

Latinidad/Spring 2017 - Scratch: Writers, Money, and the Art of Making a Living

Contents:

1. Saludos
2. Q&A: Manjula Martin
3. Resources: \$11,000 Poem Prize

BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“I learned about Marcela a few weeks ago from another editor who recommended her to me and I felt I had to contact her. I was right. I had a phone consultation with her and was so touched by her good energy since the very first minute she started talking! Her suggestions were super important and reconfirmed to me about what the right path is for me and the book I want to write. She encouraged me about the possibilities I have and, as I said to her, her words were ‘fuel to my soul.’ I really look forward to keeping in contact with her and for her to join me in this adventure! Thanks from the bottom of my heart, Marcela!”

—Ana Mercedes Rueda, <http://mensajedeangeles.com/>

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1. Saludos

Whether you’re the kind of person who neatly organizes cash by denomination or habitually carries crumpled up bills in unzipped pockets or handbags reveals volumes about your relationship with money. Writers in particular tend to have complicated beliefs about compensation. This is especially the case with Latinos who are often taught that the poor are virtuous, the rich corrupt.

Do you consider money a resource available to anyone willing to roll up their sleeves and earn it? Or is it a gift for the lucky few? Consciously or unconsciously, how writers feel about money affects how they do—and don’t—manage their writing careers. To learn more, read the Q&A below with Manjula Martin, editor of *Scratch: Writers, Money, and the Art of Making a Living*, a collection of essays from today’s most acclaimed authors, including Roxane Gay, Cheryl Strayed, and Jonathan Franzen.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Manjula Martin is the editor of *Scratch: Writers, Money, and the Art of Making a Living*. Her writing has appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Pacific Standard*, *Aeon Magazine*, *Hazlitt Magazine*, *Nieman Storyboard*, *The Awl*, *The Billfold*, *Modern Farmer*, *SF Weekly*, and *The Rumpus*. She wrote “The Dough,” a column about creative work, for *The Toast* (R.I.P.).

Manjula is the managing editor of *Zoetrope: All-Story*. She has previously worked in different editorial and writing capacities with book and magazine publishers, nonprofit organizations, and arts organizations. Manjula was born in the Santa Cruz mountains and has lived in New York City, Portland, and Paris. She’s in San Francisco now. For more information, visit <https://manjulamartin.com>.

Q: *Scratch* is a great read—every writer, aspiring or established, should buy it. Part of what makes *Scratch* invaluable is this sort of information is very hard to come by. What inspired you to create first the online magazine *Scratch* and now the book version of *Scratch*?

A: This all started because I was hungry for information, too. I had sort of fallen into freelancing full-time after the economic crash in 2009, and I had no idea what I was doing. I started asking friends, and they had questions, too, and so I started *Who Pays Writers?* (<http://whopayswriters.com>) as a way to ask the main question. From there, *Scratch* magazine developed to lend a bit wider context, and that led to the book *Scratch*.

Q: It sometimes seems that people tend to be more open about their sex lives than their financial lives, yet you managed to convince a slew of great writers to candidly speak about money. Was it a challenge to solicit the interviews and essays for the book *Scratch*? Were there any dream writers you wanted to include who declined the opportunity?

A: I did a lot of cold-calling (well, cold-emailing) and I was surprised to find that most authors were really enthusiastic about the topic. Even very successful writers have questions about money and commerce, too, and amazingly they all wanted to talk to me about it! I was lucky. But I think that speaks to the importance and urgency of the topic—everyone feels a need to bring this conversation more into the open. Sometimes the process after that initial ask was sticky or tricky, but it was all done in an environment of trust and mutual curiosity.

Q: Between creating Scratch the online magazine and the book, you have a unique overview of the relationships writers have with money. In your experience, what are three of the most common financial mistakes writers make?

A: Oh, I hate lists! But I will say that it shocks me to hear of writers who aren't reading their contracts (or are working without contracts), who don't even ask about money when agreeing to write for a publication, or who don't know even the basics of taxes and what it's going to cost you when you get paid as an independent contractor (1099). If you want writing to be your job, treat it accordingly.

Q: Alternatively, what are three of the smartest financial decisions you've seen writers make?

A: Read and understand contracts. Pay quarterly taxes. Always ask for more money, even if it's just a little bit. No one is going to give you more money unless you ask for it.

Q: How has the work you've done with both the online magazine and the book Scratch affected your relationship with money? Do you make different financial choices now than you did in the past?

A: I'm working on it! I do think I'm better about asking for more money in my own work, and more comfortable talking about it. People often tell me things about their own financial situations, and I respect the trust they put in me and take it very seriously. In terms of my own relationship to money . . . I wouldn't say I make better choices, but I have learned not to be so hard on myself for poor choices I have made in the past. I lack a lot of knowledge about finances, the way many people who grew up without a lot of money do, and it's not really all my fault. That doesn't mean I should run around bouncing checks, like I did in my early 20s, but it does mean I'm more aware of my own weaknesses and knowledge gaps, and rather than blaming myself for them I'm either trying to eliminate them, or at least work around them. I'm doin' all right.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet him/her? If you don't have an agent, how did you come to be published by Simon & Schuster?

A: Kate McKean, aka "Kate the Great." We met because of Scratch; a mutual professional acquaintance connected us because he knew she was passionate about this topic (writers and money).

Q: Aside from your invaluable book *Scratch*, what resources would you recommend to writers who want to learn more about making a living through writing?

A: Each other! Talk. To. Your. Peers. That's all Who Pays Writers? (<http://whopayswriters.com>) is, after all. It's sharing resources among community. Other writers aren't competition, they're comrades. Help 'em out.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: I'm working on a novel, so it might be a while before readers see that. But if people want to keep up with me, they can subscribe to my free monthly newsletter, "three cents"—tinyletter.com/3cents.

3. Resources

SUPERNATURAL FICTION AWARD

Deadline: April 30

The Supernatural Fiction Award offers \$1000 and publication on the Ghost Story web site for a short story with a supernatural or magic realism theme. For more information, visit <http://www.theghoststory.com>

OX-BOW ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Deadline: May 1

The Ox-Bow School of Art offers residencies to poets, fiction writers, and nonfiction writers. There is no cost to attend the residency, and there is no application fee. For more information, visit <http://www.ox-bow.org/residency-overview/>

VELIZ BOOKS

Reading Period: March 2 through May 2

Veliz Books is an independent literary press dedicated to discovering, publishing, and promoting work from emerging and established authors. They seek quality and original literature written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. For more information, visit <http://www.velizbooks.com/>

THOMAS A. WILHELMUS NONFICTION AWARD

Deadline: June 1

A prize of \$2000 and publication in *Southern Indiana Review* is given for a work of creative nonfiction. For more information, visit <https://www.usi.edu/sir/>

\$11,000 POEM PRIZE

Deadline: June 30

The University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Poetry Prize offers approximately \$11,000 and publication in an e-book anthology for a poem.

For more information, visit <http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/competitions-and-awards>

\$3000 SHORT STORY PRIZE

Deadline: June 30

The Moth International Short Story Prize offers approximately \$3000 and publication in the Moth magazine for a short story. For more information, visit

<http://www.themothmagazine.com>

ENGINE BOOKS FICTION PRIZE

Deadline: June 30

A prize of \$2000 and publication by Engine Books will be given for a short story collection, a novella collection, or a novel. For more information, visit

http://enginebooks.org/_source/

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THE GREAT AMERICAN LITERARY MAGAZINE

The Great American Literary Magazine seeks prose and poetry that defines what it means to write in this big, beautiful mess we collectively call America—writing that will be called upon 100 years from now as an exemplary piece from our diverse literary world. For more information, visit <http://www.thegreatamericanlitmag.com>

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SEEKING CRAFT/ART ESSAYS

Brain Mill Press seeks essays for their online "Makers on Making" column.

Each month, a different maker—printmakers, writers, knitters, crafters, painters, photographers, textile artists, and anyone else involved in art—

discusses their process on a particular project. They particularly invite submissions from people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ writers. For more information, visit <http://www.brainmillpress.com/>

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“You need to be your best advocate. You need to understand the financial side of the business, because if you don’t, then you by default are going to be taken advantage of by people who do pay attention to those details.”

—David Baldacci

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