

The Package Deal

PUBLISHING is not a business in which the more things change, the more they remain the same. When things change, they change—often in a big way. A current example is the package deal, whereby an author sells his rights to everything in sight (including two or three unwritten books) well in advance of publication. The “package” is usually put together by a literary agent, and it can easily add up to a million dollars for the right author.

What is apparent about this practice is not as significant as what is concealed. Behind the wrappings is a good deal of raiding on the part of publishers. The term is not in good standing in the industry and is seldom used above a whisper; nevertheless raiding goes on, and it accounts for some of the big switches that are taking place today.

Raided or not (it depends on which publisher you talk with), James Jones is virtually a textbook case. Until this year he was a Scribners exclusive. To begin with, Scribners paid Jones for a first novel which it never published; recognizing a good writer who was going to get better, they preferred (wisely, as it turned out) to introduce him with a “big book.” The gamble paid off with *From Here to Eternity*. Then followed *Some Came Running*. (Scribners did penance for its success with *Eternity* by publishing all 1,500-odd pages of the new one just as they were written.) *The Pistol* followed in 1959, and by the time Jones was able to lay the pistol down, *The Thin Red Line* was taking shape. It sold well, and suggested that there were more novels where that came from.

Then word went around that Jones was up for grabs. Last year Trident Press made him a sizable offer for his next three novels. For reasons best known to himself, Jones declined, whereupon Delacorte stepped in with a bid of \$300,000. A counteroffer from Scribners was accepted by Jones, but not long afterward Delacorte showed the color of its money again, stepping up the offer to about \$750,000, with an escalation clause that could bring the total even higher. Scribners graciously released Jones from his contract, and in so doing said good-bye to one of its top money-makers.

This is not an isolated example. In a one-shot “deal” worked out by his agent, Norman Mailer sold his new novel, *An American Dream*, to Dial for a \$125,000 guarantee. Another \$250,000 was ad-

vanced by Warner Brothers for movie rights, and, with foreign rights added, Mailer netted well over half a million dollars before the novel got its mixed reception at the hands of the critics.

Harold Robbins switched from Knopf to Trident in a deal that topped even Jones’s. “His advance from a group of publishers around the world comes to \$1 million,” the *New York Times* reported from Hollywood, where Robbins lives. Another \$1 million, plus 25 per cent of the profits, is in the bag if Joseph E. Levine picks up his option to do the movie. (He had previously produced Robbins’s *The Carpetbaggers* and *Where Love Has Gone*.) Lower on the scale, Irwin Shaw has moved from Random House to Delacorte, Gerald Green from Scribners to Trident. Ian Fleming, just before his death, switched from Viking to New American Library.

THE interesting thing about these brave new publishers is that they are all owned by reprint houses. Trident is an offshoot of Pocket Books; 60 per cent of Dial Press and all of Delacorte are owned by Dell; New American Library’s hard-cover series is subsidiary to its paperback line. These firms are in a position to control reprint rights at the outset—something the conventional trade publisher can’t do. More importantly, the full reprint royalty goes to the author instead of being split fifty-fifty, as per custom; it’s this leverage that makes possible the bonanza bid, and it helps explain why authors leave home.

A typical raiding party consists of a literary agency well armed with wampum. By assembling an attractive group of offers, the agency has the wherewithal to bug a writer’s eyes clean out of his head. The scalp follows. An advance

scout working out of Paris, where Jones lives, softened him up. It is the agent, acting as go-between, who technically protects the publisher from violating the “code” against raiding, attending to this little matter himself.

Generally speaking, the older “name” houses aren’t playing this game, and it is they who are losing talent. Some of them have set up a fire break by upping—in certain cases—their authors’ share of reprint booty. Simon & Schuster, for example, matched an offer from both Delacorte and NAL to Irving (“The Man”) Wallace on a four-book package, and were able to keep the restive Mr. Wallace from straying off the range. Random House’s Bennett Cerf beat off at least two raiding parties by giving Kathleen Winsor 75 per cent of the paperback royalties for her forthcoming novel, *Wanderers Eastward—Wanderers West*. A prophetic title, even though Miss Winsor chose not to wander.

PUBLISHERS without a close tie-in with a mass market reprinter are finding the going tough. “You either develop your own authors or buy someone else’s,” the head of one firm declared not long ago; and for many publishers buying may be cheaper than waiting. It is certainly quicker. Yet the “buy” isn’t necessarily a sure thing. The new publisher is getting a name rather than a book, and gambling too, that his man won’t run out of steam—or sex.

Is raiding unfair to the original publishers? Sometimes they don’t much care. “Harold Robbins never really belonged on our list,” a spokesman for Knopf says. And can an author really be blamed for cutting himself in on a better deal? He can go further by pointing out that publishers seldom hesitate to get rid of a writer they don’t like, or whose books no longer sell. Yet this bit of gander sauce is not without its dangers, metaphorically and otherwise. The author, in quitting a publisher, is also leaving an editor whom he has learned to work with (and who may well have steered him on the road to success) for someone he has possibly never met.

Moreover, what’s to be said for tying oneself up for three books in advance? What does it do to an author’s creative life to be writing “under the gun,” knowing that his books must sell big; knowing too, that a publisher has invested maybe half a million dollars in him, that it is strictly venture capital, and that, like an investor opening up a coal mine, he expects to get his money out?

The real implications of the package raid are not financial but artistic. The writer literally can’t afford *not* to compromise. And, unlike the coal mine, he has no depletion allowance to fall back on when the going gets rough.

—DAVID DEMPSEY.



Alone with His Wit

Max: A Biography, by David Cecil (Houghton Mifflin. 507 pp. \$6.95), and **Max Beerbohm's Letters to Reggie Turner**, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis (Lippincott. 312 pp. \$6.50), portray a man who spent most of his life self-insulated from the world, expending his talents on private jokes. Stanley Weintraub's "Reggie: Reginald Turner and His Literary Worlds" will be published later this year.

By STANLEY WEINTRAUB

MATERIAL for a biography of Max Beerbohm, although plentiful, is tantalizingly unmalleable. The problem is Max himself; for, as Lord David Cecil has written elsewhere, the biographer's art "is one of arrangement; he cannot alter the shape of his material, his task is to invent a design into which his hard little stones of fact can be fitted as they are." Max himself had made the problem clear to an earlier biographer: "I've used [my gifts] very well and discreetly, never straining them," he told Bohun Lynch; "and the result is that I've made a charming little reputation. But that reputation is a frail plant. Don't over-attend to it, gardener Lynch! Don't drench and deluge it! The contents of a small watering-can will be quite enough."

As early as the Nineties, at the doddering age of twenty-four, Max satirized his own low creative vitality by publishing what he called *The Works of Max Beerbohm*. Though he became Sir Max and lived to be eighty-four, he missed just about every exciting event of his times.

A young (and innocent) friend of Oscar Wilde, Max was in Chicago with his half-brother Herbert Beerbohm Tree's touring theatrical company when Wilde was arrested (and Reggie Turner fled across the Channel). The catastrophe dethroned literary dandyism; but Max, who was back in London and attended Wilde's three trials, remained unruffled and unaffected, and cultivated his unfashionable dandyism for the rest of his life.

Retiring at thirty-eight, he hoarded his slender financial resources as frugally as his exquisite talents. He sat out both world wars in England, a quiet

exile in his own native land; as a sedentary expatriate in Rapallo, he remained almost untouched by Italy. He married relatively late; his tepid matrimonial existence resulted in no children, few physical separations from his wife, and few visits from old friends.

Cecil's substantial "watering-can"—507 pages of handsomely packaged biography—eschews literary criticism while it chronicles Max's professional careers as artist, writer, and critic, and, through his correspondence, his friendships with or hostilities toward many of the great of his time. Often Max's pen—or Cecil's—brings such chronicles to sparkling life. But it is when Beerbohm's writings reveal the inner Max that David Cecil has the makings for an additional dimension for his subject.

Self-insulated from most human intercourse, Max could write smugly—as he did to Turner—of the Italian rape of Ethiopia: "I am sorry . . . for the Abyssinians, but, after all, they are black and barbarous. And their fate is nothing as compared with that of England, Italy, etc."

HE could play cruel practical jokes, as he did on Bernard Shaw, who long before had recommended the young man he christened for all time as "the incomparable Max" to be his replacement as the drama critic on Frank Harris's *Saturday Review*, a prestigious bread-and-butter post Max held brilliantly though unenthusiastically for a dozen years. When, in his Rapallo fastness, he discovered a book containing photographs of Shaw in his youth, "Carefully he altered each for the worse; in one amplifying the nose, in another diverting the eyes into a squint. He then had these new versions rephotographed and sent them to various friends in England accompanied by a request to post them back to Shaw along with a letter from some imaginary admirer stating that he had found the enclosed photograph of Mr. Shaw and would so much like him to sign and return it. The friends obeyed. Max was delighted to learn that as one monstrous likeness after another arrived by post, Shaw grew steadily more baffled."

Max's more private practical jokes were, perhaps, pathological for a gifted writer who had earlier found release for his personal fantasies in the nostalgic satire of *Zuleika Dobson* or the mildly venomous parody of *A Christmas Gar-*

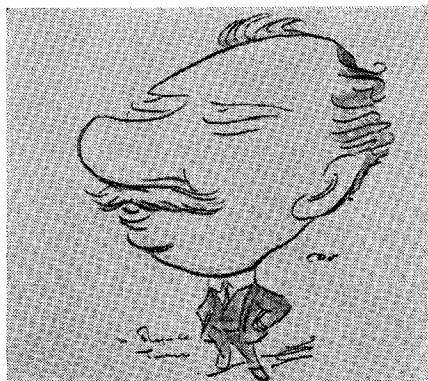


—Caricature by Max Beerbohm, in "Max: A Biography"

Max Beerbohm—unfashionably a lifelong dandy.

land, both acknowledged minor classics. He devoted months to the meticulous "improvement" (his euphemism for the mutilation and embellishment of title pages and text) of books in his library, ranging from Pater's *Renaissance* and Wilde's *Intentions* to Henderson's biography of Shaw and Queen Victoria's *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands*. "Max, then," David Cecil observes, "was not unoccupied during those years spent on his terrace or in his study. The odd thing is that he was satisfied to lavish such care and art and wit and fancy on private jokes." And the curious preoccupation is explained away, perhaps too easily, as a retention of "the childish ability to be completely satisfied by playing."

Elizabeth Jungmann, Max's faithful secretary-companion, who became his



—Caricature by Max Beerbohm, in "Max Beerbohm's Letters to Reggie Turner."

Reginald Turner—"droll, engaging, yet terribly lonely."