



Editors' Journal, or, How We Worked Three Years for 2½ Cents an Hour

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Editors' Journal, or, How We Worked Three Years for 2½ Cents an Hour

EVEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE of five years it seems purely coincidental that Susan Steiner conceived her first child at the same time that she and Peter Nagourney, her colleague in the English Department at the University of California at Santa Barbara, conceived the idea for *Growing Up American*. *Growing Up American* was to be a multi-ethnic college anthology exposing the American myth of success best exemplified in the works of Horatio Alger, Jr. "Making it" in the Alger sense, although held out as the hope for all, was actually the achievement of a very few, and the readings in the anthology were designed to expose this fact of life in America. The authors read thousands of stories, essays, and autobiographical accounts reinforcing the validity of their insight, but they still ended up victims of the myth they hoped to expose.

Their book was not published until the child was 26 months, and the expected commercial success has proved an impossible dream. Much has happened in the respective lives of the editors: jobs have been won and forfeited; foreign lands visited; their own country crossed many times; other acquaintances come

and gone. Always the saga of the anthology persisted, with letters back and forth, trips between the home of the publisher and Santa Barbara, frantic phone calls and hysterical pleas, all punctuating the constant monthly announcement that the book was "scheduled for imminent publication."

Because our ordeal epitomizes the collective nightmares and experiences of many authors, we'd like to share our journal with those still dreaming of academic best sellers.

December 12, 1968: At the University of California at Santa Barbara, where the authors were both employed, Boythorn, salesman for Bleak House Publishing Company (all names are appropriate pseudonyms for our publishing company and its employees), tries to sell Susan another limited, boring freshman anthology. When she rejects it, suggesting they publish a multi-ethnic reader instead, Boythorn enthusiastically responds, encouraging her to submit a prospectus. Susan mentions this to Peter, and they agree to think about the project.

January 3, 1969: After three weeks of trying to arrange schedules, Peter and Susan dine together and that night draw up their prospectus for an anthology.

February 20, 1969: Smallweed, editor in charge of Bleak House's English books, catches the morning plane in time to treat the eager authors to cocktails and

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lunch—a promising and professional beginning. During the meeting Smallweed dazzled us, listing the commitments his company was willing to make in order to insure the quick publication of a first-rate book. Never before had he made such an agreement; never before had a book been more worthy. Publication by February, 1970, money for Xeroxing, the publisher's research assistants to gather material, the publisher to send out all permission requests, a healthy advance, and a 64-page handout to advertise this very new and needed book—not to mention ads in *College English*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *PMLA*. The food that afternoon was only fair, but the deal was fairer and so we parted interested and excited.

March 21, 1969: In only one month, because of the prompt delivery of the prospectus to the publisher, reviews solicited by Smallweed were returned:

I am very impressed with the plans for this book; the authors have—even in this tentative outline—shown their grasp of a series of complex problems. The accent on youth is a wise one, yet the authors have not caved in to simple-minded praise. They perceive the many issues as ones to analyze, and the materials they present for analysis are of consistent high quality.

The authors of *Growing Up American* are on to something good: they work towards presenting the unity of experience. Many new texts dwell on the subject of "being young now" and offer more praise than analysis. Other books point out the uniqueness of growing up ghettoized, and emphasize that kind of difference as if the Black-Brown communities existed in no other context than their own. *Growing Up American* takes the point of view that to grow up in this country is a unique experience, and that it is one worthy of study.

Without fussing around one must immediately applaud the obvious sense of these author-editors. . . . Judging by their

tentative selections, I am bound to predict that S. and N. mean to carry out their purpose with imagination and insight.

Once a week during the next month, stylistically unique memos from the desk of Smallweed report the enthusiasm of their side and encourage the industry of ours. However, at this point there was still no contract.

April 3, 1969: "I am sure you will be encouraged by the reviewer's remarks. I am sorry for the long delay in getting this reaction to you."

April 15, 1969: "I hope you will find this review helpful and encouraging."

April 22, 1969: "It is quite enthusiastic and you should be encouraged by the critic's good words."

April 29, 1969: "I am sure you will be encouraged by the reviewer's good words."

Indeed we were encouraged. On April 11 Peter wrote to his parents:

I am editing a book of readings with a friend. It should be very successful when it appears (next January?). At the moment we are waiting for a contract from the publisher so we can go ahead with work. If the book does as well as the publishers and their advisors say we might make a few thousand dollars over the next few years.

We continued waiting for the contract; and as unhappy as we were for disappointing our parents, we were more annoyed at the publisher for this inexplicable two month delay.

May, 5, 1969: Finally Smallweed flies down for another lunch—same place, same food, new waitress. We were now a little less eager to do the book: so much time had passed. Susan was beginning to bloom and slow down as the weight of motherhood began to manifest itself; and Peter was laboring with his dissertation. The earlier promises are repeated and

even grander ones added, but we remain hesitant. We part agreeing to make a definite decision as soon as we receive a written copy of Smallweed's verbal commitments.

May-August, 1969: Go to the beach, exercise, work on dissertation, go to New York, plant gladiolas while Bleak House sleeps.

August 11, 1969: An eight page, single-spaced typed letter arrives from Smallweed along with four copies of a contract. Alas, we cannot include the letter in its entirety, though the parts certainly shall speak for the perspicacity, competence, and professionalism of the whole.

This will be a much longer letter than the one which I originally wrote to you in June and that you never received.

I owe you an apology for not getting that letter to you in June and another apology for my delay during the past three weeks in contacting you.

... you are uppermost in my mind. I hope that this letter will not arrive too late to save our relationship. I am very sorry about the delays during the past two months. My very strong desire to publish your book has not changed in that time and I hope that this letter will help revive your interest in the project.

... I promise to make this the only long letter that you will receive from me. Enough is enough.

From my last conversation with you, I understand that you want at least two important things from a publisher:

- (1) Maximum promotion of your book.
- (2) The opportunity to work closely and in harmony with competent production editors and designers toward the publication of an attractive and readable textbook.

I believe that Bleak House is in a better

position than any of our competitors to help you achieve those two goals. . . . the next few years will be an ideal time to publish basic textbooks with our company. . . .

. . . Bleak House will do everything possible to insure your text being used in colleges and universities across the country. . . . The success of our promotion and sales efforts seems clearly indicated by the number of satisfied Bleak House authors who are signing with us for their second and third books, and among these are numerous authors who have come to us after publishing with larger and older companies.

Besides effective promotion, you have indicated that you want a publisher who can provide you with intensive assistance in putting your book together. We have reason to be proud of our copyediting department. . . . Finally, . . . I personally will give your project my very best efforts . . . and I certainly will do everything possible to insure your book receiving the best possible treatment.

I have complete faith in your proposed book and I believe that the idea will have lost none of its appeal by the time it is published. It is very definitely worth the money and effort which you as editors and Bleak House as publisher will put into the project. I have never made as good or as specific an offer to an author as that which I have just described to you. This is the best possible way I can prove my faith in your and your proposal.

. . . I want to do everything possible to help you prepare the manuscripts at the earliest possible date.

August 26, 1969: The editors answer Smallweed's letter: they too are unhappy about the delays, but unlike their editor they find it too difficult to sustain enthusiasm.

October 1, 1969: Because of these delays the first contract, "Agreement made August 11, 1969 . . .," has to be super-

ceded by a second, an "Agreement made September 30, 1969"; the two authors sign the latter, promising to hand in the manuscript "on or before March 15, 1970," and the editor verifies the agreement:

The initial prospectus which I received from Mr. Nagourney and Mrs. Steiner presented one of the best ideas for a freshman reader that I have received during the past four years. . . . I plan to give *Growing Up American* extraordinary marketing emphasis during the Spring 1971 selling season.

I predict that the reaction throughout the country to the published version of the book will bring nothing but praise to the authors, their publisher, and their school.

October 21, 1969: For a number of reasons, mainly culinary and intellectual, the authors pass up a proposal to dine with the editor and "chat" about the book. Neither had yet reached the point of academic despair requiring further massaging of egos—at least concerning this particular project. What they want instead is ". . . some progress on the following: the contracts, the advance, the Xerox allowance, the permission forms, the anthologies you were to send as sample formats. We hope all these will be in the mail this week."

November 5, 1969: Born to Susan a 7 lb. 10 oz. male child. Mother and baby doing well, except for post partum depression about overdue anthology.

November 14, 1969: Entry in Peter's journal:

A publisher's representative came by having heard, somehow, about the *Growing Up American* anthology; he wanted to publish it, but I fear the contract is already signed, if that will mean anything with such great inefficiency being shown by Bleak House.

And so we bring the months of 1969 to a close, a few selections still needed to complete the text, no permission forms, no samples, no advance. The final document of the year is a form letter from the president of Bleak House, welcoming us into the fold, promising us money if we sign yet another form, and adding his signature to the now familiar Bleak Cheer: "We are all enthusiastic about the value of your work and are looking forward to its publication."

January 30, 1970: The authors carry their project into 1970; though there seems to have been little alteration in the progress of the book, the progress of the authors' souls and psyches reflect significant changes. The polite and professional style disappears: "We met with the editor and it was absolutely disgusting. We have been screwed up, down, and sideways on this book"; faith in the American way diminishes: "The book will not be published in the Spring; that can no longer happen: it will come out in October or November. . . . Ain't never going to see a penny profit"; trust in their editor degenerates into cynicism and amazement at their own naivete: "The editor has deliberately lied about almost everything connected with this project. Just incredible."

Spring, 1970: This time, which now seems so distant, was not a happy one; the frustrations of producing a book were matched and surpassed by the effects of activities outside our small office: the United States invaded Cambodia to end the war in Vietnam; students burned the local Bank of America to protest profiteering from war and poverty; throughout the land there were demonstrations and urban shootouts.

April 13, 1970: A month late in delivering a finished manuscript but well within the 90-day grace period provided

by their contract, the authors ask the publisher's forgiveness in light of the chaos at home and promise a finished text in short order.

May 19, 1970: Five weeks later the editor replies: he understands.

June 9, 1970: Their sanity curve on the rise, both authors are genuinely pleased with the late but finished manuscript they send the publisher.

June 22, 1970: Peter's university contract terminated, his last check in the bank, the remainder of the advance nowhere in sight, he stops to collect a one month's allotment of government surplus food before arriving at Susan's. He doesn't mention this when he notices the wedding invitation Susan has just received to a Rothschild wedding in France, including directions to the villa, name of presiding Rabbi, et al.:

Prière d'apporter cette carte
11, rue Masseran, VIIe.

For an hour they imagine Susan and her husband making the trip: what will they wear, who will babysit, what car will they rent in Paris? Then, as reality reasserts itself, they imagine what friend currently in Europe could take their house. Finally, they wonder about their manuscript in Bleak House, so instead of calling Paris they call northern California. Their editor is pleased with the manuscript he received two weeks ago, and now that he is reminded he will immediately begin the advertising campaign.

July 7, 1970: Still no word from Smallweed; the unanswered questions begin to mount: what about Xerox procedures, page estimates, cover design, interior art requirements, letters requesting reduced permission fees? Like a junior high school boy after his first date, we begin to

wonder how much we'll get from such an unresponsive partner. Since the book continues to be merely "scheduled for production" we continue improving it. July and August are spent in hard work; and with the work came, God knows why, a renewed pleasure in the book itself. We like it again, the selections, our introductions, the response of colleagues, the substantiality of the thing as a whole. We even like working together.

September 4, 1970: Letter from Smallweed: "Call me next week. I want to arrange to get you up here to spend a day in the office."

September 18, 1970: Curious as to whether or not Bleak House Publishing Company existed, and firmly convinced that Smallweed owed him free transportation to Marin County's Renaissance Pleasure Faire, Peter flies to San Francisco. During the drive from the airport he and Smallweed chat about their mutual interest in films—apparently they have nothing else in common. Even at Bleak House, whenever Peter tries to steer the conversation around to the anthology Smallweed interrupts and steers Peter down the corridors to introduce him to the Vice President, then the Art Director, then the page designer, then the Xerox operator, and then each member of the stenographic pool. In exchange for Smallweed's promise to send us a copy of the manuscript, Peter surrenders the original and submits to the tour. The part he was glad not to have missed was a tour of the complete sights of Bleak House: one Authors' Lounge, decor by Blue Chip Trading Stamps, stocked with color-coordinated Harvard Classics, one shipping room with unsent piles of other authors' anthologies, and one excavation for a new wing and courtyard for the expanding company. Finally it is time for lunch and at last

Peter has a chance for a decent meal at a new restaurant, the first real pleasure he has derived from his association with this growing concern.

September 19, 1970: Peter writes to Susan of his day: "... still uncertain why I had to go up . . . perhaps I was brought up because no one there likes to read. . . . met editor-in-chief of X. University Press who had been offered Smallweed's job at Bleak House when it first started. He had wisely turned it down."

October 15, 1970: Smallweed responds to Peter's third plea for the promised money reimbursing him for his trip:

Thank you for the letter reminding me. . . . If anything else goes wrong, I promise to notify you so that you can know exactly when you will receive the money. . . . I am attempting to make production day occur before the end of next week.

October 16, 1970: Still in the world of Horatio Alger, the authors believe this promise—for the last time—and join with their publisher in the true American spirit of cooperation. They revise the Bleak Advance Advertising flyer which formerly sounded like publicity for a Grade C detective thriller—"the youth of today return to America its lost myth and forgotten dream"—and request that copies be sent to Susan's mother for distribution to members of influential educational and art groups which she heads.

October 2, 1970: The authors receive two reviews of the finished manuscript:

. . . I believe it's an excellent book, a book that I would enjoy using. . . . I read the entire book because I thought it was interesting.

. . . the selections seem extremely interesting and are not commonly found elsewhere. They should provide fresh ma-

terial not only for the students but also for the instructor.

The overall idea is excellent, and it has been excellently worked out, for the most part.

There were, of course, criticisms and suggestions, many valuable, but some, as one might expect, merely reflecting a book the reviewer himself would like to have assembled. And so once again, still believing our book will be published soon, we revise and rewrite.

October 20, 21, 22, 23, 1970: all work days.

October 23, 1970: Susan writes to their editor: "Enclosed are what Peter and I hope are the final revisions. . . . Also, how soon can we expect the rest of the advance?"

Same day: Peter writes to friend: ". . . I expect to starve to death before our editor settles accounts with me."

November 9, 1970: The authors receive two more reviews; then they begin to wonder. If the publication date was 2½ weeks ago, why send us the reviews "for our use and consideration"? If the editor is eager for an early publication, why the time lag between reviews? And, we now ask, why do we receive reviews two at a time, and where's our copy of the manuscript which Bleak House promised to send us? Intriguing questions like these and imaginative answers help soothe both authors' rage and fend off another depression. They ingeniously opine that to save money Bleak made two copies of the original manuscript, sent them out, and when the copies returned recirculated them to another set of reviewers. Little did they know that in reality their publisher's actions were even more ingenious: to save money, Bleak made only one copy of the original manuscript, sent that and the original

out, and when they returned recirculated them.

Two weeks pass: Our pleasure in fantasizing gives way to suspicion and fury. Finally a model letter arrives from Smallweed. We do not wish to seem cold or unfeeling about his perils, for they indeed must be greater than even he can acknowledge:

November 25, 1970: I apologize for not getting in touch. . . . My last trip seemed to ruin me completely. I gained about 15 pounds while on the trip and my body seemed to fall apart at the seams. Everything went wrong all at once. When I returned home, my doctor put me to bed and threatened to put me in the hospital for a month if I didn't behave. . . . I hope to get the manuscript into production sometime next week, the week after at the very latest.

Incredible, but not without precedent for our disaster-prone publishers. In the context of the delays and excuses dating back to August 11, 1969, the recent document stands as the perfection of the form. Consider its improvement over the following:

August 11, 1969: I still don't know what happened to the first letter. I wrote it on the plane back to San Francisco from my visit with you in Santa Barbara. Someday, it will emerge from a stack of papers somewhere.

I own you an apology for not getting that letter to you in June and another apology for my delay during the past three weeks in contacting you. My editorial assistant, Hortense, was in an auto accident two weeks ago. Without her usual assistance, my entire operation tended to collapse.

October 2, 1969: Unfortunately the copies describing the nature of your project were not enclosed to you as our Xerox machine broke down and I was unable to Xerox copies of these documents for you.

Our publisher's astute lawyers, unable to control the incidental weaknesses their flesh is heir to, wisely had anticipated the precariousness of our:

ADDENDUM TO THE CONTRACT:

If the manuscript in final form and acceptable to the Publisher for publication shall not have been delivered to the Publisher by February 1, 1970 (or within a grace period of ninety days thereafter), by reason of the death of the author, or otherwise, the Publisher may terminate this agreement or Addendum.

December 4, 1970: Susan sends the manuscript to Smallweed with a cover letter carefully itemizing our concerns: that we be informed about the revised advertising copy which Susan's mother never received, that Smallweed be aware of our new table of contents, our new drafts of the introductory essays, our responses to the suggestions of their four reviewers, our instructions concerning epigraphs and footnotes:

I had a long talk with another Bleak House author the other day comparing our respective treatments by Bleak House. We lost. But now, hopefully, with new health and new Christmas spirit, the ghost of difficulties past is laid to rest. . . .

We are rather pleased with the way the book has turned out. Of course we hope you feel the same way. People have been surprisingly interested and eager for the book to come out. If we have overlooked anything, please let us know. . . .

December 29, 1970: Christmas and its spirit has come and gone, so has the winter issue of *PMLA* and the MLA Convention itself. The journal carried a full page ad from Bleak House with all relevant bases touched: blacks in the twentieth century, blacks in the eighteenth century, blacks loved by whites, blacks hated by whites. No word of our

book, in spite of age-old promises, and no publicity about it at the convention.

Once again, Dear Smallweed,

We noticed in the Winter *PMLA* issue, with so much advertising matter, there is not mention of our book (*Growing Up American*). Also, no word from you in answer to our last letter which expressed hope that the book would go into production within a week. Also no check for the remainder of the advance. Since we have revised our analysis of the American dream of promise and disillusionment so many times, we cannot help feeling we are doing our own growing up with this book.

December 31, 1970: Sadder and wiser, the authors and their mates open a bottle of cheap champagne—with no funds coming in on the book, they could afford no better—and watch Ben Grauer usher in the new year at Times Square. *Plus ça change, plus la même chose.*

January, 1971: The project now spans three years. The authors' correspondence with their editor, honed ever sharper by time and bitterness, falls silently on the desk of their missing target: "Mr. Smallweed is presently on a rather extensive business trip to the East and is expected to return after January 10. You may expect to hear from him soon after his return." We hear nothing and call to request the return of one copy of the manuscript; after an awkward delay, an even more awkward admission. Neither the original nor the copy, mailed out by the publisher, has been returned to the office. No one has a manuscript. The authors are merely incredulous. At our suggestion Smallweed's secretary is persuaded to try and locate our precious document. One week later we hear that the original is thought to be in the New York city apartment of a reviewer; the reviewer, unfortunately, is in Puerto Rico for a two week vacation. Three

weeks later we hear he has returned; the missing book had been mailed back months ago. The authors contemplate a law suit and reread the fine print on their contract:

The Publisher will use the same care in protecting the manuscript and other material supplied to it hereunder as is its customary practice in protecting similar material in its possession, but it shall not be liable for damages, if any, resulting from the loss or destruction of such material, or any part thereof.

Our only recourse is to reconstruct the book from whatever imperfect copies remain. This we do for two tedious days, resenting every moment.

January 21, 1971: Peter plaintively writes in his journal: "The editor's secretary at Bleak House refuses to talk with me on the phone any more, and the editor calls Susan when he has something to say." Again the authors indulge their fantasies, this time out of desperation. Colleagues across the country are asked to "send letters to the publisher saying you have heard people talking about our wonderful book at the Christmas Modern Language Association Convention in New York; ask when you can order copies. Hint that you order books for 5,000 freshmen."

The only issue left for Peter is money. For Susan, it is that a good book is missing a good market—not much of a difference. They begin pestering Boythorn, the Bleak House salesman, their only friend connected with that firm. Finally Smallweed, sensing an incipient revolt from Santa Barbara, schedules another meeting to resuscitate the project. The authors reluctantly and cynically agree to meet for a final round of lies, swearing not to surrender the reconstructed manuscript until check is in hand. Smallweed swears it will be there.

This time the authors choose a local bar as a setting more appropriate to their revised vision of themselves and their publisher.

January 30, 1971: Only an hour late, Smallweed walks in with Boythorn; Smallweed is wearing his off-the-rack double-breasted brown suit with a matching tan mock turtleneck. "Very fetching," Susan murmurs, spotting their entry through the bottom of her martini glass. After preliminary chitchat which elicits no response from either author, Smallwood produces a 3-page timetable outlining all the remaining steps leading to the successful publication of *Growing Up American*—this time scheduled for October 15, 1971, only six months later than the last date promised. He begins to read the individual dates but is interrupted when Peter wraps his arms even tighter around the manuscript and speaks for the first time all afternoon: "Where's the check?"

"Can I buy you a drink?" Smallweed asks, turning his head and waving for the bartender.

"Where's the check?" is the only reply.

Two hours later Smallweed leaves with the manuscript and the authors leave without the check. It seems that one of the vice presidents of Bleak House wants the book reviewed once more before production; only then can our check be issued. It also seems that we must write a 64-page teachers' manual. Because the authors vividly recall being assured two years previously this would not be necessary, they go home to consult the contract: "The Author will supply, when requested by the Publisher, an instructor's manual and key...."

February, 1971: Whereas before this meeting Peter was writing "Beginning (!) to hate the anthology," afterwards

he could do nothing to conceal his mental state. The journal reads: "Am bored crazy"; "Wasting away because of wretched anthology and its indecisive state."

For Bleak House, however, the spirit of the January meeting, so gloomy for the authors, was expressed by Boythorn as follows:

I am confident that this "new beginning" will move smoothly from here on to publication. Please be assured that every effort in Bleak House, especially from Smallweed and I, will be used to see that your project does get into a smooth groove. We are even more confident of "Growing Up's" future success.

The Bleakian confidence isn't contagious, but the authors plod on; they revise the manuscript again, return it to the final reviewer, but feel they must apologize for "Bleak House's burdening you once again with our project." This reviewer had already been asked to comment on the manuscript and already had done so favorably. In his second response, therefore, he writes: "I'm a far from unprejudiced reviewer of *Growing Up American* since I very much liked the book the first time around." And just as the authors have given up any hope of any sales, in spite of the canned cheers coming from the PR department of Bleak House, so this reviewer closes with "one disturbing question":

On the basis of last term's stultification of my campus (and many others. I've heard reproted), is there still a market for the book? It's predicated on the continuing militancy of students, I think, and the little dears are as mercurial as tiny old ladies. Perhaps we can rely on the conservatism of liberal intellectuals, who still order the books.

Well, after all, it has been three years!

Meanwhile, in the corridors of the English Department where Peter and Susan had been employed, gossipmongers decide they are having an affair. No one believes their anthology could still be dragging on, and charity finds no alternative reasons why they would continue to spend time together in library stacks and private offices. Gossip was its usual perceptive observer, noticing the proximity and not the conflicts beginning to appear as Peter and Susan separately wondered just why the hell they were spending so much time together?

February 23, 1971: The authors, unhappy and frustrated, consecutively number the 850 page manuscript by hand. It is a tedious and mindless task, but out of the mire comes a suggestion that they write an article exposing the entire messy project. Immediately their fantasies of spending their final advance money, earned at the rate of an estimated 4 cents an hour—money which still has not arrived—are replaced by fantasies of exposing their editor and at the same time warning all future authors. The enthusiasm for this new project reveals the authors' desperate and perhaps neurotic needs for justice and publication.

This decision to write an article becomes a landmark for the mental health of the authors: henceforth deceptions, delays and disasters may be accepted and even welcomed; the worse the better, they reason, for it all will reinforce their case. It is fortunate that their inspiration comes when it does, for their book continues to move along in its same "smooth groove." First a bizarre impasse concerning the final payment: the authors refuse to return the manuscript incorporating their final corrections until they have the check in their hands. Their editor insists his boss won't issue the check until he has received the manuscript. Stalemate

until the boss admits he is being silly and sends the check. The authors plod along writing an apparatus for the anthology, including six or seven alternative tables of contents for instructors with different taste.

April 10, 1971: A letter arrives informing the authors that the text must be shortened by 150 pages. "Send your list back to me as quickly as possible," Smallweed demands.

April 14, 1971: Susan answers: "We have sent our list back to you 'as quickly as possible.' I trust you will do the same in responding to it. . . . Please, for God's sake, no more delays."

April 28, 1971: Authors still on the prowl for new articles to replace longer ones cut; they rearrange the carefully balanced chapters, and rewrite introductions to compensate for changed contents. The new articles and the revised introductions are mailed to the editor with explicit instructions: "UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES DO WE WANT ANYONE EXCEPT OURSELVES TO MAKE CHANGES IN THESE FOUR (INTRODUCTORY) ESSAYS. INCLUDING MISS FLITE." (Miss Flite is a Bleak House copy editor held so highly in Smallweed's regard that a promise of her services had been included in his 1969 8-page letter.) A week later an air-mail special delivery package arrives containing Miss Flite's edited copies of the four introductory essays. Her editing surpasses expectations: balanced sentences tumble, subtle ideas are transformed into crude clichés, and the most original and important discussion is crossed out entirely with the comment: "This part doesn't really make sense."

Susan, who specializes in controlled rage (Peter's *forté* is self-generated indignation), writes our answer:

Miss Flite's corrections arrived today,

and Peter and I went to work immediately. By this time you have received a copy of our changes which are obviously to be preferred to hers. We are, of course, happy to accept all spelling, some comma and apostrophe changes—Camus' to Camus's, however, is not acceptable, nor should it be to any copy editor. . . .

We cannot emphasize strongly enough that we do not wish to have printed under our names Miss Flite's "corrections"; in many cases the mood, the emphasis desired, the rhythm, the context, are all unfortunately altered by her changes. These suggestions might have been attempted many moons ago, and in most book writing situations we know of, changes are suggested, usually in the margin, not brashly incorporated into the text as the writer's own words are jauntily crossed out.

The only answer to this protest is an engraved announcement:

BLEAK HOUSE COMPANY, INC.
Requests the pleasure of your company
for an Open House
to celebrate the completion of our new
wing and courtyard
on Wednesday, May 19, 1971
from 5:15 to 7:15 p.m.

R.S.V.P. 592-1300.

The announcement elicits no pride in the hearts of the authors, only a bitter memory that ground for this wing had just been broken when Peter took the first version of the "finished" manuscript to Bleak the previous summer. Did ever building proceed so fast, or book so slow?

May, 1971: The voice of one anthology contributor suddenly intrudes: his short story, selected in 1969 and remaining with the anthology through all cuts and reshufflings, has grown into a novel and the pleased author has kept the anthologizers informed of his progress.

In mid-May he writes that he is starving and wishes to receive his \$50 permission fee from the publisher; Peter advises writing to the editor.

June 3, 1971: Enclosed with a covering letter opening: "This about Bleak House, henceforth to be referred to as SOTH (Scum of the Earth)," copies of the starving author's correspondence with Bleak House arrive. The most startling paragraph occurs in a letter from the permission editor at Bleak:

Growing Up American by Nagourney and Steiner is now scheduled for publication in March 1972 and you can expect to receive payment shortly thereafter. We will assume this meets with your approval, unless we hear otherwise.

Even in the world of incredulity previously associated with *Growing Up American* there had been nothing like this brief note. Peter and Susan look at each other and can only laugh: had the publication date really been delayed 6 months again, without their being informed? After trying for a week to contact the editor, Peter and Susan finally are given reassurance that the book is still on schedule. They continue their patient wait for the page proofs which were to be mailed May 4, 1971, according to the timetable sworn to in the January fiasco, while they work on their article.

June 21, 1971: The authors send a brief sarcastic note to their editor:

We have allowed six full weeks for the usual delays, but even that leaves the page proofs a week overdue. . . . As usual, we look forward to hearing from you.

June 25, 1971: Peter and Susan call Bleak House to uncover the status of the page proofs; Peter was planning a vacation in July and Susan one in August, and they didn't want proofreading dif-

ficulties to delay the October/November publication date which they still tried to believe in.

The call is received by Smallweed's secretary. When she tells them that Smallweed resigned three weeks previously the authors' delicate thread of sanity seems to snap. They chuckle. They gaze out the windows. They nod knowingly. They stare at their typewriters. And then they write a letter to the president of Bleak House:

Dear Mr. Tulkington,

On November 19, 1969, you wrote welcoming us as Bleak House authors and encouraging us to write directly to you if we had any need for assistance. In the years that we have been working with Smallweed, your ex-English editor, there have been many occasions when we were strongly tempted to take advantage of your offer. Our anthology, *Growing Up American*, has repeatedly been the victim of Mr. Smallweed's incompetence: lost manuscripts, delays in contacting reviewers, delays in contacting and advising us of progress, or rather lack of progress, and, as it turned out, ignorance and outright dishonesty. The files we have kept of all documents concerning this project would boggle the mind of any reader. It has seemed to us that as the reviews of our project became more favorable the delays and confusions became greater.

. . . It would be embarrassing to ask you to assure competence in the final production stages of this text if we had not been plagued for so long by so many disappointments and management disasters. Had this book not been so highly praised by ALL its reviewers we would not be so insistent, but we feel that these delays hurt Bleak House as much as they distress us.

June 27, 1971: Peter's parents call to announce that his Ph.D. diploma has arrived in the mail. His mother urges him to be certain that Ph.D. is included after

his name on the cover and title page of his anthology.

September 16, 1971: Bleak House's new English editor, Chadband, seems much more competent than his predecessor, and for a brief time his promises, although only too familiar in their mindless optimism, seem plausible:

We are considerably ahead of schedule now. . . . If we continue at this pace, the book should be out by December. In addition, my conversations with the salesmen during the national meeting last week reinforced my earlier conviction that a) a year's delay has not reduced the sales potential for your book and b) the sales staff believes it is promoting a winner with your book this fall.

September 17, 1971: "We're well ahead of schedule; hopefully the pace will keep up," echoes a card from a production assistant.

Of course there were minor problems:

September 23, 1971: Chadband refuses to accept any more collect phone calls about the book from Peter, writing: "Drop me a line if you wish me to explain further."

September 24, 1971: The book's length mysteriously diminishes from 512 to 449 pages, requiring compensatory deletions and rewritings, unplanned, unexpected, and unappreciated.

October 19, 1971: The publishers misplace and lose parts of the biographical table of authors, requiring duplication of tedious research.

November 15, 1971: The design for the cover becomes an issue. The cover Peter had designed is rejected and replaced by an abstract drawing more reminiscent of a green beret soldier than the hayseed farm boy we expected to symbolize America's youth. We duly protest but do not insist on a change for fear of delaying the publishing date.

Our focus became the Christmas Modern Language Association meeting; we are convinced this is the best place to display and sell our new book. In order to meet this deadline we read proof till our eyes glaze, make concessions about length and design, and refrain from any unpleasant references to the past. If *Growing Up American* could debut at M.L.A. it would have a flying start.

October 10, 1971: Our editor's letters encourage us, of course:

Things are moving along at a rapid clip. My latest information is that the book should be published around the middle of December, before MLA.

November 24 1971: And all continues well until, in response to our request for a firm commitment about the convention, we receive the following:

I am sorry to say, Peter, that I probably won't be seeing you in Chicago at M.L.A. Although I want very much to go, and to display your book there among other things, Bleak House did not budget for a booth this year, and there was nothing I could do about it when I arrived in the office.

Oh....

Peter goes to the convention and then to New York, still without the book, and finally in January, 1972, at the home of a friend in Connecticut, he first sees the book begun in 1968. All attempts to have copies sent to his parents, who were in a position to distribute them within the New York City Board of Education, meet with what should have been the expected failure.

February 2, 1972: After several unsuccessful requests, six shiny new copies of *Business in Contemporary Society* finally arrive in New York. At least Bleak was trying. The explanation this

time was that "the boys at the warehouse must have had a rough night."

March, 1972: We finally are able to relax and turn to other, worthier, long-delayed projects, secure in the knowledge that Bleak House's "fifty-odd sales representatives around the country" are doing their best to sell this much-delayed but still timely anthology.

March 10, 1792: A letter from the Bleak House reprint editor arrives in California, asking for reprint corrections, and fuels the fires of fantasy—new editions would be forthcoming, and royalties were even now piling up.

December 7, 1972: Royalty statements arrive; sales into the thousands are listed, yet the deficit carried forward never diminishes substantially, and we look in vain for a royalty check. At the end we compute our labor at $2\frac{1}{2}$ cents per hour, but at least we are finished and the book is out. We can wait for sales to pile up, since there appears to be nothing left to go wrong. We had waited years to see the book; years more waiting for payment shouldn't be outside the limits of our patience.

The article we had planned, documenting *Growing Up American*'s disastrous publishing history, no longer seemed possible, since such a record needed a climax appropriate to its antecedents. About this we both felt mild regret, but we were willing to exchange our years of frustration, recall our curses stretching into multiple eternities, and forgive our perfect tormentors for the ego-rewards and more material pleasures our first royalty check was expected to provide.

October 22, 1972: Chadband sends significantly different letters to Susan and Peter proclaiming the final judgment on *Growing Up American*, one at last appropriate to its history:

Dear Susan,

I wish I could write you a happier letter, but I have had to make the decision not to reprint *Growing Up American* once the present stock of 1,100 copies has been sold. . . . I very much hope you'll let me know of any future writing ideas—it was a pleasure working with you.

Dear Peter,

I'm sorry to report that a decision has been made not to reprint *Growing Up American* once the present stock of 1,100 copies has been sold. . . . I hope and believe you'll have better luck with your future writing projects.

Along with the most naive adolescents whose awakenings we had so carefully collected in our text, we too suddenly face myth-shattering reality. Our hard work, creative energy, and devotion to success has gained us not success, happiness, and fame, but 2½ cents per hour, wasted years, and every author's chief confirmation of obscurity: his publisher's offer of remaindered books "at \$0.10 a copy plus shipping costs."

November 20, 1973: There is little left to salvage. We think about having the copyright placed in our name. Before writing to Bleak House, Peter submits our contract to an editor-friend in New York, who answers:

A woman in the office who has had lots of experience with publishers' contracts, having been in charge of subsidiary rights departments for a variety of publishers, . . . tells me that the Bleak contract is the most outrageous (from the author's standpoint) that she has ever seen.

February 12, 1974: Notwithstanding, we request the transfer of copyright, and Bleak's reply is not disappointing:

. . . should a book be taken over by another publisher, that publisher shall become responsible for all obligations previously related to it. Roughly speaking, this is around \$2,000 for Peter's share of the account, and \$600 for Susan's.

Please feel free, Peter to sound out other publishers. . . .

