

# Rare Bird Books

written by Entropy | January 24, 2017



## [Website](#)

Submission Guidelines: “We don’t take unagented submissions. Agents can email me at [Julia@rarebirdlit.com](mailto:Julia@rarebirdlit.com).”

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## *Interview with Julia Callahan, Director of Sales and Marketing*

*How did Rare Bird Books start?*

It started in two different ways, funnily enough. When Tyson Cornell (President and Founder) was still the Events Director at Book Soup, he went in on a publishing project with two of the employees there to publish *Empty the Sun* by Joseph Mattson under the A Barnacle Book imprint in 2009. That was where Rare Bird’s publishing wing was started. The publishing wing really picked up steam when PGW took us on as a distribution client and we exponentially grew the amount of books we published every year between 2010 and 2015.

In 2009, almost a year after the death of Glenn Goldman and after 10 years of working at the store, Tyson Cornell left Book Soup, and as he was figuring out what to do next, he started receiving calls from authors and publishers asking about helping them with events and marketing, and that turned into Rare Bird Lit.

Over the years, we’ve grown to five full-time employees. We publish 40-50 books per year, and have about 10-15 marketing & PR clients per year.

*Tell us a bit about Rare Bird. What are your influences, your aesthetic, your mission?*

We’re a general trade publishing company. So we publish all kinds of books, but we do skew more edgy or off-the-beaten-path. We like stories that aren’t being told. And we don’t like censorship. Plus, we don’t shy away from a bit of controversy. At least one of our books wasn’t allowed on iBooks for a

while because of pornographic content.

*Can you give us a preview of what's current and/or forthcoming from your catalog, as well as what you're hoping to publish in the future?*

Man, there's so much. We have everything from political memoirs (on both sides of the spectrum) to a former spy memoir to queer fiction to a book on Studio 54 to a photo book of Washington DC's famed punk club, The Safari Club. We have a ton of really cool stuff coming up.

We're always hoping to publish interesting books on sex work (preferably by sex workers), music, interesting fiction, and memoir. I always look for books by authors that reflect the city of Los Angeles. Writers of color, queer writers, writers that get overshadowed by the New York publishing scene. As much as we're a publishing house that publishes writers from all over the country (and other countries), we definitely try to make sure we're representing LA, since that's our home.

*We used to ask, "What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?" We're still interested in the answer to that, but we're even more interested to know what you think needs to change.*

I feel like your readers probably know what's exciting. Voices that don't make it through to the Big 5, a small business camaraderie between publisher and author. All of those things are awesome.

As far as change, man, it's complicated. I feel like as far as the industry that's built around promoting and selling books is concerned, we could use some more room for indie presses. I just got done with all the end of the year lists, and it is sometimes disheartening when list after list is literally all Big 5 houses. It's hard to get our books into enough hands when we don't have that kind of budget. I'd love to see some of the bigger outlets that cover books dedicate space to talking about what indie presses are doing.

I feel like for indie presses themselves, our biggest problem is always money. That's for all indie presses. So many are nonprofit, which is cool, and I can't really speak to that because I don't work at a nonprofit, but it can be tough to scrounge enough money to do some of the cool stuff that we do. We have a line of audiobooks on vinyl that are fully scored, so it's a whole experience to listen to them, and those are so fun to put together and so awesome to listen to, but the overhead on them can be pretty steep. We don't have a dearth of ideas. We just have some tight resources.

*How do you cope? There's been a lot of conversation lately about charging reading fees, printing costs, rising book costs, who should pay for what, etc. Do you have any opinions on this, and would you be willing to share any insights about the numbers at Rare Bird Books?*

I can't give out numbers or anything but we definitely are having these discussions. I personally think that if authors are able, putting in some

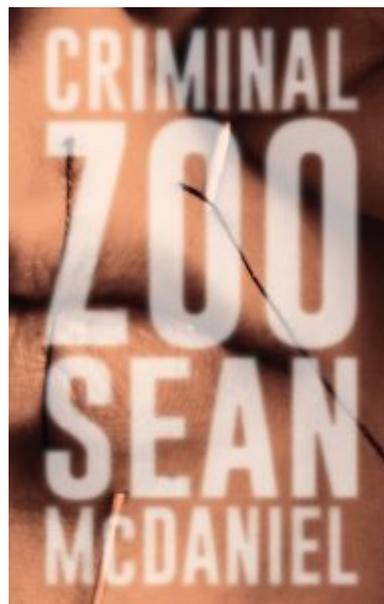
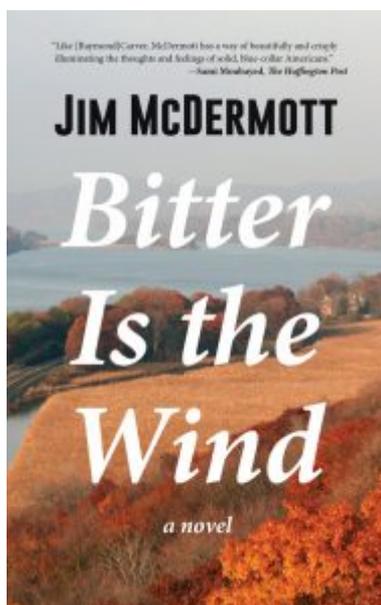
money is never going to alienate your publisher. I have authors that can't do that, and that's cool. I think the bottom line is that we want our authors engaged. Out there pounding the pavement and doing their best to sell every copy of their book that they possibly can. Making friends with booksellers and other authors. Being involved in any and every reading they possibly can. Creating their own readings. The community building is the thing that almost every author can bring to the table.

But, to get back to the question, I do think that authors need to understand how much money goes into each and every book. A book rarely costs us less than \$20k in printing, shipping, and staff time. It's usually much more. Just an awareness of the fact that we're putting a lot into each and every book, and we need partners. Unlike a Big 5 house, we don't have the luxury of having books not succeed, even if our terms for success are different than a Big 5.

I'm not opposed to authors paying for certain things, but I understand that not everyone is in a position to be able to do something like that, and as long as they're willing to work, we're good.

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### *Recent releases from Rare Bird Books:*



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### *Rare Bird Books on Entropy:*

[Review of Spent by Antonia Crane](#)

[Interview with J.J. Anselmi, Author of Heavy: A Memoir of Wyoming, BMX, Drugs, and Heavy Fucking Music](#)