



credibly impressive and comprehensive Jewish American collection. Even the Jewish press seems to have ignored its arrival. Granted, the African American volume had the name of Harvard's Henry Louis Gates, Jr. behind it. But Gates' fame alone cannot explain the disparity in the reception of the two books.

The anthology of Jewish American literature has received so little attention for the simple reason that it lacks the political punch of the African American volume. In the preface to the African American anthology, Gates presents the collection as a 2,000-page rebuke to centuries of racist theories of African inferiority. The Jewish American anthology, by contrast, can only be thought of as a celebration of the Jewish American success story. The volume begins with a petition for equal rights for Jews addressed to the Director General and Council of New Netherlands, March 14, 1656. And, as Harvard Professor Ruth Wisse wrote in one of the few published reviews of

the anthology, it was "a request that ... has been honored for almost 350 years."

But if a Jewish American Norton doesn't have the same political reverberations as an African American Norton, it doesn't mean there's nothing to fight about. In the above-mentioned review, Wisse angrily accuses the editors of the anthology of ignoring American Jewish religious thought, even while expanding the definition of literature to include Jewish songs and jokes. Of course, as Wisse knows, anthologies by their very nature reflect biases.

Norton may have solved the problem of excluding entire races or ethnicities, but exclusion, in one form or another, is still their business.

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E-Books: A Solution in Search of a Problem?

Constance Devanthery-Lewis

F all of 1999: The publishing world was abuzz with the promise of electronic publishing. The Internet Revolution, gathering speed, was transforming business — blowing up the value chain, rewriting the rules. It seemed inevitable that all media would be eclipsed by interactive access to digital information. Two new companies joined the explosion of start-ups with the promise of making books — those static, stodgy icons of a pre-Internet universe — available anywhere, anytime, at the click of a mouse. Within the same three-month period, Softbook and Nuvomedia offered dedicated, handheld devices designed to make ubiquitous electronic books, magazines, and news. In a flash, e-book "readers" were springing up from all parts, each with its proprietary — though not necessarily distinctive — look, feel, and format, and each with its aggressive campaign to acquire a critical mass of high-impact content. The format wars were on.

Fall of 2001: Stephen King's "Riding the Bullet" came, conquered, and disappeared. Of the dozens of e-publishing start-ups that had so recently bloomed, only a handful are left standing.

What went wrong?

In short, too much solution, not enough problem. The number of potential customers for e-books is still small, and the industry itself has thrown up significant barriers to its growth. The potential here is vast, but the market is unlikely to grow significantly until some fundamental issues have been resolved.

Format wars: E-publishing has been, from its inception, marked by a competition between formats. Limited content is available in each format, forcing customers to maintain multiple reading formats and content libraries. A larger, more fundamental problem is the overall confusing and off-putting "Tower of Babel" effect of so many formats, devices, readers, and browsers — each imperfect in its own way.

Copyright issues: Because it's so easy to exchange data on the Internet, we've seen a number of egregious challenges to copyright law. To the extent that publishers and authors perceive a high risk of piracy, they hold back from making content available, and the legitimate industry suffocates.

Pricing: From its inception, the Internet has fostered the notion that digital content should be free. So much is available for free that there is significant

price resistance, and publishers of quality content have, until now, been loathe to sell electronic products at much lower prices than their print counterparts for fear of cannibalizing (diverting sales of) their print products.

Lack of content: At a certain moment in the development of a new medium there is a serendipitous confluence of appealing format and availability of content, and the market takes off, reinforcing that current and transforming it into a *tsunami*. This has clearly not happened in the e-book industry. A critical mass has yet to be reached and the marketplace suffers from lack of content. Publishers are skittish about investing significantly to convert to multiple imperfect formats, and there has been no public cry for the best-of-breed product.

Lack of compelling value: This is the toughest barrier of all. While digital media promise significant advantages over their print counterparts, they have yet to deliver, except in small niche markets. None of the promises of speed to market, inexpen-

sive production, superior functionality, ease of access — the list goes on — have proven compelling enough for large numbers of people to give up books and take up reading on their computers or PDAs.

Some types of digital content like encyclopedias, travel guides, and other reference materials, have been readily adopted by the public because of their vastly superior searchability, portability, and low prices. But average readers have yet to be convinced. They find books and magazines to be very satisfactory purveyors of content. Books are compact, portable, and easy to read. They are easily purchased and look good on the shelf or coffee table. Until e-books can meet or exceed those standards — or offer some alternative, strongly compelling value — they are likely to remain a solution in search of a problem.

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The Future of the Book for the People of the Book

Ellen Frankel

Many centuries ago, Jewish reading was revolutionized by the invention of a radical new technology: the codex, the forerunner of the modern book. Unlike the parchment scroll that it replaced everywhere but in synagogue ritual, the codex had individual leaves that permitted the reader to cross-cut from one section of content to another, breaking out of the straitjacket of linear form. The invention of the printing press brought another revolution to Jewish reading, making holy books — and later secular ones — available to the whole community (not just the wealthy and the scholarly), and standardizing the formats of Jewish texts (especially the Talmud and commentaries) so that they became as canonical as their contents. Just as the codex transformed the parchment scroll into a holy relic, so the printing press transformed the hand-written manuscript into a scholarly artifact.

Are we now at the threshold of a third technological revolution in Jewish reading: the e-book (or should I say, *e-sefer*)? Or are electronic books only a

variation on an old theme, a distinction without a meaningful difference? Are we looking at the end of the printed word on paper, or is this just a passing fad?

At this early stage of electronic publishing, it's hard to call. Many decry the prediction that books are a dying species. They argue that nothing will be able to substitute for the feel of an old-fashioned book. How can you take an e-book to bed with you or to the beach? How can bytes and pixels replace the palpable feel of paper or the serious heft of a *chumash*? And how long can you stare at a computer screen before your eyes go out of focus? At this point, electronic print lacks the sharp resolution of print on a page.

On the other hand, some hail the electronic revolution as a great boon to readers, especially Jewish ones. Like the Internet itself, which has democratized access to information and resources, so too electronic publishing can potentially free authors and readers from the control of the publishing industry. Without the need to produce physical books, publishing be-