

# It's literature Jim, but not as we know it

Father Christmas will be delivering some dodgy books this year. DICK LUMSDEN has been taking a closer look

If it is true that you can measure a society by the depth and quality of its literature – what will future historians make of Britain in the winter of 2010?

Apparently we are a nation besotted by a fairly average cook, a stuffed puppet, an eccentric talent contest winner and a sprinkling of comedians.

Those of us who actually put our hands in our pocket and still buy books have just made Jamie Oliver's *30 minute meals* the fastest selling non-fiction book in history... ever... fact!

And in the pre-Christmas buying frenzy, Jamie is joined in the bestsellers chart by *A Simple Life*, the "biography" of Alexandr Orlov, the inanimate meerkat character created by advertising agency VCCP.

Throw in the contributions from Susan Boyle, Katie Price, Michael McIntyre, Keith Richards (can he even remember what happened to him?) and will anyone from the future who studies the literature of 2010 understand just what was going on?

Jamie's latest tome has topped the sales charts every week since it was released... and in the first ten weeks sold 735,000 copies, becoming the fastest selling non-fiction book of all time.

But, in fairness, at least his book goes give us some practical advice on how to feed ourselves.

I honestly can't think of anything useful to say about a fictional biography of a fictional character from a TV advertising campaign.

Even Buster Dover (yes that's his real name), the Head of Digital at VCCP, has gone on record as saying Alexandr was created during a session in the pub by some of the ad staff.

The word "simples" has now made it into the Collins English Dictionary, Alexandr has more than 769,000 fans on his Facebook page and 42,000 gullible souls follow his every word on Twitter... are they all mad?

The publishing industry in the UK sells around 760 million books each year - worth about £3 billion in sales – and, according to the Publishers Association, about half of the population have never bought a single book. That means that the rest of us must be buying around 25 books each every year.

While Jamie's new book is set to



**LITERARY GIANTS:** Clockwise from above, Katie Price, Keith Richards, Jamie Oliver and meerkat Alexandr Orlov

and is officially the fastest-selling book ever.

I know that because I looked it up online at the Guinness World Records site. Now here's an interesting fact. Second behind Jamie in this year's Christmas sales list is the now traditional, Guinness World Records annual. Why? When you can go online and find out anything you need to know, why would you want to buy an expensive hardback? Yet a lot of people have been doing just that. In one week alone this month, more than 50,000 copies were snapped up in the UK.

At the other end of the scale completely, came news this month of the world's most expensive book changing hands in Sotheby's for an eye-watering £7.2 million. The

in its own right, that got me thinking about other remarkably dull titled book and about who I might give them to this Christmas.

For Mrs Lumsden (who makes no secret of the fact she wants a dog this Christmas), I could buy *Knitting with Dog Hair*, subtitled "Better a sweater from a dog you know and love than from a sheep you'll never meet".

For my friend Dave, who is having a conservatory built at the back of his house, it would have to be *Highlights in the History of Concrete*. For Janice (a bit of a whizz at making things) I'm sure she would love the instructional book of "Tea bag folding".

And for Phil, who loved his Italian holiday but couldn't speak

*Crazy Buttocks or Tattooed mountain women and spoon boxes of Daghestan* then they are still available to order online. You've got a couple of days left before Christmas.

Looking through this amazing back catalogue of books online, while the names are hilarious, the cover illustrations are just priceless.

But jacket artwork is a serious business in the publishing industry. If you grab a book at the airport, the cover image will have just as much an influence on your choice as the words on the back cover.

And that is one of the great pities of the inexorable rise in electronic book readers – no dust jackets to perk you up while you read.

They say that by the end of next year there will be 11 million Kindle ebooks in circulation. Just in time to read next year's probable best seller; the authorised biography of the annoying kid in the air freshener ad who complains of poo smells in the toilet and goes off to drop his trousers in his friend's house instead.

It's a funny old world.

Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, one of the few companies specialising in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views on this article, or are