



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 4, Summer/00

## Categorizing your book: The “where to shelve” dilemma

Aspiring authors must “categorize” their books accurately. Whether you write fiction or non-fiction, you need to know where a bookseller will shelve your book after publication. Do not fall into the trap of leaving an editor or agent to figure it out or, worse yet, of mis-categorizing your work. Publishers need the information up-front in your query letter and, later, in your proposal or synopsis. The process to discover the correct category takes research and some patience to complete successfully and may result in improving the focus of your manuscript to make it fit better.

Fiction has three main categories (genre, mainstream, and literary) which are divided into myriad sub-categories (romance, thrillers, sci-fi, horror, etc.) If you present mainstream fiction with a romance in it to romance editors, rejection will surely follow, as will misery. Editors/agents also shy away from “cross-over” novels that fit into two or more categories, as they are hard to market as a first book.

Non-fiction categories are almost limitless, but a visit to a large bookstore will show you the main ones. They include business, self-help, history, biographies, and Canadiana, etc. These too have sub-categories, which you will need to explore. If your book does not fit a clear shelving category, it risks being put somewhere that your readers will not think to look. Further, if your book could be shelved in several places, consider that you may be writing for too large a market, and narrow your focus.

Continued on page 2....

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Categorizing your book.....	1
From the editor’s desk .....	1
Publishing Myth #4 .....	2
Upcoming presentations.....	2



### From the editor’s desk

When I took four teen-agers to Whistler for a week this spring, I also took my laptop. I wrote four articles, sold three, and did an in-depth interview for a future piece. That way I was, at least, able to write off the gas. The business side of writing cannot be forgotten...are you good at taking care of it? Do you keep every receipt? Are you registered with the Public Lending Right and CanCopy, for instance? If you’ve had a book published, you should be.

One of the *Beacon’s* readers emailed some inspiring news to me last month—a New York agent signed him up and major US and Canadian publishers are reading his manuscript. Well done, Don!

Inkspot bought another article of mine in April – look for it at [www.inkspot.com/feature/agents.html](http://www.inkspot.com/feature/agents.html). It is a more detailed version of **Publishing Myth #4** on page 2.

Some of *Beacon’s* readers will have received simple survey in the mail. It’s part of the research I am doing for my next book that will be about getting published *in Canada*. Please complete and return it if you haven’t already. Thanks!

Julie H. Ferguson

## Publishing myth #4: You MUST have an agent...

Canadian writers hear from all sides that they *must* have an agent. Is it really true? No! Ninety per-cent of all Canadian books are unagented, mainly because few sell enough copies to make it worthwhile for an agent to be involved. At 15% commission on the royalties, agents simply don't make enough money.

Here is a simple check list to determine if your masterpiece needs an agent:

- ☞ Do I want my book published in the US as well as Canada?
- ☞ Is my book international in scope?
- ☞ Is it likely to sell tens or hundreds of thousands of copies?
- ☞ Is the topic of interest to everyone?

If your answers are yes, you probably do need an agent to break into one of the eight huge US conglomerates that work solely through literary agencies.

The rest of us writing books of lesser stature or of regional interest have to become our own literary agents. In Canada the odds remain in our favour: about 10,000 titles/year are published after the aspiring author has submitted their idea directly to editors via query letters. There's hope!

## Categorizing your book

*Continued from page 1*

Other useful tips include discussing the shelving of your proposed book with a trusted retailer and your writing group. These informed, but impartial, individuals will bring an objective eye to the matter.

Categorizing your book not only helps you to sharpen its slant, but also to market it to publishers. Categorization enables you to send your inquiries to publishers and editors that specialize in your type of book and to mention the category in the first sentence of your query letter. As well as guiding you while writing, categorization also significantly improves your chances of acceptance by a publisher.

## Forthcoming presentations in Y2K

- Sep 24** **Word on the Street**, Vancouver's Library sSquare and CBC Plaza, 11:00am to 6:00pm. Julie presents ***A Canadian Writer Explodes Some Myths*** for aspiring authors at no charge.
- Oct 3** Douglas College again offers ***Get Published on Your First Try!*** Eight Tuesdays at 7:00pm. Call 527-5473 for details and registration
- Oct 20-22** ***Surrey Writers' Conference***. Meet Julie in the Blue Pencil Café for private consultations. Register at [www.vcn.bc.ca/swc/index.html](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/swc/index.html)
- Oct 28** Surrey Creative Writing Diploma Program offers ***Get Creative...with Power Words!*** Call Guildford Continuing Ed – 589-2221 – to register.
- Nov 27** ***Get Creative...with Power Words!*** for teachers at Douglas College. 1:00-4:00pm. Call 527-5473.



*The Beacon* is published quarterly by Beacon Literary Services and is distributed electronically free of charge to those writers and aspiring authors who are interested. If you wish or do not wish to receive the newsletter, please notify:

**Editor:** Julie H. Ferguson  
#5-300 Maude Road,  
Port Moody, BC  
Canada, V3H 2X6  
P: (604)469-1319  
F: (604)469-1316

info@beaconlit.com  
www.beaconlit.com

© 2000 Beacon Literary Services