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Predator Publishers

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Predator Publishers

By Brenda Ayres

It is such a heady experience to open up an email from an editor with an invitation to publish your work. Fireworks go off, angels sing “Hallelujah,” you feel instantly vindicated for all of the pains you took to produce your masterpiece, and you are so gratified that someone finally appreciates your genius. You imagine millions of people reading your ideas, and you thank God for His provision that will allow you to pay off your student loan and mortgage, and buy a new car.



Two Angels in the Sistine Madonna by Raphael, 1512

However, writer beware: There are many publishers “out there” who are actually predators: They are delighted to rob you of your intellectual property and entice you to pay for the theft in the bargain.

Several of these companies have emailed such invitations to a number of our students and faculty who published in Liberty’s Digital Commons. The email assures you that the topic is marketable and that this company is willing to publish it for you free of charge.

What could be better than that?

So you agree to let it publish your manuscript with the understanding that its editors will edit, typeset, proof it, and so on. They may even generously promise to grant you 12-17% royalties after they sell a certain amount. They will offer you a substantial discount if you want to buy copies of your publication, and they are counting on this. They know that you will be excited about giving your bound book to your loved ones and distant relatives, announcing your debut as a published writer. You'll want to send it to prospective employers, graduate committees, etc., and you will hold lectures and book signings so that you can sell discounted copies yourself.

If this all sounds too good to be true, *it is*.

Please read "I Sold My Undergraduate Thesis to a Print Content Farm: A Trip Through the Shadowy, Surreal World of an Academic Book Mill" by Joseph Stromberg at http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2014/03/lap_lambert_academic_publishing_my_trip_to_a_print_content_farm.html. Stromberg will tell you that these companies rarely edit your work; they publish "as is," warts and all and that they invest very little time and effort to make the publication marketable.

Now, you may be thinking, "I will let them publish it because this may be the only way I will be able to reach a lot of people with my work, and I don't care if I don't make money and I won't be working with it again for a future publication." You may think of it as a ministerial outreach.

So why would publishing with them be inadvisable?

Your work will not benefit from any peer review, refereed review, and most consequentially of all, editorial review. When you hold that printed copy in your hands, you will probably swell with pride and think, "Ah, I am a published writer." Then you open up your magnum opus only to discover typos, grammatical and mechanical errors, missing words, half-baked ideas, documentation mistakes, repetition, logical fallacies, and other sorts of things that would have totally unnerved the composition professor you had as a freshman. You suddenly realize that all of these defects will be apparent for the world to see.

Uninitiated readers who find your publication advertised on Amazon and Barnes and Noble and are interested in the topic, may pay \$70.00 for it only to be totally disgusted with the product. They will post negative reviews which will



Prudence by Piero Pollaiuolo, 1469-1470

embarrass you and may prevent you from ever publishing again and will certainly dissuade others from buying it. You will never see any royalties. Meanwhile, the publisher will get whatever money it can with very little expense on its part, and it will own your work so that you will not be able to revise and publish it again.

A reader has to be cheated only one time to become leery of all books published by the same company and of other companies like it, as well as of some of the vanity press companies that likewise publish indiscriminately as long as the writers are willing to pay for the publishing. This is another reason why your book won't sell.

If you mention in your dossier that you published with such companies, your professional credibility will go down the drain.

It is true that Liberty's Digital Commons does not hold the copyright of its publications and that writers are free to do what they want with their own work. They are free to publish with whomever they please, but they need to be aware that there are publishers who know how much writers want to publish, and they are very eager to exploit them. Similarly, be discerning when you buy books and/or use them in your own research. Search for information about the publishing company on the Web. If it has a poor reputation, you will most likely find blogs and other media that caution against publishing and buying from them.

Take our Lord's advice: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).