Long-established and the most fashionable book shops, edited by Markus S. Braun, Salenstein, Switzerland, Braun Publishing, 2012, 192 pp., A$65.00 (hard cover), ISBN 978-3-03768-122-0 (available from Thames and Hudson Australia)

Bookshops, like libraries and publishers, face an uncertain future in the digital era. Markus Braun’s compendium of ‘long established and the most fashionable bookshops’ is a beautifully illustrated listing of 49 such bookshops from around the world. The concise historical overview of books and bookshops concludes in 2011, from which vantage point this workponders the future of books and bookshops under siege from new reading media such as tablets, and online sales from firms such as Amazon and its subsidiary, Book Depository. Also playing a part would be the high cost of High Street rentals and the impact in the UK of the charity bookshop boom.

Recent figures show, however, that independent bookstores catering for a niche customer base are probably surviving better than some of the chains. Borders have gone out of business, while in Australia the Angus and Robertson stores have been a casualty. The presence in Australia of such shops as The Book Grocer and AllBooks4Less have increased the perception of customers that books should be cheap. Having said that, some Australian publishers have kept prices too high for paperbacks.

To return to the more positive, Long-established and the most fashionable book shops features a range of wonderful establishments, largely documented by sumptuous colour illustrations. The bookshops covered include Heywood Hill in London, Munro’s Books in Victoria (British Columbia), Shakespeare and Company in Paris and the Strand Bookstore in New York. The two Australian entries seem a somewhat unusual choice in the National Gallery of Victoria Bookshop in Melbourne and Published Art in Sydney.

All book lovers will truly appreciate this book, which would not be the same on a tablet reader. One can but drool at the photos, such as the ones displaying the splendour of the shelves of the El Ateneo bookshop in Buenos Aires.

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