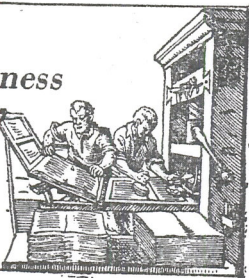


Book Business



By JOYCE ILLIG

The Bard of Avon

"I LOVE this place. I love it to desperation," Peter Mayer said in an interview confirming the report that he was planning to leave "this place"—Avon Books, where he has been editor-in-chief and publisher for 10 years. In one of the paperback industry's major recent coups, Richard Snyder, president of Simon & Schuster, has hired the 40-year-old Mayer away from Avon, where he had established a brilliant reputation and transformed a small, Hearst-owned paperback operation into a large and very prestigious publishing house that emphasized paperback originals and issued over 400 books per year. Mayer will be the president and publisher of Pocket Books, the mass paperback subsidiary of S&S and the oldest of the paperback houses.

Rumors among book people speak of a five-year contract and a total figure around \$1 million, but Mayer denied the figure and said that money was "certainly not the significant factor in any way." He said that he made his decision "essentially to get closer to the larger book publishing community."

Mayer called his new job a larger challenge and said that he wanted to bring Pocket Books "back to number one, back to excellence."

In seeking a new publisher for Pocket Books, Snyder said he was

looking for youth, experience and a proven record of success, and "the one person who fit that bill perfectly was Peter Mayer." Snyder's keen eye for top-notch publishing people has made S&S especially lively and successful in recent years. And although Snyder has received respect from the industry for this, his trail of talent raids has angered some publishers and left a few editors wounded. Henry Robbins is notable among the procession of those who have come and gone at S&S during Snyder's administration. The news of Mayer's move has caused a certain sense of wonderment among publishing insiders. "What's going to happen when Snyder's ego meets Mayer's ego head-on one day, and Michael Korda walks in and really shows them what power is about?" mused one mischievous hardcover publisher. (Korda, the editor-in-chief at S&S, is the author of *Power: How to Get It, How to Use It*. He and Snyder have worked well as a team for years.)

Mayer is expected to take a month's vacation before moving into his Pocket Books position in June. He will be succeeded at Avon by Walter Meade, managing editor of Cosmopolitan (another Hearst possession).

At Avon, Mayer reflected, "one of the things I did was really put together a very wonderful group of people. . . . I'd love to be known for having hired the smartest people in New York." He said he was going to try to put together a similar team at Pocket Books.

Avon Calling

WHILE SIMON & SCHUSTER was acquiring Peter Mayer from Avon, Avon was getting ready to acquire paperback rights to *The Final Days*, the new Woodward and Bernstein book on the end of the Nixon administration, from Simon & Schuster. The timing was close enough to raise

the question whether Mayer was involved in the transaction between his current and future employers.

"All I did was give them my opinion on what they should do," says Mayer, but they made the decision without me." Joni Evans, subsidiary rights director at S&S, said that Mayer was not involved, although he had recommended "Avon go very, very high on the book."

They did—up to \$1,550,000, breaking the previous nonfiction record of \$1.5 million held by *The Joy of Cooking*. The paperback edition may be published on May 3, 1977, one year from the official hardcover publication date (which is purely academic at this point; there are already 427,000 copies in print, half of them priced at \$1 more than the original \$10.95 list price). Or, if the book drops from the New York Times best-seller list (where it will reach first place next May 2), the paperback edition can be issued one week after it stops being a hardcover best seller.

The only real surprise of the auction was that Berkley (a relatively small paperback house, owned by Putnam's, which is owned by MCA) stayed in the bidding up to \$1,125,000 during the second round. Like most paperback rights auctions, it was held by telephone. The first round of bids was blind, with a floor of \$300,000 set by a bid from Warner Paperback Library about a year and a half ago. This gave Warner a 10 per cent topping privilege up to \$500,000 and a five per cent topping privilege thereafter.

Warner had the weekend to decide whether or not to top Avon's final bid with \$1,627,500. When *All the President's Men* was sold to Warner for \$1 million, the payments were spread over a five-year period. This time, it's less than three years, and Avon guaranteed a \$200,000 promotional and publicity budget above the advance. □