



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

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Demystifying Copyright: Some thoughts for Canadian writers

We all still hear conflicting messages about Canadian copyright and need to familiarize ourselves with the facts if we are to be knowledgeable, professional writers. Bill C-32 amended the Canadian Copyright Act in 1997, completing the second phase of reform that began in 1988.

This act gives copyright owners control over their creations, including the exclusive right to authorize reproduction of their works and decide how, and by whom, they are used. Creators are entitled to payment, whether their work is photocopied or reprinted.

Books, plays, and magazine articles, are just some examples of works, which are protected by the Act. In most instances, unauthorized reproduction (including photocopying) of published works is illegal and constitutes copyright infringement.

Today in Canada, when a writer creates an original work, it is **automatically** protected by copyright. Although it is not necessary to obtain a certificate of copyright registration for an original work through the Canadian Intellectual Property Office, such a certificate can be helpful if the *need to prove* ownership is ever required.

Copyright owners should mark their works with the copyright symbol ©, the year in which the work was first published, and their name. Although this is not obligatory in Canada and sometimes deemed amateurish, the copyright symbol is a clear reminder to others that the work is copyright protected.

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From the editor's desk

The last few months have been especially busy for me. It started in late October at the Surrey Writers' Conference with 450 attendees from Canada, the US, Britain, and other countries. What energy and what a success, right on our doorstep! I went on to present *Get Creative...with Power Words!* to secondary school teachers and used the same workshop to stimulate two classes of grade 5 students to write better than they have ever done before. In the winter and spring terms I am looking forward to giving two courses at Douglas College in the evenings.

The experiences I have recently enjoyed, while teaching adults and youth, demonstrate conclusively that writing is flourishing and that there are many young people who will take over the creative torch in the next millennium.

Now I am looking forward to writing another column for Inkspot.com, the Canadian writers' website. How about you?

Julie H. Ferguson

Publishing myth #2: The competition is too fierce

The saturation of the Canadian market with American information for writers perpetuates this myth. The truth is very different here and, thankfully, much more encouraging. So sit up, take notice, and take heart!

American editors and agents are famous for saying that they reject 99.9% of all submissions. We also know that only 8 major publishing conglomerates publish 80% of the titles in the US. Editors at these firms only deal with agents. In Canada, we have no publishing conglomerates and *every* publisher here will look at unagented authors' works, though not at unsolicited manuscripts.

Out of the 11,400 titles published in Canada in 1996/97, only 10% were agented. That means publishers accepted 10,260 manuscripts directly from authors, many of whom were first-timers. Of those 11,400 titles, 8,550 were non-fiction books. Canadian writers should be encouraged by this news. We also need to realize that our publishers are remarkably accessible, even the leading houses. Writers can often expect to talk on the telephone with an editor about their ideas before sending a query letter—attempting that in the States would be a cardinal sin. As long as we write well and submit very professional proposals about fresh ideas to the right publishers, we all have a reasonable chance of getting published north of the 49th parallel.

Upcoming events in Y2K

- January** *Off the Page*—writers take their craft into the classroom, sponsored by the Federation of BC Writers. Julie visits the Grade 12 English and history students at Port Moody Senior Secondary School.
- February 24** *Get Published on Your First Try!* starts at Douglas College. 8 Thursdays at 7:00pm. Register with Continuing Ed. 527-5472
- February 25** *Get Creative with Power Words!* School District 43 Elementary Teachers Professional Development Day:
- April (TBA)** Port Moody Festival of the Arts
- April 20** *Get Published on Your First Try!* starts again at Douglas College; 8 Thursdays at 7:00pm. Register with Continuing Ed. 527-5472
- April 29** *Get Creative with Power Words!* Douglas College. Secondary teachers Professional Development Day.

Demystifying Copyright

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Copyright generally exists for the life of a creator plus 50 years after the end of the calendar year of the creator's death. However, there are exceptions to this rule covered in the new Act which you may wish to investigate.

The advent of the Information Superhighway has led to grey areas regarding copyright, not the least of which is enforcement. Although the Canadian Act makes provision for "new technologies," further amendments to keep pace with the advancement are expected.

There is much, much, more about copyright which cannot be included here, so do try the following useful Canadian websites:

1. Canadian Intellectual Property Office: www.strategis.ic.gc.ca
2. Canada's copyright collective: www.cancopy.com
3. The Writers' Union of Canada: www..swifty.com/twuc



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