

Courtesy Outline

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16028001

26 February 2019

The Impact of Editors on the Publication of Works of Fiction: A Historical Study

Introduction

While it is the author's name that appears on the front cover and they who receive the credit, praise and criticism for their books, they do not work alone. Since publishing developed into an industry during the nineteenth century (Foster 116), editors have played an important role (Foster 124) as "a shadowy figure behind the scenes" (Foster, cited Jefferson 2), helping to shape manuscripts into the beloved books they become.

Most editors define their role as assisting the writer to produce the very best work possible in order to communicate their intent, and establish and make clear their own voice and craft (Barack et al. 58; Gross iv; Howard 72; Sharpe and Ouellet viii; Zaid 132). "Good editors may be likened to those crystal-clear glasses which form a vital part of a pair of binoculars. They are not there to alter the view or change the scenes, but to make it clearer and closer" (Ryan, cited Mackenzie 1). The role is largely an invisible one to those outside the industry, so it is unsurprising that few have questioned the impact editors have on works of fiction.

Background and Literature Review

Significance

Prior to publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, author Joanne Rowling's publisher, Bloomsbury, advised the use of a pen name to appeal to a broader audience, the argument being that boys were less likely to read a book written by a female (Nell 27), thus 'J.K. Rowling' was adopted. The *Harry Potter* series was also translated from British English to American English in preparation for release in the USA, a decision made by an editor at Scholastic, the American publisher of the series (Nell 28). The series experienced unprecedented success (Grodzinska), "Harry Potter author has died the new novel – for adults", *Franklin*), possibly due in part to these publishing and editorial decisions.

Examples such as this are the catalyst for this research. How much influence do editors and publishers have on the quality and subsequent financial or scholarly success of a fictional work? How much of an influence were these groups and individuals in the past?

Literature Review

There are few academic studies that explore the impact of the editor on the publication of works of fiction. Various texts discuss the role of the editor at present, but these are usually 'how-to' guides written by editors with the intent of educating others in the field (Commonwealth of Australia, 1 Mackenzie; Sharpe and Ouellet). Sources that focus on the development of the role over time are also rare. The role is relatively easy to define: an editor assists in creating a publishable work with a heightened chance of success by guiding the author in establishing and conveying their own voice and message, and ensuring the content of the work supports its purpose and meets a suitable standard (Barack et al. 58; Commonwealth of Australia 20; Gross iv; Mackenzie 172; Sharpe and Ouellet viii; 1; Zaid 132). Determining the impact however, is more challenging.

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