

PUBLISHING NOW

Which genres will be the bestsellers of 2020? Kathleen Whyman asks the publishers

We'd all be bestselling authors if we knew exactly what type of books people will want to read over the next year. Is domestic noir selling now? Is 'up-lit' still popular? Are vampires or billionaire sadists or unicorns going to make a comeback?

To save us the guess work (and to save me from writing a book that pitches vampires, billionaire sadists and unicorns against each other to try and hit all three trends), here leading publishers give us an insight into what they think will be reading in 2020.

First, let's look at what sold well over the past 12 months. At the time of writing, the biggest selling paperback of 2019 was actually a 2018 release – *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris.

'It's always interesting to see the endurance of titles published in the prior year,' says Transworld's publisher for fiction, Sarah Adams. 'No publisher can predict that a title will achieve success far beyond its release. We can only publish them smartly, creatively and passionately and hope readers, booksellers and reviewers will want to recommend them once they turn the final page.'

The standout book on Orion's Trapeze fiction list last year was Candice Carty-Williams' debut *Queenie*.

'Candice was shortlisted for the Costa best debut, and nominated as a Waterstones book of the year,' says publishing director



Transworld's
Sarah Adams

Sam Eades. 'We're expecting big things for the paperback in 2020.'

Transworld's Sarah Adams notes that the crime and thriller genre continued to dominate the market, occupying over a third of the top 5000 titles of 2019.

'It's more important than ever that those we take to market are not only strong enough to cut through, but also offer a fresh pitch and the opportunity for a package that manages to speak clearly to the readership.' So, basically, they want the same but different...

Transworld enjoyed particular success with Lesley Kara's debut *The Rumour*, which sold over 300,000 copies across all editions in the English language and was the biggest crime/thriller debut of 2019.

Eades agrees with the popularity of crime and thrillers – Lucy Foley's high-concept crime novel *The Hunting Party* did well, and adds that literary fiction continued to sell well.

'The historical and mythological category continues to grow, which again surprised me,' she says. 'Stacey Hall's debut *The Familiars* dominated in 2019. There seems to be an appetite for historical stories that put women at the centre of the narrative.'

A new hope

Sara-Jade Virtue, brand development director for fiction at Simon & Schuster, says: 'The up-lit, grown-up intelligent women's fiction doesn't seem to be going anywhere fast, thankfully.'

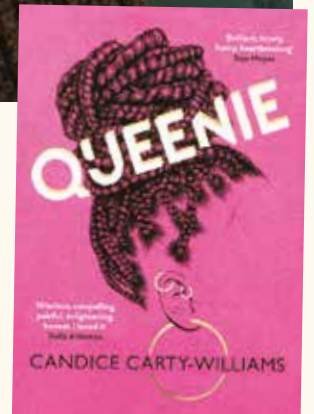
Virtue has also seen a resurgence for stories offering hope. 'Books that are a bit spiritual, not in a religious sense but sweeping, epic, finding a higher plane – whether that be in other people or yourself. The mood seems to be more "I am going to learn to love myself" as opposed to "I'm looking for my perfect partner". That's what people seem to want to read.'

Virtue also feels diverse representation will play a key role in the type of books readers will choose.

'It's about representing different voices,' she says. 'I don't know that we, as an industry, always represent sexual orientation, gender, religion, ethnicity, the working class and every other kind of diversity as well as we should do. There are a lot of new books that



Debut
author
Candice
Carty-
Williams



are hoping to address that in ever more strident ways.

At the same time, she emphasises, this needn't be the focus of the book.

'It shouldn't be: "Woohoo, I've hit that diversity box." It should be worn lightly, it should be reflective and representative of society,' she explains.

'For example, if you write a love story that doesn't feature a heterosexual man and woman, make sure that's not the only purpose of your book. If two characters who fall in love happen to be of the same sex or are gender fluid then that should be incidental, not the only selling point.'

I ask if it's possible to predict beyond the next year, into the next decade.

'I wish,' says Transworld's Sarah Adams. 'But actually, the magic happens for all of us when publishers don't just offer readers more of what they know they like but help them navigate the unknown and discover something wonderful they hadn't been looking for.'



Trapeze publisher Sam Eades
(with Ragdoll author Daniel Cole)