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*Many of you who are now reading these words are people I've known for years — for decades, in fact. At our big Summit in June, I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with even more of you. But I'm scarcely a household name (not even in my own household, it sometimes seems). So it's perfectly sensible to assume that the majority of TWUC's 2000 members have no reason to know me from Adam. That being the case, I thought it might be helpful if I were to use this first report from the Chair to introduce myself and explain what I'm doing here.*

I've been writing — hard — since 1965 and have been publishing books — pretty steadily — since 1968. Doing so hasn't enriched me materially; like so many of us, I just get by. So, while I don't have enough money to tithe for good causes, I therefore tithe with my time instead. I try never to miss a chance to sit on boards if I think I can somehow, in however small a way, be useful. Access Copyright, PEN Canada, the Arts Foundation of Greater Toronto, and the Federation of BC Writers are a few examples. Another case involves a museum. And like many of you who have lived in various parts of the country, I've had the chance to do committee work and the like in a number of locales — in my case, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and BC. I've published fifty books — fiction, poetry, history, biography, criticism — without ever having won a book prize, but I'm proud of having served on or even chaired juries that have given municipal, provincial, and national awards to many other authors.

My interest in TWUC goes back to its very beginnings. I

remember when the notion of some sort of union of writers was first being discussed by three novelists in the living room of a house on Brunswick Avenue in the Annex neighbourhood of Toronto. I was far offstage, hiding in the wings, so to speak, eavesdropping on the conversations of people older than myself: Margaret Laurence (who was twenty-three years my senior), Marian Engel (sixteen years), and Margaret Atwood (ten years). I didn't become a member of the Union until a few years had passed but I vividly remember the atmosphere of TWUC's early days, so different from what confronts us today, when our audience has fragmented and, let's admit it, people simply aren't so interested in what we do.

Yet our Union, instead of becoming tighter and narrower, as many other cultural bodies and institutions are doing, is instead opening wider, growing in physical presence and in voice. Certainly much of the news, especially where copyright and writers' incomes are concerned, is abysmally bad, and all of us must be prepared for even more developments in the publishing industry, in technology, and even in what seems to be the fuzzy new focus of the Canada Council for the Arts. Yet it's important to keep believing that some improvements may be on the not too terribly distant horizon.

I sought to become the chair of TWUC because I believe that a period of such jagged transition might benefit from having a transitional leader. One never knows, of course, but I presume that I might well be the last chair who remembers the many troubles and triumphs of the early days. The assumption is based only a little bit on the notion that such institutional memory could serve some useful purpose. Mostly it's based on the assurance that an entire new generation of young writers, ambitious ones of all backgrounds, with new solutions to old problems as well as to ones we haven't discovered yet, will stand up and take over.

I'm looking forward to working with, and for, all of you between now and our AGM in Vancouver next spring. So in a sense it's almost as though I'm saying hello and goodbye in the same letter — albeit a letter that's postdated.

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WRITERS IN EXILE /

# Shall I Be Happy that I Am Alive and Free?

BY ADNAN ALMEKDDAD



*I am a Syrian veterinary doctor. I worked for the last years in the animal pharmaceutical field, in production and importing into Syria.*

I started writing at age ten and publishing in 1989. I have two published works of poetry and two prizes for my poetry, from Kuwait in 2000 and from the Arab Emirates in 2003.

For many years, I read Arabic and world literature and I knew, of course, that many Syrian poets were living outside Syria or were experiencing difficulties from the Syrian dictatorship. At that time, I believed two things: There could be no good poetry in the absence of freedom and, as Tolstoy said, “Everyone thinks of *changing the world*, but no one thinks of changing himself.” So I spent many years of my life developing myself, my family, my job, my poetry.

But eventually I realized that I was wrong. I was trying to avoid our regime; at the same time I was talking about freedom in my poetry! But the dictatorship has all kinds of crimes in its own structure; you will not be able to build anything when it is present.

There are two kinds of physical disease: chronic and acute. The chronic one is continuous but has less pain than the acute one, which is much more painful and comes suddenly. Syrian people experienced chronic pain for the last fifty years. They knew that it would be very hard to change the regime. They tried to build Syria starting with themselves. But then the regime caught some young men who wrote statements on the walls after what they saw in Tunisia and Egypt, which was called the Arab Spring. They tortured and killed these young men in Daraa — my city, where I was living and working. The killing by the regime had begun. Killing in such a stupid way was very acute, very compressive, and passed all the red lines. So we reacted with demonstrations, in Daraa at first then in all of Syria.

As a witness, I participated in filming what was happening. I wrote some articles about the lies and false things that the media started to say about it. After that I went back to my small village, trying to help with daily needs such as water, wheat, etc. I participated with coordination groups — we established a human rights group to follow up on the new situation — trying to do any helpful thing.

I did this for four years until I was warned that the security units had connected the false name I was using for my writing to who I really was. So I left Syria through Lebanon to Turkey with my three daughters and my wife. It was dangerous as I didn’t know what might happen at every checkpoint on our way. But at last we arrived

in Turkey. We stayed there and I tried to find work, but could not. When I didn’t find stability in Turkey, I tried to find another solution. I received an offer to come to Canada, and now here we are.

We are the lucky ones. We weren’t imprisoned or arrested or bombed. I was careful and escaped many dangerous things, but many Syrian people were killed, their homes destroyed. They left their cities for other places many times; their children didn’t go to schools for years; they were put in bad camps; they experienced bad situations of all kinds: bombings, air strikes, and army attacks. Maybe the hardest thing to discover was how so much of the dictatorship was supported by governments, parties, persons, and dark forces such as ISIS. Just to “teach” people that the dictatorship is better than terror! Actually, the terror and dictatorship are the same, different versions of the same book.

Benjamin Franklin said something about who chooses between freedom and stability: you will lose both of them. Revolutions are not good things. They are just social movements that happen when there is no justice, no respect, no freedom. They just happen... no individual decisions. But you can’t say: “Hey, revolution! Why did you come?” Instead, you can say: “Who was the criminal that opened the door?”

And after all that, we can ask: What poetry will be written in such an environment? The Syrian poets mostly used symbolism techniques, hiding what was in their minds with thick language, trying to survive while still communicating some aspect of their true experience. They were separated from society because most people couldn’t understand what they were saying. But it was good in some ways: The security units could not understand, either.

They were in a prison called Syria, just like any other Syrian. So some of them tried to find something else they liked as a job. I turned to science and biology. Others, who challenged the regime in their writing, lived very badly.

When the revolution began poets started to say directly how they felt. They were arrested, left Syria, or were killed. All but the ones who supported the regime with weak arguments.

And here I am, between you, confused: Shall I be happy that I am alive and free? Or sad that Syrian people are still being killed and are still not free?

*Adnan Almekdad is the author of two collections of poems as well as a writer for Syrian and Arabic media outlets. He worked in Daraa, Syria as a veterinary doctor and now lives in Kingston, Ont.*

*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.*



# Into the Void: Life, Work, and the Struggle to Make Art

BY CORDELIA STRUBE



*Chekhov got it right — “We must work, Uncle.”  
Forget following your passion, follow the jobs.*

Growing up in Montreal, I started working at fourteen, teaching arts and crafts to kindergartners. Then, I scored a job scooping ice cream as Lemon does in my novel *Lemon*. This segued into waitressing at restos, including the Bombay Palace (FYI curries are made from yesterday’s Tandoori), Les Filles Du Roy (baguette gets recycled), the Hong Kong House (fried rice is last week’s steamed rice), and Kuzins, the chicken restaurant that hatched my novel *Dr. Kalbfleisch and the Chicken Restaurant* (where day-old barbecue chicken becomes chicken sandwich specials).

Finally the big break: retail clerk. The boutique owner, a triangular-headed man with small, wandering hands, was so impressed with my ability to set up displays that he offered me a full-time position. I passed on that to take a position as the personal assistant to an egomaniacal fashion designer, who expected me to double as a showroom model. I’d been under the misconception that my visual art skills could earn \$\$\$\$ in the fashion trade, but witnessing the exploitation of immigrants on the sweatshop floor put me off the fashion industry. I quit and reinvented myself as a British telemarketer (featured in my radio play *Marshmallow*) while moonlighting as a self-defence coach (martial art moves used in *Lemon*), and subsidizing my acting career (featured in my novel *Milosz*). But playing TV/movie token female roles, even with stars like Robert Reid (*The Brady Bunch*), Kris Kristofferson, and Harvey Keitel (all smaller in real life than on screen) was soul-eroding.

Fast forward to receiving a disappointing offer for my third novel. I called Nino Ricci for advice. Our connection was tenuous; he, a member of the CanLit Pantheon, had graciously blurbed my first novel, and we’d met briefly post-blurb. I’d introduced myself at a reading and asked him what he was going to do with the unpublished short story he’d just read — where was he going to send it?

“Into the void,” he said.

Querying him about the offer for my novel, he said, “You should be making a living off your books by now.”

Too embarrassed to admit how remote earning a living from the sale of my books was — or that I hadn’t applied for grants because rejection, in any form, quashed what little faith I had in my projects — I kept quiet. Radio drama budgets had been slashed, a stage play of mine that was set to go suddenly wasn’t, a movie in development wasn’t developing, and I’d pissed off a TV posse by

saying what I really thought. Seven days a week I taught fitness, shouting at spandex-clad people with real jobs. I envied them. *They* were building careers, buying condos and cars, getting married, taking tropical vacations, while I was destroying my knees.

That third novel was nominated for a GG, a major boost to my self-esteem, until my publicist informed me, “It’s not like it’s the Giller.”

By novel five, I was still far from making a living from my books. With my knees degenerating, I started personal training, which enabled me to stand back and watch. A wealth of raw material came my way during these sessions. I trained doctors, lawyers, CEOs, retail kings and queens, stars of broadcasting, shrinks. All had something to complain about despite riches, big houses, and glassy condos. It was the most palpable lesson in the school of money-isn’t-everything.

I kept writing novels and had a child I strapped to my back during training sessions (and who fell asleep on my body or in car seats but never in a crib). Between appointments I loitered in public places, jotting down scraps of dialogue in a notebook, adding behaviours, noting interactions, incidents. There isn’t a character in one of my novels whose pulse didn’t start with something I saw or heard while working. It all begins with unfiltered exposure to the human condition while *on the job*. The fabric of my fiction is spun *from my life experience resulting from not making a living from my books*.

I have recently published my tenth novel. The plummeting book advances of the twenty-first century barely cover property tax. The occasional foreign sale causes jubilation, but amounts to small change. To make the mortgage, I teach creative writing to all ages. My students are constant story sources, particularly the mature ones, providing endless tales of human misadventure. From all ethnic backgrounds, they endure downsizing, restructuring, chronic or fatal illness, heartbreak, disability, divorce, bankruptcy, mental illness. My day job is what enables me to get lost in the lives of others. That’s what writing novels is, to me. For a few years I get lost in the lives of my characters before sending my manuscript off into the void.

This fall, my early novels *Alex & Zee* and *The Barking Dog* are being brought out in new editions. If you wait long enough, everything becomes new again.

*Cordelia Strube is an accomplished playwright and the author of nine critically acclaimed novels. She has been nominated for the Governor General’s Award, the Trillium Book Award, the WH Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the Prix Italia.*

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# The Bitter, the Sweet, and the Unexpected: Four Writers Taste-Test the Canadian Writers' Summit



Luke Reece



Renée Sarojini Saklikar



Chuck Bowie



Nadia L. Hohn

We asked four writers from across the country working in four different genres to respond to the first ever Canadian Writers' Summit. Below is their take on what they did, saw, felt, and tasted.

## Tastes: One Bittersweet Day at the Summit

BY LUKE REECE

"Different stories require a different way of being told," said the playwright, instructor, and actor Paula Wing early on the morning of Saturday, June 18. I sat in an audience of familiar faces at the Teaching Playwriting panel, on which Paula Wing was joined by fellow artist-educators Bruce Barton and Brian Quirt. I generally like to tell stories through the writing of plays, but that day at the Canadian Writers' Summit was about stepping out of my element and experiencing what the other genres have to offer... so that's the

only quote I'll be using from that panel.

For me, the day truly began after that panel, when I put a teabag in my cup only to fill it with coffee by mistake; I was already mixing things up. I let the image, and taste, of coffee over tea sit with me as I moved through the Writers' Summit. It was a useful metaphor for what the summit would bring: surprise, laughter, misperception, and, of course, the occasional sensation of not-altogether-unexpected bitterness.

Kenneth Oppel, a Canadian author of over thirty novels, tells his stories in a way that allows readers to "leave your own skin and live moment to moment." This is how he describes writing fiction for young audiences. These tales exist in a world that is full of discoveries and where the stakes are always high. Trust me when I tell you the stakes were never higher than when eight-year-old Luke had to find enough money to purchase *Firewing* and conclude the trilogy that started with Oppel's best known work, *Silverwing*. I must admit that I was a little star struck at his keynote speech, but

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it was humbling to hear him speak about starting from writing story outlines in his fourth grade notebook. I also scribbled ideas in an elementary school notebook back in the day. Thanks to my mother these writings have been preserved, just in case I need them for my own keynote speech in the future. Who knows?

The Performing Identity: The Politics of Culture panel brought me closer to home again, as panelists included playwrights and performers I recognized from the theatre community. Things got a little fiery and the audience chimed in way before the question period, as everyone wanted to opine on how Canada can better facilitate multiple identities in literature and performance. Andrea Thompson, poet and co-editor of *Other Tongues: Mixed Race Women Speak Out*, said it best: “You need to be able to speak to people in a community in a language that the community will understand.” It just so happens that Canada is a fairly large community, with many different voices needed to address it. These voices need equal time.

Familiar met the unfamiliar as I was treated to five performances of texts I’d never read or witnessed at the panel titled Performing Women: Playwrights and Performance Poets. The immediacy and urgency in their storytelling was compelling and “made the art a different thing,” as playwright and performer Kelly Jo Burke described it. I didn’t want the readings to stop, so I bought *Performing Women: Playwrights and Performance Poets: the Panel, the Anthology* to continue reading at my own leisure. I was told that after hearing Burke, Cornelia Hoogland, Penn Kemp, Catherine Kidd, and Susan McMaster perform their work, I would recollect their voices when enjoying the text at home. This was true. Like a seashell remembering the ocean waves, their speech continues to wash over me every time I open the book.

My breakfast drink concoction was long gone by this point, and I was in need of another experiment. This meant it was time for science fiction; I don’t usually read it (it’s been awhile since my infatuation with Opper). Nalo Hopkinson, a fantasy/science fiction writer and the final keynote speaker of the day declared, “We’ve been telling fantastical stories forever.” In other words: all fiction is a form of fantasy. When she said this, I’m certain several people in the Fleck Dance Theatre had small but meaningful epiphanies. Who is to say that one text is more fantastical than another? Hopkinson said in many different ways during her address that “stories need not be factual in order to exist.” Heck, they don’t even have to be written down.

I ended the day by attending the student readings. There was a good mix of undergraduate and graduate students from schools across the country, including my old stomping grounds at York University. It was a nice way to wrap up the summit and see what’s cooking in the minds of creators not that much younger than myself. They came from each coast, and everywhere in between, as did the panelists I heard throughout the day. They had travelled to share and refine their voices with the audience. They came to tell stories, however they do it. Since this was my final event, I had a beer. Although the initial taste of coffee over tea was gone, the flavour had stayed with me all day long.

*Luke Reece is a biracial storyteller and community builder from Mississauga, engaging with young-in-craft artists that are as diverse as the community he lives in. He is the artistic director of Little Black Afro Theatre, co-creator of Dark Nights, and Obsidian Theatre Company’s associate general manager.*

## Literary Translation Revealed

BY RENÉE SAROJINI SAKLIKAR

Several years ago, while writing a book-length sequence of poems, I found an online essay by Dennis Lee, “Cadence, Country, Silence: writing in colonial space.” Lee’s thoughts on cadence came to me again as I sat outside Toronto’s Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, under a white tent canopy, the air warm and humid down by the lake. I had joined a group gathered to listen to Jessica Moore and Madeleine Stratford speak about literary translation. We were part of this year’s mega-conference, the Canadian Writers’ Summit (CWS), and as a member of TWUC (as well as the League of Canadian Poets, the Canadian Creative Writers and Writing Programs, and the Canadian Authors Association), I wanted to take advantage of learning about language from a different point of view. Of the many sessions offered, this one held fresh appeal, as both presenters were recommended by Quebec friends of mine who often chide me for not connecting enough with French-language poetry.

Confession: I’ve always held to the idea represented by the infamous paraphrase attributed to Robert Frost — that poetry is what gets lost in translation. However, this spring, at a reading series I co-host with Wayde Compton — Lunch Poems at SFU — my skepticism got jolted by the beauty of Patrick Friesen’s Griffin shortlisted translation of a Danish poet, Ulrikka S. Gernes (*Frayed Opus for Strings & Wind Instruments*). I’d also recently been reading another work in translation, *Mend the Living* (Maylis De Kerangal). This novel, a finalist for the Man Booker, was translated by Jessica Moore, and it was she who drew me to the CWS panel.

Moore, in a well-modulated voice whose timbre seemed to contain room for those ephemeral echoes in writing that haunt the page, spoke about her journey from creative writer — she’s an accomplished poet — to translator. In childhood, she said, she was drawn to arranging things (the spice jars in a cupboard, for instance), and in her undergrad years, she felt a pull toward translation. She illustrated the act of translation as more than simply knowing two languages through the analogy of knowing how to play the piano: the use of ten fingers is no guarantee of concert pianist abilities. So, too, with the kind of “knowing” that we inhabit in our day-to-day language. To begin work on translation, Moore does a close reading of the text, staying open to resonances, reminding us that when translating, the writer is in a collaborative effort in “one’s own head” as Moore described it. So, of course, the act of translation is not some mere plunking of one word for another, a continuing myth (accompanied by that other unease, that translation is dilution). Moore suggested that a translated text might even supersede its original and is the creation of something new.

We were reminded, as the afternoon heat grew dense, the air heavier, that translators support new incarnations of work which in turn keep literary texts current and in circulation. *Mend the Living*, Moore noted, is available in the U.S. market in another translation, with a different title. “From the very first sentence, it is clear that

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# Despite this bits and bytes age, the writing and editing of a book takes as much time as it takes.

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they are very different works.” And of course, this statement, as I sat under the white tent canopy, brought me again to my unease with literary translation even as I, too, felt the pull of Moore’s passionate defence of her craft: “You have to love the sound of the language,” she said, reminding me again of cadence: that echo of rhythm and sound are integral to “getting the voice of an author,” to paraphrase Moore.

Later, in the question time, I asked both Moore and her co-presenter, Madeleine Stratford (poet, professor, and president of the Literary Translators of Canada), about something both of them touched on: *the myth of translation*, the idea that literary translators can “go both ways” in both languages. Not so, these two rather remarkable women said. Jessica Moore only does translation into English. “Translation is more than just transferring,” was Madeline Stratford’s rejoinder.

Stratford, it should be noted, was a commanding presence throughout, speaking of the technical aspects of life in Canada as a literary translator: from the guidelines established for funding within the rules of the Canada Council (18 cents per word for prose, 25 cents a word for poetry translation), to what it takes to teach translation and to get established in the Canadian marketplace: “It’s really hard, you have to build a portfolio, you have to know people, you have to get your work in front of publishers.” Stratford also noted that publishers will often omit the names of translators from book covers, particularly in Britain. Throughout the panel discussion I was impressed by Stratford’s ability to make the case for translation. As she put it: “When you translate a piece of literary work in Canada, you contribute to Canadian culture.” Despite the heat, Stratford and Moore fielded with aplomb questions both technical and esoteric. I was happy to listen to writers from across Canada probe into the art of translation and enjoyed the opportunity to hear in one place a diversity of voices from within the Canadian literary community.

*Renée Sarojini Saklikar writes thecanadaproject, a life-long poem chronicle that includes award-winning poetry, essays, and fiction. She is the inaugural poet laureate of Surrey, BC, and she collects poems about bees.*

## To Write is Human; To Edit, Divine

BY CHUCK BOWIE

As a writer, I’ve always felt like editors were a necessary evil. I’ve treasured and harboured the preconceived notion of the antagonistic, adversarial relationship between editor and writer. So there I was at a Book Summit panel on editing, something I’d forced myself to attend to satisfy the request of, ahem, the editor of *Write* magazine that I attend a session I wouldn’t otherwise, surprised by an unfamiliar feeling: empathy.

Could I really be feeling empathy for editors? Where did my preconceived notions disappear to? Before me was a panel of editors speaking about the long, hard hours they spent agonizing over the feedback they would soon have to give a writer on his or her way to a completed, book-ready manuscript. One by one, they got to me, mainly by sharing a simple truth that won me over: “Authors, we editors know it’s a hard life.”

The venue was a panel discussion delivering wonderful point-after-point wisdom from Anita Chong (McClelland & Stewart), Patrick Crean (HarperCollins), Pamela Mulloy (The New Quarterly), and Janice Zawerbny (freelance editor). They had placed themselves at our service to delve into the alchemy between editors and writers. I felt as if I was receiving trade secrets, which, in fact, I probably was.

In the “feeling out” period, where we gained some background from each of the panel speakers, I knew I would be in for a treat. They were invited by the moderator, Susan Scott, to employ anecdotes — the reader may understand this to mean “juicy editorial tidbits from industry insiders” — to illustrate the challenges and rewards each experienced as editors to the famous and the still trying.

One editor — an agent at the time — told this story: He had what he knew to be an excellent property, a manuscript he suspected would be big. But he also knew he would soon leave the business



to become an editor, so he referred the manuscript to a small publisher. That publisher subsequently went out of business and the agent-cum-editor had the chance, in his new role, to get it back. The book went on to become one of his most lucrative properties.

The editors also shared the things they look for in a submitted manuscript: First of all, good writing. Editors want commitment to the craft, for without it, you'll quit before you get started. They want chemistry: a "marriage partner" of sorts, an organic process, they want to "be on the same page" as their author, they want energy. And they want to hear the writer's voice, manifested through crackling prose. It's funny; the way they phrased it, it didn't seem too much to ask.

But then, they volunteered, as a caution, the other things they required. After acknowledging (again) that it is, indeed, a hard life, they reiterated the need for commitment. Anita pointed out, to quiet nods from the other panel members, that writers should not cloud their minds with dust jackets and marketing ploys until the manuscript has been completely and satisfactorily written, re-written, and edited to the very best of the editor/author team's collective abilities.

The author needs to be coachable and to not feel as if they are being bullied. They have to do the heavy lifting; editors ask questions — they don't solve everything. And there must be no yelling or crying. Outside of the range of the microphone, one editor muttered, "You yell, no subsequent contract." I had the impression this was a "just joking/not joking" comment. The panel ended this segment with a two-word observation: "Editors push."

It seemed at this point we had arrived at the Lightning Round, where pearls of wisdom were shared in the form of brief, pithy quotes. They were wonderful, and posters could be made from these:

"The code (notation) of a novel begins with the first sentence, and the first page." Writers must get these right.

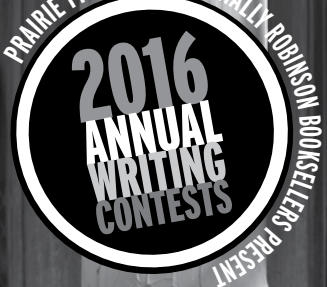
"Genre writers need to know what their readers want." Other kinds of writers should not concern themselves with what readers think, until their book is completed.

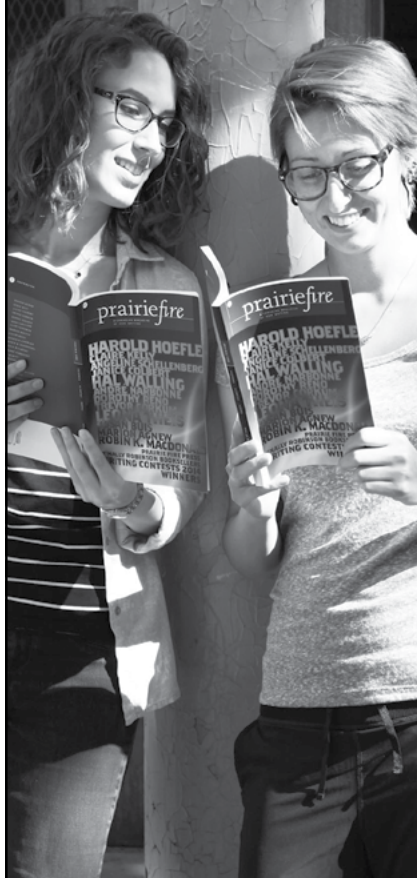
"Books resist speed." Despite this bits and bytes age, the writing and editing of a book takes as much time as it takes.

"When one is house-hunting, the prospective purchaser projects themselves into the house, imagining how they would feel if it were theirs. Similarly, editors project themselves into the space of a book (manuscript)." If this (projection) is possible, they will do anything to help make it the best possible version of itself. But if they cannot (imagine occupying it), they won't accept it.

The insights shared by the panel kept the audience rapt. The bulk of the audience, editors and editor-students, wrote notes furiously, but we writers tried not to draw attention to ourselves. It isn't often we get to peek behind the curtain.

*Chuck Bowie is a New Brunswick genre writer, an avid people-watcher, a closet introvert, and unapologetic Canadian. His third novel, Steal It All, drops in paperback later this year.*





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# Finally, KidLit Gets a Seat at the Adult Table

BY NADIA L. HOHN

I am a writer with a day job. While teaching elementary school, I have been looking for ways to make this writing thing work, opportunities to sharpen my craft. So I awaited the Canadian Writers' Summit, an event that I nicknamed "the mega-conference" to my writing friends, with the anticipation of a kid waiting for an ice cream truck on a hot summer's day. Like a kid, I wanted it all: my favourite flavour (workshops on writing for children and young adults); dairy-free soft-serve in a cup (accessibility, structure); sprinkles on top (diversity); topped with hot fudge and nuts (meeting famous authors and going to fancy wine and cheese affairs).

For children and young adult authors like me, there was a wide array of workshops. For a change, we KidLit writers felt welcome to the "adults' table" instead of the kids' menu: it was wine, steak, and caviar, a welcome change as children's and young adult authors were given space and respect and opportunities to hobnob with authors of different genres.

There was so much to take in at the conference it was sometimes a challenge to know which workshop to attend. I overlapped and skipped around over the two days. I went to the talk To MFA or Not to MFA for twenty minutes and then to the diversity panel presented by the Writers' Union. I attended an open mic reading after having left the open one-page critique for children's writers. Then I sprinted to Artists on Trial with poet laureate George Elliott Clarke, playwright Kat Sandler, and one of my mentors, young adult author Richard Scrimger. This was a laugh-out-loud event rated R for roast and raunchiness with attorneys, jury, judge, and stenographer.

But I wasn't done yet. I attended Big Issues in YA Literature after having left another panel, only then to leave to attend Kevin Sylvester's presentation, Author As Performer: Grabbing and Keeping Your Audience, which offered very practical advice for authors like me who are trying to develop my school and library presentations. Perhaps I was too ambitious, greedy even, trying to get to all of these workshops, but it could have been made a bit easier. Organizers, take note: The walks from one building or tent to another were arduous at times. Also, not having a printable or easily viewed schedule/map in advance made it challenging to pre-plan workshops.

Not surprisingly, I kept being drawn into the panels for YA and KidLit. The panel on dealing with serious issues in young adult writing focussed on autism and LGBTQ. I caught the tail end of this one but felt that more issues could have been included. Sharon Jennings' workshop on Writing Craft for Kids' Writers was more of a "how-to" guide to kids' writing. The case for Black Canadian children's literature was presented by Shauntay Grant, who discussed the importance of using Black English in the classroom, including discussion of how she used her book *Up Home* in schools.

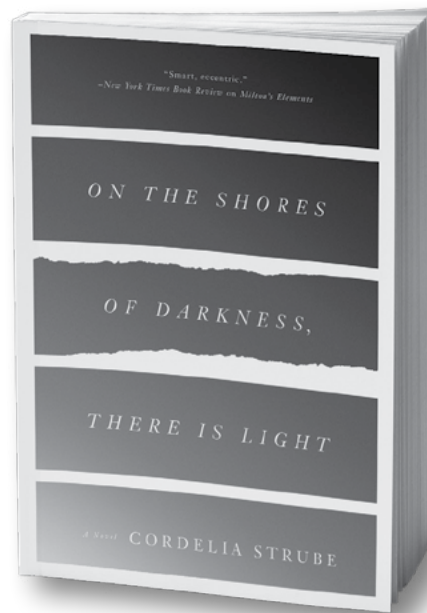
There were sumptuous nuggets of wisdom from the keynote speakers. I loved the intimate "fireside chats" with two of Canada's most known children's book authors — Kenneth Oppel and Jean Little. Oppel shared that "when you write a book for children,

you write for adults as well." I have often seen author Jean Little attending CANSCAIP meetings with her guide dog, but it was fitting to see this eighty-four-year-old on stage speaking about her early start in writing. After hearing Jean Little, there was a reception — one of a few held during the conference. We were able to relax, talking and networking with fellow writers across genres. We do not get enough opportunities to mingle like this. Sadly, I missed both Lawrence Hill's and Nalo Hopkinson's lectures, but at least I managed to get Hopkinson to autograph her latest book and take a photo with me.

Although diversity was apparent in the keynotes for the conference, I still wanted to see more diversity in the actual panels and amongst the attendees of the conference. We Need Diverse Books has been a major discussion in the American publishing industry. How is it being played out here in Canada? Also, some of the workshops with similar topics and issues could have been combined so as to prevent overlap. Finally, more attention could be paid to scheduling workshops aimed at similar genres in different time slots. These are definitely areas for growth and improvement. In all, the Canadian Writers' Summit was a formidable first-time effort and a conference needed in so many ways. I cannot wait to see how it evolves for the next one in 2018.

*Nadia L. Hohn is a teacher and children's author. Her first picture book, Malaika's Costume, was published by Groundwood Press, and a sequel will appear in 2017.*

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