

*A book by any other name...*

or

Books, research and art

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It is highly probable that the reader of this article, like me, loves books – but that, like me, she or he also spends a good part of his or her day in front of a computer screen... Such are the contradictions of modern life.

### *What is a book?*

But just what is a book? That is the first question my title – a loose translation of *Le livre dans tous ses états*<sup>1</sup> – raises. A question that we wouldn't have dreamed of asking a few years ago. We *knew* what a book was. But times have changed.

So, for a definition of the book, I went – of course – to the web.

It turns out that the word “book” (that already existed in Old English as “bōc”) can be traced back to an Indo-European root meaning “beech tree”, just as the word “livre”, in French, derives from the Latin word “liber”, which originally meant “bark” (because, apparently, early Germanic peoples wrote on strips of beech wood, and Romans on the smooth inner bark of a tree). Sanskrit also has a name for writing that is based on the name of a tree (the “ash”). Trees obviously played an essential role in the first chapter of the history of the book (as in the second).

Most of the definitions of the book given by online dictionaries were remarkably similar (there is obviously some “borrowing” going on...). The first definition inevitably concerns the form of the book, the book as an object. Here is a synthesis drawn from these definitions:

1. (a) A number of sheets of paper, parchment, etc., with writing or printing on them, fastened together along one edge, usually between protective covers;  
(b) A literary or scientific work, anthology, etc., so prepared, distinguished by length and form from a magazine, tract, etc.
2. A main division of a larger printed or written work: *A book of the Old Testament*.
3. (a) A set of blank or ruled sheets or printed forms bound in a tablet, for the entry of accounts, records, notes, etc.: *an account book*;  
(b) The records of accounts, as of a business, kept in such a book or books.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to William Shakespeare. (*Le livre dans tous ses états* was of course the title of the graduate student colloquium at which this paper had the honour of being the opening lecture.)

4. (a) A libretto;  
(b) The script of a play.
5. The Book [with a capital B]: the Bible, the Koran.

Thereafter, the definitions become more metaphorical or figurative, based on examples such as *the book of life*, *He's an open book*, *Every trick in the book*, *A book of matches*, etc.

As a literary person who naturally tends to equate a book with literature and especially the novel, I was somewhat surprised to note that, of the twelve online dictionaries and three online encyclopaedias consulted, only three shared my bias. Merriam-Webster gave as its third definition "a long written or printed literary composition", while both the American Heritage Dictionary and the Free Online Dictionary gave, as their second definition, "A printed or written literary work".

The two definitions given by the online Business Dictionary were decidedly more specific or pragmatic:

1. UNESCO definition: Bound non-periodical publication 49 or more pages.
2. US Postal Service definition: Bound publication having 24 or more pages, at least 22 of which are printed and contain primary reading material, with advertising limited only to book announcements.

Interestingly enough, in March 2010, when I first checked out the definition of a book, none of the online dictionaries mentioned the e-book in their entry. Wikipedia was the only site I found at that point that included the e-book in its definition of the "book", but then, it's an encyclopaedia, rather than just a dictionary.

Things are evolving very rapidly, however. In July 2011, Merriam-Webster gave "e-book" as its seventh definition of the book, the Computing Dictionary (which I don't remember seeing in March 2010) gave the e-book as its first definition, and all three online encyclopedias consulted mentioned the e-book or the "downloadable electronic book" (Britannica) when discussing the history of the book. Nevertheless, Wikipedia, which has a particularly extensive and impressive entry on the subject of the book, is the only one that devotes a complete section to the e-book.

Even in March 2010, however, there were several web sites specifically on the e-book that began with a definition. It is interesting to note that there was a lot of variety in these definitions. For Encarta, for example, it's an "electronic reading device: a battery-powered portable reading device displaying text on a high-resolution screen. E-books can be updated either from a bookstore or a Web site that sells digital texts." Therefore, the e-book, as defined by Encarta, is NOT really a book. It's a container, a box, a vehicle for downloading books, and reading them, not the book itself. On the other hand, several other sites define the e-book as "an *electronic* version of a traditional print book that can be read by using a personal computer or by using an eBook reader. »

In actual fact, the e-book has simply made clearer a fundamental ambiguity that already existed in the "traditional" definition of the book, where some confusion exists as to whether the work "book" refers to the material object or to the contents of that object. Since the two were more or less inseparable in people's minds, the ambiguity wasn't necessarily noticeable until recently. But, as John Makinson, Penguin Group chairman and C.E.O., said at the Financial Times' Digital Media and Broadcasting Conference in London on March 2, 2010, while talking about the iPad, the definition of the book is now "up for grabs".<sup>2</sup> David Eagleman has even created a book for the iPad that requires an Internet connection in order to be read (Nancy Wozny. "David Eagleman challenges the definition of "book" with his latest: *Why the Internet Matters*." Web. Jan. 17, 2011).

Albert Moritz, an American poet who is currently teaching at the University of Toronto (Victoria College) and who recently won the Griffin Poetry Prize of \$50,000 (as well as being a finalist for the Governor General's Award), even stated in an interview for the *Queen's Journal* published on Friday, March 12, 2010 (p. 3) that "if you enjoy looking at it on the [electronic] screen, it's a book, if you don't, then it's not a book".

As has now become evident, then, the word "book" refers as much, if not more so, to the contents as to the vehicle or frame that supports it. And given the importance of the process involved in producing that particular aspect of "the book", a process in which

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Bradshaw and Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson. « FT palns PayPal option for online news. » Web, March 2, 2010. Also quoted in David Teather. « Penguin boss has no problem with e-books. » guardian.co.uk. 29 July 2010.

graduate students often play a vital role, this leads me to perhaps the most fundamental message I would like to transmit, namely the importance of (good) research.

*The importance of (good) research, and therefore, of conscientious research assistants*

When I first happened on my thesis topic, i.e. the literary quarrel between the regionalists and the “exotiques” in Quebec at the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to a chance reference in an article by David M. Hayne, there was almost nothing available -- at least not in book form – on the subject. In the Quebec of the 1960s and 1970s, it had been virtually forgotten. But thanks to some other echoes of this polemic I had noticed while searching for a thesis topic,<sup>3</sup> I knew that the quarrel had actually existed. The trick was to know where to start looking in order to write about it. Fortunately, I found a book that treated a related subject and that had what looked like a very useful bibliography to get me started.

What followed was truly a lesson in frustration! Most of the references in this book were to articles in periodicals, and either the page number wasn't right, or the issue, or the year... Sometimes it wasn't even the right periodical! It was so infuriating that I swore that all of the references in my thesis would be as completely accurate as I could possibly make them. And I still try to make accuracy a top priority, because I've never forgotten how awful an experience that was.

When I mentioned this episode later to some of my Quebec colleagues, they told me that the author of that particular book had had cancer when he wrote it, and therefore had probably not had the time to verify all the work done by his research assistants...

I was again reminded of this problem just recently when, while working on an article, I discovered some mistakes in the bibliography of the critical edition of a well-known Quebec novel. Since the colleague who prepared the edition is known for the precision and rigour of his work, these mistakes were almost certainly due to his research assistant.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Department of French Language and Literature at McGill University at the time, it was not acceptable to do a Ph.D. dissertation on a writer who was still alive, and in 1970, in the field of Quebec literature, that narrowed the possibilities considerably.

I myself have had disappointing – and also fabulous – experiences with research assistants. The ideal situation, obviously, is when the researcher is the same person who writes the article, book or thesis based on the research. But that is often not possible, especially with the present system of research funding in Canada. So it is extremely important that research assistants understand how absolutely *vital* their work is.

This comment related to the importance of good research applies as well, of course, to work done for one's own M.A. and/or Ph.D. thesis. It is essential that all references be accurate. Among other things, deciding well in advance what style sheet to use (system of notes and bibliography, like MLA, for example) prevents a lot of problems in this area. And if – as happens more often than one would like to imagine – it ends up being necessary to invent a few page numbers the night before handing in the thesis, it is still important to take the time between submission and the thesis defence to find the right numbers and correct them. Because one day, someone like me will read that thesis and, through their own research, find those mistakes...

In other words, errors in literary research are as unacceptable as they are commonly considered to be in scientific research.<sup>4</sup> But oh, how much more exciting – from my point of view, of course – literary research is.

### *Research as a time machine*

In fact, research in the field of literary history or “reception”, which is what I know best, is somewhat akin to the work of a detective or an explorer. It's a sort of “time machine” – *une machine à remonter le temps* – that allows us the joy of constantly expanding our field of knowledge, and sometimes making fabulous discoveries. These are often totally unexpected discoveries – which are the very best kind, because they mean that the researcher is not just imposing his or her preconceived notions, hypotheses or ideologies on the period being studied, but is gaining real insight into the period and how things actually happened.

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<sup>4</sup> One might wonder, however, how much the web will change this situation, with web pages being constantly added, updated, or removed. Retracing information can become much more complicated, which is unfortunate for future researchers.

I used to say to my friends that I had lived more in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Quebec than in the period during which I worked on my thesis. For example, I read a periodical, from cover to cover (often on microfilm!), for almost every day or week during the period from 1899 to 1931. That was an exciting time in Quebec literary history since, as Victor Barbeau (who played an important role in the quarrel) put it, “literature had never been so important in Quebec”.<sup>5</sup> That particular comment by Barbeau, made during an interview I had with him in June 1973, played a vital role, by the way, because one day, several years later, I suddenly realized that this was because what the participants in the quarrel were actually arguing about was NOT really whether writers should write regionalist poetry or “exotic” (i.e. modern) poetry, but rather what kind of a nation Quebec (or French Canada, as they said then) would – or should – become. It was about politics, religion and autonomy.

Personal experience has also taught me that one should never give up, even when things get frustrating (like when it’s difficult to pinpoint the beginning or the end of a literary quarrel), as well as the fact that literary historical research can be surprisingly timeless and enduring if it is done well. And after all these years, I still find the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Quebec a fascinating area of research.

Lorne Pierce

My present research project is on the reception of Quebec literature in English Canada between 1900 and 1939, however, and one of the “stars” who made a remarkable contribution in that sense was Lorne Pierce.

Rumour has it that it was the contemptuous attitude of his professors in the Department of English at Queen’s University that made Pierce determined to prove that Canadian literature existed, and that it was worthy of the public’s interest and respect. I’m still not quite sure what factors led to his viewing Canadian Literature as what Itamar Even-Zohar would later call a polysystem, with an Anglophone and a Francophone component, but when he published *An Outline of Canadian Literature* in 1927, all the chapters (on the novel, poetry, etc.) began with a section on the French-Canadian writers in that category,

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<sup>5</sup> « La littérature n’avait jamais eu autant d’importance au Québec. » (Comment made by Victor Barbeau during an interview with A. Hayward, June 20, 1973)

before treating the relevant English-Canadian authors.<sup>6</sup> As Pierce proudly claims in his Foreword, « This Outline is the first attempt at a history of our literature, placing both French and English authors side by side. (...) Here after they must share equally in any attempt to trace the evolution of our national spirit. » He also points out that « Until recently, Canada enjoyed the unenviable distinction of being the only civilized country in the world where the study of its own literature was not made compulsory in the schools and colleges » (n.p.).

Such was not the case in Quebec, of course, where l'abbé Camille Roy had proclaimed the *nationalisation de la littérature canadienne* in 1904, and where he had then worked tirelessly, with the help of many others, to ensure that French-Canadian literature was taught in the schools, producing among other things, to help the teachers, a *Tableau de l'histoire de la littérature canadienne* in 1907 that he updated every few years. Later he even managed to introduce a course in Quebec literature at Laval University. He also published numerous articles and literary criticism in periodicals that were later collected in book form, thus quickly becoming the most influential literary historian and critic in the province. By 1927, when Lorne Pierce dedicates his *Outline* to Camille Roy, thereby indicating that this Quebec colleague is the model he strives to emulate, Roy has become Mgr Camille Roy, President of Laval University, soon to be elected, in 1928-1929, President of the Royal Society of Canada. And the *Manuel d'histoire de la littérature canadienne* that Roy had published in 1925 was in fact the main source of Pierce's information for his sections on French-Canadian Literature.<sup>7</sup>

Pierce also published a very complimentary article on Camille Roy in the *Queen's Quarterly* in 1928, and the two men (both members of the Royal Society of Canada) quickly became good friends. In 1930, Roy, who apparently shared Pierce's desire to work towards « *la bonne entente* » between Francophone and Anglophone Canadians, himself published a *Histoire de la littérature canadienne* that included a section on English-Canadian Literature.

A colleague from Laval who was going through Camille Roy's papers in Quebec City wrote to me a while ago saying that there had apparently existed a project between Roy and

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<sup>6</sup> The only exceptions were the chapters on « Nature Writers » and « The Humorists », for which Pierce found no equivalent in French Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, certain naïve comments lead one to suspect that Pierce relied heavily on Roy's work, and hadn't necessarily read all the books he discusses or mentions in his sections on French Canada.



Pierce regarding an Anthology of Canadian Poetry, French and English, that never came to fruition, even though he found a series of poems apparently collected for that purpose among the papers. So I have recently been going through the correspondence of Lorne Pierce (some 60,000 letters housed in the Archives of Queen's University) to try and understand what happened.<sup>8</sup> I discovered that the poetry anthology in question, published in 1935 by Ryerson Press, was actually the work of Pierce and Bliss Carman, and that Pierce had simply consulted Camille Roy on the selection of Quebec poetry used, which explains why the poems were transmitted in the correspondence. But in 1931, Pierce and Roy had indeed agreed to collaborate on an Anthology of Canadian Prose Writers, French and English, which was never published. I was also curious as to why Roy's *Histoire* of 1930 was never reedited, and why (given that he used to bring out a new version of his *Manuel* every two or three years) he waited until 1939 to publish an updated version of his former *Manuel* in which he eliminated the section on English Canadian Literature. Perhaps a study of Pierce's correspondence could clarify some of this.

Roy's first letter to Pierce, from 1925, is very formal, a fact that may not be unrelated to a comment made a few weeks earlier, in a letter from Thomas O'Hagan to Pierce, to the effect that Laval University was fearful of Pierce's « modernism ». By 1929-1930, however, one gets the impression that Roy has found in Pierce a true kindred spirit, and that their friendship is very important to him. Their relationship seems to reach a climax in 1931, when l'Université Laval – doubtless thanks to Camille Roy – bestows an honorary doctorate on Pierce.

Even if the rare letters Roy writes after that (one or two a year) are slightly less effusive, they still express a very real feeling of friendship. Camille Roy was very busy in his role as President of Laval (a job that he held for many years, the successors named to replace him on at least two occasions having fallen ill), and apparently never found the time to finish the preparation for the prose anthology with Pierce. But he did publish other things (including his new *Manuel* in 1939), so one can't help but wonder...

The only negative note that creeps into this correspondence happens in 1939, when Pierce sends Roy the April-May issue of the *Canadian Bookman* (a periodical which Pierce

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<sup>8</sup> Remember when people used to write letters ? How will future researchers research our email ?

had taken over to save it from bankruptcy), and Mgr Roy subsequently expresses his dismay at a short story by Velma Francis O'Neil, "Joy in the morning", published in that issue. He suggests that this indecent and unacceptable story must have escaped Pierce's notice, and urges him to better monitor the *Canadian Bookman's* high artistic character and morality! Yet on March 6, 1941, upon thanking Pierce for sending him a copy of his text "The Armoury in our Halls", he writes (my translation): "You put in it your whole heart and mind as a Canadian citizen. You underline so many problems that threaten the welfare and unity of the country we share! There is still so much work to do to build our house, to make a home where we can meet with confidence, and unite all the necessary strengths. Your pamphlet will contribute to this good cause, for which I congratulate and thank you."<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps Camille Roy's correspondence in Quebec City will help give me the answer to the change that nevertheless obviously took place in his relationship with Lorne Pierce (and English Canada?) during the 1930s. Or the key may be in Lorne Pierce's diary, if it is possible to consult it. Then again, it may just be a result of the historical context, of the evolution of both societies. After all, it was the Great Depression, and there were many strains to deal with.

The miracle is that Lorne Pierce, as Literary Editor of Ryerson Press, managed to continue printing so many books during that period. There is no doubt that he played a vital role in what I tend to call the "Invention of Canadian Literature", not only by his *Outline* but because of all the Canadian literature he published: three important series (Makers of Canadian Literature, Canadian History Readers, and the Canadian Poetry Chapbooks), and a multitude of works by individual authors. As Marjory Fee puts it, "Lorne Pierce was a central figure in Canadian publishing between 1922 and 1960, the period when he was Book Editor at Ryerson Press" (52). She adds:

It is difficult to imagine the fate of Canadian writing without [Lorne Pierce] during the period when Ryerson Press supported many Canadian books which must have lost the firm money. The smallness of the Canadian market and the exigencies of coast to coast distribution still mean losses even for good writers; Pierce, in more

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<sup>9</sup> « Vous avez mis votre cœur et votre esprit large de citoyen canadien. Que de problèmes vous soulevez pour le bonheur et l'unité de notre commune patrie! Et que de travail il reste à faire pour construire notre maison, et en faire un foyer où l'on puisse se rencontrer avec confiance, et grouper toutes les forces nécessaires. Votre brochure contribuera à cette bonne œuvre, et je vous en fais tous mes compliments, et je vous remercie. »

difficult times, can be credited with starting many important authors on their publishing careers." (51)<sup>10</sup>

As I leafed through the correspondence in the Archives, it was exciting to see handwritten letters by such famous Canadian poets as Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott, E.J. Pratt, Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney, F.P. Grove and Louis Dudek, among others. I even had one particularly unexpected surprise when I chanced upon a letter from E.J. Pratt ("Ned") recommending Lorne Pierce consider hiring a certain Miss Anna Bicknell, one of his graduating student from Victoria College, University of Toronto. It was astounding for me because Miss Anna Bicknell was to become my mother!

There were also letters from people who obviously considered themselves very important at the time (and were sometimes very demanding or critical), but who are totally forgotten today. And Pierce was always patient, sometimes sending out several sets of proofs in the mail, answering objections or complaints, or sending out samples of types of cloth that might be used on the chapbook covers.

Poetry was obviously very important at the time, and considered the noblest form of literature (both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada), even though I noticed a letter from an editor of Macmillan in the second half of the 1920s lamenting that poetry just didn't sell the way it used to, and therefore wasn't necessarily a good investment. The novel was obviously starting to take its place, although realism (as opposed to idealistic realism) was still frowned upon by many critics, both in Quebec and in Ontario.

In fact, one of my biggest surprises when I began this research project was discovering that Quebec (the so-called "priest-ridden province") and (much of) English Canada before World War II were not really as different from one another as one might expect. For example, Pierce had trained as a Methodist minister, and seems to have basically held more or less the same world view and aesthetic standards as Camille Roy. In that, he was fairly typical of the Ontario elite of the period. So it is not surprising that the more or less "official" Quebec literature of the time, generally regionalist and Catholic in inspiration, was the same Quebec literature that met with the most approval by Pierce and many other English Canadians. In *An Outline of Canadian Literature*, for example, Émile

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<sup>10</sup> The books he printed for the schools did make profits, however.

Nelligan, today highly regarded as the first modern Quebec poet, was only given half a page (as opposed to a whole page for Pamphile Lemay), and his poetry is presented very negatively: « His aestheticism lacks mellowness and depth, while he exchanges the nostalgia of the older poets for a pensive, and occasionally morbid, thirst for the satisfaction of his own artistic desires » (59).

### *Archibald MacMechan*

On the other hand, *Head-Waters of Canadian Literature*, published by Archibald MacMechan in 1924, gives a completely different perspective. It was one of my most exciting discoveries, an astonishing book that, especially when dealing with Quebec literature, takes a very modern approach. Another amazing aspect of this work is the obvious ability of MacMechan to read and evaluate French-Canadian literary works (poetry, in this case) in the original. Three years before Pierce's *Outline*, then, MacMechan was the first to devote an important part of a literary study of Canadian Literature to, as he puts it, "Canadians who write in French" (n.p. [9]). My present hypothesis is that MacMechan's *Head-Waters* was part of the inspiration for Pierce's *Outline*, although one must also take into account the influence in English Canadian literary circles of the two English translations of *Maria Chapdelaine* that came out in 1921, the importance of which it would be difficult to exaggerate.

Not only are MacMechan's analysis and judgements obviously based on a study of the literary works in French but, in the ten pages he devotes to Émile Nelligan, for example, he even offers his own translation of the poems "Le Vaisseau d'or" and "Cloître noir". There are also eight pages devoted to Paul Morin, one of the main « exotic » poets that were often so highly criticized in Quebec. MacMechan obviously greatly admires Morin's poetry, which he declares untranslatable because of the way the meaning is so closely related to the form and sonority (*le signifiant*) of the words. In fact, this particular section of *Head-Waters* is probably the best analysis devoted to Paul Morin at the time, whether in English or in French.

MacMechan also demonstrates his modernity and his familiarity with the Quebec literary scene when he concludes, in sharp contrast to Mgr. Camille Roy (who tends to favour Quebec City, where he lives), by stating that the poetry produced by the poets of the

Montreal school is by far the more important. « Their 'note' is attention to artistic form; they are more learned and more critical than the Quebec school; and their success is undoubtedly greater. The poetry of Nelligan, Lozeau and Morin is a greater glory to Montreal than her fifty millionaires » (185).

### The role of the clergy in the Canadian literary establishment

Another insight that occurred to me while going through Pierce's correspondence was the singular importance of the role played by the clergy in the Canadian literary establishment. (In that way, too, the situation was similar to that of Quebec.) Many of Pierce's correspondents were members of the clergy or had some connection to the church. The clergy definitely seemed to constitute a sort of cultural elite within Canadian society. Lorne Pierce himself was a Methodist minister, and he worked for Ryerson Press, a publishing house founded by the Methodist Church in Toronto in 1829, and known until 1919 as the Methodist Book Room.<sup>11</sup> Even Archibald MacMechan, born in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario, was the son of Reverend John MacMechan, a Presbyterian minister (and of Mary Jean McKellar, daughter of the Honourable Archibald McKellar, who held office in the first legislative assembly of Ontario from 1867 to 1875). The poet Duncan Campbell Scott, born in Ottawa, was also the son of a Methodist minister. Charles G. D. Roberts (the cousin of Bliss Carman) taught English and French between 1885 and 1895 at King's College, an Anglican theological college (among other things) – where he is said to have written some of his best poetry. He was also the son of a clergyman (probably Anglican). It came as a surprise to me that even E.J. Pratt (a major modern Canadian poet of the 1930s and 1940s) was the son of a Methodist minister, and was himself ordained as a Methodist minister although he never served as one. F.R. Scott, for that matter, was not only the son of Frederick George Scott, an Anglican minister who was himself a published poet, but was born in the rectory of St. Matthews Anglican Church, in Quebec City. (There are doubtless many more examples of these connections to the clergy. Thomas Chandler Haliburton, one of Canada's first humorists, for instance, was educated at King's Collegiate School and then at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia, both Anglican institutions.)

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<sup>11</sup> John McClelland, Frederick Goodchild, and George Stewart, who founded the famous Canadian publishing house of McClelland and Stewart in 1906, were all former employees of the Methodist Book Room.

This led me to wonder if there might not be some connection between veneration for "The Book" (the Bible) and a fascination for literature (particularly poetry) and books in general. Books certainly have incredible symbolic value.

### *Le plaisir (ou la passion) du livre...*

This question of the symbolic power of the book reminds me of an experience I had when getting my H1N1 vaccination. I brought a book with me (naturally), and the nurse who gave me the shot seemed to be fascinated by it. She took it in her hands, leafed through it voluptuously, and then said she would just love to have it in her living room. When I asked her if she read French, she quite astounded me by answering, "No, but I just love books." This brought home to me the fact that not only is there "*le plaisir de lire*", as Roland Barthes puts it, but there is also "*le plaisir du livre*".

Books do indeed have several other uses besides reading. Wikipedia offers a list of "Uses for books":

- A book may be evaluated by a reader or professional writer to create a book review.
- A book may be read by a group of people to use as a spark for social or academic discussion, as in a book club.
- A book may be studied by students as the subject of a writing and analysis exercise in the form of a book report.
- Books are sometimes used for their exterior appearance to decorate a room, such as a study.

I'm not sure if this last point completely covers the case of the nurse I mentioned; one could say it's related – but lacking the passion... There are certainly other uses one can think of, like the book as a paper weight, for throwing at a cat, or blocking a door... But what I would like to discuss in the final section of this article is in fact related to the very first "use" of the book cited by Wikipedia :

- A book can be an artistic artifact ; this is sometimes known as an artists' [sic] book.

### *OtroMar – L'aventure d'un livre*

We live in exciting times, as far as the "book" is concerned. However, people have been playing around with the definition of the book for a long time, *at least* since the 19th

century, and even more so in the 20th, via what is sometimes called *L'objet-livre* or *le livre d'artiste*, the artist's book.

A recent example of this that I find quite fascinating is an *objet-livre* called *OtroMar*. So I'll end by telling the story of *OtroMar*, although I must warn you that it's a story in progress, a story without an ending...



**Figure 1. A really big book.**

*OtroMar* (the first *OtroMar*, perhaps I should say) is a huge book (80 cm. long X 50 cm wide X 10 cm. wide) created from start to finish by an artist in Spain (see Figure 1). All the materials used were carefully chosen for the relevance of the tactile experience. The contents consist of 10 original works of art created through a technique related to *tachisme* and *collage*. These paintings are accompanied by (or accompany) a poem that can be seen as describing a trip into the depths of the sea, plunging into the unconscious, or perhaps

diving into the dangerous sources of artistic creation. By its very size, this work seeks to immerse the viewer in the reading process, creating a connection between the emotional reaction elicited by the material and visual aspects of the art work and the associations created by the symbolism of the poetry (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.**

Given the positive reaction created by this *livre-objet*, and the fact that many of the artist's friends expressed a desire to see it transformed into a "real book" that they could buy, enjoy or offer to their friends, the artist decided to photograph the original images and rework them on the computer – thus beginning her initiation into what she calls "pixel painting" --, as well as revisiting the poem so as to produce a smaller artist's book (33cm. X 24 cm. X 4 cm.) of 60 pages that involved 21 images (see Figure 3). This enriched the narrative aspect of the poem and added a new digital and photographic texture to the images. The plan was to offer to print a series of these books if there turned out to be sufficient demand.





**Figure 3.**

But then, while the art gallery where the original *livre-objet* was displayed was preparing a special exposition of this artist's work, the idea came up of creating an "event" or happening around that particular work by having an actress do a reading of the poem while the images were being projected on a screen. Rosana Pastor, the actress who accepted to do the reading, is quite well known in Spain (she was twice nominated for a Goya – the Spanish version of the Oscars). Her low, sexy voice is very effective in rendering the atmosphere of the poem(s).

The actress suggested however that reading the poem in person while projecting the art works could be distracting. This led to the idea of making a video of *OtroMar*, reworking again the digital images and presenting not only the poem read by Rosana Pastor, but, in the background, body music (music created by using the musician's body, pages of the book, etc.) to correspond to the emotions represented in the different sections. This part of the project was done by Teresa Nuñez Ruiz, a Spanish musician. The artist therefore reworked the digital images so as to produce the impression of progression or animation in the video. For example, Figure 4 shows the first image, *La Noche*, which is an evolution of the original book cover. In the second image (Figure 5), a spot, representing the dream (or the dream

world), approaches the head of the “sleeper”, growing until it fills the whole screen (Figure 6). Then the red lips from the first image reappear on the surface of the “dream” and form the title of the book, *OtroMar*.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



**Figure 6.**

For the image *Los Arcos*, that goes with the first section called *La Puerta (The Portal)*, the artist uses the same type of paper that was used to separate the pages and protect the paintings in the original *livre-objet* to gradually enclose the image, producing an effect much like the eyelids half-closed described in the poem. This symbolizes the beginning of the dream. The effect of these manipulations is amazing, and the resulting video (13 minutes, and now available on You Tube) has apparently fascinated the public both times it has been presented so far.

I have to admit, however, that one of my favourite “pixel paintings” from *OtroMar* is *Los dioses viejos (Ancient Gods)*, which appears in conjunction with the third poem, as the dreamer continues her or his descent (Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Los dioses viejos**

As you can see, *OtroMar* is a book in motion in more than one sense of the word, a book that has taken on a life of its own. From the first *livre-objet*, a sort of homage to the traditional book, it has developed into an artist's book of the digital age.

But what about the idea of it becoming a "real book", or a "regular book", that we could buy, offer to friends, put on our coffee table? Since the artist was born in Alma, Quebec, did her primary schooling in Quebec City and studied Communications and Fine Arts at the Université d'Ottawa, I was hoping that it might one day be published in book form in Quebec. The poem has been translated into French (which is in fact the artist's first language), and into English, thus providing subtitles for the video. It now appears, however, that *OtroMar*, in the form of a "regular book", possibly accompanied by the DVD of the video, will be launched in Madrid and Valencia in October 2011, at which time there will be another quite different intermedial "event" (with dance and music) organized by the artist.

And things may not end there, since there is another artistic project in the works apparently related to "before *OtroMar*"...

Whatever the final outcome of this whole adventure, it is in my opinion a fascinating example of *Le livre dans tous ses états*, of the way the "book" is reinventing itself in today's globalized and intermedial world. "The sky's the limit", as the author of *OtroMar* loves to say.

The artist's name, by the way, is VANDENDORPE and her web page can be found at [www.vandendorpe-art.org](http://www.vandendorpe-art.org).

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