a small handling charge and membership fees so that we'll be independent of grants. Phase three is when we have enough volume to fund the KU infrastructure through the mark up of the Title Fees. We've said that this would be in the region of 5%.

ATG: *It must be exciting to be spearheading such an innovative project but it also demands a lot of energy. What do you do in*

your down time to relax and refresh? Do you have favorite activities or interests outside of publishing and libraries?

FP: I love my work, so there is not much downtime. But I do enjoy the usual things — reading novels, going to concerts, taking a walk in the park with my husband.

ATG: *Frances, thank you. We're very grateful for your willingness to tell us about Knowledge Unlatched and appreciate your open and thoughtful answers.*

FP: Thank you for the opportunity. 🌱

International Dateline — A Good Bookman

by **Rita Ricketts** (Blackwell's Historian and Bodleian Visiting Scholar, Author *Adventurers All, Tales of Blackwellians, of Books, Bookmen and Reading and Writing Folk*) <Rita.Ricketts@bodleian.ox.ac.uk>



"The librarian's, I should say, is the happiest lot, though some may think it lacks the excitement, which risk and enterprise provide. If he is a College or University Librarian, he is perhaps happiest of all, should the bent of his mind be studious." — Basil Blackwell

The good bookman, **Sir Basil**, wrote this in 1945, so we have to forgive his gender specificity. He believes in the spiritual value of books. He believes with **Wordsworth** that books "are a substantial world both pure and good; Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood, Our pastime and our happiness will grow"; with **Carlyle** that "In books lies the souls of the whole past time the articulate and audible voice of the Past"; and with **Milton** that "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." For **Sir Basil**, publisher, bookseller, and would-be author, it was "the reader who really counted." He quotes **Emerson**, who once said, "Tis the good reader that makes the good book." Who, then, was the good reader, **Sir Basil** asked himself? One who reads with zest and intelligence, enjoying by understanding, who attends to the views of critics but judges for him- or herself. One who

remembers the fable of the Emperor's clothes, is wary of false prophets, is quick to detect insincerity in an author and to reject one whose motive is unworthy. One who recommends convincingly a good book, and knows when he or she has found one and then commends it to the next generation ... telling the good news of the discovery. **Richard Ovenden** has spent his life doing just that.

But **Richard** has done much more besides. Like the **Bodleian's** founder, **Sir Thomas Bodley**, he is engaged in library building.¹ Working in the second row to support his predecessors **Reg Carr** and then **Sarah Thomas**, he has orchestrated the reconstruction of **Gilbert Scott's** so-called "New" **Bodleian**; to be renamed the **Weston Library**. Its entrance, to be named the **Blackwell Hall** in honour of **Julian Blackwell's** gift, will be open to all and will, appropriately, provide the setting for future exhibitions and events that celebrate the book. It was **Julian**

Blackwell's donation of £5m, the largest single cash donation ever made to a university library in the UK, which has been central in helping **Richard** to put his plan into action. **Julian** had been in on the scheme from the start, conspiring with **Richard** and **Reg Carr** and then **Sarah Thomas** in the bar of a local hostelry. The Hall cements the bond between the library and its world famous bookish neighbour whose current president, **Julian Blackwell**, is the great grandson of **Benjamin Harris Blackwell**, who came to Oxford in the 1830s to save souls from the demon drink and to nourish them with books. He became the first librarian of Oxford's newly founded City Library in 1854. The son of a jobbing tailor from London's East End, he was an autodidact worthy of that honorable tradition. He lies in a shady grave aside the old church of St. Cross, in Oxford, now itself a library. If tombstones had ears, he would be enlivened by the news of **Richard's** appointment.

More fortunate that the self-educated **Benjamin Harris** and his son **Benjamin Henry**, who founded the world famous **Broad Street Shop**, **Richard** won a scholarship to **Sir Roger**

continued on page 55