

Of Publishing . . . And Authors

By Mary Stith

Of Publishing . . .

So your manuscript has been accepted—all the months of waiting, all the anxiety and uncertainty are over. You are about to become the author of a published book. The University of Oklahoma Press has accepted your magnum opus. What happens now? All the complex machinery of a publishing house goes into action while you wait again, more or less patiently, for the first, or galley, proofs. In the meantime, many things have happened to your manuscript—it has been through a number of hands and strange symbols appear in the margins in various colored pencilings.

The art editor (in some houses he is the typographer or book designer) has very likely made a "cast-up" of your manuscript even before acceptance—that is, he has made a calculation of its length and probable cost. He has a mental picture of what the completed book will look like—the faces of type to be used, the size of the page, the kind and weight of paper, and so on. He may even have a few sample pages using different faces and sizes of type, especially if your book presents unusual problems in typography. He will, in other words, provide the dress in which your book reaches the public. He may leave some of the details until the editor has finished with the manuscript, but he has cut his pattern and knows how he will tailor the whole garment.

Then the editor takes over. He (very often "she") is perhaps the closest link between the author and the printer. It is his job to see that you, the author, have said what you intend to say and that you have said it in the most felicitous fashion. He must interpret for the printer what you mean or want. Now authors, being only human after all, sometimes make mistakes. (Editors do, too, but we won't go into that here.) It is a fact that a person, once having made an error, seldom discovers it himself afterward. So the editor examines your manuscript for apparent errors of fact, accidental repetition of subject matter, passages that are not clear, and places where he thinks you have not realized the full potentialities of your writing craft. He will also look for libellous passages (particularly if you are writing about Texans or Texas, for in that state the libel

laws are very harsh; indeed, I have heard it said that a citizen would likely get a judgment if you mistakenly called him an Oklahoman!) He will watch to see that you have not overstepped the bounds of good taste and that you have given credit where credit is due. In other words, so far as he can, the editor will try to see to it that your manuscript hangs together reasonably well and that you are not giving undue offense to anyone in any way.

That done, he will mark up your manuscript according to house style. The last operation is more or less mechanical—an arbitrary set of rules to achieve a measure of uniformity in spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, etc.—the thousand and one "unimportant" little things that have unlimited capacity for mischief-making in the composing room, proof room, and editorial department. He will also mark for the attention of the art editor any unusual situations that will require his special consideration.

Now your manuscript, all queries and textual difficulties resolved, returns to the art editor, who will indicate for the printer the various types to be used and where, the length of the line, spacing, indentation, and the rest of the mechanical details which make the book into a real book. When he has finished with your manuscript, now marked with at least two different colors of pencil (the editor traditionally uses blue), it goes at last to the composing room.

In the shop the linotype operator sets the type in accordance with the instructions of the art editor. While he is doing this, the proofreader is working right behind him, comparing the completed galleys with your typescript to see that the two agree, using still another color of pencil, usually red. When the entire manuscript has been set in type and proofread, the galleys go back to the operator for correction, following which you get your first sets of proofs to read and return with your corrections and alterations (we hope not many of the latter). Upon their return, after the editor has examined them, the art editor marks off the pages so that the floor man can assemble them from the varying sizes of type on the various galleys. He adds the running heads, the page numbers, and any maps or other illustra-

tive material which will be printed with the book. The corrected lines are read again in the proof room, and your page proofs—which now have the appearance of book pages—are relayed to you by the editor, along with an extra set and instructions for the exacting job of making the index.

In the meantime, the illustrations which you have collected are culled by the art editor and the editor, in consultation with you, for those pictures which will both fit the text and reproduce best. The legends and credit lines are prepared by the editor from information supplied by you, and very likely your final act, except for returning the index, will be to o.k. these legends.

Now all the essential parts of your book are assembled, given final corrections, and locked in the press. Printing is underway, and it won't be too long until your book, resplendent in bright jacket representing the best efforts of the art and sales departments and smelling of fresh ink and binder's glue, will be ready for the market place.

Of Authors . . .

I have already said that authors are human beings. So are editors. Regardless of what authors may think. And since both of them are human beings, funny things can happen in the course of getting a manuscript ready for publication. Perhaps the foibles of authors are best discussed behind closed doors, but a few incidents can be retold.

In scholarly books, it seldom happens that the author oversteps the bounds of convention, but once in a while he does. A few years ago we published a historical work by a very competent but somewhat overexuberant writer (*not* an Oklahoman, incidentally), who tucked right into the middle of a rather solemn chapter a totally unexpected and startling, indeed torrid, account of the love life of the giant turtles of certain Pacific islands, complete with anatomical comparisons to man. Believing that, while the account might be acceptable as natural history or in a work intended for the zoologist, it wasn't exactly in good taste in this particular manuscript, we advised the author to delete the passage. He did, protesting faintly that he thought a touch of sex would sell his book. Months later I met the author, who told

me somewhat plaintively that he had vainly tried to peddle that chapter to various magazines—the ones in natural history wouldn't touch it, and even the sensation magazines said it was too hot for them to handle! In the confines of our own plant it was suggested that we promote sales by offering the turtle chapter in mimeographed form with each order for ten or more copies of the book. We never have had a book banned in Boston, but sometimes I toy with the idea of what an unexpurgated edition of that volume might have done for an otherwise sedate University Press.

Happily, most authors appreciate the suggestions of the editor and are content to leave design in the competent hands of the art editor. But now and then an author has a definite idea how he wants his book to look. Usually he wants it to be as big as Professor So-and-So's, and certainly it should weigh as much as Dr. Thus-and-Thus's, because he has spent two more years in his research than either of them, and his book should look it. The art editor wonders if he judges the worth of all books by size and weight. And, of course, we get the repercussions if the book falls short by so much as an inch or an ounce.

We had an author once who persisted in addressing me as "Miss Smith"—a common enough mistake once or twice, but slightly irritating after several months of correspondence. He had a rather unusual name himself. It happened that just before his book went on the press, I had to send him a telegram requiring an urgent answer. A couple of days went by with no reply. I wired again, and was just on the point of resorting to long-distance phone when his reply arrived. It seems, according to Mr. Author, that a letter had been missing from his given name, so the wire had been making the rounds of all the offices in the Department of Agriculture in Washington before it got to the right man.

Now, even though editors are supposed to turn the other cheek to authors and

to be consistently diplomatic, I couldn't resist. I wrote him a nice, sympathetic note, telling him I could fully share his feelings about his name since my simple, one-syllable surname was often spelled "Smith," although despite all the "Mary Smiths" in the world, *my* mail always seemed to reach me on time.

And Things . . .

Ordinarily the editor in a book-publishing organization is the most anonymous animal there is. There have been editors whose names have become known to the general public—witness the late, extremely gifted Maxwell Evert Perkins of Scribner's—but there are few Maxwell Perkinses either in ability or in news value. Most of us remain, except within the confines of immediate publishing circles or to "our" authors, faceless beings who vaguely "do something" in publishing.

But once I attained a sort of publicity, rather by accident to be sure. I was sent to Amarillo (in Texas) to represent the Press at an autographing party—a pleasant form of promotion when the public is invited to the book store to meet the author of a new book and, it is hoped, to buy a copy for the author to inscribe. This book was by a real rancher and cattle raiser of West Texas. That morning he had some calves to brand and so was late in getting to town. Before he arrived, in came the press bent on getting an interview and a picture for the evening editions. Time passed and no author. Newspaper deadlines can't be postponed, so the reporters and photographer bowed to the inevitable and took a desperate way out. As a result I treasure a nice cut of me fingering one of the books (title prominently displayed, of course) and an interview about the author, the illustrator, the University of Oklahoma Press, and scholarly publishing in general. I won't deny that I made the most of the opportunity. But I was a poor second to the colorful rancher, and my amazement at being drafted was so great that the people of Amarillo probably still think that all

editors stand around with their mouths open.

Since things have gotten slightly personal, I may as well go on and tell you that, so far as my own position as associate editor of the University of Oklahoma Press is concerned, I am frequently identified with various other departments of the University, from Journalism to the Library, until I have almost quit trying to explain exactly what I am and what I do. "Why, I thought *The Oklahoma Daily* was edited by a student" (obviously I am past that age), or "Will you please put an ad in the *Daily* for me?" are everyday occurrences. Or, if the speaker has a little more information, "Isn't reading proof awfully hard on your eyes?" "You correct the punctuation and spelling, don't you?" Well, an editor occasionally *does* read proof, and he *does* correct punctuation and spelling, but he does something else, too.

After nearly fourteen years in the business of publishing, nine of them with the University of Oklahoma Press, I find that publishing books is nine-tenths sweat and one-tenth accomplishment and reward, but —Where's that blue pencil, the shop is howling for copy!

Books

Life and Death of an Oilman

A distinguished addition to studies of Oklahoma and Oklahomans is the recent biography of E. W. Marland, *Life and Death of an Oilman* by John Joseph Matthews, '20ba, University of Oklahoma Press. \$3.75.

Drawings by J. Craig Sheppard brilliantly illustrate the author's skillful revelation of Marland's character. The frontispiece shows the Marland of happy prosperous days, fondling his dogs. Chapter headings depict Marland the school boy, allowing his adoring mother to straighten the tie of his absurd Glengarry costume before starting him on his way to disaster; the smoking chimneys of Pittsburgh where the young man was secretly afraid; the horse and buggy which took him prospecting; the derricks of the oil field where he got his start.

The sketches move on to the New Cumberland Anticline where Marland brought in an oil well while he was hunting coal. They picture the buffalo, symbols of 101 Ranch where, after losing his first million, he arrived penniless to bring in a gusher; and the tank farm that spread over acres,



About the Author

Miss Mary Smith, '30ba, '37ma, Associate Editor of the University of Oklahoma Press, taught in the Anchorage High School, Louisville, and in 1938 became editor for the Economy Publishing Company of Oklahoma City. She joined the editorial staff of the Press in 1943. By her experience, discretion, and zest for her work, she is well-qualified to write this article for the Quarterly.