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## **“OUT OF HAND”: MELVILLE HOUSE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF BOLD INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING**

Brooklyn, NY (Feb 22, 2022) -- Since its inception twenty years ago this February (02/20/02 to be exact), the independent publisher Melville House has been called “brilliant,” “anti-establishment,” “small but innovative,” and “[an] enticing American boutique.”

It’s also a remarkable publishing success story, particularly since there was no grand plan at the start. “It was just a collaborative art project that got out of hand,” says co-founder Valerie Merians. “We wanted to protest the Bush administration’s rush to war in Iraq, and we came up with an idea for a poetry book, of all things.”

Twenty years later, with offices in Brooklyn and London and a staff of 15, Merians and co-founder Dennis Johnson have published over 700 books, including an astonishing list of internationally acclaimed authors, such as Jenny Odell, David Graeber, John Dean, Banana Yoshimoto, Jonathan Lethem, Maggie Nelson, Slavoj Zizek, Anna Politkovskaya, and Nobel Prize winners Heinrich Böll and Imre Kertész, as well as numerous debut literary novelists.

And the company’s activist roots have continued to drive the mission. For example, Melville House has become known for “crashing” hot political titles, for instance turning the U.S. Senate’s infamous “Torture Report” — an investigation of the CIA’s use of torture and rendition program — into a widely acclaimed and bestselling book. “The government didn’t want people to read it, so they released it as a hard-to-read jpg late on a Friday night over Christmas break,” explains Johnson. “We had it out in bookstores three weeks later.”

Alongside the books, the company has become known for a certain fearlessness within the industry, speaking out on publishing issues especially as they relate to bigger cultural issues. For example, Johnson has been quoted on the front page of the New York Times criticizing Amazon not just for its impact on publishing, but on the culture at large. He has also made numerous appearances on NPR, PBS, the BBC, and elsewhere talking about the conglomerization of publishing, censorship, the rise of right-wing publishing, and literary culture in general.



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Melville House's talent for successfully publishing undiscovered writers, its spirit of independence, its nimbleness with crash publishing, its strong point of view, its gorgeous packaging, and its integrity in an industry overridden by Big Publishing interests make it a small publisher stand-out. And its twenty-year story happens to be set during one of the most tumultuous times in publishing history.

The tumult, however, only seems to propel the company forward, and Merians and Johnson say they're looking ahead to some exciting books in 2022, including a new novel, *The Perfect Golden Circle*, by British sensation Ben Myers; *The Yank* by John Crowley, a memoir by a former member of an elite unit of the U.S. Marine Corp who joined the Irish Republican Army; *My Fourth Time We Drowned*, a searing book of immigration reportage by phenomenal young Irish reporter Sally Hayden; a wonderfully inventive literary novel by Indian playwright Nandita Dinesh called *This Place That Place* — and maybe a crashed book or two.

Meanwhile, the publisher will be celebrating its 20th anniversary throughout the year with a new website, some fun new merchandise, special terms for booksellers, and, Covid permitting, a celebratory party in September.

**Valerie Merians and Dennis Johnson are available for interviews.**



Melville House is an independent publishing company based in Brooklyn and London, currently celebrating its twentieth anniversary. Recent titles include the *New York Times* bestseller *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* by Jenny Odell; the *New York Times* bestselling edition of *The Mueller Report*; the *New York Times* bestseller *Anthony Bourdain: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*; and *Authoritarian Nightmare: The Ongoing Threat of Trump's Followers*, by Watergate legend John W. Dean. For more information visit [mhpbooks.com](http://mhpbooks.com).



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