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- [Home](#)
- [News](#)
 - [Publishing](#)
 - [Books](#)
 - [Bookselling](#)
 - [Moves](#)
 - [Children's](#)
 - [Libraries](#)
 - [Academic / Professional](#)
 - [Digital](#)
 - [International](#)
- [Frankfurt 09](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Rights](#)
- [Prizes](#)
- [People](#)
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Written by Victoria Hunt

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Victoria Hunt interviews Louise Rhind-Tutt, Publicity Manager for Chatto & Windus, Harvill Secker, Square Peg and Yellow Jersey imprints at Random House, and former SYP Chair

It's been a triumphant year for Louise Rhind-Tutt. In June she won her first Nibbie (Publicity Campaign of the Year 2008) at the British Book Industry Awards, for Costa First Novel winner *The Outcast* by Sadie Jones (Chatto). This joins, on her mantelpiece, a Publishers' Publicity Circle Annual Award (hardback fiction) for the same book, and another PPC award for best publicity campaign for Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (also C&W). "When I saw the other shortlisted campaigns, I really didn't expect to win," she says of the Nibbie, "because they were all so strong. But *The Outcast* was the only debut, and that made it stand out."



As ardent as she is about *The Outcast*, a virtuoso first novel set in the 1950s, it is *The Kindly Ones* for which she reserves the greatest praise, calling it "one of the best novels I've read". Obviously, it's her job to say that. "No, really it is," she laughs, still buzzing from that campaign, in which she had to promote the fictional memoirs of an "incestuous, gay and possibly matricidal" former SS officer.

"To have something that was in translation, that was a thousand pages and hugely controversial, was so exciting," says Rhind-Tutt, though she admits that, at first, it felt a challenge. Littell, although effectively a debut author, refused to do any publicity, having already done so for the original French publication (*Les Bienveillantes*, winner of the Prix Goncourt). "This meant that we didn't have an author's right to reply in the event of any negative reviews. So when a few ran, we decided to use them as part of the promotion, with an ad campaign that ran praise against criticism, asking the public, 'Which side are you on?'" Playing devil's advocate paid off: sales of the hardback edition are now around 25,000.

Rhind-Tutt joined Random House from Yale University Press as press officer for paperback imprints Vintage and Pimlico in 2004, before moving to her current role in 2006. What makes a great publicist, does she think? "Someone who is passionate about what they're doing but happy to be in the background," she says. Also, surely, conscientiousness and a magician's ability to manage a shoestring budget, two qualities evident in this publicist, who comes to the interview equipped with helpful notes, and who was praised by the Nibbie judges for the amount of coverage, including touring, she achieved for *The Outcast* on a "modest" publicity budget. How did she make a debut author feel like an established writer so quickly?

"The campaign was well-planned, and we went to as many literary festivals as possible, including Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh," she says. "It's slightly more difficult for debut authors to get festival slots, but we had Sadie on panels with other debut writers. We also held the launch in her local bookshop [Daunt's in Holland Park] and got as much as free coverage as possible including Radio 4's *Book at Bedtime*, which sealed its literary


credentials." *The Outcast* was later selected as a *Richard & Judy* summer read, going on to sell nearly half a million copies across all editions and to top the bestseller list.

But Rhind-Tutt has form with finance. In 2006, she was elected chair of the Society of Young Publishers (having previously been its Press Officer), while her husband Toby, currently working in IT at Random House, became the SYP's first-ever Vice-Chair. Together they had to pull the Society back from the brink of bankruptcy. "When we took over we discovered there was just 31p left in the bank. It was quite frightening!" she recalls. From near-ruin came redemption, as they managed to secure corporate sponsorship while putting on a full schedule of events and cutting costs elsewhere, thus quietly restoring the Society funds, which have flourished ever since. "That year taught me that anything is possible." There were benefits too, of course. "My circle of friends doubled through the SYP. I met so many people across publishing, and that's really useful now, to keep in touch and find out what other people are doing."

Back to the present, and forthcoming projects include promoting the 50th anniversary of Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, re-published this month in a new translation by Breon Mitchell and a new foreword from the author himself. For this, Rhind-Tutt is working alongside Grass's editor at Harvill Secker, Geoff Mulligan, although she can't be drawn on Mulligan's recent move from Publisher to Editor-at-Large. Relatively new to her work portfolio is promoting the burgeoning Square Peg imprint, a quirky non-fiction list that "has been a real revelation, totally different from anything I've worked on before". Latest Square Peg offerings include *150 Things Every Man Should Know* and *The Average Life of the Average Person*, "which I've been tweeting fascinating facts from", she says. "I've become the pub quiz bore!"

With the greatest accolade for a publicist now firmly under her belt, what does the future hold? Rhind-Tutt, who's just turned 30, cites Square Peg's founder, Rosemary Davidson, as a personal role model: Davidson worked in publicity before moving into commissioning. "The thought of commissioning one day is really exciting," she says. "I'd love to think I might be doing that in 10 years' time."

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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

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