

Ineffable Manifesto

Be Charitable

Poets & Writers magazine has a series of discussions with publishing industry professionals to discuss everything under their sun. During one such roundtable, the question came up, "How many authors make their living solely from writing?" About one hundred was the general consensus.

You walk into a bookstore and there are thousands of books on shelves. Online there are thousands more not on those shelves. In the libraries there are thousands of books unavailable in bookstores or online. Thousands upon thousands of books, written by thousands of men and women, and only about a hundred make their living solely from writing.

I mentioned this to a friend and he was floored. But then we delved further. Remove the science and history books. They are written by scientists and historians who make their living teaching. Throw the poetry and literary books in there as well. Those authors have to teach writing classes or hold some other such job to make ends meet. Biographies, sports, music, cooking, self-help, written by professionals in the field or by journalists. Memoirs of people who are not writers. What does that leave?

Mystery, science fiction, and popular fiction. How many viable productive writers in those fields don't require some other income to support their writing hobbies? You can whittle the list of writers pretty quickly. Even if the number one hundred is off by a factor of ten, there would still only be a thousand writers whose sole income is drawn from their writing.

In an interview on NPR, Matthew Caws of Nada Surf talks about commercial pressures getting in the way of the "beautiful hobby" of making music. If the chances of making a living full-time as an author are astronomical, then removing that element of competition leaves

Copyright 2009 David Bindewald, Jr.

All rights reserved. No part of this essay may be reproduced in any form, including electronic transmission, without prior written approval of David Bindewald, Jr or Ineffable Books, LLC.

However, this essay is freely downloadable in PDF format from TheIneffability.com

only the beautiful hobby.

Following a similar approach to Bruce Bethke's for *Cyberpunk*, we leave it to the reader to decide whether what we write is worth paying for. By giving almost all of even that money to charity, every purchase is simply a vote of support and an expression of encouragement. What little money stays with Ineffable may one day be enough to offset its miniscule operating costs. (The dream that there may be enough money in the coffer to one day send me to Kilimanjaro and Ty to Japan is so distant as to be pipe.)

Someone might just as easily pass on us and give directly to the charities we name for our respective works. However, it seems to be easier to buy a special bag of pink M&Ms (or pens or tee shirts or tennis balls) than to just give directly to breast cancer research. Would you give to PBS or public radio if you didn't feel guilty for getting the product for free?

Know that supporting your favorite Ineffable writer's efforts also supports worthwhile charities.

Be Green

I'm a member of Sierra Club. I compost grass clippings and kitchen scraps, and use them in my vegetable garden. I use the reusable grocery tote bags and reuse my Starbucks paper bag. Fuel economy is a huge factor when I'm car-shopping. I consider myself environmentally mindful.

Most of the writers, editors, agents, and publishers that I have met are liberally-minded, if not downright progressive. So why does the publishing industry seem so environmentally haphazard?

Of those thousands and thousands of books in the bookstores, hundreds and hundreds have their last gasp in the bargain bins before their covers are ripped and returned to the publisher. Yes. Rather than either the retailer or the wholesaler or the publisher paying to have the whole book shipped back, they take just the cover as proof of unsaleability. The rest of the book is destroyed.

Leaving the environmental sensibility out, why would a writer pour

their soul onto pages to have it ripped and shredded? Who would want their written soul collecting dust in a bargain bin?

The situation is ludicrous given today's print-on-demand technology. We are practically at the point that you could place your order over the internet and an hour later pick up a freshly printed book that didn't even exist before you asked for it.

Until such time, Ineffable will make its electronic books available over the internet and utilize print-on-demand agencies for its physical copies.

Be Free

There is a step between the writer's soul pouring and the printing-tearing-destruction--the editing process. I do believe in the writer's blind spot. Truly when a writer writes, they cannot see what doesn't make it to paper. On second reading, they unconsciously fill the gaps that an impartial reader would identify.

The two solutions are either to find an objective reader to provide that feedback or to become that objective reader. It is possible for a writer who is a good reader to set aside a freshly written passage until they have time to forget it. They return later with fresh objective eyes. My reaction to old writing has ranged from "I can't believe I write so poorly," to "From what great writer did I steal this?"

However, at no point have I reached the end of a writing project and said, "This subject should be 350 pages long. Let me add 100 pages," or had any other reaction so arbitrary. Yet I've attended panel discussions among writers who were told exactly that by an editor. One writer had the gall to ask why and was told "Because then it will feel right in the reader's hand."

Both Superman and Batman had dogs for a period because some editor believed that readers wanted to see a Superdog and a Batdog and that such dogs would increase readership and sales. Whether the canine experiment was successful, both dogs are now just the funny answer to a trivia question and not great figures in the canon of comics.

Five years ago, a writer might have heard the suggestion, "Is there any

way you can squeeze a boy wizard into that story?" Last year began the proliferation of vampires. Next in the cycle...?

By staying outside of the commercial cycle and concerns, the Ineffable writers are free to create what they will, as they will. The story will dictate its own length, form, and content. The writer is subject only to their muse.

The Reader

This manifesto spells out the pledge of Ineffable Books to be charitable, to be green, and to be free. However, the reader by participating in Ineffable Books does the same. The reader's money goes to charity. The reader buys green. And the reader is free--free to read first and pay later. You can read the entire text, not just a sample, of any offering from Ineffable Books. If you don't like it, you don't have to drive down to the store and stand in line to get your money back, because you haven't put out a dime.

You are charitable. You are green. You are free.