

Collaboration or Isolation

When publishers reply with standard messages, 99.9% of the time rejections, one wonders why they cannot be more personal and amenable. After fourteen years of publishing, I think I am beginning to see why.

First, there is the sheer weight of numbers. It is impossible to answer all submissions with directed critiques. This is why consultancies are there, to study submissions individually, at a price, of course, because consultancy is a business. Perhaps more importantly, the vagaries of human nature being as they are, entanglement is dangerous, perhaps especially amongst creatives, and even more so in this twenty-first century of aggressive self-marketing.

Writers have put much of themselves into their work, so rejection is deeply disturbing and hard to accept. But an increasing number of people are writing, sometimes well, sometimes badly, therefore there is going to be an increasing number of unhappy writers, slighted and side-lined by blind publishers – or in my case, partially sighted publishers.

My intention was always to reply personally, to help, advise and collaborate as much as possible. I wonder whether this is going to have to change. The venom, dissatisfaction and hostility that exists out there in the ambitious literary world is extraordinary. We all know that beneath the veneer of civilisation lies a propensity for violence, fuelled by an impulse to be seen and heard, particularly with media being as widespread and varied as it is today, and words, we are told, are more powerful than the sword.

I am always impressed how far we humans have come, so far. Each of us is a powder keg of needs, desires and frustrations. Two people together can be hard enough, seven billion is eye-poppingly tricky. The world seems mightily confusing and our voices, as strong as they are within us, seem feeble in the face of so much overwhelming noise. Writing gives us time to consider and to set down ideas which, we believe, must surely mean as much to others as they do to ourselves. A rejection denies that. It hurts. Is collaboration mixed with empathy and understanding an option despite the risk? I'm no longer sure, but perhaps better to try and fail than never to try at all.