

The monograph challenge

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- Monographs are an intrinsically important mode of academic production and must not be sacrificed on the altar of open access.
- Book chapters are also a valuable and distinctive type of output which could find their visibility, and hence their viability, enhanced by an appropriate OA policy.
- There are to date no agreed OA solutions in the domain of books.
- In developing OA models for books it is important that the peer review process as the guarantee of excellence is not compromised.
- Adoption of the untrammelled CC-BY licence is not appropriate for monographs and book chapters.

What is it with monographs?¹ Every time someone comes up with a new procedure for research assessment or dissemination, it seems to be monographs that do not fit the intended pattern. When the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) moved between 2001 and 2008 from scoring individuals to scoring outputs, monographs did not slot neatly into the new schema and mechanisms for double-weighting had to be introduced. As bibliometric techniques for research assessment internationally come to play a greater role, monographs risk being left out of the equation. And now it is monographs which present one of the most substantial challenges for the new commitment on the part of funders and government to open access publication. Where monographs lead book chapters tend to follow. In this essay I look at the reasons why monographs and book chapters pose the problems they do, with a special emphasis on the issue of open access. I look too at some of the ways in which it has been proposed to bring these forms of publication into line with articles in journals. As a preface to these discussions, I review the arguments for why, to express the fruits of certain categories of intellectual endeavour, these modes of publication are still the best we have. This is why they continue to define the international norms of excellence in those fields. It follows that, in the event of a conflict of interests, it is monographs and book chapters which must be retained and the principles which determine assessment and publication which must be revised to accommodate them, rather than the other way around.

Let's start with a definition. According to Williams et al., a monograph is 'a printed specialist book-length study of a research based topic, usually but not necessarily written by a single academic author from their own primary research or its equivalent in downloadable digital form or other electronic format'.² After a wide-ranging discussion of issues around the monograph, not all of which can be dealt with here, the authors conclude: 'despite financial, institutional and publishing constraints and changing opportunities provided by new digital models, the value of the monograph, as a print-on-paper record of substantial research, is still recognised and valued in the Arts and Humanities research community'.³ Evidence of this value is to be found in the substantial presence of monographs within the submissions to research assessment exercises over the years in some discipline areas. For example, the data in the following table is taken from a partial survey of submissions to RAE 2008.⁴ For each discipline half a dozen institutions were sampled, chosen to represent different sizes and types of university. The one property they have in common is that all were drawn from those that had scored in the top ten for the Unit of Assessment in question (measured in terms of overall GPA) since the intention was to focus on work that the panels had judged to be the best in the respective fields. The last line of the table displays as a control comparative data from Chemistry, a laboratory science where the only type of outlet is the journal article.

	Books (%)	Chapters (%)	Journal Articles (%)	Other (%)
English	39	27	31	3
History	40	22	37	1
French	37	23	39	1
Philosophy	14	20	65	1
Sociology	22	10	64	3
Law	18	15	65	1
Politics	29	9	62	0
Economics	1	2	89	7
Chemistry	0	0	100	0

Proportions of output types in a sample of RAE 2008 submissions

The pattern is clear: there is a group of disciplines, represented here by English, French and History, in which up to 40% of the outputs in the leading departments are in the form of books with up to a further 25% coming out as book chapters, and where only about a third of the work appears as articles in journals. For disciplines like Philosophy on the other hand some two thirds of the work is in article form, with about a fifth appearing as chapters and a small but still significant percentage as books.

Generalising even more we can say that data of these sort allow us to identify three broad classes of discipline: a) those which rely exclusively or almost exclusively on the journal article as the means by which the results of research are communicated to the world at large; b) those for which journal articles constitute two thirds of the normal scientific production; and c) those for which the journal article represents little more than a third, and sometimes even less, of research output. This informal survey of UK RAE data corresponds well with the patterns identified in the much more systematic analysis of work supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) reported in Mutz et al. (2012).⁵ The comparison cannot be direct because the categories used in this study are grouped differently from those adopted in the RAE, but there are nonetheless clear parallels. In particular, their category of 'book and non-reviewed journal article' covers our monographs and book chapters (plus a small number of journals where contributions are invited rather than submitted) and their study shows how this category maps very closely onto Humanities and some Social Science disciplines.⁶ And they too note that Economics, together with Psychology, is an outlier within Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) in terms of its publication profiles. For other disciplines within that broad category, they conclude: 'the Arts and Humanities really should be treated as an independent and relatively uniform area ... Instead of counting only journal articles and their citations, however, it is important to include also monographs and anthologies' (p.14).⁷ The importance of these modes of publication emerges too from the British Academy's internal survey of its highly competitive Small Research Grants scheme. Even on the relatively short projects – 6 to 24 months – funded by these awards, some 45% of the outputs are in book or chapter form.

It will be interesting to see how the submissions data for Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, expected to be publicly available by mid-2015, will compare, and whether there is evidence for a downward trend in UK monograph production, as is sometimes claimed. For the moment however we should go with the conclusions of the data presented here and recognise that for core Humanities disciplines a substantial majority of the best work, as determined by peer review, appears between the covers of a book, whether that be a single-authored monograph or a collection of variously authored chapters. One may then reasonably ask: if these are the preferred output forms, why so? Is it simply a matter of habit that will alter as fields, technologies and assessment pressures change or are there intrinsic reasons for this preference? And if there are such reasons, as I believe there are, can the production of monographs be accommodated within the context of the move to open access?

Part of the answer can already be seen in the definition of a monograph quoted above which identifies the key concepts: 'a research based topic', 'usually ... written by a single academic author' drawing on 'their own primary research'. This close connection between the individual(s), the research and the writing is at the opposite pole from what goes on in some areas of the natural sciences, where in the extreme case there may be hundreds of names of 'authors' attached to the paper or where the 'writer' of the paper is identified separately from other 'contributors', although all are credited with authorship in the sense of having their names attached to the paper.⁸ Where 400 or 500 individuals are acknowledged in this way, it seems not implausible that some 'authors' have not even read let alone written the papers above which their names appear.

By contrast, in the Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly the former, the writing is crucial since that is usually the principal way, and in many instances the only way, that the argument is conveyed. This is not to say that clear, coherent writing is not to be found in all fields, but in HSS it will not generally be complemented and augmented by equations, tabulated data-sets and the like, nor will it be pre-organised into sections labelled 'results', 'discussion' and the like. Indeed, the supporting data may itself be textual rather than numerical – quotations, transcriptions of archival

material, letters and so on – and some of it may well be in languages other than English. The intellectually creative act lies as much in the formulation and composition as in the conception of the experiment or the connecting of hitherto independent pieces of data. It is for this reason that academics in the Humanities need the time and space of sabbatical leave or an externally funded fellowship in order to concentrate on writing rather than being able to (or wishing to) delegate the writing to someone else after the research has been conducted. It is also because of the importance of the writing and the formulation, and the absence in many cases of complementary data, that text mining and other data recovery techniques are much less easily applied; hence too the preference by many in these areas for CC-BY-ND forms of licence.

Of course, all the properties mentioned above also apply to book chapters and journal articles in these fields. The additional, in some ways defining, property of a monograph is its length, which is attributable to the greater breadth or depth of coverage to be found in such works.⁹ It is precisely the scale of the enterprise conceived and realised in such works that entitles them to particular respect and recognition, and accounts for the prestige that they have in both the national and the international domains. Nor are they just things produced by senior scholars. A recent survey of holders of British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships demonstrated the central place that the monograph holds in a range of disciplines from Social Anthropology to English Literature. A number of respondents used the expression ‘gold standard’ in this connection and almost all reported that they believed their monographs to have been key to their gaining their first academic position or to subsequent promotion. In the words of one young scholar: ‘There is no other medium that allows for the depth of research, analysis and sustained argumentation.’

And it is for this reason that research evaluation exercises like the RAE and the REF have gone out of their way to devise means such as ‘double-weighting’ in order to accommodate them. Such exercises are governed by two key principles: first, that work should be assessed by a uniform set of criteria that take as their benchmark internationally agreed standards of excellence (see the RAE/REF definitions for the levels 4*

to 1*), and the commitment to track research quality and not direct it. Thus: 'In all cases the sub-panel criteria seek to reflect rather than shape the research activity of the discipline in question' (RAE 2008 Main Panel M Criteria, §10). And again: 'The REF aims to assess all types of research without distorting the activity that it measures' (*Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions*, REF 02.2011, p.4). Taken together these principles mean that if the leading work in, say, Europe or the USA in a given field comes in book-sized chunks, then UK academics must also be accorded the opportunity to compete by producing similar chunks. To do otherwise would be to reduce UK research in these fields to a secondary status in the international forum.

The argument so far has been that the monograph is an essential mode of publication for certain types of enquiry, and that in some fields the best research has appeared and will continue to appear in that form. Can the same be said for the book chapter? The evidence from our table certainly suggests so, since chapters represent between a fifth and a quarter of submitted work in some fields. Book chapters have properties in common with both monographs and journal articles. They share with the former the tendency to be single-authored while in length they are closer to a journal article. Yet their fate hangs in the balance more immediately than does that of either of the other genres. In a persuasive blog post, the distinguished developmental psychologist Dorothy Bishop comes to the bleak conclusion that: 'if you write a chapter for an edited book, you might as well write the paper and then bury it in a hole in the ground'.¹⁰ For her, the issue is not quality but visibility. A book chapter may be longer (though practice here varies), less about reporting new data and more about reflecting on the place and importance of existing results in the larger scheme of things. And, as the historian Peter Webster in his thoughtful response points out, book chapters may well have been more rigorously reviewed than a journal article since they will often have been read and commented on by other contributors to the volume as well as by independent referees selected by the publishers.¹¹ Webster also makes the case for the intrinsic merits of collected volumes which bring together fellow specialists, cast light on an issue or topic from different and complementary perspectives, and benefit from mutual cross-reading and commentary. Such carefully

focused works often add up to more than the sum of their parts and may in fact be as 'visible' as monographs.

The issue now is quality. What Webster describes is true of the best work in this genre but there are many sets of papers which do not conform to his model. I was recently asked to review for a publisher a proposed volume where each chapter would have been appropriate in a specialist journal but where there was only the flimsiest pretence of unity to the collection, no evidence that the contributors had read each other's chapters and hardly any bibliography cited in common. All too often conference collections can be like this and this accounts for the low standing they often have in the minds of research evaluation panels and promotion committees. At this point a move to open access may be a force for good. If chapters from collections are available on the web in designated locations, then the anxieties that Bishop expresses are greatly diminished. They will appear in web searches and can be accessed without the trouble of actually visiting the library. What had previously risked being invisible becomes visible again. Of course, the quality control issue remains but this is a general one which affects open access in a variety of ways, and we will return to it below.

So far we have argued that, just as the RAE/REF had to demonstrate flexibility in order to come up with a solution that would recognise and accord due status to monographs (book chapters in this context are less of an issue), any proposals for open access must take account of and find a way to accommodate books (whether monographs or collections). What then are the problems that stand in the way of applying open access models to books? The first is obviously financial. Books cost money; in the case of small print run specialist monographs often in eye-watering amounts. If such volumes are to be made available through open access, some way must be found to pay for producing them. Even if academic book production as traditionally known were to cease and be replaced by electronic publication and distribution, the fixed start-up costs (academic editing, copy-editing, typesetting) would have to be covered.

Second is the kind of licensing. We have already indicated that in outputs where much of the excellence and distinctiveness lies in the quality of the

writing, a simple CC-BY licence may not be appropriate, and a ND (non-derivative) licence will be required to protect the interests of author and to avoid the unauthorised use of third-party material. Publishers may in addition require a NC (non-commercial) licence in order to ensure that others do not derive financial advantage from their investment.¹²

A further problem posed by monographs is that they blur the boundary between specialist academic publications and what publishers call the general or trade list. Articles in journals are for the most part only accessed and read by fellow researchers (in universities and in government and industrial labs) plus journalists and science writers and the occasional interested citizen. There is nothing wrong with that – advanced research in any field is a specialist activity targeted at people with similar degrees of specialist knowledge and understanding. Such work can then be complemented by what bookshops market as ‘general’ or ‘popular’ science. Even when the scientist is also the author of such works, as with the successful books by the likes of Roger Penrose and Steve Jones, it is unlikely that they would be referenced in research articles or figure on undergraduate reading lists. By contrast, some monographs manage to cover both bases at once. They may contain excellent original research, fresh data, new arguments, new and important conclusions that suggest innovative approaches to policy, and the like but still be highly readable, and likely to appeal to some at least amongst the ranks of general readers. Works such as Ian Kershaw’s biography of Hitler or Mary Beard’s reconstruction of life in Pompeii are candidates for inclusion in such a cross-over category. No doubt the reader can think of others.

We end with a brief survey of some of the solutions that have been proposed.¹³ One option is simply to exclude monographs and book chapters altogether from open access requirements. This might be temporarily acceptable while suitable business models are worked out, as indeed the Finch Report, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research Councils UK, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England all agree, or permanently on the grounds that open access cannot ever apply to books in the way that it does to journals. Versions of this latter policy certainly have their advocates; see for example Robin

Osborne's contribution to this collection. However, there are also strong arguments against. In the first place if, as nearly everyone agrees, open access is in principle a good thing because it makes the fruits of publicly funded research available to that public at no further cost, it is hard to see why HSS should be excluded simply because the manner of publication is different. Second, there is the visibility question we have already touched on above in relation to book chapters. It is undoubtedly the case that work available in open access has higher rates of citation than other material (see for example the results reported in <http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/268516/>). The details of the argument may vary from discipline to discipline. In my own field of linguistics, for example, the case for open access is eloquently made by Stefan Müller in the first issue of the new online, APC-free *Journal of Language Modelling*.¹⁴ However, whatever the field, it is certainly true that open access has the potential to bring with it the benefit of enfranchising a valuable form of research and publication that otherwise risks being downgraded or ignored, to the detriment of British scholarship at large.

So what are the alternatives? It is fair to say that there is as yet no one model which has gained general agreement. At the opposite extreme from simple exclusion is an approach in which books, multiple or single authored, are simply posted in PDF format on websites from which anyone interested may download them. They can be protected by the author's chosen form of licence, but access and further use are not otherwise constrained. Adopting a term that has gained currency in discussions of journal publishing, this could be called the 'Platinum' model.¹⁵ The problems here are the same as face Platinum journals: the sustainability of the venture, the development of appropriate business models and the need to ensure quality and reputation and thereby to attract the leading authors in the field in question.

There are several models already in existence. For instance, Open Book Publishers (www.openbookpublishers.com) make available full book texts that can be read online, but which cannot be copied off the screen or downloaded; instead print-on-demand or e-book versions have to be purchased. In contrast, the Knowledge Unlatched consortium of libraries (www.knowledgeunlatched.org) proposes that publishers should offer

monograph titles for the consideration of the consortium. If the consortium likes a title, it will pay the publisher up front for all the start-up costs and the text is made available and downloadable online. The publisher can seek to generate additional revenue by selling hard copies through print-on-demand. The Open Library of the Humanities (www.openlibhums.org) draws its inspiration from the Public Library of Science (www.plos.org) and charges relatively low article processing charges (APCs) with additional funding derived via donations and sponsorship. Models such as these also rely on volunteer work by committed academics and on the use and development of open-source software to facilitate the preparation of the manuscript.

Alternatively, one can envisage the equivalent of full APCs for books. This is a costly route which would be beyond the resources of the many small grant funders who operate productively in the Humanities. It is for instance the approach adopted by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), which grants a lump sum of €14,000 for the publication of a book deriving from a project that it has supported (increased to €18,000 if there are translation costs involved). In return, the FWF lays down conditions on peer review, which can serve to address the quality problem mentioned above, and is intervening to develop appropriate repositories. The latter can serve to mimic in the world of the Internet the experience of the library browser who enters with the intention of consulting one volume and leaves enriched by the contents of other items that happened to share shelf space with it. A resource which moves in the same direction but encompasses much more than the electronic equivalents of traditional books is that promoted by the DARIAH project (www.dariah.eu).

The FWF model described above is in effect 'Gold' OA for books. A variant of 'Green' is not hard to imagine. This would entail a book being published in the same way as currently at a price sufficient to defray the considerable costs of copy-editing, indexing, formatting, proof-reading, marketing, warehousing and distribution and to allow the publisher a margin of profit. However, after an appropriate embargo period – the exact length to be determined but presumably longer than the 12 to 24 months currently being discussed for journals – an electronic version would be made available for

download from the publishers website or from a repository. The technology for this would not be problematic since electronic book publishing is already well established. Indeed, it could be argued that something akin to this already exists in the substantial price reductions academic publishers offer from time to time on items from their backlist. For example, as I write, Cambridge University Press are advertising selected items in Humanities and Social Sciences at 40% of their original cover price. Obviously, it would take time and care to work out the details of this or any other kind of solution, and publishers may not easily be persuaded to grant speedy access to titles for which they foresee sustained sales over many years. And even so there could still be losers. Second-hand booksellers who specialise in academic books for example could see their market drastically undercut by any move to free electronic access after an embargo period. It is essential, therefore, that we do not charge into ill-thought-out policies and proposals in the way that has to date unfortunately characterised the discussion of open access in relation to journals.

In summary, then, the main conclusions to emerge from this brief survey of open access issues in the area of books and book chapters are:

- Monographs are an intrinsically important mode of academic production and must not be sacrificed on the altar of open access.
- Book chapters are also a valuable and distinctive type of output and could find their visibility, and therefore their viability, enhanced by an appropriate open access policy.
- There are to date no agreed open access solutions in the domain of books that can be canvassed in the focused way that the Gold vs. Green debate has developed in relation to journal publishing.
- Time should therefore be taken to develop and explore more precise models without hasty rush to a find a single unified solution for all modes of academic production.
- In developing such models it is important to ensure that the move to open access does not compromise the peer review process as the guarantee of excellence.
- The simple adoption of the untrammelled CC-BY licence is unlikely to be the right answer in the domain of books, whatever its merits

(which are in any case contested in the Humanities and Social Science disciplines) in relation to journals.

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Notes

- 1 Just as this collection was going to press the Wellcome Trust announced that they were extending their open access policy to include monographs and book chapters, a development which reinforces the need to find solutions that cover all modes of scholarly publication.
- 2 Peter Williams, Iain Stevenson, David Nicholas, Anthony Watkinson & Ian Rowlands, 'The role and future of the monograph in arts and humanities research', *Aslib Proceedings*, 61 (2009), 67-82, at p. 67.
- 3 *Ibid*, p. 80.
- 4 See www.rae.ac.uk/submissions

- 5 Mutz, Rüdiger, Lutz Bornmann & Hans-Dieter Daniel (2012). Types of research output profiles: A multi-level latent class analysis of the Austrian Science Fund's final project report data. *Research Evaluation*, online pre-publication, 4/12/2012.
- 6 We return below to the question of peer review in relation to book chapters.
- 7 By 'anthologies' here they mean what we refer to below as 'collections' or 'collected volumes'. The former term is best reserved for compilations of reprinted material, works which have an important place in teaching and reference but which by definition do not represent original research.
- 8 See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_authorship for a useful survey of practices in different disciplines (accessed 20 March 2013).
- 9 There are other large scale projects in the Humanities – for example, editions of lengthy or difficult texts or ones with complex manuscript traditions, commentaries, and the like – which fall under this same rubric and to which many of the same criteria and arguments apply. For sake of simplicity I use the term 'monograph' to cover all such endeavours.
- 10 deevybee.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/how-to-bury-your-academic-writing.html
- 11 peterwebster.wordpress.com/2013/01/14/on-the-invisibility-of-edited-collections
- 12 On the pro and cons of a plain CC-BY licence, see the exchange at: jisc-pub.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1043&context=jisc
- 13 There is not space here to cover all the views and approaches currently under consideration. See the AHRC's open access for monographs pages for many more links and a review of the relevant literature: www.ahrc.ac.uk/About-Us/Policies,-standards,-and-forms/open-access/Pages/OAPEN-UK.aspx. For the associated work being promoted by JISC see: open-uk.jiscebooks.org/?s=&search_404=1. In the international context, a number of alternatives were discussed at the ERC-sponsored event held in February 2013, erc.europa.eu/workshop-open-access-infrastructures-social-sciences-and-humanities
- 14 Stefan Müller 'A personal note on open access in linguistics', in *Journal of Language Modelling* 1.1, pp. 9-39 (2012) nlp.ipipan.waw.pl/ojs/index.php/JLM
- 15 I am aware that some people prefer not to proliferate these colour-coded categories, arguing that 'Gold' means 'immediately available' regardless of whether a charge has been paid or not; see openaccess.eprints.org/index.php?/archives/1003-Paid-Gold-OA-Versus-Free-Gold-OA-Against-Color-Cacophony.html However, it is useful to distinguish those ventures which require an APC from those which do not, and hence I retain here the labels 'Gold' vs 'Platinum'.