

WORDS AND SENTENCES

WORDS AND SENTENCES; SENTENCES AND RESOLUTIONS (NO REVOLUTIONS)

What is a wordsmith? What, if anything, should a wordsmith do? Is the act of being a wordsmith an undertaking, a task, a duty, a job? In the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, a wordsmith is “A person who works with words; especially: A skilful writer.” The OED simply states: “A skilled user of words”; Wiktionary: “One who uses words skilfully”. And so goes the war between dictionaries.

For skilful writers who earn money from their craft, we have other names, other titles: for example, “author”; or the more modest “writer”; or the more lowly “copywriter”. Or there’s the more disconcerting “speech-writer”: a breed of writer whose job is, for the most part, to ensure that politicians’ words seem skilful but that their skilfulness

amounts to nothing; that they establish no contractual relationship between speaker and listener (the constituency or citizenry or community). These craftsmen and craftswomen of words perhaps don’t deserve the title of “wordsmith” – for, should we give it to them, what would we name those other craftspeople who actually oppose them, and who believe that words are – like images – what we have at our disposal in the moment of formulating a counterpoint, a resistance, an impulse to refuse that has not yet found its words, its image, but which formulation is at the same time a congregation.

Perhaps one should thus distinguish the word “wordsmith” from the word “sophist”, and reserve the former for those who exist in the world of people and things, and the latter for those who wish to see words released and mobilised against those who put them at the service of popular and political expediency.

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