

19. Go Public (2)

By now you're probably wondering why you ever decided to write a novel at all! What started out as a task based on inspiration and that 'unexplainable urge' to put words to a vision, is at this point being lost in mechanics. There is little of inspiration at this stage of a novel. And if you are still following this topic then you have made the decision that what you have written should be available to an audience. You have decided that the world should share your vision. So now stop thinking just like a writer and think like a publisher. Think about what you have written; pinpoint the message you have put down in your synopsis and imagine who needs or who would want to read your novel.

And why? Because now it's time to write your covering letter. This should at all times be purely professional and at all times succinct. Start with a brief description of yourself, inasmuch as it is relevant to your writing. Describe the book, very briefly, referring to the synopsis for a more detailed description. And finally target your audience, and where possible give an indication of how you expect the novel to be marketed successfully. And keep it short. The last thing you want to happen is that the publisher tires of reading the covering letter – that way he won't even get to the synopsis never mind reading your book.

Once the covering letter is written, you now need to choose an agent and/or publisher. Writers' Handbooks will list agents and publishers, and give a brief description of the material they handle. In the case of publishers they will also mention whether direct dealings are accepted, or preferably through an agent. And believe me, if a publisher wants to deal only with agents, it is fruitless to approach them. Also, take heed of the submission requirements. Some will want only the letter and synopsis, others will want samples, (the first three chapters), and occasionally an agent/publisher will accept a full manuscript. In all cases, follow the guidelines. It shows respect and will increase your chances of being taken seriously. Another way to pick a potential agent/publisher is to take note of where your favourite writers are published because the chances are good that your work will be similar to theirs.

I see no harm in selecting up to three simultaneously, and sending your package to all three. That way, when the first rejection comes in (as it will) you will still have others in the pipeline. I would also advise you to send out rejected work as quickly as possible to your next name on the list, so that you are always committed to your work.

But when the first three have gone out, you can be pretty sure that for a couple of months you will be left in no man's land. The best way to cope

with that, is to work on letting the muse whisper in your ear anew. Keep your notebook to hand, and jot down any ideas, however fragmented that come to mind. Even if this is no more than a diversionary tactic, it will give you a feeling of being productive.

Also, and this is a personal opinion, increase your physical activity. Be on the move, even if it's only to spring clean the house. Getting physical will clear the mind, will reconnect you with the earth, and literally enhance your peace of mind. You need to disconnect with your novel so that you can let the next one take root in your subconscious.