

## A Million Dream Maps: The Market

One of the questions agents are often asked is what kind of books we're looking for. Most of the time we're waiting to be struck by lightning - for our heaving pile of submissions to offer up a script which shape-shifts from pumpkin into carriage as we turn its pages... which looks like all the others, but which is somehow transporting and exciting once we give in to the reading.

But I do delve into my submissions with a (part-conscious, part-unconscious) idea already in mind of what I'd ideally like to find there. That hope is informed by my personal tastes, which do not waver much (direct emotional storytelling, believable voices, a sense of recognition, high drama, the tapping of fears and anxieties, self-deprecating humour, confidence, the premature theft of innocence, wistfulness, ghosts, sentimentality to some degree, women thinking hard about other women, disinhibition, are all on the list I think; along with dogs, soft beds, sweet smells, foreign flower blooms, the memory of ice cream between the fingers, babies' heads, blood on the bathroom floor, vineyards, Manhattan, constellations, the space between heartbeats; you know, the usual).

My next set of reactions to every manuscript I pick up aren't wholly mine: I have inherited them from all of you. My sense of what I can sell, of which book will fly, derives from my knowledge of the market. And what is the market but a million more individual thought-clusters (dream maps) like the one I have, above, synthesised until all that is left are the parts which overlap - a communal consensus on what we want. We can call it good timing, we can talk of fashion, we can think of it as trends, we can speculate like meteorologists about market forces, but it's just: what are we thinking about? What are we feeling? How do we talk to each other? Who shall we be, today?

The aerial view, of a few hundred thousand televisions, spotted through living room windows, all flickering the same blue at the same speed: the market. The news on the front page of every newspaper which we all agree is too terrible to talk about in detail: the market. The gift we all gave at Christmas, the water flooding from the rivers, those songs on our iphones, the new colour of our iphones, the butterflies missing from these recent summers, the celebrity we use as common heroine and enemy: the market. The book we are all reading now, the man we are all in love with, the people who think you can't see them in their cars, the thing about Korean food all of a sudden, the impotent rage we share about something political we can't change, the way we let our children's hair grow so wild, the injections women have in their faces, our communal desire to leave the city, to do nothing, to stay up all night in the city, to live forever: the market.

As an agent, with authors' careers in my care, I have my antennae up: I need to try to forecast the weather. The books I offer representation to this month, or devise with a client this month, won't be

ready for submission for perhaps another six months, or more. They won't be finished until 2016. They won't be published until 2017. What will you be buying in 2017?

I have my views on that. But it's fashionable to say it's in your hands.

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