*Getting to grips with self-publishing might be time consuming at first but **Elizabeth Eva Leach (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Elizabeth_Leach)** shows that welcome engagement and expert editorial input can be gained from going it alone without publishers.*

A tweet back in July from the @LSEimpactblog with a link to Aimee Morrison's blog on guerrilla self-publishing (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/07/11/scholarly-publishing-broken-guerrilla-self-publishing/) asked if it was time for more academics to consider it. I'd started tentatively nearly a year ago—August 2011— with a short article on a newly discovered concordance for a medieval motet (http://eeleach.wordpress.com/2011/08/23/a-concordance-for-an-early-fourteenth-century-motet/), and was asked to write this post about the experience. My three most recent 'articles' (see my publications page (http://eeleach.wordpress.com/publications/)) are currently blog-only publications, although the most recent wasn't designed that way. I'll refer to them as X, Y, and Z (links for those that are interested are given in the discussion below).

In what follows I conclude that senior academics need to lead the way on getting online self-publication accepted. The advantages (immediacy of publication and feedback, accessibility, use of links, revisability of text) seem to vastly outweigh the disadvantages (which I think are largely imaginary; see my responses to common questions below).

I have experimented with different publication formats. Each item has a blogpost introducing the publication and then a link to an HTML version of the article hosted on my institutional webspace; X also has a PDF version produced by the typesetting software LaTeX. To ensure the full content is accessible to web searches I have posted them all in HTML and I recently moved to using Scrivener (http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php) to enable output in various formats from one file. Technical limitations with its handling of HTML code have meant that I've had to host the HTML files off my WordPress site. This is a shame because it divorces the comments box (on the supporting blogpost at WordPress) from the full text (on my university Webspace).

Pros and cons

One drawback with self-publishing is thus immediately apparent: it's time consuming and requires that the author learn to use new applications and be prepared to fiddle with them. The advantages, however, are great, many of which are conferred by the online medium itself. Article Y is vastly improved from its flat draft paper version by having links to the high quality colour images of the medieval manuscript illuminations it discusses in detail – what journal would do that?! I've also taken the decision to make all the articles a bit more friendly for students and general readers by peppering the main text with hotlinks to open access entries, mainly in Wikipedia, that serve as a glossary of terms and/or thumbnail sketches of the historical figures, works, and events mentioned. I've retained links in the footnotes to more traditional academic publications (books, articles, dictionaries and databases), which are typically paywalled, for those that want them.

Article X

The speed of being able to get one's work out to people who might find it interesting is certainly an advantage of self-publishing. My first blog-only publication, X, (pdf (http://eeleach.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/dijon-motet2.pdf) or HTML (http://users.ox.ac.uk/~musf0058/Dijonmotet.html)) was about reporting a new discovery and elucidating the questions and future directions for research that it prompts. A traditional journal might well have rejected it as too slight or preliminary, but it has been used in a number of ways by others, nonetheless. Pingbacks showed that the publication had been cited in a debate about developmental editing (see Dan Cohen (http://www.dancohen.org/2011/11/17/what-will-happen-to-developmental-editing/) and Writing History (http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/2011/11/developmental-editing/)). Although Dan Cohen noted that I didn't receive a hundreds of comments, he noted the quality of those I did receive. What is invisible, too, is that most people preferred to email me rather than post their comments, so I received more feedback than it appears. And email comments received commented on how great it was to have something so instantly,

which would have taken a year or more to go through the mill at a journal.

As updates to the blogpost intro reveal, article X did indeed form, as I hoped it would, the starting point for a Masters dissertation by one of my students this year. I quite like the instant drawing together of research and teaching that this provided: I had a ready-made suggestion for a dissertation topic that was simply 'have a read of article X and see where it takes you'. The distinction-standard dissertation that resulted threw up theses that I could never have imagined and is proving the basis for a future doctoral dissertation that will look probably end up reviewing the received view of the links between notational orthographies and chronology – I won't bore those of you who are not medieval musicologists with too much technical detail, but I'm really excited!

Article Y
My second self-published article, Y, was rather different: the paper in question had already been given orally three times (twice in difference disciplinary forums in Oxford and once at a conference) and then had been rejected from two different journals in 2009 and 2010 as not quite their thing (supporting blogpost here (http://eeleach.wordpress.com/2012/08/02/another-machaut-patron/); direct link to HTML version here (http://users.ox.ac.uk/~musf0058/MachautMelun.html)).

Had I just committed the ultimate in vanity publishing by offering readers something rejected by more traditional organs? Surely if it's been rejected by two journals already, it can't be any good? But experience suggests that the anonymous peer review process in the humanities is conservative and can be quite random. One of my other journal articles was rejected by four different journals before being published and going on to win an award from a major scholarly society. There was nothing factually wrong with it; it was just very controversial in methodology and interpretation. And I like the idea that humanities scholarship is an ongoing discussion rather than a series of last words. Far better for my hypotheses to be tested–and perhaps used profitably–by dozens of Machaut scholars in a public forum, than kept from the world by two anonymous readers from a general journal who might not be particularly specialist (and how would I know given that they are anonymous?).

Article Y has now been widely read–or, at least, looked at and downloaded–thanks to people clicking through from a link I put on another online resource, Dominique Gatté's magnificent Musicologie Médiévale (http://gregorian-chant.ning.com/), which is a sort-of specialized Facebook for medieval musicologists (nearly 1000 members worldwide to date – which I can't help thinking must be nearly all of us!). On the day I notified that site about new article Y and about a new HTML version of the previous year's article X, I had the busiest day on my blog ever. And again the email responses rolled in, ranging from simple 'thanks for posting', to lengthy serious engagement with the text along the lines of 'have you looked at such-and-such a source which would help that bit of the argument'. Humanities research can be a lonely business, so this was really welcome engagement and I'm just really excited to be able to interact with other experts in the field in this way.

Article Z
On a roll with Scrivener, I thought I'd start the process of HTMLing publications from my back catalogue in cases that the publisher has not allowed me to post the final pdf. In all these cases, so my understanding is (from reading SHERPA/RoMEO (http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/) and tweeting Qs at the ever-helpful Emily Goodhand (https://twitter.com/copyrightgirl), I retain the right to post a pre-edited version of the text.

My first port of call was article Z, which appeared in a Festschrift in 2009. At the same conference that prompted me to self-publish article Y, I also went to a paper covering some of the same themes as my article Z, whose presenter–unsurprisingly–hadn't come across my article. Usually I try to avoid publishing in places that aren't somewhere online, either as full text or at least as an abstract. Festschrifts are therefore a nightmare–one has to produce something creditable with good grace because one wants to celebrate the dedicatee, but in terms of scholarly impact it's like chucking one's work down a black hole. I don't publish to get myself well known, but because I want the ideas that I've had about things to enter the scholarly discussion, whether they are eventually taken up or utterly dismissed. Article Z seemed, therefore, like a good candidate for a bit of web-based accessibility.

I planned to do virtually no editing except for hotlinking the main text (it's another paper with a fairly large and specialist/obscure *dramatis personae*) and the footnotes. In the process of revisiting my work (which I did about six years ago now as the result of teaching a course slightly outside my usual area of expertise), I discovered misconceptions that badly needed correcting: I had misread one of my sources because I hadn't looked at that source's ultimate source. As the ultimate source had, in the interim, been put online (as I found out when I was searching for a hotlink for it), I was able to correct my mistake and revise my text. The self-published version of this article is now better than the print version (with apologies to the Festschrift's dedicatee!).

Questions people ask
The story of article Z answers one of the question people ask about self-publication: aren't you worried that your work won't have proper peer review or editorial input? Article Z had a very high quality editorial team and the volume is beautifully produced, but it's not the editors' job to spot factual errors, misreading of one's sources, and so on. While I appreciate expert editorial input into my work (in terms of writing style I learned a lot from the in-house editors at Cornell University Press (http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/aboutus/), when I published my first book), I am now experienced enough to be at least as good an editor as most of the people who edit my work in established journals. Like most senior academics, I've served my time as a journal editor and edited volumes of essays. Although they overlap, the issue of peer review– fact-checking and argument honing – is a slightly different matter from stylistic textual issues of editing. I would rather have the scholarly input of a self-selecting, non-anonymous crowd of readers than the anonymous (and often in my experience sadly vicious and dim) comments of hand-picked anonymous peers. And the beauty of self-published stuff is that one can always revise it as one lives and learns.

But the perception that self-published work lacks peer review leads to the other question people ask: don't you worry that this work just doesn't count for anything professionally? This perception is a particular problem for junior scholars and, I think, is where senior academics need to spearhead change. The only way to make self-publication reputable is for senior scholars to resolutely publish scholarly stuff online. While the REF guidelines might claim that the location of the publication doesn't count, only the quality, it is inevitable that people short-cut to a community-validated idea of quality based on where the thing was published. But journal articles – unlike books – are very rarely reviewed after publication and only get where they are after a small number of anonymous readers OK them. It's possible to click on the 'this article cited by n others' link in JSTOR, for example, but that only gives the citations that are in other paper journal publication archived by JSTOR. By contrast the comments posted on a blog in response to an article, or the response of another online publication linking to another–could surely provide a more legible measure of the 'impact' and 'peer esteem' of a particular publication.

The other question I frequently hear is whether self-publication makes one's work harder to find. This just baffles me. Academic journals are obscure organs of publication: students coming to university have never encountered them before (and now, because they access them via JSTOR and/or online, still have no idea generally what they are in 'real life'). Searching the internet using a simple search engine will locate self-published articles and individuals self-publishing can use Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu, and specialist sites like Musicologie Médiévale (see above) as well as their own blogs. In my experience, it's much more likely that people today will fail to turn up your work if it's in a resource that's *not* online. People vary of course (and not, in my experience, in any way that can allow sweeping statements about age, gender, discipline, etc.): this year I've been told not only things like 'no one reads things only on-screen' but also 'I really can't be bothered to look at stuff when I have to go the library'.

One question I have asked myself is about long-term sustainability: what happens to my blog if WordPress dies and/or to my self-published articles if I lose my Faculty webspace? If the beauty of online publication is that there's no fixed version of one's stuff because knowledge isn't stable, the danger is that everything is ultimately ephemeral. Perhaps the counting for REF and sustainability birds could be killed with the one stone (doorstop) of a paper publication of the collected self-published works in their more stable, post major commented forms several years down the line.

Related posts:

1. There is a pathetic lack of functionality in scholarly publishing. We must end for-profit publishing and allow libraries to make available the works of their scholars for all (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/11/09/functionality-academic-publishing/)

2. Do more tweets mean higher citations? If so, Twitter can lead us to the 'personalised journal'; pinpointing more research that is relevant to your interests. (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/09/more-tweets-more-citations/)

3. How to move towards a system that looks to 'publish, then filter' academic research (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/07/10/publish-then-filter-research/)

4. The ghosts of Christmases past, present and future come bearing lessons of academic publishing. (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/12/23/the-ghosts-of-christmases-past-present-and-future-come-bearing-lessons-of-academic-publishing/)

5. Scholarly publishing is broken: Is it time to consider guerrilla self-publishing? (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/07/11/scholarly-publishing-broken-guerrilla-self-publishing/)