
Introduction: *From the Mainstream: Giving the Devil His Due*

For 25 years, *American Book Review* has been recognized as the nation's primary review medium for books published by independent presses. "Independent presses" refers to noncommercial literary publishers, especially nonprofit literary presses. Unlike mainstream commercial publishers, most of which have been bought up and consolidated by huge international entertainment conglomerates, independent literary presses base their publication decisions on a book's enduring literary merit rather than its short-term commercial appeal. Conglomerate publishers, by contrast, tend to compete for the same titles and seek to serve the same markets, in the process concentrating on the publication and promotion of those books most likely to sell. As a result, the number of serious works of literature supported by the conglomerates has declined in recent years and is likely to continue to decline.

Despite this decline, it would be unfair to argue that mainstream publishing houses have abandoned

serious literature altogether. True, the serious works they publish tend to be novels (over the past decade, independent literary presses, including university presses, have published more books of poetry than all the major commercial publishers combined). Similarly, the fiction writers they support tend to be established (though, in most cases, not establishment) authors who began their publishing careers with commercial houses before the conglomerates swallowed those houses up.

These authors continue to write the kind of serious, genre-bending fiction that *ABR* has always found space in its pages to review. In this focus, *ABR* turns once again to a group of recent novelists whose work, though published by the mainstream, occupies that generic interzone we've come to know as the slipstream.

After you've read the focus, turn to our first feature, which contains reviews of three new transgressive fictions published by independent presses.