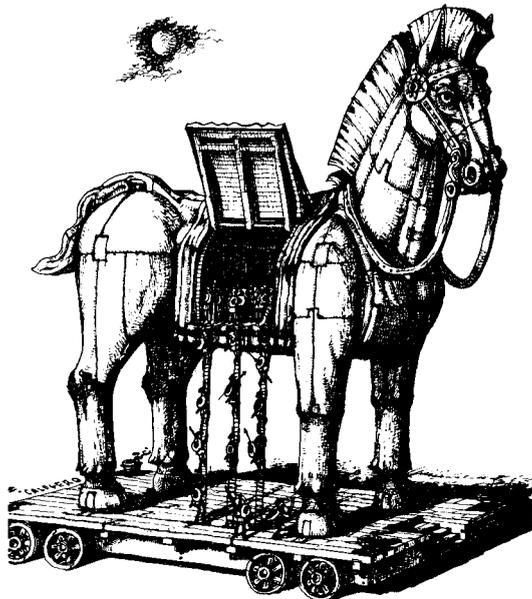


Homer is said to have used 9,000 different words.



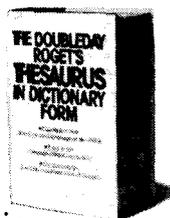
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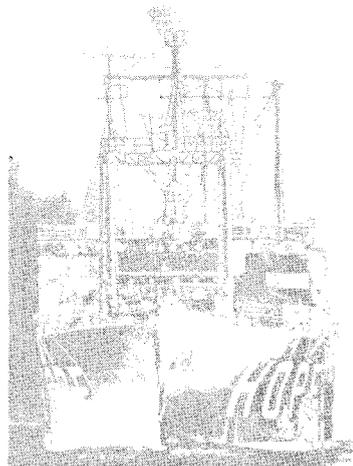
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solidity of time and place, density (by which I mean variety, eccentricity, ambiguity, inevitability), and a context for "round" characters who—in E. M. Forster's novelistic sense—undergo "change."

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Trade Winds

by William Cole

Of Editors and Imprints

The general reader doesn't know one publisher from another, so he has probably not even noticed what began as a spate and has by now become a full-fledged trend in publishing—editors getting their personal imprint on the title page along with the name of the publisher. There are Henry Robbins Books and Thomas Congdon Books at Dutton, James Wade Books at Dial, Eleanor Friede Books at Delacorte, Richard and Jeanette Seaver Books at Viking, Del Ray Books at Ballantine, Joan Kahn Books at Harper & Row, David Obst Books at Random House, and the books of Richard Marek, Publishers, through Putnam's. Right in the swim of this kind of activity are James Silberman, who left his position as editor in chief at Random House to start Summit Press (financed as a publishing division of Simon & Schuster), and Charles Sopkin, who left Dutton to get under the Playboy Enterprises bumbershoot with his Seaview Press. And note that Viking recently brought out an elaborate book, *In the Russian Style*, which was notable for citing no author, but instead stating on the jacket, "Edited by Jacqueline Onassis." (I hesitate to add, but only for a second, that Viking also brings out an occasional William Cole Book.)

That organ of the book trade, *Publishers Weekly*, recently ran a long and fascinating article by Thomas Weyr, "Getting Your Name on the Title Page," which dealt with this new trend. It all began some 15 years ago with Helen and Kurt Wolff Books at Harcourt Brace. The Wolffs, who founded Pantheon Books, had retired, but William Jovanovich, the head of Harcourt, thought they shouldn't have, so he worked out a deal with them whereby they would bring in books (Günter Grass, Uwe Johnson, Simenon), have editorial and promotional control over them, and get a piece of the action on each book. A few years later this plan, with variations, was taken up by Seymour Lawrence at Dell/Delacorte, involving such authors as Kurt Vonnegut, J. P. Donleavy, and Jorge Luis Borges.

The monetary arrangements between the editorial imprints and their publishers are complicated and differ in each case.

They're also kept too hush-hush to dig out. Sufficient to say that in some cases the imprint editors invest money, and in others they invest only their time, brains, and experience. Sometimes they share office space with their publishers, sometimes not. Most work on a salary-plus-percentage-of-profits arrangement. When a best seller is hit upon, the imprintee makes a great deal of money that he wouldn't see as a salaried employee.

Being an editor in book publishing is pleasant work: it offers a reasonably good salary and all you can read. If you keep out of house politics, do the work you're asked to do, and bring in the occasional seller on your own, you can remain ulcerless for a working lifetime. But of course there are always problems. Any decent editor I've ever known finds his loyalties divided from time to time: Which is more important, an author who is a friend or the publisher who pays your salary? Publishing is a business, and the moneymen make the final decisions. And sometimes the decisions of an editorial board, to whom your projects are submitted, may seem capricious. You are not really your own man. With your own imprint, you can get around these problems. You can pick the books you want and work with your author every step of the way. You have a chance of making a big killing, and you have the ego boost of your name on the title page.

In many cases, the designer of a book gets his acknowledgment, but the editor never does. Why? There are many reasons, the principal one being that the editor is an employee, doing work he's paid to do. Then, too, editors are forever being shot out from under their authors, who are handed on down to other editors with whom they may have no sympathy. In publishing there's a continual game of musical chairs; it's a rare editor in his forties who hasn't been with at least three firms. Another complication is that there are all kinds of editors. There's the "in-house editor" (what's his opposite?), who generally works on books assigned to him, and there's the glamorous "acquisitions editor," who knows just everybody, agents and celebrities, and "brings in" books, handing over the line-by-line work to somebody else. And there are specialists in cookbooks, how-to's, music books, detective stories, paperback originals—you name it. Brilliant as many of these people are, they can get lost in the shuffle. Most established publishers have been taken over by huge corporations, and with such behemoths, the bottom line is what everyone is looking at (the old story of artist versus businessman), and personal relationships between author and publisher disappear.

Here's where the top editor or editor in chief comes in with his imprint: he can be an old-fashioned personal publisher within the structure of a Big Daddy firm; he can give authors the touch that has perhaps been lost along the way; and he'll stick with the author. And the publisher gets a respected name to align himself with—an experienced editor whose proven ability can bring in prestigious and profitable books. ●



"Heavens! It looks like an early Miró!"