

Library Publishing is Special: Selection and Eligibility in Library Publishing

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LIBRARY PUBLISHING FORUM 2014

Library Publishing is Special: Selection and Eligibility in Library Publishing

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Traditional publishing is based on ownership, commerce, paid exchanges, and scholarship as a commodity, while library activities are based on a service model of sharing resources and free exchange. I believe library publishing should be based on those values and should not duplicate or emulate traditional publishing. University presses have mixed views of library publishing, and libraries should not adopt those attitudes. Library publishers are not gatekeepers; their mission is dissemination. Libraries need to publish because traditional publishing suffers from high rejection rates, required surrender of intellectual property, long production schedules, high cost of products, and limited dissemination. Nebraska's Zea Books is a response to these needs. Miscellaneous advice for library publishers is offered and selection and eligibility criteria are outlined. A suggestion is made for a cooperative ebook distribution network.

I want to thank the audience for coming out today and the organizers of the Library Publishing Forum for inviting me to participate. Our question for this session is "Should library publishing follow the same model of acquisitions as more traditional publishers?" If at the end of ten minutes you do not know my opinion on this question, I will have failed miserably.

Traditional publishing is based on ownership, commerce, paid exchanges, and scholarship as a commodity. The "reaction equation" is as follows: knowledge and ideas are transformed

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into books and journals, and these are transformed into dollars, eurodollars, rubles, shekels, bitcoin, or pieces of eight. Money is the measure, universal solvent, and end-product of the traditional publisher's chain reaction.

The traditional model is based on the publisher's ownership of the content for all time, in all places, in all forms, throughout the universe, and on all planes of existence, e.g.:

[...] **all copyright** in and to the Contribution, and **all rights** therein, **including but not limited to** the right to publish, republish, transmit, sell, distribute and otherwise use the Contribution **in whole or in part** in electronic and print editions of the Journal and in derivative works throughout the world, **in all languages and in all media of expression now known or later developed** [...].

(Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, emphasis added)

This assertion of ownership is not altogether unlike the “Toddler’s Rules of Possession”:

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must NEVER appear to be yours in anyway.
6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks just like mine, it is mine.
8. If I saw it first, it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours.

Bear in mind that the content so adamantly claimed by the traditional publisher was surrendered to them—usually at no cost and often with additional payments or page charges—by the submitting author(s). The ownership so acquired will now be aggressively asserted and defended, often at the expense of the author, whose extended use or dissemination may be proscribed almost indefinitely.

Libraries, on the other hand, are based on a service model of sharing resources and free exchange. Books and materials are loaned and borrowed without charge; the point is not their possession, but their use. As John Lennon wrote: “Imagine all the people, sharing all the world.”

We (the libraries) should not adopt the values of the system that has been exploiting us—library publishing should not duplicate or emulate traditional publishing.



Figure 1. Libraries should not adopt the values of the system that has been exploiting them. (“The Seal Hunt” by Percival Skelton. From Joseph Hatton and M. Harvey, *Newfoundland, the Oldest British Colony* [London: Chapman and Hall, 1883], p. 304.)

Earlier this winter the American Association of University Presses published the results of a survey of press managers regarding their collaborations with university libraries in publishing efforts (AAUP, 2014). While some comments were supportive of library involvement in publishing, others clearly were not:

“... no perceivable quality control, no revenues”

“Libraries are not generally equipped to publish in a market-driven economy.”

“Libraries ... are rarely suited to engage in ... editing, design, and printing.”

“If a library wants to publish, [it] should do so through the press.”

“... most libraries have done very little research on how exactly scholars and students are using materials.”

“[In] our library’s digital publishing group there is simply no knowledge of publishing. It’s one thing to create content or even package it. That doesn’t mean you’re publishing.”

“The danger is that the library might want to take us over, since they are very aware that some presses are now reporting to libraries!”

The press comments display an uncomfortable degree of condescension, disdain, and outright antagonism toward library publishing efforts. Note that absence of revenues is seen as a fault, and that the libraries are said to fail the tautology test—by publishing but not “publishing.” Why would libraries want to adopt or emulate these attitudes towards themselves? [*Aside: Advice to libraries—Do not take over the press! It is a white elephant whose issues you don’t need to take on.*]

But what could be the reasons behind this antipathy? What did the libraries do that was so terrible or offensive? Well, 1) they took in survivors from the university presses that went under, offering a place of shelter and refuge; and 2) they kept scholarly presses afloat for 30 years by buying monographs that nobody wanted to read or check out. The crisis among university presses can partly be traced to library acquisition budget cuts that have reduced guaranteed sales of esoteric monographs from the thousands to a few hundred. Circulation figures indicate that very many of those volumes never left the library shelves.

Do publishers have special insight into the future of publishing? Arguably not, since the major business strategy seems to be acquiring the competitors in order to secure a tighter stranglehold on the market. My belief is that the future is wide open; nobody has the answers, least of all the traditional publishers.

Library publishers are not gatekeepers; their mission is dissemination. But should libraries become publishers? Why, or why not? My view is they should, because of the present state of publishers publishing, which is characterized by

1. high rejection rates (of which many publishers are surprisingly proud)
2. surrender of intellectual property
3. long production schedules
4. high cost of products
5. limited dissemination

At Nebraska, we started our library publishing imprint (Zea Books) because we encountered projects that 1) needed to be published, and 2) were being left out by the “regular” publishing system.

For example, our *Dictionary of Invertebrate Zoology*, by Mary Ann Maggenti, Armand R. Maggenti, and Scott Lyell Gardner, had been peer-reviewed and accepted by the University

of California Press, but on the eve of its final manuscript submission the contract was cancelled by the press, which had suffered financial reverses and decided to get out of zoology publishing. A second press declined the work, due to its having a competing project, and the reviewer for a third press offered to recommend it only if he were made a co-author, an offer that was declined with emphasis. I saw the manuscript while touring the Parasitology Lab (it was about 24" high), heard the history, and persuaded Scott Gardner to let us publish it digitally, and later in hard copy print-on-demand format. It can be seen at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/onlinedictinvertzoology/2/>

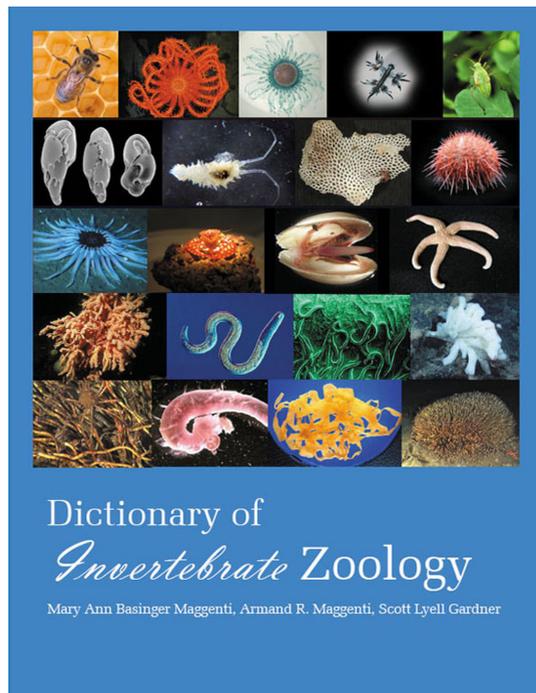


Figure 2. *Dictionary of Invertebrate Zoology*, by Mary Ann Maggenti, Armand R. Maggenti, and Scott Lyell Gardner. Book cover courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

Another example is *Hopi Nation: Essays on Indigenous Art, Culture, History, and Law*, edited by Edna Glenn, John R. Wunder, Willard Hughes Rollings, and C. L. Martin; <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/zeabook/11/>. It contains essays and artwork from a 1981 symposium at Texas Tech University. Co-editor John Wunder had proposed the book to practically every university press west of the Mississippi, but without funding to subsidize its 75 color illustrations, no press was willing to take the project. Digital production made it possible for us to do the work as both an ebook and a print-on-demand hardcover.

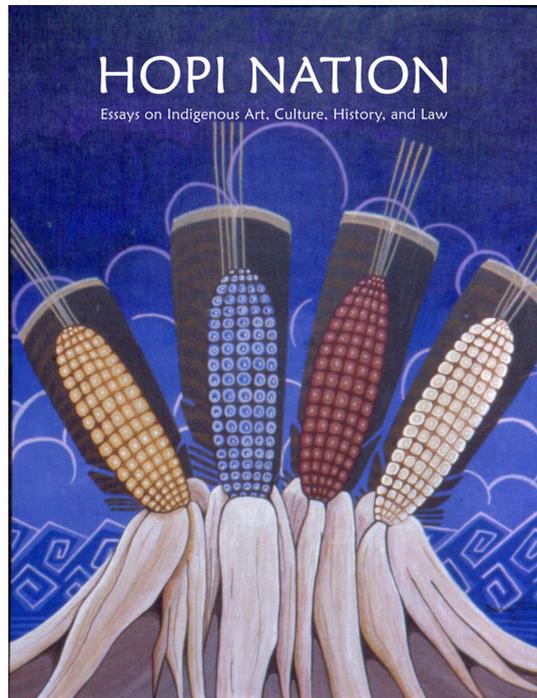


Figure 3. *Hopi Nation: Essays on Indigenous Art, Culture, History, and Law*, edited by Edna Glenn, John R. Wunder, Willard Hughes Rollings, and C. L. Martin. Book cover courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

Our mission, as we see it, is to provide a publishing outlet for scholarly work that does not fit other available publication models, either because it is too long, too short, too esoteric, too expensive, too complicated, or just too strange. I sometimes refer to us as “the press of lost causes.”

Our authors are scholars who are either affiliated with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or working in research areas of significant interest at UNL. (You might ask what area is not of significant interest at Nebraska? One answer would be “University of Texas football.”) Zea Books selection policy does not require formal peer review; it does, however, seek an opinion from a knowledgeable expert, from on campus if possible. Areas in which we publish include: Ornithology, Parasitology, Holocaust studies, Music history, Early American texts, Art history, and Women’s studies.

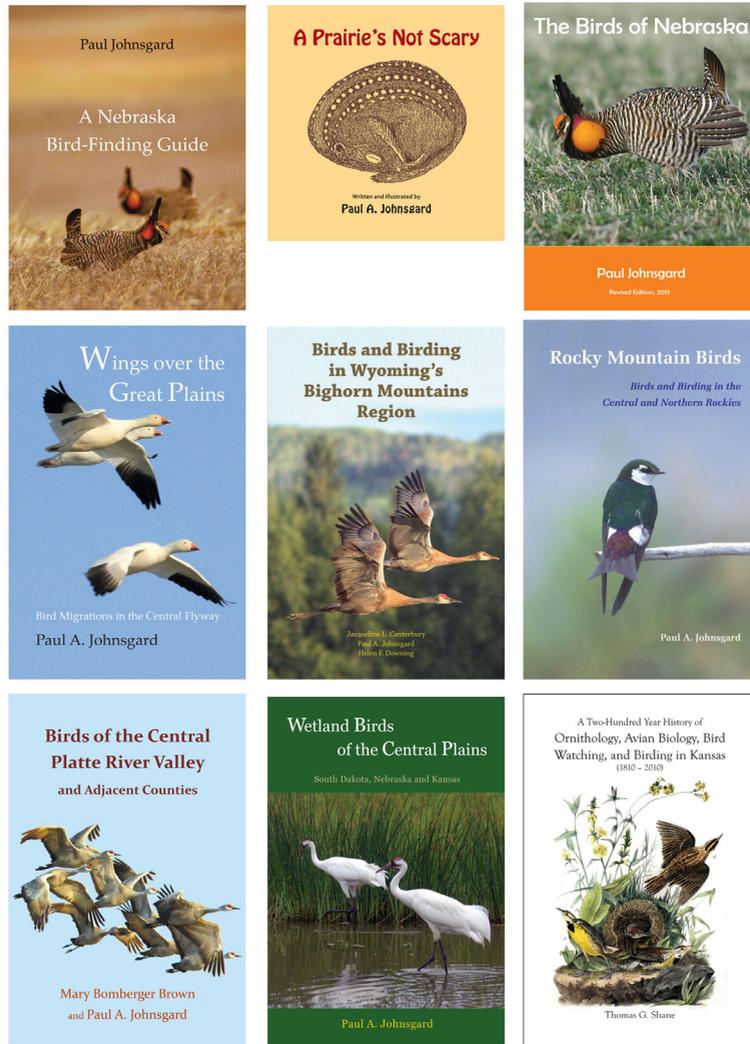


Figure 4. Ornithology from Zea Books: (top) *A Nebraska Bird-Finding Guide* by Paul Johnsgard; *A Prairie's Not Scary* by Paul Johnsgard; *The Birds of Nebraska, Revised Edition 2013* by Paul Johnsgard; (middle) *Wings over the Great Plains: Bird Migrations in the Central Flyway* by Paul A. Johnsgard; *Birds and Birding in Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains Region* by Jacqueline L. Canterbury, Paul A. Johnsgard, and Helen F. Downing; *Rocky Mountain Birds: Birds and Birding in the Central and Northern Rockies* by Paul Johnsgard; (bottom) *Birds of the Central Platte River Valley and Adjacent Counties* by Mary B. Brown and Paul Johnsgard; *Wetland Birds of the Central Plains: South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas* by Paul Johnsgard; *A Two-Hundred Year History of Ornithology, Avian Biology, Bird Watching, and Birding in Kansas (1810–2010)* by Thomas G. Shane. Book covers courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

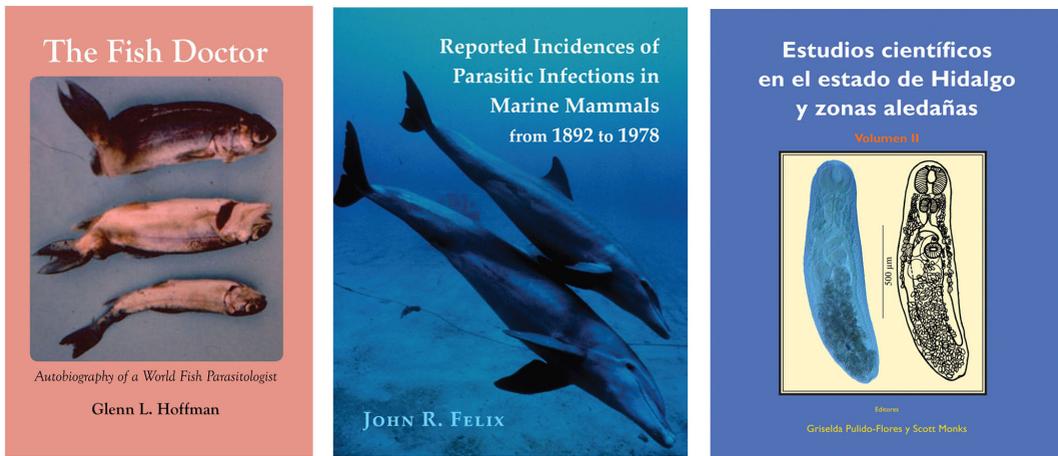


Figure 5. Parasitology from Zea Books: *The Fish Doctor* by Glenn Hoffman; *Reported Incidences of Parasitic Infections in Marine Mammals from 1892 to 1978* by John R. Felix; *Estudios científicos en el estado de Hidalgo y zonas aledañas, Volumen II*, ed. Griselda Pulido-Flores and Scott Monks. Book covers courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.



Figure 6. Holocaust studies from Zea Books: *Great Misery/La grande misère* by Maisie Renault, trans. Jeanne Armstrong; *We Survived ... At Last I Speak* by Leon Malméd. Book covers courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

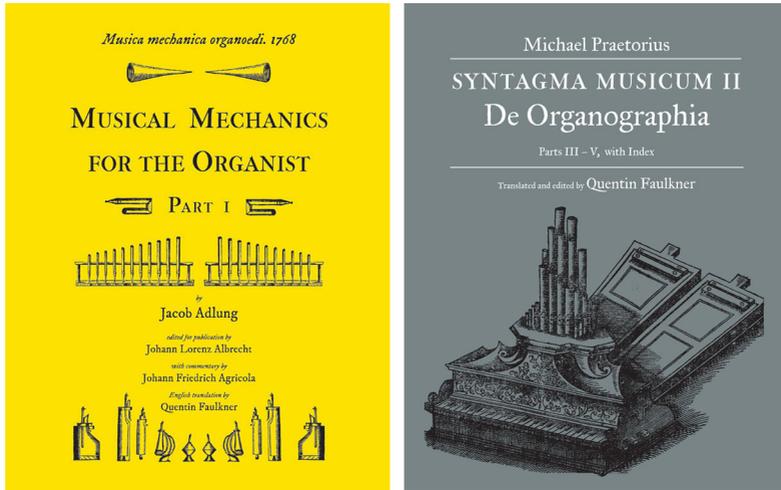


Figure 7. Music history from Zea Books: *Musica mechanica organoedi • Musical mechanics for the organist* by Jacob Adlung, trans. Quentin Faulkner; *Syntagma musicum II, De Organographia, Parts III–V, with Index* by Michael Praetorius, trans. Quentin Faulkner. Book covers courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

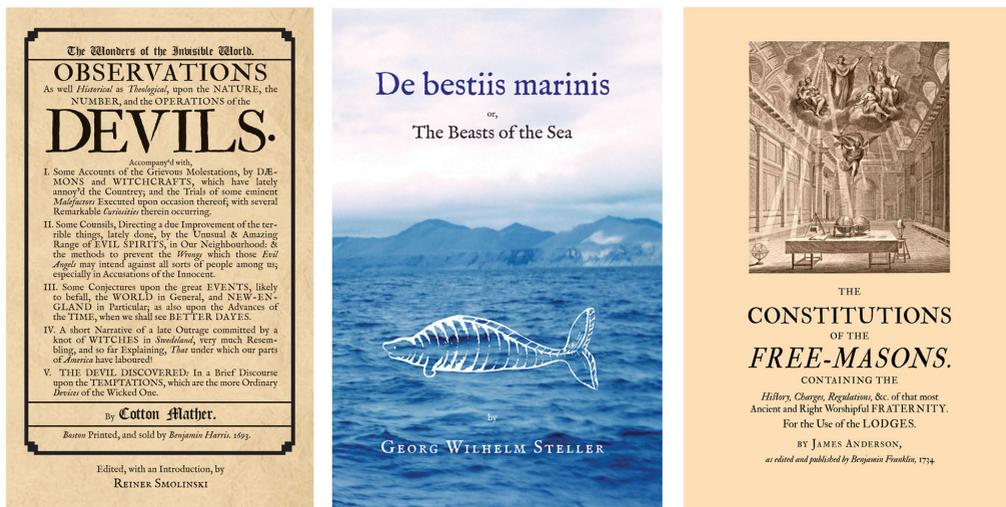


Figure 8. Early American texts from Zea Books: *The Wonders of the Invisible World* by Cotton Mather, ed. Reiner Smolinski; *De bestiis marinis or, The Beasts of the Sea* by Georg Wilhelm Steller; *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* by James Anderson, ed. Benjamin Franklin. Book covers courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

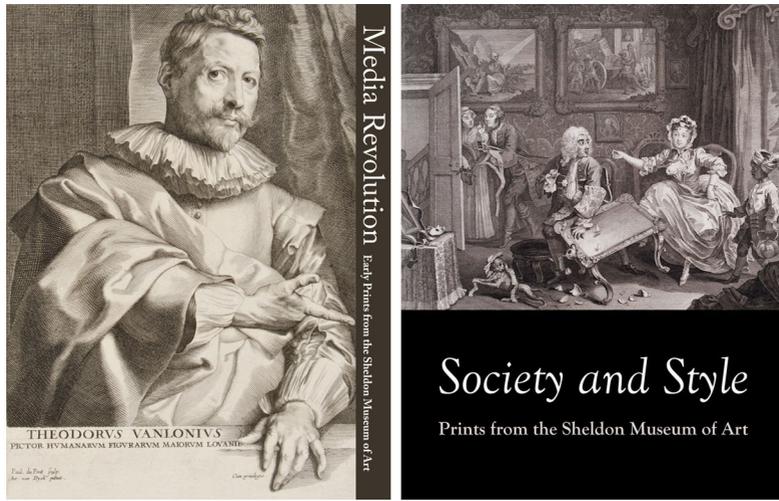


Figure 9. Art history from Zea Books: *Media Revolution: Early Prints from the Sheldon Museum of Art*, ed. Gregory Nosan and Alison G. Stewart; *Society and Style: Prints from the Sheldon Museum of Art*, ed. Alison G. Stewart and Paul Royster. Book covers courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

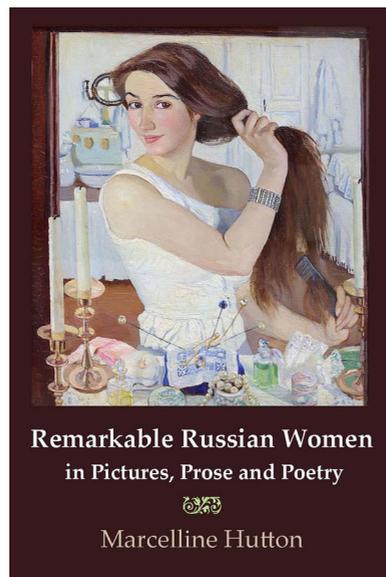


Figure 10. Women’s studies from Zea Books: *Remarkable Russian Women in Pictures, Prose and Poetry* by Marcelline Hutton. Book cover courtesy Zea Books; reproductions permitted.

My advice to library publishers would include the following.

Maintain your autonomy; as a publisher you are responsible for defending the freedom of the press. Control your costs; nothing attracts supervision as fast as funding. Start small and build up; it is much easier to grow than to scale down.

Know your author; you will not have the protective layers of interference that traditional publishers can rely on. This, however, can be a good thing, as the closer direct and personal relationships can be especially rewarding.

Look for projects that are “shovel-ready”; beware of “Winnie-the-Pooh”-type works that get stuck half-way in and half-way out.

My criteria for eligibility would be 1) it should be scholarly, or of interest to scholars, 2) it should be ready to publish, or nearly so, and 3) it should not be suitable for the university press, since we wish to respect their domain and not seem to be eating their lunch. My criteria for selection would be: everything that meets the eligibility requirements.

Finally, I would like to say a word about what I feel is needed most to make library publishing more widely effective: a comprehensive shared delivery network whereby your library publications automatically go into our catalog (and ours into yours) upon publication. Most users find our books through Google, but for those who do use the library catalogue, it would be good to have them find these resources.

My time is up. Thank you.

[Author’s note: While we did ask to hold questions until the end of the session, I did quickly answer one about our POD supplier, which is Lulu.com. The session went full time, so there was no opportunity for further questions or discussion. I did have the opportunity for a conversation with a university press director who was greatly incensed by my presentation. However, another press director told me it was the best program of the whole meeting—so I guess it averages out.]

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