

After all, how many writers understand publishing accounting practices – or for that matter, how many accountants do?

We don't know what questions to ask. And most who might know, don't ask them lest there are reprisals.

Worse, there are publishers who feel equally intimidated with the royalty statements they receive from publishers to whom *they* have sold reprint rights – paperback publishers, foreign publishers, or even book clubs. And that leads them to not including in their royalty statements the pertinent details they receive from these reprinters.

The story goes on . . . in fact it goes round and round: bookstores continue to order unreasonably large numbers of books that the publishers tout as potential bestsellers; if they don't sell as well as anticipated, they return the books; and the returns' factor impinges on the earned-royalties totals; and the authors' royalties have a returns provision. Round and round we go – and where do we stop . . . if, indeed, we do stop?

When I was editor-in-chief of Fawcett World Library, some 40 years ago, I suggested that we reduce our royalty rate, but pay the full royalty on the total number of copies we printed. The result was hundreds of satisfied authors who were getting royalties on the full print-run (along with a printer's affidavit verifying the size of the print run) . . . and getting the whole amount within a month of publication!

Instead of paying 6% on the after-returns number of books that bore a 25 cent or 35cent cover price, they got 4% on the full print run. In those days, paperback returns ranged around 40%, so the authors may have earned a little more, but even if it was a little less, they got their money within 30 days of publication rather than waiting many months . . . or often years. And *we* saved a lot of money.

We didn't have a royalties department staff to calculate sales-minus-returns every six months; we didn't have to generate royalty statements; we didn't have to write cheques (well, we spelled them "checks"); and we didn't have the expense of thousands of envelopes and postage stamps – and all of those tasks being repeated every six months! I learned that, in the end, we came out ahead of the game – and so did our authors.

Would I recommend that today? Probably not – because with the rapidly approaching instant-book operations that will eliminate all but a first printing of an appropriate size determined by the subject matter, public recognition of the author's name and other pertinent elements, the returns factor is going to disappear on its own.

But until that day comes, make sure your contract has a returns' limitation both in terms of time and in percentage of sales. The shorter the time and the smaller the sales percentage, the better.

Gibraltar Point Arts Centre

Artscape's Gibraltar Point Arts Centre on the Toronto Islands currently has a dozen or so artists in permanent studios, a meeting and studio space available on a temporary basis, and it can also accommodate retreats. The Union, along with several other arts organizations, partnered Artscape in seeking funding to start a residency program. This year 20 one-month residencies to be offered in August and September. TWUC members Michael Bryson and Ashok Mathur were awarded the residencies.

THOUGHTS FROM GIBRALTAR POINT

Michael Bryson

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR PREVIOUS WORK:

Last year I published my first book, a collection of short stories called *Thirteen Shades of Black and White* (Turnstone Press). Most of the stories had been published in Canadian literary magazines between 1995 and 1999. This fall I'm publishing my second collection of short fiction, *Only a Lower Paradise and Other Stories* (Boheme Press). The title story is over 60 pages long. It's something I wrote as an undergraduate 8 years ago, and it's a wild post-modern "on the road" tale about the difficulty of finding stable meaning in life. I also edit an online literary magazine (*The Danforth Review*) on my website at: www.michaelbryson.com/danforth

WHAT WERE YOU WORKING ON DURING YOUR RESIDENCY?

I'm banging away at the manuscript for my first novel. I'm telling everyone it's about "space aliens and the death of the family." It isn't about that, of course, except that it sort of is. It's a work-in-progress, and it's coming together quite well, but I'm resisting coming to a conclusion about what it's about (what is "about" anyway?). You can see that "the difficulty of finding stable meaning" is a theme I return to again and again.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TIME AT GIBRALTAR POINT?

Fruitful. It is really the first time I've ever had an extended period of uninterrupted time to dedicate to a project, which is maybe why I've always done short stories in the past. Because I've never had the time to dedicate to a large project like a novel. My writing really took off during my first two weeks at the Centre, and I feel like I've built a solid base now for the rest of the story. Living with a group of artists for different disciplines has also been instructive, as our mediums may be different but the challenges of creating, finding an audience, and getting paid are common to all of us. Writers often isolate themselves to work, which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. It was good, this time, to be part of a community.