THE VIOLENT WORLD OF AA'S

Are Authors Obsolete?

By JOHN TEBBEL

IF THERE is anyone still naïve enough to believe that the rising tide of computer technology is a threat only to those who perform mechanical jobs, a growing dispute in book publishing shows clearly that the depersonalization of work can strike directly at the creative mind as well.

The dispute is over one of the minor irritants of the publishing business, authors' alterations, known familiarly in the trade as "AAs." Superficially, it is a simple problem. When a book manuscript is set in type, the author gets a set of galley proofs, which he is invited to read and upon which he makes corrections. The cost of making these corrections is usually a part of the author's contract, which will read something like this: "Expense of the Author's proof corrections exceeding Ten per cent (10%) of cost of composition shall be charged against the Author's earnings hereafter."

Interpreting this clause, like so many others in book contracts, is a matter between the author and his publisher. A writer who is a valuable literary "property," as the saying goes, hardly needs to worry about it. If he wants to rewrite the book, in effect, on the galleys, the publisher may not be happy about it because resetting will delay production schedules, but he will stand the expense because he knows (or has the true faith) that he will get it back in sales, and in any case he does not want to lose the author by being chintzy about AAs. Some best-selling authors have been notorious galley rewriters—the late Kenneth Roberts was one, Churchill was another—but their sales have justified their idiosyncrasy.

The urge to change and improve what one has written overcomes a good many writers when they see their words in print. For one thing, the words look different in print than they do in manuscript. A writer who is really meticulous about his work (not a large tribe, incidentally) may agonize over his galleys and rewrite much more than he intends.

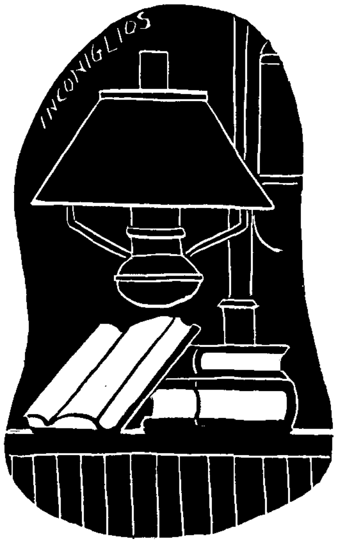
Writers who are knowledgeable about these matters also have to be careful about separating their corrections from the printer's errors, which include not only the customary crop of typographical mishaps but the kind of mistake that emanates from a dreamy or merely incompetent linotype operator who sets a word that only sounds like the one he is looking at, or who skips over whole lines, or who undertakes to improve the author's style. There is more than a little sloppy composition in the book business to contend with, and the unwary author may be charged for these errors as well as for the corrections he makes to improve what he has written. In theory at least, an author is not charged for typographical errors, only for changes he makes in the original copy after it is in type.

Enter the computer, and its fascinating entourage of automatic typesetting devices. Curiously, these are also vulnerable to human error. If the operator who punches out the tape makes a mistake, it will be faithfully set. If a photoscanning machine is used, the scanner will reproduce exactly what it sees on a sheet of manuscript. In either case, this expensive machinery is designed to cut production costs, and in order to justify itself economically, it must confine its mistakes rather closely to those made by the tape punchers.

The economic tyranny of the new technology has been set forth clearly in a recent issue of a newsletter published by Composition Information Services of Los Angeles. At a recent conference on computerized typesetting, says the newsletter, "it was generally agreed that the economics inherent in high-speed electronic and photographic composition devices make it necessary to 'get it right at the start.' One speaker deemed changes in excess of 3 per cent as enough to negate the advantages of automation."

THIS is the point at which the computers are on a collision course with the authors. The CIS newsletter quotes a study made of the production of more than 500 books by some 29 presses, which showed that authors' and editors' alteration costs ranged as high as 43 per cent of the original composition costs, and that the average cost of these changes exceeded 10 per cent. Obviously, if computerized typesetting is to take over book composition, these costs will have to be drastically minimized or even eliminated.

Some proposals have been made about how to deal with the problem, but it is significant that they have come from management and production people, not from authors or those who represent them. A few publishers are talking about tougher contracts, with stiff penalty clauses for AAs and with both authors and editors charged for the actual cost of alterations. Those who suggest charging editors for anything are scarcely realistic, unless they intend editing to cease entirely. As for authors, those of any consequence who are represented by good agents are not likely to agree to such restrictions.



ANOTHER, comparatively more reasonable approach suggests that printers educate their customers in the new technology by offering them two different price schedules, one presumably based on few if any alterations on proof by either author or editor, the other a much higher figure to be charged if the old-fashioned method is followed.

The CIS newsletter notes that at a recent conference of the American Book Publishers Council, publishers were scolded for giving authors too much latitude in making changes on proof. "Book editing and typesetting will remain in the horse-and-buggy days unless publishers alter their habits to adopt the advantages of modern technology," one speaker warned.

Yet it is plainly not the publisher's habits that the computer people want to alter, but the author's. They are against the contract clause that permits alteration, and one speaker at the ABPC conference thought it was a mistake to let the author see proof at all. It was suggested that a system of interim proofing might be devised so that the author could make corrections before any type is actually set. The objective, it was made abundantly clear, is to keep the author out of the bookmaking process once the manuscript is in type.

The responsibility, apparently, for setting the wayward author's steps in the path the technologists want him to follow is to fall on the publisher, quite naturally. He must begin taking an active role, says the newsletter, reporting the sense of the conference, "in retraining authors to erase the abuses of the past. In the years ahead, it was felt that authors will be expected to assume greater responsibility for the accuracy of the initial manuscript."

There were publishers at the meeting who protested, wondering aloud whether any of the members present and voting would actually refuse an author permission to rewrite on the galleys if a better book would result. If there were, they kept discreetly silent, but there is no question such publishers exist. In fact, after the third martini it is not impossible to hear some publishers argue that the whole copyediting-proofreading process is a waste of time and money, that the public really doesn't care about these matters of craftsmanship and never, in fact, even notices their absence.

PERCEPTIVE reviewers sometimes comment on poor design, or careless editing, or other evidences of indifference to yesterday's standards of excellence, but these publishers argue that in the present market most readers are not followers of reviews and that if they ever read them they pay no attention to them. The publishers point to the solid panning the top ten television shows regularly suffer, to the critical mayhem committed on movie box-office smashes, and, in the book businesses, to the regularity with which books deplored by critics get on the best-seller lists.

These publishers, who are sometimes referred to as "paper salesmen" by the staunch old guard, have been bolstered in their viewpoints by the infiltration of management experts into publishing during the last decade or so. These men know nothing about the book business, but they do not regard this as a handicap because they hold the doctrinaire belief that the marketing of books is no different from selling any other commodity. They regard with tolerant pity the old-timers who tell them that, far from it, they have committed themselves to the largest floating crap game in the world. Such experts look upon books as though they were bars of soap, and upon authors as an impractical, generally impecunious lot who are never going to be executives and who ought not to meddle with the much more important job of marketing. To a man, no doubt, they would agree that authors should not be permitted to interfere with the functioning of computer systems.

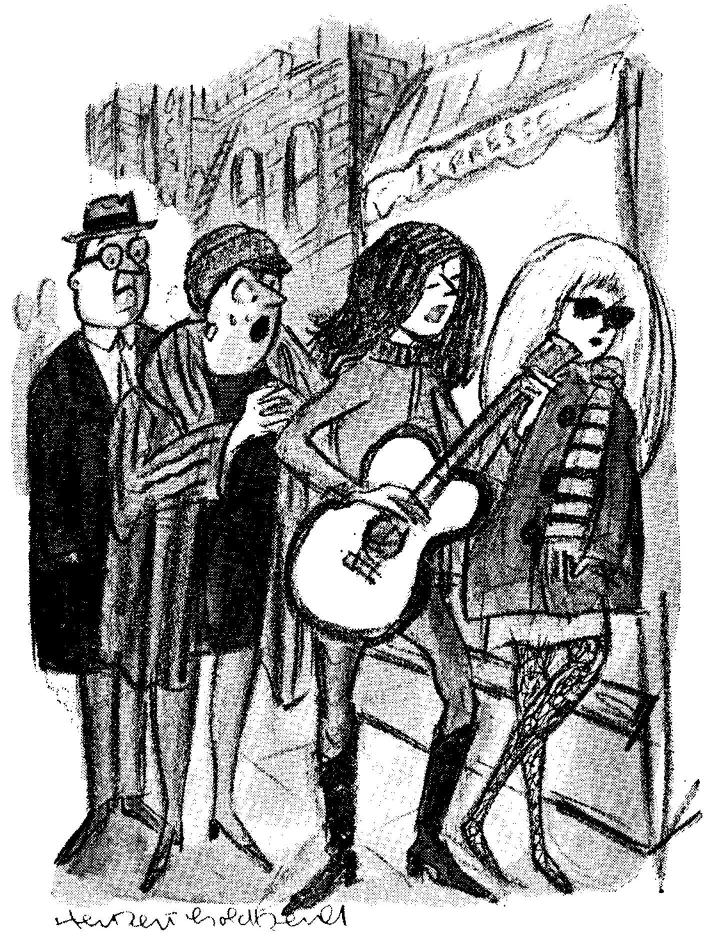
Old-line publishing houses, with their roots deeply in the past, still regard books as splendid things, to be presented to the reader with loving care and with due respect and regard for the creative mind that made them possible, but sometimes these houses seem to be fighting a rear-guard battle. Writers have long been accustomed to being treated with more or less open contempt by motion-picture people, and only slightly less so by television entrepreneurs, but they have traditionally found their real friends in publishing. The great editor, of the Max Perkins stripe, has nurtured many of them, but he, too, is a vanishing breed. The understanding publisher who respects and fights for their integrity as fiercely as he protects his own is still extant, but the economic pressures on him are great.

THE so-called idea book has been increasingly where the publishing action is; huge and often wholly irrational motion-picture and paperback money has placed a new variety of publisher and author squarely in the saddle. The kind of author who produces this kind of book is never going to argue with his publisher about his right to improve his work on the galleys, not if it means a penny less in the till.

Unfortunately, the same economic problems afflict the publisher of integrity who has authors on his list whom he respects for what they write and how they write it. His composing room costs are just as high as the "paper salesman" publisher, and if automation will keep him alive and in a competitive position, then he must automate. If that means authors must be re-educated to serve the machine rather than have the machine serve the author, then this publisher faces a cruel dilemma indeed.

Where does the author himself stand before this overwhelming march of technology—the man whose brain makes the whole publishing industry possible, and without whom it could not exist? He hopes his agent will protect him from becoming merely another gadget in a computerized world. It is inconceivable to him that, as one of the last of the individualists he is in any real danger. If he follows the rapid changes in computer research as it applies to printing, he hopes that the answer to costly AAs lies not in his "re-education," but in technology itself, which already has produced a machine capable of making corrections directly on film in the phototypesetting process. These and other advances may make the argument over AAs academic before long, and the author can go back happily to polishing his book and making it as good as he possibly can until it passes beyond recall from page proof to bound book.

In the meantime, however, he confronts the machine, as uncertain as anyone else about what is going to happen to him in the bright new communications world of the future.



"Son, dear son, come back to Scarsdale with us!"

The Wild Western Rides Again

By TOM CURRY, *author of 125 Western novels and innumerable novelettes and short stories.*

A CHESTNUT familiar to Western story fans has it that a frantic sheriff, his huge county aflame with a range war, wired for the Texas Rangers.

When he met the train, a tall officer, wearing the silver star on silver circle, dropped off.

"What!" gasped the sheriff. "Only *one* Ranger?"

"There's only one war, ain't there?"

This is the size of the problem facing the average Western hero. Alone, he must settle at least a war. While James Bond and operatives in the action field enjoy modern conveniences such as automatic weapons, planes, and electronic devices, the Westerner has just his sixgun and horse, but he makes out.

The Western, indigenous to the United States, stubbornly holds its popularity. Many readers graduate to more complicated intellectual fare, but plenty remain loyal and there's always a fresh crop maturing.

It has been exported to England and Australasia while translations sell in most foreign languages. Motion pictures and TV have made fortunes with it.

The structure is rigid. Deviations usually end up in the writer's discard pile, though there are exceptions. The Western is an individual's struggle against overwhelming odds. It appeals to the basic human instinct of an eye for an eye, a slug for a slug. Shoot the villain is a must, but not until he has almost done in the hero.

Our hero must be personally involved. He helps other sympathetic though less competent folks who have been set upon by the villain. A single viewpoint should be held, though short switches may be permitted to enhance menace. To make such a deadly duel logical, some form of wealth is the prize—animal, mineral, or power.

Action and the promise of future catastrophe hook the reader at the beginning. There are countless plot variations, but the Western pursues its narrow trail to the end.

As a byproduct, there is feminine interest, but aficionados prefer to see the hero kiss his horse rather than waste lineage seducing a girl.

The panorama of the West offers a writer a rich lode from which to draw color, characters, and ideas. Giants cross the stage, adventurers of every type. There are gunfighters, law officers, and bandits, cattle kings and cowboys, Indian chiefs, gamblers, miners, scouts, and hunters, Army personnel, ornery egotists, sheepmen and settlers, females naughty or nice.

For ages the continent was held by native tribes and wild beasts. After Columbus, the Spaniards came, hunting treasure. They imported horses, cattle, and firearms. The fur traders, French, British, and Russian, pushed in for beaver and other pelts, while holy men staked their lives to spread the word. Outside of the priests and a few true explorers, the prime motivation for a time was natural wealth.

The Dutch, the Pilgrims, the Puritans, and the Quakers came to colonize. The Revolution was a success, and the Louisiana Purchase added territory to the new nation. The Texas War for Independence was won, the Mountain Men invaded the Rockies after furs. The Santa Fe Trail was traced to deal with the Southwest, the Forty-niners beat the Overland Trail to California. Missionaries and more settlers moved into the Northwest.

—Western Collection ("The American West").

The Great Plains were a sea of blood.

Just before the Gold Rush, the Mormons made their magnificent hegira to escape persecution in the United States. They settled in what was a part of Mexico, but a year later, through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, they found themselves back under American territorial control, along with much more land.

After the Civil War, the Western story came into its own. Mass printing and distribution were applied. The West, opened to settlement and with practically free homesteads, appealed to the American spirit. The fathers of such people must have been courageous to leave civilization and seek a new deal in a savage setting.

Law was thinly spread or nonexistent in the West. A man who committed a robbery or killing would head that way. GTT, Gone to Texas, was a euphemism applied to a fugitive. Some continued a life of crime, others joined the Frontier Army to hide. Those who went straight set up as cowmen, miners, or in trade.

THE horses and cattle imported by the Conquistadores had bred and spread over the great plains without interference save from natural enemies. They ran wild and belonged to anyone with the skill to trap them and brand and tame them for use or sale.

Impoverished Confederates, to gain a little Yankee cash, rounded up longhorns and drove them to railheads in Kansas or to Gulf ports. The cowboy quickly became a fascinating figure. Runaway lads appeared on the ranches, eager to lead such an apparently glamorous life.

There were mines, the California and other gold fields, the Comstock Lode, Leadville and Tombstone. The bison herds were worth money. Every carriage had a buffalo robe, while coats were manufactured from the warm hides.

The bison was life to the Plains Indian. The Sioux and their blood brothers, the Cheyenne, the wild-riding Comanches, and others depended on the animal. The Indian ate the meat and dried it to store for lean periods. Hides served as tepee walls and clothing. Medicines came from the glands, sinews could be used as strong ropes. The savage wasted nothing, killing only what he needed.

But in a few years, white buffalo hunters exterminated the bison. This drove the Indian to reservations where he was at the mercy of venal agents. What the