



Come one, come ALLi

Felicity Wood talks to the founder of the Alliance of Independent Authors, about giving self-publishing a professional face

Despite being the founder of the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), when it comes to describing self-published or independent authors Orna Ross actually prefers the term “author-publisher”. For Ross the term self-publisher is “a bit of a misnomer . . . it implies we do everything ourselves, and we don’t. Every indie author requires a good editor, a typesetter; I mean the list goes on and on. There are a few authors who do everything themselves, but they are in the minority.”

Having established ALLi at the London Book Fair last April in an “experimental mode”, Ross has helped it grow into an association with 739 members from six continents and thousands of subscribers to its blog and daily online newspaper, *The Indie Author Daily*. Membership is split

into four strands: Author members, Associate members, Partner members and Professional members, catering for authors across the self-publishing spectrum; from big-name authors such as Hugh Howey and Amanda Hocking to those that are dabbling in self-publishing for the first time.

“For me it was about getting organised and getting people together and showing that self-published writers could be professional. The fact that a few of us in ALLi have come from trade publishers and know the challenges that are there for people that want to take it to that level of publishing helps—so we set up a professional membership for people that define themselves in that way. Their needs are very different from other members.”

She adds: “People think self-publishing is about genre

fiction, low prices and selling lots and lots of copies, and of course that exists, but self-publishing is also about experimental or niche writers who can actually make a living now for the first time since the fiction magazines of the 1950s closed down. It is not all about being on the bestseller list. It is about having a key and dedicated fanbase and that is very doable now. Self-publishing technology has blown everything open; right now is the best time to be a writer.”

Jumping ship

Ross’ decision to found ALLi was a personal one: an author published by Penguin, she left trade publishing to experience self-publishing in 2011 and found it “intensely liberating creatively and surprisingly commercially rewarding”.

“I had a very generous and nice deal with Penguin for my first two novels, but I found it creatively a little constraining. One of the problems in publishing that needs to be addressed is that a lot of the big publishers are selling to retailers rather than readers, and as

independent bookshops have fewer options in the market, difficulties arise for writers like me.

“I was sceptical [about self-publishing] at first. I thought it would be a lot of work and I had worked in the books industry for almost 20 years—I ran a literary agency in Dublin and a writing school and lectured in creative writing—so I was quite embedded in the system. But I started out small with a pamphlet of 10 poems and immediately loved the whole process.

“I then decided to re-publish my first novel, *Lover’s Hollow* (Penguin Ireland), as *After the Rising*, the title I had originally wanted, with a cover that I felt conveyed the book better rather than a cover that had been created at Tesco’s behest. I was so much happier with the whole process and I started meeting lots of like-minded writers, and thought what we needed was a non-profit organisation for all the different people hanging around in this area.”

When it comes to growing ALLi and the self-publishing market as a whole, for Ross the answer lies in partnership—be it with trade publishers and bookshops or literary festivals and bloggers. “I’m a big believer in partnership. We will all progress far easier, smoother and quicker if we think of each other as partners in the process and understand each others’ constraints. We’re putting together a booklet called *Open Up to Indie Authors*. It is a guide for booksellers, reviewers and literary event organisers to explain how having self-published writers involved can be of benefit, and also explain to self-published writers the constraints those types organisations are under.

“The campaign is ongoing, so we are constantly reaching out to various organisations, like library and bookselling associations, to have that dialogue and find out what they need from indie authors in order to be able to accommodate us.”