

Personalities in Publishing:

Jane Dorner

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The fifteenth essay in this series profiles Jane Dorner: editor, researcher, journalist, author, and Information Technology specialist. Having begun her career in publishing as a book editor at Longman, Dorner has since successfully united her various professional skills. Today she advises authors on electronic publishing, writing and technology, and copyright and licensing matters.

Jane Dorner entered her career in publishing with an Honours degree in English and Philosophy (Bristol University, 1966) and a Diploma in Art History (Courtauld Institute of Art, 1967), then worked for three years as a book editor at Longman. She then turned freelance, first as editor, researcher and reader for a variety of publishers (including Penguin, where she spotted Salman Rushdie as a future fiction prize-winner before *Midnight's Children* went into print); then a freelance features journalist. In 1985-86, a diploma course in Music and Information Technology (IT) gave a new turn to Dorner's hitherto purely literary career. Already an established author and member of the Society of Authors (SoA), she found many ways to utilise her IT expertise.

Jane Dorner helped found a writing agency, Wiseguides, which produced direct-setting business literature, and was the British adviser for Houghton Mifflin in development of their Correct Grammar software. She was then appointed Senior Research Officer for a project to survey professional authors' use of and attitude towards technological tools for writing and publishing. A lengthy questionnaire was completed by 1279

authors, and the analysis of the findings was published as a British Library report.¹

As the IT revolution began to bite tightly on the world of publishing, Dorner came to assume the role of personal liaison between authors and electronic publishing, both explaining the ways of technology to authors, and championing their rights in the new digital publishing world. The SoA set up a Scientific and Technical subgroup in 1987, with its journal, *The Stag*, aiming 'to create a forum for discussion on matters relating to writing and technology', edited by Dorner. In 1992 she organized a seminar for the group, 'To disk or not to disk – what are the questions?', 'thought necessary as authors were regarded as both bemused by new technology and exploited by publishers in the matter of presentation of their manuscripts on disk'.² The 1992 issue of *The Stag* came with a 'Software Supplement' of 75 reviews. (In 1993 *The Stag* gave way to *The Electronic Author*, likewise edited by Dorner.)

In 1991 Dorner was appointed the SoA representative to the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), a body which represents members of SoA, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, the National Union of Journalists, Chartered Institute of Journalists, and individual authors, as one arm of the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA); the other half is the Publishers Licensing Society, comprising the Publishers Association, the Periodical Publishers Association and the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers. The CLA is the UK's reproduction rights organization, with the role of licensing educational establishments, government departments, public bodies and commercial organizations to photocopy extracts from books, journals and periodicals, promoting and protecting the intellectual property rights of British authors and publishers. It collects fees from its licensees, and distributes their share of the revenues to authors and publishers.

The *Authors and Information Technology* survey led Dorner to 'become increasingly concerned at the lack of arrangements

between authors and publishers for dealing with electronic copy presented on disk'. She proposed a solution to the problems this caused: 'to supply the disk version of the work in a sealed envelope with conditions of use printed on it',³ and devised a list of eight appropriate conditions. Another outcome of the survey report was a committee of authors, agents and producers that came up with a booklet, edited by Dorner, *Guidelines for Writers in Electronic Publishing and Multimedia*, published online as well as on paper.⁴

In 1992 Dorner published a guide to writers using technology⁵ that was reviewed as 'sure to become a standard reference work on computing for writers ... an Everest of expertise and common sense and a landmark in confronting the technical and legal problems posed by computers in publishing'.⁶ Published in traditional printed form, it had its own information management complexity, having its entries set out in alphabetical order, provided with a back-of-book index, and yet a third information-location method – twelve 'key topics' leading to 'trails' of cross-references throughout the book. Author Deborah Moggach, self-confessed Luddite regarding technology, paid tribute to this work: 'Jane Dorner managed the near-impossible: to write a friendly, demystifying guide to something which is there to help us, rather than daunt us'.⁷ In the same year, Dorner spoke to the Computers and Humanities Conference about 'the stranglehold that copyright problems are having on new electronic opportunities', with the title, 'Whose text is it anyway?'.⁸

In 1995 Dorner became a member of the team working on IMPRIMATUR (Intellectual Property Rights Model and Terminology for Universal Reference), a research programme set up by the European Commission DGIII seeking to build international consensus on standards, functionality, and technology and to demonstrate a prototype 'Copyright Managed Internet Server'.⁹ The research extended over three years, and its findings were published in 1999 both as a printed document and

as a comprehensive hyper-linked suite of publications and web pages on the accompanying CD-ROM.¹⁰ In 1995 also Dorner organized and chaired a debate for the British Computer Society Electronic Publishing Specialist Group, 'The present generation of publishers is doomed', securing a pair of speakers prominent in the fields of traditional and new digital publishing: Gordon Graham (opposing) and Steven Harnad (proposing).¹¹

In a talk to the Authors' Club in London in 1996 on 'The Gentle Art of Plagiarism: artists, authors and ownership' Dorner showed how dangerously easy the unpermitted copying of the ideas and expressions of others had become with digitization. She demonstrated the possibilities of electronic manipulation interactively, with live Internet illustration, establishing that, while the latest Copyright Act gave authors the moral right to object to derogatory treatment of their work, the latest technology bestowed, in abundance, effortless means to violate this right.¹² In 1998 she spoke against the motion, 'This House Believes that the New Technologies are raising publishing standards' at the Oxford Union (and secured its defeat).

Dorner's volume, *The Internet: A Writer's Guide*, first published in 2000, explained the Net from the writers' point of view, and listed over 800 websites for writers, categorized by subject. The book included a website password: its purchasers could access the list online, with its monthly updatings. These now total a list of a thousand sites, openly available (www.internetwriter.co.uk).¹³

Now Dorner is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and sits on many committees in the publishing world, such as those of the British Computer Society Electronic Publishing Specialist Group, and Incubation2, the July 2002 conference of the trAce Online Writing Community; and on the editorial board of *LOGOS: the Journal of the World Book Community*. She is Director of the Writing and Computers Association; and as well as being the SoA's representative on the Board of ALCS, she will become Chair of the CLA in 2002.

She has 19 books to her credit (authored or co-authored, on a wide range of subjects); has published extensively in the national press and in academic journals; has edited both journals and web sites; has designed jewellery and textiles; paints water-colours and plays in string quartets. Her home life equally spans the worlds of arts and technology, with a lute-maker partner and children who are a documentary film-maker, deputy stage manager at Covent Garden Opera House, and a counter-tenor. Among them, Dorner remains artistically productive, while still the chief exponent of IT to authors, and a stalwart advocate of their rights in the new digital publishing world.

HAZEL K. BELL was editor of *The Indexer*, the professional journal of the Societies of Indexers, 1978-95, and of *Learned Publishing*, the journal of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, 1987-96.

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Published in *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* Volume 47 No. 1
January 2002 pages 111-116