

Sarah Stanton, for Budapest conference

Monograph publishing

An endangered species or the survival of the fittest

Slide 1 Opening slide of endangered species

The death of the monograph has been greatly exaggerated. It hasn't died as a species, but only the fittest will survive in the long term.

Slide 2. Let me show you a picture of old CUP, where the editorial offices used to be, the Pitt Building set in the heart of Cambridge, often mistaken for a college of the University.

Slide 3. Here inside are the Syndics of the Press, wearing their gowns, sitting in judgement on the publishing proposals which I and my colleagues put forward. They are there to guarantee scholarly merit, to check that the book is worthy of the imprint of the University. They still meet in that old building in the centre, (without gowns now), and they do scrutinise our papers, except that nowadays they are very likely also to ask questions about the commercial value of the books we propose to publish, whether we shall in fact make any money from them. They are asking us to square the circle: to publish good books which also make some money, or at least, cover their costs. We can't just take it for granted that good books will find a market.

Slide 4. Here, outside the town, is the modern building where we staff now work. This new functional building suggests the modern marketplace economy.

At the moment, across the English speaking universities at least, there is still an urgent need to publish monographs – on the part of the authors. More people need to write than to read. In the UK context, the demands of the Research Assessment Exercise mean that if you don't publish your research in some form or other, you won't be very welcome for very long within any UK humanities department – whether that be a department of literature, philosophy, religious studies, classics or indeed the more practical and professional subjects like music. In North America,

publishing the fruits of research in monograph form is still very much the route to promotion and tenure.

Slide 5. What do I mean by monographs? Here are a few examples from different disciplines. I include not only works of research by single hands, but collaborative enterprises too, or volumes of essays. These are published in hardback, at least initially and at high prices, reflecting small print runs.

For the publishing editor, the context is commercial as well as intellectual.

-----remember please the dismal truth that the academic editor is more interested in the number of *buyers* of any given book (whether they are libraries, individual scholars, undergraduates) than the number of *readers*. The buyers supply the revenue and the revenue feeds back into the publishing programme. {CUP has charitable status; there are no shareholders }

The *range* of outlets for specialised and detailed work, based on primary sources or original fieldwork, has shrunk considerably, even over the last three years. And this is because the academic library *and* individual market has shrunk. The reasons are too well known to go into, and pre-date this particular recession, but are chiefly to do with the slow decline of institutional funding, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.

You might say that the bamboo forest has been cut down, exposing the giant panda.

As a direct result, and because they are no longer rescued by their parent universities, so-called university presses are under threat. In the UK, Middlesex UP announced closure towards the end of 2009. Others are banding together to see how they can withstand the recession (*Bookseller* announcement in August) and some may change their nature, becoming more like publishing outlets for their own faculty rather than semi-independent outfits.

The publishing editor's acquisitions are a mixture of books that are commissioned, that we go out and get, and books that are submitted, what we call 'unsolicited'. The

categories are too blunt, and many books come about as a mixture of these things, of course. But the monographs that we are talking about, works of specialised research which are written for your peers rather than for students, will be among the ‘unsolicited’. There is a ready supply of such titles, for reasons above, but they are not the big earners for publishers, rather the books that you want and need to write to contribute to the discipline, which arise naturally from your research. Simply to have your research work published fulfils *at the moment*, one of the criteria of being a successful academic. To be published by a prestigious academic press is a further step up the academic ladder. Unit sales are often unimportant to the academic writer, except to his or her vanity, rarely of much material benefit because the royalties are low or non-existent.

In the areas of literature, theatre, music, classics, philosophy and religion – which is what CUP at least understands by humanities publishing - , we publish around 300 new titles per year. Of these about 120 are hardback-only monographs, (not textbooks, not reference books). That is a very big proportion compared with, say, Routledge or Blackwells, whose priorities are different. But CUP, though a thoroughly academic press, cannot survive on a diet of academic monographs alone. That 40% of our output in fact earns much less than 40% our income, and nowadays we need to publish more and more titles in order to achieve that same income, because the shrinking market means there are fewer copies sold for each title. We have to run faster to stay in the same place.

Slide 6 (Companions) Our greater income comes from textbooks, books for students (Cambridge Companions) or

Slide 7 high-level textual editions or

Slide 8 reference works, such as Cambridge Histories, books with a long shelf life or an annual buying cycle.

In some subject areas, I feel bound to advise authors to publish their more specialised works as journal articles. Journals is big business, providing reliable, upfront income.

Slide 9. The falloff in journal subscriptions is real, but less drastic than books, and online dissemination of journals mean that such articles can be widely consulted.

Journals may have less street credibility than books, perhaps, in traditional Humanities subjects, but publishers love them.

Although the university press is under threat, conversely, there are now other *non-university* publishers who have made a success of publishing large numbers of monographs or other hardback publications: Palgrave (part of Macmillan), Continuum and Ashgate, to name but three. There is a model that works. The research monograph, to extend the Darwinian metaphor rather absurdly, is like the North American bison, no longer ranging freely on the great plains, but brought back from the brink of extinction to live peaceably in the protected reserves.

Bison slide. 10

Such publishers recognise that the monograph business works nowadays, if it works at all, by publishing under the umbrella of academic series and by reducing the number of bespoke titles, by cutting down on copyediting, introducing a conveyor-belt production line, by herding those bison or buffalo into ring-fenced parks and publishing zillions of them, knowing, as I said before, that each will achieve modest sales and therefore has to make sense economically by high prices, low overheads and little or no royalty: they don't make authors rich and they may not make them particularly happy: authors have to learn to adapt to these new and usually unwelcome market conditions, to be low-maintenance, ready to adhere to the press editor's strictures about length, to pay for their own pictures and permission fees, and accept little or no advertising.

However, before we brutally categorise every species of monograph or research publication in this gloomy way, we have to distinguish between books and between authors: the authors are very different in profile, and the books do sell very variously. At one end the high flying author on his or her third book, pushing the boundaries of their subject, selling perhaps as many as 600-800 copies and maybe even with a simultaneous paperback.

Slide 11 See for example Andrew Wallace Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* which uses the author's deep knowledge of Italy and his involvement with excavations

at Pompeii and Herculaneum to bring together the material evidence for changes in taste and lifestyle with the literary evidence. We sold in hardback first and then a year later paperbacked the volume and sold 1400 copies in one year.

Slide 12, Or take *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* by St Clair.

Cheeringly, the original, well-researched, adventurous, big topics which overturn long-held assumptions, still can sell more than just a few hundred copies in hardback, followed by a properly-advertised paperback edition. St. Clair's book on reading practices in 18th century is one such example. I could cite other examples, but maybe only one in 20.

Slide 13 of global reach.

Global distribution is important in a specialised market. We have offices, like all the major presses, all over the world, to maximise sales. The English language is our greatest asset. The global reach of a good monograph can be 20-40 countries, not all English-speaking, with significant sales in Asia, for example, and in Europe in countries like Germany and the Netherlands. The sale of translation rights is another crucial way in which we disseminate books first written in English..

At the other end of the scale from the popular monography is a more familiar species, the newly published revised dissertation on a specialised topic of limited appeal. First-time authors have a hard time getting noticed. We give frequent talks on how to do convert your thesis, how to enlarge its frame of reference, cut down on footnotes, start to sell your topic rather than merely defend it. But we shall end up selling perhaps 400 copies, comparing quite favourably with other university presses. The margins of success/failure are like Dickens' Mr Micawber at this lower end of the scale: 50 copies here or there really make a difference to our notions of profit and loss.

Slide 14 of polar bear

To extend our metaphor again, life is dangerously near the edge for this particular polar bear, the revised dissertation, where the refuge of the ice floe can surely only be temporary in a slowly-melting sea.

.On a happier note: few bricks and mortar bookshops nowadays sell academic titles, but there are new ways to market in recent years, include the huge success of Amazon and e-retail generally. These are enormously useful in advertising and selling specialist works. Amazon itself demands big discounts; it is not a *free* site for publishers, but sales through that channel more than compensate for the expense as they offer great exposure and ease of purchase.

One further positive move of recent years is the prospect of an even longer shelf life. If your book does take off, and the publisher sells the prospective 400-500 copies, then nowadays there is no problem about keeping it in print. Most big publishers of academic books now have an amazing system of on-demand re-printing, if not of first time printing, whereby they print and bind just 10 or 20 copies at a time, fulfilling orders as they come in and repeating the process as often as once a fortnight, if required. Publishers make money doing this, and such digital printing is also our best way of putting hardback publications into paperback after a couple of years. This breakthrough in publishing technology has been as momentous to CUP as new online methods of publication.

What is the threat to the print world of the online business? CUP, in line with several other big presses, makes all its new research works available also in electronic files, to be sold as e-books, either individually or as part of a sale to a library aggregator such as Net Library, or, increasingly as part of the publisher's own scholarly collection such as Oxford Scholarship Online or the forthcoming Cambridge Books Online (early 2010).

However, in the industry as a whole there is not so far an observable tipping point in favour of online dissemination of monographs. A small percentage of our revenue, perhaps 3-5% in Humanities subjects, comes from e-books. The evidence so far is that such sales complement rather than substitute for print sales at the monograph level.

Online publishing is not, contrary to popular belief, cheap or or easy for the publisher. Instead there are new categories of cost: the person-cost of digital mark-up and tagging of the text; of creating functionality; the cost of building and maintaining the

publisher's online platform. In the case of the digital publication of existing print material, for every cost that is apparently saved in electronic publishing, another seems to replace it.

There is also the problem of how the traditional print publisher reaches the same marketplace with an online publication. This is a real issue: the commercial relationships between publishers, wholesalers, booksellers and libraries are less entrenched, still to be honed, and therefore expensive in an online environment.

Summary: how long do I think the academic monograph in Humanities will survive? A few more years? To my retirement, perhaps. While the academy still continues to promote and hire staff on the strength of their publishing record, monographs will survive *in some form*. Costs will continue to go down, and sales will go down even further, but the 'best' will survive, like the stubborn feisty bison, and in fact, if they get into print, they will remain in print for many, many years.