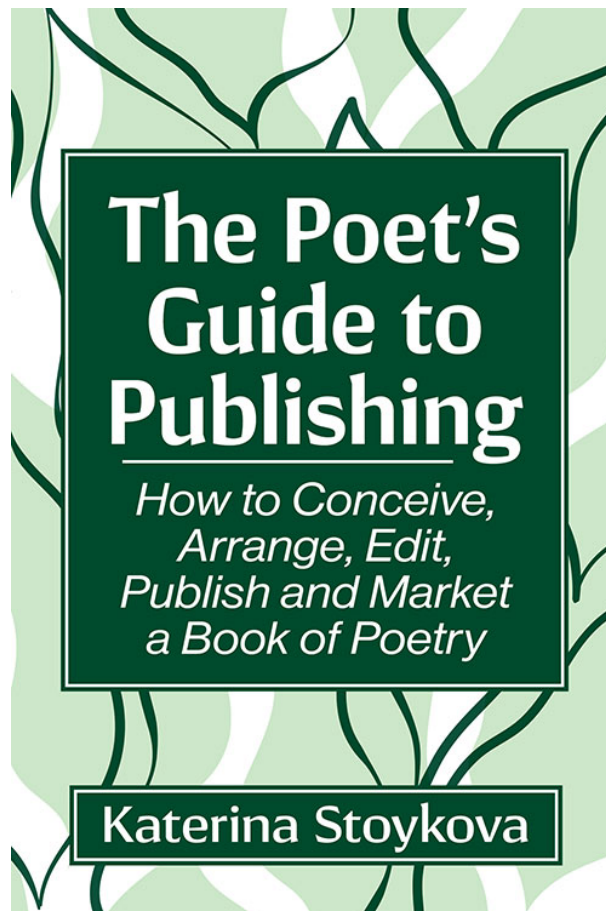


REVIEW

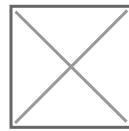
A Poet's Foundation — A Review of “The Poet's Guide to Publishing” by Katerina Stoykova

by Manuel J. Grimaldi



Katerina Stoykova, hailing from Burgas, Bulgaria, is an internationally recognized poet and the founder and senior editor of Accents Publishing in Lexington, Kentucky, having selected, edited, and published over a hundred books. Katerina is the director of the Kentucky Book Festival, gearing up for its third year under her resourceful guidance. Among all her other accomplishments, Katerina Stoykova is also a teacher, holding Poetry Book Boot Camps over Zoom for poets of her acquaintance. *The Poet's Guide to Publishing: How to Conceive, Arrange, Edit, Publish and Market a Book of Poetry*, released by McFarland Press (2024), was simultaneously conceived from and used as the craft book for those lectures. Early drafts from the book were, in essence, workshopped live with students, and further developments came from their reactions.

The Poet's Guide to Publishing: How to Conceive, Arrange, Edit, Publish and Market a Book of Poetry breaks down the stages of bookmaking. She terms it a project: a “focused, planned, temporary”



“The Poet’s Guide to Publishing” by Katerina Stoykova

set of activities. There are tactics, tools, tips, and plenty of homespun humor and counsel — ranging from sage to what Katerina terms as “corny illustrations.” If one can say anything about her technique and style for inspiration, it is this: She draws not only from her experience in this book but sometimes couples it with illustrative quotes from pop culture icons. For instance, on page three, she motivates the reader by quoting Steve Jobs’ “Real artists ship,” and following up with her hard-earned advice,

“You need to complete your project for it to count.”

Katerina begins by elucidating the process. While the project of writing a book is not finished until it takes the leap from *software* into *hardware* (publication), it also delves into characteristics of the poet: *instincts* (which relates to the ability to make good initial choices), *technique* (what it takes in effect to revisit and shape an effort), and finally *obsession*. The author has a terrific definition for obsession: “What do you think about when

you don't have to think about anything?" For poets, generating material, heading toward a rounded concept for their work, obsession motivates.

The beginning of *The Poet's Guide to Publishing* introduces students to writing in series, where the poet composes a string of poems in a context, which builds a theme to *conceive* and *germinate* the heart of the project. Katerina, drawing on years of experience in administering computer UNIX networks where she would download packages called "metafile," including old versions, revisions, and "bug fixes," translates that daily grind into a discipline for the poet. Since she's been doing it for herself for every book as well as teaching it, her students now do the same. Some students keep epigraphs, potential book titles, ideas, things to jot down for acknowledgment in a notes page, a way of giving due credit with citations for what is unoriginal in poems. The metafile is an all purpose way to keep records, assign tasks, save information, and, finally, chronicle the project for use.



Katerina Stoykova (c) Jeremy Midkiff

That is merely the beginning to an exhaustive, yet simple book that functions to motivate while reducing stress, demystifying writing, instilling a sense of faith and focus in the process through planning. The best general outline of her book may be: 1) determine a

direction, or theme, because only then can you 2) seek *order and arrangement* to the pages, which comes before 3) deciding if the poems need revision or more writing is needed, and finally, 4) when publishers are carefully selected, and only then there are solid ways to 5) promote oneself effectively that don't cause undue exhaustion. She speaks amply from experience.

Returning to the homespun counsel so ubiquitous to this book, waiting for the right time doesn't exist for the author. She writes in a declarative sentence — time is a choice. Not to put words in the author's mouth, but we are never out of time — we very much choose whether we sit down to write, which seems to be a struggle for many, as are so many activities in life. Katerina suggests pre-work. There's a relief in planning, because there's a good chance a person will respond to a phone alarm to write a few lines or journal a while longer.

Finally, with regard to publishing, one of the most powerful ideas in the book is that for all the PR and dolling up you do, in the end, she says, "winning on the quality and strength of your work is your biggest advantage." Having worked with Katerina for some time, this is certainly true, as far as she is concerned, and standing one's artistic integrity represents this direct, honest book of clear work that has suggestions she's followed. Now she shares them with you.