

Apr/May 2013

FREE

LFB meetings  
13 May & 10 June

One of these  
meetings is about  
l'après-Leveson;  
the other, gardening  
journalism

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# Biographical details

CLAIRE TOMALIN, probably Britain's best-known biographer, told London Freelance Branch's February meeting that "the most important thing if you want to write a biography is to know the story you want to tell, to have seen the story, that's what makes a biography work."

Biographer of, among others, Mary Wollstonecraft and Charles Dickens, Claire contrasted journalists who also write books (Dickens was a court reporter) with academics, writing for other academics, who haven't learned what *Sunday Times* editor Harry Evans explained, deleting the first paragraph of one of her reviews: "That's just throat-clearing – you have to get right in there

and catch your reader." Claire's 1990 book *The Invisible Woman* – on actress Nelly Ternan, with whom Dickens had a clandestine relationship – sprang from passing references to Ternan found in 1953 as a Cambridge undergraduate. There is "a new biography of Dickens every year," but this was one story "that needs to be told... about the hidden women in the lives of famous men."

Biographers "mustn't get too excited about film or theatre rights". The BBC "wasted a great deal of time" on *The Invisible Woman*. But "the happy ending is... Ralph Fiennes got interested, "and the film's made, you can see it in the autumn."

We also heard from LFB's own

Hilary Mackaskill on how a phone call to a publisher's PR resulted in her writing *Dickens At Home* – it's biographical, but it grew out of some of Hilary's travel articles.

Tom Penn, editorial director at Penguin Books, commissions biographies. At the heart of the craft is "the story", which can be a phenomenon – "we published a biography of the oceans, humanity's impact and degradation over the millennia – or an idea, like a book about the Higgs boson – or a book about a person".

When someone picks up a book, Tom reminds us, they ask first, "why should I care? Why should I stick with it, when there are so many other things to do and to read?" A biographer has to "find the subject so compelling you can't push it away."

Claire advised, "I'd get a literary agent, if possible." Tom believes "the idea that somehow one can survive by means of an advance alone or a book deal alone is largely not true – I think you do have to be doing other things as well".

With the rise of e-book self-publishing, do authors need publishers any more? Tom notes that "If people have had self-publishing successes [they] will almost always go to conventional publishers afterwards."

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● Much more at [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1303biog.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1303biog.html)



Claire Tomalin: Photo © Tony Rizzo

## Minister gives comfort on copyright

GOVERNMENT plans for changes to copyright law have been clarified in debate in the House of Lords. The NUJ raised concerns through the Creators' Rights Alliance (CRA), with the result that we got six pages of commitments from the minister, Viscount Younger. The next stage of the Bill is, at the time of writing, scheduled for 16 April, when the Commons considers amendments introduced by the government in the Lords. These include removing what looked like a new power to change the "exceptions" to copyright – the conditions in which your work can be used without your permission or payment to you.

A government statement of its precise proposals on these exceptions is imminent. We also await the promised meeting with the minister on the imposition of unfair contracts on creators (that's us). The proposal in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill on which we focused was that dealing with "Extended

Collective Licensing" (ECL), which would allow organisations such as the BBC or the British Library to write cheques to collecting societies for the right to make its archive available. This would leave [www.alcs.co.uk](http://www.alcs.co.uk) to distribute money to writers and [www.dacs.org.uk](http://www.dacs.org.uk) to photographers, when it finds us – so register now, at those addresses.

The minister has made clear that the "statutory instrument" implementing the details of the scheme will provide that only a collecting society that shows it is representative of creators may apply to him for authorisation to issue ECL. It will have to show that its members consent to the application, probably through a ballot. Such authorisations will be regulated, and revocable.

There's still an issue around unclaimed monies. The CRA is lobbying for these to be applied for the benefit of creators as a whole, for example for training and education. The Intellectual Property Office pro-

posal that this money should go to the Treasury is not quite dead, but is strongly opposed by the libraries as well as creators.

Another proposal that frightened many is for licensing "orphan works" – those for whom no creator or other owner can be located. Broadly the same safeguards will apply as for ECL. The NUJ/CRA position that such licences must be issued only for a fee payable in advance – reflecting the market value of the work – is confirmed. Lord Howarth pushed to the vote an amendment opposing this. The minister's argument against him reflected the CRA's argument that any other approach would distort the market in which we work, and he was defeated. The statutory instrument will set out what constitutes a "diligent search" for the creator of a work.

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● There's much more detail linked from [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1304copy.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1304copy.html)