

A portrait of Michael Heyward, a middle-aged man with grey hair and a friendly smile, wearing a white button-down shirt. He is positioned on the left side of the page, with a blurred background of bookshelves.

READING SHOULD BE MARVELLOUS

Award winning publisher and author Michael Heyward says when Text Publishing was born, back in the 1990s, the goal was to build an imprint that would be 'worth the candle'. They wanted to show a local literary house in Australia could be a success and share with us all the wonder of losing ourselves in books. INCITE asked Michael – who in the past has also worked as a journalist and a teacher – about publishing, about his lifelong fascination with books, and his experiences with libraries.

Q. PUBLISHERS AND LIBRARIES ALIKE ARE GRAPPLING WITH ENORMOUS CHANGE AT THE MOMENT IN TERMS OF OUR OPERATING ENVIRONMENTS AND CONSUMER RESPONSES TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES. HOW DO YOU SEE PUBLISHERS AND LIBRARIES WORKING TOGETHER IN THE FUTURE? WHAT SHOULD OUR TACTICAL PRIORITIES BE?

A. Reading is in the middle of a revolution, which means that publishers and libraries are in the middle of a revolution too. The future is always unknowable, but just at the moment it seems particularly hard to imagine.

We don't know what our industry will look like in a few years, but we do know what we can fight for.

At Text we want to fight for the values that help writers write the best books they can. We don't mind whether our books are read on paper or on screens, but we care passionately that they are good enough to make reading seem like the most exciting thing in the world. I hope that libraries will always share these values; that librarians will always want to be champions of the pleasure of reading.

Publishers and libraries should always be working together in defence of reading books, in defence of the freedom to think for yourself. You can't have one without the other.

Michael Heyward doesn't care what format a book may be in, as long as it is 'good enough to make reading seem like the most exciting thing in the world'.

Q. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY MERGERS IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD IN RECENT YEARS. HOW DOES THE FUTURE LOOK FOR SMALL PUBLISHERS IN AUSTRALIA NOW?

A. Publishing is best practised obsessively. It's most effectively done in small teams, which is why big publishers are divided up into imprints, and why we still have lots of independent publishers around the world, even though the business has been thoroughly globalised. We should therefore be cheerful about the opportunities for independent publishing in Australia. We live in a golden age of the book, in which books are more widely available at every level of our society than has ever been the case. There are more writers of merit in our country than there are publishers who can give their books the attention they deserve, so there is a lot of room for independent publishers to publish very good books and to publish them well.

Q. AS AN AUTHOR YOURSELF, WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF LIBRARIES? DID THEY PLAY A ROLE IN SHAPING YOUR CAREER IN PUBLISHING AND LOVE OF LITERATURE?

A. I would often tag along with my mother to the Mechanics Institute Library in Sturt Street in Ballarat, where I grew up. I loved that place. It was, to borrow a phrase from Carlos Ruiz Zafón, the wonderful Spanish writer whom we publish, a 'cemetery of forgotten books'. I understood that if I was patient enough, and spent enough time idly browsing the shelves, I would stumble on something amazing, a book I could not have even imagined existing unless I had actually found it. That's what libraries mean to me: they are places of labyrinthine wonderment, seductive cities of books whose thoroughfares and laneways and alleys take a lifetime to learn. Libraries are repositories of secret knowledge, that is, things that were once known well and have now been forgotten.

Q. WAS THERE A HELPFUL LIBRARIAN IN THE BACKGROUND WHILE YOU WERE RESEARCHING YOUR OWN WORK, THE ERN MALLEY AFFAIR?

A. I spent a lot of time in libraries around Australia when I was researching the Ern Malley brouhaha, and got extraordinary assistance in particular from manuscript librarians who would bring out their dusty treasures for me, boxes of manila folders storing the roughly typed manuscripts and thrillingly handwritten pages that were clues to the puzzles I was trying to solve.

Q. YOU LAUNCHED TEXT CLASSICS A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, SAYING AT THE TIME THAT YOU HOPED THIS INITIATIVE WOULD HELP TO PRESERVE AUSTRALIA'S LITERARY HERITAGE. HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE PERFORMING NOW AND HAVE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS BEEN SUPPORTIVE?

A. We now have around 80 titles in the Text Classics, and continue to release new titles every month. The list sells well. I know that lots of libraries, including school libraries, have bought copies, which is marvellous because we are all responsible for making sure that young people have access to their own culture. I am less confident about the situation at our universities because it remains true that there are only two permanent Professors of Australian Literature in the whole country, and until we systematically make it possible for young people to study Australian literature at every stage of their degrees, the discipline will remain marginal. Australian literature should be a big story for Australian libraries, and I hope that many librarians have found the Text Classics an affordable way to make these books available to the readers they serve.

Q. WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE READ SO FAR IN 2014?

A. I devoured Joan London's *The Golden Age*. It's set in a polio hospital in Perth in the 1950s, but that doesn't tell you that it's a superb novel about love. It mesmerised me from the opening sentence.



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