



WRITE

THE MAGAZINE OF

**THE WRITERS'
UNION OF
CANADA**

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SPRING 2017

**Indigequeer: A
Writer Pushes
Back Against
Marginalization**

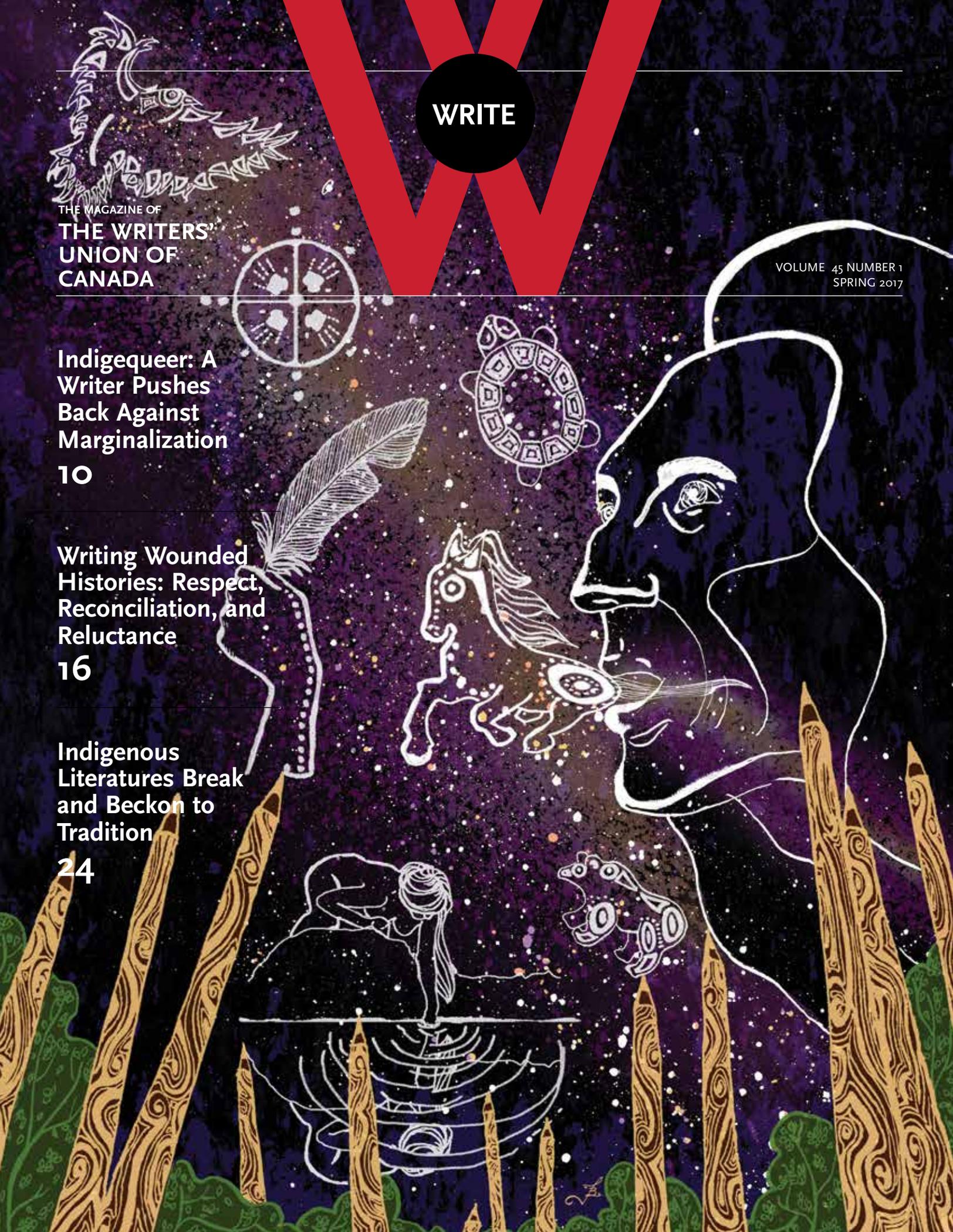
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WE SHAPE STORIES

- **INDIGENOUS EDITORS CIRCLE**
- **EDITING INDIGENOUS MANUSCRIPTS**

August 13 – 19, 2017

Humber College Lakeshore Campus
Toronto, ON

Presented by Humber College and the Canada Council for the Arts with generous support from the Department of Canadian Heritage and workshop founder the Saskatchewan Arts Board

In concurrent Indigenous-led workshops, explore issues related to editing Indigenous manuscripts, including cultural protocols for traditional material, copyright and permissions for communally owned stories, consultation with Elders, and editing trauma.

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The Indigenous Editors Circle is a collaborative forum for Indigenous editors to discuss best practices for editing and publishing Indigenous content.

Editing Indigenous Manuscripts informs and sensitizes non-Indigenous editors and publishers to working with Indigenous writers, editors and texts.

By the time you read this, the Vancouver AGM and OnWords conference will be right around the corner. As Vancouver is my home, I thought that many of you who will be visiting from other regions might appreciate a little local info.

If you're like me, and like most other writers I know, you enjoy browsing bookstores when you travel. Vancouver is far from being Canada's most bookish city (that would be Victoria/Sydney) but it has managed better than most other places to retain at least the core of its once vibrant bookselling sector. I don't mean Indigo and other cookie-cutter places, but rather stand-alone establishments with distinct personalities — and books you're highly unlikely to find elsewhere. Harbour Centre, the downtown satellite campus of Simon Fraser University, is where our meetings and events will be held. As luck would have it, it is within easy screaming distance of a number of the most interesting bookshops, the kind where highly knowledgeable staff sell out-of-print books along with some new ones.

Literally a one-minute walk north of Harbour Centre is MacLeod's Books, an immense regional institution run by Don Stewart. It is a magnet for visiting writers from around the world and has often been used as a set in feature films and television shows.

I once wrote a *looong* magazine article about the complicated workings of MacLeod's and its owner in the context of Vancouver's bookselling heritage. If you're interested you can find it online at geist.com; just search the name of the bookstore or my name. I once called MacLeod's one of the city's three most important cultural institutions (along with the louche Penthouse nightclub, established 1947, and the bar at the Sylvia Hotel). Its inventories in literature, history, and art are outstanding, but there's hardly a subject area in which it does not also specialize. For example, it has the best selection of Indigenous books I've ever seen and a notable inventory on women's issues.



MacLeod's is located at 455 West Pender (at the corner of Richards, kitty-corner from where you'll find Albion Books). Just down Pender is the Paper Hound Bookshop at no. 344. The owners, Kim Koch and Rod Clarke, run a beautifully curated store that specializes, they say, in "Arts Amatoria, Abecedaria, Beatnik, Costume & Textile, Botany, Rants & Incendiary Tracts, Vancouver Stories, [Lewis] Carroll, [Roald] Dahl, [Edward] Gorey, [Maurice] Sendak."

Of course there are other bookshop clusters that require more than walking. Kestrel Books in Kitsilano is an excellent example. Numerically the largest number of bookshops is located in East Vancouver and North Vancouver. There's one chain (but not a chain in the Indigo or mall-store sense) with locations in both these places. This is Pulpfiction Books, with stores full of new and used books together, on Main Street and Commercial Drive in the east end and a third one on West Broadway, way across town by way of the Granville or Burrard bridges.

The above falls comically short of being exhaustive, and I of course apologize. There's just barely enough space here to mention what will be Vancouver's newest bookshop, with one of the city's biggest inventories. It is Massy Books, named for the proprietor, Patricia Massy, at 2206 Main Street, just down the street from one of the Pulpfictions at 2242. It's set to open on June 1 — the day our TWUC gathering gets under way.

LOOKING AHEAD: JOIN THE WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA AT OUR UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS

OnWords & AGM in Vancouver, BC
June 1 – 4, 2017

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June 14 – 17, 2018

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May 30 – June 2, 2019

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TWUC NATIONAL OFFICE

Executive Director
John Degen, ext. 221
jdegen@writersunion.ca

Associate Director
Siobhan O'Connor, ext. 222
soconnor@writersunion.ca

Office Administrator
Valerie Laws, ext. 224
info@writersunion.ca

Membership & Donor Campaign Coordinator
Nancy MacLeod, ext. 226
nmacleod@writersunion.ca

Fund Development & Projects Manager
Gaeby Abrahams, ext. 223
gabrahams@writersunion.ca

Editor Hal Niedzviecki write@writersunion.ca

Guest Editorial Adviser Waubgeshig Rice

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Editorial Board Lauren Carter, John Degen, Nikki Reimer, Leslie Shimotakahara, Allan Weiss

Editorial Liaison Corey Redekop

Copy Editor Nancy MacLeod

Write Magazine Advertising Gaeby Abrahams ads@writersunion.ca

Design soapboxdesign.com

Layout Gaeby Abrahams

Cover Illustration Jessie Boulard jessieboulard.com

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T 416.703.8982, F 416.504.9090, info@writersunion.ca, www.writersunion.ca.

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Writing Rights

Where Would We Be Without Maureen?

By John Degen

Acting in my role as chair of the International Authors Forum (650,000 authors represented worldwide, and growing), I was pleased to travel to England in early March to run the IAF's Annual General Meeting, which was timed strategically to also allow for attendance at the London Book Fair. The massive and bustling LBF fills three levels of London's Olympia exhibition hall and features a growing Canadian contingent of publishers and agents selling Canada's writing to the world.

Touching down in London was a long-overdue homecoming for me. I lived there for some months in 1987 as an undergrad student working abroad, and somehow never managed to return (despite many travels elsewhere) until this very spring thirty years on. It was in London that I first thought of myself as a writer. After days of dishwashing, furniture moving, or some other temporary manual labour, I sat each evening in my main-floor bedsit in Earl's Court, preparing a creative writing portfolio for a workshop class at the University of Toronto. I left London that autumn certain I would be back immediately upon graduation. Having fallen in love with the country and its books, I was determined to be both a full-time author and British. Funny thing, life.

There was little time for reminiscing on this trip, however, as my schedule was packed with business. In four days, I managed to meet with about a hundred cultural sector and media colleagues from all over the world. This included a sit-down with my U.K. counterpart, Nicola Solomon, chief executive of the Society of Authors, with whom I discussed our ongoing project to set new, fair contract standards that reflect the changed and still-changing reality of the publishing business. The Society of Authors is housed in a charming freehold building (half offices, half rental flats that bring the Society crucial income) in Kensington, behind which one finds Agatha Christie's old residence — a beautiful little mews house.

The IAF AGM dug into ongoing talks at the World Intellectual Property Organization and the IAF's crucial presence at those meetings in Geneva. For far too long, the global rights and incomes of authors were discussed and debated without any authors present, libraries and educational administrators instead purporting to know what was best for us as they lobbied to their own advantage. That has changed with the creation of the IAF. The AGM also passed a special resolution and statement concerning Canada's ongoing copyright review, supporting the view that author incomes have been severely damaged by the copyright crisis in education here. This statement will find its way to desks in Ottawa as part of TWUC's ongoing advocacy efforts.

Colleagues at the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), the U.K.'s Access Copyright, generously arranged an evening meeting at the Palace of Westminster with select MPs,



Me (TWUC), Maureen Duffy (ALCS), and Suresh Chandra Shukla (Indo-Norwegian Information and Cultural Forum) at the International Authors Forum AGM, March 14, 2017, London.

where we discussed the international implications of weakened copyright and declining creative incomes. It was terribly sad to see, just one week later, the grounds of Westminster all over the news because of a violent attack.

Throughout my visit, I found myself attending to the experience and advice of poet, playwright, and novelist Maureen Duffy. Ms. Duffy is the Honorary President of the ALCS and was the central energy, forty years ago, behind the creation of both the British Public Lending Right and that country's (still) strong system of collective licensing for copying. These efforts helped the work of Canada's PLR and copyright champions at a crucial time. She is also justly celebrated for her activism around LGBTQ rights and her philosophy of compassion regarding both human and animal rights. Ms. Duffy recently led the drive to properly balance author rights and reader access in the Marrakesh Treaty, designed to encourage the creation of electronic texts for those with visual and print impairments. Canada is a signatory to the Marrakesh Treaty.

Knowing I would be meeting Ms. Duffy, I slipped into a bookstore in Trafalgar Square and bought *Londoners*, her 1983 novel about the writing life in London. Over dinner on my first full day there, Maureen and I discussed the book, and I discovered a wonderful connection. Not only is the novel set in the neighbourhood of my old flat in Earl's Court, but she lived less than a block from me when I was a Londoner trying to become a writer. We probably passed each other on the street as we walked to and from the Underground. The book is almost an alternative biography of myself. For that, and for everything else she's managed in her eighty-three years, I am grateful for Maureen Duffy.

News

THE LATEST ON WRITING AND PUBLISHING
IN CANADA AND BEYOND

AGENTS



Canadian literary agents announce professional association

Canadian literary agents announced the formation of the Professional Association of Canadian Literary Agents (PACLA) last month. Its members collectively represent more than 1000 writers and illustrators. PACLA intends to work closely with book publishers, federal and provincial governments, prize-granting organizations, writers' associations, booksellers, literary festivals, review media, and educational institutions. In addition, they have pledged to support the global Fair Contract Initiative.

PUBLISHING



Type & Tell allows authors to keep all royalties

Type & Tell is a new platform for self-publishing with a tempting twist — authors get 100 percent of their royalties. International publisher Bonniers Books Ventures has been testing the site in Sweden since 2015 and launched the project more broadly at the London Book Fair in March.

While the English website is full of aspirational language, *Publishing Perspectives* points out that the Swedish site contains some more political — and surprising — statements, such as “We live in a country where freedom of expression is every individual’s right... The time when only a handful of publishers decided what we read and what stories reached us is past... It’s time to open the floodgates for all the hidden stories out there. Now we are democratizing literature.”

Type & Tell offers many features, including mailing out review copies, marketing tools, author photos, metadata optimization, print and ebook options at various scales, and various consultation options throughout the process. This

considerable undertaking continues to expand, though there is no date set for its release outside of Europe.

READING



Nielsen analysis suggests that boys are reading more

Data suggests that boys aged nine to twelve are a growing share of the children’s reading market, according to a presentation by Nielsen Book’s vice president for insight and analytics, Jo Henry. Henry presented the analysis at the Digital Book World conference in New York, using monthly surveys of book buyers to reveal a steady climb in the overall children’s market including “a steady climb” amongst boys.

This is welcome news to observers who may have been concerned that boys aren’t reading as much as girls. Henry reported that series and chapter books as well as activity books were more successful with boys rather than straight up fiction. Henry suggested working closely with booksellers to maximize in-store displays as well as using TV appearances and advertising to bolster sales.

New research reveals that low-income children may not have necessary access to books

Results from a recent study by researchers at New York University showed that there are steep disparities in access to print media for children. People living in poverty, or near poverty, were much more likely to live in so-called “book deserts” — areas with no access to libraries, bookstores, or other sites that encourage engagement with books, magazines, and newspapers. The unavailability of such resources, in turn, can dramatically affect a young child’s ability to come to school “ready to learn,” and can be a factor in their long-term academic performance.

EDITING



For authors wanting to write authentically beyond their own experience, sensitivity readers offer expert eyes

A new consultant service is emerging in the literary world: sensitivity readers. Authors writing about different experiences in a diverse world can now bring in specialized editors to evaluate their work for cultural accuracy and sensitivity. The practice has the potential to make fiction feel more real and do justice to the cultures and individuals it tries to represent — to get it right, so to speak. It can also protect writers from the kind of unexpected political maelstrom that has become more common in the literary world, as conversations about representation and marginalized identities have taken hold in the mainstream.

Some writers have embraced the practice, such as Becky Albertalli. A recent *Slate* article describes how crushed the author felt when her first young adult novel was called out for a problematic representation of queer women. In response, she hired twelve sensitivity readers for her second book. While some publishing houses may provide their own such reviewers, an increasing number of freelance editors specializing in their own lived experiences have emerged to help authors wanting to do right by characters and the identities they don’t themselves inhabit.

EBOOKS



Shelfie abruptly announces the end of its operations

An announcement on the website of Canadian ebook bundler Shelfie, formerly BitLit, took consumers and the publishing industry by surprise on January 30, declaring that it would end all operations the following day. Shelfie’s primary service

was to package ebook editions of books to their print counterparts.

New partnership between Kobo and bol.com launches Kobo Plus subscription service

A February press release on the website of Kobo, the Canadian-based ebook and e-reader retailer, announced a new project with Dutch company bol.com named Kobo Plus. The new service for Dutch and Belgian readers will work on a subscription model, with more than 40,000 titles available for 9.99 euros per month. The press release says that “Kobo Plus was developed in close collaboration with leading Dutch publishers,” though it does not explain how publishers accustomed to purchase revenues will be compensated in the new subscription model. For authors, the release explains that “they get compensated in a different way.” There are no signs yet that this program is set to expand to North America.

COPYRIGHT



German publishers forced to repay copyright revenues

In April 2016, the German supreme court ruled that German publishers must pay authors a greater share of copyright revenues distributed between 2012 and 2015. The supreme court ruling was final and without opportunity for appeal. Authors had the right to choose whether or not they wanted to accept the reimbursements, which have been estimated to total as much as 3 million euros. Publishers worry that this could have a devastating impact on their business. Although authors had until the end of February to waive their reimbursement anonymously, publishers will not know the remainder that they owe until May or June.

A fund of 90,000 euros has been set up by the Börsenverein, the German book industry's trade group, to assist smaller publishers struggling to pay the unexpected reimbursement costs.

LIBRARIES



U.S. libraries are fact-checking, making themselves “sanctuary spaces” amidst Trump chaos

Taglines such as “All are welcome here” and “Libraries for everyone” have graced library posters, signs, and websites across the United States in the months following the election of President Donald Trump. Libraries everywhere, which often serve marginalized populations such as immigrants, people with disabilities, and the poor, have pledged to combat Trump's increasingly aggressive anti-immigrant and anti-press policies with their most central tool: information. According to a recent article in the *Guardian*, school librarians and others have been countering the incorrect and misleading claims of the president by promoting well-researched content and holding community workshops on critical thinking and citations. More recently, some libraries have declared themselves sanctuary spaces where undocumented immigrants can seek protection, advice, and help without fear. Twitter accounts such as @LibrariesResist have been helping steward the campaign and sharing resources such as a “Stop Trump” reading list.

AMAZON



Amazon drops anti-competitive clauses in contracts for ebooks in Europe

Amazon, the biggest ebook distributor in Europe, has agreed to drop clauses in its contracts that force publishers to give it terms as good or better than rival publishers or booksellers. This move came after the European Commission, which regulates competition in the EU, opened up an investigation into the practice, which was said to be stifling other platforms. Amazon released a statement in which they “welcome the fierce competition

that exists across these forms of media.” According to Publishing Perspectives, the U.K. Publishers Association has vowed to work with British authorities on similar restrictions.

GRANTS



Canada Council Announces New Strategic Fund

At a Montreal conference for arts in the digital age, the Canada Council announced a new strategic fund — “The Fund for the Arts in a Digital World.” The Fund will run for four years, from fall 2017 to April 2021, and aims to invest \$88.5 million in project grants that assist, according to Sylvie Gilbert, director of the Fund, in the “digital transition that the arts sector and our fellow citizens are looking for.” Grants up to \$500,000 will be available for large- and small-scale projects, with full details coming in summer 2017.

Donald Trump's first budget plan includes cuts to arts funding which worry U.S. indie publishers

American President Donald Trump has proposed numerous cuts in his first-ever budget draft, including the elimination of funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA supports a number of independent presses throughout the U.S., and the drastic attack on its yearly \$148 million of funding has everyone in the arts and literary world concerned — especially the little guys. Berkeley, California-based Small Press Distribution serves more than 400 small publishers, and received 4 percent of its budget from the NEA. While that may seem like a small cut, the group's executive director Jeffrey Lependorf told *Publishers Weekly* that “a 4 percent cut to the income of our presses could easily make the difference between just covering costs and just failing to cover their costs. It's the difference between existing or not existing.”

Writer's Blot

WRITER'S PROMPT /

Winning the Appropriation Prize

BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

I don't believe in cultural appropriation. In my opinion, anyone, anywhere, should be encouraged to imagine other peoples, other cultures, other identities. I'd go so far as to say that there should even be an award for doing so — the Appropriation Prize for best book by an author who writes about people who aren't even remotely like her or him.

The idea of cultural appropriation discourages writers from taking up the challenge, which is at least one reason why CanLit subject matter remains exhaustingly white and middle-class. The bulk of its producers are white and middle-class, and hesitant as they are to be accused of borrowing too heavily from the other for their own enrichment, they mostly follow the classic first rule of writing: Write what you know.

My writing advice is in opposition to that traditional axiom. I say: Write what you don't know. Get outside your own head. Relentlessly explore the lives of people who aren't like you, who you didn't grow up with, who don't share your background, bank balance and expectations. Set your sights on the big goal: Win the Appropriation Prize.

So how to win the Appropriation Prize? There's only one judge in all of this: the readers. Will the readers find themselves pulled into your work? There's nothing preventing us from writing about characters whose lives and cultures are very different from our own. There's not even anything preventing us from incorporating a culture's myths, legends, oral histories, and sacred practices into our own works. But we answer to the readers. If we steal stories or phone in a bunch of stereotypes, readers will know. It will catch up to us. There is no formula for appropriately appropriating. Instead, it's up to each of us to find the right measures of respect, learning, and true telling.

Indigenous writing is the most vital and compelling force in writing and publishing in Canada today. And this is because, in large part, Indigenous writers, buffeted by history and circumstance, so often must write from what they don't know. What at first seems like a disadvantage also pushes many Indigenous writers into the spotlight. They are on the vanguard, taking risks, bravely forging ahead into the unknown, seeking just the right formula to reclaim the other as their own.

In some cases, as the Indigenous contributors to this issue of *Write* make amply clear, their determination to forge ahead with developing an Indigenous literary culture within the Western tradition has led to estrangement — from family, from their traditional heritage; in other cases, it's led to a distanced relationship to the mainstream publishing industry which wants all the gory details, no matter the cost. But in all cases, there is the need to forge ahead, to bridge personal and social divides, to find the truth telling that underpins every meaningful writing. Indigenous writers do this with courage and, at times, truly stunning boldness.

Hal Niedzviecki is the editor of Write and author, most recently, of the novel The Archaeologists.

COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE



Opportunities and Challenges at Long-Running Indigenous Publishing House

BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, who founded Kegedonce Press in 1993, discusses the current climate for Indigenous writing in Canada.



How does Kegedonce Press determine who is eligible for publication by the press?

We try not to impose boundaries except insofar as to ensure, as much as is possible, that the Indigenous writing we publish is written by Indigenous writers who identify with specific nations and/or communities and who are recognized and claimed by them as well.

What trends are you seeing in Indigenous writing?

We're seeing more genre writing and, in general, more fiction than we did in the past.

What unique challenges does an Indigenous publisher face?

We continue to try to develop audiences and to educate them about the depth and breadth and diversity of Indigenous literatures and writers while trying to maintain a robust and exciting publishing program. It's a challenge to be doing development types of projects and advocacy at the same time that we're doing the usual work of a publisher. We are constantly pushing against limitations and challenging them in all areas of the industry from funding right through to distribution and promotions. We do a lot of extra work because we genuinely want to see every one of our writers achieve the success they're seeking and because we want to be able to continue to do what we do but better, bigger, and brighter. We are very proud of our successes, but we're never fully satisfied that we've "made it." We won't be until we've got a list of writers who

have won Pulitzer Prizes and Governor General's Awards and made international bestseller lists.

What kind of reception do your books get outside of Indigenous communities? What is the reception from reviewers, literary festival programmers, etc.?

Very positive, although we've definitely struggled to break down various stereotypes and misconceptions. Considering the size of our list, many of our books have been extremely successful in terms of awards and sales. Some have also really had legs! Our anthologies, especially *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, which was published in 2003, and Richard Van Camp's short story collection *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, published in 2002, for example, continue to sell very well more than a decade after their release dates.

Have you noticed significant fluctuations in interest in Indigenous writing since you've been a publisher?

In general, readers are more open-minded and willing to embrace a wider range of Indigenous literatures than when we first started publishing. That said, we still see many beautifully written books by Indigenous writers struggling to fully achieve the sales and wide acceptance that they deserve. The Canadian reading public tends to embrace only a small handful of Indigenous writers, and we'd like to see that change.

What is the market for Canadian Indigenous writing outside of Canada?

We've worked on this and there is some interest in a few markets. The ones that we've made some effort to break into are the U.S., Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. There's also great interest in Indigenous literatures in Germany and India.

What advice do you have for emerging Indigenous writers in terms of how to build their careers, get published, and sustain themselves as authors?

Learn to perform your own work extremely well, become articulate in discussing your writing, and maintain a profile both online and through public readings and performances. Most importantly, maintain balance so you stay focussed on your writing and improving your craft.

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm is an Anishinaabe writer of mixed ancestry from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation, Saugeen Ojibway Nation. She lives and works at Neyaashiinigmiing on the Saugeen Peninsula in southwestern Ontario. In 1993, she established Kegedonce Press. Acclaimed Canadian authors Basil H. Johnston, Marilyn Dumont, and Gregory Scofield are among those who have published books through the Press, for which she continues to work as managing editor. Her collection of short stories, The Stone Collection, received a starred review in Publisher's Weekly and is nominated for a Sarton Literary Award.

Dispatches

NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

QUEER WRITING /

On Indigenegativity: Rejection and Reconciliation in a Pool of Liberal Tears

BY JOSHUA WHITEHEAD



What means depression in the age of apocalypse? I write this during the era of Trump, the easement of Standing Rock, in the after-power of the Wom[y]n's March, and the inevitable futurity of the Kinder (Surprise?) Morgan Pipeline. I read, write, live, and love from within a milieu of political depression. I cry often — too hard, too easily — but remind myself that crying is an act of aggression, that pools of tears can shape a decolonial island.

In 2016, I placed first in the Canadian Aboriginal Arts and Stories challenge. I was awarded for my poem “mihkokwaniy,” a reflection on, and eulogy for, my late kokum, Rose Whitehead, who was murdered in the Sixties. Winning with this poem gave it a platform to be read, heard, seen, and felt on a national scale. The poem was published in *Canada's History* and recognized at the Governor General's History Awards Ceremony. And while there is the pride I feel in having completed and shared this work, the pride comes with pain, sadness, anger. To publish on such a

scale, I was required to become complicit through proximity and a feigned gratitude to Enbridge, one of the Aboriginal Arts and Stories sponsors. A representative of Enbridge gave a short speech during the award ceremony. During his speech, I hid my veins as my blood bubbled with memories; I too am both a fossil and a fuel for settler colonialism and capitalism: pale(ontology). When I bleed I seep Cree.

In retrospect, the award was a ceremony for my kokum who lies unmarked in Saskatoon, but it came with the self-obliteration required of me by those complicit in the disenfranchisement, dispossession, and deaths of Indigenous lands, Indigenous bodies, Indigenous women. To publish a eulogy through such forceful demands hurts like all hell. There is an act of survivance in publishing myself through such momentous and monstrous means but, I must stake myself here, it too demanded a life. I hurt myself again. “Holy hell,” I think — this Indigenous apocalypse we live and thrive within.

The award came with a grand prize of a one-week stay in the Banff Centre's Leighton Artist Colony. I spent a week in Banff talking to no one but the trees, the snow, my relations, the creator; I spent a week listening to how loud whiteness can be, how it can howl over the little things I say, how it can feed me sugar to shut me up. During my time in Banff I worked diligently on my second manuscript, a sex-positive young adult novel titled *Jonny Appleseed*. It's painful work, if you think of writing as method acting; me,

alone, splashing blood across the page and tracing out syllabics and characters from its messiness. Does your research hurt you? And there too is a price: giving birth to my self-ordained, glitter princess, decolonial lover required me to write in a colony within a colony. I spent too much time asking, “How much smaller can I make myself? How much more inessential?” And you may say, “But you’re enjoying spaces and opportunities that you’ve been gifted and shitting all over them.” You’re right, I am. And I hurt myself again. I was tribe-less in a barren land of Indigenous paraphernalia, bones, black blood, and IOUs (which I’m told are just as good as money).

And it’s these “tribes” I keep coming up against over and over again. In 2016 I was invited by Spur Festival to perform at their forum in Winnipeg titled “Our New Tribalism.” There I read a poem titled “a son of the forest, still” which tells the story of my father’s experiences with the Sixties Scoop as well as its intergenerational impacts on my identity. I performed for a crowd of mostly white settlers who cheered for me and thanked me after with tears and hugs. But I couldn’t help feeling like they came to me out of what felt like an attraction to pain, an elixir for alleviation. I edited my piece briefly before, much to the dismay of many, I’m sure, to directly hold those in attendance accountable: “I’m here searching for my identity while white settlers claim a new tribology.” If you put a microphone in front of me I will call out settler colonialism, ravage its thin façade like a sheet in the wind — and then cut myself on shattered bits of whiteness while I drown in a pool of liberal tears. And what can performance poetry even mean in such a space? When I’m asked to perform then sit down among the crowd, I’m gifted a cheap applause, no allowance for conversation, no means of response to realities I’ve internalized and lived through — to perform as an Indigeequeer poet I carve myself into a totem ready for transfer, a pass system into pseudo-tribologies. New-Age tribes everywhere: on Grindr, when I’m performing for social justice festivals, even while I write this piece I see the Canadian writing community called a “tribe” on the front page of The Writers’ Union of Canada’s website.

For me, writing Indigeequeerly comes from a space of negativity. It’s a harrowing emptiness, a kind of phantom limb composed of intergenerational trauma, cultural genocide, ongoing land

claims, MMIWG2S, and the bloodletting of memories that throb and ache to the bone. Again, I ask: How do we write in the age of *apocalypse*? How do we write for tradition, ceremony, reconciliation when we, as two-spirit/Indigeequeer peoples, are disbarred and dispossessed from those spaces, practices, ideologies, institutions, and calls for action? Does being Indigenous and queer cleave one away from Indigenous cultural nationalisms? Am I a trace? How do I write from a space of negation rather than relation?

I am an urban Indigeequeer who rejects reconciliation. Instead, I seek to *reterroritorialize* both settler-colonial and Indigenous-cultural worlds. I hurt, but there is a type of pedagogy, a type of creative energy, in loving one’s own sadness. The tongue is a prick that quills blood into words, urgency into utterance, power into words. What do essays and stories do for the dying and the dead? Is all writing for the disempowered a practice in eulogies? I do not want to believe that, but sometimes it simply is. How much time do we really have? How much life is left in these pools? The ducts are drying. Behind my eyes, muscle ache to close. Writing Indigeequeerly is an exercise in exorcisms; the page is a world of confession, consolation, contribution.

Ernest Hemmingway once said that writing is a well we must never empty, but to write as an Indigeequeer, hell, our wells are swollen with water, our stories float to the surface. I think here of my most ridiculous, although accurate, feedback from an anonymous reader who called me a “sad red poofter.” Maybe I am, but hey, I’m still alive and that’s worth something, innit? I’ll keep writing with all sorts of ectoplasms dripping from my pores, keep crying from the drudging, this grinding/ground work; I’ll keep hoping that these tears will fill my wells, pool into my clavicles, make a world. I’ll keep writing until Sky Woman falls from my hair and says, “Baby, you’re home,” and I’ll say, “Mama, I made this for you, too.”

Joshua Whitehead is an Oji-Cree, Two-Spirit member of Peguis First Nation, Man. (Treaty 1 territory). He currently resides in Calgary, Alta., where he is working towards a Ph.D. in Indigenous Literatures and Cultures. He has a book of poetry forthcoming with Talonbooks in 2017.

RECONCILIATION /

Writing About Reconciliation and Facing My Biggest Fears

BY RICHARD VAN CAMP



*Some time ago, Tonya Martin of McKellar & Martin asked me to write a story dealing with reconciliation from a twelve-year-old boy's point of view. She gave me a word count and a deadline, and she turned me loose. A year later, I've written the most personal book of my career: *The Journey Forward: When We Play Our Drums They Sing*. It's the story of Dene Cho. He's twelve. He's angry. He's confused. He has one question: "Why can't we speak our languages?"*

I'm sure you can see where this is going: at twelve, I was angry, I was confused, and I had one question: "Why can't I speak my language?" This book was my chance to finally have a showdown with these questions. In writing it, I achieved an epiphany: The goal is to accept who we are while pushing to learn as much of our language and culture as we can. Personally, this goal is not only for myself, but for my family, especially my son, Edzazii, who is two-years-and-nine-months old and talking up a storm.

For my twenty-first book, I encountered a series of firsts in terms of approaching and writing the story and how it was going to be published. First, I had to start getting up at 4:30 a.m. so I could write in peace. Children make you a far more efficient writer so, yeah, there I was sneaking around our home very early, but it was all worth it. *Mahsi cho*, my son!

Next, I had to face my biggest fear as a father. I had to wonder what my son's life would be without me. I would miss out on so much, but I also imagined the clues to my life that would give our boy the footsteps he would need to thrive. He could read my books; go through my entire Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram history; and he could hear the stories about my life and the ones I've told through those that remember them. He'd be carried by

my love every single day, even from the other side. I want him to share the stories I share: to keep them alive. I want him to speak the Tlicho and Bush Cree and Dene that I was brought up hearing and learning.

Also, perhaps for the first time, I felt pressure and urgency. I wanted the story to come out exactly right. I needed this book to be more than just a story about reconciliation. There are so many books coming out right now with the theme, and they are all fantastic. So far, my favourite book for kids on this topic is *When We Were Alone* by David Robertson with illustrations by Julie Flett. They showed me how you could take a residential school story and give it dignity, resilience, and beauty. For my story, it had to be about grief and hope. I wanted it to be a book that, fifty years from now, would endure because of its wide appeal to everyone. This is a book about a man who loses his wife, a boy without his dad, a people at a crossroads with their languages, and a drum wanting to go home.

On the publishing front, my story was going to appear as a flip book alongside another novella dealing with the same theme. That's a new experience for me. I'm proud to be co-published with Monique Gray-Smith and her novella, *The Journey Forward: Lucy and Lola*. We're both writing about reconciliation, but what we're really writing about is reclaiming. I cannot wait to hear the discussions both stories begin. It is "do or die" right now with our languages and I hope our books help families start to begin reclaiming what's theirs and what's waiting to be spoken and drummed and sung once again.

I am grateful to Tonya Martin and Meghan Hague of McKellar & Martin. They gave me a chance to tap into the twelve-year-old inside of me who asked, more than thirty years ago, the same questions Dene Cho now asks in my new book: "Why can't we speak our languages? How did we get here? How do we return to who we deserve to be?"

*Richard Van Camp is a proud member of the Tlicho Dene from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. He is the author of children's books, short stories, graphic novels, and a novel, *The Lesser Blessed*, now a feature film.*

Excerpt from *The Journey Forward: When We Play Our Drums They Sing* by Richard Van Camp

"All things change: animals, people, seasons, the world. We all have to change together."

I thought about it. "How can we change if we're all in trouble?"

He shrugged. "Maybe we need to be in trouble to change and work together."

"What?" I asked.

"If nothing bad happens nothing ever changes."

I thought about it. "Well, that's dumb."

He shrugged, "Maybe it's you that'll lead the change..."

I shrugged, "I doubt it."

"Why?"

"Well for starters," I said. "This town is cheap."

He looked around. "I love our town. Why do you think it's cheap?"

I shrugged. "It's just cheap. My mom told me once that it takes eight minutes to drive from one end of town to the other."

He leaned on his cane. "Is that right? Geez, it just took me all afternoon to walk across town to see my friends."

"Really?" I asked. "Can't you call the *Handi-Van*?"

"Nah," he said. "Save that for the old people. It's just me, two feet, and a heartbeat."

I laughed.

"Oh," he said. "And Shirley, my cane."

"Shirley?" I asked.

"Yes, it's kind of cheap but I say, 'Come rain or shine, I can surely make it anywhere as long as I have my Shirley.'"

"Ah," I said. "I get it."

The stove popped again and we both looked at it.

"Anything else... bothering you?"

"Yes," I said. "You'd think that in all those years when my mom and dad and all of their brothers and sisters were in residential schools, you'd think their parents would come and get them. How could you let go of your kids?"

"We trusted," he said. "We were told education was going to make their lives easier."

"Did you have kids?" I asked.

"No," he said, "but I knew a lot of people who did."

"So why didn't you do anything? Why didn't you try to rescue them?"

"I left," Snowbird said. "I was a young man then and I went to *Tso Kwe* — Dreaming Mountain — to learn. I left for a year. When I came back, the villages and camps were quiet. I thought that the world had ended while I was away..."

I looked at him. He was thinking of something.

Or remembering.

"What?"

He leaned forward and looked my way, "There were no kids."

I turned cold with the way he said it.

"There were no nieces and no nephews. No sons. No daughters. No dads being dads. No moms being moms. Grandparents didn't know what to do with themselves. Nobody did. But I remember the crying. The nights were filled with it... All of the children were gone."

I closed my eyes. I almost heard it: a deep sorrow that sliced the earth in half.

"The world was crying with us. Even the dogs. Oh, we all cried together. I remember that. The birds, well... it rained for months. The coldest winters. That's when the drinking started. That's when we became half a people. I promise you we all tried in our own ways to save our families, our future. But it was the law: You could not see your children until they came home for the summer."

I felt my blood boil, "Why aren't they teaching this in my school and every school in the world? I didn't even know this."

He nodded, "Bring me to your school. I'll tell them."

"You will?"

He nodded again, "Promise. It's time we talk and it's time to heal."

"Thank you," I said.

How much heart can one soul beat? I felt like my dad was here wrapping me up in a blanket of love...

"Wow," I said. "I have a map where he used a pencil to trace out where he travelled as a leader: Vancouver, Ottawa, Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Winnipeg, High Level. I sometimes trace my finger over where his pencil touched and I pretend he's touching my finger with his."

"Hi, Dad," I say. "I miss you."

I kept that part to myself.

I want to go to every place on the map that he went, so I can see what he saw.

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FAMILY /

A Poet's Words, Dividing and Bridging a Family and Community

BY TANYA ROACH



I united with a long-lost box filled with forgotten memorabilia. After aging out of the house at nineteen, my belongings became scattered across town. Bags and boxes loitered in closets, basements, and storage rooms. I had my own home in Yellowknife when these things diligently made their way back to me. As if they were saying remember me.

Among the photo albums and jewellery was a treasured dollar store locket diary. The hardcover was decorated with a neat assembly of still-life flowers. Inside the pink pages had delicate thin lines and smelled faintly of an old perfume. The penmanship was careful and deliberate. The words were plain and simple yet brutally honest. It dated back nearly twenty years. A ballad written by my eight-year-old self.

I wrote what I saw and expressed how I felt, both beautiful and ugly. My family was a strange, quirky bunch that struggled and persevered. Our home was usually filled with food and Inuit women. Their presence filled the air with familiar warmth as they sat visiting, sipping coffee and talking about life. They were short and soft with gentle voices. Except my mom's. Hers was loud. It was shockingly loud at times. Her stories and her laughter permeated through the air like an unexpected gust of fresh, cold air. One time her friend took her for a ride on a Harley Davidson and my sister and I could hear her cheering and hollering two blocks away.

One bright summer afternoon I lay on my bed writing. Our neighbourhood and our people were a people in transition. It was a thing of beauty and disappointment, pride and insecurity. Not too long ago my mother and grandmother lived on the land and lived a life I would never know. Having grown up in a house sheltered

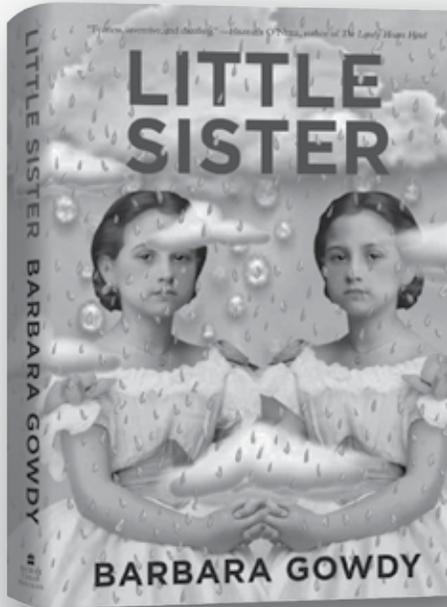
from the elements, I was just a spectator. They were the real deal, living life. All I did was watch. When I asked too many questions it was considered rude. When Mom asked what I wrote about in my diary, I showed her and she cried.

Violence, drugs, alcohol, abandonment, and poverty comprised the maze from which I found the people in my life struggling to break free. Our lives were what I wrote about. She asked me to stop writing, fearing it would make us look bad. That she wasn't doing her job as a mother properly. But she was doing her job; we just lived in a shitty neighbourhood surrounded by a lot of shitty things.

Writing became a hindrance in childhood and early adulthood. My mother and grandmother told me to stop writing about us and our neighbourhood. They scolded me and shunned me, withholding love and affection. I was embarrassing us and putting people down. But there was just as much inspiration as there was hardship and I wanted to capture it. Writing was therapy and it would prove we all lived and still loved. I have tried to explain this to them, but they don't want to hear what I have to say. When I speak up it hurts them. Naturally, I'm sad they don't want to listen and understand. But a part of me knows that when I acknowledge the hardship in my community, it's difficult for them. It's like turning over a rock that has historical filth underneath. They want to focus on the good. I can sympathize with that, but I also know that acknowledging the past and present is a part of reconciliation.

Today, journals, notebooks, and loose-leaf paper waver aimlessly throughout my apartment. Words flow onto paper then stop like a scratched CD still trying to play music. I could create fiction and change names, but they would still know. Jolts of electricity shock the pathways in my brain as I look for common ground. The further I venture in search of truth and redemption, the more I alienate myself from my family. *You judge us. You betray us. You hate Inuit.*

Tanya Roach is an Inuk from Rankin Inlet, Nvt., and works at an Inuit boarding home in Yellowknife. She is a former foster child that connects to her culture through writing and throat singing.



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WRITING /

Writing Wounded Histories

BY LOUISE BERNICE HALFE



The history that I come from is an ongoing wound with blisters waiting to burst. It is marked with disease, starvation, warfare, and culture carnage. Its anguish takes many forms, and it affects communities, families, and individuals.

In order to help heal the wounded present and for people to move forward, history needs to be understood and explained. The communities, the families, and the individuals, including me, continue to revive and repossess the damaged and the lost. I have struggled as a writer with what to disclose and how to disclose “my” history within the context of this “Canadian” chronicle. As writers we are told “write what you know” and “tell the truth.” Faced with choosing subject matter and themes, our choices are personal and often involve ethical struggle. All writers face ethical choices in choosing subject matter, themes, and how and when to draw on their lives, but for those of us with wounded histories, the choices can have particularly sharp edges.

In the book *A Kind of Scar*, the Irish poet Eavan Boland writes, “Who the poet is, what she or he nominates as a proper theme of poetry, what self they discover and confirm through this subject matter — all of this involves an ethical choice. The more volatile the material — and a wounded history, public or private, is always volatile — the more intensely ethical the choice.” Such thoughts are always on my mind whenever I am preparing to publish new work. As a Cree writer, and especially one whose youth was in multiple ways marred by colonial history and residential school experiences, I have had to navigate between my community’s history and values and those of mainstream writers.

Over the years, I have had the difficult honour of sitting in many circles where people have disclosed all kinds of atrocities committed within communities and families, and to individuals as well as to themselves. There is no lack of ideas and themes that I can write about, but such material is surely volatile. The ethical questions such material poses, therefore, are what shall I disclose and how shall I share it? These are two questions and two dilemmas with which I have had to wrestle. Shall I, for example, use the essence of the story of another and make it my own? Do I have that right? Shouldn’t I seek permission of the teller to use their story? And if I make it my own, how shall I protect the identity of the individuals involved? Writing

in the first person is often perceived as personal, and therefore confessional. Hence, how do I weave the story and make sure it rings true? The voice must be authentic, and I must know the subject intimately to be able to reach the heart of another. Elders will often share their personal survival stories as well as pass on legends that demonstrate the fallacies and errors of human trials and tribulations. Story, then, must be narrated, whether spoken or written, from the heart. “*Pēyāhtik pekīskwē*,” speak with care, the Elders teach.

Themes that address incest, wife beating, gang rapes, child pornography, children being sold as prostitutes, pedophilia, heroin addicts robbing innocent victims, the murder of family members, dislocation from home, pissing oneself due to alcoholism, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, stolen lands, mercury poisoning of water — these are not monopolized by any one community or people. But when they are coming from an Indigenous voice, the writer has to be careful of reinforcing stereotypes about her people and not perpetrating lateral violence. How then should I transmit these stories? As a writer, I feel responsible to reach as many people as I can to help slice open the silence around the painful subjects listed above that causes so much personal and community harm.

When I take up any of these subjects, I am filled with conflicting feelings, ambivalences, and doubts. I wrestle with how to justify my chosen subject and how I should protect myself from any given backlash. Like Eavan Boland, I am aware that my writing is about “conflict and repossession; and repossession itself is not a static or single act.” It has therefore been essential for me to write from the “I” perspective, from the history that I know, the wounded past that has marked the very present.

I have had to revisit the history of my ancestors, the kindness they bestowed on the first Europeans, the visitors’ betrayals, the battles, the signing of the treaties, more betrayals by the government and the churches, the stolen lands, and ultimately the near destruction of a culture and a nation. How do I write these without judgement, without blame, without rhetoric and anger? I don’t wish to tell the same old story; rather I wish to capture the heart and the imagination of readers. To do so, I take the readers to those uncomfortable but very real places without “pointing a finger.” The reader’s fingers must be able to point to their own heart, where serious examination must occur. I am aware of these intense conflicts that surround me. The poem, the past, and I are never that simple.... I am my private witness and that is all I can

go by. And the task is never easy.

To protect myself from dismissal and charges of obscurity from the general public and from my community, I have had to turn to ceremony when I write and do so in my first language. In some of my poems, this navigation has entailed mixing Cree and English, and I have used Cree to ground myself emotionally and mentally. Language itself, particularly my tribal tongue, is ceremony. Language takes me into a unique world view. It grounds me in identity and place. Many words in Cree when translated relate to the physical — as in land or body — and contain a spiritual essence. For example, the word for language — *pikiskwēwin* — loosely translates as “taking something apart from the female body that has the life of the wind.”

Using the Cree without providing translation can be a bar to non-Cree speaking readers. I provided Cree translations in my collection *Bear Bones and Feathers* but I haven't always been so generous. I thought if mainstream writers could get away with writing a sentence or two in Latin or French or Italian I could do the same with Cree. I was expected as a reader “to figure it out” when confronted with other European languages. Hence, I felt the very same way toward the mainstream reader. I wanted to create dialogue between the reader and our community by omitting the translation.

That said, Aboriginals are not homogenous. We are, however, all kin — *wāhkōhtowin* — so why segregate ourselves even further by using language in a way that creates barriers to understanding among kinsfolk? Words have power. I have wrestled with this knowledge, realizing that my tongue can hurt others. My Elders taught me the importance of *kisteyihtowin* — respect — which means the sacred heart of relationship, which involves the mouth. I have not always been respectful; it is a hard lesson to silence the tongue when you have been silenced one too many times. Nevertheless, judicious choice of words is still necessary while navigating the truth to be shared.

I have also had to learn to navigate cultural protocol when it comes to talking about ceremony and spirituality in writing. I have therefore turned to the Cree language, to my Elders, and to ceremony to explore what needs to be said. I have also studied many other artists: multimedia artists, visual artists, musicians, playwrights, dancers, photographers, and others to examine how they've crossed these difficult waters. Writers in the past were often told “don't write about this,” even though it was depicted elsewhere, but increasingly the Elders recognize that much has been lost and will continue to be lost if it is not recorded. I have justified my writing in saying that anthropologists and archaeologists either uncover or steal and openly share our sacred traditions, and it would be better if it was shared directly with the integrity of an Indigenous heart and voice. Aboriginal writers have both ownership and responsibility. I have worked at following protocol to honour my community and knowledge keepers the best way I know how, yet honour truth and the freedom of creative expression. This is the work I do.

Louise Bernice Halfe – Sky Dancer is Cree. She is the author of Bear Bones & Feathers, Blue Marrow, The Crooked Good, and Burning In This Midnight Dream.

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MEMOIR /

Leaving a Job, Becoming a Writer, Finding One's Lost Self

BY ELAINE J. WAGNER



I was disappointed and discouraged. My job hadn't worked out as I had anticipated. I had signed a three-year contract and I was giving up after one. Working at the federal level of Anishinaabe politics wasn't for everyone.

Certainly it wasn't for me. *I was too soft. My skin was not thick enough. It also wasn't dark enough.* My skin tone was more like that of my traditionally band-custom-adopted, non-native father. What really hurt most was that I believed we were all on the same team, working for the same purpose; to enhance the lives of Anishinaabe people. *I was wrong.* There were many individuals striving for personal recognition. I wasn't one of them.

From my office window, I stood staring at the concrete below, watching as people walked determinedly toward their destinations. *What am I going to do? I asked myself. What can I do now? Well, one thing's for certain, I'll have time to rewrite my children's manuscript. AND, I'm going to get that children's story published,* I determined.

Stepping away from the window, breaking my internal strife, I grabbed my purse and walked out of the Office of the National Chief at the Assembly of First Nations, Ottawa. The tears of heartbreak started the moment I saw our car with my husband at the wheel sitting curbside. "What's wrong?" he asked gently. He was fully aware that leaving Ottawa meant a great loss of intense proportion to me. I wasn't able to utter a word. I simply shook my head and let the dam burst. There was so much to do before we would be ready to depart. We had no home to return to. We had left it when my husband, my son, and I came to Ottawa for my career. Now, we were leaving behind my two sisters and their families. I would miss them. *I already missed them.*

In the elevator, headed up to our apartment, my husband made a suggestion. "Why don't we go online and see if we can find someplace to house-sit until we find another place to live?" *How stupid!* I thought to myself. *How stupid can that be? As if complete strangers would accept us into their home? My own people did not accept me. And what was worse yet, I worked so hard trying not to be intrusive or cause any problems. What did that get me?* I was so inundated with shame at failure. All I wanted was to live a good life, in the best way I knew, and to be of service to Anishinaabe people.

I was not raised Anishinaabe. I was not even allowed to go onto the reserve. I grew up in a non-Aboriginal community, attended a private company-owned school, and when I asked my Saulteaux mother, "What am I?" she answered, "French Canadian." She answered French Canadian because she was ashamed of who she was. She was a product of the residential school system. Yet when I received my treaty status card in the mail, I knew I belonged to a people. I had a heritage, but I had been taught nothing about its culture.

As a child, I liked to write. I was very good at English and grammar. The almighty dollar prevented me from attending university, but perhaps English or journalism would have been my major. I would have liked that. Leaving school after grade eleven, I took secretarial training on a \$200 loan. Funding kept me there just long enough to achieve a clerk typist certificate. Nevertheless, typing at 90 wpm with 100 percent accuracy helped me find clerical jobs and, later, helped me in my writing.

I landed a job with the Manitoba Tribal Council. New life lessons began to unfold. I didn't remain with the Tribal Council very long. I wasn't welcome there and I felt that energy directed at me. Unknowingly I was in search of my identity, a search that was leading me to the offices of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, as

Executive Secretary to then Grand Chief, Phil Fontaine. He taught me about the history of my people and their culture. He treated me with great respect and acceptance. With the help of Phil Fontaine and his family, I was able to realize my Anishinaabe spirit and be proud of my people's strength as a nation. Phil was from my home reserve, Sagkeeng First Nation (formerly Fort Alexander, Man.) and yet I had not known him then because I was not allowed on my own reserve.

And now I was out of a job and, I felt, practically back to square one. Calming down, I took my spouse's suggestion and went online and found a website for house/petsitters. Before moving to Ottawa, we had lived in Kelowna, BC. We found a ranch in nearby Rutland which was in search of a couple to care for their place while they enjoyed an Arizona winter.

A huge white truck, with horse trailer attached, sat at the bottom of a steep slope, awaiting our arrival. We had never met the owners personally. After some last-minute instructions, they handed over house, barn, and gate keys; then drove up the incline leading to Highway 33 South. Our responsibility: three barn cats to feed plus a brain-damaged dog that lived in a dog house outside. *How exciting is this going to be?* I pondered, not wanting to verbalize negative thoughts. Emotions still ran amok. Our son had chosen to remain in Winnipeg. I had cried the entire 500-odd miles from Winnipeg to Regina; some six hours west. Eventually tears ceased to flow, replaced by an ache in my heart that settled in my stomach.

I was assessing the computer desk in their home office where I would be able to write. Large bay windows were the gateway to a magnificent mountain view. As I sat at the desk, absorbing my environment, a family of mule deer appeared, lazily chomping at the dry mountainside grass. A wily coyote followed shortly thereafter, causing a commotion, as deer bounded quickly but gracefully away over uneven terrain. *A truly inspirational sight.* The cloud of fog enveloping my body grew lighter. I could feel it dissipate. It still clung to me but was no longer strangling my being. *I could be exactly where I need to be. Unconsciously, I knew it. It was a time to heal and renew my broken spirit.*

Days later I began rewriting my original children's manuscript. Finishing it after several weeks, I readied it for submission to a publisher. *Which publisher?* I wondered. Researching several Canadian publishers, I chose Theytus Books in Penticton, BC, since they produced works only by Aboriginal writers. Having my treaty status, I qualified, overcoming one major hurdle; plus, my book was Aboriginal-themed with a smattering of Ojibwe words that I had learned whilst working with Anishinaabe organizations.

Months passed. We had found another housesit and my husband and I were spending six months on Vancouver Island in Courtenay, BC, caring for another house and two cats, both dying from cancer, one in a more advanced state than the other. The owners, a two-spirited couple, were in Europe for five months. Our furnishings were in storage in Kelowna but we were living rent-free, trying to scrape together funds for a security damage deposit plus two months advance rent. I was working on another manuscript at another stranger's computer, in a totally different home office environment. In the quiet solitude, I could hear the ocean waves slapping against the shore and the abundance of

bird calls and squirrels fluttering about in the quiet of the island. Mother Earth was at work re-energizing me.

Answer the damn phone. It's ringing is driving me nuts. Where are you? I wondered. I hate being interrupted in the middle of a train of thought...

"Hello!" I answered, trying not to sound annoyed.

It was the managing editor of Theytus Books. *Meshom & the Little One* had been accepted for publication, and editing and art illustrations could begin before it would go to print. An Aboriginal art illustrator would be found for me. There was a contract to be signed. *Even a small signing bonus! Just like a professional hockey player. Oh my God!* Feelings of elation and great joy swept over me. My feet barely touched the floor as I ran to find my husband.

I was going to be a published author of a children's book and that one fact inundated me with the most rewarding and fulfilling feeling I had ever experienced. It remains with me. It's a lifetime award to myself, a wonderful achievement. *Meshom & the Little One* launched in Saskatoon, Sask., at the Aboriginal Writers' Festival in 2006. The book's illustrator attended with me.

Three years later my second manuscript, *Racin' Jason*, would launch. By this time, we had moved back to my home province of Manitoba and were living in Winnipeg. McNally Robinson for Kids helped me launch the book. The truly wonderful part of that book launch was that my husband and son were present with other family and friends. Both stories have given me great pride and a feeling of accomplishment. I have enjoyed visiting schools and reading my books to students. They have so many interesting questions and I come away enlightened and delighted from our interactions. Another meaningful reward from the publication of my books is the royalties that reinforce my pride and feelings of well-being. One never knows how many books have sold until that royalty check arrives with your sales breakdown. It's always a gift: sometimes small, sometimes large, but always welcome.

Writing makes me feel worthwhile, complete. It gives me purpose. I am humbled by the ability to express my thoughts and emotions through children's tales, to promote living a good life and to help non-Aboriginal children learn of our people's good hearts and ways. It has helped to soothe and heal my personal pain and loss. To bring about awareness that to be soft is to be gentle. To care is to be kind. To have these qualities is success, not failure. Writing has taught me that it can be cathartic through journaling and fulfilling through sharing. Through writing, I have learned of my abilities, my manner of expression, my personality, my weaknesses, and my true strengths — my character.

Tapping keys on my keyboard, I await word that my third submitted manuscript, a sequel to my first two, will be accepted for publication. In the meantime, I dabble in pastoral poetry and simply enjoy writing — a letter, or something on Twitter or Facebook — and thinking about a blog of my own and wondering: *Would I have enough to write about? Would anyone be interested in what I have to share?*

Elaine Wagner was born February 29, 1944, and raised in Pine Falls, Man. She is the youngest of nine siblings born to Anishinaabe parents. Elaine resides in Winnipeg with her husband of fifty years.

CRAFT /

Humour and Coping in Native Writing



BY GORD GRISENHWAITE

Losing myself in moments of dark (and arguably inappropriate) humour saved me from drowning in the stresses of working the crisis line and sharing my home and life with high-intensity foster children.

Yes, I looked into the proverbial dragon’s face and laughed. My writing takes a similar approach. My work tends to take unflinching looks at life through a mixed-blood person’s eyes.

Many non-Indigenous people deal with life’s setbacks with laughter, but this tendency seems particularly true for Native writers. Some of the best and best known Native writers such as Thomas King and Lee Maracle take readers to some pretty dark places, but tend to ease us into the murk with a sly humour that keeps us from averting our eyes from the horrors they describe. They also provide us opportunities to learn. Both use satire, sarcasm, and irony to get their points across.

Like those writers, my work tends to blend moments of humour with life’s daily horrors. But I do not inject humour deliberately to soften the blow. It just emerges, sometimes catching me by surprise, and it usually feels appropriate for the scene, even if I cannot explain why it appears or even when and how it has appeared. For example, I once wrote the following scene:

A crowd has gathered outside the narrator’s grandmother’s house because an apparently crazy white woman has shown up on rez, causing a ruckus that has stirred up the neighbours. Some respond to her threats with tongue-in-cheek threats of their own. The police show up and confiscate one old man’s guns and arrest him. The police, with no paperwork of any kind, choose to believe the white woman, remove the narrator from his grandmother’s home, and threaten to charge the narrator’s aunt if she does not comply with the white woman’s wishes. Sometime afterward, the old guy walks home with a polka-dotted handkerchief pressed to his face. He says, “Just trying to keep my nose clean so them cops’ll gimme back my guns, hey?”

I had the opportunity to have the scene, from a novel-in-progress, blue penciled by a prominent non-Native publisher. The publisher seemed overly concerned that I would “use” humour in a scene as grave as this one. His reaction perplexed me. I asked him, “Why wouldn’t I?” Once again, he called my “use of humour” inappropriate and did not think it would fly with readers. Quite

likely my story will shock some readers (and I hope it does), but the story itself tends to fall in line with traditional Native storytelling. Native storytellers have long used humour to impart lessons. In fact, many trickster tales feature the trickster as a self-serving clown who is undone by her plots and schemes. These comic tales tend not to have overt moral messages, but show the results of bad behaviours and poor choices.

My use of humour does not make me insensitive to the scene’s gravity, but serves as a way of making the unpalatable palatable, such as Thomas King’s use of humour in pieces like the title story of his 2005 collection, *A Short History of Indians in Canada*:

Bob Haynie catches a cab to Bay Street at three in the morning. He loves the smell of concrete. He loves the look of city lights. He loves the sound of skyscrapers.

Bay Street.
Smack!

Bob looks up just in time to see a flock of Indians fly into the side of the building.

Smack! Smack!

Bob looks up just in time to get out of the way.

King has summed up over 500 years of North American colonialism in about seventy understated words. But he has not alienated readers. Instead, we laugh at the scene’s absurdity. No blaming. No shaming. In addition to making us laugh, King leaves us with much to think about.

Lee Maracle wields sharp sarcasm and irony to explore the loss of Native languages in “Language,” a poem in her 2015 poetry collection, *Talking to the Diaspora*:

Some white guy sets me straight
Aboriginal people are losing languages
Funny, thought I had it just a minute ago
maybe it’s in Gramma’s old shoebox
maybe it’s sandwiched between papers
in plastic bags hidden under mom’s bed
Hey, has anyone seen my language?

King’s words slap readers with a silk-gloved hand, but Maracle’s gut-punch us, and still we laugh. And think. Both King and Maracle are master storytellers, and their work gives us the opportunity to see the world from their Native perspectives, and invite us to make changes, right old wrongs, and go forward in a good way.

As a Nle?kepmx writer, I cannot imagine telling my stories without the “use of humour,” even if it occasionally appears as inappropriate slapstick, and certainly lacks the sophisticated grace of Thomas King’s, and the I’m-tired-of-your-BS-so-just-listen approach sometimes used by Lee Maracle. Humour in Native writing might not slay that dragon, but it will give it pause.

Gord is Nle?kepmx, and a member of the Lytton First Nation. He is completing a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor. His stories have appeared in The Antigonish Review, Prism International, Our Stories Literary Journal, Okanagan Life Magazine, and Touch the Flame: Stories from the Okanagan Mountain Park Fire.

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EMPATHY /

On Seeing and Being Seen: Writing with Empathy

BY ALICIA ELLIOTT



I've heard that when you see someone you love your pupils get bigger, as if your eyes want to swallow them up and trap them inside. I don't know if that same physiology applies to seeing objects, but I like to imagine my pupils were huge, hungry black orbs when I first read Leanne Simpson's Islands of Decolonial Love, gobbling up each of her words as fast as they could. Every sentence felt like a fingertip strumming a neglected chord in my life, creating the most gorgeous music I'd ever heard.

It was the first time I, as an Indigenous woman, read the work of another Indigenous woman. It was such an intimate and personally revelatory moment — as if she had reached out from the pages, lifted my face and smiled. *She can see me*, I thought. *She can see me*. I was twenty-five years old.

I'd known I wanted to write since I was twelve, but back then I'd never seen a girl like myself in the books I loved so much. I saw white girls — often upper-middle class, often pining after unremarkable white boys. So that's what I wrote. I wrote my way out of used clothes and Hamburger Helper and parents who screamed in the night. None of my characters ever worried about money. None of them were concerned what their friends would think if they met their Haudenosaunee dad or their white, bipolar mother. None of them had a Haudenosaunee dad or a white, bipolar mother. Things were simple; things were normal. Rich boys and brand names were normal.

Obviously, as I got older, my taste in literature changed. What didn't change was my suspicion that publishers felt Indigenous girls like me were unworthy of book covers or book deals. Even in university the women we studied were white: Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Jane Austen. I admired these women's work, but they weren't writing what I needed to read, and this made it hard to believe there was space for what I needed to write.

So imagine my surprise when a fellow writer — a white woman

— told me during post-workshop beers that I was going to get published right away “because I was Native.” I knew that there was some talk about the literary community's need to be more “diverse,” but as far as I knew that was all it was. Talk. I could count the Native writers I knew of with half a hand — none of whom were women, and none of whom were writing about Native women in a way I recognized.

The idea that the colonialism, racism, and sexism which had systematically kept Indigenous women out of the literary community could somehow be leveraged through some half-assed literary affirmative action to benefit me as an Indigenous woman was absurd. And yet this white woman believed it with her whole heart. And yet this white woman got into an MFA program and I got rejected from every one I applied to. Perhaps I hadn't made it clear enough on the application that I was Native. Perhaps I had made it too clear on the application that I was Native. It was hard to say.

After that I stopped writing for years. When I would write — between mothering a four-year-old and shifts at my minimum wage job — I scraped all indigeneity out of my work. At least if my fiction read as “white” I'd be sure that any rejections were based on the work itself. I wouldn't have to yet again field questions about why my characters were Native, or deal with criticisms that they somehow weren't “Indian enough” — issues that, as far as I could tell, never came up for white writers, for white work.

Then came *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Everything changed. Reading her stories of Indigenous women who had good sex and bad boyfriends, who dealt with both underhanded and overt racism, who spoke their language and loved their families, gave me hope. Here — in these pages — was what I'd been looking for my whole life. Finally, after twenty-five years, I felt like there was space for me to breathe inside the claustrophobic world of CanLit. Reading Leanne Simpson's stories ultimately gave me permission to write my own.

Of course, this realization didn't change the realities of the publishing industry. I once applied for a short story contest with a piece about the complicated relationship between two Indigenous women and lost to a story written by a white American man that not only appropriated, but outright misrepresented Indigenous ceremonies. His story featured stereotypical drunken, dysfunctional Indians — one of whom offered his white girlfriend

to his brother during Potlatch. His brother accepted, and the two went off and had sex in the woods, the rest of the Natives vomiting and partying around them.

Potlatch ceremony had to be held in secret from 1885 to 1951 due to the Canadian government's ban. There was a raid on the village of Memkumlis in 1921, where forty-five people performing Potlatch were arrested. Twenty of those arrested were sent to prison. I shudder to think of how their grandchildren would react if they read this story and saw how the powerful ceremony their ancestors fought for was turned into racist, colonial poverty porn. The old questions emerged. Was this, written by a white man in another country, more "Indian" than my own writing as an Indigenous woman? Did this racist portrayal and cultural appropriation of Indigenous people matter if the story was otherwise "good"?

That, for me, is the crucial problem with the push for "diversity" in publishing — something I've known my whole life but have only been able to articulate recently. "Diversity" is not about letting those who aren't white make whatever art matters to them and their communities. If that were the case, it would not have taken me twenty-five years to find Indigenous women represented in a meaningful way in a book.

No, "diversity" is about, as Tania Canas so succinctly puts it in her article "Diversity Is a White Word," making "sense, through the white lens, of difference by creating, curating, and demanding palatable definitions of 'diversity' *but only in relation to what this means in terms of whiteness*" (italics added). Essentially, it's the literary equivalent of "ethnic" restaurants: they please white people because they provide them with "exotic" new flavours — but if they don't appease white people's sensitive taste buds, they're not worth a damn.

With "diversity" being such a hot topic lately, I've noticed a rise in white people writing from other racial perspectives, such as the man who won the short story contest. I sometimes wonder whether these white writers believe, as my classmate did, that black writers, Indigenous writers, and other writers of colour have an "edge" in the current publishing climate, and as a result, white writers must now make their texts more "diverse" to compete. I will not say that these authors cannot write from an experience they've never had. To an extent, all fiction writers write from experience they've never had, since the characters they're writing are not real.

What I will say, however, is that there is a marked difference between the way the man who wrote the Potlatch story wrote Indigenous people and the way Leanne Simpson writes Indigenous people. What is that difference? Well, there is this oft-cited notion that you can write from any perspective as long as you write with empathy. I don't know for sure whether the white man who wrote about the Potlatch felt he was writing with empathy. He may have. He could have no idea why his words were so offensive to me. He could even read this essay and liken my criticism of his work to censorship. That was Lionel Shriver's much-discussed reaction to her black critics. That's the knee-jerk reaction many white people have to criticism from marginalized communities.

Writing with empathy is not enough. It never has been. Depictions like these — reactions like these — are proof that there is only so much empathy white people are willing to extend to those who aren't white. Empathy has its limits — and, contrary to what some may think, it is possible to both have empathy for a person and still hold inherited, unacknowledged racist views about them. How else do you explain Canada's apology for residential schools and pleas for reconciliation coexisting with Canada's continued, purposeful underfunding of Indigenous children? How do you explain the national outrage over the murder of fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine existing at the same time as the national silence over the child welfare system that targeted her as an Indigenous youth and made her so vulnerable in the first place?

To truly write from another experience in an authentic way, you need more than empathy. You need to write with love. That is what I felt when I read Leanne Simpson's stories. That's what I feel when I read the work of Gwen Benaway, Waubgeshig Rice, Katherena Vermette, Eden Robinson, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, and Cherie Dimaline. That's what I hope Indigenous people feel when they read my work. Love.

Look at us as we are now and feel your pupils go wide, taking in what we've survived and what we've accomplished despite everything. If you can't do that, then why are you writing about us at all?

Alicia Elliott is a Tuscarora writer from Six Nations currently living in Brantford, Ont. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in The Malahat Review, The New Quarterly, and Grain.



In Their Golden Age, Indigenous Literatures Break and Beckon to Tradition

BY SHANNON WEBB-CAMPBELL

Indigenous literatures are extremely difficult to categorize. They are as vast and varied as their First Nations authors.

They are also, as professor and writer/publisher Gregory Younging, member of Opsakwayak Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba, explains, “part of the continuum of Traditional Stories that have been told on Indigenous territories for millennia as part of Oral Traditions.”

It is this connection to ancient tradition that allows Younging, who teaches at the University of British Columbia and is managing editor at Theytus Books, the oldest Indigenous publishing house in Canada, to make the claim for “Indigenous literatures as their own canon, and not a subgroup of CanLit.”

As he puts it, “These stories are connected to the land, ancestors, and the particular Indigenous nation they come from. These stories also have Indigenous Laws — protocols — associated with them.”

Storytelling is integral to every Indigenous nation. Storytelling is sacred, and filled with a deep sense of responsibility. Many Indigenous peoples believe stories are acts of ceremony. Some

Indigenous laws and protocols around storytelling include what stories are allowed to be written and shared and what stories are not meant to be made “public,” as they are seen to belong to the overall oral tradition of the community.

Stories and poetry are medicines. Unlike CanLit, Indigenous writing, then, must be seen as primarily an extension of that traditional knowledge system — a new and sometimes hybrid way to maintain oral traditions and embody Indigenous past while coming to terms with colonial history and present realities. Gwen Benaway, a two-spirit transgender poet of Anishinaabe and Métis descent, whose second collection, *Passages*, was published by Kege-donce Press in 2016, notes that the differences between Indigenous and Canadian storytelling is “we, as Indigenous peoples, write with our ancestors. We write from a land which is ours.”

Benaway’s work begins and ends with the land, and her poetic voice defies expectation and subverts category while examining the intersections of identity. *Passages* combats the legacies of colonization, transphobia, racism, erasure, and imposed

Christianity. As a poet, Benaway argues Indigenous poetry is distinct from Canadian poetry, as its focus is towards lyrical repetition and the interweaving of ancestral voices, rather than formal innovation.

“Indigenous poetry reflects our relationships. It is part ceremony, part song. It moves through spirit into the world,” she says. “Whether I’m writing about anal sex or racism, every part of my poetry comes through my worldview and ancestors. It’s a link between worlds.”

Richard Van Camp, member of Tłchq Nation from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, an internationally renowned storyteller and bestselling author, describes Indigenous literatures as an offering, as “braiding our stories with a written word that protects, honours, and promotes them forever.” Van Camp cites the past thirty years as a “growing Golden Age of Indigenous publishing.”

Indeed, a snapshot of the landscape is promising: Indigenous presses abound, including Kegeonce Press, Theytus Books, the Healthy Aboriginal Network, the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and Pemmican Press. Additionally, major publishing houses and established smaller presses ranging from Douglas & McIntyre to Arbeiter Ring to Penguin Random House Canada are now actively publishing Indigenous authors. Writers like Eden Robinson, Gregory Scofield, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Lee Maracle, Katherena Vermette, and Carol Daniels are on the tips of the Canadian literati’s tongues.

With all that publishing and activity, it’s not surprising that the emerging practice and tradition of Indigenous writing is still very much in flux. “Much of the literature reflects the old way of telling stories, that woven into each story is a teaching. I see that in our literature,” says Monique Gray Smith, a mixed-heritage woman of Cree, Lakota, and Scottish ancestry, who is partnering with Van Camp on a flip book for young readers (each author is writing their own novella) to be published by McKellar & Martin in May 2017. But like Benaway and others, Smith doesn’t see historical and present-day tradition as static or oppressive. As she says, “I also see Indigenous literature(s) as the evolving of culture. Now the stories are shared orally as well as through written text on constructs like a tablet, an e-reader, or a book in your hand, instead of sitting by the fire or out on the land with your moshum or dad or in the kitchen with your kookum or aunties.”

Says Richard Van Camp, “If you’re sharing your truth, your insight, your pain, your joy, your worry, your dread, your sorrow, your arousal, your community, your traditions, your language, your spirit, your ways with the written word and you are Indigenous, well, I’d say that’s what makes Indigenous literatures.”

The Van Camp/Smith flipbook is about reconciliation, a tremendously difficult topic that many Indigenous writers are currently grappling with. For Smith, writing is itself a form of healing. She uses traditional ceremony as part of her practice — smudging before and after she sits down to write in order to keep the stories in their place. Lately, she has been veering from writing about trauma explicitly, though she acknowledges there are beautiful books written about the living history of residential schools. She chooses to be subtle, believing that young people

don’t need to know all the details to understand harm or to learn empathy.

“As writers, some of the stories we tell, they flow through us, and sometimes they show up in physical illness. It’s caused me to slow down over the past six weeks, and to really reflect on what reconciliation means at this time in our country,” says Smith. “The last few years we’ve talked about reconciliation, there’s been an unveiling of residential schools. Then we have Canada 150 celebrations, the Sixties Scoop, our collective history. So many Indigenous people are ill right now.”

Indigenous literatures are emerging as at least part of the answer to the problem of creating healing through restoring and reinvigorating cultures that have been deliberately repressed. “The triumph of Indigenous literature(s) is that it exists. We exist. We are revolutionary and powerful. We defy silence,” says Benaway. “We write against oppression. We are resisting genocide and documenting the lives of our communities. It’s an extraordinary example of our resilience and brilliance as nations.”

Shannon Webb-Campbell is a Mi’kmaq poet, writer, and critic. Her poetry collection, Still No Word (Breakwater Books, 2015), received Eagle Canada’s inaugural Out In Print Award.



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Writing Wrongs: A Panel Discussion



Cherie Dimaline



Rukhsana Khan



Drew Hayden Taylor

Cherie Dimaline, Rukhsana Khan, and Drew Hayden Taylor discuss what it means to write about — and against — injustice.

CHERIE: So I'll tell you a quick story. I recently was invited to a very lovely writer's festival, and I was paired with this incredible nonfiction writer. And I thought, "Oh, this is great! I love his work." And then he and I sat down and discussed it and we were like, "I wonder why they put us together?" I write short stories, novels. What is the connection? And then we looked at the name of the panel and — he's African American — it was called *In the Skin of the Other*. So, I ask this question: Do you feel that your work or that you, yourself, as an artist, are othered?

DREW: I've had to deal with that. Especially with coming off living on the reserve, coming here, and living in an environment where I didn't look Native. In fact, one of the first things I wrote was an essay being very, very angry about how I was perceived here

called "Pretty Like a White Boy: The Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway." Yeah, I deal with that on a regular basis. Even though I was born and raised on a reserve, I've been to 140 reserves across Canada and the United States, and I still had to validate my existence. But an interesting example, a larger example outside of me. The thing about being a Native writer, whenever there was a show or something that needed to be done, either in television or theatre, or whatever, that was, you know, "We're doing a native show, who should we get? Let's call Drew." One of the projects I'm working on right now is writing a play about John A. MacDonald... from the Native perspective.

RUKHSANA: I think Canadian multicultural literature has a kind of a noble aspect to it. They don't necessarily want a good story,

they just want something that kind of says, oh, yes, you were downtrodden and we want you to wallow in that and tell us about it, and stuff like that. And I said to my husband one time, “You know, they always expect me to write about Muslims and stuff.” And he says, “Well, what’s the big deal? Just write a good story and stick a coolie in it.” (You know, a coolie is a brown person.) So, you get put in a little box and sometimes multicultural literature or Muslim literature has to do with, like, oppressed females, genital mutilation, whatever, and I don’t want to write about that. I want to write a good story. I almost feel like I get more recognition in the States because they kind of get me more, whereas Canadians want to be polite. We’re so polite. We want our literature to be so polite and maybe Canadians don’t get what I’m trying to do, like in terms of stretching the story, the elements. I haven’t tried magical realism yet, but, you know, things like that.

CHERIE: Part of it, for me at least, is that you feel such a responsibility when you’re telling the stories from your community. And certainly there’s different layers of storytelling — those stories that come from ourselves as individuals, and then those stories that come from a place of community and tradition. So there are different levels of responsibility. But one thing that I noticed, and maybe this is reference to the fact that we’re talking about injustice, but I’m often asked to speak on issues outside of literature. So, social justice and racism and issues of diversity, and my response has always been “I’m just a writer!” Like, I don’t have a PhD, I didn’t study that. How do you feel about that? Are you comfortable addressing those issues?

RUKHSANA: Oh, definitely. I’ve always had that kind of crusader thing in me. I always wanted to go and do something good and —

DREW: Make the world a better place.

RUKHSANA: Yeah! I thought, you know what? I want my books to do something good. I actually want my books to earn — and it’s kind of selfish — I want them to earn me good rewards even when I’m in the grave.

DREW: But the interesting thing is your definition of what is a socially redeeming point, because I grew up on a reserve. So the issues that people in a dominant culture might consider social issues, were everyday. My second comedy, *The Baby Blues*, dealt with an aging powwow dancer who goes from powwow to powwow. He’s getting too old to win, but he makes just enough money to get to the next powwow. He just believes in partying, dancing, chasing women. You know, just no responsibilities, that’s what he does for the summer. And he goes to this one reserve that he hasn’t been to in a long time. He’s setting up his tent and he sees a beautiful young girl down by the river. He goes and sweet talks her, and through the conversation, both we and he discover it’s his long-lost daughter from his last trip there eighteen years ago. Don’t you hate it when that happens? And, so I’m writing about this, and to me, that’s — and I hate to say this — a slice of life. But we toured it in the States and there were a lot of people responding to it, people from Latino or black communities. In the story, they run into the mother who won’t

let him leave — she sabotages his truck — until he can come up with seventeen years’ back-child support. And all of a sudden I’ve discovered that I’ve tapped into this thing that a lot of women in the audience were reacting to. They were cheering and yelling and all this sort of stuff. I wasn’t trying to make a political point, but I was reflecting a reality I grew up in, even a personal reality.

The above conversation is excerpted from a panel discussion recorded at Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre in the fall. The event was a collaboration between the International Festival of Authors and The Writers’ Union of Canada.

Cherie Dimaline is a writer and editor from the Georgian Bay Métis community. She is the author of three books of fiction and coordinates the annual Indigenous Writers’ Gathering.

Rukhsana Khan is an award-winning author and storyteller. Born in Lahore, Pakistan, she immigrated to Canada at the age of three and has won and/or been nominated for forty-two awards around the world.

Drew Hayden Taylor is an Ojibway from the Curve Lake First Nations in Ontario and an award-winning playwright, journalist, short story writer, novelist, commentator, scriptwriter, and documentarian.

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— WAUBGESHIG RICE

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Fiction

Fat Rabbits & Wry Smiles

BY HELEN KNOTT



Journal Entry 267 268

I can only speak from what I know and what I know may not be the truth, but it is my truth. My words are grounded in the teachings from my previous life, the one with Kohkum and Moshum, but this new life is full of endless paved roads that can equal an alternate journey. Senseless chatter and changing music blaring from car stereos fill the air alongside the space that is taken up by shiny and sometimes pretty distractions. There are so many places and people to lose myself here. I try to hide myself from the teachings I know to be real, but my truth always finds me. My truth grabs a hold of my wide brown shoulders and shakes me until I am forced to recognize it. I see double, triple, multiple realities all at once. I have to navigate all of this chaos and make meaning of it.

When I hit these pivotal moments in my journey I “evolve” and can never see things quite the same. I sure as hell can try, and I do sometimes, but the truth won’t let me live there for long. When I do accept it, there are always periods of adjustment. There is a time where what was known slips away and what is new and now known, is grappled with. My continuous existential Indigenous complex likes to break a foot off in my ass every now and again. I am in that moment now. I am in the in-between.

The In-Between

I would like to think that before the word was divorced from breath and pinned down on paper life was a lot easier. You must have known when to still your tongue and when to let it bring words into this world to be heard. Words are medicine. I can hear my Kohkum’s voice telling me that whenever I was caught spitting out insults from my brown little mouth at other kids. Even when people came over to visit Kohkum and they started to gossip about Karen’s new shitty boyfriend or Danny’s drinking problem,

Kohkum wouldn’t hesitate to stop them and remind them about the power of their words. Maybe that’s why Kohkum didn’t have many real friends, because the realness of her reminded people of how lost they really were.

Nowadays we got so much of everything yet plenty of nothing in our words. We have forgotten the simple power that is in them. I do it every day when I text my sister or when I’m sending a message to a new girl I am trying to get to know, or when I am talking to a friend about a girl I am trying to forget. I am living in two worlds, the world I was raised in and the world that I am living in.

I am Jesse, the son of Josie who lost her way and took her own life, the son of Harold who runs from responsibility, maternal grandson to Josephine the gatherer of medicines and Eddie the keeper of songs. I am the maternal Great Grandson to Old Man Alec, known to most just as Old Man, who worked as a healer within the territory. I am also Jesse, the fan of old school hip hop, the hypothetical romancer of women, the lover of coffee and stories found in seedy bars, the hidden intellectual, the midnight poet and starlight philosopher. I smoke too many cigarettes and cuss too often, I am the de-romanticized Indian poet warrior in the flesh. I was told by Kohkum that little blue lights were present when I was born and that they were the ancestors coming to welcome me back into this world. I am an old soul that is grappling with my young spirit. Young me likes to put up a fight. Young me gets into literal fist fights. Young me feels the strain of fighting with what old me knows.

I reduce my language to no syllable textual replies on the daily and wonder if there’s any medicine at all in these little blips.

omg fml wtf idfwu ttyl ty nm u pls smh dtf ? luv u k imu ... these hoes aint loyal

Sometimes I wish I was raised with less knowledge. Then I can stop feeling so bad about the fact that yesterday I told Brandy from 127th Street she was “a shady bitch.” I said it right to her face. I could have just said, “Yo, why would you do something like that when you knew it would hurt me?”

Or, I could have held my tongue and said nothing at all but no, young me likes to pull on the philosopher Snoop Dogg in these moments and say, “Bitches ain’t shit but hoes and tricks.” But old me knows that it isn’t the truth, that it isn’t my truth. Jesse who chopped wood for all the elders living in a five-kilometre radius for free and braided sweet grass with his kohkum would never call Brandy from 127th a shady bitch. He would have thought it, though. Maybe. Cue the internal war fighting for the manifestation of spiritual liberation.

The Remembering

I celebrated my twenty-fifth birthday last week and when my sister Kandice brought out the cake with the candles, time slowed

down. Flashbacks streamed in as she carried the homemade cake with yellow icing towards me. The flashes came abruptly and the moments played out before me. *Flash.* Me and Kohkum in the bush. The snow up to our knees. The sound of the hard snow breaking to the will of our bodies to move forward. The fat white rabbit stuck in the snare lifeless. Kohkum's wry smile when she sees the rabbit. *Flash.* The water. I am drowning. Almost drowning. I am gasping. Panicking like I was told not to and making it harder on myself. I scream out for help with what I believe is going to be the last of the air in my lungs. I slip beneath the water line. Darkness. I feel Grandpa's big hands grab onto my little boy body and pull me upwards. Upwards towards the light. *Flash.* I am sitting down beside Kohkum picking lowbush blueberries. I hear a noise coming from the bushes in front of us and Kohkum is up before I even register that this is probably a bear. I sit paralyzed with fear. The brown head of a bear emerges from the bush and I watch in disbelief as Kohkum walks softly towards it. She speaks in Cree to the bear, who then sits down and watches Kohkum as she backs slowly away towards me. She slips her hand in mine and pulls me up and we walk away on the trail we came up the mountain on. "I told him we only took what we needed and we left some for him," she says as we continue walking. She squeezes my trembling hand.

I blew out the candles after Kandice shook my shoulder. I'm all too used to intrusions like that and Kandice is used to snapping my zoned out ass back to reality.

Kohkum and Grandpa may have been gone for over five years now but they never let themselves be forgotten. Kohkum told me once, as we sat out back by a crackling fire, that I was going to do some kind of healing work. Her voice paused after she said that, and the silence hung long and heavy as we stared up at the stars. "I just don't know what kind yet, but I know you will be responsible for bringing some kind of good medicine into this world, my boy," she said with the same wry smile she had when she found a rabbit in her snare. I nodded. I was seventeen at the time and had no idea how I could ever become whatever she saw that night.

Journal Entry 325

I should write here more often, but there is so much going on in the world out there. The homie Mike took me to his community last week and we went to a sweat lodge. It felt SO good to be able to cleanse and pray like that. I emerged from the lodge a sweaty, born-again, handsome Indian man ready for the path ahead. I spoke with Mike's uncle Johnny for a while after and he said I am welcome to come back whenever I want. Finally, a sweat close to home.

On a different note, the piece I submitted to this anthology call out got accepted. I am finally growing my literary legs and going somewhere with it. Kohkum always said that people's gifts are revealed to them when they are ready, and sometimes this takes a lot of hard work. Well, shit, I've been putting the work in, man. I've given young me a lickin' and have really settled down and started working through some of the baggage that I've been dragging everywhere with me. I rifled through memory upon memory, thumbing over faded mental photographs so I can let them go. One of the harder memories to release was when I found my mom beat up and passed out amongst the empty beer bottles on the kitchen floor and Harold and his rusted war party pony gone from the driveway. I let all of that shit go. I laid tobacco. I said prayers. I wrote letters. I cried out like a lonely coyote on the prairie. I am finding my way.

Journal Entry 534

Holah. I had a kick-ass time last night celebrating my first book. Me. Jesse. Jesse who grew up donning a jean jacket and eating fried potatoes and moose meat. Jesse with street dreams, with a mind full of big things. Jesse the almost suave and only partially debonair cleans up pretty damn good! I even wore a suit and mingled with the literary crowds like I had always been a fixture in their bougie uppity-class world. Life is good.

Before I went I made sure to offer some tobacco and give thanks for the words that were given to me. I did a good smudge down and said some prayers. Grandpa used to say that songs travel the world waiting for someone to be ready and willing to hear them and hold them. I believe it is a lot like that for writing stories and sharing words. They come to you when you are ready.

After I finished the reading I was approached by a woman who was a few years older than me, and I did not expect what happened next. Her almond shaped eyes held a little sadness in them but captured the light at the same time as she spoke with me. She told me that what I had read that night, a passage relating to healing from the absence of my father, Harold the wanderer, had touched a part of a pain that she had been dancing with since she was eleven years old. Eleven years old. I watched as a tear escaped the corner of her eye and when she finished sharing some of her story, she embraced me. I held her in my arms until she was ready to let go then wandered outside to the street curb to light a smoke.

I looked up at the few stars that I could see and smiled that same wry smile that I had seen on Kohkum's face so long ago.

I am here now and words are my medicine.

Helen Knott is of Dane Zaa, Nehiyaw, and mixed Euro descent from Prophet River First Nation, living in Northeastern British Columbia.

Poetry

On Receiving a Government Letter Rejecting Our Indian Status



BY SHANNON WEBB-CAMPBELL

Father calls, says they are revoking us.
His voice gravel thick, we were Indians once,
now we're unrecognized

a deadweight of shame returns,
while thousands of papers soar
through Grandfather sky, only to land
like scalps on doorsteps of would-be Qalipu

my ancestors are on trial,
we no longer live in No'Kmaq village
mark Smallwood's infamous words,
there are no Indians on the island of Ktaqamkuk
despite 100,000 applicants

denial repeats to eradicate Mi'kmaq existence
one too many anglicized names, webs of displaced identity
Grandmother moon mutes
another loss of kin, and spirit

God damn Jackatars,
government commands colonial amnesia
you beadwork in the suburbs,
Google Mi'kmaq translations,
only learned to bang your drum far from home

Ottawa notes: I'm not Indian enough
still landless, no claim, no bones to hone
Father says, it was good for a while,
but what about the next seven generations

I tell him, L'nu Neuptjeg (I'm Mi'kmaq forever).

Shannon Webb-Campbell is a Mi'kmaq poet, writer, and critic. Her poetry collection, Still No Word (Breakwater Books, 2015), received Eagle Canada's inaugural Out In Print Award.

To the High Steel Mohawk Worker



BY GLORIA MEHLMANN

the eagle's wings are clipped,
the moon 'explained,'
rivers have demanded dams
and mountains excavation...
far be it from us to complain
except in this:
losing our old symbols, we must beg another —
render our dismay inviolate that you,
yes, you beam-walking man
atop skyscrapers of New York,
poised between life and death, sure-footed,
should suffice
beyond the street-bound grasp of inward sight.
a cut-out silhouette against the light bends
to foreign permanence
that lends to us
the fiercest passion of winged Icarus

Gloria Mehlmann is working on a book of short stories about life on Cowessess First Nation Reserve, her childhood home in Saskatchewan. Her first book, Gifted to Learn, published by the University of Alberta Press (2008), illustrates how societal issues influenced teaching in the Regina Public School System.

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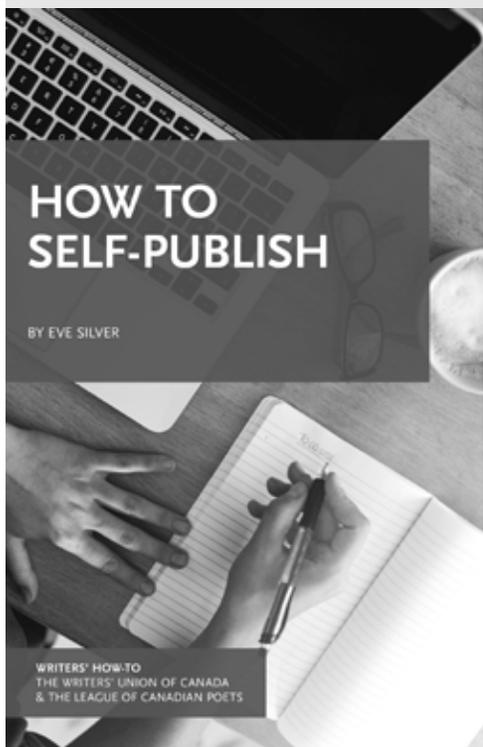
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Member News & Awards

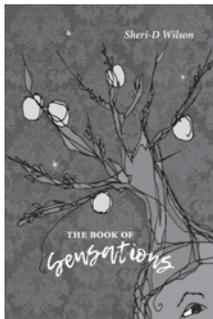
Announcements

Member **Ruby Remenda Swanson**'s first book, *A Family Outing*, published by Cormorant Books, is a story about how her life changed after her sixteen-year-old son told her he was gay. Despite her initial reaction of shock and denial, she became a public advocate for the LGBT community.

Regina member **Anne Campbell** announces publication of two new books: her sixth collection of poetry, *The Fabric of Day, New and Selected poems* (Thistledown Press), a book about a prairie persona grounded in the wonder of the salient prairie land, and *Biblio Files, a History of the Regina Public Library*, her second co-edited book with the University of Regina Press. The book tells the stories of one of Canada's leading city libraries from its beginnings, through '60s community activism, a film theatre, and one of Canada's first language-literacy programs.

Member **Jennifer Cook** has had a library named after her in Donghol Touma, Guinea Conakry, West Africa. The library was named La Bibliotheque Communale Jennifer Baniczky Cook in recognition of Cook's efforts to assist in the building and opening of the library, the first institution of its kind in the town. Cook is accepting donations of French language books for the institution.

Ottawa journalist and author **Barbara Sibbald** announces a new collection of short fiction, *The Museum of Possibilities* (The Porcupine's Quill). Its sixteen narratives focus on pivotal moments of intense longing for love, power, fame, freedom, revenge, and, most importantly, connection in an increasingly disaffected world.



Calgary member **Sheri-D Wilson** announces the publication of *The Book of Sensations* (University of Calgary Press), a book that explores an intricate ecosystem of language and feeling with fine-tuned vocabulary, far-reaching observation, and a surrealist eye. Sheri-D delves into the personal and the universal, the everyday and the mythical.

Calgary member **Emily Ursuliak** has released her first collection of poetry, *Throwing the Diamond Hitch* (University of Calgary Press). In 1951, two intrepid women, Phyllis and her best friend, Anne, set off on a road trip from Victoria to Red Deer. They travelled there by 1927 MG Roadster and returned on horseback. They documented their

adventures in a journal, which was passed down to author Emily Ursuliak, Phyl's granddaughter. *Throwing the Diamond Hitch* is an inventive, poetic retelling of their journey.

Member **Amanda Hale** will be attending Las Romerías de Mayo, an international cultural festival in Holguín, Cuba. Canada is guest of honor at the festival, as it was at the February Havana Book Fair. Hale is invited to speak about Canadian literature and to promote the Spanish translation of her novel, *Sondeando la Sangre*.

Saskatchewan member **Byrna Barclay** announces the publication of two new titles from Burton House Books: *Line Dance*, an anthology of poetry edited by member **Gerald Hill**, and *BEETHOVEN* by member **Jim McLean**.

Awards

Jan Thornhill has been nominated for the Cleaver Award honouring 2016's best picture-book illustrations for her work in *The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk* (Groundwood).

Members have been included on the Saskatchewan Book Awards 2017 shortlist. The Regina Public Library Book of the Year Award nominees include *The High Mountains of Portugal* (Penguin Random House) by **Yann Martel**. The Muslims for Peace and Justice Fiction Award also has Martel on the shortlist as well as member **Gail Bowen** for *What's Left Behind* (McClelland & Stewart). Listed for the Rasmussen, Rasmussen & Charowsky Indigenous Peoples' Writing Award are **Trevor Herriot** for *Towards a Prairie Atonement* (University of Regina Press) and **Louise Bernice Halfe** for *Burning in this Midnight Dream* (Coteau Books). Halfe's book is also nominated for the Saskatchewan Arts Poetry Board Award as is member **Sylvia Legris**'s *The Hideous Hidden* (New Directions). In the Young Adult Literature Awards, nominees include two members, **Judith Silverthorne** for *Convictions* (Coteau Books) and **Arthur Slade** for *Flickers* (HarperCollins). Both **Louise Bernice Halfe**'s *Burning in this Midnight Dream* and **Yann Martel**'s *The High Mountains of Portugal* are nominated for the City of Saskatoon and Public Library Saskatoon Book Award. Finally, two members are nominated for the City of Regina Book Award: **Blair Stonehild** for *The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality* (University of Regina Press) and **Trevor Herriot** for *Towards a Prairie Atonement* (University of Regina Press).

Canadian authors and TWUC members **Ivan E. Coyote** and **Robin Stevenson** have been recognized with 2017 American

Library Association Stonewall Awards, administered annually for exceptional English-language books with LGBT characters or themes.

Four members appear on this year's USBBY Outstanding International Books list, an annual list that aims to reflect the best in children's literature from around the world for readers from preschool to age twelve. Members are **Nadia L. Hohn** for *Malaika's Costume* (Groundwood Books), **Jo Ellen Bogart** for *The White Cat and the Monk* (Groundwood), **Amanda West Lewis** for *The Pact* (Red Deer Press) and **Robin Stevenson** for *Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community* (Orca Book Publishers).

There were lots of TWUC members on the 2016 ReLit Awards shortlist. In the novel category, **Carellin Brooks** was the winner for her *One Hundred Days of Rain* (BookThug). Other nominated members were **Danila Botha** for *Too Much on the Inside* (Quattro), **Anakana Schofield** for *Martin John* (Biblioasis) and **Pauline Holdstock** for *The Hunter and the Wild Girl* (Goose Lane). In the poetry category, **Harry Thurston** was on the list for *Keeping Watch at the End of the World* (Gaspereau). And in the short fiction category members nominated included **Jess Taylor** for *Pauls* (BookThug), **Rhonda Douglas** for *Welcome to the Circus* (Freehand), **Donna Besel** for *Lessons from a Nude Man* (Hagios), **Lana Pesch** for *Moving Parts* (Arsenal Pulp), **Mark Anthony Jarman** for *Knife Party at the Hotel Europa* (Goose Lane), and **Richard Van Camp** for *Night Moves* (Enfield & Wizenty).

Member **Margaret Atwood** has been recognized by the U.S. National Book Critics Circle with a lifetime achievement award.

Atwood and member **Heather O'Neill** were longlisted for the 2017 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction.

Up for the Writers' Trust Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing are members **Jamie Swift** for *The Vimy Trap: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War* (Between the Lines) and **Noah Richler** for *The Candidate: Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* (Doubleday Canada).

The shortlisted finalists for the Manitoba Book Awards have been announced. **Allan Levine** is nominated for the Carol Shields Winnipeg Book Award for *The Bootlegger's Confession: A Sam Klein Mystery* (Ravenstone). **David Bergen** is nominated for the Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction for *Stranger* (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.). **Hal Niedzviecki** has been nominated for the Mary Scorer Award for Best Book by a Manitoba Publisher for *The Archaeologists* (ARP Books).

The B.C. Book Prize shortlist includes members in a number of categories. In the Hubert Evans Nonfiction Prize category, **Deborah Campbell** is nominated for *A Disappearance in Damascus: A Story of Friendship and Survival in the Shadow of War* (Knopf Canada) and **Carol Shaben** is nominated for her work as co-author with Mohamed Fahmy of *The Marriott Cell: An Epic Journey from Cairo's Scorpion Prison to Freedom* (Random House). In the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize category, nominees include **Joan Haggerty** for *The Dancehall Years* (Mother Tongue Publishing), **Jen Sookfong Lee** for *The Conjoined* (ECW Press), **Ashley Little** for *Niagara Motel* (Arsenal Pulp Press), **Jennifer Manuel** for *The Heaviness of Things That Float* (Douglas & McIntyre), **Joy Kogawa** for *Gently to Nagasaki* (Caitlin Press), and **Mark Leiren-Young** for *The Killer Whale Who Changed the World* (Greystone Books). **Anne Fleming's poemw** (Pedlar Press) is shortlisted for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize and **Michael Layland's A Perfect Eden: Encounters by Early Explorers of Vancouver Island (TouchWood Editions) is up for the Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize and the Bill Duthie Booksellers' Choice Award. In the Sheila A. Egoff Children's Literature Prize category member nominees are **Kathleen Cherry** for *Everyday Hero* (Orca Book Publishers), **Kit Pearson** for *A Day of Signs and Wonders* (HarperCollins), and **Robin Stevenson** for *Pride: Celebrating Diversity & Community* (Orca). In the Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize category, **Margriet Ruurs** is nominated for *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* (Orca) and **Nikki Tate** for *Deep Roots: How Trees Sustain Our Planet* (Orca).**

Finalists for the Lambda Literary Awards include members **Lynda A. Archer** in the Lesbian Fiction category for *Tears in the Grass* (Dundurn); **David Homel** (trans.) in the LGBTQ Graphic Novels category for *The Case of Alan Turing: The Extraordinary and Tragic Story of the Legendary Codebreaker* (Arsenal Pulp Press); **M.E. Girard** in the LGBTQ Children's/Young Adult category for *Girl Mans Up* (Harper Teen Canada); and **ja qing wilson-yang** in the Transgender Fiction category for *Small Beauty* (Metonymy Press).

Classifieds

TROPICAL RETREAT

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New Members

Dave Atkinson, *Cure for Wereduck*, Nimbus Publishing, 2016

Quentin Casey, *Joshua Slocum: The Captain Who Sailed Around the World*, Nimbus, 2014

Marty Chan, *The Ehrich Weisz Chronicles: Infinity Coil*, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2015

Julie Cameron Gray, *Lady Crawford*, Palimpsest Press, 2016

Mike Deas, *Dalen and Gole: Scandal in Port Angus*, Orca Book Publishers, 2011

Barb Drozdowich, *The Author's Platform: A Beginner's Guide*, Booktrope Editions, 2015

Dan Paxton Dunaway, *Heart Like a Wing*, Ronsdale Press, 2016

Leanne Dunic, *To Love the Coming End*, BookThug, 2017

Deborah Gorham, *Marion Dewar: A Life of Action*, Second Story Press, 2016

Heather Ann Hollis, *Teaching with Humor, Compassion and Conviction*, Pembroke Publishers, 2016

Martin Hunter, *Bright Particular Stars: Canadian Performers*, Mosaic Press, 2016

Etta Kaner, *Friend or Foe: The Whole Truth About Animals that*

People Love to Hate, Owlkids Books, 2015

Roberta Laurie, *Weaving a Malawi Sunrise*, University of Alberta Press, 2015

Lisa J. Lawrence, *Rodent*, Orca Book Publishers, 2016

Anita Miettunen, *Big Blue Forever*, Red Deer Press, 2017

Leanne L. Myggland-Carter, *Choices*, Rubicon Press, 2015

Steve Paikin, *Bill Davis: Nation Builder, and Not So Bland After All*, Dundurn Press, 2016

Gail Picco, *Cap in Hand: How Charities Are Failing the People of Canada and the World*, Civil Sector Press, 2017

Mariam Pirbhai, Ph.D., *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture: Novels of the South Asian Diaspora in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific*, University of Toronto Press, 2009

Barbara Radecki, *The Darkhouse*, Dancing Cat Books, 2016

Rick Revelle, *Algonquin Sunset*, Dundurn, 2017

Laura Scandiffo, *Fight to Learn: The Struggle to Go to School*, Annick Press, 2016

Anna Marie Sewell, *Fifth World Drum*, Frontenac House, 2009

Emil Sher, *Mittens to Share*, Scholastic Canada, 2016

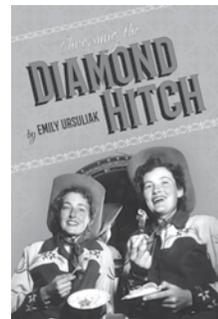
Joan Sutton, *All Men Are Not Alike*, McClelland & Stewart, 2016

Ruby Remenda Swanson, *Family Outing*, Cormorant Books Inc., 2016

Blair Trewartha, *Easy Fix*, Palimpsest Press, 2014

Dot Tuer, *Mining the Media Archive*, YYZ Books, 2005

Emily Ursuliak, *Throwing the Diamond Hitch*, University of Calgary Press, 2017



Richard Van Camp, *We Sang You Home*, Orca Books, 2016

Margo Wheaton, *The Unlit Path Behind the House*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016

Steve Wight, *Perdition Granted*, Tellwell, 2016

T.E. Wilson, *Mezcalero*, Montezuma Books, 2015

jia qing wilson-yang, *Small Beauty*, Metonymy Press, 2016

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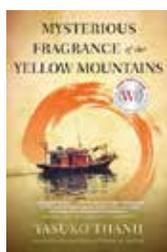
Kaie Kellough
Accordéon



Katherena Vermette
The Break



Catherine Cooper
White Elephant



Yasuko Thanh
*Mysterious Fragrance
of the Yellow Mountains*



Rebecca Rosenblum
So Much Love

Winner announcement: May 25 at the Four Seasons hotel in Toronto

Learn more about this year's shortlist and past winners at
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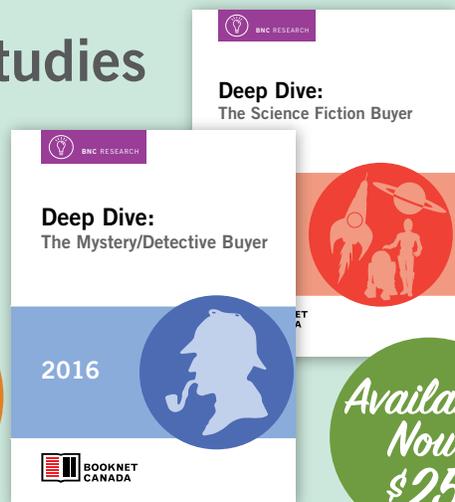
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