Reviewers confined to the galleys

Bella Hass Weinberg’s suggestion in a letter to this journal (The Indexer 17 (3) April 1991, 214) that, at least in the US, ‘reviewers work from unindexed galley proofs’, seems validated by an article in the US journal, Small Press: The Magazine of Independent Publishing. Its Spring 1992 issue includes a survey, ‘Reviews; Back to Basics’ (pp. 20-5), in which 16 US journals’ review departments were asked for their policies, in a highly competitive world—‘most of the editors interviewed said they received upwards of 100 books a day’.

On the whole, immediacy of appearance of the review, to coincide with publication of the volume, seems held most important: many review editors prefer to receive advance bound galleys rather than wait for finished volumes—though some expect to receive these also, as a bonus, later. Not one pointed out that the bound galleys would lack the index, which the reviewer could then neither use nor assess—this seems to suggest somewhat makeshift reviews. Of the 16 reviews editors, 14 specified the type of material they like to receive, as follows.

Proving the original assertion: The Bloomsbury Review ‘prefers galleys except in the case of books where the photographs, design or illustration are such that the reviewer would be influenced’ (spot the non-deliberate omission here!). For Chicago Tribune Books, ‘Bound galleys are preferred’. New York Review of Books: ‘send the galley’. Publishers Weekly: ‘One rule is firm: bound galleys should be submitted four months prior to publication date.’ San Francisco Review of Books ‘wants to receive proofs in galleys in order to publish a review in a timely fashion’. Small Press: ‘We prefer to get bound galleys so reviews can appear in a timely fashion’. Six out of 16: 37.5 per cent.

Optional: For Hungry Mind Review, ‘publishers can send galleys or finished books’. One alone: 6.25 per cent.

Having it both ways: Booklist ‘prefers two copies of galleys or F&Gs [unexplained]’, but ‘requires a publisher to submit a finished copy of every title it reviews’. Library Journal ‘wants galleys or bound books as early as possible . . . send us bound books, if that’s the only way you can afford it . . . Publishers must follow up reviews with a copy of the bound book’. For Los Angeles Times Book Review, ‘bound galleys should be sent at least two months in advance . . . Finished books must be sent once a review is published’. New York Times Book Review: ‘send galleys three or four months in advance . . . a review will not be published without a finished book to show’. Voice Literary Supplement: ‘Publicists suggest sending galleys and finished books’. For The Washington Post ‘it is important to receive bound galleys as far in advance as possible . . . When a book is assigned for review, a postcard is sent to the publisher requesting two copies of the finished book’.

Again, six of the 16: 37.5 per cent. None of them, however, cites the index as a bonus of the finished volume. Just one journal, Choice ‘only reviews from finished books. Do not send galleys.’ Send enthusiastic approval.

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As for the UK—we invited two leading review journals’ editors to give us their views. The Times Literary Supplement editor replied as follows:

‘On the whole, we work from finished volumes. In one or two cases where the reviewer needs to start work early or where the time available before publication would otherwise be inconveniently short, we may request bound galleys (or the publisher may send them without being asked). In these cases, we would certainly expect to receive the finished volume also, in order to be able to send it on to the reviewer for a final check.

I quite agree with you about the importance of being able to consult the index. It should be added that the problem has arisen only because publishers have become so sloppy about sending out finished volumes in good time.’

And from the London Review of Books:

‘We don’t have a policy on proofs or finished copies, but I should point out that the book, rather than the proof, is more preferable. It is easier to work with the real thing—there’s an index and it’s easier to read. Moreover, when the finished copy arrives early, there’s no need for a proof.’

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To repeat part of the original letter that raised this issue here (see above):

‘The Societies of Indexers should make the case to publishers that an index is an essential component of a book, greatly enhancing its reference value. We should condemn the practice of sending out page proofs without indexes for reviewing purposes . . . The index needs to be evaluated as much as the text; it is not a mechanically produced appendage to the text, and its quality will determine the facility of access to the book’s contents.’

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