

*Learned Publishing*, 24:75–78

***The Subversive Copy Editor: Advice from Chicago (Or, How to Negotiate Good Relationships with Your Writers, Your Colleagues, and Yourself)***

Carol Fisher Saller  
Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009, 136pp.  
ISBN: 9780226734255,  
£9.00/\$10.14

As one who began his career in publishing as a copyeditor in the pre-digital era wielding a blue pencil instead of a mouse, I approached reading this book as an opportunity to engage in some nostalgia but also with curiosity about how much the copyediting experience has been affected by computers.

There are obvious benefits to editing manuscripts on a computer, and Carol Saller acknowledges many of them in her chapter titled 'Know Thy Word Processor'. The ability of computers to automate certain types of editing helps relieve the job of some of its tedium, for example. But the technology can be a mixed blessing. Authors often think they are helping when they actually create problems. One of only two occasions in the book when Saller uses italics to emphasize a point appears in the chapter addressed to writers: '*Something you should never do once editing has begun is to make changes to the original e-files in the expectation that you can send them to the copy editor, who will somehow incorporate this new version into her work.*'

Early on, as Saller observes, we all thought using computers to edit would save both time and money, but experience has shown neither type of advantage to be realized. We spend more money than ever print-

ing things out, and 'the time we save automating tasks, we lose in having to prepare the e-files for typesetting'. Moreover, 'what we save in hand marking, we lose in a hundred other little tasks that we do because it's so easy we can't resist'.

Although one of Saller's roles as a senior editor at the University of Chicago Press is to handle the Q&A's that are submitted by users of its famous *Chicago Manual of Style*, and although each chapter features a question at the start with an answer provided at the end (not always, I have to say, very closely related to the subject matter of the particular chapter), this is not a book of 'Advice from Chicago' in the manner of CMOS. Saller tells her readers at the outset that 'You won't learn the fundamentals of copyediting from me' and warns them not to expect answers that will help them resolve disputes over particular questions of style and grammar they may be having with their friends and colleagues. Rather, she offers this as a book about relationships – and thus the subtitle in parentheses is really what best describes the book's purpose.

The book will be useful to a variety of people, not only copyeditors (whether in-house or freelance) but also fellow workers in other departments and the writers themselves.

Those in other departments will gain a better appreciation for what challenges copyeditors face in dealing both with authors and with their co-workers. Authors may come away from this book having a better understanding of the pressures under which copyeditors work and the dedication they have to helping authors achieve their own goals more fully. Saller emphasizes that it is, above all, readers whom copyeditors want to serve, and in that ambition they are striving to do what the authors themselves most want also.

As a junior copyeditor, I would have found the wise advice in this book invaluable. One of the obstacles that anyone drawn to this profession must eventually overcome is perfectionism. Saller observes that 'there's no end to the amount of fussing you can do to a manuscript, whereas there's a limit to the amount of money someone will pay you to do it. At some point it has to be good enough, and you have to stop.' Or, as Saller emphasizes for the second time using italics, '*The manuscript does not have to be perfect.*'

Designers do not often get credit in book reviews, but I'd like to say that the cover and layout for this book perfectly serve its aims. Indeed, the cover should win a prize for sheer cleverness. More than once I

## Book reviews

tried to remove the rubber bands and yellow sticky that appeared to be on the book rather than of it.

Normally, I would not point out tiny errors in a book, but since this is a book about copyediting, I feel I would be remiss if I neglected to signal these mistakes: 'became' should read 'become' on page 38, line 1; 'among' would be better used than 'between' on page 49, line 2, since there are more than two items being related to each other; 'publically' should read 'publicly' on page 53, line 10; and the comma on line 4 of page 79 should be omitted because it separates the subject from the verb. I consider these to be in the category that Saller regards as uncontroversial. More in the borderland between 'grammar' and 'style' might be my quibble with her frequent use of pronouns where there is no clear noun antecedent. That might be one of my obsessions as a copyeditor, perhaps owing to my training in philosophy, which stresses clarity above all.

The observations in the previous paragraph may be viewed as another demonstration that a book does not 'have to be perfect' to serve its purpose well!

**Sanford G. THATCHER**  
Director Emeritus, Penn State  
University Press  
sgt3@psu.edu

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doi:10.1087/20110110

***Bookmakers: British Publishing in the Twentieth Century***

Iain Stevenson  
London, British Library, 2010,  
296pp.  
ISBN 978-0-7123-0961-5, £25, hbk

Charting the rise (and change) of book publishing through a century during which technologies, businesses, global influences, and business practices have changed so

dramatically is a considerable challenge; particularly when it is finally presented in fewer than 300 pages. Fortunately, the author of this book, Iain Stevenson, is well placed to write such a history with his experience of working for some of the major players and undertaking research in publishing trends as part of his current work at University College, London.

The book is divided into nine chapters that chronologically discuss events and people, starting with 'The Magna Charta of the Book Trade' (introduction of Publishers Association and the Net Book Agreement) and finishing with 'The End of the Affair' (deregulation and the death of the NBA).

The opening of the twentieth century is described by Stevenson as a period when publishing was debilitated and threatened. The established companies had stagnated and the existing 'three-decker' model (requiring purchasers to buy three volumes to obtain a full novel) was expensive and exclusive. New entrants into the market faced considerable challenges, not least of which were the lending libraries and bookshops. At the turn of the century there were fewer than 5,000 new titles each year from 120 publishers. Compare this with 2009 when the Publishers Association reported that there are over 3,000 UK publishers producing more than 130,000 titles.

The book charts the changes brought about by spirited individuals and external forces worldwide. With the wealth of information and characters, it is perhaps not surprising that the narrative (well-written though it is) appears to sometimes jump between topics, and I felt that there is an expectation that readers will be familiar with the people being described. In many cases it is the numerous footnotes that provide more detailed and interesting infor-

mation about the events being discussed in the main text.

Educational and research publishing is presented as only a small player within the century, although as Stevenson acknowledges, it provided a bedrock of reliable income for several publishers such as Longman, and enabled them to take greater risks with their other publishing lists. He also points out the rather wonderful situation that rarely required publishers to update their textbooks. The example is given of a geography textbook (*Modern Geography*) which was first published during the 1930s (with statistics dating from the 1920s) which was still being used well into the mid-1950s with no revision.

For those interested in developments in STM publishing, the role and importance of Robert Maxwell is given full credit. Stevenson may not have been a supporter of Maxwell's methods, but he is an admirer of Maxwell's vision and drive. He records the investigation by the Department of Trade inspectors which ruled that Maxwell was not 'a person who can be relied on to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company' but then decided not to prosecute him. He also gives a short but useful summary of the takeover by Leasco which was reversed following strong support for Maxwell from his journal editors and authors. Stevenson dryly observes that it is these authors and editors who unwittingly made it possible for Maxwell to pursue the subsequent frauds and theft of his company's pension fund.

I could find no factual fault with the content of the book, and the extensive (perhaps over-heavy) use of references throughout to justify any fact or reported opinion give it a gravitas that lifts it from being an interesting read to being a scholarly one. The author is (by his own admission) an academic and the