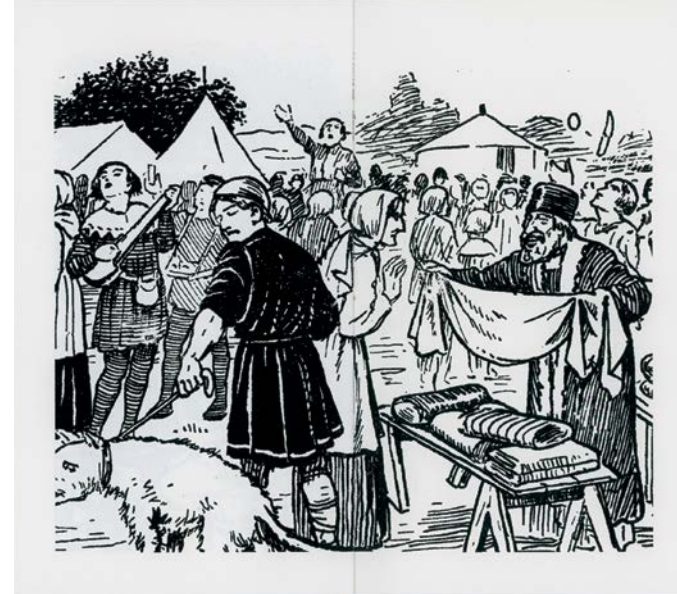
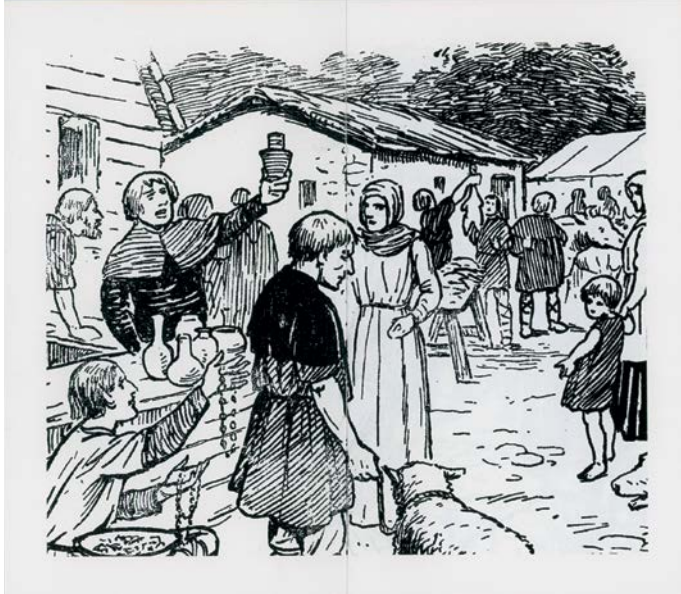


The Common Publisher



Fair
8pp, 200 x 105, inkjet
on white cartridge,
sewn pamphlet;
single example, 2006.

p.2-7

During the mid-1970s I worked in the office of the supplier of UK published books to the Library of Congress in Washington DC. The selection procedure for the accessioning of new titles for the library excluded very little in the way of new material (romantic fiction and school-level textbooks being two categories automatically precluded). Ordered, processed and despatched weekly were examples of the broad range of trade and academic publishing, as well as a far greater proportion of material, wholly specific by way of its being for example, local or literary or political; or to side-step classification, just inherently obscure. If one single factor distinguishes this considerable eclectic area of publishing activity, it is that the numbers produced and distributed of each title are insignificant when compared to the type of publishing practised by commercial publishers.

One particularly extreme example in terms of the activity and purpose of publishing was a self-published pamphlet listing and annotating references to *Cricket in the writings of James Joyce*. A copy had been deposited with the British Library (as legally required for the purposes of copyright), which had classified, catalogued and listed it in their fortnightly supplement to the British National Bibliography. The title was ordered from the author, who supplied it from his edition of

just twenty copies for the listed price of *nothing*. The overall cost of producing the twenty copies obviously amounted to next to nothing compared to the cost of say, several thousand copies of a hardback novel; but importantly, and significantly, because the work was offered free on demand it stood outside of commerce.

The author/publisher had made a pragmatic decision of productional scale based on, and in terms of, a considered assessment of the potential audience for his title. Of course, over and above all such considerations was that the twenty pamphlets would arrive and end in the hands of readers who would appreciate and find some use in the purpose of his research; but as well, the publication can be seen as a model of one extremity within a breadth of publishing approaches. Another 'hypothetical' model at another extremity, sharing certain similarities with the above example but contrasting with others, might be a volume of the same number of pages, but with an unoriginal and finely printed text, bound using elegant materials and published in a similarly restrictive edition, but selling for a very high price.

The publisher not only sets the terms for the practice in the price of publications, but also develops the strategies for how they are to be made. These productional decisions are to a lesser

or greater extent based on assumptions or models of how the material should end up looking, and more often than not various compromises come into play. At one extreme, an edition of a book can be written out by hand, echoing precisely the methodology of the scriptorium; and thereafter the sophistications of later reproductive technologies are all available, limited only by the equation of capital against expediency. However, the handicap of limited financial input should be seen in the context of the freedoms inherent in the license to publish.

To take again the two examples above, the publisher of the Joyce work establishes an *academic* control (in that it is not the product of an institution as such) whereas, the publisher of the elegant volume establishes an *aesthetic* control. In both cases, with each new title, the publisher reasserts control particular to the concerns and subject-matters of the project of the work; and in developing and establishing a practice for publication, generates control along with the continual practical consequences of that control.

Outside of the domain of free floating and arbitrary patterns of information—individual titles wholly displaced from subject groupings—it is the imperative for association that makes a copy of the Joyce work sit most comfortably as an appendix to the Joyce oeuvre and to other critical

works on this writer. It might, in addition, sit in similar comfort with other bibliographical works, citing the occurrence of the particular within a single literary output ('Asparagus in the writings of Marcel Proust' perhaps). To apply such an imperative to the 'Fine Press' example, where the associations are to be found in the productional qualities of other hands, either contemporaneous or historic; or, where the associations are isolative in the extreme, in an imprint-tethered collection, then the essential nature of such aesthetic production is to contain each title within the oeuvre of the publisher.

In principle, the more limited in quantity in which a publication is produced, the less likely it is that copies will survive *anywhere*. By virtue of this, the historical earliest, for example—the *first*—is intriguing only inasmuch as there can never be any definitive retrospective view, residual culture is bound to be fragmentary and incomplete. This shortcoming was perfectly stated by Michael Morrow, director of one of the first 'early music' groups, Musica Reservata, when he declared that "everyone has to knit their own Middle Ages".

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