

PUBLISHING NOW

Which genres are currently topping the charts? Kathleen Whyman asks the publishers

While you should always write the book you want to write, it's good to keep an eye on which genres are selling well so you can capitalise on this if your novel fits into one of them. It's worth looking at both fiction and non-fiction charts, as fiction often reflects what's going on in the factual world.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, political non-fiction is doing well, with *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House* by Michael Wolff and *Becoming* by Michelle Obama both hitting the top of the charts.

Phoebe Morgan, editorial director at Trapeze, says: 'Politics dominates so many of the headlines, it's almost become a book trend in itself. With the constant delivery of depressing, confusing news, people turn to books for the answers, striving to understand and make sense of the political unrest.'

Stacey Donovan, director of Hallmark Publishing, notes a similar trend in the US.

'Politics has become so much more central to our online interactions in the past five years. I don't think anyone's surprised to see popular fiction become more political as well,' she says.

TV influences

What people are watching influences what they want to read. Perhaps to counteract the perceived lack of influence we have in



Stacey Donovan
of Hallmark

the political world, a surprise trend is books about cleaning and tidying up.

Hannah Smith, editorial director at Head of Zeus (Aria), says: 'Marie Kondo's Netflix series became a phenomenon and people everywhere are taking control of tidying up their lives.' This was proved when *Hinch Yourself Happy* became an Amazon and *Sunday Times* bestseller.

Charlotte Brabbin, commissioning editor at HarperFiction, believes the popularity of TV programmes such as *Poldark* and *Escape to the Château* has led to the rise of books set in Cornwall and with idyllic holiday escapes.

'The impact of Netflix and Amazon Prime, who are investing fiercely in romcoms at the moment, is filtering through into the book industry,' she says. 'I know that many editors are on the search for the next big romcom. If someone wrote the next *When Harry Met Sally* – quite a tall order – I'd be very happy!'

Nia Beynon, director at Boldwood, says the popularity of crime documentaries and podcasts has sparked an interest in true crime, a view echoed by Leodora Darlington, publishing executive at Bookouture, who says: 'Crime thrillers sell brilliantly across all territories.'

Morgan agrees: 'Some genres are perennially popular. Detective crime novels never seem to go away and there's a huge market for saga paperback books.'

'Perfectly pitched saga does very well in both the US and UK,' says Darlington, with Brabbin adding that 'saga novels still sell fantastically'.

Saga success – and snobbery

The popularity of sagas like *Poldark* was a topical issue at the recent Romantic Novelists' Association annual conference. In a panel discussing where romantic fiction stands in the industry today, it was made clear that saga readers are prolific and loyal.

'We can't write them fast enough to fulfil demand,' said award-winning novelist Jean Fullerton. 'But there's a snobbery about them; they're often not recognised as proper novels.'

The *Bookseller's* managing editor Tom Tivnan admitted: 'I can't remember the last time we interviewed a saga author, which is shameful.'

Stories from World War II, inspired by true stories, are also popular, as Katie



Hannah Smith of
Head of Zeus (Aria)

Seaman, editor at Ebury, has found.

'Readers are looking for new perspectives on the conflict and aftermath,' she says, adding: 'With the emergence of a new generation of female writers, I think we'll see the reclaiming of chick-lit by the millennial generation. It's a genre that's been less popular in recent times but it'll come back, with less focus on romance and more on female friendship and careers.'

Compelling characters

At Head of Zeus (Aria), historical fiction is 'ticking along nicely,' says Smith, as well as stories focusing on characters who are breaking out of their comfort zones.

'Readers are empathising with characters who find their voices, whether shouting out about Brexit or Trump, the #MeToo movement or LGBTQ rights,' she says.

Despite topping the charts for several years, psychological thrillers are demonstrating staying power.

'Many still selling staggeringly well,' says Darlington. 'But they need a unique or compelling hook to make them successful.'

Katrin Lloyd, commissioning editor at Accent Press, has noticed the genre seeping into the way other genres are presented. 'When it comes to romance, for example,' she says, 'readers are looking for less cupcake chick-lit and more depth, more twists.'

There is an appetite for other genres too.

'The trend for mum-lit and up-lit continues to grow,' says Morgan, while Darlington notes that 'book club fiction and steamy romance are riding high in the US Kindle charts'.

With so many genres proving popular, from political thrillers to romcoms to cleaning, there's a good chance your novel will fit into one of these trends.

But don't be disheartened if it doesn't. All trends go full cycle and genres that may not be so popular now will soon be back in vogue, and you'll be ready when they are.