

Writers' Forum, December/January 2005

service can give you the truth AND the tools to improve your book."

The Hilary Johnson Authors' Advisory Service offers detailed appraisals of authors' typescripts, covering all types of work as Hilary explains: "We cover all fiction genres, full-length non-fiction, including autobiography, short stories, children's book, TV and film scripts and poetry. Normally, for novels and full-length non-fiction we provide an assessment of either the complete typescript or else the first three chapters plus synopsis partial, but we are flexible and can usually accommodate authors' individual needs where they vary from the standard. We also provide a copy editing and proof reading service."

Hilary doesn't just help aspiring authors and vanish from their lives but often continues to help writers, even after they have signed a book deal. "It is especially pleasing that the relationship with many successful clients has not ceased with publication. In several cases they ask me to read their most recent typescript before it goes to their agent or editor and I am regularly called upon to give advice and support when it is needed."

Having been in the industry for a quarter of a century Hilary sees authors make many mistakes. "Not being sufficiently aware of what is being published in their particular area of interest *now*; being in too much of a hurry to see results and therefore not taking enough time to revise and edit their work; not appreciating agents and editors are not in the business to help aspiring authors or even be nice to them".

These are some mistakes that Hilary sees aspiring authors making.

"Technically, the most common mistake aspiring novelists make is to disregard, usually because they are unaware of them, the principles of narrative viewpoint. Other common mistakes are the inclusion of too much back story at that crucial early stage when the plot should be driving forward and, so far as dialogue is

HILARY'S TOP THREE TIPS

- **Read. Read anything and everything, but most particularly read the kind of material you wish to write.**
- **Develop an understanding of the publishing industry and book-selling industries and be prepared to make some accommodations to your ambitions in light of this. Without compromising your integrity as an author, of course!**
- **Take infinite pains with a typescript. Do not send it into the cruel world until it is as good as you can possible make it.**

The Three P's

Practice

Patience

Persistence

concerned, including the trivia of ordinary conversation which do nothing at all for the story and serve only to slow the pace. Not dissimilar to this are the difficulties inexperienced authors have in moving characters around, which leads to much opening and shutting of doors, getting in and out of cars and the consumption of innumerable cups of tea or coffee."

Hilary is also a scout for a leading agency and recommends about six to ten authors to the agency a year.

"I always make it clear that I do not forward a typescript to the agent unless I am convinced that there is a sensible purpose in doing so."

To be recommended to the agency the author's writing has to be exceptional.

"At the initial stage, the author's personal qualities are not especially relevant (I know having worked with a number of well-known people that even being famous doesn't guarantee that a person's novel will be published). It is their work which counts and this, to be recommended to the agency, must be of outstanding quality and commercially viable. Unfortunately, these days the first does not necessarily mean the second automatically follows."

Full-length fiction is the most common submission the service receive "of which the bulk is popular women's fiction and crime/thrillers, followed closely by science fiction and fantasy. We also receive many children's book for all age-groups." The

readers for Hilary's service are all experienced in their fields.

"Most have worked as editors, several are editors who are also published authors. I tend to choose former editors rather than those who are exclusively writers when it comes to appraising authors' work, largely because they have proven themselves professionally in this regard and they are accustomed to working with authors," said Hilary.

One such editor is Rachel Hore, one of the Hilary Johnson consultants who has recently sold her first novel, *The Dream House*, which will be published in 2006 by Simon and Schuster.

Hilary advertises her service as providing advice and critique and is frequently contacted by writers seeking advice.

"This I normally give free of charge over the phone or in an email. The questions which arise repeatedly are about vanity publishing, and problems with agents. I am always pleased to speak to prospective clients on the phone and am available at most civilised hours (I would prefer not to have phone calls late at night, in the small hours of Christmas Day, all of which have happened, though admittedly the last was from a client in Japan)."

Hilary's clients come from all over the world, the most exotic coming from Inner Mongolia.

For authors looking for publication the Hilary Johnson Authors' Advisory Service is available for advice and provides a fee-structured appraisal service. Hilary's readers are professional and reliable and as Kate Harrison points out with an appraisal service such as Hilary Johnson's "You get what you pay for – experience and the knowledge to be able to spot where you can improve."

Improving your work and therefore chances of publication are what all aspiring novelists should be aiming for – that elusive book deal will not materialise without it. ■

For more details on the Hilary Johnson Authors' Advisory Service call 01485 578594, email: hilary@hilaryjohnson.demon.co.uk or visit www.hilaryjohnson.demon.co.uk

Borders links with amazon

BORDERS has launched a dedicated UK sales website, powered by Amazon's e-commerce technology. The site is available from borders.co.uk and booksetc.co.uk, to sell books, music, DVDs and videos.

The move follows the success of the three-year-old Borders US website, which also uses Amazon technology. Initial marketing offers from the site include three for £12 on a selected range of paperbacks, and 40 or 50 per cent off a selection of hardbacks, including Michael Palin's *Himalaya* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson Illustrated) and *Paula Radcliffe: The Autobiography* (Simon & Schuster).

In addition to the technology, Amazon will also be providing product fulfilment and selection, site content, such as editorial reviews, and customer service.