



## Getting Published: What No-one Tells You

---

Tom Lee

**M**ONEY. MONEY IS the thing that no-one tells you about getting published – that there will be no money. Actually, this isn't really true. Everyone tells you that there is no money in writing books, that it has been getting worse for years, but either you don't believe them, believe you will somehow be the exception, or assume that they are exaggerating. Of course there will be money. But there isn't, there is no money.

Except that there is, for some writers, a very few. Only the other day, a writer friend told me about another writer who had just got proper money – I mean, over £300,000 – for the US and UK rights for a book she has not yet written. This is the sort of thing you used to hear about but which I assumed never happened any more. Apparently it does. What was even more surprising is that this is not a commercial writer but a brilliant and subversive one, who deserves all the money in the world, or at least enough to live comfortably and write brilliant books.

It would be great if more of us made this kind of money — but we don't. This one is a huge exception. There is, on the whole, no money. As a result, writers are obsessed with money (except perhaps those who make lots of it, or those who have lots of it for other reasons — though they are probably obsessed with it, too).

One of the reasons that people don't realise how little money there is is because – until they are published and they find out – writers don't often put a number on it. It's embarrassing, frankly, to admit how little you got



paid for the thing that you worked so hard on and for so long. In my case, £1000 for my book of short stories, the product of around seven years of writing work, on and off.

The money came in two halves — the first on signing the contract, the second on publication. The day after the first £500 went into my account I had a blocked drain and had to call a plumber. Two hours later he gave me a bill for £580. Here was a sign I was in the wrong business.

But despite all this, despite it being a daily problem, despite the fact that the publishing business and its money is ludicrously skewed to pushing certain work and certain authors, I cannot bring myself to believe that I deserve more money.

I think my work is good and it's important to me to make it as good as it can be, but it feels like hubris to suggest that this should be of value – monetary or otherwise – to anyone else. Maybe this is a failure of confidence or imagination but no one told me there would be money. No one asked me to be a writer. It's not a public service. No one would suffer or die if I had chosen to do something else. I chose to be a writer. I could – maybe should – have been a plumber.