

Book Reviews

***Trevor Colbourn,
Editor***

Gordon Graham and Richard Abel, eds., *The Book in the United States Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1996). Paperback, \$21.95.

I approached this book with interest. After all, who better to put together a collection of essays on the U.S. book trade but Gordon Graham and Richard Abel—two well-known “bookmen.” I was not disappointed. This work covers most areas of the U.S. book industry, and looks at its history, present, and future. It is the story and assessment of the world’s largest book industry “from publisher to library by way of book dealer and wholesalers.”

Originally published as a special issue of *Logos*, this book is an informative collection of essays written by a group of well-known personalities in the book trade. Each author writes from a different background, and the personal viewpoints of each are evident throughout.

Two major themes are present in most of the essays: the growth and concentration into larger units (superstores and large publishing corporations) and the electronic future of publishing. The importance of libraries to the trade is another recurring theme.

What is to be the fate of independent booksellers in the age of superstores? Most industry watchers think that they will survive. In a personal look at independent book selling, Bill Kramer of Kramerbooks (Washington, DC) sums up the future: “Independents, like the small mammals of the late Jurassic, will have to forage among the dangerous footfalls of the giants.” Independents offer hand selling, reacting quickly to new ideas, and response to local needs, according to Kramer. The twentieth century was a golden time for personal book retailers; however, Kramer fears that the twenty-first century may see the dawn of impersonal book selling.

Stephen Howath of Borders takes the other side, stating that “the major ingredient in superstores is service.” Admitting that superstores’ priorities are growth and a contest for market share, Howath discusses how such stores are organized and how they function. An interesting and revealing comparison of major superstores in areas such as service, inventory, and price is part of his essay. As a customer of each, I enjoy the convenience of the superstore inventory and the discounted prices but find that most lack the personal touch of the independent.

The book wholesaler is important to both. Giving an overview of wholesaling and gazing into his crystal ball, Steven Mason of Ingram Library Services believes that wholesalers will provide “the book” in whatever its format and will continue to lead the industry in innovation and technology.

Richard Abel, whose company supplied books to academic libraries in the U.S. and throughout the world in the 1960s and 1970s, covers the internationalization of the U.S. book trade; Al Silverman, CEO of the Book of the Month Club, discusses the rise and fall of book clubs; and Robert Worth, with 40 years of textbook publishing experience, goes into detail on that industry’s “privileges, peculiarities, and peccadilloes.”

Paperback books have had an enormous impact on our society. Betty Ballantine, one of the founders of Bantam Books, prepared a wonderful account of the growth of the paperback book market, from the “paperback revolution of the 1940’s to today’s paperback as big business.”

Eric Newman of the American Medical Publishers Association provides a look into the world of medical publishing, where journals are “high-priced, narrowly focused: and drug advertising is a unique and very profitable part of advertising revenue.” As is the case in other areas of publishing, online services, CD-ROM, software, and other nonprint electronic formats are the fastest growing part of medical publishing.

Peter Bodman of Academic Press sees the scientific publishing world undergoing upheaval and being greatly influenced by the development of the Internet, the decrease in academic research library funding, and the librarian/scientists’ revolt against journal publishers. In a not so surprising view, Bodman states that libraries should ensure that their funding keeps pace with publisher price increases. On the other hand, librarians have accused publishers of price gouging.

Changes in the scholarly communication process are being discussed among publishers—especially university presses and science/technology/medical publishers as well as librarians. Hendrick Edelman of Rutgers University calls for an alliance of publishers and academic libraries that he finds essential for the future of academic library collections. As libraries’ buying power has diminished, new technologies and formats have appeared that create great challenges for leadership in today’s academic libraries.

Another possible change in scholarly communication is an even closer relationship between libraries and university presses. Libraries may distribute scholarly materials electronically produced by university presses, according to Naomi Pascal of the University of Washington Press. Whatever the outcome, university presses will continue to occupy their small but significant niche in scholarly publishing.

Societal publishers face many of the challenges and problems of other publishers, with electronic publishing among the most challenging, according to Judy Haroviak, American Geophysical Union. Both university press and societal publishers are grappling with the challenges of electronic publications including accessibility, cost factors, and copyright and intellectual property issues.

In her paper on electronic publishing, Susan Whisler of the University of California Press predicts that within ten years 10%-20% of titles will be in print only. The other 80%-90% will be exclusively electronic or multiple format titles. Interestingly enough, she states that early experience in the current transition period indicates that online access boosts the sale of print. In his essay about reference book publishing, Joseph Esposito of *Encyclopedia Britannica* finds that while publishing in electronic formats is still maturing, the *Online Britannica* has become the primary form of the reference.

Martin Levin and Donald Lamm have opposite opinions concerning the role of large corporations in publishing. Presenting case histories of three imprints—Macmillan, Random House, and Simon and Schuster—Martin Levin, an intellectual property lawyer, states that the influence of large corporations has been positive. This is not the view of Donald Lamm, President of W. W. Norton. Lamm states that “the structure of

publishing in the 1990's creates a danger for the book in the very industry that produces and disseminates it." Concerned about the future of the book in our increasing aliterate (the ability to read without the desire to do so) society, Lamm sees the book coexisting with the computer, a view shared by librarians.

Werner Linz of Continuum Publishing provides an informative look at religious publishing, discussing the history of U.S. religious publishing as well as its current trends. Lenz finds that the whole market for religious books has always been strong, but that today that market is "enormous."

Juvenile publishing is also expanding rapidly, with annual sales of \$1.2 billion. Charles Gates of Intervisual Books covers the world of children's book publishing. Cameron S. Mosley, the originator of the familiar "universal ownership label" found in textbooks, writes about school publishing from the days of Webster and McGuffey to the current day, when sales to schools in 1995 were over \$5 billion. However, that same year \$3.4 billion was spent for bananas and \$9 billion on pizzas. Unfortunately, U.S. schools spend only \$100 per student annually on books.

Writing from a librarian's perspective, Mary R. Somerville, past president of the American Library Association, discusses the public libraries' mission and historical significance. With over 40 million adult Americans not able to read or write beyond the third grade level, adult illiteracy is a major problem. Strong library programs are needed to combat this problem. While the book is still the library's "stock and trade," Somerville acknowledges that computer access is becoming increasingly important.

A discussion of small and alternative publishers was not included in this volume; perhaps their role is not considered to be sufficiently important by the editors. It is an interesting omission, not that all areas of the book trade could be covered.

The essays point out the tremendous diversity within the U.S. book trade. It has grown so large that, as Gordon Graham states, "its vital parts are ignorant of each other." In many ways, the existence of this book will help to remedy that situation. It is certainly a must read for those interested in the book and its future—especially scholars and librarians.

—Barry B. Baker

Is your institution a metropolitan university?

If your university serves an urban/metropolitan region and subscribes to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Metropolitan Universities printed elsewhere in this issue, your administration should seriously consider joining the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities.

Historically, most universities have been associated with cities, but the relationship between "the town and the gown" has often been distant or abrasive. Today the metropolitan university cultivates a close relationship with the urban center and its suburbs, often serving as a catalyst for change and source of enlightened discussion. Leaders in government and business agree that education is the key to prosperity, and that metropolitan universities will be on the cutting edge of education not only for younger students, but also for those who must continually re-educate themselves to meet the challenges of the future.

The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities brings together institutions who share experiences and expertise to speak with a common voice on important social issues. A shared sense of mission is the driving force behind Coalition membership. However, the Coalition also offers a number of tangible benefits: ten free subscriptions to *Metropolitan Universities*, additional copies at special rates to distribute to boards and trustees, a newsletter on government and funding issues, a clearinghouse of innovative projects, reduced rates at Coalition conventions. . . .

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