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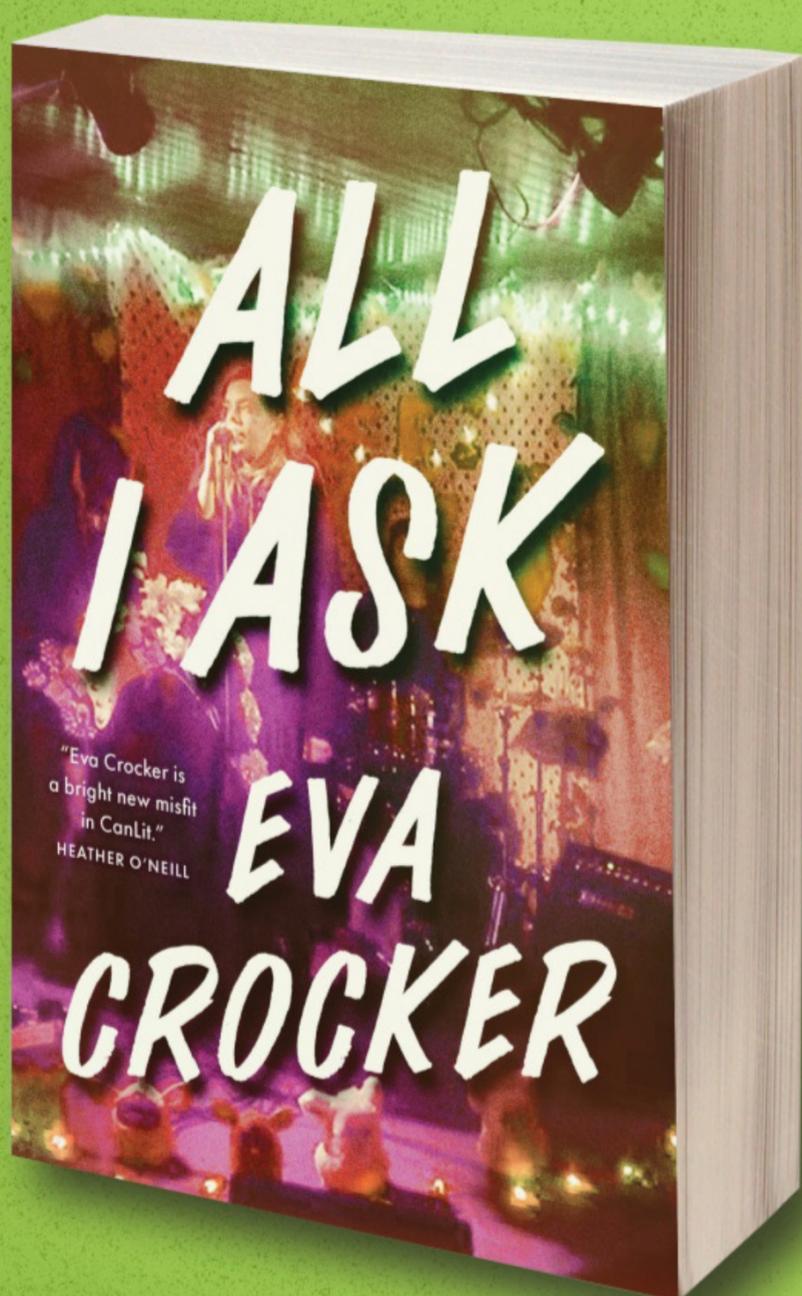
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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Stephen Abram is the executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries.

John Allemang is a thirty-year veteran of the *Globe and Mail*.

Paul W. Bennett has written ten books. His latest is *The State of the System: A Reality Check on Canada's Schools*.

Kelvin Browne is the executive director of the Gardiner Museum, in Toronto.

John Fraser is the executive chair of the National News Media Council of Canada.

Graham Fraser was Canada's sixth commissioner of official languages.

Mark Kingwell wrote *Fail Better: Why Baseball Matters*.

Stephen Marche is a novelist, columnist, and, most recently, podcast host.

Jean McNeil has authored fourteen books.

Richard Moon is a distinguished law professor at the University of Windsor.

Abi Morum will start university this fall.

Amanda Perry teaches literature at Concordia University and Champlain College.

Anna Porter is a former publisher and the author of *In Other Words: How I Fell in Love with Canada, One Book at a Time*.

Zalika Reid-Benta received the 2020 Danuta Glead Literary Award for *Frying Plantain*.

John Elizabeth Stintzi recently published a novel and a collection of poetry.

Michael Taube, a syndicated columnist for *Troy Media*, was a speechwriter for Stephen Harper.

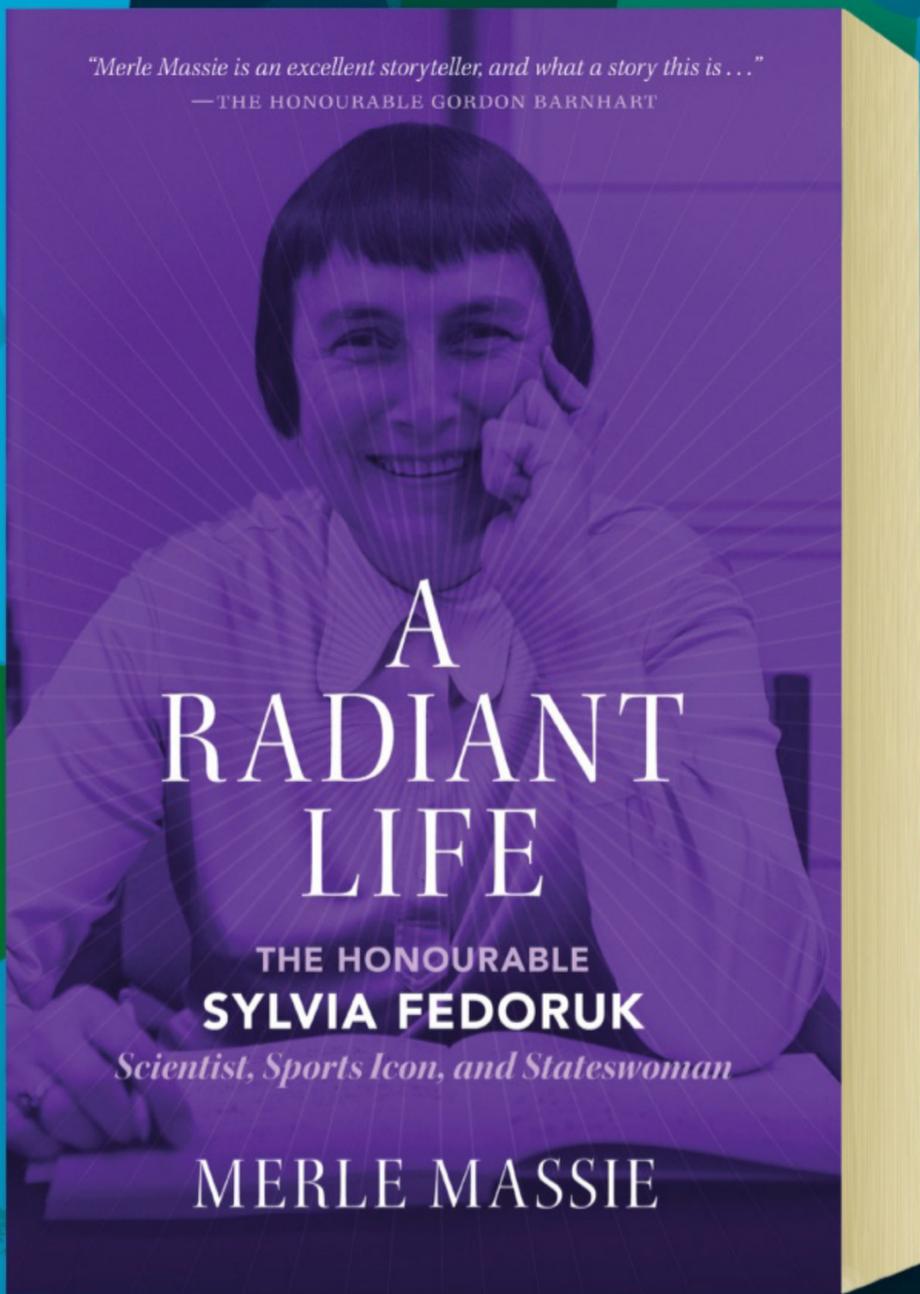
Sarah E. Tracy is working on *Delicious*, a forthcoming history of MSG and umami.

Joyce Wayne was an editor with *Quill & Quire* and head of Sheridan College's journalism program.

Cover illustration by **Kara Pyle**.

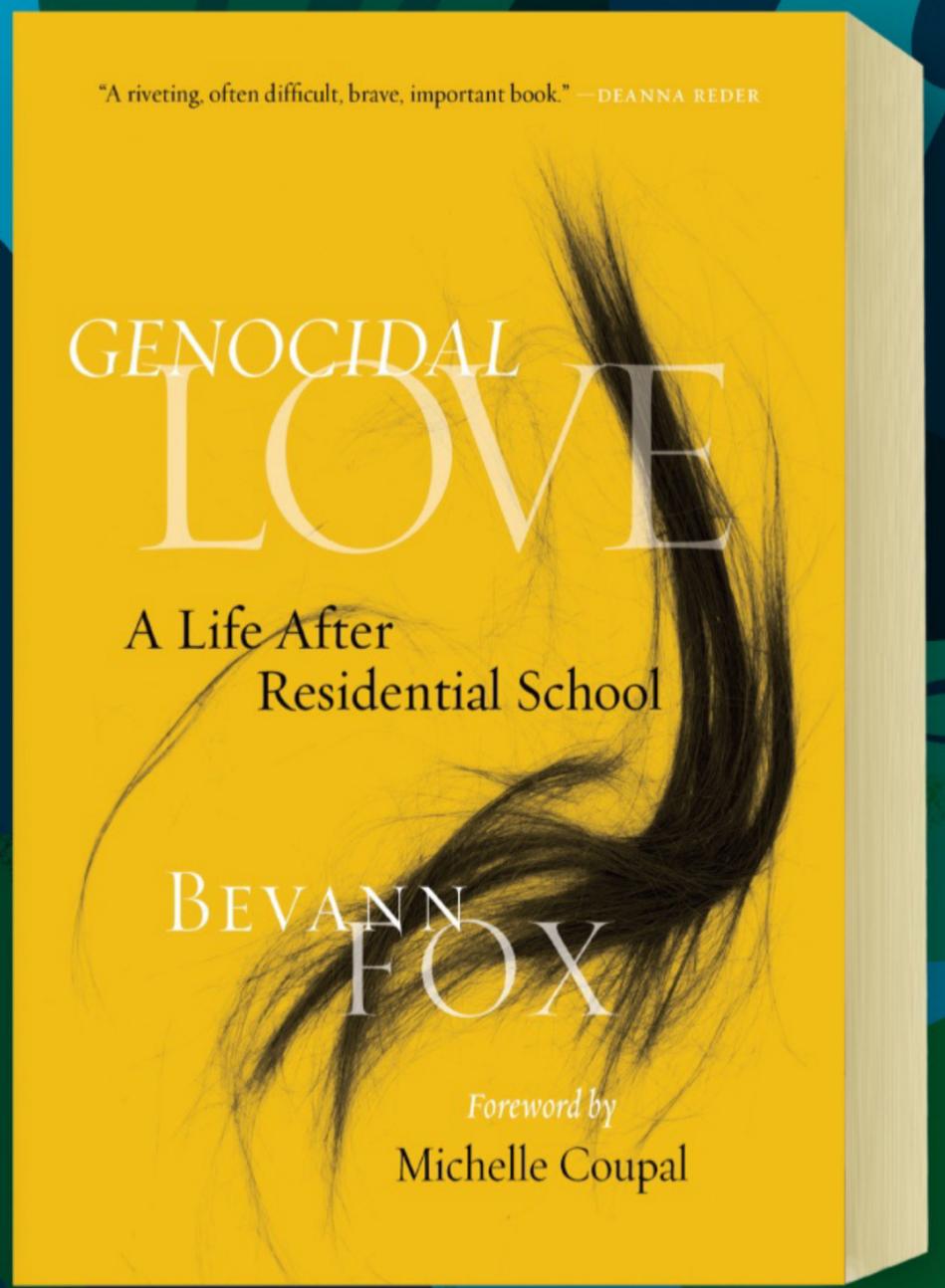
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What's in a Name?

THIS MONTH, BACK IN 1858, A FORTY-nine-year-old candidate for the U.S. Senate had to defend his position on racial justice, after a man approached him in a hotel lobby and asked, somewhat incredulously, “whether I was really in favor of producing a perfect equality between the negroes and white people.” That same day, on a public debate stage, the Republican nominee made his position clear: “I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races.” Many decades later, I was born in a city named after that politician, who would lose the Senate battle but go on to win the war.

Locals are proud of Lincoln, with its imposing statue of the Great Emancipator by Daniel Chester French watching over downtown. And even in this period of reckoning, one would be hard pressed to imagine petitions calling for the renaming of Nebraska’s capital. Honest Abe, it seems, enjoys a rarefied seat indeed.

Yet elsewhere, we are again asking ourselves who and what our monuments, public institutions, and place names honour. Some want to rechristen Dundas Street in Toronto, dubbed after Henry Dundas, the “gradual” abolitionist. Some want to take down a 131-year-old likeness of Egerton Ryerson, whose writings helped conceptualize residential schools, in the heart of the university that bears his name. Vancouver’s Instagram-friendly statue of Gassy Jack, who took a twelve-year-old Squamish girl as his wife, has been given the Jackson Pollock treatment. And street signs in Sydney, Nova Scotia, no longer bear the surname of Edward Cornwallis, who once put bounties on Mi’kmaq men. But few figures have generated as much controversy these past few months as John A. Macdonald.

For years, there have been attempts to remove sculptures of our first prime minister, including recurring calls in Regina, one of the few cities in western Canada with such a likeness. Now there are petitions in Charlottetown to remove the bronze bench where tourists can pose with the architect of Confederation. The University of Windsor is reviewing the “appropriateness” of Macdonald Hall, a campus residence. The Sir John A. statue near my office, put up in 1894 but overlooked by most, has been defaced with pink paint. And Queen’s University, in a city where

the lawyer once practised, has struck a committee to reconsider Sir John A. Macdonald Hall, the law building dedicated in 1960.

Calls to rename streets, petitions to rededicate buildings, and attempts to dismantle or destroy statues can disrupt static interpretations of complex historical narratives. They can also put small-c conservatives on the defensive. Whether you argue for or against Macdonald Hall or any other place name that animates our national map, it’s hard to deny the visceral divisiveness of public commemoration. It’s what was on my mind ten years ago, when I wrote, “Perhaps more than ever, it is critically important to work toward a process of un-mapping.”

A lot of place names simply go unnoticed. I’ve lived in Toronto’s Riverdale neighbourhood for years, and I still can’t remember the cross street just north of my house (to say nothing of the Scottish peninsula I think it salutes). But we have strong attachments — both positive and negative — to others. Some sort of formalized, nuanced un-mapping process, and not the simplicity of social media referendums, might help us navigate which attachments we choose to keep as a nation and which we choose to sever.

It’s not just attachments to dorms and streets that matter. Many also have attachments to the stories they *think* are behind those tributes, however real or dubious. Just take Lincoln.

Honouring the late president wasn’t exactly on the legislative agenda in 1867. The capital had long been in Omaha, the largely pro-Union city north of the Platte River. Yet many more people, including former slave owners and Confederate sympathizers, lived south of the Platte, and they wanted the seat of power nearby. It was a contentious fight, and finally a toponymic-minded senator amended the Removal Act: if the capital were to ever leave Omaha, it would have to be called after Abraham Lincoln. Obviously, Democrats would never go for it.

Lincoln was so named in spite of the sixteenth president — not in honour of him. That’s not the story Lincolnites like to tell themselves, though; many bristle when you point out his complicated views on race or the original backhanded nature of their demonym. But the meanings of names change. Yesterday’s slight can become today’s honour, just as yesterday’s honour can become today’s slight. To know one’s history is to grapple with that never-ending negotiation. 

Kyle Wyatt, Editor-in-Chief

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Literary Review of Canada

Massey College
4 Devonshire Place
Toronto, ON M5S 2E1
info@reviewcanada.ca

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kyle Wyatt
editor@reviewcanada.ca

ART DIRECTOR

Brian Morgan

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Rose Hendrie

POETRY EDITOR

Moira MacDougall

COPY EDITOR

Barbara Czarnecki

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Daniel Samuel

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Marlo Alexandra Burks, Murray Campbell,
Bronwyn Drainie, Basil Guinane,
Beth Haddon, Mark Lovell, Cecily Ross,
Alexander Sallas, Derek Ungless

PROOFREADERS

Cristina Austin, Michael Strizic

PUBLISHER

Eithne McCredie

ADVERTISING

Daniel Samuel
ads@reviewcanada.ca

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Macfarlane (Chair), Marina Glogovac,
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In Canada, \$56/year plus GST/HST (\$68 for libraries
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libraries and institutions).

Literary Review of Canada

P.O. Box 8, Station K, Toronto, ON M4P 2G1
subscriptions@reviewcanada.ca
(416) 932-5081

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Literary Review of Canada is published ten times a year
by Literary Review of Canada Charitable Organization
(NO. 848431490RR0001).

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ISSN 1188-7494

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Literary Periodicals Index and the Canadian Index,
and is distributed by Disticor and Magazines Canada.

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Furthermore

RE: *Stitches (Poppy)*
by Grant Harder (June)

WE LOVE THE MAGAZINE, BUT JUNE'S BLACK COVER, with stitches on an injured hand, is depressing. We keep that one face down on the coffee table. As nature photographers and filmmakers, we live in a world of colour or sometimes dramatic black and white landscapes, which can be very effective. But this shot is so gloomy, and seems to lack any purpose.

John and Janet Foster
Madoc, Ontario

RE: *Is This Thing On?*
by Beth Haddon (June)

THE IDEA OF SEPARATING THE CBC'S NEWS RESOURCES from all other programming goes back at least a quarter century. Its feasibility is nearing the end of its shelf life, and its potential may have even been an illusion this whole time. An all-news CBC hinges on the Mother Corp's superior news-hunter abilities, something hardly in evidence with *The National* (a stumbling program with ratings far surpassed by rival *CTV National News*). And don't buy the "blame Facebook" excuse for the long slump. In the early '70s, the CBC was able to reinvent itself. *As It Happens*, for example, wasn't just another Canuck retreat, the way CBC Gem is a wannabe Netflix. That program set standards worldwide.

So, a cocky CBC? Call in Uncle Chichimus and Hollyhock.

Peter Goddard
Toronto

A GOOD BOOK REVIEW IS MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A great feat of distillation. And this *Literary Review of Canada* piece on what ails the CBC is one of the best I've read.

@heymattcahill
via Twitter

I WAS IMPRESSED BY BETH HADDON'S EVEN-handed calm in her review of *The End of the CBC?* This is an issue that tends to arouse extreme emotions, but I would add one small amendment to the book's proposals for the broadcaster's future. Aside from news, the CBC seems to excel in another area: sketch comedy. I recall that the CRTC squashed the attempt by Newsworld (as it was then) to include comedy programming more than twenty years ago. But in our own era, with definitions increasingly blurred and a growing number of young people encountering news only through satire, I think

that a revamped all-news CBC could still find room for shows like *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *Baroness von Sketch*.

Suanne Kelman
Toronto

RE: *Name Drop*
by Daniel Garisto (June)

WONDERFUL REVIEW BY DANIEL GARISTO OF *Charles Darwin's Barnacle and David Bowie's Spider* in the *Literary Review of Canada*. It showed me new things about my own book—how cool is that.

@StephenBHeard
via Twitter

RE: *Don't Stop the Presses*
by Kyle Wyatt (June)

THE NUMBER OF NEWSPAPERS CLOSED SINCE 2008 is nowhere as high as you and Ryerson's Local News Research Report Project claim. News Media Canada posts an annual count on its website, which shows there were 1,026 community newspapers in 2019, compared to 1,042 in 2011, the first year a full inventory was taken.

Paid dailies have fallen from ninety-eight in 2008 to seventy-four this year. About half weren't closed, per se, but were merged or had their frequency reduced. Many of the losses came in 2017, in Ontario, when Postmedia and Torstar traded thirty-seven titles (the Competition Bureau is investigating). This pattern was also seen in British Columbia, where twenty-two of the thirty-three papers exchanged between Glacier Media and Black Press, from 2010 to 2013, have been eliminated (the Competition Bureau has not yet investigated). And the number of free dailies has dropped from forty-seven in 2008 to five, mostly due to the recent extinction of commuter tabloids.

As I showed in *Greatly Exaggerated: The Myth of the Death of Newspapers*, from 2014, newspapers enjoy economic features that have allowed most to continue making double-digit profit margins despite a sharp drop in print advertising. This remains true based on my examination of recent annual reports. Newspaper companies have adapted by increasing their cover prices, and most now charge for online access. Losses reported in the tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars are strictly on paper and represent the reduced book value of these businesses.

It is difficult to resist the suspicion that the number of newspaper closures in Canada has been inflated in advance of the ongoing \$595-million federal bailout. This will be the

subject of my forthcoming book, *The Great Canadian Media Swindle*.

Marc Edge
Richmond, British Columbia

RE: *Harsh Treatment*
by J. L. Granatstein (July/August)

WHILE READING J. L. GRANATSTEIN'S REVIEW OF *Civilian Internment in Canada*, I was struck by his repetitive insistence that "it is important to point out that the evacuation of 22,000 Japanese Canadians from the B.C. coast to the interior was not internment." Granatstein does not deny in the least that "the vast majority of Japanese Canadians were treated harshly and unjustly during the Second World War." However, for some reason, some finely honed semantic measurement perhaps, he takes umbrage at the book's use of the term "internment."

I have to wonder if the thousands of Japanese Canadians who were mercilessly vilified and then rounded up in a fury of racial fear, stockpiled at Empire Stadium, and transported far from their homes would find any comfort in quibbles over definition. A few of them ended up in Taber, Alberta, and picked beets on my grandfather's farm.

I know little about that reprehensible time, but I carry the weight of the actions. And from my comfortable pew, it all sure seems like internment to me.

Bill Engleson
Denman Island, British Columbia

...and Signed "Pedantically Yours"

IT'S UNUSUAL INDEED TO FIND ERRORS IN THE magazine, especially in two separate reviews (July/August). These corrections aren't of earth-shaking importance, but here they are anyway: In "National Personality," Bruce K. Ward refers to the fall of the Diefenbaker government in 1964. The election (the first federal election in which I was able to vote) took place in April 1963. Ward also refers to the defence crisis of 1963–64. I wrote about that as a student journalist, but it happened in 1962–63. Finally, as Ron Brown does in *Toronto's Lost Villages*, Barry Jordan Chong refers to "Lady Simcoe." Alas, she was plain Mrs. Simcoe, since her husband never received the knighthood he so clearly wanted.

Michiel Horn
Toronto

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The Passport

New-found meaning behind that slim and elegant booklet

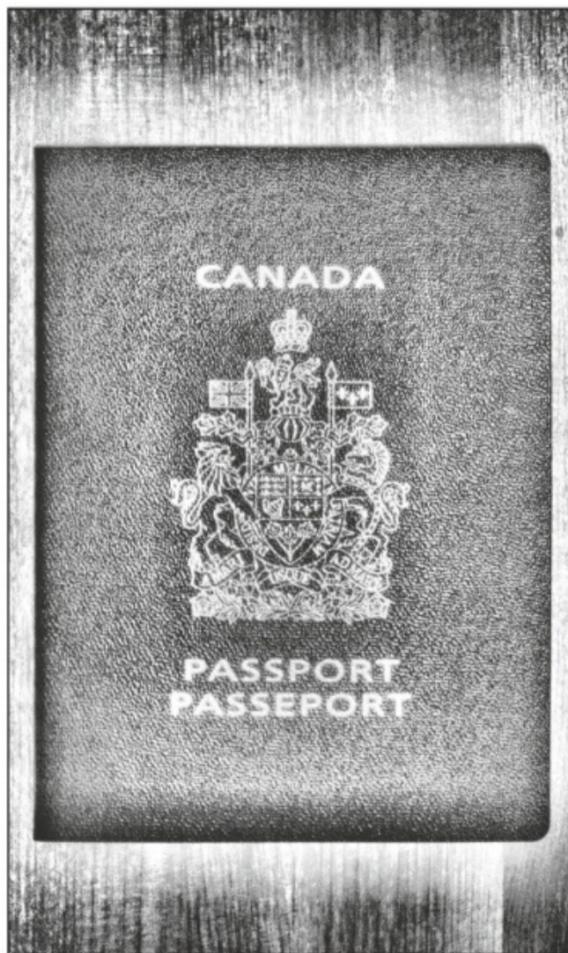
Stephen Marche

THE DOCUMENT IS ELEGANT. NO ONE can dispute that. The deep navy blue of its slightly pebbled cover, the understated gilt imprint of the royal arms of Canada, which somehow looks faded even when new — the passport is a classic. Its cover may be harder, more durable, the pages inside more decorated than when I was a boy, but, in the hand, its familiarity is heavy, anchoring. A passport is a little book printed for a single situation, the condition of being between countries. To hold it is to be going from home to elsewhere or from elsewhere to home. Over time, the booklet assumes the association of distance and belonging, of leaving and returning. This year that association, often subtle, like a half-remembered smell from childhood, clarified itself in the atmosphere of trauma that overtook the world. This was the year when we remembered what it means to hold a Canadian passport.

When COVID-19 hit North America in March, I happened to be on a family vacation in Tobago. Facts, known quantities, established perspectives turned out, often overnight, to be poorly grounded assumptions that no longer applied, and I found myself ten degrees from the equator and confused. Half an hour after our departure, federal officials warned would-be travellers not to leave home. A day later, the government told us to come back before commercial options dried up. There were no earlier flights leaving Tobago. We were scheduled for the last one, unless Sunwing cancelled, which it mercifully didn't. The Tobagonians didn't want us there: the government asked all of us to return home as promptly as possible, and ordinary people looked suspiciously at anyone from away. I didn't blame them. We were vectors of disease. As the anxious week ground down, constantly opening up new vistas of uncertainty, I found myself returning to the hotel safe, again and again, to check the passports. Their slight sheen in the half-light would calm me. They were our way home.

Once we were on the plane, with the passports safely stowed in the carry-on, my first thought was for a young writer I used to know who had moved to New York. When I was in my thirties and she was in her twenties, she had asked me for career advice. The first thing I told her was to leave Canada. How many kid writers had I told that? Maybe as many as two or three dozen? America wants talent and Canada doesn't, I told them. If you want to make things, and make a living at making things, you have to leave. Canada loves its systems vastly more than individual expression. It chooses the stability of institutions over personality or excellence every time.

Where was that writer at that moment? New York was on the edge of the precipice as we flew back. The city had just announced its first few thousand deaths and was two weeks away from not knowing where to bury its dead. Anyone who has spent any time in the United States over the past few years should not be surprised. Ride the subway in New York, cross the border on a busy day, get sick there, God forbid — the American systems, as a whole, are in mid-collapse. COVID-19 has exposed the breakdown at all levels, from the federal government and the states competing for PPE to the chaotic overlapping of plans to reopen businesses that vary jurisdiction by jurisdiction.



Its familiarity is heavy, anchoring.

The United States has, in effect, only an ad hoc civil service. Two-thirds of senior roles at the Department of Homeland Security are unfilled. Several states — Texas and Florida being the largest — have such limited government they barely deserve the name. A month after 1.5 million Floridians had applied for unemployment benefits, just 40,193 had been paid. Americans decided to run their country like a business, and they're doing it. But all businesses fail eventually.

At Canadian customs, I handed over our passports. The border guard took our papers, acknowledged who we were, instructed us on how to quarantine, waved us through. Physical calm descended on me: my family and I were

once again part of an order we understood. And that slim elegant booklet, in the middle of global crisis, garnered a new association: gratitude. I was suffused with profound gratitude.

♦
WHAT WAS I GRATEFUL FOR? WHAT WAS THE substance of my gratitude? The passport gave me the sensation of homecoming, familiarity, the knowledge of my physical safety, an assumption of care that has become less and less easy to take for granted in a sickening world. To have a passport, to have papers is a blessing we could ignore before COVID-19 but not after. I would be lying if I did not acknowledge a positive presence, too, a connection with a people. I was grateful to be among Canadians.

Defining national characteristics for any country is silly at the best of times and dangerous at the worst of times, but the process is particularly silly and dangerous when it comes to Canada. Justin Trudeau has described us as "the world's first post-national state." That's just a way of shrugging off the question of who we are. Not that shrugging off the question of national identity is the wrong response. Trudeau's dad famously said that "there is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian," and that's a vital absence for us. Being Canadian is not a connection of race or blood or language or tradition. The Americans have the power of their symbols. The English have the ingrained connection of their manners. Out of a sense of embarrassment, we've cobbled together our versions, but their power is negligible. I wasn't suffused with gratitude because of maple syrup and hockey, or self-deprecation and the overuse of the word "sorry." I was grateful for strong institutions. I was glad to return to a country where the administrative state is maintained and supported, not just by politicians but by ordinary people.

But I knew, at the same time, that the institutional nature of the country is what has always driven me crazy about Canada. It's why I told all those kid writers to leave, and why I wasn't wrong to tell them that. Canada wants to keep you in your place. In countries as in families: what you love about your home is what infuriates you, and when the crisis hits, sometimes it's what infuriates you most that you need most.

When it mattered, when the world shattered, the Canadian political class responded with ingrained instinct to institutional prerogatives. The respect for established expertise and order transcends party here. While Trump retweeted calls to fire Anthony Fauci, and Boris Johnson delayed locking down London, Doug Ford, whom I have described in the past as a tinpot northern Trump, proved me wrong. He listened to public health experts, he imposed their advice as policy, he insisted on total informational

transparency, he did not hedge his bets, he did not bother with rhetorical games. He gave near-daily press conferences where he made clear and clearly informed decisions. The response of a supposed populist to the outbreak has been in the best Canadian tradition of deference to expertise, distinct from the vast majority of his conservative counterparts in the United States and everywhere else. Compare Ford's response with the cruel stupidity of the governor of Florida temporarily banning non-Floridians on cruise ships from disembarking, closing and opening and then closing the beaches — and you see why I was so grateful to be home. As I write this, Ontario stands at around 150 new cases a day, and Florida is approaching ten thousand. Government matters.

The spectacle of the prime minister working from home in March, as his spouse self-isolated in another part of Rideau Cottage after testing positive for COVID-19, was the aesthetic performance of our national orderliness. The fact that the leader of our country was left alone with his three children to work from home, like the rest of us, without any help, all that scrupulous cheerful distance, was maximum Canadianness: an absurd level of samey-samey rules-following on display. His hair, usually coiffed with an almost incredible precision, took on a rumpled shagginess that was every bit as much an aesthetic act. Look, he was saying, even my hair must go through the dishevelment that everybody else's hair must go through.

The orderliness in which we live comes at a cost. As a writer, I see it most fully in my little corner of the culture industry, which is a small but revealing group because it pertains to an aspect of life that is inherently uncontrollable and, for most of its history, in explicit resistance to administration. Art is wild. Art is shocking. Most of all, art is unpredictable. Talent is fundamentally unjust; some have it and some don't. No one knows why. In this country, that basic fact of life is unacceptable. The history of Canadian culture is the history of either ignoring art or trying to manage its unpredictability. There's a reason that all the best Canadian music of an earlier generation — Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young — could be made only in California. The question of whether the art is any good rarely occurs to anyone here. Taste is all very well, but a mandate is a mandate.

Here's a current fact that could only be Canadian: We are better at managing film festivals than at making movies. TIFF is a masterpiece, but the Canadian cinematic masterpiece remains unmade. If you want somebody to organize the lines into the theatre, hire a Canadian. The movie inside? I wouldn't bother. If you make a film here, it will be made to serve the needs of the CRTC or Telefilm or some other institution rather than a market or an audience. And the corollary is obvious. If you just want to subsist in a static category of "filmmaker," Canada might work for you, as long as you don't make anything that disturbs the orderliness of the institutions. If you want to make an actual film, leave. The commitment to the institution, in this country, carries more weight than any function it purports to serve.

The media operates against the same cultural backdrop. The CBC, at least in English, is a palimpsest of virtue regimes. It articulates institutional values and then attempts to impose them on the audience, which is why its audience is in

such steep decline. It resembles nothing so much as a humanities department at a mid-size university, fixated on its internal logic to the exclusion of its relevance. That's natural enough. It's a public broadcaster. But other outlets — CTV, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star* — have the exact same tendency. The Rob Ford scandal had to be broken by Gawker, an American blog, even though our newspapers knew about his crimes. Because they were consumed with the question "Are we the kind of institution that reports this?"

The media and culture industries are minuscule little corners of Canada as a whole. But the same dominance of the administrators affects every aspect of the country. Canada is tremendous at holding public panels on the need for innovation; not so much at innovation itself. In the Conference Board of Canada's latest report on the subject, which was released in 2018, the organization ranked the country number twelve on a list of sixteen. In February of this year, just before the outbreak, Carolyn Wilkins, the Bank of Canada's senior deputy governor, gave a speech at the Economic Club of Canada, in which she stated the obvious: "Canada trails many other advanced economies on indicators that we know increase productivity and the competitiveness of our businesses." By her estimation, if our productivity had grown at the same rate as that of the United States during the 1990s, our GDP would be about 13 percent higher. That translates to \$5,000 per Canadian each year for twenty-five years. She attributes part of that failure to a dearth of investment in information and communications technology, as well as in research and development.

The week before Wilkins's speech, the chief executive of Suncor Energy, Mark Little, gave a remarkably self-reflective talk in Toronto about the state of Canadian industry, in which he pointedly refused to blame Trudeau or the government, as many other CEOs have. The scandal of Canadian companies' lack of investment in innovation was, in his view, on business leaders. "This is something we need to embrace as a country, as business leaders across the country. Are we doing enough?" Both Watkins and Little were expressing a frustration with what can be described only as a cultural reality: the avoidance of risk and the love of stability. Who wants disruption here?

The entire tone of our public life has been shaped by institutionalism. But in crisis, all this enclosure, all this limitation can be comforting. For myself, the comfort of returning to Canada was like returning to the stability of the family — in no small part because Canadian power is a family, or a bunch of families anyway. Business here is nepotistic. Power is nepotistic. The prime minister is some guy's kid. In the early days of the crisis, Galen Weston, another guy's kid, sent an open letter to the press assuring Canadians that the food supply chains were stable. The reality of nepotism is unfair and stupid and backward, and you don't have to look further than Jared Kushner to see how absurd and dangerous that can be. But I'm pretty sure about Galen. He has been around my whole life, standing in a field talking about sweet corn and organic cherries in those ridiculous ads. If Galen says the logistical networks are stable, then they are.



THE CANADIAN LOVE OF ADMINISTRATION, THE bureaucratic mentality that can elaborate itself

into plentiful absurdities, is something more than a national characteristic. I'm not sure that I would go so far as to say it's the soul of the country — because what is that? — but it is the national structure. It's how things are here.

That structure derives, at least in part, from the country's status as a British colony. The administrative order derived from the parliamentary system, and the tradition of the English civil service is a substantial inheritance; one of the deeper ironies of this moment is that many former colonies have become better stewards of that tradition than the United Kingdom itself. Trinidad and Tobago, where my family and I were nearly stranded, has that same inheritance, and I could see the power of that system working there too. In the afternoons, the minister of health and the chief medical officer and the minister of national security gave statements explaining, in detail, the measures taken and their probable consequences, where and when emergency clinics had been set up, the guidelines for the public. And all this when, in early March, there were only two cases in the whole country. The contrast with the United States was staggering: Trinidad and Tobago is a nation of 1.3 million with a GDP of a little over \$20 billion (U.S.). It is nonetheless evidently better governed than the world's purported superpower.

Northrop Frye identified Canada's colonial inheritance as the "garrison mentality." The pre-origins of the Canadian state were isolated outposts, inevitably producing "a closely knit and beleaguered society." Such people were in a constant state of fear from outside threats, developing an internal logic that was identical with self-preservation. For Frye, that spirit of interiority and containment preserved itself as the national context changed. "As the centre of Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changes correspondingly," he wrote in 1965. Multiculturalism, far from being a challenge to that spirit, has only amplified and enlarged it. Our innovation in immigration was the points-based system of 1967, and our geography has kept our immigration system uniquely controlled. The vast majority of new Canadians are here because they passed an elaborate test and proved to officials that they belong; they have been admitted into the garrison.

But if there is a garrison mentality, there is also the view from the garrison. Nature dominates our experience, and the nature of where we are is punishing, obliterating. "I have long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature," Frye wrote. "It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest." Canadian landscape is the cure for all sentimentality. Go and walk around Northern Quebec or the Peace River Country or even in downtown Toronto in February, and it will become clear, without needing to be expressed, that life is a brief resistance against a base condition of indifferent lifelessness. Supposedly our core narrative is one of survival. To me, what Canada teaches without teaching, by being itself, is that nothing survives in the end, not even stories. All glory is vanity.

The concept of freedom is always intimately bound up with the conception of wild animals. Kantian categories or political theories are

Deep Bleu

I've cut out
the sea.

I'm Matisse glued
to my chair,

fixed on the ceiling:
voici la terre.

Earth had to be feminine.
La nuit sans rêves;

when night is a woman,
dreams are all lost.

Here comes the sea:
we're swimming in grief.

Mais oui,
c'est la mer.

Shahilla Shariff

Shahilla Shariff is a Canadian living in Hong Kong and the author of the poetry collection Life Lines.

nothing beside them. The experience of freedom varies with the experience of nature. There are places where freedom is the freedom to rot. There are places where freedom is the freedom to soar. There are places where freedom is the freedom to rip out the throats of the weak. Our animals survive in packs, like bison, or, like the grizzly, in superb isolation. The English tradition of anthropomorphizing gardens and forests — rabbits cooking stews, fantastic foxes, toads riding motorcars — has little purchase here. We know that the raven is not like us but that a part of us is like the raven. The wilderness, obscured, crushed, shapes us no matter how deeply we stuff it down.

The pandemic has altered the concept of personal freedom at its essence, suddenly, everywhere. Our blasted land, this country either in winter or between winters, has always made human freedom seem like a ludicrous fantasy. In the Canadian landscape, freedom has always been a confrontation with death that we hide ourselves away from in elaborate systems, in a kind of extreme form of unwildness — as much politeness as possible, as much order as manageable. To become strong, durable, productive, uncomplaining cattle — that was the dream the settlers had for us out of the wilderness. If it amounted to an ideology, our founding principle would be the ideology of the obedient herd. And when the storm comes, what could be more delicious than to cower among your fellow beasts of burden in the safety of the stable?

◆

ON THE DAY I RETURNED FROM TOBAGO, THE PASSPORT in my hand had two meanings. First, I was holding the collective decisions of gen-

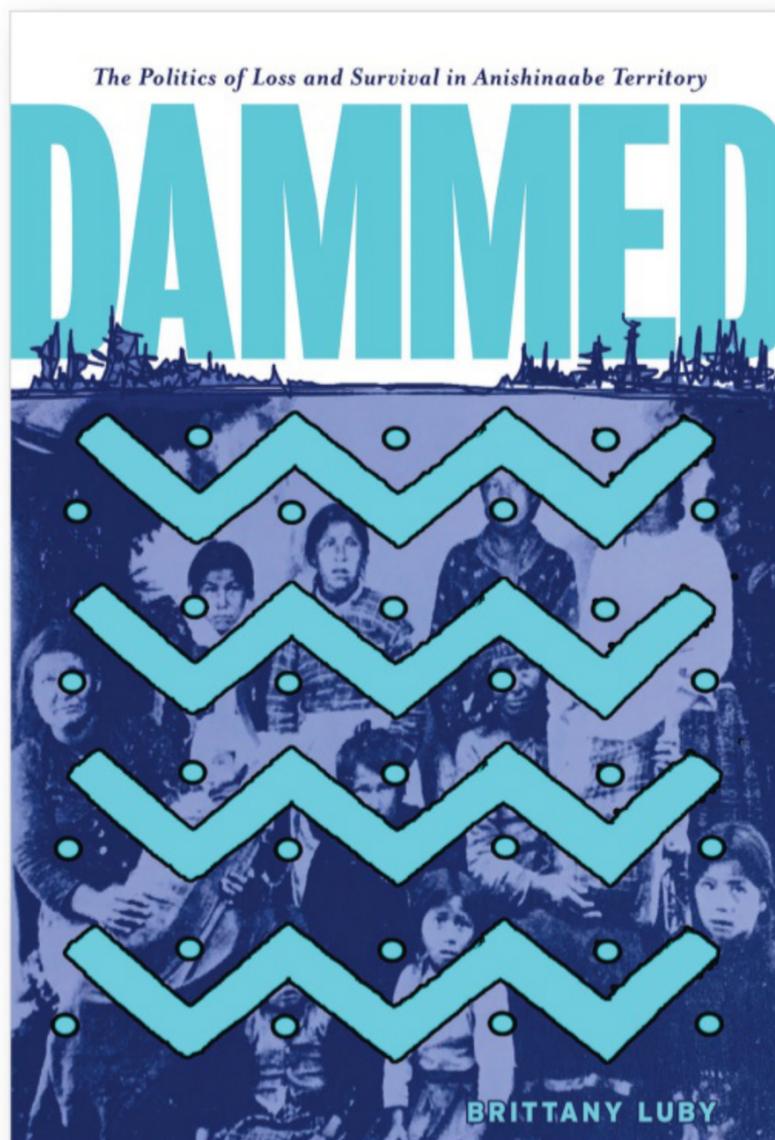
erations — decisions around the political order, around health care, around support for what might be called the public good. Elections have consequences. Centuries of elections can save your life. That's not symbolism, that's not a feeling, not some speechifying material. My passport is my passport because of those decisions. Others have made me safe. I am grateful.

The passport in my hand was also a path home, and your home is different from your papers. The home I inhabit is a confrontation with oblivion, a garrison overlooking a wilderness that forces us to recognize that we are all the same. I am oddly proud of the harsh wilderness inside us, a cruelty we are so scrupulous about masking, from outsiders and from ourselves.

I am still conscious of the cost of that truth. If you want to be meaningful, you'll have to do it somewhere else. If you want to go into business, you will automatically focus on ancillary markets. No one will respect you for what makes you different here. They'll take care of you because of what makes you just like everybody else. All of this is to say that Canada is my home — nurturing and oppressive with the same gesture, safe and claustrophobic in its enclosure. And like any home, it can be known only by leaving and returning. There will be time for a good long look at ourselves now. For the foreseeable future, we are going to be living within our own borders, in every sense.

My passport has been put away. It will remain put away until the world opens again. I keep it in the safest place I know, that slim and elegant booklet stamped by many authorities, but contained in its own.

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Wanderings

Here is a coast and here is a harbour

Jean McNeil

Think of the long trip home. / Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? / Where should we be today? / Is it right to be watching strangers in a play / in this strangest of theatres? — Elizabeth Bishop

ON FEBRUARY 29, THE CALENDAR'S most elusive date, I arrived in São Paulo from my home in London. Although the morning was cool and overcast, emerging from the northern hemisphere winter into the subtropics felt like awakening from a cryogenic slumber. During the flight, I had watched Orion cartwheel across the sky as we journeyed down the Atlantic Ocean. I am a hardened traveller, but each time I fly I find it a miracle that we are able to propel ourselves through space with such velocity and relative safety. Also, I know how long the alternative mode takes.

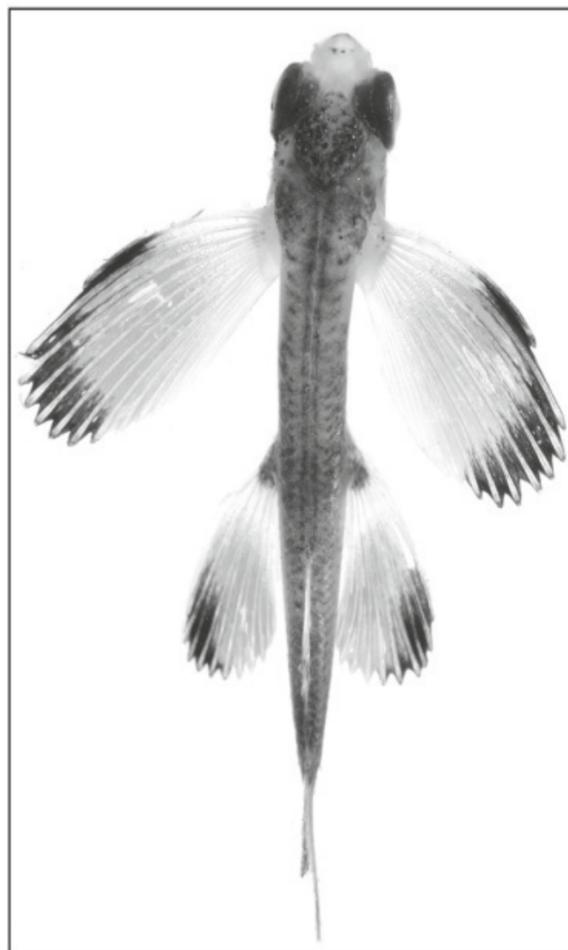
A decade ago, I travelled from the Falkland Islands to Vigo, in northern Spain, on a research vessel — the longest of several trips I have done as writer-in-residence on scientific expeditions. It took us three weeks to sail along the coast of Brazil alone. I remember looking at the charts each day on the bridge, watching the second officer mark our inching progress in a pencilled line filigreed with Xs. Some days, it seemed we stood still. The horizon remained unchanged as we stuttered upward into the tropics, the deck becoming littered with flying fish, which stranded themselves there by the hundreds. There was a stretch when we did not glimpse another ship on the radar for eleven days. More than any other of my voyages by sea, that journey showed me the true girth of the planet — something difficult to apprehend as we zoom around it in the troposphere.

I have always been restless, not to mention claustrophobic. I live in London, in part because it's an easy city to leave. We have six major airports that process seventy-eight million passengers annually; in normal circumstances, 1,300 flights a day take off and land at Heathrow alone. I've benefited personally and professionally from the hypermobility that the city affords. Even when I'm not travelling, I can tag along vicariously. If the prevailing southwesterlies are blowing, I have a clear view from my flat of planes lining up to land at Heathrow. One floats into view every ninety seconds, as if turned out from a factory at precise intervals. There is something serene and reassuring in the way they sink through the lemon haze of the city smog like vast, contented sharks. Each plane signifies an opportunity to leave and gather new knowledge and experience; each is an exemplar of modernity. "Andando más, más se sabe," wrote Christopher Columbus, navigator and plunderer

of the Americas. The further you go, the more you know.

In my obsession with travel, I am probably making that most basic of errors, mistaking movement and velocity for a plan, shape, or purpose — even a morality. The journey is a too-convenient synecdoche for life. Arrivals and departures have a built-in drama, but they are enigmas too, a distraction from the essential marathon of living, which is staying: staying the course, staying put, enduring.

Travel is often tedious and upsetting, never mind dangerous. Over the years, I've been snarled in New York, where I found myself underneath the World Trade Center as both



Perhaps the fish are still flying.

planes struck, and then marooned for weeks afterwards when all aviation was cancelled. I've been stuck at Toronto Pearson after an Air France flight crashed on the runway, stymied by polar whiteouts in Antarctica, stranded by volcanic eruptions, and abandoned by the Royal Air Force on a tiny island in the middle of the Atlantic. But the pandemic is the most effective grounding I've experienced. As I scour the silent London skies for planes, I consider what I have lost or, more precisely, what has been rescinded.

♦

I STARTED READING ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETRY IN part because, like her, I grew up in Nova Scotia, and I felt a kinship with her rendition of its landscape, as well as admiring her remarkable

melding of the vernaculars of the natural and the social. I began reading her in earnest in Rio de Janeiro, where I lived in the mid-1990s, and where Bishop had lived many years before.

Like Bishop, I detect a common grammar in the geographies of Brazil and Canada. The two countries are in many ways twins, built on similar continental scales, both totalizing polities that span climates, ecosystems, dialects, Indigenous cultures, remote archipelagos of settler communities, wildernesses ransacked by extractive companies, and time zones. Most Brazilians live in the southern industrial heartland. For them, Amazonia functions in the national imaginary as the Arctic territories do for the bulk of border-hugging Canadians: a near-mythic region that they will likely never visit. Instead, they might venture to Portugal or Argentina, to "experience something different," as a colleague from São Paulo remarked to me. After hearing of my stays in the Amazon and the northeast, she said, "You've seen more of Brazil than I will ever do."

Elizabeth Bishop arrived in the country by ship in December 1951. She would spend much of the next seventeen years in a place she expected to visit for only two weeks. Brazil fuelled her best poetry, not always as direct inspiration. The physical and psychological distance that the move afforded her seemed to permit her, at forty-two, to finally write about her painful childhood, when she was bounced between relatives in Nova Scotia and Massachusetts. Out of this awakening came some of her best-regarded work, including "Sestina" and "In the Village."

Bishop grew up partly in her grandparents' house in Great Village, a tidy settlement not far from the shore of Minas Basin, an arrowhead-shaped body of water in the crux of the Bay of Fundy. Here, famously, the highest tides in the world rake in and out every day, their differential up to sixteen metres — as tall as a five-storey building. Minas Basin is shallow, and the transformation wrought by the vast tidal machine is all the more startling. It makes for a backdrop that is in constant radical motion, a gargantuan sink draining and filling. I wonder if this natural anomaly influenced Bishop's writing, if not representationally then rhetorically. Her customary recalcitrance, the lines that bristle with questions and corrections: could they be, in part, a consequence of living in a place where even the horizon is unstable? That daily rupture from russet mud flats to the glimmering seams of cold sea may well have sharpened her eye and her sense of indeterminacy.

On arriving in Santos, Bishop noted the port city's impractical landscape. The mountains of the Serra do Mar, a 1,500-kilometre-long

range that runs close to the Atlantic, were “self-pitying,” their greenery “frivolous.” Moving on to Guanabara Bay, she quickly came to the pithy observation that “Rio is not a beautiful city but rather a beautiful setting for a city.” These judgments are abrupt, dismissive, and perhaps a defence mechanism. Possibly, the only way she could get purchase on this wholly unfamiliar reality was to read it through a cool prism of reticence. Her northern hemisphere eye was being challenged; so too was what she would later call her “Scotch-Canadian-Protestant-Puritan” temperament.

I have often thought about the way the original landscapes of our lives become the means through which we interpret the world. My theory is that we imbibe the detail of the places where we grow up, absorbing it into our psyches and bodies in a form of metaphysical transfer. For Bishop, Brazil functioned as a kind of Claude glass, a black, reversing mirror turned on the chilly grandeur of the north she knew. (In one of her earlier letters home, she joked that the place was “a kind of deluxe Nova Scotia.”) Even as her new environment invigorated her present-tense poetry, honing its aesthetic angle of attack, her mind was lured back to the Maritimes of her childhood: those “narrow provinces of fish and bread and tea,” with their lupines, bladderwrack, fireweed, and wild iris.

When I first came to Rio de Janeiro in 1994, I struggled to believe my eyes. The perfect cursive of the Bahía de Guanabara, the mountains with their meringue-whipped peaks, the terracotta *favelas* that clung to their sides, and the massive, futuristic highway tunnels blasted beneath them. This remains the single most powerful impres-

sion of a place I have ever experienced, a sensory overload that took me days to recover from.

Straight away I realized that the lavishness of the tropics presented a mimetic challenge to a writer. Try to describe it and you risk overstatement, sentimental naïveté, and — a more serious flaw — an instinct to exoticize. The natural abundance and warmth are easily romanticized, but the cummerbund that stretches around the planet, 23.5 degrees from the equator north to south, is overwhelmingly a zone of poverty and inequality. Only Singapore, Panama, and a clutch of tax-haven Caribbean islands join the ranks of the thirty countries classified by the World Bank as high income. Brazil itself is currently the eighth most unequal country in the world.

By the time I arrived, Bishop had been dead for fifteen years. As I went about my work as a journalist, I found myself brushing up against her ghost in unsought, fortuitous encounters. Ricardo Sternberg, the nephew of Bishop’s Brazilian partner Lota de Macedo Soares, was the cousin of a friend of mine. One rainy day, I met him at a pizzeria in Botafogo for lunch. I had told him that I was a writer from Nova Scotia living in Brazil and that I hoped to write about his aunt’s partner and her affinity with landscape. Sternberg was then a professor of literature at the University of Toronto. Here was a grown-up version of the boy I had read about in Bishop’s letters, whom she had helped get from Rio to Harvard, where she would later teach.

“She was very good fun,” he recalled. “Very humorous, an engaging conversationalist, a kind of raconteur.” This was not what I had expected to hear about a person who — if you read her carefully crafted poems as indicative of her personality — might be thought coolly contemplative at best, a fussy perfectionist at worst. She did not behave like a literary figure, he told me. “She never flaunted the fact that she was widely read or exercised her vast range of reference. She could talk to anyone; she would not talk down to them.”

Not long afterwards I went to a *churrasco* at my friend Marie’s house in Petrópolis, the mountain town where Bishop and Lota had lived in Fazenda Samambaia, the Frank Lloyd Wright-esque house that Lota had built there. Given that thirty years had passed, I didn’t expect anyone to remember her. “The house is there,” Marie pointed across the road. “My handyman, Vidigal, used to work for her.” Within minutes Vidigal was beside me, a figure not unlike the tenant farmer whom Bishop’s alter ego takes to task in “Manuelzinho.” He began recounting anecdotes, unprompted, of how Doña Lota always drove too fast on the twisting, precipitous roads, and how Doña Elizabeth would sit and watch the clouds spiral down from the mountain for hours.

Back in Rio, I reread “Questions of Travel,” replaying the scenes that surrounded me: “The mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships, / slime-hung and barnacled.” I adopted Bishop’s lens, as if don-

ning another pair of eyes, to look upon the city’s unique, stern voluptuousness. The Pão de Açúcar, whose western flank I could see from my window, and the towering Pedra da Gávea were exactly that: upturned freighters, coated with bromeliads and moss dripping in the epic winter rains.

Other encounters followed when work took me to Ouro Preto, the colonial-era town in the state of Minas Gerais, where Bishop lived out the latter part of the Brazilian chapter of her life. It was there I met her friend (and lover, although I didn’t know this at the time) Lili Correia de Araújo. I then made my way to Santarém, the low-slung, sultry city at the confluence of the Amazon and Tapajós Rivers, and the subject of Bishop’s eponymous poem. I came to feel a bit spooked; her presence was everywhere I went, a persistent, diaphanous chaperone.

♦

ALTHOUGH WE ARE SEPARATED BY SIXTY YEARS AND by social class, there are striking similarities between our childhoods. Bishop was brought up for a time by her maternal grandparents; I was also raised by my mother’s parents in Cape Breton. Her father died when she was eight months old; I never met my father, although I know now that he is dead. Her mother was committed to a psychiatric institution when she was five, and they never saw each other again. I met my own mother when I was eight, when her true relation to me was revealed, and I lived with her for only a handful of years. Like Bishop, my early life was peppered with stoic great-aunts, mental illness, alcoholism, isolation, and the fragmentation of families who let houses, land, and finally each other slip through their fingers.

Until I was living in Rio, I had no idea that Bishop had written about the place where I grew up. The Cape Breton of her rendering has a mysterious, spectral quality, with mist haunting the fissures of the land, the “rotting snow-ice sucked away / almost to spirit; the ghosts of glaciers drift / among those folds and folds of fir.” She sees abandonment in “deep lakes” reputed to be in the interior — the Bras d’Or Lake, most likely. The baleful land gives way gradually to poignant characters: two preachers, a man carrying a baby, a bawling calf. Here, she perceives the essential bargain of living in wilderness: nature determines and defines you, the land is supreme, and we are subjects in its dominion.

I found this equation stifling. I didn’t want to live in a lifelong state of siege by a domineering wilderness, never mind in poverty. Bar my grandfather, my immediate family were outraged if circumstances — a family visit, a job — required them to leave the island. Our radio was the unceasing stream of visitors that came to my great-aunt’s store and gas station, and the gossip they brought from the outside world. That was enough for them. So where did my restlessness, my conviction that I had to get away, come from?

An early childhood scene: an apartment where we stayed, after fleeing the breakdown of my grandparents’ marriage, on Ochterloney Street — a name that could only have been dreamed up by homesick Scots — in downtown Dartmouth, which was in those days a rust-bucket city, Halifax’s poorer twin. I remember nothing about the place apart from colour: a roll of toilet paper, pink or purple, wallpaper that wouldn’t have looked out of place on a Beatles album cover. It was the mid-1970s

Plutonium Valley

For Craig Dworkin

Alkali accrues in basins of abandoned badlands.

Pools of brine give way to splitting planes of hardened clay, replete with radial cracks.

Brittle crystals beard the hardpan lakebeds.

Legions of salt carve sharp but fragile letters into the weary earth.

Ancient colonies of dormant halophiles huddle in the drained tributaries of Styx, alien archaea thriving on thin films of saline.

Evaporated water leaves behind minerals too heavy to join the clouds.

Golems hide under the rubble of barren hillsides, glaring at military personnel from the mirrors of their dreams, sand looking through sand.

Ken Hunt

Ken Hunt is the author of, most recently, The Manhattan Project. He is also the founder of Spacecraft Press.

in the Maritimes, always a few years behind global trends, and the world was still cast in shades of sherbet: avocado bathrooms, magenta bedsheets.

An abstract panic overtook me. I began shaking, very slightly, as if I had a chill. "I have to go," I said. "Go where?" my grandmother asked, casting around the apartment, confused. "You mean the corner store?" I replied, "Somewhere." But what I meant was *anywhere*.

I'd had a premonition. At eight, I understood that we were poor, and getting poorer, and that I was going nowhere, in every sense. I was being lined up by circumstance to serve as one of life's bystanders, and rightly or wrongly, I concluded that I could dodge this fate through motion. The hunger to move through space that seized me in that apartment has never left. I still feel harassed by the curve of time — an aperture that is about to close and extinguish me — and the harried need to reach a place where becoming, not just belonging, is possible. It is like being addicted not to any substance but to a dimension.

Bishop explores the relationship between spaces and solitude. (Although rarely alone romantically, she said to her friend Robert Lowell, somewhat melodramatically, never mind grandiosely, "When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived.") A latent restlessness courses underneath the surface of plangent questions: "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? / Where should we be today?" In many of her poems about place — "The Map," "The Imaginary Iceberg," "Night City" — she approaches her subject from a distance. Here, emotional situatedness requires separation.

Now, distance and isolation have invaded our everyday language. I had never heard of "self-isolating" or "social distancing" until a few months ago, but our lives have since become soaked in such bizarre phrases. Like so much of the novel coronavirus discourse, these are lonely terms. Rereading Bishop's work in so-called lockdown (another example), I am more struck than ever by how many of her poems are cloaked in an atmosphere of loss, even those she wrote in her youth. The sound of elegy is anticipatory, even prescient, as in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," whose ironic title is undercut by the first two lines: "Thus should have been our travels: / serious, engravable." In the echo chamber of her work, "One Art" stands supreme for loneliness and lament: "I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster, / some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. / I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster."

◆
SPEAKING OF DISASTERS AND ENGRAVINGS, THE cover of my diary enthusiastically states, "2020 — Filled with plans, parties, and plots to conquer the world." How could I not have heard the fate-baiting message, the hubris?

The diary currently leads a much more interesting life than I do, having already been, or being about to travel, to Jordan, Kenya, Zanzibar, Spain, and Canada. Since escaping the flat on Ochterloney Street, I have spent much of my life commuting between hemispheres. My existence is oriented and organized emotionally through motion. Like a compass, I point myself in the direction of the next place, the people I will meet, the alchemy of possibility. Movement gives fission to what I think of as the defining element of life: entropy.

Travel, of course, represents both privilege and damage. As someone who has researched and written three books on the polar regions, I have seen the three square metres of ice shrinkage caused by each one-way transatlantic flight. In the context of the collective trauma of the pandemic, this pause in our plans is not a serious problem. Yet, to be confined by governments, even if required to fight a deadly virus, is to be disempowered, politically and economically. And for a writer, it restricts the basic premise of our role in the world: to bear witness.

The loss of the usual crochet of contrails over our skies is a potent symbol for how I have experienced the outbreak. The stillness signals an abrupt and disorienting collapse of time and space. This stage of my life, previously so global, has shrunk to the four square rooms of my flat. Now, I am effectively more trapped than I've ever been on Antarctic bases during whiteouts, or on ships in the middle of the ocean with engines on the blink. I find myself living under a version of martial law in a country that has seen some 50,000 excess deaths so far, and whose government's negligence, bluster, hesitation, and rank errors are becoming increasingly clear. Brexit and the pandemic response are intimately connected, both products of arrogant complacency and misguided exceptionalism. I think of them now as a joint venture: PanBrexit, Brexdemic. In any case they are both termini: first we were held captive by nationalism, a program of disjuncture based on the denial of possibility, identity, and opportunity. We have since become hostages of another, more literal death.

Being in quarantine feels very much like one of my long sea voyages. There are dark clouds to the north, dark clouds to the south. The days are gelid with a sense of waiting to arrive, waiting for the succour of harbour. All islands are islands; for once, the oceans and the whales that ply them are relieved by our sudden silence. We are under-occupied, spooked, stalled, and suddenly fanatical about details that used to not preoccupy us. We wait to resume life at our own pace. I have a realization: it's not just restlessness that compels me to travel, I feel safer while in motion. Here in my flat I feel like a sitting duck, as if I'm waiting for the virus to find me. I'd rather take a risk and venture out into the world and all its mortal glamour.

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come / to imagined places, not just stay at home?" Bishop asks at the end of "Questions of Travel." A similar bewildered voice in *Geography III* wishes to know, "In what direction is the Volcano? The / Cape? The Bay? The Lake? The Strait?" The bristling question marks are mine, now.

What would have happened on the journeys I have had to forsake this year? In Jordan, I was to interview pharmacists about a new vitamin formulation. In Zanzibar, I would have taught a non-fiction workshop to young writers from across Africa. In Tanzania, I had arranged to interview Richard Knocker, one of the top safari guides on the continent, for a book I am writing on the Anthropocene. I conjure a montage of my counter-life: slim *ngalawa* boats, the fishing dhows of the coast of East Africa, their only light at night a hurricane lamp in their bows; low clumps of *Acacia mellifera*, the blackthorn tree, on the lip of the vast inland sea of the Ngorongoro; the ochre plains of Jordan seen from the window of a plane banking to land.

As Columbus understood, the spirit of travel is the same as that of knowledge. To go to an unfamiliar place is to enter into a similar state of high alert as that required for interpretive and imaginative writing. The journey always involves a quest, the acceptance of multiple perspectives and contingent realities. The voyaging self is always aware of the life of its twin, the might-have-been self, had we stayed at home. The pandemic has disrupted our equation between place, being, and possibility, especially those of us with multiple nationalities and identities. My home is everywhere, and so staying still is a paradoxical form of homelessness. Perhaps, as for Bishop, literature is my true home.

◆
TODAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EIGHT WEEKS, an airplane arced overhead. The sound of its deceleration, like the groan of an exhausted angel, once so familiar, is now deafening. I rushed to the window — a British Airways A320, on quick inspection. It looked less like a plane than a visitation from another dimension. I watched as it banked to the west, finding its waypoints to the runway.

When I returned from Brazil in early March, I couldn't have foreseen that it would be my last journey for a while. I couldn't have imagined the empty terminals, their luxury shops shuttered, or the couple of hundred passengers shuffling through in hazmat suits and plastic face shields, wiping down their luggage with Dettol.

By March, the virus had made landfall in Britain. I had seen a few people wearing masks when I flew from São Paulo to Porto Alegre, but otherwise everything had looked normal. As I finally wheeled my suitcase through Terminal 5, I stopped for a moment to admire its vast cathedral-like interior, the maze of orderly BA check-in desks, with people snaking between them wearing saris, keffiyehs, dashikis. It was the world in miniature.

On the customary Piccadilly Line purgatory — slow, but less than a quarter of the cost of the stupidly overpriced Heathrow Express — I recognized one of the cabin crew across from me, an Irishman with an alarming sunburn (he had fallen asleep around the pool, he said). I asked about his pattern of working, why he did the job. The long-haul flight to São Paulo was outside of his routine, he told me. He usually did the routes to Boston or New York, although his wife would prefer him to stay within Europe.

What kept him doing these kinds of journeys? Surely it was difficult to be so far away from home and family? "I never get tired of travelling," he said. "Maybe there's something wrong with me, but if I couldn't do it, I'd be so depressed."

At Hatton Cross Station he bounded off the Tube on his way to catch a flight to the west coast of Ireland. I wished him a good trip as he waved goodbye, his burned face gleaming in the light of an early spring morning. ▲

Inspirations

Questions of Travel

Elizabeth Bishop

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965

One Art: Letters

Elizabeth Bishop

Selected and edited by Robert Giroux

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994

Virtual Realities

Putting technology to the test

Paul W. Bennett

Teachers vs. Tech? The Case for an Ed Tech Revolution

Daisy Christodoulou

Oxford University Press

232 pages, softcover and ebook

SMART TECHNOLOGIES, FOUNDED IN Calgary in 1987, introduced its first interactive whiteboard in the early 1990s. It was a wall-mounted unit that allowed teachers to connect to the internet, run animations, and generate electronic notes for their classes. Smart continued to innovate with advanced touch-sensitive displays throughout the decade and was hailed by many as a harbinger of a new era. That's certainly what Daisy Christodoulou thought when she began teaching high school English in 2007–08. She was wowed by the board's promise and committed to taking full advantage of it. In spite of her best intentions, though, Christodoulou quickly found herself using the latest ed-tech gadget as an ordinary classroom projector — rarely turning on its more sophisticated features. She wasn't alone: that's exactly what most of us did.

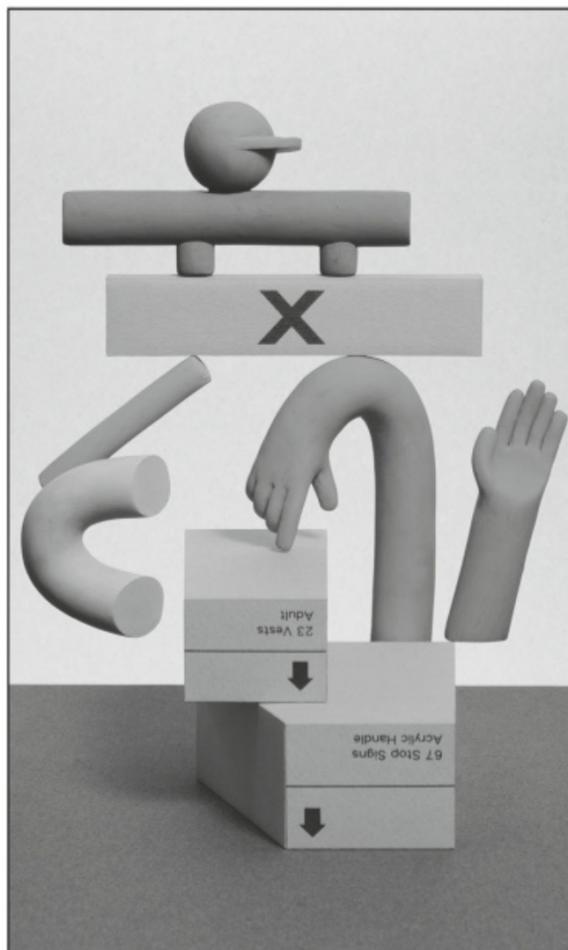
Over recent decades, billions of dollars have been invested in education technologies like the Smart board, along with laptops and tablets, yet the OECD reported in 2015 that such investments have led to “no appreciable improvements” in student learning. Indeed, optimistic forecasts of the transformative power of classroom computers and internet access never materialized. IT spending in British schools, where Christodoulou taught, quadrupled during the interactive whiteboard craze, which ultimately fizzled. By 2018, Smart Technologies had laid off hundreds of employees and had been acquired by Taiwan's Foxconn, while its signature product was dismissed as just another example of “imposing unwanted technology on schools.”

It's not just high-tech whiteboards. In 2013, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest in the United States, reached a \$1.3-billion deal with Apple and Pearson Learning to supply iPads to some 700,000 students. The plan was jettisoned a year later because of security vulnerabilities, incomplete curricula, and inadequate teacher training. If the giants can't make tech work, how can anyone?

The revolution that never seems to materialize is the central focus of Christodoulou's *Teachers vs. Tech?*, released just as COVID-19 thrust millions of teachers, students, and their families into e-learning on the fly. It's a timely book that asks a vitally important but discomfiting question: Why has ed tech failed in the past, and is it destined to fail in the future? We may now be closer to answering the second half

of Christodoulou's central question, thanks to an unplanned global experiment in education that has little end in sight.

Teachers vs. Tech? presciently tackles what have become central issues in pandemic-era schooling: What are the obstacles to harnessing ed tech? Why do teachers retain a healthy skepticism? How do we constructively repurpose the machines in ways that work? Christodoulou offers an engaging, original, and soundly researched guide to largely uncharted territory. In a field dominated by tech evangelists, such as Google's Jaime Casap and Getting Smart's Tom Vander Ark, and by tech fearmongers, like the media theorist Douglas Rushkoff and the



A harbinger of a new era?

popular critic of “addictive technology” Tristan Harris, Christodoulou is committed to a reasonably objective, evidence-based analysis.



TEACHERS HAVE OFTEN BEEN LABELLED BY POLICY makers, technology promoters, and school administrators as “resistant” to change. A steady parade of TED Talk speakers have left the distinct impression that educators are conservative and change-averse by nature. And yes, prominent teacher advocates maintain that education is an inherently human enterprise, irreplaceable by technology. But none of these positions completely explains the resistance to ed-tech interventions. That's because such technologies come with an embedded pedagogy, Christodoulou

contends, that embraces pseudoscience theory and goes against the grain for most educators.

Over the past seventy years or so, cognitive science and psychology have revealed a great deal about how the human mind works and how learning happens. Education providers wedded to play theory and interactive gaming have cherry-picked scientific investigations, particularly those associated with artificial intelligence. What interests Christodoulou is “the gap between what we know about human cognition, and what often gets recommended in education technology.” That technology is rife with fancy gadgets and fads, most of which are promoted by ed-tech evangelists, school-change theorists, and learning corporations, such as Pearson or Cengage.

Promoters of technology-driven education see opportunity flowing from what the late Harvard change-management guru Clay Christensen termed “creative disruption.” Too many innovations, however, can lead to too many new problems, especially when innovation boosters free-ride on unfounded theories, including so-called discovery learning. “The faddiest part of education,” Christodoulou writes, is the part dubiously rooted in scientific research. “Far from establishing sound research-based principles, technology has been used to introduce yet more pseudoscience into the education profession.”

Christodoulou tackles head-on the most significant and disputed issues around integrating technology into the classroom. Can it be effectively used to personalize learning? What's wrong with saying “Just google it”? How can technology be used to create active learning? Do smartphones and other devices have any place in the classroom? Can ed tech build upon the expertise of teachers? How can it improve student assessment for those educators? Her answers are clear and persuasive. (To tell a student to “Look it up on Google,” for example, is to tell that student to engage in discovery learning, “an idea which has a long history of failure.”)

Teachers vs. Tech? is at its best when making the case for technology-assisted teaching that actually incorporates the science of learning. Drawing upon her first book, *Seven Myths about Education*, from 2014, Christodoulou explains how cognitive science has shed new light on the efficacy of explicit instruction, which can effectively develop long-term memory and help overcome the limitations of short-term memory. Her plea is for ed tech and associated software that taps into that neglected form of pedagogy.

Whether to ban smartphones in the classroom is one of today's hottest education issues, and Christodoulou jumps right into the fray. She demonstrates how those devices interfere with learning; they are “designed to be distracting”

and absorb too much time inside and outside of school. Citing a 2017 meta-review by two leading European learning scientists, Paul A. Kirschner and Pedro De Bruyckere, she notes the “negative relationship” between academic achievement and social network activity among young people; put another way, texting and playing around with phones brings down your marks. Christodoulou also takes on the popular claim, first advanced by Marc Prensky in 2001, that adolescents are “digital natives” who are better at multi-tasking. That assertion, she shows, is completely unfounded. That’s why she favours strict limits on smart devices during class time and wishes tech giants would produce other devices better suited to teaching and learning environments.

♦
TEACHERS VS. TECH? PRE-EMPTIVELY ACKNOWLEDGES what students and parents have learned during the COVID-19 school shutdown: there is no real substitute for in-person teaching and live human interaction in a classroom. Teachers have training and first-hand experience that’s extremely difficult to replicate. Having said that, the effective use of the latest learning technology can remedy a few blind spots.

Christodoulou is no Luddite; she actually welcomes technological solutions, provided they do not disrupt or unduly complicate teachers’ lives. Indeed, certain innovations can help teachers develop more consistency in their delivery. Spaced repetition algorithms, for example, can improve students’ retention and long-term memory. Comparative judgment technology, pioneered by Christodoulou and her No More Marking research organization, can streamline the laborious process of grading, while making it a more reliable indicator of progress.

But the positive developments should not blind us to the dubiousness of the claims that learning corporations make for their heavily promoted products. Silicon Valley panaceas of personalization, active learning, and constant connectivity, in particular, are “too often interpreted as being about learning styles and student choice.” And with increased access to powerful search engines, students increasingly consider long-term memory irrelevant. “Connected devices are seen as a panacea for all of education’s ills, when they may just make it easier for students to get distracted.”

As it dismantles “faddish and trivial projects,” *Teachers vs. Tech?* provides a master class on how to clear away the obstacles to improving K–12 education through the effective, meaningful, and teacher-guided use of technology. The book’s title ends with a well-placed question mark. Popular and mostly fanciful ed-tech myths need to be exposed. But simply pointing fingers at the high-tech giants who dominate our classrooms will get us nowhere.

After struggling with all sorts of technologies during the great and ongoing COVID-19 distance-learning experiment, students, teachers, and parents may be longing for a respite and a return to offline bricks-and-mortar education. But even that would be a shame: this is no time to lapse into retrenchment. If the latest technologies promote the “wrong ideas,” it is ultimately up to educators to set them straight so that the current generation of students can truly benefit from connectivity and the latest learning tools — no matter where they’re actually sitting in the months to come. ▲

School Daze

A teenager’s view from lockdown

Abi Morum

MARCH BREAK SEEMS SO LONG ago now, but that was the week everything changed. My friends and I had gone to Mexico. We were really excited; it was our last big trip together before we graduated. But when we returned to Halifax, it felt like we had travelled to an alternative universe. We went straight into lockdown: our school was closed, the streets were empty, and we weren’t even supposed to leave our houses. Everything was so quiet.

You’d think it would be good not to have to go to school anymore. I definitely did, at least at first. I go to Halifax Grammar School — or, I should say, I used to go there. It’s small: there are only about 500 of us, although our ages range from junior primary through to grade 12. I started at the school in grade 7, so the place has been a big part of my life. I didn’t expect my final year to be cut short like this. It was sad not to be able to say a proper goodbye.

I remember back in January, my geography teacher had talked about how the coronavirus had gotten so bad in China that schools had been forced to close, and that there was a possibility of a student transferring to our class to complete their diploma. We thought shutting down schools was beyond imaginable here. On the last day before the break, my math teacher had told us to bring home our binders, just in case. My friends and I had laughed at the time, because this teacher was known for being super-cautious. She even stopped a lesson once when a classmate sneezed, to make us all use hand sanitizer. That doesn’t seem so crazy now.

Lockdown turned my world upside down. My school switched to online classes, and my parents began working from home. Suddenly, we were spending a lot more time together. We did all the usual things, the things that we’ll remember as the typical quarantine activities: watching everything on Netflix and going for short, scary walks around the neighbourhood where you mainly tried to avoid other people. But I enjoyed having the extra family time, especially as I still hoped to move out in the fall.

I found that I had a love-hate relationship with studying from home. On the one hand, it was much less stressful; on the other, I was often distracted. With virtual learning, it was like being given a choice of whether to pay attention. The teacher couldn’t always tell if we were listening. And there were too many unanswered questions back then, of what would be happening with our exams, with graduation, with prom, and with university. It was difficult to focus on the present when the future was so uncertain.

I took art, English, French, math, physics, and geography as part of the International

Baccalaureate program. Art proved to be the biggest challenge in my new bedroom-classroom-studio set-up. And I mean literally: One of my canvases was two metres wide! The experience of the pandemic really influenced my final projects. (How could it not? It was all we were thinking about.) I’d done a painting based on a photo I had taken on a family vacation to Italy, which turned into a homage to the country we’d been hearing about frequently on the news. It also became a reference to the time when we could travel without having to think too much about it. Another series of pieces incorporated salutations from around the world: *hi*, *bonjour*, *ciao*. I was considering how people were no longer able to hug or touch when they greeted each other. Projects like this made me feel part of something bigger than just being alone in my room.

In the end, our IB exams were cancelled, but we still had to write school exams to complete the year. We did these over Zoom — not in the school gymnasium, as we would usually do, surrounded by nervous peers. The teachers were concerned about cheating, so they just made the tests open book. I think they were also worried that the whole experience of online learning had been tough on us. They didn’t want the situation to hold us back or hurt our marks. We were grateful for that.

Next came graduation, the event that we had all been dreading, as there would be no walking across the stage, no pinnacle of our school career, which we’d been working toward for thirteen years. Instead, my parents and I huddled around the computer to tune in to the live ceremony. Afterwards, we were able to go to the school at a specified time to take photos. It was strange being there again, but at least I could have my gown and diploma moment, even if it wasn’t with my classmates. There was some good news, though: our prom, or a socially distanced version of it, was rescheduled for August. So we did manage to have one final celebration.

After the weirdness of the last six months, I’m looking forward to what comes next. Soon I’ll be heading to Acadia University to study kinesiology. Wolfville is only an hour from where my parents live, but it still represents the start of my independence. I know that I’m lucky to be able to move away at all. Some of my friends will have to continue with online classes for a while longer, maybe much longer. The dorms will all be singles this year, and Acadia has pushed back the start of classes to late September — the aim is to have in-person teaching, with larger labs and lectures delivered online. Nobody knows what “normal” is anymore, but it looks as if my first year might be *close* to the experience I’ve been picturing for so long. It’s the beginning of a new adventure, anyway. ▲

The Western Front

Speaking unspoken truths

Zalika Reid-Benta

**They Said This Would Be Fun:
Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up**

Eternity Martis

McClelland & Stewart

256 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

THIS IS THE BOOK I WISH I'D HAD IN grad school when a white acquaintance made a quip about all of the "angry Black women" in our cohort of fifty (there were four of us). It's the book I wish I'd had in high school when a white classmate demanded I "talk to those n—," kids he accused of stealing at a house party. Gracefully written and sharply recounted, *They Said This Would Be Fun* is the book I wish I'd had throughout my academic career — so I could share it with students, teachers, and administrators, to put their actions and words into perspective and to tamp down the overwhelming isolation I often felt.

Herein lies the beauty and the power of Eternity Martis's memoir: for Black women who have had to navigate and survive the blatant aggressions and coded language of campus life, reading these pages will be a cathartic experience. Conversely, for those who have never been policed or never had to police themselves in public, for those who have never had to experience the insidiousness of discrimination, reading this book will serve as a necessary awakening. Martis strikes the right balance between writing for those who will have an implicit understanding of the events she recounts and educating others on the prevalence of systemic racism in higher education in Canada.

They Said This Would Be Fun begins on a somewhat universal note. Any woman who remembers leaving home for university or college — excited for the sheer possibility and liberation that a campus promises — can see herself in Martis in 2010, the year she enrolls at Western University, in London, Ontario. Early on, and with great humour, she describes trying and failing to use a bong for the first time. She then briefly backtracks to her high school days in Toronto, where she yearned to attend Western. However, just a few pages in, Martis subverts the expectations of both the reader and her younger self by detailing a horrific incident during a Halloween party, with three white students entering a bar in blackface.

This jarring turn of events sets the tone for the rest of the book, which showcases the harsh realities that Black women and Black people in general face. Situations that should be innocuous and fun or carefree and exciting can quickly prove unsafe and triggering. "You can just be wandering through your life, not really trying



Realities on and off university campuses.

to have a race or gender experience, and then here comes an image," the author and political commentator Melissa Harris-Perry said in a 2011 lecture. "Here comes the tilt."

Martis does more than recount the details of her promising-turned-horrific Halloween night; she delves into the prevalence of blackface on Canadian campuses, citing a 2009 Halloween party at the University of Toronto, a 2011 frosh week party at the Université de Montréal, and a 2014 costume contest at Brock University. Martis makes similar moves throughout: she begins intimately, detailing personal experiences, and then widens the scope to reveal the anti-Black racism that's entrenched in Canadian history and institutions. She describes how white people on campus and around London assumed — even insisted — that she was born somewhere in the Caribbean and not in Canada: "Why is it so hard for some people to believe that anyone with beige or brown skin can be 'from here'?"

After posing this rhetorical question, Martis examines the history of London, moving from the 1850s, when over 40,000 free Blacks and refugee enslaved people left the United States and settled in what was then the Province of Canada, to the 1870s, when the Ku Klux Klan was active in the city. While noting that London has undergone a significant demographic shift over the past decade, she also brings attention to the fact that it is currently home to many white supremacist and alt-right groups. By coupling the personal with the statistical, she puts Canada under a microscope as she debunks the myth

that this settler-colonial country is exempt from the racism we see south of the border.

A POIGNANT AND HOPEFUL THREAD IN *THEY SAID This Would Be Fun* is Martis's exploration of racial dynamics within her own family: her father is Black and Jamaican, and her mother is South Asian. Her mother and maternal grandparents are imbued with dimensionality, love, and good intentions. Her mother's influence, in particular, is a positive one. But Martis is also honest about how they struggled to understand her Blackness. She notes that while her South Asian family members had experienced racism themselves, they dismissed how anti-Black racism, specifically, could affect her.

Martis digs into the complexities of her family's affection — how it could lead to the erasure of her lived experiences, which could lead to isolation. To try to uplift Eternity once she began writing articles, her grandfather would leave her newspaper clippings about South Asian authors, which she strove and failed to find inspiring. He would then question why she never wrote about South Asian life. After a frank conversation, his understanding of her identity began to evolve:

When I come home on the weekends now, newspaper clippings about books by Black authors greet me on the table. I see myself in these writers; their successes fuel my own. Over lunch, my grandfather and I catch up to talk about what I'm writing,

and discuss the latest news stories to do with discrimination. My mother and I have long, engaging conversations about race and she listens instead of dismissing me.

Such growth speaks to the possibility of true allyship for people willing to do the work, willing to listen and learn in earnest and in sincerity.

Martis takes the reader through the relationships she had during her four years at Western, using them to frame such issues as how white men and other men of colour exoticize and fetishize Black women; the ways in which women are expected to contort themselves and appease their partners; and the dynamics of abuse. In one chapter, written in the second person with searing vulnerability and unflinching clarity, Martis depicts her high school boyfriend's abuse and the complexities involved with ultimately leaving him in her first year of university, after a violent incident. She then moves to expose the rape culture on Western's campus and, in doing so, amplifies the experiences of other survivors. "Who needs the term *victim-blaming* when we have *why*?" she asks:

Why did you go to his place? Why did you wear that dress? Why didn't you tell the police? Why didn't you speak up sooner? Why did you think it's okay to ruin his life? Why do you think this happened to you? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

She ends the section by answering the dehumanizing yet sadly predictable line of questioning with "Why don't you fucking ask him?"

As the book concludes, Martis admits that she'd thought about transferring from Western many times, but she ultimately decided to stay and graduate, even when friends and acquaintances chose to leave. Her decision was made easier near the end of her third year, when the women's studies department offered a new course, "Black Women's History in Canada," which she describes as "the meeting spot we had been desperately searching for."

They Said This Would Be Fun ends on a note of catharsis and the transformative power of Black female friendship. Martis highlights sisterhood as a community that both supports and inspires, that is a space where Black women are finally able to be soft and vulnerable, angry and tired without reproach or consequence. She underscores the importance and necessity of this space, as wider society stifles or overlooks the voices of Black female-identified people and the violence they face. It's a sentiment that hits home in the wake of the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Breonna Taylor, Iyanna Dior, Muhlaysia Booker, Sandra Bland, and, unfortunately, countless others. As the Black feminist writer Robyn Maynard has pointed out, there's an "overrepresentation of Black women in police encounters" that many of us have long known. We're just now seeing the actual statistics reported.

To say *They Said This Would Be Fun* is a timely read would do a disservice to its staying power. It's a book that should be required reading now and in the years to come. Fiercely honest, meticulously researched, and deeply personal, it is an excellent account of what it means to be a Black woman in a Canadian university — and a Black woman in Canada. ▲

THE ARGUMENT

Lend Me Your Ear

In defence of public libraries

Stephen Abram

THIS COUNTRY'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE hungry for content, especially for content that represents a range of voices and experiences — from Indigenous histories to French-language poets, from the memoirs of recent immigrants to the graphic novels of third- or fourth-generation Canadians. In the ten years ending in 2018, our librarians spent \$714,376,318 on collections. And while books are just one of the many ways that libraries meet the social, economic, employment, recreational, and educational needs of their communities, they remain central to the larger mission. A great deal of that money, then, goes to the authors, illustrators, and publishers who create the volumes that public libraries — and their users — crave.

Recently, it's been argued that the public library system is somehow nefarious, that this critical infrastructure of ours competes with Canada's authors and publishers. "Libraries rely on the traffic generated by pimping free entertainment to people who can afford it," Kenneth Whyte wrote in the *Globe and Mail* in late July. "All the genuine good they do is to some extent made possible by being a net harm to literature." That couldn't be further from the truth. Consider the impact of a single dollar that goes to a local public library. That dollar will yield an average of \$5 in economic return on investment, and as much as \$8 in, for example, Kawartha Lakes and Newmarket, Ontario. Based on a toolkit developed by the NORDIK Institute, that dollar will bring in, on average, close to \$25 in social return on investment, reinforcing things like cultural integrity, cognitive development, and safe communities. And that dollar will undoubtedly support this country's publishing industry.

The fact of the matter is Canadian publishers could not thrive without Canadian public libraries that are proud to focus on Canadian books and authors. The ecosystem is complex, yes, and many analysts misinterpret the buying patterns of libraries, which use consortia and jobbers to build scale into their collection development. To some, these sales look like business-to-business activities; left uncontextualized, the statistics can suggest that lending books is hurting the book business. But meaningful sales they are.

The first-sale doctrine allows you to lend a book that you own to a friend or family member. It allows you to donate that book or even resell it. That doctrine also applies to libraries, but, unlike you, libraries participate in the Public Lending Right Program, which distributes tens of thousands of payments to content creators every year. Since the federal program was established in 1986, it has paid out over a quarter of a billion dollars to Canadian copyright holders. This money is in addition to the original

sales price of a physical book or the original licensing fee of an ebook.

Research by BookNet Canada, along with longitudinal studies by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, suggests that books retain their popularity longer in libraries than they do on retail shelves. Three-quarters of loans involve titles published more than a year ago — what publishers refer to as backlist items. An example might be Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black*, which came out in fall 2018 but remained the second most popular book at the Toronto Public Library sixteen months later. In bookshops, up to 60 percent of sales are recent works — the frontlist titles published within the past several months. As the University of Ottawa's Michael Geist recently put it, "This distinction is important because it points to the fact that book loans from libraries actually become an important source of income for authors as their books move from the frontlist to the backlist." (Often publishers retain PLR rights in contracts with their authors, so they're actually the beneficiaries when you check out that novel.)

What's more, the suggestion that libraries are somehow siphoning off sales from publishers ignores well-documented patterns of behaviour. According to a recent More Canada report on independent bookstores, "Library browsing and reading can substitute for book buying, but research data show that it also generates book purchases. Together, a public library branch and an independent bookstore will support and sustain higher levels of discovery and reading than either would generate on their own." Libraries are an essential ingredient; without them, the recipe for Canadian books falls flat. Anyone who has ever spent time in the stacks knows how easy and exciting it is to find new writers (whether just published or published years ago). Libraries also host countless readings and events that help raise the profiles of those writers. In promoting an author's newest book, libraries often anticipate renewed interest in their older books — and buy additional copies for the collection. And the Pew Research Center has confirmed what many of us know anecdotally: "Data show that those who use libraries are more likely than others to be book buyers and actually prefer to buy books, rather than borrow them." Indeed, as the Book Publishers Association of Alberta put it on August 6, the shared value of public libraries is something to believe in "unequivocally."

The core principles of twenty-first-century libraries are simple: We respect copyright and pay for what our patrons use. We also strategically focus on Canadian-authored and Canadian-published books. Any assertion to the contrary is false. The argument that lending books in this country is hurting authors or publishers is simply misguided and unsupported by research. ▲

All the Kremlin's Men

On seventy-five years of Russian interference

Joyce Wayne

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, THREE DAYS after Japan formally surrendered, bringing the Second World War to a close, Igor Gouzenko vanished from the Soviet embassy on Charlotte Street in Ottawa's tranquil Sandy Hill neighbourhood. Over the next forty-eight hours, something of a legend was born. The details and chronology differ depending on the teller, but most agree that Gouzenko, who had been in the city since 1943, first headed to the *Ottawa Journal*. The twenty-six-year-old cipher clerk had secrets to share. But then his courage failed him and he went home.

Gouzenko, who had learned days before that he was to be shipped back to the Soviet Union, was frantic and afraid. He had stolen scores of top secret documents and worried that as soon as the embassy's military attaché, Nikolai Zabolin, discovered the missing papers, he'd be ambushed and punished.

When he arrived home, at 511 Somerset Street West, a strange-looking two-storey affair with round windows overlooking a park, Gouzenko's pregnant wife, Svetlana, urged him to try the *Journal* again. They had their safety and that of their two-year-old son, Andrei, to think about. So he returned to the paper and pleaded with the night desk to inspect his cache of documents. But the editor — perhaps uninterested, perhaps unable to understand the excited Russian before him — made one of the greatest gaffes in twentieth-century journalism and turned Gouzenko out onto the street.

On the surface of things, the Soviets and the Canadians were the best of friends. On St. Catherine Street in downtown Montreal, for example, Eaton's flew the hammer and sickle above its main doors, and the director John Grierson's pro-Soviet documentary, *Inside Fighting Russia*, had been enthusiastically screened across the country. Yet the friendship was paper-thin. Soon, the Canadian government would learn the USSR had been intent on gathering secrets from our Chalk River laboratory, a hive of scientific activity located about two hours northwest of Ottawa. As the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, in New Mexico, moved ever closer to producing the A-bomb, the Soviets aggressively targeted associated operations here. And Gouzenko carried the proof on that sultry Wednesday night of September 5, 1945.

After his rejection at the *Journal*, Gouzenko tried the Justice Building at 294 Wellington Street. But the department was closed, and he was told to come back the next day, which he did with his family in tow. He forced his way into the inner sanctum, where he threatened to shoot himself if he wasn't allowed to speak to the justice minister, Louis St. Laurent. (For years,

his pistol was enshrined in the International Spy Museum, in Washington. It was recently returned to Ottawa.) Sent away again, Gouzenko tried the RCMP's Bureau of Naturalization, where his attempts to defect were refused.

Back at his apartment — technically Russian property — he heard Colonel Zabolin's chauffeur pounding on the door. Gouzenko and Svetlana, in desperation, hid little Andrei with a neighbour, and Gouzenko jumped over a balcony to get away before Vitalii Pavlov, the embassy's *rezident*, broke into the home with a group of Zabolin's men. Only then did the police get involved. "It was like a game of cops and robbers" is how Amy Knight described the



He lit the match that started the Cold War.

scene in *How the Cold War Began*, "with the hapless Ottawa police confronting belligerent Russians desperate to find their missing cipher clerk and his documents."

Gouzenko never did meet with St. Laurent, but he did get the attention of Norman Robertson, who contacted Mackenzie King. The undersecretary for external affairs told the prime minister that a "terrible thing" had occurred. "Robertson seemed to feel that the information might be so important both to the States... and to Britain that it would be in their interests to seize it no matter how it was obtained," King wrote in his diary.

But the prime minister was distracted, putting the final touches on the Throne Speech and

preparing to open a new session of Parliament. He was also leery of Gouzenko's intentions: "My own feeling is that the individual has incurred the displeasure of the Embassy and is really seeking to shield himself." King was a wartime supporter of cordial relations between Canada and the Soviet Union and didn't wish to rock the boat; Robertson and others, however, ultimately convinced him to send Gouzenko back to the RCMP, who then transported him to the top secret Camp X, on the shores of Lake Ontario, near Whitby. That's where Gouzenko fell into the hands of John Leopold.

Leopold was born in Bohemia in 1890 and arrived in Canada in 1912. He was five feet four and of Jewish background — two things that made it difficult for him to become a Mountie. But he spoke several languages and was virulently anti-Communist. In 1918, he managed to join the ranks. "He spent the next decade as a secret RCMP agent," Knight wrote, "posing as a house painter and working his way up the hierarchy of the radical Canadian labour movement." Just weeks after Gouzenko defected, Leopold was appointed chief of the RCMP's intelligence branch, the Special Section, where he became among the most thorough investigators of Communist agents and sympathizers in this country — perhaps *the* most thorough.

As Gouzenko was whisked off to Camp X, King notified Harry Truman and J. Edgar Hoover, and soon afterwards the befuddled prime minister found himself on a plane to Washington. The president and the FBI director were livid. Most worrisome to them was how deeply the Soviets had infiltrated efforts to build the atomic bomb. Yet Truman, too, was hesitant to decisively expose his Soviet allies.

It wasn't until February 3, 1946, that the nationally syndicated radio columnist Drew Pearson shocked Americans by announcing that a Soviet spy had surrendered himself and confessed to a "gigantic Russian espionage network inside the United States and Canada." Pearson, a confidant of the Truman cabinet, had been leaked the information — by the president himself. What's more, according to Pearson, "the Russian agent taken by the Canadians has given the names of about 1,700 other Soviet agents operating not only in Canada, but also in the United States."

Gouzenko's treasure trove of stolen documents, some of which were released to the public only in October 2018, was the spark that many historians believe ignited the Cold War. It was irrefutable evidence that the Soviets had set up an intricate spy operation on Canadian soil — managed by the Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU. The telegrams, letters, and handwritten notes showed that Zabolin was running the

network from the Soviet embassy on Charlotte Street. What's more, they showed that an MP, Fred Rose, was operating on behalf of the Soviets from his office on Parliament Hill.

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MY FATHER, HARRY VINE, WAS BORN IN 1904, IN Nesvitz, a tiny shtetl nestled precariously on the undulating border between Russia and Poland. Like his comrade Fred Rose, he was an active member of Canada's Communist Party. Before that, in Nesvitz, he had witnessed the brutal murder of his two older brothers. When he was only seventeen, his parents sent him to Canada to cut a trail for the surviving family members, whose day-to-day existence had been inalterably transformed by the pogroms, wars, and revolutions being waged in the Pale of Settlement. My father's brother Irving and sister Fanny made perilous journeys of their own to Windsor, Ontario, where an aunt with a farm and dry goods store offered them sanctuary.

Although our family often met for Jewish holidays, weddings, and bar mitzvahs, I never heard the brothers and sisters talk about the destruction of their humble existence in Nesvitz or about the death of their older brothers. They never spoke to their children about their voyages as solitary teenagers, sailing from the port of Danzig across the Atlantic Ocean. It was not until after my father's death that I learned of the murder of the eldest brothers. My aunts and uncles happily spoke about whose kids had been accepted into medical school — never about what had ravaged the family back in Russia. Privately, my father continued to recount his adventures during the civil war that followed the revolution, and I was all ears. He seemed mesmerized by the Red Army cavalry, which stormed into Nesvitz during the post-1917 conflict. He would vividly describe a colonel who had held a pistol to his head. He ordered my father to collect the village doctor and escort him to the train station, where wounded soldiers were lying on the railway platform. Fifty years later, my father still spoke with great pride about his own bravery.

I eventually learned that two of my father's siblings had remained in what is now Belarus, while an older sister, Dvora, married a general in the Red Army and moved to Moscow, where she taught school. During Stalin's reign of terror, her husband was taken from his bed, tortured in the Lubyanka, convicted of treason during a show trial, and shot by a firing squad. The Nazis murdered the remainder of the Vine family.

Safe in Canada, my father married Rachel, from the old country. But he was restless and eager to join the growing movement of leftists during the Great Depression. He left Windsor for Montreal when his wife took ill, taking his three-year-old son, David, with him. For years, he worked as a labour organizer in the garment factories, and he was the top dog in a group of *havers*, friends who lived in cold-water flats in the Jewish ghetto in the riding of Cartier.

In 1943, two years before Gouzenko stole those documents, my father campaigned for Fred Rose, who had been born in Lublin, Poland, in 1907. While the Communist Party was technically outlawed in Canada, operating instead as the Labor Progressive Party, Rose was a card-carrying member running against the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation's

David Lewis, in a by-election in Cartier. Rose won by 30 percent (and again by 40 percent in 1945). His was a landmark victory, celebrated by Communists and sympathizers across the country. To this day, he's the only Communist to have served in the House of Commons — and the only MP convicted of violating the Official Secrets Act.

In the late 1940s, my father's life took a dark turn. His second wife, Edith Miller, died in hospital after a simple surgical procedure. She had been the head of the Young Communist League in Montreal and an ardent supporter of international Communism. When my father attempted to contact his comrades to announce her death — mostly writers and intellectuals living in the Soviet Union — he discovered many were dead or had gone missing in the gulags. Some had died before the Nazi invasion, in June 1941.

The Gouzenko revelations, along with the subsequent trials and convictions, had frightened my father as much as they disillusioned him. It was clear that Moscow had been actively undoing the Communist Party's progress in Canada. Disheartened, he returned to Windsor, where he opened a furniture store with his younger brothers.

Although my father spoke with reverence of his Montreal years, there was always an element of secrecy about why he relocated to Windsor. He hid his Yiddish and Russian books, including Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*, in our cold storage room — alongside hand-preserved dill pickles

“As it was, I was accustomed to keeping secrets, having been schooled by the best.”

and sugared strawberries. Babel's short stories from the 1920s honestly portray the brutality of the Red Army and show fascinating sympathy for the Bolshevik struggle. The Soviet intelligentsia lauded him, but his days of favour with Stalin's regime were not to last. He was executed on an early January morning in 1940, just hours after a show trial that lasted a mere twenty minutes.

On those same lamp-lit basement shelves of ours, I discovered the fiction of Dovid Bergelson, who was also executed, on the Night of the Murdered Poets, in August 1952, during Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign against “rootless cosmopolitans.” By the time I could decipher the titles on these tucked-away books, I had learned from my father that his favourite Jewish writers were all dead, murdered at the Lubyanka or in yet another fanatical purge.

What struck me as strange, even then, was my father's nostalgia for all things Russian — literature, music, dance — along with an equally powerful distaste for Canadian culture and the prime minister. This was the McCarthy era in the United States, but even here, he was endlessly fearful of speaking about his past. Once, in grade 3, I stood up in class and announced that Diefenbaker was “a terrible leader.” My teacher, of course, reported my outburst to my mother, Helen Marcus, my father's third wife. She detested secrecy, but my father admonished me sternly, and I was forbidden to repeat anything I heard at home.

AS I GREW OLDER, MY FATHER'S STORIES GAINED urgency. Around the time my aunt's husband, the Red Army general, was executed, my father had become increasingly devoted to the idea of returning to the Soviet Union. His sister Dvora was in Moscow, but the two did not communicate during the 1930s and '40s. Mail was stopped or censored at the Russian border, and my father had no knowledge of her troubles. And then, slowly, he turned away from Communism — as did many others who discovered how Stalin had treated their friends and family back home. The dissonance between the cause he'd devoted the best years of his life to and the stark reality of Russia's anti-Semitic police state tore him apart.

In the early '30s, Stalin had promised a place for the Jews of the world — a place that might even rid Russia of centuries of virulent anti-Semitism. Birobidzhan was founded at the centre of a modern Jewish Autonomous Oblast, sitting on the Trans-Siberian Railway near the China-Russia border. But even this dream drowned in a bottomless pit of broken promises. After the war, Stalin targeted it and its Yiddish institutions that had given so many Jewish Canadians hope. (Last year, the former party supporter Sol Hermolin told me over a coffee at the Free Times Café, in Toronto's Kensington Market, that when he misbehaved as a child, his mother would threaten “to leave him behind when the family moved to Birobidzhan.”)

The promise of Birobidzhan had been on the minds of many members of the Communist Party in Canada. And in 1939, only ten days after Canada declared war, they followed instructions from Moscow and publicly supported the now inconceivable Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The party was actively against the war effort throughout the 1940 federal campaign, even claiming that King's decision to call a wartime election was no better than Hitler's plebiscites.

Ultimately, Canada banned the Communist Party because of its anti-war position. More than 100 prominent members, including the party's leader, Tim Buck, were interned at Camp Petawawa in Ontario or Camp Kananaskis in Alberta, or were jailed at Kingston or Hull. Gouzenko's chief interrogator, John Leopold, who'd infiltrated the party meetings in Toronto during the 1930s, testified against Buck. The crack-down had far-reaching implications. “During the Second World War,” Rhonda L. Hinder wrote recently in *Civilian Internment in Canada*, “the Canadian government imprisoned, in jails and internment camps, hundreds of far-left activists.” Ethnic groups were particularly vulnerable. To be a socialist from a visible, ideological, or religious minority spelled trouble.

Early in the war, Communist propaganda in Canada made a desperately precarious situation much worse for European Jews. Moscow-approved propaganda against the Allies helped perpetuate the King government's response to Jewish refugees seeking entry into the country. It must also have profoundly affected the Jewish members of the party already here. How could they tolerate and support Hitler and Stalin's non-aggression pact?

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BETWEEN 1939 AND 1945, CANADA ADMITTED ONLY about 5,000 Jewish refugees. During the same period, China accepted 25,000, Britain accepted

RESTORING DEMOCRACY

IN AN AGE OF
POPULISTS & PESTILENCE

JONATHAN
MANTHORPE

Author of the National Bestseller
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– Hugh Segal, *The Globe and Mail*

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70,000, and the United States accepted 200,000. There was a time, before the war, when Jews were barred from swimming in Lake Ontario: “No Dogs or Jews,” the signage read at a Toronto beach in 1933. The same year, a riot broke out between Jews and Gentiles, at Christie Pits Park in Toronto. During a baseball game, with several thousand in attendance, twenty young people raised a large white sheet painted with a huge black swastika, and some cried “Heil Hitler.” As Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir described in their 1987 book, *The Riot at Christie Pits*, “Jewish supporters rushed the flag-bearers, and pandemonium broke out. Spectators yelled ‘Kill the Jews’ as youths made after one another with clubs, chains, bats, and broom handles.”

By the time of the riot, Torontonians were well aware of the Nazi rise to power. According to Levitt and Shaffir, newspapers “carried horrifying front-page reports of the atrocities against Jews during the first months of Hitler’s rule.” The *Toronto Daily Star* “referred to the burning of books in May 1933 as a ‘holocaust,’ and repeated references were made in both the English and Yiddish press to the ‘destruction,’ ‘annihilation,’ and ‘extermination’ of the Jews in Hitler’s power.” Yet five years later, the *Toronto Telegram*, which opposed Jewish immigration, declared: “It cannot be denied that Jewish people as a class are not popular in Canada.”

Jews weren’t excluded just from swimming in Lake Ontario. After Fred Rose was charged with espionage — after he served six years in prison and was forced to return to Poland — an aura of suspicion and exclusion continued to cloak Canada’s Jewish population. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, investigated in part because of the Gouzenko Affair, were simply U.S. citizens convicted of espionage. But Rose was an *elected official* who had often lunched with Norman Robertson. And many of Rose’s comrades held essential jobs in government or academia. Here, through well-placed Jewish Canadians, Soviet tentacles had reached the highest levels of power.

WHILE MY FATHER AND HIS COMRADES STRUGGLED to create a socialist Canada, Gouzenko helped expose the depth of Soviet activities. Before the revelations, Colonel Nikolai Zabotin was a darling of the Ottawa diplomatic corps. He was tall, with a fine head of blond curls and a penetrating gaze. Women, especially, were mesmerized by his Red Army uniform and flawless French and English. When not trading bons mots around the capital’s most fashionable dinner tables, Zabotin concentrated on Chalk River and the nuclear reactor being built on the banks of the Ottawa River. It was there that the ZEEP prototype was developed with the help of Alan Nunn May and Bruno Pontecorvo. Both physicists had joined the Communist Party in their home countries — Nunn May in Britain and Pontecorvo in Italy. And both worked under cover for the GRU, gathering classified information about Chalk River and Los Alamos. British officials had cleared both men for work at the secret atomic laboratory, likely with the assistance of the master double agents Kim Philby and Donald Maclean.

From Chalk River, Nunn May and Pontecorvo passed secrets along to Fred Rose, who kept morale high among Zabotin’s ring of spies. Once, an official from the Soviet embassy even carried a minuscule chunk of plutonium to

Moscow — atomic gold that Nunn May had managed to steal. Spies were also embedded in the civil service. Yet many if not most Communist Party members and wartime sympathizers were not aware of the spying activities. They were shocked by the Gouzenko revelations, even as they were considered suspects themselves. Even John Grierson, head of the National Film Board and later the Wartime Information Bureau, was questioned by the Royal Commission on Espionage, which Mackenzie King established. Careers were destroyed, lives ruined.

Twenty-three suspects were detained incommunicado at RCAF Station Rockcliffe, and ten appeared before the royal commission, where Gouzenko was the star witness. They were charged under the Official Secrets Act and sent to prison. Freda Linton, who once worked as a secretary to John Grierson and who was a party member close to Rose, managed to evade the RCMP by leaving the country. She was never charged, and decades later I wrote a novel about her, *Last Night of the World*.

My father once told me that party members were never sure if they’d be rounded up, interrogated, jailed. And many, like my father, continued in a perpetual state of fear long after Russian espionage ceased to be a burning issue. In my father’s case, his work for the party left him clinically anxious, with bouts of severe depression, for which he was hospitalized. He sometimes recounted life on the lam, sleeping on a different sofa every night after the party was declared illegal. Until his death in 1981, he was suspicious of being detained and fearful of crossing international borders. He never failed to keep all the doors and windows locked. He feared he would be sent back to the Soviet Union, as Fred Rose had been sent back to Poland. He wouldn’t be treated as a hero, he worried, but would meet the same fate as those fallen writers he so revered.

I TOOK A YEAR OFF FROM MY UNDERGRADUATE studies at Carleton University to work as an assistant to Ed Broadbent, who had won his Oshawa-Whitby riding in the 1968 general election, defeating the former Progressive Conservative cabinet minister Michael Starr by fifteen votes. Broadbent’s office was on the sixth floor of Centre Block, directly under the clock tower. I luxuriated in the leather sofas and old mahogany desks and was awestruck by the parliamentary pages, who gladly brought liquor and wine to an MP’s office on demand. Lunch at the parliamentary cafeteria cost a dollar.

I answered phones and wrote letters on a tomato-red IBM Selectric typewriter. My boss was a dedicated MP who tried to convince me that John Stuart Mill was more important than Karl Marx. He was a joy to work for: fair, easy-going, and somewhat indulgent of a young woman with radical ideas about politics. Once, leading up to the 1972 “corporate welfare bums” election, I accompanied Broadbent to see David Lewis, by then leader of the NDP. I’ll never be sure how, but Lewis recognized me: “Are you the little guy’s daughter? Are you Harry Vine’s girl?” (Lewis himself was short, but my wiry father was only five feet three.) When I admitted that I was, he replied, “One iota of trouble from you and you’re out. Do you understand?”

As it was, I was accustomed to keeping secrets, having been schooled by the best, and for years I made certain to never mention my encounter

with him to anyone except my father. I asked why the NDP leader was so upset almost thirty years after Rose's election, and he responded by detailing how the Rose campaign was better organized than the CCF's effort.

For decades after that 1943 by-election, my father, who never was interrogated by the RCMP — or so he claimed — argued that the information gathered by Rose's ring of spies was of no importance and certainly nothing of serious interest to the Soviets. He maintained that it was material anyone could have gleaned by reading the daily papers or reviewing Hansard. He believed the RCMP had exaggerated the case and that Fred Rose was innocent. Only shortly before his death did his views change.

Of course, it was not the case that the information collected by the Soviet spy ring was of little consequence. It was so important that Gouzenko helped trigger the Cold War and rearrange the Canadian political landscape. And it was now clear that Soviet support for Communist movements outside of Russia would be sacrificed to support Stalin's government, no matter how chilling the consequences.

In 2003, the *Globe and Mail's* Jeff Sallot interviewed Martin Rudner, then the director of Carleton University's Canadian Centre of Intelligence and Security Studies, about the Gouzenko case. "It was absolutely explosive," Rudner said, "probably the single most important event in counterintelligence." As Sallot wrote, "Mr. Gouzenko disclosed the existence of Soviet 'sleeper networks'—spy rings consisting of secret agents recruited at early ages and kept in place for years until they attained positions from which to influence the policies of their native countries or steal important scientific, military or political secrets." And, according to documents revealed by a later defector, Gouzenko's defection "effectively paralyzed Soviet espionage efforts in Canada for 15 years."

Igor Gouzenko and Svetlana were granted Canadian citizenship and new identities after they left Camp X. Their home in Port Credit, Ontario, was under constant RCMP protection. Although Gouzenko feared that Soviet agents would assassinate him, he managed to appear on television, always wearing a bag over his head. And he kept busy writing books. His novel about Stalinist Russia, *The Fall of a Titan*, won the 1954 Governor General's. He died in Mississauga on June 25, 1982.

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MANY OF THE THIRTY-NINE CANADIANS SUSPECTED of working for the Soviets, including the eighteen convicted under the Official Secrets Act, were Jewish, compounding the age-old trope of the Jew as traitorous troublemaker. That Jews were also responsible for the Russian Revolution became an article of faith for many. As Allan Levine put it in *Seeking the Fabled City*, "Jews were frequently portrayed in the English- and French-language press, and by politicians, church leaders, and businessmen, as dangerous Bolshevik sympathizers; urbanites, rather than farmers, who threatened the virtuous rural ideal imagined for Canada; and above all, as a 'race' that could never truly assimilate into a Christian nation."

Not long ago, I sat down with the octogenarian Solomon Blaser, to record his memories of growing up in the Toronto branch of the Communist Party. He recalled his early days at his parents' cabin at Camp Naivelt, open

to Jewish members and their friends, near the Credit River outside of Brampton. Paul Robeson and Pete Seeger sang for the campers, and hundreds of orators promised a better world under Communist rule. "My parents were looking for a place for their children to swim and play in the fresh air," Blaser explained. "To purchase the land for Camp Naivelt, the members asked the Ukrainian comrades to make the offer to the landowner, who never would have agreed to sell his farmland to Jews."

Levine estimates that 30 percent of Canada's Communists in 1930s were Jewish, although other historians consider that percentage low. Regardless, the impression that they were responsible for the proliferation of Communist candidates before and during the Second World War profoundly affected Canadian immigration policy. While the U.S. and Britain began to open their doors to Jewish refugees, Canada steadfastly adhered to its position of "none is too many" (the phrase that Irving Abella and Harold Troper used to title their landmark 1982 book) long after the existence of the death camps became widely known in 1944.

When the detention of the Soviet spies made the headlines in February 1946, it served to entrench the wartime views of Frederick Blair, who directed immigration under Mackenzie King. Even though Blair was fully aware of the plight of refugees, he stood firm, saying no country could "open its doors wide enough to take in the hundreds of thousands of Jewish people who want to leave Europe: the line must be drawn somewhere."

As my father reached the end of his life, he expressed his disappointment with the Communist Party and the anti-Semitism it provoked. What haunted him was Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country," which he believed crushed movements outside Russia. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the Canadian Communist Party had played a significant role in everyday Jewish life in Montreal and Toronto, with cultural events, summer camps, rallies, and other activities. But the Jewish membership began to shrink after the war. Moscow's meddling in Canadian politics even frightened the greater, less politicized Jewish community.

At the Twentieth Party Congress, in 1956, first secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin and his "cult of personality." The curtain was finally pulled back on the former premier's egregious crimes. Party members could no longer hide their suspicions: the Soviet Union had been transformed into an autocratic police state. It was also a time when the Canadian parents who spoke Yiddish at home and founded Camp Naivelt increasingly encouraged their children to attend university and professional schools — while keeping their heads down. Fewer and fewer Jewish Canadians entered politics. Fewer became journalists. The trials of shtetl life and the Bolshevik-leaning poets and storytellers who narrated a rich but tragic existence were forgotten, except by those stalwart followers who tried to keep the revolution's flame burning, even after it had burned out in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc.

It's no exaggeration to say that keeping a low profile became *de rigueur* for the majority of educated Jewish Canadians after the war. We have not been as active in national issues and commentary as our brothers and sisters in France, the United States, or even the United Kingdom.

Calling a Body a Body

A body is lightning in a bottle.
Some small miracle,
a sequence of events
necessary for one.
All of them political.
Especially those that aren't.
The word strains like us
to contain multitudes, defining
one thing against another.
Me. A mass. A thing passed
or a thing of importance. Both
boundary
& boundless.

Dominik Parisien

Dominik Parisien is an editor and the author of We, Old Young Ones, a chapbook. His debut collection, Side Effects May Include Strangers, is due out this fall.

IN 1973, WHEN I WAS SHARING A COOPERATIVE home with a group of young radicals on James Street, a few blocks from the Gouzenko apartment on Somerset, Phyllis Clarke came to visit. Clarke was the co-editor of *Yours in the Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck*, a book she was researching at the time. She was a stern-looking redhead with tightly curled hair, and she reminded me of my father's former comrades, who would occasionally visit his furniture store, to discuss things like the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. Those aging comrades would speak in hushed tones of J. L. Cohen, "the people's lawyer" who defended many of the suspects rounded up by the RCMP. Clarke was Cohen's daughter, and she had devoted her life to socialism.

I stared at her, and she glared back at me. I'll never know if she recognized me, as David Lewis had back on Parliament Hill, or if she thought my New Left housemates and I were pretenders, who understood nothing about the sacrifices she and others had made in the name of the Soviet Union and international Communism. ▲

Inspirations

Yours in the Struggle:

Reminiscences of Tim Buck

Edited by Phyllis Clarke and William Beeching
NC Press, 1977

How the Cold War Began: The Gouzenko Affair and the Hunt for Soviet Spies

Amy Knight

McClelland & Stewart, 2005

Seeking the Fabled City: The Canadian Jewish Experience

Allan Levine

McClelland & Stewart, 2018

The Iron Curtain

Directed by William A. Wellman

Twentieth Century Fox, 1948

Language Barrier

The life of a conspiracy theory

Richard Moon

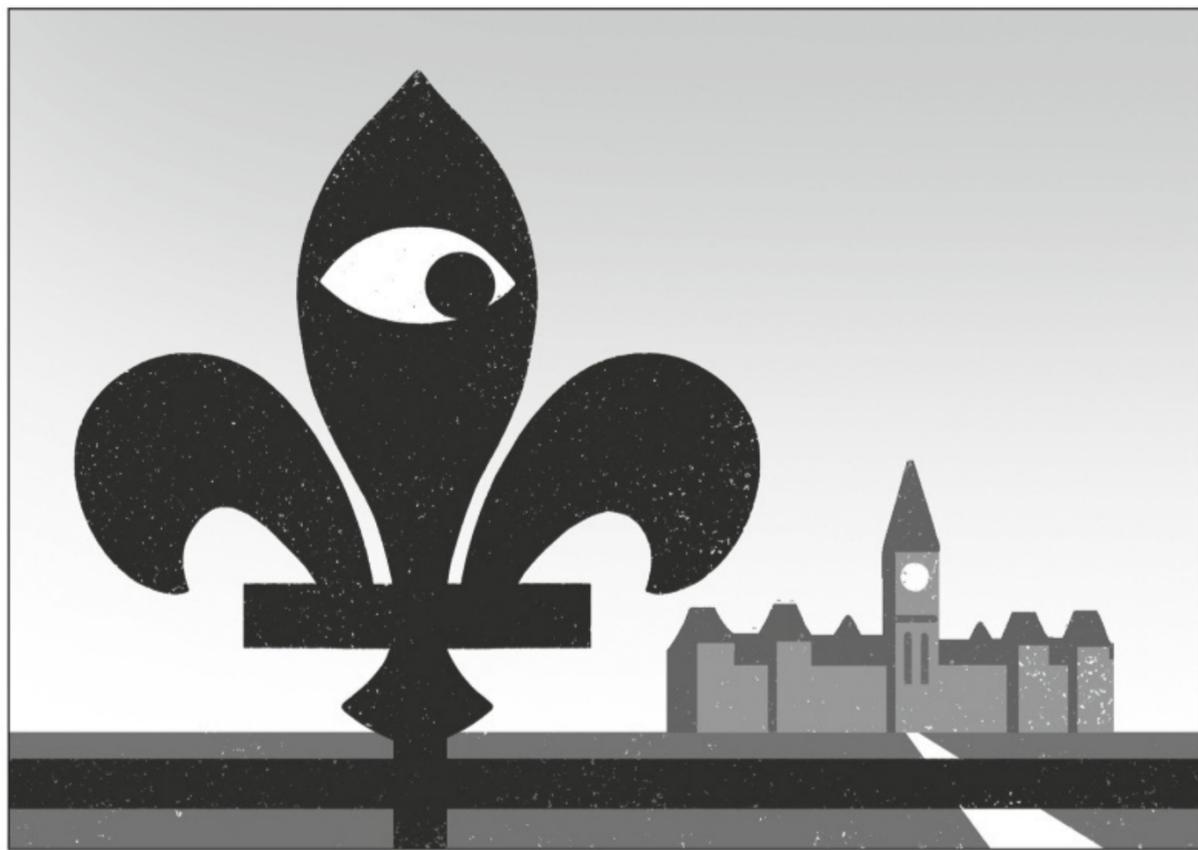
WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL in the late 1970s, someone lent my father a copy of *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow*. The book is now mostly forgotten, but at the time it circulated widely in English Canada. The author, a retired naval officer named Jock V. Andrew, argued that Pierre Trudeau's policy to increase bilingualism in the federal civil service was simply the first step in a larger plan to turn Canada into a completely French-speaking country. The prominent aeronautical engineer Winnett Boyd, who believed that Andrew's thesis was "difficult to refute," provided the foreword.

The slim volume, with a giant blue fleur-de-lys on its cover dominating a red map of the country, sat on my father's chest of drawers for about six months before it disappeared. Either he returned it to its lender or my mother, who was born and raised in Quebec City, found a way to dispose of it. I don't think my father ever looked at it. He was not much of a reader, and he was not a gullible man. But he did have a visceral dislike of Trudeau and an inherited suspicion of Quebec. Like many Anglo Canadians who enlisted during the Second World War, he deeply resented the prime minister's avoidance of military service and opposition to conscription.

Not available in bookstores, *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow* had to be ordered directly from the author, for \$3.50. Still, it sold more than 120,000 copies in its first year. These copies, in turn, were widely shared among friends and family. The informal circulation anticipated the way misinformation often spreads on the internet — unimpeded by media filtering, below the public radar, and away from critical scrutiny.

Andrew's claims were taken up by some of those whom Stephen Harper would later describe as "old stock Canadians" — citizens of British heritage who saw Canada as an English-speaking nation that was politically and culturally linked to the U.K. This group had assumed that the French-speaking population centred in Quebec would continue to play a minor role in national politics and, in due course, would become assimilated into the more successful political and economic culture of English Canada. But in the late 1960s, with the election of Trudeau and the escalating debate about Quebec's role in Confederation, this assumption had become more difficult to maintain.

Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow tapped into the concern that many Canadians had about the increasing visibility of the French language in the country's commercial and political life. At the time of its publication, in 1977, there were loud complaints that French was being "shoved down our throats," after the government required



Clandestine attempts to keep English Canadians out of power?

manufacturers to include both official languages on product packaging. The increased visibility of French coincided with Ottawa's affirmation of multiculturalism, which recast cultural diversity as something to be celebrated, rather than as a problem to be managed. The official recognition of both bilingualism and multiculturalism represented a challenge to the Anglo Canadian understanding of national identity.

Andrew sought to expose the deeper and disturbing purpose behind bilingualism. He was convinced that a secret plan had been carefully worked out long ago by a cabal of powerful French Canadians and was now being implemented through careful political manoeuvring by Trudeau and his secretary of state, Gérard Pelletier, with the help of a fifth column of "goons." Andrew maintained that Trudeau, "under cover of some very clever double-talk," had set out "to convert Canada from an English-speaking country into a French-speaking country." Official bilingualism was "nothing but a smokescreen for what is really happening." This conversion was "the primary and sole objective" of the government, and would "remain the same until every city, town and village in Canada has become French-speaking and French-controlled."

Trudeau had employed specific strategies, Andrew contended, to bring about this transformation. The most important: the requirement that all significant positions in the federal civil service, the armed forces, and the RCMP be held by individuals who could speak both languages. This, supposedly, would ensure French

Canadian control of critical national institutions. It was a simple and obvious fact that they were far more likely than English Canadians to be bilingual, since the latter previously had little reason to learn French. The larger plan also included changes to immigration policy that disfavoured those from Britain but welcomed newcomers from French-speaking countries, as well as government support for the internal migration of French Canadians within the country.

Now that Quebec had "for all practical purposes removed all vestiges of the English language" from its territory, it could serve as "an impregnable bastion, breeding pen, and marshalling yard for the colonization of the rest of Canada." Once they were resettled in English-speaking communities, the new arrivals would be encouraged to demand services in French. This secret operation was being implemented with the "organizational assistance of the French Church, and under cover of an organization called the Richelieu Society." Andrew also pointed to "paid agitators (officially termed 'animators')" who were "inciting French-Canadians to militant racism" and demanding services in French from every level of government. He was confident that once English Canadians woke up to what was happening, they would resist the Trudeau plot with all the resources available to them. And because the plot was so far advanced, violence — even civil war — might be necessary.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES SEEK TO EXPOSE HIDDEN forces that lie behind significant events or social

developments. Occurrences that on the surface appear to be the consequence of natural or social forces, or the actions of one individual or a few, are instead the result of carefully laid plans by powerful individuals, whose involvement has been actively concealed from public view. While these theories have a common character or structure, their content is culturally specific, reflecting the issues and anxieties of a particular time and place, which in the case of *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow* (and Andrew's 1979 follow-up, *Backdoor Bilingualism: Davis's Sell-out of Ontario and Its National Consequences*) included the historic distrust that many English Canadians held for Catholic Quebec, and a general anxiety about growing ethnic and racial diversity. Most of the conspiracy theories that originate in the United States rest on an intense distrust of government (and in particular the "deep state"). Andrew, in contrast, did not regard state power as inherently corrupt but was instead concerned with the usurpation of that power by those working against the public interest.

Many of the best-known theories, such as the deep state's responsibility for the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9/11 or the assassination of John F. Kennedy, reject the established account of an event and purport to expose its true cause. These are not simply backward-looking explanations, however. They understand the conspiracy to be ongoing — involving the active and continuing concealment of the truth and the suppression of evidence that contradicts the official story. And, of course, it is understood that conspirators with enormous power and influence (whether the deep state or the pharmaceutical industry or the Illuminati) are continuing in their efforts to manipulate events.

Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow was different. Because the conspirators' objectives had not yet been realized, the book was both an exposé and a call to action. In this way, it resembled *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an anti-Semitic pamphlet, produced at the end of the nineteenth century, that purported to be a first-hand account of a Jewish plot to undermine Christian civilization. Similarly, some versions of the "Eurabia theory," which anticipates the domination of Europe by Muslims, claim that a secret agreement has been reached between powerful European political and corporate interests and leaders of the Muslim world. (This belief has inspired numerous violent acts, including attacks on mosques in Quebec City and Christchurch, New Zealand.)

When large groups of individuals feel vulnerable to forces beyond their control, conspiracy theories flourish. They trade on a distrust of authority or expertise — a distrust that has sometimes been cultivated by political actors and media outlets that are mostly, but not exclusively, right wing. Spin now dominates discourse. Distortion and deception have degraded things, so that we no longer expect to be told the truth and are less able to evaluate the ideas and information put before us. The consequence is that the choices we make are often based not on reasoned judgment but instead on ideological predispositions.

In a sense, conspiracy theories are a modern form of mythology. They offer simple and understandable explanations for complex events that are the outcome of multiple social and natural factors. Believers resist the idea that things happen by chance and instead imagine there are

always larger powers at work — and those powers may be malevolent. When people's lives or expectations are disrupted in a dramatic way by a major social or natural event, they may find it difficult to accept things as simply random or accidental. These theories tell stories in which ordinary people play central roles. The forces that have disrupted their lives are not indifferent to them. The conspirators thought about them, took them into account, and acted in order to harm them. Within this framework, people's anger is justified and has an object. It is possible for them to resist the villains — to oppose the conspirators' plans or to expose what they have done.

Conspiracy theories especially appeal to individuals who fear the loss of social status or economic security. And because status is often tied to national or racial identity, these accounts are often explicitly xenophobic or racist. They direct people away from the complex sources of their economic and social difficulties, and toward identifiable people or groups who are accused of plotting to undermine the status quo — whether Protestant English Canada or Christian civilization.



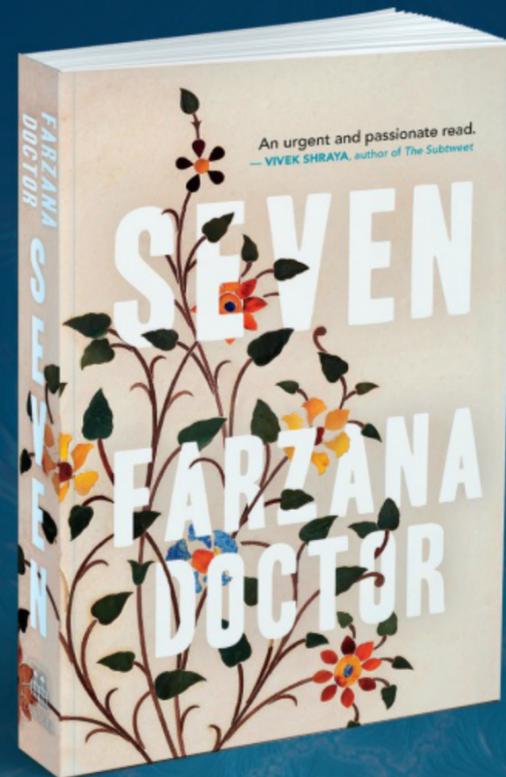
SUSPICION OF AUTHORITY MAKES CONSPIRACY theories remarkably resilient. Counter-arguments and inconsistent facts are simply absorbed, providing further evidence of the power of the conspirators and the breadth of their scheme. Unlike most theories, though, the one advanced in *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow* could be disproved with the passage of time. Andrew had claimed that the conversion of Canada into a French-speaking country would occur within ten years. Clearly that did not happen. Yet his most ardent followers, including members of the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada, were not completely discouraged. Some simply adjusted the theory, so that it was now about French control of the levers of political power, rather than the full-scale transformation of Canada into an exclusively French-speaking country. Others insisted that the predicted transformation had not come to pass because Andrew had alerted the nation — and thereby foiled Pierre Trudeau's plan.

Disinformation now spreads easily and rapidly within social media ecosystems that are liberated from filters and counter-argument. In such a world, *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow* seems almost quaint. The issues that caused many Anglo Canadians to feel anxious about their identity and status — including changes in Canada's ethnic and racial mix and the shift in its cultural orientation from the United Kingdom to the United States — did transform this country, although not in the ways that Andrew feared. With these changes have come a new set of anxieties and identity issues that are sometimes expressed as imagined conspiracies. However, even these theories are now largely generated outside the country and are no longer specifically Canadian in their content. ▲

Inspirations

**Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow:
Trudeau's Master Plan and
How It Can Be Stopped**

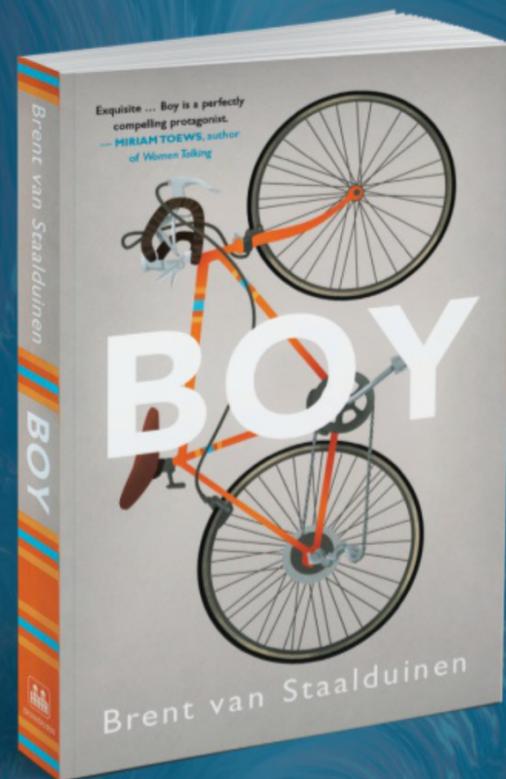
J. V. Andrew
BMG Publishing, 1977



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Comeau Speaks

Insights from inside the FLQ

Graham Fraser

Mon octobre 70: La crise et ses suites

Robert Comeau, with Louis Gill

VLB éditeur

240 pages, softcover and ebook

ON NOVEMBER 27, 1979, ROBERT Comeau was called upon for the second time to testify in public before the Keable Commission, the Quebec inquiry into police activities during and after the October Crisis. Previously, in four in-camera hearings, he had denied any participation in the Front de Libération du Québec and had refused to speak publicly. He was nervous; another refusal could mean a sentence of up to two years for contempt of court.

Comeau, a history professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, had in fact been a member of the FLQ, primarily delivering communiqués from the cells that had kidnapped James Cross and Pierre Laporte in October 1970. Before that, he was involved in a robbery of dynamite. Determined not to answer questions about his involvement, out of solidarity with his comrades, Comeau was stunned when Jean Keable announced at the last minute that the upcoming interrogation was cancelled: the commission had learned that François Séguin, Comeau's closest friend, who had also been summoned to testify, was a police informant.

Comeau was shattered. "The revelation of the truth about François Séguin was the worst shock of my life," he writes of the October Crisis. "It literally floored me; I had to be escorted from the commission's hearing room. I was able to recover only after therapy that lasted two years." The two had been friends and comrades since 1970, when they were both involved in the FLQ, and later when they joined En Lutte, the Maoist organization sarcastically called a *groupuscule* in French. Séguin had the key to Comeau's apartment; he came and went as he pleased, often borrowing books. And he had been spying on the professor for almost a decade.

THIS FALL IS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE October Crisis, among the most dramatic examples of terrorism in modern Canadian history. Those few weeks in October have been the subject of commissions of inquiry, histories and novels, docudramas and documentaries. Memoirists have described the crisis, and biographies of Pierre Trudeau and other political actors have given it plenty of attention. Each subsequent decade has seen a fresh burst of retrospectives and reflections. The historian J.L. Granatstein, for example, publicly opposed the invocation of the War Measures Act at a York University rally, in 1970. "I have never before



Fifty years on, the October Crisis is still making news.

or since been afraid of a crowd, never feared being torn from limb to limb, but that day I was frightened," he later recalled. "The shouts from the students that interrupted my speech were frequent and hostile." By the 1990s, he had changed his position entirely.

At the time, the prime minister justified the use of the act, which relaxed restrictions on the police and led to nearly 500 arrests, by suggesting there was a threat to overthrow the government. Peter C. Newman was sufficiently persuaded that he wrote a front-page story for the *Toronto Star* saying so. Later, convinced that he'd been manipulated by Trudeau and his senior advisers, Newman wrote in his 2004 memoir, *Here Be Dragons*, "I easily conclude that Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act as a partisan weapon to intimidate Quebec's separatists for his own political purposes."

Comeau was not a major actor in the FLQ or the October Crisis. In the 1994 National Film Board documentary *La liberté en colère* (available free online), he appears as an amiable minor figure in comparison with Pierre Vallières, Charles Gagnon, and Francis Simard. What clearly haunts Comeau is the fact that, of all those involved, he was virtually the only one to face no charges and to spend no time in prison. This has led a number of people to conclude that he was a police informer; the novelist Louis Hamelin, for one, explored this theory in the prizewinning *La constellation du Lynx*, from 2010, and more recently and more openly in *Fabrications*, a 2014 collection of essays.

On the contrary, Comeau argues. He wasn't charged not because he was an informer himself, but because he was being spied upon by two others who were, Séguin and Carole de Vault. Bringing him to court would have put those sources at risk. In addition to challenging Hamelin's conspiracy theory, Comeau also dismisses the idea that Vallières, the writer and intellectual heart of the FLQ, clung to: that Laporte was executed as part of a federal plan to discredit the organization and the separatist movement. No, the provincial cabinet minister was killed by Jacques Rose and Francis Simard after he tried to escape. While the details have never been revealed, all of the kidnappers—including Paul Rose, who was not present at the time—took responsibility.

A FEW MONTHS AFTER COMEAU'S TRAUMATIC experience at the Keable Commission, there was a party in Quebec City for reporters who were about to cover the 1980 referendum campaign. William Johnson, the *Globe and Mail* columnist, was there with a dark-haired, exotic woman who was introduced as Jeanne du Sablon. When asked what she did, she smiled coyly and said that she was a dentist.

Afterwards, one of those at the party said that whoever she was, she was no dentist: she had bad teeth. But the mystery did not last long. A few days later, the reporter Michel C. Auger was in a doctor's waiting room when the receptionist called the next patient: Carole de Vault. It turned out she had met Johnson at the skating

rink outside the Château Frontenac, where she was being kept incognito. They became romantically involved, and he later helped her write *The Informer: Confessions of an Ex-Terrorist*.

It was de Vault, a twenty-five-year-old UQAM student in 1970, who had harassed Comeau to give her dynamite. In what he calls “an unfortunate attempt” to brush her aside, Comeau lied: “I invented a ‘leader of the FLQ,’ claiming that his directives were to not follow through with the operations she wanted to launch.” When they heard this, the police concluded that the leader must be Comeau’s friend and colleague Noël Vallerand, a historian who went on to become a senior deputy minister in the PQ government, but who had absolutely no connection with the FLQ.

Comeau vents his indignation at de Vault’s betrayal, and at Johnson’s participation in the writing of her 1982 book, which he argues is a tissue of lies. In it, de Vault claimed that Comeau recruited her into the FLQ; Comeau argues that she actually approached him, suggested a robbery at a company where she was working, constantly asked him for dynamite, and wanted him to relaunch the FLQ after he had dropped out in December 1970. According to Comeau, she repeated “a good number of these lies” in a television interview with Paul Arcand of TVA, in September 2017.

In November 2018, de Vault threatened to sue Comeau if he published *Mon octobre 70*, and her lawyer complained that Comeau “speaks often about her sexuality.” In her own book, she talked about her affair with Jacques Parizeau. Comeau adds only that he also spent a night with her and that she had an affair with a former bodyguard of the crime boss Donald Lavoie, about whom she co-wrote another book.

Comeau also writes about the still mysterious murder of Mario Bachand, a felquiste who was shot in Paris in 1971. Conflicting theories have suggested that Bachand’s killing was officially sanctioned by Ottawa or was an attempt by the FLQ to settle scores internally. While appearing to lean toward the second scenario, Comeau is indignant that no effort was made by federal or provincial authorities to pursue the investigation.

After the October Crisis and the Keable inquiry, Comeau continued his work as an academic, editing a series of publications, organizing conferences on political leaders in Quebec, and winning numerous promotions and awards. Tucked inside this concise account, intended to set the record straight, is the narrative of a man who made a convoluted journey from terrorism to Maoism to nationalism — and who eventually came out of the closet. Comeau concludes by writing that while he categorically condemns the acts of the FLQ, “as much for their inefficiency as for their murderous consequences,” he still does not question the goal of an independent Quebec.

A half century has passed since the traumatic events of October 1970, and it is time for a major history that pulls together all the strands: the terrorist cells of the FLQ, their infiltration by informers who were controlled by the police, the complex relations between Ottawa and Quebec City, and the scandalous behaviour by the RCMP — the break-ins and barn burning. Although he is a historian, Comeau has not written that book. But this memoir adds fascinating details to a key event in Canadian history. ▲

WHAT WE EAT

The Mess

Deconstructing the institutional food menu

Sarah E. Tracy

Take Back the Tray: Revolutionizing Food in Hospitals, Schools, and Other Institutions

Joshna Maharaj

ECW Press

264 pages, softcover and ebook

I MET THE CHEF JOSHNA MAHARAJ IN September 2012. It was a team-building exercise: a day-long retreat to the University of Toronto’s Hart House Farm in Caledon. We were researchers gathered for the start of a fellowship year, and we were there to think about food. Maharaj was there to help us make some. Her booming, asthmatic laugh and no-nonsense directions turned a gaggle of awkward academics into a high-efficiency team setting sourdough bread to rise, slow-cooking beef, baking sticky toffee pudding, and prepping local greens for a giant salad.

At the time, I was existing in the purgatory of lost illusion. To the room, I was engrossed in chopping carrots, but inside I traded between grief, guilt, depression, and outrage. I was two months postpartum, emotionally raw. My caregivers had failed me. Yet I too had ignored the evidence of risk. My newborn son had died in hospital after five hours of life — a home birth mismanaged — and I had learned that there is no greater corrective for complacency than bloody, untimely, and preventable loss.

Maharaj joined our group of food scholars many times over the course of that academic year. Collaboration with a local chef and activist was a tremendous luxury — one made possible by a private endowment for humanities research. It was a bubble. Since that time, Maharaj has spent significant energy working within a bubble of temporary funding. Bubbles can insulate from trauma, but they can also burst.

Maharaj wrote *Take Back the Tray* before a pandemic underscored our struggle to protect the most vulnerable. Before a pandemic shocked us into a new admission of our interdependence — of the vulnerability of our food system and the “sovereign” nuclear family; of our reliance on extended kin networks, public services, and local businesses. Before a pandemic exacerbated the grossly unequal distribution of bubbles across race and gender.

“Take back the night” is a declaration of women’s inherent value — a statement of agency in the face of degradation by an intimate partner. *Take Back the Tray* is an impassioned call for mutual respect to govern the intimate act of care when provided at scale. Maharaj takes us into institutional kitchens and walk-in freezers; she shares tested strategies for incorporating more “scratch cooking,” more local restaurants and caterers, and more area farmers into food ser-

vice. She offers an account of the delicate, plodding, and poignant work of healing institutional roles and relationships strained by the violence of scarcity and profit-based logic.

Take Back the Tray argues that institutional food service should be as sustainable, affordable, healthful, inclusive, transparent, and delicious as possible. Why? Because where food insecurity or poor food quality exists, illness and dysfunction follow. And if we must be mercenary about it, the cost of investing in health now is less than the cost of paying for ill health later.

Maharaj returns many times to the mantra of Janice Sorenson, a dietitian with the Canadian Malnutrition Task Force: food is healthy only if it’s eaten. The tractable and seemingly cost-effective wedges of freeze-dried starch so common on cafeteria trays often just end up in the garbage. They’re not *good*. That means we spend public funds feeding corporate contracts and landfills instead of our own bodies. Toronto hospitals, for instance, throw out as much as a ton of food every single day. This kind of waste is doubly tragic when set against the prevalence of hunger in our communities, and the particular vulnerability of the people hospitals feed.

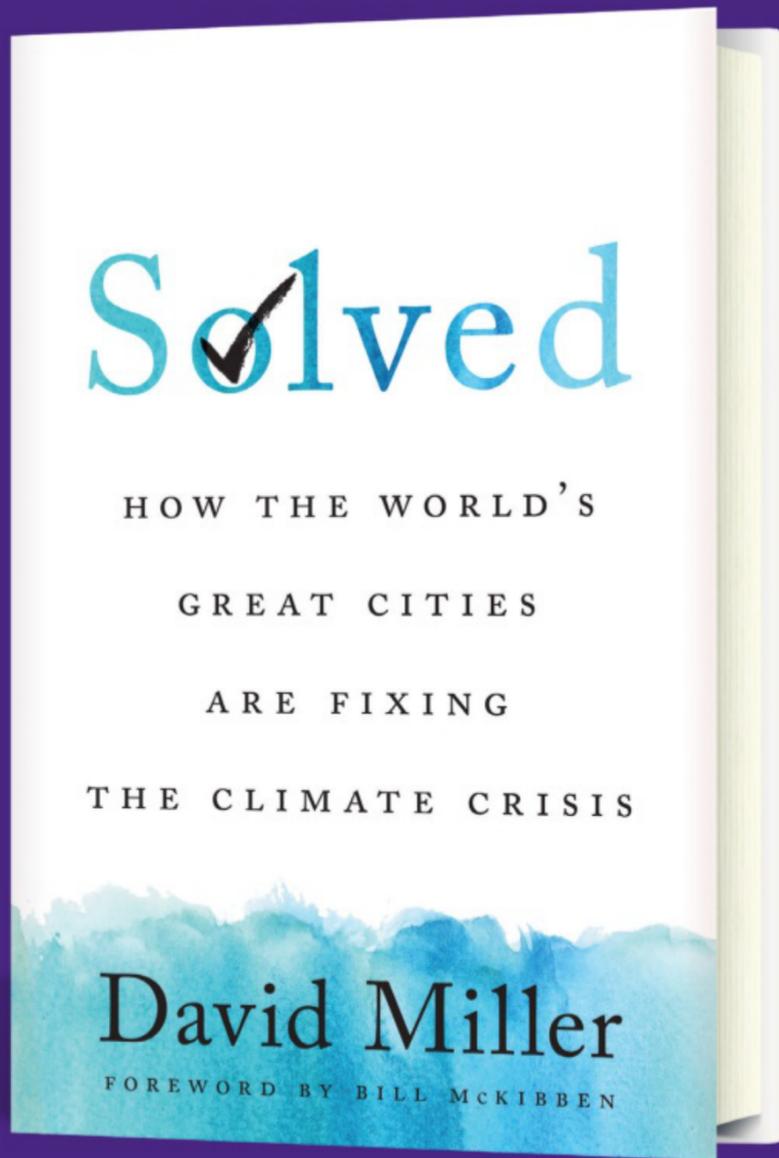
I remember being wheeled into my room at Mount Sinai Hospital after the longest day of my life. Twelve hours of labour, eons for an ambulance, another eight and a half minutes to the emergency room, a heartbeat of blissful unconsciousness, thirty seconds to yank my son from my body, five hours to decide to take my baby off life support, and four hours more to realize that no one had any plan to bring me food.

Unable to keep anything down during labour, I was running on morphine and ice chips. I was depleted. I needed desperately to eat my feelings. When I asked about food, a nurse brought me a container of green Jell-O. Even the most straightforward labour demands a level of physical effort comparable to running a marathon. At that moment, I needed so much more than Jell-O. If I hadn’t had the means and support system to bring in outside food, I would have endured hunger on top of pain and grief.

My story is one of thousands. Hospitals, schools, and care facilities are full of heartache and heroism. We already know that they need better food. *Take Back the Tray* offers hope that we can actually answer that need.

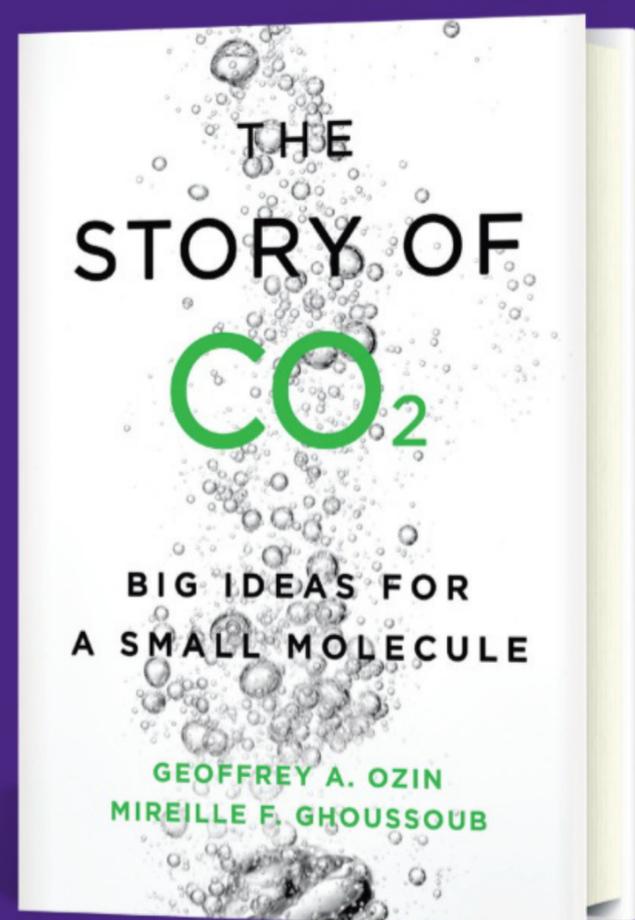
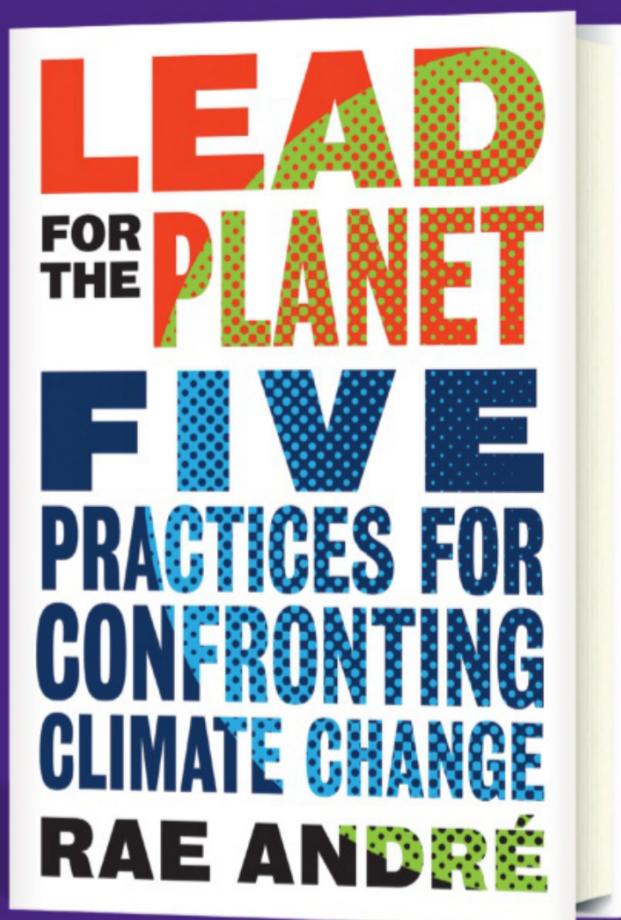
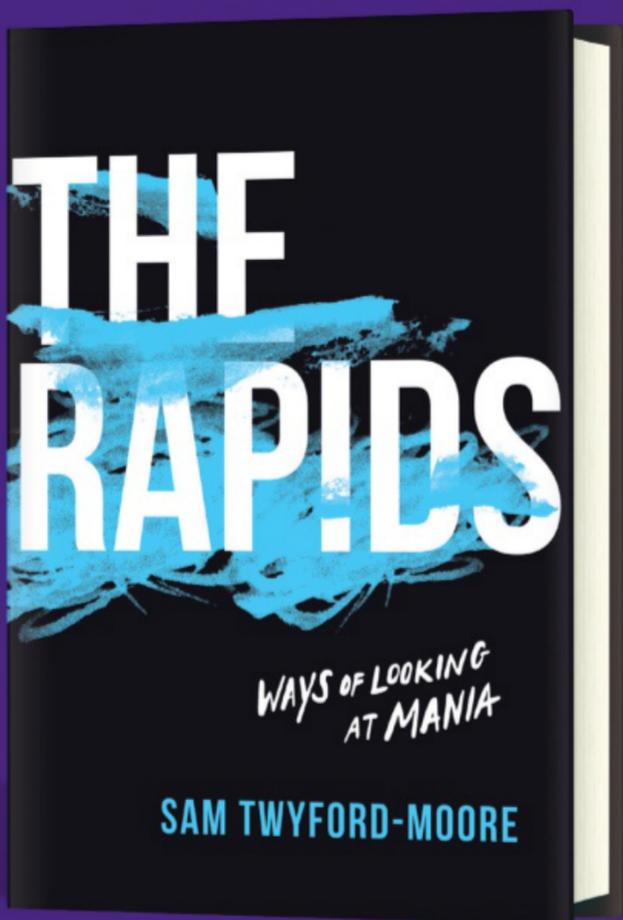
“Hospitality” and “hospital” share an etymological root: *hospes*, the Latin for stranger. The first hospitals were public guest houses where people passing through (different, but not so different, from you or me) could be fortified anew. When we’re weary, or wounded, we look to community and good food as our original medicine. And that deserves far better than fickle grant funding. ▲

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Book Club

A lifetime of publishing in London

Anna Porter

A Bite of the Apple: A Life with Books, Writers and Virago

Lennie Goodings

Biblioasis

304 pages, softcover and ebook

I AM A FAN OF MEMOIRS ABOUT PUBLISHING. For close to forty years, I have enjoyed reading them, and I still find them fascinating. The first two I read were Sir Stanley Unwin's *The Truth about Publishing* and, later, *The Truth about a Publisher*. Sir Stanley was famous for publishing Bertrand Russell and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, but my reason for reading him was that I had just lied my way into a very junior job at a British company that didn't believe in hiring people with no experience. I was desperate enough and hungry enough to embellish my resumé; I was fairly sure they wouldn't bother checking with Whitcombe & Tombs in New Zealand to confirm whether I had worked there as a junior copy editor or, as was the actual case, a junior bookstore clerk.

The best memoirs provide insights into an era and the people, including the author, who made it memorable. Some, like Michael Korda's highly entertaining *Another Life*, give you intimate, closely observed portraits of writers, politicians, stars, and adventurers; others, like Diana Athill's *Stet* and (my favourite) *Somewhere Towards the End*, leave you with the feeling that you have just engaged with a wonderfully candid, clear-eyed friend who was happy to talk honestly about sex, editing, dogs, and, of course, the writers she has been close to. More recently, there was Robert Gottlieb writing about his astonishingly varied list, which included Lauren Bacall, Robert Caro, Nora Ephron, Bruno Bettelheim, John le Carré, and Mordecai Richler, and about his challenging stint at *The New Yorker*.

Since I have spent most of my life in the book business, I have met these and many other memoirists: Korda in jodhpurs in his office, Diana Athill in a longish dress carrying a mountain of paper, and Gottlieb, somewhat dishevelled, as he rushed past me on his way to a meeting with Mordecai. I also once met Lennie Goodings, when I was trying to interest her in the work of some of our writers. She was small, intense, and, despite the deafening noise of the Frankfurt Book Fair, totally focused.

Goodings's new book, *A Bite of the Apple: A Life with Books, Writers and Virago*, has most of the characteristics of highly enjoyable memoirs, but it is also a fascinating exploration of the women's movement from the 1970s to almost the present day. Virago, founded in 1973, during the heady days of early feminism and at a time



Lennie Goodings and the Viragos helped change publishing.

of great political upheavals, was among the first commercially successful self-declared feminist presses, led by women and focused on their points of view, their history, their fiction, their concerns, and their passions. The Viragos knew their audience. They knew that there were many "out there who wanted to understand and be part of this world-changing 'club'" of feminism. Their list, as Lennie Goodings writes, began with a deep sense of purpose, an urgency to prove that women were eager to accept a champion, to read about issues they found important: "Virago and the other feminist houses which preceded and soon followed in Britain and across the world published instinctively, knowing that there was a readership hungry for their books." At a time when women's voices were rarely heard on radio or television, let alone in politics and never in boardrooms, this seemed like a revolutionary idea to some. But most women agreed it was about time.

It's hard to imagine now, in hindsight, how explosive Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* were, or how Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* spoke in ways other novels hadn't. It's hard to imagine how eager we were for more. It's good to keep in mind that the Sex Discrimination Act was not passed in the United Kingdom until 1975. In Canada, it was the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in 1982, that finally included women's rights; the Employment Equity Act wasn't adopted until 1986.

Virago's founder, Carmen Callil, was exacting, brisk, and cajoling, with an almost visceral understanding of publicity. She came from a marketing background and saw no reason why Virago's books shouldn't be read by everyone—both men and women. She believed that books could change the world, and she was committed to helping make that change happen. It was "the refusal to be seen as marginal," Goodings writes of Virago's first catalogue and bedrock principles: "the desire to inspire and educate and entertain *all* women, and men too; to bring women's issues and stories into the mainstream; to demonstrate a female literary tradition."

Through Virago, the authors Sarah Waters and Angela Carter sensed a world of new possibilities opening up. The novelist and critic Margaret Drabble has even said that Virago Modern Classics, with their distinctive green spines, changed the course of English literary history. By 2020, that list included more than 700 titles, featuring the work of some of the best literature by anyone—man, woman, or other. Elizabeth Taylor, Zora Neale Hurston, Violet Trefusis, Rose Macaulay, Willa Cather, Doris Lessing, Margaret Laurence. I remember the sight of all those green spines lined up, and I still have many of them on my shelves. As Rachel Cooke has said, they remind you "that we connect to the women on whose shoulders we stand."

Virago's contemporary fiction list managed to command attention both from the media and from bookstores. No wonder, with the likes

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of Tatyana Tolstoya, Lisa St Aubin de Terán, Barbara Kingsolver, Claire Messud (I have just reread *The Woman Upstairs* and recommend it to everyone), and Sarah Waters, who “understands the transforming power of a story.” There was also Virago’s stellar crime fiction, from Sara Paretsky, Amanda Cross, Sarah Dunant, and others; and the list of Virago non-fiction that tackled issues such as ingrained inequality, the objectification of women’s bodies, and rape, incest, and abuse. It was Virago that published Sylvia Fraser’s horrific story *My Father’s House* in the U.K., for example. (Key Porter first published it in Canada.)

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A *BITE OF THE APPLE* INCLUDES NUMEROUS LONG Virago lists, which have been a godsend for me during the time of COVID-19. They have reminded me of books I wanted to reread (with the perspective of time and experience) and of authors I haven’t read but wanted to — not as a chore but as something to look forward to. But what can be a wonderful “Goodreads” experience for some can become too much for others. At times, too many lists leave not enough room for the fascinating intimate portraits of writers and editors that are a hallmark of great publishing memoirs.

However, the portraits that Goodings does allow space for are delicious. Sarah Dunant, whom she has edited and published for twenty-five years, is daring and unafraid of controversy or of making sudden turns in her own writing career. She is pictured as “a little ferret — down she goes and up she comes — grinning with the prize: the truth.” As Goodings quotes Dunant, “One of feminism’s great achievements is the way it has changed not only the present, but also the past.” Then there’s Angela Carter — clever, witty, eccentric, a woman who loved to talk and often did, for what seemed like hours on end. “She gave of herself, her ideas, her wit, her no-bullshit mind,” as the novelist Marina Warner wrote of Carter in the introduction to *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales*.

Goodings also paints a great picture of Margaret Atwood, who knocked on its head the irritating British notion that Canadians are nice but a bit dull. Too witty, too clever, too observant of her times, Atwood became a British media celebrity. No frontiers or boxes could contain her writing or her personality. She was willing to deal with long, uncomfortable road trips, late trains, mediocre food, and bad hotels, while, through it all, writing brilliant poetry, challenging essays, and big imaginative novels that have remained uncategorizable. Goodings describes how Atwood is edited in three countries simultaneously, and without the confusion that such a scene might conjure. (A memorable group editing session in freezing Toronto helps drive the point home: “We were six — editors and agents — and though we all knew each other, were all experienced editors, and had long worked with her, the feeling of needing to step up, to be good enough, made us all laugh nervously.”)

Goodings also engages with what’s now called the fourth wave of feminism, which she thinks should occupy the space formerly held by its predecessors. She takes a courageous step by publishing books by a younger, angrier generation, with its rallying cry of “Fuck the patriarchy.” She recognizes that the fourth wave is less white and more inclusive than the old ones,

even if it is in many ways more judgmental. She writes of the 1984 First International Feminist Book Fair, an event that began with “confidence, strength and audacity,” with its ninety-one exhibitors and authors from a number of countries. Yet for Goodings, it ended with a personal sense of failure. No accommodation had been made for women in wheelchairs, and an angry speech by the poet Audre Lorde, decrying the lack of women of colour on the organizing committee, interrupted the jollity of the opening party. But even then, there is a note of hope: Women were at last discovering each other’s stories. “We found each other.”

Goodings writes enthusiastically about taking a chance on Maya Angelou in 1984. “She came often to Britain and we watched as the country fell deeply in love with her: she captured every size and shape of heart — old, young, ignorant, wise, proud, and shy.” Virago published *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* fifteen years after it first appeared in the U.S. (and sold a million copies), and Goodings and Angelou became friends who travelled, laughed, cried, sang, and even danced together: “She had a special hip-rolling move that I and others tried to learn.” There was a real connection between them, one that lasted through many years, as such connections do.

A Bite of the Apple takes a courageous stab at writing about the racism that, despite the accolades for some writers of colour and the emergence of Black presses, still persists in publishing: “Racism, like sexism, is still far from being eradicated, however the writers telling stories and the gatekeepers deciding who gets to tell them is changing. The conversations are shifting.” In her final chapter on giving and taking courage, she quotes Sandi Toksvig (“We’re genetically programmed to tell stories”) and talks about Sarah Waters (“Going well outside oneself, exploring the other, is what good books are about”).

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THE OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE OF VIRAGO PRESS HAS changed several times since it was founded in 1973. I was sad to learn, in 2006, that it had been sold to one of the multinationals. I feared that its publishing would be curtailed — that its ability to take chances on new voices would be cut. After all, we know that only about 20 percent of the books any of us publish will earn money. So far, as Goodings tells it, this has not happened. But I fear that, eventually, it will.

It was five years after Virago was founded that Lennie Goodings — who was born in Cornwall, Ontario, and attended Queen’s University — arrived on the scene. By then, the press was already a force in British publishing, admired both for its list of brilliant women writers and for its ability to market them successfully to a general audience. She had an idea of some emerging literary forces in Canada but had little interest in the world here after she left. In that sense, our careers diverged, while following somewhat similar paths. I fell in love with Canada and became an outspoken cultural nationalist as I read and published our writers. Like Goodings, I worked in a field long dominated by men who had no interest in power-sharing with women. For both of us, the women’s movement — feminism as we lived it — became fundamental to our longevity in the trenches we chose to inhabit. And both of us are aware of standing on the shoulders of those who preceded us. ▲

Draw a Bath

The architecture of where we wash

Kelvin Browne

The Architecture of Bathing:

Body, Landscape, Art

Christie Pearson

MIT Press

424 pages, hardcover

OUR EARLIEST AND MOST VIVID memories of joy can be watery ones: splashing in a wading pool as a toddler, taking a bath before bedtime, revelling in the surf with hundreds of others on a hot summer afternoon. But the emotions associated with water go back further than childhood: They're primeval stirrings. They remind us that bathing has been an aquatic occupation of ours for thousands of years.

The Architecture of Bathing, by the architect and University of Waterloo professor Christie Pearson, surveys famous, beautiful, and idiosyncratic balneal buildings, along with such objects as tubs and pools that are the props for ablution. Pearson's bathing summary is comprehensive, both historically and geographically. It includes how we augment nature with piers, docks, and promenades, and how we build elaborate spas that are somewhat antithetical to the simple pleasures of plunging into hot water that springs magically from the ground and of wallowing in sulphuric-smelling mud. Bathing can be athletic, in the gargantuan swimming pools of the Olympics, for instance. Bathing can be therapeutic, with sensory deprivation tanks and mysterious waters that are reputed to cure disease. Bathing can be sacred, highly ritualized, and institutionalized with temples, shrines, and monuments adjacent to or completely enveloping a water source. Bathing can also be profane, especially when it doesn't have much to do with getting clean, like those dips at the Continental Baths in New York (better known to the non-gay crowd as the place that launched Bette Midler's career).

Bathing structures correspond with how we bathe. In Turkey: "You lie prone on a heated platform, then sit on a bench in a personalized niche with a basin collecting water, which you then throw over yourself." In Japan: "You squat to collect the water, douse and scrub yourselves, then enter a deep tub to soak sitting with knees bent up." In Finland: "You sit on tiered benches to sweat, then jump into the lake to rinse and cool off." Things are more basic in India: "You walk into the river, submerge yourself three times, then walk back out." Pearson includes a photograph of the Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion, the Toronto landmark built in 1922, but the

Canadian way of bathing is likely typified by another photograph in the book: a rustic cedar tub heated with a wood-burning stove, set in pristine natural landscape.

Before we mechanized bathing, we relied on nature to provide lavation. When we recreate the waterfall, cloudburst, tranquil pond, or bubbling brook with stainless steel shower heads and porcelain tubs, we attempt to bring their natural poetry into our homes and institutions. This mythic quality relates to even the most inadvertent of bathing situations. Consider how the humble fire hydrant, wrenched open during a heat wave so that urbanites can cool down, is transformed, momentarily, into Old Faithful, spurting from the steaming pavement.

Fountains offer examples of unexpected bathing opportunities, too. The eighteenth-century Trevi Fountain in Rome is a grand public art

"Recall the shock as a child when you saw people you knew in their bathing suits."

installation and, as immortalized in Federico Fellini's 1960 *La dolce vita*, a good place to make a splash. In the film, the character played by the voluptuous Anita Ekberg jumps into the baroque icon. She is a siren amid the marble gods taming the waters, becoming a figure of unbridled sexuality. The Trevi Fountain is quite different than Keller Fountain, a cascading park that the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin created in the late 1960s, in downtown Portland, Oregon. Rather than representing hedonistic excess, it embodies Halprin's belief that civic space should be permissive and inclusive; frolicking here symbolizes freedom for all. Composed of monumental abstract shapes, with few barriers to impede access, the artificial falls evoke the mountains and rushing rivers of the region.

Bathing is often an egalitarian experience. Recall the shock as a child when you saw people in their bathing suits — people you had never seen undressed were now almost naked. "We enter the public pool, the sauna, or the beach with a heightened awareness of our own bodies and those of others," Pearson writes. "Bathing environments emphasize tactility and body awareness, literally bringing us closer to materials and bodies than we are in other spaces." The prim schoolteacher, the stern police officer, and the next-door neighbour all uncovered. It was even more confusing because, suddenly, these predictable people were unrecognizably happy

and liberated. They were unlike their day-to-day selves, and so much more like you.

Not unexpectedly, in a history of bathing, the ancient Romans are prominent:

The Romans' bath buildings are some of their most innovative and exciting, not bound by traditional forms required by most other building types. Large or small, they tended to be at the forefront of structural experimentation and daring. The great imperial *thermae* of Trajan, Nero, Diocletian, and Constantine in Rome were colossal constructions, able to accommodate thousands of people at a time.

Architecturally, these structures became the prototypes "for the later vaulted, domed civic and sacred buildings we are familiar with." Next time you are intimidated by an august bank or government office whose neo-classical edifice is meant to impress, just imagine the space as a bath, with the officious staff naked.

In Rome, communal bathing was essential for social cohesion. People of all classes went to the baths to get clean and to chat. Pleasure was not yet connected with sin. "We commonly exemplify the decadence and decline associated with the Roman Empire with the baths," Pearson writes. "Seeking pleasure for its own sake was gradually demonized during the rise of Christianity, and this continues to taint bathing culture." Water may be good for baptism but not for mass cleansing, and certainly not to give a Christian a sensual experience enjoyed in public. But even in non-Christian cultures where communal bathing was once deeply embedded, the practice is on the decline. In Japan, for example, young people no longer value the traditional bathhouse experience. It's what their grandparents did.

Bathing used to liberate. Student trips to Europe were shocking for those of us who witnessed families blithely changing into their swimsuits on the beach — right out in the open — not to mention the topless women and the men in Speedos that only gay guys would attempt in North America. Even WASP families, who were uptight in town, used to consider skinny-dipping a must in cottage country. Boathouses had steps into the water for the women to go in and out discreetly, while men were expected to run naked off the dock. But somewhere along the line, swimming, showering, and bathing all became a bit prudish. "If the communal bath is under threat worldwide," Pearson writes, "I want us to stay a while where it still can be found: a fragment of a utopia, a lively glimmer of an alternative." ▲

Ink Stained

Reflections on newsrooms past

John Allemang

Fish Wrapped: True Confessions from Newsrooms Past

Edited by David Sherman

Guernica Editions

228 pages, softcover and ebook

THE CREATION OF A NEWSPAPER — THE fat, opinionated, story-filled scroll of repurposed pulp that used to hit the front door with a thud each morning — was rightly known as the daily miracle. Anyone who talked their way into the biz back when print held sway couldn't help but be amazed by the warp speed of journalistic transformation: A few hours ago, you were gabbing to your deskmates and lying to the dutiful editor who wandered by to beg for some copy. And now suddenly, the whole building is shaking as the presses roll out your imperfect eye glazer on a neighbourhood zoning dispute that's propping up a supermarket ad on A22.

There's always tomorrow, you'd say on the bad days, basking in the daily miracle's cycle of endless forgetting and the eternal chance of *AI* affirmation that bucked up those reporters temperamentally inclined to doubt and distrust. Yes, even a brilliant column in today's paper would be soaking up battered cod tomorrow, but for a full twenty-four hours, and longer still if you could place a wordy feature in the weekend edition, you were fat-free and attention-getting.

Tomorrow isn't what it used to be. The paper part of newspapering endures, but only just, an archaic artifact for tactile browsers who want to slow down technology's unstoppable thrust while advertisers depart in droves. Pretty well everything else is gone — that everyday sense of the miraculous, the quaint division of news into discrete diurnal chunks, the self-deprecating bravado that made you proud to belong to a tough-guy/tough-gal milieu, where your life's work could be happily dismissed as fish wrap. It's this lost world of outmoded, overconfident ink-stained wretches that the Quebec writer, musician, and (it need hardly be said) ex-journalist David Sherman conjures up in a lively assembly of twenty-seven free-speaking scribes who somehow survived their profession's penchant for self-destruction.

Sherman calls *Fish Wrapped* "a eulogy to an era before Twitter and Instagram and Facebook when newspapers were still relevant and anxiously awaited, often compulsively." Why that compulsive need for the daily paper turned so rapidly into indifference and even contempt toward dead-tree journalism isn't analyzed; it's

taken as a given, from the vantage point of 2020, that newspapers were doomed and that their disappearance is the natural result of technological progress, rather than a prolonged act of self-sabotage. And so *Fish Wrapped* is less a respectful eulogy and much more the manic monologizing that's half heard at a dive-bar wake, a chaotic paean to glorious irrelevancy from people who consider themselves lucky to have lived large in crazier times before the industry succumbed to what Sherman calls "the wasting disease."

These recollections cover a huge expanse of newspaper time, from the cocky, often lunatic, anti-authority 1960s, when reporters were the shock troops of information gathering (nothing was true until it was seen and heard by our man on the spot), to the orderly, deferential, corporate present, when managers meet (and meet and meet), hash out the direction of the day's news,

"We believed in our newspaper, yet it constantly betrayed our trust."

and leave desk-bound keyboard drones to complete the bland vision. There's a clear preference for a good-old-days nostalgia that's rooted in booze-soaked risk taking and not giving a damn, which, for all the rampant non-conformity on display, loses its appeal as the superior journalistic model — as if uninhibited carousing by itself produced better newspapers than a devotion to indie coffee blends could ever do, as if a perennial hangover and a trail of broken relationships were somehow crucial to critical thinking in a way that a clear head and a good night's sleep and a family to go home to at the end of the day could never be. A young journalist who bothered to read the more extreme wallowings of wild-man behaviour in *Fish Wrapped* could be justified in feeling contempt for all the self-glorifying waste and wastedness on display, rather than wistful regret for the deranged freedoms that have been lost in this better-behaved, better-educated, budget-paring era.

Fun, as defined by old-style journalists, is a challenge to the now dominant orthodoxies of managerial control and eternal belt-tightening. That kind of freewheeling, screw-you independence has been lost in more standardized HR-run environments, and noisy rebelliousness has given way to a more submissive, well-regulated, middle-class collegiality. Modern newsrooms are filled with people who are glad just to have a decent job, and who can blame them if they don't instinctively defy authority, internally and

externally? The work's hard enough as it is, and fun (to say nothing of hangovers) would just get in the way when you have to pick up the kid at daycare, get dinner ready, and keep checking in with late-night updates for the news desk.

To be fair, even the antiquated chroniclers of wasted time recognize that their war stories haven't aged well. "There's no doubt that today's scribes will live longer," writes Peter Cooney at the end of his heavy-drinking reminiscences, noting the hostility of his Concordia journalism students toward beery anecdote. But this generational shift doesn't have to be seen as some sort of puritanical preference for dull longevity over a fun-filled journalistic death wish. *Fish Wrapped* proposes a false dichotomy between the bleary then and the clearer-headed now, when young journalists don't bother to believe that good storytelling is the product of excess.

Unless you're a name-brand raconteur like Christopher Plummer, writing about treating a policeman's horse to cocktails in a Broadway bar with Jason Robards, memories of drunkenness grow tedious in their mindless predictability. The true confessions of *Fish Wrapped* are no more true for being wrapped in an alcoholic haze.

FORTUNATELY, THERE'S MORE TO *FISH WRAPPED* than glassy-eyed longings for a rose-tinted *temps perdu*. Sherman's contact list may be too closely tied to the tavern-rich Montreal scene of the last century (which at least supplies good period detail about FLQ violence, institutional corruption, Pierre Trudeau sightings, Mila Mulrone's shopping sprees, and grandiose hydroelectric projects that were secretly infiltrated by the *Gazette's* game-for-anything Jim Duff). And with an instinct for antics, he privileges tales from the pseudo-populist *Sun* school of defiant disreputability over whisperings from well-mannered business-and-politics outlets like the good grey *Globe and Mail*, where sobriety remains the house style despite endless attempts to loosen up. But, like an *AI* editor who knows the front-page news mix needs a few leavenings and treats, he's made a game attempt at breadth.

The book includes pieces on gathering gossip, buddying up to rockers, and living large on the junket circuit, none of which will convince you that celebrities are as fascinating as writers trick them out to be. But, hey, maybe the same thing can be said about mainstream newspapering's usual subjects, all those drab politicians, business titans, and millionaire athletes. Making a lot out of a little is one of the reporter's greatest talents; it fills the space, as we used to mutter with half-praise at the end of yet another day's skeptical transcribing.

John Pohl covers the local-newspaper realm, a curious habitat of newsy lobster suppers and prize photos of misshapen vegetables, as he details his rocky ascent from the Shelburne *Coast Guard and South Shore Gazette*, in Nova Scotia, to the *Moose Jaw Times-Herald* and Saskatoon's *Star-Phoenix*, where the owner installed a camera in the men's room to catch graffiti vandals (bad bosses who don't care much for troublemaking journalists are a running theme). Liz Pogue contributes a revealing memoir of her formative days making up stories about UFOs and celebrities for supermarket tabloids, where facts may be fungible but the hard rules of spelling, grammar, and style are rigorously applied. Charles Gordon chronicles a once-prosperous interlude at the *Ottawa Citizen*, where the sophisticated mandarin Keith Spicer arrived as editor and tried to elevate the intellectual tone of the place with refined dinner discussions. By *Fish Wrapped* standards, Spicer's underlings behaved extremely responsibly, and there is a refreshingly dainty image of him trying, at one night's conclusion, to teach the star columnists Roy MacGregor and Earl McRae how to walk like one of his heroes, the former French prime minister Pierre Mendès France. One labours to imagine MacGregor passing on these insider choreographic tips when he worked with Stephen Harper on the PM's hockey-history tome—but, no, political journalism stiffened up with the times, and the image won't come to mind.

Sarah Murdoch probes the rise of first-person female journalism, starting with her shy attempt to go undercover as a prostitute in Ottawa's thriving escort scene. (Why are so many print journalists natural introverts? But it explains the boozing.) That soul-baring experience seems to have prepared her well for the empathetic editing of professional self-regarders like the columnists Sondra Gotlieb and Rebecca Eckler. What Murdoch calls the lifestyle section's "I-writing women," along with their me-first stories of yummy mummies and doggie daycare and girls-night-out cosmopolitans, were notable victims of the modern cost-cutting era, as nervous papers retreated to the comforting core mission of hard news. But more hardened and versatile practitioners of tough-broad opinionizing like the old-schoolers Christie Blatchford and Rosie DiManno lingered on.

The late Blatch and the still-churning-'em-out Rosie would have been useful contributors to *Fish Wrapped's* true confessions. There's an oft-told story of the pair of them defying the tedium of a charity golf tournament by playing the last three holes topless—yet sober!—that could have neatly challenged the book's boisterous machismo ethos. Of course, in the real world of non-confessional, keep-your-head-down (and clothes-on) newspapering that most female journalists experience, they were outliers, topless or clad. So it's actually refreshing in *Fish Wrapped* to read the recollections offered up by the playwright and novelist Marianne Ackerman, who describes the challenges of starting her career at the late *Ottawa Journal*, staffing the paper's Hull bureau, as a penniless single mother. Of course, she missed out on the drunken cavorting and had to develop superb time-management skills that went completely against the male journalistic norm of compulsive procrastination.

Eventually, she'd had her fill of the adrenalin-rich, deadline-driven pace. There's no doubt that daily newspapering, in spite of all the errant

undiscipline, was a crash course in the writer's craft, enabling Ackerman and others to tell a story fast—but also clearly, tightly, and accurately (which takes considerable effort and discernment when the clock's ticking and a fun-free editor is growling). No one wants to wake up at 3 a.m., the way all fast-moving journalists do, with the gut-wrenching sense of horror that the morning paper will contain a misspelled name. But "in the long run," Ackerman observes, with a disturbing certainty that lifelong journalists would prefer to shrug off, "deadlines are not compatible with good writing, which takes time, reflection, inspiration and an enormous amount of revision." What daily journalism supplies to its practitioners most of all is "instant gratification, which can become addictive."

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IT'S HARD, PAINFUL EVEN, TO SEE YOUR WORK AND your way of life (and your legacy, if journalists only had one) dismissed as a self-limiting addiction. Those damned deadlines, and the last-minute inspiration of guilt or shame that went with them, were the only thing that made it possible for a hesitant, over-thinking mind like mine to turn out thousands of articles, features, columns, profiles, reviews, editorials, and charticles over thirty years. I even wrote a weekly news poem to deadline, late-breaking verse as we called it, and once, as my editor shouted out instructions from the *Globe's* lawyer on the other end of the phone, I had to rewrite a few merry rhymes about the litigious Conrad Black mere minutes before we went to press. While that was my idea of fun, I sure couldn't have done it drunk, on no sleep, with cops manhandling my rhyming dictionary. I may well have been a little hungover, given the nightly lure of Aussie shiraz, but the rush of the deadline turned out to be a perfect analgesic.

Yet if it weren't for all those deadlines, those down-to-the-wire struggles for a few more inches of smart copy and an ending that felt like an ending and not just the residue that survived an editor's bloodstained delete key, maybe I could have produced a few novels or plays or award-winning poems, like a real writer. Didn't Richard Addis, the hotshot London editor flown in to rescue the *Globe* from its innate dullness when it went up against the sassy *National Post* in better days, nickname me Voltaire when we first met at a French restaurant? Enlightenment philosopher, poet, polemicist, polymath. Yeah, that sounds better on the tombstone than "career hack."

But that was as good as it got. Every journalist has a best-before date, and few of us manage to get out in time. *Fish Wrapped's* memoirists are sad and angry and disappointed for a reason. They outlasted their era; they had a good thing, and now it's gone. They blame incompetent owners, greedy hedge funds, dithering governments, slimy technocrats, kids today. But in the end, the problem is personal: you can't adjust, you won't adjust, and maybe you shouldn't have to adjust. Every new proposal tossed out at the weekly features meeting becomes one you did twenty years ago. Every innovation designed to transform storytelling is just an obsolescent plaything for the dumbed-down crowd. Every rah-rah town-hall business-plan announcement is one more omen that disaster is imminent. Reading the former *Toronto Star* editor Michael Cooke's fatuous rallying cry to his troops, awkwardly shoehorned into *Fish Wrapped's* more personal memoirs—"Big chan-

ges coming... all good and all necessary... and exciting... and fabulous... embrace the new... brilliant and lasting success"—I can barely choke back the screams of "Bullshit!" Any journalist trusting enough to believe those empty, elliptical phrases was in for the most predictable of shocks. Simultaneous with the publication of *Fish Wrapped*, the Torstar media empire was being sold for a cut-rate \$60 million. The usual external enemies—Facebook, Google, COVID-19—got the blame, and little mention was made of management's disastrous tablet strategy ("Doing for news what Cirque du Soleil has done for circus," the ever-upbeat Cooke once proclaimed), which lost \$23 million. Trying to keep a newspaper going in the digital era, said the departing Torstar chair John Honderich with belated realism, "has been an uphill struggle."

So shouldn't someone in the allegedly free-speaking newspaper game have had the courage and integrity to shout down Cooke several years back? If not to save all the jobs that would need to be cut, at least to advise optimistic young journalists that they'd better start thinking about a new line of work? People who used to live out their working lives as journalists, including many of my more presentable ex-colleagues, now find better-paid, better-regulated, and often no less interesting work in university information departments, advertising and public relations, government communications jobs, and a myriad of well-funded hospital posts—anywhere that those with a quick mind, a way with words, and an ability to synthesize complex issues can get their just reward. When I used to speak to journalism students, one of the best pieces of advice I could give them was this: Don't become a journalist. But if they were determined to do so against the odds, then they should at least be strategic and marry someone who had an assured income: doctors, lawyers, and professors were the best bets, since they actually might enjoy the wit, intelligence, fun-loving instincts, up-to-date opinions, and insider knowledge that an experienced journalist would bring to the table.

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IN THE NEWSROOM, YOU HAD TO BE CAREFUL voicing cheery notes of despair. Contempt for grumpy old men with fun buried deep in their past became commonplace as the managerial go-getters touted a more glorious future. Once you lost faith in daily miracles, you learned to keep your mouth shut among people who deserved to have hope, and you tried to stave off the contempt for self and others that salaried disbelief engendered.

Keep your mouth shut? The whole point of being a journalist, the reason you pursue a low-paid job of dubious respectability, is to have the small freedom of being able to hold forth unfiltered, if only among your half-listening seatmates. Or so I used to think. Years later, with the *Post* reduced to its own version of dullness and predictability, and the *Globe* reverting to its unflashy dependability, one of Addis's successors delighted in mocking me as Bartleby the Scrivener, which was his master's in American literature way of saying that while I might once have been capable of good work, I was now more likely to be found staring blankly out the window, rejecting all story requests with the Melvillian line "I would prefer not to."

It wasn't far from the truth. I no longer jumped at assignments. I'd been at the paper for three

decades and held to values the new era rejected, like the power of a senior writer to say “No, thanks” (sometimes elevated to “Are you kidding?”) if he thought the assignment was dumb (“Can you do a quick feature on how to save yourself if you’re caught in an air-balloon fire?”) or unethical (“Would you like to cover the America’s Cup in San Diego? Just be sure to mention the New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc tasting”). Or if he disagreed with the paper’s encroaching right-wing bias (“Give me something on how Obama’s politics are coloured by his Kenyan genes”) or thought something was just a really bad fit (“I need you to write about a B.C. child-killer who’s just got out of prison”). My bullying boss actually yelled that last one at me in an unusually unhinged state: “Find the family and talk to them!” I was in Toronto, it was 6 p.m. on a Friday, I wasn’t a crime reporter, and there was a dinner to go to. I told her no, with an overlay of disdain, and contemplated my resignation all weekend. Fortunately, the gods of journalism intervened, and by Monday she was out of a job. Now that was a miracle.

If only the readers could see how badly their well-ordered paper was run. *Fish Wrapped* offers a sample, but it’s all so picturesque, so long ago. What was I doing in this strange business that was in such a hurry to get nowhere fast? Being a senior writer became a drawback: You lacked eagerness, you couldn’t keep up with the technology, you found fault when you should have seen an opportunity, you held true to the outmoded union rules when everyone else was a team player who took on dubious projects without complaint. No one around you knew who you used to be or cared about the clever columns you used to write, the bright bits of prose their parents or grandparents once enjoyed, the stuff you could still do if only someone wanted it. One of the saddest things about daily journalism, reflected in *Fish Wrapped*’s elegiac bitterness, is that it’s so completely ephemeral. That’s no surprise, given that the word “daily” is an essential part of the deal, but it’s still a shock when you reach the end and discover there’s nothing there, that your life’s work is buried deep in a database, and even the fishmongers have moved on to fresher wrapping material. Funerals of dead colleagues become the only place where you feel truly alive.

No wonder, in this worrying place where introversion collides with retrospection, that the most resonant piece in *Fish Wrapped* is the film critic Liam Lacey’s unflinching, clear-eyed, sweetly melancholy memoir of his thirty-six *Globe* years. It turns out that good writing, with a keen sense of dark humour, makes everything bearable, even the newspaperman’s long descent toward irrelevance and oblivion.

The grimy, smoky *Globe* that Lacey joined as a young writer with a reputation for being a “good light read” feels ancient to me, and I arrived just a few years later. We shared the same boss, a tough, laconic moralist who took solitary motorcycle trips on his vacations, advised his writers that journalists should have no friends, and fought fractious turf battles against the higher-ups with the righteous zeal of a guerrilla warrior dealing death to the imperialists. We were journalistic outsiders and even imposters by the standards of the hard-living hard-news crowd, innocent precursors of the now-constant attempt to shake things up, reach new audiences, find alternative sources of revenue, dilute

the standards. Lacey chased down urban trends and explained pop culture, while I became the staff writer for a short-lived real estate tabloid designed to bleed off a few ad dollars from the bloated *Toronto Star* New in Homes section (it seemed to be an advantage that I knew nothing about suburban real estate). Both of our sections eventually failed, as pretty well every innovation was bound to do over the next few decades. But we were literate, irreverent, semi-erudite writers in a conservative institution that valued phrase turners for some reason, and the paper was vast and varied enough that there was always interesting work to be had.

Until there wasn’t.

“If there was a single moment when I knew we were screwed . . .” So Lacey begins an engaging chronicle of our collective downfall. But really the screwing up and alienating had been going on for years, as the worried business overlords took control and the newsroom’s self-confidence was sapped. Managers who used to be defenders and protectors of the quirky, creative workforce became cold-blooded agents for the higher powers, skilled at pleasing upwards while autocratically imposing corporate schemes on the cowed rank-and-file — schemes that were designed to help us reach new demographics, generate innovative advertising revenue, and stave off destruction for a little longer. Skeptical writers who used to think they were in charge of the material that appeared under their bylines now did what they were told with all the weary ambivalence of the collaborator.

We were screwed over too many times to count, and so were the readers, disturbed and mystified by a once-confident institution that went through weird annual identity crises. The bosses’ way of dealing with all the threats of cancelled subscriptions was to act pleased that we were shedding older readers unwanted by advertisers. “Publishers pushed to make newspapers more appealing to people who don’t like to read,” Lacey writes all too knowledgeably. “More pictures, shorter stories, more lists, sidebars and ‘value-added’ consumer tips.”

As he notes with restrained horror, our advertisers became the real customers. I knew we were screwed when I noticed a series of unnecessary feature stories in the precious news pages promoting technological innovations above an ad from a company that just happened to be reinventing itself as a leader in the innovation business. This was the beginning of the despised custom-content era, the moment when big-bucks agencies, in collaboration with newspaper management, started directing and reshaping our editorial output, using innocent staff writers to give their sly strategy more credibility with deceived readers.

The concept of “fake news” hadn’t yet been articulated, but savvy newsroom cynics took grim pleasure rooting out the apparent fakery and complaining to anyone who would listen. Much of the travel section was now financed by the people being written about; eventually a lame proviso (more like a postviso) was inserted at the end of each sponsored story, as if that excused the casual attempt at luxury-lifestyle deception. The fashion pages seemed like one long *objet*-filled excuse for product puffery. More worryingly, news beats like health care and education were expanded in lockstep with the zeal of advertisers in those fields eager to buy space. But in a period of limited economic resources,

what news stories and unlucrative areas are you neglecting when you write uncritical feature after uncritical feature on exciting new MRI technologies and the growing number of young women making their mark in STEM subjects?

The writing was on the wall when the shit-disturbing reporter Jan Wong was sent to Montreal after the Dawson College shooting and soon filed an opinionated Jan Wong kind of article that tied the immigrant shooter’s alienated rage to Quebec’s exclusionary pure laine identity. In the fury that ensued (including denunciations by the prime minister and the premier), my vulnerable colleague was left to twist in the wind by *Globe* bosses who should have owned the story and the reaction that followed, since it was published on their watch and by their designated troublemaker. Journalists who were just doing their job used to believe management would always have their back. No longer. Mess up, by the ambitious editors’ self-serving standards, and you’re on your own against the world.



WE BELIEVED IN OUR NEWSPAPER, YET IT CONSTANTLY betrayed our trust. Lacey articulates the deep faith that came from working for a serious journal with high standards and a palpable sense of integrity, and the Jesuitical knots we tied ourselves into to dissociate our work from the shabbier version of the place that couldn’t rise to its own standards. Whenever that bond was severed, when a tell-all investigation about Doug Ford’s alleged youthful drug dealing failed to appear or some higher force (the publisher? the owners? the Illuminati?) bypassed the editorial board decision makers and determined that the paper would yet again offer up a tortured argument for a Conservative victory in the upcoming election, we realized we’d made a deal with the devil. And once again, the feelings of embarrassment (in Lacey’s case) or self-loathing (in mine) would wash over us. “It’s more complicated than you think,” whispered the conspiratorial national editor, after I denounced yet another knee-jerk Harper endorsement as an affront to the thoughtful, youthful, educated urban demographic we were supposed to be pursuing (marketing arguments being the only things bosses now understood). I have no idea what he meant, or why he thought my old-man naïveté needed his *sotto voce* correction, but then preachy newspapers are among the least transparent institutions in this country.

Maybe we should have untightened our behinds, shed a few polysyllables, and signed on with a spunky tabloid — those folks at least had fun, to judge from all the stories in *Fish Wrapped*. A large measure of that self-cleansing hilarity came from knowing that there was nothing high-minded to believe in, no justification for taking yourself seriously like the broadsheet boys and girls, when you concocted Sunshine Girl captions and punning headlines on local carnage for a sexist right-wing rag. How could you believe you were on a mission, that you were embodying the J-school vow to speak truth to power, when you were a young, hung-over David Sherman being ordered to interview Montreal strippers shedding their clothes as a fundraiser for the Children’s Hospital — Tits for Tots, as the crass Brit editor called it.

But then you know you’re still, at heart, an old-school journalist when you coolly assess that tight little phrase and say, “Not bad.” ▲

programmed to be a challenger. The dialogue ranges over Gideon's young life and his father's inescapable march toward sage-like maturity. The layout of the pages is fun. Contemporary exegesis of classic tales — say, Jacob's flight and his dream — comes in the illustrated dialogue around the text. Theology is hopelessly, and gloriously, mixed up with the here and now and the personal:

Gideon: How does he know God's there when he wakes up?

Rick: He feels it. Some people think there's a state of religious feeling not confined to any religion. You can call it God or something else or nothing at all. Sometimes it's called awe. Heschel —

Gideon: Your guy at the seminary.

Rick: — called it radical amazement. Others named it the Mysterium Tremendum. That's Latin for —

Gideon: I get it. Did you ever feel that?

Rick: I thought so, back then.

What's so compelling about this and other passages is that the business of faith is never traduced, although religion itself comes in for a few whacks. Gideon Salutin was not taught any religion in his youth; it's as if his dad was sufficiently bummed out by his own teenage and young man zealotry that, like many parents, he didn't want to inflict his "mistakes" on his offspring. Nice try, Rick, but it never works, or hardly ever. As Philip Larkin famously observed, parents "fill you up with the faults they had/ And add some extra, just for you." Fortunately for Gideon Salutin, his "faults" are DNA-crafted

to stand up to the father's occasional bombast, while Rick himself is a genuine odd duck: just when you think you have him pinned down, he will surprise you and make you shake your head about something that seems obvious and sensible but that never occurred to you before, or at least not in that particular light. Time and again, political and editorial pulpity sheds contemporary light on these ancient texts, while illuminating the journey father and son are on.

Consider how Rick and Gideon, now firmly an adult, talk about Joseph revealing himself to his creepy brothers. You will recall, I am sure, that Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by those jealous siblings, but that he rose to become Pharaoh's right-hand man.

Rick: There's a midrash [a rabbinic interpretation of Bible stories] where Joseph says: The brother you think is dead is right here in this house. They look around and say, Where? He opens his arms and says: It's me!

Gideon: That's sweet.

Rick: Then he says it was all part of the plan.

Gideon: If you believe God plans everything.

Rick: Think of it as: it all worked out in the end.

Gideon: Like the fire at the cottage.

Here the dialogue is broken, to explain that the family cottage burned down in a winter lightning storm when Gideon was just five. When they rebuilt, Gideon got himself a tree-house and Rick a screened porch.

Gideon: I learned from that.

Rick: What?

Gideon: Change takes time. At first I thought, You get the insurance. You get the plan, that's it. But we went every weekend while Mike and his crew built it. There was always something new but there were new problems to solve.

Rick: When I was fired by The Globe and Mail after writing a weekly column for 20 years, we were at your karate class. You saw my face.

Gideon [as a child]: WHAT?

Rick: I told you and said it might be a good thing. You said

Gideon [as a child]: Like the fire at the cottage.

Rick: You're very good at making connections.

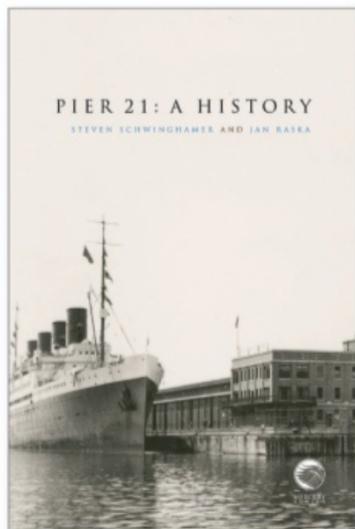
Gideon: They're awful things you'd never choose to happen. But after, if it works out, you're kind of glad.

Living in a time of plague, as we do, helps us understand the pull of Biblical journeys and the eternal question of where was — where is — everyone trying to go. The search for something beyond the freighted struggle for survival takes on even more significance and meaning. I don't think either of the Salutins would argue that they have made a major foray into a deeper understanding of Biblical mysteries. They don't have to. They have unpretentiously woven their own stories into an eternal one in such a magical way, it would almost make you want to take a guided tour of the Holy Land with the two of them sweetly nattering all along the way. ▲

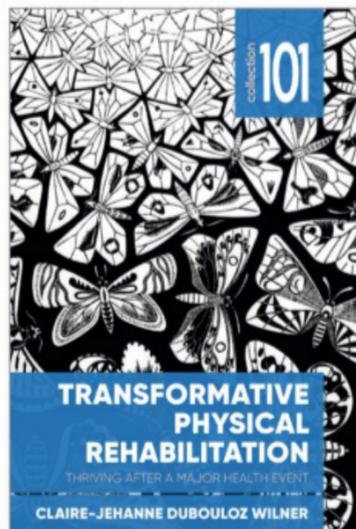


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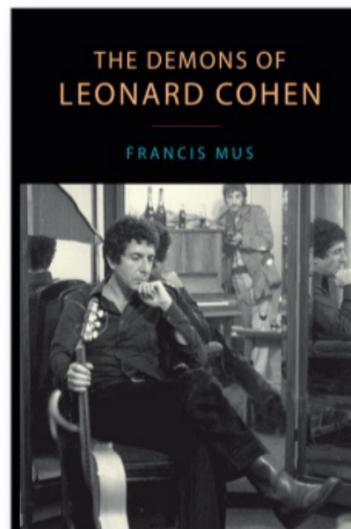
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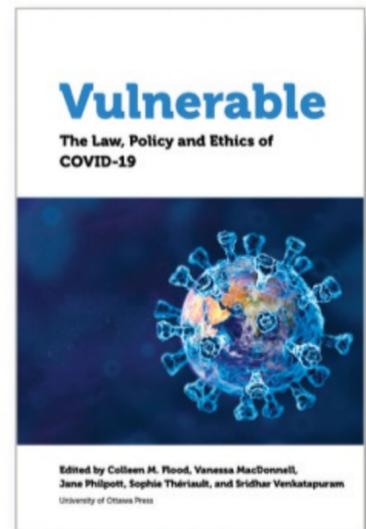
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The Ashes

A season of loss

Mark Kingwell

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL HAS limped through a pandemic-dominated season, with a bitter labour dispute as its unsettling centrepiece. As if disease and the game's disappearance weren't enough. Once more, the billionaire owners tried to exploit the merely multimillionaire players with offers of pro-rated salaries and a truncated season. The fans, as usual, were the losers.

So it goes in professional sports. In May, the *Globe and Mail* columnist Cathal Kelley recalled a conversation from years earlier, where the likeable Blue Jay Lyle Overbay, then earning \$7 million (U.S.) a year, said he considered himself *poor* next to his teammate Vernon Wells, earning \$18 million (U.S.) at the time. This, Kelley noted, is part of "MLB's sorry lesson in economics." In a later column, he would add this: "There can be villains in a sports business squabble, but no heroes." And this: "Somehow, baseball players have deluded themselves into believing that because they work for a living, that qualifies them as working class." America's cherished national pastime has become "a relic of a past time."

All true. Most fans try to compartmentalize such thoughts, because we love the game. But when play is interrupted, all manner of reflection, some of it unwelcome or painful, enters the idle mind that can no longer idle at the ballpark.

♦
MY MOTHER DIED IN EARLY 2019, LONELY IN A hospital bed in Victoria. Through the previous fall and winter, after a stroke rendered her seriously ill, I had travelled to be with her and my father several times. Those visits full of departure lounges, hospital rooms, and their living room — a place of endless bickering and everyday troubles, like filling out tax returns, trying to divine scrawled computer passwords, or dealing with my two competing brothers — had been so dominated by small tasks that I had not, except for one moment when she was wheeled out of intensive care looking like she'd been hit by a truck, allowed time for emotion.

The hospital called me just after 4 a.m. Eastern on March 7. The man was quiet and solicitous, a calming voice from 3,500 kilometres and three time zones away. I sat on the edge of my bed with my head in my hands, the universal posture of grief and defeat. The next day, I had to teach a seminar, which I barely remember, before going straight to the airport. The days and weeks after that would bring me all the usual things one faces with the death of a parent. My brothers and their families were on vacation in Hawaii, and so I was on my own for the first days, struggling single-handedly with routine logistics and

grief. My father is sight impaired and adept at the learned helplessness so frequent in men of his vintage. In his prime, he could navigate four-engine naval patrol planes across oceans. Now he could not even tell me where to find my mother's passport so she could be declared legally dead and released from the morgue.

I was surprised to learn that, despite her fervent Roman Catholicism, my mother had willed that she be cremated. For all the years of my youth, I had repeated the words of the Apostles' Creed, which indicated that, among other things, I believed in the resurrection of the soul and the body. But I became a philosopher, not a theologian. Maybe you can



Missing the altered time spent together.

resurrect ashes into a complete heaven-sent body? I don't know.

I have no doubts about my mother's soul, but what makes the body part harder is that we chose to scatter those ashes in several places that were meaningful to her. Some went into the ocean water along the harbour walk near my parents' house. After the rather surreal scene of having the box of them queried at airport security, I took some to Jackson's Point on Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto, where my parents had met as lovestruck youngsters at a summer camp. My father was then a monk, one of the Christian Brothers who ran the camp. He was employed as a lifeguard and swimming instructor; he was tall and good-looking, with a flashing movie-star

smile. My mother was a high school girl working in the kitchen. All those years later, my wife and I sent some of her ashes swirling into the lake water one autumn afternoon, with a chunk of Ecclesiastes as benediction.

My father left the monastic order — obviously, or you wouldn't be reading this — and when they were married a few months later, glamour shots of their wedding appeared in all the Toronto newspapers. They were indeed a handsome young couple, the world theirs to take. The Royal Canadian Air Force offered him its own kind of glamour, plus the hierarchy and order they both craved. The next quarter century of service took them, and us, to a new base every two or three years, across the country and back.

I loved this transient life, but it offered few of the usual anchors of childhood. Baseball, though, was always there. My father taught me how to fill out a score sheet, explained the frequently Byzantine rules, with their delicate checks and balances, and indulged in the inevitable games of backyard catch. It wasn't until much later that I realized my mother, too, was a lifelong fan. She didn't talk about it much, and didn't like watching games on television (though she always laughed when that Glavine and Maddux "Chicks dig the long ball" ad came on). What she loved was going to the park, sometimes with her knitting basket, and sipping the first half of a beer before passing the glass on to my father or, later, one of us boys. She couldn't stomach warm beer.

Also like many fans, my mother preferred minor-league ball to the increasingly raucous experience of big MLB stadiums. I once took her to a Blue Jays game at the sound-system-pounding concrete cavern then known as the SkyDome, and she hated it. She was used to the bucolic pleasures of Nat Bailey Stadium, the AA and AAA site tucked away inside a large public park in leafy Vancouver — these days, alas, another Scotiabank sponsorship hangar. She and my father also started taking annual trips to Seattle to watch the Jays, like hundreds of other West Coast Canadian fans. But she had far more interest in the outlet stores and cheap dining options, at least until the opening of Safeco Field (now T-Mobile Park, part of the relentless corporate-branding trend that she hated). The old Kingdome, which was like a peeling, neglected house by the end of its tenure, made her feel woozy. Baseball was for the outdoors, like football, fishing, and picnics. It was a Sabbath, time out of time.

She had very little interest in the baseball literature that I grew to love, from early *Sports Illustrated* yarns scooped from my older brother's room to the books of adolescence and adulthood: Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly*,

A Visit to Edgar Allan Poe's Cottage in the Bronx

Under an ashen-grey October sky
the drone of daytime traffic followed me
as I walked from the Kingsbridge Road subway station
to Edgar Allan Poe's cottage
in the Bronx.

The white, one-and-a-half-storey cottage
had a veranda, windows with green shutters;
frame-built, unlike the house of Usher.
Inside, the rooms were small, the ceiling low.
I wondered how tall was Poe.

There were souvenirs aplenty.
A bronze bust of Poe surveyed one room,
a stuffed raven surveyed another.
Have Your Very Own Black Cat: \$4.00 each.
Did I expect a free frisson?

Poe himself would have shuddered.
What demon had tempted me here?
I climbed a dimly lighted staircase
whose narrowness was claustrophobic,
and stumbled on his tubercular wife's deathbed.

Then felt I like some intruder. The reality
seemed so unreal. Did I imagine the air tainted?
I had journeyed here alone
to pay homage to Poe
in that month of all months in the year.

Len Gasparini

Len Gasparini is the author of Götterdämmerung, a book of poetry and essays.

Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, Paul Quarrington's rollicking *Home Game*, and E. R. Greenberg's underrated *The Celebrant*. And in non-fiction, there was Jim Bouton's raunchy epic, *Ball Four*, and everything by the Rogers Kahn and Angell. In a *sui generis* slot, one had John Updike's unimprovable 1960 *New Yorker* essay "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu":

Greatness necessarily attracts debunkers, but in Williams' case the hostility has been systematic and unappeasable. His basic offense against the fans has been to wish that they weren't there. Seeking a perfectionist's vacuum, he has quixotically desired to sever the game from the ground of paid spectatorship and publicity that supports it. Hence his refusal to tip his cap to the crowd or turn the other cheek to newsmen.

Six decades have gone by, and Williams's wish is now a reality: This summer in Korea, the KBO League played crowd-free matches, viewable on early morning TSN, with the NC Dinos against the Kiwoom Heroes or the Doosan Bears. In Japan, play finally resumed in June, but only cardboard cut-outs of fans could get seats. Major League Baseball, despite numerous player infec-

tions, opened a shortened, fan-free season in late July—but not in Toronto, after a ruling by the federal government sent the Blue Jays south of the border for "home" games. The perusing of baseball books rather than game-day programs used to be a winter diversion; lately, it's the closest many of us have been able to get to the field.

◆

THE LAST TIME MY MOTHER VISITED ME IN Toronto, before she became too ill to travel much, she stayed with me in an apartment I was renting in Seaton Village. The downtown neighbourhood is a typical chunk of the city's architectural vernacular, with rows of narrow two-storey residential buildings, most semi-detached, with little sidewalk-bound parkettes, community hockey rinks, and those corner stores that sell everything from milk, ice cream, and potato chips to surprising arrays of hardware, exotic condiments, Korean dumplings, Jamaican beef patties, and Portuguese beef sandwiches.

This area was part of my mother's life tapestry. She went to high school six blocks from my apartment, and she lived in a small workingman's house one subway stop further west. In between, on a route she walked every day, there is an odd sunken park, a former gravel quarry, called Christie Pits.

The Pits has a multi-layered baseball resonance. In mid-August 1933, five years before my mother was born at a nearby hospital, a six-hour riot broke out there in the aftermath of a bitterly contested game. At the time, it was called Willowvale Park (Christie Pits being considered a little too coarse). On one side of the park's baseball diamond was the Harbord Playground squad, composed mainly of Italian and Jewish boys from the surrounding blue-collar neighbourhoods, populated to this day by families whose first forebears arrived in Canada during successive immigration waves before and after the First World War. Opposite them, the St. Peter's Club nine were sponsored by a Catholic church that still stands about four blocks from my old place. Both were local teams, but St. Peter's was Anglo Catholic rather than Italian Catholic or (perceived to be worse) European Jewish.

Ethnic and political tensions were high that summer. Adolf Hitler had seized power in Germany just six months before, and Toronto's economic fault lines were being ruthlessly exposed by straitened Depression-era conditions. When, during the first of two quarter-final games, a flag bearing a swastika was raised in the crowd, there were angry boos answered by shouts of "Heil Hitler." Two nights later, just as the final out was recorded, a swastika was again displayed, on a blanket this time, and the inevitable fight was unleashed.

The punching and kicking started on the diamond, but it spread in increasingly violent running skirmishes involving some 10,000 residents who had gathered to watch. No one was killed, but dozens were hurt and hospitalized. The fracas was not even close to the Haymarket affair, still less to widespread coordinated atrocities like Kristallnacht. But it's still something that's hard to reconcile with Toronto's projected image of easygoing—if not self-satisfied—diversity and civility.

Christie Pits has been peaceful for many decades since, to the point where it is almost impossible to imagine a melee involving thousands anywhere near it. This is a quiet, if not quite bucolic, corner of the city. The primitive landscaping of the park itself features long sloping walkways at opposite corners, with ramps down to the little collection of amenities. There, below street level, you can find a small wading pool, a soccer field, a playground, and, in the northeast corner of the expanse, a gravel-covered baseball diamond.

You can't *really* call it a "ballpark," though the outfield is grass and there is a short cyclone fence to make home runs feel real. The backstop and dugouts are steel tubing and chain-link metal mesh. Behind each foul line is a sad three-tiered bleacher with backless bench seats for about ten people. When games are played here, most fans sit on the steep grass hillsides. Choice vantages are at the very top of the incline, where the ground is level, and on a little flat hump of land on the first-base side, where early birds set up aluminum lawn chairs on the miniature plateau. A Mister Softee truck comes to every game, and there is a little concession stand behind centre field, where you can buy popcorn and soft drinks.

The whole set-up is more reminiscent of *The Bad News Bears* than of even the most basic Cape Cod, A-Ball, or NCAA field. I once attended a graduation ceremony at Bard College, in

upstate New York, and that school, not exactly a Division I powerhouse, has a baseball stadium that makes Christie Pits look like a sandlot. Thousands of American high schools have better facilities. But, but: on summer Sundays, always at 2 p.m., the hometown Toronto Maple Leafs (not to be confused with the hockey team of the same name) dig into the gravel against opponents in the Ontario Intercounty Baseball League. The Barrie Baycats, the Guelph Royals, the Welland Jackfish, and several others all take turns making the short bus ride to the city. This is semi-pro ball, a few amateur players just possibly on their way up, some former pros definitely on their way down, and a bunch of just-there players with talent well above average but not well enough to make it anywhere else.

The Vancouver Canadians, who play in that beautiful Nat Bailey Stadium my mother liked (named after the first successful drive-in restaurateur in Canada), are currently the only MLB-affiliated minor-league team in Canada. Once classified as Triple A, they are now the Class A Short Season affiliate of the Blue Jays. Other teams in various towns and cities across the country belong to independent leagues, collegiate leagues, or semi-pro outfits. In Toronto, the closest MLB-affiliated team is the Buffalo Bisons, on the other side of the usually busy but currently closed border. So the baseball choices in my town tip precipitously from the two-time World Series champion big show right down to this Podunk neighbourhood park with no seats, no admission fees, and a harried owner who runs up the hill to retrieve any foul ball sent into the gathered few. Christie Pits makes for pretty good baseball, but, more to the point, it makes for excellent entertainment.

My mother loved this place. After she and my father moved to Vancouver Island, she returned to Toronto only a few times: a high school reunion, the funeral of a friend, a serious tax issue. Each time, if we could arrange it, we would head over to the Pits on the Sunday afternoon and sit on the hill, letting the familiar rhythms of ball and strike, out and inning, pass the time for us. I would get us Popsicles from the nearby corner store. There was no beer, warm or cold, but there was always Coke or coffee.

My mother was often described as difficult or judgmental or strict. She was all of these things,

not least, I think, because she had to raise three rambunctious sons pretty much single-handedly while my flyboy father winged his way from the Azores to the Arctic. She was also loving, loyal, and often sad. Baseball brought her peace. Those infrequent afternoons at Christie Pits, afternoons that could go on forever without the strictures of a game clock, were rare hours we spent alone together. I never saw her as happy anywhere else.

WHEN I GOT BACK TO TORONTO LAST YEAR, ASHES in my carry-on bag, I made a couple of resolutions. The scattering on Lake Simcoe was one. The other was this: on opening day of the 2020 baseball season, when, as we all know, time begins — and stops — I would take the subway over to Christie Pits and surreptitiously scatter a couple of handfuls over her favourite diamond. This would constitute a municipal by-law infraction, I knew, but I was prepared to take the rap if anyone cared to notice.

But then everything changed. Opening day never came. Our transit system became a petri dish. The Intercounty League postponed its season. Baseball was gone from us, except in forms I found increasingly depressing: fantasy games run by a newspaper, pitting different eras of Blue Jays against each other; sports channels reliving glory days by offering “rewind” broadcasts of classic games. But classic games are memorable because we *remember* them. A large part of sport’s appeal is watching contests as they unfold, knowing there is no script, knowing the result has yet to be determined. Highlights are great, but baseball, in particular, is about the lived experience in the moment, the way time really does change when your biggest decision might be whether to have another hot dog or a second beer.

What I miss about baseball is, of course, everything. But what I miss above all is the altered time spent together with other fans — friends and strangers — all of us sharing something so simple that it is surpassingly beautiful, sublime, irreplaceable. I can’t get my mother back, and I can’t ever watch another game with her. It is still not clear when anyone will be able to watch a game with other devotees, in the great democratic proximity of ballparks everywhere. But those memories of Sunday afternoons at the

Pits, watching the players scratch out their small paycheques — paycheques that could never cover their bills — because they just love to play the game, bring me back to that mysterious combination of the ordinary and the elevated that has no name other than magic.

IT IS A CLICHÉ IN THE BASEBALL WORLD TO SAY, after a failure, “Wait ‘til next year.” (I know at least two baseball books of that title, and there are probably more.) Of course, if I wanted to, I could even now take the long walk to Christie Pits, from my new home on the other side of town, observing correct social distancing along the way, and scatter the ashes. But I choose to wait until next year, when, we all hope, baseball will grace our summertime again. Meanwhile, the little box is next to me as I write this.

And I think I’ll keep some of it with me forever. Cricket fans know that the idiosyncratic trophy for Test contests between England and Australia is an urn of ashes, allegedly of a burned wicket bail. The origin story is complicated: When the Australia eleven bested the England side in an 1882 contest at the Oval, in London, the *Sporting Times* printed a sardonic obituary for all of English cricket, noting that “the body will be cremated and the ashes sent to Australia.” When England travelled to Australia in a quest to regain the notional ashes the next year, and prevailed, a group of Melbourne women presented the English captain, Ivo Bligh, with the urn. Bligh later married one of them, the euphoniously named Florence Morphy.

The Ashes are quintessentially cricket, but they have also endured because they are a potent symbol of friendly contests, victory and defeat, and the good-humoured year-after-year wonder of sports. Baseball has been taken from us this plague year, but its remains are safe and cherished. That is what the game means to me, yesterday, today, and forever. The game, and its fans, will eventually be resurrected — in body as well as soul.

The flesh is weak, after all. It craves a cold beer now and then, and maybe that proverbial ballpark hot dog that Humphrey Bogart considered “better than roast beef at the Ritz.” Any heaven without those plain, exquisite pleasures isn’t for me — or for my mother.

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A Sultan's Education

Babe Ruth before pinstripes

Michael Taube

The Man Who Made Babe Ruth: Brother Matthias of St. Mary's School

Brian Martin

McFarland & Company

226 pages, softcover and ebook

ON SEPTEMBER 5, 1914, GEORGE Herman Ruth Jr. hit the first home run of his career, at Hanlan's Point Stadium. On the Toronto Islands that day, in a large concrete and steel ballpark, the nineteen-year-old pitched the first game of an International League doubleheader for the Providence Grays against the local Maple Leafs. Memorably described as a "youthful southside phenom" by the *Toronto Daily Star*, he gave up one hit, walked three batters, struck out seven, and smashed a thunderous three-run dinger over the fence in the sixth inning against Leafs pitcher Ellis Johnson.

It would turn out to be the only minor-league home run for the man we remember as Babe Ruth. The whereabouts of the ball that would make fans and collectors salivate (and a lucky auction house quite happy) remains a mystery. Legend holds that it was stolen, or that it resides in a bronzed state in an unnamed restaurant, or that it rests in a watery grave. Today, two nondescript plaques at Hanlan's Point are all that physically remains of the stadium and the deep fly that helped launch a career.

The slugger, also affectionately known as the Bambino and the Sultan of Swat, would return to Toronto in the 1930s, this time as a New York Yankee, in town to play an exhibition game against the same minor-league team in the same stadium. True to form, he hit another towering homer, which reportedly landed in Lake Ontario and was never retrieved. As Tom Valcke, former president and CEO of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, once told the writer Jerry Amernic, "It would almost make draining the lake worthwhile if two of the Babe's biggest taters are sitting on the bottom."

Ruth's connection to Canada is much deeper than the fate of two long-lost four-baggers, however. His fans of yesteryear, and admirers thereafter, owe a debt of gratitude to the kind heart and firm hand of a Catholic brother from Nova Scotia who intensely loved the great game.

Brian Martin's *The Man Who Made Babe Ruth* brings to life the inspirational figure who helped transform young George into a sports legend. An educator at St. Mary's School, in Baltimore, Brother Matthias played an important role that's been discussed only lightly by others, including by Ruth in his 1948 autobiography. Martin, a retired *London Free Press* journalist and author

of several books on America's favourite pastime, has admirably lifted the veil much higher.

♦

BROTHER MATTHIAS WAS BORN MARTIN LEO Boutilier on July 11, 1872, in the small Nova Scotia community of Lingan, on Cape Breton Island. He was the eighth of ten children born to Joseph and Mary Ann Boutilier. His father, a Lutheran who converted to his wife's Roman Catholic faith, was one of many men who worked in the local coal mines. But, according to Martin, "Joseph's descendants believe he became overly zealous in his new faith and had some sort of religious argument at the mine that may have contributed to his departure."



The little rascal who turned into a king.

This helps explain why the Boutiliers left Nova Scotia in 1880, as does an extended period of financial hardship that afflicted the Maritimes. After briefly considering Halifax, the Boutiliers sailed to Boston, where Joseph found work as a machinist, while his older children settled into good jobs. They all became proud American residents. Martin was only nine when the family arrived in an East Boston neighbourhood that was "firmly in the grip of baseball fever."

Different variations of the game, including round-ball, were played by young Bostonians, while the older players of the Boston Red Stockings were part of America's first professional baseball league, the National Association. When the league collapsed, a separate franchise,

the Boston Red Caps, became a charter member of the "more businesslike" National League. The Boutiliers became enthusiastic fans of this strange new game. "Like other immigrants," Martin writes, "they soon realized that following baseball helped them bond with their neighbors, old-timers and newcomers alike."

Religion also played a critical role in young Martin's life. Along with his brother Thomas, Martin was "more spiritually inclined" than most of his siblings — "to the delight of their father." Around 1890, he joined a congregation of the Belgium-based, English-speaking Xaverian Brothers. Though the organization didn't train would-be priests, it served as a lay "religious community approved by the Catholic Church." It still does: "Like priests, the Brothers vow to dedicate their lives to poverty, chastity and obedience."

Eventually, Boutilier was assigned to St. Mary's Industrial Training School, a Xaverian institution in Baltimore, and became a full member of the brotherhood on March 25, 1900. He took the name Brother Matthias. He taught courses and served in the "key post of school disciplinarian," which made sense, since he had grown to six feet, six inches and had come to be called the Boss by the young boys. More important for fans, Brother Matthias became one of the school's baseball coaches — in another city that was fascinated with the game. And this led to his fateful meeting with the future Bambino.

♦

GEORGE RUTH WAS BORN IN BALTIMORE ON February 6, 1895. He grew up in a working-class neighbourhood near Carroll Park, where he could safely play outside. Six years later, George Sr. inexplicably left his lightning-rod business to his older brother, sold the family home, and opened up a saloon not far from Camden Yards, where the Orioles play today. This was a much tougher environment, and the family's new living standards were at the "top of the lowest class." The Ruths barely had time to take care of young George, and he began to associate with boys "who easily found mischief in the busy cobblestone streets near the rail yards" and were "constantly getting into trouble in a rough-and-tumble part of town."

Ruth quickly became "known to the police" and was occasionally caught "for petty larceny and mischief and taken home." Discipline from his father served little purpose. A family friend, the policeman Harry C. Birmingham, who thought George was a "little rascal," may have been the person who suggested sending him to St. Mary's. The young scamp attended for short periods starting in 1902; the school became a permanent fixture in his life two years later. He would reside there for the better part of a decade.

Ruth had the choice of learning various trades, and he settled on shirtmaking for St. Mary's forty-four intramural teams. Originally, he didn't have much of an affinity for the sport that would make him famous. Martin suggests the game he played "in the streets may have resembled baseball in its most crude form, far below the level at which the boys of St. Mary's played it." And even at that, he didn't play very often.

While a number of brothers at St. Mary's, including Alban, Herman, and Gilbert, would play supporting roles in Ruth's budding love affair with baseball, it was Brother Matthias who was the lead actor. As the school disciplinarian, he kept the youngster on the straight and narrow — although Ruth wasn't actually all that "prone to fisticuffs." He grew into a good-natured and thoughtful talent, "interested in the well-being of the other boys... especially the less fortunate ones."

Brother Matthias, who taught at St. Mary's until 1931, saw things in Ruth that others didn't: Martin suggests that Brother Matthias may have first noticed "what scientists later determined to be [Ruth's] superior hand-eye coordination." While Ruth preferred to be a catcher, Brother Matthias "ordered him to go in and pitch" one day after he started acting up. (Of course, it was on the mound that he was later noticed and offered a major-league contract.) And while Brother Matthias discouraged boys from using their left hand in the classroom, and forced Ruth to juggle his glove as a left-handed catcher, he didn't press a particular handedness when it came to batting.

Ruth started to mimic Brother Matthias's "unorthodox but effective" playing style. This included "taking small pigeon-toed steps rounding the bases" and swinging the bat "with a powerful uppercut." These St. Mary's trademarks remained with him throughout his professional career with the Boston Red Sox, New York Yankees, and Boston Braves.

BUT ALL OF THIS BEGS A QUESTION: IF BROTHER Matthias played such a crucial role in the making of Babe Ruth, why has he been kept in the shadows for so long?

Martin offers several possible explanations: Brother Matthias was a rather shy gentle giant. He barely spoke about his enduring friendship with Ruth, other than in a long-forgotten interview with Thomas Shehan, of the *Boston Evening Transcript* (Martin reprints the 1935 exchange in this book). Brother Matthias continued to encourage his former student after he left St. Mary's, and the Colossus of Clout later bought him multiple Cadillacs, but their private correspondence wasn't made public until long after their deaths in the 1940s.

Moreover, Brother Matthias didn't stop the braggadocious Brother Gilbert from claiming to anyone who would listen that he was the Bambino's guiding force. But for all the interviews and banquet speeches, Gilbert's singular role was in recommending Ruth to Jack Dunn, owner of the International League's Baltimore Orioles — the Babe's first professional team.

Martin's wonderful book has brought an important story to the surface. We may not know where Babe Ruth's baseballs are in Lake Ontario, but we now know a great deal more about the unlikely Canadian hero who helped him become one of the greatest players the game has ever seen.

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Adventures of the Dynamite Kid

Tyler Enfield's new novel

Kyle Wyatt

Like Rum-Drunk Angels

Tyler Enfield

Goose Lane

440 pages, softcover

FRANCIS BLACKSTONE, THE YOUNG hopeless romantic and charming dime-novel star of frontier Arizona, “has never found it easy to discuss his own place in the world or his aimless wanderings or, most of all, the decisions he makes.” And as the protagonist of Tyler Enfield’s new novel, he sure doesn’t make it easy for us — the readers — to discuss his place in the Old West, circa 1888, or his intertextual wanderings toward a town that “somehow jumps about on a map, appearing both here and there depending on who’s looking.” Trying to discuss Francis and his band of gunslingers, trying to understand their place within this story and within the mythology and fact of the frontier, trying to follow the rich and temporally shifting allusions that Enfield’s equally enigmatic narrator weaves throughout these pages — well, as Twain would say, “There’s millions in it.”

Like Rum-Drunk Angels is a difficult Western to pin down, which seems appropriate for a genre that’s long plied tropes of erasure and violence, stereotype and domination — tropes that have rightly worn out their welcome since the days of *The Virginian* and *Riders of the Purple Sage*. It’s a truth that Shatzky Shell, that sibylline storyteller in Alessandro Baricco’s cult classic *City*, knows through and through as she shapes the story of Closingtown. And it’s a fact that echoes throughout this book — like running water echoing in the deep canyons of the Southwest. With a yarn like this, you don’t always know what you’re hearing, where it’s coming from, and certainly not what it means, but there’s little you’d rather do than sit on your horse and listen for a while.

Francis, fourteen when the story begins, is a “passionate contrarian” out to win the heart of a girl whose name he does not even know. In a town called Nowhere, his path crosses that of Bob Temple, a fatalistic outlaw reputed to have once scalped an angel, who has a map that leads Francis down an abandoned mine shaft and into an ancient tomb. Does he encounter a ghost down there in the dark? A genie? Maybe just the whispers of Scheherazade? What we know is this: “In his wildest dreams, Francis could not have thought to prepare against such a moment.” And we know that he emerges from the mine with a lamp, surely a charmed but possibly cursed emblem that comes in and out of focus throughout the novel.

In short order, Francis and Bob start a gang that includes Francis’s dotting older brother, Samuel, and their best friend, Ned Runkle. Together, the Blackstone Templars spend a year crashing about Arizona, Nevada, and California — robbing trains and causing landslides, accidentally taking opium, evading vengeful rivals and flying pianos, and pursuing a fortune foretold by Amish triplets. As Francis chases his love, America comes to love him for all that he symbolizes, “an ideology of such mythological proportions that the world has yet to contain its progress.”

♦
“I DON’T GET YOU,” THE MUCH-OLDER BOB TEMPLE says to his partner in crime, shortly before they are to rob a bank. “Not one bit.” There’s tension between the two from the beginning, not that the young hero seems to mind, at least not right

“Some conventions of the Western die hard, and eventually the penny drops.”

away. “That’s fine,” Francis replies. “I’ve never even asked you to.”

Temple’s efforts to understand Francis — his frustrations with the Dynamite Kid, as the newspapers dub him, along with his awe — parallel our own. But who, exactly, are we?

Tyler Enfield, a writer and filmmaker from Edmonton, takes roughly seventy pages before he first breaks the narrative facade that ought to separate him from his narrator, his narrator from his protagonist, his protagonist from us. It’s almost imperceptible, just nine words: “The author of this story appears to feel different.” Ten pages later, and for only a moment, we’re reminded again that false fronts define any Western; the narrator shifts to the second person, addressing the reader as “you.” Then it’s the reference to “a Disneyland of fossil-fuelled ecotourism” and hints of the Trump administration’s decision to open federally protected lands to resource development. There’s the chapter heading that reads “That Night, Francis Blackstone Dreams He Is You” (and is that John Lennon with a walrus moustache who keeps showing up in those dreams?). There’s also an aside about Prometheus, the world’s oldest tree, which a non-fictional graduate student working for the U.S. Forest Service cut down in 1964, some seventy-five years after the fictional Francis naps under its shade in the Nevada mountains. “When Francis later stood to urinate upon the tree it was an act of homage, knowing the scar-

city of moisture in these parts.” With increasing frequency and urgency, the reader is beckoned with such narrative intrusions. How are we to interpret this fraught and multi-faceted landscape, we are asked, whether then or now?

Moby-Dick so rewards return readers because Melville didn’t mind shifting voice, playing with form, bringing the past into the present, and the present into the past. In so many respects, he threw out convention. Each time you reopen *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael’s story is that much more believable, that much more absurd. Is Ishmael even the narrator’s name? Similarly, with its well-placed anachronisms and subtle cultural commentary that goes almost unnoticed at first, *Like Rum-Drunk Angels* will reward the second or third read. “Many will say this is not possible,” as even the narrator admits, “and so it would seem, which is precisely why its effect is sufficient to bring both parties to a halt.”

Some conventions of the Western die hard, of course, and eventually the penny drops — Francis must return to Nowhere to save his girl. In one way or the other, he is forced to part with the gang and the others who join him on his peregrinations: “Francis is sad to discover he’s not an adult. He’s just a boy after all. He never knew it was possible to feel this broken. This alone.”

We — the readers of today — have read and watched enough Westerns of yesterday to know that Francis doesn’t end up alone. But like a town that jumps from place to place on a map, his journey from a judge’s son in Nowhere to a celebrated outlaw everywhere to an old man sitting on his porch in Tucson is one full of tricks and sleights of hand.

“I got a not-good feeling about this one,” Francis says before his last train robbery, to nobody in particular. And then the narrator says this, to us:

It will be another ninety years before someone can look up from this very spot, the spot Francis presently sits his horse, and see the image of a skyscraper warped and abstracted in the windowed face of another just like it. That someone will shout words Francis has never heard, their meaning contingent upon invention. They will express gladness at alien concepts and neon signage.

We are that someone. And as we ride into the sunset alongside Francis Blackstone — as Tyler Enfield pans his camera across vistas that are at once familiar and alien — we are the lucky ones, charged with inventing meaning out of a novel that refuses to be contained. ▲

Crossed Histories

A collection from Kaie Kellough

Amanda Perry

Dominoes at the Crossroads

Kaie Kellough

Esplanade Books

216 pages, softcover and ebook

SAY THE WORD “MAROON” AND MOST people will think if not of the colour, then of being stranded on a desert island. They might imagine a Robinson Crusoe scenario, where an interchangeable tropical location provides a backdrop to a (usually male, usually white) struggle for survival. But there is an older, Caribbean genealogy to the word that takes us back to the history of slavery.

Maroons were Caribbean rebels: Africans and their descendants who had escaped plantations to form their own communities. Settling in hard-to-reach mountain ranges and stretches of rainforest, they had to defend themselves against societies that sought to re-enslave them. “Petit marronage” was a more ambiguous practice whereby enslaved people would disappear for days or months, only to eventually return to the plantation. As a form of resistance, petit marronage involved a complex dynamic between freedom and subjugation, revolt and compliance.

Kaie Kellough’s debut short story collection, *Dominoes at the Crossroads*, brings Caribbean rebellion into the Canadian present. In locations ranging from Montreal and Winnipeg to the Guyanese capital of Georgetown, characters from the diaspora confront mechanisms of exclusion and seek livable futures. The stories trace connections between radical activism within Canada and major events like the revolutions in Haiti, Cuba, and Grenada. Yet Kellough is above all concerned with more subtle forms of resistance. Many of his characters negotiate degrees of freedom, neither fully escaping from nor surrendering to a society that continues to devalue Black lives. “Petit Marronage” provides the title to his longest story and the concept that anchors the collection as a whole.

The possibilities and limits of flight are a recurring motif in these tales. In “We Free Kings,” the narrator abandons Montreal for Vancouver to escape the small-mindedness and homophobia of segments of the Caribbean community, only to be stalked by memories and feelings of ambivalence. In “Smoke That Thundered,” a young man from Calgary is shipped to Guyana by his parents to reconnect with his family’s roots—a journey that may result in him leaping off Kaieteur Falls. The outcome is unclear, as Kellough is not interested in straightforward realism. His stories play with form, departing from and returning to narrative conventions

with a rebelliousness that could be its own version of marronage.

The ties between form and content are clearest in “Petit Marronage” itself. A dreadlocked saxophonist criss-crosses Canada, but time and identity prove unstable. The narrative frequently slides into the past, and the narrator slips into the mind of a fugitive slave in Fredericton in 1816 or that of Marie-Joseph Angélique, the enslaved woman convicted of burning down much of Montreal in 1734. In the present, racist encounters underline a very contemporary hostility toward Black bodies. The story is repetitive, but that’s the point. No part of Canada is untouched by histories of slavery and discrimination. At the same time, the saxophonist grapples with cyclical rhythms in Caribbean music, which prompt attention to “subtle variation” and demonstrate that “repetition did not mean stillness or limitation.” This meta-commentary on artistic practice invites another reading of the story, where instances of escape and resistance also recur.

◆

KELLOUGH’S ATTENTION TO THE SPECIFICITIES OF setting will be familiar to readers who know his other work. A fixture of the Montreal arts scene, he was raised in Calgary by Guyanese parents. He relishes in detailed depictions of all three places in *Magnetic Equator*, his third collection of poetry and the winner of this year’s Griffin Prize. One poem, “ghost notes,” critiques claims about writing from nowhere. As the poetic voice insists, “i think differently / in montréal from how i did in calgary, i write and dream / in georgetown guyana with a flying fish / carried on the frothed surge of thought.”

Kellough’s reckoning with Calgary is one of the animating tensions of *Magnetic Equator*. His judgment of the oil-dependent suburbs is frequently scathing: “i don’t have anything kind to say about calgary, circa 1985.” That said, these poems are gripping in their particularity, subverting pastoral tropes and wringing symbolism out of the Saddledome. In *Dominoes at the Crossroads*, the prairies are far more one-dimensional. Beyond a shout-out to John Ware, “a Black cowboy who had been enslaved in South Carolina in the 1800s, and who first introduced cattle and ranching to Alberta,” the region is marked by racial discrimination and parades of cowboy hats. The racism reads honestly; the Stetsons stray into the realm of stereotypes.

Dominoes at the Crossroads focuses more intently on Montreal, recalling Kellough’s experimental ode to the city and its cultural plurality in his debut novel, *Accordéon*. Streets and neighbourhoods are described in minute detail, evoking the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier’s baroque aesthetics. The same love for the local that saw

Accordéon’s narrator celebrate the pharmacy chain Jean Coutu here lends poetic weight to metro stations. French also seeps into the pages (“Montréal” literally keeps its accent), and two stories are riffs on Hamidou Diop, a Senegalese double agent who appears as a minor character in Hubert Aquin’s Québécois classic *Prochain épisode* (*Next Episode*).

For Kellough, the Caribbean is both a point of origin and a dynamic, contemporary location. These stories map multiple, contradictory diasporic trajectories: one character of Haitian descent becomes a Montreal landlord who revels in gentrification; another is a student turned taxi driver who thwarts his parents’ project of upward mobility. Meanwhile, returning to the Caribbean is no simple matter. In the story “Dominoes at the Crossroads,” two characters travel to an unnamed island, where one has roots and the other is pursuing a research project on the Grenada revolution. As the narrator considers his status as a “wealthy high brown international,” he struggles to read the locals’ reaction to his presence. The story poses the question: Would he be an agent in the next revolution or its target?

Throughout, the collection is unapologetically intellectual, leading with a faux academic paper and referencing a wide range of Caribbean writers and thinkers, including Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé, and Édouard Glissant. The result is an intertextual feast for anyone already familiar with the region’s literature—although, at times, the concepts feel more developed than the characters. Each story is told in the first person, but the individual voices remain stylistically similar. Kellough’s narrators also have a tendency to editorialize, explicitly stating their positions on questions of identity and belonging. Some passages feel stranded between literary fiction and politically oriented essays.

In a book this self-aware, these stylistic choices have internal justifications. In “Capital,” one character objects that a political discussion “is too obvious,” anticipating and deflecting similar objections from the reader. The final story questions the notion of single and separable selves, suggesting that the book’s narrators may all be variations of one another. Still, the writing is most captivating when it is less direct and more lyrical. In “Navette,” for example, or the final passages of “Ashes and Juju,” imagery takes over and Kellough the poet is in stronger evidence.

Ultimately, *Dominoes at the Crossroads*, especially when read alongside *Magnetic Equator*, should expand Kellough’s reputation as a major writer. Like the practice of petit marronage itself, this multi-faceted text asks for careful reading as it maintains its many contradictions. ▲

My Tour of Nowhere

IT HAS BEEN MONTHS SINCE MY TWO debuts — a novel, *Vanishing Monuments*, and a poetry collection, *Junebat* — came out, but I've still not seen either of them in a bookstore. Not in person, at least. In April, I was supposed to see my books in a lot of bookstores. I had a three-week tour lined up, with around twenty events, in Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Guelph. In May, I should have seen my books in, at least, St. Louis, Lincoln, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Kansas City (where I currently live). In June, I was planning on Vancouver, Portland, maybe New York City, and, hopefully, Los Angeles.

We all know why I couldn't visit any of these bookstores. In the second week of March, shortly after my partner and I decided not to attend a large literary conference in San Antonio, it became clear that I wouldn't be going anywhere. Despite the fact that my publishers, Arsenal Pulp and House of Anansi, had teamed up to arrange an excellent tour — especially for a debut author publishing with indie presses — and despite the fact that I'd funnelled a majority of my energy for the first months of 2020 into making sure I could do these books justice, I was suddenly staring down the barrel of a pandemic.

I probably should have been suspicious when everything seemed to be going extremely well. Winning the Writers' Trust of Canada's RBC Bronwen Wallace Award in May 2019, selling my two debuts to two of my favourite Canadian presses in the weeks that followed, and being photographed in January for a *Quill & Quire* cover: each of these things alone should have been a warning that something big was going to come along to ruin the moment. With each of these milestones, I should have remembered that as well as things have turned out for me, nothing has ever come easy. Every good thing comes with caveats.

The hardest thing about publishing my first two books at this strange time has been how unreal those publications feel. I suffer from depression, and one of the greatest challenges I face is getting out of my own head and

being present. My brain is always searching for a way to subvert or obfuscate reality, to justify the deflation and pain it wants me to feel. I was looking forward to my tour not because I'm particularly well suited for travel or socializing, but because seeing posters for my events, and having people sit and listen to me read, and seeing some of those same people line up after with my books in their hands for me to sign were all experiences I knew not even my brain could steal from me.

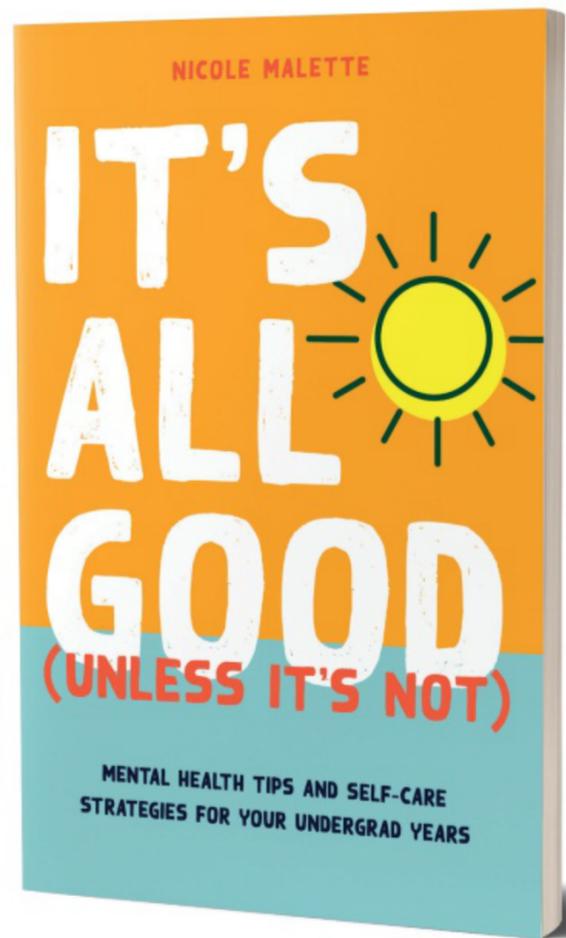
Vanishing Monuments and *Junebat* were both, in their own ways, harrowing to write. Both touch on mental health — specifically depression. Both take root in my coming to terms with being non-binary. This aspect of my identity can feel unreal, particularly in public, where it is often illegible. Since my books centre on non-binary experiences, I was particularly excited to meet queer people with whom I could be confident in my identity's legibility. I envisioned my tour as an opportunity to have my work as well as my own queer self validated.

With these events cancelled, the texture of my life hardly changed with the publication of my books. I've done a bunch of virtual events, of course, which have been nice. I've had some heartening profiles and reviews written, and have received some generous notes from readers. But the fact this has all happened remotely means it's easy for my brain to reject that I'm finally a published author. Instead of getting the experience of launching my books across Canada and the United States, I've been doing little besides walking my dog, worrying about the state of the world, and collecting unemployment. The milestone I'd been working toward for so much of my life has passed by with little pomp.

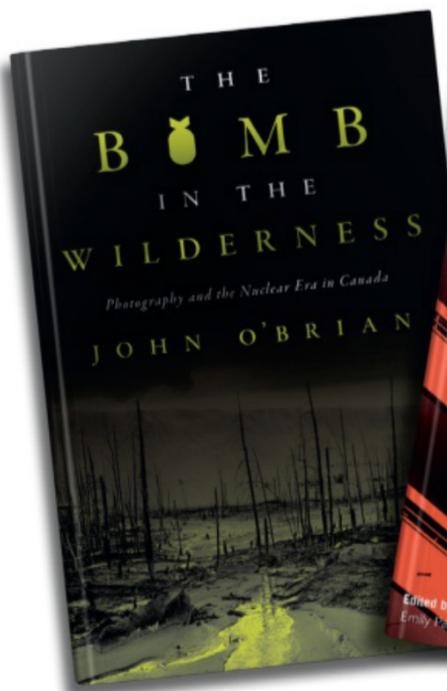
The most positive outcome of all of this is how losing my tour brought me back to writing. The pandemic forced me to realize how little control I have over my life, while also illuminating where the little control I do have resides. And that is in creating the work itself. I may not see my books in a bookstore in 2020, but I can at least hope they will still be on the shelves by the time I publish again. 

John Elizabeth Stintzi is the author of Vanishing Monuments and Junebat.

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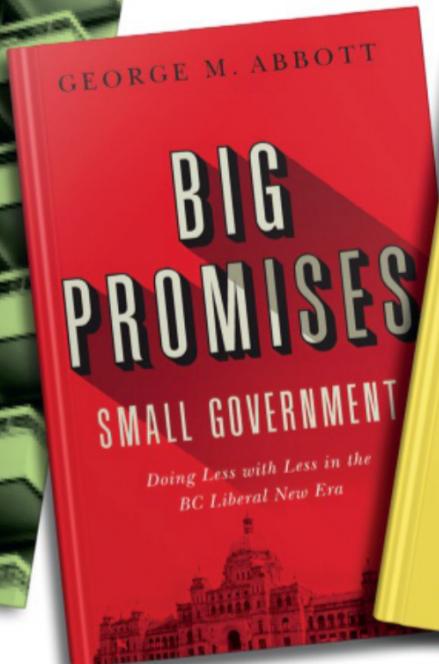
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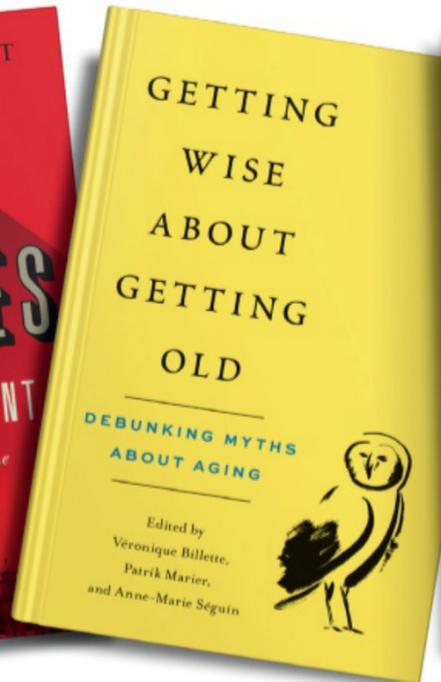
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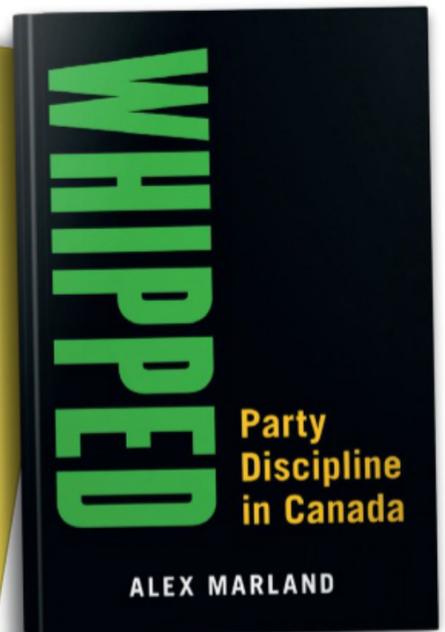
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