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news

An Edition of One: Xerographic Replacements to Meet Continuing Demand for Brittle Books in Book Format

By Wes Boomgaarden

Some books' lives in academic libraries resemble a paraphrased version of Thomas Hobbes's state of Nature: Their lives are nasty, brutish, and short. This is a fact of library life, and we routinely replace this category of common, heavily-used, worn out stock with reprint copies from whichever publishers can provide them, and we write it off as the cost of conducting the business of our educational enterprise.

Unfortunately, we too often find another category of book for which a dismaying trio of circumstances makes the routine of simple replacement-with-reprint impossible. This sad triangle is bound on one side by the fact that the book is out of print (o.p.) or out of stock indefinitely (o.s.i.). Secondly, the paper of the copy in hand is too inflexible, or brittle, to allow for routine repair. The third and most important line completing the triangle is that the book, common or obscure, continues to be in demand *as a book* for a number of reasons.

The resultant problem - or "challenge" to those preferring more positive euphemisms - is an irreparable book, reported *o.p.* or *o.s.i.* by the Acquisition Department, still needed in book format by the library's readers. A solution: The creation of a replacement edition of one or a few to meet demand. Although this solution is no longer a new idea, it remains a practical option that requires a systematic approach to work well.

At the Ohio State University Libraries this systematic approach involves the review of hundreds of bibliocasualties every week, most receiving a triage exam after returning from loan, or as the result of being identified by public services or stacks maintenance personnel. The Libraries' conservation specialists skilled in the practice of triage know the range of options available that best serve the collection, and they route the injured books to the appropriate work station for action. Paper flexibility is the critical factor in deciding what further action is feasible. If the book's paper still has flexibility, it is routed for either conservation treatment (repair), or given a trip to the library's contract bindery for recasing or rebinding.

The brittle books take one of two different routes. One route can look suspiciously like procrastination and is called "phase boxing"; done because there are too many to handle. The other route for brittle books takes them through a search-for-replacement process that yields sufficient information for a collection manager to make a rational decision on their fate. The obvious preferred choice for, say, a 1908 brittle monograph is the reprint edition available from AMS or another reputable publisher or reprint house. Unfortunately and more occasionally, *Books in Print* and *Guide to Reprints* are found to be large works of fiction, and their erroneous or outdated listings dash the hope of purchasing a reprint.

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There is another factor to consider. The results from the search in OCLC or RLIN for the listings of a master microform of the the title, e.g., the Library of Congress, or Yale, or University Microfilms has preserved the title on film. A check to see if the informational content of a book has been preserved in the national and international preservation effort can be of interest, and can influence the collection manager's decision on how best to preserve the book. (We recognize the importance of contributing to the Nation's efforts to preserve important books on film.)

Nevertheless, collection managers always recognize important features in the book in hand that would not satisfy the local reader were the book reproduced as a microform. Some of these characteristics are:

- the existence of color, continuous tone, or halftone illustrations as plates or in the text crucial to the meaning of the work;
- maps that will not reproduce faithfully to be useful in context within microform;
- the format of the book, which dictates its continued use as a codex (field guides and music scores, for example); and
- books in high demand, whose circulation records show several circulations each year in the

recent past.

Enter the "xerographic replacement" option, which allows the library to satisfy its readers' desire for attractive, usable copies of books they need, while keeping special features such as maps and color plates and the codex format. The replacement is produced on alkaline, permanent paper, and library bound for durability and openability. The work is done by an outside contractor (the Archival Products Brittle Book Replacement Service or another firm) after the book is collated and special features marked by the library staff. Of course, all copyright related regulations are carefully observed.

This option is extraordinarily popular among collection managers and readers, but it doesn't mean that we have found the perfect solution. Our new "edition of one" is still highly vulnerable to theft, damage, and loss, and (unlike preservation microfilms) there is no backup except the so-called leaf master, the original leaves of the brittle books themselves, which we generally do not keep. We should be planning the next improvements now.

In the future, how can we improve the operations of the process so that our "edition of one" will never go out of print and so will always be available? We need to prepare more aggressively to maintain a machine readable (digitized) copy of the texts so that they can be printed and bound on demand at a lower cost. We also should work toward better service. In our future libraries, those books in demand as books will have a prominent place, but enhanced availability and accessibility is crucial to their value.

On our way to that future, photocopying selected brittle books for preservation, and continued access to them as books, is now a very valuable option.

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