

"Writers are the most important people in Hollywood, but we must never tell the sons-of-bitches."

- Irving Thalberg

The Unseen Side of Publishing

by Lorcan B. Lawson

All authors have their mentors. One of mine is Mario Puzo, who's almost like a Godfather to me. I didn't listen too hard when he said never write in the first person. He should have added: 'unless you can do it well.' Rules are fine if they're not stupid. But his best advice by far was this: 'Never trust anybody but yourself. That includes critics, friends, *and especially publishers.*' I wondered what he had against publishers. Getting rejections from them is part of the author's lot in life, isn't it? It took many years (like twenty-six) for the substance of his message to sink in. Publishers, in the main (we all know there's some good in everything), are a blight on the literary landscape, for reasons I'm about to expand on, inspired by my godfather and many like him in the art fraternity. If that shocks the reader, it's because he doesn't know the half of it and I'd like to set him right.

The evidence shows that only for the authors in history, we'd still be chipping messages in stone, the

two per cent of us able to read and write. Writers thought for far too long that God invented publishers to be their means of going public. It turns out that the idea was invented by publishers—the people who deal in books as a commodity for money, not the content as a vital cultural essential. The idea that self-publishing is author vanity was invented by the same wheeler-dealers, for reasons that gradually dawned on me too. Shame authors for their self-confidence (arrogance) and capture them; subjugate them. It's medieval arseholery. But then, publishing is just that, because it never moved on from the serfdom ethos. To a publisher, moving on is for the mugs; the artists and all the rest of the flim-flam. Publishers have God on their side, and the gravy train writers represent is God's gift to them for being such sterling chaps. I was shocked to learn how badly Roseanne Barr was treated when she—not the turkeys who took all the credit and money—wrote her TV-comedy series of the 1980s. Listen to what she says about Hollywood on the various radio interviews she's given (especially on the ABC Book Show (Australia) at

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/roseanne-barr-roseannarchy-dispatches-from-the-nut/2922618>

The reality of life for the struggling artist in New York (upward of 100,000 of them) is that he has to go down to SoHo from whose sidewalks he might sell a painting for \$600—if he's lucky. If he sells one to a gallery owner, he'll see the same painting sell for

\$6,000 in that gallery a week or two later, and he'll get no cut of the proceeds. Not a sausage. The big money, it seems, is for the person who has skill in paying rent, not the moron who has artistic talent. There's a tradition in Western 'civilization' that holds that there are two types of people: those with a license from God to make profits out of the labour of the second type—the artist, who by divine decree, has to live in a garret, eat slops and die early. It's 'just the way things are' – and they generally stay that way until something gives.

Something is giving, as we speak. What follows here is an account of how untalented, artificially self-confident men and women (wardrobe bullshit artists) subjugated the creative writing fraternity and nobody could (or so it seems) do anything about it. They call themselves publishers, and their (secret) business is bullying in order to thief from the artists amongst us. Just read the small print in a typical publisher/author agreement to see how theft is legalised despite what the common law says about such sleazy practices. But then the law is an ass designed by thieves for the benefit of thieves, isn't it? These bottom-feeders justify their thieving by saying they take all the risks. Then they wave the threat over you that if you don't come to their terms, to their party, you'll remain in obscurity, unpublished.

Because they successfully pulled off this blackmail, they became the tail that wags the literary dog. They've got away with their scam for centuries and, despite all

the available evidence of their ineptitude, a smidgen of which I'm going to unveil here, they're still taken seriously—by the usual suspects who'd climb over their dead Grandma to see their name in print. Only for the salvation of the electronic media, that farce would be assured of a long cosy future. Authors would go on being latter-day slaves. They'd go on flying first-class while artists thumbed rides. You get the picture. But people in the know will tell you that the day of reckoning has arrived. The riverboat gambler's stranglehold on publishing has finally reached its use-by date.

As you'll see from the list that follows, the writers are the stars of literature, not the profit-motivated thieves. Not only do they create the works but they know how good they are when publishers don't. The publishers didn't know! The writers had to prove themselves in many cases by doing the publisher's job for him. We're left to ask: what good do publishers do? We're already seeing that they're not necessary for a writer to reach his reading public. Not any more. If politics attracted genuinely decent people in sufficient numbers, governments would have subsidised authors to ensure the health of democracy, as Jefferson strongly advised. No one is as awake to nonsense as artists; no one does dissent anywhere near as well as they. But government didn't help them. They helped big business and the rich instead. Bummer. So the opportunists got busy and exploited the system, making a

mockery of Lincoln's famous proclamation liberating the slaves.

As I've matured as a writer and a human being, I've noticed that there are definite forces operating in society that enforce inertia in the individuals that make it up. It's like the bromide the army put in the soldiers' tea to dilute any desire they might have to start shagging each other—which, it has to be said, is their business, not the army's. The brass don't want them doing it so they get dosed with bromide—especially since it inhibits their thinking and dulls their mutinous instincts. The force that's most obvious to me is the compact between government and the cowboy financial institutions where the commonweal is pillaged for the benefit of the grubby privileged few. Or did we miss the lessons to be learned from the latest global financial meltdown?

It makes me want to puke, you know—that gutless artists now hover around that grubby few and their bureaucratic lackeys waiting for crumbs—obedient, subservient and hopeful. The energy force known up till the 1960's as the Avant-garde is barely a memory today. Artists have become the step-children of organization men and women—what I call 'the suits', whose art is BS and their manners barbaric. But a no less insidious force is the unmerited power wielded by the people attracted like blowflies to the exploitative end of the book publishing industry. By abusing their unearned position and society's trust, they effectively act-

ed as an Inquisition aligned against creative writers – the people our society relies on to refurbish our courage for action, our cultural instincts and awareness of the mystery we call life. Like the evil rich rancher in cowboy westerns, they commandeered the river forcing out the little land holders downstream in order to buy out their ranches for a pittance.

This manicured form of fascism went on indefinitely because of the low IQ of our politicians and voting majority and the absence of anything of substance in their respective underpants. Of course they'll protest that we're demented and that they're the only sensible people available to fill that role, but who's listening these days? We've done it for too long already.

Before the e-Revolution came along, nobody really questioned the right of the business mentality—suited buffoons and commercial exploiters called publishers—to judge whether the works of talented people called artists merited public exposure. Think about it: would we get wife-bashers to counsel us on the sanctity of marriage or convicted crims to lecture on righteousness? The answer is yes when it comes to publishing; an industry that, as we shall soon see, is managed by the least fit to do so. If writers wrote just for the money, they'd be idiots and failures, and their product crap. Why is the principle okay for writers but not publishers? Was it just assumed that art was a sub-branch of commerce and that human culture was just a commodity like soybeans? The gatekeeper role of the least fit

was assumed to be not only the most effective way of managing the output of these rope-sandaled beatniks, but right and just as well. Thus quality control was taken over by dickheads with no idea of what quality was, either as a written piece or as a cultural imperative. These self-opinionated nobodies were going to 'filter out the rubbish.' I'm smiling as I write this.

The record of publisher rejections makes for some judgments of its own concerning where the rubbish is to be found. What follows is a small sample of their rejection habits; an insignificant fragment in a litany of crap as only publishing industry people know how to dish out. Although being only the tip of a giant iceberg, they expose the state of subjugation of the sighted and insighted by the unsighted and the out-sighted gamblers whose incapacity to distinguish between a stool and a truffle over recent decades saw conventional publishing migrate into the brothels section of the Yellow Pages. Look at this list and decide for yourself: are we dealing with people who merited the trust and respect that was afforded to them by the naïve and abused producers of the goods and their public, or inept gamblers who made up for their losses by stealing from authors whose own gargantuan efforts had established their credentials, not risk on the part of a publisher?

Stephen King: Stephen King received dozens of rejections for his first novel, *Carrie*. He kept them tidily

nailed to a spike in his bedroom. One of the publishers sent King's rejection with these words: "We're just not interested in science fiction that deals with negative utopias (sic). They don't sell." Publisher ignorance does, then? If it hadn't been for King's wife Tabitha, the iconic image of a young girl in a prom dress covered in pig's blood would not exist. King received thirty rejections for his story of a tormented girl with telekinetic powers, and then he threw it in the garbage can. King admits he contemplated suicide. Long-suffering wife Tabitha fished it out. King sent his story around again and, eventually, *Carrie* was published. The novel became a classic in the horror genre and has enjoyed film and TV adaptations as well.

William Golding: Golding's *Lord of the Flies* got rejected by twenty publishers. One denounced the future classic with these words (which should be inscribed on the pompous git's tomb): "An absurd and uninteresting fantasy. Rubbish and dull." Yeah, right, Mr Expert. (What's that gobbling sound I hear?)

John Creasy: He got seven hundred and seventy-four rejections before selling his first story. (It's not a record. Millions of good writers in the rest of the iceberg got or get far worse treatment from editors and publishers). Creasy went on to write five hundred and sixty-four books using fourteen different names, and proved that the great bulk of publishers fell into the category of those who have jobs they should be barred

from having. Every calling has pretenders and misfits, but not as blatantly spectacularly as publishing.

John le Carré: After John le Carré submitted his first novel, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, one of the publishers sent it along to a colleague, with this message: "You're welcome to le Carré – he hasn't got any future." Can you picture these prima-donnas at work, perched in the fowl house going through the sweat and tears of the submitting authors? Apart from the implied insult to his colleague, it showed contempt for the geese who lay the golden eggs. Frankly, I detect a perverse jealousy rooted in resentment that comes from wanting to be a creator too. After a few years in the business, they take themselves for God's little jackbooted agents.

Anne Frank: According to one publisher, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was scarcely worth reading: "The girl doesn't, it seems to me, have a special perception or feeling which would lift that book above the 'curiosity' level." Fifteen publishers of this calibre likewise rejected Frank's book. The publishers thought the book was dull, and had far too much family infighting (as though their circumstances under enemy occupation justified such displays of emotion). Publishers thought the discussion of Anne's emerging sexuality was too explicit for readers. To them, a first-hand account by a victim of one of the greatest genocides in human history is boring. That disqualified them from expressing an

opinion, in my view. But wait! Then they ordained that because this boring little authoress dared to mention a bit of about her sexual feelings, it made the poor publisher's life hell. Who are these fucking arseholes?! If we wanted to appoint anal-retentive censors and destroyers of human creativity, we couldn't go past these parasitic boofheads for sheer malicious efficiency and competence.

Joseph Heller: In an act of almost unparalleled stupidity, one jack-booted creativity destroying publisher remarked of Joseph Heller's 'Catch-22': "I haven't the foggiest idea about what the man is trying to say ... Apparently the author intends it to be funny – possibly even satire – but it is really not funny on any intellectual level." Here we can see the undiluted pomposity of a largish gobbling farm bird passing judgment (or is it just gas) on matters intellectual? At least they know comedy, those clown-genuises down at Turkey Central.

J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was rejected by a dozen publishers, including A-Listers like Penguin and HarperCollins. Bloomsbury, a small London publisher, only took it on at the behest of the CEO's eight-year old daughter, who begged her father to print the book. It was below lazy turkeydom's dignity to test the market and far easier to be dismissive than helpful. A kid had to take the lead. An eight-year old kid knew more about the value of Rowling's work than publishers who are paid to know, yet

they got to make the billions that flowed, not the kid, or even her father at Bloomsbury. Can you see why I might sound angry? I'm glad that Rowlings has finally told all her bottom-feeder parasites where to get off.

Ursula K. Le Guin: One publisher sent this helpful little missive to Ms Le Guin regarding her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*: 'The book is so endlessly complicated by details of reference and information, the interim legends become so much of a nuisance despite their relevance, that the very action of the story seems to be to become hopelessly bogged down and the book, eventually, unreadable. The whole is so dry and airless, so lacking in pace, that whatever drama and excitement the novel might have had is entirely dissipated by what does seem, a great deal of the time, to be extraneous material. My thanks nonetheless for having thought of us. The manuscript of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is returned herewith.' The book went on to win both the Hugo and the Nebula awards. Another 24-carate turkey puts a plastic charge under the racket his ilk have been running all this time.

Jack London: Rejected six hundred times before his first story was considered to be of merit. Six hundred times. Jack's writing didn't have any of the hallmarks of a less than professional artist, but the non-artist turkeys couldn't see the bucks in it due to the reduced size of the farm bird's brain—their own.

George Orwell: One publisher rejected George Orwell's manuscript of *Animal Farm* with these words: "It is impossible to sell animal stories in the USA." But it's possible and even likely that idiots can be employed by publishing houses? Gobble-gobble-gobble.

Tony Hillerman: Tony Hillerman, now famous for his *Navajo Tribal Police* mystery novels, was initially told by publishers to "get rid of all that Indian stuff". Another bird-brained ponce shows how empty his interior is.

William Faulkner: One publisher protested in the rejection letter for Mr Faulkner's book, *Sanctuary*:

"Good God, I can't publish this!" It's bloody hard to find a publisher who isn't a God-botherer or a spiritually prejudiced judge of free spirits. They're God's fifth column charged with the responsibility of keeping atheists out of the loop and feeding anaesthetic to the masses. It's not as though Faulkner's work suddenly improved and it led to acceptance by publishers. My guess is that the cleaning lady glimpsed a page or two and put it in the 'acceptance' tray.

John Grisham: John Grisham's first novel *A Time to Kill* was rejected by fifteen publishers and thirty agents before he published it himself. If John Grisham had a low opinion of lawyers, it doesn't take much effort to imagine what he thought of publishers.

Vladimir Nabokov: Nabokov's *Lolita* was greeted by one publisher with these words: '... overwhelmingly nauseating, even to an enlightened Freudian ... the whole thing is an unsure cross between hideous reality and improbable fantasy. It often becomes a wild neurotic daydream ... I recommend that it be buried under a stone for a thousand years.' Enlightened Freudian, eh? These turkeys really do think they're clever. I used to wonder why they don't write books, then it hit me that they make sure there's no money in it for the scribes.

Richard Doddridge Blackmore: His *Lorna Doone*, a Devonshire-set romance of rivalry and revenge was turned down eighteen times before being published in 1889. There are nearly a dozen big-screen or TV versions of the story. Today, Blackmore is considered one of the greatest British authors of the 19th century.

Sylvia Plath: According to one publisher, Ms. Plath's ability as a poet was nothing special: "There certainly isn't enough genuine talent for us to take notice." Yet another pompous git making a fool of himself dressed in bird feathers and making lewd sounds.

E. E. Cummings: Mr Cummings' first work *The Enormous Room* was rejected by fifteen publishers. He eventually self-published the book and it went on to become considered a masterpiece of modern poetry. In gratitude, he dedicated the book to fifteen publish-

ers who were in the wrong calling. I would have mailed them some legless stools.

Robert M. Pirsig: Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* was rejected one hundred and twenty-one times before going on to become a cult classic. Pirsig's manuscript attempts to understand the true meaning of life. The editor who finally published *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* said of Pirsig's book: "It forced me to decide what I was in publishing for." Indeed, *Zen* has given millions of readers an accessible, enjoyable book for seeking insight into their own lives.

Irving Stone: Stone's *Lust for Life* was rejected sixteen times, once with this helpful synopsis: "A long, dull novel about an artist." The book went on to sell over twenty-five million copies. We all know by now that arts managers hate talent, and artists. It's what makes them unfit.

Rudyard Kipling: This master of the written word was treated as badly as any other scribbler by the philistines of publishing. One of the editors of the *San Francisco Examiner* made this judgment in rejecting his short stories: "I'm sorry Mr Kipling, but you just don't know how to use the English language." Kipling is now a revered author and the boofhead editor of the *San Francisco Examiner* is ... well, who cares?

Frank Herbert: Herbert's *Dune* was rejected twenty times before finally successfully reaching print—and becoming one of the most beloved science fiction novels of all time.

Patrick Dennis: Author of *Auntie Mame*. Based on his party-throwing, out-of-control aunt, Patrick Dennis's story defined in 1955 what Americans now know as "camp." Before Vanguard Press picked it up, fifteen other publishers rejected it. Within years, *Auntie Mame* would not only become a hit on Broadway but a popular film as well. Dennis became a millionaire and, in 1956, was the first author in history to have three books simultaneously ranked on The New York Times best-seller list.

Richard Adams: Adams' *Watership Down* was rejected on the grounds that 'older children wouldn't like it because its language was too difficult.' Only an older child in publishing could come up with that crap.

Madeleine L'Engle: L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* was rejected by twenty-six publishers before finally breaking into print. It went on to win the 1963 Newbery Medal.

Jack Kerouac: This was one boofhead publisher's view of Kerouac's *On the Road*: "His frenetic and scrambled prose perfectly express the feverish travels of the Beat Generation. But is that enough? I don't

think so." Nobody knows who that pompous git was, but we know Kerouac.

Margaret Mitchell: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* was rejected thirty-eight times before finally finding a publisher.

Judy Blume: Blume received "nothing but rejections" for two years. Ms Blume is now considered to be one of the most influential children's literature writers of her generation.

Kenneth Grahame: Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* was refused by a publisher because it was an "an irresponsible holiday story." When I hear of pompous gits talking about responsibility, I reach for my luger.

Louis L'Amour: He was rejected over two hundred times before he sold any of his writing.

Isaac Bashevis Singer: One jaded publisher (pompous git) rejected a submission of Mr. Singer's with the words: "It's Poland and the rich Jews again." Who are these creeps? Where do they crawl out from?

Marcel Proust: Mr Proust's behemoth *Remembrance of Things Past* (A La Recherche du Temps Perdu) received this delightfully plain-spoken critique from one publisher: "My dear fellow, I may be dead from the neck up, but rack my brains as I may I can't see why a chap should need thirty pages to describe

how he turns over in bed before going to sleep." This pompous git was half-right. He was dead from the neck down as well.

Richard Bach: His work was rejected forty times before anyone in a publishing house saw what was of merit in it. Bach has always insisted that this story, told from the point of view of a young seagull, wasn't written but channelled. Nobody in publishing thought a story about a seagull that flew not for survival but for the joy of flying itself would have an audience. Macmillan Publishers finally picked up *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* in 1972, and that year the book sold more than a million copies. A movie followed in 1973, with a sound track by Neil Diamond.

James Joyce: It took twenty-two rejections before a publisher took a chance on a young James Joyce in 1914. They didn't take too big of a chance—only 1,250 copies of *Dubliners* were initially published. Joyce's popularity didn't hit right away; out of the 379 copies that sold in the first year, Joyce himself purchased 120 of them. Joyce would go on to be regarded as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. *Dubliners*, a collection of short stories, is among the most popular of Joyce's titles.

C.S. Lewis: Lewis received over eight hundred rejections before he sold a single piece of writing. This is the classic demonstration of the art of being a turkey.

Charles Shaw: In 1952, Crown Publishing Group in New York took a chance on the story of a shipwreck in the South Pacific - *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* by Shaw, an Australian author. It was rejected by dozens of publishers on his own continent and by an estimated twenty British publishing firms. By 1957, this humorous tale was made into a movie starring Deborah Kerr and Robert Mitchum. The story and the movie are considered war classics and garnered several Academy Award nominations, including one for Best Writing.

Jasper Fforde: Fforde received seventy-six rejection letters before finally seeing his first novel *The Eyre Affair* in print. The book is now considered a classic of the modern fantasy genre. Seventy-six pompous gits got it dead wrong.

Meg Cabot: *The Princess Diaries* slipped through the hands of seventeen publishers before finally being accepted for publication.

Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen: Their multi-million dollar series *Chicken Soup for the Soul* got turned down thirty-three consecutive times. Publishers claimed that "anthologies don't sell" and the book was "too positive." The total number of rejections came to one hundred and forty. In 1993, the president of Health Communications took a chance on the collection of poems, stories, and offered tid-bits of

encouragement. Today, the 65-title series has sold more than 80 million copies in 37 languages.

Laurence Peter: In 1969, after sixteen rejections, Canadian professor Laurence Peter's business book about bad management *The Peter Principle* finally got a green light from Bantam Books. Within a year, the hardcover version of *The Peter Principle* was in its 15th reprint. Peter went on to write *The Peter Prescription*, *The Peter Plan*, and the unintentionally amusing *The Peter Pyramid: Will We Ever Get to the Point?*

Thor Heyerdahl: Heyerdahl's classic adventure narrative, *The Kon Tiki Expedition*, was rejected twenty times before finding a publisher. Heyerdahl wrote the true story of his raft journey from Peru to Polynesia, but when he tried to get it published, he couldn't. One publisher asked him if anyone had drowned. When Heyerdahl said no, they rejected him on the grounds that the story wouldn't be very interesting. In 1953, after 20 rejections, *Kon-Tiki* finally found a publisher—and an audience. The book is now available in 66 languages.

Richard Hooker: Before the television series, there was the film *M*A*S*H*. Before the film, there was the novel. Richard Hooker's unforgettable book about a medical unit serving in the Korean War was rejected by twenty-one publishers before eventually seeing the light of day. It remains a story of courage and friend-

ship that connects with audiences around the world in times of war and peace.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: An editor once told the author that: “You’d have a decent book if you’d get rid of that Gatsby Character.” Why is it that we so avidly seek the opinion of morons? How is it that they wield that sort of power over writers?

Jorge Luis Borges: One publisher rejected Mr Borges’ work because it was: "utterly untranslatable." The pompous git was in fact utterly unfit for the job he held and the writer—along with so many more like him, suffered needless neglect and indifference as a consequence this turkey flapping his wings in the dust.

D.H. Lawrence: After reading Mr Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, one publisher warned: "For your own sake, do not publish this book." God, in the guise of an idiot, passed judgment. It still goes on because most authors prostitute themselves before these clowns just to see their name in print (with the arse out of their trousers).

Theodor Seuss Giesel: The Dr Seuss book *And to Think I Saw it on Mulberry Street* was rejected for being “too different from other juveniles on the market to warrant selling.”

Other names that went through the humiliation of submitting their precious work to insensitive idiots are

as follows: Beatrix Potter – David Chilton – Robert James Waller – Tom Peters – James Redfield – Deepak Chopra – Gertrude Stein – Upton Sinclair – Ezra Pound – Mark Twain – Edgar Rice Burroughs – Stephen Crane – George Bernard Shaw – Anais Nin – Thomas Paine – Virginia Wolff – Edgar Allen Poe – Henry David Thoreau – Benjamin Franklin – Walt Whitman – Alexander Dumas – Pearl S. Buck – Norman Mailer – Alex Haley – Jerzy Kosinski – et al.

Remember: we've only touched the surface part of the part of the iceberg that's above the water. There's a depressing pattern formed by this litany of humbug from Humbuggers Anonymous. The time has come to bypass them altogether. What writer could stick with them knowing he doesn't have to anymore? In no other profession are such incompetent fools tolerated in positions of control. It's the aim of all at Phoenix to ensure that the farce we've known as traditional publishing gets swept away as quickly as possible and its workforce sent to the dole queues where they belong. My objection to literary parasites is that writing and books are too important to be put in the hands of people like them. Why not hand religion over to them as well? The logic and the absurdity level are the same. Or are we so stupid still that it can go back to business as usual? One of my fears on this subject is that writers will go on handing over their works to thieves and rapists. There seems to be a divine law that says creative people have to be spineless and submissive.

My many rejections from publishers were mostly polite at least. But I was certain they hadn't even read my stuff. For a long time, I had no grievance on that level. But Jean-Paul Sartre would hold me in contempt. He despised people who praise their executioners. I've slowly come around to see that conventional publishers are the executioners of the values most artists/authors hold. They adulterate what they're saying so they can stay out of court when in most cases the court case has to proceed so that we can evolve. In this sense, their cowardly practices make them destroyers of human advancement; I don't care what anyone says. This life is about far more than bunkering down and surviving injury-free, as writers know. Fuck those who come along to sanitize their texts. What unmitigated gall and insufferable *cheek!* A pox on them, I say.

The token list provided here gives a hint as to why one would the way I do. Artists have to find a better way of doing what publishers have been doing on their behalf. The electronic media have handed the solution to them on a plate. Nerds and geeks of the IT world have trotted up on their skinny ponies to snap the locks on the dungeons whose walls writers have adorned for so many centuries. It's no small thing. Groundhog Day is finally over. We ought not squander the opportunity. Writers unwilling to use their new liberty deserve all they don't get as a result.