THE HIDDEN POWER OF RETELLING GREAT STORIES

The Writer

Imagine • Write • Publish

MARCH 2023

THE BOOKTOK REVOLUTION

WHY WRITERS (AND READERS) ARE FLOCKING TO TIKTOK

45+ PUBLISHING RESOURCES



WRITING PROCESS: 22 MUST-ASK QUESTIONS

WHAT'S NEXT AFTER STEPHEN KING TWEETS AT YOU?

THE GOODS ON PRE-ORDER CAMPAIGNS

THE WRITER ★ Member



GET **$20 OFF** OUR CRITIQUE SERVICE!*

Become a member of *The Writer* today

Whether you're just beginning your writing journey or have several published books to your name, becoming a member of *The Writer* will help you seamlessly take your ideas from initial inspiration to final publication, granting you exclusive access to all the resources, tools, advice, and expert webinars you'll need to successfully publish your work, market your writing, and stay ahead of the curve in the fast-changing publishing industry.

Start your free trial today at:
writermag.com/memberships

*The $20 discount for our Critique Service is available only for *The Writer* Member Plus and *The Writer* VIP Member tiers.

The Writer

THE OLDEST MAGAZINE
FOR LITERARY WORKERS
Founded in Boston, 1887

VOLUME 136 **MARCH 2023** NUMBER 3

20
Why we retell stories over and over again
Writers love taking a familiar story and recasting it with more diverse characters or slightly different circumstances.
By Toni Fitzgerald

26
All of your burning #BookTok questions, answered
Everything a writer needs to know about the burgeoning book resource, whether you're navigating it for business or pleasure.
By Cathryn Haight

32
Digging deep into process
The secret to crafting a sustainable – and sustaining – writing life.
By Anica Mrose Rissi

36
On cookies and rejection
How an author fortifies her professional stamina (and goes on in the face of rejection) through the serenity of baking cookies.
By Melanie Brooks



3 Prologue
4 The Write Stuff
6 Market Focus
7 Opportunities
8 Breakthrough

11 Broadening the Bookshelves
Getting to know literature by Anglophone African writers.
By Yi Shun Lai

42 Postscript
Publishing resources

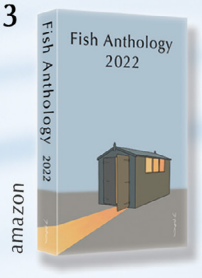
48 Gigi Will Know



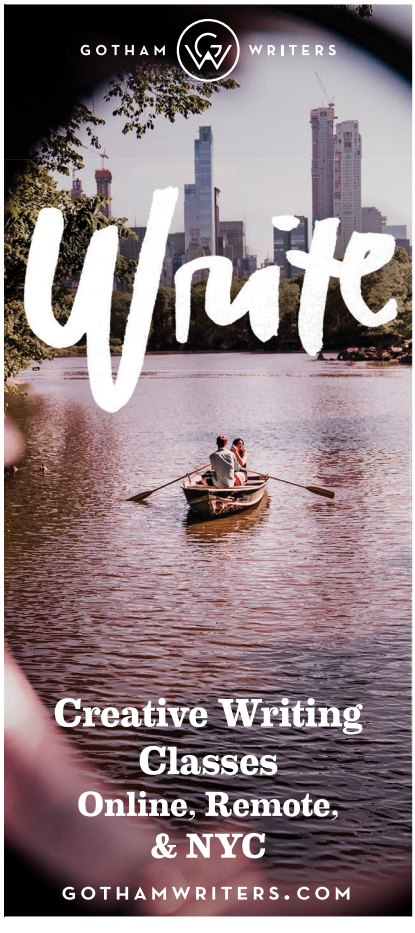
Flash Fiction
Prize

· Judge: Kit De Waal
· Word Limit: 300
· Entry fee: $14 ($9 subsequent)
· Closes: 28 Feb '23

Prize Fund: $2,000
+ 10 best stories will be published in the
FISH ANTHOLOGY 2023



Details:
www.fishpublishing.com



The Writer

Editorial
Toni Fitzgerald, Copy Editor

Art & Production
Jaron Cote, Senior Graphic Designer

Operations
Laura Randall, Operations Coordinator; **Tou Zong Her,** Client Services Manager & Media Analyst; **Andrea Palli,** Senior Client Services & Operations Lead; **Darren Cormier,** Client Services Associate; **Amanda Joyce,** Controller; **Tina McDermott,** Accounts Payable Associate; **Wayne Tuggle,** Accounts Receivable Associate

Digital Operations
Mike Decker, Senior Digital Designer; **David Glassman,** WordPress Developer

Sales & Marketing
Ed Feldman, Director of Media Solutions; **Toni Eunice,** Media Solutions Manager (Phone: 617-706-9089, Email: TEunice@madavor.com); **Client Services,** clientservices@madavor.com; **Ryan Gillis,** Marketing & Audience Development Manager; **Jaime Sweeney,** Marketing Associate; **Alice Barry** Audience Engagement Editor

Executive
Jeffrey C. Wolk, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer; **Courtney Whitaker,** Chief Operating Officer; **Jason Pomerantz,** Vice President, Consumer Marketing; **Matt Martinelli,** Vice President, Content

In memory of Susan Fitzgerald, COO, 1966-2018

Newsstand Distribution
Weekly Retail Service

To sell *The Writer* magazine in your store: Contact KPS
Phone: 888-999-9839; Email: RetailServices@kable.com

Customer Service & Subscriptions
The-Writer@pcspublink.com; US: 877-252-8139, CAN/INT: 760-496-7575

To subscribe: writermag.com/the-magazine/subscribe
To buy back issues: magdogs.com/the-writer-magazine

Subscribers allow 4-6 weeks for change of address to become effective. Subscriptions are non-cancelable and nonrefundable unless otherwise promoted. Frequency subject to change without notice. Additional double issues may be published, which count as two issues.

Submissions
Read our submission guidelines: writermag.com/the-magazine/submission-guidelines

Please include your name, mailing and email addresses, and telephone number with any correspondence. Return postage must accompany all manuscripts, drawings, and photographs submitted if they are to be returned, and no responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited materials. All rights in letters sent to The Writer *will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and as subject to unrestricted right to edit and to comment editorially.*

The Writer (ISSN 0043-9517) is published monthly by Madavor Media, LLC, 35 Braintree Hill Office Park, Suite 101, Braintree, MA 02184. Periodicals postage paid at Boston, MA and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Please send changes of address to **The Writer**, P.O. Box 460700, Escondido, CA 92046.

The title **The Writer** is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Contents copyright © 2023 by Madavor Media, LLC. All rights reserved. Contact our official partner, Wright's Media, about available usages, license fees, and award seal artwork at madavormedia@wrightsmedia.com.

MADAVOR MEDIA

Contact us:
The Writer, Madavor Media, LLC
35 Braintree Hill Office Park, Suite 101, Braintree, MA 02184

Subscribe to our newsletter:
writermag.com/newsletter

Become a member of *The Writer*:
writermag.com/memberships

Enter our current contest:
writermag.com/the-writer-contests

Join us on social media:
twitter.com/TheWriterMag
facebook.com/TheWriterMagazine
instagram.com/TheWriterMag

Please Recycle This Magazine

Prologue

"The essence of the [writing] process is revision. The adulating portrait of the perfect writer who never blots a line comes express mail from fairyland."

—JOHN MCPHEE

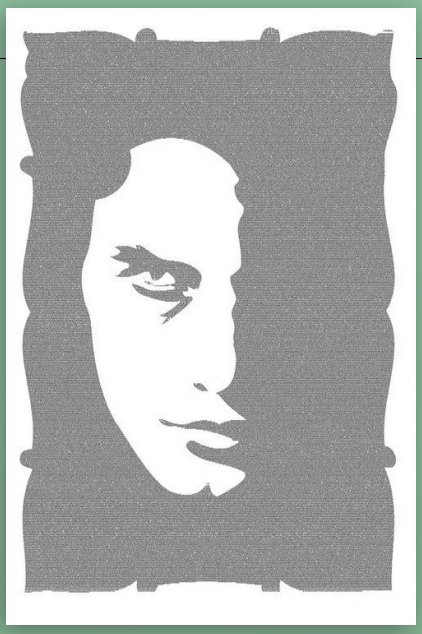


LEIGH PRATHER/SHUTTERSTOCK

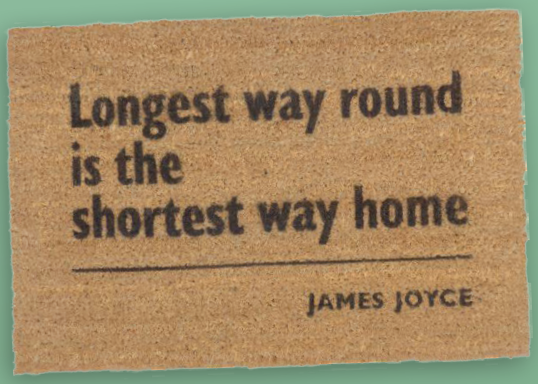
p. 4 Celebrate St. Patrick's Day in a writerly way. p. 6 Pre-order campaigns: Worth it?
p. 7 Submit your best stuff. p. 8 What happens when Stephen King tweets at you?

Emerald gems

If you don't want to pound a pint of Guinness or don green, but you still want to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, you can pay a little respect to Irish literary giants with these items.



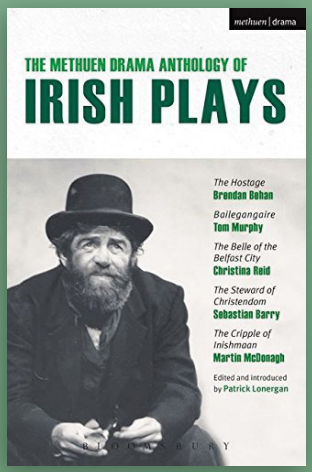
***The Picture of Dorian Gray* Novel Poster**
The entirety of Oscar Wilde's novel is reprinted on this poster around the classic image of Mr. Gray.
£12.99 (approximately $15.71),
theliterarygiftcompany.com



James Joyce Doormat
This quote from Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* seems fitting for the doorway of any house.
£20 (approximately $24.19),
theliterarygiftcompany.com

Sally Rooney *Normal People* Tote Bag
You could easily imagine one of the characters from this young Irish author's novels using this bag, right?
$22, *etsy.com*





The Methuen Drama Anthology of Irish Plays
Five great Irish plays are collected in this book, with works ranging from Brendan Behan's classic *The Hostage* to an early work from Martin McDonagh that hinted at his coming brilliance.
$22.95,
barnesandnoble.com



W.B. Yeats Writer's Block
These 2-inch wood cubes make a bout of writer's block feel a bit more tangible.
$10.99, *etsy.com*

Samuel Beckett Author Quote Mug
A little motivational quote about failure from Samuel Beckett is a good pick-me-up along with your morning coffee.
$18.99, *etsy.com*





A Modest Proposal Babygro
Jonathan Swift set the standard for satire with his Modest Proposal, but we understand if this onesie isn't everyone's – ahem – taste.
£11.95 (approximately $13.31), *theliterarygiftcompany.com*



Chronicles of Narnia Jigsaw Puzzle
A library collection of C.S. Lewis' beloved series gets the puzzle treatment.
$48, *fineartamerica.com*



Dracula T-shirt
Red is the perfect color for this shirt showing off the 1927 stage adaptation of Irish author Bram Stoker's novel.
$32, *outofprint.com*

Do pre-order campaigns really work?

The struggle of achieving the 'buzzy bestseller.'

By Marissa DeCuir



VECTORMINE/SHUTTERSTOCK

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT A TWEET will have staying power after it disappears from your feed, but this 2021 viral tweet by YA author Jenny Elder Moke still resonates with me: "I know this is very against popular discussion, but the idea of pre-orders being so important to a book's success is just exhausting. People just...don't shop that way. Books are a tactile thing, and they're often a browsing experience. People want to peruse at a bookstore."

As the president of Books Forward, a literary publicity firm, I find the question of "how do people buy books?" is always on my mind because the answers fuel our book marketing efforts. And here was an intriguing offshoot of that essential book-buying question: "Do pre-order campaigns 'work?'"

Pre-order campaigns are promotions designed to sell books before the official release date. On publication day, all those pre-sold books are dispatched for delivery, and the pre-sales are tallied up with sales that occur during release week.

Pre-orders are significant for a couple reasons: First, because pre-sales are counted during, and not before, release week, they can increase the chance of landing on a bestseller list. Second, if an author is traditionally published, the publisher ostensibly wants to start making money back as soon as possible and anticipate how a title will perform.

But are pre-order campaigns (and expectations around their success) helping or harming authors?

Moke continued on Twitter: "The fact that a book needs to be a buzzy bestseller *before it even comes out* is a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. Because if pubs expect a book with a lot of pre-orders to succeed, then they necessarily assume the opposite for books that don't have them."

She added, "ALL books deserve to find their way to readers, and not all books need to be bestsellers to be successful. The way this industry has narrowed in on one extremely subjective metric for success is so ignorant and disrespectful to actual readers."

Moke noted that distribution has made a bigger difference than pre-orders in selling her own books, crediting "excellent placement in places like Wal-Mart and Target, and large enough orders in B&N [Barnes & Noble] that the book could be face out."

I wholeheartedly agree that books do not need to be bestsellers – particularly immediate bestsellers – to be successful. In fact, our publicity firm is dedicated to helping authors understand that good promotion is a marathon, not a sprint. And while it's beneficial to plan promotion leading up to a launch, there is also plenty of opportunity to keep momentum going after.

Conventional publishing wisdom has maintained that books only have a short window around publication to be considered successful – but, as we've seen, a viral video on TikTok can catapult even obscure titles into the spotlight. "Convention" doesn't always keep pace with "innovation," and the publishing industry is no exception.

So could it be that the industry's use of pre-orders as a major metric of success does not accurately reflect how readers actually buy books – and are authors being unfairly sidelined as "unsuccessful" by their publishers as a result?

I spoke with one of our authors, *New York Times* bestseller Joan He, about whether or not she felt pre-order campaigns were "worth it." She had actually responded to Moke's original tweet, saying: "Not going to argue that it isn't exhausting (because it is!) or that it should be this way but also sometimes preorders are the only way you can get a pub to increase a print run and distribute it better so that there IS that tactile experience."

She continued, "After my first experience, I will never take my book being in a store for granted. And a large part of *DOTC* [*Descendant of the Crane*] being in stores was due to preorders. But yup, wish it weren't this way."

"Those are still my thoughts," He said. "I think a pre-order campaign probably isn't worth the swag costs/time/effort, assuming you're able to expend those, of course, if you can't figure out how to make yours stand out or if it's just not something you want to do."

For her part, He said she enjoys the process of putting together her pre-order campaigns. Her strategy is to make sure every pre-order incentive is high quality and tailored to the book. She enjoys adding personal touches because she wants "to make it feel like a gift to readers."

When asked if she feels like pre-order campaigns are "worth it," she said she feels her pre-order campaigns helped readers discover her first novel, *Descendant of the Crane*, and helped her second novel, *The Ones We're Meant to Find*, become a *New York Times* bestseller.

He also explained that her pre-order campaign reached readers internationally, and while those sales don't help with U.S. lists, "readers are still readers when it comes to word of mouth." And a sale is still a sale – even when it comes overseas.

Perhaps the answer regarding pre-orders lies somewhere between Moke's and He's experiences: A savvy, well-crafted pre-order campaign *can* help a book sell and can positively influence your publishing experience. And: It *is* skewed to look at pre-orders as a primary metric of publishing success. As Moke said, not all books need to be bestsellers to be successful. All books deserve to find their way to readers.

Marissa DeCuir is the president and partner of Books Forward publicity and Books Fluent publishing. A former journalist, she's always looking for the best hooks to utilize in author publicity and book marketing and believes in taking a personal and strategic can-do approach to help authors reach their goals.

Upcoming Calls for Submissions

***Sand Hills* literary magazine**
Categories: Art, poetry, prose
Description: Editors seek U.S. entries from emerging and established writers and artists for the 47th issue.
Deadline: March 20
sandhillslitmag.com/submit/

Allium, A Journal of Poetry & Prose
Categories: Poetry, craft essays, fiction, hybrid, nonfiction, and creative nonfiction
Description: With three issues per year, *Allium* welcomes voices from BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and neurodiverse communities in addition to diverse-aware authors. Guidelines include a maximum poetry length of five pages and 15 pages for all other works.
Deadline: March 15
allium.colum.edu/submit

***Transform The World* anthology**
Categories: Sci-fi, near-future hopepunk
Description: In its third anthology of the *Writers Save the World* series, stories should be set in the next 100 years, take a hopeful tone and focus on new ways of living. One story per entrant, and pricing varies based on word count and prior publication.
Deadline: March 1
duotrope.com/duosuma/submit/transform-the-world-anthology-6OZk7



LAURITTA/SHUTTERSTOCK

When social media catches fire

A new author tweeted her feelings about a failed book signing. Things got crazy.

By T.J. Murphy

CHELSEA BANNING'S JOURNEY through writing and self-publishing *Of Crowns and Legends,* her first book, is not unfamiliar: ups and downs, stops and starts, and learning the business from the ground up. It was in promoting her novel that Banning happened on a road far less traveled.

The 33-year-old Ohio-based writer demonstrated how using social media can (with a stroke of luck, she says) pay off.

The long march to publication

"I started writing *Of Crowns and Legends* in high school, then put it down in college and picked it back up in 2018," she told *The Writer*. "I finished the final draft in early 2022 and published it [in] late August. I did a lot of research on the self-publishing process. How to do it, where to do it, what platforms and distributors are best. I did that for about a year."

What Banning never imagined in the marketing stage was how a new author's dream – a first book signing event – could be nightmarish one day, then, through a surprise social media twist, become "surreal."

You never know who you'll find in the void

"Had my first author signing today at a local bookstore," Banning wrote in a TikTok post on Dec. 3 of last year. "Only two people came and I was pretty bummed, but it was nice to see them!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHELSEA BANNING

Banning tried to stay positive, but the disappointment she felt about the small turnout burned on. Against the advice of her husband, she decided to air her experience on social media.

"We had talked about it on the car ride home, but I was still feeling a little upset the next day and wanted to talk it out with someone who was in the writing community or just kind of 'speak into the void' and get it off my chest," she says.

The tweet racked up more than 80,000 likes after sparking the memories of bestselling authors like Margaret Atwood, Jodi Picoult, and Stephen King.



Banning took to Twitter, writing, "Only two people came to my author signing yesterday, so I was pretty bummed about it. Especially as 37 people responded 'going' to the event. Kind of upset, honestly, and a little embarrassed."

The tweet racked up more than 80,000 likes after sparking the memories of bestselling authors like Margaret Atwood, Jodi Picoult, and Stephen King.

King tweeted back, "At my first *Salem Lot* signing, I had one customer. A fat kid who said, 'Hey bud. Do you know where there's some Nazi books?'"

"Join the club," Atwood wrote to Banning. "I had a book signing to which nobody came except a guy who wanted to buy Scotch tape."

Going viral

Unsurprisingly, the conversation went viral, attracting the attention of reporters from NPR, BBC News, and the *Wall Street Journal*, not to mention local TV stations.

Things got crazy, Banning says. "My inbox was full of interview requests and emails from other writers or people saying they bought my book for support. It was surreal."

Banning's "hope" had been to sell 300 copies of the book, and she dreamed of hitting the 1000 mark. After the tweet storm, sales zoomed past 3000. By early January, she had sold more than 8500 copies.

Banning had another book event on Dec. 19 at the local library where she works. Fifty people showed – 25 times the turnout for her first book signing.

We asked her: What's the better promotional tool? Book signings or social media?

Banning says it's a mix.

"Honestly, I learned that both are hit or miss," she says. "Social media is pure luck as to what gets seen, and book signings can be tough. I do know that a lot of authors tend to have good luck at craft shows, literary festivals, or even Comic-Cons."

One thing is for sure: Despite social media's reputation for trolls and haters, it's a place where writers can support other writers – a dynamic fully on display in Banning's Twitter feed, @chelseabwrites.

T.J. Murphy has been a writer, author, and magazine editor for more than 20 years. His first reading was a debacle that he is still recovering from.

LAURITTA/SHUTTERSTOCK

» *Opportunities*



The Scop
Categories: Poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, art, photography
Description: The King's College publication is open to submissions from all writers and creators for Volume 83. One prose piece per genre (7,000 words or less), and stories must be in a Word document.
Deadline: March 18
duotrope.com/duosuma/submit/scop-lit-fine-arts-mag-kings-college-N0zdB

Bermuda Triangle Prize
Categories: Poetry
Description: Judges seek up to three poems on a water and earth theme. Winners win $50 and publication and display in the Poet's Billow Literary Art Gallery.
Deadline: March 15
duotrope.com/duosuma/submit/bermuda-triangle-prize-R03j7

James Jones First Novel Fellowship
Categories: Fiction
Description: Writers who have never published a novel are invited to enter the 32nd annual award from the James Jones Literary Society, which has a $10,000 prize for the winner. Entries cost $33 and must include a two-page novel outline and the first 50 pages of the unpublished novel.
Deadline: March 15
jamesjones.submittable.com/submit

The Writer's
CRITIQUE SERVICE

Get PROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK *on your work!*

PLUS AND VIP MEMBERS GET $20 OFF!

Need some professional feedback on your writing before you submit it to an editor or agent?

We're here to help.

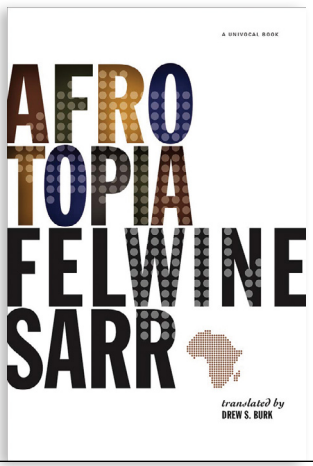
Whether you're working on a novel, a short story, an essay, or a memoir, our critique service will help you identify where your draft sparkles and where it might need a bit more polishing.

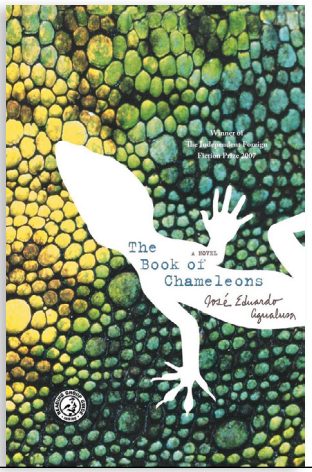
Learn more at writermag.com/critique-service

Broadening the **Bookshelves**

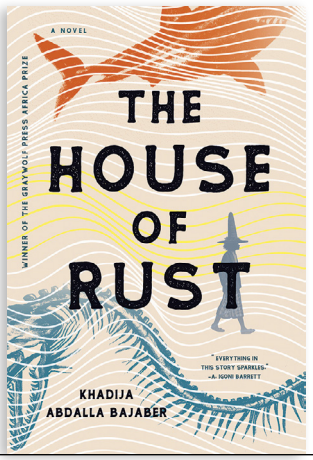
This month, we're focusing on literature by Anglophone African writers.

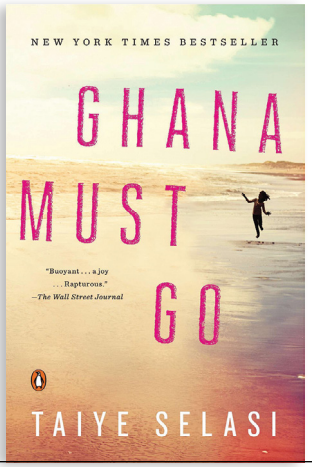
By Yi Shun Lai

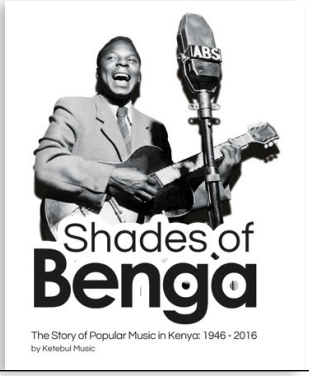












This month's The Nightstand picks from Yvonne Owuor

WINWIN ARTLAB/SHUTTERSTOCK

Getting to know literature by Anglophone African writers

I have been at this column for over a year now, and still, every month I learn something new from the people I interview for it, not just about the subject matter itself, the literature we happen to be discussing each month, but also about that *way* in which we look at literature and the myriad ways there are to interpret it.

With his first email to me, David Nandi Odhiambo, who teaches English at the University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu, and whose four award-winning novels are unlike any I've previously read, points me in a direction new to me: He writes of "minoritarian" and "majoritarian" literature. I do some Googling. "Minoritarian literature," various sources tell me, is often used in conjunction with "postcolonial" literature. This I understand, but I am eager to hear from Odhiambo exactly what he thinks of it.

Right away, Odhiambo tells me that the canon shouldn't be thought of as monolithic: It's flexy, he says, moving through time and culture, and this movement is objective, depending on who's in power. "One of the things that I ended up doing," says Odhiambo, "was then looking at something known as the minoritarian, which is not a response to the majoritarian but [the majoritarian] language. Minoritarian literature is literature written by minorities in the dominant language. I was really interested in thinking about what that meant, having to



come to books through all of this literature that is viewed in very specific ways." Minoritarian literature, he goes on, is a counternarrative. "But the minoritarian goes a little bit further: Initially, you had the development of the Afro-European model and the Anglophone novel, where you had people like Chinua Achebe writing *Things Fall Apart* (1958). And there you have someone who's attempting very much to say, OK, there are these models of representation that aren't consistent with the experience I have as an African. There was a movement to having that voice, the African voice, speak of their own experiences."

Odhiambo says that this work, although it reflected a kind of progress, also necessarily reflected the majoritarian world: "[The work] still had a binary world. But things have shifted toward looking at how there is an intersectionality there – we live in a world where there are interconnections rather than singular frames of reference."

I can already feel the prickles of misapprehension at the back of my brain. I ask Odhiambo if there isn't a superior value judgment placed on the dominant language.

Odhiambo tells me that the language issue runs deeper than just a value judgment. "For instance, I grew up in Kenya, and it was a British colony, and the two official languages are English and Swahili. But people, for the most part, spoke English. And when I went to school, I studied in English. However, the difficulty with language is that it doesn't necessarily capture the experience of people who live outside of that language. So, in a way, you end up being devalued because you're working with a language that doesn't include you, ultimately."

I'm thinking about my home country of Taiwan and how hard it was for my parents' families when, in 1949, they were forced to use Mandarin Chinese as the official language of education and business instead of their native Taiwanese. How devalued they felt; how much lower on the social ladder they suddenly became. Odhiambo tells me that the issues faced by writers working in Anglophone Africa are similar: "I think that if you are born into a

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID NANDI ODHIAMBO

language, there are a lot of assumptions that come with the language and with the majoritarian. Many of those assumptions in the language and the history of the language are based on pseudoscientific racism. So you have philosophers like [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich] Hegel who talk of the African not having a law, not having a soul, being close to nature. These ways of thinking about the African end up showing up in works like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where you have characters who are – well, they're faceless. They're voiceless. And they represent ... darkness. And so, yes, I think that when you are outside of that language, you're forced to contend with those assumptions and note that the language doesn't reflect you. And so that's why I think you see that shift with trying to bring in sort of more traditional ideas so that the ideas are there. And then a shift in terms of how people are working with language. There's an attempt to move into an experiential relationship to what language can do other than giving you concepts and categories that speak to who you are."

Odhiambo reminds me that although the language we're currently speaking of is English, majoritarian literature can be spoken of as the language of the colonizer: "If you're in a country like Senegal, and you work in French, you have the same challenges."

I ask Odhiambo where he thinks the movement toward a larger presence of minoritarian literature started. "A big moment for the development of African literature in terms of the larger literary imagination is the end of the colonial period for many of these countries. There is an attempt to grapple with what it has meant to have been colonized. And also what it means to be independent in relation to that: Who are we?

"Much of this work would look at the difference between the traditional and the modern and the ways in which those two are in conflict with one another, the disappearance of the traditional. Initially, that tended to be the impetus in the writing. And then you continue to have that strain, a writing that looks at trying to represent a voice. And someone like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, he would take that one step further: What we need to do is write books in our own languages to fully replicate our experience, to capture the nuances of our experience."

"There's an attempt to move into an experiential relationship to what language can do other than giving you concepts and categories that speak to who you are."

Odhiambo notes that there are still problems with this more organic way of thinking: "It still stays within that framework of thinking that we have to come up with categories to make sense of who we are. [For instance,] I say that I am a Luo person. That's the tribe that I come from in Kenya. And then there's an official way we can talk about what that actually means, what is legitimate. [O]ne way of thinking of Africa [is] usually bound up in a kind of oppression. [But] I think writers that are looking at multiple ways of talking about the African experience, those are the writers that are doing the work around what the minoritarian is attempting to show, which is the way in which there's an affect from multiple influences."

I think about the many sounds in my home language of Taiwanese and how hard it is to replicate those sounds in English or even in Mandarin. I think about how I struggle sometimes to find English equivalents to Taiwanese expressions. I wonder if African writers sometimes feel frustration at having to shoehorn their lived experiences into a language not their own. "Writers that are really thinking through the implication of working with a language that is not their own have to find solutions in their own work to move beyond what that language doesn't say or can't say or can't capture. And I think that one of the things that starts to happen is that there is a shift, for instance, toward the fragmented sentence. There's a way in which you're not necessarily dealing with characters, but you're dealing with personas, personae, who are part of social networks or assemblages. So, the black figure becomes something that is an attempt to articulate what hasn't been said. It sounds sort of contradictory, but you're trying to write the thing that hasn't existed in language before. And so that has meant bending the language to make it your own."

The part of me that tracks corporate America is shrieking here. How do we get people who aren't attuned to things like fragmented sentences and characters as personae to make work like this a success?

Odhiambo reminds me that there is precedent for this kind of work – he points out Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. And then, he says, "I also don't know whether the minoritarian is necessarily trucking in a kind of corporate idea about what the writer is. It's not necessarily an ambitious trajectory toward attaining a certain level and standing in society. It's more about that artistic enterprise of thought. Can we arrive at thinking through the assumptions in the language? And I think that when you start to make that move, it's an uphill battle because there is a strong resistance to difference because the authoritarian model doesn't incorporate difference. What it does is it talks about sameness. It's not about multiplicities. And so, I think that it's a difficult uphill battle, but I think that it's the battle of the artist to find an integrity with their work that is the emphasis here, and that's what's successful."

The beast that lives inside of me, the one that wants all writers to be paid equally, is setting up a storm in my belly. I press the issue: How do we get these writers paid? How do we *advocate* for them? Odhiambo gently presses back: "It may seem idealistic, but I think very generally, there are two different kinds of writers. There is the writer, who is very much interested in audience and in speaking to audience in ways sometimes that inform and also that clarify and explain. That's an important role, and those books end up being successful. [Chimamanda Ngozi] Adichie's *Americanah* is an example of that. And I think there have been recently a spate of African writers who have won the Booker Prize and the Nobel. These are writers who are drawing on that advocacy role that you're describing. So, it exists. But there's a place for many different kinds of voices. And there's another kind of writer, and I think I'm very much a part of that tradition, where the emphasis is, how do you arrive at a thought, at thinking? Because I think much of what we do is receive, have received wisdom or received knowledge. And that tends to be the way in which we make sense of the world.

"And so there ends up being a lack of questioning over, for instance, the way the corporate model has taken hold. The point here is that you can't ask people to pick up thought to engage with it. You just have to have opportunities for it to exist. And for that potential for that to take place in larger and larger communities.

"But the goal of the writer, I think, is really to get to the place where they're doing the work of showing ways to think that are useful in making sense of the world, the complicated world that we're moving in." Here Odhiambo pauses, and I wonder if he's going to talk to me about the difficulties of making a living this way, but he doesn't.

"It can be done. It can be successful. Mm hmm. But the point is not the success of it. The success is in whether you're articulating some kind of thoughtful vision about the world that we move in."

I tell Odhiambo my capitalist brain is struggling with the idea of these writers toiling away without broader recognition, and he tells me what so many writers in this space have said before: that it's the problem of having to write to what the larger publishing houses want. "What ends up actually happening is that if you publish with a really large house, you're going to get a lot of support. You're going to get your work reviewed. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be successful, but it's a platform that makes that kind of success that you're talking about more possible. So how does one access that? I think that the idea is that what you do is then write to the market. If it's time to talk about child soldiers in Africa, then there's books about child soldiers in Africa. If it's attention to gender and equality, that becomes the kind of book that comes out because it's potentially more marketable."

But Odhiambo sees minoritarian literature as a pathway different from all of that: "Language, in a sense, is an interpretation. It's a stand-in for experience. So, it doesn't capture the ground. It tells us something about the surface of the surface. I think that what is happening, though, is that there is a shift just generally in terms of how people are thinking about literature, where the emphasis is becoming more on, 'How do we get to the subject?' Rather than the subject. What is the context that created the subject? What is the subject's orientation that creates the way that they make sense of the world? And so I think that this writing – and it's something that that I grapple with a lot in my own work – is attempting to shift the conversation. And it since [has] become a part of the conversation about what literature *is*."

I wonder aloud if I can find my way to a world where it isn't, as Odhiambo puts it, only the loudest voices that get heard, the voices that tell singular truths. Odhiambo tells me, gently, in his way, not to be so impatient. "I do believe that anyone thinking in the way that the minoritarian is attempting to think through how we talk about the ground, how we talk about how we arrive at our ideas, is moving us in the direction of getting past that somehow."

Yi Shun Lai teaches in the MFA program at Bay Path University and is the author of two books. Her next book, a YA historical novel, is due out in 2024 from Atheneum Books.

Talk to the Practitioner:
Chiedozié Dike

I reach Chiedozié Dike through my friend Joj, who has worked, as long as I've known them, to provide a space for writers who don't always get the attention they deserve. Within a hot minute, I know I'm in the presence of someone whose own mission is to spread the possibilities of writing out to as many people as possible.

Dike, who is from Nigeria and now lives in London, is a writer and lawyer. He has also written for television and radio. His short stories have been published in three anthologies and in online publications, including *The Write Launch* and *Afreada*. He is working on several novels.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHIEDOZIÉ DIKE

The Writer: You're a copywriter and a lawyer. How does all of that fold into the writing you're doing now, which is more literary in nature?

Chiedozié Dike: Storytelling was the first thing. Everything else was a detail which led me *back* to writing. I remember being a kid. I had all these imaginary friends and the curtains had names, the flask had the name, the nail clippers had names, all of those. I constantly was creating stories. I was in my own little bubble, my own little world. The first thing I ever wrote, I was about 5. A classmate of mine bought the story off me for a profit.

TW: You were 5? You managed to make that profit early! You said that everything had a name. For me, one of my aunts taught me that the rocks had a name and the bushes

had names and so on and so forth. But that was because my aunt is uniformly unique. She's the kind of person who would name things. Where did *you* pick up that tradition from? Is it family? Is it cultural? Tell me a little bit about where that storytelling comes from.

CD: I come from an oral storytelling tradition. It started to die by the time I was born, and still my mom held on to it. And she would tell my siblings and I, you know, folktales about the tortoise and the hare and all of that stuff. It sort of fostered that we need to tell stories. For me, letter writing was also a big deal. I remember constantly reading the letters my grandma or my grandpa would send to my mom. I used to read those letters, and the first thing I was really obsessed with was the handwriting.

My mom and my granddad had really, really good handwriting. So, I would try to copy that. And in the process, I'm reading these letters and how well-crafted they are. I'm picking up things about cadence and the sort of things like a specific person would say as opposed to the other, like the trademark greetings that my grandfather would use and how my mom would respond to things. And, you know, it was really funny, because even in the letters that are the type I remember, there's something really interesting about these letters: the letter writer would anticipate the reaction of the person who's reading it. Like, you know, they'll make a joke and [then they'll write] "he laughs" in brackets, or "she laughs." So all of this is really, really interesting to me.

TW: You're from Nairobi. You speak English, obviously, and your family is Igbo, so you speak Igbo. You also speak French and Yoruba. But you write in English. Can we talk a little bit about that? Does it bother you to write in the language of your colonizers?

CD: English is, like, the lingua franca of Nigeria. It's basically history, you know. Oppression does not sit outside of the history of colonization, so it doesn't bother me. It's a part of my history inadvertently by being Nigerian but by virtue of where I was born. So English is very much my language. I think in English.

Oppression does not sit outside of the history of colonization.

I haven't tried to write in Igbo before, in terms of the creative stuff. I can do it in terms of, say, doing a little bit of translation for somebody. But I haven't tried to do creative writing in Igbo before, which is really interesting because, going back to the stories my mom used to tell us, the narration was always in English, but the most interesting thing and the rich[est] part of the stories were always the songs, the folk songs that accompany the stories, and they were always in Igbo.

There are all these rich metaphors and allegories. I honestly think it is a superior language to English because there's a richness of imagery and visuals and metaphors that's just commonplace in Igbo. You don't need to have like a fancy degree or need to take anything to be able understand it. It's just a natural part of the language. So, I feel like, even though I do not approach creative writing in Igbo, I write with a sensibility of language that is very much Igbo.

TW: You said that you don't need to take a special class or a special course in order to be able to access the richness of the Igbo language. Are you referring to the master of fine arts classes that folks sometimes say we have to take to learn about things like metaphor and simile and plot?

CD: That and just even, like, below the rudimentary level: English in the way that it was taught to me has always been more about like standards. There's never been much room in it for self-expression except through [standardization]. It *has* to be a metaphor or simile, like that's just the way the language works. [But] language is really at the heart of self-expression in that the way everyone talks is very, very much unique to them.

Following on that, I always make this argument that the type of Igbo I speak is the Auntie Igbo because some of it also is gendered. I would make the argument that this is a specific way in which women speak. And because I had a lot of aunties, and I was raised around a lot of women, that is why I speak [the way I do]. It's more lyrical, it's more enjoyable, [as] opposed to with Igbo men, there's an emphasis on parables and on, you know, the very deep, serious sort of things that you have to sit and unravel. But [Auntie Igbo] is very playful.

It's very lyrical. There's a lot of use of metaphors and a lot of onomatopoeia, which I find really just really, really interesting and engaging.

TW: You're working on a few novels right now. At which point did you feel like you wanted to work on longer works?

CD: I literally used to spend my [school] holidays reading and writing. I did a lot of experimentation at the time, even though I wasn't really aware that that was what I was doing, trying out different voices. There were two moments when I decided when I was able to articulate to myself: When I read *Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta – how *angry* the book made me! I wanted to be able to do that, get people to feel things, to create atmosphere. [Another] book that also did that for me was [Richard Yates'] *Revolutionary Road*.

TW: It sounds like you were drawing from both the cultural traditions of writers from Nigeria but also writers from the [United] States or writers from England. Would you say that you sense a difference between them?

CD: A lot of the difference is political, and also constructed in that, a lot of the [Nigerian] writers I read growing up, the[ir] writing was very utilitarian, in terms of, there's this big thing we have to deal with: the colonial government or colonialism after that. And then the military juntas in Nigeria as well. It was very pointed in that way. And then we went from that to this space [that], in one way or the other, has been dictated by the West. Ultimately, all our biggest writers have always been published in the West. While that was useful for the time, it was also something that worked in terms of the business angle. And so it then became like this box: When there's a pattern of publishing a certain kind of story, it then becomes prescriptive. So, you just started to feel like, over time, there's a certain kind of story that gets published. It has to be about the military, it has to be about the war and stuff.

"So, you just started to feel like, over time, there's a certain kind of story that gets published. It has to be about the military, it has to be about the war and stuff."

Having the breadth of stories that I've had access to, both oral and written, I'm very mindful of myself as just the writer. I can be an African writer. I can be a Nigerian writer. But only in the terms of basically claiming space. It's this sort of strategic essentialism, where I am going to take up this space. I'm going to take on this title [of writer] just to create this category. That sort of space-making is not supposed to be eternal. It's very strategic. So it's like, OK, I can be a Nigerian writer, an African writer. [But] at some point, I'm just a writer. Because that's how I think of myself.

And I think the stories that I come up with are universal. Because it's all about the same things. It's love [for instance].

Looking at the way that Nigerian writers and other African writers are marketed as opposed to like writers from other parts of the world, it's [always like], "Oh, this is a glimpse into the colonial or into the war or something." But it's not. It's a story about two people in love, you know?

TW: You're saying the pigeonholing should be strategic on the part of the writer, and it should be a choice, not dictated by the publishing industry.

CD: I'm like everybody else. I hope to have a really good career. And I want to be able to show that you can write whatever the heck you want to write. You can write about sex, you can write about gay relationships. We talk constantly about the white male gaze, but there's also the heterosexual gaze. There's when you come from the quote unquote, margins. And I'm not even sure what that means. You are playing a game that is predetermined without your consent. I think one needs to be mindful of those boxes that really have nothing to do with [you] and define your own parameters for what a good story is.

You [get told] in creative writing programs, for example, maybe this is too melodramatic. According to whom? Melodrama means different things in England and Nigeria. And if I'm writing a story with Nigerian characters in Nigeria, I mean, that's where you have to meet me.



I asked novelist Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor to choose five books by Anglophone African writers. From the beginning, she stumps me. "I cheated a little," she says. "I included one from so-called Francophone Africa and another from Lusophone, but they're translated into English." When I ask her why, she returns readily, "I want to get away from the silos. Even within our own spaces, [I want to] elevate the story no matter where it is from, from within the continent." She smiles. "We miss out on the immensity and diversity of stories that come from the other language areas. [There's] incredible literature, say from the Francophone or Lusophone world, that informs and actually speaks to the so-called African Anglophone realities. There's a space that actually is an African space that should transcend language and the land."

> **The English of Kenya, is not necessarily the same as the English in Nigeria. It's not the same as the English in Cameroon. It's not even a dialect of English. It just becomes a language of landscape."**

Owuor adds that she's involved with Nairobi's Macondo Literary Festival (not to be confused with Sandra Cisneros' Macondo Writers' Workshop), which originally covered only Anglophone African literature. Recently, Owuor and her co-organizers expanded the festival to include literature from Lusophone and Francophone Africa. "We always found a way to speak to one another," she says, "even if one only spoke Portuguese and the other only spoke English. There was always a way. And that's been such a revelation." Soon, the literary festival will include not only literature from Francophone and Lusophone Africa but also Arabophone Africa. "There's been an incredible lesson about the need to bring down the silos, which are mostly in our imagination, and to invite the story in, wherever the story comes from."

I ask if Owuor isn't a little resentful that these stories must be translated into the language of a country's colonizers before it can be made accessible. She laughs. "I'm obsessed with the sound of languages. I've become aware the language

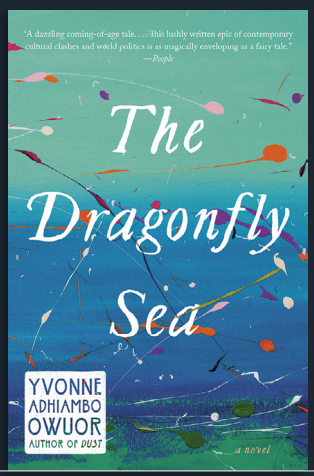


PHOTO COURTESY OF YVONNE OWUOR

is...promiscuous and has absolutely no loyalties to nationalities or to our political stances. Languages seem to find a way to survive, or they figure out a way to survive. I'm paraphrasing Chinua Achebe, but he says, 'You will see what marvelous things we will do with that language, with English.' So I speak of Englishes. And Frenches or Portugueses. Arabics...I love what it does when it enters a landscape and infuses itself. It's both parasitic and opportunistic.

"My own passion for languages and awareness of what I call the Englishes, the English of Kenya, is not necessarily the same as the English in Nigeria. It's not the same as the English in Cameroon. It's not even a dialect of English. It just becomes a language of landscape."

Owuor's five picks are as follows.

***Afrotopia*, Felwine Sarr.**

Translated from French (Sarr is a Senegalese academic, writer, and musician), *Afrotopia* is "an exquisite love letter with philosophical and profound and historical and a call to the African future, an African idea of a sense of the self and a call to inhabit not only our skins but also inhabit the ground from which we emerge," Owuor says. She praises its prose and its directness and its redefinition of utopia: "It's such an anthem of more than hope, of a kind of art. It's almost as if in a way, it's kind of saying, 'but everything is already here'...Specifically, it's as if utopia is a seedling grown on the African soil and breathing in the African landscapes and drawing from the African skies."

***The Book of Chameleons*, Jose Eduardo Agualusa.**

"This is the kind of book that only an Angolan could have written, and only an Angolan of African descent," Owuor says. Narrated by a gecko who observes the albino main character, whose job it is to provide new memories for those who want them, this book is easily cast into the genre of magical realism, but Owuor rejects that easy classification. "One of the things we want to say within the African space is that these things that feel magical or unreal or surreal are realities of the real. They are surreal realities and part of our daily life."

***House of Rust*, Khadija Abdalla Bajaber.**

Winner of the inaugural Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction, Bajaber is a writer from the coast of Kenya. The book, set in Mombasa, is about a young woman who must rescue her father, who is trapped under the ocean. Owuor describes it as a very "oceanic" book, and she notes that its significance goes beyond its storytelling or its prose: "The history of colonization has also been a history of amputation. And for Africans, the major significant amputation was the amputation from our maritime imagination. We have absolutely no idea why the Europeans that lurked around this region assumed that we had absolutely no agency or involvement or relationship with the ocean, and we did not have a maritime imagination or an ancient maritime relationship, despite the evidence of cities and histories and chronicles and the language itself. So, I think there's a new generation that starts to reclaim our stake, redraw our lines [to] the sea as part of our identities and also part of our own history. So, Khadija does it in a very contemporary way, with incredible resonance to the past."

***Ghana Must Go*, Taiye Selasi.**

Owuor confesses to "love at first sight" upon reading this novel about diaspora and the connections that drive us. "Apart from its exquisite story and its references to a very painful episode within our contemporary African history, when the Ghanaians were moved forcibly out of Nigeria, it becomes an exquisite human story, a story of migration, of our nomadism and our search for home and belonging." Owuor also praises the way the book moves seamlessly through timelines: "I love books that are trans-temporal. You kind of say, OK, I recognize the present, but I feel the resonance of the past, and I see glimpses of the future as well."

***Shades of Benga: The Story of Popular Music in Kenya (1946-2016)*, Tabu Osusa.**

To explain this more academic-like choice to me, Owuor lets me in on a little history about the prevalent musical style of Kenya: "Benga, it is said, was what happened when the people from the region where I come from, the Nyanza, the Lake region, who have a musical instrument called Nyatiti, the eight-string musical lyre, encountered the Spanish guitar. They started to play the guitar with the cadences, the phrases, the style, the fingering of the Nyatiti, and this incredible other sound emerged. And this sound also then travels all over the region." Owuor points out the importance of music to the Kenyan culture and adds that the book tells the story of Benga's being the root of "an unfolding, literally a flowering, of varieties of music, types of music, in Kenya."

Why we retell stories over and over again.

Writers love taking a familiar story and recasting it with more diverse characters or slightly different circumstances.

By Toni Fitzgerald

d over again. Why we retell

n. *Why we retell stories over and*

ell stories over and

ell stories over and over again.

ories over and over again.

stories over and over

retell stories over and over

tell stories over and over

ELL STORIES OVER

Why we retell stories over and

ories over and over again.

Stop us if you've heard this one. A headstrong young woman bucks the expectations of society and her family by stubbornly insisting on doing things her own way. She meets a young man who seems immune to her many charms, spars with him, and ultimately falls in love with him. Along the way, she learns that things are not always what they seem and sometimes, being vulnerable is the only way to move forward.

Of course you've heard this before. It's the plot of Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*. But it's also the plot to a whole host of other books, including *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding, *The Love Match* by Priyanka Taslim, *Debating Darcy* by Sayantani DasGupta, *Pride and Papercuts* by Staci Hart, and *Pride, Prejudice and Other Flavors* by Sonali Dev, just to name a few. Each book offers a slightly different take on the classic tale. In one, the Elizabeth Bennet-styled protagonist is a successful neurosurgeon; in another, she's a high school debate champ. Every work shares the same basic structure, but the details differ enough that each functions as its own unique story.

Austen's work is hardly the only one to be retold. Writers have used classic stories as a vehicle for their own world-building for centuries, but recently we seem to have entered a renaissance for these retellings. Recasting a classic has many advantages. People are already familiar with the story, so you spend less time setting up the plot. And you earn automatic buy-in from fans of the original. Another, increasingly important reason to retell stories is to do it with a more diverse cast, allowing more people to see themselves in the tales that shape society.

It's the universality of a story that keeps it relevant as time goes on. And that appeal draws writers back to the writing device again and again. "We as readers enter a text in complex ways," says DasGupta, who has written two young adult books inspired by Austen texts. "And so, what appeals to me about *Pride and Prejudice* appeals to someone else differently. That's what makes these authors timeless is that their stories do have so much nuance that readers can enter at different points."

Retellings vs. tropes

Reusing ideas is certainly nothing new in literature. From Biblical stories to Homer's *Odyssey*, concepts get adopted and tweaked for the audience. This is different, though, from another literary practice many writers rely on: using tropes. Tropes are plot devices deployed repeatedly throughout



literature, such as friends to lovers in romance novels or a red herring in mystery novels.

While retellings and tropes share commonalities, like relying on a set piece, they are unalike in other ways. Writers enjoy more freedom with tropes, which can be interpreted in different ways or reimagined to fit the setup. Tropes have no specific characters or plotlines, whereas retellings do. And while writers can reinterpret classics in ingenious fashion – see, for example, Melissa de la Cruz's clever recasting of the dwarves in *Snow White* as child laborers in the mines in *Snow & Poison* – they must stay within the confines of the already-established storyline.

Why retell a story?

Writers retell stories for many reasons: to honor a work that made a big impact on them; to amplify an important message; to explore a theme from a new direction; to add diversity where there had been none. Retelling is often one of the first forms of storytelling a writer encounters. Who didn't imagine themselves as Cinderella, the prince, or the fabulous fairy godmother while growing up? Those machinations can lead to new ideas based on our own interests and our own timelines. What if Cinderella's stepsisters weren't actually that bad? (*Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* by Gregory Maguire.) What if the prince didn't go knocking on doors to find Cinderella but instead uploaded a blurry picture of her to Instagram? (*Sometime After Midnight* by L. Philips.) What if Cinderella were Black and queer and trying to figure out why a slew of girls went missing? (*Cinderella Is Dead* by Kalynn Bayron.)

One reason writers use retelling: To honor a story that made a big impact on them.

Retelling also has another value. It forces readers to rethink things they may have taken for granted. While many of us read the classics in high school, we may not stop to re-examine them, and the "truths" they peddle, as we grow older and gain perspective. Retellings help us see ideas in a new

CRISTINA CONTI/SHUTTERSTOCK



FRAN_KIE/SHUTTERSTOCK

light. "When we look at a story we know well – or know *of* – we tend to see what we expect to see," says Amanda Sellet, whose *Belittled Women* wittily reinterprets Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women*. "'*Romeo and Juliet,* how romantic!' '*Little Women,* how sweet!' Giving a familiar story a makeover lets you view it in a new light. Maybe that classic you thought of as wholesome is actually kind of weird. Or toxic. Or ridiculous."

Retelling to right wrongs

Classics exert such influence over our education. They serve as foundational texts – who, after all, hasn't taken a class involving Shakespeare, Austen, or one of the Brontë sisters? These stories form building blocks for our understanding of other works. And for writers, they show how plotting, characterization, and craft should work...or reveal why they don't.

That uneasy relationship with a classic text inspired both Sellet's *Belittled* and Betsy Cornwell's inventive YA novel *Reader, I Murdered Him*. The latter draws inspiration from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* but rearranges many of the elements of the story and incorporates a queer romance. Cornwell says their book is more of a response to *Eyre* than an actual retelling, but they use some of the same characters and plotlines. They felt their reaction to the book evolve as they grew older. When they first read it with their mother at age 10, they felt scared of Edward Rochester, the brooding head of the manor where Jane works. Later, Cornwell became more and more bothered by the character while revisiting the book. When Dr. Christine Blasey Ford gave testimony about her alleged assault during Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court hearings several years ago, Cornwell channeled their frustration into creating *Reader*. "I just felt so much anger about how her story was treated," they say. "And that just sort of resonated with these thoughts I'd had about *Jane Eyre* and Rochester and the little girl and the story and what her version of events

might be. All those things came together for *Reader*."

Sellet felt similarly conflicted about *Women*. In *Belittled*, the protagonist, Jo, has a complicated relationship with the text that provides her namesake. Jo's mother is obsessed with Alcott's work, but her daughter sees its flaws and tires of all the comparisons to the book that her name invites. "*Little Women* loomed large in my consciousness from a young age, but it was a more complicated relationship than pure fandom; there were always things about the story that bugged me," Sellet says. "That didn't prevent it from being a foundational text – something I'd quote from with my mother and sister on a regular basis."

Sellet used her book to embrace the universality of Jo's experience (the writer calls her protagonist "a churning bundle of *want*," and who among us isn't?) while critiquing the problematic aspects of Alcott's vision. "A hundred and fifty years after *Little Women*, there may be less emphasis on being 'ladylike,' but the pressure to conform hasn't gone away. And if someone tries to make you small and silent and subservient or to take away your freedom, it's important to ask why, even if it means getting labeled difficult or rude," she says.

De la Cruz relished turning a trope that she has never liked on its head in *Poison*, her retelling of *Snow White*. "I loved reworking the evil stepmother angle. I think stepmothers have such thankless roles, especially in fairy tales. And in real life, all the stepmothers I know are the loveliest mothers – and I wanted to honor that love. The myth of this evil stepmother is just this terrible trope we've had in our culture," she says. Retelling provided an avenue for reinvention. "In reality, stepmothers are just as loving as mothers and will die for their children.

Retelling to add diversity

Publishing gatekeeping has been going on since way before the 20th century. Most classic tales center on white, cis, straight protagonists. Retellings bring new viewpoints to a story, plus a chance for people of color, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community to see and center themselves.

> "We all want to be the heroes of the story – and seeing and centering non-'mainstream' characters in familiar worn fairy tales is very powerful."

That opportunity attracted DasGupta to Austen retellings. She grew up a fan of the author, reading her books repeatedly. But as much as DasGupta loved the stories, she also knew they presented a limited point of view. She didn't see herself or her family represented in them. "I've been thinking about doing an Austen retelling with multicultural characters forever, mostly because I grew up loving Austen, I'm an Austen fanatic. But also, I never saw myself, obviously, in any of those stories, and I really wondered what it meant to insert Brown and Black characters into these classic stories," DasGupta says.

She even had a bit of meta fun with the insertion. In *Debating*, her two main characters discuss the merits of swapping diverse characters into what they term traditionally white stories. As a writer of color, DasGupta believes in the importance of writing new stories but also revisiting and revising the old. "Do we, meaning marginalized authors, write our own stories? Do we insert ourselves into these classic tales? Do we do both? And you know, I think my answer is, obviously, we do both," she says.

De la Cruz has penned retellings of several classics. She looks for ways to help everyone see themselves in the main character. "We all want to be the heroes of the story – and seeing and centering non-'mainstream' characters in familiar worn fairy tales is very powerful. It sends a message that anyone can be a princess, a warrior, a knight. That's a huge message," she says. "In my latest retelling for Never After [a series of fractured fairy tales], I had a lot of fun turning King Arthur, Merlin, the Lady of The Lake into a funny, warm, Latino family. Why not?"

Retelling to learn

Finally, you can't overlook the value of retelling as a vehicle for learning craft. Cornwell retold fairy tales in many of their earliest writing exercises. "I could kind of use them as plot training wheels for myself, and that is still an assignment that I give to my students as a writing teacher is to retell a fairy tale because I do think it is very good training to look at how these very durable stories work," they say.

Whether it's for training, improving, or relating, retelling can prove a useful addition to every writer's toolbox.

Toni Fitzgerald is the copy editor for The Writer *as well as a freelance writer. She was recently both delighted and appalled to discover a retelling of the classic movie* Grease *that she wrote at age 15. She promises never to publish it. Web: tonifitz76.com*



ROMAN SAMBORSKYI/SHUTTERSTOCK

All of your BURNING #BookTok QUESTIONS, answered

Everything a writer needs to know about the burgeoning book resource, whether you're navigating it for business or pleasure.

By Cathryn Haight

You would think that a social media platform made for consuming seconds-long videos one after the other wouldn't appeal to a bookish crowd. But with the rise of #BookTok – a hashtag on the social media platform TikTok devoted to all things literature – readers are just as likely to be thumbing through these short video clips as they are to be thumbing through a paperback. The influence of #BookTok goes far beyond the screen of a smartphone, though, proving a true force in the publishing industry. According to eBook and audiobook service Scribd, books showcased on BookTok have risen an average of 75% in popularity. And Barnes & Noble has an entire website section (and a table in some brick-and-mortar stores) devoted to titles trending on the platform. Whether you're coming to BookTok as an author looking to gain traction for an upcoming title or simply as a spectating bibliophile, we've got answers to all your queries, with some input from the creators and writers who know it best.



ROMAN SAMBORSKYI/SHUTTERSTOCK

What is BookTok, anyway?

#BookTok is more than just a hashtag. It's a corner of the internet where literature lovers can laugh and cry together, authors can promote their work and share writing tips, and everyone from indie booksellers to big-name publishers can reach their audience in a more personalized, untraditional manner. The niche has the power to launch a new writer's career or even launch a title published years ago to bestselling stardom. And it's free to use, too. You don't have to be a full-blown creator to make an impact. Even if you just make one video, there's a chance the right folks will find it, thanks to the magic that is the ultra-personalized TikTok algorithm.

Who's on it?

Given the newness of TikTok itself, which launched in 2016, it's no surprise that Gen Z has a strong BookTok foothold, but you truly can find all kinds (and all ages) of bibliophiles dwelling there on both the audience side and the creation side. "The BookTok community as a whole is a diverse community of people, reading and talking about the books that they love, even the books they hate," says Ayman Chaudhary (@aymansbooks), a 21-year-old who holds the title of BookTok's most popular creator with 901,800 followers. Chaudhary began posting on her account in August of 2020 after she was inspired by finding a video tagged "#BookTok" on the platform earlier that year. She never set out to "influence" others (just to enjoy herself by making a few bookish videos here and there) until one book recommendation video went viral later that year.

MelissaBlair(@melissas.bookshelf)is an Ontario-based Anishinaabe-kwe writer and book reviewer. She describes the BT crowd as enthusiastic, curious, and hilarious. "Some of the funniest people on the app are BookTokers," she adds. Blair is known on the platform for her on-point reviews of books that might not get as much traditional publicity, like books by Indigenous and queer authors and nonfiction books focused on Indigenous and feminist issues. She's also known for putting on a full-blown mystery-solving extravaganza for BookTokers in December of 2021 after anonymously self-publishing her debut novel, *A Broken Blade*. She invited people to solve the question of which prominent BookToker was behind the new release through a clever campaign complete with wax-sealed personal letters and a series of video clues.

What's on BookTok?

In short, anything you could imagine: Book reviews both short and long, quick-picture slideshows set to music



to pay homage to the mood of a book, witty and creative ways to remind us all how great our local library is, mini tours of dreamy bookstores around the world, thematic book roundups, and so much more.

As far as trending content styles for early 2023, Chaudhary has noticed a pattern of BookTokers pulling a powerful quote from a book and showcasing it on screen to catch a viewer's attention, as well as a more multimedia approach to book recommendations. In one example, the creator plays a video clip on a laptop, then closes the laptop and brings the book on screen to better encapsulate the energy of the story. Blair has noticed a greater emphasis on reviewing short books and novellas on the platform (perhaps BookTokers are looking for a head start on their robust Goodreads 2023 reading goal).

Where to start

BookTok is like a writerly Wild West. It can be hard to know where to start. Here are a few of our favorite accounts to help you get acquainted with the platform.

@aymansbooks

Come to this most-followed account for the ultra-voicey book reviews and stay for the funny book-lover lifestyle content.

@melissas.bookshelf

Melissa Blair's account offers everything from comprehensive book reviews of work by Indigenous authors to tips on how to manage your mental health as a writer.

@literaryfling

Stacey Yu keeps things big picture on her account, which covers scandals in the publishing industry, graphics, and the political or economic impacts of a title.

@zoes_reads

Zoe Jackson has some of the best book roundups around, balancing them out with videos. She tackles some of a reader's most pressing issues, such as "how to read more in 2023."

@mackinstyle

Along with stellar reviews, Mackenzie Newcomb (who is also founder of the Bad Bitch Book Club) delivers book recs based on popular TV shows with some a-day-in-the-life content mixed in.

@ezeekat

Jaysen Headley has a handle on fantasy books, offering great game and TV show suggestions, sprinkled in with videos showing hand-written book annotations, chapter by chapter.

BookTok and book sales

Chaudhary's first viral video – before she became the force she is today on the platform – was 57 seconds long, instructing viewers to: "Stop what you're doing, shut up, and read this book," the book being *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* by V.E. Schwab. After her video received thousands of views, the title launched onto the *New York Times* bestseller list in mere weeks. Blair's debut novel, *Blade*, sold nearly 4,000 copies in the first two weeks after its release (presumably enough to cover any funds put toward self-publishing the book). The hashtag #ABrokenBlade has garnered nearly 3 million views. "It was a mix of emotions," says Blair of her book's viral moment. "I was shocked by the level of response the book and the launch had online, so it was very exciting but also very overwhelming."

Scribd notes that Colleen Hoover's *It Ends With Us* enjoyed a 70% jump in readership after reaching BookTok fame, and *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller increased its readership by 68%, even though it was published nearly a decade before it made appearances on the bestseller list. Even book giants like Barnes & Noble have acknowledged the power of TikTok to launch titles to viral stardom, with BookTok-themed tables in stores as well as newsletters and webpages to help customers get their hands on those sought-after viral titles quicker.

How to get started

The best way to get started is to simply get inspired by other writers and readers on BookTok and make content that you love. "Get inspiration from them and see how they promote their own books and how, in return, you can do it on your own," Chaudhary says. "Authors can make their books go viral on their own the same way readers can and vice versa."

What's it like to be a BookTok creator?

According to Blair, being a BookToker involves balancing pre-planned videos with of-the-moment creations: "I plan

BookTok-Approved Recommended Reads

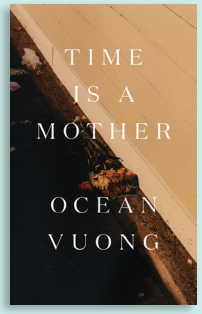
***Time is a Mother* by Ocean Vuong**
New York Times bestselling author and poet Ocean Vuong is known for his evocative work that preserves the past, like petals pressed between sheets of wax paper. *Time is a Mother* is no exception, detailing his relationship with his late mother. You can find numerous clips on BookTok slowly panning over particular verses in this book to resonate with the viewer.

***Before the Coffee Gets Cold* by Toshikazu Kawaguchi**
This bestselling novel brought BookTokers to tears. Tracking the journeys of four different characters as they take advantage of the magic of a cafe capable of time travel, the novel has been lauded as a favorite among the community.

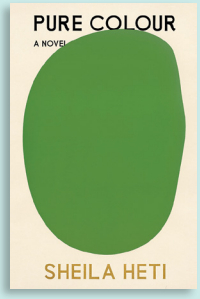
***Pure Color* by Sheila Heti**
Whether it's included in a "books about grief" round-up or a "hot girl book recommendations" video, this metaphysical novel, which explores the deepest corners of how humans handle life's turbulence, made a splash on the platform.

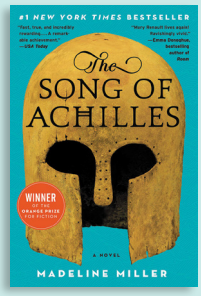
***The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller**
This novel reimagines the arc of Achilles and Patroclus from Homer's *The Iliad* as a romance and, though it received some award recognition when it was published in 2012, didn't come close to the reach it's had since BookTok discovered this heart-wrenching tale.

***Book Lovers* by Emily Henry**
A literary agent and uptight editor find romance with each other when they both seek respite from the hustle and bustle of NYC in a small town. BookTokers gave this novel rave reviews, some capturing their giddy reactions upon reading certain snippets of dialogue.

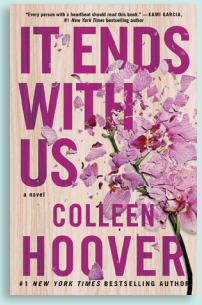


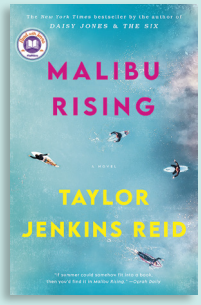




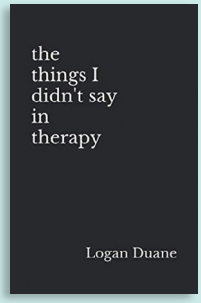














***It Ends With Us* by Colleen Hoover**
Hoover has become a BookTok legend, which, according to publisher Atria, has led to this book spending a combined 151 weeks on the bestseller list after being promoted on the platform. *It Ends With Us* is the gateway for many readers into Hoover's repertoire of romance, following a couple as they strive to break a familial cycle of domestic abuse.

***Malibu Rising* by Taylor Jenkins Reid**
Any reader who loves a good dose of family drama and scandal will finish this novel in a night – as long as it takes for the party that takes up the entirety of the book to go up in flames (literally). It's garnered a slew of four- and five-star reviews from BookTokers.

***The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig**
The subject of numerous glowing review videos (and some even seeking to capture the aesthetic of the book in a collage of moving images), this novel focuses on a woman contemplating suicide who learns of the alternate paths her life could take as she opens different books in a magical library.

***The Things I Didn't Say in Therapy* by Logan Duane**
This powerful poetry collection has become so popular on the literary corner of TikTok that there's now an entire account just dedicated to showcasing work from the book. It's self-published and vulnerable, contending with love, loss, and grief at the forefront of the poignant prose.

***Funny You Should Ask* by Elissa Sussman**
One BookTok user referred to this romance as the first book to give her a "book hangover," while another put together her perfect cast for a potential movie adaptation (with Chris Evans as the male lead, of course). This witty novel follows the relationship between reporter and Hollywood actor over the course of 10 years.

out videos for book reviews and recommendations. But sometimes I have a fun idea for a trending sound and film on the spot." For Chaudhary, it's being choosy about what books make the cut to be promoted on her account. "I don't post about every book that I read, and that's because I like to post about books that are objectively good, my audience would like, and nothing that's harmful," she says. "Post ideas mostly come to me in the moment. I like to incorporate sounds and concepts into my content. When I see stuff on my [TikTok] 'for you' page, I think to myself: 'How can I make this book-related?'"

The status of TikTok

Books have not gained the same traction on Twitter or Instagram as they have on TikTok. Blair feels that TikTok is the perfect place to catch the attention of newer readers, so to speak, since the short format and high level or personalization can aptly match users with content that interests them but they wouldn't discover otherwise. "It gets non-readers into the BookTok space in general and can help lifelong readers discover new books and genres," she says. "Because the videos are so short, I think users are more willing to 'risk' their attention on something new in a way that they just aren't with longer-form content."

Chaudhary agrees that the bite-sized format of TikTok is a huge factor in reaching a broader readership. "I believe information – whether it's books or not – transfers better on TikTok, in some cases. Within 10 minutes of scrolling through your 'for you' page, you can experience dozens of different emotions and gain new knowledge about so many things you've never heard of. I believe one of the reasons why books have become so popular in the past few years is because talking about these books on TikTok makes it much easier and simplistic."



ROMAN SAMBORSKYI/SHUTTERSTOCK

BookTok Tips

Blair has this BookTok advice for writers: "Have a clear notion of what you're trying to accomplish on the app before you post. Also, spend the time necessary to understand the differences between reader and author spaces, and don't infringe on reader-only discourse." Also, any author looking to join BookTok should prepare to get personal. "Only join if you're wanting to post consistently and engage with readers in a much more personal way than ever before," she says. "I would join to build a genuine community with your readership and not just promote your books – those videos don't often do well, anyway."

Chaudhary also recommends writers keep an intimate approach when it comes to making content, like showing behind-the-scenes moments of the writing process to forge a connection.

Cathryn Haight is a writer and editor based in Boston. A former staffer at The Improper Bostonian, *she writes about food, art, travel, and (obviously) social media. cathaightwrites.com*

DIGGING DEEP INTO PROCESS

The secret to crafting a sustainable – and sustaining – writing life.

By Anica Mrose Rissi



STONEPICTURES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Confession: I am a process junkie. As much as I enjoy talking and thinking about story and craft, my true love is analyzing process.

Process involves the physical act of writing and how and when you do it – your habits and routines. But it is also, perhaps mainly, about mindset... or mind games. It is the ways you psych yourself up and psych yourself out – steel yourself, reward yourself, pep talk your way through it, or get yourself stuck. Process is a combination of mindset and approach: the ways you create the conditions you need in order to *create*.

Figuring out your own best process is about noticing what you need, when you need it, and why it is what you need. It's about pulling back the curtain and analyzing the mechanics that allow the magic to happen.

WRITERS LOVE TO CREDIT THE MYSTical and magical parts of their processes. When that initial idea, long-sought solution, essential new scene, or perfect plot twist pops into your brain – *shazam!* – it absolutely feels like magic. But it doesn't come out of nowhere. It only shows up because you've opened the door and invited it in by heeding the conditions you need to be creative.

Just as you can study craft by noticing, examining, and breaking down the choices and techniques other writers apply to their drafts, you can study the minutiae of your own process and discover how to approach the work more strategically and deliberately. In this way, you can learn to create your own optimal conditions for magic.

The first step is to notice your own patterns, tendencies, and emotional needs, so you can more reliably differentiate a bad day from bad writing and *your* needs from your draft's needs. When should the whole thing be deleted, when should a scene be reconsidered, and when do you simply need a snack and a nap?

Sometimes it's enough to open the door for creativity. Sometimes you need to lure it inside with bait.



WE EACH HAVE TO FIND AND FOLlow what allows us to keep going as bumps and roadblocks hit, and that differs for every project and every writer. Just as there is no right or wrong way for a story or sentence to go – because it is all according to taste – so, too, your process is purely your own. It's all about what works – and what doesn't – for *you*.

Our muses all feed on different forms of sustenance. What should you feed yours?



On any given writing day and across the life of a project, here are some questions to consider:

What gets you started?

What keeps you going?

When is it time to stop?

At what points do you tend to need rest (breaks or distance), and what *kinds* of rest provide what you need?

What drives you forward, invites you back in, and keeps you invested over time?

Where do you tend to find joy?

What feels most like play?

What do you need for stamina?

What parts of the process usually go well? How does that feel in your brain and body?

Where and when do you tend to get discouraged? How does *that* feel in your brain and body?

What are you afraid of? (Naming your monsters helps you see, understand, and defang them.)

In what ways do your fears fuel you? In what circumstances do they hold you back?

What kinds of deadlines, feedback, goals, schedules, routines, or surprises have worked well for you? Why?

What kinds of deadlines, feedback, goals, schedules, routines, or surprises throw you off? Why?

Under what circumstances have you leveled up?

Under what circumstances do you thrive?

How do you define *good enough*, and how does that definition serve you?

How does it hold you back?

What are your strengths in terms of process? (Not your strengths *on* the page but those in your approach to the page, i.e., your mindset about your work.)

What are the associated drawbacks? (For example, perhaps one of your strengths is discipline. If you set a routine, you stick to it and can count on yourself to show up and start working. Perhaps, conversely, you're not always great at allowing yourself to rest. You struggle to adjust to ebbs and flows or life circumstances that make sticking to an iron-clad schedule or daily word count not always optimal – mentally, physically, or creatively.)

What is the story you need to hear? What's stopping you from telling it?

What kind of pep talk, reminder, or affirmation might help you proceed?



One last note:

Process is fluid. To build and maintain a sustainable writing life, you must forge a path for perseverance. But don't expect to clear a single path and carve the steps in stone.

From season to season and project to project, your needs will shift. The path might change. Paying frequent attention to process – to what you and your writing need and when – is an ongoing part of the work.

You can do it. This magic is in you.

Anica Mrose Rissi is the award-winning author of more than a dozen books for kids and teens, including Hide and Don't Seek: And Other Very Scary Stories *and* Love, Sophia on the Moon. *Her next book, the middle grade novel* Wishing Season, *comes out in June. Find her online at anicarissi.com and follow @anicarissi on Instagram and Twitter.*

STONEPICTURES/SHUTTERSTOCK



NEW AFRICA/SHUTTERSTOCK

On cookies and rejection

How an author fortifies her professional stamina (and goes on in the face of rejection) through the serenity of baking cookies.

By Melanie Brooks



I make these cookies that have become a hit with friends and family – enough so that I've even gotten some commissions via word of mouth for events like birthdays, graduations, weddings, and baby showers, and I've managed to earn a little pocket money to boot. I'm not going to lie. These cookies are pretty awesome. They are the fancy kind that you sometimes see in boutique cafes and bakeries, glazed and decorated with royal icing.

With time and practice, I've gotten quite adept at creating any design I can find a cookie cutter for, and when I can't find a cookie cutter, like for a recent request that someone made for guitars, I can print or freehand a paper template that does the job. My "portfolio" includes holiday motifs: Christmas trees, snowflakes, candy canes, Valentine's hearts, Easter eggs, Fourth of July flags, Halloween pumpkins. I've made flowers and teddy bears, vinyl records, basketballs and books, elephants and flamingos, and, when my daughter was accepted to the University of Toronto last year, I even managed to recreate the university logo (an intricate two-step process that involved using edible glue to attach a maple leaf cutout to the letter T). I just finished a batch that looks like frosted doughnuts for my next-door neighbor's first birthday party.

The best thing about these cookies is that they taste as good as they look. They are adapted from an old Martha Stewart sugar cookie recipe that mixes sugary sweetness with a hint of lemon. The glaze frosting uses almond extract, and the combined flavors are delicious. The cookies are my go-to gift for any celebration. I present them in a cellophane

NEW AFRICA/SHUTTERSTOCK

bag tied with a cute matching ribbon. They consistently receive rave reviews.

I started baking and distributing these cookies in earnest about five years ago, right around the same time that my former agent started approaching publishers and shopping my memoir – a book about family secrets, illness, grief, and learning to be authentic. A book that has asked more of me than anything else I've ever done.

The convergence of these two "artistic" endeavors was not really intentional, but it has been, as it turns out, providential. Because here's the thing: Five years of trying to publish a book that feels in so many ways like an extension of myself (factor in a two-year hiatus after my agent and I parted ways, and I decided to buckle down and complete the manuscript before venturing out on submission again) is a *really* long time. And this, as most writers know if they have settled into the reality of the literary trenches with me (removed from the early fantasy of a quick and glamorous book deal), means an all-too-steady stream of rejections. Rejections that, despite the ongoing self-pep-talks I've given and therapy sessions I've endured about separating myself from my art and all that jazz, inevitably feel like a resounding judgment of *me* and can easily upend the stability of my mental health and send me spiraling toward the dreaded pit of writerly despair.

Rejection, as we are told so often in writing programs and workshops, is a universal part of the territory of being a writer, no matter what your level of acclaim. "Get used to it," they say. "Grow some thick skin." What they don't talk about as much, though, is just how much it hurts. These books and poems and essays and articles – over which we've toiled, returned to again and again to craft, sacrificed time with friends and family for, poured so much of ourselves and our emotional energy into – are intricately threaded into the ways we measure our sense of worth. So when an arbitrary editor on the other end of an email query quips, "Not for me," I can't help but hold myself up to many of the other writers around me who, if I'm to believe carefully curated social media posts, are achieving mountains of publishing success and feel vulnerably lacking. I start questioning my talent, send whiny texts to writer friends saying, "Why did I become a writer again?," and panic over wasting years of my life for nothing.

Enter the providence of my cookies. There is nothing high-stakes about them. I gather the ingredients, measure, mix them up, roll out the dough, cut out the shapes, bake, and decorate. If I fail at any point in the process, I know immediately, and it's never anything I can't correct. Burn the bottoms? Start over. Mess up the decorating? Leave the smudged ones for my husband and kids to eat. When I'm finished with a batch, I'm really finished with them. I don't second-guess whether I've done them right, wonder if I should have chosen a different frosting color, included another part to the design, or put a pretty enough ribbon on the packaging. I don't lie awake at night immobilized by bouts of imposter syndrome that have me imagining that people are going to see through my facade and know I'm not a *real* baker. They are just cookies. Not only do they provide a finite creative project that I can complete in just a few hours, but also they lack any power to bruise my ego and send me on that spiral of self-loathing because when I present people with my cookies, they love them.

Rejection is a universal part of being a writer. "Get used to it," they say. "Grow some thick skin." What they don't talk about as much is just how much it hurts.

Every. Single. Time.

Not once have I opened my inbox to find any of the following messages in connection to my cookies (adapted directly from my stack of declined memoir queries):

- *While the cookie has a compelling design, and you are clearly an excellent cookie maker, the timing of your offer is not quite right. We just ate a cookie recently, and we only have room for a certain number of cookies in our pantry, so unfortunately we can't take your cookie.*
- *Your cookie is beautiful, and the flavor and texture are profoundly tasty. I am afraid, however, that this cookie is not the best fit for our palates. We are looking for a certain type of cookie, and this isn't quite it.*
- *We were so grateful to have the chance to consider your cookie. It inspired lively conversation here, and we were taken with so much of what the cookie had to offer. However, it's been a pretty tough cookie market these days, and we just don't think your cookie is the right one for us to compete with in that market.*
- *I took your cookie to our top tasters meeting today, and we had a very interesting discussion about it. A lot of the tasters really liked it, but a couple of years ago, we had a cookie with a similar shape and also flavored with lemon, and even though it got amazing initial reviews from early tasters, not enough people chose to eat it. Our sales team is reluctant to take on another lemon cookie. So for that reason, we have to pass.*

Instead, here's just a sampling of how my cookie recipients tend to respond:

- One friend texted a photo of one of my cookies next to her mug of coffee with the caption, "Breakfast of champions."
- Another person sent the message, "I couldn't wait to dive in!" accompanied by the image of an empty cellophane bag on the passenger seat of her car.
- My therapist (who gets a basket of them at Christmas) told me that when it dawned on his elementary-aged son that his father wasn't meeting with clients in person during COVID, the first thing his son said was, "Does that mean we aren't getting any of those yummy cookies from that lady this Christmas?"

Knowing that one thing I have to offer basically has a 100% acceptance rate has been its own form of therapy. Since I've never actually been able to grow that recommended thicker skin, finding something else separate from my writing (and my entangled ego) that brings me joy and success has shored me up when rejection has threatened to push me over the edge. The calming, no-risk process of baking has allowed room for a temporary change of scenery that refuels my artistic drive. It has bolstered my endurance to continue inhabiting this creative life and kept me hacking away at the other, more daunting, less-welcoming path toward my memoir's publication. And the best thing about it? No matter where that daunting path leads me, I always, always had snacks.

Knowing that one thing I have to offer basically has a 100% acceptance rate has been its own form of therapy.

Melanie Brooks is the author of Writing Hard Stories: Celebrated Memoirists Who Shaped Art from Trauma *(Beacon, 2017). She teaches creative nonfiction in the MFA program at Bay Path University, and her memoir,* A Hard Silence*, about living with the ten-year secret of her father's HIV will be published in September 2023 by Vine Leaves Press.*

The Writer



BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

For bonus articles, contest alerts, writing prompts, and industry news, subscribe to our free newsletter!

Bit.ly/thewriternl

Postscript

PUBLISHING RESOURCES

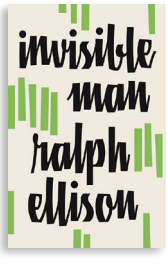
When it comes to getting published, there are many spinning cogs. Here are some of the resources you'll need to take your work from inside your brain to in front of the eyes of readers. The following listings are a sampling of what the industry has to offer. For a complete guide, visit writermag.com. →



THE MONTH AHEAD

March 1

Ralph Ellison was born on this day in 1904. He would become the first African American to win the National Book Award for Fiction with his novel *Invisible Man*.



March 2

Today, the birthday of Dr. Seuss, is National Read Across America Day. The goal is to encourage kids to build a daily reading habit.

March 3

The annual California Creative Writers Conference (wcwriters.com) starts in Los Angeles, with dozens of literary agents, established authors, and other industry pros to pitch, learn from, and mingle with.

NTL STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Agents

Information in this section is provided to *The Writer* by the individual markets and events; for more information, contact those entities directly.

F = Fiction N = Nonfiction P = Poetry C = Children's Y = Young adult O = Other $ = Offers payment

C Y ADAMS LITERARY
Represents children's and YA authors and artists with picture books, middle grade, and YA fiction. Submit via online submission form only. (Temporarily closed to submissions but may reopen later this year.)
Contact: Adams Literary, 7845 Colony Road, C4 #215, Charlotte, NC 28226.
704-542-1440.
info@adamsliterary.com
adamsliterary.com

F N Y ANDY ROSS AGENCY
Represents authors of narrative nonfiction, current events, history, journalism, science, literary and commercial fiction, and YA fiction. Submit via email.
Contact: Andy Ross Agency, 767 Santa Ray Ave., Oakland, CA 94610.
andyrossagency@hotmail.com
andyrossagency.com

F N BETSY AMSTER LITERARY ENTERPRISES
Represents authors of literary, upscale commercial and women's fiction, voice-driven mysteries, narrative nonfiction, travelogues, memoirs, social issues and trends, psychology, self-help, pop culture, women's issues, history, biography, lifestyle, careers, health, parenting, cooking, gardening, gift books, and more. Submit online only.
Contact: Betsy Amster Literary Enterprises, 607 Foothill Blvd. #1061, La Canada Flintridge, CA 91012.
b.amster.assistant@gmail.com
amsterlit.com

F N Y B.J. ROBBINS LITERARY AGENCY
Represents authors of literary and commercial fiction and general nonfiction, with a particular interest in select genre fiction (mystery, suspense/thriller, historical), sophisticated young adult fiction, and nonfiction with commercial appeal, including biography, memoir, history, health, travel, sports, African American, science, and pop culture.
Contact: B.J. Robbins Literary Agency.
818-760-6602.
robbinsliterarysubmissions@gmail.com
bjrobbinsliterary.com

F N Y COOKE MCDERMID LITERARY MANAGEMENT
Represents authors of literary fiction, commercial fiction (thrillers, horror, and upmarket women's fiction), research- and narrative-driven nonfiction, and middle grade and YA books. Email query only. No attachments.
Contact: The Cooke Agency, 320 Front Street W #1105, Toronto, ON M5V 3B6, Canada.
647-788-4010.
admin@cookemcdermid.com
cookemcdermid.com

F N DON CONGDON ASSOCIATES
Represents authors of fiction and nonfiction. Check website for individual agents' interests.
Contact: Don Congdon Associates, 88 Pine St., Suite 730, New York, NY 10005.
212-645-1229.
dca@doncongdon.com
doncongdon.com

F N DOUG GRAD LITERARY AGENCY
Represents authors of fiction and narrative nonfiction. Query via email before submitting.
Contact: Doug Grad Literary Agency.
718-788-6067.
doug.grad@dgliterary.com
dgliterary.com

F N EMILIE STEWART LITERARY AGENCY
Specializes in literary and commercial fiction and nonfiction. Query by email only.
Contact: Emilie Stewart Literary Agency.
646-559-2702.
info@emiliestewartagency.com
emiliestewartagency.com

F N Y THE FRIEDRICH AGENCY
Represents authors of literary and commercial fiction for adults and young adults, as well as narrative nonfiction and memoir. Submit via email only. No attachments.
Contact: The Friedrich Agency.
mfriedrich@friedrichagency.com,
lcarson@friedrichagency.com,
hbrattesani@friedrichagency.com,
hcarr@friedrichagency.com
friedrichagency.com

F N C Y HG LITERARY
Represents authors of fiction, nonfiction, and all levels of children's and YA literature. No romance, science fiction, religious fiction, or screenplays. Check website for agents' interests. Email submissions only.
Contact: HG Literary.
Emails for agents on website.
hsgagency.com

F N HORNFISCHER LITERARY MANAGEMENT
Specializes in serious and commercial nonfiction and select fiction.
Contact: Hornfischer Literary Management.
queries@hornfischerlit.com
hornfischerlit.com

F N Y IGLA
Represents authors of commercial and literary fiction, topical nonfiction, and middle grade and YA fiction. No screenplays or children's picture books. See website for agents' interests and email addresses. Email queries only.
Contact: Irene Goodman Literary Agency, 27 West 24th St., Suite 804, New York, NY 10010.
Email via website.
irenegoodman.com

F N Y JANE ROTROSEN AGENCY
Seeks commercial fiction and YA. Also considers memoirs and narrative and prescriptive nonfiction. Submit via email; no attachments.
Contact: Jane Rotrosen Agency, Attn: Submissions, 318 East 51st St., New York, NY 10022.
212-593-4330.
info@janerotrosen.com
janerotrosen.com

F N MCCORMICK LITERARY
Represents authors of literary and commercial fiction and nonfiction, including memoir, history, narrative, biography, lifestyle, sports, self-help, and pop culture.
Contact: McCormick Literary, 150 West 28th St., Suite 903, New York, NY 10001.
212-691-9726.
queries@mccormicklit.com
mccormickwilliams.com

F N PHILIP G. SPITZER LITERARY AGENCY
Specializes in literary fiction,

mystery, thriller and suspense, biography, current events, politics, and African-American.
Contact: Philip G. Spitzer Literary Agency, 50 Talmage Farm Ln., East Hampton, NY 11937.
kim.lombardini@spitzeragency.com
spitzeragency.com

F N Y SARAH JANE FREYMANN LITERARY AGENCY
Seeking nonfiction: world and national affairs, business, humor, sports, spiritual, psychology, self-help, women/men's issues, books by health experts, cookbooks, narrative nonfiction, nature, memoir, cutting-edge journalism, travel, multicultural issues, parenting, and lifestyle. Also seeks sophisticated mainstream and literary fiction and edgy YA fiction. Prefers email submissions.
Contact: Sarah Jane Freymann Literary Agency.
submissions@sarahjanefreymann.com
sarahjanefreymann.com

F N TALBOT FORTUNE AGENCY
Represents authors of romance, women's fiction, thrillers, historical fiction, mysteries, literary fiction, and narrative nonfiction, including history, immersive journalism, and current events. No children's books, fantasy, poetry, or screenplays. Submit queries by email with the first five pages of manuscript. No attachments.
Contact: Talbot Fortune Agency.
queries@talbotfortuneagency.com
talbotfortuneagency.com

C Y WERNICK & PRATT AGENCY
Represents authors and illustrators of children's fiction and nonfiction books, picture books, novelty books, early readers, middle grade, and YA. Submissions via email only.
Contact: Wernick & Pratt Agency.
submissions@wernickpratt.com
wernickpratt.com

F N WILLIAM CLARK ASSOCIATES
Represents authors of literary fiction, narrative nonfiction, and translations. Submit queries using online submission form. No screenplays.
Contact: William Clark Associates, 54 West 21st St., Suite 809, New York, New York 10010.
212-675-2784.
Email from website.
wmclark.com

F N C Y WRITERS HOUSE
Represents authors of literary and commercial fiction, women's fiction, sci-fi/fantasy, narrative nonfiction, history, memoir, biography, psychology, science, parenting, cookbooks, how-to, self-help, business, finance, YA, and picture books.
Contact: Writers House, 120 Broadway, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10271.
212-685-2400.
See website for agents' emails.
writershouse.com

Contests

O AURAND HARRIS MEMORIAL PLAYWRITING AWARD
Seeks new, unpublished, and unproduced full-length plays for young audiences. Open to all playwrights. Only submit one manuscript per year. Submit by email only.
Deadline: May 1.
Prizes: First place, $1,000; second place, $500.
Contact: The New England Theatre Conference, Inc., Aurand Harris Playwriting Award.
harris-award@netconline.org
netconline.org

F BRISTOL SHORT STORY PRIZE
International short story competition open to all writers over the age of 16. Maximum 4,000 words. Stories can be on any theme or subject and are welcome in any style, including graphic, verse, or genre-based. Enter via online form or regular mail.
Deadline: April 26.
Entry Fee: £9 per story.
Prizes: First place, £1,000; second place, £500; third place, £250. 17 shortlisted writers will receive £100. All winners will be published in the anthology and will receive two paperback copies.
Contact: Bristol Short Story Prize, Unit 5.16, Paintworks, Bath Road, Bristol BS4 3EH, UK.
enquiries@bristolprize.co.uk
bristolprize.co.uk

F C Y CHANTICLEER BOOK REVIEWS AWARDS
Sixteen genre writing competitions for books featuring contemporary stories, romance, middle grade, historical, paranormal, fantasy, and other themes. Books may be published, unpublished, indie, or traditional.
Deadline: Varies depending on award.
Entry Fee: $99 for most entries.
Prizes: First-place winners receive a prize package and marketing package, 16 grand prize genre winners recognized, one overall grand prize winner receives $1,000. Grand prize winners announced at Chanticleer Awards Gala.
Contact: Chanticleer Book Reviews,

THE MONTH AHEAD

March 4



Hide your electronics, then grab a pen and notebook to join in on the National Day of Unplugging. Write about the feeling of disconnecting.

March 8

Day one of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference (awpwriter.org) in Seattle, with thousands expected to join an "essential literary conversation and celebration."

March 14

Jumpstart your writing (and get a jump on summer) at the Get Away to Write retreat (murphywriting.com) in New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

PLATONOVA SVETA/SHUTTERSTOCK

1050 Larrabee Ave., Suite 104 #334, Bellingham, WA, 98225.
chanticleer@chantireviews.com
chantireviews.com

F JAMES JONES FIRST NOVEL FELLOWSHIP
Awarded annually to an American author of a first novel-in-progress. Submit via online submission form. Submit a two-page (maximum) outline and the first 50 pages.
Deadline: March 15.
Entry Fee: $30, hard copy; $33, online.
Prizes: Frist place, $10,000; second place, $3,000; third place, $2,000.
Contact: James Jones First Novel Fellowship, c/o MA/MFA in Creative Writing, Wilkes University, 84 W. South St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766.
jamesjonesfirstnovel@wilkes.edu
wilkes.edu

F SATURDAY EVENING POST GREAT AMERICAN FICTION CONTEST
In its nearly two centuries of existence, *The Saturday Evening Post* has published short fiction by a who's who of American authors – ultimately helping to define what it means to be an American. Submit any genre of fiction between 1,500 and 5,000 words. All stories must be previously unpublished.
Deadline: July 1.
Entry Fee: $10.
Prizes: Winning story will be published in the January/February 2024 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*, and the author will receive $1,000. Five runners-up will each receive $200 and will also have their stories published online.
Contact: Editorial, The Saturday Evening Post, 3520 Guion Rd., Indianapolis, IN 46222.
317-634-1100.
editors@saturdayeveningpost.com
saturdayeveningpost.com/fiction-contest

F N TOM HOWARD/JOHN H. REID FICTION & ESSAY CONTEST
Enter any original short story, essay, or other work of prose up to 6,000 words. Submit through website.
Deadline: April 30.
Entry Fee: $20 per entry.
Prizes: $3,000 award in each category. Ten honorable mentions (any category) will receive $300. All winners published online.
Contact: Winning Writers, 351 Pleasant St., PMB 222, Northampton, MA 01060.
Adam Cohen, President.
adam@winningwriters.com
winningwriters.com

Publishers

N AVALON TRAVEL PUBLISHING
Publishes travel guides between 250 and 700 pages. Only looking for books that fit into Moon guidebooks. Submit query via email only.
Contact: Avalon Travel, 1700 4th St., Berkeley, CA 94710.
acquisitions@hbgusa.com
avalontravelbooks.com

N O HARVARD COMMON PRESS
Specializes in cookbooks and parenting/childcare books. Submit proposals by regular mail or email. Check website for genre email addresses.
Contact: The Harvard Common Press, Attn: Submissions, 100 Cummings Center, Suite 265D, Beverly, MA 01915.
978-282-9590.
quartoknows.com/harvard-common-press

F N KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP
Publishes a wide variety of genre fiction and nonfiction under various imprints. No children's, YA, poetry, science fiction, or fantasy. Check website for specific editor interests and email addresses. Submit query only (no manuscripts) by email. Check website for genre email addresses.
Contact: Kensington Publishing Corp., 119 W. 40th St., New York, NY 10018.
800-221-2647.
kensingtonbooks.com

N KENT STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Publishes in the following areas: Ohio and the surrounding region, sports, history (Civil War, abolitionism, military, true crime), and literary studies (Hemingway, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Inklings).
Contact: The Kent State University Press, 1118 University Library, 1125 Risman Dr., P.O. Box 5190, Kent, OH 44242.
330-672-7913.
ksupress@kent.edu
kentstateuniversitypress.com

N LLEWELLYN
Publishes practical nonfiction books with an emphasis on body, mind, and spirit, including magic, wicca, paganism, witchcraft, ghost hunting, spirit guides, tarot card decks, tarot books, reincarnation, astrology, alternative health, angels, and more.
Contact: Llewellyn Worldwide, Acquisitions Department, 2143 Wooddale Dr.,

Classifieds

READERS: Use caution when entering into any legal contract with a literary service offering agenting-type assistance or publishers who charge for publication. If you have any concerns regarding the advertiser's commitment or claims, please contact the advertiser directly.

ADVERTISERS: We do not accept ads from agents or businesses that charge a reading or marketing fee. For our private records, please provide us with a street address and contact telephone number. *The Writer* reserves the right to reject or cancel any advertising which at its discretion is deemed objectionable, misleading, or not in the best interest of the reader.

SEND YOUR AD TO: *The Writer*, Sales Account Manager, 35 Braintree Hill Office Park, Suite 101, Braintree, MA 02184 or call (617) 706-9089. Email: teunice@madavor.com. Major credit cards accepted.

CONTESTS

FOUR CONTESTS, $41,900 IN PRIZES AT
WinningWriters.com/tw23
Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest (No fee!)
Tom Howard/John H. Reid Fiction & Essay Contest
Tom Howard/Margaret Reid Poetry Contest
North Street Book Prize (for self-published and hybrid-published books)


CONFERENCES



RETREATS

GET AWAY TO WRITE - FLORIDA. March 14-19, 2023. Escape the cold to write in Florida. Spend an inspiring week working on your poetry or memoir with Peter E. Murphy or Nancy Reddy. Enjoy plentiful writing time, insightful feedback, homemade meals, and time to relax. Learn more and register: www.stockton.edu/murphywriting

WRITING RESOURCES

It's possible to learn to be funnier.
Visit www.ThinkingFunny.com humor-writing resources, workshops, free contests. getinfo@thinkingfunny.com

CONTINUED →

Classifieds

EDITING/CRITIQUING

PROFESSIONAL EDITOR, Award-winning Author (Bantam, Berkley/Ace, others) offers extensive critiques, respectful in-depth editing. Fiction, non-fiction, juvenile/YA. Carol Gaskin 941-377-7640. Email: Carol@EditorialAlchemy.com or website: www.EditorialAlchemy.com

ACE EDITOR. Editorial rescue from a nurturing but whip-cracking, well-connected, celebrated author (*Bang the Keys*, *Jazzed*) who will help you unleash the true fabulosity in your projects and bring them to fruition in the real world before depression or drink destroy your nerve! Email: jilldearman@gmail.com. www.jilldearman.com.

Unlock the potential of your manuscript!

Want to write a good book? I can help.

Helga Schier, PhD.
Publishing executive, published author and experienced editor offers powerful, comprehensive and effective editorial services.

"When Helga entered the picture, my manuscript went from promising to a published and critically acclaimed book."
– Ed Driscoll, award-winning comedian and writer

withpenandpaper.com 310.828.8421
helga@withpenandpaper.com

SUBSCRIBE OR RENEW TODAY!



ONE YEAR FOR ONLY
$29.99

writermag.com/the-magazine/subscribe

Woodbury, MN 55125.
651-291-1970.
submissions@llewellyn.com
llewellyn.com

N NEW WORLD LIBRARY
Focused on nonfiction books about spirituality, personal growth, women's interest, religion, sustainable business, the human-animal relationship, Native American interest, and the environment. No children's books submissions. Prefers email submissions.
Contact: New World Library, 14 Pamaron Way, Novato, CA 94949.
415-884-2100.
submit@newworldlibrary.com
newworldlibrary.com

N C SASQUATCH BOOKS
Publishes regional books covering the West Coast of the U.S. only, mostly nonfiction titles focusing on food and wine, travel, and gardening. Publishes some children's titles. Currently closed to submissions but reopening later this year; check website for details.
Contact: The Editors, Sasquatch Books, 1904 Third Ave., Suite 710, Seattle, WA 98101.
sasquatchbooks.com

N SQUARE ONE PUBLISHERS
Adult nonfiction books on alternative health, collectibles, cooking, gambling, health, parenting, personal finance, postcards, self-help, and writing. Submit via regular mail only.
Contact: Acquisitions Editor, Square One Publishers, Inc., 115 Herricks Rd., Garden City Park, NY 11040.
squareonepublishers.com

Self-Publishers

48 HOUR BOOKS
Offers quick publishing turnaround time: 48 hours for production of perfect-bound books, five days for hardcover and coil-bound books. Includes free book templates.
Contact: 48 Hour Books, 2249 14th St. SW, Akron, OH 44314.
800-231-0521.
info@48hrbooks.com
48hrbooks.com

AUTHOR HOUSE/INSPIRING VOICES
Offers editorial, design, production, marketing, and bookselling services for authors with an inspirational or faith-based story or topic. Book formats include print-on-demand options for hardcover and paperback books as well as eBooks and books for children.
Contact: Inspiring Voices.
833-262-8899.
Email via online form.
inspiringvoices.com

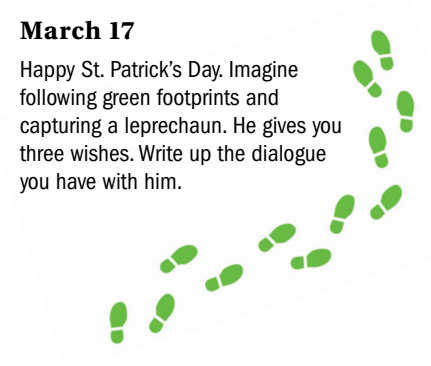
OUTSKIRTS PRESS
Offers several publishing packages plus writing services, copy editing, color illustration, ghostwriting, and marketing guidance. Also provides an option for making books available on mobile phones and eReaders.
Contact: Outskirts Press, Inc., 10940 S. Parker Road, #515, Parker, CO 80134.
888-672-6657.
info@outskirtspress.com
outskirtspress.com

STONESONG
Offers traditional or eBook publishing with line editing, fact checking, proofreading, illustration, image research, indexing, design, and typesetting. Print-on-demand available. Also has a traditional agency arm.
Contact: Stonesong, 270 W. 39th St. #201, New York, NY 10018.m
212-929-4600.
submissions@stonesong.com
stonesong.com

THE MONTH AHEAD

March 17

Happy St. Patrick's Day. Imagine following green footprints and capturing a leprechaun. He gives you three wishes. Write up the dialogue you have with him.



March 23

In celebration of literature and literary culture, writers and readers meet up in Charlottesville, Virginia, for the annual Virginia Festival of the Book (vabook.org).

4LUCKY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Magazines

PERFORMING ARTS

N $ AMERICAN THEATRE
Covers trends and events in all types of theater, as well as economic and legislative developments affecting the arts, with a particular focus on professional, not-for-profit theater. Mail or email query.
Contact: Rob Weinert-Kendt, Editor-in-Chief, American Theatre, 520 8th Ave., 24th Floor, New York, NY 10018.
212-609-5900 ext. 370.
rwkendt@tcg.org
americantheatre.org

N O $ DRAMATICS
Monthly magazine for high school theater students and teachers with practical articles about acting, directing, design, production, and career-oriented profiles of working theater professionals. Also publishes one-act and full-length plays. Plays should be performable in high schools.
Contact: Dramatics Magazine.
Submit ideas through form on website.
dramatics.org

N $ EMMY
Bimonthly television industry magazine for TV professionals and enthusiasts. Official publication of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. No highly technical articles or academic/fan-magazine type articles. Best section for newcomers is "Labors of Love," the 500-word, front-of-the-book profiles of TV people.
Contact: Editor, Emmy, 5220 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, CA 91601.
emmys.com/emmymag

N $ OPERA NEWS
Publishes articles of interest for the opera professional and the opera buff. No fiction, poetry, or personal remembrances. Submit query or manuscript and published writing samples via email.
Contact: Kitty March, Opera News, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10023.
info@operanews.com
operanews.com

SOCIAL JUSTICE / EQUALITY

N $ BRIARPATCH
Publishes on a wide range of topics: current events, grassroots activism, electoral politics, economic justice, ecology, labor, food security, gender equality, indigenous struggles, international solidarity, and other issues of political importance. See website for editorial schedule deadlines and guidelines. Submit query by email.
Contact: Briarpatch Magazine, 2138 McIntyre St., Regina, SK S4P 2R7, Canada.
866-431-5777.
pitch@briarpatchmagazine.com
briarpatchmagazine.com

N $ IN THESE TIMES
Publishes articles that fit the magazine's mission of advancing democracy and economic justice, promoting social movements, and discussing politics and culture. Submit query using online form. See website for department guidelines.
Contact: In These Times.
submissions@inthesetimes.com
inthesetimes.com

F N $ LEARNING FOR JUSTICE
A publication of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Publishes features related to anti-bias education, diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice topics.
Contact: Learning for Justice.
Email from website.
learningforjustice.org

N P $ THE PROGRESSIVE
Seeks investigative reporting, electoral coverage, social movement pieces, foreign policy pieces, interviews, activism, and poetry. No editorials or satire.
Contact: The Progressive, 931 E. Main Street, Suite 10, Madison, WI 53703.
608-257-4626.
editorial@progressive.org
progressive.org

TRADE/TECHNICAL

N $ DIGITAL ENGINEERING
Magazine for design engineers who purchase or use computer hardware and software for the design-for-manufacture industry. Publishes tutorials, application stories, product reviews, and commentary.
Contact: Kenneth Wong, senior editor, Desktop Engineering, 50 Speen St., Suite 302, Framingham MA 01701.
508-663-1500.
kwong@digitaleng.news
digitalengineering247.com

N $ FIREHOUSE
Published for firefighters. Covers specific incidents, innovations, controversies, and trends affecting the fire-service industry. Also publishes photo stories.
Contact: Firehouse Magazine.
Email using online form.
firehouse.com

The Writer

GET SOCIAL

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

@TheWriterMagazine

@TheWriterMag

@TheWriterMag

Gigi *Will Know*

One thing we must consider when we look at creative work is whether or not we're slapping unreasonable boundaries on ourselves.

Dear Gigi,
Could you please explain all the various categories or genres of books? For instance, I've just learned that speculative fiction is science fiction focused on the future. How do you define book club fiction as compared to adult fiction, women's fiction, contemporary, or commercial? Is the opposite of "upmarket" something lower on the scale and probably not worthwhile? Can a manuscript qualify under two or more of these categories? How does one define a book's category in a query letter so that a potential agent will want to read it and possibly represent it? Should I keep it to one category or be more honest and use more than one?
Thanks,
—LOTS OF OPTIONS



Have a query about craft? Need some clarification on an aspect of the publishing industry? Looking for career advice? Email your queries to tweditorial@madavor.com with the subject line "Advice Column." We can't wait to read your questions!

Dear Lots,

This is a pile of good questions and a couple of really terrible ones. Let's start with the good ones, shall we?

Yes, a manuscript can "qualify" – more on that slippery term later – under more than one category. Most manuscripts are several things. For instance, you might have a historical romance. You might have space opera set in the near future. You might have contemporary upmarket fiction that is also book club fiction.

Your next question ties into that: One doesn't really "define a book's category;" a book either is a thing or it isn't. We look at these book genres as being ways to guide an agent or an editor into understanding what you envision the book as. For instance, in a query letter, you might say that your novel is "YA historical," which will give the agent an idea, and then the rest of your query letter will fill in the specifics: It's set in the Old West, for instance, and it has some speculative elements, say.

Now, the harder questions: Can I define all the genres for you? No, for two reasons: First, a great number of people have already done this really, really well. A quick Google search will help you to find some definitive guides. And second, answering this question would eat the entire magazine, and they are not about to pay me to write the entire magazine.

Next, you ask about book club fiction. Book club fiction can cover several categories. It is, briefly, fiction that you could see being discussed at a book club. So it could be literary commercial fiction, say. Or women's contemporary fiction.

Reguarding your question about upmarket fiction: Friends, let me make something crystal clear: *Every* book is worthwhile. It has value to *someone*. In Melanie Brooks' *Writing Hard Stories: Celebrated Memoirists Who Shaped Art from Trauma*, the writer Monica Wood says, "If a hundred thousand people read your book, it means that you've written a hundred thousand books, because it's different for every single person." The same sentiment applies here. "Upmarket" is just a category. And upmarket books may not sell as many copies as "commercial" works or as genre works – horror, romance, sci-fi – so whose yardstick are we using here? The sales and marketing team's or the writer's or the person who reads the book that sold 5,000 copies and whose life was irrevocably changed by it?

Now, onto speculative fiction. You say you learned it's about sci-fi based in the future. That's wrong: Speculative fiction can *encompass* sci-fi, but speculative is work that embraces elements that don't exist in nature, history, or work that exists outside the realm of "reality" as we know it. Like ghost stories.

I said I'd answer all of your questions regardless of whether or not I thought they were good, and here's why: I think one thing we must consider when we look at creative work is whether or not we're slapping unreasonable boundaries on ourselves. When we ask if fiction "qualifies" to be one thing or another or whether or not a certain genre is "worthy," we need to also ask why we're placing our creativity on a hierarchical scale. Who's to say we should value one type of work over another?

Salty, so salty, and ever yours,
—Gigi

ILLUSTRATION BY YI SHUN LAI

The Writer CONTESTS

WRITE WELL

GET PUBLISHED

WIN CASH

Enter our writing contests for a chance to win $1,000 and publication in our magazine!



LEARN MORE AT
writermag.com/the-writer-contests

48 HOUR BOOKS



Self-publishers need a trusted printing partner and outstanding results.

With 48 Hour Books, you get both.

Not to mention...

Fast Turnaround

We're the fastest book printers in the world! Production time for standard perfect bound books is 48 hours or less, with same-day service available.

Premium Options

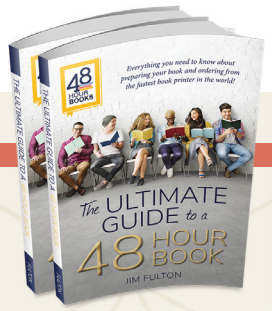
Fast printing doesn't mean skimping on options! Elevate your book with features such as Diamond 3D covers, foil stamping, hardcover books, dust jackets, and cloth and leather covers.

Unmatched Service

Our expert staff is here for you at every step. *We actually answer our phones!* Don't take our word for it - check out our incredible independent reviews.

FREE Self-Publishing Guide

Visit 48HrBooks.com to order your copy! *Paper and cover samples included.*



Easy Pricing & Ordering

Select all the options you want and find out exactly what you're paying when you place an order.

Call us today for **FREE HELP**

or check out the resources on our website!

800-231-0521
info@48HrBooks.com

2249 14th St. SW
Akron, Ohio 44314

www.48HrBooks.com