



**WRITE**

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**THE WRITERS'  
UNION OF  
CANADA**

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Sell Books  
**16**

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**REVENGE OF THE  
INDIE BOOKSTORE**

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# Writing Rights

## The Crucial Months Ahead

By John Degen



In the flurry of testimony and public debate just before passage of the *Copyright Modernization Act* in 2012, very little attention was paid to the government's reiterated assurances that if unintended consequences resulted from any of the proposed changes to the *Copyright Act*, those changes would be the subject of serious review five years on. That was more than just a promise from the government of the day — it was written into the legislation. By law, our new government must review the previous government's legislation in 2017. That's the good news.

The bad news is that, just like the word "education" added to the fair dealing provision in the Act — and indeed just like the term "fair dealing" itself — the word "review" was never clearly defined, leaving it open to broad interpretation, and even misinterpretation. The stipulation for a five-year review of the legislation did not go into great detail about just what such a review might look like. Are we looking at lengthy public hearings by a Parliamentary Standing Committee or the Senate (or both) and an exhaustive review of evidence showing whether or not there were indeed unintended negative consequences from the change in the law? Or should we anticipate a quick look-see at the current landscape and a rubber-stamp reading "DONE" on the copyright review?

It's easy to guess what the education lobby would prefer. The less scrutiny on fair dealing the better for those folks, considering how much leeway for free copying they have given themselves with their unilaterally declared Fair Dealing Guidelines. *Copyright review? Nothing to see here, folks. Keep on moving.*

I use the term "lobby" advisedly, because we are not up against teachers and students in this fight, and that's very important to keep in mind. We are up against the highly paid professional representatives of school boards, provincial ministries of education, and post-secondary institutions. When you send me to Ottawa to speak for Canadian authors, you're sending a Canadian author who happens to be a registered lobbyist. When education sends their people, they send professional lobbyists who happen to be lawyers. In my experience of Ottawa hearing rooms, there have been precious few actual educators present. Why not?

I personally don't believe there are very many frontline teachers, professors, or library workers who would go to the barricades to defend their institutions' practice of not obtaining a licence for the vast amount of copying that is done by our K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions — copying that amounts to hundreds of millions of pages or millions of books per year. In fact, almost all of the educators with whom I've spoken are very uncomfortable with this ongoing dispute. They recognize and value the longstanding partnership between professional creativity

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## To date, the Focus on Creators letter has over 2400 signatures — an unprecedented coalition of Canadian artists communicating directly with our government.

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and their own work, and they don't want to end up in court. What's more, none of them are experts on copyright. So they look to their schools to define the parameters for them.

What that leads to is widespread misinterpretation and misunderstanding — teachers who truly believe schools have been given broad permission for industrial-scale copying for course-pack creation. In my public debates about this issue, I have run up against the belief that the mere fact of a school library having one copy of a book on its shelves justifies as many copies of as much of that book as is requested. Imagine the surprise of university professors brought to court for overreaching on fair dealing. Hadn't their school told them they could copy as much as they did?

Thanks to everyone who signed onto the Focus on Creators ([focusoncreators.ca](http://focusoncreators.ca)) letter to Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly. To date, the letter has over 2400 signatures — an unprecedented coalition of Canadian artists communicating directly with our government. You can bet we will be leaning on this coalition in the crucial months ahead, encouraging as comprehensive a review of Canadian copyright as we can get.

The parliamentary record shows the entire Liberal and NDP caucuses voted against final passage of the *Copyright Modernization Act* back in 2012, which suggests that a clear majority of the current Parliament agrees something is wrong with that piece of legislation. The evidence we and Access Copyright have gathered provides the authoritative proof of its wrongness. Stay tuned.

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# Writer's Blot

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WRITER'S PROMPT /

## A Guide to Braving the Book Club

BY RUTH E. WALKER

*My novel Living Underground is not a bestseller, nor has it won prizes. But I did manage to get invitations to more than twenty book clubs across southern Ontario, as well as forays to Michigan and Virginia.*

Here's how I did it, and what I learned from sitting in a room while a group of strangers dissected my plot, questioned my characters' motivations, and asked questions about themes I didn't even know I had in there. In short, it is mildly terrifying. But it is absolutely worth the nerves. So here's a short guide to book club success.

### HOW TO GET INVITED

- Create a book club page and a downloadable readers' guide. Emphasize elements that make your book a good book club choice such as a historical setting or the way the narrative poses questions to generate discussion.
- Add "available for library and book club programs" to your business card.
- Tell everyone in your circle of family, friends, and colleagues that you'd happily visit book clubs.
- Promote visits on social media with photos, blog posts, tweets, and so on.
- At every book signing, media interview, reading event, writing workshop, and conference, slip "book club" into the conversation.
- Eavesdrop and speak up whenever anyone says "...at my book club..."

### BEFORE YOU GO

- Find out what the format is and what they expect of you.
- Ask if a member will lead the evening or if it is more free-flowing.
- Ask what time you are expected and how long you will stay. (You may want to set a time limit.)
- Let them know if any topic is out of bounds. (Sometimes things can get very personal.)

### WHILE YOU'RE THERE:

- Be the guest author, not the wannabe member. Avoid the social drinks and go easy on the nibbles.
- Dress professionally. (Your sweatshirt is great for writing marathons and gardening.)
- Start the session by letting the members know: I'm a writer and I'm used to critiques and rejection so you can't hurt my feelings even if you don't like anything about my book.
- Be open to what the bookclub has to say. Reading is an individual experience and not everyone will love your book. Get ready to respond with: *Thank you for letting me know; That wasn't what I had in mind, but I appreciate hearing your response to it; I appreciate your honesty.*

The benefits of connecting with readers through book clubs are not necessarily financial. (You may get an honorarium or sell some books to the members, but then again they may all take your books out of the library.) Think of the book club as an opportunity to share in an emotional response to your book. Listen for what clicked with readers and where they might have struggled with certain scenes or characters. A great book club meeting can give you insights into your creative process even while validating this strange and wonderful thing that we do.

*Ruth E. Walker writes and facilitates workshops and retreats in Oshawa, Ont.*

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COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE



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**SAT**  
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Canadian Authors for Indies 2017 is under way!

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NEW VOICES /

# The Terrorist, the Security Guard, and the Emergence of a New Voice

BY MAYANK BHATT

*The ancient Greeks told us that those whom gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. That may have been true in the ancient times. These days, the gods turn them into novelists.*

Writing a novel for the first time is guaranteed to drive anyone crazy. It was plain stupidity that made me embark upon this misadventure. It all began during the graveyard shifts at a condo in Toronto where I began working as a security guard soon after I immigrated to Canada in 2008. As a security guard, you mostly sit around and do nothing. But doing nothing for prolonged periods of time is boring. I decided to write a short story.

The idea for the story came from my apartment building at Keele and Lawrence, known colloquially as Gujarat Bhawan (Gujarat is a province in India and Bhawan means a building) amongst the South Asian immigrants of the area. They were like me — qualified, experienced, and doing survival jobs. It was entirely conceivable that the absence of tangible success could easily lead them to getting embroiled in unsavoury misadventures.

I began to explore the theme of immigration and linked it to terrorism. My purpose was not to get into a polemical argument. I was keen to explore terrorism's impact on an immigrant family. Young people make mistakes and sometimes these mistakes drastically alter their lives and the lives of their families. I wanted to understand how a family would cope (or not cope) with a son involved in a terror plot.

I began to write sometime in December 2008 — my first winter in Canada. I showed the story to a resident, who suggested I enter it in a short story competition. That's when I came across *Diaspora Dialogues'* short fiction mentoring program. *Diaspora Dialogues'* promotes diversity in fiction, poetry, and drama.

Surprisingly, I was selected and M.G. Vassanji, one of the finest contemporary novelists in the world, became my mentor. I had the privilege of working with him for three months and the short story was published in *Diaspora Dialogues' TOK 5: Writing the New Toronto* in 2010.

I should have stopped here and gone back to living my life.

But no, I decided that my story was good enough to be turned into a novel. I enrolled in the writing program at Humber School for Writers. Days turned into months and then into years, and I struggled with my manuscript. Whoever claims that writing is fun

is a congenital liar. A former good friend advised me to abandon the idea of completing the novel. I almost abandoned him, but continued to work on my manuscript.

Finally, when I could do nothing more to the manuscript, I began to look for agents because I was told that agents could get better deals. I wrote to an agent and she promptly asked me to send the manuscript. I did so and didn't hear back from her, ever. Then I wrote to another agent. She responded within a day. No, she said, we're not interested. I gamely struggled for a few more months, and then gave up. The manuscript languished for a couple of years.

Eventually, a friend suggested I send the manuscript to Mawenzi House. I was reluctant considering M.G. Vassanji had mentored me and Nurjehan Aziz, the publisher of Mawenzi House, is Vassanji's wife. The friend assured me that the publishing house would take a professional decision. With some trepidation, I sent my manuscript.

It was accepted.

A process that had started soon after I landed in Canada came to fruition in September 2016 when the novel was finally published. It looked stunning. The cover image is a self-portrait by Charles Pachter, the renowned Canadian artist. Many of my friends, members of my family, and total strangers have helped me in writing this novel, some by evaluating the manuscript critically, others by providing me with the right passage from the Qur'an, and still others by providing legal background.

As I was busy informing my friends and acquaintances of my novel, I heard back from Antanas Sileika of the Humber School for Writers. He said he had read a review in *Quill & Quire*. I rushed to the nearest bookshop to buy the magazine. It was a brief but good review. I'm not sure how well or badly the book will do, but its publication and a good review are more than I ever imagined for it.

In mid-November, I read from the published book at the condo where I worked as a security guard, and where I first began writing the novel. It was one of the most exhilarating moments of my life. That Sunday afternoon, many residents who had helped a security guard and his family settle in Canada were eagerly listening to an author talk about his experiences. This was overwhelming, and every bit worth the effort.

*Mayank Bhatt immigrated to Toronto with his wife and son from Bombay in 2008. His novel, Belief, was published by Mawenzi House Publishers in September 2016. He is an administration and marketing coordinator at Simmons da Silva LLP, a law firm in Brampton.*





# What a Bookseller/Writer Has Learned About “Being an Author”

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BY DINA DEL BUCCHIA

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I started working in a bookstore the day after my last undergraduate exam in 2002. The parchment confirming my double major in English and Creative Writing would soon be burning a hole in my closet like the duo-degree (and an MFA later on) would scorch dry my wallet for years to come.

**T**his was the beginning of me paying off my life choices: a job, the thing I had to do to get by. The thing I still have to do to pay rent and feed myself and buy new dresses to make myself feel better about all the larger material things I'll never have. Writers have “real” jobs. As if inserting fart jokes into poetry isn't already exhausting work.

That first job was at our country's largest national chain. The location I worked at is now closed and the space houses a behemoth SportChek. I quit years before that and spent time at

a series of independents, including beloved Duthie Books. Now I work at a university bookstore. It's different and the same. Primarily I work in the trade section. I see the books that sell and I know what's on bestseller lists. I see things I won't write: super-hot thrillers and dystopian young adult money-printing franchises and hot takes on financial management and colouring books. I see that the dominant force in publishing is still male and white and straight, and that's reflected on the shelves.

So, as a bookseller, you can make a choice to showcase the work of writers who don't play into that boring, old trap. One advantage

is that I also see all the other books that come in. The ones not featured in mainstream media, not on bestseller lists. A good bookseller will recommend the books they love, interesting books, whether they've been praised in *The New York Times* or not.

Being a bookseller hasn't affected my approach to writing as much as it's affected my approach to being a writer. In that first year, I remember a writer approached me as I loaded display shelves on the main floor. With a goofy small-town retail smile plastered to my face I asked if I could help him. I could. By explaining why there were no Canadian authors on the display I was company-mandated to create. I was young, intimidated, wanted to not have this conversation. And then I looked at the display and said, here is one, here is one, here is one. But the yelling and berating continued. I will never forget how terrible it felt to be the person on the bottom of multiple food chains, to be shamed by an author, someone in the career I aspired to.

There have been other instances, too. The writer who would ignore their children while they browsed and let them destroy the kids section. The writer who insisted on repeatedly using the store P.A. system to yell at customers to come to their meet and greet. The many writers who aggressively insisted their books deserved to be featured on the front counter. The writers who commented on my outfits, either negatively or perversely. The big-name writer who had a rider that consisted of the poshest pens, which were then pocketed at the end of the event by the author's personal assistant. I told myself, If I'm lucky enough to be published I will not behave like a cranky toddler.

I remember feeling so low every time local authors would come into Duthie and a co-worker would tell them I was a writer. A bookless writer. An MFA student. A scare quotes "writer" not to be taken seriously. Their responses ranged widely: from wanting to immediately vacate the store to supportive. The latter is how I respond to any writer who tells me they are a writer. I don't need to read and offer detailed notes on their five-part epic Bigfoot saga (if anyone has one, though, I'm into it). I don't need to be a dismissive jerk either. I believe them. I support them.

*Dina Del Bucchia is the author of three collections of poetry, an editor of Poetry Is Dead magazine, and the artistic director of the Real Vancouver Writers' Series.*

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