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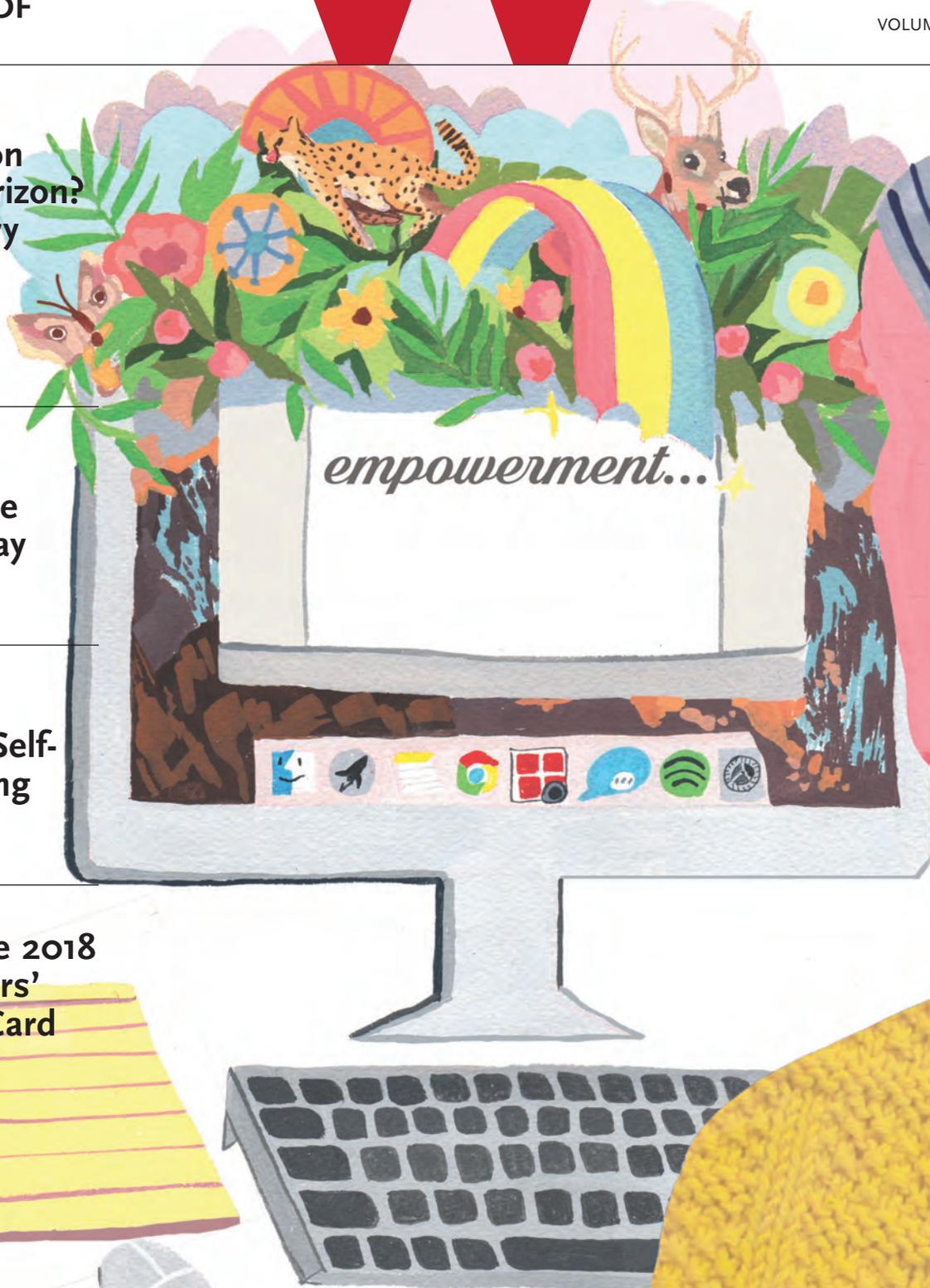
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As I reflect on the year that just ended, I can't help but think that the tide may be finally turning in favour of the creative class.

Sales of hardcover books, after all, were up more than 3 percent by the end of 2018. It first started to sink in for me the week that John Degen and I were in Ottawa to give testimony to the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Heritage (on November 22).

The day before the Liberal Government released its Fall Economic Statement. The announcement included funding for three initiatives to bolster independent journalism in Canada. The cost is estimated at \$595 million over five years.

"In recent years," states the Fall Economic Statement, "changes in technology and in the way that Canadians consume news have made it difficult for many news outlets to find and maintain financially sustainable business models."

The Government recognized that the market is failing to produce "strong and independent journalism [that] serves the public good." Government initiatives include giving eligible news organizations access to charitable tax incentives, offering tax credits to news organizations, and offering tax credits for subscriptions to Canadian digital news media.

The same could be said of the book publishing industry with the disappearance of bookstores, erosion of collective copyright, loss of midsized publishers, and ultimately decline in writing income. With this government, there may be an opportunity to explore new funding models, such as guaranteed income for artists or even a tax credit to authors.

Tax credits, for example, are routinely used by governments to encourage private-sector investment in industry, especially to spur innovation. Why not a tax credit for authors to incentivize cultural production? In BC, for example, you can receive a 30-percent tax credit for investing in a startup in several eligible sectors. Even if you don't pay income tax — as is the case with many low-income authors — the government will actually send you a cheque for the refundable tax credit. If it is good enough for industry, why not the arts?

The day after the Fall Economic Statement, John and I appeared before the Standing Committee on Heritage in Ottawa along with representatives from Universities Canada and the Canadian Publishers' Council. I was surprised by the pointed questions and incredulity that some MPs had for Universities Canada. Parliamentarians are beginning to understand that free copying of

our works by the education isn't "fair dealing." Our income survey couldn't have been published at a more opportune time. The hard numbers on declining incomes resonated with MPs.

"What has happened is that the Government, [Access Copyright] and authors got into what has turned out to be a Faustian bargain with a sector of the economy that I respect greatly," Liberal MP Randy Boissonault said during the committee hearings. "The deal that was made in 2012 [for a new *Copyright Act*] has not been respected by universities. Why would you choose to pay lawyers and go to court... and not just pay authors?" It was a question that Universities Canada struggled to answer.

With Université Laval settling their class action lawsuit with Copibec and the Federal Court ruling in favour of Access Copyright against York University, it is only a matter of time before the education sector is forced to settle and end their wasteful litigation. The tides are turning.

The year 2018 also wasn't a great one for the big tech platforms, battered by concerns about privacy, Russian hacking, and a lack of transparency. The European Parliament recently approved a new directive laying out rules for how content is protected and paid for by tech platforms that have long avoided regulation. The directive requires platforms and aggregators online to pay licences for the use of content snippets. The directive also imposes greater responsibility on platforms for lawful sharing of online content. The Europeans are disrupting the disruptors.

At the same time, a disruption from the tech sector itself could prove valuable for creators. There's increasing talk that new decentralized technology could allow creators to circumvent the centralized platforms and connect with readers directly. The technology, called a distributed ledger (or blockchain), has been around for decades but has become famous for powering cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin. Blockchain could now disrupt books, and Access Copyright hopes to be a pathfinder by launching Prescient Innovations, a lab to pioneer the application of this technology to the advantage of creators.

So, 2019 may be shaping up to be a year of uncertainties, but also, perhaps, opportunities. It's time for some "creative destruction," as economists like to say, driven by creators.

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Writer's Blot

WRITER'S PROMPT /

Qanuq ihumavit? (What do you think?)

BY NORMA DUNNING



I had the privilege of being in the company of a First Nations Elder one late fall afternoon. I love Elders. I love their wisdom and their way of talking. It's simple words. Simple words that are packed with meaning.

I had sat with her and complained, “Elsie, I get so tired. All this university stuff and I get so exhausted and now I have all this academic writing to get finished and I just sit and stare at the cursor on my laptop blinking at me. I can't do it. I just can't write anything.”

Elsie sat quiet for a few minutes. I waited in anticipation of some sage advice, reminding myself that we never interrupt or rush an Elder.

I just knew that some wise words with deep meaning were going to be spoken. I just knew that something that would carry me through all my academic worlds would be given to me. Something that would ground me and wipe this writing block from my head.

Elsie finally looked up at me, her gray long braids framing her wrinkled brown face, and said, “Why don't you just go clean your toilet!”

“What?” I was shocked. Had Elsie not heard my lamenting? My question? Didn't she understand what I was trying to get across to her?

“Clean my toilet?” I asked, my way of doubling-checking. “You think I should clean my toilet?”

“Yes,” and then her old belly started to shake, and the ancient couch we were sitting on started to dance — or at least I was sure it was dancing. Then, I started to laugh with her. When we both decided to settle down, I just shook my head at Elsie and said again, “Really?”

“Yes, really. When you're stuck, Norma, when your head is plugged up and feels heavy, go do something normal. Something that makes your mind and body move away from that computer. Clean your toilet!”

Clean.

Your.

Toilet.

Words that have stayed with me for the last four years. Words that have carried me through most of my academic writing.

Writers are always asked what it is we are working on. We're expected to rattle off a long list of manuscripts and thoughts. We are supposed to somehow validate our existences by spouting off a massive catalogue of creative work that is in progress. I can't think of any other profession that has those same expectations placed on them. I honestly can't.

I know that I always have to be writing something else besides academic work. I know that I have to have something else going on that takes me outside of scholarly writing. But, like all writers, I have those hard days.

I've learned when writing becomes labour — walk away from it. I've learned that even though I think I'm writing the best thing that has ever been written — it probably isn't. I've learned mostly that writing can always be better — even when we think we're done with that one poem, that one story, that one novel.

I've especially learned that cleaning my toilet is one of the healthiest things that I can do for myself — and believe me, that thing just shines and shines.

*Norma Dunning is an Inuit writer, researcher and scholar. She is a fifth-year doctoral candidate with Indigenous People's Education through the University of Alberta. Her well-awarded debut collection of short stories, *Annie Muktuk and Other Stories*, was released in 2017. Her first collection of poetry, *Eskimo Pie*, will be released in the fall of 2019.*

Dispatches

NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

EMPOWERMENT /

Two Publishing Paths Diverged in a Digital World: A Stark Look at Self-Publishing

BY MARK LESLIE LEFEBVRE



“Self-publishing is the best way to kill your writing career!”

I let those harsh words, spoken by a respected fellow writer who was earning a living as a full-time writer, hang in the air.

“But...” I wanted to say. Except, I knew better.

I’d been a bookseller since 1992 and had seen plenty of crappy, unedited, terribly designed self-published books. Despite loving books in all shapes, sizes, and guises, I had a difficult time scrapping together any affection for the many self-published books that had been pitched to me. They usually stood out like that mutt in the litter of beautiful frolicking puppies, or that kid with the thick line of snot trailing down his lip from his nostril, making you want to look away.

I nodded. This trusted mentor wanted to prevent me from being cast in that same unholy light. He’d watched me slowly claw my way out of magazine slush piles, first earning contributor copies, then minimal cash payments, and, finally, the pro rate of five to six cents per word for my stories.

A dozen other writers offered similar advice — but I did it anyway. That was in 2004, when you’d be as likely to admit to

self-publishing as you would to masturbating.

To hide my shame, I crafted the Stark Publishing imprint. Stark wasn’t just a great word considering the raw, bare, and sharp DIY ethic, but it was derived from Stark Entertainment, the DJ service company my best friend Steve and I ran in our university days. Steve + Mark = Stark.

Despite the advice of friends who wanted to protect me from embarrassing myself like poor little snot-faced Johnny, I felt justified in publishing a collection of mostly previously published stories. Different editors had already selected them for their magazines, so the stories had already fought their way through “legitimate” publishing gatekeepers.

One Hand Screaming was released in October 2004. That experiment in self-publishing was like a Lay’s potato chip for me. I couldn’t just have one. I had opened my mind to the possibilities that now existed via new publishing technology.

Not even fifteen years after that first book, I now have more than twenty books out, from different publishers and my own imprint. The count is higher if you include digital-only titles. Because a book doesn’t have to be defined as “300 pages bound between two pieces of cloth.” And an author doesn’t have to limit their fate to a business model that consists mostly of agents and publishers trying to sell a book to a chain bookstore buyer in New York or Toronto on a four-season buying cycle.

I've seen hundreds of authors earning five-, six-, and seven-figure incomes from their ebook sales alone, and many others who've been able to write full-time. Embracing both traditional and self-publishing options has doubled my income.

It's not about rejection. It's about control.

When done properly, the only "self" in self-publishing is "self-directed." Successful authors are hiring editors, designers, and marketing experts just like a publisher.

Running Kobo Writing Life, Kobo's free self-publishing platform, I've seen hundreds of authors earning five-, six-, and seven-figure incomes from their ebook sales alone, and many others who've been able to write full-time. That's something that's almost impossible for most traditional-only published mid-list authors, whose declining incomes are negatively impacted by smaller advances and domino-like publishing mergers.

Embracing both traditional and self-publishing options has doubled my income. Approximately 90 percent of my traditional publishing revenue comes from print sales, and roughly 75 percent of my self-publishing revenue comes from ebook sales. I get paid from my publishers twice annually. My self-publishing income comes monthly, directly into my bank accounts from Amazon, Kobo, and Draft2Digital.

In the fall of 2017, I left my high-paying corporate job to write full-time and to independently assist authors in their own journeys via my podcast and consulting.

Including that dear author friend who sincerely wanted to help me by warning me what I was getting into. He was right, back then. But things change. I have helped him sell more copies of a

hybrid title published internationally than he made from the same title in domestic traditional publishing sales. Seventy percent of a \$5.99 ebook (\$4.19) versus 12 percent of a \$14.99 ebook (\$1.80). Combine the larger margin with a higher volume of sales, and you see why more writers who embrace the hybrid publishing model can earn a respectable living.

The truth is, there's no single publishing solution. Each book project is as unique as you the author. To riff off Robert Frost: Two publishing paths stand before you. You can choose both. I have. Being open to the possibilities has made all the difference.

Mark Leslie Lefebvre is a writer, speaker, and book nerd interested in empowering authors. In his weekly podcast, Stark Reflections on Writing and Publishing, he speaks with inspiring and innovative creatives and shares his perspective about the publishing landscape.

COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE



WRITERS IN EXILE /

Interpreting Fear and Violence from Arabic into English

BY JACKLEEN HANNA



I have had about a quarter of a century in Canada since my arrival as a landed immigrant from Syria. My tongue still stumbles sometimes to reach the heart of the second language — English.

I write poetry, stories, and articles. I want my tongue to speak and write in creative and journalistic writing between two contradictory languages, each with their own style, construction, and rules.

My university studies in Syria were in the field of electrical engineering. After years of self-testing, I decided to work as freelance interpreter and translator for organizations that need to serve newcomers.

I was once asked to interpret for a police division in Toronto. I was afraid to appear before the police officer. I said to the agency employee, “I am worried, I don’t want to take this assignment.” She replied, “But you passed the exams, and you have the professional and linguistic competence to do the job. There is a woman who needs your language skills to testify.”

I challenged myself and went to the police department. I felt terrified, my hand was sweating, and my heart beat quickly. I thought back to Syria, where the police humiliate and mistreat citizens for no apparent reasons. I was thinking of women who are victims of daily domestic, political, and religious violence back home and in Canada.

I did my job that day and felt like a heroine. My tongue had become a skillful parrot. I know how violence tastes; I know that when we fear, our tongues become broken and the words fall dead with no echo between our lips.

After years of experience, I became a parrot for the stories of others. My heart became a sponge to contain the plight of the refugees. I became a channel to carry the meaning between two languages. The interpretation in “first person” weighs heavily on

I became a channel to carry the meaning between two languages. The interpretation in “first person” weighs heavily on me.

me. I tested the depths of the others — their progress and fears — closely. I was even called to translate for women in labour! No need to translate tears, cries, and joy.

At the end of the day, I go to my apartment in Scarborough. I salute the walls and the plants. In my head, I repeat the stories of refugees and victims. I witness the fear in the eyes and lips of those who claim refugee status as they await the judge’s decision. I remember tears of joy and pain. Histories of violence and persecution are present in front of me in various forms. I leave everything behind and try to write poems about love, beauty, and peace.

It’s a rich experience, and I’ve even learned some modern insults in both languages, besides new legal and medical terms.

As a self-employed interpreter, “I’m not just a tool,” as one service provider angrily said to me once. I am a Syrian-Canadian poet and translator. I have two languages that I dream and work with. My mother became a refugee in Sweden recently. I dream of embracing her, crying and singing with her in all languages after a forced absence that lasted more than a decade.

Jackleen Hanna is an award-winning poet who published five poetry collections. She has written an enormous number of articles for Arabic media, including Al Jazeera. She has been heard on radio channels as a cultural reporter. She emigrated from Syria in 1997.

This column is part of a series exploring the lives of writers in exile now living in Canada. It is a partnership between TWUC and PEN Canada.

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Register now: writersunion.ca/annual-conference-agm (deadline: April 26, 2019)



TWUC's Annual General Meeting is on Friday, May 31. The AGM is free to attend. All members are encouraged to attend and participate in planning our year ahead.

A reminder that anyone wishing to use the AGM travel subsidy must attend the AGM.