



**THE WRITERS'
UNION OF CANADA**

200-90 Richmond Street East, Toronto, Ontario M5C 1P1
T 416-703-8982 F 416-504-9090 www.writersunion.ca

September 22, 2011
For immediate release

Contact: Diane Hargrave
dhprbks@interlog.com or 416-467-9954 ext 104

Canadian Writers Declare Their Digital Rights

Toronto – The Writers' Union of Canada, which represents nearly two thousand of the country's book authors, today issued "A Writer's Bill of Rights for the Digital Age."

Conversations and coverage of the digital evolution of books have been dominated by a focus on the publishing and distribution mechanisms and on the hardware and software but the entire enterprise begins with the work of writers, who create the content that others produce and distribute.

Central to this Bill of Rights is the principle that writers must be able to manage their digital rights and earn their fair share of the revenues generated by their work when it appears in digital form. "Over the past year the issue of electronic rights has been front and centre with our members," said author and Writers' Union Chair Greg Hollingshead. "For example:

- 1) What royalty rate should a writer expect from their publisher?
- 2) Which aspects of the electronic rights should a writer keep or sell?
- 3) How should libraries deal with digital copies of Canadian works?

These are some of the questions our members have been asking. So we consulted with dozens of writers and leading thinkers on digital matters to develop what we are calling 'A Writers' Bill of Rights for the Digital Age.'"

The Bill calls on government, publishers, libraries, and agents to do right electronically by writers. It asks government to ensure that copyright legislation protects their intellectual property in the electronic realm. It specifies contract terms for rights reversion and an equitable sharing of net proceeds from the sale of ebooks, and it calls on publishers to honour those terms. It asks that libraries acquire digital copies of works only from rightsholders or their licensing agencies.

"On average, writers earn 10% to 15% of the cover price of a book or ebook," Hollingshead observed. "The other 85% or 90% supports a crucial network of small and medium enterprises that look after publishing, advertising, printing, digitizing, design, distribution, and retailing. Our Bill of Rights recognizes the writer's work as the starting point for this entire industry – whether that work ends up in print or electronic form. In the novelty and sweep of digitization we must not forget this."

The idea for something like a digital Bill of Rights for writers came from Writers' Union member Alan Twigg, who is also the publisher of BC BookWorld, which will feature the principles of the Bill in their Autumn issue.

"The digital landscape is constantly shifting," Hollingshead adds. "Our Bill of Rights is likely to evolve with the circumstances. For now the question is: What are our members' core demands and principles with respect to their rights in the digital age?"

Greg Hollingshead is available for interviews.

About The Writers' Union of Canada

The Writers' Union of Canada, founded by writers for writers in 1973, is the national voice for Canadian book authors. Its mandate is to support the interests of its members and to defend the freedom of all Canadians to read, write, and publish. The Writers' Union of Canada provides professional development and career resources for writers, administers reading programs, and provides updated industry information for its members. We also advocate for writers' rights, as well as for their economic well-being.

About Greg Hollingshead

*Greg has published six books, not only in Canada but in the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and China. In 1995 his story collection **The Roaring Girl** won the Governor General's Award for Fiction. His 1998 novel **The Healer** was shortlisted for The Giller Prize and won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize. His 2004 novel **Bedlam** was a Globe and Mail 100 Best Books of the Year, a New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice, and longlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Greg is professor emeritus at the University of Alberta and director of writing programs at the Banff Centre. In 2007 he received the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Gold Medal for Excellence in the Arts. He is currently the Chair of the Writers' Union of Canada. He divides his time between Ontario's Algonquin Park and Edmonton.*