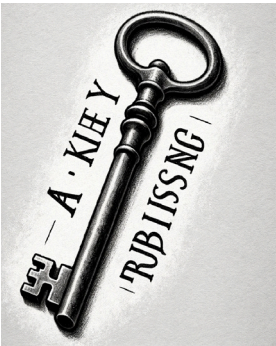


SECRETS OF PUBLISHING REVEALED!

AN EDITOR'S GUIDE
TO THE LITERARY WORLD

LEX E SANTÍ



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A Key Therapy Publications

*For Shona and Gordon Ahrae,
Shanti Strong*

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FORWARD, AND ABOUT THOSE SECRETS!



It has been seven years since the journal I edited went offline; sometime in 2017, I turned the lights off and moved on to other things. In 2006, the short-lived literary journal *SlushStories* launched, and it gave birth to what I often referred to as just two letters: OS. Our Stories Literary Journal ran for 11 years in an online format and printed annual anthologies of their work that you can still find today on Amazon. At its height were ten staff members, an app in the Apple Store, and creative writing workshops. We had hundreds of submissions come in every month and a solid reputation. The only trouble was that there wasn't any money in it. I had the stubborn belief that the readers on my staff should get paid to read and give feedback to 100% of the submitted stories. So that meant I had to work often reviewing countless short stories without pay. Not to mention editing, Photoshopping, and Dreamweaving the journal in my free time. The bottom line is that I got burned out, but did we produce some fantastic work?

As an editor-in-chief at *Our Stories*, I found a world of listening and responding to stories, which was powerful and profoundly moving. Every quarter, we would publish around five short stories, an interview with a well-established writer, and I would write an essay. This collection of essays is now the physical collection of the essays in a complete form. It provides a guide for beginning writers looking for advice and to get into the head of someone who was, for lack of a better term, "a decider" in the literary world for about a decade. Moreover, it is the work of someone staggeringly ambitious, bold, and in love with the literary world. I look back at all this and say, "Wow, where did I get all that energy!" The truth is, I still have it—it has just been refined and concentrated into other endeavors.

The wonderful thing about OS was that we reviewed all our submissions. At the time, this was unheard of in the literary community. Sadly, it still is. It provides an altogether more structurally sound literary journal, which is devoid of favoritism and allows the best of the best work to rise to the top. It encourages compelling feedback and offers the journal's readers a non-alienating system. I have expressed my belief in the system

over the years, which is echoed in the essays throughout the collection.

However, if you're reading this, you're likely more interested in understanding what compels an acceptance into a literary journal than in the back and forth about the academic world and what makes a great literary journal. But, when you spend a lot of time not only accepting the top .1% of what is submitted to a literary journal but responding to the other 99.9% of the submissions and telling people why you're not publishing them, you have a drastically different skillset than anyone else in the game. You see flaws and learn to articulate those flaws, whereas others are quick.

I have rewritten — often several times — every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers.
— Vladimir Nabokov

This unique experience of where I sat for the journal's history uniquely qualifies me to have insight into what it takes to publish short stories in the literary market. But more than just being an editor, you get insights into what it was like to read literary notables by osmosis. You get insights into how the short story market receives the short stories and what the behind-the-scenes thinking that goes into the literary marketplace is. This advice can be applied to novel or nonfiction publishing if used correctly and read closely.

Who should read this? Anyone who wants to publish their creative written works should read this. While journal names like "Missouri Quarterly" or "Paris Review" may not mean something to the standard household member, and as the literary market continues to change, anyone who is a "decider" in the field of reviewing stories to green light works sits from the same vantage as I did for eight years.

The primary advice, which I labor to expand upon in the six years of quarterly essays that I share here, is this and can be summarized as follows in a TLDR:

- 1) Have a clean manuscript, free of errors and formatted correctly.

- 2) Don't waste the reader's time in the first two pages.
- 3) Write your heart out
- 4) Revise, revise, revise.

Particular essays which are included here have a certain must-read quality to them. The first essay, "Writing, Like Learning a Language," attempts to draw the parallel of something that I have always considered my gift: connection with other humans and the mastery of conveying and transmitting ideas to someone. This is also critical in my profession as a therapist, which is by far the most beautiful day-to-day I have with strangers now in my life. Other essays provide fundamental insights into the editing process and how excruciating it tends to be. Still further, I found the time to riff on issues such as finding communities to share your writing where you would not be judged for your work and "Do no Harm" as a literary experience.

I was particularly fond of "Unkie Editor" as it was the first time I wanted to play with the essay format and create an allegory of what some readers experience when submitting their work and playing with the idea. All the essays share insight into the literary world and provide a basis for you, the writer, to put more time and effort into the revision process.

We slip into a dream, forgetting the room we're sitting in, ignoring it's lunchtime or time to go to work. We recreate, with minor and, for the most part, unimportant changes, the vivid and continuous dream the writer worked out in his mind (revising and revising until he got it right) and captured it in language so that other human beings, whenever they feel like it, may open his book and dream that dream again.

— John Gardner

I have a particular awe for writing and the experience of finding an excellent book, a good movie, or a good game that takes you away from the doldrums of everyday life and whisks you into something magical. In

particular, essays like Concrete and Roadblocks take pains to ask writers to work more with the audacious and aim higher. I like that; you can see it in my writing. Take chances. What do you have to lose?

Each essay labors to get into the pain of writing, which is rewriting. The Joyce Carol Oates quote below discusses the joy in this process. I see it similarly, but it can be challenging. It is a much different process than the creative one. That I find my creative part is offended by the editing part of my brain, and I need to encourage myself to get into it,

The pleasure is the rewriting: The first sentence can't be written until the final sentence. This is a koan-like statement, and I don't mean to sound needlessly obscure or mysterious, but it's simply true. The completion of any work automatically necessitates its revisioning.

- Joyce Carol Oates

I want to take a moment to close out the forward by thanking my mentor and former professor, Richard Bausch. Bausch played a considerable role in my life while at George Mason University, and it is in his lineage that I felt adopted and loved by him as a student. He was not the first professor I had met in creative writing who had wisdom. However, he was the first I had that imparted it with such a fluid and deft voice, and I was at a time when I could receive it so thoroughly. Thanks, Dick.

Otherwise, please enjoy this collection; making it for you was fun.

Lex E. Santí

1/14/2024

MAKE YOURSELF UNDERSTOOD



SPEAKING ANOTHER LANGUAGE IS A LOT LIKE WRITING A STORY. Bear with me. You try to get something out, and you hope you've understood. Let's say more.

Sometimes, you don't know how to get someone to understand what you're trying to describe in your story. Try as you might, you struggle to rack your brain to find a dozen ways to express a feeling, an event, or, say, as I will share an embracing moment in my life, a simple word.

The first time I lived in Romania, five years ago with the Peace Corps, I told someone about the hammock I brought. I wanted them to know why the thing mattered to me, why I'd trucked it seven time zones over, and what it meant to have it with me.

The problem was I didn't know the word in Romanian for hammock. So, I used what language I knew and said, "island bed," and then I said, "ship bed." Then, if those weren't bizarre enough, I said something I'll never forget: "pot en aer," literally a "bed in the air." So, they laughed until they got a hold of themselves and searched for a dictionary.

Was that the right way to describe it*? Uhh, no, it wasn't. It was a little embarrassing, but I managed to make myself understood.

So, writing stories is a lot like that. We're looking to make ourselves understood, and we must have -before anything- that undeniable audacity to believe that we can convincingly tell a story. So we hit a phrase, describe a feeling or emotion, and then try to present it to a stranger in many ways.

And I mean, tell it "Convincingly" in the sense that you want to get life on the page, and you have the guts to believe someone will get wrapped in the suspension of their reality and become engaged in the waking dream they created. Damn, that isn't easy. I have to say, *I think every one of the stories that I ever published tried to do that.*

It's about getting it right and having the courage to revise your creativ-

ity until it directly bisects the division between the artist and the other, forcing them into a transient state where your imagination allows them to exist with the text.

But how does that start?

It takes, more than anything, in that first instant -when you put fingers to keyboard- to make an utterance, to break the silence and decide you have something to say and that you're going to (insert explicative here) well make yourself understood.

To have the audacity to say it. To have the audacity to write.

It takes courage to do what we do. Know that, believe that.

If you struggle in this field, chances are you're doing something right; chances are you care; chances are that you want to utter something and let your voice be heard -and sure- you're scared, scared that you won't be listened to, or that they won't "get you."

You may be worried that you're not going to nail the paragraph perfectly or can't get the majority of your feelings into the text and convey them properly. I understand.

Here's the thing: you won't, at least not the first draft, but starting will get you to utter that first word, to take a chance, to believe that you dare to write and tell the story the way you want to. All that.

This brings us full circle. This is also like learning a language: the moment you stop speaking, you end the experience of making yourself understand, and communication ends. Full Stop. If you have struggled with learning a language and being in a foreign country, the work is often to continue explaining something repeatedly to make it make sense to the listener. As a writer, you get to lay the words in such a precise order that they appear signified and digestible to most readers.

So, then I said, yeah, "hamac" (in Romanian), and after they stopped laughing, said, "So what does it matter? Why is a thing important to you

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here?" So, you tell them how you would swing in that hammock every day in your Romanian apartment, swinging lazily, thinking about the life you made in a foreign country. In the middle of the night, you'd curl up in it -wrapping yourself in your sleeping bag- that bizarre hammock you decided to bring to Romania, and this is what it meant: because it gave you a bit of peace every day. It told you where you came from, and if kept you grounded like a bed in the air should.

Now, go on and write.

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