

Introduction

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WHAT IS "QUALITY BOOK PUBLISHING?" To the editors of this issue of *Library Trends*, it is the "serious" book. While all of us may have somewhat variant definitions of "serious," we would probably agree that, in general, it is the intellectual or at least thoughtful and thought-provoking work of fiction, poetry, biography, history, criticism, etc., as opposed to the "popular" novel—the gothic romance, spy thriller, western, or mystery—or the "fad" nonfiction book—books on diets, physical fitness, cookery, more or less offensive jokes, and so on. While not all books in these genres are lacking in serious intent or content, most fad or popular books clearly are flashes-in-the-pan, here today and gone by midnight. What we are concerned with are books with high levels of high ideas, content and writing, books which assure—or at least promise—current and, we hope, lasting interest. We are also concerned with their physical beauty and integrity.

Yet what we usually settle for is some reasonable compromise of a decent product, decently produced. Why do we have to endure compromise? Why can't we expect—and get—perfection? For one thing, it is a less than perfect world in which we live and there are many factors

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which work against perfection. It is some of these factors which we asked authors to explore in these papers. We also sought suggestions for improvement in some of the problem areas, and a number of ideas came forth.

The original purposes of this issue had a rather broad concept: "Publishing in Library and Information Science," by which we meant the role of publishing in our professions, including such topics as on-demand and nonpaper publications, overproliferation, and corporate journal publishers. I discussed the idea with Eleanor Blum, founder of the University of Illinois' Graduate School of Library and Information Science's course on contemporary book publishing. We decided that we wanted to focus on quality in trade book publishing, in view of the fact that many of the other concerns were being covered for libraries elsewhere. There seemed to be very little addressing the question of quality, an issue about which Dr. Blum and I have been greatly concerned for many years. If books are going to continue to be a major factor in libraries for several more decades, which all three editors of this issue firmly believe, we need to be concerned about the many factors which are involved in ensuring quality.

After we arrived at an outline, we enlisted the aid of the third editor of the issue, Ann Heidbreder Eastman, who has been associated with both libraries and the publishing industry for some thirty years as library supporter, publishing representative, American Book Publishers Council/Association of American Publishers (ABPC/AAP) staff member, and ALA councilor, and who knows many of the leaders in the industry. With her advice and help, we identified possible authors; actually finding them proved to be difficult, largely because of the extreme demands on the time of many busy people. (Librarians think they are overcommitted—they should peep into the world of publishing, which seems to be largely populated with workaholics.) We present the results of this planning herewith, in the hope that the issue will be, at the least, enlightening and, at best, an indication of a genuine interest on the part of a number of people in continuing and even increasing a commitment to quality trade book publishing.

Dr. James W. Carey, Dean of the College of Communications of the University of Illinois, is internationally respected for his probing analysis of communications media. Dan Lacy, long associated with McGraw-Hill (and also a librarian, archivist, public library trustee, and teacher of courses in publishing during his distinguished career) has often written on the role of the book in our society. We asked them to contribute keynote articles, Carey's on the book as a medium of communication

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and Lacy's on the book as literature. In "The Paradox of the Book," Dean Carey notes that never has there been so much scholarship on the book as object or medium, in spite of contemporary pressures on literacy and intellectualism, and he explores the reasons for this phenomenon and the possible consequences of this research. Lacy looks at the possible effects of the new technologies on books as we know them and concludes, perhaps not too surprisingly, that the quality of the text is far more important than the format.

In spite of a hectic pace dictated by the appearance of her latest book, *The March of Folly*, with all the consequent interviews and personal appearances, Barbara Tuchman graciously consented to contribute a brief article on "the role of the author in ensuring quality in trade books." She quite correctly notes the impossibility of "ensuring" such a thing and goes on to comment on the various pressures, commercial and societal, which can influence authors, in the process making it quite clear where she stands in matters of integrity and taste.

As noted earlier, Ann Heidbreder Eastman has long been a participant and an observer in the publishing and library professions. She begins by reviewing the present status of relations between publishers and librarians, and then identifies a number of the stresses and strains within both professions which lead to the existing tensions between the two groups. She then zeroes in on the crux of the matter: the shared responsibilities of the entire book community, including the reaffirmation of the importance of reading and the rejection of what she calls the "either/or fallacy," i.e., the notion that we must live entirely with books as we know them or entirely with the newer electronic media. Finally, she presents a strategy for a successful national campaign to promote books, libraries and reading. At once visionary and practical, the program is based on imaginative professional use of established methods of promotion. Given money, massive doses of time and energy, and a renewed spirit of cooperation, the goal can be accomplished.

William Goodman has produced a piece on the role of the editor which begins with a definition of a little-known axiom, "Sifton's Law," and relates it to the publishing scene. He then looks at the contemporary literary world and surveys a number of genres to see if there are projects that should be developed before the end of the decade, projects that are not only worthy but also are commercially attractive. The article is a fascinating exploration of the horizons of the highly respected editor of a firm that consistently receives awards for the high quality of the contents and physical appearance of its books.

We have two short pieces by literary agents. The first by Richard Curtis, of Richard Curtis Associates, Inc., is a statement of what an agent does, with many definitions and examples. It appeared originally in his book *How To Be Your Own Literary Agent* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983) and is reprinted here by permission.

The other piece on agents by A.I.. Hart of The Fox Chase Agency, Inc., is at once idiosyncratic and highly informative. At once philosophical and practical, he offers an insight into one of the more difficult roles in publishing, that of the middleman between author and publisher.

Leonard Shatzkin is known throughout the industry as a man of broad and varied experience, with many ideas, some of them controversial, about the industry and its problems. He summed up much of his thinking in his 1982 book, *In Cold Type; Overcoming the Book Crisis*. In this piece for *Library Trends*, he discusses book production technology, present and future. He notes capabilities, used and unused, and offers suggestions for aesthetic and economic improvement. Note the inclusion of the aesthetic function; a rational approach to book production does not have to mean the sacrifice of quality. Indeed, a highly integrated approach can improve quality.

Martin Levin, a veteran publisher and recognized specialist in marketing problems, a founder of the Book Industry Study Group (BISG), and now a practicing attorney specializing in publishing law, reviews the chaotic American scene, from the incredible numbers of books involved (over half a million titles currently available plus 50,000 more published each year) to the equally incredible numbers of returns and their even less logical handling by the industry. He then sounds a clarion call for an end to all this waste, and he offers some concrete and original ideas for the beginnings of sanity.

Promotion is an important factor in the publishing process, as Martin Levin noted. One of the most innovative and best-known promotion specialists in the industry is Esther Margolis, now head of her own publishing house, Newmarket Press. In an intensely practical article, Margolis states the importance of promotion, citing many successful campaigns as examples.

We have so far taken note of many aspects of the publishing scene, pointing out some of the many pressures that argue for or against quality publishing. But no quality publishing can take place in the future without first-rate people in the profession. What can be done to recruit and educate promising young people for leading roles in the publishing process? We asked John Tebbel, author and retired educa-

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tor, to comment on this topic. Tebbel has the distinction of having headed the only graduate academic program in publishing in this country, at New York University in 1958-1962. He surveys the often discouraging history of education for publishing programs, the present scene, and calls for a more rational, formalized approach. The recent decision of AAP to discontinue its education for publishing efforts underscores the pressing need for the development of new and innovative programs as quickly as possible.

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