

An Open Letter from Our Director

After the “Amazon disappearance” of August 5, 2026 (that metaphorical asteroid that seemingly obliterated twenty years of our hard, dedicated work in the blink of an eye), we’ve had to face some very hard truths, not the least of which is that our world is now not a very nice place; conscienceless giants, AI bots, questionable algorithms, and outright crooks increasingly hold sway over our lives, and this makes it very difficult to hang onto one’s aspirations and humanity.

Many small publishers experiencing the completely unjustified, unexplained, yet “irreversible” termination of their account that we just have would throw the whole kit and caboodle against the wall and leave their authors to pick up the shattered shards. As tempting as that is, and as easy as it would be (except for my broken heart), I cannot bring myself to do that. As always, my first instinct is to try to take care of our authors, to whom I feel an enormous obligation. (We have, after all, made children together.) But recovering from Amazon’s sledgehammer blow will take commitment, time, and no small measure of creativity plus David-vs.-Goliath spunk.

Our Plans as of August 11, 2026

We’ve determined the best course of action would be to switch our printing and distribution framework to the legacy service Lightning Source, which better supports and protects independent publishers with more than a self-published book or two in their catalog. Alas, we do not have the (now) \$25,208 it would take in setup/maintenance fees for the first year alone to migrate our entire list to them, nor could we sustain the \$3,288/year fees in the following years (which, like everything else, will go up). So that’s out.

So far, all of the affordable services we’ve looked into cater to individual self-publishers (as Amazon KDP does) and have terms and conditions that would not protect us or our authors. While we plan to move our list to one or more of these services to handle global printing, distribution, and order fulfillment of our titles—this will not happen overnight—we do not intend to risk a repeat of what Amazon has done, nor are we holding our breath that Amazon will do right by us. We are being extremely cautious as we move forward, considering all possibilities and scrutinizing the tiny print, and we are proactively cutting Amazon entirely out of the equation. The only way books we’ve published will appear on Amazon is through used booksellers aligned with the giant or when an author sells their personal copies using their own Amazon Seller account.

We’ve wasted enough time speculating about what we possibly could have done to deserve this termination. Did Amazon decide that a few AI-assisted book covers were prohibited despite our checking their little disclosure box as required? (If so, what an irony: Amazon’s front end is almost entirely run by AI!) Did one of our author’s books get reviewed favorably a few times too many within some arbitrary span of time, and the algorithm took it to mean the reviews were fake and we were therefore manipulating Amazon’s services? How can we possibly know, much less challenge the decision, if they won’t tell us? It likely would not change anything if we did. It’s folly to try to reason with a black box.

Our Priorities Going Forward

I’ve had to reexamine our priorities, which are now and have always been baked into the mission of FutureCycle Press. (We like to think that these are our authors’ priorities as well.) In order of importance, here they are:

Priority 1

Honor our authors by skillfully and ethically publishing their work despite limited staff and financial resources, building a solid reputation over time for quality, care, and sound editorial judgment.

Priority 2

Preserve the work for current and future generations by keeping it in print so it's not lost to history, greed, malice, or neglect.

Priority 3

Make the work available to anyone wanting to read it, including poorer folk who cannot afford to buy the books.

Priority 4

Facilitate authors' access to low-cost paperback copies to sell at readings or from their websites—at a healthy profit, if that's important to them.

Priority 1 has already been met, and no algorithm, bad actor, or ignorant oaf can ever take that away.

Priority 2 has seen a setback, but we've identified ways to ensure the books are preserved for posterity without subjecting them to the whims of bad or non-human actors. We have choices that, if asked, we will share with our authors who choose to stay with us. Those authors wishing to self-publish or resubmit their work should email us at futurecyclepress@gmail.com and request we take their book(s) out of print.

Priority 3 was accomplished in the past by regularly offering free promotional copies of the Kindle editions on social media. Those editions are dead now, but Kindle is hardly the only digital format for easily distributable ebooks. There is no reason we cannot do the same thing with a digital library hosted on our own website, and—because we'd have completely unfettered control and local-first backups—we could promote our authors' work far more reliably and effectively than we ever could through Amazon.

Priority 4 was the sticking point. Large print-on-demand services catering to self-publishers offer low-cost author copies, but other printing options are available. Our concern: If books aren't sold on a huge international site like Amazon or pushed to bookstores through major distribution pathways, can they even be considered viable? Given our experience since 2008, I realized it is rare for a contemporary poetry title to sell more than a few retail copies a year on Amazon, and most of them don't *ever* sell. (Expanded distribution sales to bookstores are even rarer. Bookstore real estate is reserved mainly for gift books and blockbusters.) Good books drown in the sea of unvetted, poorly edited self-published books that relatively few people want to take a chance on. What's the advantage of that? We have a few stars who do better than average, but even our extraordinary FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize winners' books don't sell. The vast majority of sales are author copies sold at readings when poets make a personal connection with their audience. Less often, someone will download a free ebook, then spring for the paperback edition. This is why our publishing model emphasizes boosting our authors' profits up front by deeply discounting unlimited author copies instead of giving them a small percentage of royalties they are unlikely ever to see.

After we thought long and hard about all of this, my partner, poet Robert S. King, and I came up with a long-term, multi-tiered plan that I think just might work—and work better than what we were doing before. We all have a choice in how to respond to Goliath's unconscionable wreaking of havoc, and I for one refuse to just give up and die. Our slingshots may be small, but our aim is true.

—Diane Kistner, FutureCycle Press