Keywords in Creative Writing

Starkey, David, Bishop, Wendy

Published by Utah State University Press

Starkey, David and Wendy Bishop.
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Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/9293.
paltry sum, but many authors are happy to receive the exposure of having their work reprinted and—if they retain the copyright themselves—are willing to waive permission fees altogether.

Ironically, if authors often complain about receiving too little from permission fees, editors compiling the pieces for an anthology often feel as though they cannot afford to pay those fees. While putting together a collection of stories and novel excerpts, Aaron Shepard found that “in general, the larger the publisher or agency, the higher were the fees, the shorter was the term of license, the longer was the response time and—since I had to remove high-priced selections—the less exposure was received by their authors” (1994, 26). The authors of this book sympathize with Shepard’s grievance. The permission fees for David Starkey’s textbook *Poetry Writing: Theme and Variations* are deducted from annual sales, with his contract stipulating that all fees be paid off before the author receives any money for his book. Five years after the book’s publication, Starkey had yet to receive a royalty check. To avoid this problem, Wendy Bishop relied extensively on friends and colleagues donating their poetry for free when compiling *Thirteen Ways of Looking for a Poem*.

Tracking down the copyright holder in order to pay permission fees can be a nightmare for editors, especially if the work was published many years earlier and/or by an obscure press. Fortunately, in 1999, the Copyright Clearance Center established the Republication Licensing Service, which allows “rights holders to individually set permissions fees, monitor requests and control redistribution medium, all online.” Those seeking to buy permissions are able to “get copyright permissions [and] information about available content [and to] monitor the status of their requests quickly and over the Web” (Reid 1999, 79).

**SCHMOOZING**

"Schmooze" comes from the Yiddish *shmusen*, meaning “to chat,” which in turn is derived from the Hebrew *shemuyoth*, which means “rumors.” The etymology contains both the harmless aspect of schmoozing—friendly talk—as well as its less appealing side—gossip mongering. The creative
writing graduate student at the Associated Writing Programs’ annual conference who gushes to the eminent writer, “I loved your latest. Can I buy you a drink?” is schmoozing, even if she is entirely sincere in her praise. That same unknown writer who repeats every word of her conversation to entertain an editor who just may publish her short story is schmoozing again (see “Conferences, Colonies, and Residencies”). To schmooze is tacitly to declare that you have some inadequacy that you cannot address yourself; you need the help of the person you are schmoozing.

Obviously, schmoozing takes place in all walks of life, and to their credit, most writers seem to feel morally tarnished (though not permanently) by the activity. Nevertheless, literary schmoozing goes on in a number of different guises. There is, for instance, the time-honored gambit in which a writer feigns interest in a publisher’s latest offerings merely to have an opportunity to introduce the subject of his own work. Likewise, the editor of a new or obscure magazine may play the sycophant in order to wheedle a contribution from a big-name writer. There is also a kind of cautionary schmooze, in which writers of higher rank cater to someone of lesser renown based on the speculation that while that person is not yet worth a full-scale schmooze, he or she may soon be. Perhaps the most distasteful schmoozing goes on among writers who are putatively friends, but whose real interest in one another is as allies against some other, more noxious rival. It is here, where insincerity is barely masked as goodwill, that the regrettably petty nature of so much of the business plainly emerges.

The great irony is that schmoozing is frequently less effective than a writer might have wished. Granted, there are authors whose chief talent seems to be their ability to work a room, but unless a writer has at least a modicum of talent to back up her cocktail party skills, she probably won’t get far. And those few talented writers who don’t actively schmooze will probably still get published eventually, even if not as widely or as well as their more socially skillful peers.

Still, attendance at any writers’ conference might lead one to believe that the writer with absolutely no tendency to schmooze is rare indeed. Even Charles Bukowski, the very emblem of the Anti-Schmoozer, is revealed in his published correspondence to be as adept at flattery, cajolery, and name-dropping as anyone in twentieth-century American letters. Thus, creative writers might as well confess their gift for blarney and take as their motto: If Bukowski schmoozes, so must we all.