

Two Plus Two Equals GOOD FELLOWSHIP



Editors Savoie Lottinville and Mary Stith (left) welcome Sheila Reilly and Virginia Gilbert, winners of the O. U. Press's unique fellowships.

By DICK SMITH

"I'VE FORGOTTEN who made the observation," said Mary Stith, chief of the University of Oklahoma Press editorial offices, "but I think this is true: 'An editor is a person who has a passion for anonymity'."

Mary Stith is an editor who rarely forgets the authors of quotations (or at least, is never at a loss when it comes to the means of tracking authors down); but the irony of her forgetting the author of a favorite quotation is not nearly so arresting as the fact that she and the Press's director, Savoie Lottinville, have won nation-wide publicity for some of the most adroitly anonymous editors in the business.

These editors are the winners of the Press's annual fellowships—a unique-in-

the-nation springboard into publishing circles for students with editorial ambitions and locality frustrations.

This year, for the first time in the history of the fellowships, two girls have won the June-to-June, \$1,500, eight-hour-a-day training bonanzas. One of the girls, Virginia Gilbert, is a history major from Ardmore; the other, Sheila Reilly, is an English major from Tulsa. So far, except to friends, they are not known outside of the state. The irony that by next June they both will be well-known in publishing circles for another type of anonymity is a tribute to the reputation of the Press and its fellowships, and to Lottinville and Miss Stith—the persons who supervise the fellows.

Basically, the idea of the fellowships is this: Learn while you work. When they reported for assignments in June, Virginia and Sheila were given a brief introduction to the Press's departments—editorial, design, distribution, the press shop itself—and then each was given a manuscript to edit and process through these departments until it evolves as a published book on the market.

Considering the nature and award-winning quality of University Press books, this might seem much like throwing a child into the water to make him learn how to swim. But Miss Stith and Lottinville are satisfied their fellowship winners will manage to float at first, if not swim immediately; they have good reasons: in addition to the supervision and the experience they'll be able to offer Virginia and Sheila, they know that the two girls are well-versed in grammar and that they have imagination.

Knowing grammar (not only King's English, but English—as Miss Stith puts it—"as it's spoke") and having imagination are the two qualities for which fellowship applicants are most critically gauged.

Virginia and Sheila, for instances, were given a written test with three parts: they first had to supply missing punctuation to an essay on Horace that had been completely stripped of punctuation (see "How Would You Fare?"); they then were given a statement which included many erroneous facts which they were supposed to spot and, with the help of reference books, correct (sample: When Daniel Webster's dictionary was first published . . ."); and finally they were given an excerpt from a recent manuscript and were told to make any editorial changes which they might suggest in helping the author to present his material more satisfactorily.

How Would You Fare?

To win the Press fellowships, Sheila and Virginia had to pass some unusual written tests. The extract below was taken from one of those tests. The idea is to supply the missing punctuation. How well would you do? Get a pencil and try. The corrected extract follows.

In the fifth epode we find the first direful picture of the witch canidia a singularly disgusting person it is at once the most tragic and the most dramatic poem that horace ever wrote curiously dramatic for it opens with the outbreak of terrified anger from the patrician child who has been trapped into the witches den there to die a slow torment for the better making of a love philtre and it closes with the curse which the doomed boy hurls at his destroyers fear has left him and fury has taken its place he bids the hags remember that no magic can alter right and wrong or avert retribution he dying at their hands will pursue them to their shameful deaths the rabble will pelt them with heavy stones and fling their unblest bodies to the wolves

this shall my parents see
alas surviving me

How Did You Fare?

Correctly punctuated, the extract reads as follows:

In the fifth epode we find the first direful picture of the witch Canidia, a singularly disgusting person. It is at once the most tragic and the most dramatic poem that Horace ever wrote—curiously dramatic, for it opens with the outbreak of terrified anger from the patrician child who was been trapped into the witches' den, there to die a slow torment for the better making of a love philtre, and it closes with the curse which the doomed boy hurls at his destroyers. Fear has left him and fury has taken its place. He bids the hags remember that no magic can alter right and wrong or avert retribution. He, dying at their hands, will pursue them to their shameful deaths; the rabble will pelt them with heavy stones and fling their unblest bodies to the wolves.

*This shall my parents see,
Alas, surviving me.*

Satisfied that Virginia and Sheila have imagination and knowledge enough, Miss Stith and Lottinville are teaching them the trick of wielding those traits with— anonymity.

"It's not the easiest thing to teach," said Miss Stith, a pleasant woman whose merry eyes flash with a proofreader's acuteness. "Sheila and Virginia have to have a sense of literary perspective so that when they begin working on manuscripts they can judge whether their author is a literary artist who can violate the rules, or whether he is a person who should be made to conform. But it is always the author's personality that is paramount. We editors are never ghost writers and must never be suspected of tampering. Our task is to put the author's best foot forward, and to do this we must have a sense of responsibility not only to the author, but to the reader—and at the same time remain anonymous."

Virginia's and Sheila's opportunities for adroit anonymity come by mail, by visitor, and by request, in the form of manuscripts. The Press receives about 1,000 manuscripts a year. Of these, only a fraction (30 or so) are published. Virginia and Sheila read some of the manuscripts and make recommendations as to whether the manuscripts should be accepted or not. This in itself is an ambitious assignment. Press Director Lottinville describes the Press's realm as the printing of "anything that a great university will dignify by teaching in its classrooms." Consequently, the two pretty fellows can expect anything from Americana to Greek dictionaries to pass across their desks for comment.

Once books have been selected for Virginia and Sheila to edit, the girls will first read them over to get the author's style. Then by working with the authors, they decide on deletions, additions, or rearrangements; help select illustrations; and check credits for bibliographies and notes. As the books are being proofed for the printers, the girls will keep the authors advised of the positioning of illustrations and of the design of the book.

This area—the designing of the book—is an example of the variety of training fellows receive at the Press.

"The fellows have all been individuals," said Miss Stith. "Each one had a different strong point; and the fine thing about this fellowship is that they are given every opportunity a publishing house has to offer in discovering what that strong point is. Perhaps it's in editing, but then it might be in design or in marketing. We had one girl who was average in editing but outstanding in composing press releases and

jacket blurbs. The fellowship gave her the opportunity of spotting and developing that talent as perhaps no similar program might have done."

There are only *similar* programs in the United States today. Oklahoma's university press is the only such press in the country that offers working fellowships. But doing things which are unique—and successful—is old hat with Press Director Savoie Lottinville, under whose directorship the fellowships were begun.

Lottinville, '29 O.U. graduate and a Rhodes scholar, is a person who thinks of his group as working in the realm of ideas. "And in the realm of ideas," he says, "there are no rules of thumb."

"It is not easy finding people who are both exact and imaginative," he said. "But our fellows must be both. And above all they have to recognize new, good ideas. We tell them to disregard thinking about what everybody else does. For a thoughtful person, nothing is ridiculous."

Such thinking has resulted in critical acclaim for the Press from scholars and bibliophiles all over the world. Virginia and Sheila will probably work on manuscripts for the Press's most ambitious series to date—the recently announced Centers of Civilization series which will involve many of the world's greatest scholars in what Lottinville considers to be one of the most significant contributions ever to have been made by the University. Or perhaps Vir-

ginia and Sheila will edit contributions to the Press's scholarly and highly absorbing series on the American Indian or the series on the Western Frontier. At any rate, whether they work on a Book-of-the-Month selection like *Wah' Kon-Tah* or the Press's all-time best seller, *Plowman's Folly*, they'll have the opportunity of attending all the staff, merchandising, and editorial meetings which Lottinville charges with his penchant for originality and new ideas.

"We seek their opinions at all times," said Lottinville, speaking of the professionally-green fellows. "Every business has the problem of having its regular employees not seeing the forest for the trees, but the fellows we've trained help us keep that problem down to a minimum. They've taught us about as much as we have taught them. Inevitably they ask questions for which we have no answers."

One question for which Lottinville has many answers is: Where can I get a job when my fellowship is over?

"Each year," said Lottinville, "after we've had a chance to see what our fellows can do best and what they would like to do most, we send a letter to all the publishing firms, recommending the fellows for employment. In each instance over the past ten years our fellows have had a wide choice of locations and positions."

Such a recommendation is a job-seeker's dream and the excellent positions received

by past fellows testify to the reputation of their training.

Last year's fellowship winners, Herbert Hyde and Dick Wentworth, have taken assistant editor's jobs with the University of Wisconsin Press and with Henry Regnery Co. (a non-fiction publishing house in Chicago). Other fellows are now working as editors for McGraw Hill, Macmillan and Co., Better Homes and Gardens magazine, and for the university presses of Johns Hopkins, California, Texas, Louisiana State, Chicago, and Illinois universities.

Miss Stith points out that the men they've trained are offered more money than the girls. "They'll offer a girl the same job, but with less salary. That's a sour point with me," she said.

But gender is never a factor in determining the winners of Press fellowships, although more men than women have won them. Miss Stith noted that the majors of the fellowship winners have been either English, letters, history, or journalism.

Although many of their fellows have been trained in journalism, Miss Stith doubts that any good editor or any working editor would have time for creative writing, and with professional pride she challenges the theory that an editor is either a frustrated author or a bookworm. An editor, as she sees the person, is an acute middleman who extracts great satisfaction from presenting a personality and a subject to an audience in the best possible manner. "A person has to enjoy people as well as words in order to do that," she says.

Miss Stith agrees with Lottinville that the Press has gained as much as the fellows in the ten years since the fellowships were begun. Each fellow edits about seven or eight manuscripts during the year—heavily supervised at first. But then, as their work becomes more assured, the supervision is less necessary.

Has the inexperience of the fellows ever cost the Press?

Miss Stith could think of only one instance—and it was caught before the loss occurred. "One of our fellows," she said, preferring anonymity for him, "was given a manuscript which he insisted should be dropped. Happily, we read it and insisted otherwise: it became *Gail Borden, Dairyman to a Nation*, and it won its author, Joe B. Frantz, the \$1,000 Texas Institute of Letters award as the best book on Texas for the year.

"Now that fellow is head of another university press. He's obviously making correct judgments now."

Anonymously, of course.



Editor Stith checks Sheila's first proofs. Fellows supervise manuscripts from receipt to hawking.