



## Questions for: Fiona McMorrough

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*The CEO of arts communications consultancy FMcM contributes to our Q&A series*



### ***Describe your current job***

One task right now - hold the team together, while remote; keep our heads above water and the business afloat!

### ***What was your first job in the book industry?***

I arrived from Ireland and asked Office Angels to place me in any publishing house, doing anything - so while the permanent receptionist was off having ear operations, I was the stand-in receptionist at Unwin Hyman. From there I wangled my way into the trade division, including Pandora Press, which had just published *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson. Yes, I was very excited by that!

### ***Who has been the most influential person in your career?***

I left London and lived in the States for a few years before returning to Hamish Hamilton, Penguin, where I worked for five formative years as promotions executive for Andrew Franklin and Alexandra Pringle. They had a huge impact on me and my career, alongside Karen Geary and the late and brilliant Kate Jones. The big four taught me how to be ambitious for a book and to care for the author - a formidable bunch to learn from. They set me up!

### ***How has the industry changed since your first job?***

When I worked at Penguin and then Virago and Bloomsbury decisions were still primarily editorially led - now everything is market-led. This is definitely a time when I hope the industry can take good care of our authors, as a priority, our life blood.

### ***What's the biggest challenge in your job?***

The media market continues to change at break-neck speed, and the biggest challenge is to ensure my team continue to connect and communicate with all media, across all platforms, for our authors and clients - and they do!



***What's the best piece of book-related advice you've ever been given?***

Continue to work with books and authors you feel passionate about.

***What are the most interesting things you're seeing at the moment in the industry?***

The speed with which the industry is adapting under lockdown is remarkable - the full embrace of digital and the next big push towards direct to consumer sales and communications. A huge rush of creativity and collaboration, support and goodwill.

***What do you think might be the next big thing?***

New platforms. Hybrid campaigns. Working from home.

***How are you coping with working from a home environment?***

I love it. The team are working as hard as ever. Zoom. Facebook live. Regular meetings. The weather. But missing seeing people.

***How do you think the industry will come out of the Covid-19 crisis?***

I think there will be a shakedown, but essentially I think books and publishing will thrive. I am delighted to see small presses and authors are benefiting from Arts Council Grants - essential - and I am sure the big ships can help too if necessary.

***What do you most like doing when you're not working?***

I like being out in the woods or by the sea, travelling, movement - yoga, running, tennis, walking. Eating and drinking with Diane and our friends. Going to Ireland to see my family.

***What is the best book you've read in the last year?***

Best! Well, I have loved *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (Penguin) by Elif Shafak and *Inside the Wave* (Bloodaxe), Helen Dunmore's final collection of poems. But if I have to choose only one it has to be *Girl* (Faber) by Edna O'Brien, which I have read slowly under lockdown. This book rocked me to my core - ferocious truth, deep humanity, word by word stunning to read, great storytelling. She is a seer! We need to treasure her.

***What are you reading now?***

*Amora* (Amazon Crossing). A brilliant collection of short stories by a critically acclaimed and prizewinning Brazilian writer, Natalia Borges Polesso, and *Negative Capability: A diary of surviving* (Sandstone Press) by Michele Roberts - her memoir of perseverance following rejection by her publisher and an identity crisis. Which reminds me, I also loved *The Perseverance* (Penned in the Margins) by Raymond Antrobus, his multiple prize-winning (Rathbones Folio Prize and *Sunday Times* Young Writer Prize) debut collection of poems.

**Fiona McMorrough is CEO, FMcM Associates.**

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