

# honor, riches, fame and love of beautiful women

Who said scriptwriting in Canada was difficult? Below, Douglas Bowie debunks the popular myths and tells it as it is.

by Douglas Bowie



Douglas Bowie is a screenwriter (*U-Turn*) who has lately been writing TV drama. His plays *The Man Who Wanted To Be Happy* and *A Gun, A Grand, A Girl* were seen on the CBC's *Performance* series this past season, and *Breakdown* is currently in production at the National Film Board.

WRITER'S SIGNATURE

Don Crivoli



REAL WRITER

I guess it was the guy from *Playboy* pestering me day and night for an interview that finally brought an end to my patience. Here I was, answering the same old questions for the hundredth time – What was Murray Westgate *really* like? Did I sleep in the nude? And I couldn't help thinking – why me?

Why should I be lionized – treated to in-depth profiles in the slick magazines, invited back time and again to bandy quips with Peter Gzowski, plied with lavish fees to pontificate for an hour or two in front of eager undergraduates – all because I happen to be a well-known film and television writer? And it's not just me. Every TV writer I know feels the same way. We're tired of the unceasing glare of publicity, the unthinking adulation. We'd give our Smith-Coronas just to be left alone to do what we do best, what we were born to do – rewrite.

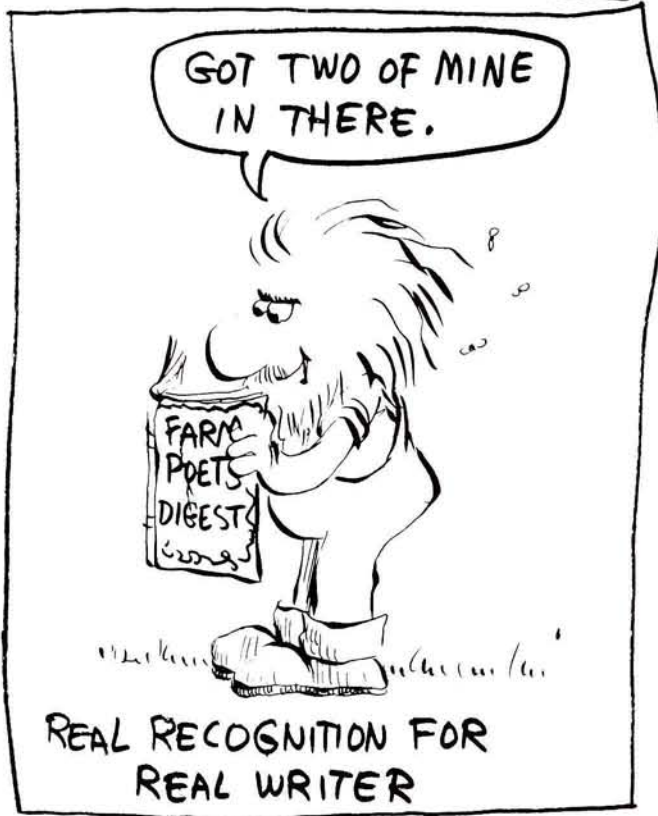
Although one would never know it from the shameful way they're ignored by the media, there *are* writers in Canada who don't write for film or TV. Real Writers. Angry Young Playwrights who stage Major Theatrical Events daily in their very own basements. Uncompromising Prose Stylists who are discovering New Ways of Seeing Things in their very own basements. Painfully Sensitive Poets who are afraid to go down in their very own basements. Real Writers all, and all with Certified Unhappy Childhoods and Pungent Anecdotes from their Years on the Road, just waiting to elicit a laugh and a tear from *Morningside's* listeners.

Surely it's time these Real Writers received their share of the heady wine of popular acclaim so long monopolized by the TV writer. So on behalf of my beleaguered TV colleagues, I say, give us a break, folks. Adulate the Real Writers for a change and leave us to get on with our life's work – polishing fourth drafts.

In order that all you talk show hosts and gossip columnists will be able to identify Real Writers and stop hounding us TV writers, I offer herewith a few of the salient differences.

It's not difficult to spot a Real Writer. He wears faded jeans, a faded workshirt, faded Greb Kodiaks, and speaks in a faded monotone. A TV writer, on the other hand, wears checked, permapress slacks and Polaroid Cool-Rays, unless he is a Frustrated Real Writer, in which case he dresses accordingly, with one small but telling difference. His jeans are pre-faded.

A Real Writer used to live in a garret, now lives on a farm, listens to the vibes, and keeps his head together. A TV writer used to live in a suburb, now lives in a garret, listens for the bill collector, and tries to keep body and soul together.



A Real Writer carries a frayed canvas bag which contains all his worldly possessions. Sometimes, if the vibes are right, he'll take a ragged hunk of bread from this bag and offer it to you with a wordless nod of blessing. It is permissible to decline this offer with a phrase such as "I'm not into grains just now." If, however, you unthinkingly accept, you will be thought fastidiously bourgeois if you brush off the lint before eating it.

A TV writer carries a Samsonite Executive briefcase. He does not as a rule keep chunks of bread in it unless he is suffering through an identity crisis. He may, however, offer you a Certs. You should never refuse a Certs.

A Real Writer is an Artist with Poetry in his Soul. A TV writer is a hack who had larceny in his soul (before he sold it to the CBC.)

A Real Writer's Best Friend is generally his Big Old Dog or, in a few cases, the ozone layer. A TV writer's best friends are his residual cheques.

TV writers aspire unashamedly to Honor, Riches, Fame and the Love of Women. Real Writers aspire secretly to all of these, except the last, for which they substitute the Love of a Good Old Lady. This does not, except in odd cases, refer to their mother. When a Real Writer has the Love of both a Good Old Lady and a Big Old Dog, truly great art almost invariably results. If he has also spent time in jail, a Real Writer is occasionally able to transcend himself and become a country and western singer. There is no known instance of a TV writer becoming a country and western singer.

A Real Writer has a Swiss Army Knife and knows the value of a Good Sharp Stick. A TV writer wishes he had a Swiss Bank Account and knows the value of a Good Sharp Accountant.

A TV writer eats meat, (blood rare, twice a day if he's working on a cop show.) A Real Writer eats mostly beansprouts and fasts frequently (as you would too if you ate mostly beansprouts.)

A Real Writer feels most at home in a Literary Quarterly. These little magazines, which appear two or three times

a year, do not pay cash but send the author two free copies and a bag of granola. A TV writer feels most at home in a Script Conference, Batting Ideas Around Off the Top of His Head. This is where Talented and Qualified people offer helpful suggestions about how the TV writer's work may be improved. Sometimes, as a special surprise, they make the improvements for him without even telling him. He understands this because he is a Professional. The Real Writer is, of course, a Gifted Amateur.

A Real Writer drives a cab in his spare time. A TV writer takes cabs all the time. If a Real Writer should chance to discover that his fare is a TV writer, he immediately denounces the CBC and then asks if the TV writer knows any producers with Integrity because he just happens to have this Truly Meaningful script in his canvas bag...

A Real Writer will Read His Work Aloud at the drop of a hat (if necessary, his own.) A TV writer hears his work read aloud by actors all the time, and doesn't recognize it because of the changes.

TV writers are paid exorbitant fees and are, of course, Filthy Rich. Real Writers must make do with their Canada Council Arts Grants, Short Term Grants, Ontario Arts Council Grants etc., and are, therefore, Dirt Poor.

A TV writer's work is watched by hundreds of thousands, even millions. He is obviously Pandering to the Lowest Common Denominator. A Real Writer's work is read by his Old Lady and his mother. He is clearly Striving Against Perfection.

A Real Writer is loaded with Talent. A TV writer is loaded with gin.

And life is a glorious cycle of song.  
And I am the King of Roumania. □



RANDOM WRITER