



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
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AAUP ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 1973

Address by Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., Director, Princeton University Press
and President (1972-1973) of
The Association of American University Presses

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You have heard the "confessions" of press directors who have survived the current crisis in university publishing--and you yourselves have survived our discussions of budgets and statistics and committee reports. In these years of troubles we are assailed by numbers usually printed in red ink, and although I have occasionally been accused of using a square-root in order to calculate optimum printing quantities, I promise not to burden you with more numbers tonight.

The problem of optimum printing quantities and of overstock goes back a long way, and before I get to my main theme I think I may bring comfort by telling you about two scholarly printer-publishers of long ago. In 1472, less than twenty years after Gutenberg, the two German printers Sweynheim and Pannartz, who had moved to Rome, sent the following petition to the Pope:

"We were the first of the Germans who, with vast labor and cost, introduced this art into your Holiness's territories; and by our example encouraged other printers to do the same. If you read the catalogue of the works printed by us, you will wonder how and where we could procure a sufficient quantity of paper, or even rags, for such a number of volumes. The total of these books amounts to 12,475--a prodigious heap--and unbearable to us, your Holiness's printers, by reason of those unsold. We are no longer able to bear the great expense of house-keeping, for want of buyers, of which there cannot be more flagrant proof than that our house, though otherwise opacious enough, is full of quire-books, but void of every necessary of life."

I quote from Mumby's history of publishing and bookselling. Mumby goes on to tell us that "The immediate result of this petition is unknown to us, but the fact that Pannartz abandoned printing for the art of engraving in the following year suggests that the Pope's assistance, if forthcoming at all, was not sufficient for the purpose. Sweynheim, who died some three years later, seems to have continued to print to the end, but not, apparently, with any enthusiasm."

Judging from the sale catalogues I have been receiving from university presses lately, many of us have the same problem. But now we apply to

foundations, not to the Pope, for help. I hope we will be more successful than Sweynheim and Pannartz, who perhaps needed an AAUP to act as intermediary.

Inventory control and good management generally are important, but there is a lot more to university publishing. That is my main theme. I would like to speak rather personally about what is most important about our profession, and that is the character of the individuals in it. What we profess can be expressed in a few true but too often uninspiring platitudes: the distribution of knowledge, the spread of learning. The significance of our profession, in all its wonderful variety, had been made concrete in my experience by a large number of individuals, and I want to pay tribute to a few of them in a way that will, I hope, be at least suggestive of what they have meant to me and to others. The people I want to speak of are all scholars and publishers, usually both, and by their personalities and their lives they have enriched our calling.

I said that a large number of individuals have played a part in my own education in publishing--including many of my colleagues at this meeting, and especially my colleagues from Princeton. But I will speak of only a few people, none of whom is still active in university publishing, and some of whom have gone from us. Moreover I shall not be able to give anything like a rounded picture of these complex individuals; rather I shall try to isolate in each instance one or two exemplary personal qualities, qualities which have helped to frame the ideals of our profession.

First let me speak of Datus Smith, who was my first boss when I went to Princeton in 1946. Datus's outstanding characteristic, I think, was and still is a contagious enthusiasm for learning and for books. I had met him during the war and we had talked about postwar possibilities; he made university publishing sound like a marvellously exciting challenge (which it is) and like a free and painless road to a universal education (which it may be, though certainly not painless). So when, shortly after V-J Day, a V-mail letter offering a job with Datus reached me in the South Pacific, I accepted by return V-mail.

Working for Datus was indeed an educational experience, and fun too. Every day was an adventure, with Datus's inexhaustible energy permeating everything. He had gathered around him an extraordinary group of people--P.J. Conkwright, Norvell Samuels, Miriam Brokaw, Harold Munger, Harriet Anderson, Margot Cutter--names known to many of you here. Datus was definitely the center and the guiding light. He had faith and vision. At about that time, when university publishing had not yet established itself as it has today, he wrote in the Atlantic Monthly: "The business of publishing is communication, and the special business of university presses is to communicate the results of scholarship. A case might be made that, because of the constantly expanding circles of influence from a scholar's work, this is fundamentally the most important kind of communication in the world." He believed that, and he taught us to believe it.

Knowing Datus's dedication, when the news finally came that he would leave the Press, we found it hard to believe. Nevertheless it was very much in

character for him to become the first president of Franklin Publications, reaching out across the war-scarred world with books. It made sense to think about Datus sitting in a tent with a group of Arabs, communicating his un-failing enthusiasm for books and knowledge.

I have already mentioned P.J. Conkwright and Norvell Samuels. Earlier in this meeting you heard P.J. talk about the design of scholarly books. In 1946, when I arrived at Princeton, he was already a star, though he had not lost and never did lose that shy human warmth, like a spring breeze from the Oklahoma plains. Although he was uncompromising in his standards for design and printing, he had a perspective that pervaded his work and that made a deep impression on me. One day when I was discussing some typographic problem with him, he remarked: "Printing is a servant art." A profound statement, full of wise humility. It is clear that the great abiding quality of all P.J.'s book designs is that they do not exist for their own sake; they enhance and help to convey the content of the book.

"Printing is a servant art," said P.J.; but it was Norvell Samuels who helped me to realize fully that publishing is also a servant art. This is not a novel idea; certainly Datus saw publishing as a service to scholarship. But for Norvell it was something different because Norvell was and is primarily a businessman. He believed in the intellectual and human value of what we were doing, but his job was to sell the books and pay the bills. In his concern for finance, he never forgot the real purpose. This enabled him to carry out business responsibilities with a special perspective. He was, I believe, the first person to leave university publishing to become the head of a major commercial publishing house, where this same wise judgment led to great successes. Norvell's successes surely grew from his rare combination of business judgment with a broader perspective of publishing, a perspective that was to a large extent his own individual creation.

I suppose I ought to apologize for talking about Princetonians, but these are the people who have exemplified the qualities of university publishing for me. Each of you, I am sure, has counterparts in your own experience. So I will not apologize, and indeed I will call forth still another example from Princeton, this time a faculty member who served on our editorial board. Probably each of you can think of your own parallel example.

The man I refer to is the late Professor Jacob Viner, the renowned economist, who was a member of our Editorial Board from 1950 to 1953 and later served as a Press Trustee from 1959 to 1961. During the early 'fifties I attended many Editorial Board meetings as a junior editor. They were very serious underneath an interplay of scholarly wit and good fellowship but somehow I was not quite prepared for what happened in 1953 when, simultaneously, I became Editor of the Press and Professor Viner became Chairman of the Editorial Board. Looking back, I can see that it must have been his thought that the young editor needed further training in the principles of scholarship, and as chairman he was going to see to it that nothing unscholarly got by. At that first meeting ten projects were recommended for approval; four were approved, and six were sent back for further study. I felt a bit like the student who wrote the Princeton Faculty Song about a dreaded dean:

He raised the standards up so high
They graduated just one guy.

So I became a kind of graduate student under Jack Viner, being trained not in the field of economics but in general matters of scholarship and publication. What questions should one ask of a scholarly book? What kinds of advice should be sought, and under what circumstances? How should one balance various kinds of evidence against one's own inexpert but nevertheless necessary judgment? What is the meaning of the imprint of the university press carrying the name of our university?

Of course I should have realized what would happen when Professor Viner became chairman if only I had taken more seriously his delightful and witty essay with the title, "A Modest Proposal for some Stress on Scholarship in Graduate Training." It is tempting to quote at length. Let me give you some samples:

"My proposal is sincere and modest," he wrote. "I give also only an old-fashioned and modest meaning to the term 'scholarship.' I mean by it nothing more than the pursuit of broad and exact knowledge of the history of the working of the human mind as revealed in written records. I exclude from it, as belonging to a higher order of human endeavor, the creative arts and scientific discovery."

Was his tongue in his cheek, or not? I can still see his eyes sparkling. And we go on to hear that:

"The University of Avignon, in 1650, found itself faced by a candidate for the doctorate who had capacity, but who had applied himself less closely to the pursuit of knowledge than to less exacting and more exciting extra-curricular activities. After some hesitation, it conferred the doctoral degree upon him with the notation sub spe futuri studii, which I am told can be translated as 'in the hope of future study.' May I suggest that our doctoral degrees should be granted, and accepted, in this spirit even when there is not occasion to spell it out in the letter of the parchment?"

So much for his attitude toward doctoral dissertations. In the same "Modest Proposal," turning to authorship and publication, he noted:

"The modern scholar spends much more time in correcting the books of non-scholars, which unfortunately took much less than half of a lifetime to write, than in writing his own books. For the writing of books there is little time left to scholars from their inescapable tasks. It is still true that of the writing of books there is no end, but it is also true that most scholarly manuscripts have no ending. If the scholar does complete his opus majus, there is often too little conversion of even university presses to the virtues of deficit financing to make its publication possible. If, nevertheless, the scholar does manage to complete his manuscript and to find an unworldly publisher, he still reaps little reward of any sort, except to his vanity if the reviewers are kind."

He tells how, after highly specialized training, graduates "find their way back to the colleges to transmit to the next generation the graduate school version of a liberal education, or how to see the world through the eye of a needle....Men are not narrow in their intellectual interests by nature; it takes special and rigorous training to accomplish that end."

It takes many kinds of qualities to make a university publisher, or a university press--editors, scholars, designers, businessmen, printers, and so forth. Directors of presses attempt to combine these qualities in varying degrees. Models are helpful--I have tried to characterize some who have been most helpful to me, and I hope you will excuse my drawing so heavily on my own experience.

But my experience has been in the AAUP too, going back to the first meeting I attended, in 1947. That was the first time that the broader world of university publishing was opened up to me. I remember Savoie Lottinville, Rollin Hemens, Don Bean, Sam Farquahar, Charlie Proffit, Marcus Wilkerson, Bill Couch, and other legendary characters. Once more, my point is that the character of publishing is determined by individuals, though the principles of publishing are general.

So, before closing I want to speak especially about one individual who contributed beyond measure to our profession. I mean Tom Wilson. My earliest recollection of him goes back to the California meeting in 1948. He still had a bit of the air of an ex-commander on an aircraft carrier, tall and smiling and easy-going as long as things were going well, but with a reserve of strength and power. He had recently taken command at Harvard University Press, which had almost been abolished by President Conant but had been pulled through by Warren Smith and a few others. Tom, like Datus, had a vision of what a university press could be; he made us all feel it, and he made it come true at Harvard. Loyal as he was to Harvard--and he always fought for Harvard in a pinch--Tom was also a superb statesman of university publishing generally, expending time and effort to advance the cause of all presses. Most of us here tonight can picture him as he rose in one or another of our meetings to speak, always cogently and wisely and with generosity. He was, I believe, the most respected member of our profession during the past quarter-century. Surely, if extraordinary individuals have shaped our calling, he was one of them.

I am tempted to go on, but I have sworn not to speak of our present members. I hope I have made the point that, in spite of our present preoccupation with finances, it is individuals that make the difference--individual authors, individual publishers, individual books.

Let us not, like those early German printers, drown ourselves in bad management. Let us manage carefully and well, at the same time taking inspiration for our real purposes from the love of learning of Datus Smith, the proud humility of P.J. Conkwright, the wise perspective of Norvell Samuels, the rigorous scholarship of Jacob Viner, and the generous vision of Tom Wilson.

This Association provides a forum in which such individuals can set standards and can be our teachers. There are still among us men and women worthy of emulation. Earlier in our program we had a "confessional." I have spoken of university publishing as a "calling" and as a "profession" in which we "profess" something. Religious connotations abound. I hope that the experience of this meeting will inspire in many of you, as it has in me, a renewal of faith. We reinforce each other in our belief.