

The Future of the Book

P. Atkins

University of Oxford, England

*Author for correspondence e-mail; peter.atkins001@btinternet.com

In this talk, I shall reflect on the evolution of the book from its earliest form to the present day, and ask whether it can survive in the IT-centric world. I shall explore what I see as the advantages and disadvantages of the printed page. Then I shall turn to a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the e-book. Although there are extraordinary properties of electronic books, not all their features are advantageous. In particular, I shall ask whether e-books diminish or cultivate the imagination of the user. Because they may be non-linear in presentation, do they fail to instil a sense of intellectual rigour? However, clinging to the printed page may be a sign of the conservatism of old age and to be honest, we have to accept that e-books will be central to the future of education. So, how can we maximize their efficacy? What are the features of e-books that we need to develop and promote? Does the rise of the e-book spell the end of the line for the single author and the rise of the corporate production? Does that matter?