

# BALTHASAR MORETUS

*and the Passion of Publishing*



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# MORETUS

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*Museum Plantin-Moretus | Print Cabinet*

**BĀI**



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## ‘Balthasar Moretus and the Passion of Publishing’, a story of co-creation

*The Alderman for Culture, City of Antwerp*

Antwerp is the archetypal Baroque city. That was so in the seventeenth century, and it still is today. This identity has much to do with the *savoir-vivre* of Antwerp’s inhabitants: a wealth of tradition that includes a vibrant arts scene, splendid architecture and culinary delights.

Antwerp has a Baroque style all its own. Set the title page of a Baroque book from Antwerp alongside an Italian example and the difference is immediately apparent; Antwerp Baroque is more elegant than the Italian version. Indisputably, Rubens played a major role in this – so much so that the whole city is steeped in the Baroque. Even early on in the seventeenth century, other cultural entrepreneurs were also beginning to contribute towards the success story of the Antwerp Baroque: print publishers, goldsmiths and silversmiths, furniture makers, carpet weavers, etc. They helped build Antwerp’s fame as a centre for the production and export of Baroque luxury goods that went to every corner of the globe.

Included in that story is Balthasar Moretus, the grandson of and successor to the sensational sixteenth-century publisher Christophe Plantin, who proved so influential in the development of publishing. Moretus elevated books to the status of works of art, employing exuberant title pages, costly book illustrations, elegant fonts and a surfeit of decoration. He set the bar high and attracted leading artists to book design. Peter Paul Rubens was among those whom he asked to design illustrations for his latest publications. In terms of splendour, a coloured ‘Rubens breviary’ can certainly compete with any painting or miniature.

Rubens and Moretus worked together on more than twenty book projects. Designs for title pages and illustrations were also supplied to Moretus by Erasmus Quellinus, Karel de Mallery, Peeter de Jode and Abraham Van Diepenbeeck.

All the same, there could be no books without clients, authors and buyers. These were also crucial factors for Balthasar Moretus. All the information about a book’s production process – from the initial concept to the book’s sale – can be found in the extensive Plantin Press archives, which are preserved at the Museum Plantin-Moretus. They include letters between authors and publisher, drawings by Rubens and Quellinus, cost calculations for books and information about buyers. Other forms of physical testimony are also still in evidence at the museum: copper plates, wood blocks, moveable type, etc. This deep well of information can help us understand every aspect of Baroque books.

Do today’s publishers have to take all the above matters into account when starting a new project? How are contemporary publishers envisioning the book trade in terms of innovation? Do they also run into obstacles as Balthasar did? What is their influence on the development of a book? Which traditions do they cling to and what motivates them; can *their* story tell us something about a seventeenth-century publisher’s driving force?

*Balthasar Moretus and the Passion of Publishing* is the story of a publisher’s passion for books and of how he managed to motivate writers, artists, designers and printers – past and present – to create a quality product without losing sight of business imperatives. This book is the story of successful co-creation between publishers and artists, and, in the case of Balthasar Moretus, the story of a friendship with Peter Paul Rubens.





## Balthasar Moretus I: a concise biography

- Dirk Imhof



**B**althasar Moretus I, Christophe Plantin's grandson, was head of the Plantin printing company from 1610 to 1641, when, thanks to him, the firm enjoyed a period of great prosperity. Not only was he able to resume and improve upon the highly lucrative export of liturgical works to Spain, but he also succeeded in establishing a solid reputation for his business in the rest of Europe through the publication of numerous splendid and erudite works.

Nevertheless, when he was born on 23 July 1574 Balthasar's future appeared less than auspicious. His father

feared that he might lose both his wife and son during the birth. The whole of the right side of Balthasar's body was paralyzed. That aside, the boy proved highly intelligent and he learned to write skilfully with his left hand, which moved his father to train him for work as a proof-reader in the family printing firm. From 1586 he attended the Latin school at the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp, and from October 1592 he lodged for some months in Leuven with the renowned humanist Justus Lipsius in order to further his proficiency in Latin. While there, however, he became seriously ill. After much disagreement, his father brought him back to Antwerp. From then on he was set to work in his father's business as a proof-reader and was entrusted with correspondence in Latin.

Balthasar's younger brother, Jan Moretus II, also worked with him in the firm and was responsible for the sale of its books. In 1604, a year before Jan's marriage to Maria de Sweert in July 1605, the brothers asked their parents to pay them an annual salary for their endeavours. They concluded an agreement with their parents to the effect that in exchange for their wages they would look after the business affairs of the *Officina Plantiniana*, promising to retain the business as a single enterprise.

Management of the business passed to the brothers when Jan I died on 22 September 1610. The division of their respective duties went smoothly, with Balthasar in charge of the publishing and printing sides of the business, while Jan II saw to the sale of their publications. Following the sudden death of Jan II in 1618, Balthasar was left to assume sole responsibility. He entered into partnership with Jan II's widow, Maria de Sweert, and her brother-in-law, Jan van Meurs, who took charge of the book trade. However, their collaboration ended in 1629 following vehement quarrelling. In the 1630s Balthasar was able to rely on the assistance of several dependable and efficient employees for the day-to-day running of the printing and bookselling sides of the business.



Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, Portrait of Balthasar Moretus, oil painting (MPM V.IV.3)

These men included his cousin Louis Moerentorf, Jan Ottens and Philips Collaert. Meanwhile, Balthasar Moretus II, the son of Jan II, had completed his education and became increasingly involved in the firm. Balthasar Moretus I died on 8 July 1641 just before his sixty-seventh birthday.

The publications that Balthasar Moretus I placed on the market were often voluminous and lavish books containing theological or historical treatises, as well as works by classical authors. Many were furnished with impressive illustrations. Of these, the allegorical designs by Peter Paul Rubens appeal most to the imagination. Balthasar was highly aware of the quality of his publications. When replying to a priest who sought to have a book published by him, but who lacked sufficient resources to pay for it, Balthasar wrote 'pray forgive me if I do not print [works] for the same price as others would, just as the painter Rubens would not paint [works] for the same price as others would'. When admiring these striking publications it is all too easy to forget that at the same time he was also producing a great deal of ordinary printed matter, including numerous ordinances for the City of Antwerp, political pamphlets and simple prayer books.

Despite this, his times were less than conducive to the sale of books. The continual state of war in the Holy Roman Empire had a detrimental impact on activity at the Frankfurt book fair, where in the past Balthasar's father, Jan Moretus I, had been able to market a sizeable amount of his production. The trade fair gradually petered out and ceased completely in the 1630s. Moreover, Balthasar had to contend with the illicit reprinting of his books in both Lyon and Amsterdam. Fortunately, he had Spain, which was a major marketplace of increasing importance.

Balthasar Moretus I evidently preferred to remain close to home. Apart from a few minor visits to Brussels and Scherpenheuvel he did not travel. Even when his presence was needed in order to champion his business, such as for the publication of his *Biblia regia* in Rome, he preferred to remain in Antwerp on the pretext that he could not possibly leave the printing business unattended and that his paralysis prevented him from making the journey. Nevertheless, he followed developments at home and abroad with keen interest, keeping himself abreast of events by reading a variety of news-sheets on which he commented extensively in his letters.

Balthasar was less than blessed in terms of his family life. He was responsible for the care of his elder brother Melchior, who suffered mental problems, as well as for that of his brother's eldest son, Jan III, who also struggled with

a mental disorder. In 1631 he acknowledged that nothing short of a miracle could heal Jan III, after which he pinned all his hopes on his nephew Balthasar II to succeed him as head of the Plantin publishing house.

Balthasar I Moretus never married. In his home on the Vrijdagmarkt, which he had had rebuilt as a splendid mansion, he surrounded himself with works of art and, in particular, with books, as he had been a bibliophile and book collector since his youth. Out of modesty he never allowed himself to be painted until later in life; consequently, the only portraits to have survived show him as an older man.

Further reading on this subject:

- Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses. A History and Evaluation of the Printing and Publishing Activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp, Amsterdam* – London – New York, 1969–72, I, pp. 202–5.



Erasmus Quellinus, *Portrait of Balthasar Moretus*, grisaille on panel (MPM V.IV.38)

## ‘Ex arte et decore typographica’: Balthasar Moretus I, publisher of Baroque books

Dirk Imhof



Dionysius the Areopagite, *Opera*, Balthasar Moretus, 1634: title page volume 1 (MPM R 63.2)



When speaking of Balthasar Moretus I as the publisher of Baroque books in the first half of the seventeenth century, the first thought that comes to mind is of books with title pages and illustrations by Peter Paul Rubens.<sup>1</sup> This virtually automatic association is due to the imposing visual language of Rubens, who, through his numerous allegorical images, introduced a new mode of expression to the illustration of books at the time. Nevertheless, Balthasar Moretus's Baroque publications entail a great deal more than simply the inclusion of a title page or illustration designed by Rubens or one of his pupils. These works are also notable for their other decorative features and the entire layout of the text, which is evidence of a careful balance having been struck between font and format. Moretus was not the only seventeenth-century publisher of these types of book; however, he was a man who mastered their creation to perfection. He followed the production of each book closely, starting from the initial manuscript stage to the final printed copy. This essay aims to provide a bird's-eye view of his working methods as he brought these magnificent books to fruition.

This overview narrows its focus on just one aspect of Balthasar Moretus's activities as a publisher and glosses over the financial aspects of publishing. The first question that Moretus asked himself when offered a new book for publication was whether he could make a profit from it and sell sufficient copies. In general, he aimed to get the author either to purchase a part of the print run and bring the book to market by his own efforts or else to take charge of financing the book either wholly or in part. An analysis of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 10 for further information about Balthasar Moretus I.

his decisions in that regard is a fascinating study in its own right but is beyond the scope of this overview. Once he had shown himself willing to publish a book and had slotted it into the printing firm’s schedule, he had to turn his thoughts to its look: the format, paper and fonts that would best suit a particular edition. Would it be appropriate to illustrate the book and, if so, which artist might best suit the task, etc? When making such decisions he always bore the cost in mind. If an author opted for a large format, Moretus’s automatic response was to consider the costs created by such a choice. Commercial considerations also came into play. After all, the book had to be sold as well. Although our attention fixes first and foremost on the physical realization of his publications, we remain conscious all the while that for him all these aspects were inseparably interconnected.

## A few preliminary observations

Balthasar Moretus was a publisher who played a very active role in determining the look of a new publication. The actual books as a finished product demonstrate the result of his work. Moreover, a wealth of records has been preserved in relation to the Plantin Press which yield more information about how the books were brought into being. Nevertheless, we need to bear two limitations in mind. We have no information about verbal agreements. A number of pertinent people lived in Antwerp, including Rubens and other artists with whom Moretus discussed the book illustrations. Discourse with them was not by letter but in face-to-face conversations for which there is no written record. We are deprived of a considerable amount of information as a result. Fortunately for us, Moretus’s most important engraver, Cornelis Galle I, settled in Brussels for several years. During that period in the 1630s there was frequent correspondence concerning the dispatch back and forth of copper plates and drawings. These letters contain interesting information about the creation of the books’ illustrations and all the issues that this entailed.

The negotiations between Balthasar and his authors were also in large part verbal affairs. At regular intervals in his letters we encounter references to meetings that have taken place on some previous occasion or else invitations to discuss matters in more detail person-to-person. When

he then writes ‘as we discussed thoroughly when you were here’, without any further explanation, we can only guess at the content of the discussion.

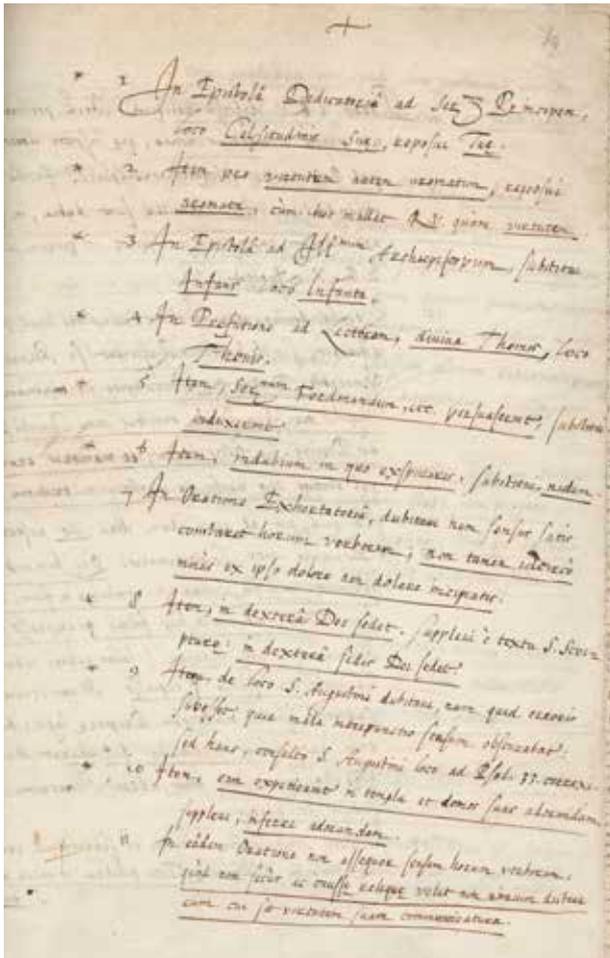
At first sight the correspondence that we have inherited from Moretus appears extremely comprehensive. On closer inspection, however, it consists mainly of copies of the original letters that he sent. Therefore, when speaking for the sake of convenience about Balthasar’s letters, we are referring to the copies and not to the originals. Nevertheless, in cases where the original letters have been preserved, by and large they do match up with the copies.<sup>2</sup> While we do have Moretus’s letters, we lack a great many letters from his authors. A few exceptions aside, such as the countless letters from Philippe Chifflet or Bartholomaeus de los Ríos, we have to make do solely with Balthasar’s letters. In other words, while we know what Balthasar wrote, we don’t know what the author replied. Despite these constraints, the letters provide an abundance of information concerning book production at the Plantin Press. Nothing at all has come down to us from other seventeenth-century publishers; in their case, we have nothing to rely on but the books that came off their printing presses.

## The submitted text

A common thread running through Moretus’s work as a publisher is the fact that in everything he did, from start to finish, he took an extremely conscientious approach, scrutinizing every last detail. It was a process that began as soon as the text was delivered to his door. He always went through it personally, paying attention not only to the content but also to correct spellings and quotations. An apt example of this can be seen in the publication of the book by the Spanish author Carolus Neapolis, who had written a commentary on the *Fasti* by the Roman poet Ovid. At the end of 1635, when Balthasar confirmed his receipt of the text, he wrote that it contained rather a lot of errors and that he had had all of the quotations checked by his proof-readers. He added that his preference was to receive the text in the author’s own handwriting. When authors reread their own text after its transcription by a secretary, they could easily overlook all the mistakes: ‘Forgive me for being so

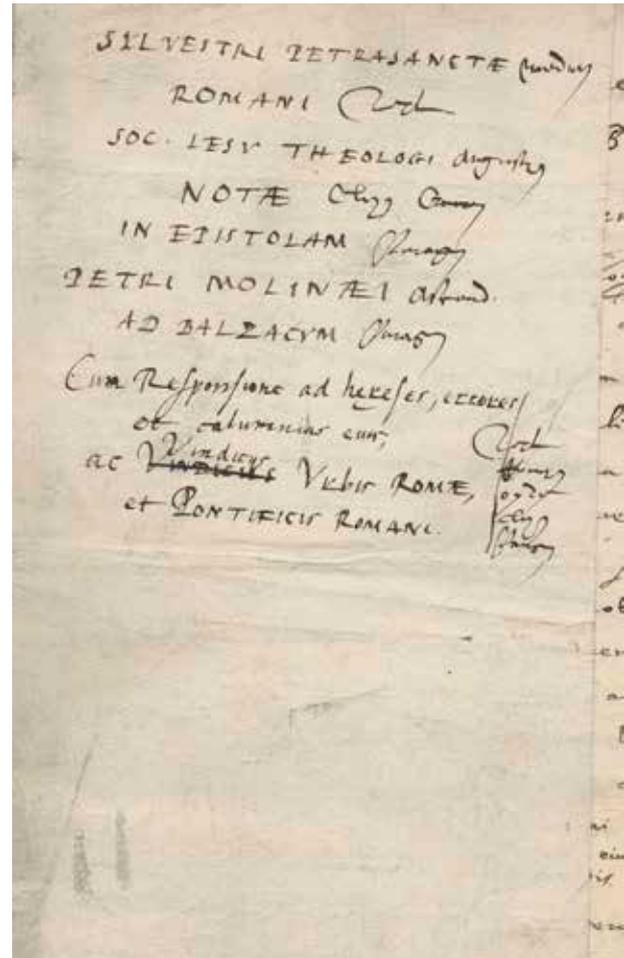
2 One such example is that of the letters to Antoine de Winghe, Abbot of Liessies, which are kept in the Archives départementales in Lille (France). For the most part they are in line with the copies held at the Museum Plantin-Moretus.

bold as to complain about the errors of your secretary. In the past, the great scholar Lipsius, my tutor, voiced no objection when I indicated to him clearly that I would prefer writing by his own hand, despite the difficulty of reading his writing, rather than a copy by some other with a finer hand. For if the author then reads his text anew, he no longer sees the faults at all because his own manuscript and presentation yet remain in his mind.<sup>3</sup>



Moretus's list of questionable passages in Bartholomaeus de los Ríos, *Phoenix Thenensis*, 1637 (MPM Arch. 120, *Imprimerie*, 1637–1655, p. 89)

Authors or bodies that wanted to have text printed by the Plantin Press were often sent a whole slew of questions on passages in which Balthasar voiced his reservations concerning the correctness of words or quotations.<sup>4</sup> It was not only spellings that mattered but also where to place hyphenations. In a letter dated 25 February 1635 to Timotheus Hojus, secretary to the archbishop, the publisher signalled that hyphenations such as 'o-mnia' and 'da-mnatione' could not pass muster. Words deriving from Greek also had to be



Silvester Petra Sancta, *Notae in Epistolam Molinaei ad Balzacum*, 1634, manuscript with draft version of the title page and instructions from Balthasar Moretus concerning the fonts to be used for each line (M 266)

- 3 'Ignosce quaeso, si liberius de amanuensis vitiis sim questus. Aegre haud olim tulit Sapientiae et Litterarum Antistes Justus Lipsius, Doctor meus, cum aperte ei indicarem malle me ipsius autographum, inscitâ licet manu scriptum, quam elegantiori alterius descriptum. Nam auctor etsi relegat, suae scriptionis et sententiae memor, scriptionis menda haud advertit.' (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres*, 1633–1640, p. 302). From this point onwards, references to records from the Museum Plantin-Moretus will be abbreviated as 'MPM Arch.' followed by the number. The titles of records have been taken from Jan Denucé, *Musaeum Plantin-Moretus: inventaris op het Plantijnsch archief – inventaire des archives Plantiniennes*, Antwerp, 1926.
- 4 See, for example, the batch of 'dubia' (dubious cases) sent to Bartholomaeus de los Ríos in connection with his *Phoenix Thenensis* in MPM Arch. 120, *Imprimerie* 1637–1655, pp. 89–92, or the innumerable discussions about the text of the *Missale Coloniense* in MPM Arch. 119, *Imprimerie* 1626–1636, pp. 27–104.

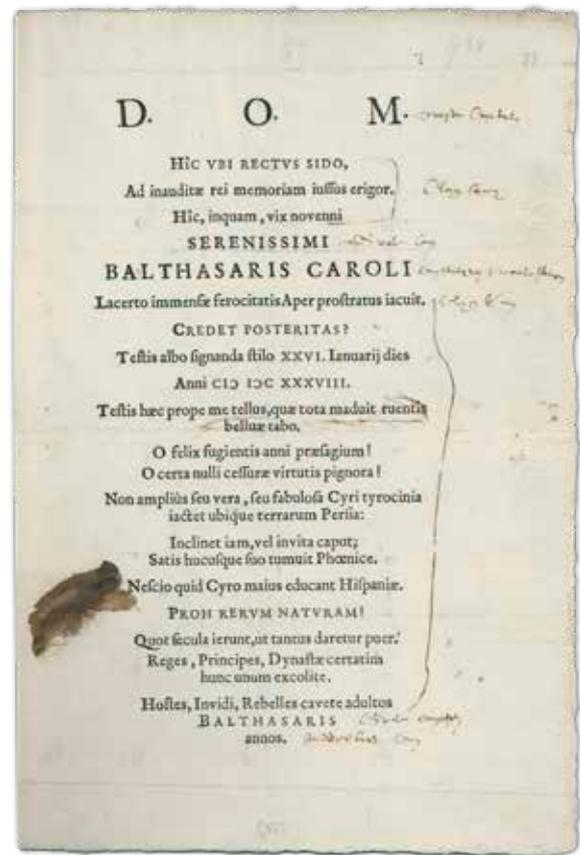
hyphenated correctly according to their constituent parts; consequently, Moretus wrote that ‘*bla-sphemo*’ (blasphemy) was erroneous and should read ‘*blas-phemo*’ in keeping with Ancient Greek etymology.<sup>5</sup>

## Paper, format and font

Various factors played a role with regard to the choice of paper, format and font for a book. In some cases external factors allowed little or no choice. This applied in particular to paper, because in that respect the publisher was highly reliant on market supply. During a time when there was a near continuous state of war, the supply of paper could not be taken for granted. In the 1630s, this was the reason why Balthasar was able to buy so little paper, which compelled him to postpone various publications. It was only gradually at the end of the decade that he was able to come by the paper he needed again via the Northern Netherlands. The quality of the paper was extremely important to many authors and customers. Naturally enough, Balthasar selected paper of the highest quality for his large luxury editions. He wrote to Abbot Antoine de Winghe that good paper and an appealing font were an invitation to read the text. If Dutch publishers were giving this treatment to their secular publications, why should he not do the same for religious works?<sup>6</sup> In his view his customers were not of the penny-pinching type, so he could afford to print these publications on expensive paper. The Jesuit Balthasar Corderius wanted Moretus to print the collected works of Dionysius the Areopagite, a fifth-century Greek theologian and philosopher. On 25 July 1630, Moretus wrote to Corderius that authors such as Dionysius deserved to be put in print on superb paper. Those with higher regard for pearls than glass would not care about the price. Moreover, he referred once again to the Dutch publishers who were the first to print even their *booklets* on superb paper so that they should be held in even greater esteem.<sup>7</sup> However, reality thrust a spoke in his wheels. A few months later, he was compelled to inform Corderius that he had been unable to secure suitable paper for this edition; in other words, the plan

had to be temporarily shelved. These examples demonstrate the importance that Moretus attached to high-quality paper.

As regards the format of a book, Balthasar allowed commercial motives to dictate his actions. For example, a larger quarto was less suitable for an anthology of poetry because it did not sell well. True poetry devotees went for smaller sizes. Despite this, when he did publish works of this type in a larger format, there was a particular reason for doing so, such as in the case of the *Lycorum libri IV* by the Polish poet Sarbiewski. Balthasar printed the first edition of 1632 in quarto because the author was dedicating his work to the pope and that required a larger format. Two years later, however, he



Poem for Balthasar Charles, Prince of Asturias, and his hunting trophy, 1638, with instructions from Balthasar Moretus concerning the font to be used (R 63.8 2:54)

<sup>5</sup> MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 162.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Chartam vero candidiorem in omnibus exemplaribus assumam, ut soleo in libris precationum ut et typorum et chartæ elegantia ad eas legendas inventur. Batavi fere semper in libris vanis charta candidiore utuntur, quidni ego in libris sacris et piis?’ (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 132, a letter dated 13 October 1634).

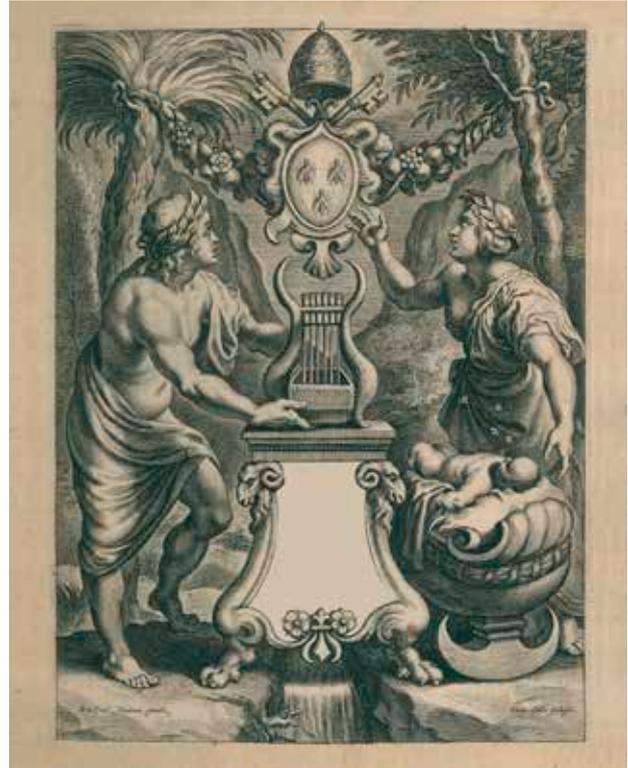
<sup>7</sup> ‘Nam auctores illi antiqui nitidius imprimi merentur, et qui margaritam prae vitro aestimare novit, pretium haud curat. Et vero Batavi praeceunt in libellis nitidiori charta excudendis, ac magno proinde aestimandis’ (MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, p. 115).



Mathias Casimir Sarbievius, *Lyricorum libri IV*, 1634 (A 4573)

printed a new edition for the 'fans' in the smaller 24° format.<sup>8</sup> If the author was financing a publication, Moretus found it easier to decide to publish the book in a larger format and using a larger font. Concerning the book *Epaenesis Iberica* by Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, a paean to Spain, he reported to his contact Ludovicus Nonnius that he would be printing the work in quarto and using a large font, this being appropriate when portraying a great kingdom. He anticipated poor sales for the work, although in that event the author would bear the cost of the entire publication.<sup>9</sup>

At times it was not possible for Balthasar Moretus to avoid the wishes of powerful noblemen when they specified a large format. A good example of this was the publication of the *Officium hebdomadae sanctae* (a prayer book for Holy Week) of 1638. On each occasion, Moretus had all its editions printed in the small 24° format. The large octavo format was reserved for the 1638 edition alone. It was the case that, while on a visit to the printing office, the Marquis of Mirabel had stated the king's preference for a larger format.<sup>10</sup> Likewise with regard to the format of the book describing the Siege of Dole (published 1639), it was the choice made by Cardinal-



Mathias Casimir Sarbievius, *Lyricorum libri IV*, 1632 (A 828)

Infante Ferdinand of Austria that proved decisive: did he wish the book to be in octavo or did he prefer it published in folio so that the book would match Hermannus Hugo's account of the Siege of Breda in 1626?<sup>11</sup> In the end it was published in quarto.

A book's format also determined in part the size of the font. Naturally enough, it was not as simple as choosing one font for an entire publication. It was in this respect that Balthasar Moretus and his typesetters exhibited their professionalism in selecting the various font sizes and types in the correct proportions for the various sections of the book, such as the foreword, index or marginalia. Some words in the text had to be in italics or capitalized and this, too, had to be done to the highest standard. In a discussion with Antoine de Winghe, Moretus wrote rather curtly that De Winghe should have faith in his craftsmanship.<sup>12</sup> A larger font was always

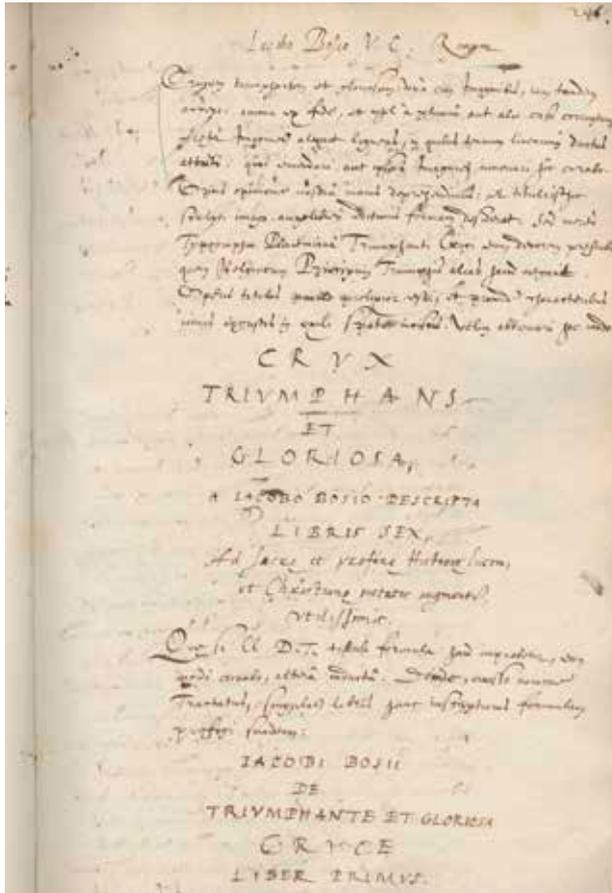
<sup>8</sup> 'Et quia Pontifici Optimo Maximo inscribere statuisti, primo augustiorem et tanta maiestate haud indignam formam meditabor, deinde minorem et quae magis studiosis inserviat' (MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, p. 187; letter to the author dated 2 May 1631).

<sup>9</sup> '... ut typi augustiores augustissimum regnum exornent' (MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, p. 206, letter dated 10 July 1631).

<sup>10</sup> MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, pp. 301–2; a letter to Petrus Ursinus in Lisbon dated 5 June 1637.

<sup>11</sup> MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 331; letter to Philippe Chifflet dated 13 January 1638.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Antoine de Winghe dated 11 September 1631 'Quaesio R.V. mihi in arte mea haud diffidat' (MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, pp. 218–9).



Balthasar Moretus, Design of the title page for Jacobus Bosius, *Crux triumphans*, enclosed with his letter dated March 1615 (Arch. 135, p. 245)

easier for older people to read. Balthasar's father, Jan Moretus I, had already specially printed some prayer books in a larger font for the convenience of the older clergy. The prayer book *Praxis quotidiana divini amoris* (1631) by the Jesuit Petrus Franciscus Chifflet also had a larger typeface. Balthasar had chosen this so that – in his own words – it would be more pleasing to Her Highness (the Archduchess Isabella, to whom the prayer book was dedicated) and would be of greater service to his older readers.<sup>13</sup>

For some authors, terms such as ‘octavo’ or ‘quarto’ regarding the format and ‘ascendonica’ or ‘canon cleyri’ for the font were considered an arcane language comprehensible only to printers. It was far more practical simply to cut out the

desired format from a sheet of paper and display that instead. Moretus would often send a ‘specimen’ to the author: in other words, a sample of a few pages incorporating a section of the text printed on the selected type of paper in the font that he wanted to use for the whole book. This approach made it easy for an author to assess whether or not the proposal suited him. On 17 June 1616, for example, he sent Jacobus Bosius a specimen of the latter's work concerning the Cross: *Crux triumphans et gloriosa*. Bosius approved it promptly and replied on 9 July 1616 that he had beheld the specimen ‘with delighted eyes’.<sup>14</sup>

Naturally, the type for the selected font needed to be actually available. Balthasar employed the extensive collection of punches and matrices that Christophe Plantin had amassed in the sixteenth century. By that means he was able to have new type cast whenever necessary. Lead type wears out more easily, after all, and continually needs replacing. When he began work on the aforementioned *Opera* by Dionysius the Areopagite he was unhappy with the quality of the type and had it recast, resulting in several weeks' delay. Quality was more important than rapid delivery.

## The illustrations

The illustrations together with the title page are very eye-catching visual features of any publication and thus require a great deal of attention. Nowadays they are often the most appealing aspect of these Baroque publications and they were also of great importance in the seventeenth century. A shoddy title page dissuades people from purchasing and reading a book. However, the production of illustrations and, in particular, engravings was an expensive business and at times many an author would underestimate the cost. Some sought to make savings by taking it upon themselves to contact an artist to make the designs or an engraver to cut the copper plates; however, such illustration work was often less straightforward than they thought. Balthasar Moretus was usually displeased when authors wanted to take personal responsibility for the illustration of their books. He always had to take care that the drawings and engravings were being

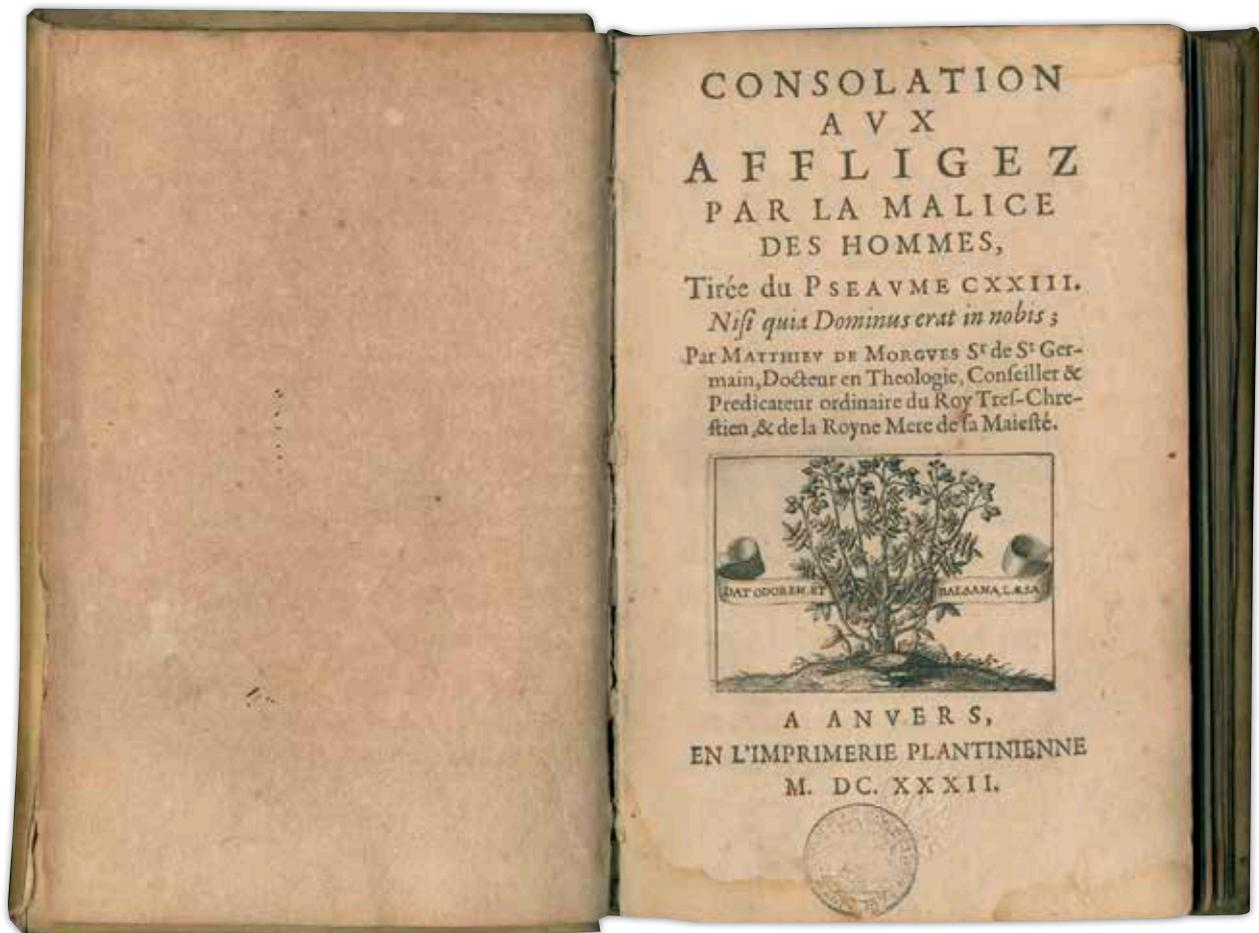
13 Letter dated 21 December 1629: ‘... formâ et caractere grandiusculis, quae Ser<sup>m</sup>ae Principi arrideant et senescentibus magis inserviant’ (MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, p. 74).

14 Regarding the letter from Moretus, see MPM Arch. 136, *Copie de Lettres, 1615–1620*, p. 51; regarding the letter from Bosius, see MPM Arch. 77, *Recueils de lettres Gillis Beys-Bylandt*, p. 533: ‘Impressionis operis nostri de triumphanti cruce abs te transmissum specimen, laetissimis oculis inspexi.’

executed to the highest professional standard. Discussions on this subject resulted in tensions on more than one occasion.

One frequently recurring problem, for example, was that the size of a design or a copper plate did not conform to the format of the book in which the illustration was to be placed. With regard to his work *Consolation aux affligés par la malice des hommes* (published in 1632), Mathieu de Morgues had proposed that the artist Nicolas van der Horst in Brussels should prepare the designs, which Cornelis Galle would then proceed to engrave. However, the design was too large for the book. Van der Horst had not drawn a sapling

but a whole tree; moreover, the tree depicted by Van der Horst could not be found in any botanical work on trees.<sup>15</sup> Balthasar Moretus had a keen eye for all matters. Another example was the copper plate that Philippe Chifflet supplied for the illustration of his book *La couronne des roses* (1638). It was too large for the book and so Balthasar returned the plate to Chifflet.<sup>16</sup> Even Rubens made too large a design on one occasion. Such was the case with the title page design for the book on the Siege of Breda, *Obsidio Bredana*, by Hermannus Hugo. On 21 January 1626, Moretus wrote to the author that he had received the drawing, but added the comment:



Mathieu de Morgues, *Consolation aux affligés par la malice des hommes*, 1632: title page (MPM A 1821)

15 'L'image de baume est trop grande pour la place du titre; ie feray icy tailler une plus petite, aussi le peintre a fait non pas un arbrisseau, mais un arbre contre la description des historiens des plantes. Aussi ie ne trouve la figure en aucun aucteur: mais ie la feray faire selon la description de Bellon' (MPM Arch. 142, *Copie de Lettres 1625–1635*, p. 245).

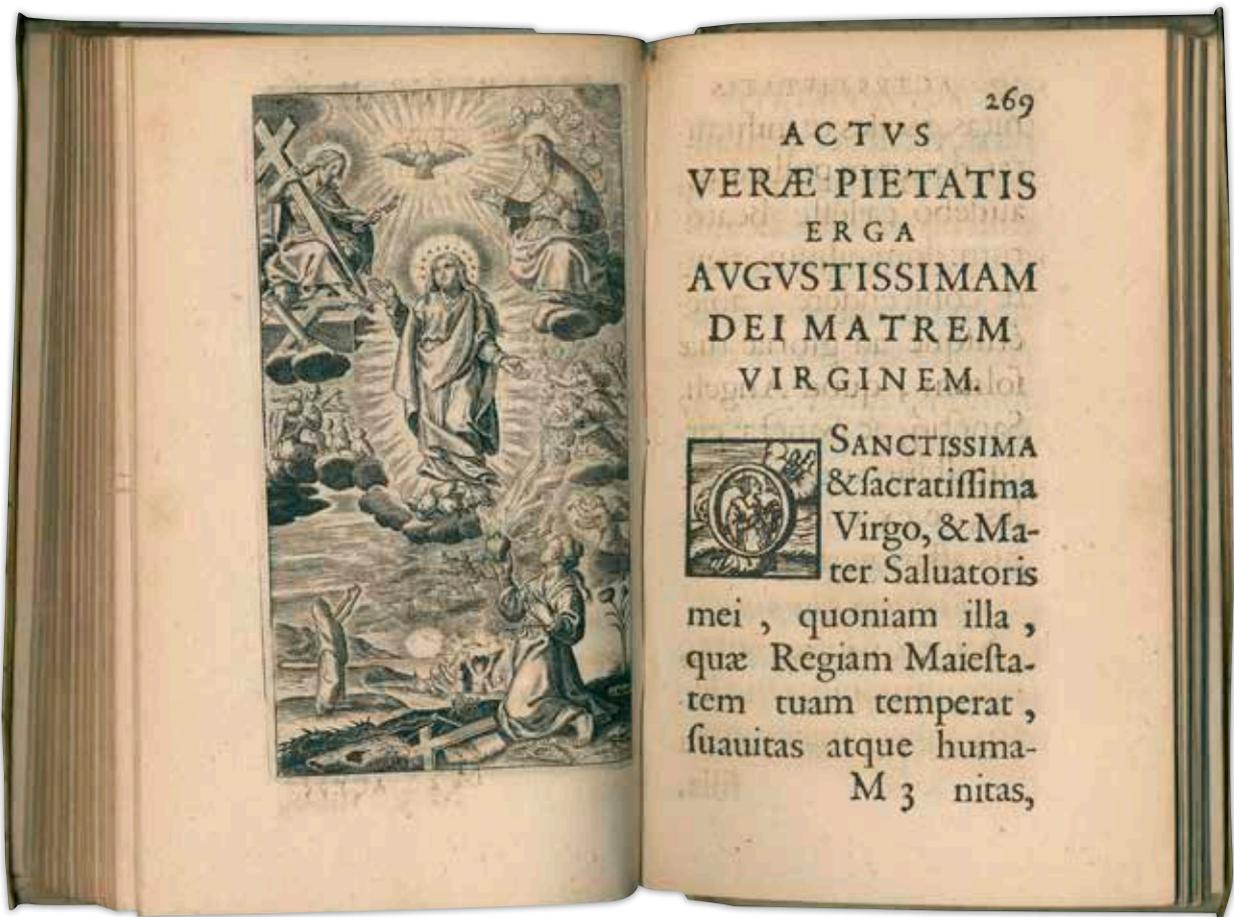
16 'Quod ad imaginem quam incisam et Coronae Rosarum insertam velis, ea nimis magna quam ut eidem commode inseratur' (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 420, letter dated 31 August 1639).

‘However, it is somewhat larger and must be drawn anew according to the format as indicated by the red lines on the enclosed sheet of paper.’<sup>17</sup>

Above all else, the publisher had to remind his authors and draughtsmen that they needed to leave enough room in their designs for the title. A notable example was the title which Frederik de Marselaer had asked Theodor van Loon to design for his book *Legatus*. Balthasar was not happy about the title itself. To begin with, the author’s name was larger than that of the king and, secondly, not enough space had been left for the full title. To make the title fit the copper

plate, the inclusion of ‘PHILIPPO IV HISPANIARVM ET INDIARVM REGI’ could be abbreviated simply enough to ‘AD PHILIPPVM IV HISPANIARVM REGEM’.<sup>18</sup> Another such example was the missal that Moretus printed in 1626 for the Diocese of Cologne. The proposed title was far too long. Were it to have been printed in its entirety, it could have been done only by using letters so small that it would have been impossible for the engraver to cut them legibly into the copper plate.<sup>19</sup>

When an author took charge of delivering the copper plates, it would sometimes entail more work (and costs) for

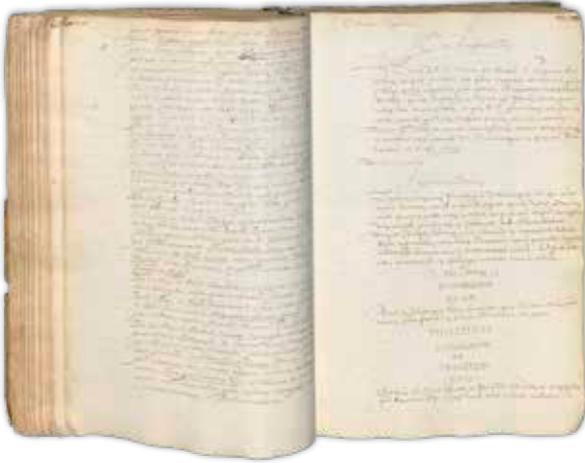


Petrus Franciscus Chifflet, *Praxis quotidiana divini amoris*, 1631 (MPM A 696)

17 ‘Tituli delineationem iam nunc recipio, et remitto, una cum lamina in qua incidatur. Sed paulo maior est delineatio, redigenda ad formam lineis rubris in charta adiuncta designatam ...’ (MPM Arch. 138, *Copie de Lettres 1620–1628*, p. 243).

18 MPM Arch. 138, *Copie de Lettres 1620–1628*, pp. 213–4, letter to De Marselaer dated 13 September 1625.

19 MPM Arch. 138, pp. 235–6, letter to Bernardus Gualteri dated 1 December 1625.



Balthasar Moretus to Frederick de Marselaer, 13 September 1625 (MPM Arch. 138, pp. 213–4)

the publisher than having new plates cut. The Italian Jesuit Silvester Petrasancta furnished the copper plates for all 290 emblems in his work on emblems, *De symbolis heroicis libri IX* (1634). At first, Balthasar wrote tentatively that he would have preferred the plates to have been somewhat better engraved; however, he became increasingly critical once the engraver, Andries Pauwels, set to work on the corrections. The plates proved too thin to be reworked properly, and some of them had to be cut again completely from scratch.<sup>20</sup> According to payment records in the accounts, Andries Pauwels was indeed hard at work on improvements to the plates from 13 December 1633 to 23 June 1634. This cost Moretus an additional 268 guilders for which he had not budgeted.<sup>21</sup>

If an author absolutely insisted on personally arranging for the copper plates to be made, Balthasar would then stipulate the engagement of Cornelis Galle to engrave the title page at the very least. All things considered, the title would be the first thing to catch the reader's eye. For the illustration of his book on the Siege of Breda (1626), Hermannus Hugo had the copper plates cut in Brussels at his own expense. In Moretus's view, Galle alone was properly able to engrave the title page (after a design by Rubens), and in the end that is exactly how things turned out.

To avoid such problems, the publisher preferred to arrange production of the illustrations himself. To that end he would call on the services of various draughtsmen in



Balthasar Moretus, Sketch of the title page for the *Breviarium Romanum* of 1614 (MPM Arch. 118, p. 437)

Antwerp, the most famous of whom was Peter Paul Rubens – ‘the Apelles of our age’ as Balthasar referred to him, after the legendary Greek painter of the fourth century BC – as well as others including Peeter de Jode and Erasmus Quellinus.

Most of the designs for title pages were by Rubens' hand.<sup>22</sup> The ideas for these designs were conceived in consultation with Balthasar Moretus. On a couple of occasions Balthasar made a few sketches for a design subsequently elaborated upon by Rubens. The most celebrated example is the title page of the *Breviarium Romanum* (1614). Balthasar indicated where a particular depiction had to be placed on the title page and Rubens then went on to draw the figures. In other cases, Rubens

20 MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 72; letter to the author dated 22 April 1634.

21 MPM Arch. 166, *Dépenses spéciales 1620–1636*, fol. 177v–178r.

22 For further information about the relationship between Balthasar Moretus and Rubens, see p. 29.



Peter Paul Rubens, Design of the title page for an anthology of poems by Bauhusius, *et al.* (MPM TEK.389)

left concise notes alongside the drawing to explain why he had drawn some of the figures, such as in his design for the title page for the poetry of the Jesuits Bernardus Bauhusius, Balduinus Cabillavus and Carolus Malapertius in 1634. He wrote above: ‘Here is Muse or Poetry with Minerva or Virtue, united in a Hermathena image. I have chosen Muse for this instead of Mercury, which is warranted by virtue of several examples. I do not know whether my idea shall please you. For my part I am rather content with it and go so far as to compliment myself on its account.’<sup>23</sup>

Input from the author himself was also required when devising the design. The Spanish author Carolus Neapolis thought that Moretus and Rubens would be coming up with

a title-page design for his publication of Ovid. Balthasar wrote to him on 28 November 1637, telling him that he and Rubens were hesitating over which design to choose and would greatly appreciate his preference.<sup>24</sup> A few months later, in a letter dated 8 March 1638, he clarified that they wanted to know whether or not he approved the design for the title page.<sup>25</sup>

Authors were not always in agreement with the design devised by Rubens. The clergy were occasionally at odds with the nudity of allegorical female figures on the title page. Balthasar Corderius’s edition of commentaries by Greek Church Fathers on the Gospel According to St. Luke (*Catena Graecorum patrum in Lucam*), published in 1628,

<sup>23</sup> ‘Habes hic Musam sive Poesim cum Minerva seu Virtute forma Hermatenis coniunctam nam musam pro Mercurio apposui quod pluribus exemplis licet, nescio an tibi meum commentum placebit ego certe mihi hoc invento valde placeo ne dicam gratulor’ (MPM TEK.389).

<sup>24</sup> MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 326, letter to Carolus Neapolis dated 28 November 1637: ‘At pro imagine tituli Rubenius mecum adhuc haeret quid argumenti seligat. Te quaeso, Ill. Domine, quid potissimum ipse malis, praescribas.’

<sup>25</sup> MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, pp. 338–9, letter to Carolus Neapolis dated 8 March 1638: ‘Ignosce Ill.me Domine, haud recte de meo vel Rubenii ingenio censes, quod fallendo tempori tuum de libri imagine iudicium requiri existimes. Libentes enim auctoris ipsius sententiam intelligimus, ut nostram deinde vel firmemus, vel mutemus. Placent quae suggeris eaque Rubenii penicillum magis illustrabit.’



Peter Paul Rubens, Design of the title page for M.C. Sarbievius, *Lyricorum libri IV*, sketch in oils (MPM V.IV.58)

shows a woman, the allegory of truth, who is placing a chain of precious stones around the neck of Luke the Evangelist. Moretus wrote to Corderius that he had understood from another Jesuit in Antwerp (Heribert Rosweyde) that the author was wondering whether the figure representing truth was not too scantily clad. Moretus reassured Corderius: in Rubens’ view this was not the case.<sup>26</sup> For his part, Abbot Antoine de Winghe commented on the position of the Virgin Mary to the right of Christ on the title page of the *Opera* by Ludovicus Blosius, but Rubens justified his drawing by referring to a verse from the Psalms.<sup>27</sup> The abbot’s response to this has not been recorded.

Moretus wrote to Balthasar Corderius that, as a rule, Rubens was given six months in which to conceive a new design. He would then draw the design in his spare time. If required to do this during his working hours he would charge at least 100 guilders for each drawing.<sup>28</sup> The sums that Rubens requested from Balthasar Moretus for design work were certainly not excessive: regarding designs for a book in folio, he asked 20 guilders; for a book in quarto, 12 guilders; for one in octavo, 8 guilders, and for one in 24° a mere 5 guilders.<sup>29</sup> He requested even less for the designs concerning the breviary of 1614: taking all the designs together for the ten illustrations and the title page he asked 132 guilders, which breaks down to only 12 guilders per drawing. As a result, he often asked less than other draughtsmen. In 1632, for example, Peeter de Jode received 27 guilders for designing the title page for the philosophical work by Rodericus de Arriaga, *Cursus philosophicus*.<sup>30</sup> Rubens’ pupil Erasmus Quellinus charged a little less than De Jode, but at 24 guilders for a design in a folio publication and at 15 guilders for a quarto publication his fee still exceeded that received by Rubens.<sup>31</sup>

In turn, the sums that the draughtsmen were paid always remained far below those charged by engravers for their work. Whereas Rubens received 20 guilders for designing the title page of Corderius’s *Catena Graecorum patrum in Lucam* (1628), Cornelis Galle demanded 80 guilders to engrave it.



Balthasar Corderius, *Catena Graecorum patrum in Lucam*, 1628: title page (MPM B 1016)

Galle charged a still higher fee of 95 guilders for Arriaga’s *Cursus philosophicus*, whereas De Jode had received just 27 guilders for his drawing. Without doubt, engraving a copper plate with a burin (a steel cutting tool) was much harder and a lengthier process than producing a drawing.

Cornelis Galle I was Rubens’ favourite engraver.<sup>32</sup> While his brother Theodore was alive, Cornelis Galle received commissions and payments through his brother’s print

26 MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, pp. 24–5.

27 MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, pp. 218–9.

28 MPM Arch. 144, *Copie de Lettres 1628–1633*, pp. 124–5, letter to Balthasar Corderius dated 13 September 1630.

29 MPM Arch. 134, *Grand livre 1624–1655*, fol. 222 right.

30 MPM Arch. 166, *Dépenses spéciales 1620–1636*, fol. 125v.

31 See, for example, MPM Arch. 167, *Dépenses spéciales 1637–1678*, fol. 13r: ‘Adi 9e [March 1638] aen Erasmus Quellinus voor teekeninghe ... voor den titel du Siege de Dole fl 15’ and fol. 14r: ‘Adi 4e ditto [May 1638] Erasmo Quellino voor de teekeninghe vanden titel van Carolus Neapolis in Fastos Ovidii fl 24’.

32 ‘Titulum incidi a Corn. Gallaeo, cuius scilicet manu Rubenius delineationes suas sculpi in primis desiderat’ (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, pp. 111–2, letter to Benedictus van Haefen dated 28 August 1634).

production workshop.<sup>33</sup> This workshop was responsible not only for the engraving of copper plates and the reworking of used plates for subsequent reuse, but also for making imprints from these plates. Cornelis set out on his own following Theodore's death, and, although he remained Balthasar Moretus's first choice as an engraver, other engravers were also engaged now and then for the Plantin Press. Balthasar was particularly demanding in respect of engravings for the title page. While Cornelis Galle II was still in training under his father, Balthasar's view was that he needed some additional instruction when scoring plates for title pages. On 23 December 1636, he wrote to Cornelis Galle I: 'Your son should pay better attention to the proportion of the printed letters, namely the "L" and "E", with which he made the most errors in the title for Lipsius. When he comes to Antwerp, I shall readily instruct him in engraving letters to greater perfection, as well as in maintaining proper proportion between them.'<sup>34</sup>

The preparation of designs, engraving of plates, printing of proofs and any corrections had to be organized as smoothly as possible so that no time was wasted. Balthasar arranged all the shipments and communications between authors and artists. We are able to observe that organization at work during

the period when Cornelis Galle I was living in Brussels and letters were regularly being sent to and fro between Antwerp and Brussels. It is exemplified in the apology for the Spanish monarchy *Philippus Prudens* by Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz published in 1639. The first part contains a series of portraits of Portuguese kings. Moretus had acquired the copper plates for these portraits from a publication in 1621 by Petrus and Joannes Bellerus. Owing to the fact that not all the plates met with his high standards, he had Quellinus make corrections to the prints. On 28 September 1638, Balthasar sent Galle the 23 plates with portraits together with the prints bearing Quellinus's corrections. Galle replied that he was missing two portraits and asked which was the more urgent: Lobkowitz's book or Jean Boyvin's concerning the Siege of Dole. Lobkowitz's book was given priority and Galle was required to pay special attention to the portrait of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand. Galle wondered whether the latter should be depicted in armour or in his cardinal's robes, to which Moretus replied with the requisite information. Correspondence between Moretus and Galle continued in this vein for several more months, allowing us to observe the course taken by their work as if we were front-row spectators.<sup>35</sup>

Once the illustrations were ready, decisions had to be taken on where to place them in the book. This, too, had to be done according to the highest of standards. A letter to Benedictus van Haeften, the Abbot of Affligem, concerning the publication of his *Regia via crucis* (1635) sheds clear light on this matter. Apart from the title page, designed by Rubens and engraved by Galle, the book contains 38 engravings of images relating to the Cross. The publisher had arranged them such that they could be printed at the beginning of each corresponding chapter. To indicate how the job should *not* be done, he referred to a previous work by Van Haeften, the *Schola cordis* (The School of the Heart), illustrated with engravings by Boetius à Bolswert and published in 1629 by Hieronymus Verdussen: 'I know that this is different in the *Schola cordis*, but the absurdity therein is that oftentimes some pages, which we call the right-hand pages, are left blank for want of text. If you choose to have the illustrations appear on the left-hand page, you must send me supplements for the text that immediately precedes the illustrations to prevent the



Joannes Caramuel Lobkowitz, *Philippus Prudens*, 1639, pp. 90–1 with portrait of Archduke Ferdinand (K 125)

<sup>33</sup> Concerning Theodore Galle's workshop, see p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> MPM Arch. 147, *Copie de Lettres 1635–1642*, p. 64: 'U.L. sone sal believen te letten op de proportie vande gedruckte letteren, namentlyck op de L ende E waerinne hy meest gemist heeft inden titel van Lipsius [for a 1637 edition of his *Opera Omnia*]; als wanneer hy eens te t'Antwerpen sal comen, sal hem lichtelyck komen instrueren in meerder perfectie van de letteren te snyden, als in goede proportie vande linien te houden.'

<sup>35</sup> Karen L. Bowen and Dirk Imhof, 'Exchanges between friends and relatives, artists and their patron: the correspondence between Cornelis Galle I and II and Balthasar Moretus I', in: *In monte artium. Journal of the Royal Library of Belgium*, 3 (2010), pp. 89–113.

same disfigurement as in the *Schola cordis*. Biverus furnished us accordingly with supplements, inclusions or deletions with a view to a uniform placement of the illustrations. For that reason, he gave his consent likewise to the omission of some sections of his text.<sup>36</sup>

It is indeed frequently the case in the *Schola cordis* that a chapter's text ends on the left-hand page, leaving the right-hand page entirely blank because the engraving has been printed on the following left-hand page.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, to avoid the annoyance of empty pages, it was necessary either to make

the text a little longer and to have it run on to the right-hand page or else to shorten the text so that it could finish on the right-hand page.

If, despite this, a blank page proved unavoidable, there were other means of redressing this shortcoming, such as the inclusion of an additional illustration or a quotation from the Bible, a Father of the Church or an ancient author, depending on the book's context. In the aforementioned work by Mathieu de Morgues, *Consolation aux affligés par la malice des hommes*, Balthasar noticed that page 12, following



Benedictus van Haeften, *Regia via crucis*, 1635, pp. 304-305 (R 57.13)

36 MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633-1640*, pp. 92-3, a letter dated 11 July 1634: 'Scio aliter in Schola cordis observatum, sed in eo absurditas est, quod deficiente subinde materia paginae aliquot, quas dextras vocamus, vacent. Si vero laeva in parte imagines reponi malit, tum supplementa singulorum capitum quae figurae subsequuntur, mihi mitti necesse sit, ne eadem quae in Schola cordis deformitas committatur. R.P. Biverus pariter nobis supplementa misit, addenda vel omittenda prout uniformis imaginum situs postulat: imo eundem in finem quaedam etiam e textu suo tollendi licentiam concessit.'

37 For an example of this, see MPM cat. no. A 3945.

the author's dedication to Marie de' Medici, would remain blank if he were to start the main text on the right-hand side, as was proper. He proposed that the author seek out an appropriate quotation to fill the empty space or else that an illustration be inserted there, in this case a depiction of King David.<sup>38</sup> As we can see from the book, Mathieu de Morgues opted for the illustration.

When the definitive copper plates were ready, impressions from them had to be printed on to the pages of the book already printed with text. This was a time-consuming process and the more illustrations that a book had the longer it took. An example of such a book is the aforementioned *Regia via crucis* by Benedictus van Haeften. In June 1635, once printing of the text was complete, 300 copies of an initial series of engravings were printed in Theodore Galle's workshop. A second series of 100 copies was completed with illustrations in 1637, then a series of 200 copies in October 1641 (after Balthasar's death), a further 250 copies in 1649, a series of 100 copies in 1651 and, finally, almost 20 years after the text was printed, a final batch of 550 copies. Consequently, there could be a timespan of several years between the printing of a book's text and the printing of the engraved title page and illustrations. Someone purchasing a copy containing the first fresh imprints from the copper plates was more fortunate than someone who obtained a later copy printed from worn plates.



Payments to Christoffel Jegher for new initials (MPM Arch. 194)

## Initials and tail pieces

While they may attract less attention than title pages and full-page illustrations, it is nevertheless the case that all manner of decorative elements, such as initials, printer's devices and tail pieces helped determine the overall appearance of the books published by Balthasar Moretus. Together with the illustrations, they dictate the distinctively Baroque character of his publications. Many end pieces (lesser illustrations marking the end of a section in a book) are truly minor works of art. We can attest to the importance that Moretus attached to them, because in the 1630s he commissioned a highly esteemed artist such as Erasmus Quellinus to draw such end pieces. He also had Quellinus design new initials on a regular basis.<sup>39</sup>

Initials and end pieces were woodcuts that could be printed together with the lead type in one composition. Christoffel van Sichem supplied the new woodcuts in the 1620s, and after 1625 the Plantin Press appointed Christoffel Jegher permanently for that purpose. Religious works were furnished with initials containing religious images connected with the initial. For example, the letter 'A' included a depiction of the angel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin Mary (the Annunciation), while the letter 'D' included a depiction of King David. With regard to non-religious works, Jegher would cut new decorative initials using botanical motifs. In 1629, for example, he cut dozens of 'foliage letters' and in June 1631 specific initials for the quarto edition of the Bible, for the *Opera* by Dionysius the Areopagite and for the *Opera* by Seneca. Although they had been made for specific works, these initials and end pieces could also be used subsequently in other publications.

## The book's title

Lastly, a book also needed an apt title in order to sell well. As far as Balthasar Moretus was concerned, a title needed to give a clear indication of a book's contents. Two examples serve to illustrate this. In 1634, he was commissioned

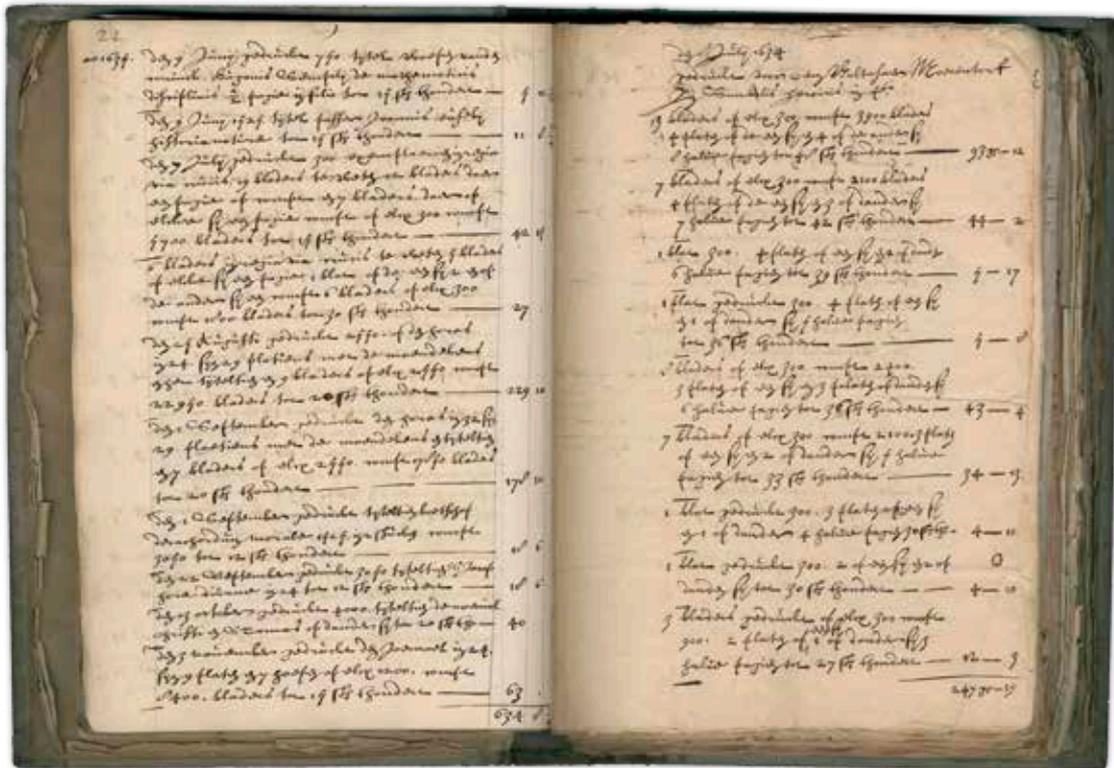
38 'J'envoye avec ceste la premiere feuille de vostre Consolation: en laquelle la douziesme page est vuide pour commencer le livre en une page droicte. V.R. pourra ordonner quelque sentence pour remplir ceste page, ou on pourra mettre l'image de David aucteur du Pseaume' (MPM Arch. 142, *Copie de Lettres 1625-1635*, p. 245; letter dated 23 March 1632).

39 See, for example, MPM Arch. 1440, *Documenten onderteekend door P.P. Rubens en Erasmus Quellin*, doc. no. 4: '18 april [1639] ... item acht letteren 1 E 1 A 2 H 2 I 2 L: fl. 9 - 12; 5 mej ses letteren 2 B 2 C 1 G 1 N: [gl.] 7 - 4' or MPM Arch. 1440, *Documenten onderteekend door P.P. Rubens en Erasmus Quellin*, doc. no. 3: 'Ick hebbe geteijckent voor Sr Moreto a° 1639 23 iulii ... item 2 letteren op hout a 24 24 st. [gl.] 2 - 8; 50 letterkens op hout a 12 st. [gl.] 30'.

by the Jesuit Aegidius Bucherius to print the text edition of a work about the calculation of time by Victorius Aquitanus, a fifth-century Roman author, supplemented with Bucherius's commentary. Initially, the publisher went along with Bucherius's proposal and printed the book's title as 'In Victorii Aquitani canonem paschalem scriptum anno christi vulgari cccclvii. & nunc primùm in lucem editum commentarius ...'. Balthasar began to have his doubts in the autumn of 1633, once the work had already been printed. In a letter dated 22 December 1633, he suggested an alternative title to Bucherius: 'De emendatione temporum ...'. Instead of focusing attention on the text edition by Victorius Aquitanus, prominence was now given to the actual subject of calculating time. Readers would rely on this when

considering whether to make a purchase.<sup>40</sup> Bucherius's reply has not survived. The book's title was reprinted in February 1634, after the word 'emendatione' had been replaced by 'doctrina'. As a consequence some copies of the book have the first title page while others have the second. However, Moretus's intervention made little impact and the book sold poorly. Three years later, at a time when he was unable to obtain any paper for new publications, he bemoaned the situation, wishing that he could turn Bucherius's book into unprinted paper to make up for his shortfall, which would also allow him to reuse it.<sup>41</sup>

The publisher was just as unhappy about the title that Hugo Sempilius had chosen for his mathematical work: '*Prodromus mathematicus*' (Mathematical Herald).



Payments to Theodore Galle's workshop for printing the copper plates for Silvester Petra Sancta, *De symbolis*, in 1634 (MPM Arch. 123, 86bisr)

<sup>40</sup> 'Victorii editionem laudari scio, at malim re ipsa probari, emi, et legi. At peccatum in titulo, qui materiam in opere delitescens haud indicat' (I know that the Victorius edition deserves praise, but I should very much like for the book to be appreciated, bought and read for its content. However, that is inconsistent with the title, which does not at all reflect the subject that lies hidden within the work' (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 35, a letter dated 22 December 1633).

<sup>41</sup> In February 1636 he wrote to Petrus Franciscus Chifflet: 'Bucherii Victorius si in nudam chartam convertatur, mihi utilis esse possit quia a paucissimis emitur' (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, p. 229).

The title certainly did not reveal anything about the book's content. Moretus's expressed a preference for '*De disciplinis mathematicis*' (Concerning the Disciplines of Mathematics) and it was under that title that the book was published in 1635.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

Printing a book was a long and complex process involving many facets that demanded proper consideration. Balthasar Moretus supervised all these different steps in minute detail. He disliked a hurried approach to work. His letters contain a recurrent adage attributed to the Roman statesman Cato: '*Sat cito si sat bene*', which means: 'Quick enough, if good enough'. Therefore, authors were usually presented with a proof to review before their work was definitively printed. If we consider that Balthasar was occupied not with just one but with dozens of publications simultaneously and still managed to pay attention to the smallest detail, it is astonishing that he had so much energy and also, miraculously, that so little went wrong. Nevertheless, things did go awry on occasion. In 1630, for example, the wrong illustration was printed on the title page of the *Diurnale Romanum* in 32°. The engraving that depicted Saints Peter and Paul had been switched accidentally with a depiction of Saint Francis, which belonged to the Franciscan prayer book *Officia propria sanctorum Ordinis minorum*.<sup>43</sup> Balthasar realized this only once many copies had been dispatched. To rectify this error, the title pages had to be reprinted with the correct picture and then sent out again.<sup>44</sup>

In the case of some commissions Moretus was simply unlucky. In 1629 he had started to print a publication of works by a Spanish bishop at the expense of the Spanish nobleman Don Francisco Bravo. Fifteen quires had already been printed (each one amounting to 763 copies) when Bravo died, preventing the publisher from embarking upon any more of the work. The pages already printed were worthless to Balthasar and, at best, were good only for packing paper.<sup>45</sup>

Other publications close to his heart also encountered problems: a new edition of the atlas by Abraham Ortelius had to be called to a halt halfway through the printing process; the collected works of his idolized mentor Justus Lipsius proved a commercial disappointment, and a new publication of the *Biblia regia* did not go through at all.

Leaving aside those projects that enjoyed a less than ideal trajectory, Balthasar Moretus was a particularly successful publisher. He owed this in large part to his exceptional talent for so expeditiously organizing the tasks undertaken by all those involved in the printing of a publication – authors, artists, his own staff, etc. Moreover, he was an excellent mediator, a quality that often came in useful. As a publisher he never lost sight of his publications' marketability and he tried, often with much patience and diplomacy, to steer his authors' expectations in that direction. Owing to his organizational talent, the outstanding workmanship of his typesetters and printers, and the artistic qualities of the artists with whom he worked, he created Baroque publications which, to this day, continue to astonish us with the unsurpassed perfection of their printed text and illustrations.

42 'At vero titulus *Prodromus mathematicus*, haud placet; quasi nihil aut parum eo opere continetur; clarus ac brevis hic, *De disciplinis mathematicis libri duodecim*, bona R.V. venia a me substituetur' (MPM Arch. 146, *Copie de Lettres, 1633–1640*, pp. 78–9, letter dated 23 May 1634).

43 See the letters to the Parisian book dealer Eustache Foucault and Michel Sonnius II dated 11 April 1630 (MPM Arch. 142, *Copie de Lettres 1625–1635*, pp. 117 and 118).

44 See, among others, the shipment on 23 March 1630 of 50 copies of the *Diurnale* in 32° to Eustache Foucault (MPM Arch. 238, *Journal 1630*, fol. 34r). The shipment of 50 titles of the book was recorded on 12 July 1630 (MPM Arch. 238, *Journal 1630*, fol. 89v).

45 'De gedruckte bladeren die niet anders en connen dienen dan voor packpampier' (letter to François Vivien dated 11 May 1634; MPM Arch. 142, *Copie de Lettres 1625–1635*, p. 398).

## Peter Paul Rubens, the Moretus and the Plantin Press

- Dirk Imhof



Following the death of Peter Paul Rubens on 30 May 1640, Balthasar Moretus was moved to write to the provost of Harelbeke, Mathieu de Morgues: ‘*Vrayement nostre ville a beaucoup perdu par la mort de Mons. Rubens, et moy en particulier un de mes meilleurs amis*’ (Truly, our city has lost much with the death of Rubens, and I, in particular, one of my best friends). Balthasar had indeed lost an old friend; they had known each other since their youth and had remained in touch into their old age.

In 1600, Balthasar wrote to Rubens’ younger brother Philip that he had known Peter Paul as a child at school and had admired him very much. Whether it can be inferred from this that they were already friends at that time and went to school together would be, perhaps, to take this too far. Balthasar had greater contact with Philip Rubens, who, like him, had been part of Justus Lipsius’s group of students in Leuven. In the early seventeenth century, when the Rubens brothers were living in Italy, it was with Philip that he corresponded.

Rubens returned to the Netherlands in 1608. He supplied several drawings that he had made of monuments in Italy for the book that his brother had written about ancient Rome. It was his first contribution to the illustration of a publication by the Plantin Press. A few years later, when Balthasar I and Jan Moretus II had succeeded their father as heads of the company, Rubens supplied designs for new illustrations for the folio *Missale Romanum* of 1613 and the *Breviarium Romanum* of 1614. From then on, he regularly drew designs for the Moretus. Although at times he also worked for other publishers in Antwerp, the majority of his designs were intended for the Plantin printing company. He was not always available to take on their commissions, however. Sometimes he was travelling abroad, such as when participating in peace talks in England in the years 1629–30.

After 1613, Rubens’ deliveries of designs and paintings were recorded in the accounts of the Plantin Press. The artist painted portraits of members of the

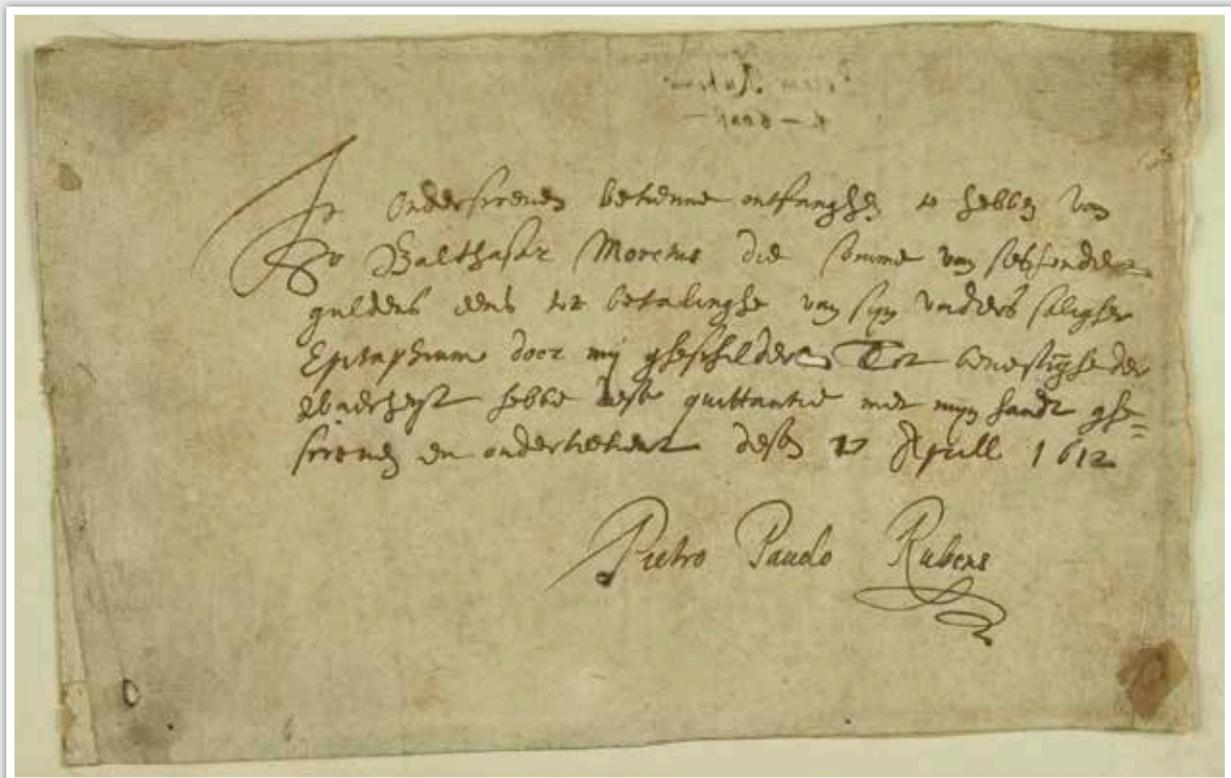
1600 Pour le portrait de l'abbé de Saint-Étienne, évêque de Liège	300
1601 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	150
1602 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	100
1603 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1604 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1605 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1606 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1607 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1608 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1609 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1610 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1611 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1612 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1613 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1614 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1615 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1616 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1617 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1618 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1619 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1620 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1621 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1622 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1623 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1624 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1625 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1626 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1627 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1628 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1629 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1630 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1631 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1632 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1633 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1634 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1635 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1636 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1637 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
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1639 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
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1641 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
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1647 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1648 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1649 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1650 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1651 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1652 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1653 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1654 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1655 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1656 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1657 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1658 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1659 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1660 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1661 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1662 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1663 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1664 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1665 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1666 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1667 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1668 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1669 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1670 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1671 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1672 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1673 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1674 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1675 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1676 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1677 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1678 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1679 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1680 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1681 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1682 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1683 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1684 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1685 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1686 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1687 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1688 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1689 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1690 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1691 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1692 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1693 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1694 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1695 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1696 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1697 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1698 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1699 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75
1700 Pour le portrait de S <sup>r</sup> Moretus, évêque de Liège	75

Deliveries of paintings and drawings by Peter Paul Rubens (MPM Arch. 134, *Grand livre 1624–1655*, fol. 222 right)

Moretus family, including Christophe Plantin and Jan Moretus I, and also humanists such as Abraham Ortelius and Justus Lipsius. These portraits can still be viewed at the Museum Plantin-Moretus. Other paintings that he supplied over the years, such as a portrait of the Greek philosopher Plato and some religious scenes, disappeared from the Moretus collection. One painting by Rubens was especially important to the Moretus family: *The Resurrection of Christ*. The work was displayed in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp above the tombstone of Jan Moretus I. Balthasar paid Rubens the hefty sum of 600 guilders for the work.

Records were kept of Rubens' acquisition of books in remuneration for supplying paintings and drawings to the firm. Between 1613 and 1640 he purchased a total of some 200 books. We do not know which of these were

destined for his own library and which were bought to give to friends and acquaintances. It is likely that he used a number of these books as reference material for his painting. There is no question that he was particularly well informed on the subject of ancient mythology and history, and in a letter to Balthasar there was good reason for Philippe Chifflet to describe Rubens as '*le plus sçavant peintre du monde*'. In 1632 Rubens opened a second account for the purchase of books intended for the studies of his son, the lawyer Albert Rubens. They were paid for by using the money that Moretus owed him for the purchase of 328 copies of Hubertus Goltzius's works on antique coins and the copper plates employed to illustrate those works. However, it is not always clear which of the books were purchased for Albert and which for Peter Paul himself.



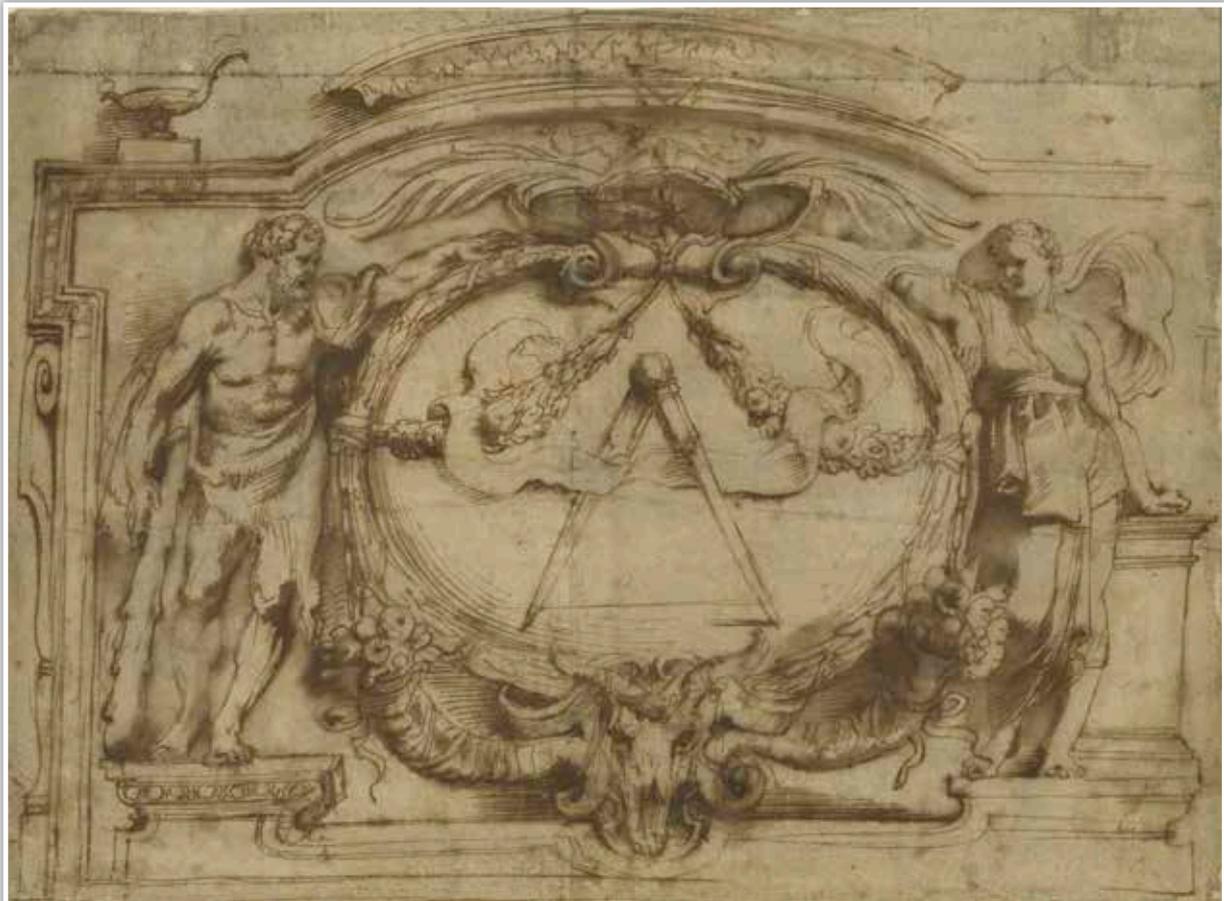
Receipt for 600 guilders paid to P.P. Rubens by Balthasar Moretus I for the painting above Jan Moretus I's tomb in the Cathedral of Our Lady, Antwerp (27 April 1612) (MPM Arch. 1440 *Documenten onderteekend door P.P. Rubens en Erasmus Quellin*, doc. no. 1)

Apart from books, Balthasar Moretus also supplied Rubens on one occasion with 2000 woodcuts. These were woodcuts by Christoffel Jegher after designs by Rubens. Unfortunately, we know little more than the fact that they were indeed printed in 1633.

As a designer, Rubens was the ideal artist for Balthasar Moretus. Owing to their extensive knowledge of Roman mythology and Christian iconography, these two erudite men were able to complement each other's work superbly. The fact that they also shared a warm friendship made their partnership all the more exceptional.

Further reading on this subject:

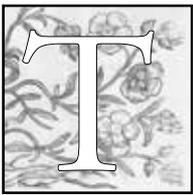
- Max Rooses, *Petrus-Paulus Rubens en Balthasar Moretus: een bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der kunst*, Antwerp, 1884.
- Herman F. Bouchery and Frank van den Wijngaert, *P.P. Rubens en het Plantijnsche huis: Petrus Paulus Rubens en Balthasar I Moretus. Rubens als boekverluchter voor de Plantijnsche drukkerij*, Antwerp, 1941.
- J.R. Judson – C. Van de Velde, *Book Illustrations and Title Pages (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XXI)*, Brussels, 1977.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Drawing of the printer's device for the Plantin Press* (MPM TEK.391)

## The Pricing Policy of the Officina Plantiniana, 1580–1655

Goran Proot



he business left by Christophe Plantin (c. 1520–89) to his son-in-law Jan Moretus I (1543–1610) enjoyed great renown throughout Europe for the first-rate books that it brought to the market.<sup>1</sup>

Each of the publications from the Officina Plantiniana was meticulously produced down to the last detail, not only in terms of form but also content. Plantin attached great importance to high standards of typesetting and printing, and he was continually investing in new type. His attention also focused on the illustrations that appeared in his books, and gradually, with increasing frequency, he chose illustrations in copper which, while more expensive, were far more beautiful. The publisher's list that he had built was comprehensive and diverse. Plantin's first instinct had not been to target local customers but, instead, to direct his books written in Latin and other scholarly languages towards an international audience. He used an extensive network of contacts to bring his books to Paris, Leiden, Madrid and the Frankfurt book fair from where they reached book dealers and customers the length and breadth of Europe.

Many aspects of this story are already widely known; however, studies focusing solely on the economic side of the Officina Plantiniana are rather few and far between.<sup>2</sup> From reading Leon Voet's monumental study *The Golden Compasses*

we learn that the survival of the business during an economic downturn owed itself to Plantin's acute business acumen and his ability to take drastic measures at short notice.<sup>3</sup> One crucial factor in the continuation of the business was also the decision to hand over the main branch of the printing and publishing firm to one manager with each successive generation and thus not to split it up, as happened in the case of some competitors.<sup>4</sup> Alongside other factors, the Plantin Press was helped to become a healthy and robust enterprise thanks to monopolies on particular types of book and permanent commissions for institutions.

This essay takes a deeper look at another significant factor: the pricing policy of Christophe Plantin and his successors in the period 1580 to 1655. We shall be examining just how the Officina Plantiniana determined and negotiated the price of books. The 76-year span of this study allows us greater insight into the strategies adopted by four successive generations of business manager. Plantin's pricing policy during the last ten years of his life serve as a benchmark by which to assess the pricing policy of his son-in-law Jan Moretus I in the period 1589–1610. By the same token, his stance serves as the base point for the strategies adopted by Balthasar I and Jan Moretus II in the period 1611–41, and, finally, it is also possible to examine the policy decided upon by Balthasar Moretus II between 1641 and 1655.

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- 1 See, for example, Francine de Nave, 'De Moretussen en de Antwerpse boekgeschiedenis van de 17de en 18de eeuw', in: Dirk Imhof (ed.), *De boekillustratie ten tijde van de Moretussen*, Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, 1996, pp. 13–28; Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses. A History and Evaluation of the Printing and Publishing Activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp in Two Volumes*, Amsterdam, Vangendt & co., 1969–72 (2 vols.).
  - 2 In 1972, Voet wrote on this subject: 'Of all aspects relating to the Plantin printing shop the problem of sales has up to now been least dealt with' (Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, p. 387, footnote 1). Voet goes on to cite a handful of studies, but few have been added to that number since then.
  - 3 Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, vol. 1, p. 87.
  - 4 Stijn van Rossem, *Het gevecht met de boeken. De uitgeverstrategieën van de familie Verdussen (Antwerpen, 1589–1689)*, Antwerp, 2014 (published as 'print on demand' from Lulu.com), pp. 38–44.

This economic analysis is based on an extraordinary document from the Plantin archives. This document, numbered M321, contains a chronological list of more than 2,300 published titles dating from the period 1580 to 1655, including prices. Although the list does raise a number of questions on some points, its sheer range provides unprecedented opportunities for gaining a better understanding of price development over three-quarters of a century.

Over the next few pages we shall first be explaining that document and then investigating how it can be used for an economic analysis. To allow us to understand this properly, we need to look at books from the same perspective as the printers. For that reason we shall be focusing attention on the *printed sheet* as an economic entity in the printing firm and will be taking into account a number of factors that can influence a book's production costs.

## Manuscript M321

The M321 manuscript, which is introduced with the words 'Catalogvs librorvm a Chr Plantino Annº. M.D.LXXX. impressorvm' (Catalogue for the books printed by Christophe Plantin in the year 1580), can be described as a production list or overview of titles with prices for the book trade. The manuscript measures 264 by 193 mm and contains 165 pages, 131 of which contain entries. Different hands have added to its content year-on-year, and from 1580 to 1655 it provides an annual summary of the Officina Plantiniana's book production: a total of 2,367 entries.

The document's structure remains virtually the same throughout. The descriptions start off by identifying the title and author, which often corresponds word for word with the titles on the title pages of the books themselves, although at times they are abbreviated. This is often followed with details about the edition in question, including the names of adapters or translators. The bibliographic format is nearly always mentioned, as well as the number of printed sheets and pricing. More than half of the descriptions state the inclusion



Production list MPM M321, fol. 1r (264 × 193 mm)

of illustrations, and in 15% of cases the notes refer to the types of paper employed. Although such details also appear now and again during the first 20 years, they are mostly encountered in the seventeenth-century entries. In more than 40 cases, the descriptions contain specific typographical information, such as when a work has been printed using either very small or, conversely, very large type.<sup>5</sup>

A typical entry is as follows:

*Manuel des catholiques. Du R.P. Canisius, mis en flamand par Gabriel Chappuys. 16° sh 14l. fig. co[m]munes st 4 ½ cum figuris aeneis st 9<sup>6</sup>*

In the above case this refers to a French translation by Gabriel Chappuys and dating from 1592 of the 'longseller' (long-term bestseller) entitled *Handboek der katholieken* by the Jesuit Petrus Canisius (1521–97).<sup>7</sup> After the translator's

5 For example, M321, fol. 3v, no. [1]: 'Biblia Latina minimis characteribus 8° sh. st 22.' (1581), or fol. 5v, no. [2]: 'Biblia Latina maximis characteribus' (1582).

6 MPM M321, fol. 23r, no. [10]. Cf. Dirk Imhof, *Jan Moretus and the Continuation of the Plantin Press. A Bibliography of the Works Published and Printed by Jan Moretus I in Antwerp (1589–1610)*, Leiden, Brill/Hess & De Graaf, 2014, 2 vols., no. C-15. Cited from this point forward as: Imhof, *Jan Moretus*.

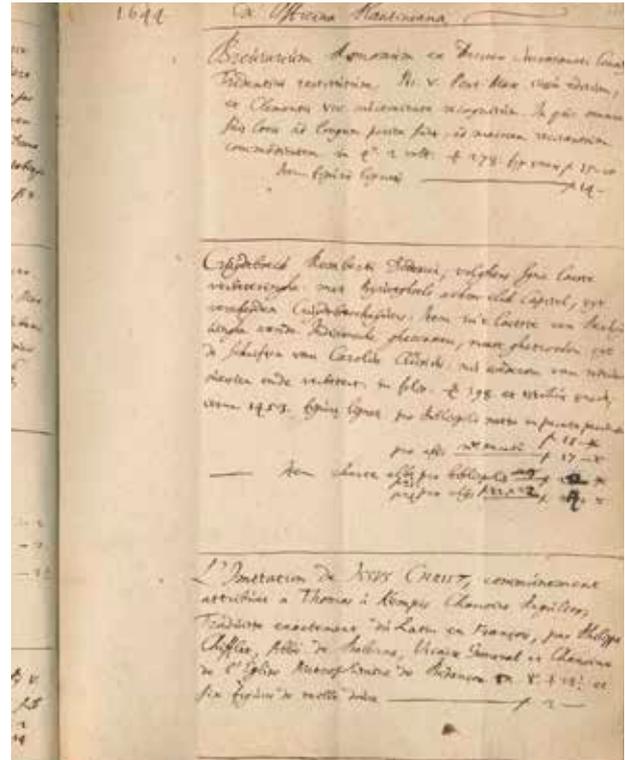
7 Concerning the translator, see Jean-Marc Dechaud, *Bibliographie critique des ouvrages et traductions de Gabriel Chappuys*, nouvelle édition, Geneva, Droz, 2014. Concerning the various publications, see Paul Begheyn, 'The Catechism (1555) of Peter Canisius, the most published book by a Dutch author in history', in: *Quaerendo*, 36 (2006), pp. 51–84.

name comes the bibliographic format '16<sup>o</sup>' (*sextodecimo*); next comes a symbol for the number of printed sheets (represented here by the letters 'sh'), an indication of the type of illustrations ('fig[ures] co[m]munes': woodcuts) and a price expressed in *stuivers*, in this case 4.5. A copy of the same booklet illuminated with copper-plate illustrations ('cum figuris aeneis') cost twice as much: 9 *stuivers*.

Prices are always expressed in *carolusgulden* (Carolus guilders). This was the accounting unit of currency in which the *Officina Plantiniana* usually showed its income and expenditure.<sup>8</sup> The *carolusgulden* consisted of the *florijn* (*fl.*), which was divided into 20 *stuivers*.<sup>9</sup>

It was normal among traders to state prices in amounts used for accounting purposes. In everyday life, of course, it was coinage that people used for minor transactions, but its value was at the mercy of significant fluctuations. The list refers only once to payment cash-in-hand ('in parata pecunia', fol. 113r), for a publication of the famous *Cruydtboeck* by Rembert Dodoens of 1644.<sup>10</sup> In that entry a distinction is made between four different prices: a price for book dealers in cash ('pro bibliopolis netto in parata pecunia fl 15' [for book dealers 15 florijns in cash net]), for others – i.e. private customers – 17 florijns in cash; then a price for a copy on white paper for book dealers (21 florijns) and for others (24 florijns). This is quite an exception, as nowhere else in the list is there any mention of cash or separate prices for private customers.

When making comparisons with other sources, we can determine that the prices in M321 are *book dealers' prices* expressed in monetary terms employed for accounting purposes.<sup>11</sup> The sums represent the ideal maximum sale price for copies. On occasion the *Officina Plantiniana* would grant a discount on this, depending on the situation, the size of the order and the relationship with the buyer. The discount could amount to as much as 40% for what were termed 'black books', while for 'red and black books' (liturgical prints and other devotional works in red and black) it did not exceed 25%.



Production list MPM M321, fol. 113r (264 × 193 mm), detail. An exceptional statement of separate prices in cash for the *Cruydtboeck* by Dodoens (1644), both for book dealers and private customers

The prices relate always to unbound books: 'in albis'. A book would often be given a first binding only at the request of the buyer, who, depending on his taste and purse, could have his purchase clad in either a simple or expensive binding.<sup>12</sup>

Although the list is a fascinating starting point for an economic analysis of 76 years of pricing policy, it is not perfect as source material. It becomes readily apparent from a comparison with the excellent bibliographies for Christophe Plantin and Jan Moretus I that a proportion of their publications are missing from the list.<sup>13</sup> At times the reason for this is obvious, such as in the case of the long series

8 Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, p. 445. Concerning the *carolusgulden*'s use as a unit of currency in accounting, see Erik Aerts & Herman van der Wee, 'Les Pays-Bas espagnols et autrichiens', in: Johan van Heesch, Jean-Marie Yante & Hannes Lowagie (eds.), *Monnaies de compte et monnaies réelles. Pays-Bas méridionaux et principauté de Liège au Moyen Âge et aux Temps modernes*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2016, pp. 163–200 (in particular pp. 182–8).

9 Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, p. 445, footnote 2.

10 STCV 3119583. With special thanks to Diederik Lanoye. The STCV can be consulted online free of charge at [www.stcv.be](http://www.stcv.be).

11 From the archives, in relation to a publication of Thomas Saily's *Gvidon, en practique spirituelle dv soldat chrestien* (1610), it appears that it was ultimately decided that the author would purchase half of the print run at the book dealers' price: in this case, 13 *stuivers* per item (MPM Arch 21, fol. 48 left). That was also the price stated in M321 (fol. 21r, no. [2]). See Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, S-18, pp. 628–30.

12 Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, p. 16.

13 Leon Voet, *The Plantin Press. A bibliography of the works printed and published by Christopher Plantin at Antwerp and Leiden*, Amsterdam, Van Hoeve, 1980–83, 6 vols. Abbreviated to 'PP' from this point forwards.

*Geboden en uitroepen* and other publications commissioned by the City of Antwerp. The Officina Plantiniana received a set annual fee for this printed material, which otherwise served no further commercial use.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, comparison with the bibliographies also shows that the list contains titles for which up until now we lack even a single copy. For the period dating from 1611 onwards, and in the absence of any bibliographies coming to light for the successors of Jan Moretus I, we are reliant on the still incomplete *Short Title Catalogue Vlaanderen* (STCV: Short Title Catalogue Flanders) and, in particular, on the M321 list, which already serves as a first-class sample survey in view of its scale.<sup>15</sup>

## Bibliographic formats and printed sheets

The bibliographic format and the number of printed sheets are indispensable for a printer. When a typographer decided to publish a work, his first decision would concern the format. Virtually all other decisions flowed from that one. To keep a firm grasp of matters as we progress with this discussion, we need to look more closely at the precise nature of a printed sheet and the bibliographic format.

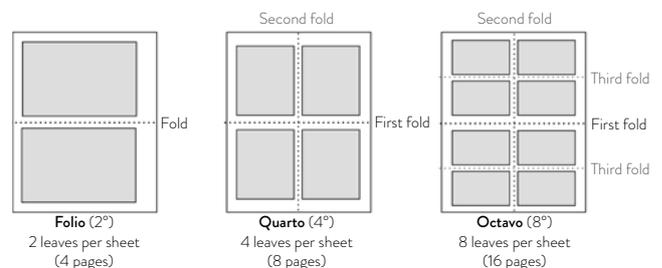
During the period of hand-operated presses, books were printed on large sheets of paper. The bibliographic format indicates the number of pages that can be obtained from one sheet of paper. For posters, it was usual to print one page per sheet and to leave the reverse blank, given that the poster would be nailed or pasted to a surface. Books in this format are called broadsheets (full sheets). Books in what is termed the folio format are more commonplace, such as the first Bible printed by Johannes Gutenberg using moveable type. For that Bible two pages were printed on either side of the sheet, thus amounting to four pages in total (diagram 1). Once printed, the sheets were folded in two and placed one inside the other to create quires (also known as sections or gatherings), which were then stitched together by a bookbinder. This format is called a *folio* (2°). Folios are quite large books and often expensive, such as theological and legal works of reference for a well-to-do clientele. If the number of pages per sheet is doubled again, the result is a *quarto* (4°). Quartos yield four leaves per sheet of paper (i.e. eight pages), which are half the size of those in folios. Once

printed, the sheets have to be folded twice. This is a typical format for pamphlets, which have a fast turnaround time. The next format in the list is the *octavo* (8°), in which eight leaves or 16 pages are obtained from one sheet of paper. Throughout a sizeable part of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this format was the most commonplace for books ranging typically from a few dozen to a few hundred pages. It is neither too large nor too small and was often used when printing schoolbooks. The *sextodecimo* (16°) format, as in the aforementioned example, is half the size again. It is made by printing 32 pages per sheet of paper, 16 on each side, and then folding the sheets four times.

As the seventeenth century progressed, the 12° format began to catch on. This format came to eclipse the 16° format. As the name suggests, the 12° yielded twelve leaves per sheet of paper or 24 pages. It is a small, sleek format and highly versatile. By doubling the number of leaves per printed sheet it also became possible to produce a truly miniature book with 24 leaves or 48 pages per sheet: the 24°. Smaller still was the 32°, which had been based on a 16° but contained twice as many leaves per printed sheet. The 24° makes regular appearances in Christophe Plantin's publisher's list and continued to be produced frequently by his successors. The 32° was particularly successful under Jan II and Balthasar Moretus I (active 1611–41) and also to a certain degree under their successor Balthasar II.

For the sake of completeness we should also mention at this point the 18°, which had 18 leaves or 36 pages per printed sheet. It appears in the M321 list a mere seven times.

**Diagram 1:**  
Printing and folding three important bibliographic formats



<sup>14</sup> Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, p. LXII.

<sup>15</sup> As of 1 January 2018 the STCV contained 24,566 descriptions, slightly more than 13,000 of which date from the 17th century.

In terms of production, the actual number of pages on a printed sheet was of lesser importance. Inking the printing forme required much the same amount of time and material regardless, as did impressions. When the text had to be composed of typeface in common usage, it made little difference to the typesetter whether he had to compose four large pages or eight small ones. However, it did make a difference in the case of small formats, such as 24° and 32°, which generally employed very small type, and piecework pay was markedly higher as a result. This could partly explain the price differences per sheet of paper (graph 2).

Typesetters and printers were paid for piecework at the Plantin Press and not by the hour. Therefore, it was wholly in the workers' interest to make good progress. At the same time, the typographer and proof-readers ensured that the desired quality standards were maintained. In terms of business operations, the decision to pay workers on a piecework basis was an interesting one, because it meant that estimated production costs could be determined in advance with a fair degree of accuracy. This made it possible in broad terms to determine the number of printed sheets that would be needed for one copy. As far as the master was concerned, it was all a matter of correctly estimating the number of printing sheets needed for one copy in order to arrive at an accurate calculation of the total investment.

Nevertheless, it was difficult to chart precisely all expenditure for each individual project. The costs for paper, ink, typesetting and printing might well be budgeted easily enough, but it was much more challenging to calculate exactly and factor in the wear and tear on lead type, the inking balls, the presses and minor materials. Moreover, there were also seasonal expenses, such as heating and light. On occasion, too, books or manuscripts had to be purchased, proof-readers with a particular expertise had to be engaged, or the compilation of indexes required additional manpower. Finally, payments also had to be made when obtaining the approval of the church authorities and when acquiring patents from secular authorities. This explains Leon Voet's assumption that, on top of the easily identifiable expenses, an additional 20 to 25% needs to be added to the production costs for each project in order to arrive at a realistic production cost figure.<sup>16</sup>

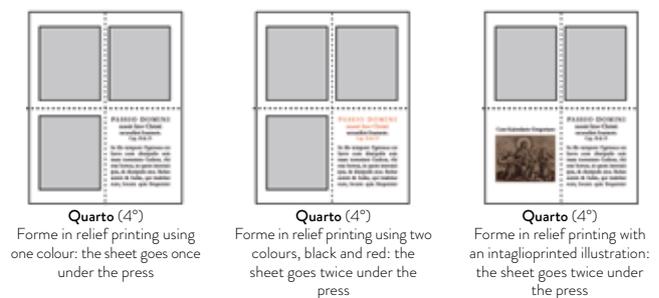
## Ancillary production costs

Certain types of process for the finished product entailed additional production costs. We shall discuss three such processes owing to their relevance to the rest of this story: printing in colour, the use of illustrations and the use of different types of paper.

The first process is multi-colour printing. Hand-presses in the early modern period were capable of printing only one colour at a time, which explains why most books were printed solely in black ink. Thus each sheet printed in red and black ink had to go under the press twice, which doubled the working time and required additional ink (diagram 2). Moreover, the typesetter had to adjust or partially mask the type in between passes of the sheet through the printing press.<sup>17</sup> This was necessary for nearly all liturgical printing and affected the price of these 'red and black books'. Sometimes dual-colour printing was restricted to the first sheets showing the liturgical calendar, but often the whole work was in two colours. In the case of other types of text, the use of red was a rare occurrence in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup>

### Diagram 2:

Printing in a second colour or intaglio printing requires additional passes through the printing press



The second process concerns illustrations. The cost of illustrated works could rise sharply depending on the type of illustrations. Unless illustrations could be reused from a previous project, a designer would have to be appointed first of all and he would usually be paid on a piecework basis. Afterwards the design would be produced either in wood or

<sup>16</sup> Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, vol. 2, p. 391. Here, he defends his position that other researchers have underestimated the issue of production costs, which has led them to the view that Plantin operated excessive profit margins.

<sup>17</sup> For details, see Ad Stijnman & Elizabeth Savage (eds.), *Printing colour 1400–1700. History, techniques, functions and receptions*, Leiden, Brill, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> As of 2 April 2018, the STCV contained 179 liturgical prints dating from 1601–50, 68 of which had a title page and/or preliminary material in red and black (38%) and 150 of which where the entire work was in several colours (84%). Taking all publications together from 1601–50 (5,481), 273 at that time had a title page and/or preliminary material in red and black (6.2%) and 243 used several colours throughout the entire work (4.4%). If we discount the liturgical works from that period, then 4.9% of the publications had a title page and/or preliminary material in red and black (273 out of 5,464 publications) and only 1.7% were works where several colours were used throughout (93).

copper. Although woodcuts were usually less refined, they did have several advantages. Naturally enough, woodblocks could be placed under the press together with the moveable type and, moreover, they were very long-lasting, making it potentially possible to spread the investment cost among several projects.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, illustrations executed in copper – as engravings, etchings or a combination of the two – allowed for much subtler detail. Copper engravings were more labour-intensive than etchings, but more durable, because they yielded more impressions of good quality before the plates required retouching or rectification.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of which technique was employed, the copper plates had to be placed under a different type of press (known as a rolling press or etching press).<sup>21</sup> This was a delicate operation and was usually contracted out to a specialist workshop. To summarize, one sheet of paper on which both lead and copper were used for printing had to pass under two different presses – one for relief printing and one for intaglio printing – and this increased the cost (diagram 2).

Finally, there is also a third process: varying print runs by using different types of paper. After all, the same type can be used to print on ordinary, fine or heavy paper. Printing can be done just as well using small or large sheets of paper. This also had an impact on production costs and thus on the sale price.

Other factors to affect the production price were of lesser importance.

## Pricing policy over the course of four generations

Keeping this information in mind, we can examine the Officina Plantiniana's pricing policy in the period 1580–1655 based on the book trade's prices in the M321 list.

That list contains 336 entries (14.2%) that are useless for our purposes, because they are either incomplete or unclear. However, the remaining 2,031 entries are of use to us. They cover a period stretching over four generations: Plantin delivered 298 publications from the period 1580–89, Jan Moretus I delivered 503 between 1589 and 1610, 962 publications can

be attributed to Jan II and Balthasar Moretus I (1610–41), and 234 were produced in 1641 or thereafter under the management of Balthasar Moretus II. A number of titles (nine dating from 1589, 12 dating from 1610 and 13 dating from 1641) could not be attributed to any one individual with certainty, but they have been included for a number of calculations nevertheless.

There follows below a description of price developments for the entire period. Afterwards we shall be analysing the influence of bibliographic format in each successive generation. We shall be looking more closely at the prices for non-illustrated and illustrated books. We shall end with a number of reflections concerning types of paper and how these were employed by the publishers in relation to the sale price.

### *Price developments per printed sheet*

In 1588, a *Breviarium Romanum* in 8° – a commonplace practical manual for the Roman Catholic liturgy, illustrated with woodcuts – would have cost 32 stuivers from Plantin.<sup>22</sup> Some 21 years later, a comparable breviary from Jan Moretus I would have set you back 70 stuivers; however, apart from one copper engraving on the title page, this publication was also illustrated entirely with woodcuts.<sup>23</sup> In 1632, under Balthasar Moretus I,



*Breviarium Romanum*, Antverpiae: ex officina Christophori Plantini, 1588, 8°. MPM A 1240, fol. A1r (184 × 117 mm)

19 On the basis of the archives, Renaud Milazzo calculated the production costs for an emblem book by Junius, printed in 1565 and published by Christophe Plantin (PP 1476). The costs for the designs and decoration amounted to 29% of the total production cost, while the costs for the 58 woodcuts accounted for a further 33%. In other words, the illustrations and decorations were responsible for 62% of the production costs. Plantin's profit margin for this edition was somewhat limited (1.63 stuivers per copy at a sale price of 4 stuivers or 41%), but because the woodcuts could be reused many times over, the production cost of reissues was made considerably lower. See Renaud Milazzo, 'Les ventes de livres d'emblèmes par l'officine plantinienne de 1566 à 1570', in: *De Gulden Passer*, 93:1 (2015), pp. 7–35, table 2 (p. 12).

20 Antony Griffiths, *The Print before Photography. An Introduction to European Printmaking 1550–1820*, London, The British Museum, 2016, pp. 50–5.

21 Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, p. 44.

22 PP 834 A.

23 Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, B-67.

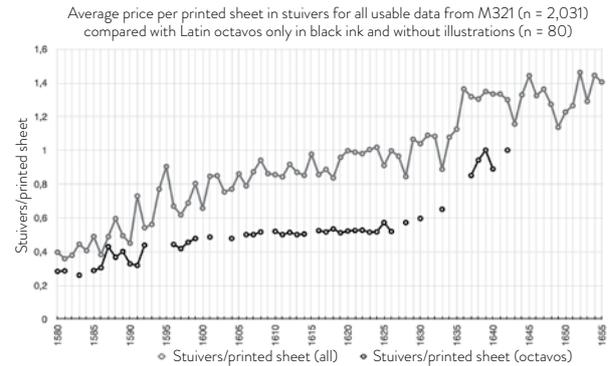
the same book cost 80 stuivers and 14 years later Balthasar Moretus II was charging as much as 95 stuivers for one of them.<sup>24</sup> It is notable that each new edition was more extensive than the previous version. However, to arrive at an accurate estimate of the price increase, we need to look at the price per printed sheet. Seventy-one sheets were needed for the first breviary, 80 for the second and 95 for the last one. Therefore, when converting this into the price per printed sheet, the price rose from 0.45 stuivers in 1588 to 0.875 and 0.94 stuivers until reaching 1.08 stuivers in 1646 – that is nearly two and a half times as expensive as 58 years previously. Far from being an exception, that price increase is in fact characteristic of that period.

Just as everywhere else in Europe, the early modern economy in our region fell victim to unstoppable inflation.<sup>25</sup> Life became increasingly expensive. In 1600, for example, the cost of rye was more than double what it had been in 1580, and in that same year cheese was being sold for 90% more than its price 21 years earlier.<sup>26</sup> Since nobody wanted to starve to death, people's wages had to follow price inflation, which is precisely what happened. To take one example, a typesetter working under Balthasar Moretus II in the period 1651–5 would have earned approximately 60% more than comparable colleagues in 1601.<sup>27</sup> However, if typesetters were being paid more, then logically enough this also fed through to the price of the products on which they were working: books. Graph 1 illustrates the average price per printed sheet per annum.



*Breviarium Romanum*, Antverpiæ: ex officina Plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, 1632, 8°, fol. \*1r. MPM A 1254 2e ex., title page with engraving, the work itself has been illustrated with 10 woodcuts (188 × 123 mm)

Graph 1:



We can see a gradual but marked price increase for the whole period, interspersed every now and then with a few outliers. Over the course of 76 years the price per sheet of paper rose by a factor of 3.5 from 0.39 stuivers in around 1580 to 1.36 stuivers in around 1650.

Although this picture is supported by a large quantity of data and thus is correct, it cannot necessarily be used to make price development comparisons. After all, the averages pertain to a highly diverse range of books. For example, some of the upper outliers indicate luxury publications. To obtain a better idea of the actual increase in the price per sheet, we need to exclude from the comparison those books that required additional production costs.

The lower line in Graph 1 provides clarification. The data in black relates exclusively to books without any special features. They were all publications in 8°, printed exclusively in black ink and without illustrations. Moreover, as far as is known, they were printed on ordinary paper. In other words, this shows how *standard books* were priced. The Latin, non-illustrated octavos, purely in black ink can serve as a baseline against which to compare the price of other books.

The price level of these ‘neutral’ books also rose steadily. It is notable from this that an initial increase in price persisted from 1580 to approximately 1610, followed by a period of stability. The rate charged per printed sheet remained virtually the same from around 1610 until around 1625; afterwards the price rose again – this time much more sharply than before. Between 1625 and 1639, the price per sheet for these books increased by 40%: from 0.59 stuivers to 1 stuiver per printed sheet in 1639 and 1642.

<sup>24</sup> MPM possesses the edition dating from 1632 (A 1254 A) but not that from 1646; this is described in M321, op fol. 117v, no. [2].

<sup>25</sup> E.E. Rich & C.H. Wilson, *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe. Vol. IV. The economy of expanding Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, Cambridge, 1967, Chap. VII.

<sup>26</sup> See the file online at <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/>, data for Belgium processed by David Jacks (2001) and Leticia Arroyo Abad (2005).

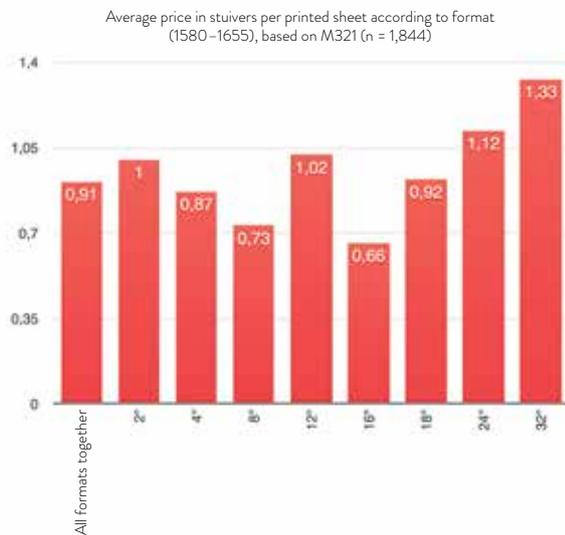
<sup>27</sup> Based on Verlinden 1965, pp. 1057–93, who obtained this information from the Plantin archives.

At present it is unclear how the price developed for these standard octavos after 1642. The fact is that the publisher's list kept by Balthasar Moretus II contains few such books.

### *Bibliographic format*

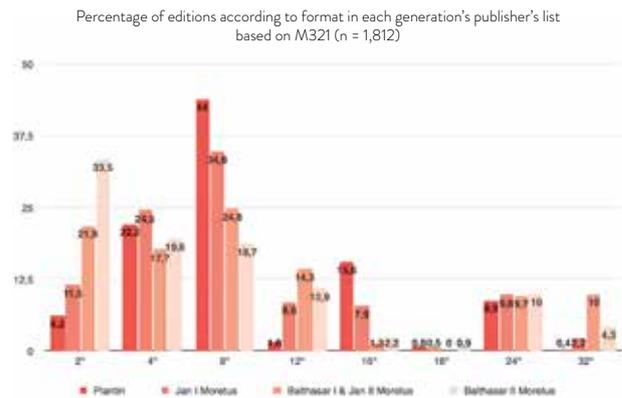
Let us now examine a number of factors that affected the price. Instinctively, we might assume that large books would be more expensive than smaller ones. This also proves to be the case if we look at the retail price for a copy, but that is because books in a large format usually have more pages than books in smaller formats. Graph 2 shows the average price per printed sheet for all formats together (bar to the far left) and thereafter separately according to bibliographic format, ranked from large (2°) to small (32°). It can be discerned from this graph that 2° was indeed more expensive than 4°, which in turn was more expensive than 8°. The cheapest of all per printed sheet was 16°. The formats 12°, 18°, 24° and 32° are progressively more expensive than average. The minuscule booklets in 32° cost almost half as much again per printed sheet than the average and were double the cost of the cheapest format (16°).

**Graph 2:**



The mix of book formats changed continually over the course of time. When book printing first began, most books in the Southern Netherlands were printed as 2° or 4°. From the end of the fifteenth century onwards, the smaller, more conveniently sized 8° gained importance. In around 1520 it overtook the 4° as the most important format. In the 1540s the 16° format also got a foot in the door. This format had spilled over from Italy, where it was often used for cheap text editions of works by classical authors. Among booksellers, practical pocket-books were also designated by the term 'enchiridion' or (reference) manual, which referred as much to their indispensable nature as to their useful format.<sup>29</sup> These booklets could be slipped with ease into a pocket and thus remained within reach at all times. Plantin recognized their benefits and used the format with regularity for text editions; it became increasingly obsolete under Jan I, subsequently disappearing almost completely (Graph 3).

**Graph 3:**



The opposite situation occurred with the 12° format. Scarcely used in Antwerp in the sixteenth century, this format became one of the most important in the seventeenth. That trend is quite striking when comparing the percentage for 12° under Plantin with that of his successors. Remaining with the smaller formats, the share for the 24° remained more or less stable and there was an increase in the 32°, particularly in production under Balthasar I and Jan Moretus II.

28 Goran Proot, *Metamorfose. Typografische evolutie van het handgedrukte boek in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1473–1541. Catalogus bij de tentoonstelling in de Bibliotheek Stadscampus van de Universiteit Antwerpen 13 november–29 november 2017*, Antwerp, Vereniging van Antwerpse Bibliofielen, 2017, p. 24, graph 2.1. Needham estimates the number of incunabula in the West in 2° format at approx. 8,900 editions, in 4° at approx. 15,700 editions, in 8° at approx. 3,200 editions and in 16° at approx. 275 editions. As regards smaller formats, there are only a few dozen survivors in 32° format and a handful in 64° format. Cf. Paul Needham, 'Format and paper size in fifteenth-century printing', in: Christoph Reske & Wolfgang Schmitz (eds.), *Materielle Aspekte in der Inkunabelforschung*, Wiesbaden, 2017, pp. 59–107 (here pp. 71 and 99).

29 In sales catalogues from the Parisian printer, publisher and bookdealer Robert Estienne (died 1559) the phrase 'enchiridii forma' appears some ten times between 1542 and 1552 in order to specify editions in 16° format.

Finally, there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of folios. It is clear that Jan Moretus I and his successors were continuing to drive up investment in this large and prestigious type of book. Conversely, both the 4° and 8° declined in importance. A relatively modest decline of a few percentage points in the case of the 4° puts the decline in popularity of the 8° in even starker relief. While Plantin published four out of every ten books in the latter format, his successors reduced the number of publications in 8° quite drastically.

This change of direction can be detected even in the publisher's list under Jan Moretus I. It is significant that his successors also continued along the same lines, allowing us to be quietly confident that this owed itself to a deliberate, strategic decision. Plantin's successors exhibited an ever increasing use of 2°, 12° and the very smallest formats. The 16° plummeted and the percentage for the 8° halved. It is not at all coincidental that sharp cutbacks were being made to the cheapest formats at that time, while the three most expensive were being promoted.

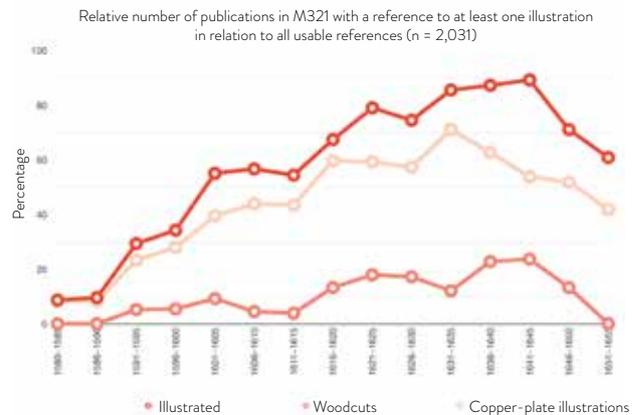
In part, changes to the composition of the Plantin Press publisher's list were following general trends. Between 1601 and 1655, the percentage of the 8° format among Antwerp's publishers fell by more than 10%: from approximately 41% in the period 1601–5 to approximately 28% in the period 1651–5.<sup>30</sup> The percentage enjoyed by the 4° also dipped in that period. While one book in every three was still a 4° format at the start of the seventeenth century, that figure was just one in four 50 years later. By contrast, the 2° showed a small gain in percentage points over that period (roughly from 8 to 12%). The percentage for the 12° more or less doubled to the extent that in or around the middle of the seventeenth century approximately one in four books was being made in that format. While the 24° format was still a rarity at the beginning of the century, it had gained roughly 10% of the market 50 years later.

In other words, the experience at the Officina Plantiniana was one mirrored throughout Antwerp; however, the trends took root earlier at the Plantin Press and were also more sharply pronounced. This indicates that the Moretus family was not so much following market forces as driving them.

### *Ditto with copper illustrations*<sup>31</sup>

The publishing strategy that the Moretus family developed within the first 65 years following the Plantin's death was not limited solely to choosing different types of book format. Much more so than the founder himself, Plantin's successors placed their focus on illustrations.<sup>32</sup> Graph 4 shows the number of editions or print runs of works contained illustrations according to the M321 production list and indicates whether they used a relief or intaglio printing method.

**Graph 4:**



Given that we have no perspective on the period dating from the foundation of the printing firm (1555) until 1580, it is difficult to evaluate the first few years on the graph. However, one thing is clear: starting from Jan I's succession to the business up to the period 1641–5, the percentage of illustrated works increased continually until it suffered a sudden decline from approximately 90% to 60% during the period 1646–55.

The term 'illustrated' may be misleading. Whenever the production list makes reference to one image for an edition or part of the print run, that image has been added to the total. In many cases the title page alone was illustrated. A typical reference in the list reads: '*titulus aeneus*' (copper title plate). The number is specified in more detail only in 166 instances. Usually the number fluctuates between one and

<sup>30</sup> Breakdowns according to format also depended on the type of printing centre. In Mechelen – then a peripheral printing press location – the trends were different; see Diederik Lanoye, 'De Mechelse drukpers voor 1800', in: *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 16 (2009), pp. 131–50, table 1 on p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> MPM M321, fol. 69v, no. [2], ["Idem met copere figuren"].

<sup>32</sup> Concerning Plantin's development of books using intaglio illustrations, see Karen L. Bowen & Dirk Imhof, *Christopher Plantin and Engraved Book Illustrations in Sixteenth-century Europe*, Cambridge, 2008.

ten (in 96 cases); it relates to between 11 and 20 images in 31 cases, and in 38 cases the number of illustrations exceeds 20. The references are mostly accurate.

The decline in the number of illustrated works after 1646 needs to be qualified. The majority of publications from that period consisted of liturgical editions, and most of those were illustrated, even if only on the title page. Consequently, we think that with the passing of time whoever was compiling the list paid ever less attention to this facet.<sup>33</sup> Until such time as we possess a bibliography for Balthasar Moretus II, we will have only a hazy impression of those last years.

The ratio of illustrations using woodcuts or using copper plates is also striking. Plantin developed an ingenious strategy early on which entailed illustrating his publications with ever more images and ones of higher quality. His successors took that approach still further; to that end they showed an increasing preference for copper plates over woodcuts. Two variants were often made for liturgical editions: one using woodcuts and one using copper-plate illustrations. As Karen Bowen has established on the basis of missals published between 1590 and 1650, a near complete shift took place in the space of 60 years in favour of intaglio illustrations.<sup>34</sup>

The commercial importance of illustrations – even if there was only one, such as the Officina Plantiniana printer's device on the title page – can hardly be overestimated. Once an edition or print run had been illustrated, its price per sheet could double. Over the entire period from 1580–1655, editions for which no specification of illustrations was made in the production list would have an average cost per printed sheet of 0.61 stuivers. In the case of an illustrated book this would amount to 1.13 stuivers per sheet. Copies using nothing but woodcuts were a little cheaper: 0.92 stuivers per printed sheet as against 1.15 stuivers for books using copper-plate engravings or etchings.

Graph 5 provides an overview of the average price per printed sheet per time period. This brings two matters into focus. During the first 16 years (1580–95) a book with illustrations cost on average per printed sheet twice that of a non-illustrated book. Even at the end of the period there was generally still a difference in cost of around one quarter, which was not insignificant. Moreover, the graph may give the

Graph 5:



impression that as time progressed the prices for illustrated books became more affordable in relative terms. However, that is not actually the case. Compared with the 'neutral' 8° in Latin, which can serve as a benchmark, all of the average prices remained on the high side. The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the content of the works produced. As Dirk Imhof in particular has already convincingly demonstrated, Plantin's successors focused their attention increasingly on liturgical editions, which were invariably printed in red and black ink. Logically enough, higher production costs for a second printing colour translated into a higher retail price.

Books using intaglio illustrations not only look much more attractive, but are also much more expensive than ones with woodcuts. In other words, it is unsurprising that more would be paid for publications with engravings or etchings. However, the buyer was paying not only for the additional production costs, but also, and above all, for the luxury factor. This can be seen from a comparison of two variant publications of *Hebdomada Mariana* by the refugee Irish author Richard Stanihurst (1547–1618) (Table 1).

<sup>33</sup> In some cases we know for certain that the publications had illustrations; see, for example, STCV 6841691, 6596373, 12915248 and 12868689.

<sup>34</sup> Karen L. Bowen, 'Tabellen van illustraties in liturgische werken', in: Imhof (ed.), *De boekillustratie ten tijde van de Moretussen*, pp. 178–81 (see Table D, p. 181).

**Table 1.** Price comparison between two variant publications of *Hebdomada Mariana* by Richard Stanihurst, 1609<sup>35</sup>

	<i>Publication with woodcuts</i>	<i>Publication with engravings</i>
No. of printed sheets	11	11
No. of illustrations	8	8
Print run	1000	500
Retail price per copy	7 stuivers	14 stuivers
Price per printed sheet	0.64 stuivers	1.27 stuivers
<i>Costs for the illustrations</i>		
Drawings	fl. 12 st. 10	–
Cutting/engraving	fl. 9	fl. 53
Reworking engravings	–	fl. 5
Printing from engravings	–	f. 15
<hr/>		
<i>Total for the illustrations per copy</i>	fl. 21 st. 10 0.43 stuivers	fl. 73 2.92 stuivers

As the table indicates, a copy with engravings cost twice as much as one with woodcuts: 14 stuivers as against 7 stuivers. As far as we can tell from the archives, the additional costs for the engravings amounted to only 2.49 stuivers (2.92 st. minus 0.43 st.). Thus the supplementary production costs for engravings were more than three times the production costs for woodcuts.

This example is no exception. As a rule, the managers of the Plantin Press doubled the price of publications when they had been printed with intaglio illustrations. Not only did this allow them to double turnover, but it also allowed them to increase profit margins by still more. Apparently this did not pose a problem for the market. The number of illustrated editions was driven up with each successive generation, and intaglio printing replaced woodcuts with ever greater frequency. At times the demand for copies with engravings exceeded expectations, whereupon loose pages of additionally printed engravings were pasted over woodcut illustrations.

## Paper

References to the paper used for an edition or for its print run are encountered on 356 different occasions. The first such comment that we come across concerns the size of the sheets used in printing the six-part mass by Philippus de Monte (1521–1603): ‘*real pap. double*’.<sup>36</sup> It was indeed paper of the Royal type, which was approximately twice as large as the frequently used Chancery or Pot-format paper.<sup>37</sup>

Jan I and his successors used paper increasingly often as a convenient means of product differentiation. For example, the folio-format *Missaal* of 1599 was produced in three variants. A first print run of 850 copies was illustrated with woodcuts.<sup>38</sup> The books cost 6 florijns and 10 stuivers each. In addition, Jan Moretus I brought on to the market a further 300 copies with intaglio illustrations, each of which sold for 9 florijns, and finally he had 100 missals printed with copper-plate illustrations ‘*en plus grand papier*’, which added yet another florijn to the cost.<sup>39</sup>

As explained earlier, although producing copies on different types of paper was a simple matter, it provided a diverse range of possibilities. The production cost decreased when using grey paper or smaller sheets, which would bring a book within reach of a wider range of buyers. Then again, the use of whiter, finer, thicker or larger sheets of paper would appeal to customers who could afford a certain degree of luxury. In most cases, print runs using luxury paper were fairly limited, thus ensuring that the buyer took home quite an exclusive item.

Luxury and exclusivity come at a price. What that meant for customers is obvious, but it is much more difficult to establish how much the production costs were for one print run compared with another, because of the difficulty in ascertaining precisely which type of paper is being described in the M321 list. Designations such as ‘*gris papier*’, ‘*petit papier*’, ‘*grand papier*’, ‘*papier fin carré*’, ‘*papier commun*’, ‘*papier blancq*’, ‘*papier fin de troyé*’, ‘*papier grand median*’, ‘*papier bon volume de lyon*’, ‘*papier bl[anc] carré*’, ‘*maiori charta*’, ‘*papier fin carre grand*’, ‘*ex meliori charta*’, ‘*in bona charta*’, ‘*in charta maxima*’,<sup>40</sup> and so forth, do provide an idea of the quality in question, but often cannot be associated with punctual

35 Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, S-44. Costs were not charged for each illustration; it is probable that Jan I was able to reuse a number of woodcuts and/or engravings from previous projects.

36 M321, fol. 1 no. [4]. PP 1715.

37 Compare the 15th-century dimensions in Needham, ‘Format and paper size’, p. 71, with the table in Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, pp. 73–5.

38 MPM, 4–151, incomplete copy with a mixture of woodcuts and intaglio illustrations.

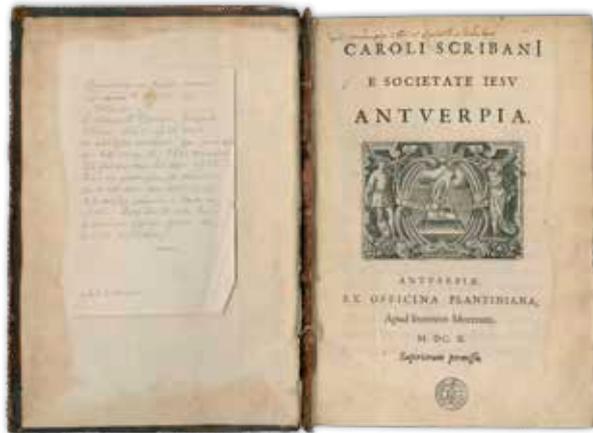
39 Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, M-23, pp. 459–61. Cf. M321, fol. 33v, no. [7]. There are no known copies from print runs using copper plates.

40 Respectively, M321, fol. 15v, no. [3] and no. [4], fol. 38r, no. [13], fol. 39v, no. [7], fol. 42r, no. [4] and no. [5], fol. 42v, no. [10] and no. [11], fol. 43r, no. [1], fol. 44r, no. [6], fol. 45r, no. [5], fol. 46r, no. [13], fol. 46v, no. [13], fol. 47r, no. [1] and no. [10].

paper orders. In 1610, for example, deliveries from the paper merchant Jan Verspreet state names such as ‘*fin grand carré*’, ‘*fin grand v[olume] de lyon*’, ‘*grand mesle carré*’, ‘*grand mesle p[apier] bastard*’, ‘*fin leger voll[ume] de lyo[n]*’, ‘*fin median leger*’ and ‘*fin median pesant*’, to name but a few, but not a single one of these quality designations coincides precisely with what is stated in the production list.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that ‘*gris papier*’ is the same as ‘*papier meslé*’ or ‘*papier bastard*’, but we cannot be certain, and in most other cases, too, there is room for doubt.

Inspections of copies still extant do not usually yield any solutions either. The naked eye cannot nowadays distinguish between paper from a print run printed 400 years ago on ‘*papier blanc*’ and that on ‘*papier commun*’ from another print run. All the same, there must have been a visible difference at the time for producer and buyer alike.

By measuring copies we can demonstrate that print runs of a single composition were made using different sizes of paper. For example, the Museum Plantin-Moretus possesses five copies of the city commentary *Antverpia* by the Jesuit Carolus Scribani (1561–1629), one of which was printed on larger sheets of paper.<sup>42</sup> M321 does not specify large format copies. Consequently, a separate price for these is unknown. The M39 production list does mention in brackets a separate print run of 25 copies: ‘(25 *grand*)’;<sup>43</sup> ten of which were



Carolus Scribani, *Antverpia*, Antverpiae: ex Officina Plantiniana, apud Joannem Moretum, 1610, large sheet edition. MPM, B 3401 (272 × 188 mm)

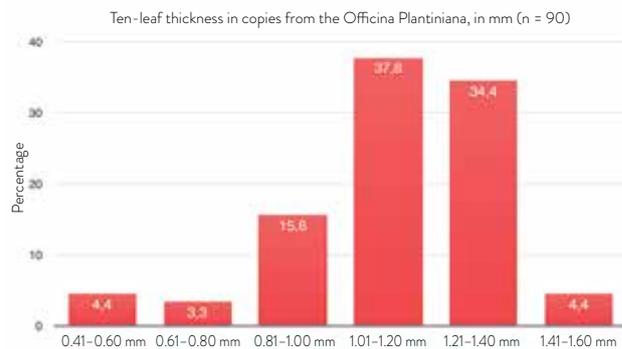


Carolus Scribani, *Antverpia*, Antverpiae: ex Officina Plantiniana, apud Joannem Moretum, 1610, on standard paper. MPM, A 566, fol. \*1 recto (249 × 170 mm)

intended as presentation copies for Antwerp’s Jesuits.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that the remaining 15 copies were not intended for the mainstream market either.

The thickness of printed sheets is equally variable and can also be measured (Graph 6). Although research in this area is still in its infancy, it is clear from the graph that print runs were performed using wafer-thin paper (less than 0.81 mm for ten leaves), ‘standard’ paper (0.81 to 1.40 mm) and very thick, heavy paper (more than 1.40 mm). This is tangibly apparent, certainly in terms of the extremes. In the case of the *Breviarium Romanum*,

Graph 6:



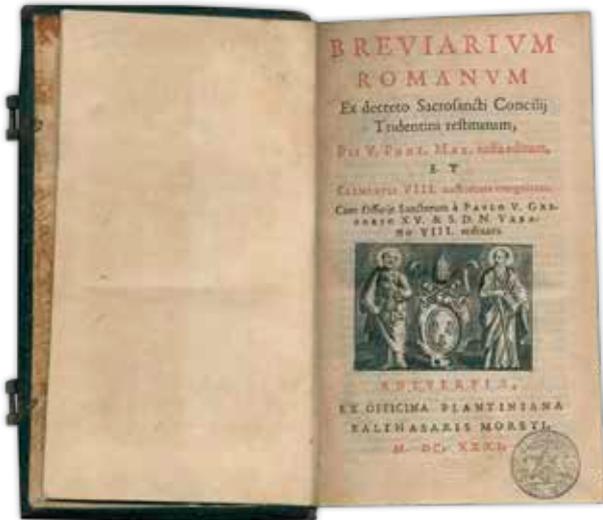
<sup>41</sup> MPM Arch 126, fol. 216 right. With special thanks to Kristof Selleslach.

<sup>42</sup> Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, S-30. See also L. Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani S.J. 1561–1629. Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, Antwerp, 1961, in particular pp. 187–203. The book block for the copies A 566, A 1066, A 1362 and A 1165 measures 248–258 by 169–176 mm. Conversely, the book block for the copy B 3401 measures 272 by 188 mm.

<sup>43</sup> MPM M39, fol. 21r, no. [18].

<sup>44</sup> Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, S-31: p. 647.

published by Balthasar Moretus I in 1631 in 12°, the thin Bible paper definitely served a functional purpose.<sup>45</sup> The breviary in question numbers some 1,320 pages and would otherwise have been monstrously thick had standard paper been used.



*Breviarium Romanum*, Antverpiae, Balthasar Moretus I, 1631. MPM A 1277, first part (138 × 80 mm), book, block printed on wafer-thin paper, numbers 660 pages and is thus only 38 mm thick

Conversely, in 1604, Jan Moretus I had copies printed of Justus Lipsius's *De amphitheatro liber* using unusually thick paper.<sup>46</sup>

At times the way in which paper was employed was highly sophisticated. In 1599, for example, Jan Moretus I furnished copies of Lipsius's *De constantia* in which the actual text was printed on standard paper, while the introductory sections used heavy paper.<sup>47</sup> Thus the title page and the dedication to Antwerp's city council literally made a firm impression, while no additional costs were involved in the rest of the book. Other such examples from the Officina Plantiniana bear testament to the fact that an astute businessman was at work and thus none of this was accidental.<sup>48</sup>

Although we are unable to calculate the exact costs, offering copies on better quality paper did the Plantin Press absolutely no harm at all. The cheapest paper that Jan Moretus I bought from Jan Verspreet in 1610 cost him 8 ⅓ stuivers per ream, the most expensive twice as much, but the price of most reams lay somewhere in between. One example makes it clear how the publishers made additional profits on luxury editions. The *Missaal* (1599) was printed in folio format in three different print runs. The print run with copper-plate illustrations cost 9 florijns, while the print run using better quality paper cost 10 florijns, a difference of 1 florijn or 20 stuivers. This sizeable book numbered 167 printed sheets, exactly one-third of a ream of paper. If the cheaper version had been printed on the very cheapest paper and the luxury edition on the most expensive, the price difference would have amounted to 2.77 stuivers at most – but the difference was probably less than that. In other words, the publisher took at least 13 stuivers additional profit above the margin that he had for an edition with copper-plate illustrations.

## Conclusion

Plantin's successors consciously and systematically pushed the publisher's list up to a higher market segment. Jan Moretus I concentrated his focus on more expensive book formats than his father-in-law had done, and succeeding generations continued the same policy. At the same time, they placed increasing emphasis on illustrated works, with a preference for the attractive but more expensive intaglio technique. Moreover, the Officina Plantiniana began using a diverse range of paper types with increasing frequency, allowing them to offer a wide selection of luxury edition variants. By so doing, Plantin's successors, even more so than their founder, were manipulating a market of wealthy customers with sophisticated tastes. This strategy had two important economic consequences. Firstly, the production of more expensive books caused a consequent increase in turnover, but most importantly publications of illustrated works and print runs using better quality paper yielded even higher profit margins than usual.

45 MPM A 1277, first part.

46 Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, L-12. 10 leaves of the MPM A 573 are 1.52 mm thick in total. The paper in the MPM A 1373/2 and A 973/3 copies is noticeably thinner (respectively, 0.99 to 1.19 mm for 10 pages).

47 Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, L-15. The preliminary leaves of the MPM A 1180 copy have been printed on sheets of approx. 0.15 mm and the rest of the book on sheets of 0.11 mm.

48 For example, the MPM A 1180 copy (third part) in which the preliminary material for Lipsius's *Epistolarum selectarum III. centuriae* has also been printed on thicker paper (Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, L-39). This is equally the case in the MPM A 567 copy of Arias Montanus's *Naturae historia* of 1601 (Imhof, *Jan Moretus*, A-13). Balthasar Moretus I also applied this technique; see, for example, the difference in paper thickness between the introduction and the rest of the work in the copy in the Bibliothèque Mazarine 2° 499 of Lipsius's *Opera omnia* in folio dating from 1637.

## Engraving, reworking and printing from copper plates: Theodore Galle's workshop

- Dirk Imhof



On 2 August 1598, Jan Moretus I's daughter Catharina married Theodore Galle, the eldest son of the Antwerp print publisher Philips Galle. Theodore had returned shortly before from Rome, whereupon he gradually took over his father's business. From the outset he worked in close partnership with his father-in-law's Plantin Press. Galle's workshop, in which his brother Cornelis and Karel de Mallery also worked as engravers alongside Theodore, was responsible for the cutting, reworking and printing of almost all the engravings for the Officina Plantiniana. In addition to the many jobs commissioned by Jan Moretus, Theodore remained an independent print publisher. He worked with his father-in-law in that capacity as well. He relied on the Officina for projects both large and small, ranging from the standard printing of a short text for a series of prints to far-reaching collaborations, such as the publication of the emblematic works by the Jesuit priest Joannes David.

After the death of Jan Moretus I, his sons Jan II and Balthasar I continued to work extensively with Theodore Galle's workshop. Theodore died in December 1633. When his widow died three years later, the workshop's activities were divided up. Cornelis Galle I concentrated on engraving copper plates, while Theodore's son Jan took charge of printing and selling engravings. Cornelis I settled in Brussels in the 1630s. This brought with it plentiful correspondence and dispatches of designs and copper plates. Today, these letters provide us with a great deal of information about the creation of illustrations for Moretus's publications.



Payments made to Theodore Galle's workshop, including for the engraving of copper plates for the *Breviarium* of 1614 (MPM Arch. 123, *Graveurs I. Galle 1600–1692*, fol. 23r)



While this was happening, Cornelis I was training his son Cornelis II as an engraver. From the autumn of 1639 he, too, began to work for Balthasar Moretus. He took over an increasing number of commissions from his father, whose eyes were becoming too impaired for the precision work demanded by engraving. After the 1630s, although Cornelis I and II remained Balthasar Moretus's most important engravers, Moretus did rely occasionally on the services of other craftsmen in Antwerp, such as Andries Pauwels or Anton van der Does. For their part, the Galle father and son team also accepted commissions from other publishers, even though Moretus expected them to work exclusively for him. As his father before him, Cornelis Galle II trained his own son Cornelis III as an engraver. However, he died in the same year as his father, 1678.

Meanwhile, Jan Galle continued to print all the copper plates for the books of Balthasar Moretus I and II. As heir to the sizeable stockpile of copper plates from both his father and grandfather, he brought out new publications of these print series and loose prints at regular intervals. Nevertheless, over time the connection between the Moretus and Galle families became more detached, resulting in their partnership becoming rather more business-like in nature. In the mid-1670s, for example, Jan Galle was compelled to reduce his rates for copper-plate printing under pressure from Balthasar Moretus III and his mother, Anna Goos. After Jan Galle's death in 1676, his sons, Guillaume and Norbertus, tried to carry on the business of the copper-plate printing workshop, but the Moretus family made fewer and fewer requests for their services and, after 1693, all activities seem to have ceased. The partnership between the Plantin Press and the Galle family's print workshop had lasted for nearly a century and was a unique and successful collaboration in the history of Antwerp's publishing culture.

Further reading on this subject:

- Karen Lee Bowen, 'Working practices in Antwerp: the Galles', *Print Quarterly*, 26 (2009), pp. 123–42.

## The breviary in folio of 1614: a pet project of the Moretus brothers

- Dirk Imhof



It was through the extraordinary folio edition of the *Breviarium Romanum* published by Jan II and Balthasar Moretus I in 1614 that the two brothers were able to showcase an example of their typographical capabilities that far surpassed the work of any of their competitors. What made this breviary such an impressive book was not only the quality of the paper used and the typographical workmanship, but also the new designs by Peter Paul Rubens for the title page as well as all ten illustrations. Rubens' designs for this breviary were among the first that he produced for the Plantin Press. The intention may also have been to print his new designs in the folio edition of the 1613 missal. However, only two new illustrations and accompanying borders were ready on time: the Adoration of the Magi and Christ's Ascension, both designed by Rubens. Consequently, pre-existing copper plates with older designs had to be used for the other illustrations. For subsequent editions of the missal, Jan II and Balthasar Moretus I did replace all the illustrations with designs by Rubens, and these continued to dominate the illustrations of liturgical works at the Plantin Press over the following decades.

After the death of Jan Moretus I on 22 September 1610, the two brothers – Balthasar I and Jan Moretus II – succeeded their father in heading the printing firm. Jan Moretus I's widow, Martine Plantin, continued to be a co-partner in the business until 1614 (two years before her death in 1616). Between 1610 and 1614, the brothers accomplished several projects at their own expense and risk. In 1612, for example, they

acquired from the print publisher Jan Baptist Vrients his copper plates and his unsold stockpile of atlases. Another major project was the publication in folio of the aforementioned *Breviarium Romanum* in 1614. The

Item	Cost
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1614	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1613	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1612	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1611	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1610	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1609	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1608	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1607	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1606	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1605	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1604	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1603	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1602	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1601	3000-0
Cost of paper for 3000 sheets for 1600	3000-0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1068-5</b>

Cost calculation for printing the *Breviarium Romanum* of 1614 (MPM Arch. 118, *Imprimerie 1600–1625*, fol. 73)

brothers had to pay a fee whenever they made use of the company's infrastructure and workforce, because their projects (and the potential profits) were being performed beyond the partnership with their mother. As a result, we now have at our disposal detailed breakdowns of the various costs involved in printing this breviary and the accompanying prayer books for the Franciscans and the Polish and Spanish Churches. We have a detailed picture of how much they paid for the paper, the wages for the typesetters and printers, impressions from the copper plates, etc.

Initial sales for the breviary were limited. It is possible that its high price – 16 guilders for a copy on ordinary paper or 18 guilders for better quality paper – dissuaded potential customers from purchasing such a splendid prayer book. This edition was certainly not within the reach of the impecunious priesthood. In 1614, the Moretus brothers sent some 120 copies to the Frankfurt book fair, but sales did not live up to their expectations. Fortunately for them it was from this point that trade began to take off again with Spain and with the export of luxury liturgical works. In January 1615, this development allowed them to ship 200 copies to Spain.

Further reading on this subject:

- Karen Lee Bowen, 'The Moretuses' production of illustrated liturgical texts', in: *The Illustration of Books Published by the Moretuses*, Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus exhibition catalogue, 1996, pp. 37–41 and catalogue entries nos. 33 and 70.



Copper plate used for the title page of the *Breviarium Romanum* (1614), subsequently adjusted to include the coat of arms for Pope Urban VIII in the 1628 edition (MPM KP 167 D)

## Literary publishing & deep regard

Andrew Steeves



What is it that we talk about when we talk about publishing books? Publishing is in essence as old as speaking, and only slightly younger than thinking. When you boil it right down, *thinking* is the marrow in the bones of publishing; it is the essence of the endeavour, what gets the publisher out of bed in the morning and into his or her boots. Publishing, though often otherwise employed, is at heart the servant of ideas.

While writing ideas down for preservation and circulation is an old habit, book publishing as we now know it didn't become a cultural force in the West until the early sixteenth century, when the printing press and moveable type took Europe by storm. No doubt the scribes on whom the spread of literature and learning had previously depended were unimpressed by these technological innovations and loathed the new publishing industry they fostered. The manuscript book – typically manufactured as a singular work commissioned by and produced for a specific individual – gradually gave way to mass-produced commodities manufactured on spec for multiple, un-predetermined readers. This speculative aspect introduced interesting new problems, namely increased financial risk and the disconnection of the production from a specific reader, but it also opened the text to more readers.

The rise of publishing was much helped by the rise of capitalism, industrialism and international trade in general, but ultimately it was the humanist principles of the Renaissance and the various waves of rebellion and reformation that really spread printing, publishing and

reading far and wide. Of course, the established powers sometimes felt that they spread a little too far, and a little too wide. Understanding the potential that printing and publishing held, Church and State wasted no time asserting themselves – sometime as patrons, sometimes as clients, and always as sanctioners, protectors, persecutors and censors. So from the beginning, book publishers have been speculators, playing a sort of cat and mouse game with those in power, currying favour to attract patronage or altering their publishing programme in an effort to keep their heads off the ends of pikes. But the very best publishers were always also something more, seeking out the authors whose texts best expressed the issues and concerns of their communities, and the artists and craftspeople whose skills helped give the expression of those ideas a proper physical form.

Traditionally, the first post-scribal European publisher is said to be Johannes Gutenberg. Gutenberg's invention of an adjustable mould for casting moveable type places him among the most influential inventors in human history. I find it instructive, however, that the founder of Western printing lost his business to his creditors before his first book was even off the press. Literary publishers will be relieved to know that under-capitalization, crippling debt and the constant threat of financial ruin are merely part of our proud heritage. Publishers have had a precarious relationship with commerce from the very beginning.

Printers and publishers have also always been, for better or for worse, agitators for and beneficiaries of technological change. While the desire for faster and cheaper production methods has sometimes overshadowed the value of quality

workmanship, it is wrong to assume that technological change has always had a corrosive effect on the quality of books. Twentieth-century presses such as Nonesuch and Penguin (at least in the beginning) demonstrated how mechanization could incorporate traditional design and production values to produce inexpensive books of distinction. There was something incredibly democratic about the early mass-produced and reasonably priced Penguin paperbacks that the expensive museum pieces produced by the private press movement seemed to miss utterly. A beautiful book that no one can afford to purchase and read can make only a limited contribution to the wellbeing of a community, but a well-constructed, mass-produced object might well revolutionize a nation.

In more recent times, the advent of the personal computer has made the basic tools of digital type founding and book design available to almost anyone curious enough to learn how the trick is done. That same desktop computer is an awesome tool in the hands of small literary publishers, providing them with the ability to move text files, images, proofs, galleys, press releases, promotional material, purchase orders, invoices or payments around the world with the click of a mouse – and that’s just scratching the surface of the tool’s potential. At any rate, printers and publishers have had a longstanding relationship with technological change and they tend to adapt without much trouble.

Fundamentally, if you consider the challenges faced by literary publisher 400 years ago and you look at literary publishing today, not much has changed. The ideas are still what drive us; we still hold an uncomfortable relationship with our patrons (now primarily granting agencies and arts foundations); our ranks are still populated by a strange mix of idealists and opportunists; we are still undercapitalized, forever dancing on the razor’s edge of solvency; and we continue to benefit from and struggle with the ever-changing technologies of the trade, striving to express a half-millennium worth of traditions through new tools.



I’m hardly what you’d call an industry insider. I’ve only ever held one job in printing and publishing, and it’s one that I invented for myself. I’m the first to admit that my experience is limited. I’ve parked myself in a backwater

town, far from the centre of culture and commerce, and for the last two decades I have focused my attention on editing, designing, printing and marketing literary books – that is, I’ve been minding my own business, and finding my own way. Yet I have found that this intensely localized experience has fostered a kind of native intelligence, an intelligence nurtured more by wide reading, long reflection and an intimacy with the challenges of my daily work than by extensive travel, formal education or professional association. While I sometimes feel that my work is out of step with the preoccupations and trends of mainstream publishing, I take comfort in knowing that it is rooted *here*, in a specific cultural tradition that extends from the very tactile present into the equally tactile past.

A book is a funny, dynamic kind of tool, one that is at once both transcendent and temporal, expressing aspects of the cultural and historical period in which it is made. Anyone who makes their living writing, designing, manufacturing or publishing literary books does so in the context of the preoccupations and trends particular to the moment in history they occupy, and the books that they produce will reinforce or resist the wider aesthetic, technical, material, economic, social, political or environmental concerns of the day. While the context of book production is necessarily general, societal and historical, we must not forget that the specific actions required to literally *make* a book are always also specific, carried out by in a local context by individuals using the tools, skills and materials available there and then, and applied toward the publication of a specific text. This dynamic, telescopic aspect of the book is one of the reasons it remains a vital cultural tool so many centuries after its conception.

For the literary publisher, the dynamic possibilities embodied by the book come with some hefty responsibilities. If we wish to properly enact the book’s potential – to unleash this dynamism in service of our community and culture – we need to be more than mere producers and purveyors of commodities or artefacts. In order to do this we must perpetually re-image the book’s cultural function, and then we must enact it. The best printers and publishers through the ages have striven to design and manufacture books that were robust enough to fulfil their cultural purpose, books that were as lithe as the texts they carried and wily enough to transport those texts successfully through time and space to their readers.

Historically, the technical and material aspects of making good books have not been all that difficult to

solve, but fostering the desire to solve them and the drive to maintain a high level of care in the production of books has been much more problematic. In the bluster of industry and commerce, printers and publishers tend to lose sight of their responsibilities as cultural agents, side-stepping such questions of the book's proper cultural purpose and busying themselves instead with the innumerable minute operations of their day-to-day work. Attention shifts to the things that can be measured with marketing reports, spreadsheets, ledgers, inventories and calendars, reducing the book's complex cultural function to the production and sale of a commodity.

When we lose focus and forget our cultural responsibilities, the negative effect is readily visible in the low quality and limited cultural impact of the indifferent books we produce. But as the English printer Harold Curwen observed, the outcome is rooted in the choices of individuals:

*Printers have a great responsibility in that with equal facility their presses can turn out well designed things which are a pleasure both to the workers who make them and to all who use them, or shoddy, badly designed things which do not fulfil their purpose well and degrade everyone who makes use of them.*

Making books that fulfil their cultural purpose is too often shrugged off by designers, printers and publishers as being too complex, too expensive, too niche-market or too far outside of the scope of their responsibility. We accept the unmooring of books from their cultural purpose and potential on the grounds of economic or technological determinism, as if no other outcome were possible. But if we will not strive for good books, we will eventually arrive at the point where we are no longer able to imagine *how* to make them, or even *why*. The only answer I see to this problem is action. We must embolden ourselves to invest the time, energy and resources required to produce books that are robust enough to fulfil their cultural purpose, books that might inspire those who encounter them to re-imagine the way language and literature might be employed as tools for building and strengthening our communities. As Thoreau pointed out in a letter to Harrison Blake in 1853, when it comes to matters of this higher order, we more often fail out of inertia than out of ignorance:

*As to how to preserve potatoes from rotting, your opinion may change from year to year, but as to how to preserve your soul from rotting, I have nothing to learn but something to practice.*

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When not making books, I spend a lot of time rambling in the wilderness near my home. One of the things that strikes me when I'm out there is how temporary it all is, relatively speaking. After all, the arrangement of my present landscape is a mere 10,000 years old, shaped by the repeated advances and retreats of mile-high sheets of ice. All these years later, I can read the story of the land on the land as I travel over it, discerning where itinerate rivers formed of glacial melt dithered and changed direction. I scramble over massive rocks that were moved miles by ice and were then dropped, well, erratically. It's hard to take yourself too seriously when you realize that your very *terra firma* is actually in a constant state of becoming and unbecoming.

This may help to put our questions about the nature of book production and literary publishing, a small corner of human endeavour, into context. In fact, to discuss the history of publishing in my own country of Canada is to discuss a past so recent as to be almost indiscernible from the present. Nothing about it has roots deep enough to merit being called established. Even in Europe, the future of the book is simply not distant enough from its beginning to really allow significant differentiation between a history and a forecast.

When I'm in a dour mood, I think of the Canadian publishing scene as little more than a weed seeded by chance and nurtured by patriotism, sprung up between glaciations of broader global change. I see no reason why we should think that our present cultural landscape might not be utterly reshaped as suddenly as it has appeared, and no reason why it shouldn't be. (There's no room for sentimentality if you set your watch by deep time.) I can't help but think that all the present turbulence in the publishing trade – to call it a 'decline' would falsely imply that we'd actually gained a summit – is simply the normal state of perpetual change that will continue to take place no matter how many symposiums on print culture we hold, industry organizations we establish, awards we endow or grants we dole out to writers and publishers. Change is simply the way this works.

The American proto-ecologist Aldo Leopold once wrote that 'to build a road is so much simpler than to think of what the country really needs.' And so it is that institutions and programs are established not when we have a clear vision for change, but rather when our imagination

fails us. In the publishing industry – in Canada, in particular – a considerable amount of infrastructure has been thrown up in support of an ‘official’ culture that has, for the most part, failed to materialize. Looming like the false-fronted main street of a boom town, this cultural-industrial complex bears about as much relation to a real, functioning culture as a flower box does to a functioning wilderness. The more self-laudatory the government officials and festival organizers become about their supposed success, the more the award-ceremony socialites titter in their embarrassing displays of self-celebration, the more hollow the charade becomes. Do these pronouncements and displays convince anyone of anything about the true cultural health and function of our communities, or are they simply roads to nowhere?

Out on the land, contemplating deep time can send you one of two ways. It can overwhelm you, make you passively fatalistic, convinced of your own insignificance and of the inevitability of massive, catastrophic change – a line of pessimistic thinking which branches off in many unfortunate directions. On the other hand, it can evoke a sort of reverence and wonder, a sort of *deep regard* for the place where you are standing and the moment you have to stand in it. I believe that this deep regard is at the very heart of publishing literature, and that literature is at the very heart of what the country really needs.



Literary publishers are often quick to criticise the predatory practices of ‘Big Retail’ and multinational commerce, to bemoan the consolidation of our media, threats to copyright law or the slow collapse of the independent retail book trade, or to rail against the proliferation of technological gadgets like the hand-held digital devices which some believe threaten to make the printed book obsolete. Personally, while like all book publishers I must contend with these challenges, I refuse to be defined by them. While there is no question that the book trade is facing down massive change, if history has anything to teach us it is that publishers will adapt. Going forward, I expect that I will continue to publish books in much the same fashion that I do today, employing a mixture of technology, skill and knowledge of my craft to present new texts to the public. Everything else is details.

That said, I believe the most serious challenges in the days ahead will be the ones which will confront our society more generally, global challenges which will eclipse the mere inconveniences, hiccups and transitions faced by the book trade specifically. In a sense, these global challenges are timeless (like Thoreau’s challenge about the rotting of one’s soul), and are only now lent new urgency thanks to the past century of reckless over-consumption. Who would have imagined that one day we would need to moderate our use of earth, air, water and fuel in order to contend with the real possibility of their being finite? Who would have guessed that we would arrive at the point when the logic and logistics of local economy would have to be relearned? But relearn them we must.

We must also relearn what literature and book publishing are for. Any fool knows that there are easier ways to make a living than by designing fine books or publishing literature. While this economically impoverished branch of publishing has never been fully subsumed by the rules of capitalism, a complacency, a fuzziness of purpose and a sense of entitlement has somewhat eroded our resolve in recent decades. This erosion is evident in the poor quality of much of what gets published by literary presses and by the lacklustre way in which they publish it. ‘When we regain a sense of what poems are for’, writes the Kentucky poet Wendell Berry, ‘we will renew the art (the technical means) of writing them. And so we will renew their ability to tell the truth’. I believe this statement holds true for book publishing also.

Standing in my printshop setting poems and essays into type, or walking the land that surrounds my home, the significance of my life and work in this time and place is brought into sharp focus, and it is at once thrilling and humbling. As literary publishers, we are entrusted with centuries of thinking, thinking which, while old in human terms, is a mere youngster nestled in the context of deep time. If we honour this tradition of thinking, and we honour this time and this place, paying them deep regard, and if our imaginations do not fail us so that we settle for the safety of roads when we ought to be out scouting the literary wilds – if we honour these responsibilities and pay them deep regard – then the literary press – however small, however plagued financially or oppressed politically, however befuddled by technological change or harassed by those whose only motive is profit – will continue to renew our society’s ability to tell the truth.

Sources

- Wendell Berry, 'Notes: Unspecializing Poetry', in *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), p. 84.
- Harold Curwen, quoted in Herbert Simon's *Songs and Words: A History of the Curwen Press* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 108.
- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), page 101.
- Henry David Thoreau, letter to Harrison Blake (27 February 1853), in *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*, edited by Bradley Dean (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 83.

A shorter version of this essay appeared in *Smoke Proofs: Essays on Literary Publishing, Printing & Typography* (Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2014).

## Engravers from Antwerp or Brussels? Illustrating the works of Hermannus Hugo

- Dirk Imhof



If an author insists on personally supplying the copper plates for the illustrations in his book, a publisher might assume that they will be of good quality. After all, the quality of the illustrations determines to a great extent the quality of the book that is ultimately printed. That such a situation can all too easily lead to problems is demonstrated by the exchange of letters between Balthasar Moretus and the Jesuit priest Hermannus Hugo. Following his publication in 1617 and 1620 of two religious works by Hugo, Moretus printed two more of Hugo's works, in 1626 and 1630, this time on a military subject – a decidedly unusual theme for a priest. The first publication described the Siege of Breda, while the second dealt with the tactics of the cavalry.

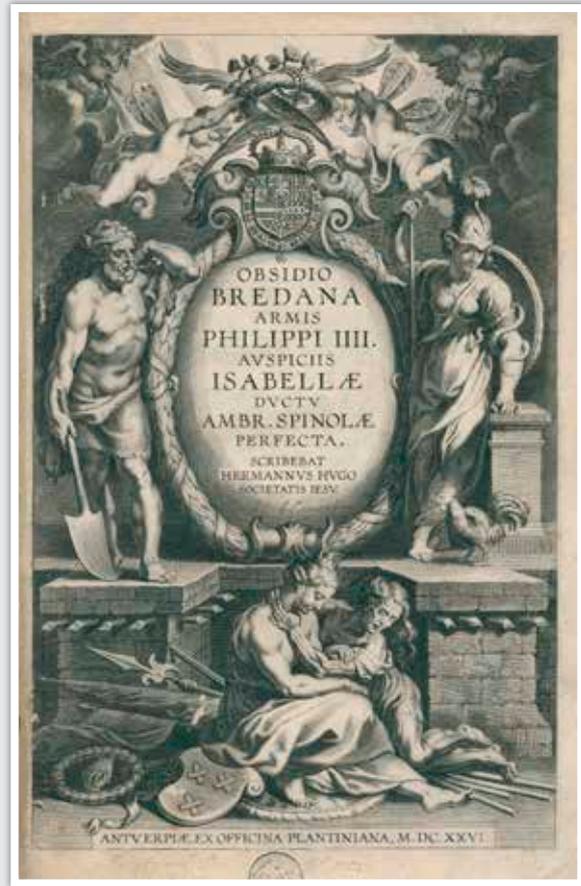
Hugo's great passion was actually Latin poetry. His most celebrated such work is *Pia desideria*, a book concerning the yearnings of the soul. It was illustrated with numerous emblematic devices and was first published in 1624 by Hendrik Aertssens. The work was particularly popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was translated into Dutch, French and English. However, owing to the course that his life took, Hugo did not have many other opportunities to compose poems. After having spent a few years teaching, he followed the Duke of Aarschot to Spain as his confessor, then on his return to the Netherlands he became chaplain to Ambrosius Spinola, whom he followed on all his campaigns. When in 1629 the city of Wesel was unexpectedly taken by the troops of the Dutch Republic, the Spanish army withdrew from the Veluwe region. To make matters worse, the army was assailed by an outbreak of the plague, which also proved to be Hugo's undoing. He died in Rheinberg in 1629.



Hermannus Hugo, *De militia equestri*, Balthasar Moretus, 1630: title page (MPM O.B 6.3)

Only a few years earlier, in 1625, Spinola had triumphed when he succeeded in taking Breda. Hermannus Hugo produced a report of this siege, which Balthasar Moretus published in 1626 in Latin under the title *Obsidio Bredana*. Translations into French and Spanish followed. Rubens designed the title page to the book. The illustrations, maps of the terrain and the depictions of the fortifications and deployment of the troops were produced by the artist A Bolswert at Hugo's expense in Brussels. However, Balthasar Moretus wanted Cornelis Galle to engrave and be solely responsible for the title page at the very least. Moretus did not think much of the engravers from Brussels.

Hugo's posthumously published work on the military tactics of the cavalry, *De militia equestri*, resulted in a similar argument between the author and Moretus concerning the making of the copper plates. In November 1628, Balthasar replied to Hugo's request to print the book by stating his view that an engraved title page would be fitting, given the book's proposed dedication to the king of Spain. Cornelis Galle would have to be entrusted with the task. He asked that the author send the drawings for the other illustrations to Antwerp, where they could be etched or engraved. However, Hugo persisted in his desire to have the copper plates made in Brussels. A few months later, when printing was already in progress and work on the engravings had started in Brussels, Moretus was unable to conceal his disappointment about the copper plates. In May 1629 he wrote to the author: '*At heus, quam sculptor vester isthic ineptus!*' (Alas, how unsuited to the task is your engraver!). In the summer, Hugo joined the military campaign once again. In June, he was stationed at the Spanish army camp at Den Bosch. The book's production had already suffered delays owing to the substandard work produced by the Brussels engraver, and it now became more sluggish still thanks to the limited opportunities for consultation with the author. Hugo died in the autumn of 1629 before the book was finished. Fortunately, Moretus was able to rely on the cooperation of Guilielmus de Wael, the Provincial of the Jesuits, who assisted with the final editing of the text and in the search for some copper plates that had gone astray.



Hermannus Hugo, *Obsidio Bredana*, Balthasar Moretus, 1626: title page (MPM R 53.4)

## Publishing for a difficult author: the Bartolomaeus de los Ríos publications

- Dirk Imhof



Some authors made life difficult for Balthasar Moretus. While their work was in the actual process of being printed, they would forward additional text to be added to the book and would nitpick continually about the pettiest of details. The Spanish Augustinian friar

Bartholomaeus de los Ríos was just such an author. As confessor to Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, he held an influential position at court and it was wholly in the publisher's interests to maintain friendly relations with him. Moretus's diplomacy



Erasmus Quellinus, *The Holy Name of Mary*, drawing for *De Hierarchia Mariana* (MPM TEK.404)



Erasmus Quellinus, *Our Lady of Good Success*, drawing for *De Hierarchia Mariana* (MPM TEK.405)

and patience served him well during the publication of two of De los Ríos's works: the *Phoenix Thenensis* (1637) and the voluminous *De Hierarchia Mariana* (1641).

These two works by De los Ríos cannot be viewed in isolation from the extraordinary events that were taking place in the Southern Netherlands at that time. In 1635 the Northern Netherlands and France entered into a coalition. They proceeded to invade the Southern Netherlands from the east. During their advance towards Brussels, they had also besieged the town of Tienen. The looting and destruction that followed the town's capitulation were so extreme that even the pope was moved to call the French king to account. The situation looked distinctly precarious for Ferdinand when the coalition forces advanced still further. Ultimately, however, the army was forced to retreat as a result of mutual mistrust between the Dutch and the French, as well as a lack of supplies.

In connection with the reconstruction of Tienen, the archbishop consented to let De los Ríos establish the Brotherhood of the Slaves of the Virgin Mary in the town. De los Ríos also arranged for a statue of the Virgin Mary, named Our Lady of Los Remedios, to be brought to Tienen to mark the occasion (the statue was destroyed in the eighteenth century). The book *Phoenix Thenensis* is an account of all these events.

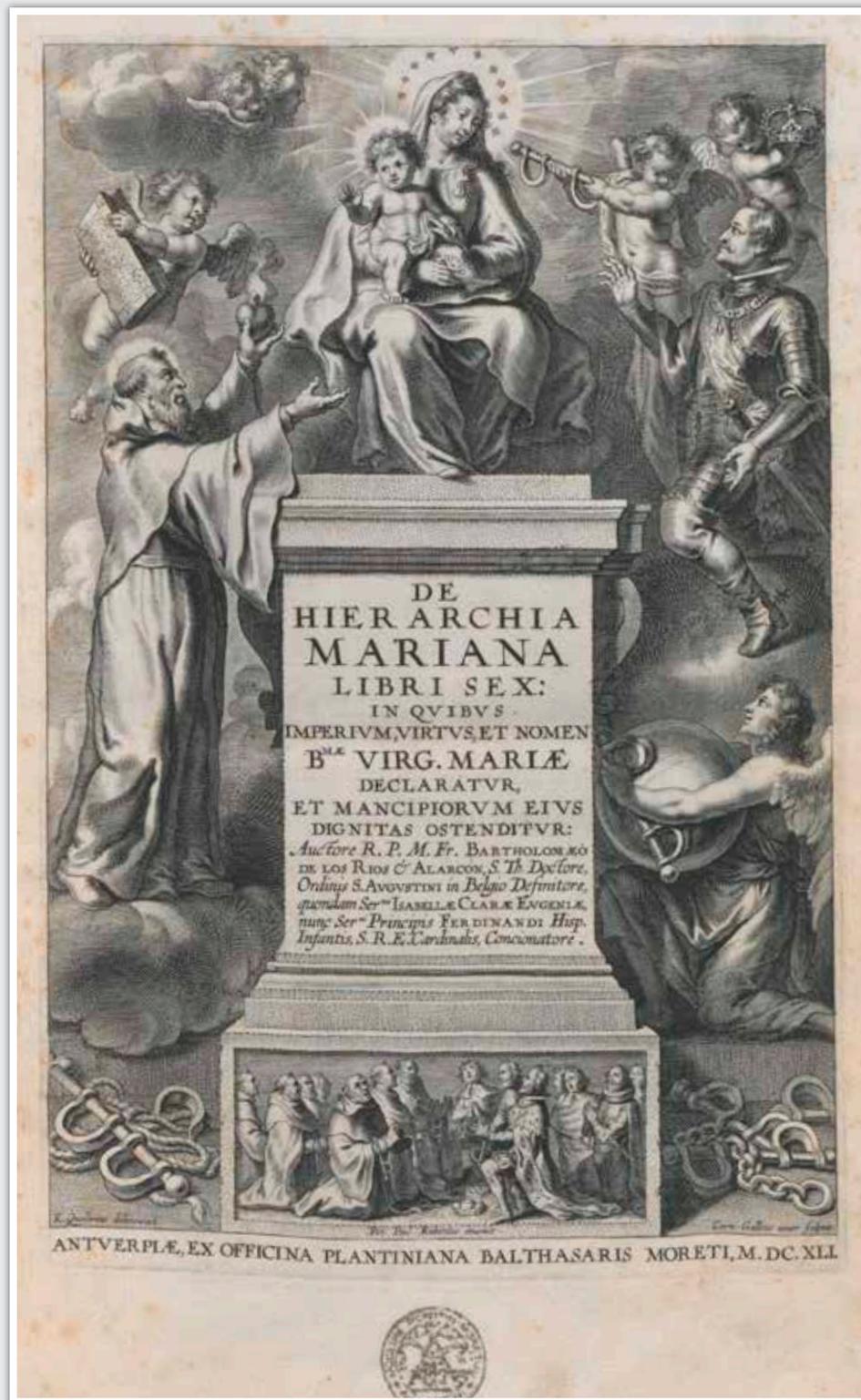
Soon after, in June 1638, Ferdinand scored a military triumph at the Battle of Kallo, where he defeated the Dutch, who had made a fresh attempt to conquer Antwerp. More than 2,500 Dutch soldiers perished and many others were taken prisoner. The victory was rousingly celebrated in the Southern Netherlands and motivated De los Ríos to write a new book, *De Hierarchia Mariana*, for which he once again engaged the Plantin publishing house.

De los Ríos was the cause of all sorts of problems during the course of printing the books *Phoenix Thenensis* and *De Hierarchia Mariana*. For the first work, he had written a brief message to the inhabitants of Tienen and this appeared at the start of the book. However, after the work had been printed, he expressed a wish for a new piece of text to replace the opening section. Pages that had already been printed had to be printed anew and Moretus had to destroy the original ones. He was able to put the author's mind at ease; he had disposed of the pages concerned by way of the latrine.

A similar situation arose in the case of *De Hierarchia Mariana*. Some sections had already had to be reprinted when, on 10 November 1640 – by which stage the book's printing had almost reached completion – De Los Ríos submitted another two poems, by two of his friends, for inclusion at the beginning of the publication. This time Balthasar held firm; he insisted that the poems could be included only at the end of the book, thus preventing anything that might otherwise require further reprints. Balthasar continued to reply to all of De los Ríos's queries as patiently as ever, but such patience was lacking on the part of Cornelis Galle, who was responsible for the illustrations. De los Ríos went in person to see Cornelis Galle in Brussels in order to have him make the engravings for his book, but Galle was unable to reach any agreement with him. In January 1639, Galle wrote to Balthasar Moretus: 'But we could not come to terms, for he is so mean-spirited, penny-pinching and dim-witted that I marvel you could reach an accord with him.' The design for the title page had been made by Quellinus. Moretus sent the design to Galle in Brussels, asking that it be shown to De los Ríos. Galle informed Moretus that he had done as requested, but that De los Ríos had been unhappy with the drawing. According to Galle, the Augustinian had no understanding of art. Relations failed to improve in the months that followed, and the engraver feared that he would not be paid. He wrote to Balthasar: 'I fear a quarrel with him about the price, for he is nothing if not penny-pinching.' In the end, and despite all these difficulties, an exceptional and beautifully printed book did leave the printing presses, illustrated with an elegant title page and various decorative full-page illustrations.

Further reading on this subject:

- *Tienen, 1635: geschiedenis van een Brabantse stad in de zeventiende eeuw*, Tienen, Museum Het Toreke exhibition catalogue. Brussels, Gemeentekrediet, 1985, pp. 15–54 concerning the events in Tienen in 1635 and pp. 367–75 concerning the two De los Ríos publications.



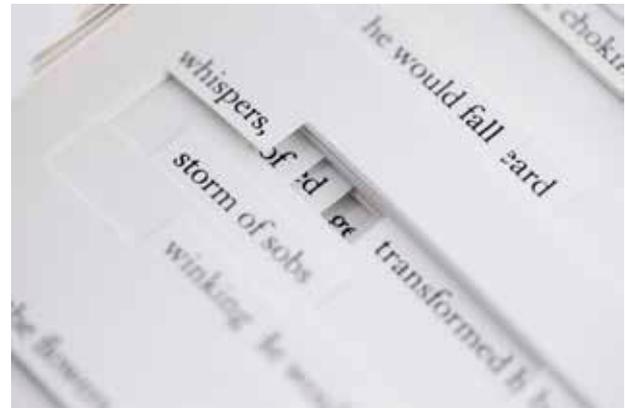
## Visual Editions: Stories for contemporary readers

Paul van Capelleveen



Marcel Proust wrote that the form of the book has often been misplaced – the news in a newspaper on perishable paper and literary classics in costly bindings. Proust thought that readers frequently attached importance to the wrong text. He writes that ‘we should do things the other way around and fill the newspaper with, let’s say ... Pascal’s *Pensées*’. In the beautifully bound book ‘with gilt-edged pages that we open but once every ten years’ we then read the gossip ‘that the Queen of Greece has gone to Cannes or that the Princess of Léon has given a costumed ball. Thus matters would be restored to their proper proportion’.<sup>1</sup>

What form should a modern book take and should it be in a digital or paper version? Visual Editions in London has positioned itself as a publisher that challenges its readers by punching out whole sections of pages, printing text upside down or selling boxed sets of pages as if they were playing cards, but also by sending ghost stories to your iPhone – they take place in your own bedroom! How are contemporary techniques combined with quality and new angles? In what ways does an unusual literary publisher – like Visual Editions – secure attention for its publications?<sup>2</sup>



Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*, 2010 (Photograph: Visual Editions)

### The Visual Editions mission statement

Books contain ‘content’, which is the label given by larger publishers, or otherwise ‘ideas’, as their smaller counterparts like to term it. However, books are not published (solely) because they are attractive and interesting; they can actually bring in revenue. The publisher collects that money, paying out part of it to those who bring the job to fruition, ranging from the author and illustrator to the printer, while distributors also benefit from these earnings following delivery.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Marcel Proust, *Swanns kant op*. (Translation: Martin de Haan, Rokus Hofstede). Amsterdam, Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2015, pp. 32–3.

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks are due for the advice received from Adriaan van der Weel, Goran Proot, Steven van Impe and Filip Marsboom.

If buyers are few, the publisher earns too little to make a profit or investments, and avoiding that outcome requires a strategy. A publishing house ensures that part of its list will meet with enormous success – through the creation of bestsellers, which could include asking a celebrity to write a book. The publisher can bear in mind that remainders will be sold on the remaindered books market within a short space of time. Publishers seek out co-financiers, such as the author, foundations, government bodies or millionaires.<sup>3</sup> Other profit-making strategies focus on the publication of cheap reprints, narrowing the area of focus in which it is possible to stand out from the crowd (e.g. gardening or children's books), licences, bulk data and translation rights.<sup>4</sup> More recent recommendations to publishers boil down to three points: make your publications (and your publishing business) interactive; make them personal; and build content together with a specific cultural profile ('Get interactive', 'Be personal', 'Build content and culture').<sup>5</sup>

For publishers with a small list, the strategy is closely intertwined with the publisher's personality and choices depend on coincidences, such as meetings with authors.<sup>6</sup> The two founders of Visual Editions have clearly distinct interests and also a common goal, which, in their own words, can be reduced to 'really narrow ambitions'.<sup>7</sup> One of the directors is a graphic designer, while the other is a marketer.

Visual Editions' creative director is Anna Gerber (born in Paris). She studied political philosophy (in Los Angeles and London), followed by communication design at the University of the Arts in London (1999–2000). She wrote reviews as a (graphic) design critic in magazines such as *Creative Review* and *Eye*, and also worked as a graphic design tutor. The company's strategic director is Britt Iversen (born in Copenhagen). She studied at the Business School (1991–4) in Denmark before moving to the South Bank University in London, where she graduated in business and

consumer studies. Afterwards, she worked as a strategist in the advertising and brand-names sector.

Visual Editions (VE) does not conceive any books itself: 'we publish them'.<sup>8</sup> VE's focus is on the design and marketing, with the VE duo defining the text as 'visual writing' and where that text's visual design is intrinsic to the story and more than decorative or cosmetic. Part of the marketing policy is not to articulate marketing in the objectives and to designate the design as the main task.

The formulation of a mission statement is standard practice among English-speaking publishers (such mission statements are usually absent from Dutch and Flemish publishers' websites) and invariably within these statements the term 'story' features prominently. Penguin Random House gives centre stage to the 'story' but not to its visualization.<sup>9</sup> The VE mission statement comes down to the designing of stories: VE wants 'stories' to be approached as startling reading experiences, published not solely on paper and reaching diverse segments of the public. This allows VE to satisfy the requirement of being both 'interactive' and 'personal'. The marketing strategy certainly comes into play in relation to this, because well before a book sees the light of day the publisher seeks contact with the public to share ideas, and from the time of production until after the launch VE publishes videos on the internet. The selling price is low, because the focus is deliberately one of 'affordable cultural objects'.<sup>10</sup>

The firm's own sphere of work is defined as the interface between publishing, graphic design, culture and technology. This also represents the key to its financial strategy. Collaboration with other parties, such as Google Creative Lab, Mercedes-Benz, Ace Hotel, WeTransfer, the V&A Museum and Penguin Books, results in lower costs *and* broadens the scope for the potential audience. The time of VE's founding – 2009 – coincided with a crisis in publishing; economic recession forced businesses to downsize, and strategies had to be revised owing to the increase in sales of

3 Kevin Absillis, "Uitgevers zijn tragische mensen". Over de biografieën van Emanuel Querido, Geert van Oorschot, Johan Polak en Rob van Genneep, makelaars in boeken, in: *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 24 (2017), pp. 251–65 (esp. p. 263).

4 Frank de Glas, *De regiekamer van de literatuur. Een eeuw Meulenhoff 1895–2000*. Zutphen, Walburg Pers, 2012, pp. 173, 177.

5 Zaid Al-Zaidy, 'Three ideas for reinventing print media', in *The Guardian*, published 8 March 2013 [<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2013/mar/08/print-marketing-three-steps-relevant&sa=U&ved=0ahUKewiaiaaYnJnaAhUR-16QKH0TDEsQFggLMAI&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=007466294097402385199:m2ealvuxh1i&usg=AOvVaw20PBDrGTUFSwXycReE1CXM>].

6 Absillis (2017), pp. 264–5.

7 Francesca Coluzzi, 'Interview with Anna and Britt, Visual Editions, London', in 'Out of Ink. Future of the Publishing Industries', published 8 January 2013 [<http://networkcultures.org/outofink/2013/01/08/interview-with-anna-and-britt-visual-editions-london/>].

8 Coluzzi (2013).

9 'Company history' [<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.co.uk/about-us/company-history/overview/>].

10 'Anna Gerber & Britt Iversen (Visual Editions): We Don't Own Anything, Our Readers Do', presentation during Typo, London, 19 October 2012 [<https://www.tyotalks.com/videos/we-dont-own-anything-our-readers-do/>].

e-books and an acceleration in the changeover from paper to digital.<sup>11</sup> VE decided to adopt a specialist niche and was labelled a ‘boutique’ publisher for that reason.<sup>12</sup>

VE consists of a small team of three women, who are proud of having founded a business run by women: ‘you can be creative *and* have kids’.<sup>13</sup> For certain projects the team expands temporarily to include more employees. Consequently, there is very limited investment in permanent staff, technology or premises, and this makes the business flexible, less susceptible to economic downturns and less dependent on hunting out bestsellers. VE is able to survive without a stock-exchange listing, shareholder meetings and hostile takeover bids. Meanwhile, VE has a business model with an eye on profits. At the outset, there was some room for open access or open source solely for promotional purposes. Later, joint ventures and subsidies covered the costs of some open access publications.<sup>14</sup> The initial phase gives one example of how capable the two founders are as businesswomen.<sup>15</sup> Their first publicity came from a book for which the text was out of copyright (*Tristram Shandy*); the second text also came free of charge; rather audaciously, they approached the world-famous author Jonathan Safran Foer and asked him for a new text for which they would not be paying a fee.<sup>16</sup>

VE operates as a matchmaker between author and designer in which it seeks a balance between form and content, literature, typography and art.<sup>17</sup> The focus on ‘culture’ increases VE’s prestige and thus satisfies the third condition for modern publishers (‘Build content and culture’). The publishing firm does not have a house-style and sources different designers for almost every new project. VE’s website lists all its projects in chronological order, from the most recent to the oldest. As of the beginning of 2018 that makes 15: the first nine were published on paper, the last five were solely digital. Electronic applications were (subsequently)

published in the case of two of the physical books: project number 3 was also issued in an iPad version, while number 5 was issued as a website. These projects are presented without distinction under the heading ‘Our books’.<sup>18</sup>

1. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*: September 2010.
2. Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*: November 2010.
3. Marc Saporta, *Composition No. 1*: August 2011.
4. Adam Thirlwell, *Kapow!*: May 2012.
5. *Where You Are*: November 2013.
6. Geoff Dyer, *Another Great Day At Sea: Life Aboard the USS George H.W. Bush*: 27 May 2014.
7. Liaquat Ahamed, *Money and Tough Love: On Tour with the IMF*: 24 July 2014.
8. Douglas Coupland, *Kitten Clone: Inside Alcatel-Lucent*: September 2014.
9. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*: 30 November 2015.
10. Joe Dunthorne and Sam Riviere, *The Truth About Cats & Dogs*: January 2016.
11. Reif Larsen, *Entrances & Exits*: January 2016.
12. Alan Trotter, *All This Rotting*: April 2016.
13. Joanna Walsh, *Seed*: April 2017.
14. Tea Uglow, *A Universe Explodes*: April 2017.
15. Kate Pullinger, *Breathe*: January 2018.

Even from a cursory glance at this list, it is clear that VE is not an author-based publisher; VE does not invest in a limited number of authors capable of delivering a bestseller in the fullness of time. Although Dyer and Thirlwell have collaborated on several projects, most of the authors appear in the publisher’s list only once.

11 John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture. The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*. London, Penguin Books, 2012 (2nd edition), pp. 377–409.

12 Michel Faber, ‘Tree of Codes by Jonathan Safran Foer’, in *The Guardian*, published 18 December 2010 [<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/dec/18/tree-codes-safran-foer-review>].

13 Lucy Bourton, ‘Gung-ho women: Visual Editions discuss sisterhood and motherhood in creativity’, in ‘It’s Nice That’, published 8 March 2017 [<https://www.itnicethat.com/articles/international-womens-day-visual-editions-graphic-design-080317>].

14 Coluzzi (2013).

15 Kasia Kroszer, ‘Interview with Kat Meyer, Conference Co-Chair, Tools of Change for Publishing, Plus Contest! Win a Free Pass to TOC’, in ‘Booksquare’, published 11 January 2011 [<https://booksquare.com/interview-with-kat-meyer-conference-co-chair-tools-of-change-for-publishing/>].

16 Elisa Nelissen, ‘Breaching the Boundaries. An Interview with Visual Editions’, in: *TXT: Exploring the Boundaries of the Book*. The Hague, Boom Uitgevers, 2014, pp. 2–6 (esp. p. 4); Owen Troy, ‘Typograpofriday: Tree of Codes Part 1’, in ‘The Experts Agree’, published 23 September 2010 [<http://theexpertsagree.com/2010/09/typografriday-tree-of-codes-part-1/>].

17 Andrea Kurland, Visual Editions. Defenders of Print Part’, in ‘Huck’, published 10 May 2013 [<http://www.huckmagazine.com/art-and-culture/print/visual-editions/>].

18 ‘Our Books’ [<http://visual-editions.com/our-books>].

## The material aspect of the paper book

Even before any text has been put to paper, VE goes in search of designers and printers that make a good fit with the author concerned.<sup>19</sup> The production process is often ‘chaotic and frustrating’, which may be because a methodology cannot be established in advance, or because every book is different, or because the manufacturing process is unusual or subject to complications, and unanticipated setbacks and opportunities keep arising. Imagination is paramount and needs to act as the creative dynamic.<sup>20</sup> If a book is in danger of becoming an assembly line project, the publishers require a dissenting voice ‘to cause productive havoc’.<sup>21</sup> A large part of their work is devoted to research – a defining feature of this small alternative publishing house.

There has never been a lack of alternative publishers, any more than there has been a lack of private printers, protest publishers and artists; specialist publishers have existed throughout history, even up to the present day: the Beurs van Bijzondere Uitgevers (Special Publishers’ Fair) in Amsterdam has a hundred participants each year. Within the current book market, there are a few notable players who emphasize the materiality of the book by experimenting with ink, paper, workmanship and format. A book’s material can yield different meanings. One of these is a physical book’s ability to convey how long it will take to read, unlike many online stories.<sup>22</sup>

As a specialist or niche item, an exceptional book is no longer the exception. Readers are not satisfied with the standard book format. Nevertheless, the standard format remains the norm for paper books. Each genre has its own norm (e.g. comic books or art books), but in the case of the novel this is nowadays the codex format paperback, approximately 20 by 13 centimetres. Otherwise, something ordinary can be turned into something unusual and vice versa, with something special being made ordinary. The pocket edition is itself an example of this: revolutionary in the 1930s, but now standard issue. How long will it take before the d- or e-book has become the norm, and what will we *then* see as the special or unusual book format?<sup>23</sup>

Format can have a differentiating effect. Miniature books are an obsession for some collectors, but excessively weighty, outsize volumes can also prove a fascination. In 2010, a miniature book

was published on the work of the Dutch typographic designer Irma Boom. It measures roughly half a finger in height: *Irma Boom. Biography in Books*. This was too small for the book trade, where it would soon have disappeared amid other books on the shelves. For that reason the publisher offered it in a boxed format that was nearly as large as a ‘normal’ book. This standardized the special book format. A few reprints later, a luxury edition appeared in a different format: 45 centimetres in height (*Irma Boom. The Architecture of the Book*, 2013). That publication could not fit upright in a standard bookcase.



*Irma Boom. Biography in Books*, 2010, and *Irma Boom. The Architecture of the Book*, 2013 (Photograph: author)

When the only matter at hand concerns the format – be it giant-sized or tiny – you could almost see it as parodying the book form: a book that is not normal, but which is *too* big, *too* thick or *too* small. An element of hyperbole or even kitsch attaches to some extremely large or small books. This cannot be said in the case of Irma Boom; the format is her means of conveying the content of the book. The tiny biography radiated modesty, but the message was clear: ‘my prodigious oeuvre can fit inside a very small booklet’. However, it is and remains an unmanageably tiny book and Boom’s response to the criticism received by the first version was expressed through the large format of the subsequent luxury edition. In the latter case, Boom would seem to be implying: ‘Oh dear, weren’t you able to read it properly? Did you need a magnifying glass? Is this version better for you?’ There is an ironic element to the format. The format is a meaningful property of the paper book.

<sup>19</sup> Gerber & Iversen (2012); Coluzzi (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Wilson, ‘Great looking stories’, in ‘With Associates’, published December 2011 [<http://2011.withassociates.com/december/ve>].

<sup>21</sup> Kurland (2013).

<sup>22</sup> J. Yellowlees Douglas, *The End of Books, or Books Without End? Reading Interactive Narratives*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> This paragraph has been based in large part on an unpublished lecture that I gave on 15 April 2016 during the Symposium Bijzondere Boekvormen (Special Book Formats Symposium) at the National Library of the Netherlands in The Hague.

Its size is an expression of ambition: comprehensiveness, profundity and expansiveness, or the opposite: humility, brevity and essence.

The current large formats fit seamlessly within a tradition of atlases, books of reproductions and photographs, but also including the even more formidable choir books or music books that were placed on stands in a church. Books on stands have recently changed genre. The publishing firm Taschen Books employed this archetypal format for a Helmut Newton photo book on a book table designed by Philippe Starck – there are now other examples. For technical and financial reasons formats remain within certain boundaries and that is the reason for books of an average format: not so small that you can't read them and not so large that you can't get them through the door.

A paper book clearly has three dimensions, that third dimension being needed to reveal the book's contents: after all, it is only by leafing through a book that the reader can make the words and images visible. Moreover, browsing and reading take place within a period of time and this divides the pages into text already read and that encountered on other pages but now invisible (memory), the open pages (the present) and the pages still unread (the future).<sup>24</sup>

Publishers such as Visual Editions, and also artists, toy with these sequences and with the space and materiality of the book, causing these three time frames to intermingle. One means of doing this is to print on transparent paper whereby text and image merge together inseparably on the recto and verso sides of a page, or to employ a concertina-type format with coordinate pages presented to the reader simultaneously. This type of disruptive approach to our normal pattern of linear reading serves different purposes: such books do not work on the basis of suspense and progression, but on the basis of association and interruption.<sup>25</sup> The associative reading of an artist's book leads the reader into personal and intimate territory with exploratory thoughts, a continual interchange between looking, reading and touching; between letters, materials, imagery and personal tactile experiences.

VE's aim is not to make artists' books and not to make limited editions, but (just like Irma Boom) to make books for a wide audience. The format used for VE books is never

extreme. The first four books were in a perfectly standard pocket size and the most recent titles can be read on a standard iPhone. In other words, the VE book's materiality is not being given further emphasis through its format. Meanwhile, experiments are being tried out on various aspects of the paper book: ink, paper and construction. Experiments of this type have a long history and are often less innovative than claimed.

Experiments with ink are performed as much by authors as by artists and printers. One of the more celebrated examples of a story where the author had a multi-coloured scheme in mind is William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Publisher Random House balked at its cost and it took until 2012 before the Folio Society published an edition in which 14 colours were selected to demarcate the different time periods in the book.<sup>26</sup> Other ways of using ink to make exceptional books have been applied by artists such as Carina Hesper, who covered the photographs in *Like a Pearl in My Hand* (2017) with several layers of thermochromic ink. Readers have to press the palm of their hand on to the photographs to make the portraits of the orphaned children visible. There are also types of ink that fade when exposed to light or heat. In 2000, Heather Weston published the booklet *Read (past, tense)* dealing with embarrassment and blushing in which the text is negative-printed against a red background. The reader touches the heat-sensitive red ink while leafing through the pages, and as the colour bleeds away it brings an intimate text to the surface (previously hidden between the lines). Printing without ink – blind embossing – is a way of allowing the dent (the impression) in the paper to speak; many examples of this are also to be found among limited editions and artists' books, such as Claire Illouz's *The Whiteness* (2008), based on a chapter from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. The Argentine publisher Eterna Cadencia published a transitory book containing *El Futuro No Es Nuestro* (2012), an anthology of recent South American fiction, which was placed on the market as *El Libro Que No Puede Esperar* ('The Book That Can't Wait'). The ink's exposure to air and light causes a reaction, with the words fading away after a few months of removing the book from its sealed packaging.

24 Christoph Benjamin Schulz, *Poetiken des Blätterns*. Hildesheim, Zurich, New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 2015, p. 320.

25 Paul van Capelleveen, 'Artists and books. Seven views', in: Paul van Capelleveen, *Artists & Others. The imaginative French book in the 21st century. Koopman Collection, National Library of the Netherlands*. Nijmegen, Vantilt Publishers, 2016, pp. 12–27.

26 Joe Whitlock Blundell, 'Folio Society limited editions', in: *The Private Library*, 6th series, volume 9:3 (autumn 2016), pp. 130–92 (esp. pp. 170–1).



Carina Hesper, *Like a Pearl in My Hand*, 2017  
(Photograph: Jos Uljee/National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague)

VE used fluorescent ink for its first publication, the novel *Tristram Shandy* (2010) by Laurence Sterne. The snow-white paper contrasts with the text printed in black, but Sterne's quirky punctuation – an abundance of dashes and asterisks – have been printed in luminous orange; the pages separating the sections from one another are wholly in that colour (in fact, the ink did not transfer well and several sections had to be reprinted).<sup>27</sup>

Another way of emphasizing a book's materiality is by using watermarks, as Irma Boom did in her SHV book (*Thinkbook*, 1996). Some publishers and artists have employed watermarks as illustrations. Antiquarian bookbinder, publisher and book designer Monique Mathieu-Frénaud had a papermaker incorporate a pattern of her own design as a watermark in the paper used for *Melancholia* (2001).<sup>28</sup> The American artist Helen Hiebert

worked with the French artist Beatrice Coron on the publication of *Interluceo* (2015).<sup>29</sup> Hiebert made the abaca paper herself with watermarks in the form of seven different geometric designs. VE has not used any special paper with watermarks.

Workmanship is a third option when seeking to underscore the materiality of a printed book. This could mean the inclusion in a book of unique, hand-painted illustrations. This has not occurred in the case of VE, but the printing firm has employed a paper-processing technique: papercutting. This venerable form of folk art has been taken up by contemporary artists and, for example, is used to cast shadows on the paper while reading (as in the case of Beatrice Coron's cuttings in Hiebert's *Interluceo*). This can be done by hand using scissors or a blade, although laser cutters can also be employed. Graphic artist Moon Brouwer designed an admirable pop-up book using three-dimensional, laser-cut images of the brain (*Bovenkamers*, 2012). A Flemish example is the luxury edition of Tom Lanoye's *Mamma Medea* (2001), bound by Koch and Guns bookbinders and then punctured by a Lasertek laser beam with the consequent loss of part of the book's text. VE used mechanical means to create holes in paper in its second book: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*. In each page of the book, the unprinted areas within the type page were punched out of the as-yet unfolded sheets of paper. VE has also employed cutting techniques for other books. Various pages were torn out of Sterne's book along the perforated border, and Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1* was published as a loose-leaf book: the printed quires were cut into pieces.

Truly handmade creations are rare among commercial publishers, except during a book's design phase. In the Penguin Threads series, for example, the artist Jillian Tamaki was asked to design covers which were hand-embroidered after her drawings, but that original handiwork was then reproduced in relief; in other words, the end product was not made by hand. VE also has a preference for the industrial book and utilizes manual work only if it is absolutely essential. This was the case for *Tree of Codes*. It turned out that, once die-cut, the sheets of paper could not be fed through the binding machine without being torn to shreds. Folding into quires and sorting (gathering) them together

27 'A nose for type', in *Eye*, 20 (2010) 77, pp. 78–83.

28 'Melancholia' [<https://www.kb.nl/themas/collectie-koopman/melancholia>].

29 'Helen Hiebert Studio' [<https://helenhiebertstudio.com/products/interluceo/>].

had to be done by hand.<sup>30</sup> Mistakes were occasionally made when gathering quires together; there are copies in which several quires have been placed upside down and in the wrong order.



Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*, 2010, pages 17 and 18: copy with sections that have been sewn in the wrong way around starting from page 18 (Photograph: author)

## Visual Editions, 2010–12

When it comes to printed books, the traditional focus has been on the text, while illustrations have been subordinate, even if they sometimes took up more space. As a rule, illustrations were intended as an alternative means of presenting information, such as through diagrams, for example.<sup>31</sup> It was the text that was ‘in the driving seat’. VE has taken a different approach to this; even in their first publication, *Tristram Shandy*, texts were turned into illustrations, and the first visible thing on a page is not the text but the interventions of lines and dashes in red ink. Just as in the case of an artist’s book, this compels the reader to look at a text differently: as one component of image and material. A long history underpins the turning of text into an illustrative medium, the origins of which have been identified by Johanna Drucker, among these being the cubists who included words in collages.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon has been given greater impact thanks to the internet – through the separation between physical and virtual documents and an increase in reading on screen as opposed to reading on paper – because thinking in icons is taking precedence and the boundary between image and text is blurring. When using a screen, readers cannot always tell where the text begins and the imagery ends.<sup>33</sup> The designers of paper books see this as a challenge and are trying to obtain the same effect on paper by using other means. VE has taken inspiration from new technology, too, but clearly emphasized in their first phase that technology was essential not only to digital publications: ‘actually technology is really interesting in the printed book world as well’.<sup>34</sup> Researcher Geoffrey Brusatto has also said that the manual workmanship given to Foer’s book pointed to limitations in the production process which ‘make the design process interesting. And research into new possibilities within prevailing production methods is desirable, as it is only when these are challenged that we get new forms of book.’<sup>35</sup>

The novel by Laurence Sterne – the first edition was published between 1759 and 1767 – is one of the most unconventional literary stories. The narrator makes continual digressions, cheerfully relates that he is omitting passages

30 Geoffrey Brusatto, ‘Het (nieuwe) gedrukte boek. Van informatief naar participatief’, in: *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 19 (2012), pp. 176–93 (esp. p. 188).

31 Jay David Bolton, *Writing Space. Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*. New York, London, Routledge, 2011 (second edition), p. 50.

32 Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word. Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

33 Bolton (2011), pp. 63–6.

34 Interview Coluzzi, 2013.

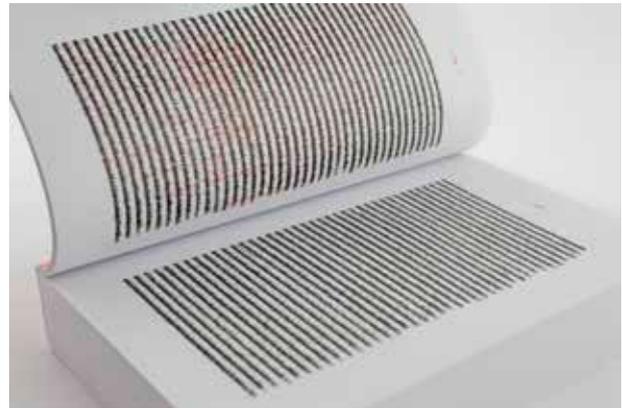
35 Geoffrey Brusatto, ‘Het (nieuwe) gedrukte boek. Van informatief naar participatief’, in: *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 19 (2012), pp. 176–93 (esp. p. 188).

and appears to be in constant dialogue with the reader. The reader cannot hack into the text but, where possible, Sterne gives the reader the freedom to supplement the story.<sup>36</sup> One such example is a blank page on which the reader can draw a portrait of Uncle Toby's beloved. The reader is invited to become the writer, something taken as a matter of course in digital stories; consequently, Sterne's novel is often cited as an example of an early 'digital narrative'.<sup>37</sup> In the VE edition, an oval coat of varnish has been added to the blank page to create an empty portrait frame within which the reader can create the portrait.

The VE edition of *Tristram Shandy* begins on the front cover with an erratic red line that has been drawn to depict peaks and troughs in all editions of the text. The line runs from '1759' all the way to 'This edition, 2010' on the back cover. Many of these editions have tried to honour the visual idiosyncrasies, but by no means all. Some editions are missing the colourful page of marbled paper as described in the text, or else it has been reproduced in black and white (Part 3, Chapter 36). There are also editions that ignore the omission of ten pages – the page numbering is supposed to leap from (for example) 322 to 333, because this is how Sterne conveys pointedly to the reader that he has missed ten pages, but this is far from universal. VE implements the visualization of these missing pages with a greater than customary thoroughness; the remaining five stubs with their perforated edges fill the space between pages 322 and 333.

*Tristram Shandy* was printed by C&C Offset Printing in China; the design was in the hands of Emma Thomas from APFEL (A Practice for Everyday Life) in London. The assignment was: make this book relevant again, technically perfect and affordable to a new readership.<sup>38</sup> To that end, not only were Sterne's own interventions expressly incorporated in red, but the designer also sought new solutions for the former illustrations. The black page – which indicates the death of the character 'Yorick' – was given a unique appearance: on pages 1.043 and 1.044 the preceding pages (1.016–1.042) have been printed one on top of the other, which is best seen from the recurring text in red. That entire section of text has been ruined, just as has Yorick's life.

The marbled pages have also been given a modern twist; in the past, such decorative papers were employed for use as flyleaves and placing them in the middle of the book was one of Sterne's quirks. In this case the designers looked to modern printing technology: the page contains an extreme magnification of the dot matrix for the image of a woman's mouth. Normally speaking, our eyes do not see this dot matrix in cyan, magenta and yellow. According to the designers, the moiré pattern varies from copy to copy.<sup>39</sup>



Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, 2010 (Photograph: Visual Editions)

Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, 2010 (Photograph: author)

36 Zoë Eckman, 'Visual Textuality in *Tristram Shandy*, Print Technologies and the Future of the Novel', in: *The Shandean*, 24 (2013), pp. 59–69 (esp. p. 60).

37 Bolton (2011), pp. 140–2.

38 'A nose for type' (2010); Owen Troy, 'Tree of Codes, Part 2: Visual Editions Interview', in 'The Experts Agree', published 1 November 2010 [<http://theexpertsagree.com/2010/11/tree-of-codes-part-2-visual-editions-interview/>].

39 'A Practice for Everyday Life' [<http://apracticeforeverydaylife.com/projects/the-life-and-opinions-of-tristram-shandy-gentleman>].

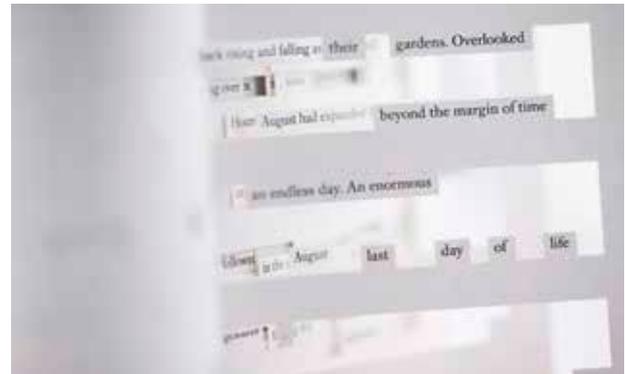
New features were also introduced alongside the modernizations of traditional illustrations: when Sterne says that a passage is intended only for the truly curious reader and a door is then closed, a corner of the page is folded over to such a degree as to make the text beneath it legible only by folding back that corner (page 1.019). Beads of perspiration have also been visualized using spot varnish (pages 5.410–5.411), a dying echo is printed in increasingly faint ink (7.536), repetitions of sounds are printed over one another (4.337) and throughout all the intermediate pages arrows point to where an interrupted story is finally resumed (pages 9.656–9.668).<sup>40</sup> Sterne expert Zoë Eckman describes the VE edition as perfectly suited to contemporary readers owing to these interventions – interventions of the sort also encountered in artists' books.<sup>41</sup>

VE's second book necessitated the involvement of more than six parties, leaving aside the author Jonathan Safran Foer. *Tree of Codes* was designed by Sara De Bondt Studio, the cover was designed by Jon Gray, the die-cuts were made by Cachet in Purmerend, the book was printed by Die Keure in Bruges, the gathering of the quires was done by Beschutte Werkplaats Ryhove in Ghent, and Hexspoor in Boxtel performed the remainder of the bookbinding.

Anyone picking up the book will notice at once that it is not as heavy as might be expected for a 284-page work. Almost half its weight has been lost as a result of the many holes in its pages. It is a cut-up novel: the text has been excised from a complete novel by Bruno Schulz (1892–1942), who was murdered during the Second World War and whose oeuvre has almost entirely disappeared. *The Street of Crocodiles* is one of these works. Foer excised letters from the title to leave behind only '*Tree of Codes*'. Elsewhere, rather than excise individual letters, he cut out whole words, sentences and paragraphs. The new story concerns loss and memory. Critics noted that this was certainly not the first cut-up novel – that honour goes to William Burroughs' *The Nova Trilogy* (1961–4) and the process was compared with *A Humument* by Tom Phillips (1966).<sup>42</sup> Foer's new

poetic sentences met with a sympathetic reception ('August painted the air with a mop. Hours pass in coughs') and this Schulz story in a new guise, nearly 'cut to death' yet still cleaving to his 'soul', was felt to be both ironic as well as a strange but fitting tribute.<sup>43</sup>

The design was problematic, as Sara de Bondt explained: 'In my studio, with the help of ten students, I cut out the whole of that book twice by hand.' Foer received photographs of the new pages to see whether he felt the story was working well dramatically. As a result, De Bondt soon discovered that, by accident, 'an enormous hole' was running through the top of the book from start to finish. The problem could be solved only by shifting the position of certain passages, all of which means that the 'accidental' format of the open spaces has been subject to more manipulation than might appear at first sight.<sup>44</sup> The pages were printed on one side; otherwise, the book would have been unworkable; in the end it reached 142 pages in length. De Bondt referred to it as a 'sculpture', but some critics felt obliged to point out that the book looked as if a stack of paper had been put through a shredder. It looked exceptionally fragile: 'Just one rake of the fingers would destroy it.'<sup>45</sup> In the author's personal opinion the margins could have been somewhat wider and the cover could have been given reinforcing interior flaps.<sup>46</sup>



Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*, 2010 (Photograph: Visual Editions)

40 In part based on Nancy Alsop, 'Visual Editions launches its first book', in *Wallpaper\**, published 27 September 2010 [<https://www.wallpaper.com/lifestyle/visual-editions-launches-its-first-book>].

41 Eckman (2013), p. 66.

42 Troy (2010: part 1); see 'Tom Phillips' [<http://www.tomphillips.co.uk/humument/chronology/60s>].

43 Faber (2010).

44 Ruth Jood, interview with Sara de Bondt: 'Vormgevers: Sara de Bondt', on Radio 1, published 30 November 2010 [<http://cobra.canvas.be/cm/cobra/kunst/1.915982>]; 'Safran Foer publiceert boek vol gaten', in 'NOS', published 15 November 2010 [<https://nos.nl/artikel/198455-safran-foer-publiceert-boek-vol-gaten.html>].

45 Faber (2010).

46 Steven Heller, 'Jonathan Safran Foer's Book as Art Object', in *The Times*, published 24 November 2010 [<https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/24/jonathan-safran-foers-book-as-art-object/>].

The lightweight, fragile nature of the book made reading it an unusual experience. VE felt that this produced ‘a new reading experience’.<sup>47</sup> Reading the book is actually simple enough, but the initial reaction is usually confusion, because the holes in the paper reveal underlying letters, words or sections of text and it seems as if you have to read them at the same time as well. That is not the idea. According to VE, the best thing to do is to lift up the page slightly, separating it from the underlying pages, and then read only the words on that page. In other words, you have to keep hold of the page while reading.

One critic suggested that the book was a godsend for the academic establishment, a ‘conceptual must-have’, while the author was personally convinced that the book would not sell<sup>48</sup> – because the publisher had not circulated any review copies and was motivated by making books rather than by selling them.<sup>49</sup> If there was one VE book capable of proving such assertions wrong it was *Tree of Codes*. VE did not have a marketing department based in the United States, where there was no advertising campaign; nevertheless, the book met with success. In fact, VE used rather more contemporary means, such as Facebook and Twitter, alongside their own website, and their account on Vimeo and YouTube. Joost van Zoest wrote: ‘It is telling that the paper version of *Tree of Codes* should be a hit on the internet.’ This was in part thanks to a book trailer that showed readers’ astonishment when first leafing through the book. The prizewinning video received many shares and links. Van Zoest: ‘What’s more, the Facebook page for *Tree of Codes* offers users the opportunity to share photos and video clips in which they’re reading the book. Many blogs focused on Foer’s book, with postings invariably accompanied by appealing footage supplied for free by Visual Editions.’<sup>50</sup>

Designers and bloggers seemed to respond enthusiastically and reported that the first edition had already sold out by

Christmas.<sup>51</sup> Many American buyers were disappointed. VE made a new video especially about the printing process, which explained that the second edition would take three months. This marketing exercise delivered results; the book was reprinted time and again and VE sold more than 30,000 copies.<sup>52</sup>

VE devised a new communications strategy for the third book. *Composition No. 1* by Marc Saporta was published originally in 1963. Saporta used short scenes to tell the story of a certain X, his wife Marianne, his former mistress Dagmar and the au-pair raped by X, Helga; these scenes were published on loose pages. It has been called a kaleidoscope of memories.<sup>53</sup> The pages can be shuffled like playing cards, even if the ones in the VE edition are too large and lightweight for that. Responses to the VE publications were somewhat over-the-top. One critic reported incorrectly that the book in this loose-leaf format was the first to employ ‘the interactive shuffling and sliding we’re so familiar with on our screens and [bring] it to a physical book’.<sup>54</sup> There is a longer history to loose-leaf books and stories that consist of scenes to be read in a random order.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting that people who viewed the paper books were trying to assign to them an entirely non-existent novelty, and this indicates that the soliciting tone of VE’s marketing campaign had been a success; VE had not needed to assert that it had something new, because others did that for them.

The design of *Composition No. 1* was in the hands of Matt Pyke (from Universal Everything), who printed the back of each page with a different illustration, which was always composed of all the words from the text and was automatically generated.<sup>56</sup> For this publication, VE made the transition to a different medium: an iPad app. Texts spring from one to the other in the app, and it is only by touching the screen that a text stays visible. Let go of the screen while

47 Silvia Bertolotti, ‘The Visual Dimension of a Text: Interview with Visual Editions’, in ‘Digicult’, published 2015 [<https://digicult.it/news/the-visual-dimension-of-a-text-an-interview-with-the-publisher-visual-editions/>].

48 Heather Wagner, ‘Jonathan Safran Foer Talks. Tree of Codes and Conceptual Art’, in *Vanity Fair*, published 10 November 2010 [<https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2010/11/jonathan-safran-foer-talks-tree-of-codes-and-paper-art>]; Faber (2010).

49 Heller (2010).

50 Joost van Zoest, *Convergence culture revisited: the case of Jonathan Safran Foer*. Utrecht, Utrecht University, 2011 (bachelor degree graduation assignment), p. 27.

51 Matthias Mueller, ‘New Year, New Publishing’, in ‘Cultural Constellations’, published 11 May 2011 [<https://culturalconstellations.wordpress.com/2011/05/11/new-year-new-publishing/>].

52 ‘Tree of Codes by Jonathan Safran Foer: Making Of’, in ‘YouTube’, published 7 March 2011 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0GcB0PYKjY>]; ‘Tree of Codes by Jonathan Safran Foer’ (VE website) [<http://visual-editions.com/tree-of-codes>]; Gerber & Iversen (2012).

53 André Naffis-Sahely, ‘French Literature’, in: *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 September 2011, p. 31.

54 ‘Composition No. 1 “re-imaging” a French classic’, in: ‘ParisVoice’, undated [2011] [<http://parisvoice.com/composition-no-1-qre-imaginq-a-french-classic/>].

55 Bolton (2011), pp. 149–50.

56 Alexander Ecob, ‘Enforced focus’, in: *Eye*, 21 (2011) 81 (autumn), p. 94.

reading and you are sent straight to another text. In other words, readers cannot allow themselves to be distracted – the very thing that makes the internet so appealing.<sup>57</sup>



Marc Saporta, *Composition No.1*, 2011 (Photograph: author)

A second manifestation of *Composition No. 1* was a readers' group at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. The intention was to organize a community around the book ('orchestrating that sharing idea').<sup>58</sup> A video about that 'event' was placed online and showed 150 volunteers in different parts of the museum, each one reading aloud one page from the box. There was no predetermined route, the idea being that visitors would hear the story in as randomized an order as possible.<sup>59</sup> In a previous video filmed in a park VE had shown the wind carrying off the 150 pages in all directions – visualizing the chance nature of the reading process.<sup>60</sup>

VE also published aesthetic and witty videos of this type in response to other publications, such as *Kapow!* by Adam Thirwell (2012), a book about diversion. Once again the book was printed by Die Keure, but this time designed by Studio Frith (Frith Kerr) – although this is not

stated in the book.<sup>61</sup> Reading postures are portrayed in a Vimeo video: sitting upright or leaning to one side, lying head down on a bench, in a vertical stance with the book turned away, walking downstairs past the book, gazing at a book on the pavement from the first floor.<sup>62</sup> These ironic exaggerations of the book's difficult typography created a buzz on the internet, as did an earlier video announcing the book ('Kapowing Kapow!', 24 February 2012) and an interview with the author, a video about the presentation, accompanied by postings on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Flickr and Pinterest. Moreover, old-fashioned review copies of this book were also distributed.

Each page contains the author's diversions, with stories within stories within stories, including the untold stories, designed differently in terms of typography, with pieces of text arranged upside down, diagonally or transversely in rectangles, circles, parallelograms and other whimsical shapes that often run over into the margins as well. Soon it became apparent that two facing pages would no longer suffice, and the designers decided to insert fold-out pages capable of concealing still more diversions, culminating in a fold-out sheet of ten pages of text. That aside, readers are neatly helped with the order in which they have to read main and supplementary texts. Each time the reader needs to jump to these divergent passages, the main text includes a special symbol seemingly derived from road signs to indicate a turn-off.

## Visual Editions, 2013–15

A transitional period now dawned for Visual Editions in which they were to publish books in both paper and digital format. The project *Where You Are* (2013), with separate contributions from 16 authors in a box set, could also be viewed as a website. By now it had become clear that the paper books should not get bogged down in gimmicks and that digital technology would open up new possibilities with more surprises for the reader. *Where You Are* was ideal for a website, because it was a box of maps, based on

<sup>57</sup> Ecob (2011).

<sup>58</sup> Gerber & Iversen (2012).

<sup>59</sup> 'VE at the V&A: A Live Mass Reading Event', on 'YouTube', published 24 January 2012 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yzon\_xG5MHk].

<sup>60</sup> 'Composition No. 1 by Marc Saporta', on 'Vimeo', published 11 August 2011 [https://vimeo.com/27484241].

<sup>61</sup> Bert Van Raemdonck, 'Uitklapboek en snipperroman', in: *De Standaard/De Standaard der Letteren*, 27 July 2012, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> 'Kapow! by Adam Thirwell: Featuring Bertie', on 'Vimeo', published 13 June 2012 [https://vimeo.com/43965791].



Adam Thirlwell, *Kapow!*, 2012 (Photograph: author)

several stories, such as the route of a Mexican vagrant, the operation of GPS in South Africa or the organization of a work table. Apart from maps (each with its own navigation and symbols), the website also contains texts that show up on the screen in pale grey and become black and legible only when scrolling from section to section.<sup>63</sup> One of the critics asserted that the 'story' by Geoff Dyer in particular had found a new way of binding together the visual and textual elements, but that many of the other contributions had ended up being too textual or illustrative. For that reason, people were intrigued about the direction in which VE would go next.<sup>64</sup>

There is a need to ascertain the qualities that are unique to different media such as paper and online books. There is always the possibility that the differences between them will change over time. Moreover, designers (such as Andrew Losowsky) are reflecting on dividing the story among different media simultaneously: one part in newspaper format, another part in podcast format and a third part in webpage format. Nowadays, we can already search for and find news reports in a variety of media – books, too, can begin to lead a hybrid media existence.<sup>65</sup> In its transitional years, VE approached this from a different angle, having books on paper, as an app for an iPad and as an event in a museum. Just like Losowsky, VE wants to

remain faithful to a text and at the same time take advantage of the medium.<sup>66</sup> Further to this we can see that it is not only media that are converging, as internet theorist Henry Jenkins contended in 2006: the barriers between the media are being broken down, content is streamed via a variety of channels to the user, who encounters it in a variety of forms.<sup>67</sup> Simultaneously, we are seeing the media setting themselves apart from one another (diverging as opposed to converging media) with paper books being made that have taken inspiration from online technology, while reinforcing their unique tactile properties at the same time. One example is *Typographic Links* (2007) by designer Dan Collier: he mimicked hyperlinks in a paper book using red threads that roam through the pages, connecting words with one another at various points.

A book is differently organized when using online technology: a defined beginning or end is absent; the story proceeds only thanks to the reader's efforts and it functions within a network of connections.<sup>68</sup> Given that, potentially, each reader reads a different story when online, the shared reading experience of a particular text is missing, while there is the shared experience of seeking out a path, as when playing games. It is worth considering that these digital stories have been preceded by 'paper incunabula'; as far as choices and diverse reading experiences are concerned, there

63 'Where You Are' [<http://where-you-are.com>].

64 Rick Poynor, 'Space for stories', in: *Eye*, 22 (2014) 87, pp. 2–3.

65 María Serrano, 'Visual Editors and Literary Designers: An Interview with Andrew Losowsky', in 'The Publishing Lab' [online op: <http://the-publishing-lab.com/features/view/149/http-the-publishing-lab.com-features-view-149-andrew-losowsky>].

66 Bertolotti (2015).

67 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, New York University Press, 2006, p. 11.

68 Douglas (2001), pp. 39–54.

is, for example, Raymond Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961) with ten sonnets, each of which has 14 lines of verse that can be separately combined.

VE's strategy changed. Whereas the initial focus was on the production of extraordinary books, paper versions of which could not be made by other publishers or as online versions, subsequently there was an attempt to seek out the individual unique qualities of both manifestations, in order to emphasize above all the paper version's qualities (as in *Composition No. 1*). VE's most recent period of production has been devoted exclusively to the publication of online books, but plans are afoot for new paper editions.

## Visual Editions, 2016–18

Nowadays, printed books provide the opposite of a d-book (digital book).<sup>69</sup> Their stability and solidity underline their authority; a story, even in all its flighty capriciousness, can be committed permanently to paper. This is precisely why many critics and readers find it inconceivable that the fate of the book in the twenty-first century will be akin to that of the horse and carriage in the twentieth. The paper book has been called a sophisticated example of a primitive technology, and the e- or d-book has long been held a

primitive example of an ultra-sophisticated technology.<sup>70</sup> The qualities of a d-book are chiefly: polyphony and participation along with alternative pathways, plot twists and storylines. The story unfolds at the reader's home.

One such example is *Breathe* by Kate Pullinger (launched in January 2018). It is a free iPhone app made possible for VE thanks to a partnership with Google Creative Lab Sydney (Tom Uglow) and the 'Ambient Literature' programme subsidized by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council.<sup>71</sup> The partnership between VE and Google Creative Lab began in 2015. Editions at Play was set up especially for the purpose: a platform for 'digitally-native' books and for mobile phones in particular. *Breathe* is told in short scenes and is split up into 105 pieces of on-screen text. The main protagonist, Flo, is trying to contact her deceased mother, but spirits interrupt her. By using APIs (application programming interfaces), and after the reader has given permission, location data (address, dates, weather conditions) and photographs are used in the story, which can then unfold in your own room. It starts off early on in the introduction about ghosts, which are encountered everywhere – in my case: 'It's as though they were there all along, waiting, with me, in my room, with you in The Hague, on my phone, in your house, in the air that we breathe.' Flo's texts are sometimes progressively deleted, from start to finish, after which the screen turns black and a ghostly text starts to appear in white. The reader's exact location is included in this: 'I'm close by.' The story is continually interrupted by messages in flickering black or grey, the fingerprint of the swiping reader suddenly flashes up as a shadow, and if you try to delete it a hidden text then appears. A warning is displayed if you hold the phone sideways: 'I'm a book. You'll need to turn me the right way around to read me.' The to-and-fro motion of the iPhone generates a strange glow, with text displayed against the background of your own interior. There are the lamentations of Syrian refugees, lines from Clara Smith's song *Shipwrecked Blues* and suggestions that there is someone with you in the room. 'Be personal', one of the three recommendations to contemporary publishers, has been taken literally in this case and is only possible thanks to the reader's cooperation.



Kate Pullinger, *Breathe*, 2018 (Photograph a: Visual Editions; other photographs: author)

<sup>69</sup> Term coined by designer Tom Uglow, see Chris Smith, 'The Tom Uglow interview: "Books are the future of books"', in 'Prolifiko', published 15 February 2015 [<https://prolifiko.com/googles-tom-uglow-think-outside-the-book/>].

<sup>70</sup> Douglas (2001), pp. 14–5.

<sup>71</sup> 'Breathe' [<http://www.katepullinger.com/breathe/>].

VE tried not to be too obvious about the way it was using existing technology, thus avoiding having the story dominated by technology. This meant not employing some gimmicks, such as colour and outline-of-object recognition.<sup>72</sup> The book's marketing was aimed chiefly at a



Tea Uglow, *A Universe Explodes*, 2017 (Photographs: author)

young, female audience, which signalled a new development for VE, if not for the author, and which was achieved thanks to the collaborating parties' networks.

In Visual Editions' third phase, performing research – with authors, developers and designers – took on an even more prominent role: research into new reading behaviour and readership scope. One of the outcomes was to personalize the book, while another was the use of blockchain technology for *A Universe Explodes* by Tea Uglow (2017). This story about disintegration is the joint property of a number of readers, each of whom adds (1) and deletes (2) words until only a single word is left. The short story involving 21 displays allows the reader to compare the original version with the current version (using a special button). One hundred versions are available for manipulation, but in April 2018 nearly half had not yet been transferred to a primary owner. More than one-third had a primary owner (38 versions of which version 9 was owned by writer Margaret Atwood), 13 versions had acquired a secondary owner via blockchain and three versions (numbers 15, 21 and 65) had undergone three revisions. In number 65, for example, changes were made to the colour of a pottery bowl, minor textual alterations were incorporated and a kitchen was redesignated as a nursing home. In another version (number 75) this space had been changed by book illustrator Sam Winston into a back room. It is a book with

long-term goals in mind, and at present potential readers can do nothing other than follow all the changes to the text – by reading the story systematically and regularly – in the hope that one of the other owners decides to make you a co-owner. The question is whether or not this has the effect of encouraging reading. In the interim the format has acquired an aura of exclusivity, which contravenes the publisher's democratic mission. However, the publication is now performing a difficult juggling act in trying to find a balance between ownership and digital culture.

## The future of Visual Editions

Experiments with d- and e-books are still in their infancy, which can be seen from the frenzied ideas being tried out, as in the case of VE with *A Universe Explodes*. Other publishers are following suit. *Private Vegas* (2015) by James Pettersons was announced as a self-destructing e-book, the text of which disappeared after 24 hours. Tom Uglow also posited ideas about future digital books, such as a book that pursues you via billboards or that is hard on your heels on the internet.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, seeking out the best printing firm is no longer a criterion for VE; it is now more about finding the best software, animation technology and art director in order to create books 'that can't be printed'.<sup>74</sup>

VE's directors are aware of the changes that their company has undergone, from a focus on visual paper books to an emphasis on new digital reading experiences. They are frequently asked the question 'What is the future of books?' But their reply is that people never query the uncertain future of the Kindle or the app. All book formats will have changed in ten years' time.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, it can be confirmed that VE's interventions in terms of the paper book were in essence not new ones – often deriving from artists' books or digital practices – but it was VE that purposefully applied them to commercial literary publications for the first time. In addition, we can see how VE has successfully deployed existing digital techniques (GPS, games) for innovative literary reading experiences using the iPhone.

72 Molly Flatt, "Eight books in, and we're still learning": Editions At Play on their responsive ghost story, *Breathe*, in *The Bookseller*, published 2 February 2018 [<https://www.thebookseller.com/futurebook/breathe-723661>].

73 Smith (2015).

74 Coluzzi, 2013; tweet from Visual Editions, 1 February 2018.

75 Wilson (2011).

However forward-looking it may be, VE's approach cannot work without understanding the history of the book. Emily King wrote: 'There is a widespread belief that publishing's future depends on the broadest possible engagement with its past' – with that in mind, apps go together perfectly with handmade paper.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, we cannot help but observe that our understanding of the past is inadequate and that we can say little about the future with certainty – it is better that we leave predictions to Marcel Proust's present-day colleagues.

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<sup>76</sup> Emily King, 'The Book, but not by the book', in: *V&A Magazine*, summer 2013, pp. 58–65 (esp. p. 63).

## The fate of the copper-plate engravings bearing designs by Peter Paul Rubens

- Dirk Imhof



The Museum Plantin-Moretus holds a collection of 2,846 copper plates belonging to the Plantin printing company. Substantial though this figure may appear, it is far from representative of the number of copper plates originally possessed by the Moretus family. Preserved within the collection are a great many copper plates bearing designs by Peter Paul Rubens; however, some specimens ended up in collections elsewhere or were simply lost.

Only a limited number of copper-plate engravings after designs by Rubens were reused for subsequent editions. There is a good reason for this: decorative title pages could be put to use for different editions with relative ease, but the title pages with Rubens' designs were made specifically for a particular work and thus could not simply be incorporated in another work unless the content of that new publication was more or less the same. In such cases, a Rubens design could be used again successfully. Examples include the title page for Stephanus Simoninus's *Silvae Urbanianae seu gesta Urbani VIII* (1637), which had been used previously for the *Lyrlicorum libri IV* by Mathias Casimir Sarbiewski (1632), while the title page that Rubens had made for Augustinus Mascardus's *Silvarum libri II* (1622) reappeared in 1654 and 1663 in the publications of poetry by the Spanish writer Francisco de Borja, *Las obras en verso*. Similarly, copper plates could be reused for the illustration of liturgical works in which the content remained the same for years. For instance, the title page of the *Breviarium Romanum* (1614) was used again for a new edition in 1628. A minor adjustment



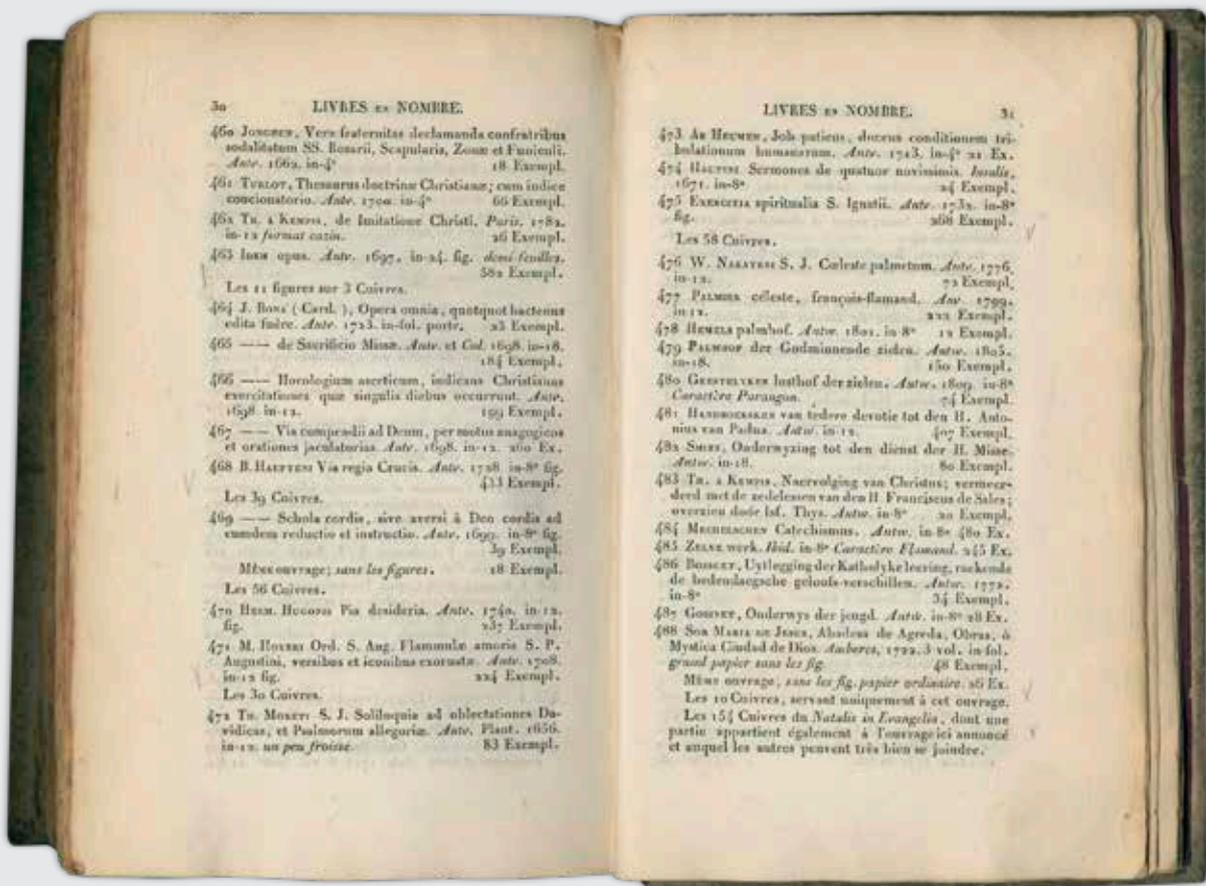
The inventory of the copper plates made in June 1653 (MPM Arch. 354, *Inventarissen 1642–1664*, fol. 90v)

was necessary on that occasion, because by then the new pope, Urban VIII, had a new coat of arms which was depicted at the base of the title page.

Copper plates deteriorate quite quickly when large quantities of prints are taken from them. They can be reworked a few times, specifically by deepening the grooves, but this can only be done to a limited extent and, ultimately, the plate becomes unsalvageable. It is probably for this reason that the original copper-plate engravings of Rubens' designs for the missal of 1613 and the breviary of 1614 no longer exist. It is possible that they were among the assembled 287 pounds (in weight) of 'old copper worn plates of diverse books'

which were sold in July 1653 to Cornelis Galle II and in all likelihood simply melted down thereafter.

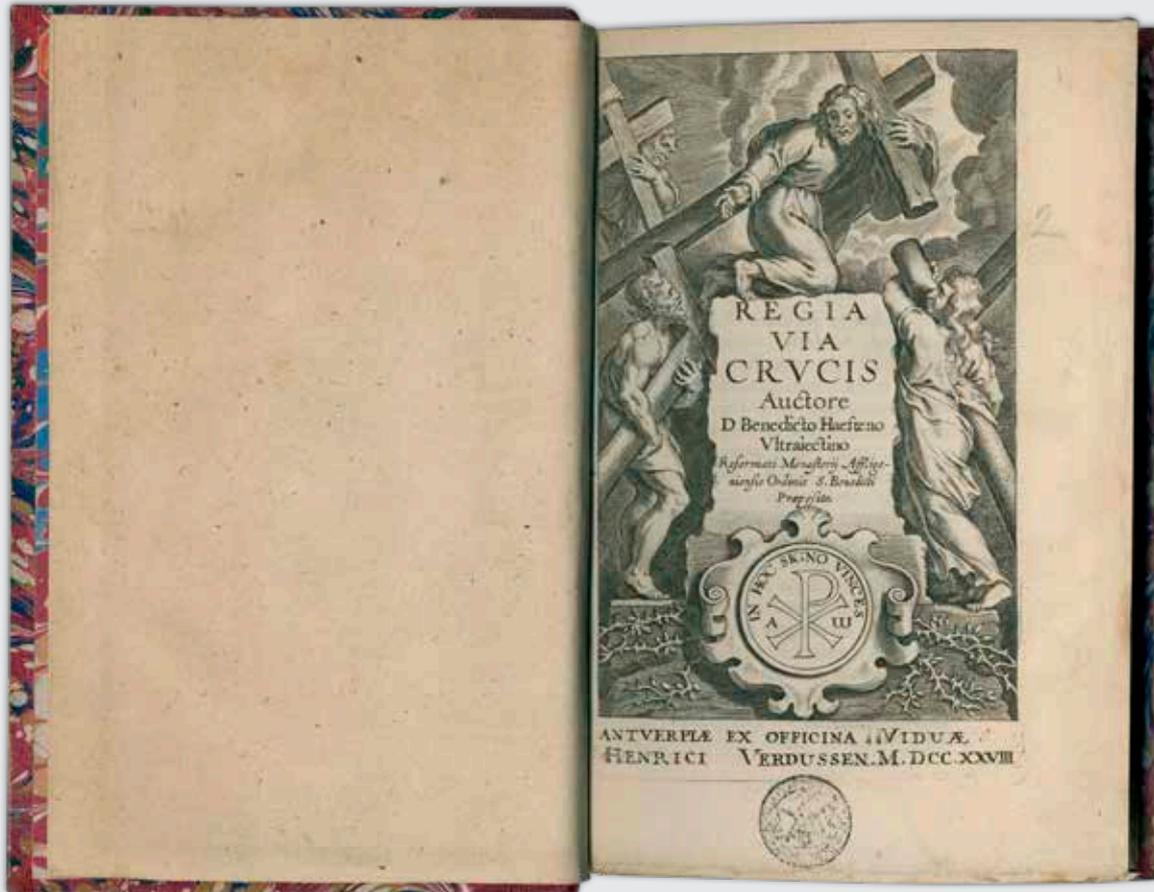
Balthasar II and his successors regularly drew up an inventory of the copper plates in their possession, which has allowed us an insight into the copper plates that were still available to them. The last full inventory was compiled in 1704, just before a portion of the plates was sold to the Antwerp publishers Henricus II and Cornelius Verdussen I. These included the 39 plates used in the publication of the *Regia via crucis* (1635) by Benedictus van Haeften, with a title page designed by Rubens. In 1728, almost a century later, the Verdussens released the book again with the



Catalogue de livres en feuilles, provenant de la mortuaire de feu Madame veuve P.A. Verdussen, Antwerp, Ancelle, 1834: p. 30 (MPM V 69)

same illustrations. Their name and the new year of publication (1728) were engraved on the title page. The collection of copper plates remained in the Verdussen family's ownership until the public sale in 1834 of their library and printing equipment. By this route, the plates found a home with the Trappists of Westmalle Abbey, who started their own printing business in the mid-nineteenth century and accordingly bought the materials they needed for it. In 1850, for example, they printed a *Missale Cisterciense*, for which they requested technical advice from the last remaining printers at the Plantin Press.

In 1877, during the celebrations for the 300th anniversary of Rubens' birth, the then curator of the Museum Plantin-Moretus had prints taken once again from the copper plates bearing title pages after Rubens and published them in a celebratory anthology: *Titels en portretten gesneden naar P.P. Rubens voor de Plantijnsche drukkerij/Titres et portraits gravés d'après P.P. Rubens pour l'imprimerie Plantinienne* (reprinted in 1901). This allowed a wider audience to enjoy these masterpieces by the Apelles of the seventeenth century.

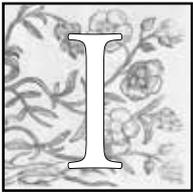


Benedictus van Haeften, *Regia via crucis*, Antwerp, widow of Henricus Verdussen II, 1728: title page (MPM A 4190)

## Imschoot, Uitgevers. The history of a passion

Guy Vingerhoets

### Background



In around 1987, at a time when the fiftieth anniversary of the Ghent printing business Jozef Imschoot was fast approaching, deliberations were underway on how to turn the celebrations into a suitably splendid

occasion. Jozef Imschoot, a certified master typographer, had founded the business in 1937 (officially 1938). Jozef was passionate about a delicate, technically more demanding type of printing and enjoyed a collaborative approach to his work, involving local artists in particular. However, to make itself a going concern the printing firm gradually pursued a more commercial path. It was Ghent University that became an especially important customer, given its high demand for all manner of publications. Over time, the founding father – who died in 1988 – passed the baton to his sons Luc and Dirk. Each brother had a distinct character: the rather more traditional and pragmatic Luc being complemented by his more progressive and artistic sibling Dirk. The business, which had premises on Burggravenlaan near the Ghent-Sint-Pieters railway station, was well equipped in terms of technology, with the older machinery being regularly maintained and used for specific assignments. The high quality of the work they delivered did not escape the attention of the Flemish art world, and printing commissions were regularly entrusted with the Joz. Imschoot printing business in the form of exhibition catalogues and invitation cards. It was perhaps because of these good artistic relationships that the decision was

taken to celebrate the anniversary through a series of 50 publications produced by and for the company's customers. With this '50/50' series in mind, Imschoot engaged the services of 50 creatives with whom the printing firm had collaborated over the years. Within a set format of 34 by 24 centimetres, each of them was asked to create a design which the printing firm would then produce and place in a smart, white envelope as a business gift for the firm's customers. Although only 31 of the planned 50 projects were realized in 1987/88, some of the works were true gems on which the printing firm was able to lavish attention. There can be no doubt that the experience gained through the '50/50' series formed an importance source of inspiration in the firm's creation of its own publishing house; however, the form that this new publishing business was to take would be determined by quite different circumstances, the seeds for which had been sown a few years earlier.

### A dream beginning

As previously mentioned, the quality of the firm's printed material had not escaped the notice of publishers and artists alike. It was Dirk Imschoot in particular who welcomed artistic projects and did his best to satisfy unconventional requests and seek solutions for them. As early as 1985, and without realizing its significance, the printing business had printed an artist's book by Peter Downsbrough on behalf of the publishers Pietro Spartà and Pascale Petit. An artist's book is a self-contained art project created by an artist in the form

of a book. It is less an art book *about* an artist or an exhibition and more a work personally designed by the artist and realized through the medium of a book – an artist’s book – instead of as a painting, print or installation. The modern version of the artist’s book was born in the 1950s and ’60s by pioneers such as Edward Ruscha and Dieter Roth, who employed the medium of books as an accessible and affordable means of conveying and displaying their ideas and creations to a wider audience.<sup>1</sup> This modern artist’s book, usually inexpensive and with a large print run, underwent a boom period in the late 1960s and the 1970s when minimalist and, in particular, conceptual art were in the ascendant.

The artist Peter Downsbrough is included in that (post-) minimalist and conceptual movement and was part of the first generation of American artists to give the artist’s book a special place in their oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> Downsbrough, who, together with his partner Kaatje Cusse, shuttled to and fro between Brussels and New York, was particularly delighted with the professionalism of the Joz. Imschoot printing business in its handling of his artist’s book. In the summer of 1986, the Downsbrough–Cusse artist duo contacted Dirk Imschoot and suggested the idea of publishing a series of artist’s books: Peter and Kaatje were in a position to approach their many American artist friends in person, and Kaatje was able to act as curator for the series. Having his own publishing firm, Dirk had more artistic leeway and the publishing firm could complete its projects through its own printing business. Although Dirk had no experience as a publisher and at the time was relatively unfamiliar with the international art scene, it appeared to be a good plan. Moreover, he knew that the printing firm would benefit from greater visibility and potential international commissions. Even if the publishing business did not prove profitable at once, it could still act as a showpiece and thus attract new customers to the printing business. Dirk succeeded in convincing his family and in 1987 ‘Imschoot, Uitgevers’ was launched. As agreed, Peter and Kaatje tested the waters with their artist friends. They came up with an impressive list of internationally renowned artists prepared to work with a Flemish publisher/printer completely unknown to them. Kaatje pressed ahead immediately, while Dirk and his staff entirely justified the Imschoot reputation for discussing and solving problems. In the period 1987/88, Imschoot, Uitgevers published six artist’s

books for the Imschoot–Cusse (‘IC’) series, by the important conceptual artists Robert Barry, John Baldessari, Hanne Darboven, Peter Downsbrough, Albert Mertz and Lawrence Weiner. All the booklets were A5 in size (21 × 14.8 cm) and had a soft cover. One thousand copies were printed, which kept the cost relatively low and meant that even art-school students would be able to afford a ‘Baldessari’. A collector’s limited edition of 25 booklets was produced with a hard linen cover and dust jacket. The artist signed and numbered these luxury copies and, unsurprisingly, they were sold at a higher price. Although by the 1980s the conceptual boom time of the 1960s and ’70s was past, and the new generation of artists was reverting to canvas and paying relatively little attention to artist’s books (one has only to think of neo-expressionism and the transavantgarde), the Imschoot–Cusse publications were able to arouse great international interest. In 1988, Kaatje Cusse approached Leo Castelli (one of the most influential gallery owners of the second half of the twentieth century), asking for and obtaining his consent to exhibit the first six Imschoot, Uitgevers booklets at his New York gallery. The preview was held on 11 January 1989. The brand-new publishing firm became internationally renowned overnight; the booklets and Imschoot name drew both the popular and specialist press, and important collectors and contemporary art museums subscribed to the series.

## Continuity through quality

Reinforced by the recognition given to the IC series, Dirk Imschoot decided to widen the publishing firm’s radius of operations and Luc Derycke joined the firm in 1989 to organize this. Luc, who had enjoyed an artistic training and at the time had little experience of publishing art/artist’s books, was eager to accept the challenge. In the meantime, Imschoot, Uitgevers had also become involved with the publication of artist monographs and exhibition catalogues, and at first Luc helped with some of those projects and focused his attention on the accounts for and distribution of the existing publisher’s list. However, an important opportunity arose in the winter of 1989/90, which was to result in a second series of artist’s books.

1 For further information about the history of the contemporary artist’s book: Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, *Esthétique du livre d’artiste, Une introduction à l’art contemporain*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, (2012).

2 Moritz Küng (2011), *Peter Downsbrough. The Books*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, Moritz Küng (ed.), (2013).

Meanwhile, Kaatje Cusse remained actively engaged as curator for the IC series and continued to work through her original list. Owing to circumstances, a seventh title by Christopher Williams appeared too late for the Castelli exhibition and was published only in 1989. There followed successive IC booklets by Balthasar Burkhard (1991), Dara Birnbaum (1992), Joseph Kosuth (1992), Carl Andre (1993), Dan Graham and Marie-Paule Macdonald (1993), James Welling (1996), Sol LeWitt (1998), Jennifer Bornstein (1999) and Michael Snow (1999). Each one was a shining light within the international circuit of the visual arts. Although, to her own surprise, she featured as a model in an artist's book by her husband (a former project by Peter Downsbrough from 1987 published by Imschoot only in 1999 as *Within [time]*), Kaatje called a halt to her adventure as curator for Imschoot, Uitgevers just before the new millennium.

The second series of artist's books from the Imschoot collection was the result of a collaboration between Luc Derycke and Bernard Marcadé. Bernard was a French curator commissioned in 1990 by the Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, to organize a number of exhibitions on contemporary artists.<sup>3</sup> Luc and Bernard knew each other and with the organizers' permission it was decided to produce an artist's book for each of the exhibitions instead of a traditional catalogue, and on the same lines as the series made by Kaatje Cusse. The invited artists were informed that they were expected to deliver an artist's book in A5 format but that otherwise there were no rules. In the preparatory phase, Bernard and Luc visited each participating artist to help crystallize the plan for their booklet. This was a feast for the young Luc Derycke, who noted the importance attached by the artists to this aspect of their work. At the same time, he was gaining the experience that he would need when entering into the publishing profession later on.<sup>4</sup> The series was given its own name 'IM' (standing for Imschoot-Marcadé), but stuck to the same concept employed for the IC series, with an A5 format and a limited number of signed luxury copies alongside a standard edition with a soft cover. The exhibitions followed apace, one after the other; in 1990 alone, ten artists – some very famous names among them – published a book in the IM series: Jean-Michel Alberola, Giovanni Anselmo, Christian Boltanski, Jan Fabre, Luciano Fabro, Paul-Armand Gette, François Morellet, Niele

Toroni, Michel Verjux and Daniël Walravens. This project continued into 1991 for a while and saw contributions from Leo Copers and Sherrie Levine. Meanwhile, Imschoot, Uitgevers had become an established name and had set a standard for quality in terms of artist's books. There was a corresponding influx of initiatives and proposals, and the job of making the right choices and avoiding financial risks became a delicate operation. Luc became an ambassador for the Imschoot brand, established ties between the publishing firm and the art world, and sought out financing models to realize new projects.

## Teamwork

Following what from a commercial perspective was a somewhat naive and yet, in essence, notably successful start to the 'art' publishing house, it was imperative to keep the train on the right track. Through his publishing firm and series of artist's books, Dirk had introduced an entirely new element to the art world that had caused international reverberations. Although pragmatic as an entrepreneur – by then the Imschoot business had nearly 50 members of staff – it was through the publishing business that he seized upon the challenge to promote art democratically and accessibly through the medium of books. Dirk acted as a catalyst, giving his staff the confidence and space to take initiatives and providing virtually unconditional support in the process. He always succeeded in attracting the right people for the job and worked with the greatest respect to satisfy the artists' creative wishes.

1992 was to be a significant year of transition for the publishing house. Luc Derycke produced another artist's book for Imschoot with Stephen Willats, as well as a catalogue raisonné of Lawrence Weiner's cinematic work, but he was by degrees seeking his own path and in that same year, while still on good terms with the Imschoot brothers, he left the business. Kaatje Cusse curated the books for two American artists, Birnbaum and Kosuth, while Bartomeu Mari, who was working for the Fondation pour l'Architecture in Brussels, produced an artist's book for Imschoot with the Spaniard Antonio Muntadas and the American Matt Mullican. Despite continuing to use the A5

<sup>3</sup> The exhibition series 'Affinités Sélectives' was held at the Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels; Bernard Marcadé was the curator.

<sup>4</sup> Since 1992, Luc Derycke has worked as a book designer and publisher; since 2005, this has been under the name MER.Paper Kunsthalte.

format, the print run exhibited greater variety and somewhat fewer copies were printed for less well-known artists. The custom of giving hard covers to the signed limited editions was also abandoned. The manufacturing costs of a linen-clad hard cover with an illustrated dust jacket had proved so much more expensive than the standard edition that it was no longer commercially viable to continue the tradition. Also in 1992, Cornelia Lauf made her entrée as a new curator for the publishing house. Cornelia was an art historian and wife to the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth with whom Kaatje had just produced a book. The Kosuth-Lauf family had moved from New York to Ghent and, thanks to the collaboration with Kaatje, the couple had been introduced to the Imschoot publishing business. Following

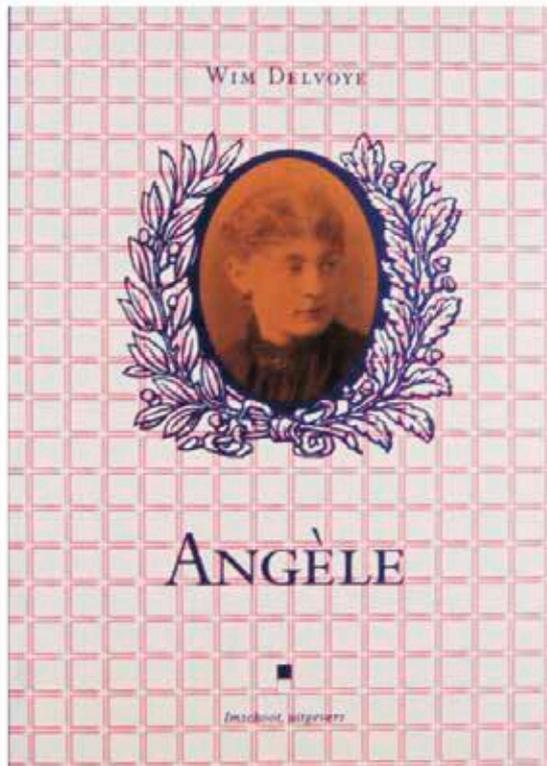
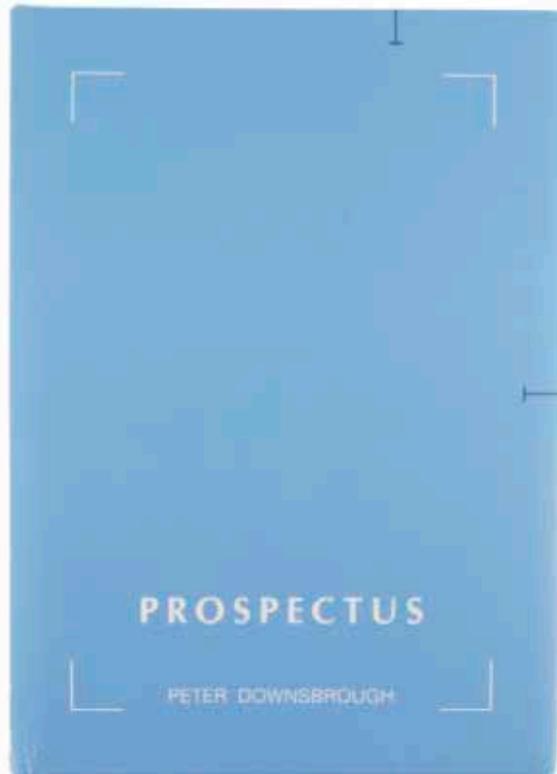
the departure of Luc Derycke, Dirk Imschoot was without a curator and saw at once the added value that Cornelia Lauf could bring to the company with her background and contacts. Consequently, Cornelia took over Luc Derycke's role in 1992. Luc Imschoot, who had been chiefly involved with the printing side of the business, left the company in 1993. He died in 2007.

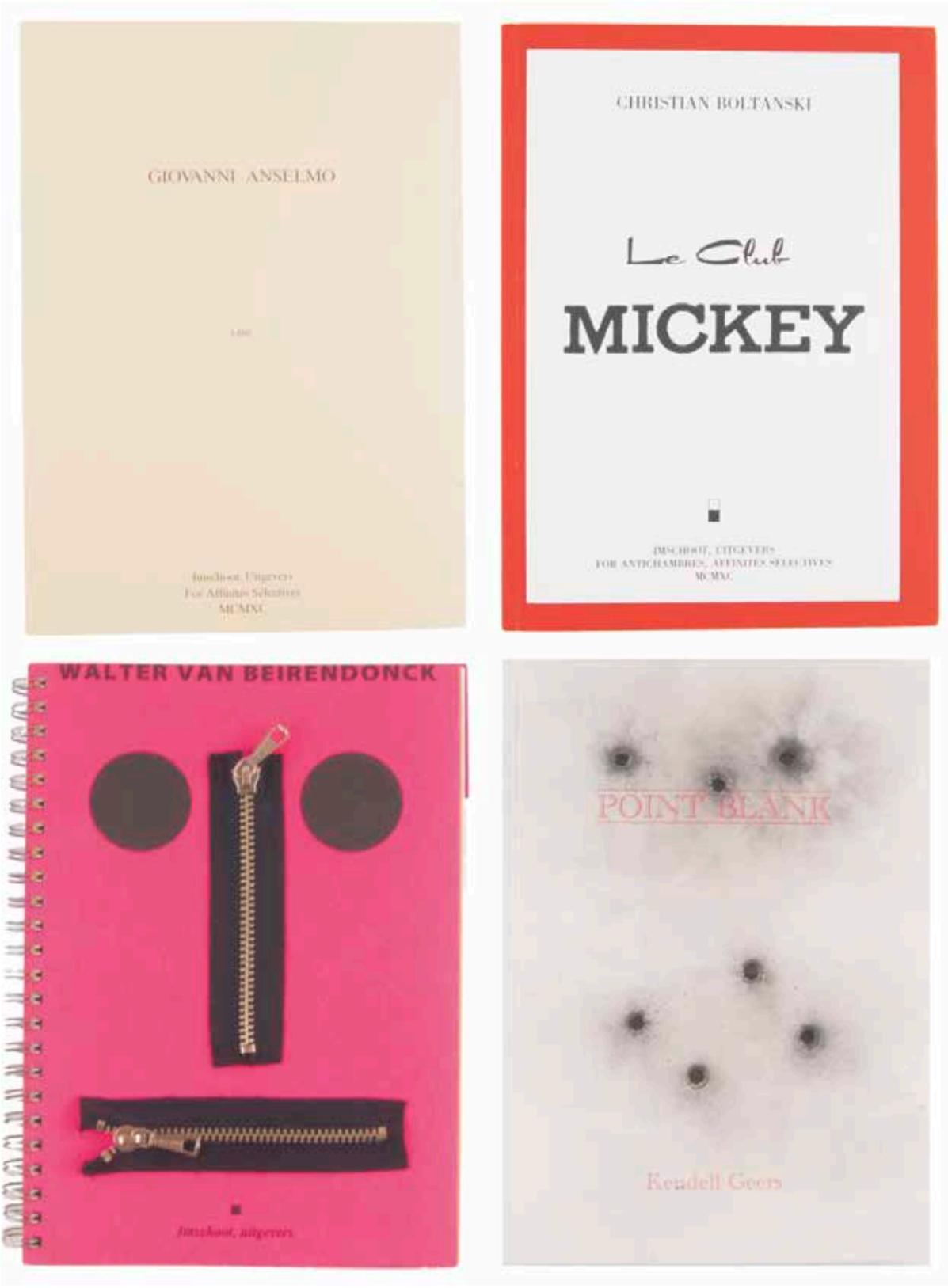
Cornelia Lauf's arrival at the publishing house was like a breath of fresh air. She was very pragmatic by nature, knew the direction she wanted to take and was not afraid of bringing that clearly across. More so than Kaatje, she found the many publishing side-projects to be problematic. Dirk Imschoot could find it hard to say no and had a weakness for projects that involved printing-related challenges or simply



*Sculptuur* (1988) by artist Mark Verstockt and submitted for the 50/50 series, which was produced to mark the 50th anniversary of the Imschoot printing firm. The design reveals its three-dimensional structure when opened up.

Over the following pages: (upper row from left to right) two artist's books from the Imschoot-Cusse series – *Come On* (1987) by Robert Barry and *Prospectus* (1988) by Peter Downsbrough) – and two from the Imschoot-Marcade series – *Lire* (1990) by Giovanni Anselmo and *Le Club Mickey* (1990) by Christian Boltanski; (lower row from left to right) two artist's books from the Imschoot-Lauf series – *Speculations* (1992) by Ken Lum and *Angele* (1996) by Wim Delvoye); an example from the applied arts series curated by Cornelia Lauf – *Mutilate* (1997) by fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck; an artist's book from the series curated by Kurt Vanbelleghem – *Point Blank* (2004) by Kendell Geers.





appealed to him.<sup>5</sup> However, Cornelia felt that they were dead weight and diverting attention from the real objective: producing a series of beautiful artist's books. She put her many contacts from the art world to use and initiated a new IL series (Imschoot-Lauf), which in the main responded to a younger generation of artists working chiefly in a neo-conceptual vein. The IL series published artists such as Ken Lum (1992), Michel Zumpf (1992), Eran Schaerf (1994), Sarah Seager (1994), Chris Wilder (1995), Wim Delvoye (1996), Hirsch Perlman (1996), Diana Thater (1996) and Marc Goethals (1997). After that and with Dirk Imschoot's consent, Cornelia resolutely changed course. Even though up to that point the artist's book had remained the preserve of visual artists, the publishing house wanted to harness its status and expand the medium to include other art forms. It was an audacious undertaking that, while not well received among purists, would indeed give rise to some exceptional specimens of book printing. Contacts were arranged with a broad range of artistic talent from the worlds of product design, fashion, media and even music. Although this series no longer bore the IL label, Cornelia Lauf supervised the majority of projects, assisted in this after 1998 by Kurt Vanbellegem, a new member of staff who was initially involved mainly with the sales strategy for the books. The series devoted to the 'applied' arts began rather cautiously with contributions from spectacles designer Patrick Hoet (1997), product designer Jasper Morrison (1997) and media guru Glenn O'Brien (1997). However, the same year also saw publication of the booklet *Mutilate* by fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck; it became a global success and was particularly popular in Asia. Three editions were published with a combined print run of 9,000 copies – unheard of for an artist's book. Another highlight from that more experimental series was the singer-musician Arno Hintjens' book object, which was published in 1999 under the supervision of Kurt Vanbellegem. The book consisted of 17 of the singer's favourite LPs, which were cut down to the familiar A5 format and ingeniously bound within a black cardboard cover. Praise was showered upon the book at international exhibitions.

Around 1998, Cornelia moved to Italy and ended her collaboration with Imschoot, Uitgevers. Kaatje, too, called her IC series to a halt in 1999. Cornelia's role was taken over by Kurt Vanbellegem. Kurt had already been working

for Imschoot for some time, albeit in a more commercial capacity. After studying psychology and art history in Ghent, he went on to follow a curatorial studies programme in London. In 1996, when he got in touch with Dirk in Ghent in response to an internet arts project, the publishing firm's artist's books also came up for discussion. Kurt was immediately enchanted by the booklets, but wondered about the firm's sales policy. Dirk admitted that this had not been an immediate priority since Luc Derycke's endeavours, and both men agreed to professionalize sales. In addition to his work as a curator, Kurt travelled on commission with the Imschoot, Uitgevers booklets, firstly around Europe and later the world. He visited libraries and bookstores, attended trade fairs and was instrumental in substantially increasing the publishing firm's turnover. After Cornelia's departure, he took over the artistic management of the publishing house. Owing to his contacts he was in touch with a much younger generation of artists, and, following his test piece with Arno in 1999, he oversaw projects with Heidi Specker (2000), Masato Nakamura (2001), Messieurs Delmotte (2002), Joe Scanlan (2002), Martí Guixé (2003), Kendell Geers (2004), Paul Morrison (2004), AA Bronson (2006), Gabriel Kuri (2006), Sam Samore (2006), and Superamas (2006). The highpoint of this series – which was never given its own name – was undoubtedly the book *Point Blank* by the white South African Kendell Geers, who had each of his (blank) booklets peppered with seven bullet holes in order to examine what he termed the constructive side of the destructive. As it was at the height of the Marc Dutroux abduction and rape case (the court passed sentence on Dutroux in 2004), the completion of this project brought with it some obvious organizational challenges.

## Swansong

In 2004, at the invitation of Bart De Baere, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (M UHKA), Kurt Vanbellegem organized 'NOT DONE, het kunstenaarsboek/ the artist's book', an exhibition about the Imschoot, Uitgevers artist's books. Alongside the books, which were on display to the public as autonomous works, there were also visual works by many artists from the Imschoot catalogue. The title was

<sup>5</sup> Around 2000, Dirk Imschoot started up a second trade name, which was a simple reversal of the first: Toohcsmi. It became a launching pad for projects that did not suit the Imschoot, Uitgevers publisher's list, but which Dirk was nevertheless keen to see realized.

Dirk's way of making it clear that the publication of artist's books was a daredevil financial venture and actually 'not the done thing' from a commercial perspective. A great deal of art received government support, and it seemed only logical to all concerned that theatre companies, opera houses, visual artists and symphony orchestras should be subsidized. The book world fell outside of that ambit; after all, there was always money to be earned from books, surely! However, as far as artist's books are concerned, that is no easy matter; the demand from artists is sizeable, but it is a niche market and sales are limited. You cannot live by artist's books alone, and it was only rare birds such as Imschoot, Uitgevers that dared to take on the risk and were able to cushion any losses through other activities. Despite a productive period in 2006 in which a further five titles were published, the end of the Imschoot adventure was looming. Major competition from printing firms in low-wage countries, as well as a sharply declining demand for printed matter among major customers owing to the increasing popularity of email and the internet, placed greater financial pressure on the printing business and, in turn, on the publishing business as well. Dirk Imschoot was tired and, while at a New York preview surrounded by his American artist friends of longstanding, he made a momentous decision. In 2006, the Joz. Imschoot printing business and Imschoot, Uitgevers ceased trading. They have left behind a wealth of books as their legacy.



# Colophon

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