

The Big Book that Wasn't: Caroline Calloway and the Influencer Book Deal

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The Age of the Influencer has had a significant impact on the publishing industry, from the ubiquity of Bookstagram and BookTok, to celebrity book stylists and influencer book deals. The influencer book deal has become an established phenomenon, often accompanied by handsome advances and elaborate publicity campaigns. However, as Julie McCarron and Michele Matrisciani point out in the Publishers Weekly article “What’s an Influencer Worth to Books?”, follower counts don’t always materialize in sales—and similarly, as we explore in this case study, the “influencer book deal” might not produce a book at all. Caroline Calloway, a now infamous internet personality who first shot to fame through an Instagram account chronicling her life as an American in Cambridge, netted a \$500,000 book deal with Macmillan in 2016 but failed, ultimately, to ever produce a book. However, rather than spelling the end of Calloway’s literary career, this scandal seemed to signal a new era of bookish intrigue. In this presentation, we follow the story of a Big Book that Wasn’t, drawing on Simone Murray’s notion of performing authorship (*The Digital Literary Sphere*, 2018) to examine the wisdom or logics that underpin the influencer-publisher relationship.

Bios:

Chandni Ananth is a research assistant at the SFB 1385 “Law and Literature” at the University of Münster, where she received an MA in National and Transnational Studies. Her research interests include contemporary book culture and publishing, post-digital print cultures, the global anglophone publishing field and Indian book history.

Nayantara Srinivasan is an M.A. student in the British, American and Postcolonial Studies programme at the University of Münster, specialising in Book Studies. She has previously worked in sales, foreign rights and editorial at a publishing house in India. Her research interests include contemporary publishing networks, bookselling, and digital book cultures.

Hauptautoren: ANANTH, Chandni; SRINIVASAN, Nayantara

Vortragende: ANANTH, Chandni; SRINIVASAN, Nayantara