

NEWSLETTER

May, 1956

Volume 1, Number 2

ANNOUNCING JUNE MEETING

The next YPG meeting will be held June 5th, at 8 P.M. at Freedom House, 20 West 40th Street. This will be the final spring meeting and is for members only. The Constitution will be voted upon and there will be a discussion of plans for next year. If you are interested in participating in the growing activities of the Group and want it to become a good representative organization, you are urged to attend this meeting.

SELECT MATTER

Alice Jackson, of Ingersoll and Brennan, is going to Europe this fall. While in London, Alice will be on a special mission for the YPG. Her task will be to establish relations with our sister organization in England, The Society of Young Publishers.

The Gale Research Company has written to us, requesting information about the YPG. We have sent forth the necessary information which is soon to appear in the 1956 Encyclopedia of American Associations. The Young Publishers' Group will also be listed in the 1956 Literary Marketplace.

Anyone looking for a change of job? Janet Salter has been informed of a production-assistant's job which is open. Please contact her at Random House for further information.

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ELEANOR KASK TELLS GROUP ABOUT "ANDERSONVILLE"

The dramatic story of what happens behind the scenes before the curtain is raised on a best seller was told by Eleanor Kask (Mrs. Donald Friede), Publicity Director of The World Publishing Company, who spoke on "ANDERSONVILLE -- The Making of a Best Seller" at the May 1st meeting of the YPG at Freedom House. Mr. Donald Friede, Senior Editor at World, who was also scheduled to appear on the program, was unfortunately in the hospital.

The idea for a nonfiction Civil War book was first suggested to MacKinlay Kantor by Donald Friede, who had the foresight to anticipate the growing public interest in the Civil War and the astuteness to choose an author whose own interest in the subject dated back to his early childhood. Mr. Kantor turned down the non-fiction suggestion but offered to write the novel ANDERSONVILLE instead.

The unusual and highly successful promotion ideas used by Miss Kask to pave the way for the book before publication and to advance its sales afterwards included a newsletter, "The World of Books and Vice Versa," sent to book reviewers before the book appeared; original illustrations by artist Ben Stahl depicting the characters in the book, which were used for posters and ads; a limited, autographed edition of 750 copies which went to the booksellers; and a \$5000 ad, the entire back page of the New York Times, two weeks after publication of the book.

Published in the fall of 1955, ANDERSONVILLE sold 120,000 copies in

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Andersonville (continued)

1955. It is still selling at the rate of 2,000 copies per week (and, of course, has just won the Pulitzer Prize). Miss Kask also related the exciting details of how motion picture rights were sold to Columbia Pictures for \$250,000, a sum which was then the highest ever paid for a novel.

Reported by Evelyn Kosoff

OUTLOOK

When they teach American literature in the colleges they ought to teach something about the commercial aspects of that subject. The tendency is to consider literature and art as if existing in some kind of economic vacuum. Yet all of us in publishing who enjoyed studying art for art's sake in college have more or less been brought down to earth by the monetary facts of life. In publishing we learn that a good book is known as a "property," and that unfortunately it must stand the test of the sales conference like so many other commodities offered the buying public. We learn that an author is a gentleman (esquire!) who earns or is trying to earn his living by selling what he writes. And we learn that the publisher is primarily an investor. Yet, judging from the manuscripts and submission letters publishers get daily, it seems that not many people are aware of this close relationship that art has with business in our society. In fact, there is still no better way that society can show its estimation of a work of art than by how much money it is willing to pay for it.

At this last meeting of the YPG, Eleanor Kask, the woman behind the superb promotion campaign for "ANDERSONVILLE," gave a candid, blow-by-blow description of that book's fabulous commercial history; as a story it probably deserves a small book of its own. Yet how many students of literature will ever know that story? Of course, many will feel that the whole business

Outlook (continued)

of money, advertising and sales are just so many necessary evils and quite irrelevant to the literary merits of the book. Yet, I doubt that any author ever considered his royalty check a necessary evil, and my guess is that some authors would have been receiving them sooner in life had they been taught something about "literary economics" in their school days.

Sam Blumenfeld
Newsletter Editor

Select Matter (continued)

We were glad to see Roger Smith, PW reporter, and his wife in the front row at our April meeting.

B.W. Heubsch, who spoke at our April meeting, has written to us. We were so delighted with his letter that we thought the entire Group would want to read it. It is, therefore, reprinted forthwith:

May 1, 1956

Dear Miss Kossoff,

I enjoyed my evening with the Young Publishers' Group ever so much. I went away with the feeling that the future of American publishing was in good hands.

Thanks for Volume 1, Number 1 of the Newsletter with the too flattering account of my talk.

B.W. Huebsch

Select Matter Editor - Janet
Salter

NEWSLETTER

August, 1956

Volume 1, Number 3

AUGUST COCKTAIL PARTY PLANNED

Dorothy Parker, newly elected Chairman of the Social Committee, has announced that the YPG will give a summer cocktail party on Wednesday, August 8, from 6 to 8 P.M. at 40 East 10th St., Apt. 9E (c/o Salter). All members and their guests are invited. There will be a door charge of \$1.00 for members and \$1.50 for non-members to cover the expenses of the party.

UHLAN TO SPEAK AT SEPTEMBER MEETING

Sheldon Meyer, Chairman of the YPG, announced that Mr. Edward Uhlán of Exposition Press and the author of "THE ROGUE OF PUBLISHERS' ROW" will speak at the Group's first fall meeting, which will be held at Freedom House, 20 West 40th Street, at 8 P.M. on September 5.

JOBS

Alice Jackson informs us that there is an opening for a temporary job as general assistant to a literary agent at Ingersoll and Brennan, 19 W. 55th Street. The work consists of typing correspondence and reading manuscripts, has a 6-hour day, pays about \$50 a week and begins on August 15. Applicants should apply directly to Ingersoll and Brennan.

POETS' CORNER: On Moderation

Do not try to be a hero
Or a candidate for zero
If your soul is really moderate in style.
For the average are more happy
When life is not too snappy
Or preoccupied with castles on the Nile.

—S.B.

YPG ADOPTS CONSTITUTION AND GIVES VOTE OF CONFIDENCE TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

At an exciting business meeting of the Young Publishers' Group, held on June 4th at Freedom House, the membership, with a quorum of nineteen members present, voted on and adopted the Constitution proposed by the Executive Committee and amended from the floor by the members present after considerable discussion. (A copy of the adopted Constitution is attached.)

The present Executive Committee, with Chairman Sheldon Meyer (Grosset and Dunlap) and Vice Chairman Janet Salter (Random) were given a vote of confidence to continue the planning and executing of the Group's activities until next year when a formal election can be held according to the procedure defined in the Constitution. Dorothy Parker (Popular Library) was elected Chairman of the Social Committee, an office which makes her a member of the Executive Committee as well.

The Treasurer, David Rogers (Knopf) gave a detailed report of the accounts and estimated the expenses for the coming year. Sam Blumenfeld (Viking), Chairman of the Publicity Committee and Kay Purcell (McGraw-Hill), Chairman of the Membership Committee, asked for volunteers interested in serving on their committees. The Secretary, Evelyn Kossoff (Macmillan) reported that the new mailing address for the YPG is:

c/o R.R. Bowker Company
62 West 45th Street
New York 36, N.Y.

By unanimous vote it was agreed that meetings, beginning in September, would be held on the first Wednesday of each month at Freedom House.

OUTLOOK

One of the most discouraging aspects of publishing today is the lack of time that firms have to give young unpublished writers of talent the advice and guidance they need in order to reach the goal of publication. Few editors or readers have the time or inclination to write much more than the usual vapid rejection note which is both businesslike and curt and often tends to leave the author with a profound feeling of failure. Many promising talents lacking the slightest encouragement from the country's publishers eventually give up trying. The publishers' point of view is understandable to a point. His readers are forever swamped by an endless stream of incoming manuscripts which must be dealt with as quickly as possible. And so it is not unusual for promising manuscripts, especially unsolicited ones, to be no more than glanced at for commercial evaluation before rejection.

Of course, from an economic point of view, a manuscript is nothing more than a business proposition, the author merely saying in a more subtle way, "You invest in the publication of my manuscript, advertise it, sell it and we can split the profits between us." But even so, a manuscript is not like any other business proposition. It is a work of art, and if good or promising deserves a special consideration.

Other businesses and industries, out of community responsibility, or shrewd public relations, or a desire to spend highly taxable money, offer free services to the public. Thus a gas firm will hand out free road maps and touring services, and insurance companies will give away booklets on first aid, child care, and other popular subjects. Publishing firms, with similar motives, can do somewhat the same by offering talented unpublished writers the kind of generous critical advice so badly needed when a first manuscript is submitted. To a young writer a publishing house is not merely a business, but an institution at the center of the nation's literary culture, forever linked in his mind with all the great writers of the past and the important literary voices of the contemporary world. From these institutions he has the right to expect something more than a tactful businesslike note—cold in its formality and evasive in its wording.

Outlook (Continued)

Certainly publishers would like to gain the good will of the many young promising writers who send them manuscripts year after year. And certainly the health of American writing would improve if authors knew that their manuscripts were being given some serious critical thought by an editor who understood something of the writer's isolated struggle with his art, ambition, and ability.

Sam Blumenfeld
Newsletter Editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

I was disturbed to read your editorial in the last Newsletter recommending the teaching of "literary economics" to prospective authors since I was under the impression that this point of view was by now an anachronism.

The last generation of young writers took so seriously the admonitions of the publishers' salesmen about the necessity for catering to the market and the difficulties of earning a living by writing that most of them with any brains and integrity went into fields other than literature. Those who decided to stay and brave the obstacles did such a thorough job of conforming to all the rules and avoiding all the taboos that they have slowly but surely been putting themselves out of business. By this time one would think that even the publishers would have come around to the point of view that the business of literature is, after all, originality not conformity.

"Literary economics" is not a subject for authors to be worrying about, but it is a legitimate concern for editors and publishers. Instead of passing the buck to prospective authors, I think the prospective editors ought to do some research on the current literary market in order to bring publishing policies up to date.

B.C., Westport, Conn.