

Eric D. Goodman on Getting Published

Contributed by
Sunday, 17 September 2006
Last Updated Monday, 18 September 2006

Eric D. Goodman is a professional writer and editor. He publishes WRITEFUL, a literary weblog, and is currently polishing TRACKS, a novel-in-stories that already has literary agents talking. Eric talks with us on the craft of writing and on getting published.

Eric D. Goodman on Writing and Publishing

Eric D. Goodman is a professional writer and editor. He publishes WRITEFUL (www.writeful.blogspot.com), a literary weblog, and is currently polishing TRACKS, a novel-in-stories that already has literary agents talking. Eric talks with us on the craft of writing and on getting published.

WAPYB: How do you decide which newsletters and magazines you'll write for? Do you write the story first, and then figure out where to submit it, or do you research the magazines, etc. first, and then write the story?

Eric: For me, it always begins with the story. A first draft is written in a fit of inspiration. Granted, a first draft is seldom what ends up being submitted, but it is the seed. Once a draft is written, and reviewed and edited, I then try to determine who the audience is for a particular piece. With that in mind, I go about revising, always keeping the ideal reader right over my shoulder, planted beside the story's original intent.

Sometimes what I end up with is quite different after I've refocused for a particular audience.

Next, I try to look at every single sentence, one at a time, and ask myself whether it adds to the story, whether it is really saying something. A fault with many beginning writers is to overwrite. I still overwrite. That's why I practice the "is this sentence/word necessary" exercise.

After I've polished my story, and I'm happy with how it sounds and what it says, I then look for a vehicle to publish my story. In my case, since most of my freelance writing is fiction, I'm hitting first magazines (pie-in-the-sky) then literary journals (hopeful exposure, hopeless pay) and then smaller literary journals and online publications.

That's not to say online publications are at the bottom. I'm just a little old fashioned in that I like to be able to hold the writing in my hand. That's why, although I have an iPod and load my CDs and audobooks onto it, I still have to buy the real, physical books and CDs.

WAPYB: How do you go about contacting the newsletters, newspapers, etc? Do you contact the owner/publisher directly, or do you use some other method?

Eric: I usually refer to a directory of literary journals and magazines, such as Writers' Market. I always go online to check out the online entity first, to check for any changes in the names of editors or what they are looking for. Then, I take my stock query letter (one for each story) and tailor it to the specific periodical. If my story is under 30 manuscript pages, I send it along with my letter in an over-sized envelope. If it is longer, I send only the query and ask permission to send the full manuscript.

Most directories give a list of editors or at least mention which editor (either by name or generically) to direct a query to. That's who I contact.

WAPYB: How much time do you spend writing every day?

Eric: It's amazing, what trivial things can spark epic writings. Sometimes just seeing a spider on a wall, hearing a bit of cafe conversation, watching an unusual-looking person walk along a sidewalk or waking from a dream can spark an idea that blazes into a novel. I keep a file of ideas and thoughts -- hundreds of them -- that I hope will seed future writings. I'm never at a loss when it comes to ideas ... it's time that eludes me.

Some people say you have to apply fingers to keyboards daily. Hemingway wrote three pages every day. Personally, I write in spurts. Certainly, in my work, I'm involved with my writing daily. But most of my fiction comes in spurts. For example, when I'm writing a novel, I'll submerge myself in the story, live and breath it, and complete a draft in a month or so. Then I'll go a month or two where I'm not actively writing fresh fiction, simply editing older stuff.

Once I've written a fresh draft, I usually try to put it aside and not look at it for at least a few months. There are always other writing projects I can work on -- the ones that have already simmered on the back burner for a few months. That way, when I return to something I've written, I see it differently, without the attachment I might have if I were to start editing a few days later.

WAPYB: What about the agents? What is sparking their interest in you? What are you doing to generate this interest? What are they saying? And, what are your next steps (goals), should an agent contact you?

Eric: Agents can be a difficult lot to get in with. I've been courting agents for years and, while I often get encouraging comments and am asked to resubmit, I haven't secured the power-agent of my dreams yet.

However, I am hopeful about my new novel in stories, TRACKS. I'm still working on revisions and edits, but I've already had several agents ask to see it when it's ready. That's a good sign. Usually I'm knocking on their doors after a novel is complete.

I think I've gotten their attention for a few reasons. One, my writing has certainly improved with practice. No matter how polished a writer may be, there's always room to improve. Second, I've tried to meet some of the agents by attending literary events and writing conferences. I used to think that being a writer meant being a hermit, sitting alone in the study and mailing off manuscripts. On the contrary, an important part of being a writer is promoting your book and yourself. It's not always easy to wear both hats, but it is important.

Finally, I think I've gotten some attention because of my literary blog, www.writeful.blogspot.com. In fact, one agent specifically complimented it when asking to see my work.

But blogs can be a two-edged sword. There are some great ones out there that are every bit as good as traditional publications. But there are also the teen-aged diaries and hipster hookup blogs that won't do much to impress an agent or publisher. I think the key to a literary blog is to be professional, and try not publish anything you wouldn't want printed

on the front page of the New York Times or Wall Street Journal or Washington Post. Your reputation's on-line.

Eric D. Goodman is a professional writer and editor. He won the International Gold Award from the Newsletter on Newsletters for his superior writing and editing. Recently, he received one of two Honorable Mentions in the Baltimore Review's annual fiction competition and read from his fiction at Downtown Baltimore's Patterson Theater. Eric's a two-time finalist in Paramount's Chesterfield Writer's Film Project founded by Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment and a three-time winner of National Novel Writing Month. He's been published in On Stage Magazine, Travel Insights, The Federal Voice and Coloquio.

Eric publishes WRITEFUL (www.writeful.blogspot.com), a literary weblog, and is currently polishing TRACKS, a novel-in-stories that already has literary agents talking. Eric talks with Sid Smith on the craft of writing.

www.writeful.blogspot.com (his literary weblog)

<http://www.writers.net/writers/40995> (his bio)