



WRITE

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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 Development &

Fund Researcher

Nancy MacLeod, ext. 226

nmacleod@writersunion.ca

Communications Coordinator

Gaeby Abrahams, ext. 223

gabraahams@writersunion.ca

Pacific Coordinator

Raquel Alvaro

ralvaro@writersunion.ca

Editor Hal Niedzviecki write@writersunion.ca

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Editorial Board Wayne Grady, Andrew J. Borkowski, John Degen, Kelly-Anne Riess, Allan Weiss

Editorial Liaisons Leslie Shimotakahara, Corey Redekop

Copy Editor Nancy MacLeod

Write Magazine Advertising Gaeby Abrahams ads@writersunion.ca

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We acknowledge the support of the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Government of Ontario, which last year funded 1681 individual artists in 216 communities across Ontario for a total of \$52.8 million.



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

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Writer's Blot



WRITER'S PROMPT /

Five Rules for Creating Disabled Characters

BY ADAM POTTLE

How do you create strong disabled characters?

The question goads me. Where disability's concerned, there's so much banal, shitty writing out there. Countless authors have resorted to clichés and stereotypes when creating disabled characters, and as a disabled person myself — I have a hearing impairment in both ears — such writing frustrates and even angers me. Whenever I come across a Tiny Tim- or Quasimodo-type character — that is, a pitiful or depressingly tragic figure — I tend to throw the book across the room. There are too many books out there for me to waste my time on lazy writing.

So, to prevent any more of these clichéd characters from coming to life, I've come up with five rules for creating disabled characters (Elmore Leonard, eat your heart out). These rules grew out of both my reading and my desire to explore disability as a narrative subject. Writers looking to diversify their characters will find these rules useful.

1. Choose different disabilities, not old standards. I can name several stories off the top of my head that feature characters with Alzheimer's. There are other ways people lose their memories! Choose something different and interesting, not what's convenient.
2. Use your research well. It's not enough to research disability; you have to find an effective way to incorporate the information into your narrative. When I was reading about Charcot-Marie-Tooth

disease for my novel *Mantis Dreams*, I saw pictures of CMT patients' feet. They looked a little like claws because of dramatically raised arches. That image of claw-like feet informed the way I constructed Dexter Ripley's character and led to the novel's most prominent motif.

3. Explore what could be positive about your character's disability. Many people assume that having a disability is a tragedy...probably because writers keep depicting it that way. It's not a tragedy. Read Frances Itani's *Deafening* or Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*. They show just how dynamic disability can be.
4. Don't give a character a disability simply because it's convenient for the plot. Rohinton Mistry is a particularly consistent sinner in this regard in my opinion. His fiction's stuffed with characters whose disabilities serve only to underscore their tragic circumstances. The narrative must fit the disability, not the other way around.
5. Make your character more than a disability. This is probably the most important rule because it brings together the first four. Disabled people are often thought of as objects rather than human beings, and writers tend to perpetuate such thinking. Never forget that disabled people have desires and ambitions and frustrations and loves and joys the way any other person does.

One last thing: vibrant and engaging depictions of disability separate good writers from shitty writers. That's because good writers extend their empathy and imagination to all corners of humanity, not just the people who are like them. Many of our best writers, from Timothy Findley to Ann-Marie MacDonald, have provided us with nuanced portrayals of disability. They do their homework. They recognize that disabled people are just as beautifully fucked up as the rest of us. They're the ones worth reading.

Adam Pottle's first novel, Mantis Dreams: The Journal of Dr. Dexter Ripley, won the 2014 Saskatoon Book Award. His first play, Ultrasound, will premiere at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto in Spring 2016. He lives in Saskatoon.

Dispatches

NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

PUBLISHING /

Lessons in Self-Publishing: Legitimacy, Being Cool, and Getting Read

BY VIVEK SHRAYA



Twelve years ago, soon after recording my first album, THROAT, I became obsessed with getting a record deal. This obsession lasted for most of my twenties, largely because I understood that the music industry was a lot like high school, with a clear line dividing the cool kids and the namelessly unpopular.

I had spent my teenage years painfully on the wrong side of that line and I wasn't going to allow that to happen again. It took releasing four independent records over six years, but I did finally get signed — to a boutique label in Paris. How's that for cool?

It took less than two years for me to walk away from my label. It turned out that being signed meant my demos were repeatedly shelved because I wasn't producing music the label wanted, music exactly like my previous record. It meant being told to take down specific photos from my website because I didn't look "masculine" enough. It meant the bulk of the money I had made from my nominal advance went to my lawyer to secure my freedom once more — I paid thousands of dollars to be independent again. It also meant feeling genuinely brokenhearted and foolish for chasing a dream that ultimately didn't validate my music or advance my career.

During this time, out of frustration and desperation to still be creative, I turned to writing what would become my first collection

of short stories, *God Loves Hair*. As the book neared completion, conversations I had with author friends about self-publishing sounded eerily similar to the music world. I was told that self-published books were considered "vanity projects." I could see the dividing line again, but this time I wasn't going to be swayed. I decided to apply the same model I had used for eight years as an independent musician and invest in my story myself. I self-published *God Loves Hair* in 2010. Here are the highlights of what I learned from self-publishing:

HIRE PROFESSIONALS

People do judge a book by its cover. Readers want to buy books that look and feel good. Invest in your writing and your book by paying a designer to create a great cover. Also, invest in a designer to design your book so that it stands proudly next to published books. Don't try to save money by not hiring a designer. It doesn't matter how good you think your Photoshop or InDesign skills are. You can employ those skills for your event posters and other promotional material.

BE PREPARED TO BE REJECTED

Many local bookstores didn't want to stock my book because it was self-published — though some of those stores changed their minds when they saw the book in person because it presented well (see above point). Large media outlets wouldn't review it. There are many grants and awards that won't consider self-published books (and now that the book has been "published" in a new edition by

an official publisher, some of those same awards and grants still won't consider the book because it is considered a "reprint").

THINK AND ACT LIKE A PUBLISHER

If you self-publish, you need to see yourself not just as the writer, but also as the publisher. You are your own PR. No one is going to promote your work if you don't. Tweet, Facebook, Instagram. Talk about your book. I remember feeling like there was nothing more obnoxious than saying, "I'm working on a book." But when I had conversations with others about my work, they connected me — to other writers/artists, book event organizers, and readers.

BE CREATIVE

In the absence of interest and acceptance from mainstream institutions (publishers, retailers, and press), I was constantly brainstorming different ways to promote my book. The book had illustrations, so I contacted Tumblrs that featured illustrations. Because of the book's queer content, I contacted various LGBTQ blogs and organizations, including a then-new duo called Everyone Is Gay who give advice to LGBTQ youth. They didn't review the book, but they generously tweeted about it and last fall, four years later, we went on a twenty-one-city book tour together.

USE YOUR CONTACTS

I have built my career largely upon my mother's wisdom: *It never hurts to ask*. It was because I asked award-winning Toronto writer Farzana Doctor about how she kept the momentum for her book in the second year after its release that we ended up subsequently touring the U.S. together.

SAY YES

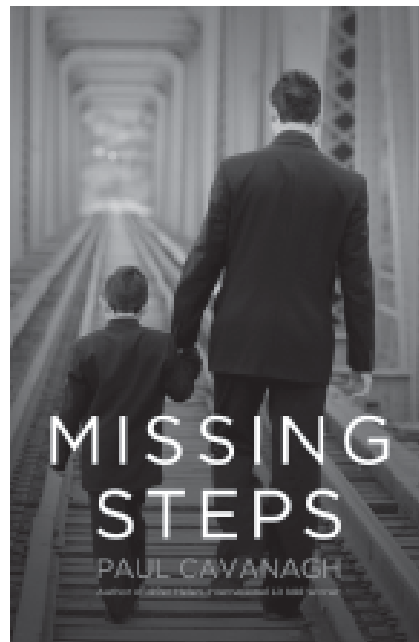
In the year my book launched, I did almost three dozen book readings. I said yes to every invitation to read. Reading to a room full of strangers is incredibly vulnerable. Reading to an almost empty room of strangers is even more vulnerable. But you never know who is in your audience. I once did a reading for five people in an empty church on a rainy evening. I found myself wishing I had said "No thank you" to the organizer's invitation and instead was in bed watching *Mad Men*. One of the five attendants was a professor at a university who ended up adopting *God Loves Hair* as a textbook in her class for several semesters.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

Really. Last year, Arsenal Pulp Press published a new edition of *God Loves Hair* (along with my new novel, *She of the Mountains*) and I am so grateful to them for believing in the book and helping

it to reach new audiences. I am also grateful that I had the courage to self-publish, that I believed and invested in a book about a genderqueer child of colour, because I learned that it is possible to connect with readers without the backing of an institution. More importantly, *God Loves Hair* has given me the gift of knowing how it feels to stand behind my work and to legitimize it myself. There is nothing cooler than that.

Vivek Shraya is a Toronto-based artist, musician, and writer. A three-time Lambda Literary Award finalist, Vivek's debut novel, She of the Mountains, was named one of The Globe and Mail's Best Books of 2014.



A novel about families, the secrets they keep, and the importance of forgiveness.

A compelling exploration of the role memory plays in father-son relationships.

by Paul Cavanagh
International Lit Idol winner
Author of *After Helen*

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Bookmarking Canada, One Viaduct at a Time

BY ALISON LANG

“When I was growing up, I really had this feeling that stories were about somewhere else, for the most part,” says Miranda Hill. “The more I read CanLit, the more I realized: not every story is about New York, or London... this is a story about a place that I might know.”

Hill is the founder and executive director of Project Bookmark Canada — a nonprofit organization that puts stories and poems in the exact physical locations that they were set. It’s a new type of Canadian literary tourism, providing a direct connection between story and place; in Hill’s words, the project creates a crossroads “between the imaginary and the real.”

In 1999 Hill was living in Toronto, raising two young children, working as a writer, and squeezing in time to read while the kids were asleep. “I was basically either reading or walking,” she says. As she strolled her Toronto neighbourhoods with her children, Hill began to realize some of the books she was reading were sometimes set in the places she was walking. “I thought, wow, this is amazing, that I’m right here in the place where these characters are. I felt very immersed in the books I was reading.”

“I wanted to foster the idea that people could encounter the story in the space they were in, go to it, experience it, and not have to bring the book,” Hill says. “Or they could also encounter it by accident, and realize this is a different take on a place they already knew, or thought they knew.”

Hill began making personalized Toronto reading lists for friends to help them rediscover their own neighbourhoods through a literary lens. But it wasn't quite enough. “I wanted to foster the idea that people could encounter the story in the space they were in, go to it, experience it, and not have to bring the book,” Hill says. “Or they could also encounter it by accident, and realize this is a different take on a place they already knew, or thought they knew.”

After a bit of refining, Hill came to the idea of using plaques as permanent markers of the literary references in question while avoiding the classically stodgy implications of such a marker. “The plaques are ahistorical — I wanted them to be something you can read right in the space, driving you further into exploring the space, but also going to the book, finding the story, finding the poem, going a little further into that writer's world,” she explains. “You realize it's your world now, too, because you've encountered it physically.”

Hill began reaching out for advice. She spoke with Molly Peacock, the American-Canadian writer and one of the creators of the Poetry in Motion program, which introduced poetry in New York City subways. Peacock encouraged the project and also gave Hill a rundown of what a large endeavour it would be. Over the next few years, Hill assembled a board of directors and incorporated the project. By 2008, Project Bookmark Canada officially became a charitable organization, and by 2009, Hill was ready to unveil the first-ever Bookmark: a passage from Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* at the Bloor Viaduct in Toronto.

Ondaatje's Bookmark unveiling received a lot of attention from media and from the City of the Toronto itself, including a visit from then-mayor David Miller. Since then, Bookmarks have been installed all over the country: from Owen Sound, Ont., to downtown Winnipeg. Bookmarks are largely culled from reader suggestions — if the suggested passage fits the basic criteria (“You have to stand where the characters are standing,” Hill says), it goes before the board of directors and a site-selection committee. Once the Bookmark gets through this phase, it's subject to a number of other factors, including author approval, partnership with the host community, and, most pertinently of all, funding. Each Bookmark plaque — constructed to last forever and withstand the elements — costs approximately \$10,000 to create, ship, and maintain. And each Bookmark comes with a \$1500 honorarium (for the author or their family) that Hill says is essential.

“I've had experience a couple of times of being told by writers that they really needed that money,” she says. “It still strikes me, hearing that. It's really telling, how difficult it can be to be an artist in our society. We aim not only to recognize but to compensate.”

While Project Bookmark Canada has managed to secure funding from grants and foundations, including the Trillium and Metcalf Foundations, the organization has found success in partnering with community organizations as well. In 2012, two Bookmarks featuring a passage from Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* were installed in Vancouver's Chinatown — one in Mandarin and one in English. The project was greatly supported by the fundraising

efforts of a number of community groups, including the Asian Canadian Writer's Workshop and Historic Joy Kogawa House Society, as well as the work of volunteers like *Ricepaper Magazine* Editor Anna Ling Kaye, who attended meetings on Hill's behalf.

"As a small organization, we can't do this without other people," Hill says. "Our philosophy is co-operative; the Bookmarks are for everyone. We want to draw people's attention to something they didn't know was there, and draw them to things happening in their local communities as well."

There are other types of literary tourism in Canada — the Writer's Chapel Trust, as one example, installs plaques every fall honouring writers in the Writer's Chapel of St. James the Apostle Anglican Church in Montreal. However, it's the connection to local community and the Bookmark's centring of specific CanLit passages that distinguishes Project Bookmark Canada. "To have a cross-country network and a permanent installation of stories, I haven't learned about that anywhere else," Hill says.

Perhaps due to its unique approach and focus, Project Bookmark continues to gather momentum. Bookmark 14 was installed over the summer, featuring a first-time Maritimes setting that marked *No Great Mischief* by Alistair MacLeod. It was unveiled on October 1, just across the Canso Causeway at the Nova Scotia Visitor Information Centre in Port Hastings. The effort culminated in an event held in Halifax organized by the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia as a tribute to MacLeod's work and as a fundraiser for Bookmark. Then, just a few days later, the fifteenth Bookmark was unveiled in Oakville, Ont., celebrating Lawrence Hill's *Any Known Blood*.

Looking into the future, Project Bookmark Canada will work with the Hamilton and Brampton Public Libraries to set up databases where patrons can input passages and suggestions for future Bookmarks. Although financial support is always the foremost concern, Hill is also looking to branch out with other initiatives across the country and create more bilingual Bookmarks. Overall, she says the only things holding back the project's ever-burgeoning national plans are money and time. The interest — from readers, from authors, from communities — has always been there, and in that sense, Project Bookmark Canada is flourishing.

"We've moved forward with so much speed and excitement," Hill says. "We can never read fast enough. We will never run out of possibilities."

To learn more about Project Bookmark Canada, make a donation, or suggest a Bookmark, go to projectbookmark.ca.

Alison Lang is the editor of Broken Pencil Magazine and a culture journalist based in Toronto.



TOP: The *Any Known Blood* Bookmark, unveiled in Oakville, Ont., on October 5.

BOTTOM: Members of the family of the late Alistair MacLeod celebrate the October 1 unveiling of Bookmark 14: *No Great Mischief*, in Port Hastings, N.S.

Fiction

From “The Smith- Coronamancy”



BY GARY BARWIN

That's not typing, that's writing.

Because the keyboard is teeth, the gnash of the fingers, the alphabetic bite of speech. The dance card of the hand. The tongue. Thinkprints pressed through a lattice. Don't strain yourself. A grid or grin of lettermarks. A thirst impression. The bones made machine.

Tree association: keyboreal forest. Motosynthesis harpischoral and Underwould. Can't see the forest for the teeth. A steampunk tongue trail on the bounded biome of the open field. The multidimensional spaceuttertime expressed on the single plane of the page. Snowletterflakes. Or nodimensional nofield. Horizontal. Invertical. Ingestural. Printstinctual.

The flocking locked shadows of the plenipotential codex made material on the birdpage sky. Trepanopticon, roof open to cloud, indivisual letterforms, the clickerclack licked tickertape of train-track. The open feel physical, luck plucking play on the platen-fed page. Ludic letterforms in a wild game of hunt and peck, synecdochekeyboard and multicoloured ribbon of verbs. Journeying and the return.

The alveolar shift and the uvular bell work. And then the exploratorio: the dyslexicon of the typo, the asemicrophonic typographic clinamen, the partita of slip, stutter magic, the across purpose, the misfeed nurturing gnosis, the knowsis of the numerous numinous made actual in the noment. The phenomenon. The reverbal.

Grammarmageddon. A gift of the imagidental. The gasped hows of the accidontal, the prestidigitation of the letterdremain tongue, the hiss and gnaw of the ployful mouth deployed. The divergent written road, the type rited, the myth pronounced.