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# Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Atom and Eve, or, On The Beginning of New Things

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# Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Atom and Eve, or, On The Beginning of New Things

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I hark from a time when a book was a book: multiple pages bound together within some kind of cover, something you could hold in your hands. For those of us who worked in bookstores, the main divide was between trade books and textbooks. Trade books were for the retail book trade (thus the name), and textbooks were readily identifiable by their oversized format, their flimsy cardboard bindings and the questions at the end of each chapter. Publishers like **Random House** and **Doubleday** ruled the trade side, while **Prentice-Hall**, **Addison-Wesley**, and **Houghton Mifflin** were among the giants of textbook publishing.

Hardcover books were called hardbacks and paperbacks had emerged from being “pocket-books” (now called mass-market paperbacks) to also include trade paperbacks, emulating the size of hardbacks. The more genteel term “softcover” had yet to come into vogue.

Later, when I ventured into academic book-selling, I learned that there was a vast amount of scholarly publishing that was taking place which never touched the average **B Dalton**’s shelves. Scholarly and technical works, the titles of which I could barely pronounce, let alone understand, came from publishers large and small, most operating independently: **Pergamon Press**, **Academic Press**, **Plenum Press**, **Kluwer**, countless societies and associations, and of course the university presses, which were still publishing gems in press runs numbering in the low-hundreds that would never otherwise see the light of day.

In this rich and varied environment, I grew up professionally, allowed to perform tasks that put me in daily contact with these artifacts of information and entertainment. From the bookstores I acquired the skill of being able to stack books all the way up my arm to move them from one place to another. From my library and wholesaler work, I knew how to “read shelves”, a kind of cave-man’s sensory federated search for finding the title being hunted.

I got to look inside books with colorful jackets, with plain cloth covers, or with plush padded covers which my co-worker, **Joe Sheckman**, used to call “crushed ooze.” I opened books ranging from miniature formats that could be hidden in the palm of my hand, to folio edi-

tions of rare works. I touched and looked inside limited edition art books that sold for thousands of dollars each, as well as remaindered trash novels that could be had for under a dollar. I devoured any title that came from either **Rizzoli** or **Abrams**, celebrating their graphics and their commitment to bring fine art within reach of the common man. I gawked, along with my co-workers, at pictorial guides for dermatologists, after which we all washed our hands and said a silent “thank you” for being spared the diseases pictured therein.

As we grew older and started our family, children’s books populated our home and our lives. *Goodnight Moon* and *Green Eggs and Ham* and countless other gems became our daily reading matter. Outings to the local public library to romp among the myriad of scattered kid’s books became a dual form of entertainment and daycare. We taught our daughter the value of books, extolled the virtues of reading, used books to fill her hungry mind and feed her imagination.

A book was a book was a book. All of them like-enough objects that everyone recognized the species. We bought them, collected them, shelved them, traded them, gave them as presents, shared them with friends, talked about them over cocktails, wrote about them in reviews, thought about how much better they inevitably were than the movies from which they were made. We studied what was in them to learn, to build a better life, to make the world a better place, to gain credentials, to become independent, thinking people. And, at one time or another, we all thought about writing one. Books. Objects. Things.

Defining a book is now not so simple. In the age of the electron a book may be recognized as a whole thing, or be identified by one of its component parts. We now enter an era where books will be defined by the experience of the user, rather than their physical format. For tomes read “cover-to-cover” the term book may still apply, as in “I read a cool book online recently.” Where essential facts are sought and discovered, a book will simply be a database. To the student or researcher it will not matter whether the original object was a book, an article, or just data. When A&I services and other

search-and-access tools offer-up chapters in the same way they now take users to e-journal articles, those users will have no need to differentiate between the two. The chapter will become an article. The book will become a single-issue/single-topic journal.

eBook as book, eBook as database, eBook as special journal. Read from PCs, accessed from laptops, downloaded onto **i-Phones**, **PDA**s, and **i-Pods**. Stored, copy-and-pasted, bookmarked, highlighted, tagged, spidered, parsed.

Books have undergone this kind of transformation before. With the advent of moveable type, the creation of books went from being a highly personal, individual process controlled by monks in monasteries, to a mechanical product of mass production. To the cleric who created illuminated manuscripts, the change was earthshaking, bewildering, and more than a little threatening. The ability to create numerous works on a massive scale released control over production to the general populace, opening the way for the broad-based development of secularized literature and leading eventually to the democratization of societies. While we celebrate this now as progress, at the time it felt to many like anarchy and the end of social order.

I don’t dread the arrival of eBooks. They expand the reach of knowledge. They heighten the speed of discourse. They can be made compact in ways that printed books cannot, something of occasional importance to those of us who spend way too much time on jets and in airports. They allow the expansion of the “in-print” lifespan of books far beyond anything that could be accomplished in a world of physical inventory. They will not be denied, nor should they be. On a personal level, their arrival creates new challenges and opportunities for me professionally, and are the vehicle by which booksellers who make the leap to eBooks hope to assure their long-term survival.

As this new **Gutenberg** age transforms books from three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional space, something will still be lost for those of us who grew up with physical books. For me, the memory of holding a book, feeling the texture of the paper as I turn its pages, smelling that same paper, is part of the relationship I’ve formed with certain works. The musty smells of old books tickle my nose, relaying olfactory stories of their survival. The different smell of glossy stock is a foreshadowing of graphic works that will delight my eye as well as tweak my nose. Hand-crafted books speak to me of the affection that an artisan

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## Vendor Library Relations from page 74

has transferred to those titles. What similar sensory and emotional responses will be awakened, delighted by eBooks?

Within my working lifetime, we will no longer make any differentiation between physical books and eBooks. eBooks will rule and be the accepted norm. Perhaps the word “book” in any form will pass into oblivion, the same way early cars were called horseless carriages, a term that has no meaning in today’s world. Will that be something lamentable? I think not. It will just mean we’ve witnessed, participated in, and survived a very big change, but survive it we will. We’ll all enjoy the benefits of having easy access to virtually limitless information about the world. For those of us inclined to still have books we can hold, bookstores of some sort will still be around, though they may be the equivalent of antique stores today. So be it. I like antiques. I may be one myself someday.

In the meantime, I intend to welcome the new with a minimum of lamentation for the old. What comes is inevitable. As **Dickens** reminds us:

*“Change begets change. Nothing propagates so fast. If a man habituated to a narrow circle of cares and pleasures, out of which he seldom travels, step beyond it, though for never so brief a space, his departure from the monotonous scene on which he has been an actor of importance would seem to be the signal for instant confusion.... The mine which Time has slowly dug beneath familiar objects is sprung in an instant; and what was rock before, becomes but sand and dust.”* 🌳

## Rumors from page 73

also have a **Bet You Missed** it on p. 73. Your crack **ATG** staff – **at work!**

And the awesome **Christine Fischer** has taken over the **Group Therapy** column from two able predecessors – **Rosann Bazirjian** and **Beth Bernhardt!** How does your library handle **database trials**? Ours does a lot of them and they are year-round affairs, not a cyclical event. Do you tell teaching faculty about them? See this issue, p.65 for an interesting discussion of this continuing issue.

And speaking of awesome! The fabulously wonderful **Margaret Landesman** has collected some incredibly interesting articles on initiatives by public libraries. Coming up in the February issue of **ATG!** I ask again, have you renewed your subscription?

Saw the amazingly energetic **Anne Langley** <anne.langley@duke.edu> at the **Charleston Conference** in November. **Anne** is Chemistry Librarian at **Duke University** and she and **Helle Lauridsen (ProQuest)** spoke about “deep indexing.” This is the data that is available in tables, figures, and graphics that in the past has been difficult to access. **Anne’s** case study, this issue, p.83 is about something entirely different, though. She asks what to do with a new employee.

What is the single **biggest game changer** that will alter scholarly communication in the next 3-5 years? This is just one of the questions that the bam-zowie **Greg Tananbaum** asked his panel during the **2007 Charleston Conference**. He summarizes briefly in this issue, p. 80.

And I hope that you all heard the wonderful paper by **Bill Hannay** (especially his rendition of “Ready for Teddy”) during the **2007 Charleston Conference**. And if you didn’t, shame on you. Still, we have his paper for an upcoming issue.

And, thanks to the incredibly hard-working **Ramune Kubilius** <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu> there are tons of other meeting reports in this issue, p.53.

**Be sure and visit the new ATG NEWS CHANNEL at [www.against-the-grain.com](http://www.against-the-grain.com)!**

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Yr. Ed. 🌳

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REVERSE  
SIDE

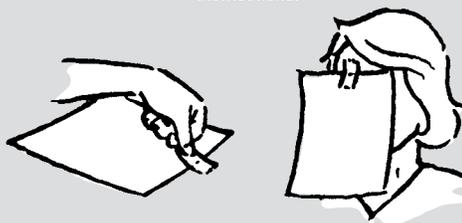
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