

E-BOOKS & BOOKMEN

AUTHORS are increasingly fed up not receiving their fair share of the growing e-books market.

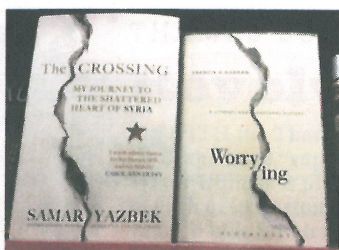
For backlist e-book sales, test figures show that authors are paid 25 percent of net receipts, with publishers taking 5 percent. Yet publishers rarely actively sell books that are no longer new or bestsellers. They sit on the backlist with no marketing or promotion – and in the case of e-books they don't even take up shelf space, at a tiny amount of data storage.

In the US, the Authors Guild has launched a new campaign this summer seeking a straight 50:50 split on e-book earnings. It says that when an author was paid 10-15 percent of a hardback's price, that reflected half the profit, after paying for printing and associated costs.

In Britain, the Society of Authors is seeking an even better deal for writers, recently suggesting that once an item is available on the backlist and the publisher is making no clear and significant continuing investment, the publisher should retain no more than 15 percent of the income.

Publishers may not be keen on paying authors more for themselves, but they have at least backed authors' rights to be paid when e-books are borrowed from libraries. At present, Public Lending Right payments don't apply to library books borrowed over the internet. Organisations representing authors, publishers and booksellers joined forces last month to release a joint statement on the results of a lot scheme for e-book lending, stating: "It is critically important that authors receive fair payment each time their works are borrowed."

'E-Bookworm'



BOOKALIKES

■ A JOURNEY into Syria and a history of fretfulness: inspired juxtaposition in Waterstones, Piccadilly, London last week.

LOG ROLLING



Selfie

■ "HERE is a simple idea for a lovely tomato salad dressed with pesto," Lindsey Bareham gushed in her *Times* "Dinner Tonight" column on 15 July. "It comes from *The Big Red Book of Tomatoes*, my favourite book at this time of the year."

Alas, Bareham was too busy salivating over pine kernels and parmesan to name the author of her beloved cookbook: one, er, Lindsey Bareham.

Classic

■ ASKED by the *Observer* what books he would be taking on his summer hols, the paper's associate editor Robert McCrum said: "I will take some new poetry, *The Curiosities* by Christopher Reid (Faber, £14.99)."

The *Eye* has often noted McCrum's penchant for plugging books by the publishing house of which he was editorial director in the Christmas log-rolling fests. But in this case, Reid is a friend as well! What could be more agreeable?



Barnett formula

The Versions of Us
Laura Barnett
(Orion, £12.99)

IT WAS Evelyn Waugh, loftily pronouncing on the merits of Nabokov's *Lolita*, who first came up with the category of "stunt novel".

By this Waugh meant a work which ignores plausible characterisation or naturalistic treatment for a sensational and eye-catching form aimed at drawing the impressionable punter into its net. Stunt novels don't, of course, have to be about paedophilia, or indeed be written by card-carrying highbrows. In fact, most of the current crop of bestsellers have some relationship with the genre. Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* was a stunt novel, as was Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*, and so, indisputably, is this mega-selling debut by Laura Barnett.

Neither does the stunt novel have to be particularly original. The Versions of Us is reminiscent of Kate Atkinson's 2013 work *Life after Life* (see *Eye* 1337), and the publicity material accompanying the new book bravely acknowledges a debt to *Sliding Doors*; but its real cinematic source-book would seem to be Richard Curtis's last outing *About Time* – a fixation that extends even as far as the intermittent Cornish settings.

Artist's son Jim and child of Jewish émigrés Eva meet as Cambridge undergraduates in 1958. The three variations on their joint and single existences that follow take in a) an immediate hook-up; b) Eva's eventual marriage to her current boyfriend, a rising young actor named David Katz; and c) her instant nuptials with same owing to an unforeseen pregnancy.

Thereafter, a repeatedly

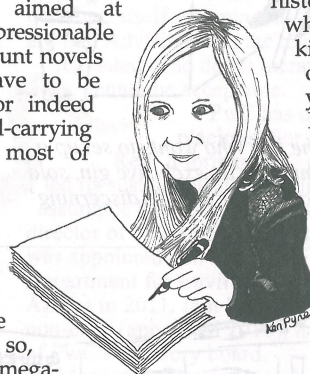
shuffled pack offers a selection of outcomes. Jim is, variously, a failed artist, a highly successful one, and a has-been, while marrying Eva and then leaving her, living in a boho commune with a woman called Helena and in version three getting together with Eva later on.

Eva, meanwhile, pursues a career as a journalist-cum-novelist and is alternately attached to Jim, Katz, a foreign correspondent named Ted and a nice chap called Carl. The constant switching of the narrative can be the tiniest bit confusing, but if nothing else Ms Barnett tries jolly hard to fill in the historical background which a novel of this kind, extending over nearly 60 years of recent English history, can't very well ignore.

While there is some hilarious reportage from 1966 in which Jim, off to an art exhibition, falls in with some badinage-swapping hippies ("Hey man. Going to the show...? Groovy. Should be a blast"), much of this takes in the music of the time. Here Ms B has clearly done her homework: the guests at a party in the summer of 1971 would very likely have been dancing to "Wild Horses" by the Rolling Stones, the album *Sticky Fingers*, on which it appears, having been issued only a month or so before. Ditto Eva's 14-year-old daughter's obsession with David Bowie in 1974 and the purchase of Aladdin Sane as a birthday present; or, to shift the cultural backdrop over to cinema, the early-Seventies trip to see Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.

But where *The Versions of Us* strains credulity is in the extraordinary docility of its prose style. It is a novel, above all, of blandly sagacious advice, in which women contemplating the sight of their newly-born grandchild offer, without the least suspicion that someone might have uttered the words before, phrases like "Motherhood is wonderful – important – but if you simply draw down the shutters on your creative life you'll end up resenting her", or husbands with insufficiently medicated wives declare: "That's what marriage is, isn't it? Taking the rough with the smooth."

It is also a novel filled with stock phrases, in which lickerish 19-year-olds have "soft and pliant" bodies, Jim's artist dad counsels him to "always try to show things as they are" and Jim, staring at his infant daughter, is struck by "the sense of a life stretching before her like a blank page waiting to be filled". This last simile is, of course, the entire premise of the book.



Pseud's Corner

Popeye is very, very similar to these medieval cultpures. You have a sense of transcendence taking place here. Here with Popeye it's transcendence of male energy. He eats that spinach and he transcends into the strength. And I think, you know, that's the art; the spinach is art.

JEFF KOONS in conversation with Alan Yentob in *Imagine...*
Jeff Koons: *Diary of a Seducer*, BBC1

She had a period where she thought she might be a depressive, but she now thinks she is actually porous – she soaks up other people's

emotions and then feels them even more vividly than they do.

SOPHIE HEYWOOD interviews FLORENCE WELCH, *Guardian*

Sinatra takes soiled £5 words and makes them glisten like mystic opals; his voice like spring light clarifying a dusty catacomb.

IAN PENMAN, *London Review of Books*

Barbecue is a form of cultural power and is intensely political, with a culture of rules like no other American culinary tradition: sauce or no sauce; which kind of sauce; chopped or not chopped; whole animal or just ribs or shoulders.

MARK W. TWITTY, *Guardian*

Contributors: Toby Lenahan, Brendan Flanagan, Craig McFarlane, Alexander Echlin and Jakob Berry.

£10 paid for all entries