



Introduction

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FOR MANY OF us who work closely with books and participate in their production, promotion and distribution through commercial channels, libraries and schools, and who teach their use, it seemed that the changes and expansion of the American book publishing industry during the post World War II period deserved a single publication to survey its varied and increasingly specialized activities.

The dozen years under consideration are framed by our emergence from wartime living and the adjustment of our population first to civilian life and then to the atomic and space age. During this timespan, publishing adapted itself from an economy of scarcity of materials and skilled manpower to one of abundance, from an era of pent-up demands to one of competition within the industry, with other media of communications and diversions. While this period has been one of unprecedented growth and expansion of book publishing, it has not kept pace with the developments of other industries, not even those in related fields.

The most cogent comments by which publishers refer "to their work, loftily, as a profession; realistically, as a business; ruefully, as a gamble" indicate many facets and explain some of the fascinations publishing has to offer. "As a business [it] represents less than one five-hundredth of the nation's 350-400 billion dollar economy. It consumes far less than 1 percent of the United States output of paper. It attempts to serve a population in which, according to Dr. Gallup, only 17 percent of adults could say in 1955 that they were 'currently' reading a book, as compared with 55 percent in Great Britain."²

Comparisons with other countries are hazardous because no universally accepted definitions for simple terms like "books" or "pamphlets" have been established. Nevertheless, some generalizations

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lacking statistical refinement are permitted since they provide the only yardstick for our national book publishing operations.

Approximately as many books have come from the world's printing presses in the twentieth century as between the invention of printing from moveable type and 1900. The publishing situation changes so rapidly that an equal output may be accomplished in the next quarter century because the current annual world production has reached 5,000 million copies. Considering the size of population, this would place only two copies in the hand of every person. Actually adult ownership must be infinitely smaller since half of these books are used in schools and a substantial part of the remainder in public and institutional libraries.

Geographically book production is greatly restricted since three out of four books originate in ten countries; among them the U.S. held fifth place in title production in 1955, outranked by the U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom, Japan, and the German Federal Republic.³

In title production per millions of population the U.S. finds itself at the bottom of a list of twenty-three countries where only China, India, and Brazil held lower positions in 1952.⁴ In fact, our situation may be somewhat better because some countries, including the U.S.S.R., report in their publishing statistics pamphlets which our figures omit, along with other categories like university press, church and secular organizations' productions.

In terms of copies the U.S. is in a more significant position as the third largest producer behind Russia and the United Kingdom.⁵ Among book exporters we hold second place after the United Kingdom.⁶

While book production statistics do not explain every cultural or scientific development, they can serve as a yardstick of a nation's predominant interests and as an index to its status in the world's intellectual community. The following table indicates subject areas according to percentages of titles published during 1955 in various countries⁷ and it illustrates the preoccupation of the U.S.S.R. with science.

	<i>Pure and Applied Sciences</i>	<i>Literature</i>
U.S.S.R.	59	12
Poland	45	18
United Kingdom	22	35
U.S.A.	20	37
Spain	11	43

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It is the purpose of this issue to probe into the complexities of the heterogenous topic of American book publishing. It does not lend itself to division into mutually exclusive segments for it thrives on inconsistencies and depends on the fickle taste and judgment of its public. This diversity is due to subject matter and the pattern of publishing operations which developed over the last three hundred years with minimal restrictions from the government.

To do justice to the topic, a three-pronged approach was chosen:

Two papers cover publishing from 1946 to 1957 on an industry-wide basis and present economic and production developments.

Ten papers consider the various branches of publishing and are divided into two groups:

- a. commercial productions: trade, university press, textbook, private presses, book club, hard-cover reprint, paperback
- b. individually or collectively subsidized productions: vanity press, government and foundation, association

Finally, eight additional papers beginning with one on reference and subscription book publishing makes the transition to the third avenue of approach which stresses subject. This paper is mainly devoted to the humanities and social sciences and is followed by others on religious, art and architecture, music, law, science and technical, medical, and children's books.

Correspondingly the choice of authors is based on the consideration that three professions should be drawn on for contributions; those who are directly engaged in book production and distribution, those who teach the use of books in library schools, and those who deal with books in the varied activities of librarians. Each contributor was asked to provide a short historical introduction to his subject and to focus his attention primarily on the period of 1946-57. Beyond this, the treatment and method of research was left to the individual authors.

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