Final Paper

The past six weeks have been a great exercise in real world experience. Now I know what it feels like to work in the publishing industry, and in all honesty I’m somewhat ambivalent about it. I really like editing, but as I read authors’ queries and manuscripts, I confirmed to myself that I’d rather be on the other side of the editorial process. Instead of acquiring manuscripts, I’d rather be writing them; I felt this way before I entered the publishing program, but I wanted to expand my knowledge of the industry. This program has been extremely valuable to me so far, this internship course in particular. I’m grateful to be afforded this opportunity to build my career, and I know I could thrive in the editorial department of a publishing house after I graduate. Of course I’m still uneasy about the future, as any college student is, but it feels good to have a stronger sense of direction. This internship’s the best job I’ve ever had, and I’d be interested in continuing it throughout the year if they’d have me.

Though I read about the publishing industry on a frequent basis, there’s no substitute for actually working in a house. Kensington Publishing is located in midtown Manhattan, just off Broadway. It features various imprints like Aphrodisia, Brava, Citadel, Dafina, Pinnacle and Rebel Base Books, which publish erotica, romance, non-fiction, African American fiction, thrillers/true crime, and humor, respectively. The main editors I report to are Michaela Hamilton, Executive Editor of Kensington and Editor-in-Chief of Citadel, and John Scognamiglio, Editor-in-Chief of Kensington. They e-mail me queries and manuscripts, and after reading them I give a
detailed evaluation. This report includes not only my opinions on what’s working and what isn’t, but suggestions for improvement by page. For example, I’d write the page number(s) to direct them to an issue I think should be fixed before publication. I also do this for some of the Assistant Editors.

I only write detailed reviews for books they tell me they are going to publish; it’s usually for a published author with whom they already have a contract. When I receive agented and unagented submissions that the editors haven’t looked at already, they’re usually bad. I stop reading after the first fifty pages if it looks like it’s going nowhere, or usually after the first few if the writer just can’t write. Out of principle, I usually disregard submissions where there’s frequent misspellings or grammatical errors, for two reasons: if you’re going to submit a novel, you should be proud of it, and have at least proofread it, so chances are it isn’t that good if you haven’t put in the time or effort; and copyediting is going to have a hell of a time making a terrible story into a good one—there’s so many other works that are polished and readable that deserve to be published. Each writer competes for a very small slot, as Kensington has enough authors as is. The publishing schedule is very tight. Even when deadlines drag out, it’s difficult to acquire new authors unless they’re really good. This is what each of editors I read for has told me, so I follow their advice. This seems to be a norm in the business, as I remember the editors at Harpur Palate, a literary journal in Binghamton, would stop reading a submission if it didn’t hold their interest or meet their standards after the first five pages.

Everyone has been a great mentor to me, and I look forward to working with them for the rest of summer and hopefully beyond. Everyone is personable, respectful, informative, and understanding. I love the work environment and am truly content with working here. It’s a huge step up from my last job (pizza delivery), so I’m excited to be doing something I actually care
about. At the end of the forty hour week, it’s fulfilling to know that I contributed to the literary world. As an editorial intern, I’m influencing which books get published, and how ones that are soon-to-be-published can improve. I’d say I’m in a good place in my life right now.

In addition to working in the editorial department, I’ve also worked in reception and subrights. Even something as menial as handling phone calls or filing contracts and other subrights paperwork is a learning experience. It’s interesting to be part of a business entity and see how things are done behind the scenes. Inside knowledge is the best kind, and mine grows every day. I also mail out covers to authors and unproofed galleys to various subrights agents in foreign countries. These are all excellent skills to familiarize myself with, as they’re transferable from job to job. Even if I choose not to work at Kensington in the future, my experience at this publishing house greatly improves my qualifications. When I update my resume again, it’s going to be the strongest it’s ever been. My LinkedIn page has come a long way since I first created it, and I couldn’t wait until I started my internship so the website would allow me to enter Kensington as my current job!

Ultimately, I learned how editors function on a pragmatic level. Not everything is motivated by personal taste. Audience satisfaction and profit are two thirds of the pie when it comes to acquiring a new author. Without these in mind, an editor would unwisely acquire everything he or she likes. It’s a skill I’m learning, and will hopefully hone in the years to come. But it’s still important to have an open mind and a kind eye when reading submissions.

And so, the only thing missing from this internship is an environment for science fiction and fantasy, as Kensington doesn’t really dabble with those genres. The closest things are paranormal romance and urban fantasy. Though I would like to work in a publishing house that caters to these genres after I graduate, I’m not complaining for now. It’s useful to see the full
spectrum of the editorial process, especially when it comes to commercial fiction, which is more romance and suspense than it is sci-fi and fantasy. Nevertheless, I’ll be examining these genres and their cultural influence for my research paper.

There’s not much else to say except thank you, professor. You really helped me land this internship. My resume and cover letter wouldn’t have been as organized without your suggestions, and I would never have known that Kensington was looking for a summer intern if I didn’t read it in an e-mail you sent out. I’m having a great summer so far, and it’s nice that this is a paid internship! Just so you know, I’ll be taking Internship II in Spring 2013 for scheduling reasons. On the plus side, this gives me a lot more time to read more books and articles for my thesis paper.