

Payments for Paperback Rights Soar

By HENRY RAYMONT

A spate of enormous payments to authors for paperback and movie rights is changing the profile of the book business as well as testifying to its financial health.

Never before have so many six-figure advances been given against future royalties as in the last few months. And paperback publishers, one considered junior partners on the book scene, are surpassing the film industry as the goose that lays the golden egg.

For example, Fawcett, the mass paperback house, recently paid \$1-million for James Michener's novel, "The Drifters," and reprint rights to eight previous books. Bantam Books has paid \$500,000 in advances for Michael Crichton's "The Terminal Man," and Warner Brothers has paid an equal amount for the movie rights. The Dell Publishing Company has joined with Harper & Row to offer Gerold Frank \$500,000 for a biography of Judy Garland he does not expect to finish before 1975.

(An advance is paid against a book's future earnings. If they exceed the advance, the author receives more money.)

At least a dozen titles, ranging from first novels by Alan Lelchuk, James Mills and Marc Norman to a much-heralded biography of Queen Victoria by Cecil Woodham-Smith, have been sold to paperback or movie companies in the last few weeks for figures in excess of \$250,000.

What enables paperback publishers to spend such sums of money? The answer is lower production costs and advanced techniques of mass market distribution and promotion that lead to a higher volume of sales than much of hardcover publishing has.

Inflationary Spiral

"Advances are caught in an inflationary spiral just as prices of books," said Marc Jaffe, vice president of Bantam, who noted that paperbacks that sold two years ago for 95 cents now average between \$1.25 and \$1.65.

The upward trend is likely to continue as long as "The Big Five"—Bantam, Dell, Fawcett, New American Li-

brary and Pocket Books—as well as a host of smaller houses compete for potential best sellers to add to their burgeoning lists.

Thus, Avon a month ago paid \$400,000 for reprint rights to "Gone With the Wind." Popular Library bought Jane McIlvaine McClary's "A Portion for Foxes" for \$236,000, and Curtis, a little-known imprint, paid \$80,000 for Marjane Meaker's novel "Shockproof Sydney Skate."

The big advances, which Ralph Daigh, vice president of Fawcett, calls "a sign of exuberant health," indicate the increasing impact of paperbacks on the book business.

For one thing, it is causing some leading hardcover publishers to consider moving into the mass paperback field. For another, it is threatening the time-honored practice whereby authors share half (or, in the case of big-name authors, somewhat less) of the paperback royalties with their original hardcover publisher.

"If this goes on—and, alas, it will—I can see a situation three to five years from now when we're all going to be in the paperback business," a prominent hardcover publisher said wistfully.

In one indication of the new developments, Philip Roth, whose string of best sellers was lengthened this season by "Our Gang," his

political satire on the Nixon Administration, has left Random House because he no longer believes in sharing the paperback income with the publisher.

Mr. Roth's next two books, "The Breast," a humorous novella about a teacher who turns into a breast, and "The Great American Novel," a 700-page book he is still working on, will be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston. Paperback rights will be negotiated independently by Mr. Roth's lawyer, Arthur Klein.

According to trade reports, Aaron Asher, Holt's vice-president, paid about \$300,000 for the two books, retaining book club rights.

William Peter Blatty, au-

thor of the phenomenally successful novel "The Exorcist," is reported to have received a \$1-million advance from New American Library and W. W. Norton for a multiple-book contract under which he will also be allowed to keep full paperback royalties.

Since "The Exorcist" was published by Harper & Row just over a year ago, it has been on the best-seller list. A Bantam paperback edition of 1.2 million copies was issued last week and another edition of five million has just been ordered.

Actually, only some months ago Paul Gitlin, the literary lawyer, negotiated an even bigger contract, reported to total \$2.5-million for four



Alan Lechuk



Jill Kromontz
Philip Roth



The New York Times
James Michener



Dick Friska
William Peter Blatty



Philippe Halsman
Gerold Frank



Camera Press
Michael Crichton

books, for Irving Wallace, whose novel "The Word" is a leading best seller. Under the contract, Mr. Wallace will receive full paperback royalties from Bantam Books, which has licensed the hardcover rights to Simon & Schuster's Trident Books.

These contracts have caused widespread unhappiness at many hardcover houses where publishers and editors (who refuse to be quoted for fear of offending paperback publishers) foresee a stampede of huge financial demands from authors.

Ross Claiborne, editorial director and vice president of Dell, said that in paperback publishing, just as in the hardback houses, "enormous successes support bad mistakes."

"It isn't all just honey from our side," he said, conceding that every major paperback publisher had lost many gambles on books he was less eager to advertise than his hits.

Dell participated with Alfred A. Knopf in one of the biggest recent literary auctions when the two companies bid at least \$350,000 for a two-volume Victoria biography by Mrs. Woodham-Smith. Dell also paid \$295,000 for David Niven's popular "The Moon's a Balloon," published by Putnam's.

Advance Criticism

Bantam's unusually high bid for a first novel by Mr. Lechuk — "American Mischief" to be published in January by Farrar, Straus & Giroux—is said to have been influenced by highly favorable advance criticism from Mr. Roth and Philip Rahv. Mr. Lechuk, a 33-year-old professor of English, has written a work about sex and politics on the campus.

James Mills is the author of "Report to the Commissioner," a novel about a police narcotics squad just published by Farrar, Straus and bought for \$300,000 by Columbia Pictures. Pocket Books acquired the paperback rights for a \$250,000 advance.

Marc Norman, a 29-year-old University of California graduate, has scored a double-hitter with his first novel, "Bike Riding in Los Angeles," due to be published by E. P. Dutton in September, and "Oklahoma Crude," a film script bought by Columbia for \$300,000.

Dutton is holding back on paperback rights on the assumption that the film's success (George C. Scott and Faye Dunaway are the stars) will enhance interest in the novel.