Musings of a Lilliputian publisher

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I must plead my extremely limited experience of publishing and point out that it has been restricted to the history of medicine—a most unrepresentative, and certainly the least profitable, branch of medical publishing. Why should an author want to publish his own work in the first place? In my case speed of publication was the only reason. As I had only eight weeks in which to bring out a book there was obviously no alternative but to publish myself. Indeed, the publishing houses associated with our universities operate at such a leisurely tempo that any author over the age of 55 who submits a manuscript to them runs the risk that the actuarial odds are slightly in favour of a posthumous publication. Hence I duly registered Sandford Publications with the Board of Trade and edited a series of essays commemorating the bicentenary of the Radcliffe Infirmary, which were published just in time for the festivities with the title of *Oxford Medicine* (1970). The 750 copies cost £600: the trade price was £1.65, and it retailed at £2.50; and, as I was fairly confident that it would make a loss, I rashly offered to donate all the profits to charity. As only 20 copies remain unsold my accountant is now drawing up a balance sheet, which, despite heavy claims for publishing expenses and book promotion parties, still discloses a modest profit.

Profits and other rewards

My next venture, *An Illustrated History of Brain Function* (1972), written in collaboration with Dr Edwin Clarke, was more ambitious. The reason for publishing it myself (in association with the University of California Press) was to have a free hand, with my co-author, in the choice of paper, illustrations, and general design of the book. There are over 160 illustrations, including a coloured Rembrandt frontispiece. The initial 2000 copies printed on art paper cost £2100 and the book sold at £3.65 (trade) and £5.50 (retail). This book has gone into a second edition and the German and French rights have been sold, so that it now shows a good profit.

In collaboration with Professor Nigel Reeves I wrote *Friedrich Schiller: Medicine, psychology, and literature* (1978), co-published with the University of California Press. My main reason for publishing myself in this instance was purely financial: the 1500 copies cost about £5600, and it sells at £12.00 (£9.00

trade). Although this book was published only a few months ago, several favourable reviews have appeared and through the good offices of the British Council it was displayed at the recent Frankfurt Book Fair—so that already nearly half the publishing costs have been recovered.

Thus by publishing my own books I consider that I can achieve quicker production, have more control over the design and format of the book, and get a far better financial return: indeed, my total earnings on four previously published books came to nothing. Only one was published by a medical publisher: the others were produced by libraries or academic bodies, and, although three books sold out, presumably any profits went to subsidise less successful works. In my limited experience, therefore, I have no fears about publishing, but I do find considerable problems in writing books.

Problems and criticisms

What are the problems and criticisms of the role of author-publisher? It may be argued that an author cannot be objectively critical of his own work: it is rather like a pregnant midwife delivering her own baby. But in co-publishing with an American academic publisher this criticism does not apply, as the manuscript is first submitted to assessors for evaluation. The main problem of a Lilliputian publisher is one of marketing. In this connection the excellent facilities of the British Council are often overlooked. They offer their services in book promotion abroad; they circulate a monthly catalogue of British books; they display British books in their library and exhibit them at foreign book fairs. The services of a part-time salesman paid on commission are easily obtained; there is always mail-order selling through the appropriate medical journals; and the distribution of a large number of review copies offers the cheapest and best form of advertising. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that marketing does present problems for small publishers, whereas difficulties over storage and dispatch are greatly exaggerated.

What are the options open to SOMA? First you may decide to publish under your own imprint. If you do so, then a distinction should be made between publishing occasional books as a hobby, and undertaking a full-scale publishing enterprise. Alternatively, SOMA may decide to draw up its own specimen contract for authors, or through affiliation with the long-established Society of Authors, use their skill in negotiations with publishers. Finally, there is the possibility that, given a growth hormone, Sandford Publications may extend its publishing activities to other medical authors.

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WORDS CANCER is Latin for crab, and came to be applied, also as canker and chancre, to chronic ulcerating lesions generally. In the past one or two hundred years it has come to mean more specifically a malignant tumour. This may also have been the meaning in ancient times because, according to Galen, it was a tumour and called cancer because the surrounding veins resembled a crab's legs. The Greek for crab is *karkinos*, whence carcinoma. The word cancer had also an entirely unrelated meaning—namely, grating—and was commonly used in its diminutive plural, CANCELLI, meaning crossbars, grating, and lattice. It has yielded some English words that we hear from time to time in clinical and academic practice. A patient may CANCEL an appointment. Indeed, I depend on cancellations to finish the morning clinic in time for lunch. To cancel, originally, was to obliterate writing by drawing lines across lattice-wise. A single line or series of parallel lines drawn across would be, etymologically at least, only half the job. CANCELOUS BONE is constructed of thin partitions enclosing cavities containing red marrow. Where the forces acting on the bone

are predominantly unidirectional, the partitions are aligned in the direction of the applied force. The cut surface of cancellous bone then shows the partitions arranged in two series of parallel lines crossing each other as in a lattice.

A chancel was originally a lattice-work screen in a basilica separating judges and council from the audience. In a church it is no longer the screen but the eastern end beyond the screen reserved for clergy and choir. A CHANCELLOR was originally a court usher whose station was at the grating (chancel) that separated judge from public. His promotion over the centuries has been meteoric. He left the grating and became an official secretary, then the secretary of a nobleman. Eventually enobled himself, as Lord Chancellor he has become the highest officer of the Crown, and has some quite important duties, such as Keeper of HM Conscience. By extension therefrom, the titular head of a university is its chancellor. The vice-chancellor does most of the work, and when times are difficult the grating occurs in his teeth.