



## Clarion Review

Self-Help

### **Don't Tell Me Your Wife Likes It: Writing and Publishing a First Novel**

Ronald C. Gordon

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Think it's easy to publish a book? Think again. Intelligent and outspoken, Ronald C. Gordon uses snarky humor to explain why *easy* is the wrong word in this "how-not-to" book for aspiring authors. Gordon spills the beans on the real process behind getting a novel into the world with this frank, and plainly partisan, memoir. *Don't Tell Me Your Wife Likes It* offers an exasperated fiction writer's entertaining perspective on publishing his first novel, warts and all.

Gordon comes by his pointed opinions honestly; in 2009, he set out to publish his first work of fiction, a literary coming-of-age novel that clocked in at more than 800 pages and found no takers in the traditional publishing world. The road to eventual success was time-consuming and expensive, and though we know that his novel, *Not Fade Away*, eventually made it into readers' hands, we definitely feel Gordon's pain as he walks us through the journey.

Never afraid to call it like he sees it, Gordon takes to task the so-called experts who claimed they would help him on his way. For instance, he introduces us to the editor-who-wouldn't-quit, whom he renames "Lenore Raven." (The Poe reference is one among a multitude of literary allusions.) She's the one who whittled his lengthy novel down to what Gordon calls, begrudgingly, "something else entirely." Gordon admits the novel needed trimming, but bemoans changes based on rules he feels shouldn't be rules at all, but guidelines. "Show, don't tell," Lenore predictably admonishes. Gordon agrees in some cases, but what about when he has deliberately opted for more distant narration? He shudders to think what Ms. Raven might have done to famously effusive writers like Faulkner or Maugham.

Gordon loves literary references, and classic fiction fans will find mentions of everyone from Charles Dickens to Harper Lee here. He also loves films, and can get carried away with connections between books and movies, taking the reader on many tangential trips to Hollywood on the way to his main points about publishing's pitfalls. Gordon refers to his own

writing frequently, using *Not Fade Away* as a case study. Readers unfamiliar with his novel, however, may get a bit lost in the particulars. It would be useful to have the novel itself at hand while reading about its evolution.

Gordon focuses his comical rants on traditional publishing, but also takes well-earned shots at underwhelming writing workshops and even the self-publishing services he ultimately uses. This is not to say he wouldn't do it again. *Not Fade Away* is, after all, the first in a trilogy.

*Don't Tell Me Your Wife Likes It* shows that novelists need more than talent to survive the publishing process. According to Gordon, perseverance and a strong sense of humor may be their most valuable tools.

*Sheila M. Trask*