"Faber needed to be more boisterous in its marketing, in its packaging, in its top-to-toe love of the books it was publishing"

When Stephen Page was still the new boy at Faber, his spurs as yet unearned, a friend gave him a copy of Frederick Warburg's autobiography, *An Occupation for a Gentleman*. These days, the title would be ironic, or perhaps merely a bad joke, though it was neither when the co-founder of Secker & Warburg was writing. Indeed, Page assumed it was given to him ironically. "I thought I'd read a rather tweedy version of the publishing life, which is not quite the life I lead. I couldn't have been more wrong. It's a book about a publisher who really wants success for his business and for his writers but his complaints are the same complaints we struggle with today. It was just a different environment."

Just looking at Page, in his black jeans and zip-up cardigan, makes clear how different that environment is superficially from the one inhabited by Warburg and his contemporaries, in those days when literary agents and editors remained unknown to the public and a deal could be concluded with a handshake and a small sherry at the Garrick. Yet in the Eighties and Nineties, aspects of Faber remained rooted in that era. On the one hand, Pete Townshend was invited aboard as a sort of rock 'n' roll version of T S Eliot, whose *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* once seemed to bankroll Faber. On the other, the notion that books and authors be publicised, or – heaven forfend – *marketed*, was anathema to Faber's then presiding deities. Even design had to be subservient

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In five years, Stephen Page
This week he received the V

to Pentagram's over-arching vision. It was all rather *precious* in ways that Secker & Warburg and André Deutsch and Weidenfeld & Nicolson probably never were. Faber published great books but it was hard to escape the feeling that – rather like academics whose command of a prestigious but impenetrable jargon gives them a feeling of power and superiority over the rest of us – they were not intended for mass-consumption. Faber's sense of exclusivity made it a notably insular publisher. And, ultimately, an unprofitable one.

Page doesn't entirely disagree. "There was an introspection about Faber and a sense – justified in some ways – that its job was to define some kind of canon; that that was the main job. Everything was structured around that... There was a lack of valuing of certain things, and a lack of expertise when it came to very modern skills." He chooses his words carefully. When he arrived at Queen Square in autumn 2001, it was with a sense that "a Faber under my leadership would not value some of the things that were valued under another leadership. I felt it had to become more of a *business*, more oriented toward the commercial disciplines that make for a successful publisher once you've made the right decisions. The choices were always fantastic, but Faber needed to be more boisterous in its marketing, in its packaging, in its top-to-toe love of the books it was publishing. Everybody had to be involved... There was some momentum around those ideas but it had a long way to go."

Page's predecessor, Toby Faber, provided him with "a windfall... He'd restructured some of the costs, America, the warehouse... He'd hired a refreshed team to start leading the editorial effort... He'd done some really hard things that meant I could get straight on with the job of bringing in a more energetic and

Stephen Page: a high regard for Faber as a reader