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Of Two Minds About Books

By **MATT RICHTEL** and **CLAIRE CAIN MILLER**

SAN FRANCISCO — Auriane and Sebastien de Halleux are at sharp odds over “The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo,” but not about the plot. The problem is that she prefers the book version, while he reads it on his iPad. And in this literary dispute, the couple says, it’s ne’er the twain shall meet.

“She talks about the smell of the paper and the feeling of holding it in your hands,” said Mr. de Halleux, 32, who says he thinks the substance is the same regardless of medium. He added, sounding mildly piqued, “She uses the word ‘real.’ ”

By the end of this year, 10.3 million people are expected to own e-readers in the United States, buying about 100 million e-books, the market research company Forrester predicts. This is up from 3.7 million e-readers and 30 million e-books sold last year.

The trend is wreaking havoc inside the publishing industry, but inside homes, the plot takes a personal twist as couples find themselves torn over the “right way” to read. At bedtime, a couple might sit side-by-side, one turning pages by lamplight and the other reading Caecilia font in E Ink on a Kindle or backlit by the illuminated LCD screen of an iPad, each quietly judgmental.

Although there are no statistics on how widespread the battles are, the publishing industry is paying close attention, trying to figure out how to market books to households that read in different ways.

A few publishers and bookstores are testing the bundling of print books with e-books at a discount. Barnes & Noble started offering bundles in June at about 50 stores and plans to expand the program in the fall, said Mary Ellen Keating, a Barnes & Noble spokeswoman.

Thomas Nelson, a publisher of religious books, offers free e-books with a print book for some titles. It is particularly good for readers who want to share books with family or friends who read in different formats, said Tod Shuttleworth, senior vice president and group publisher at Thomas Nelson. The bundles have sold well, and Thomas Nelson is considering adding more

for the holiday shopping season.

Meanwhile, [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) is doing its best to convince print lovers that “reading on Kindle is nothing like reading on a computer screen.” Its Web site promises a display on which “text ‘pops’ from the page, creating a reading experience most similar to reading on printed paper” because it produces neither glare in a well-lighted spot nor a glow in the dark.

Sony, which introduced a new line of e-readers Wednesday, said they were smaller and lighter than before, with clearer text and touch screens, all to make them feel more like printed books. “Consistently the No. 1 thing we heard was it needs to feel like a book, so you just forget that you have a device in your hand,” said Steve Haber, president of Sony’s digital reading division.

This straddle-the-line marketing underscores a deeper tension: the desire to keep the print business alive so as not to alienate a core market, while establishing a base for a future that publishers see as increasingly digital, said James L. McQuivey, an e-reader industry analyst with Forrester.

“There is much more emotional attachment to the paper book than there is to the CD or the DVD,” said Mike Shatzkin, founder and chief executive of the Idea Logical Company, which advises book publishers on digital change. “It is not logical — it’s visceral.”

A print book bundled with an e-book would have been useful for Liz Aybar, 35, and Betsy Conti, 31, a Denver couple who like reading together so much that when they read “The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo” in paperback, Ms. Conti ripped out sections of the book as she finished them so Ms. Aybar could read them.

But since Ms. Conti, a director of technology, bought an iPad, she has gone to the other side. They are both reading Ken Robinson’s “The Element,” but bought two separate copies — a print book for \$15 and a \$13 Kindle version for the iPad.

“I feel more connected to a book than I do through the iPad,” said Ms. Aybar, who works at an education nonprofit group.

Alexandra Ringe, an editor, and her husband, Jim Hanas, a fiction writer, both 41, fell in love over books, with one of their early dates at a used-book festival in Manhattan. They married in a SoHo bookstore and live in an apartment in the Park Slope neighborhood with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves.

She collects vintage yearbooks and self-help books. But he likes to read on his **iPhone**.

“For me, real reading is for e-books, and books have become this kind of collectors’ object,”

said Mr. Hanas, who has published short stories in literary journals like McSweeney's and is publishing his next book, "Why They Cried," only in digital format. "It's kind of amazing to see people still going through the stages of acceptance that books are going away, saying they like the way books feel and smell. I was there, but I'm past that now."

For Erin and Daniel Muskat, a couple in Brooklyn, the ink-stained quarrel has disrupted the togetherness of their reading habits.

Ms. Muskat, 29, bought an iPad for her husband, 33, who works at his family's shoe business, before their honeymoon in June, but quickly discovered that his electronic reading impinged on her old-fashioned reading.

"I brought a book with me and I barely read it," said Ms. Muskat, a media consultant. "We used to go to the beach and we'd both take out books, but he had an iPad, and it was almost distracting because it didn't feel like he was reading with me."

For Mr. de Halleux, a video game executive, the battle over reading tastes has skipped to a new generation. He and his wife both read to their 3-year-old son, Tristan. He reads Winnie the Pooh to the child on a screen. She reads it in old-fashioned paperback form.

Mr. de Halleux said he was confident the boy would eventually favor the digitized version. "He really likes it because you can zoom in on things," he said.

And he said the discussion in his household had brought in his parents, too. His own father favors paperbacks, arguing they can be more easily shared, while his mother goes for the e-reader, which she says is easier on faltering eyesight as people get older.

"The argument is more heated by the day," Mr. de Halleux said. "It's a topic of intense scrutiny at the moment."