

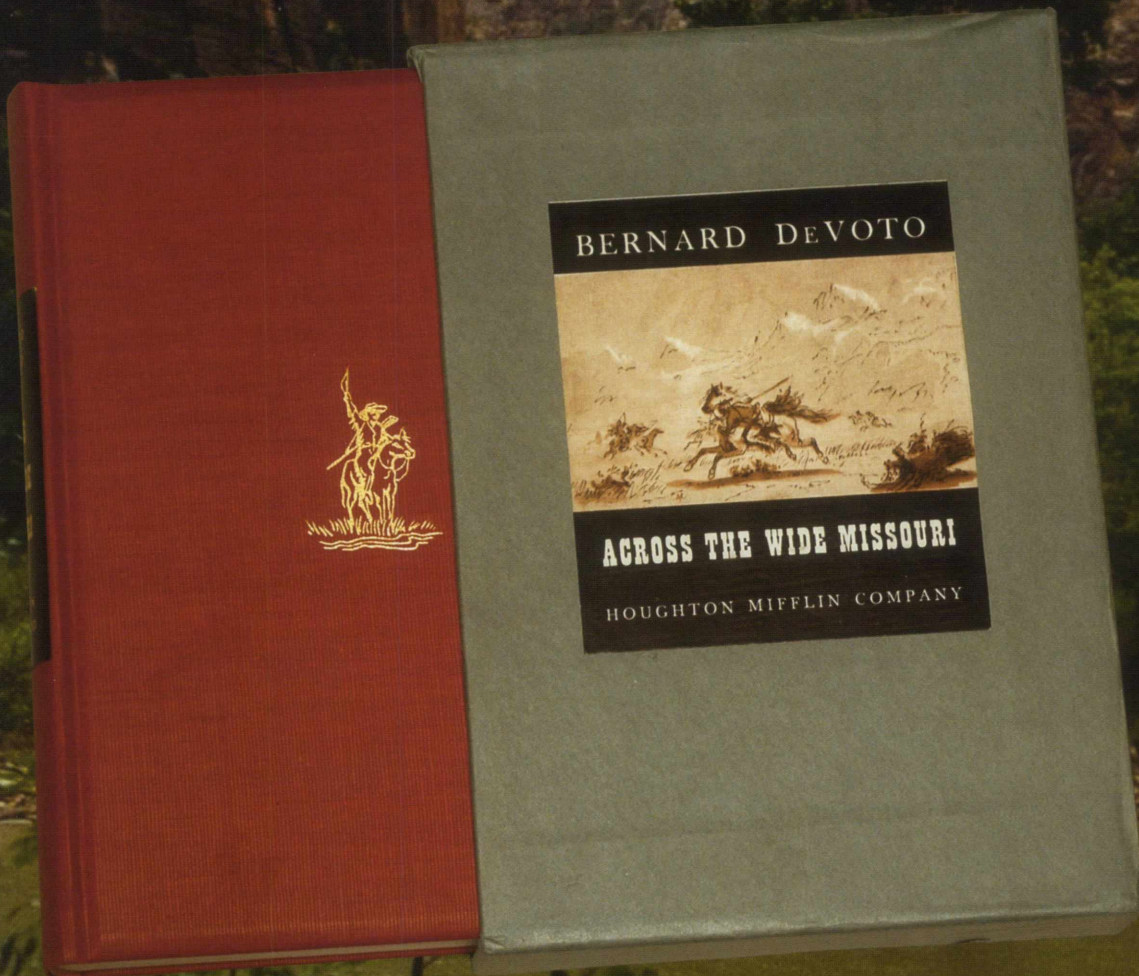
September 2007 Volume 17, Number 7 \$5.95

FIRSTS

THE BOOK COLLECTOR'S MAGAZINE

Bernard DeVoto

The
Future of
Collecting



Writing & the Mind of Man

by Lee Biondi

WE ARE PRIVILEGED to be in the midst of an intellectual and societal revolution. There is a change coming—already here for some of us—in the way the human mind works in relation to the stimulants of its environment, and therefore in the way we think, and therefore in the way we write.

This change is, of course, the Internet, and the attendant electronic variants that computing will bring once computer usage is completely second nature to us.

What will happen to books when computing is woven into every moment of the fabric of our daily existence? For some people, such computer usage already is second nature and is taken for granted, but those of us who would subscribe to a magazine devoted to book collecting are, by psychology and by self-definition, “antiquarians”—collectors of books as historically situated objects. Most of us have been, as a group, slower to come around to the new technologies. Such a reaction is predictable among self-proclaimed antiquarians. We fear, to varying degrees, this disruption the new technologies have in store for us and our collecting endeavors. If things change, what will they become? How will changes affect our comfort level in the world of book collecting with which we are now familiar? Will this comfort level be taken away from us?

Certainly changes are coming. Many changes have already taken place that all of us have noticed.

Many changes have already taken place that we have not yet noticed because of the pace of the modern world.

But change is not necessarily catastrophic. This is why I would like to focus in this essay on *continuities*, rather than *disruptions*. I would like to do this by drawing attention to the grand continuity, the great human arc of alphabetic thought and written communication.

I would like to postulate this mental apparatus in the human being as a sustainable continuity regardless of the technology employed for the *generation, storage, transmission* and *retrieval* of written works. *Generation* being to my mind the most important, with storage, transmission and retrieval technologies being mere servants. And I would further like to postulate that this continuity is not merely sustainable by a concerted effort of antiquarians such as ourselves but, in fact, that this intellectual continuity is an irrefutable imperative of our species. I would like to emphasize that, regardless of the technologies employed, the meat of the matter is the substance of the thoughts expressed: *the content*.

Once any technology designed for the transmission of human communication passes its rudimentary practical stage of transmitting only necessary informative “data,” it becomes a technology ready for higher-level communication. By this I mean philosophy, scientific theory, theology,

metaphysical speculation and literature.

Ancient writing systems were first developed because of the need to finalize and agree upon—and to be able to refer back to—the details of quotidian matters, mostly financial: business contracts, sales contracts, payrolls, agricultural borderlines, etc. It is often surprising to newcomers to the history of the origins of writing that the first forms of writing were not attempts to imitate spoken language, but were predominantly pictographic (representational of real objects) and numerical. Sound theories on the topic suggest that writing in its infancy developed not with or from spoken language, but rather from the need to memorialize acts of counting.

After this level of contractual matters and basic transactional memorialization had been sorted out, humans had other uses for ancient writing systems such as cuneiform. Clay tablets eventually graduated from minor contracts to *The Gilgamesh Epic* and other flood narratives, as well as other fictions intended for pleasure and/or enlightenment. Early Greek papyri carried wills and payrolls, but eventually included the books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and the books of the New Testament.

The computer age has had a similar genesis so far: punch cards, data processing and number crunching came along first, but the technologies have now evolved into vehicles for Bartleby.com, Project Gutenberg, questia.com, Google Books, etc. (that is, projects involving e-texts of preexisting works). And the Internet has moved along to Internet publication, or at least prepublication, of original works of fiction. We have seen experiments with the form in some of the works of Stephen King, Elmore Leonard and William Gibson.

I would like to consider that the electronics in our immediate future and long foreseeable future are a continuation of the printed book in the way that the printed book was a continuation of the manuscript tradition, or the codex was a continuation—a refinement—of the scroll.

Basically, fair copies by hand, printed books and e-texts are all replicator technologies and they are

all mere sections of the greater historical arc. Certainly, new technologies bring variations on traditions, but they do not have to destroy traditions. Writing technologies did not destroy oral tradition. The books of the Torah moved intact from Hebrew scrolls to the codices of the Greek Septuagint. Printed books did not destroy writing. Telephones did not destroy face-to-face communications or letter writing. Television did not destroy the movies. Movies did not destroy theater. Recorded music did not eliminate the desire for live performances.

Technologies evolve. If they are good enough, they are added to the repertoire of methods by which humans communicate. If they are suitable, they become carriers of the human aesthetic and philosophic agendas, and do not limit themselves just to business and emergency communications. Morse code and Citizen's Band radio, as helpful as they were within their respective domains, never grew beyond those domains.

I want to look at the printed book, and now the computer, as evolutions, rather than revolutions, in this great historical arc of human intellectual and aesthetic endeavor. I would like us to consider both the printed book as we know and love it, and the electronic book of the future as some fear it, as analogous technological vehicles—

more analogous than we are currently inclined to think—both carrying forward basic human values and projects that our race formed in ancient Judea, Classical Antiquity and the Latin Middle Ages. I would also like us to consider that the ancient manuscript tradition, the history of the printed book and the advent of computer technologies of word processing and storage can be perceived not as radical upheavals, but rather as similar servants to the same human needs and endeavors.

The invention and spread of the technology of moveable type and the attendant printing press was an evolutionary development, not a revolutionary one—and it was an inevitable development, given the manuscript tradition from which it was born; as was stereotyping inevitable in the technology of

What will happen
to books when
computing is
woven into every
moment of
the fabric of our
daily existence?

moveable type; as was sound inevitable in the medium of silent motion pictures: just waiting for the technology.

Or, for that matter, as movies themselves were hidden embryonically in the art forms of Drama and Opera: just waiting for the technology to catch up to the creative urges of human beings possessed with artistic genius. Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde and Verdi might well have been movie directors had cinema been an option to them. And their genius would not necessarily be reduced by using different technological avenues as outlets for their creativity. Nor is the era of great steps forward in fictive and nonfictive texts about to come to an end because of electronics.

The printed book has served extremely well as a technology: it is compact, portable and, when properly indexed, handy for random access and specific information retrieval. Contents pages and running heads help locate passages of interest. All in all, the printed book is a great technological device. It has served very successfully in its role of carrier—as the intermediary between the writer and the reader.

To go to the very root of the matter, I wish to postulate as a given that the shared interest in collecting as an activity among those of us in the field of rare books is a natural outgrowth of a fundamental interest in the acts of writing and reading, authorship and readership, sender and receiver. We are discussing collecting as a possessory or conservative act in this specific time period at the beginning of the Twenty-first century because the familiar intermediary between the writer and the reader—known for centuries as “the book”—is in a process of change, perhaps its most important period of change since the expansion of printed books via moveable type during the Fifteenth century. I emphasize the word “perhaps” because the technology of transmission between the writer and the

reader is less important than the actual intellectual and emotional relation between the writer and the reader. We focus on the tangible, but must keep in mind that “the book” is a handy tangible sign of a more slippery and intangible relation.

The act of writing—whether in fiction or nonfiction—is an act of articulation of thought. A nebulous thought is no thought at all, even to its generator. Articulation is essential. Only written articulation can render a thought

transmittable without error. The alphabetization of the human mind is the reason we can express and share thoughts clearly. It is in the act of writing that human thought progresses. The great thinkers must write down their thoughts to clarify them, even to themselves, and then to transmit them effectively beyond a small circle of intimates.

Genuine literacy, human intelligence and human wisdom did not begin with the advent of moveable type, and these human attributes will not disappear with the advent of computers.

I think that what many collectors and rare book dealers are afraid of is the disappearance or at least the decline of the object of transmission: the book as we know it. That is the concern about the future that is upon us today because we are the ones, by inclination and profession, who are the keepers of the book and manuscript objects of the past. And this

project of “keeping” these objects is one I wholeheartedly endorse and participate in.

How might one “collect” downloads of first appearances of important future texts? In lieu of an author’s written archive of letters to friends, family, publishers and editors, what is one to do trying to “collect” e-mails and voicemail messages? What will be lost of writers’ working methods as hard-copy manuscripts with tangible revisions are replaced by databases constantly rewritten and saved with a keystroke that replaces all previous drafts? What is lost in this technological transition?

*What will be lost
of writers’ working
methods as hard-copy
manuscripts with
tangible revisions are
replaced by databases
constantly rewritten
and replaced with
a keystroke?*

It is important to remember that part of what is lost is just the same as what has always been lost, and it is important for us to face the uncomfortable fact that permanent irrevocable loss is the greatest anathema to a collecting mindset. This mindset is certainly one common denominator among collectors today.

I am not alone in our world in continuing to lament, almost daily, the loss of the great library at Alexandria, or the deliberate destructions of great manuscripts and books and objects over the centuries imposed by conquering ideologies upon the conquered. But for us, the "Library of Alexandria" is more a Borgesian fantasy than an historical reality. Our imaginations flourish in the face of such a loss—perhaps more than they would in the face of a continued reality. Who would really use such a library now?

When I visited the new "Library of Alexandria" last winter, the experience remained one of fantasy and imagination: the reality was banal in the extreme. The architecture of the building is far more impressive than the holdings are and probably ever will be; I particularly appreciate the alphabetic decoration of the exterior. So now the United Nations and the nation of Egypt are "off the hook." The "Library of Alexandria" has been rebuilt! Who cares what's in it? I saw mostly local students reading American and European magazines and working at computers. A few rooms were devoted to a display of European prints that left me disappointed on two fronts: the entire display would not have appraised north of \$200,000 and consisted mostly of early Nineteenth century views and maps of an ancient culture that the Europeans had gone there to illustrate and then plunder.

There is no "Library of Alexandria." There never will be. But great things are all too often lost, and thus we must take seriously our self-imposed roles as keepers.

Despite extant correspondence and early working drafts of beloved fiction and important discoveries in the sciences, we must face the fact that we have lost (in fact never had access to) the writers' conversations and, most agonizingly, their actual thoughts. The ubiquitous ancient wax tablet books were as erasable as a Palm Pilot. Of course, thoughts and conversations have always been starkly private, beyond the eavesdropping of scholars and the possession of collectors, but not beyond the wishful fantasies of scholars and collectors whose inquisitive and possessory natures are boundless.

The history of books and manuscripts is as

much a history of what has been lost as it is one of what humanity has been able to preserve. New technologies may lead to less physical matter in the way of working drafts available for study or collecting, but they will in no way lead to a lessening of the importance of the final statement of a great author and that this final product will continue to be where our greatest interest should lie.


We must not lose sight of the fact that the finished statement of the author is of the greatest importance: most authors, artists and musicians would rather not let the public have access to other preliminary drafts, sketches and demo tapes that led up to the final work. *Stephen Hero* is not of the caliber of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and it is likely that Joyce would wish that *Stephen Hero* had never been published. Is *New Directions* to be applauded or condemned for doing so?

Of course, one should never hold an author responsible for a posthumous publication, or unauthorized appearances of earlier versions of great works. The responsible parties are scholars, collectors or "fans."

We must be prepared intellectually to delegate early drafts and versions to the status of interesting to scholars or die-hard fans—and certainly they are often very valuable in the marketplace—but never substitutes for, or equals of, the finished product as officially presented to the public by the artist or author.

For the time being, these comments apply to prepublication versions only, because nowadays, as for centuries past, upon publication a fictive text is permanently fixed (usually, at least, though some authors have done substantial revisions of their work, e.g. Dickens with *Oliver Twist* and Henry James with many novels in the "New York" edition of his collected works). This long general history of publication fixity may become victim of one of the greatest possible changes of the future, as texts intended as art or entertainment may once again be subjected to as much constant change as they were way back in the oral tradition.

We must be prepared for electronics to change radically the life of some texts POSTpublication as our notions of authorial fixity evolve. Works, at least works of art or entertainment, may be let go of by the writer with a different future in mind than that of permanent fixity. Postpublication rewriting, additions, deletions and other manipulations may posit such a work as a public forum in cyberspace, open to any level of malleability. The modern world of "restored director's cuts" of movies, DVDs with alternate endings and scene selections,



remixes ad infinitum of hit records, YouTube shenanigans and Wikipedia has paved the way for the consuming public to take similar license with postpublication e-texts in expanding, customizing fashions.

Regarding specifically the collecting of prepublication literary manuscripts, let me make a few observations. First, the desire for ownership of, or research access to, such material will never disappear from the mindsets of collectors and scholars. Clearly the computer will decrease the number of early drafts on paper as we now know them. And early drafts on paper are the easiest things for collectors to get hold of physically and also mentally. As I mentioned earlier, we can never “collect” a writer’s conversations with friends about a work in progress any more than we can possess the writer’s actual thought processes (though we wish we could). We only have access to the early drafts on paper, right up to the final typesetting manuscript draft or typescript.

Setting aside collectors’ needs and scholarly interests, the advent of the computer could go both ways in shedding light on prerelease versions and processes of work. An author can continually write over the same document and only save the current version at the end of each writing session, or the writer can save every version of every writing session. Surely the computer has meant more rewriting, because it makes it so easy. Even the most complicated books before computers had limited numbers of drafts—over 10 for some sections of *Ulysses*.

Imagine how much rewriting Joyce might have done with a word processing program readily at hand. I can almost hear him laughing aloud while running *Finnegans Wake* through spell-check. James Joyce wanted us to experience *Finnegans Wake* exactly as it is published in final book form, where it first became a titled novel, and not for us to experience it in retrospect as the various fragments of “Work in Progress” that he dribbled out over the 15 years it took to write. The book, and only the book, is James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. The fragments are interesting, they are enlightening, some are certainly expensive, they are highly collectable. But they are “Work in Progress”: they are not *Finnegans Wake*. Though, by now, the concept of a constantly changing POSTpublication cybertext of *Finnegans Wake* might have been something that Joyce could have taken to. This particular book lends itself to such manipulations as perhaps no other. I believe the cyberspace environment may be a perfect one in which to

reawaken *Finnegan* as a living text. I think this novel may become a regular feature in cyberspace and hypertext discussions, and that this novel may end up having more influence in the Twenty-first century than it did in the Twentieth, during which it was relegated to an interesting cul-de-sac.

The act of reading may evolve from holding a book and reading ink on paper by reflected light to one of sitting before a screen and reading projected light—other possibilities exist or will be invented. The acquisition of knowledge in a nonfictive mode and the thrill of emotion in a fictive mode will not pass away from the palette of human experience. But reading as we know it today, predominantly silent and solitary, evolved from other modes: reading aloud in a group and reading aloud in solitude: different norms for different times and places and situations, and different human mindsets.

But what will we be “collecting” in the future? I am of the opinion that collectors should broaden their horizons and interests and take a more encompassing view of literacy, writing, reading and collecting.

I have been a dealer in antiquarian material, printed and manuscript, for more than 17 years now. Before that, I was in the retail book trade, in a couple of big corporate chains. From this combination of experience I have noticed a triangle of interests: manuscript material; antiquarian printed books (which now includes modern first editions); and new books. But the fact is that these three interests do *not* form a triangle: more often than not, they are stand-alone points existing separately. They are islands. I have always been baffled by their mutual exclusion, when their existence should rightfully be one of mutual embrace.

These should be integrated interests, for the simple reason that they relate to each other inextricably if one is truly interested in human literacy and human intellectual development. But many regular patrons of new book stores never enter an antiquarian shop or even know that our world exists. At best, they think of “used and second-hand” book shops they have at one time or another drifted into, those shops where books priced over 100 dollars are locked in glass cases. Such people, acknowledged book lovers, often would not believe than one can still buy a first printing of Homer. Many serious readers and academics don’t know the least thing about our world of first editions. Many serious and well-read academics discuss texts in their classes while remaining obstinately devoid of all knowledge of the generation of those texts. Dickens’ plot in *Martin Chuzzlewit*

changes midstream simply because sales of the monthly parts issue were declining and he attempted a quick fix. Analyzing that plot by any of the post-modern structuralist, post-structuralist or deconstructionalist methodologies that discourage or disallow biographical and historical referencing are exercises in futility, though intriguing ones.

An integration of these three points—manuscripts, rare printed books and new books—into a viable living triangle would be a welcome development. New books offer reassessments at times that can be essential to avoid ossification of one's views, especially of one's pet theories on pet subjects. We should not deny ourselves fresh perspectives, or ever think that we have reached a point of sufficient education.

By this admonition I simply want to remind us all that we should not forget the generating impulse of our collections: the original love of the content of the work. We are blessed to be collecting objects that are more than mere objects: books are objects with content—viable intellectual and emotional content. We should not lose sight of the fact that it is the content which brings the exceptional merit to the object. We are collecting objectified examples of human thought.

Owners of first editions of Galileo can enhance their knowledge and the pleasure they take in their collection by reading Stillman Drake's modern English paperbacks or the occasional CD-ROM edition. One of my clients keeps his multimillion-dollar 1390 Wycliffite English Bible manuscript next to a well-used reference facsimile of the ninth edition of John Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" (*Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church*) and a 30-dollar CD-ROM of another Wycliffite Bible manuscript. In a recent visit to Harvard I was thrilled to see a professor there who had his reference books and his modern editions side-by-side with a truly

superb antiquarian collection of first editions of science and astronomy—and he loves them all.

This level of genuine enthusiasm and knowledge is far preferable to me than being shown around sterile collections of trophy high-spots lined up in gilt morocco clamshell boxes. I would very much like to see a genuine enthusiasm regenerated in the collectors of today and encouraged from the start in those of tomorrow.

Imagine how much
rewriting Joyce might
have done with a word
processing program
readily at hand. I can
almost hear him laughing
aloud while running
Finnegans Wake
through spell-check.

I would like to see today's readers and collectors know more about where their favorite books come from, and established collectors know more about where their prize possessions stand *now* in the world of academia and scholarship. What is still most relevant and fascinating about Galileo, Hobbes, Blackstone or Adam Smith? Why did you spend so much money to own this or that book? Where did a particular book come from and where did it go after being set loose on the world. What makes it valuable? Where does this or that book stand on the great arc of human thought, and why? I would like to see each of us make an effort to keep in mind the grand continuity, into which we carve our personal niches of collecting interests.

There is a website in Japan that has published e-texts of the complete works of Charles Dickens, the Bronte Sisters, and other key Victorian novelists. If one chooses to, one can now read any and all of Dickens' novels on a computer screen. My reaction to this development may echo your own: a great big "So what?" I am not impressed by the newest toy as a way to transmit these texts. You can already read Dickens in paperbacks, or first editions, or finely bound leather sets, or anything in between. Let me put forth the proposition that the appearance of *The Old Curiosity Shop* on the Internet is a moment in textual history, literary history and intellectual history that is

no more important or less important than the appearance of just another Latin Vulgate Bible in 1455. That may sound like heresy to some book collectors, so I must explain this position a little further, as it relates to the grand continuity.

The Gutenberg Latin Bible is a moment of no significance in the history of the text of the Bible. It is a moment of importance in the history of technology and the history of the distribution of the Bible, because suddenly more and more copies of Scripture could be made through mechanical means. In the history of the Bible itself, the Parisian Manuscripts of the 1220s and 1230s are far more important than Gutenberg's edition. In the history of the Bible, the 1516 (and subsequent 1519 and 1522) Greek and Latin New Testament of Erasmus (beautifully printed by Froben) is more important than any incunable edition of a Latin Bible. And yet many "book collectors" cannot speak to the importance of the Thirteenth century Parisian manuscript Bibles or the 1516 Erasmus New Testament, but only to the rarity and expense of the early incunable editions, led by the Gutenberg Bible.

This mindset is an understandable case of temporarily putting object ahead of content, temporarily forgetting that we pursue a field of collection that is content driven, and from which the content portion of the equation should never be removed, and if and when content is delegated to second place, it should be done so sparingly and knowingly.

There is a *vade mecum* of the modern book collecting world known as *Printing and the Mind of Man*. This is the reigning king of all the various premanufactured lists from which parvenus can instantly begin to collect. *PMM*, as it is dubbed in dealer/collector shorthand, is the most rarified and exclusive of all the prefab collecting lists that now clutter the landscape of our field. It may not have been intended as such, but it has certainly become that now. The *PMM* collecting mindset works to preclude the generative enthusiasm that I pointed to earlier, as well as beneficial exploration on one's own down private roads, and has devolved into the choice prefab checklist of trophies for the wealthiest of collectors.

In the early 1960s, a few very well qualified scholars began putting together their list of the most important works ever printed, in chronological order according to their printing dates, not their writing. Admittedly, the material that made the final cut for inclusion in *Printing and the Mind of Man* is, generally speaking, well-chosen materially

and deserving of admiration (or in some cases disgust, like Gobineau, Treitschke and Hitler). Almost all the selections, minus a few of strictly British interest, genuinely deserve their status of "collectability" and would have done so without *Printing and the Mind of Man* to advertise and justify them. The project of *Printing and the Mind of Man* is a valid one, if left to its own definition: that is, *printing* and the mind of man. The book and the list are about PRINTING. The Gutenberg Bible had everything to do with printing but next to nothing to do with the mind of man. Most of the early *PMM* numbers are insignificant moments in the mind of man when considered from the grander perspective of human intellectual development. The Gutenberg Bible had no impact on the mind of man from a theological viewpoint. From that perspective it was "just another Biblia Latina" and clearly, by its designers and printers (Gutenberg, Fust and Schoeffer) it was seen as a continuation of the manuscript tradition by other means: mechanical, technical means. It was much more a commercial than a theological venture. The 42-line Bible of Gutenberg, Fust and Schoeffer is, of course, *PMM* Number One. But the uncomfortable fact hanging over it is that whatever text had been the first to have been printed by moveable type would be *PMM* Number One, even if it were *Ars Grammatica* of Donatus or a cookbook.

We can be grateful that the status and expected salability of the Latin Bible was such that *PMM* Number One is an intrinsically important work. The first printed books in the French and English languages were not fortunately enough chosen to have such continuing resonance: both happen to be a once-popular history of Troy by Raoul Le Fevre that is now long forgotten except by specialists in the field. *PMM* Number Two is more important theologically than the Gutenberg Bible, as it is the first printed Bible in a vernacular, albeit an awkward and already outdated German version. *PMM* Number Three is Augustine's *City of God*; *PMM* Number Four is Justinian; *PMM* Number Five is Pliny; Number Six is Virgil; Number Seven is Augustine again, this time for his *Confessions*; Number Eight is Dante; and Number Nine is Isidore of Seville. No one will gainsay the importance of these works in the intellectual history of mankind. But the appearance of these printed texts caused nary a ripple in the intellectual life of the period for a very simple reason: these books were already very well known to the clergy, the aristocracy and the intelligentsia through the manuscript tradition. These were famous and well-read books for generations, if

not centuries, before reaching print. Print was a medium, a carrier for new editions. The first contemporary secular book in *PMM* is Number 10, Valtruvio's *De re militari* ("on things military"), but the editors of *PMM* acknowledge that although contemporary, having been written in 1466, the book was already widely known by the time it was printed just six years later in 1472, through its vast circulation in manuscript. (Vast by that day's standard, and to all the right people in the field.) Similarly, the first book on Renaissance architecture, Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, though printed in 1485, was already well known and highly influential long before its printed book publication because of manuscript publication and wide circulation since about 1452. *Printing and the Mind of Man* continues through its early numbers with Avicenna, Thomas a Kempis, Maimonides, Aesop, Bede, Albertus Magnus, Ptolemy, Averroes, Euclid, Plato, Aquinas, Homer and Vitruvius. A pattern emerges: old and well-known texts via a new technology, much like *The Old Curiosity Shop* on a Japanese website.

The near contemporary printings of Alberti and Valtruvio begin to tighten up further with Littleton in 1481 and the appearance of Malory's *Morte Darthur* in 1485, a book that, though recounting old legends, had a contemporary impact. Contemporary impact fully and very powerfully hits stride with the 1493 Columbus Letter, which is of the highest significance as it combines for the first time a truly significant event or discovery being communicated for the first time to anyone in the public via the medium of printing. With a few more looks to the past, *PMM* eventually settles into what I think it should be: a history of great moments in human intellectual endeavor reaching their intended public for the first time via print. Most of the early *PMM* numbers probably belong more to an unpublished imaginary

work that would be entitled *Writing and the Mind of Man*. It is the *writing* that is fundamentally important and the technology of transmission is merely in accordance with the technological accomplishments of its time period. The content is supreme. Whether one reads Holy Scripture in Latin or English manuscript, in a beautiful incunabular edition, or in the horrible limp leather junk copies that litter this century, one

is still moved by the Holy Spirit in the content of the work, and the carrier system becomes completely irrelevant.

And—on a lesser note—if a child today first experiences the touching death of Little Nell on his or her computer screen, I believe that he or she could be just as moved as we were when we were children first reading the same passage off cheap paperback paper, long before we discovered and luxuriated in the gorgeous Nonesuch edition of the complete works of Dickens.

Such is the supremacy of content over carrier. It is right that, as collectors, we seek and obtain the best examples of the carrier, but we are prompted to do so originally by content.

Our collecting of ancient, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, and of printed books of the Fifteenth through Twentieth centuries will continue unabated in this young century and, I believe, through the coming centuries. It will be the collecting of Twenty-first cen-

tury books that might change as the Twenty-first century book changes, evolves and redefines itself.

A few of the key collecting trends over the last decades of the Twentieth century have been: Firstly, an emphasis on trophy-level high spots across the board, rather than knowledgeable depth or completion within a given field or with a specific author. Secondly, there has been a dramatic spike in the modern firsts market with an emphasis on

The Gutenberg Latin Bible is a moment of no significance in the history of the text of the Bible. It is a moment of importance in the history of technology and the history of the distribution of the Bible...

dust jackets and their tiny increments of condition. Current prices on high-spot novels of the Twentieth century are constantly-invoked “shockers” among the genuinely antiquarian dealers.

Recently, a third major trend has become the ubiquitous use and abuse of the Internet. There aren't many secrets anymore. Everyone seems to know who has what and at what price. And dealers who, through lack of real hands-on experience, don't really know where their copy of something stands on the condition and rarity charts, just price according to what they see on the Web. Not easy to do accurately or fairly when copies of Dickens' *Christmas Carol* are listed from \$5,000 to \$50,000. And if Internet dealing is risky and confusing, Internet auction sites like eBay can be downright crazy. There is an abundance of material that is inaccurately described and is being sold for a lot more than it's worth. The hapless buyers will discover this when they go to sell the items again and talk to a reputable, knowledgeable dealer.

I recently saw a Poe item on an Internet auction site that was basically a year-later reprint of “The Raven.” It was rebound, falling apart, wrongly described as “first book form appearance” (even though it was in a later reprint of a periodical) and “a genuine rarity,” even though it wasn't—and the bidding was up to about 10 times what the piece was worth. That amateur dealer, cloning out terminology and catch phrases from experienced dealers in order to sound professional enough to fool gullible beginners browsing the Web, simply did not know what he was selling any more than those bidders knew what they were bidding on. The winner was getting taken and will someday be in for a rude shock. High-end Poe

specialists wouldn't even want that item in stock.

A first printing of *Live and Let Die* in facsimile jacket brought \$1,900 recently on eBay. (Poor sap.) I saw an Internet dealer description of a book he had already put out at a stated asking price that read: “I don't know if the handwriting is really by H.P. Lovecraft but someone told me it looks like his.” Obviously, real reference and research and expertise are falling by the wayside in the headlong rush to get everything on the Internet. All of us have equally amusing anecdotes, but our amusement fights the undertow of saddening anti-professionalism that belittles our field more and more every day.

A fourth significant trend over the last 10 to 15 years has been private individuals growing more comfortable with buying at auction on their own, without dealer representation. The auction rooms of Christie's and Sotheby's in New York and London are no longer the mostly wholesale venues that they were a few decades ago. The auction rooms are now in the process of establishing the high-retail end of the market and dealers are left to raise their prices and just try to keep up with last week's record-setting prices realized. The rooms are no longer the dealers' domains. The “mystique” of the rooms—even Christie's and Sotheby's—has worn off to the extent that individuals are more and more comfortable bidding on their own, relying on advice

and condition reports directly from the house. The auction houses have been very aggressive and successful in moving the market in this direction; and the demystifying and downgrading effects that the Internet has had on auction processes in general has helped the big houses find new direct clients.

I expect these “turn-of-the-century” trends to continue for awhile into the new century: auction frenzy; modern first frenzy; Internet chaos; the borderline bunko tactics of amateurs with sudden wide

And if Internet dealing
is risky and confusing,
Internet auction sites
like eBay can be
downright crazy.
There is an abundance
of material that is
inaccurately described
and is being sold for a
lot more than it's worth.

exposure and a ready lexicon of fake professionalism; and an over-emphasis on high-spots to the exclusion of other deserving books.

The collecting processes of already-extant material will not differ greatly in the near future. Prices will go up on what people are already collecting. Serious and knowledgeable collectors of this and future centuries will still want first editions of Copernicus, Newton, Jane Austen and James Joyce.

The methodologies that might be changing to the greatest degree will be both how and why to collect Twenty-first century material, whether fiction or nonfiction. But even here, the process may have precedents and existing analogues through history. Prepublication "e-texts" and downloads of important Twenty-first century books may well be as ignored by book collectors as were the serializations of the great Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century novels that appeared before their book form publications. By serialization, I mean the appearances of texts in preexisting titled magazines, as distinct from "parts issues"—notably those of Charles Dickens—that are self-titled, finite and highly collectable. Dickens reinvigorated the parts issue format in 1836 with the *Pickwick Papers*, and became the prime mover of the format. But as collectable as such parts issues are, serializations are resolutely avoided. They are the orphans of the collecting world.

As the next generation of book collectors gets used to the idea of prepublication formats via computer, they may also reassess the currently low value put on serializations of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. When prices on "first trade editions" in original cloth are skyrocketing to levels beyond the means of many would-be collectors, focus may pull back to reveal how disproportionately underpriced are many of the serializations. As a Nineteenth century example: near fine first editions in the original cloth of *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Woman in White* and *Great Expectations* will easily top \$100,000 as a group. The first appearances of all three of these novels can be had for comfortably under \$10,000 in a run of Dickens' journal "All the Year Round." Other Nineteenth-century examples abound and there are Twentieth-century examples, as well. There is little to apologize for with buying a serialization that precedes the book. But the mindset that now overwhelmingly prefers the book over the serialization may itself continue through the upcoming history of electronic texts, and history may repeat itself with e-texts being equally orphaned as serializations have been. The physical book may win out as the collectable

entity in the future over today's threatening electronic upstarts, just as it has in the past over preceding newspaper or magazine appearances.

Of course, we can all speculate on the future of the world of book collecting, but that's all it is for now: speculation. Since I cannot accurately predict the near future of book collecting, let me, in closing, touch for a moment on a few things I would like to see happen.

I would like to see collecting of the great books to continue to be pursued by inquisitive newcomers as they are exposed to the field through whatever avenues bring them to us, and for us to welcome them and encourage them along. I would like to see current collectors and newcomers grow in their knowledge of the manuscript traditions that preceded the printed book and integrate that knowledge into their specific collecting interests where applicable. I would encourage the expansion of interests beyond the fixation on high-spots and pre-manufactured lists, and beyond even just first editions. I would encourage established collectors and newcomers to explore the histories of the books they collect, and learn why later editions may also be worth their notice (for example, the 1519 and 1522 editions of the Erasmus New Testament; the second through sixth editions of *On the Origin of Species*; the second edition of Malthus' *On Population*; and the later lifetime editions of *Leaves of Grass* as that collection of poetry grows into the massively important work as we know it today). I would try to expand the knowledge of today's high-spot collectors in order to encourage more personalized collecting and less "template" collecting from someone else's menu, be it *Printing and the Mind of Man* or *Connolly 100* or any other prefab list. (Someone who buys the PMM edition of Vitruvius off the PMM list should be aware of what a second-rate edition it really is, and that it took about another half century for the extant manuscripts to receive a proper and thoughtful printed edition.)

In summary, I think that established collectors occasionally need to refresh their perspectives through new input, and I think that serious newcomers might still occasionally need the advice of actual professional rare book dealers. The one single thing that I am totally confident of in the future of book collecting is that serious collectors of fictive or nonfictive texts will continue to be generated by their original love of content, and that content above all will maintain their collecting interests down whatever paths that future technologies might present to us.