

CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

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FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

**Green Gables
Re-Anne-imated**

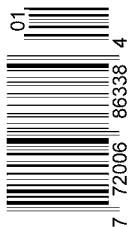
**Canada's Chilling
TV Film Noir**

**Coaching Writers
On Getting A Life**

Kim's Convenience

**Crowd Pleaser,
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The ecology of a healthy writing environment

What the heck is going on with Canadian television?

Mennonites mired in drug-dealing? Korean shop owners offering a “gay discount”?

There was a time in a Canadian context, when “pure” would have brought to mind snow-filled tropes. And Ins Choi’s play-based series, *Kim’s Convenience*, offers darkly funny laughs that would not have made it off the Fringe-fest circuit just a few years ago.

These are things that can only come to a country confident in its maturity and liberal values. They can grow only in a healthy, diverse environment.

And they can only be done well by screenwriters who are confident and supported.

A healthy “cultural ecology” is key, and the recent focus on diversity — different voices and different viewpoints — is encouraging.

Both *Kim’s Convenience* and *Pure* are products of long gestation periods and both required courageous souls to create, support and buy these projects. Not only do they offer a view of Canada that is not widely seen, but they also offer a view of Canada as something more complex than a “few acres of snow,” or a Mountie who always gets his man, or really polite people who curl.

Screenwriters can also find inspiration, as well as markets, in genre diversity. Of course many screenwriters have based their work on books, plays, songs and paintings. And screenwriters don’t just write screenplays. Some write plays and novels. Some also write blogs, write and illustrate graphic novels, play in bands, paint, direct, produce. They find additional outlets for their creativity and their work.

And those additional outlets are necessary.

Screenwriters need a strong cultural garden to succeed. A solid film and television industry, active publishing industry, a flourishing live theatre scene, all can help each other remain strong and healthy and to grow, adapt and innovate. When one falls ill, the others should pay heed.

The success of *Pure* and *Kim’s Convenience* is reassuring. When shows like these do well, barriers are removed, opportunities open and the process feeds on itself (but not in a bad way, like a hungry zombie).

But we shouldn’t pat ourselves on the back. Yes, there have been accomplishments, but we need to keep raising the bar higher — and exceeding it — both in terms of diverse voices and support for our screenwriters.

If we want to maintain the ability to tell Canadian stories to Canadians *and* to the world, we have to ensure we exist in a place where it’s possible.

After all, cool things don’t happen in a vacuum. ■

— Tom Villemaire

Spring 2017

Cameron Archer runs the Canadian television/media website Gloryosky (www.sweetposer.com), and is also a freelance arts writer. He currently lives in Eastern Ontario.

Katherine Brodsky is a Vancouver-based writer who has written for *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Variety*, *Esquire*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and even *Playboy Magazine*. She has interviewed a diverse range of intriguing personalities including Oscar, Emmy, Tony, Pulitzer, and Noble prize winners. Sometimes she writes scripts, too. Find her on Twitter @mysteriouskat

For over 15 years, **Greg David** was a television critic for *TV Guide Canada*, the country’s most trusted source for TV news. A former member of the Television Critics Association, he is currently a partner at *TV,Eh?*, a website (www.tv-eh.com) devoted to covering the Canadian television industry.

Mark Dillon is a Toronto-based freelance journalist and former editor of *Playback* magazine. He is author of the award-winning *Fifty Sides of The Beach Boys*.

Matthew Hays is a Montreal-based writer, author, and university and college instructor.



Writing our truths with passion

His articles have appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times*, *Maclean's*, *The Toronto Star* and many others. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award.

Paul Mather was showrunner on *Corner Gas* and head writer on *Rick Mercer Report*. He co-created *Dan for Mayor* for CTV and created *Men with Brooms* for CBC. Since moving to L.A., he's developed with CBS and written for *The Michael J. Fox Show*, *Cooper Barrett's Guide to Surviving Life*, and *Powerless*. He thinks every bio should have one whimsical sentence at the end.

Simon McNabb is in his fifth season as a writer for CBC's *Murdoch Mysteries*. His other credits include *Package Deal* and *The Kitchen Musical*. He is a graduate of the USC School of Cinematic Arts and completed the CFC Prime Time Television and NSI Totally Television programs. He lives in Toronto.

Diane Wild is a Vancouver-based writer, editor and health care communicator who founded the *TV, eh?* website and gallivants to work on the Olympics every couple of years.

It's been 10 days since the new American president took office. Three days after he signed his travel ban. The day after the shooting at the Quebec City mosque that left six dead and 19 more injured. I am standing before a university class of film students about to teach a lesson on half-hour comedy.

An experienced professor has advised me that the classroom should be a safe place — a sanctuary free from the woes of reality. But I can't stop myself, my mouth opens and something comes out about *these troubled times*.

Student eyes rise from laptops and phones to meet mine. Now I've done it. They think I have some wisdom to offer — and I don't know where I'm going with this.

Nonetheless, my mouth is open again and sounds are coming out. Words I have heard so often from the writers of many countries at the annual meetings of the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds meetings. Words that always make me feel better. *Our job as screenwriters is to speak truth to power.*

Maybe not the soundest of advice less than a week after the term "alternative facts" was coined. Haven't we just learned that a good lie is more effective than a million facts and figures? Then I remember screenwriter Bruce Smith's words: "you can get to simple clear persuasive truths in fiction that you can't get to purely through fact particularly about controversial issues..."

In a world that is deeply divided, where people have grown wary of anyone who is not like them, story is a powerful way to help us understand each other. Not in a liberal media conspiracy kind of way. The world has many different truths. Every writer's truth is different.

And there it is: the exit ramp from this ill-prepared ramble: Story is the vessel into which we put our truths, our voice, our point of view. Yes it is very important to learn the craft, to hone your skill by writing, writing and writing. But it is also important to nurture and protect your voice, to know your truth and speak it without fear.

And out! Was that inspiring? Do they feel better? I scan the classroom and notice there are more female faces than male, more skin tones than I have names for. Did I just lie to them? After all, the media landscape isn't exactly welcoming to women and/or diversity, will their truths ever get made?

But then I looked down at my notes for the actual lesson — the part I'd taken the time to prepare. We were about to take a deep dive into two American half-hour series that these students love. One is *Broad City*, mind blowing for its celebration of female friendship. The other is *Atlanta*, revolutionary in the way it takes us into the lives of ordinary American black men. And the trades are filled with stories about breakthrough series from Israel, Denmark, Turkey and Iceland.

The signs are here in Canada too: *Baroness von Sketch*, *Kim's Convenience*, *Shoot the Messenger*, *Mary Kills People*, *Pure*, *Cardinal*. Series that smash the prefab mold of American programming our broadcasters have long preferred. Series that boldly explore places and ideas that are new to our screens. Series with voice.

In these troubled times maybe the only thing we can do is write our own truths — passionately and fearlessly. ■

— Jill Golick



The WGC Policy Decoder

The WGC's "Policy Decoder" looks at public policy issues that concern Canadian screenwriters/showrunners. This edition decodes the "group-based licensing" proceedings for private broadcasters at the CRTC, which culminated in public hearings at the end of November 2016.

What's The Big Idea: The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) regulates broadcasting in Canada under the *Broadcasting Act*, and issues licences to broadcasters, without which they cannot legally operate. The *Broadcasting Act* includes a number of policy objectives to support Canadian content, and the CRTC implements many of them as a condition of these broadcast licences. Licences generally come up for renewal every five to seven years, which provides the opportunity see how broadcasters are performing and to reset those conditions if necessary.

In 2010, the CRTC created the "group-based approach" to licence large, private English-language broadcasters. This approach recognized the reality of corporate consolidation in the sector. The CRTC also imposed group-based spending requirements for Canadian programming at that time. The CRTC set the initial conditions of licence under the group-based approach in 2011 for a five year term, which was later extended by another year. The current licences are set to expire in 2017, and the regulatory process to renew them began last summer.

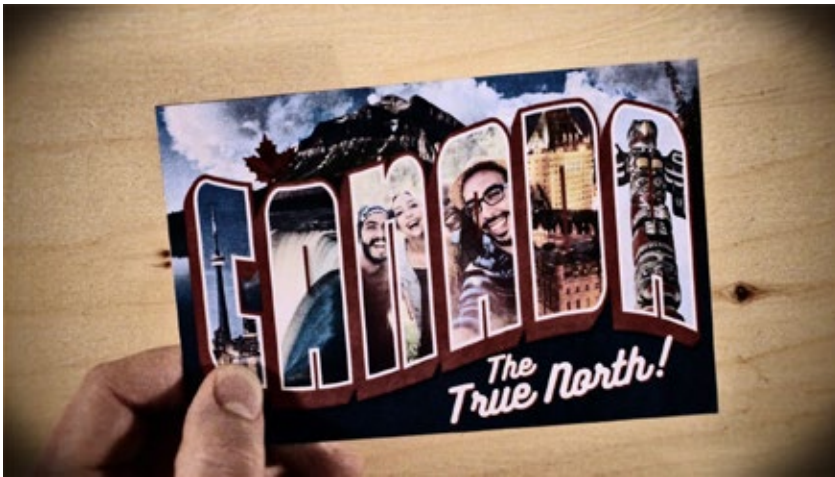
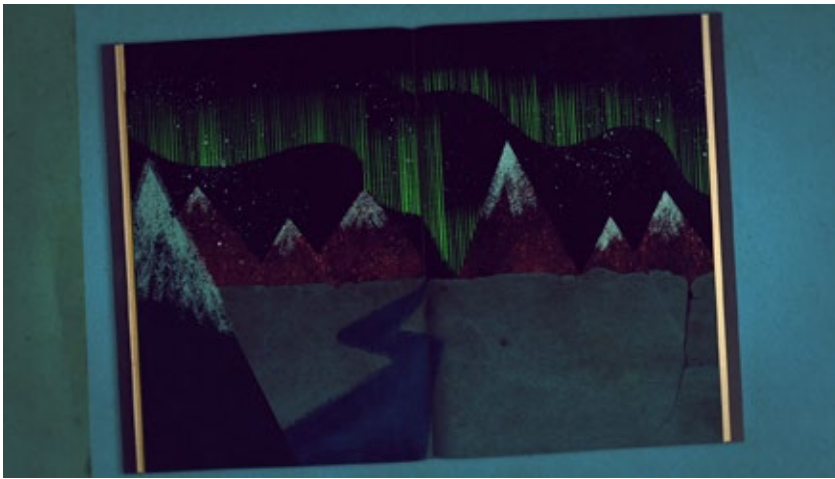
Why Care: Spending requirements on Canadian programming are a crucial component of supporting Canadian content. This is particularly true for "programs of national interest" (PNI), the CRTC category that includes drama, comedy, much children's programming and animation, and long-form documentary — the main genres that WGC members work in. Many of these kinds of productions simply wouldn't exist

without regulation, and in 2015, Bell, Shaw, Corus, and Rogers spent over \$300 million on PNI. That's a very significant part of our industry.

But in the licence renewal process last year, broadcasters came crying poor. Bell and Corus in particular argued that their spending minimum percentages had to be lowered due to the threats from Netflix and cable unbundling. In fact, PNI spending is determined as a percentage of broadcasting revenue, so any revenue declines would *already* be accommodated in this model — a reduction of the percentage itself would be a "double whammy" for the Canadian production sector, and a massive one at that.

Where It's Going: The WGC made a strong, evidence-based case for maintaining spending requirements where they are, as a percentage of broadcasters' revenues. The WGC made detailed written submissions, and appeared in person before the CRTC in Ottawa in November, to strenuously argue that spending levels had been set at the low end of the spectrum in 2011, due to how they were calculated on historical averages. The WGC laid out the history of the policy decisions, and co-commissioned a report that quantified the impacts of Bell's and Corus's proposals — proposals that if projected out over a five-year licence term could lead to spending losses of over \$200 million for PNI alone. The WGC also argued for a renewed focus on development, for better data and broadcaster reporting, and for spending on new production rather than library content.

As of press time, the results of our efforts are not yet known. The CRTC is expected to issue its decision some time in the spring, well in advance of the new licences taking effect on Sept. 1 of this year.



"Telling Canadian Stories, Telling Canadians Stories," produced by the WGC; directed and animated by The Juggernaut.

Telling Canadian Stories: WGC Videos

Canadian screenwriters play a crucial role in reflecting a Canadian perspective for audiences at home and around the globe — on all screens. As the Department of Canadian Heritage held its "Canadian Content in a Digital World" consultations last autumn, the WGC reinforced this home truth with the release of three animated videos. They feature screenwriters sharing personal anecdotes about their passion for what they do and where they live. Penny Gummerson, an award-winning Métis screenwriter (*Strange*

Empire, *Arctic Air*, *Heartland*, *Moccasin Flats*) talks about the importance of home and the north. Simon Racioppa (*Fangbone!*, *Spliced*, *Annedroids*) recalls the power of hearing Canadian stories as a young person. Bruce Smith (*19-2*, *John A.: Birth of a Country*, *Cracked*) relates his experience of working in the U.S. — and choosing to return to write in Canada. The "Telling Canadian Stories, Telling Canadians Stories" videos are about the desire to create Canadian programming for the benefit of our own citizens — and the global audience. Watch the videos on the WGC's YouTube channel: youtube.com/Writersguildofcanada

The WGC in Ottawa

WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker and members of staff were in Ottawa in February to attend the Prime Time industry conference and to lobby government. The guild met with MPs and senior bureaucrats to discuss the future of Canadian content in the digital era. Key topics of conversation included the need to ensure that support continues for Canadian production, the central role that Canadian screenwriters hold in the sector, and the importance of more resources in the development phase. As always, the WGC continues to make sure that the voices of Canadian screenwriters are heard in the nation's capital.

Writers Talking TV

The WGC continued the Writers Talking TV series with two recent events featuring WGC showrunners: Aubrey Nealon, showrunner of *Cardinal*, interviewed by Carol Hay, and Michael Amo, showrunner of *Pure*, interviewed by Cal Coons. Attended by WGC members and non-members alike, both evenings were filled with insights about screenwriting craft and about the Canadian industry. You can listen to all editions of Writers Talking TV on the WGC website, at <http://www.wgc.ca/nolevel/wgcpodcasts.html>. WGC members also shared their expertise at Fan Expo Vancouver in a panel called "Canadian Screenwriters: Creating the Sci-Fi Nation." The panel took a behind-the-scenes look at writing sci-fi, and featured Simon Barry (*Van Helsing*), Brad Wright (*Travelers*), Ken Kabatoff (*Travelers*), Jonathan Walker (*Van Helsing*), Daegan Fryklind (*Bitten*), and moderator Dennis Heaton (*Motive*). ■





CONVENIENCE

SHOP KEEPING

By Matthew Hays

The creative forces behind
Kim's Convenience on the
burdens of success and
heading into season two

“As a writer, it’s all about editing and tinkering — it’s never finished. Like a stand-up routine, they try bits out, then adjust, they figure out what works.”

It’s a strange memory for Ins Choi. It was 2011, and he was mounting the first production of *Kim’s Convenience*, his play about the life of a Korean-Canadian family as they ran a corner store, at the Toronto Fringe Theatre Festival. “There was this line I had put in, where the parents pronounce Kentucky Fried Chicken as *Kenturkey* Fried Chicken,” he recalls.

“I mean, I thought that was hilarious,” he says, laughing hard enough to indicate he still does. “But the audience at the Fringe? They didn’t laugh at all. I realized it was something only my sisters and I found funny.”

This was one of the bumps of writing *Kim’s Convenience*, the show that would become a massive Fringe hit, then go on a cross-Canadian tour (winning over more audiences and critics) and then, last year, debut as a TV series. It’s a story actor, playwright and screenwriter Choi tells as a means of saying something he can’t state emphatically enough: the writing process is never over, and there’s always room for improvement. As well as being part of the success story that is Canada’s Fringe Theatre fest circuit (joining *The Drowsy Chaperone* and writers like Steve Galluccio and Brad Fraser who cut their teeth there), *Kim’s Convenience* has grown into one of those very rare cases: the show is both a crowd pleaser and a critical darling.

Last October, when the series was first hitting the airwaves, *Maclean’s* Adrian Lee identified the reason for success early on, “What makes *Kim’s Convenience* work, though, goes beyond the Korean heritage that the show refuses to leave behind — it’s because of the universality of its spirit.”

“Yes, we’ve been elated,” confirms Choi. “The show has been so successful, right from the beginning at the Fringe.”

Choi had in fact written the original script for *Kim’s Convenience* as a series of vignettes that would centre on a Korean-Canadian family that was experiencing some dysfunction amid their shop-keeping duties, doing so while taking breaks from

performances at the Stratford Theatre Festival. He had such high hopes for the play, he shopped it around to every major theatre company in Toronto only to face rejection. “They didn’t do it in a mean-spirited way,” Choi insists. “But I was surprised.”

Choi was left with a choice: give up or self-produce. He chose the latter, of course, and took his act to the Fringe, where before it was even mounted it won a best new play contest on the strength of the script alone.

“The Fringe was instrumental to the success of the play,” he says. “I learned so much. What is so important is to have that testing ground with an audience. As a writer, it’s all about editing and tinkering — it’s never finished. Like a stand-up routine, they try bits out, then adjust, they figure out what works.”

And oh what a difference a Fringe Festival makes: after the show sold out every performance and got rave reviews, Choi was inundated with offers from the very theatre companies that had once said no. He decided to go with Souleppper, which mounted the play, where it again met with the success everyone yearns for.

Choi concedes the shift to a TV series was daunting, and knew he would have to collaborate with someone who had some greater experience in the medium. He was put on a “series of blind dates” with series writers and showrunners. When he met Kevin White, he got the strong sense that the seasoned writer and producer — with credits on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *Corner Gas* and *Schitt’s Creek* — had a passion for this play, which he had seen in its initial run at the Fringe.

The play’s central narrative thrust comes in the form of real estate salesmen, who want to buy the titular convenience store so they can build a condo development. The other conflict is the unhealed wounds after a nasty falling out between father and son. “In the play, you don’t know if he’s going to keep it or sell,” says White. “But we couldn’t have that as the



The room at work including (from left) Anita Kapila, Nadiya Chettiar, Kevin White, and Amelia Haller.

“Writing in a group was a delight as well as a challenge ... Can I trust you with characters that I’ve loved for many years?”

central tension in the pilot, because then you’d know right away he wasn’t going to sell. We had to come up with other plotlines for the various episodes.”

As well, the characters of the son and daughter were made seven or eight years younger. “If we rolled back the clock,” says White, “we figured we could build to various stories that had been compressed in 90 minutes of the play.”

But essentially, Choi says, “it had to be about many of the same situations, and the characters had to be the same. We needed to expand the world of the play, but keep what everyone loved about the play intact. That was a big challenge.”

“I loved the play so much,” says White. “I didn’t want to have a hand in fucking up the TV adaptation.”

There was also a significant shift for Choi in terms of process: at the Fringe, the writing was his; in a TV season, you enter a room full of writers, and collaborate. “Writing in a group was a delight as well as a challenge,” he says. “Can I trust you with characters that I’ve loved for many years? And I had to trust entire new characters. You enter the room thinking, ‘My idea is the best idea.’ Then it morphs, and then the third idea is the best idea. You have to keep your ego in check. You have to listen, and you have to hear the best idea.”



Back row: Garry Campbell, Anita Kapila, Nadiya Chettiar, Matt Kippen, Amelia Haller and Carly Stone.
Front row: Ins Choi and Kevin White.

“You want other people to relate to it,
but ultimately you have to write
what’s true to you. I write what I know
and what I find to be funny.”

Kim’s Convenience has drawn a lot of press for its groundbreaking status: this is the first show with an entirely Asian cast in Canadian TV history. The show and play it was based on clearly have a lot of fun with stereotypes, something that audiences of all backgrounds have enjoyed. Watching the show, I’m struck by something Oscar-winning filmmaker Denys Arcand told me about writing about the Quebecois very specifically: the paradox, he pointed out, was that if a writer tries to be universal, they almost certainly fail. It’s when they are honest and very specific “that the material will actually be the most universal.”

“That’s a really interesting point, and it’s very true,” says Choi. “It’s sort of counterintuitive. You want other people to relate to it, but ultimately you have to write what’s true to you. I write what I know and what I find to be funny. People who aren’t Korean have loved it and found it funny.”

But in a sense, Choi and White feel that the universalism of *Kim’s Convenience* is obvious, given the family as locus point, both for conflict and humour. “In the play, Ins wrote thoughtfully and compassionately about people and a family that transcended where they were from or where I was

from as an audience member,” says White. “And at the end of the day, as the drag queen character in the pilot says, family is family. When I saw the play, in fact, it seemed more familiar to me than probably any play I’d seen.”

“At the core, it’s about a family that’s struggling to be together and to survive,” says Choi. “People can relate. It’s always hard. The fact that so many Canadians are immigrants probably doesn’t hurt.”

People are so eager to see diversity, and Choi says he understands that, but he has his own reservations about his new status as a champion of the cause. “I’ve been desiring stories like this to be told, in a good way, like *Moonlight* or *Fences*, with creators of colour. I’m aware of how *Kim’s Convenience* is landing. But I don’t think about it too much. Sometimes it comes into the conversation. I will get invited to some function to be a guest speaker and it’s totally about diversity. I’m basically being asked to be the Diversity Guy. I politely decline.

“I’m a writer, and I’m kind of an actor. But there’s that desire to pigeonhole. My next play is about being a bad parent, not about being Korean. Being Korean is a part of me. But I’m a son, I’m an uncle, I’m a bike rider. There are lots of things to write about. But I know there’s money in writing about being Korean because it’s sold.

“Obviously, I am so happy and grateful for the success of *Kim’s Convenience*. The play and now the show, and season two is going very well. If I’m only known for it, I’m grateful. But if I’m only known as the Korean-Canadian guy, that kind of bugs me. I’m trying to do something else, but I’m also realistic that there may be no demand for that. Failure is great — it feels bad, but you learn so much from it. Success feels good, but there are negative things that come with it, like being pigeonholed.

“I’m also well aware that if I can create more opportunities for actors and writers of colour and women, then that’s obviously a good thing. I have influence with *Kim’s Convenience*, which I appreciate.”

Choi adds that some of his most revelatory moments came during failure. “I did a show called *Subway Stations of the Cross* at Fringes across Canada a couple of years ago. It was inspired by a homeless person. Some people liked the show, others didn’t, while most didn’t know what to make of it. I felt crappy in the moment. But I knew I got something from it. It wasn’t a huge success like *Kim’s Convenience*. I thought, ‘I’m still human, I don’t have the Midas touch. I have to work like anyone else.’ That was important to realize.

“It’s important to stay grounded.” ■

Steve Galluccio dishes on writing about his heritage

Fugeddabout holding back

Steve Galluccio has one word of advice for writers who are worried about stepping over the line when musing about their ethnic heritage: fugeddaboutit.

“I’ve never held back or thought about it,” he says. “It’s about my experience.”

And Galluccio is experienced in the art of writing about being Italian. His hit play, *Mambo Italiano*, was eventually transformed into a hit 2003 movie. He also wrote the 2004-05 TV series, *Ciao Bella*, which screened in both English and French versions on CBC. In 2013, he wrote *The Saint Leonard Chronicles*, all about the intricacies of being Italian in Montreal.

“It’s interesting, because it’s the critics who take issue with the characters I write — especially non-Italian critics. Italians, on the other hand, will come up after a show and say, ‘This is exactly who we are!’

“The non-Italian critics will say I’m being silly, stereotypical, and will go on and on about how that’s not really how Italians behave or what they say. They will actually tell me I’m mistaken and that this is not my culture.

“I attribute it to a certain political correctness. I know that I’m not the voice of the Italian community, nor have I ever pretended to be, but I am writing what I know.

“Rule number one: I never censor myself. I just always find it amusing that non-Italians say it’s an unreal stereotype, while Italian Italians — the real thing — say it’s like being in their living rooms.” ■

THIS GIRL IS ON FIRE

By Mark Dillon

Susan Coyne and John Kent Harrison find relevance adapting the century-old *Anne of Green Gables* novel into a TV-movie trilogy

Susan Coyne thinks it's a perfect time to revive that precocious red-headed orphan from P.E.I.

Coyne, who penned last year's YTV movie *L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables*, sees the strong-willed title character as an ideal heroine for this era of women's marches and a presidential candidate who assured all the little girls they are powerful and deserve every opportunity to pursue their dreams.

With the recent election in the U.S. spotlighting women and the challenges they face, the role of girls and women in literature and other forms of entertainment is especially meaningful.

"I hope this is the watershed moment in history when we really think about these little girls and what they're seeing in the world and what they're taking in from the media," Coyne says. "It's no joke anymore. We've got to stand up for them now and give them role models that shine a light on our times."

Anne's story is not only meaningful in today's context, its backstory is also darker than readers of the 1908 novel might recall.

"She was put to work when she was four or five," Coyne recounts. "She worked for a series of families, and in one the father would get drunk and smash things. And she calls the orphanage where she was sent 'the worst,' because there was no scope for imagination."

The creative Anne (played by Ella Ballentine) is taken in by Matthew Cuthbert (Martin Sheen) and his sister Marilla (Sara Botsford), farmers in their 50s and 60s who were expecting to adopt a boy but are won over by the plucky girl — a little more slowly in Marilla's case. With their love and support, Anne flourishes in the town of Avonlea.

The production was driven by Breakthrough Entertainment EVP Joan Lambur, who happens to be friends with Kate Macdonald Butler, Lucy Maud Montgomery's granddaughter and overseer of much

of the author's intellectual property. Breakthrough convinced YTV a retelling was called for and PBS agreed, picking up the movie for an airing during American Thanksgiving.

Lambur reached out to Coyne, a multiple WGC Screenwriting Award and Gemini Award winner for her writing and acting on backstage comedy *Slings & Arrows*. Coyne has an affinity for iconic literary works and characters, as displayed in *The Man Who Invented Christmas*, her adaptation of Les Standiford's book about how Charles Dickens came to write *A Christmas Carol*. The Ireland/Canada copro featuring Dan Stevens (star of Disney's forthcoming *Beauty and the Beast*), Christopher Plummer and Jonathan Pryce is expected to hit theatres this year.

"Joan read my Dickens script and thought maybe there was a connection there because it's period and it's about creative imagination," Coyne says. "I think of Anne as basically a writer-in-training, as we find out later. You could see in this child a longing to tell a story about the world and make it make sense for people and find fresh meaning outside of church and society."

YTV wanted the production to stay true to the much-beloved book that has reportedly sold more than 50 million copies.

"It's not about reinventing it, but new things appear as you re-read the novel, such as the cruelty and setbacks Anne's had to overcome," Coyne says. "All kids have moments — whether it's bullying or some other darkness or difficulty they have to face — and this girl speaks to them as a brave soul who's hard to keep down and whose good heart and imagination prevail. That's what excited us in telling the story for this new generation."

Of course, this latest incarnation is not a response to recent events. The project was brewing since at least 2012 when Breakthrough announced it as a 13-episode series. Instead, the TV movie was produced and based



“I hope this is the watershed moment in history when we really think about these little girls and what they’re seeing in the world and what they’re taking in from the media”



Top: Susan Coyne; Bottom: Ella Ballentine as Anne Shirley, shares a moment with writer/director John Kent Harrison, on the set of The Good Stars.



on its positive reception two more are coming: *The Good Stars* (which aired in February) and *Fire & Dew* (airing, appropriately enough, on Canada Day).

But the story seems to capture something very ‘now.’ Coincidentally, CBC has in the works its own *Anne*, an eight-part series adaptation produced by Northwood Entertainment and showrun by Moira Walley-Beckett, a Canadian-born, Los Angeles-based Emmy Award winner for her work on *Breaking Bad*. *Anne*, due March 19, will be available in May on Netflix.

The YTV movies are directed by John Kent Harrison, a London, Ontario native and current Portland resident. Harrison professes a partiality to strong female protagonists, evidenced by his CBS MOW *The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler* (2009), about a Polish Underground heroine during World War II. He wrote the script for *The Good Stars* while Coyne handled *Fire & Dew*.

While Montgomery wrote sequels that take Anne near the end of her life, the three movies all draw from the first novel, which sees her age from 11 to 16. The first movie explains how she came to stay with the Cuthberts. Harrison describes *The Good Stars* as

more episodic than plot-driven. Having raised two daughters, he was interested in Anne’s pubescent relationships with her peers, including frenemy Gilbert Blythe (Drew Haytaoglu).

“I wanted to write about how that creates conflict for her at 12 and 13 and how she’s not sure she even wants to be 13 with all that pressure. In that sense I hope to connect with a contemporary audience of that age,” he says.

Harrison describes YTV’s main directives for his script as “maintaining the tone we’d achieved in the first one. It was a matter of staying inside Anne’s mind and heart and not stepping outside and having her watch things go by.” Coyne, meanwhile, qualifies the broadcaster’s notes as minor and helpful, although they insisted there be no smoking. Not even pipes.

Harrison feels the story’s main aspect that doesn’t reflect today’s Canada is the lily-white makeup of Avonlea. But the way Anne is ostracized for her orphan background and appearance — that carrot-coloured hair — could resonate today with many different kinds of people.



Opposite: Ella Ballentine, tends garden as Anne Shirley; Above: Ella Ballentine, as Anne Shirley and Martin Sheen, as Matthew Cuthbert star in Susan Coyne's version of *Anne of Green Gables*

"I try to stick to universal themes, so it will translate everywhere to everyone: making friends, connecting with family, finding out who you are, expressing your feelings. That's why the book is so successful and why it's been translated into 20 languages," Harrison says. He adds that although he devised a few incidents to lend his script some gravitas, he kept to the book as much as possible.

Coyne came up with some funny business of her own in keeping with 21st-century kids' sense of humour — such as Matthew face-planting on a pile of manure — and felt the dialogue also needed some updating.

"People spoke in paragraphs if novels from one hundred or more years ago are to be believed," she says. "The rhythms of how we speak are very different, and that's one way I modernized it." At the same time, she injected the script with local dialect of the day, referring to a book of P.E.I. idioms that yielded such gems as "don't be cobblesome."

Anne of Green Gables has been adapted for the big and small screens dating back to the silent era, and many Canadians are particularly fond of the 1985 CBC/Sullivan Entertainment miniseries starring

Megan Follows. Coyne chose not to rewatch it.

"I saw it when it came out," she says. "But I didn't want to start off thinking I couldn't do any better than that. I wanted to approach it in a fresh way and not be influenced by what they had taken out of it because that's a whole other team and sensibility. But mostly it was because it was so good and iconic that I thought I'd better not look at it."

Harrison was of a similar mind. "When I got the call to direct, I thought it best to not see it," he says. "I saw the trailer for it after I made the first movie and saw I had some of the same shots. But I didn't see the story the same way. I wasn't daunted by the fact that it had been made before and was so celebrated. I'm a theme-based filmmaker and saw it as an opportunity to explore the theme of imagination."

What approach CBC's *Anne* takes remains to be seen. Coyne says news of the rival production didn't factor into her thinking.

"Somebody probably had the same thought I had reading the book — that there's a lot there that's modern and fresh, and maybe we should be revisiting it," she says. "That's how things go in terms of Zeitgeist." ■

DOING GOD'S WORK

By Diane Wild

A certain dogged faith is required to work for nearly a decade on an idea for a television show, optioning and re-optioning the source material, despite years of rejection. Michael Amo's vision for *Pure*, the six-part CBC series that premiered in January 2017, stems in part from a non-fiction magazine article about the Mennonite mob in Canada and Mexico called "The Wages of Sin," by Andrew Mitrovica and Susan Bourette. Amo laughs when asked about development funds in those early days. This was a passion project.

"Whenever I feel sorry for myself as a writer, I always console myself with the fact that we do have the power to write whatever we want," Amo said. "No one's stopping us."

He wanted to write this particular story so on his own time and own dime he used those omniscient powers to create a pitch document to go along with the article he'd optioned ... and got no traction. Then he wrote the *Pure* pilot and shopped that around to networks in Canada and the United States ... "again, crickets." He knew others had tried and failed with a similar concept — he was once scolded with "you can't imagine how many times we've been pitched this story!" — but he had faith in the concept, so he kept writing, kept re-optioning that article, kept re-pitching to networks after executive turnover.

"It was such a unique story, I just loved it. I loved the characters, I loved the world, and I loved particularly the fact that I was mixing drama with very black comedy," is his explanation for persevering. "That's not something we do a lot of in Canada, though I think we're wired that way."

He was a true believer in a land of skeptics at first. "I felt if I didn't push it forward, nobody would. And as I moved it forward, other people came on board who were just as enthusiastic as me, so that bolstered me as well. There were times when the project seemed well and truly dead and I had to take the paddles to it and start it up again. But if you talk to other writers, like the people who did *Orphan Black*, I don't think that story is too dissimilar. Anything that is off the beaten path, there is going to be more resistance to it."

He credits *True Detective* and *Fargo* with helping networks become converts to limited series and noir-ish series, meaning he finally got a yes. He developed four of six *Pure* scripts with a Canadian broadcaster before they decided the series wasn't for them after all, "so we were back on the street." When he pitched again to CBC he was astonished and grateful they picked it up this time.

CBC saw the series as a distinctive and distinctively Canadian story. "We loved how Michael had created a rich, character-driven crime thriller set in a community we don't see depicted on television every day," said Tara Ellis, executive director of scripted content. "The story tackles good versus evil in a community that, relative to mainstream society, feels pure and untouched by the ills of contemporary society."

Given the places to pitch a show in Canada are dwindling and network brands very mainstream, CBC's recent focus on more cable-like dramas was the miracle Amo needed. "*Pure*, with its violence and black humour — I'm not surprised it didn't find a home at the other networks," he said. "We had four out of six already written so in some ways it might have been easier to pull the trigger on something that was unproven, but kudos to them, and they were a joy to work with."

Amo pitched *Pure* as a "spiritual thriller." The plot revolves around Noah Funk, a family man and newly minted pastor for an Old Colony Mennonite community forced to participate in the drug trade but determined to work from within to destroy it, joining forces with a cop who embodies much of the hedonism the Mennonites reject from *auslanders* (outsiders). "I always saw the engine of the whole series as Noah's spiritual journey. He's trying to get closer to God at the same time as he rids his community of these evil incidences."

Mennonites, who eschew many of the trappings of modern society, are not a likely audience for the series, but Amo is aiming for a broader theme amid the specificity of his setting. "We all have a strong



Gord Rand as Abel Funk and Ryan Robbins as Noah Funk head to town in the television series, Pure.

spiritual impulse within us, and all the characters are looking for a sense of redemption and purpose in their lives. I think that's the universal impulse behind the story that anybody, regardless of who they are, can relate to."

While the "Menno mob" is real, *Pure* offers a fictional representation that blends elements of customs and clothing from various conservative Mennonite communities. "I felt it would have been unfair to point a finger at a particular community and say these are the drug dealers," he explained. "Mennonite communities would say it's not factual and I would agree. It's not intended to be factual. For me it was more interesting to get at the spiritual journey of this one individual because that's what interested me most."

Amo used books and documents to research the tight-knit religious community that is determinedly not outward-facing, and he hired a consultant who had lived in one of the more conservative communities to review scripts and assist with the Low German language that peppers the dialogue.

He had a more personal advantage as well: his grandparents were Mennonites who arrived in Canada after the Russian revolution. Though they raised their children outside of the community, his

grandfather had written a memoir of his life, and an interest in the culture was handed down to Amo through his mother. The magazine article about the drug trade became his "narrative Trojan horse" into a contemporary exploration of the culture that he'd wanted to do for years, and he noted the crime drama element makes for a compelling television story engine.

Set in Ontario, Texas and Mexico, *Pure* was shot on a no-U.S.-presale-sized budget in Nova Scotia, which bears little resemblance to at least two of those three settings — a production challenge overcome with visual effects but also with the discovery of an abandoned, decrepit factory that became the Mexican drug compound and a gypsum mine that could fill in for a quarry in Texas. Besides, as he laughed: "There's green areas of Mexico, I swear." Amo credits production designer Jennifer Stewart with pulling off the visual style on a minimal budget, including the bucolic Ontario village that contrasts with the diabolical workings within it.

Amo knows that audiences don't grade on a curve so he and the rest of the creative team worked hard to ensure the show punched above its budgetary weight. "You're up against some very incredible and well-financed shows, and audiences don't care



“It was such a unique story, I just loved it. I loved the characters, I loved the world, and I loved particularly the fact that I was mixing drama with very black comedy”

how much a show cost to make, they just care if it’s entertaining or not. It was a challenge to make a show that would cut through the noise of all the other shows.” *Pure* has been blessed, then: the premiere cracked the Numeris top 30 for that week, with over a million viewers.

After working for so many years on the project, on his own time and with his own money, Amo wanted to preserve his creative vision as much as possible once the series was picked up. Working with production partner David MacLeod helped allow creative decisions to be made by a small group of people. “As a consequence there’s a fairly undiluted vision to the show, and either you like it or you don’t,” said Amo. “But for me as a creator, writer and showrunner, it’s afforded me the kinds of freedoms I enjoy.”

He worked with one director, Ken Girotti, throughout the series, a partnership that also allowed for more streamlined creative decision-making. “Good things can happen when you have good people who know what they’re doing empowered to do their jobs.”

Perhaps most importantly in service of the singular vision, Amo wrote all six episodes and was on set every day to take advantage of opportunities and respond to challenges. He did have invaluable assistance from Tassie Cameron as story consultant and, when production was imminent, Andrew Wreggitt. Wreggitt, who served as creative consultant, is a screenwriter friend whose family came from the same Russian Mennonite diaspora as Amo’s, and who was recruited to help “wrestle the scripts down to a suitable size and help focus the characters’ journeys.”

Pure was initially conceived as a cable show, meaning Amo had planned for closer to 55 minutes per episode rather than the 42 he had to work with on CBC. Plus he’d planned for eight episodes rather than

six. With the sheer compression of taking the scope of a cable show and squeezing it into a network timeslot, Amo feels an unintended consequence was to make the show’s plotting more taut, though he mourns the “personal moments we had to walk past, and quieter moments we had to leave behind.”

His original intention was to create a Mennonite pace and Mennonite sensibility through quiet scenes that stood in stark contrast to the high adrenaline scenes, and most viewers would likely think he succeeded. “I think those were the moments that got squeezed a bit, but for people used to conventional TV I don’t think they’re going to miss it. It just feels kind of normal.”

CBC has marketed the show as a limited run series, though Amo has plans for three seasons if given the chance. “If it is one and done, so be it, and the ending provides a sense of closure to the journeys of the characters, but I would describe it as a door for further seasons too.”

After the years of struggle and rejection, the compromises made for time and budget, Amo asks the question: “Is it the show I had in mind? It changed, it evolved, for a whole bunch of different reasons. Some in positive ways, some in ways that were frustrating because we couldn’t do this or that, but I don’t think an audience watching the show is going to notice all the things that drive me crazy.” And he counts his blessings in many ways — for instance the cast that includes Ryan Robbins, Alex Paxton-Beesley, Peter Outerbridge, A.J. Buckley and Rosie Perez. “I would go on set and forget I was the person who wrote it, I’d get so drawn into it. Sometimes the stars align and you get lucky.”

“Funny thing is I don’t think getting a ‘commercial idea’ into production would be any easier,” he says. “So if you’re going to pitch something, it might as well be something you love.” ■

Canadian Noir

The next big thing?

Dark, and darkly funny, crime dramas. Morally conflicted protagonists, malevolent antagonists. Stark worlds and world-views. Film noir-like shows are currently in vogue, and Scandinavian noir in particular has become a brand with worldwide appeal. With CBC's *Pure* and CTV's *Cardinal* both launching this year to good reviews and ratings, is it possible Canadian noir could become a trend?

Michael Amo's influences include the Coen brothers and Scandinavian crime dramas, and Tara Ellis, CBC's executive director of scripted content, sees those influences onscreen. "*Pure* shares elements with Scandi-noir, including a journey for our characters that is rife with moral dilemma and jeopardy," she said. "Aesthetically, one can also compare the beautifully stark world that director Ken Girotti created for the series, which plays the simplicity of the Mennonite community's rural setting off of the outsider and cop world, with shows in the Scandinavian noir genre."

Ellis is non-committal on CBC actively seeking similar shows, but the door is open. "Canadian audiences will continue to be enthralled and intrigued by a good mystery story, and it is our responsibility as commissioners to find new ways to tell those stories, including but not limited to the noir genre."

"These elements make for satisfying TV [to watch and to write] because they allow for genuine unpredictability," says *Cardinal* showrunner Aubrey Nealon. "In a noir, it's never certain the good guys are going to prevail — and if they do, it usually comes at a tremendous cost."

"In film noir, you never know who you can trust. Even the heroes have secrets and sins and ambiguous motives. In *Cardinal*, we see this in our two leads, Cardinal and Delorme — lying to each other from the moment they meet, suspicious of each other even as they grow to admire one another."

"The term noir seems to have expanded since the forties and fifties films it used to describe," says Giles Blunt, the author whose book *Forty Words for Sorrow* is the basis for *Cardinal*. "I mean, you had the troubled or haunted protagonist, and also a certain brutality and cynicism of tone whether in the protagonist or the narrator. Lately noir is used mostly to distinguish dark, gritty stories from the more upbeat, even cozy, whodunits — which leaves a lot of room."

"*Cardinal* is certainly haunted — at least in the first outing — and the murders he has to solve are often brutal. But he himself is not brutal, nor are the cops he usually works with. And he isn't cynical. In fact, his own inner struggle revolves around the high ideals he maintains and his failure, in the past, to live up to them," Blunt says about the character he created in a series of novels. "I certainly think his guilt and his being, in a psychological sense, on the run, puts it in the noir ballpark. (Director) Daniel Grou and (star) Billy Campbell, in particular, are doing great work to put that across — all that frozen terrain, and *Cardinal*'s sense of being trapped start to form a single geography. You only have to see a few frames of those exteriors or a closeup of Billy's face to know we're deep in noir territory."

Showrunner Nealon points to the show's setting as well. "Film noir also tends to have menacing settings — usually dark cities with danger lurking around every corner. In the case of *Cardinal*, that menace takes the form of the bitter frozen north. It's a landscape that can kill you in a heartbeat, and that threat hangs over the characters at all times."

Given *Cardinal*'s snowy backdrop and *Pure*'s stark sunniness, the term film blanc might be more apropos if the term weren't already co-opted to mean feel-good fantasies. But though this emerging Canadian noir might have better lighting, darkness shows up in plot and character. It's a tone audiences are more used to seeing on cable, but *Pure* and *Cardinal* both air on broadcast networks.

Despite that, Amo has found that the audience for *Pure* is also CBC's core audience. "It's not alienating them and I think there's an appetite. Canadian viewers are insanely sophisticated, so are they surprised it's on CBC? Yes. But now that it's on there, they're already watching all these great cable shows so why can't they watch it on CBC too?"

"Luckily for me, TV viewers seem to love this sort of show right now," said Blunt. "Novelists have been turning out noir for a long time — it's just that now, with limited series being all the rage, such shows are in demand. Tastes go in phases — one year it's car chases and cool fashions, the next it's cute grannies and country houses. Right now it's cops with psychological issues doing the best they can in a dark world." ■

LIFE COACHING WRITERS

By Katherine Brodsky

Writer's block. Procrastination. Self-sabotage. Fear of failure. Fear of exposing one's self. Do any of those sound familiar? If so, you're not alone. Writers may start with a blank page, but internally, there's chaos in action. That's why many of them are turning to life coaches.

Torontonian Jocelyn Cornforth was on a clear path. She went to law school, interned, and then got a job at a law firm. Except, one problem. She realized that she wanted to be a writer. A path far less clear. She had no real knowledge of the industry and hadn't so much as written a screenplay draft, let alone gotten an agent. All she knew is that she had "a burning desire in my soul to do it."

That's when she met Barbara Deutsch, a top creative career coach who started her career in front of the camera doing over 100 commercials, appearing in TV series like *Taxi* and on Broadway. Although she lives in L.A., she frequently holds workshops in Vancouver and Toronto.

"If you're going to strive for excellence, a coach is never a bad idea, I've always believed that and have been open to it...Barbara was kind of there and validating that 'yes you want to do this so let's figure out how to do it and get out of your own way and talk honestly about what's going on with you,'" says Cornforth.

As someone who has worked in Hollywood and with a wide range of people within it, Deutsch was able to share truths about the business and had a real understanding of how daunting it can be. She was like a bridge between the creative and business world. She also took a tailor-made, intuitive approach towards Cornforth who'd call her before going into important meetings, or even while homesick working in London. "For me, she was kind of a touchstone...a steady person in [my] corner."

"I can get away with saying anything," boasts Deutsch, who is about to enter the 7th decade of her life. "Everyone's kind of the same. Creative people ... no matter how old they are, they are filled with wonder and imagination, and if that's too much when

they grow up, they don't know how to stay consistent, they don't have discipline."

On top of that, she says in her experience "writers ... don't like to write, they don't like to finish, and they hate everything they write."

So they seek counsel.

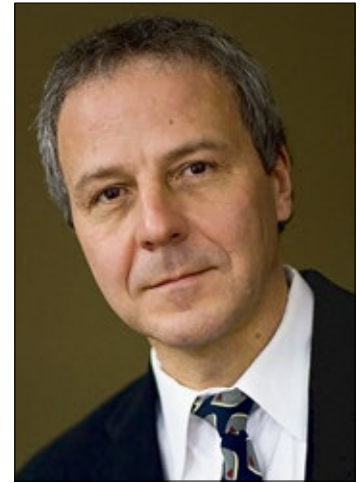
"Usually some kind of block [brings creative people to me]," says Toronto-based psychotherapist/life coach Bradley Foster, "Either they've gone as far as they can, or they realize they've got some kind of writer's block, or ... something is getting in the way of sitting down and finishing what they've started."

There are many factors that can get in the way of writing. Whether it's a relationship ending, or someone close — like a parent — telling you that you'll never be any good or make any money writing.

"Unfortunately it only takes one person saying one thing like that to drown out all the positive reviews, all the good things people say," explains Foster, "Sometimes we just hold on to that one negative comment, and it just keeps echoing."

That's why Foster works with clients to rewire their internal dialogue by exploring their fears and examining their negative self-talk. One of the ways he does this is by using 'gratitude exercises' whereby he challenges them to write down three things that they are grateful for, including one thing about themselves. "If someone can take that negative self-talk and turn it around and be grateful that they are creative, that they have done many things that have proven their creativity and that they aren't a failure, and that they won't be held up to ridicule — that tends to undermine the negative self-talk."

One of the quickest ways to self-sabotage, he says, is taking on too much. That's how writers set themselves up for failure, thereby reinforcing those



From left: Jocelyn Cornforth, Barbara Deutsch, Bradley Foster

negative voices that are constantly gnawing at them. Writers are frequently guilty of that.

Deutsch agrees. “If they say that they are going to write five hours a day every day, I know that’s never going to happen. They just want it to happen. I say, how about an hour, every other day? And when the hour is finished, stop writing.” Otherwise, she says, feeling bad about what they do wrong, often becomes a great excuse not to write. “Writers are really very special people, and there are a million ways in which they sabotage themselves,” says Deutsch: “Procrastination is a form of self-abuse.”

Foster encourages writers to set realistic, measurable goals and believes in getting them to write a certain number of words or pages, rather than distraction-filled hours. It’s best to underplay and then exceed, he says. “If you overdo, you feel good. If you underdo, you feel bad.” The choice is clear.

In some ways, Deutsch sees herself as a professional champion of her writer clients. “Most people just want to be understood and need someone to tell them ‘get off your ass and write,’ she says, “I’m a mentor that gets paid, but I will kick your ass. You’ll get things done.” She often encourages clients to take practical steps to that end such as bringing their work to an acting class to be read, or sending a funny note to a producer’s assistant in an attempt to get a script read (rather than collect dust).

She also has several tools in her arsenal. ‘What’s your competitive edge’ and ‘your alien’ are two with which Cornforth, who has known Deutsch since 1997, is quite familiar. “Something that you’re naturally better at than anybody else — that’s your thing — your competitive edge,” explains Cornforth, “Don’t do what works for someone else. It might be just that you are really nice.” The alien, on the other hand, is that thing that comes and sits on your face when something isn’t going quite

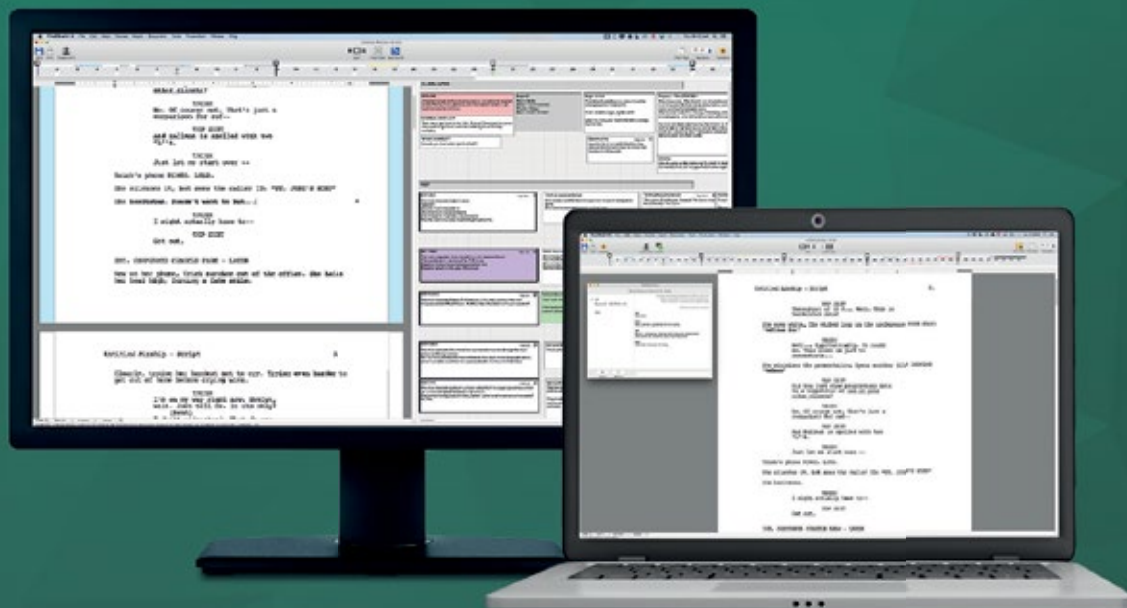
right — it’s the sum of your insecurities and worries. But you pretend it’s not there. Instead, says Cornforth, Deutsch has taught her that instead of ignoring the alien, you should recognize it, take a breath, and visualize it crawling back down. “It frees you up again.”

Many screenwriters are prone to experiencing elated highs when they are busy working, and extreme lows when they are in between projects. “I counsel them to have multiple projects going at once,” says Foster. So when they are not working on paying projects, it becomes the perfect time to get excited about those dust-gathering screenplays and other writing projects. “Something they have in their back pocket that they had to put in the back burner and now they can bring it out, and it’s fresh.”

Spend enough time in a room with other creative people, and you quickly realize that you’re not alone in your fears or neuroses. Deutsch often hosts workshops and encourages roleplaying within groups. That means having those difficult conversations about things writers rarely like to talk about, such as negotiations. Or, says Cornforth, “When you’re talking to the showrunner, and you’re wondering if you’ve said something wrong, then you can have a conversation with Barb about how to approach that person, and it opens up possibilities.”

Writing, for the most part, is a pretty solitary activity. It’s easy to go for days, if not weeks, without speaking to a single person — lest we mention bathing. “Writers can get pretty disconnected,” says Foster. That’s why he urges writers to go out for a beer with a friend, or even just to a coffee shop: “Just to remind yourself you’re not the only person left on earth.” Besides, when you’re stuck, often the moment you stop thinking about something is exactly when you’ll get that brilliant idea. ■

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Deer's dream gig

By Greg David

Tracey Deer's dream has come true. When she was 12, she dreamed of being a fictional filmmaker but followed the documentary genre in university. *Mohawk Girls*, prepping for a potential fifth season on APTN, was first created as a documentary film but burnout caused Deer to revisit the project as a scripted series. A chance meeting with Cynthia Knight — they were introduced at a Christmas party hosted by Rezolution Pictures — cemented their friendship and partnership co-showrunning the Canadian Screen Award-nominated series about four women living on a First Nations reserve.

Does everyone bring personal stories into the writers' room as inspiration for Bailey, Zoe, Caitlin and Anna's adventures?

We definitely pull all of our storylines from personal experiences; hardships and relationship disasters are wonderful fodder for ideas. We always want their stories to be as grounded and as realistic as possible.

Who is in the writers' room for season five?

We have Heidi Foss and Penelope Laurence. And we have our story co-ordinator, Emilie Arcand. We're an all-female writers' room. The show is about women and who better to write about them than women?

***Mohawk Girls* began as a documentary. When did you realize it made sense as a scripted series?**

I was working on my first feature film in northern Quebec, and I was in a car in a blizzard in the middle of the night. It was during this long ride that I reflected on my relationship at the time and my sister's relationship. I started making notes on the crazy things going on in our lives. That was at the beginning of my documentary career, and I did ten years of them. When my last documentary, *Club Native*, was done I was suffering from emotional burnout. I couldn't come up with another idea and months had gone by.

When I was a child, I wanted to be a fiction filmmaker, and I only fell in love with documentaries when I was in university. I thought, 'Let's see if I can be a fiction filmmaker after all.' I wrote a short film that was the context of *Mohawk Girls* and filmed that.

Was it a bit of a mind twist going from documentary filmmaking to scripted television?

A total twist. I find fiction to be very freeing, and you can do anything you want. With documentaries, a lot of the storytelling happens in the editing room. It's an entirely different process to have the sky as the limit, but very, very fun.

How does the co-showrunner partnership between yourself and Cynthia work?

This is our first time, and we're doing it as a team. We both bring different strengths to the table and have very naturally fallen to those strengths. Cynthia is very 'big picture,' and I am a director, so very much about the details. Instead of one brain balancing the two, you have two putting all of their energy into these two departments.

Series like *Mohawk Girls* really spotlight real First Nations stories. How important is it to tell those stories?

There needs to be a partnership between my people and this country to make things better. Bridges need to be built between the communities, and one of the things we wanted to do with *Mohawk Girls* was, 'Welcome to our world.' Come in and get to know us. We are more than the 30-second news bite that is negative and depressing. Understand the social issues we're facing. Once you understand, help us with them. We have incredible stories of both joy and hardship, and it's important that Canadians know that because they play a big part in that story. ■

Past seasons of *Mohawk Girls* can be found on APTN.ca.

Unfair Engagers

The Guild has declared the following engagers “unfair” for failing to abide by grievance procedures or the decision of a joint standing committee. The WGC’s working rules prohibit members from working with unfair engagers.

All I Want Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Battered Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Christmas Town Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

FOTP Productions Inc.

Principal: Richard Rapkowski

**Guardian Films Inc./
En Garge Films Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

H & S Films

Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis

Hiding Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.

Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin

Ice Planet (1) Canada Ltd.

Principal: Philip Jackson

Justice Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.

Principal: Robin Payne

Les Productions les Plus Belles Routes du Monde Inc.

*Principal: Andre Belanger
(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)*

Lester Beach Entertainment

Principal: Jeff Lester

Mikisew Keemiwan Productions, Ltd.

Principal: Norman Champagne

Nikolai Productions

Principal: Cindy Lamb

Norfolk International Ltd.

Principal: William Macadam

Numb Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Perfect Stranger Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Prospero Entertainment Group Inc.

Principal: John Lambert

Richard Lowry Productions Inc.

Principal: Richard Lowry

She Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Spiritual Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

System Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

T Man Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Zolar Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Please Help Us Find These Writers!

The CSCS is holding foreign secondary authors’ levies for writers

The Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) is holding foreign secondary authors’ levies for a number of writers and uncredited productions. As CSCS does not have a current address for these writers or the productions do not have complete credit information we have not been able to forward any monies to the entitled writers. The complete list of writers and productions is available on the CSCS website at:

www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot_news/index.html

If you have any information that would allow us to contact any of these writers or their agents, or if you are a credited writer on the listed production, please contact:

Marisa King at m.king@wgc.ca

or call (416) 979.7907 ext. 5231 or

1.800.567.9974 ext. 5231.

Please note that CSCS may require writers to furnish contracts in support of their claim. According to CSCS regulations, if a writer does not claim his or her monies within two years of being posted on our website these monies revert to the operating expenses of CSCS.



More than a sketch

By Cameron Archer

Transitioning to screenwriting from a sketch comedy, improv and acting background, Ian MacIntyre's work currently appears on Family Channel and Netflix (*Degrassi: Next Class*), The Comedy Network (*The Beaverton*) and Teletoon (*Winston Steinburger* and *Sir Dudley Ding Dong*, *George of the Jungle*). MacIntyre remains active in the Toronto sketch/improv community as a member of sketch troupe Beggar's Canyon. The former Dartmouth, Nova Scotia native's upcoming work includes DHX Media's *Degrassi: Next Class* and *Inspector Gadget*, and 9 Story Entertainment's *The 3 Amigonauts*.

How does *The Beaverton*, based on the website of the same name, differ from more established news parodies, like *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *The Rick Mercer Report*? What challenges exist in adapting a news satire website to television? Most Canadians have heard of *22 Minutes* and *RMR*? The real difference is, *22 Minutes* and *RMR* react to the week's news as it happens, whereas *The Beaverton* is written and shot months before it airs. This necessitates writing a lot more about trends and Canadian culture in general and is the hardest part about adapting the website. Online we can be pretty nimble, making jokes the same day or even hours

after Kevin O'Leary insults a kid's lemonade stand, or what have you.

How do you adapt your comedy for different audiences? Most of the shows you write for, such as *Inspector Gadget* and *Winston Steinburger*, are children's cartoons. The *Beaverton* aims for an adult audience familiar with *Full Frontal* with Samantha Bee and *The Daily Show*.

Having done years of live — often unpaid — sketch comedy and improv helps to get in the headspace to write for kids. You learn that jokes are disposable, you've probably got a better joke in you, and often the dumbest thing you can think of is the best way to go. I believe this pontificating translates to writing for adults as well. It's important to write something for kids that still makes you laugh as an adult.

You studied theatre at the Dalhousie University Acting Program. What advantages exist in being a writer/performer, as opposed to the single-discipline approach?

Every writer should try performing at some point, even if it's just a class. It gives you much more appreciation for how weird and unnatural working off a script can be, particularly if you're on set. You quickly learn the value of concise, "non-writery" dialogue. Writing — and then performing

— your own comedy quickly dispels you of the notion that every joke you write on a page is automatically funny.

How did you become established in screenwriting? What should the aspiring screenwriter expect when transitioning from stage to screen?

I started doing sketch in Toronto after university, and eventually realized the writing part satisfied me more than acting. I met plenty of sketch folks who were working writers, and so many of them were generous with their time. I owe a lot to my friend and fellow sketch comedy goof Mike Kiss, who gave me invaluable advice, feedback, and even my first opportunity to pitch professionally. It was a fantastically bonkers cartoon called *Grojband*, about as ideal a first gig as one could hope for.

Going from acting to writing, it's most important to put in the time and produce solid samples, whereas in acting you're mainly trying to "get seen." In acting, you need an agent pretty much to get started, whereas in writing getting represented usually comes later. An acting background gives you advantages, like increased perspective on the entire industry and — hopefully — additional confidence when networking. Bombing onstage and realizing it won't kill you is a *great* way to get over the fear of pitching in a room. ■

Money for Missing Writers

The Writers Guild of Canada is holding monies for the writers listed below. The WGC has been unable to locate the writers and forward the money to them. If you have any information that would help us reach these writers (or their agents or estates), please contact the staff member indicated below. These writers would thank you.

IPA - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9975 ext. 5270

Dawn Cumberbatch — *Top Cops*
Elana Devine — *Student Bodies*
Warren Easton — *Odyssey II*
Gerald Fourier — *Littlest Hobo*
John Hollard — *Littlest Hobo*

NFB - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9975 ext. 5270

Laszlo Gefin — *Revolution's Orphans*
Janos Szanyi — *Revolution's Orphans*
Gilles Toupin — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*
Peter Vogler — *Ernie's Idea*

MEMBERSHIP, APRIL 18, 2016 - OCTOBER 06, 2016

Welcome

Sam Acton King Vancouver BC
Betty Ann Adam Saskatoon SK
Jorge Aguirre Montclair NJ
Elise Allen Valley Glen CA
Lawren Bancroft-Wilson Vancouver BC
Mark Banker Westlake Village CA
Derrick Beckles Toronto ON
Sydney Calvert Toronto ON
Ins Choi Toronto ON
Michael D'Ascenzo Stoney Creek ON
Petro Duszara Montreal QC
Stephanie Fabrizi Toronto ON
Matt Fleckenstein Tarzana CA
Shea Fontana Saugus CA
Amelia Haller Toronto ON
Alison Hepburn Toronto ON
Allison Hogg Toronto ON

Suki Kaiser Bowen Island BC
Emma Kassirer Toronto ON
Neil LaBute Santa Monica CA
Nick Murphy Sherman Oaks CA
Anjali Nayar Baie d'Urfe QC
Dean Orion Santa Monica CA
Ariella Pahlke Terrence Bay NS
Mark Palansky Los Angeles CA
Dominic Poliquin Saint-Jean-Sur-Richelieu QC
Aisha Porter-Christie Toronto ON
Rebecca Raftus Toronto ON
Derek Robertson Toronto ON
Jeremy Smith Vancouver BC
Lisa Rose Snow Toronto ON
Renee St. Cyr Toronto ON
Patrick Watson Montreal QC

Our condolences

Dave Broadfoot Toronto ON
Jordan Christianson Toronto ON
Michael Gleason Marina del Rey CA

John Mandel Los Angeles CA
Alan Thicke Woodland Hills CA

News from WGC Members

In addition to writing for the Corus series, *Snow Snaps*, **Penelope Laurence** just joined the story room of *Mohawk Girls* season five. She is excited to be writing and story editing the final season of the show and is especially enjoying mining her bad relationships for fabulous *Mohawk Girls* storylines.

Nathaniel Moher has just wrapped working as a writer/creative consultant in the development room for season one of *Smoke(d)*.

Production has wrapped on season one of *Kristal Clear*, a web series about a beauty vlogger who turns invisible, written/created by **Amanda Fahey** and starring Melanie Leishman. Produced with the support of IPF/OMDC, its ten-episode run will premiere this spring.

Tom Mason just sold an original series to DHX and has signed for an additional six books in his Ella & Owen series for Little Bee Books. His comic book, *The Tinkers*, has been picked up by Space Goat Publishing for release later this year.

Allen Markuze is currently writing on *Snow Snaps*, a new series based on the award-winning movie *Snowtime!*, the highest-grossing Canadian film of 2015.

Jacob Potashnik's first collection of short stories will be launched in Montreal in March. *The Golem of Hampstead and Other Stories* is published by Lawrence Jarvik's Penny-A-Page Press. Jacob also completed the first draft of his feature romantic comedy, *The Audit*.

Heka-Rose Publishing has published **Doug Molitor**'s third novel, *Confessions of a Time Traveler*, a sequel to his 2012 *Memoirs of a Time Traveler*. An excerpt chapter will be featured in Nikki Finke's fiction blog, HollywoodDementia.com.

Christina Ray has spent the last six months expanding her horizons as a writer on an undisclosed AAA game for Ubisoft Montreal. She'd love to tell you all about it, but then she'd have to kill you.

Linsey Stewart and **Dane Clark** were nominated for a WGA award in the "Shortform New Media - Original" category for their AwesomenessTV web series *The Commute*, which has over 8 million views on YouTube.

Barbara Radecki's debut novel, *The Darkhouse*, a coming-of-age thriller, was published in Canada through Cormorant/DCB in Oct. 2016, and will come out in the U.S. through Orca Books in May 2017.

Larry Bambrick has recently been signed by L.A.-based talent agency APA. His small-town noir series *The Sweet Life* has also been optioned by Canadian production company Seven24.

After consulting with a brand management firm, writing team **Josh Sager & Jerome Simpson** changed their slogan from "Putting the I back in TEAIM" to "Ampersand means team!" Their cheque to the brand management firm did not clear.

Elan Mastai's debut novel *All Our Wrong Todays* was published by Penguin Random House in February 2017. The movie rights were sold to Paramount Pictures, with Amy Pascal producing and Elan writing the script adaptation.

Carolyn Saunders first feature, *The Wasting*, starring Lauren McQueen, Alexz Johnson and Brendan Flynn, sold to China on the first day of the Berlinale. It is screening at festivals in Europe and the U.S. Carolyn is also putting together her second feature, *Island West*.

Todd Ireland is currently writing and story editing on season one of *ReBoot: The Guardian Code*, a live action/CGI hybrid for Rainmaker/Wow Unlimited. ■



Our friend **Jordan Christianson** (1981-2017) was a talented screenwriter, a lover of basketball, and a staunch supporter of the bald community. Over the past four years he used his creativity and warmth to trick the audience of *Murdoch Mysteries* into enjoying his subversive, inimitable sense of humour. For those who had the chance to work with him, there was no kinder or more generous collaborator. He will be missed not only by his friends and colleagues, but by countless viewers, who, though they never had the chance to meet Jordan, will never get to experience the joy and laughter his work would have brought into their lives.

- Simon McNabb

A primer for our American cousins

By Paul Mather

So, American TV or movie writer, you've taken the plunge and moved to Canada to escape Trump. Welcome to your new home! As a newcomer you should be aware of the subtle yet important differences in the Canadian industry. Let's dig in!

Let's go over some terminology. The WGC is the Writer's Guild of Canada. They're responsible for the magazine you're holding in your hands, *Canadian Screenwriter*, which they publish so that when you don't have a job you can look at pictures of other writers who are working.

The CRTC is the agency responsible for ensuring the integrity of Canada's airwaves by making sure citizens have access to American Super Bowl commercials. Periodically the CRTC holds public hearings to determine the future of television. You might think these are sort of like professional wrestling: lots of posturing, people get hit with chairs, and the outcome's worked out in advance. CRTC hearings would make a good game show, but the CRTC hasn't mandated a game show quota so Canadian broadcasters don't make any.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or CBC, is an important cultural institution. It was founded in 1936 to unite Canadians coast-to-coast by providing them with a common enemy. Note that it's technically incorrect to refer to CBC as "the CBC." Incorrect: "Did you hear about the stupid goddamn thing the CBC did?" Correct: "Why

is this guy alienating CBC with a gratuitous joke?"

But let's talk about production. As in the United States, Canada has purpose-built soundstages full of state-of-the-art technology. As a Canadian writer, you won't be getting near any of them. Instead, you'll be shooting in a repurposed industrial building which may not have the gyms, commissaries, and frozen yogurt places you're used to, but which *does* have asbestos and, if you're lucky, a forgotten room with a dead body!

You should also be familiar with a few key formatting differences between Canadian and American screenplays. In the U.S. one would script an action sequence like this:

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

GARY'S supercharged McClaren CAREENS through the crowd of supermodels, JUMPS over a fountain, and CRASHES into a pile of money.

In Canada the same sequence would be scripted like this:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Gary enters.

GARY

I just got in an offscreen car accident.

Also, remember your Canadian spelling. Here "favour" has a "u", "defence" can be spelled with a "c," and "residual check" is spelled "residual cheque" except it's not because they don't exist.

As in the U.S., Canada celebrates excellence. You have a walk of fame, honoring those who came to Hollywood and made a name for themselves in the arts. Toronto also has a walk of fame, which does the exact same thing.

Trump often rails against "Hollywood elites" and accuses them of living in a bubble. The good news is as a TV professional in Canada, you will never hear a politician refer to you ever again. Yes, life as a screenwriter north of the 49th parallel may seem daunting. Yet, in spite of the obstacles, Canadians make TV and film that's enjoyed around the world. If you thought being a liberal in Trump's America felt like being held hostage in a country that desperately needs you but can at times feel indifferent or even hostile, you will be well-prepared for life as a Canadian arts professional. ■

March

6-12 — Canadian Screen Week academy.ca

12 — Canadian Screen Awards Broadcast Gala, CBC academy.ca

17-19 — Vancouver Web Fest vancouverwebfest.com

April

19 — National Canadian Film Day canadianfilmday.ca

21-23 — Toronto Screenwriting Conference torontoscreenwritingconference.com

22-25 — Toronto Animation Arts Festival International taafi.com

24 — WGC Screenwriting Awards wgc.ca

27-May 7 — Hot Docs hotdocs.ca

May

TBA — TO WebFest towebfest.com

25-June 4 — Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival insideout.ca

June

8 — The Writers Guild of Canada Presents Writers Talking TV wgc.ca

11-14 — Banff World Media Festival banffmediafestival.com



MERIDIAN ARTISTS

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416-961-2777

Los Angeles

1664 Greenfield Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90025
310-479-2777

ma



WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS

The Writers Guild of Canada
congratulates the 2017 finalists

Celebrating
Canada's
Screenwriters



Writers Guild of Canada

CHILDREN'S

Numb Chucks, Season 2
"The Chucks Get Stuck in a Hole"
Written by **Josh Gal**

Odd Squad, Season 2
"Drop Gadget Repeat"
Written by **Tim McKeon**

Odd Squad, Season 2
"Failure to Lunch"
Written by **Mark De Angelis**

DOCUMENTARY

*Not Criminally Responsible:
Wedding Secrets*
Written by **John Kastner**

Quebec My Country Mon Pays
Written by **John Walker**

FEATURE FILM

ARQ
Written by **Tony Elliott**

Maudie
Written by **Sherry White**

Two Lovers and a Bear
Written by **Kim Nguyen**

MOW AND MINISERIES

Bruno & Boots: Go Jump in the Pool
Written by **Adam Barken**

Odd Squad: The Movie
Story by **Mark De Angelis**,
Tim McKeon/Teleplay by
Mark De Angelis, Tim McKeon,
Adam Peltzman

Unclaimed
Written by **Dennis Foon**

BEST SCRIPT FROM A ROOKIE SERIES

Letterkenny, Season 1
"Ain't No Reason to Get Excited"
Written by **Jared Keeso
& Jacob Tierney**

Private Eyes, Season 1
"Family Jewels"
Written by **Shelley Eriksen**

Second Jen, Season 1
"Couch Surfing"
Written by **Amanda Joy
& Samantha Wan**

Wynonna Earp, Season 1
"Bury Me With My Guns On"
Written by **Alexandra Zarowny**

TV COMEDY

Kim's Convenience, Season 1
"Ddong Chim"
Written by **Garry Campbell**

Kim's Convenience, Season 1
"Janet's Photos"
Written by **Ins Choi & Kevin White**

Letterkenny, Season 1
"Super Soft Birthday"
Written by **Jared Keeso
& Jacob Tierney**

TV DRAMA

19-2, Season 3
"Fall"
Written by **Nikolijne Troubetzkoy**

This Life, Season 2
"Destruction as Creation"
Written by **Celeste Parr**

X Company, Season 2
"August 19th"
Written by **Stephanie Morgenstern
& Mark Ellis**

TWEENS & TEENS

Degrassi: Next Class, Season 2
"#CheckYourPrivilege"
Written by **Cole Bastedo**

Degrassi: Next Class, Season 1
"#TeamFollowBack"
Written by **Ian MacIntyre**

Degrassi: Next Class, Season 2
"#TurntUp"
Written by **Courtney Jane Walker**

Degrassi: Next Class, Season 1
"#YesMeansYes"
Written by **Alejandro Alcoba**

THE 21ST ANNUAL

WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS

Hosted by Laurie Elliott,
written by Terry McGurrian

Winners announced
April 24, 2017
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www.wgc.ca