

Advances to authors changing book business

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NEW YORK — A spate of fabulous advances 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 as in the last few months. And paperback publishers, once considered junior partners on the book scene, are quietly 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 and Warner Brothers have paid \$500,000 each for paperback and movie rights, respectively, for Michael Crichton's *The Terminal Man*.

And the Dell Publishing Company has joined with Harper and Row to offer Gerold Frank \$500,000 for a biography of Judy Garland he does not expect to finish before 1975.

At least a dozen titles, ranging from first novels by Alan Leichuk, 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.

"Advances are caught in an inflationary spiral just as

prices of books," said Marc Jaffe, vice-president of Bantam, noting that paperbacks that two years ago sold 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 Library 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 McLary's *A Portion* for Foxes for \$236,000, and Curtis, a little known imprint, paid \$80,000 for Marijane 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 lucrative paperback income.

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 and Winston. Paperback rights will be negotiated independently.

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