

## Chapter VIII

### The New Book?

Will the printed monograph become extinct? Or will it simply evolve into another format that remains as highly popular and durable as the one that has been an integral part of learning and leisure for the past 500 years?

Dillon has observed that the first electronic information products to be accepted by librarians were digital versions of printed reference sources because of their greater ease of use and added functionality. Next came electronic journals which were quickly accepted because they could be accessed from outside the library building and they solved many shelving and binding problems. But, according to Dillon, “There was one member missing from the librarian’s traditional print triumvirate of indexes, journals, and books—and that was an electronic version of the venerable monograph. You cannot create a digital library if you don’t have digital versions of the very format that consumes most of the space in a physical library, and the very format that is the basis for everyone’s idea of what a library should contain—books. A digital library needs digital books.”<sup>1</sup>

While the digital book or e-book might seem like a simple concept, its development into a standard and universally accepted format has not yet evolved. Crawford has pointed out that there are actually a number of different formats and no single standard accepted as an e-book. He identifies nine different types of e-books, among them:

- e-book portable devices -- texts which can only be read on the devices and cannot be printed, termed “locked” e-book devices Crawford says these have the least to offer from a library perspective.

- the “open” e-book is a model SML-based standard which has been proposed for e-book markup and encryption
- public-domain e-books -- “freebooks” following no standards, which are available to be downloaded over the internet
- “pseudo-books” which are consulted for only a portion or a page or two of text; these are mainly commercial electronic versions which can only be read on a computer and don’t conveniently replace a print, circulating collection
- “Instabooks”-- marked-up texts which are archived digitally and printed on demand. This type of service enables a book to remain perpetually in print and has helped to bring out-of-print books back into print, maintain inventory on slow-selling books, and publish books which would have a small audience.
- CD-ROM books, mainly in the vanity press realm. An author can have a work committed to CD-ROM and distribute copies.
- Not quite books – that is all manner of texts which aren’t long enough to be considered book length, mostly in the vanity category<sup>ii</sup>

The implications of digital format are leading to interesting new possibilities. In response to the article by Crawford on e-books, Gregory Anderson wrote “More e-book Thoughts,” in which he observed that because the e-book is digital, it can be both read or listened to.

The e-book has the potential to be a sort of electronic opera. We can watch opera, of course, but we can also listen to it, or just read the libretto. *The Phantom Menace* can be watched, listened to, or read. If we want to, we can combine the videocassette, the compact disc, and the printed book into a single, seamless medium.....”Opera” is the plural of “opus.” and “opus” means work. Although it usually means a musical composition, opus can refer to a literary work, a radio or television play, or even a motion

picture. “Book,” on the other hand, means a “set of sheets bound into a volume.” And that doesn’t seem to describe this new medium... in a few years will the e-book really be a book at all? Won’t tacking “e” onto the front of “book” really misrepresent what this format will become? Won’t we need a new name, a set of different terms, to refer to this medium we currently call the e-book?<sup>iii</sup>

Just as journal has been “unbundled” by the possibilities of electronic format, so too might the monograph become transformed or unbundled. With the invention of printing, many of the scholarly features of the book were developed, such as the title page, index, and bibliography, not to mention the mass reproduction of illustrated materials, maps, etc. The book of the past 500 years bears little resemblance to the handwritten codex. In fact, it became so different that it had to have a new name. The invention of printing has been credited with enabling the rise of the sciences through scholarly communication for the dissemination of findings.<sup>iv</sup> Just as the invention of printing brought new possibilities for scholarship, digital publication holds forth new enhancements for scholarly communication. Digital publications can

- Extend the scale, breadth, and accessibility of scholarly evidence
- Encourage innovation in learning
- Facilitate and encourage innovation in scholarly discourse
- Provide multiple views of the same primary evidence<sup>v</sup>

Electronic media and digitization are now venues for both publication and preservation. Digitization has become the most prevalent means of preservation. While most scholars prefer the original format of texts to study for long periods of time, the rarest materials, “treasures,” cannot be subject to handling. For these, digitization enables anyone with the necessary technology to examine texts anywhere.

The British Library has digitized a number of its rarest holdings and they can be viewed with “turning the pages” software. Through the use of a touch screen, the reader “turns the pages” by dragging a finger over a corner of the on-screen page. The software displays the page flipping over on the screen. These virtual texts also have zoom capability and other viewing features. The mirror writing of Leonardo da Vinci is reversed by the software so that it can actually be read, a feat hard to accomplish with the original notebook leaves. While the display on screen does not make the study of these texts easy or comfortable, digitization provides the only access possible for the rarest of materials. These digital versions are expensive to produce and it seems unlikely that large numbers of texts will receive this kind of treatment. But the British Library project exemplifies how digitization can enhance the study capabilities of a text for scholars and provide avenues of reading and access not possible with the original formats.

While digitization has made “surrogate” copies of rare materials widely available, for special collections, the access not ownership paradigm does not fulfill the need for scholars to examine originals. While the textual contents of books and manuscripts can be made available through photocopy, filming, or digitization, the “information as artifact,” principle often applies. These facsimiles have actually increased demand for examination of the originals. That is, the container or artifactual aspects of an item are often as important, or even more important, than the contents. Or stated another way, the value lies in the complete package, rather than in just the contents.<sup>vi</sup>

. This attachment to the printed book is deeper than the convenience offered by the format. The printed book was a new format in 15<sup>th</sup> century Venice when Aldus Manutius began publishing pocket texts. Szepe, an art historian, has been researching the roles the distinctive new Venetian book formats played in constructing layers of the early modern self. The book could serve metaphorical functions as a friend, as a lover, a civic trophy, or a medium to God,

promoting communication with, and of, the private inner self. In one of the earliest works, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, the protagonist enters a dream state in which he describes an antique fountain of a nude, sleeping nymph. The work, which was censored, is one of the most highly admired books for its beauty ever printed. It is said to have inspired the great Venetian painters Giorgione and Titian, who pioneered painting of the female nude, which was to become a central subject in western painting.<sup>vii</sup> The printed work still has a role to play in the electronic era, according to Szepe:

As we gain access today to encyclopedias on CD-ROM and the world on internet, many of us still enjoy the companionship of a pocketbook novel with a photo of the author, the more democratic equivalent of Aldus' luxury octavo, while sitting in an outdoor café. We appreciate the beauty of a large artbook on our coffee table in the living room, or the precious limited editions artist book in a museum, both descendants of such luxury books as the *Poliphilo*. People still inscribe important events in family bibles or take oaths on them. Books retain useful functions in society as physical objects and as metaphor, even as digital technology strips them of some of their traditional roles.<sup>viii</sup>

While the e-book may become successful for certain kinds of reading matter, as far as researchers are concerned, materials in original formats will continue to be the realm of research for the foreseeable future simply because those materials already are in existence. The product of the scholarship, the articles and monographs, may increasingly be released or "published" in electronic formats, but the concern for printed materials will still be foremost in the humanities.

It is still early in the development of electronic or digital books. Some of the models will undoubtedly undergo modifications and by convergence eventually result in fewer formats. The format of the scholarly monograph at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems to be evolving into

a hybrid product that is partly printed and partly digital, also referred to as divided text or split publication. Acceptance of electronic books appears to be progressing more rapidly for popular “reads” than for scholarly treatises. The publication of a 225 page mathematics treatise by Robert Kaplan entitled *The Nothing that Is* with its 78 page bibliography only “published” on a website stirred much controversy in academic circles. Separating the scholarly apparatus from the text was seen by some as the first steps down a slippery slope of not properly referencing and citing previous research.<sup>ix</sup>

This attitude was summed up by the reaction of Jill Watts, an associate professor of history at California State University at San Marcos. “If what’s on the Internet doesn’t last forever, then we’ve lost power,” she said. “If the academic apparatus disappears, then we’re moving back to an earlier period when authors weren’t citing sources and could just say whatever they wanted. We’re coming out of an industrial-oriented society that wanted everything to be added up and quantified into a virtual society where that’s less valuable.” Watts opted to cut pages from the text of her book rather than have the bibliography separated on a website.<sup>x</sup>

Others authors are seeing the separation of the scholarly trappings from the text as allowing the full apparatus to still be made public and also the inclusion of other data and supplementary texts which might have been excluded in an exclusively print publication. They saw the relegation of the less readable and consulted aspects of a work to the publisher’s website as a cost savings which would enable the continued printing of scholarly works.<sup>xi</sup> Indeed, this study of academic library collections is following the new trend of “publishing” the voluminous data tables on the ALA ACRL website instead of printing them in the volume of text.

While not everyone’s ideal solution, the hybrid book, at least for the time being, seemed to be a solution to the question asked by the 1997 symposium, “How Will I Get Tenure if You Won’t Publish My Book?” At that symposium the problems with both the printed book and the

electronic book became apparent to the attendees from academe and the publishing world. The main publishers of scholarly works, the university presses, were the first to begin experimenting with a split or divided book.

Throughout the 1990s the discussion of the printed monograph becoming an obsolete format and being completely converted to an electronic product had assumed that the whole of books would become electronic. When the expense and problems of long-term preservation of electronic works began to be apparent, the initial enthusiasm for digital publishing began to wane. There was also resistance from academe as to how peer review and refereeing would be reconciled with electronic publication. Librarians began to point out the advantages of paper as a permanent format versus the unknowns of software and hardware becoming obsolete and digital texts becoming un-accessible. It seems likely that the e-book will not totally replace all printed books, but will simply provide new formats for libraries and readers.

The most encouraging sign at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was the assumption that the book as an entity which had existed and multiplied in great quantities since the invention of printing, over 500 years ago, would continue to exist. The book might agree as Mark Twain had once wryly quipped, "Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

The evolution or migration to electronic format may be a fortuitous development for collection analysis and assessment. Data on usage of texts, and even usage by segments or portions of texts, may be much easier to collect and more readily available in all types of libraries, as will data on the distribution of resources by subject and language parameters. In the future, studies of resources may be divided into print and electronic rather than monograph and serial. Rather than bringing an end to the monograph as we have known it, the electronic text will become another category of resource we need to select and assess.

When more texts are electronic files will we still refer to them by the same terms that

differentiated types of scholarly communication and research reporting – journal, book, article? Or leisure reading, novel, short story or essay, poetry collection? Will the book have a new name? Or will we be comfortable with a term which has included all manner of published materials bound in one volume? The title of the first best seller e-book, *Riding the Bullet* released in 2000 by Stephen King, may turn out to be ironically prophetic. For the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at least, it appears that academic libraries will be continue to be “riding the bullet” of technological and economic change.

### Notes for Chapter VIII

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- i. Dennis Dillon, “Digital Books: Making them Work for Publishers and Librarians,” *C&RL News* 61, no.3 (May 2000): 391.
- ii. Walt Crawford, “Nine Models, One Name: Untangling the E-Book Muddle,” *American Libraries* 31, no.8 (September 2000): 56-59.
- iii. Gregory L. Anderson, “More e-Book Thoughts,” *American Libraries* 31, no. 9 (October 2000): 34.
- iv. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press As An Agent of Change* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- v. Daniel Greenstein, “Publishing Scholarly Information in a Digital Millenium,” *Computers and the Humanities* 32, no. 4 (1998): 254.
- vi. Barbara M. Jones, 50-51.
- vii. Helena Katalin Szepe, “Metaphors of the book in Renaissance Venice,” *Inquiry* (University of South Florida), 1, no.1(Spring 1998): 4-5.
- viii. *Ibid.*, 5.
- ix. Doreen Carvajal, “Books get Shorter as Bibliographies Are Banished to the Web,” *New York Times Book Review Online*, accessed May 29, 2000. Need URL
- x. *Ibid.*

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xi. Ibid.

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