

**WRITE**

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# Writing Rights

## The Ministries Strike Back

By John Degen



If the fight for authors' rights in Canada were a 1970s-era sci-fi trilogy, we'd be in episode two right now. That's the one where the plucky rebels suffer what looks like a major setback on their way to the ultimate triumph of the third film (*Return of the Licence* — wait for it; it's awesome). Sure, we destroyed the monolithic and terrifying Post-Secondary Copying Guidelines at the end of episode one — and it felt so good, didn't it? That giant fireball in the sky and all those scattering university administrators yelling "Appeal! Appeal!" But now those damnable guidelines are back, bigger and meaner than ever, and they have the well-resourced and impenetrably-armoured Ministries of Education driving the assault.

And that's about as far as I can take this analogy. Because this is not an entertaining series of movies. It's a real-life attack on our rights and incomes, and it's not fun at all.

My point is this: The lawsuit filed against Access Copyright in February by a consortium of Ontario school boards and provincial ministries of education is *not* the end of our story. That legal gambit — as baffling as it was (schools suing authors... really?) — was somewhat predictable to those of us who've been watching this plotline develop for the past decade or so. To switch from film to poker, you could say the educational sector has pushed their chips in a big pile to the centre of the table and is now "all in" on the

gamble of destroying collective licensing. It's a risk they probably feel they can afford to take. After all, their own war chest has been vastly enriched by five straight years of not paying a fair price for the hundreds of millions of pages of copying they do each year. They are sitting on a huge pile of money — your money — and they are using it for their long game of never having to pay for copying again.

The ministries claim their lawsuit is simply a request for a refund on overpayment from before 2012. Some request. "Excuse me, writers and publishers whom we refuse to pay... could we have 25 million in cash please?" The very same Copyright Board tariff decision they reference in claiming this "refund" is one they themselves refuse to respect. "Tariffs are not mandatory," they claim, despite a clear Federal Court decision to the contrary (*Access Copyright v. York University*).

I wish I had a spoiler for you about episode three. The fact is, this win will come to us only one way. We need continued resistance, in numbers. I read every member letter to MPs on which I'm copied. I appreciate each and every one. A recent one ended with this wonderfully pithy request:

"Please explain when I will be paid for my work."

I suggest we all make the same request, again and again, until we get an answer. Stay tuned!

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## Editor's Note

By Doyali Islam



The Spring 2018 issue of *Write* engages with the notion of "home and away." Anna Marie Sewell's feature about writers' struggles with housing gives us an opportunity to (re)consider the ways in which art-making, community-building, and realities about home/housing intersect. Kerry Clare's feature on independent Canadian bookshops reminds us that not everything has been lost to Amazon and big box stores and might inspire you to visit some of her top bookstore picks across the country. Furthermore, two dispatches in this issue provide information on residency opportunities for writers who seek a temporary home away from home. Further still, the Industry Q+A and Writers in Exile column reflect each other beautifully: Both articles discuss how to invite newcomers and refugees into our literary communities, but from distinct vantage points.

This issue of *Write* also marks the beginning of a new and ongoing accessibility column — *Accessibility.doc* — by Adam Pottle.

The issue also contains critical — as in both cynical and necessary — dispatches by Aviaq Johnston and Caroline Adderson.

Speaking of critical engagement, from coast to coast, after the Stanley and Cormier verdicts, we find ourselves in an uneasy spring. To be honest, readers, I find myself wondering what I can possibly offer you here. Perhaps it's okay, sometimes, to let our seams show.

I guess I'll end with my one fierce belief — that storytelling matters, and will always matter.

May our words find good homes. May our words open doors for each other.

# Writer's Blot

WRITER'S PROMPT /

## Remembering and Forgetting

BY SHENIZ JANMOHAMED



*"It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity."*

— *Salman Rushdie*, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*

Sometimes I sit with his photo in my lap and ask myself what it would feel like — to be crouched on a *dhow*, be adrift for days, until sea salt crusted my skin, until I could feel sweat soaking my inner thighs. What was the view like so close to the water? How could my great-great-grandfather sleep, when elbows poked into his back, when the sound of water replaced speech?

And then the shore. The inching towards land, the relief, the fear.

\* \* \*

My great-great-grandfather feared nothing. At least that's what we we're led to believe. He was the stuff of legend, a pioneer who embarked on a fortune-seeking journey from Gujarat to Kenya. He became known as *Simba* (lion in Swahili), after encountering man-eating lions in the dead of night and survived to tell the tale. He was the torchbearer of our family myth. He kept the flame of courage alive.

And what of my great-grandmother, who left her childhood home as a teen, never to see her mother again?

All I know is of her departure.

She was never given permission to arrive.

*When will you arrive?*

Truth becomes mythologized after decades of storytelling, like a rock reshaped by the waves of the sea. Home, as I imagine it, no longer exists. It is a memory lodged in the heart, an immovable rock of an unattainable hope. It is a compass directing me to an unreachable destination. It is, in itself, a return.

*Return to where?*

There are generations of women I've never known, who whispered too softly in my DNA, whose stories were hushed by their fathers and sons and brothers. Who hushed themselves into silence.

*Return to whom?*

Home an ache in the bones. Home is the smashed windows of colonialism, the dry mouth of drought, the hands over mouths, mouths un-singing, mouths unspeaking, mouths agape.

*Open your mouth.*

My ancestors sang their songs elsewhere, and I'm beginning to forget the words.

*Say something.*

*Anything.*

\* \* \*

I return to that unknowable place. A prodigal daughter, standing at the threshold of my great-great-grandmother's home. She is waiting for me. Ageless, painless, immortal — her *bhandani* sari caked with flour and salt. Her hands know my hands, like we've held each other before. When she speaks in the singsong lilt of Kutchi, I respond with words from her childhood lullabies.

I am not estranged. I am not foreign. I am not exotic.

I am *home*.

\* \* \*

#QuestionsForAncestors #Belonging #Identity #HomeAsCompass

*Sheniz Janmohamed is a poet, artist educator, and land artist. She is the author of *Bleeding Light* (Mawenzi House, 2010) and *Firesmoke* (Mawenzi House, 2014). She has written for a variety of publications and runs the blog *Questions for Ancestors*, which features BIPOC*

COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE



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# Dispatches

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NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

ACCESSIBILITY.DOC /

## The Language of Disability: A Brief List

BY ADAM POTTLE



*This past February, I participated in a theatre workshop in which the actors, directors, musicians, and crew members had to flesh out a play about disability. The story takes place in a society where everyone has a disability, and on the first day of the workshop we were asked to identify what we thought were the key images.*

We wrote the images on strips of paper and pinned them to a corkboard. The play's narrative tension arises when an able-bodied man enters the society: riffing on that idea, someone wrote "a man with no maladies."

When I read that phrase on the corkboard, I bristled. To think of disability as malady — as woe, pox, problem — is to think in ableist terms. It implies that disability must be corrected, cured, cleansed from society. The whole point of the play was to portray disability as an accepted aspect of humanity and assert that a truly diverse society includes disability. That word "maladies" showed me that even the most well-meaning people — diverse and talented artists who had the best intentions — can get it wrong.

Ableism pervades all aspects of daily life but none more so than language: terms and idioms like *maladies*, *handicaps*, *blind as a bat*, *deaf as a post*, *crazy*, *spaz*, *psycho*, *nuts*, *lame*, *cripple*, *retard*. These phrases and many more like them have become so ingrained in our language that we're seldom aware of their impact when we use them, and while disability advocates have

made crucial progress in raising awareness of that impact, it unfortunately hasn't made enough difference. These words persist, as do the ableist attitudes that accompany them. It therefore falls to writers, our venerated guardians, wielders, and creators of language, to demonstrate that impact by telling stories, while also suggesting more progressive words.

What follows is a short list of phrases that have arisen in countless conversations about disability. This list has grown out of my own interactions as a disabled person (specifically a deaf man), as well as my experience writing creatively and academically about disability. I don't intend to prohibit anyone from using certain terms; I'm simply explaining the meanings behind them.

### **Person with a disability**

Some people prefer this phrase because it puts the person ahead of the disability. They believe that doing so focusses on the person's humanity rather than their disability. The difficulty is that it also suggests separation between one's humanity and one's disability. Using this phrase might imply that the person in question is ashamed of their disability, that their disability is an appendage that just happens to be there.

### **Disabled person**

Many prominent disability advocates use this term. By putting "disabled" first, it becomes a point of pride, suggesting that one's disability is a crucial part of their identity. At the same time, some people are uncomfortable identifying as disabled because of the social stigma attached to the term. It's a subtle shift, but turning

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# Ableism pervades all aspects of daily life, but none more so than language.

“disability” into “disabled” makes a tremendous difference. People who are uncomfortable with “disabled person” typically use “person with a disability.”

## **Condition-based language: Deaf, blind, autistic, schizophrenic, paraplegic**

This type of language is much more specific. Some may not want to disclose this information, and that’s fine; on the other hand, it’s honest, and people are curious. If someone says they’re disabled, chances are people will wonder “How are they disabled?” I myself identify as deaf. It’s the simple truth.

## **Visually impaired or hearing-impaired**

Some people use impairment-based language as a disability substitute, a sort of linguistic Stevia. It’s an accepted way of describing people with partial blindness or partial deafness; however, it also comes with a subtly ableist undercurrent: saying someone is visually impaired implies that her vision is scratched, dented, or blemished — that is, less than perfect. It’s negative language, and we try to use more positive language in this regard.

## **Differently abled**

A catch-all term — a pseudo-progressive phrase that obscures one’s condition. We’re all differently abled, but we’re not all disabled.

## **Physically challenged or mentally challenged**

This terminology is not only vague; it suggests that a disability is something to overcome, which is an ableist idea. (Whenever

someone calls another person “physically challenged,” I always imagine two people engaging in a wrestling match or a street fight.)

## **Handicapped**

An outdated term and the butt of too many golf jokes. Unless one is writing about a disabled character from the 1950s, one should avoid this term.

There are dozens of books, articles, blogs, and websites that writers can use to help create disabled characters and explore diversity and disability politics. One such resource is the “Disability Language Style Guide” produced by the National Center on Disability and Journalism (available at [ncdj.org/style-guide](http://ncdj.org/style-guide)). While even the most well-meaning people can get it wrong, it’s equally true that the most well-meaning people are willing to work to get it right.

**#MakeCanLitAccessible #DisabilityStories #DiverseCanLit  
#DisabilityIsPartOfDiversity**

*Adam Pottle (@AddyPottle) is a novelist, poet, playwright, and essayist whose work explores the dynamic and philosophical aspects of Deafness and disability. His recent novella, The Bus, has been shortlisted for two Saskatchewan Book Awards, and he is currently finishing a nonfiction book about how his deafness has influenced his writing. He lives in Saskatoon.*

*This ongoing column explores disability and accessibility issues in the writing community.*

NAVIGATING FUNDING CHANGES /

## R.I.P., WIR: New Funding Model Ends a Program

BY CAROLINE ADDERSON



*Did you hear that creak and slam? That was yet another door closing on an income source for writers. Copyright payments — slam. Decent advances — slam. And now the Writer in Residence (WIR) position as we know it.*

I've been lucky to be a WIR a number of times. The sweetest of these occasional gigs have offered money to write along with the pleasure of working with emerging writers. Most were mentorship positions. In all cases, they were rewarding experiences, so when Stella Harvey, Artistic Director of the Whistler Writers Festival (WWF), invited me to be their 2017 WIR, I accepted. The caveat was that while Stella had received partial funding from the municipality, more than half the money would come from the Canada Council for the Arts, which had only recently changed its funding model. Now, instead of the host applying for the grant, the onus was on the writer. However, she assured me that she had consulted with a program officer who told her that given the WWF's past success rate, funding was likely; it just couldn't be guaranteed. Ultimately, the jury would decide.

Completing the application took hours of work. Nevertheless, I leapt through the hoops and pressed send. Results were promised by September, so we scheduled the program to start just after Labour Day. When no announcement came, we proceeded anyway. Mid-September, before I travelled to Whistler for my second set of appointments, both Stella and I queried the Council again. Without confirmation of funding, I couldn't create a long-term schedule. A week later they informed all applicants that results would be announced in November. It was neither logistically possible nor fair to the participants to suspend the program until that time.

In mid-November I received my rejection. By then I had completed three-quarters of the work and spent hundreds of dollars in gas driving back and forth from Vancouver to Whistler. Why were we rejected? According to the program officer, my writing project "did not rank as highly as others." I explained that this was fair enough, however most of my paid hours were spent mentoring and teaching, not writing at all. Because of their administrative delay, I

provided these services in advance, in good faith, because we were told that funding was probable. His response was "since the launch of the New Funding Model in the spring of 2017... [we] do not offer support for artist-in-residence activities that concern the training and development of arts students and non-professional writers." Slam.

I'm not the only WIR in this situation. Given the delay and that we were essentially misinformed at the time of application about the changes to the system and our likelihood of success, and given that the Council now has extra millions in grant money to disburse, I admit to hoping that they would do the right thing and earmark some funds for those of us caught up in the changeover to the New Funding Model. Barring that, sympathy goes a long way. But when I asked the program officer how he would feel about doing \$3000 worth of unpaid work, he responded with silence.

I'm lucky that Stella had some municipal funding and the flexibility and ingenuity to adjust her budget and compensate me as best she could with limited dollars. In the end, factoring in gas costs, I received a little more than half of the money I was owed. But what about the writers whose hosts depended exclusively on Canada Council funds?

It's a sad situation. Beyond writers losing yet another source of income, there is the lost opportunity for new writers to develop. By the end of my three months at Whistler, several writers had rewritten their way to a publishable manuscript. Others were that much closer to one. All had dramatically improved. Publishers now expect near print-ready work, but not everyone can afford to hire an editor or easily access one. The WIR position filled this need. Until spring 2017, it was a separately funded program that over the years had grown into a cultural institution, one that benefited everyone involved. It has essentially been eliminated without notice. How many doors are left in the house of culture now to slam on writers?

If you're applying to be a WIR, here are a few things to consider:

- In the words of the program officer I dealt with, "The assessment context for Writer-in-Residence projects has changed now that these applications are assessed along with creative writing projects." It's all about your writing project. Understand this and put your best work forward for consideration
- Don't count on it. The success rate of a writing grant is 20 percent. This will now be the success rate of a WIR position.
- If the residency involves teaching or mentoring, start nothing until funding is secured.
- Show in your application how being in residence is relevant to your writing project. This is apparently what they mean by question 12 on the application form: "You may wish to explain specific requirements related to your artistic practice or the regional context in which you work..." For example, if you're accepted at Berton House, the jury may expect your writing project to relate to Dawson City or the North.

*Caroline Adderson is the author of four novels, two short story collections, as well as many books for young readers. Her work has received numerous national and international nominations and awards. She is the program director of the Writing Studio at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.*