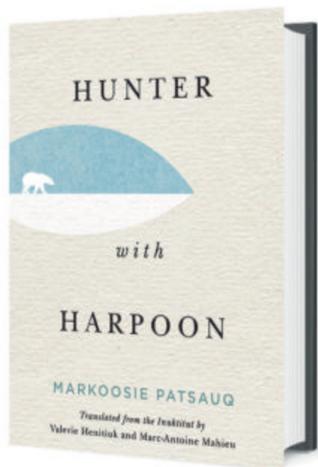


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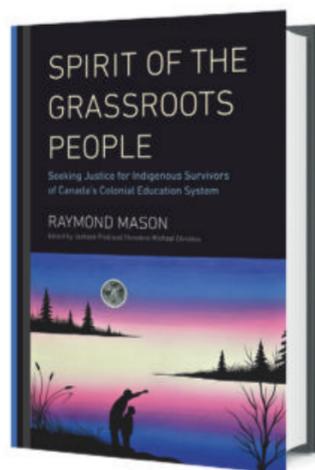
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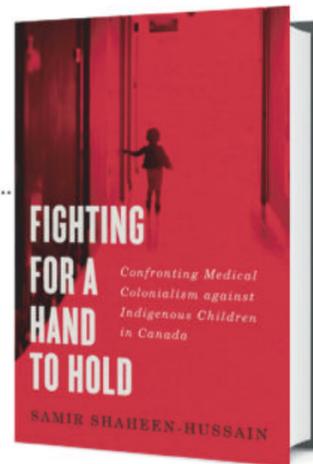


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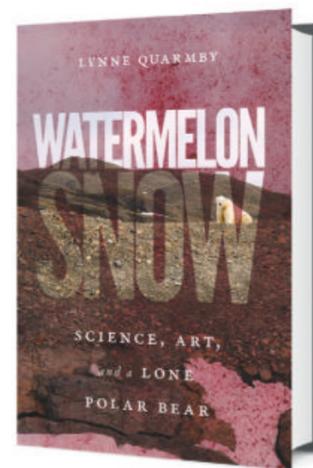


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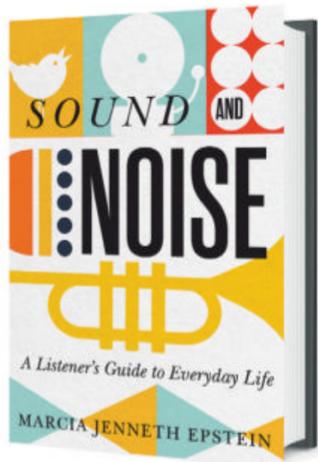


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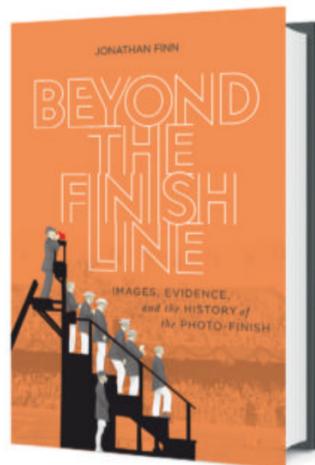


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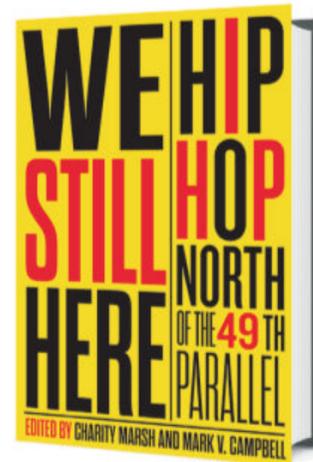


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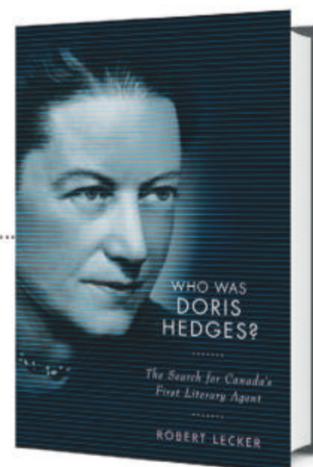
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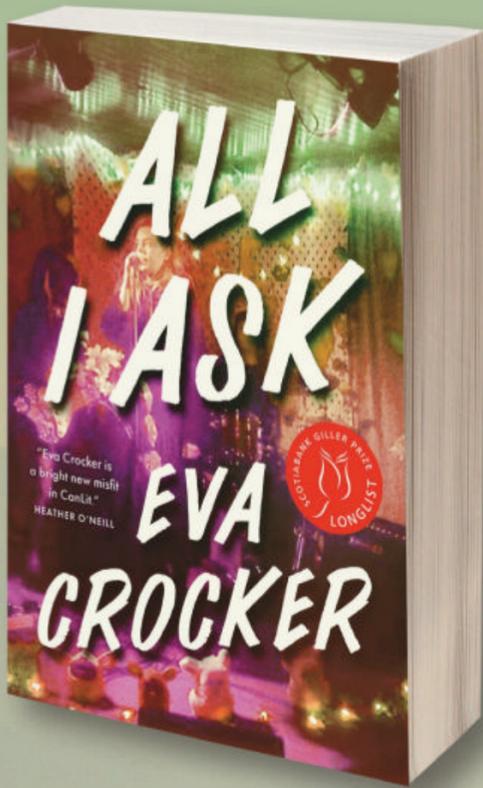
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CHRIS ALEXANDER America Then and Now **AMY SPURWAY** Sweet, Sweet Donair

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A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

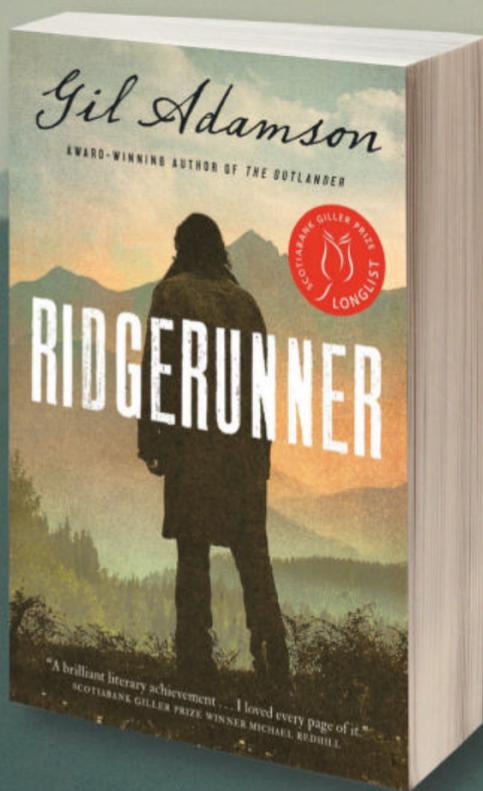


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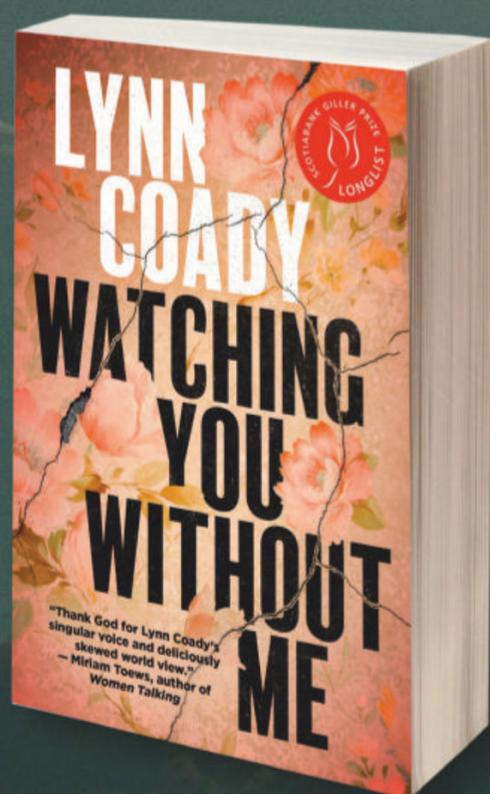
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A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

FIRST WORD

American Judge

Kyle Wyatt

3

FURTHERMORE

Linden MacIntyre, Bruce Crown,
Kirk Makin, Andreas Schroeder,
Stephen Abram, Richard Sanger

5

CLIMATE CRISIS

There May Yet Be Hope

Our future is not set in stone

Arno Kopecky

7

AROUND THE WORLD

Power Down

Is this the twilight's last gleaming?

Srdjan Vucetic

10

In the Holy Land

A new perspective on
an age-old conflict

Patrick Martin

12

BYGONE DAYS

A Wretched Motley Crew

The struggle that defined two nations

Chris Alexander

14

Service Records

The changing ways we remember

Adam Chapnick

17

WHAT WE EAT

Wrap Party

Ode to a famous sandwich

Amy Spurway

19

POLITICKING

Operative Words

Behind the campaign curtain

Jeff Costen

20

THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Bathroom Reading

Too many still
aren't sitting comfortably

Rose Hendrie

22

Twists of Fate

How the pandemic
ruined happenstance

Ethan Lou

26

♦

POETRY

Lisa Pasold, p.13 Bao Li Ng, p.18 Alex Manley, p.25 Nicholas Bradley, p.33

THIS AND THAT

Sales Report

This unaffordable Vancouver

Frances Bula

27

COMPELLING PEOPLE

Poet for Our Times

Returning to the words of Dorothy Livesay

Aaron Giovannone

30

LITERATURE

Portraits of Tragedy

A remarkable debut collection

David Staines

34

Twitter Fingers

Vivek Shraya's new novel

Jean Marc Ah-Sen

35

BACKSTORY

The Royal Treatment

Bryn Turnbull

36

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Jean Marc Ah-Sen wrote the novels
Grand Menteur and In the Beggarly
Style of Imitation.

Chris Alexander served as Canada's
minister of citizenship and immigration
from 2013 to 2015.

Frances Bula has covered urban issues
and city politics for the Globe and Mail,
the Vancouver Sun, and Canadian Architect,
among others.

Adam Chapnick teaches defence studies
at the Canadian Forces College.

Jeff Costen is an associate principal
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Aaron Giovannone teaches English literature
and creative writing at Mount Royal University.

Rose Hendrie is the magazine's assistant editor.

Arno Kopecky is an environmental author
and journalist in Vancouver. His new book
of essays, Notes on a Paradox,
comes out soon.

Ethan Lou just published Field Notes
from a Pandemic: A Journey through
a World Suspended.

Patrick Martin is a former Middle East
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Amy Spurway wrote the novel Crow.

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Robert Kroetsch: Essayist, Novelist, Poet.

Bryn Turnbull has a Globe and Mail
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A Novel of Windsors, Vanderbilts, and
Royal Scandal.

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♦

On the cover: Intimidation Mask (2018),
by **Brian Jungen**. Photographed by
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American Judge

SEVENTY YEARS AGO, HEINRICH CRAMER sailed into New York Harbor aboard SS *American Judge* and passed the Statue of Liberty. The twenty-seven-year-old former soldier of a defeated army then spent five weeks in limbo, on Ellis Island, unsure if the United States would admit him. He spoke Low German, High German, and Russian, but not English, and he had very little money in his pocket. Finally, on November 24, 1950, the day after Thanksgiving, he left the storied immigration station, found lunch in Manhattan for a dollar, and set forth — now known as Henry — on his next chapter.

For the better part of his life, Henry was a proud U.S. citizen who loved God and country only slightly more than he loved horses and a fresh loaf of rye bread. He settled in Middle America, where he married a woman from Orange County, California, who could trace her family roots to eighteenth-century Virginia. He worked a dairy farm, raised three kids, and drove a school bus in his retirement. Henry was deeply conservative but the kind of guy who would go out of his way to help a neighbour or a perfect stranger, who would splurge a little to take his grandson on an airplane ride at the county fair, and who would tie a yellow ribbon around a tree when his other grandson went off to war. He knew all too well the tricks a demagogue could play, the way a despot could manipulate the religious and deceive a people, so he would visit high schools to talk about the importance of history and the dangers of indoctrination.

Everybody loved Henry Cramer. While he never completely lost his Lower Saxon accent, he represented so many of the things that were good about the United States. His wasn't quite a rags-to-riches immigrant story, but he realized, in his more modest way, the American dream. And, of course, he was my grandfather.

When I decided that, like Opa, I would build a different kind of life in a different kind of country, I worried the most about what he would think. Was I disrespecting the sacrifices he had made and the opportunities I had been given? To my great relief, he supported me, and, when I was eligible, he encouraged me to become a citizen of my new home. He understood, I think more than anyone, why I decided to leave.

Opa passed away shortly before the ascent of Donald Trump, and I have often wondered

what he would make of the forty-fifth president, with his good-people-on-both-sides this and fallen-soldiers-are-losers that. I have wondered how my grandfather, a former Morse code operator, would interpret the Confederate flags, the swastikas, the Proud Boys, the Orwellian doublethink, and all the other unsettling signals that have come to punctuate this moment. And as I filled out my mail-in ballot for the 2020 U.S. election, I wondered which little oval he would shade if he were still with us.

"He was a master at attracting the citizenry to his plan without revealing his true motives," Opa wrote in his 1997 memoir. "By the time he had full power, he had the country by the throat." He was recalling Adolf Hitler's rise, but those words echo in my mind as I watch Trump tighten his grip on the Justice Department, on the judiciary, and on the Republicans in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and as he flouts convention with increasing impunity and sows division and skepticism and hate.

"Get rid of the ballots and you'll have a very peaceful — there won't be a transfer, frankly. There will be a continuation," the president said before he tested positive for the virus, when asked if he would commit to a peaceful transfer of power should he lose to Joe Biden. Contrast these bald words with those of Ronald Reagan, who opened his first inaugural address by thanking his rival Jimmy Carter. "By your gracious cooperation in the transition process, you have shown a watching world that we are a united people pledged to maintaining a political system which guarantees individual liberty to a greater degree than any other," the Great Communicator said in January 1981. "In the eyes of many in the world, this every-four-year ceremony we accept as normal is nothing less than a miracle."

The graciousness is gone. The normal is gone. The world keeps watching, but I fear the miracle that so attracted Opa all those years ago is gone too. It almost doesn't matter how November 3 turns out: vast swaths of the American electorate are frozen in ideological cliché, having allowed and encouraged a blustering bully to bulldoze one institutional check and balance after another.

Opa would have turned ninety-seven in June, and I miss him. But I'm also relieved, in some ways, that he didn't have to watch these past four years of disgrace. And that I didn't have to watch him, God forbid, go along with it. 

Kyle Wyatt, Editor-in-Chief

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Furthermore

RE: *The Prognosis*
by David Cayley (October)

PLEASE ACCEPT AND PASS ON TO DAVID CAYLEY MY admiration for “The Prognosis.” The point isn’t whether we should agree or disagree with some or all of the piece. It is to express satisfaction on finding a brave and reasonable and unfortunately rare commentary that offers a dissenting perspective on what has become, in many ways, a hysterical discourse.

Linden MacIntyre
Toronto

RE: *Thank You, Next*
by Joe Martin (October)

JOE MARTIN’S ANGER IS PALPABLE. YET IT IS PROFOUNDLY misplaced. A peculiar history lesson on Conservative (and Liberal) prime ministers, ending in a bizarre jab at the late Pierre Trudeau, Martin’s argument that we must stick by leaders who do not deliver the instant gratification of winning has multiple flaws, most of which can be addressed by the rise of far-right populism the world over.

Nations such as Brazil, Hungary, Russia, Belarus, Austria, Italy, India, Bolivia, and the United States have fallen to the far right’s vision of identity politics and “stick by your party and leader no matter what.” Martin’s language seems to agree with the yes-sayers and sycophants of those countries, including the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate, which is tirelessly working at increasing the equality gap and engaging in outright racism, xenophobia, and voter suppression ahead of the November election. Is this all acceptable to Martin? After all, those Republicans are supporting their party and winning. Using his vernacular, Kellyanne Conway’s Orwellian “alternative facts” is also dandy, because it bypasses the dreaded “Tory Syndrome.”

Such language is not only dangerous and anti-intellectual, but also troublesome when you actually begin to read the history of what is now known as the Conservative Party of Canada.

Bruce Crown
Toronto

RE: *Ink Stained*
by John Allemang (September)

JOHN ALLEMANG HAS PRODUCED A MASTERFUL AND memorable piece of writing for the *Literary Review of Canada*, about the death throes of the newspapers where he, where I, and where so many others have toiled.

While *Fish Wrapped* nicely covers the days of ambulance chasing, riotous drinking, and tabloid silliness, it is decidedly light — and perhaps intentionally so — on the financial cruelties and bureaucratic compromises that have steered newspapers steadily toward the shoals. In balancing the fun-loving nostalgia of *Fish Wrapped* with a poignantly thoughtful narrative of how newspapers are well on the way to being squeezed out of existence, Allemang crafted a piece that deserves inclusion in the time capsule of our journalistic era.

Kirk Makin
Toronto

MY OLD COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND JOHN ALLEMANG on a book to read and what’s been lost in the newsroom. Must read — and I say that as one of those who struggled to walk the line between old ways and new.

@AGuyNicholson
via Twitter

RE: *Lend Me Your Ear*
by Stephen Abram (September)

THIS SO-CALLED DEFENCE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IS so full of misinformation, half-truths, and errors that I’m not going to dignify them with corrections. However, one outright fabrication about the Public Lending Right Program really needs to be called out. Stephen Abram claims, “Often publishers retain PLR rights in contracts with their authors, so they’re actually the beneficiaries when you check out that novel.” Not so.

First, publishers can’t “retain” a right they’ve never had. Back in the 1970s, when the notion of a lending right was first negotiated, the publishers (to their credit) formally gave up any PLR claim, since they had other sources of government financial support. Thus, no book contract between an author and a publisher in Canada even references PLR; it’s not a negotiable or assignable right. Furthermore, even if some benighted publisher were to try to insert it, the PLR Commission wouldn’t honour it.

In my five decades of helping hundreds of writers with book contracts, I’ve never — not once — encountered a contract in which Abram’s scenario occurs.

Andreas Schroeder
Roberts Creek, British Columbia

SURELY, ANDREAS SCHROEDER HAS DONE RIGHT BY the authors he’s helped. But I cite my own experience and the cheques made out to the publishers I worked with. Hopefully, this debate

will encourage even more authors to register with the PLR Program.

As far as the suggestion my piece is full of “misinformation, half-truths, and errors” — that’s just part and parcel of the broader demonization of libraries. For those who are interested, I have compiled many references and citations (see reviewcanada.ca/fopl). And perhaps a longer piece in the magazine is needed on the topic.

Stephen Abram
Toronto

RE: *All the Kremlin’s Men*
by Joyce Wayne (September)

THE RUSSIAN STRATEGIES WE’RE SEEING PLAY OUT today are decades old. It’s the tactics that are evolving with tech.

@Leah_Zaidi
via Twitter

RE: *The Passport*
by Stephen Marche (September)

STEPHEN MARCHE’S DISSECTIONS OF THE Canadian psyche and the art our cultural pooh-bahs see fit to celebrate (a moral beauty pageant, of sorts) are incisive, enjoyable, and necessary. He succumbs, however, to the myopia that usually afflicts our least impressive right-wing politicians — imagining that the only alternative to the way things are done in Canada is the way things are done in the United States. A working health care system is not incompatible with an innovative and vibrant artistic culture. Look at Europe. Look at Japan and South Korea. Take a closer look at Canada.

Richard Sanger
Toronto

RE: *The Mess*
by Sarah E. Tracy (September)

I’M WRITING TO YOU, SARAH, WITH TEARS STREAKING down my face. Thank you! For threading together such beautiful connections in this review, and for offering your own heartbreak in solidarity with my work. I’m sending you a big hug, my dear, with lots of love and gratitude.

@joshnamaharaj
via Twitter

Write to letters@reviewcanada.ca or tag our social media channels. We may edit comments and feedback for length, clarity, and accuracy.

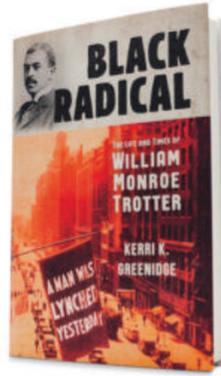
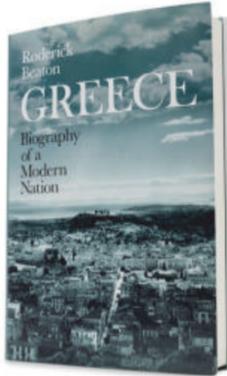
“It’s important that good ground-breaking new history writing explains what is important and why it matters. For all the frustrations and disappointments we have in the world, history is alive and well.”

Peter Frankopan, 2020 Chair of the Jury for the Cundill History Prize

“Roderick Beaton keeps returning to the question: What is a nation? It’s a book that, even if you’re not Greek, you will find really interesting, because it will make you reflect not just on Greece, but on your own country as well.”

Juror **Anne Applebaum**

Roderick Beaton
Greece: Biography of a Nation
The University of Chicago Press | Penguin



“I have to confess the hardest thing for me about Kerri Greenidge’s wonderful book was that I couldn’t skip anything. I had to read every page, kept wanting to know what was going to happen next.”

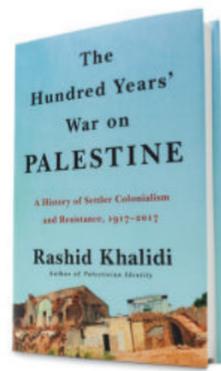
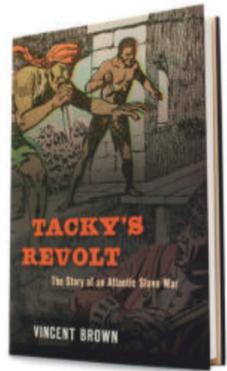
Juror **Eliga Gould**

Kerri Greenidge
Black Radical: The Life and Times of William Monroe Trotter
Liveright Publishing

“Vincent Brown brings the story of Tacky’s Revolt to life, using personal memoirs, testimony, and digital cartography. This is analytical history at its best; it’s also a beautifully written narrative.”

Juror **Eliga Gould**

Vincent Brown
Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press



“It’s history and autobiography; it’s political as well as personal. Rashid Khalidi’s new interpretation of an old conflict is brought to life by his compelling, impassioned narrative.”

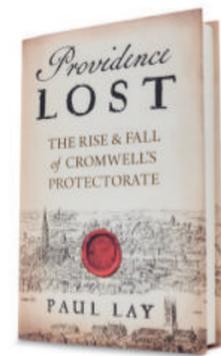
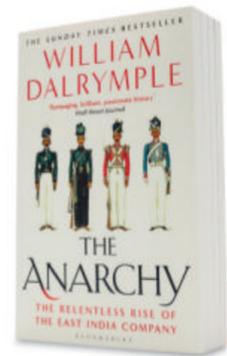
Juror **Lyse Doucet**

Rashid Khalidi
The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017
Metropolitan Books | Profile Books

“This is one of the most important stories of modern colonisation; it also speaks to a broader argument about the nature and power of corporations. William Dalrymple’s book is not just a page-turner, but a work of art.”

Juror **Sujit Sivasundaram**

William Dalrymple
The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company
Bloomsbury Publishing



“This book will surprise you. Paul Lay’s account of England’s first and only experiment with republican government will give you some new ways of thinking about England, and Englishness.”

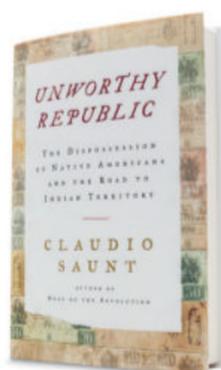
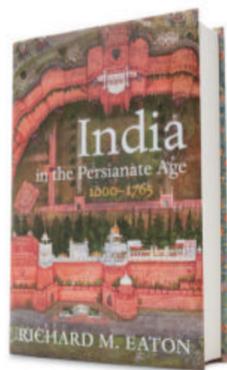
Juror **Anne Applebaum**

Paul Lay
Providence Lost: The Rise and Fall of Cromwell’s Protectorate
Head of Zeus

“Richard Eaton’s is a book that will certainly cause disquiet for those who seek to purify or isolate India’s history by way of religion, culture, ethnicity or politics. It is a magnum opus.”

Juror **Sujit Sivasundaram**

Richard M. Eaton
India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765
University of California Press | Penguin



“This is a familiar story, but Claudio Saunt takes a new and breathtakingly original approach. This is an extremely well-written, gripping book, with a fascinating interpretative spin.”

Juror **Eliga Gould**

Claudio Saunt
Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory
W. W. Norton & Company

“This book asks a deceptively simple question: What happened to us? It’s a fundamental question, and Kim Ghattas answers it by looking at an old history in a new way. This is history which makes headlines today.”

Juror **Lyse Doucet**

Kim Ghattas
Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Rivalry that Unravelling the Middle East Wildfire | Henry Holt & Co



“Fifth Sun is a feat of high order — intellectually and imaginatively. A moving and immersive account of the Mexica people, this is a gripping read, but also a book of scholarly value, thanks to Camilla Townsend’s stunning use of Nahuatl sources.”

Juror **Sujit Sivasundaram**

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Knopf Canada

464 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

ON SEPTEMBER 12, 1961, A THIRTY-four-year-old activist from Connecticut named Stephanie May travelled to New York and began a hunger strike outside the Soviet mission on East Sixty-Seventh Street. Two police officers threatened to arrest her for vagrancy the moment she arrived; they agreed to let her stay only after she promised not to spend the night. For the next six days, May occupied the sidewalk from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., living on water and broth and feeling, as she later wrote, “absolutely invisible, except to little children instructed not to look, and to teenagers in parochial school uniforms who stole furtive glances and then giggled.” The resolute woman wore a body-length sign strapped around her neck: “RUSSIA! STOP Nuclear Testing!! Stop poisoning the air!”

The Soviet Union had just announced it was abandoning the moratorium on atmospheric nuclear testing then in place between the world’s two superpowers—a moratorium that Stephanie May had played a prominent role in bringing about in the first place. History has largely overlooked her, but she was a key member of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. SANE, as it was known, was the most influential peace group of its time, with a membership that included the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and Eleanor Roosevelt.

In 1957, the same year May was invited to join SANE’s board, she began writing letters to world leaders and public intellectuals from her kitchen table. Quite a few wrote back. Some, like the head of the Atomic Energy Commission, did so in hopes of shutting her up; others, like the Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell, became close pen pals whose correspondence shored up her spirits whenever the cause seemed hopeless.

Never was it more so than in that autumn of 1961. Over the previous decade, the great powers had measurably increased the entire atmosphere’s radioactivity by detonating hundreds of nuclear warheads in sea and sky; cancer rates were spiking near test sites all over the world, especially in children. Now the moratorium May and so many others had campaigned tirelessly to achieve was about to be vaporized by a fresh barrage of tests. These were the days before Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and acid rain, long before Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. With Europe and North America entering the most



The prospect of nuclear annihilation must now compete for our attention.

prosperous period in human history, environmental contamination was a fringe concern and Americans’ faith in their own government was matched only by their loathing for Russia’s. A little nuclear fallout was a price the public seemed willing to pay to win the arms race.

Four days into May’s hunger strike, the press finally bit. “I’m not willing to crawl into a hole in the ground and accept nuclear destruction without a murmur,” she told a reporter for the *New York Post*. “This is my murmur.” Television crews from ABC, CBS, NBC, Universal Pictures, and others rushed to interview May the next day. Her poise and informed conviction inspired a wave of similar hunger strikes that spread across the country in the following weeks; May ended her own on its seventh day. Oblivious to the woman from Connecticut, the Soviets resumed their tests, and the United States followed suit.

“In a period such as our own we cannot ask for certainties: there are none,” Russell wrote May two months later. Still, the philosopher went on, “I am convinced that the prevalent apathy which is the only condition under which Khrushchev and Kennedy, Macmillan and Adenauer, de Gaulle and Mao Tse Tung, are able to carry out their lunatic policies, is based not on a lack of concern but on a sense of impotence. If we can show people a way in which they can genuinely obstruct, and finally prevent, the whole nuclear policy, this sense of powerlessness will go, and with it the apathy.”

In the following months, the Cuban Missile Crisis would bring humanity to the brink of

the nuclear abyss and trigger yet another round of atmospheric tests. But one year after that, in October 1963, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty. They haven’t detonated a nuclear bomb above ground since.

◆
COMMANDING HOPE IS NOT ABOUT STEPHANIE May, but Thomas Homer-Dixon does elevate her story to the level of sacred parable, one the Canadian professor consults throughout his book. Her story matters not because she won some total victory but precisely because she didn’t. After all, the Doomsday Clock now sits at 100 seconds to midnight, closer to Armageddon than it—than we—have ever been. That’s partly thanks to ongoing nuclear proliferation, but also because the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists added climate change to its threat calculus in 2018 (and it added COVID-19 this past January). Even with that, you have to wonder why the organization stopped there: civilization has brought so many existential crises down upon itself—is there any need to list them?—that the prospect of nuclear annihilation must now compete for our attention.

Our atmosphere’s radioactivity has actually returned to normal over the past half century, as have cancer rates linked to fallout. For anyone paying attention in late 1961, such an achievement would have seemed somewhere between ludicrous and impossible. Sixty years later, as we face other lethal accumulations, it’s good to be reminded that existential despair is neither

new nor insurmountable. It's thanks to people like Stephanie May that we have the luxury of contemplating why our odds keep getting worse.

"Anyone who grasps the severity of humanity's predicament," Homer-Dixon writes, "confronts an unforgiving conundrum, which I've come to call the *enough vs. feasible dilemma*. On one hand, changes that would be *enough* to make a real difference — that would genuinely reduce the danger humanity faces if they were implemented — don't appear to be *feasible*, in the sense that our societies aren't likely to implement them, because of existing political, economic, social, or technological roadblocks. On the other hand, changes that do currently appear feasible won't be enough by themselves." (The national carbon tax comes to mind.) When Stephanie May and her colleagues overcame their generation's version of Homer-Dixon's dilemma, they did it by stretching *feasible* and shrinking *enough*, until the two finally overlapped in a place we all could live. To do so required brilliance and tenacity. But after poring over five hundred pages of May's personal notes and correspondence, Homer-Dixon concludes that her true "secret trump card" was hope.

Homer-Dixon describes himself as a complexity scientist. He's been studying the interplay between environmental collapse and society for decades, always with an eye for solutions that brings a rare note of optimism to an undeniably bleak subject. His previous book, *The Upside of Down*, argued that the decisive cause of the Roman Empire's collapse was an energy shortage, with clear implications for the modern world; he closed with a chapter on "catagenesis," his term for the surprising opportunities that can arise in the wake of catastrophe. *Commanding Hope* essentially picks up the thread from there. Homer-Dixon regards the institutional breakdown we see all around us (exhibit A: U.S. democracy) as a counterintuitive source of hope, exemplified in the "Build back better" slogans now proliferating in the age of the pandemic.

A more superficial treatment might have floundered on tropes like "Never let a good crisis go to waste" or some version of the false aphorism that John F. Kennedy popularized, about the Chinese symbol for "catastrophe" being the same as the one for "opportunity." This kind of rhetoric — Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine for good guys — is catnip for professional persuaders, and no wonder: Who doesn't want their suffering to serve a higher purpose? When I listened to Justin Trudeau justify his prorogation of Parliament by saying, "As much as this pandemic has been an unexpected challenge, it is also an unprecedented opportunity," part of me wanted to forget everything but the possibility that the Liberals would finally do something radical.

Commanding Hope doesn't let anyone off so easy — not me, not Trudeau, and least of all hope itself, which can be trusted only when it tells the whole truth. By the time I finished this book, I had come to regard its thesis as a planetary version of the Stockdale Paradox, named after a man who survived seven years of torture as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. As James Stockdale put it, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which

you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality."

MAYBE I DO NEED TO LIST THOSE EXISTENTIAL crises. At least a few. Perhaps a parable from my own backyard will do.

The Fraser River that runs through the heart of Vancouver was, until recently, among the world's great salmon rivers, with up to thirty million sockeye returning to spawn through late summer and early fall. Between 1980 and 2014, those numbers began to decline precipitously, but the run still averaged 9.6 million a year across that quarter century. Now, the decline has become a death spiral: less than half a million made it home last year, and this year, half of that.

In no particular order, there are four main contributors to this collapse: overfishing, climate change, salmon farms (which spread disease and parasites into wild salmon populations), and a rock slide in 2018 that choked a critical section of the river, blocking a huge proportion of sockeye from reaching their spawning grounds.

The world will not end if these fish disappear from the Fraser River, any more than it ended when cod disappeared from the East Coast. But these aren't isolated tragedies. In the past fifty years, 68 percent of the planet's wild animals were obliterated by humanity's expanding footprint, according to a report by the World Wildlife Fund released earlier this year. One million species around the world now face immin-

"To offer hope as a weapon in this fight runs the terrible risk of sounding earnest."

ent extinction. Life as we know it *is* coming to an end, and the micro-story of the Fraser's salmon contains many of that macro-tragedy's main plot points: overconsumption, industrial agriculture, and a climate that is changing too quickly for countless plants and animals to adapt. These all act together to make the biosphere (humans included) more vulnerable than ever to "natural" disasters.

Those other disasters, the human kind, come in so many shapes and sizes that lately I've noticed we're lumping them under the catch-all umbrella of "climate change." But, as Homer-Dixon points out, global warming is a symptom that pales in comparison to its cause: our relentless increase in consumption of just about everything on earth. Most liberal politicians, including Justin Trudeau and Joe Biden, can get behind the fight against climate change, at least in principle. But how many of them would dare to campaign against perpetual economic growth?

Homer-Dixon's been thinking about this stuff all his life, but it wasn't until he had kids that he began to contemplate the antidote to despair. "I live with one vivid fear for Ben and Kate," he writes early on. "I fear they'll lose hope, that their sense of future possibility — made vivid by their imaginations, and so wonderfully alive in their countless 'How abouts' during their childhoods — will be crushed. Instead, they'll be led by the accumulating weight of evidence to tell themselves just one story about their future." And what's that singular storyline?

"We're all members of a failed species, and during this century we're destined to bear witness to the devastation of our planetary home and the violent unraveling of much of what we've accomplished."

MY DAUGHTER IS ALMOST FIVE. SHE LIKES TO TIP-toe into my home office while I work and ask me what I'm writing about. I've known for some time that answering her question is going to get harder, not easier, the more she understands. It feels good to read a book about hope, is what I'm saying.

Feeling good is a trap of its own, of course, one of many that have led humanity to the edge of this cliff. That's why Homer-Dixon is very specific about the quality of hope he's for and the kind he's against. That appraisal comes with an entertaining tour of opinions that thinkers through the ages have held about the last emotion to escape Pandora's box. "Hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism," declared the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, whereas Baruch Spinoza dismissed hope as indicating "a lack of knowledge and a weakness of mind." The radical American eco-philosopher Derrick Jensen has accused hope of acting as a sedative, for being "nothing more than a secular way of keeping us in line... a longing for a future condition over which you have no agency." The U.S. Navy admiral Gene La Rocque (a dedicated promoter of nuclear détente and civilian oversight of the military) echoed that

position when he admonished us, "If we want a better world, we as human beings ought to do what we can to bring about the change. Hope is a futile mental exercise." Dostoevsky, for his part, begged to differ: "No man lives, can live, without having some object in view, and making efforts to attain that object. But when object

there is none, and hope is entirely fled, anguish often turns a man into a monster."

Hope's brightest moment in my lifetime arrived in 2008, when Barack Obama made it seem both audacious and self-fulfilling. But no sooner had he brought it to the White House than hope's downfall was foretold by that harbinger of American decline Sarah Palin, who smote it with a taunt: "How's that hopey-changey stuff working out for ya?"

"Hope has seen better days," Homer-Dixon allows. "Our honest intuition that lots of things are going wrong — our legitimate worry that the possibility of a good future for ourselves and our children is slipping away — makes the idea of hope, like our faith in human progress, seem a bit silly, even pathetic." Even more dangerous than false hope, however, is the possibility "that we'll lose faith in our ability to create a positive future." In a world running out of everything but carbon dioxide, he concludes, "scarcity of hope could turn out to be the most crippling scarcity of all."

As the book's title implies, the hope Homer-Dixon is promoting has a dual nature. It arises from an internal summons and emerges as a call to action. That kind of hope isn't naive: it's transformational. You'll know it by the three qualities Homer-Dixon discovered in Stephanie May: first, honesty, above all. She never exaggerated or cherry-picked the evidence of nuclear testing's danger, and she always referred to best-case scenarios to demonstrate how brutal even those were. That honesty conferred "an acute

moral clarity," Homer-Dixon writes, "which translated into an unerring ability to discern the moral idiocy of the positions taken by many testing advocates." (Again, one thinks of the carbon tax.)

The second quality of May's hope was astuteness. She kept as informed as a civilian could be and "used, to great effect, her status as a housewife and others' ready assumption that she was naive." A brilliant debater, May was constantly "searching out and exploiting the critical assumption, fact, or contradiction on which everything at that moment hinged." Finally, May's hope was powerful, "backed by a combination of gumption, dogged perseverance, and exacting attention to political strategy." Put simply, she never gave up.

These are all qualities that describe history's most famous activists, from Gandhi and Martin Luther King to Greta Thunberg — all on Homer-Dixon's list. Surely we should add Stephanie May's daughter, Elizabeth, who would one day lead Canada's Green Party.

◆
COMMANDING HOPE ISN'T CALLING ON YOU TO become a revolutionary activist in the battle to halt climate change, abolish inequality, and stop the infinite pursuit of economic growth. You don't have to go on a hunger strike. Homer-Dixon's appreciation for the human condition, along with his relish for the dramatic sweep of history, delivers him from propaganda. But his story does offer an antidote to the apathy-inducing sense of impotence that Bertrand Russell wrote about in 1961. To take but one example of how that persists to this day, he cites a 2019 study that found 62 percent of Americans

who believe in climate change feel helpless to do anything about it. If 2020 has taught us that we could all get a little more involved, then this is a book for our times.

Given that we're now "confronting some of the most formidable vested interests on Earth," our odds are no better than the anti-nuke activists' were, and probably they're a lot worse. It's not just fossil fuel companies we're up against but also the banks and shareholders who finance destructive industries, as well as the political power centres where the status quo resides. The closer you look, the more it appears that the thing we're really up against is ourselves.

To offer hope as a weapon in this fight runs the terrible risk of sounding earnest, which these days means insincere. Ours is the world of the corporate message and the public persona, a world of airbrushed influencers and pablum politicians whose sunny ways can win elections even as they make our eyes roll. All that PR is reflected in reverse in our private lives, where irony and cynicism have been gaining currency for as long as I can remember. When we're among friends, without a camera, the savvy and sophisticated approach is to raise an eyebrow at any earnest promise. This attitude helped prevent 42 percent of the U.S. electorate from voting in 2016, and it kept 35 percent of Canadians at home in 2019.

We exalt irony and cynicism above hope, because that feels like the smartest response. But lately I've been thinking: maybe it's just the easiest. The likeliest outcome for civilization over the next century may well be tragedy on a scale too large to contemplate. Homer-Dixon is very clear about that. Yet there's a "simple to describe, but . . . staggeringly hard to execute"

alternative: "Not only must we stop our collective slide towards global calamity — we need to reverse it." That means "addressing our world's agonizing social and economic injustices," and it means "the boundary of our identity — of our 'we' — must expand to encompass nature too."

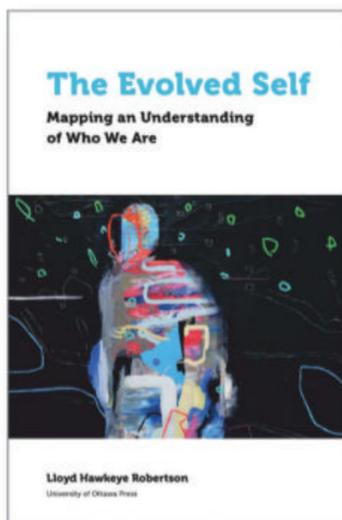
So what's an average citizen to do? Thankfully, the enormity of the task ahead hasn't stopped millions from getting into the streets to demand our leaders undertake it. Maybe we aren't so jaded after all; maybe the 2020s can be a bigger, better version of the 1960s. *Commanding Hope* is light on prescriptions, which some readers might see as a flaw, but Homer-Dixon does suggest that we can all "begin by multiplying today's vital youth activism a thousand-fold around the world." He wrote these words before this summer's Black Lives Matter marches, which began just after the book went to press, but he could be channelling the rapper Killer Mike just as easily as Greta Thunberg when he says we need to "mobilize this activism into coherent political movements that genuinely challenge dominant power systems."

Such a challenge is all but guaranteed to provoke a "vicious and quite possibly violent reaction." That may be news to some, but not to Black Lives Matter, nor to the countless land defenders and pipeline protesters who increasingly find themselves under physical attack, as often as not by legal authorities. Throw in an American election where hope is once again on the ballot, and you've got yourself a bona fide field test of Thomas Homer-Dixon's central thesis: that fundamental change may not always follow fundamental breakdown, but it never happens without it. ▲

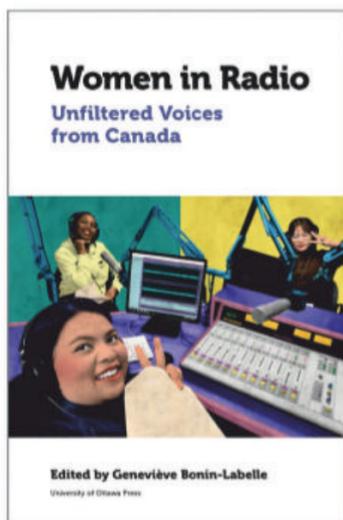


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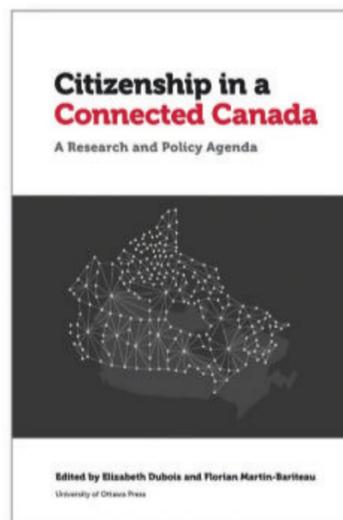
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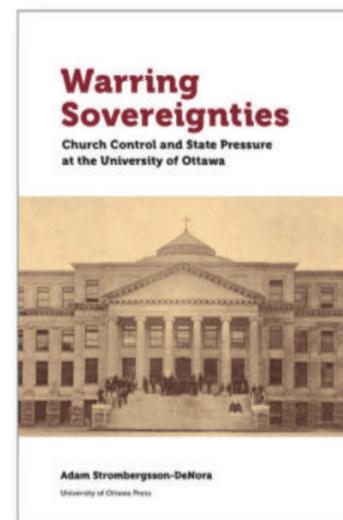
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Power Down

Is this the twilight's last gleaming?

Srdjan Vucetic

Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order

Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon

Oxford University Press

304 pages, hardcover and ebook

A HISTORY OF UNITED STATES hegemony — a term that international relations scholars use to describe consent-based world leadership — is a chronicle of a decline foretold. Consider the original Sputnik moment, in 1957; the breakup of the Bretton Woods system, in the early 1970s; the ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam, in 1975; and all those anxieties about an “emerging Japanese superstate” and “imperial overstretch.” Predictions of a “post-American world” have suffered few shortages, even as the United States has actually gone from strength to strength. The “unipolar moment” that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall certainly halted the prognostications of declinism, but only for a while.

In December 2004, amid daily footage of American soldiers fighting and dying in the streets of Fallujah, the U.S. federal government's own National Intelligence Council foresaw “the rise of new powers, new challenges to governance, and a more pervasive sense of insecurity” by 2020. Four years later, just as the Barack Obama administration was moving into the White House, the same organization reported on the emergence of a “global multipolar system” by 2025, with “the newer players bringing new rules of the game” and the United States going into relative decline, “even in the military realm.”

Of course, declarations of America's decline are as old as claims of its predominance — and need to be treated with some caution. But in *Exit from Hegemony*, Columbia's Alexander Cooley and Georgetown's Daniel Nexon argue that this moment is indeed quite different. Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic's economic, geostrategic, political, and social consequences will take decades to play themselves out, and, yes, Washington might still have an ace or two up its sleeve, but the underlying dynamics are all pointing to the end of U.S. supremacy. “We readily admit that we can only guess at just what type of international system the United States will seek to promote in the future, let alone how its aims will interact with the preferences of other great powers,” the authors write. “What we can say with greater confidence is that the United States will no longer be able to exercise global hegemony, and that it will need to accommodate other powers to a much greater extent than it is used to.” And while there are

many unanswered questions about America's role in the future, Cooley and Nexon are confident on one point: “At the very least, it will be one of, at most, a small handful of first-tier great powers.”

Simultaneously pitched to international relations theorists, to assorted analysts, and to the educated, media-savvy general reader, *Exit from Hegemony* is a major achievement. The first reason is its conceptual clarity. “International order,” we learn, is but a convenient shorthand. Rather than a discrete, bounded, and differentiated “thing,” the phrase can refer only to *relative* stabilities in state interactions and related goings-on. This is why Cooley and Nexon



Signs of an almost certain end.

conceptualize international *ordering* — their preferred term — as an ecosystem (“ecology”) constituted by rules, norms, and values, on the one hand, and everyday routines, flows, and practices on the other. Such are the “architecture” (or content) and “infrastructures” (or forms) of global politics. This framework helps us understand how “the American hegemonic system” and the broader international order co-emerged over time and space, and across institutional settings, and why attempts to revise that system are not necessarily anti-American in character.

The “liberal” international order, we also learn, is likewise a shorthand notion that conflates very different configurations of liberal-

ism. The “neoliberal” theory of state design, which emerged in Anglo-American politics and policies during the 1980s, dovetailed with the “liberal intergovernmentalist” architecture of the 1990s — think of NAFTA, the European Union, and the World Trade Organization — but it did not fit as nicely with liberal democratic politics at the national level. Ask any number of “populist” politicians about their problem with globalization, and they will likely point their fingers at the “liberal managerialism” of a transnational, cosmopolitan elite bent on stamping out “traditional” social orders and “real” people. The more sensitive we are to these different dimensions of liberalism, the less likely we are to conflate the “democratic backsliding” of today with the end of liberal international ordering as such.

So the proper benchmark for evaluating the “liberalness” of U.S. hegemony lies not in political philosophy but in history. The Pax Americana that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union was generally more liberal than its Cold War iteration — to say nothing of whatever pax existed before. In that spirit, Cooley and Nexon present both a conceptual overview of hegemony and a series of brief histories covering the Roman Empire, the Spanish Habsburgs, Bourbon France, Ming China, and the British East India Company, among other polities. Though short, these sections go a long way in substantiating the authors' contention that hegemony can, in fact, illuminate multiple logics of political organization, not just empires but also confederations and federations.

THE BACKBONE OF *EXIT FROM HEGEMONY* CONSISTS of the four chapters with the word “exit” in their titles. The first two, “Exit from Above” and “Exit from Below,” explore the supply-and-demand side of alternative-order building. As relative economic power shifted toward “the Rest” (especially China), “the West” saw its “monopoly patronage” melt away. Today, neither Washington nor Brussels can impose sanctions for human rights violations without worrying about driving targeted governments into the hands of “new providers of economic, security, and cultural goods” — the likes of Beijing, Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran. Arguably, the pandemic has only increased the ability and willingness of countries to leverage non-Western assets and “exit options.”

The next chapter, “Exit from Within,” focuses on the changing nature of contemporary transnational advocacy, namely the shift from the promotion of liberal peace, order, and good governance that characterized the 1990s to a “counter-order transnational mobilization.” An

impressive network of far-right outfits — study groups, conferences, front organizations, and online platforms that promote the “traditional family”—help illustrate this transition. The fact that the Kremlin underwrites some of these activities is a reminder that different pressures working against the liberal ordering tend to support one another. The same point emerges in “Exit Made in America,” a chapter devoted to the radical presidency of Donald Trump, which the authors rightly portray not as the cause of exit but rather as its morbid symptom and accelerant.

The positive feedback effects among all these exits have set the world on a path toward three possible (and mutually inclusive) scenarios. The first is a Sino-American rivalry, which must not be confused with the notion of a “new Cold War.” Cooley and Nexon italicize their reasoning: a cold war is “an *existential struggle* between political systems,” in which “nearly every possible field of competition — visual arts, music, sports, scientific achievements, chess, and so on — becomes, or is one step away from turning into, a zero-sum struggle.” Say what you will about aggressive Chinese posturing, but this existential struggle is decidedly not happening today.

The second, more likely scenario is multipolarity, a strategic goal of the Chinese and Russian states since at least 1997 and now the wish of populist leaders everywhere. A multipolar world could manifest itself in several ways. Anchoring one end of the continuum would be an ongoing à la carte liberal inter-governmentalism characterized by vigorous but peaceful contestations between Washington, Beijing, and Brussels. On the other end, we might see a more fragmented, neo-mercantilist, and ruthless international order, not unlike the one imagined in the television series *Occupied*, a Norwegian political thriller about the “silk glove” invasion of a small nation by its much larger neighbour.

Cooley and Nexon name their third scenario “globalized oligarchy and kleptocracy.” Indeed, the prevailing patterns of extraction and expatriation of wealth (by individuals as well as corporations), of corporate influence (on political campaigns, regulations, and so on), and of the general misuse of public power for private bene-

fit (see Trump’s attempts to defend himself in a civil case using the full weight of the Department of Justice) suggest that “grand corruption on an unprecedented global scale” is part and parcel of the ecology of the liberal ordering. And things are likely to get worse before they get better.

As Trump’s America demonstrates, liberal democracies do not have strong defence mechanisms against a globalized symbiosis between kleptocrats and the far right. This argument can be pushed further as we near the November 3 election: What if the American hegemonic system *continually* creates the conditions for exploitation “at home”? The liberalisms that promote such an abiding state irresponsibility in health care, education, and social services seem to perfectly align with the liberalisms that justify the pursuit of all-time hegemonic records — the deployment of troops to over 150 countries and their permanent basing in at least seventy. These cannot be pinned solely on one president or one political party.

A made-in-America pandemic economy has put this exploitative relationship into sharp relief: police, prisons, and the Pentagon receive ample taxpayer money, while “essential workers,” who are disproportionately female and people of colour, receive another reminder that it is only their *work* that is essential, not they themselves. (To be sure, similar systemic inequities are at play here in Canada.) Maintain the status quo through the next crisis — the worst of climate change is yet to come — and soon enough illiberal autocrats will have no trouble convincing the rest of the world that their idea of a social contract is better.

Cooley and Nexon note that the future of the American hegemonic system also depends on the dollar’s dominance in the global monetary and financial systems — an aspect of U.S. power that the British international relations scholar Susan Strange once dubbed the “super-exorbitant privilege.” Accordingly, they invite readers to pay close attention to the changing politics of money: for example, how China is challenging SWIFT, the Brussels-based wire-transfer system that many of us use and that American authorities sometimes pressure to exclude certain foreign banks and firms from global financial flows. What remains under-explored in *Exit from Hegemony*, however, is

the conditions under which the United States loses its position as the go-to provider of global liquidity, or how the euro or the yuan can achieve parity with the dollar as the go-to reserve currency. Could a “coalition of the willing” emerge to establish the financial institutions necessary to subvert U.S. monetary power?

COOLEY AND NEXON’S BOOK DESERVES THE WIDEST possible readership because it gives convincing answers and provokes the right questions at the right time. No matter who wins the upcoming election, the global hegemony of the United States is almost certainly ending, but the work to explain and understand that end will continue for years to come.

As we consider America’s diminishment on the global stage, we should remember the work of the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, particularly his concept of “cultural hegemony,” which reminds us that the most effective expressions of influence are often found in educational, artistic, and intellectual institutions — not simply the marble halls of Washington. To defeat the hegemonic power of the ruling class, Gramsci argued, Marxists had to learn how to wage a “war of position,” a protracted, subtle struggle for academic and cultural clout. One of the ironies of the present political moment is that it is the right — not the left — that is most closely following Gramsci’s revolutionary theory. Indeed, the counter-order transnational mobilization of the “new” New Right is waging a type of war through fearmongering over the “cultural Marxism” and “cancel culture” of our universities and mainstream media.

Sparked by York University’s Robert Cox in the 1980s, a neo-Gramscian school of international relations departed from the then-reigning models of hegemony, which emphasized the centrality of the state, by theorizing Pax Americana as a particular type of capitalist power — an interlocked, reciprocal, and dynamic relationship that combined the economic and military might of the United States with a transnational network of institutions working to disseminate liberal ideology across regions and issues. Though Cooley and Nexon disengage from this brand of thought, it remains worthy of consideration as we ponder the many different expressions of American power today and tomorrow.

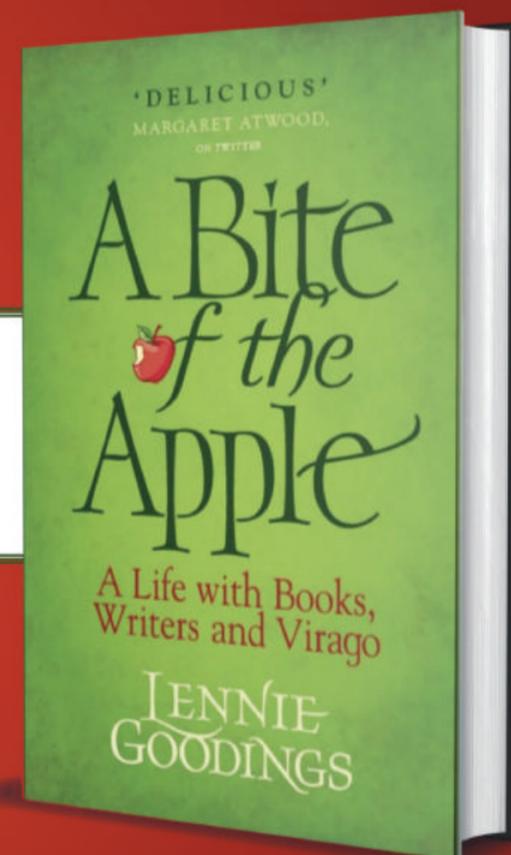
“All an apple should be: crisp, tart but sweet, steeped in mysterious history and tangled symbolism.”

—MARGARET ATWOOD

“A fascinating exploration of the women’s movement from the 1970s to almost the present day.”

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**The Two-State Dilemma:
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Michael Dan

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264 pages, hardcover and ebook

AS A LONG-TIME MIDDLE EAST CORRESPONDENT, I often speak to various interest groups in synagogues, mosques, churches, and elsewhere. Years ago, I liked to tell a tale of how difficult it was to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

Three people — a Catholic Northern Irishman, a Black South African, and a Palestinian (or an Israeli, depending on the group) — were given a chance to visit heaven and ask God one question.

The Catholic Irishman went first. He said that his people had been at war with the Protestants for most of a century, and there was no end in sight. "Will my people ever find peace?" he asked.

"Yes, my son," said God, "but not in your lifetime."

"Thank you, Father," said the Irishman, somewhat encouraged about the future.

The Black South African then said: "Holy Father, we have been under the yoke of white settlers for more than a century. Will we ever be free?"

"Yes, my child," said God, "but not in your lifetime."

The South African, too, left with the good news that her people's day would eventually come.

Then the Palestinian spoke: "Heavenly Father, we have struggled against Israelis for decades, at a great cost in lives to both sides. Will there ever be peace in the Middle East?"

"Yes, my son," said God, "but not in my lifetime."

As the years went by, peace came to Northern Ireland and apartheid ended in South Africa, but God was right: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes on. Even recent positive developments — such as Israel's much-heralded signing of normalization agreements in September with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain — do not end it. If the agreements are carried out, the UAE and Bahrain will become the third and fourth Arab states to sign treaties with Israel (following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994).

Peace with the UAE was low-hanging fruit for Israel: Jerusalem needed only to agree to

"suspend" its plan to annex large portions of the Palestinian West Bank and the two countries could announce a deal. Indeed, the two have long worked together and traded in matters of technology and medical research, and many Israelis expect that the normalization of relations with Abu Dhabi will result in large-scale tourism and the sale of military equipment to the Gulf state.

Israel, it is believed, has long supplied the UAE with intelligence on neighbouring Iran. In 2010, when Israel's clandestine espionage service, Mossad, wanted to assassinate a senior member of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, it sent the hit team to the Emirate of Dubai to intercept and kill the man. Though local police officials didn't appreciate this move, the national government did little about it. Contrast this inaction with the retaliation taken by the United Kingdom and Australia, whose passports had been forged by Israel so the assassins could gain entry to Dubai. One Israeli diplomat was expelled by each of the two countries, and stern rebukes were sent to Jerusalem.

The Arab signatories of past treaties have long insisted they support the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — so too do the UAE and Bahrain. But the proposal, first envisioned by the United Nations in 1947, to divide the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River has come to naught. Israel continues to spread out across large parts of the river's West Bank, which it occupied in the 1967 Six-Day War and calls the Biblical areas of Judea and Samaria. It has been forty-one years since Egypt signed its treaty with Israel and twenty-six years since Jordan did. Still there's no two-state solution.

Even the announcement in July of a temporary halt to the annexation of the Jordan Valley makes very little difference; Israel already exerts effective sovereignty throughout the West Bank and has done so for fifty-three years. The vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians have never known a time when this was not the case. It is a point Michael Dan drives home in *The Two-State Dilemma*.

Dan — a retired Toronto neurosurgeon and philanthropist — has concluded that the two-state solution, long considered the ultimate answer to this conflict, is no solution at all. In fact, it's a dilemma: a situation where parties must choose between two or more undesirable alternatives.

There is not enough room for two states between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, Dan insists, and Israel, acting in the name of Zionism, has effectively engaged in "colonization" of what land there is. He pulls no punches and, no doubt, will alienate many in his own

Jewish community by saying that Zionism, the political movement to secure a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine, is "a nineteenth-century socio-political ideology" that has run its course. "What then, should we call today's reality in historic Palestine if after more than a century of effort, the Zionist project is barely able to achieve a Jewish majority in that geographic space? Does it even make any sense to talk about political Zionism, or should we switch the conversation to post-Zionism?"

Indeed, Dan argues that "Zionism is guilty of ethnic cleansing, theft of land, intentional destruction of 'native' — or Palestinian — settlements . . . , intentional destruction or appropriation of native culture, and systemic and structural impoverishment of the native population." He likens such behaviour to "what Canada did to Indigenous nations."

With his book, Dan joins the ranks of Jews who have dissed the two-state option. In a controversial essay in July, for example, Peter Beinart, the former editor of the *New Republic* and now editor-at-large with *Jewish Currents*, pronounced the two-state solution dead and urged people "to abandon the goal of Jewish-Palestinian separation and embrace the goal of Jewish-Palestinian equality." This would result in one binational state in which both a Jewish homeland and a Palestinian homeland would be safeguarded. "Today, two states and one equal state are both unrealistic," Beinart wrote. "The right question is not which vision is more fanciful at this moment, but which can generate a movement powerful enough to bring fundamental change."

Fanciful it may be, but if the two-state solution deteriorates without a viable alternative, the region risks large-scale terrorism and ethnic cleansing.

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THERE HAVE BEEN SOME TANTALIZING MOMENTS when a two-state solution did seem near. It came closest, perhaps, between 1993 and 1995, known as the Oslo period (for the city in which Israelis and Palestinians first met secretly to forge a preliminary agreement). After the Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat and the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the paperwork at the White House, on September 13, 1993, a majority of Israelis were giddy with anticipation.

Soon after the signing, Israeli border officials excitedly greeted me as I crossed one day from Jordan to the Israeli-occupied West Bank. I was returning from Damascus and Beirut, I explained, and several gathered around. "What's it like in Damascus?" they wanted to know. "Has Beirut recovered from the civil war?" Like many at the time, they imagined going to these

cities for a weekend, because they were so close. What no one foresaw, though, was that Baruch Goldstein, a physician and Israeli settler, would attack a prominent Hebron mosque in 1994. The shooting killed twenty-nine Muslims at prayer, left dozens wounded, and triggered a wave of suicide bombings by Hamas in retaliation. Nor did anyone expect the actions of Yigal Amir, an Israeli law student and right-wing activist. Inspired by Goldstein and indoctrinated by the same radical settler rabbis, he assassinated Rabin in November 1995. The attacks by just two Jewish ultra-nationalists scuttled any hope of fulfilling the promise of Oslo.

March 27, 2002, could have been the new dawn of a two-state agreement. On that day, in Beirut, members of the Arab League voted unanimously to support a peace initiative presented by Saudi Arabia. It called for recognition of Israel and normalization of relations by all Arab states, provided Israel agreed to the creation of a Palestinian state along the borders that existed before the 1967 war, reinstating the frontier between Israel and the Jordanian-occupied West Bank and Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip. It was a remarkable offer that should have been snapped up by the Israeli government, but on that very evening, a Hamas suicide bomber entered a Passover Seder at the Park Hotel in Netanya. The blast he set off killed twenty-nine Jews in religious celebration and wounded 140 others.

Rather than welcoming the Arab peace initiative, the prime minister, Ariel Sharon, quickly ordered troops in tanks to move in and take control of the Palestinian government enclave in Ramallah. They destroyed most of the buildings, except for the office of the president; Arafat would remain a prisoner there until 2004, when, critically ill, he was transported to Paris and died.

DAN LEANS TOWARD ISRAEL AND PALESTINE FORMING a single cooperative state of some sort, and he sells it as a logical outcome of game theory, a kind of speculative psychology in which you try to anticipate the reaction of another party to certain circumstances and form your own move according to what you expect the other to do. It's a mix of logic and math — kind of like chess, except that moves in chess are made sequentially. In game theory the moves are made simultaneously.

A classic example of game theory is known as the prisoner's dilemma. Two guys are arrested for robbing a jewellery store and making their getaway in a stolen car. The police realize they don't have enough evidence to convict them on the robbery, only the car theft. So they separate the two men and offer each a deal: If one confesses and testifies against the other, he can go free and the other guy will receive a three-year sentence. But if one decides to stay mum, and the other implicates him, the first guy will serve three years and the other guy will go free. If both squeal, both will serve two years in prison. And if both stay mum, they will both serve one year in prison for the car theft.

What's a crook to do, not knowing what the other guy will do? As observers, we can analyze the options and calculate the best, mutually agreeable option to take: in the case of the prisoner's dilemma, both should stay mum.

Replace the thieves with Palestinians and Israelis, and let them consider whether it's better

to cooperate with the other side, on many matters of concern to both, or not. Dan acknowledges that game theory isn't a prescription for resolving the conflict. Rather, it "might help us to think about it in original and counter-intuitive ways." He's not trying to "propose solutions to the conflict," he insists. Rather, he wants to "draw our attention to *non*-solutions," such as an apartheid state or two states. The nub for both sides of the conflict is this: "What kind of a one-state solution would I be prepared to accept?"

The Two-State Dilemma is enticing and, at times, captivating. But there are a few errors of fact that should trouble readers. Before the Israeli state was established, the Jewish terror group Lehi was commanded not by the future Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin but by Avraham Stern and another future prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir. Begin was leader of the Irgun, another pre-state paramilitary organization. And it was the Irgun, not Lehi, that brought the contentious arms-carrying cargo ship *Altalena* to Israel in 1948, in defiance of the new Jewish government. As well, Operation Pillar of Defense, part of the ongoing Israeli war on Hamas in Gaza, took place in November 2012, not 2013. Finally, and most disturbing, Dan writes that Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, "managed to pass a bag of his semen to his wife during a regular prison visit" when the very source that he cites, Politico.eu, states that Amir only "tried to pass" a bag of semen to her.

Particularly when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is critical to get the facts straight.

IS A BINATIONAL STATE REALLY AN OPTION? THE best case for it that I ever heard was made by a senior member of Hamas, of all people. Ahmed Yousef, a deputy foreign minister and adviser to the Palestinian prime minister in Gaza, spoke frankly when I asked him if Israel had a right to live in historic Palestine. "I do believe this land, this is the land of all Abrahamic faiths, the land of all prophets," he told me in my 2011 *Globe and Mail* documentary, *Inside Hamas*. Muslim, Christian, and Jew all have a right to live in the region, he said. And if these people would come together, what a combination they'd make. "We are all well-educated people. If we work together we can dominate the whole region. . . . We can be a good model for the whole world."

Earlier this year, I read the Irish writer Colum McCann's *Apeirogon*, a compelling novel based on the true story of two men who did work together, one Israeli and one Palestinian; each lost a daughter to the conflict and decided to use his grief as a weapon against hate. They travel the region and the world, telling their stories in hopes of gaining converts to peace. But the conflict, like the book's geometric title, has infinite sides, and since each faction of extremists believes it will ultimately win on its own, it's hard to imagine them ever agreeing to cooperate. On the other hand, it's not hard to imagine the bloodshed that will come if they don't. ▲

Catacomb Saint

did I mention it was raining when we left — the roof was battered, under siege, soaked, whipped, hammered — my shoes were wrecked into hash, my skin dreadful to touch — did I tell you about the storm at all, did I admit I was, I am, afraid

first the priest went by, holding a church, and then his brother, his nephew, his friend — the cycle of life and dead as a crumpled gold handkerchief — if I could paint, I would be a bit like that

it was a day of rest, and the dog was charming — we were beautiful animals that day in the sun, blankets over our knees while our friends met on the rooftop

we had taken the night train — the old and dirty gods were packed in trunks — for hours you were on your knees — did your heart give out — the patterns on your hands were blue — which is the detail to be blamed

during the funeral those amphibians inched up the pulpit, not frogs but salamanders — I remembered you smoking a cigar and reading the day's papers in a dark café — those international papers laid out on a white folded tablecloth

now you have embroidery instead of names — your bones are decorated by jewels that wink like eyes — you are being worshipped — you are already dust — you are waiting for someone to speak your real real name

Lisa Pasold

Lisa Pasold is the author of Any Bright Horse and, most recently, The Riparian.

A Wretched Motley Crew

The struggle that defined two nations

Chris Alexander

**The British Are Coming:
The War for America, Lexington
to Princeton, 1775–1777**

Rick Atkinson

Henry Holt and Company

800 pages, softcover, ebook, and audiobook

**La noblesse canadienne:
Regards d'histoire sur deux continents**

Yves Drolet and Robert Larin

Éditions de la Sarracénie

221 pages, ebook

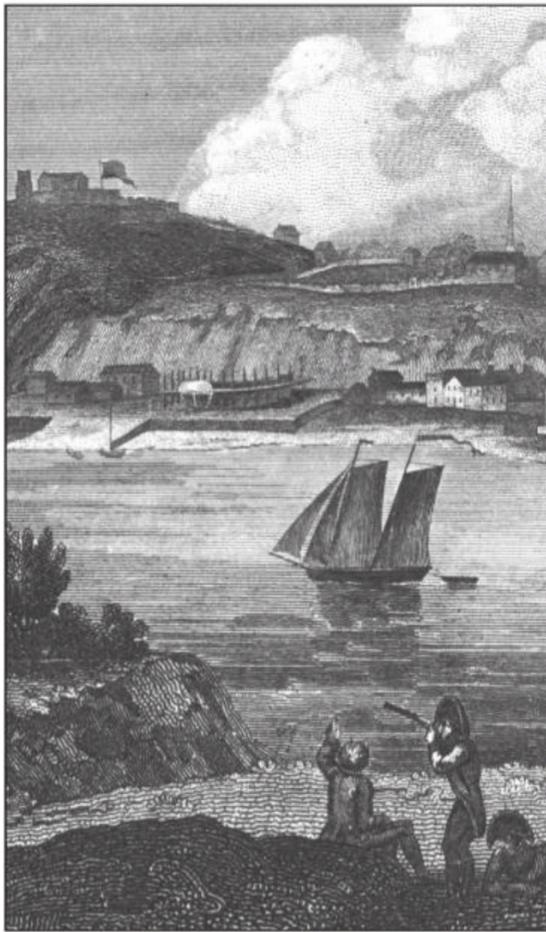
FOR SIX OR SEVEN UNPRECEDENTED decades, Canada and its allies shared three powerful assumptions: that democracies would multiply, trade would grow, and borders would stay open. NAFTA and an enlarging European Union were poster children for these megatrends. Sadly, in the age of Trump, Brexit, and COVID-19, all three comforting nostrums — signs of history's seeming drift toward better times — have hit the buffers. According to Freedom House, an independent watchdog based in Washington, the world has seen fourteen consecutive years of democratic decline since 2006. The Brookings Institution reports that exports as a share of global GDP peaked in 2010. And since 2015, a global migration crisis, a series of travel bans, a smaller EU, and now a pandemic have brought hard borders back with a vengeance, overshadowing the scores of fences, barriers, and walls erected in the decades since 1989.

With many land crossings closed and democracies tottering, now is the right time to look back on the origins of Canada's own border with the world's first full democracy and top trading partner. Well before 1776, democracy, entrepreneurship, and openness were formidable forces in America. Faster than the United Kingdom itself, the thirteen colonies fulfilled Adam Smith's prophecy about the end of mercantilism. After independence, even as the United States remained blighted by slavery, segregation, and racism, it became a pole of attraction for tens of millions of immigrants — first European, later Asian and Latino — who powered waves of innovation and transformation. Since the Civil War ended in 1865, America has been the engine of globalization, defined by the Peterson Institute as "the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information."

But the U.S. has sometimes taken its foot off the gas and stepped away from global leadership. The first instance was a decade of instabil-

ity and depression between the two world wars, when Washington was mostly in an isolationist and protectionist mode. The second began with the 2008 global financial crisis, itself triggered by American excess; it tipped our neighbours into disengagement, indebtedness, polarization, and renewed protectionism. This cycle, made more toxic by disinformation and inequality, has engulfed many countries, turning them inward as well. The costs are still being counted.

Once the dust settles from the November presidential election, will the United States reclaim its leadership role for a new era of global problem solving? Although I am among the hopeful, it's of course too soon to say. But



The many clues point to Canada.

perhaps we can look back to see a little more clearly what lies ahead.

THE THREE-TIME PULITZER PRIZE WINNER RICK Atkinson knows hard times: as a historian and journalist, he has written about Vietnam, Iraq, and improvised explosive devices. His Liberation Trilogy, about U.S. involvement in the Second World War, is a brilliant literary diorama of campaigns in North Africa, Italy, and Western Europe, as well as a chronicle of the victories that relaunched globalization in 1945. As America struggles to live up to its founding ideals today, Atkinson has returned home to recount its first fight as a country. *The British Are Coming* covers events from March 1775 to January 1777, two years

that are equally crucial to Canada's emergence as a modern nation.

Atkinson starts his prologue in Portsmouth, England, on June 22, 1773. Arriving from Kew in "a royal chaise pulled by four matched horses," George III was met by his guard, the Twentieth Regiment (three years later, they would relieve the Citadel of Quebec before surrendering at Saratoga, New York). Rowed out to Spithead in a ten-oared barge, the king reviewed twenty ships of the line "moored in two facing ranks along five miles of roadstead." These were gunboats of the world's largest fleet. "Five hundred vessels large and small" bobbed around the monarch, who enjoyed a thirty-one-course banquet that afternoon on board the ninety-gun *Barfleur*. The naval review lasted four days.

Atkinson's scenes are almost cinematic, as he unfurls the tapestry of what would prove a brutal war. The underlying message of his prologue is unambiguous: two years before the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the thirty-five-year-old George already feared that his only hope of pacifying mutinous New England — on edge since March 5, 1770, when soldiers of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment, colloquially known as the Vein Openers, fired on a Boston mob — lay in those "wooden walls" floating near Portsmouth. Without compulsion powerfully delivered, he suspected, disobedience would fester and grow. It was a disquieting thought for the peacemaker of 1763, who had at last put Britain in control of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes.

Duty weighed heavily on George. Conciliation had worked at Quebec, but clouds of discord were gathering further south. When Massachusetts, and then the First Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia, rebuffed even watered-down acts of Parliament, the king made his choice. "Blows must decide," he wrote to Lord North on November 18, 1774.

The king was far from confident of success. On February 11, 1775, he famously joked, "I do not know whether our generals" — meaning Thomas Gage, who had arrived in Boston in May 1774; three major generals sent to stiffen his spine; and forty-five other senior officers — "will frighten the enemy, but I know that they frighten me." As it was, in 1775, the decision to use force resulted in British defeats around Boston and in North Carolina and New Jersey, as well as victories in Canada, on Long Island, and in Westchester. (The stunning reversals of 1777 and Britain's final defeat in 1781 will be central to the next two volumes of Atkinson's trilogy.)

History's verdict on this uxorious monarch has been damning. Despite a sixty-year reign that coincided with the Industrial Revolution, George III tends to be either lampooned by posterity or portrayed as an outright villain, the

dim-witted author of a catastrophic cock-up. Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* presents both versions, with the pre-porphyria king's tragicomic descant on sending "a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love."

In this present political moment of eagerly questioned assumptions and rightly disputed narratives, we need to go beyond caricature. Was it inevitable that George III would be drawn into war? Atkinson, whose focus is on military operations from opening salvo to closing surrender, omits the backstory on which any full answer would hinge; his short prologue covers only twenty-two months leading up to Lexington and Concord. Nonetheless, the clues are many, and most of them point to Canada.

Americans generally welcomed Quebec into the fold in 1763, after France formally ceded it. But disenchantment quickly set in because of a perception of unequal treatment. As the historian Alan Taylor has put it, in describing General James Murray, Quebec's first British governor, "rather than force French Canadians into a British mold, Murray favored adapting the empire to their culture." Writing in 1766, Viscount Barrington, secretary at war, said "the two great points in respect to Canada" were to "make the Colony affectionate to us and to make the people happy." The next military governor, Sir Guy Carleton, shared this conciliatory impulse, spending four years in London, from 1770 to 1774, to build support for a plan to institutionalize it. The resulting Quebec Act was redrafted four times in early 1774, just as Parliament was enacting the Boston Port Bill and other "intolerable acts" that so riled colonists to the south.

On June 3, 1774, Parliament heard from Michel Chartier de Lotbinière, a seigneur: though lukewarm toward the bill, he confirmed that restoring French civil law would be popular. Meanwhile, American petitions to Parliament had been refused. One potential bridge-builder, Benjamin Franklin, had been severely dressed down by the Privy Council on January 29; less than two months later, he was sailing home on a ship from Portsmouth.

The Quebec Act promised "the free Exercise of the Religion of the Church of Rome." In giving royal assent on June 22, George III said "it was founded on the clearest principles of justice and humanity, and would, he doubted not, have the best effect, in quieting the minds and promoting the happiness of his Canadian subjects." As news of this measure trickled into harbours up and down the Atlantic coast, groans of indignation hardened into pledges to resist. For many in Massachusetts and Connecticut, free institutions were under threat. In the eyes of almost everyone in the thirteen colonies, the king was siding with Catholics over Protestants. Amid the uproar, a committee of correspondence in Massachusetts declared itself a "Solemn League and Covenant"—a formula used by the parliamentary side in England's first civil war. This drew a rebuke from Gage, which set the stage for military confrontation in April 1775.

The Quebec Act proved a principal factor that nudged Americans from disaffection into open rebellion. By rejoining lands north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi to Quebec, London was seen to be reviving New France's reach into the heart of the continent—and blocking westward expansion by English-speaking settlers.

Even the Declaration of Independence, adopted one week after the Continental Army had left its last camp in Quebec, at Île aux Noix, included among its list of grievances the king's "abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies."

Then as now, borders, land, and religion had popular resonance greater than that of taxes, juries, and even habeas corpus. Outrage against the measures to "placate" French Canadians was general: most of America's founders, including Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, decried the bill. Samuel Langdon, the president of Harvard College, inveighed against "popish schemes of men who would gladly restore the Stuarts and inaugurate a new era of despotism."

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ATKINSON'S FIRST CHAPTER OPENS ON MARCH 6, 1775, a moment of ferment, at the Old South Meeting House in Boston, where Joseph Warren delivered a sermon to mark the fifth anniversary of the Boston Massacre. A few months earlier, in September 1774, Warren had proposed the Suffolk Resolves, which denounced the Quebec Act as a threat to "the Protestant religion and to the civil rights and liberties of all America." In endorsing them, the Continental Congress declared the resolves were intended to prevent Parliament from establishing "tyranny" in

"The American urge to attack Quebec tapped into folk memory."

Canada, "to the great danger, from so total a dissimilarity of Religion, Law and government, of the neighbouring British colonies."

In Robert McConnell Hatch's words, "There was hardly an American colony that was not incensed by the Quebec Act." Unsurprisingly, the first major military action authorized by the Second Continental Congress, in June 1775, after morale-boosting victories at Lexington and Concord, was the invasion of Canada, now defended by fewer than 700 regulars (since two regiments had been deployed to bolster the British force at Boston).

The American urge to attack Quebec tapped into folk memory. "For nearly a century," Atkinson writes, "Americans had seen Canada as a blood enemy." He rightly distinguishes between irrational fear and historical fact—a line the nineteenth-century American historian Francis Parkman did much to blur. In Atkinson's assessment, the Quebec Act, which came into force on May 1, 1775, "infuriated the Americans and altered the political calculus." It did so mostly by inflaming popular prejudice: "Catholic Quebec was seen as a citadel of popery and tyranny." The northern colony was expected to be easy pickings: "Most Canadians were expected to welcome the incursion, a fantasy not unlike that harbored by Britain about the Americans." As Atkinson adds archly, "This would be the first, but hardly the last, American invasion of another land under the pretext of bettering life for the invaded."

Before the campaign was even approved, enterprising Americans had taken matters into their own hands. In May 1775, Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen captured Fort Ticonderoga, on the south end of Lake Champlain, with its "noble train of artillery." They also raided Fort Saint-Jean on the Richelieu River. Atkinson glides over these events swiftly, despite the forceful nudge they gave to congressional decision-making and the kinetic role the captured guns played in prompting the British to quit Boston.

Arnold's bold actions had outsize consequences. Together with Allen, he was a chief advocate of the Canadian invasion. When others were captured (Allen), fell ill (Philip Schuyler), or were killed (Richard Montgomery), Arnold kept going, drawing on his merchant shipping experience to stymie Carleton's advance down Lake Champlain. In 1777, Arnold was again central to British reversals, bluffing Barry St. Leger into retreat in August and fighting John Burgoyne to a standstill in October, all long before his defection in 1780. (A deep irony of the American Revolution—and a key to its complexities—is that Arnold settled in New Brunswick in 1785, and his family was later granted over 13,000 acres in Upper Canada.)

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THE FIRST YEAR OF "THE WAR FOR AMERICA" WAS actually dominated by a war for Canada, with the Quebec Act a principal *casus belli* for both. For nearly half of the twenty-three months covered in *The British Are Coming*, the Continental Army was in Quebec. Yet Atkinson devotes only three of twenty-two chapters to the invasion, leaving out the Battle of the Cedars, in May 1776, so critical to the liberation of Montreal. In the end, more American soldiers were captured at Quebec, the Cedars, and Trois-Rivières than at the Battle of Long Island.

Atkinson mentions the lexicographer Samuel Johnson, but not Sir William Johnson, the architect of British Indian policy, whose nephew Guy Johnson convened over 1,000 Haudenosaunee and other First Nations representatives at Oswego, New York, in July 1775. With Carleton also present, this council was a defining moment of the war: Britain's Indigenous allies undertook to defend the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, but not other colonies. To this day, the Canada-U.S. border runs along the St. Lawrence from Lake Ontario to Akwesasne—through Mohawk territory that straddles the international boundary. Even Sir John Johnson, Sir William's heir, is absent from *The British Are Coming*, despite his showdown with Philip Schuyler at Johnstown in January 1776 and the precedent he set for other loyalists in May 1776, when he fled to Akwesasne with hundreds of armed supporters, mostly Catholic Highlanders. (For this broader story, Gavin Watt's *Poisoned by Lies and Hypocrisy: America's First Attempt to Bring Liberty to Canada, 1775–1776*, from 2014, is a good source.)

Atkinson is strong on the British withdrawal from Boston; the campaign to reoccupy Long Island, Manhattan, and Westchester; and the first battles in Virginia and North Carolina, including the decisive American win at Moore's Creek. With his description of Franklin's diplomacy at Paris, the playwright Pierre Beaumarchais's covert gun-running, and George Washington's close-run victories at Trenton and Princeton, the shape of eventual American victory is clear

long before John “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne launched his ill-fated Saratoga campaign.

By 1774, America had made up its mind: 3,059 days of seesaw hostilities merely prolonged the agony. Yet the main protagonists, as is so often the case, were prisoners of their own limited perspectives to the bitter end. For the British, victories at Quebec on the last night of 1775 and at Fort Mifflin, New York, on November 16, 1776, created an illusion of success sufficient to renew the campaign. Gage, Burgoyne, William Howe, and Henry Clinton, the British generals calling most of the shots, left distinctive imprints. But their efforts were doomed. Only Carleton, the defender of Canada and protector of the Loyalists, achieved his main objectives.

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WHY DID GEORGE III FAIL TO PUT DOWN A REBELLION when his predecessors had succeeded in Scotland, Ireland, and Acadia? The short answer is because of ignorance, scale, and changing times. The king was a polymath, but what his ministry did not know about America would have filled his 65,000-volume library. The task was far too vast: Scotland’s Jacobite armies in 1715 and 1745–46 had fielded about 35,500 soldiers; in America, an estimated quarter of a million rebels took the field. Moreover, repression was falling out of fashion. As Enlightenment ideals and the romantic movement further entrenched the primacy of the individual, it became less acceptable to compel consent. In effect, Britain lost the information war — the battle for the affections of ordinary people — almost before it began.

A century of benign neglect had produced a muddle in colonial affairs, a habit of autonomous self-government (of which London was unaware) that shakily coexisted with a presumption of parliamentary supremacy (which colonists ignored). For many Americans, the Crown had become an unrepresentative burden. They pointed to the rapacious East India Company and the sugar barons of Jamaica and Barbados, who had more voices in Westminster than the thirteen colonies. If the king had decided against force in late 1774, he would have been hastening the inevitable. American autonomy was irreversible.

The war for America eventually came to comprise 1,300 battles or skirmishes on land and 241 naval engagements. It took 26,000 to 36,000 American lives — one-third each from battle, disease, and imprisonment. This was the largest proportion of the U.S. population to perish in any conflict outside the Civil War. Atkinson does not mention the British toll — over 40,000 dead, with a slightly smaller proportion killed in battle and more by disease. He also downplays another dramatic result of Britain’s defeat and America’s failed northern invasion: the migration of over 100,000 Loyalists to Nova Scotia, Quebec, and other parts of the empire.

In the end, Atkinson’s gifted storytelling is tarnished by millenarian language and incomplete analysis. For Loyalist refugees and their Indigenous allies, the emerging United States was anything but a “majestic construct” where “beyond the battlefield, then and forever, stood a shining city on a hill.” They had been persecuted and jailed. Their property had been confiscated. Exile beckoned. (Those seeking a broader perspective should read Taylor’s *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750–1804*, Maya Jasanoff’s *Liberty’s Exiles:*

American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World, or Michael McDonnell’s *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*.)

◆
AMONG THOSE WHO EXPERIENCED THE “AMERICAN War,” as many called it in Quebec, each individual story was different. The vicissitudes of a civil war fought in backcountry farmsteads and remote outposts, as much as on fields of battle, forced many people to be shape-shifters or turncoats. Allies became traitors; ambiguity and self-interest governed all. After Lotbinière’s appearance before the House of Commons in 1774, for example, which helped Carleton win votes for the Quebec Act, he lost his bid to recover two seigneuries on Lake Champlain. So he went on to Paris, where the French foreign minister, Comte de Vergennes, hired him as a confidential agent; by June 1776, he was introducing himself to John Hancock in Massachusetts, contrary to the count’s instructions. But the family’s flirtation with revolution was short-lived. Lotbinière’s son, a British officer captured by American forces in November 1775, went on to become Carleton’s confidential agent. Throughout the invasion, militia officers from seigneurial families played major roles in defending Canada — including François-Marie Picoté de Belestre, Joseph-Dominique-Emmanuel Le Moyne de Longueuil, and Charles de Saint-Ours at Saint-Jean, as well as the de Lorimier brothers at the Cedars and Louis Liénard de Beaujeu de Villemonde at Quebec.

During the six-month siege of Quebec and its fortress, only seventy British regulars were present in the garrison. Locally recruited militia and Royal Highland Emigrants, veterans of the Quebec campaign who settled in Canada after 1763, played the more decisive role, alongside British sailors and marines. While some habitants rallied to American colours and the Continental Army received supplies from dozens of parishes around Quebec, much to Carleton’s chagrin, the indulgent policy he and Murray had adopted toward clergy, seigneurs, and notables ultimately won the day.

The role that seigneurial families played between 1774 and 1777 has not been fully told. But the picture is clearer thanks to *La noblesse canadienne: Regards d’histoire sur deux continents*, an excellent survey of the nobility of New France by Yves Drolet and Robert Larin. They examine a core of about two hundred families, with thousands of descendants living today, who were either *nobles de fait* (meaning they signed themselves as *écuyer* and were treated as nobility by their peers) or *nobles de droit* (descended from families whose nobility had been legally recognized by the state under *lettres de noblesse* or *charges anoblissantes* after the reforms of Louis XIV and Colbert in 1660).

Most had come to Canada as civil office holders, or as officers in the Régiment de Carignan-Salières or Troupes de la marine. Many had played key roles during the Seven Years War. Theirs was a hybrid social group, with internal cohesion founded on heredity and porous boundaries open to new entrants on the basis of ambition, merit, talent, or wealth. Drolet and Larin describe it as a closed legal order (*un ordre légal fermé*) alongside an open social group (*un groupe social ouvert*).

The snobbish Carleton had several *nobles de droit* on his staff; children of Luc de la Corne and others married senior British officers and

officials. But postwar prominence went mainly to *nobles de fait*, particularly those related to Le Moyne de Longueuil, Picoté de Belestre, and Fleury Deschambault. After the Quebec Act and again following the 1783 peace, many members of this extended family, mostly the *cousinage* of the Baroness of Longueuil, were rewarded with places on the Council for the Affairs of the Province of Quebec, the upper house. Ironically, the invasion of 1775–76 had made the colony more Catholic, more francophone, more loyal.

◆
EVEN FOR THE DEFEATED, THE COMMERCIAL COST of the war was short-lived: British exports to the United States, £4.4 million in 1773, rebounded to £3.7 million by 1784. Early globalization resumed, albeit with new obstacles in its path. *Ancien régime* France, shorn of Canada but proud of its role in splitting America from Britain, soon lurched into revolution and continental war, disrupting trade for a generation. When global exchange began to grow again in the 1820s, there were few comforting nostrums. But for Canada and many other countries, the economic tailwinds were strong. The U.S., even while achieving commercial pre-eminence, remained largely aloof from world affairs through Reconstruction and into the Gilded Age.

Since 1945, America’s role has been altogether different: the relentless impresario behind the Bretton Woods system, the UN, and NATO has led more often by cultural and economic example (Wall Street, Hollywood, Silicon Valley) than by strategy (Vietnam, Iraq, Syria). As at its founding, so at its moments of greatest global influence, the superpower of creativity and imagination has been subject to intense bouts of overreach, self-delusion, and popular prejudice.

America’s founding ideals, which square easily with its Cold War leadership, culminated in enlarged European institutions and dozens of new democracies in every part of the world. Did those same ideals drive corporate America’s love affair with China, consummated by Kissinger and sustained by the two Bushes, Clinton, and Obama, which allowed a one-party dictatorship — one that has refused democracy, freedom, and the rule of law — to become the nation’s principal economic partner?

In resisting British coercion, Americans had just cause. The larger arc of hostility to Quebec — that corrosive cocktail of jealousy, religious chauvinism, and self-interest that brought committees of correspondence to life in 1774 — is much harder to explain. Even now, a quarter of a millennium later, it remains astonishing and instructive that the rebellious colonists’ first military priority after Lexington and Concord was not the liberation of Boston but the attempted subjugation of Canada.

In the final analysis, both George III and the Continental Congress made the same mistake: they tried (and failed) to compel consent by force. The result was two new democracies launched on the North American continent at virtually the same time: one with the ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1788 and the other with the Canada Act of 1791. It is indeed an old question that arises again today: Does the United States have the reserves of self-awareness necessary to see the bigger picture, to supply the hard explanations that the next phase of globalization will require, and to recover from its latest bouts of self-delusion, polarizing intolerance, and dictator-abetted isolationism? We’ll see. ▲

Service Records

The changing ways we remember

Adam Chapnick

The Fight for History: 75 Years of Forgetting, Remembering, and Remaking Canada's Second World War

Tim Cook

Allen Lane

480 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

TIM COOK HAS SPENT THE LAST TWO decades publishing well-received, accessible accounts of Canada's military history. Much of his early career focused on the First World War (his *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917–1918* won the 2009 Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction). More recently, he has written poignantly about that war's successor, including his two-volume *The Necessary War* and *Fight to the Finish*. His latest book, *The Fight for History*, positions the Second World War on the periphery of larger questions: What does it mean to remember, and why is history so important to our national well-being?

Ask Canadians what they know about their country's military history, and most will mention Vimy Ridge. That 1917 battle marked the first time that all four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force attacked a target together. Its success, often attributed to the planning prowess of the division commander Arthur Currie, has since become symbolic for many of an emerging independent national identity. But ask more specifically about the Second World War, and you're likely to draw a blank. Intuitively, the disparity is baffling. For one thing, thousands of veterans still live among us. Moreover, if there has ever been a good or "necessary" war, to use Cook's term, the conflict that successfully prevented a savage and evil Nazi regime from taking over the world would have to be it. So why, until relatively recently, has it been so poorly remembered in Canada? *The Fight for History* provides a series of answers that are as worrisome as they are convincing.

◆

COOK BEGINS WITH THE VETERANS THEMSELVES. When the Second World War ended seventy-five years ago, many felt that they had "earned their peace dividend." Now was the time to build a better future for themselves and their families, rather than to dwell on what they had seen and felt overseas. Ironically, the Allies' victory dulled the wartime horrors in the popular imagination. When Mackenzie King rejected calls for a new national monument to commemorate the sacrifices made abroad, the prime minister effectively dismissed the limited veterans' protests that did emerge and suffered no political consequences.

The rapid and aggressive demobilization of the armed forces that followed was similarly

palatable to a citizenry that had moved on from its wartime posture. In the aftermath of significant cutbacks to all three military services, Cook notes, "the senior officers found the pen-wielding uniformed historians easier to target than the traditional military personnel heading into the new Cold War." While work on the army's official history continued, efforts to capture the stories of the air force and the navy were compromised. And, unlike their Allied counterparts, few senior Canadian military leaders wrote about their personal involvement. The National Film Board and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation weren't much help either. It took seventeen years for the



There's still a battle to be fought.

NFB to produce the highly regarded *Canada at War* series. Few watched it, though, as the CBC screened its episodes late in the evening. Since most veterans were inclined to limit discussions of their experiences to private Legion halls, those still interested in what had happened inevitably turned to American and British sources.

If the first fifteen postwar years reflected what Cook calls "benign neglect" in the recording and recalling of Canada's wartime experience, the next fifteen were plagued by open hostility. Many veterans, still clinging to old British traditions that were quickly eroding in modern Canada, interpreted the 1965 adoption of the Maple Leaf flag as a personal affront. American involvement in the Vietnam War poisoned

thinking about violent conflict among a growing number of young Canadians, many of whom couldn't, or wouldn't, differentiate between a war in defence of freedom and a military quagmire. Under the spell of the Quiet Revolution, nationalist Québécois officials responsible for the provincial high school history curriculum transformed the country's wartime activity into proof of "English Canada's subjugation of French Canada." For young Quebecers, the war became a story of Canadians being sent to their deaths by incompetent British generals, while systemic discrimination held back the career progression of francophone officers. Mackenzie King's 1944 decision to impose conscription came to symbolize the ultimate betrayal of French Canada by its English brethren.

Elsewhere, Canadians were hardly lining up to defend the state's wartime conduct. The late 1970s marked the beginning of a national awakening to the forced relocation of thousands of Japanese Canadians in the early 1940s, a tragedy made more widely understood by the publication of Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan*, in 1981. Rather than acting quickly to acknowledge the wrongdoing, Ottawa stalled. Only after the United States Senate announced its commitment to restitution for Japanese Americans, who had been similarly mistreated, did the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney pledge \$400 million in compensation and promise to teach and disseminate this terrible story.

Cook's assessment of Ottawa's actions is irksome. While he recognizes the harm done to Japanese Canadians, he reserves his vitriol for Tokyo's refusal to acknowledge its horrific mistreatment of Canadian prisoners of war. A subsequent chapter that details the belated official recognition of Indigenous veterans and members of the merchant navy is more balanced. Taken together, these chapters convincingly demonstrate that, hardly forty years after one in ten Canadians donned a military uniform to defeat one of the most tyrannical and vicious dictators of the modern age, pride in the national contribution to the Allied effort had been all but replaced by shame over the country's domestic failures.

Cook reserves his harshest criticism for *The Valour and the Horror*, a series of three films released in 1992 by the CBC and the NFB. The filmmakers, Brian and Terence McKenna, used the Canadian surrender in the battle of Hong Kong, in December 1941; overwhelming losses suffered at Normandy during the battle of Verrières Ridge, in July 1944; and the end-of-war bombing campaign against German cities, which caused extensive civilian casualties, to depict Canada and its allies as incompetent

Mania

Air tastes of cucumber and salt. The sea is too big and mountains too tall. Five thousand boats squeeze and bounce in the waves. Brightness overwhelms.

Buzzing in my brain till 3 a.m.
My body is burning bright, white light, I can feel everything
flooding—sunshine, rain, all flooding, chaos chaos chaos, over and up, up and upside
down, the rain pours, it never stops, never lets up.

Bao Li Ng

Bao Li Ng is a staff writer for the Varsity and the Gargoyle, at the University of Toronto.

and cruel. The utter neglect of national achievements — the Allies did win the war, after all — and the seemingly deliberate effort to paint Canadian veterans in the worst possible light ultimately led to an internal CBC inquiry on how the film could ever have been sanctioned as a documentary. In light of the investigation's devastating report, the series was never broadcast again.

Defenders of Canada's wartime contribution, who had objected so passionately to *The Valour and the Horror*, did themselves no favours the following year when a Legion hall in Surrey, British Columbia, refused to admit five Sikh veterans to its Remembrance Day ceremony, because they refused to remove their turbans. The branch had a rule that required people to set aside any head covering upon entering. Cook is much too kind in suggesting that the issue was "muddied, as are all these complex notions of heritage and traditions of an older age rubbing up against the modernity, diversity, and inclusivity of the current age." The rule was shamefully racist and born of ignorance, and the outrage over its application was compounded by the fact that these Sikh veterans had risked their lives in fighting ideologies of racial supremacy. More subtle anti-Semitic sentiments, which emerged when Ottawa pledged to include a Holocaust gallery in a new exhibition space for the Canadian War

Museum, further compromised the credibility — and respectability — of the veterans' lobby.

♦
IT IS DIFFICULT, AND POTENTIALLY MISLEADING, TO identify a single turning point in national attitudes, but the welcome that approximately 15,000 veterans received from 500,000 Dutch citizens when they returned to the Netherlands, in May 1995, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Holland, is as good as any. International recognition has often caused Canadians to rethink their history — even Lester Pearson's contribution to the end of the Suez crisis was politically divisive before he won the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1957. After the Dutch reception, a reinvigorated national campaign helped establish the Juno Beach Centre, a museum dedicated to Canada's role in the Second World War, in Normandy in 2003.

At home, the appointment of one of this country's great military historians, the outspoken and controversial J. L. Granatstein, as director-general and chief executive officer of the Canadian War Museum marked a similar crossroads. The no-nonsense Granatstein spearheaded a successful effort to reinvigorate the aging museum alongside a number of other established historians, including Cook himself. A new building opened on budget and on time in 2005, and it has since drawn over half a mil-

lion visitors every year. Apart from an early conflict with aggrieved veterans over the depiction of the Allied bombing campaign of German cities, the museum has been largely free of the partisan bickering that tainted previous memorial efforts. Canada still lacks a stand-alone Second World War memorial, but depictions of the war as "necessary" are far less divisive today than they used to be.

Cook concludes his captivating book with a call to action: "History is messy, tangled, and complex; it is unsettled and contradictory. It takes effort to understand, and its meaning changes from generation

to generation. But we must push back against apathy and indifference. We must tell our stories, truthfully and bravely. For if we do not embrace our history, no one else will." The words are compelling, but I'm not sure that they're sufficient. In an era that has seen strongman dictators emerge on nearly every continent, when the norms of liberal democracy are regularly flouted and undermined, is it really enough to argue that the greatest threat to historical ignorance is a diminishment of the national self? I fear that we are past that.

In times of international strife, history is one of the most critical tools we have to remind us of the perils of ignorance. Sure, we must study the past to understand ourselves, but we must also think historically to better position ourselves to defend and preserve the broader liberal world order for which so many have sacrificed their lives and livelihoods. Whereas Cook remains enraged by the so-called history wars — which witnessed the slow eradication of the teaching of Canadian constitutional, diplomatic, and military history at the end of the twentieth century — a number of us have moved on. We lost that battle years ago, and there is a larger war still to be fought. In twenty-first-century Canada, the fight for history is an existential one, and the forces of ignorance lined up against us are terrifying. ▲

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Wrap Party

Ode to a famous sandwich

Amy Spurway

Book of Donair: Everything You Wanted to Know about the Halifax Food That Became Canada's Favourite Kebab

Lindsay Wickstrom

MacIntyre Purcell Publishing

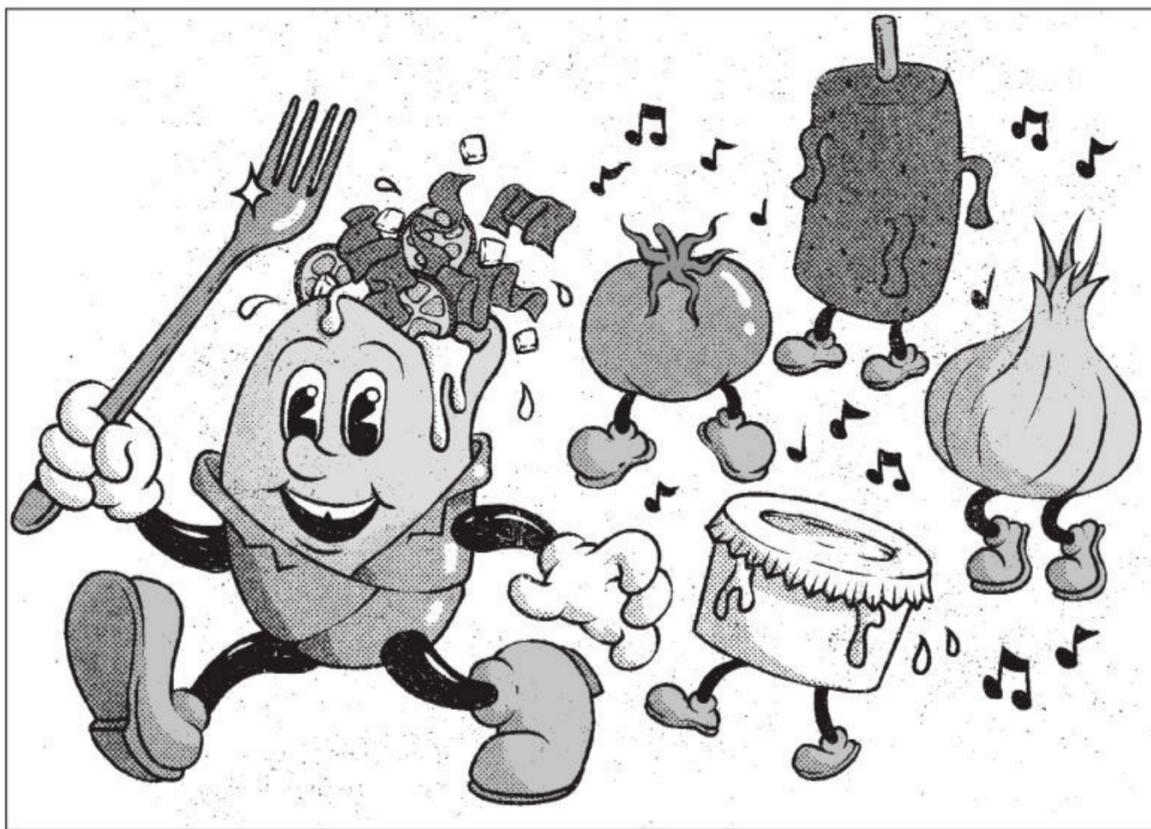
192 pages, softcover

FIRST, A CONFESSION: I AM A DONAIR heretic here in Halifax. My fondest (albeit fuzziest) memories of this town's iconic meat 'n' pita mess-fest were actually made in Fredericton, circa 1995, and involved the highly dubious donair submarine sandwiches peddled by the equally dubious campus character known as Rog the Sub Guy. I also believe that lettuce absolutely *does* belong on donairs. And because I've been a vegetarian for over a decade now, properly spiced seitan passes for meat in my books. Finally, I confess that my eyes nearly got stuck in the back of my head from rolling so hard when the donair was declared the official food of Halifornia, in 2016. But maybe that is because I'm from Cape Breton, and our unofficial official food is the pizza burgers sold in gas stations (not that we make a scene by going around declaring it so).

It was in light of these egregious failures of fealty to the mighty street food that has saved countless wasted university students from the 2 a.m. munchies that I read Lindsay Wickstrom's *Book of Donair*. And it was in spite of these failures of donair fealty that I found myself waving my copy in the air, thumping page 14 and yelling like a manic street preacher: "Back off, Edmonton! Donairs belong to Halifax!"

Because nothing brings out the ferocity of East Coast pride faster than another part of the country trying to claim something we *know* is ours. See those transplanted Maritimers who brought donairs out to the oil patch with them? They're ours, too! But exactly how much of the donair can the East Coast — and Halifax in particular — really claim? Why does it even matter? What is it about a pile of spicy spit-roasted shaved meat stuffed in flatbread, topped with a sickeningly saccharine sauce, that gets us so worked up?

The donair is not exactly what one would call classy fare, given its reputation as something best enjoyed with dulled senses and a big bottle of antacids handy. As iconic foods go, it's not posh like poutine, stylish like Nanaimo bars, or cozy like butter tarts (which, of course, should have raisins). But what the donair lacks in class, it makes up for in character. Donairs are a repository of so many personal, cultural, and historical tales for people in and from Atlantic Canada that they've become a symbol of iden-



Halifax's messy mascot is on a mission.

tity and pride, even if they are a little rough on the guts sometimes. "So, donair history exists in fragments, slivers and vague accounts with large gaps that must be sewn into a story," Wickstrom tells us. "It is no easy task to weave the tapestry of memories, blog posts, newspaper clippings, promotional materials and public directories." The facts are as sticky and messy as the dish itself, but it's the savoury story that helps hold it all together.

Book of Donair does a fine job of tracing the multiple international evolutions of what eventually emerged as the Halifax donair, as well as the pan-Canadian journey it has been on since that fateful day in the mid-1970s when Peter Gamoulakos concocted a sauce from "sweetened, curdled milk." Yes, here is where I fall in line with Halifax's purists: if it doesn't have the sweet sauce, it is not a donair. At the same time, *Book of Donair* does a fine job of challenging the myth that the donair is a product of any one person, place, or period of time. Rather, the tale of this sloppy kebab is one woven through multiple food-pioneering families, various eating establishments, and several decades.

Wickstrom provides a detailed who's who of Halifax's donair players, and there were moments in the book when it felt like I was reading a saucier version of those bits in the Bible where so-and-so begat so-and-so, who then begat so-and-so, who then took off for Truro/Toronto/Edmonton and begat so-and-so. The recipes and methods for making critical components (that meat, that sauce) were passed

on and passed around, restaurants changed hands and changed names, and the donair slowly made its way across Canada.

Wickstrom's background as a Halifax food blogger comes through in the conversational, comedic tone of her narrative (or, maybe I should say, do-narrative). While shedding light on the donair's culinary history, the book also delves into its cultural impact. Nowhere is that impact more apparent than in the section dedicated to donair stories that Wickstrom asked fans to send in; she includes her own about being terrorized by "a noxious phantom odour" in the office of a donair-eating doctor. True to the sweet-meat pita's reputation as a late-night staple of the sloshed-student set, a few of the stories start with somebody being drunk and end with something sketchy happening. But others feature donairs in pop culture references, alongside "feats of strength, airing of grievances, epic tales, anecdotes, sociables, and love stories" all powered by the hand-held food.

In recent years, the donair has been hauled out of the hazy, early-morning-munchies gutter and has made its way into the glammed-up street food zeitgeist, with everything from gourmet donair cupcakes to the donair sushi burrito. *Book of Donair* celebrates and embraces all iterations. With due homage paid to her subject's humble Haligonian origins, Wickstrom concludes that, however messy, the donair has the power to unite a nation rather than divide one. It's a satisfying story, slathered in love, wrapped in nostalgia. ▲

Operative Words

Behind the campaign curtain

Jeff Costen

Inside the Campaign:

Managing Elections in Canada

Edited by Alex Marland and Thierry Giasson

UBC Press

252 pages, softcover and ebook

ROGER STONE HAS A NETFLIX documentary about him. David Axelrod's memoir is a *New York Times* bestseller. While American political operatives have long been the subject of media interest and lore, their Canadian counterparts tend to work in the shadows and live in relative anonymity.

Condensed election cycles, more stringent spending limits, and third parties have created quieter, less visible campaign leadership north of the border. Yet the strategies, policy deliberations, and communications tactics used while stumping leave lasting and often foundational impacts on the governments we elect.

Canadians are due for a thorough and serious look at campaigns and the decision-makers who shape them. With *Inside the Campaign: Managing Elections in Canada*, the political scientists Alex Marland and Thierry Giasson aim to provide exactly that. Theirs is the latest installment in UBC Press's Communication, Strategy, and Politics series, a contribution they boast is the first instance where academics join public-sector practitioners — from political staffers and civil servants to media observers — to help explain the complicated and often secretive world of political campaigning in this country.

Within seven days of the polls closing in the forty-third federal election, Marland and Giasson had gathered input from over twenty contributors. And while that October 2019 vote serves as the book's anchor, the resulting insights are not necessarily specific to Canada's most recent trip to the ballot box. As Marland and the *Toronto Star* columnist Susan Delacourt write in the introduction, "In some ways, the spectacle is relatively unchanged from the time when John A. Macdonald gave speeches from raised platforms decorated with bunting or when Wilfrid Laurier addressed crowds as he passed through their communities on a whistle-stop tour." In other ways, of course, our political system must now contend with disrupters that neither Macdonald nor Laurier ever imagined: digitization and the accompanying polarization of the electorate, a rapidly changing media landscape, and the unexpected halt of in-person events over recent months. Political practices that have shaped elections for decades have been overdue for analysis, but now many of them may be on their last legs. The question is whether lessons of Canada's political past can help us



Proroguing the old political playbook.

grapple with the present trend lines while we try to forecast a murky future.



TOGETHER, *INSIDE THE CAMPAIGN'S* CONTRIBUTORS provide a detailed look at the recurring roles seen during the typical writ period — news editors, national campaign directors, party platform builders, and so forth — as well as roles specific to 2019. The intersection of historical context and personalized experiences gathered here is a key strength, limited only by the willingness of insiders to take part in the drafting process. The chapter "Leaders' Debate Coordinators," for example, co-authored by the Leaders' Debate Commission executive director Michael Cormier and the former CBC producer Brooks DeCillia, provides an illustrative look at the conception, deliberations, challenges, and successes of our first (and possibly last) official debate commission. While anyone who followed last year's election is familiar with the controversies surrounding the independent agency, such as its inclusion of the leader of the People's Party of Canada, Maxime Bernier, and its denial of accreditation to fringe media outlets like the Rebel and True North, Cormier and DeCillia paint a refreshingly honest picture of a commission that was both "building the plane while it was in the air" and aspiring to make debates "a more predictable, reliable, and stable element of federal election campaigns."

Similarly, in "The Independent Candidate," the former Liberal MP Jane Philpott offers a personal and sobering account of the unique

challenges faced by independent candidates trying to fundraise, collect data, and win votes in our party-centric system (her co-author on the chapter is the University of Guelph political scientist Tamara Small). The campaign took a "high-touch" approach that attempted to connect Philpott with every household in the riding through one-on-one conversations. While her independent bid did not yield the outcome she expected, it resulted in an impressive war chest and memorable interactions with thousands of voters, many of whom sent her spirited handwritten notes. "I will be 81 in a couple of weeks and had all but lost hope of seeing any semblance of honour or integrity in government," one supporter wrote. "Canadians now have living proof that honesty and integrity can be upheld, and a new inspiration will grow."

First-hand accounts offer instructive glimpses behind the scenes, but several questions about various recent campaign functions remain unaddressed — or are mentioned only peripherally. Did the Conservative Party misjudge its support in the battleground Greater Toronto Area ridings? How did the Liberal Party calculate its response to the explosive reporting about Justin Trudeau's history of wearing blackface and brownface? How did the various parties respond to the return of Quebec nationalism to mainstream federal politics? Marland and Giasson concede in their editors' note that several insiders struggled with "engaging in critical perspectives on their work during the campaign period," and they specifically point to their difficulty in

securing engaged participation from Liberal partisans. Among the contributing authors, Michael McNair, the former executive director of policy for Prime Minister Trudeau and adviser on Canada's COVID-19 response, stands out as the only Liberal with partisan experience; when secrets of the governing party come into play, those who know the most are indeed often the least likely to speak. Despite this limitation, the collection will provide readers with an astute look at the larger political zeitgeist.

Canadians have been inundated with media depictions of electoral goings-on south of the border, where everything about casting a ballot—from whether you can vote, to how you can vote, to where you can vote—is subject to torqued political commentary. By contrast, Marland and Giasson emphasize the role of public institutions in preserving the integrity of Canadian elections and maintaining continuity as political leadership comes and goes with the will of the people. They present the “important but sometimes controversial” role of Elections Canada as a safeguard of our continued stability in a tumultuous period, shaped by the threat of cyberattacks and the rapidly shifting look and feel of third-party activism. And they show how the “caretaker” role of civil servants and political staff, who remain in their positions during the campaign period, helps our system withstand excessive partisan influence. This concept applies even to ministers: “The caretaker convention dictates that, when Parliament is dissolved and there is no confidence chamber to hold them accountable, ministers will exercise restraint. Through such self-restraint, they show respect for democratic accountability.”

On-the-ground experience with public opinion polling, communications, event planning, fundraising, and platform development brings us closer to understanding the roles of campaign practitioners. While individual contributors bring their own insights to the table, the increasing importance of voter targeting, segmentation, and activation emerges as a common thread. André Turcotte and Éric Grenier pronounce that “the key duties of pollsters during an election campaign start with an understanding that party strategists no longer look at the electorate homogeneously but adopt strategic segmentation techniques that allow for policies and communications to be designed for targeted groups.” Fundraisers are more reliant on communicating “a personalized message on a mass scale,” supported by carefully curated supporter databases. Media buys are increasingly selected to reach target voters digitally where the party has its best chances to make gains.

These shifting trends were not unique to Canada's forty-third election, but the circumstances of 2019 amplified their importance. The forty-second election, for example, in October 2015, was defined by a broad change in sentiment and wedge policy proposals, focused on democratic renewal and middle-class reform, put forward by the Trudeau Liberals. But no such issues dominated 2019, which has been dubbed the *Seinfeld* election by some operatives—a campaign about nothing. Voters were less divided on policy or ideological grounds, and no party was able to successfully shape the ballot box question. The upshot was a game of inches, aimed at micro-targeting the right segments of voters in the right ridings with the right

message. The circumstances were unique, but it seems the emphasis on personalized outreach is here to stay.

INSIDE THE CAMPAIGN DEMONSTRATES THE FLUID nature of campaigning in Canada, but the editors and contributors could not have contemplated or addressed the most significant disruption to election campaigns around the world: the pandemic. Frequent references to the physical spaces that shape our politics continually remind the reader how much the ground has shifted: “Canadian election campaigns are run . . . behind closed doors, in offices and war rooms, out on the campaign trail, and from planes, trains, and tour buses.”

Elections are fundamentally about bringing people together, yet recent votes in the COVID-19 era have required political leadership and administrators in countries like Mongolia, Singapore, and South Korea to throw out the old playbook. As Canadians look to November's U.S. federal election, or to the recently held provincial elections in New Brunswick and British Columbia, valid questions linger about the successes and failures of bringing people together—politically and physically—in a public health environment that requires them to stay two metres apart.

Joe Biden's presidential bid certainly made a case, through its fundraising success and steady climb in opinion polls in the summer, that large in-person events may not be necessary for victory and may even be inefficient. Despite a lack of face-to-face gatherings or whistle-stop tours, the former vice-president saw record-breaking donations, with \$365 million in August alone, besting Donald Trump's \$210 million and easily eclipsing Barack Obama's record of \$193 million from September 2008. Biden's selection of Kamala Harris as his running mate inspired a wave of enthusiasm for the Democratic Party and a staggering \$26 million in political giving within twenty-four hours of the announcement, even as the candidates were deprived of the pomp and circumstance of a traditional rally. Certain Democrats have even attributed this fundraising efficiency to the current environment, by pointing to the intimacy of Zoom meetings and cost savings from the lack of room rentals and catering. The untested strategy earned Biden the moniker “Joe Hiden” from Trump, but it appeared to be working as of early October. And if the Democrat's campaign ultimately proves successful in November, we could see virtual fundraising events survive on both sides of the border as a permanent phenomenon.

While elections in the U.S., British Columbia, and New Brunswick give us reference points, the future of our federal politics, from the timing of the next vote to the look and feel of a new “normal,” are far from certain. *Inside the Campaign* does more than just articulate the spaces and mechanics of a point in time, though; it helps us understand the social, political, and infrastructural factors that have shaped past elections and, in some cases, can be expected to continue doing so. Readers looking for an unfiltered account of the 2019 campaign may be disappointed, but Marland and Giasson help paint an instructive picture of a country facing all of the tensions of the twenty-first century with stable institutions in place and administrative expertise likely to survive unscathed. Regardless of what the next normal brings us, that position of strength will be worth safeguarding. ▲

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Bathroom Reading

Too many still aren't sitting comfortably

Rose Hendrie

Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?

— Matthew 15:17

The wiser course would undoubtedly have been to admit its existence and to dignify it as much as its nature will allow.

— Sigmund Freud, preface to John G. Bourke's *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations*

WE ARE TAUGHT FROM AN early age that going to the lavatory is a private affair. For the actual purpose of the room, there are many names: we refer to washing, bathing, resting, or powdering to skirt the business at hand. And here, of course, is another bit of avoidance: “doing one’s business.” There is also “the call of nature,” “talking to a man about a horse,” and a whole host of cruder, even violent terms. Perhaps we should make like the child in Dr. Seuss’s *Halloween Is Grinch Night* and go instead “to the euphemism.” While there is fun to be had with the quick stream of whimsy, behind it lies an awkward tension. The act of relieving oneself is necessary but confidential, natural yet embarrassing, serious but also rather humorous. Such exertions, we learn, are not meant to be seen, and absolutely not meant to be heard.

Point number one: While it’s important to keep one’s privates exactly that, this prudishness around the most basic of bodily functions can be stifling, not only for those who live with gastrointestinal conditions but for wider debates on public washroom accessibility, sanitation, and social inequality, which are far from resolved. Point number two: These pandemic times have unavoidably pushed this very private task into the public consciousness.

◆

IT IS REMARKABLE TO THINK THAT EACH OF US spends roughly three years of our life going to the toilet. And that’s not to mention the reading, watching, and maybe for some — though it’s still an etiquette grey area — talking on the phone. Potty training is a child’s first step to becoming a functioning member of society. Along with learning to communicate, this is phase one of proto-personhood: say please and thank you, and try not to wee on the floor. For those of us who are fortunate, this is the start of a lifelong lack of thinking about using the loo. It is something we take for granted. An accessible, clean space is often available, whether it’s in the home or out and about. When nature calls, we know exactly how to answer and can do so, for the most part, comfortably.

Early this summer, as we tentatively re-emerged back into society, blinking over the tops



Oh, the places we go!

of our masks and jumping every time someone coughed, we headed to parks (sometimes too many of us), to doorsteps, and to any available tuft of grass — all to see the friends and family who had been, until then, small, flat pigments on a screen. Thousands took to the streets to support Black and Indigenous communities. Others, in smaller numbers, protested the closure of hair salons. Everyone out in the great outdoors faced the same predicament: When the need strikes, where on earth do you go? Few public facilities were open; malls were closed, libraries and cafés, too. To pee or not to pee was the question, but if you did, you risked being ticketed by a bylaw officer — if the earth was the only available option. It had all gone quiet on the washroom front. So what were people supposed to do? Hold it?

It was hardly a surprise, when so many of us see restrooms as a basic right, that the first few frantic months of lockdown saw panic buyers rushing straight for the toilet paper. Desperate not to be caught short, they dashed to the supermarkets with an urgency that seemed, well, fitting. The fact that COVID-19 did not target the bowels specifically was beside the point. White towers of TP protruded from trollies. In some instances, physical fights broke out in the aisles. Some refused to succumb to the hysteria but later worried about the consequences. An Australian newspaper even included extra blank pages for readers, in case things got really bad. The possibility of a shortage touched a nerve, perhaps because toilet paper touches us all.

Henry VIII’s toilet block at his Hampton Court Palace was known as the Great House of Easement, a phrase that, in my opinion, should enter the general bathroom lexicon right alongside the “oval office.” But it was precisely this notion that drove those initial stockpilers: people couldn’t bear the thought of losing their ease. This was not the full story, as it turned out, despite how quickly the hoarding narrative took over. The American public radio program *On the Media* did a piece on the shortages back in April — getting to the bottom of it, so to speak. It seems that toilet paper supply chains exist in a delicate balance. Also, the stuff we encounter out in the world is different from that which we use at home; they are two separate products, usually manufactured by different companies. One is recycled, the other is virgin fibre. One is flimsy and comes in huge, industrial rolls, while the other has a family of bears losing their minds over the softness of those cushy sheets. What’s more, there’s little incentive for companies to store vast quantities of toilet paper, as it’s bulky and not worth much. There aren’t great reserves of emergency rolls, as nice as it is to conjure an image of a Parthenon-style warehouse piled high with cushiony columns (watch out for those bears). It’s made to meet demand, and when demand in the home skyrocketed earlier this year, there was a moment of real scarcity.

Incredibly, the United States experienced a similar toilet paper shortage in the winter of 1973, because of a rumour that tissue factories in Japan weren’t producing enough. This false

scare was picked up by a Republican senator and then by the comedian Johnny Carson, who did a bit about it on his show. It wasn't long before consumers were lining their closets with stacks of "just-in-case." Carson was later forced to apologize when the joke, and the hearsay, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. It took four months for the confusion to be resolved. The sense of panic probably didn't help to moderate consumption. The flow of misinformation isn't easily stemmed.

THE NOTION OF GOING TO THE TOILET WAS NOT always cloaked in the shame and privacy that modern manners like to dress it in. Defecation was once a public, unremarkable activity, even a celebrated responsibility for those attending to a monarch's needs, in the alternative throne room. Privacy itself used to be a privilege only of the rich, until the nineteenth century brought the aims of industrialists and sanitary reformers happily together, as the labouring population moved from the fields to the factories, where there were noticeably fewer bushes. So began the shift toward our current understanding of public necessities: think divisions, doorways, and discretion.

The Great Exhibition in 1851 saw the introduction of the first flushing pay toilets, where visitors exchanged a penny for a clean seat, a towel, a comb, and a shoeshine, which is what gave the English their jaunty expression "going to spend a penny," even if the expectations involved aren't quite the same now. The history of the flushing lavatory goes back at least five hundred years, maybe even two thousand, depending on whom you ask. In the sixteenth century, Sir John Harington installed one in his house in Bath to please his godmother, Queen Elizabeth, who was coming to stay. (It is worth mentioning that he was attempting to curry favour after being banished from court for telling risqué stories.) So the wonderfully named Thomas Crapper, the Victorian plumber, did not, alas, invent the toilet, as many mistakenly believe. Neither did he inspire the term "crap," which predates him — though it is a marvellous bit of nominative determinism. Crapper's contributions include upgrading the S-bend to the

U-bend, which prevents noxious fumes from passing back up through the pipes. It is partly thanks to Mr. Crapper that loos are, mostly, odour free.

While the concept of public washrooms has existed since at least Roman times — who doesn't remember the joy and horror of learning about the infamous sponge on the end of a stick? — a mere two hundred years ago, they were still communal spaces. In the U.S., it wasn't until the 1880s that Massachusetts enacted a law requiring workplace restrooms to be separated by sex; it was the first state to do so. Before that, male and female workers simply shared. Such a thought would surely cause those who rally and rage against gender-neutral bathrooms to choke on their Starbucks. But why should we balk at this? The nature of propriety is as fluid as the path of civilization. One age's acceptance is another age's offence. Nose blowing, for instance, would have horrified our courtly

"It had all gone quiet on the washroom front. So what were people supposed to do?"

ancestors, yet we're happy to do it — often with great, trumpeting abandon. We're fairly unperturbed by spitting, too. It's below the neck that the problems arise.

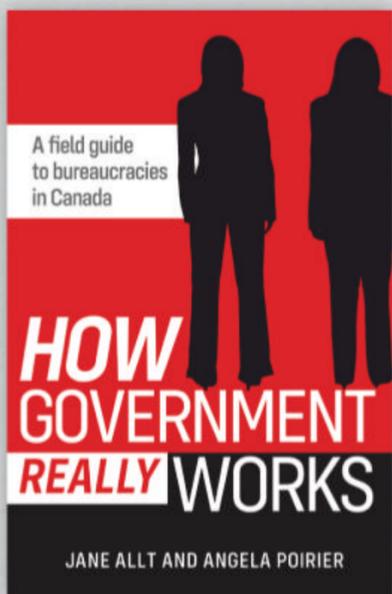
Of course, it's not hard to see the reason for our distaste. Defecation is a dirty business, and our concerns are largely biological. Feces is toxic, a vector of disease-causing bacteria, worm eggs, and parasites, and we should do all we can to avoid it. Poor sanitation and unsafe water (read: water contaminated by excrement) cause one in ten of the world's illnesses and some half a million deaths every year. Morbid topic as it is, that's about half of the global deaths for this novel coronavirus so far. But how much more airtime has the latter received? I would venture that it's considerably more than double. In all the skirting and the silence surrounding issues of sanitation — itself a cleansing term for the process it describes: the removal of human waste — it's easy to forget that two bil-

lion people still do not have access to the most basic of toilet facilities. And that's not just in some far-flung corners of the globe; it's here, it's everywhere. Shit happens, and it happens all over.

Despite how much our quick-flush culture (two flushes if you're being courteous) would wish to forget this, we have a serious access problem. This is what Lezlie Lowe drew attention to in her aptly named *No Place to Go: How Public Toilets Fail Our Private Needs*, which came out a couple of years ago. Lowe is Canadian and an unashamed toilet activist. Her platform? More toilets, more truly public, on-the-street, tax-funded, and open-to-everyone toilets — not the publicly accessible but privately owned ones we've come to depend on. "Without a network of reliable public bathrooms, who uses the city and how they use it changes; those populations can be effectively excluded from the public sphere," she wrote in a recent essay, hoping to remind people that, yes, the situation is dire, especially for people experiencing homelessness, those with inflammatory bowel conditions, anyone who uses a mobility device, the elderly, taxi and bus drivers, caregivers, and parents of young children.

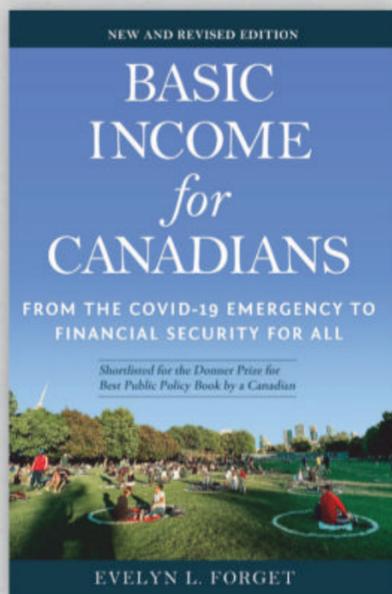
Lowe's essay coincided with a brief burst of other news items around June and July, as regular journalists about town felt the deleterious effects of this shortage, one assumes. Since then, though: silence. Businesses have reopened, albeit with physical distancing measures in place, and we are back to relying on them for our business-doing needs. But the issues remain. Those who are unhoused — for whom the message "Stay safe and stay home" must have felt like a cruel bit of mockery — may be turned away from such establishments or unable to afford the toilet tax of a coffee or a bite to eat. For some, these amenities are more than a convenience, they are a means of accessing clean water; they are a lifeline. The point is that public washrooms, if properly funded, could promote health and cleanliness, not hinder them — particularly in a time when handwashing is paramount. Consider too that recent studies have shown fecal transmission of COVID-19 to be a possibility. It's not a comb and a shoeshine that activists like Lowe or

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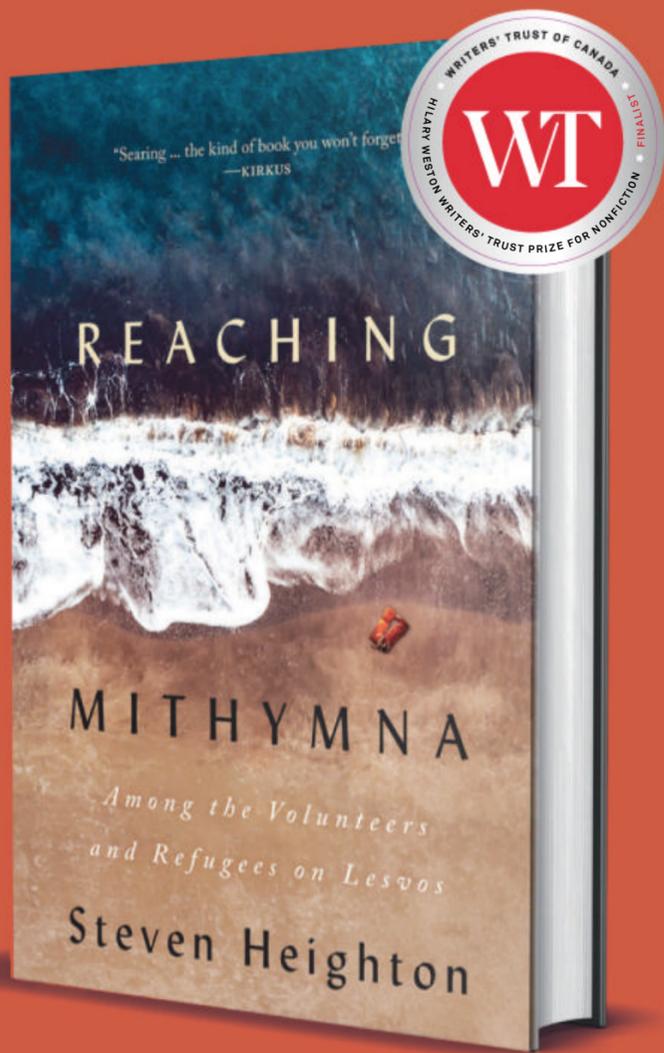
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the Ottawa organization GottaGo! are asking for — just clean, available seats. As we know, winter is coming. And in its frosty grips, will washrooms across the country close again? Might parks, recreational centres, restaurants, transit terminals, and stores shut up their doors and leave our vulnerable populations out in the cold? What then?

When the *London Review of Books* profiled Lowe's work, the writer took the opportunity to speak about how his Crohn's disease made travel problematic in an increasingly loo-lacklustre London. This was something he tried to shed light on whenever possible, the reviewer said, even though an editor had once told him, "Readers don't need to know this much about your bathroom needs."

ROSE GEORGE, ANOTHER WRITER EMPLOYED IN trying to get modern society to collectively unclench, points out in *The Big Necessity* that while toilets provide a barrier against the physical dangers of excrement, we are keen to use language to avert the social ones. There is not much in the way of middle ground when it comes to the wording around bowel movements, no sensible, neutral-sounding "sex" equivalent for doo-doo. If I was to refer to "stool," you might think me a doctor; if I use "ordure," you'll deem me pretentious; but if I say "crap," you'll call me vulgar. The safest term, "poop," or "poo" to us Brits, is what you might hear a parent say to a child in the form of a nervous question. George notes that even "feces," a fairly clean and clinical-sounding expression, is from the Latin for "dregs" and took on its current meaning only in the seventeenth century. Her preferred term is "shit," by the way, partly out of frustration.

Language is powerful; it's slippery too. The way we speak *around* the act of excretion — rarely *about* it — is more likely to provoke a giggle or a wrinkled nose than a serious discussion. We are back to being children again, nervous, embarrassed, frantically shaking our heads to show that we don't need to go. Because this is what poo does: it spoils the fun, or someone's lunch, with a dirty dose of reality. So we sweep such issues under the societal rug and concentrate on more palatable initiatives, such as feeding the hungry (also very important, but what goes in . . .). Historically, swear words have reflected what we fear or don't understand, whether it's damnation or sex, or possibly one by means of the other. Casting going to the toilet — shitting — as a taboo is a further means of distancing. So where does this leave us, now that "damn" has lost its potency, even becoming rather cuddly; now that we're slowly becoming less priggish about sex; now that, in the face of a global virus, death is becoming harder to ignore? Is poo the last taboo?

"Everyone poops," wrote the Japanese children's book author Tarō Gomi. His classic work came out in 1977 and depicts an array of different-sized defecations, artistically rendered in brown smudges. There are animals and humans, big scat and little droppings. We know that it's the '70s because the adult illustration shows a man atop the toilet reading a newspaper and smoking a pipe. Also, because there don't appear to be any women. "Poop" is mentioned a total of sixteen times, not including the title or the recurring brown splotches. Gomi certainly intends to imbue the word with familiarity and

normalcy, which are admirable pursuits. But it would be nice if ladies could poo too.

There is a revealing passage in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy's magnificent novel, that has stuck with me. As a child, the protagonist Rahel is taken to the ladies' room of a cinema, the "Public Pots," by her great-aunt and her mother. Rahel is too small to balance above the hole, so she is held and goes in a "trickle." Her great-aunt is next, all enormous legs, fat, hairy knees, low-swinging bosom, and "gurgling, bubbling" sounds. When Baby Kochamma finally finishes, Rahel looks at her watch. "So long you took," she remarks. Then Ammu, Rahel's beautiful mother, relieves herself "in a whisper. Against the side of the pot so you couldn't hear." Nothing more than a whisper, because someone is always listening, judging. Contrast this with male urination in literature, which is a far more triumphant affair. Perhaps most famously there's Gulliver, who heroically puts out the flames of the Lilliputian palace with a great stream of piss (his form was gigantic to the folks of Lilliput, as was his flow). Along the same lines, Updike delights in the thunderous splashing of men as "they stood lordly above the bowl." He goes on to mansplain in what is perhaps the most eye-rollingly applicable use of this new term: "Everything about them was more direct, their insides weren't the maze women's were, for the pee to find its way through." Oh, John. When this quote made a recent appearance on Twitter, people were quick to point out that women's urethras are actually shorter than men's.

This is the sad fact of the matter: the maze mentality, the don't know, don't want to know approach. "Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!" moans the devastated Strephon in Swift's poem "The Lady's Dressing Room." Why? He has found out that his fair beloved defecates like the rest of us. While Swift casts his satirical gaze on both the artifice of beauty and Strephon's imbecilic delusions, the shame of women relieving themselves still rings true some three hundred years later. Just as the beautiful Ammu whisper-pees, only sexless, clownish figures like Baby Kochamma needn't worry about letting rip. Enter a women's washroom today and there is bound to be that one end stall whose occupant is patiently waiting for everyone else to leave. And for good reason: emerge to an audience and you may receive a half-hidden smirk, as those on the other side of the door bask in the relief of it not being them. Men are not exempt from their own bathroom-based social rituals, of course: woe betide he who looks or, worse, appears to be trying not to look at another man's genitals. Public restrooms are not at all restful when it comes to the battleground of modern manners. Depositing one's waste is as revealing of human nature as any other behaviour, and what it reveals is a set of deep-seated fears.

UNTIL VICTORIAN TIMES, THE PUBLIC "PISSYNG-
holes" of the Western world (as they were known in the Middle Ages) were, on the whole, built only for men. The implication was that ladies should keep to the private, domestic sphere and stay in their lavatorial lane. Without the appropriate facilities, women had to make do, sometimes urinating over a gutter, concealed — and trying as much as possible to not look like they were peeing — by their skirts. There is a name for their situation, the "urinary

leash," which describes the distance they could go beyond the nearest water closet. This is a phrase that has gained a stark new relevance recently. As Rose George expresses it, "To be uninterested in the public toilet is to be uninterested in life." The politics of privies is a long drop into a whole host of other topics: economic, cultural, sociological, psychological, linguistic, religious — and the list goes on. We exist now in "the new dark ages of the public bathroom," George warns, as for some that leash grows ever tighter.

Like most people, I have used my fair share of public washrooms. There are the memorable experiences, like the loos in the fancy London restaurant whose walls were made entirely of mirrors. The novelty soon wore off when locating the door proved difficult, and the continuation of the mirrored surface into the stalls led to a more social event than I was expecting, as I sat alongside increasingly smaller versions of myself. Then there are the not-so-pleasant incidents: the sprinkled-upon seats, the fruitless pumping of an empty soap dispenser, the toilet paper strewn across the floor in reckless waste. But I am lucky: I have a clean bathroom to return to. I can sigh at this misfortune and then move on; not everyone can. Like the great American toilet paper scare of 1973, the view of public bathrooms as undesirable, disgusting places is another self-fulfilling prophecy. Japan has come up with a creative solution: the Tokyo Toilet Project, where a number of well-known architects were tasked with sprucing up some park lavatories. The most striking design uses special coloured glass, so the space can be seen into when unoccupied, alleviating any concerns over safety, but the wall turns opaque when the door is locked. At night, the bathrooms light up like green, yellow, pink, and blue lanterns. They are a thing of beauty as well as necessity. The design speaks of pride, not shame.

In another twisting of public versus private, China's traditional public conveniences are doorless and are referred to as open-style or *ni hao* (hello). If this seems shocking, take into account the gaps in North American cubicle doors — the not-so-slim slits that occasionally allow you to lock eyes with another toilet-goer. I was struck by this revelation when I first came to Canada, particularly in a country that censors nudity and swear words in films on TV but, strangely enough, leaves in the violence. Presumably these spaces are to prevent acts of disrepute, with the message being that we require some privacy, but not too much, lest we descend into ill doings. The dictates of propriety are far from fixed. In fact, they're in constant, dizzying motion.

But the drugs, the sex, the people seeking shelter — it won't all disappear with the close of a door, especially one with gaps. It's no different than a transit system. Both trains and toilets serve to encourage and ease movement. Think of the uproar if subways or buses were deemed too expensive to clean, so were simply decommissioned (you have legs, say the powers that be, you can walk).

When you try to keep some out, you keep everyone out; but surely we are past the point of making do. This year, health has been high on everybody's list, and so it should remain. We must keep the lid on this injustice open and stop the prevarication around privies. Because everyone poops. Absolutely everyone. ▲

Moving To

In a plastic cup behind the poet a bubble creeps
airward. Readings are like flights or jokes or orchestral concerts;
you don't clap between the movements — that's gauche.
You clap when it lands. I'll admit I'm not afraid of dying
in a plane crash. Just afraid of being
yelled at by customs. Like so many people I talk to,
I have mixed feelings about Toronto. Sure there's the open sky
and the open SkyDome, the ghost the CN Tower becomes in the fog,
how Blair kissed me on her couch that first night, the way the Leafs settle
at the bottom of the standings, all the different Hudson's Bay models
fresh escaped from the catalogue peopling the streets in lieu of citizens,
and of course Billy Bishop — to die for.
On the other hand all those bright glass towers are embedded
with the creatives who do graphic design for cigarette companies
and other mid-tier villains of the urban landscape: people who step
onto bike paths without looking and lazy landlords who mean well
but never actually lift a finger. I get it.
It took me most of a decade to get back to therapy. Still,
I want to stay in Montreal. All the brutalism; I rejoice in the sun
light on concrete, like when a beautiful woman lays her hand upon
an ugly man's naked chest; all that distance she has to travel and he's just
there. The rent here seems like a glitch in the system, though I read the *Globe*
article about the various underlying causes,
and it *did* get noticeably worse from one summer to the next.

But life is like that, nothing is sacred and good things do go,
especially when there aren't any bylaws against it. Every now
and then I imagine quitting it all, sniffing out a job writing
quirky descriptions for a dog adoption agency in LaSalle
or serving coffee so far east of St-Laurent
I never run into another displaced Calgarian.
At least for the time being I'll stay on the Plateau,
catching the shimmers of pigeon as they turn polygon
against the sky. It's true what they say about grief, how good it is
and the stages — pupa, larva, adult — or is that something else.
Coming up for air is like a rewind button; the present
can be both backward and forward, like a prequel.
I saw ice for the first time in the city today, mid-bike path,
and sun, and shadow and a futuristically retro pair of frames
on a young professional's face. I thought about how
for all those years my sadness drove me to things like
a mute chauffeur. When I get back to my desk I mistake pomodoro
for chiaroscuro or maybe KonMari. I've got lots of work to do. Next
month, I'll be forty-five minutes out of Ottawa, sitting on a slow darkening
porch in the shadow of a tractor graveyard. In the fading light
I'll come to understand something about magnets, or desire. 'Cause
I'll be pulsating with something embarrassing that will keep pulling
the mosquitoes toward me. Just like the condo developers,
they can taste the meals they haven't eaten yet.

Alex Manley

Alex Manley won the 2012 Irving Layton Award for Fiction.
Their debut collection is *We Are All Just Animals & Plants*.

Twists of Fate

How the pandemic ruined happenstance

Ethan Lou

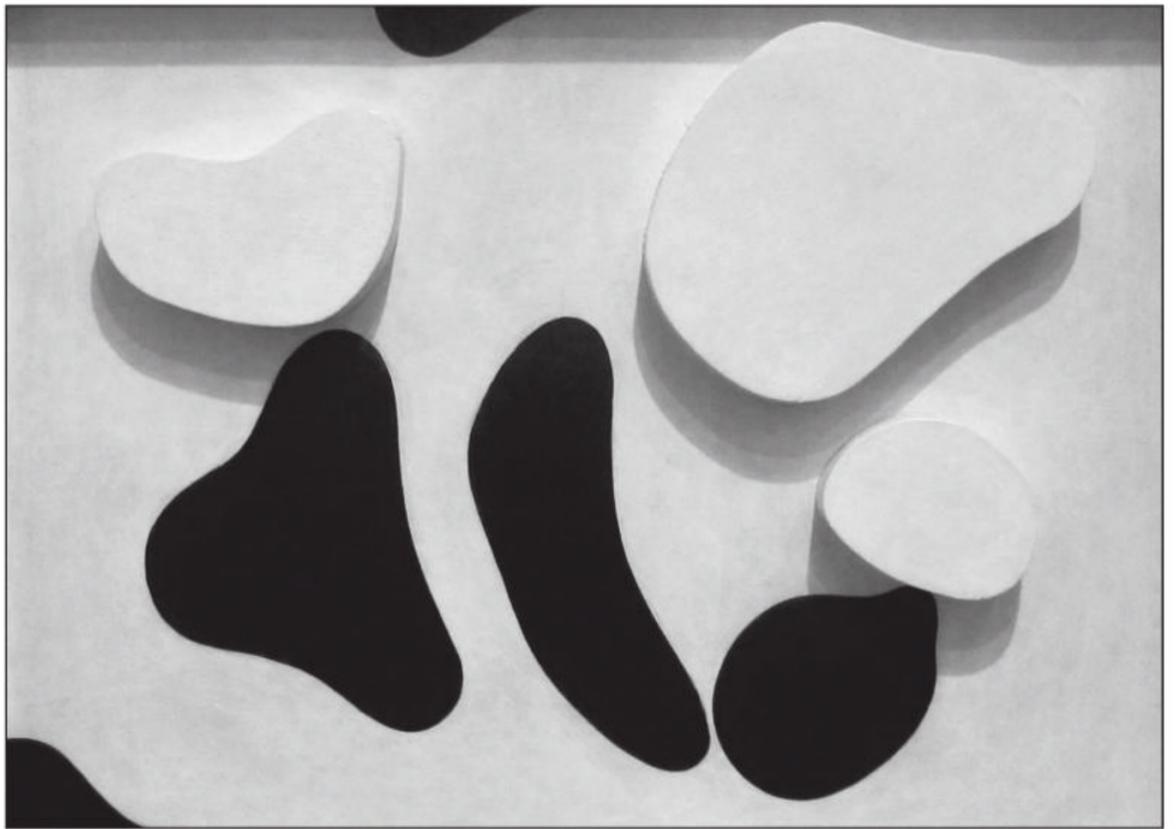
IN THE TELEVISION SERIES *THE NEWSROOM*, the young producer Maggie Jordan lands her biggest scoop when she overhears a bureaucrat on a train. It's not really that far-fetched: I once sat beside a Liberal operative on a flight to Vancouver, and our conversation became the basis of an article I published in the *Independent*. A friend, an interior designer, got her start when she sat beside her future boss at a conference. I also know an artist whose career was sparked while queuing for a music festival. A random sixtysomething man simply asked her the most random of questions: "What do you think about when you aren't thinking of anything?" Until then, she seemed destined to be a mechanic.

Now with COVID-19, we take fewer train and plane rides; our conferences and festivals are virtual; and with physical distancing measures and many venues accepting only pre-bookings, our interactions with the outside world are increasingly antithetical to chance. We no longer talk to strangers. We have fewer serendipitous encounters. And we lose something important as a result — even if it's hard to define and quantify.

Google's co-founders met because one was the other's guide on a university tour. Then it was the suggestion of a third man, whom they connected with at a conference, that led to the search engine's breakthrough with advertising. The reporter Bob Woodward first met his confidential source Deep Throat, who provided key information in the Watergate scandal, in an awkward chance encounter that he compared to "two passengers sitting next to each other on a long airline flight." Even the word "serendipity" comes from a story, "The Three Princes of Serendip," that a guy in Venice happened to hear from another guy and that then inspired Horace Walpole to coin a phrase.

Such fortuitous moments are maximized in urban settings, where there are more people more densely packed together. Years ago, Nassim Nicholas Taleb described this phenomenon in *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. "This makes living in big cities invaluable because you increase the odds of serendipitous encounters — you gain exposure to the envelope of serendipity," he wrote presciently. "The idea of settling in a rural area on grounds that one has good communications 'in the age of the Internet' tunnels out of such sources of positive uncertainty." Yes, a lot of us have figured out how to work from home in recent months — we've moved our entire lives online — but that is no substitute for propinquity.

Now with everything on Zoom and other platforms, we have done away with the little accompanying activities that punctuate real-



The shot of accident, the dart of chance.

world occasions: the walk through town and the elevator and subway rides, the lineup for tickets, and the time in the waiting room. The virtual event itself — whether a meeting, a concert, a cocktail party — is also more streamlined. Gone are the urinal encounters, the smoke breaks, the dead time between segments that you fill with chit-chat, the possibility of meeting your soulmate or accidentally elbowing someone in the face.

You never know what ultimately might come out of those little activities. In *Team of Teams*, the former U.S. Army general Stanley McChrystal writes about the starting break of a billiards game: When the coloured balls get hit by the white one, they also hit each other, repeatedly. Every additional ball represents a massive increase in the number of potential outcomes. With so many moving parts, the pre-pandemic world of face-to-face events was one of endless possibilities. "Diplomats understand that very well," Taleb writes in *The Black Swan*. "Casual chance discussions at cocktail parties usually lead to big breakthroughs — not dry correspondence or telephone conversations."

To be sure, not everything is chance. It was largely Larry Page alone who came up with the idea that was to be the seed of Google. Yossi Vardi, who offered Page and Sergey Brin that game-changing idea at the conference, frequents such events because he believes in engineering serendipity. Even before he became a reporter, Woodward constantly sought out "things or people who were interesting." But in a pandemic

world, it is less likely that a future Woodward and Deep Throat, neither of whom actually worked in the White House nor knew anything about the other, will find themselves outside the Situation Room at the same time for different reasons, both kept waiting. And with masks on, there is less chance for meaningful, connection-forming small talk, or any talk. It is as if life has become billiards with fewer balls.

The implications of all this are hazy, for we don't know what we don't know. Maybe there's even some good here. Think of all the traffic accidents, street robberies, lost wallets, dropped cellphones, and pigeons' pooping on our heads that we've avoided by staying home. They exist in the same realm of nothingness as the boss who never became a friend because you did not go for drinks after a successful presentation; the classmate who never became a lover because you never went on that long field trip; or just that book that never became your favourite because you never saw it on the lap of a fellow subway rider.

"The chance observation falling on a receptive eye" is how *Scientific American* defined "serendipity" in 1955, before the word gained its wide currency. One trip to the pub, one bus ride, one subway commute, one university tour — any one event — could easily mean nothing. But chance could also mean everything, and over the course of one's life, the accumulation of such activities definitely amounts to something. That something's gone now, and although we can ponder it, we can never truly know what it is. ▲

Sales Report

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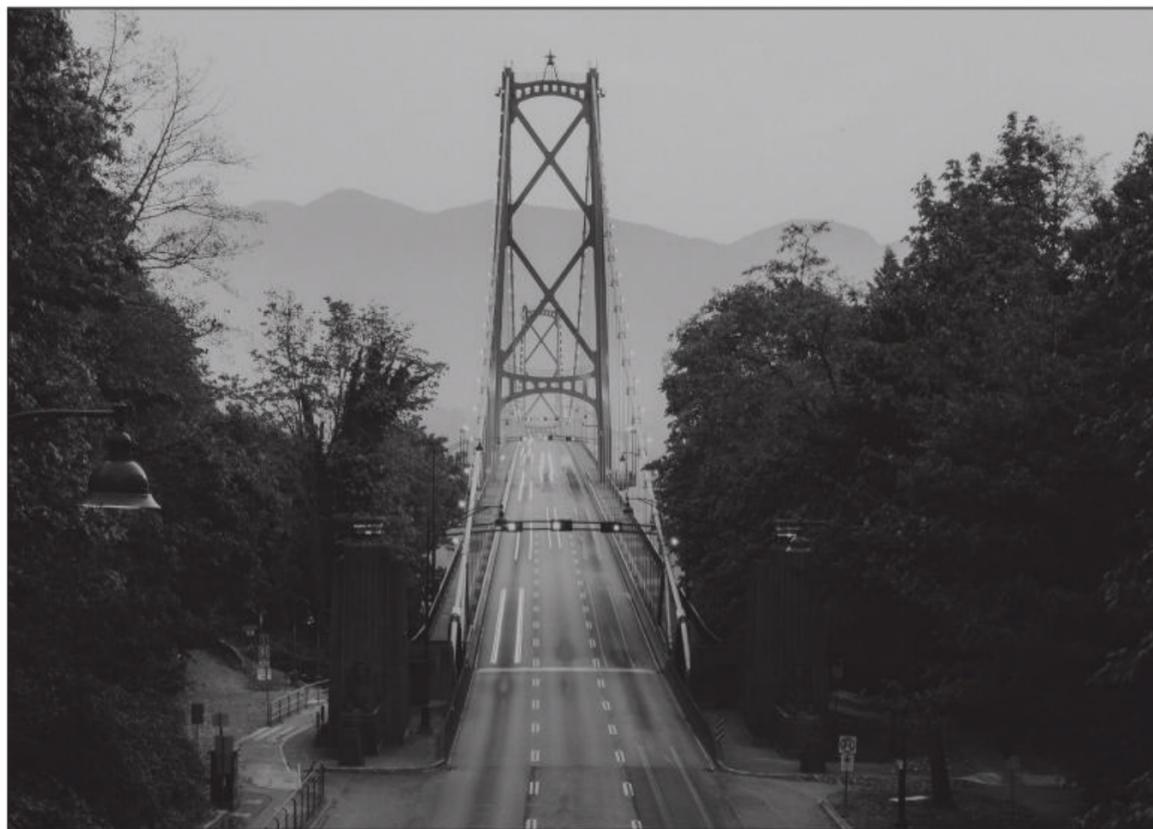
248 pages, softcover

I HAVE LONG WISHED FOR SOMEONE to write the definitive book about Vancouver: its blend of idiosyncratic subcultures, its conservative-meets-Lotusland-meets-revolutionary politics, its fraught relationship with real estate and housing. Something that would be the equivalent of Mike Davis's 1990 portrait of Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*.

Over the years, there have been several titles about various slices of Canada's little L.A., this city on the edge of the continent, far from the national power centres. The urban planner Lance Berelowitz's *Dream City* explored Vancouver's emergence as a beacon of new urbanism. Jill Wade's *Houses for All* was about the grinding fight against a free-market, capitalism-will-solve-all mindset to get some subsidized or affordable housing built. The journalist and researcher Donald Gutstein's *Vancouver Ltd.* looked at the power brokers who controlled development in the 1960s and '70s, while his *The New Landlords* showed how local real estate dynamics shifted as the wealthy of Eastasia (his term) invested here. More recently, Larry Beasley, the city's former chief planner, examined the rise of a new model of urban development beginning in the 1990s, with *Vancouverism*. (Disclosure: I provided a foreword for that book.)

But none of these works have captured the full tapestry of this shape-shifting place that has been permeated with gold-rush mentality from the beginning. And, I must sadly report, the latest entry in the field, Jesse Donaldson's *Land of Destiny*, does not do it either. Yes, I fully realize it's unfair to demand that Donaldson, who came from a theatre and acting background and says he kind of fell into historical journalism, match my expectations. After all, he was commissioned to do a short book filled with quirky anecdotes, along the lines of his previous *This Day in Vancouver*, only with a real estate theme. His work is, by its nature, largely focused on what he can cull from the journalism of others. Still, I was hoping, as I do with every new book.

Donaldson has done some digging in the archives and, occasionally, with locals. I found some of his vignettes of Vancouver history to be fun revelations: The city's first mayor went on to a career in "place marketing," which seems so very modern. By 1889, 85 percent of the land was owned by 130 people, and the Rockefeller family controlled a substantial swath of down-



A city divided over real estate.

town property by the 1950s. The man who built my house in 1909, Robert Balfour, not only was on the first council but was the Canadian Pacific Railway's superintendent of bridge construction. And legendary among Vancouver investors was Rudyard Kipling, who bought a couple of lots near what is now Fraser Street and Eleventh Avenue in 1889 and provided a prescient view of how all things real estate continue to work here: "You or your agent hold to it till property rises, then sell out and buy more land further out of town and repeat the process. I do not quite see how this sort of thing helps the growth of a town, but the English Boy says that it is the 'essence of speculation,' so it must be all right."

Donaldson also paints a lovely story of the man who helped entrench the Vancouver Special, the unadorned rectangular house that emerged in the 1960s and was especially appealing to immigrant families, because it could easily be divided into two large suites, both above ground. And he has reminded me of the history of rent control, of the rush to convert cheap apartment buildings to stratas in the 1960s, of the cast of characters who were determined to gentrify Gastown in the 1970s, and of a dozen other great moments in Vancouver real estate history. It's as if I've been able to reread the news of the past without having to scroll through pages and pages of microfiche.

It was a bit disconcerting that *Land of Destiny's* first three chapters are focused on white colonials sabotaging each other to get the transnational rail terminus where they wanted it, among other

fighters to divide up the spoils. I started to wonder whether the Indigenous history of Vancouver land might get left out altogether. But Donaldson does get to it and does a good job of summarizing the efforts to push First Nations out of Kitsilano and Stanley Park, a history that's getting some attention these days. Still, I would have been interested to learn more about the exact mechanisms and rationalizations that were used to take over these established settlements. It seems akin to having some stranger walk in through your unlocked front door, only to start auctioning off your furniture. I can never understand exactly how it's done.

There are a number of inaccuracies and misspellings that should have been caught in editing. For example, the Affordable Rental Program and the Multiple Unit Residential Building Subsidy were federal programs, not provincial ones. Basement suites were not legalized in Vancouver in 2007; that happened almost overnight in 2003, when the incoming Coalition of Progressive Electors, headed by Larry Campbell, changed the bylaw in one motion to make them legal. Donaldson refers to Andy Yan, a prominent voice on foreign investment and local real estate and someone who has frequently talked about the head tax his Chinese grandfather paid, as "fourth-generation," which he certainly is, and "Japanese," which he most certainly is not. While these are relatively minor points, they are also somewhat unnerving when I think about the errors that might be included on topics I know less about.

Those glitches pale, though, next to the biggest hole in this history, which occurs as Donaldson limits his narrative to one overarching theme: that a select group of speculators have controlled this city forever. In *Land of Destiny*, only the names change through the decades — the general storyline stays the same. There is always a powerful group of marketers and speculators, and there is always a willing band of politicians to give them whatever is needed in order to reap the windfall.

Donaldson suggests that Vancouver's dynamic real estate experience is unique. But that interpretation, a familiar one in an often unhappy city, where suspicion-filled and resentful narratives about development are an established noir tradition, leaves out so much. For one, Vancouver is not unique when it comes to land rushes. That's pretty much the story of the western United States and Canada, as people scrambled to acquire property, in what were seen as newly opened and empty territories, and then market it to newcomers. Capitalism at its rawest.

Second, Donaldson doesn't explain why the speculators were so successful here compared with other places. Many have failed at this capitalist game of creating demand where there was none before, losing fortunes as buyers failed to appear at their gimcrack Shangri-Las. What was it about local dynamics that nurtured enough pressure on real estate that it became a reliable speculative vehicle right from the start? Donaldson keeps emphasizing that this has been a part of the city since day one, not a recent development. But why? In the late 1800s and early 1900s, this wasn't the resort town it is now. People weren't moving here for the waterfront views. There's an economy and demographics piece missing.

A HISTORY OF VANCOUVER REAL ESTATE

should give some kind of attention, at some point, to all buyers and owners, not just foreign investors. But too many of those buyers and owners are absent from *Land of Destiny*. Their absence becomes steadily more glaring as the chapters unfurl because local transactions are, in the end, the mechanism that makes speculation work.

Randy Shaw's *Generation Priced Out*, Conor Dougherty's *Golden Gates*, and Davis's *City of Quartz* are examples of histories that are not particularly kind to developers. Davis, a self-described Marxist and socialist, is particularly scathing. But these authors also consider the homeowners — even, and sometimes especially, the most liberal and progressive ones — who have made the speculation game so bountiful. Davis details the way that homeowner groups of thirty years ago, using the language and often the support of the environmental movement, blocked development of lower-cost housing throughout Los Angeles: "Environmentalism is a congenial discourse to the extent that it is congruent with a vision of eternally rising property values in secure bastions of white privilege." (I imagine he is utterly unsurprised that there are now 60,000 homeless Angelenos.)

Shaw, a long-time tenants' rights advocate in San Francisco, and Dougherty, a *New York Times* economics reporter, likewise offered withering observations that emphasized how the widespread opposition to any incursion into single-family zones by apartments, or even housing

variations as minor as duplexes, has helped ensure there's a permanent shortage of affordable housing. And, not coincidentally, it has meant the value of property in those walled-off single-family areas, which often account for up to 90 percent of a city's available land, continues to rise at rates that far exceed local income gains. When that kind of shortage and subsequent price escalation happen, speculators flock to the warmth (see also: pandemic; toilet paper).

Foreign investors alone didn't drive up prices in Vancouver, though they've played a part, just as Canadians have in Mexican beach towns. They came here because locals had made it a good place to speculate. The restricted geography (mountains, ocean, the U.S. border) and the successful pushback on a freeway through downtown, while admirable on many fronts, have also contributed to a hamster wheel of intense competition. Because of the lack of a freeway, Vancouver could never provide lower-cost housing through the same mechanism as cities like Calgary or Houston, with their endless possibilities for spreading in every direction along high-speed commuter arteries.

Land of Density makes it sound like a mystery why all those politicians with real estate cronies get elected. But it's not a mystery. A significant group of voters, the ones who have benefited from the way the current system works, keep electing them. They were mostly pleased with themselves and their foresight while Vancouver property values kept climbing. It's only when

"Foreign investors alone didn't drive up prices in Vancouver."

things got a little out of hand this past decade — when suddenly neither children of the land rich nor double-income households could afford even the first rung of the homeownership ladder — that we saw some backlash from the existing owners.

It would have been nice to see that analysis and history in this book. The opportunity was there. There's no shortage of archival news accounts of locals pushing back to keep the outsiders away, including the now-legendary comment by a west-side resident in one public hearing that a potential transportation corridor shouldn't be allowed in her area because it is filled with the "crème de la crème."

Another opening for a deeper look: Donaldson describes the way a new political party, the Elector's Action Movement, known as TEAM, took over the city in 1972, wresting it away from the old-guard Non-Partisan Association, which was seen as too cozy with developers. In his account, TEAM was barely any different, and it ended up with many of the same real estate players in its fold, along with a similar pro-development mindset. However, there was a crucial difference: saying it was listening to the neighbourhood-power movements then emerging, TEAM shut down most high-rise development in Vancouver. Construction in the West End, which had been transformed from a district of poor rooming houses into a densely packed apartment zone in the 1950s and '60s, came to a standstill. The few towers introduced

in other places — West Point Grey, Kitsilano, South Cambie — became lonely monuments to a bygone era. In the one notable area where the TEAM council did allow development, the formerly industrial area of False Creek South that was repopulated with multi-family housing, it restricted the density so much that, with park space counted in, the area actually accommodated fewer people than a detached-house neighbourhood of the same size.

Such political deference to vocal homeowner groups has continued steadily. The result is that most new housing is built on the slivers of land left over, usually through a complex process of rezonings and public hearings. The only recent developer able to circumvent the status quo is the Squamish Nation, which controls a slice of prime real estate near the Burrard Bridge that is not subject to city zoning processes. So its architecture team has designed an ultra-high-density cluster of towers — called Senakw to commemorate the village that once stood there — that will be modified based only on what the Squamish think needs to be changed, not on the views of their famously change-resistant neighbours at Kits Point. Everyone else, though, must jump through endless hoops. That benefits the biggest marketers and developers, because they have the resources to manage that kind of process. The small builders — the ones who tend to build the lowest-cost housing in other cities, where they can do so through a simple, negotiation-free process — are at a disadvantage.

Donaldson doesn't bypass completely the role of supply and homeowner demand. He notes that the Shaughnessy Heights Restriction Act of 1911 banned multi-family dwellings in that luxury neighbourhood, mainly to keep out Chinese Canadians, but ended up affecting the market in an unanticipated way: "As a result of the dwindling housing supply, prices increased, making [the area's mansions] a hot commodity for speculators, and consequently, instead of bothering with tenants, Shaughnessy homebuyers instead opted to evict them, and leave their homes empty in anticipation of a quick sale." But that's almost the only mention of this dynamic, and it's buried far in the past.

DONALDSON'S TAKE ON VANCOUVER HOUSING IS an unfortunate artifact of a raging war. For those not in the know, or unable to decipher the often-coded language that emerges about our housing stock, there is a profound emotional and rhetorical rift here over the root causes of unaffordability, homelessness, and general housing distress. Friendships have been broken, former colleagues don't speak to each other, and birthday parties can get ugly if a housing debate breaks out. Millennials (including Donaldson) are a particularly divided generation: a huge proportion have been shut out of ownership, but they've interpreted the reasons very differently.

On one side of the fight are those who believe Vancouver has a problem unlike anywhere else in the world, caused primarily by distorted demand: foreign investors buying up properties that are then left empty by the tens of thousands, while "real" Vancouverites have to huddle together in basement suites. To them, there's no point trying to build more supply, because it's all going to the wrong buyers anyway. That group believes developers and politicians of all

levels have formed near-criminal alliances to cater to wealthy foreigners, at the expense of locals. (For journalists and politicians, it can be very tempting to align with this view, which pins the blame on others, rather than pointing any fingers at their own readers or voters.)

On the other side of the divide are those who see similarities between Vancouver's problems and the housing disasters in almost every other city of the industrialized world, where rising rents and home prices are wildly outpacing local income increases. This faction, reflecting an emerging YIMBY movement, looks at the way zoning has historically worked to create shortages for lower-income groups by restricting land for detached houses — homes whose values rise steadily as populations grow and create ever more competition. The less wealthy then must find apartments in the bits allocated for multi-family or must live in the basements of the lucky. This faction is generally in favour of more supply, especially if it can be taken from some of the single-family territory.

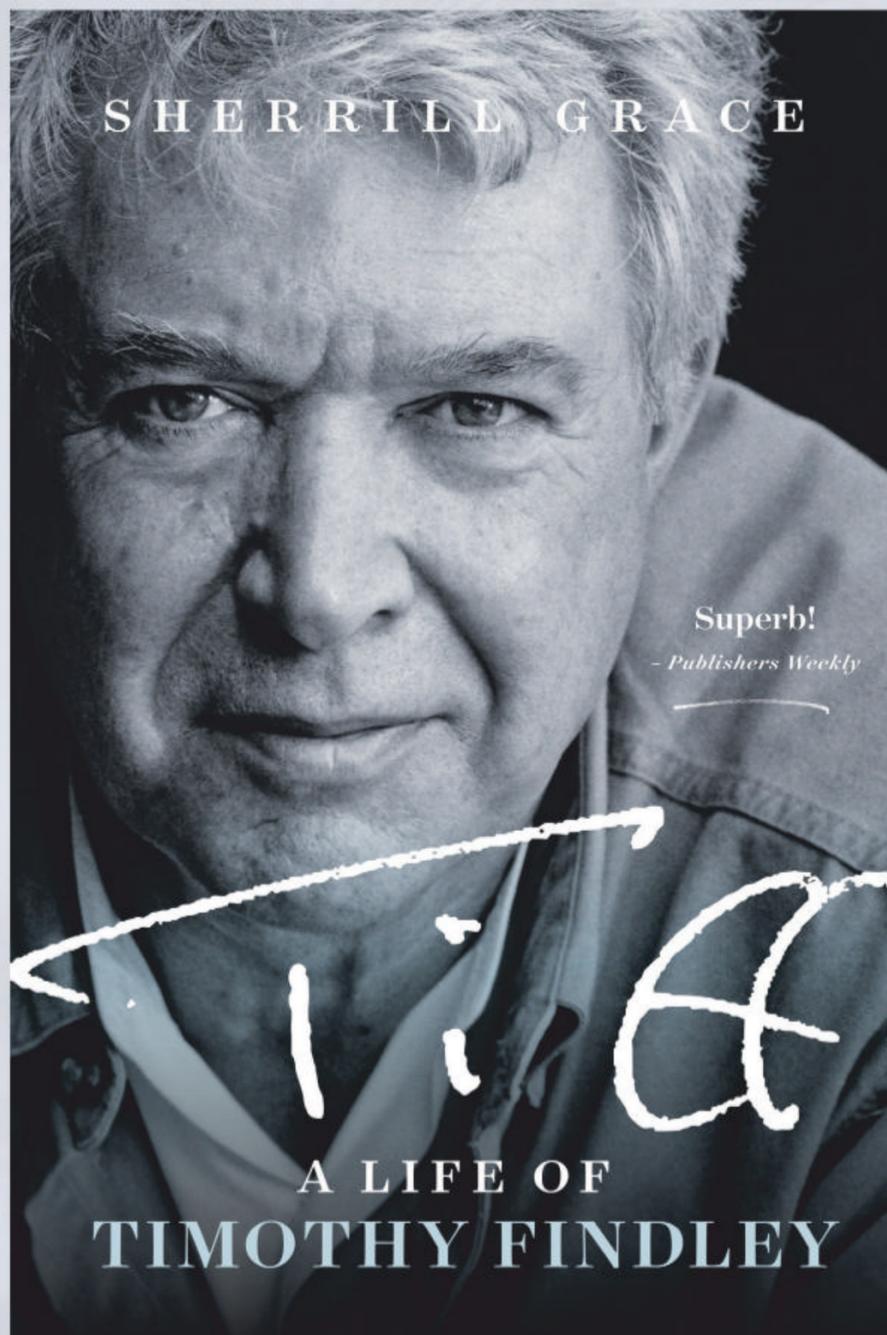
Donaldson is clearly in the first camp, and he chooses as his main contemporary sources many of those who have dedicated themselves to its narrative. (More disclosure: I'm viewed by trolls and critics as not aligning satisfactorily with this group, and this review will undoubtedly lead to another round of accusations, from my dedicated anonymous critics, that I'm a developer shill, a "supplyist," or an apologist for the Chinese Communist Party.)

In his introduction and his conclusions, Donaldson employs language and framing that pins everything on the cabal of "others." Real estate is controlled by "oligarchs." Developers and politicians, even left-wingers like the former councillor and NDP MP Libby Davies, have "cozy" relationships. He throws out the casual stat that 46 percent of condos in Vancouver are owned by "investors."

Like many who have come to use the term in recent years as a straight pejorative, he doesn't seem to recognize that "investors" also constructed and run much of the now-valued low-rise apartment stock of the 1960s and '70s, or that the new generation of "investors" are supplying rentals through their willingness to buy and then rent out individual condos. That's the way most rental housing gets built in the market system we currently have: people who have some extra money acquire property and offer it to those who don't. Donaldson criticizes how half of the market condos built on the former Woodward's site went to, again, investors. I researched the ownership of those 400 units at one point. The overwhelming majority were owned by people with local addresses — small-time investors with Hispanic, Italian, and English surnames — who were clearly trying to keep their middle-class heads above water by getting into the real estate investment game with one small foothold.

I've found the same is true in researching the ownership of commercial spaces along Broadway, where a new subway line is about to be built. The most striking pattern is that so many of the hundreds of properties are owned by people who are clearly mom-and-pop investors, playing a local game of Monopoly in this land of destiny.

So, in the end, Donaldson's book is a useful summary of one part of the history of Vancouver real estate. But it's not the complete history, which is still to come.



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Poet for Our Times

Returning to the words of Dorothy Livesay

Aaron Giovannone

LIKE MANY PEOPLE, I'VE TAKEN TO going for long walks during the lockdown. Today I buy a Fanta at the gas station near our Calgary condo, and when I step outside again, a painfully thin man astride a BMX bike asks if I have a cigarette (I don't). I cross busy Fourteenth Street, with its loud traffic having stubbornly returned, and after just a few steps on the other side I am swallowed by the green quiet of Mount Royal. The change is dramatic. I put one earbud in to listen to a podcast, leave the other out to hear the birdsong. This old, affluent neighbourhood was originally known as American Hill, but around 1910 it rechristened itself after the Montreal mountain, out of loyalty to the Dominion. After about an hour, my route past silent mansions, under enormous poplar trees, through wide avenues and park after park after park takes me to a lookout over downtown, dominated by the cross-hatched, obsidian gleam of the Bow Tower. I linger for a few minutes, with dog walkers and resting cyclists nearby and a group of teenagers whiling away the afternoon cross-legged in the grass.

That cityscape comes to mind again when I read "Queen City," a 1936 poem by Dorothy Livesay. The multi-part text sketches a panorama of Toronto during the Great Depression. "When I look at the Royal York, / Shooting above hunger," Livesay writes of the luxurious railway hotel, which was the tallest building in the British Empire when it opened in 1929: "Its elevator heart pumping life / Pumping gold from cellar to summit." Livesay can't help but compare the magnificent structure with the suffering humanity she sees elsewhere in the city: "I look at man again / A thing scarce noticed by the sun, or mentioned in / The social columns." The man strikes a heroic pose often seen in the social realist works of the era: "I see / His legs, his overcoat, his hatless head / His hands held steady and his clearlit eyes —." Then, in an ecstatic moment, Livesay connects the man to the building, with herself as the link: "I am tall as the Royal York / For I built it!"

As a Marxist, Livesay understood it was the working class who deserved credit for the twenty-eight-storey hotel. Workers such as the hatless man were as tall as the building itself, the product of their labour, and Livesay, taking their side, grows in stature along with them.

Livesay went on to enjoy a long, celebrated career. A two-time winner of the Governor General's Award and an officer of the Order of Canada, she also became the namesake of British Columbia's poetry award. She often addressed social issues in her writing, but only her early work directly addresses the problems of the working class — "a thing scarce noticed."

The political ferment of the Depression led her to embrace Communism, and often, in a kind of romantic identification, it allowed her to see the world through the eyes of workers, realizing that she was really one of them. It's this period of her writing, from the 1930s to the mid-'40s, that feels particularly vibrant to me now.

◆

BORN IN 1909, DOROTHY LIVESAY WAS A DAUGHTER of the professional middle class. Both her father and her mother were authors and journalists, having met at the *Winnipeg Telegram*. When Dorothy was eleven, her father, James, moved the family to Toronto, where he became the head of the *Canadian Press*. In *Right Hand Left*



From cellar to summit.

Hand, a memoir of her early life, Dorothy called him a self-described "radical and agnostic," who took her to lectures on literary and political topics at the Masonic Temple just north of Bloor Street. Dorothy attended private school, scored top grades, and went on to study French and Italian at Trinity College, University of Toronto. She wrote for the student newspaper, the *Varsity*, and in 1928, at the precocious age of nineteen, published her first book of poetry, *Green Pitcher*, inspired by imagist writers.

In her fourth year of university, Livesay fell in with a circle of students led by the Marxist economics professor Otto Van der Sprenkel, and she soon had accepted, as she put it, "the theories of dialectical materialism." After a

stint at the Sorbonne, where she completed her thesis, she came home to Toronto in 1932, in the middle of the Depression. "My political convictions became the dominating obsession of my life," she wrote. "There was no job in sight; and . . . I was by now deeply concerned with the plight of the unemployed and the political scene in Canada." That's when she joined the Communist Party of Canada.

What did Communism mean to Canadians in the 1930s? The economic and political establishments were terrified of it. After all, a revolution had occurred in Russia a little more than a decade before. In 1931, the controversial section 98 of the Criminal Code, which equated political dissidence with sedition, was used at R. B. Bennett's behest to imprison the head of the Communist Party of Canada, Tim Buck, and several party associates. Buck's case stirred considerable civil protest, including public statements by Livesay herself. In 1934, after prison guards fired shots into Buck's Kingston prison cell in an apparent murder attempt, his conviction was overturned. After the repeal of section 98 by Mackenzie King, in 1936, the premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis, passed his own Padlock Act, which allowed officials to close any building used for "propagating communism or bolshevism." The 1937 law, which did not define Communism, targeted individuals and organizations, Communist or not, who simply displeased the authorities, including several Protestant missionaries at a lumber camp in 1938.

"No one else except the communists seemed to be concerned about the plight of our people," Livesay later wrote, "nor to be aware of the threat of Hitler and war." Unemployment reached 30 percent in 1933; millions had no jobs, and countless others watched their pay and working conditions steadily erode. Farms in the drought-stricken West were abandoned, and thousands of homeless men wandered from city to city in search of work or relief. The Communist Party did more than speak to the desperation of many Canadians by demanding jobs programs and unemployment benefits; it also empowered workers, putting them at the centre of a world view that deemed them a revolutionary class and the protagonists of history.

The Communists evangelized through a vibrant network of unions, community groups, and associations, including the Young Communist League, the Canadian Labor Defense League, the National Unemployed Workers Association, the Workers' Unity League, and the Farmers' Unity League. In 1932, Livesay and her literary comrades co-founded one such organization, the Progressive Arts Clubs. Their biggest success was the stage play *Eight Men Speak*, about the attempted murder of Buck, which was shut

down by the Toronto police after its first performance, despite Livesay's protest.

In 1934, Livesay took a degree in social work, at that time an emerging profession, from the University of Toronto. It complemented her desire for social justice and gave her intimate access to the lives of the struggling and unemployed. "It was not only a physical shock to see poverty face to face, it was a psychic shock," she observed years later. "This situation made me all the more committed to doing away with the capitalist system." Livesay followed the job market, moving between Toronto; Montreal; Englewood, New Jersey; and Vancouver. And wherever she went, the Communist activist produced stories, poems, leaflets, and agitprop. For *Masses*, a publication founded by her Progressive Arts Club in 1932, she filed first-hand reportage on the fascist movement in Montreal, on a miners' strike in Corbin, British Columbia, and on the working conditions of beet farmers in Raymond, Alberta.

Livesay's poetry addressed major news events with sympathy for the working people in the headlines. Of the 1931 Black Tuesday Riot in Saskatchewan: "Because three miners in Estevan, striking, were murdered in cold blood / By the yellow dogs, their bosses." Of the 1933 death of Nick Zynchuk, a Polish immigrant killed by the police during an eviction scuffle: "There was a roar and pistol crack. / Nothing had happened in the street — / Only a worker was shot in the back." In response to the 1935 Dominion Day riot in Regina, where two protesters were killed by the police and hundreds injured: "Give us no uniforms — / warm walls instead; / pierce with no bayonets / we ask for bread!"

Her verse referenced major events of international anti-fascism, too, such as the Spanish Civil War and the death of Federico Garcia Lorca, the Republican poet murdered by General Franco's forces. These were topics on the lips of leftists worldwide, and by rehearsing them herself, Livesay joined an international community — what the literary historian Cary Nelson has called a "revolutionary chorus."

◆
COMMUNISTS SUCH AS LIVESAY WERE ONLY THE most vocal and radical of a cohort of writers who were pulled leftward by the Depression. As the literary scholar Candida Rifkind has pointed out, a generation of Canadian writers "produced a 1930s culture of political excitement and aesthetic controversy in defiant resistance to the miseries, violence, and contradictions of the Depression." This group included the Communist Vancouver poet A.M. Stephen, the labour troubadour Joe Wallace, the legal scholar and Co-operative Commonwealth Federation architect F.R. Scott, the Montreal poet and CCFer A.M. Klein, the modernist writer and critic Leo Kennedy, the popular Edmonton playwrights Elsie Park Gowan and Gwen Pharis Ringwood, the award-winning poet Anne Marriott, and the Vancouver novelist Irene Baird. Even Morley Callaghan, the rare bird who could publish in prestigious American venues such as *The New Yorker*, wrote about the economic conditions of the Great Depression — although Livesay gave his 1935 book, *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, a mixed review in *Masses* because the way the protagonist resolved his problems was only "an individual solution."

With the anemic Canadian publishing industry weakened even further by the economy, this leftist literary culture relied on little magazines

for publication, including *Masses* (which became *New Frontier* in 1935), as well as the Communist newspaper the *Worker*, which later became the *Daily Clarion*. Perhaps the premier literary venue at this time was *The Canadian Forum*, a magazine affiliated with the CCF through its socialist think tank, the League for Social Reconstruction, and whose literary editor was the Trotskyist poet and future winner of the Governor General's Award Earle Birney.

Livesay's writings were informed by social realism, a much-debated aesthetic. For most artists, "social realism" referred to art with documentary qualities that highlighted vulnerable people and revealed the social and political causes of their oppression. Social realist art itself was meant to be accessible to those whose problems it depicted, whose own lived realities might be illuminated by the work. (This was rather different than the *socialist* realism endorsed by the Soviet Writers' Conference, which required a much more polemical approach that explicitly promoted socialism.)

In a 1936 address delivered on the CBC, deliciously titled "Decadence in Modern Bourgeois Poetry," Livesay implicitly contrasted social realism with modern poetry, which "appeal[s] to a very small group of people who happen to have had the same prolonged education." While the scientific Marxists were wrong about the decadence of the bourgeoisie — it was destined to survive, as it turns out — Livesay made some good points about the inaccessibility of high modernist works, by T.S. Eliot and others, which promoted conservative politics. Even well after her Communist period, social realism continued to impact Livesay's aesthetic thinking. In her influential 1971 essay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," for example, she asserted the importance of realism, or "objective fact," which in rather Marxian language forms a "dialectic" with "the subjective feeling of the poet."

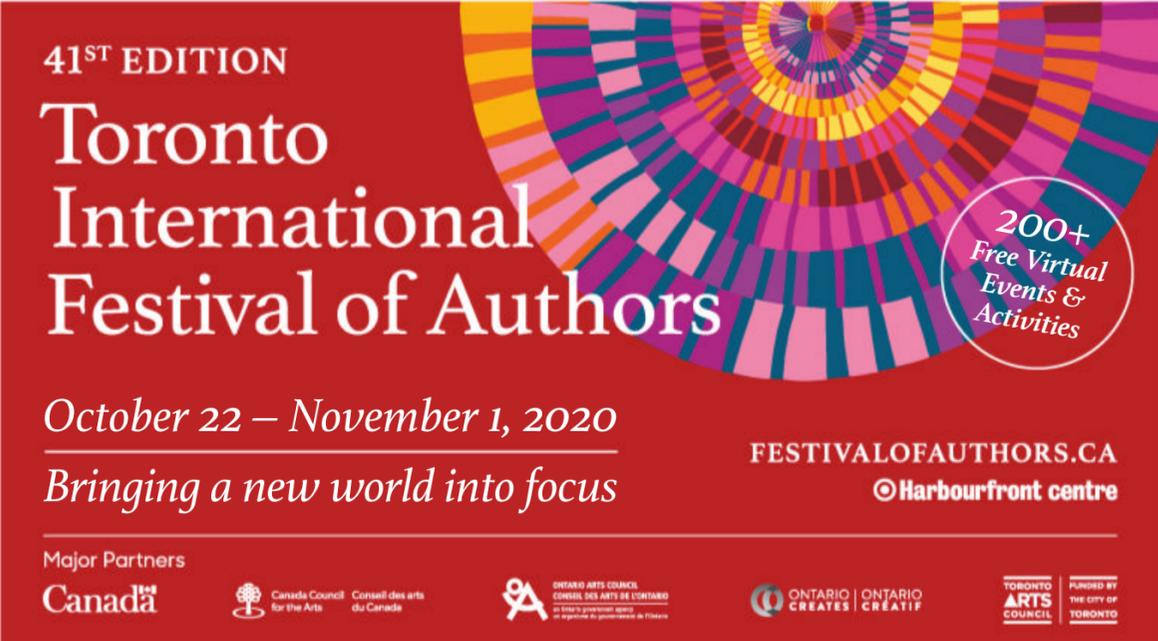
Like most writers, Livesay was not working class in the popular sense of the term, but instead middle class by education and profession. Yet the poor labour market of the Depression revealed that these two supposedly different classes had much in common. In *The Crisis of the Middle Class*, from 1935, the American social theorist Lewis Corey described the professional middle class as "brain workers," a new type of proletariat in the early twentieth century. Whereas professionals in law, accounting, medicine, and communications in the nineteenth century were likely petit bourgeois, independently selling their services, they increasingly found themselves working

within large organizations in the twentieth century, a time of expanding corporations and government bureaucracy. While these professionals, especially in managerial positions, might have enjoyed more independence and prestige than manual labourers, the brain workers were ultimately employees, subject to forms of discipline, dependent on a wage, and vulnerable to dismissal. As a social worker, Livesay was herself one of these new professionals: throwing in her lot with the working class was not just a sympathetic or romantic choice but in her own class interest.

◆
IT IS A BITTER IRONY OF HISTORY THAT AFTER years of timid government spending, the public investment generated by the Second World War ended the Depression in 1939. This sudden transformation of Canada's economy and culture also changed the political scene, and Livesay was drawn away from Communism.

The Communist Party of Canada initially opposed the war, then pulled an about-face in 1941 when the Soviet Union entered it alongside the Allied powers. These contortions cost the party some prestige and credibility. Meanwhile the CCF, which intended to pursue socialism by parliamentary means, was gaining ground, making startling gains in provincial elections in British Columbia, in 1941, and Ontario, in 1943, as well as taking on leadership roles in organized labour. In 1934, Livesay published a poem making fun of the CCF and its leader, J.S. Woodsworth ("Take a look at Woodsworth — / See his nice goatee. / Who's to save the country? / No one else but he!"), but influenced by the politics of her husband, Duncan Macnair, she increasingly found herself drawn to the democratic socialists. Much later, Livesay wrote about her changing expectations in *Journey with My Selves*: "When war broke out in 1939 we had to give up, or at least lay aside for the future, the idea that our generation could change the world. All community efforts narrowed down to that of the home."

We can see Livesay's changing views and the nation's altered realities at play in *Day and Night*, her remarkable collection published in 1944. The titular poem shifts its perspective among workers in a steel mill and is full of evocative rhythms, representing the punishing routines of manual labour. It articulates the men's anger at "the bosses profit" and demonstrates the difficulties endured by the workers — whose "bodies are hammered through the night" and are subjected to "the steel's whip crack." Yet the



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speaker counsels against worker revolt: "Add your hunger,/ Brawn and bones,/ Take your earnings:/ Bread, not stones!" In wartime, proletarian revolution was off the table.

Maybe the best poem from the collection is its finale, "West Coast: 1943." Instead of adopting the point of view of workers, it puts us in the position of a detached, even leisurely observer. "We, who lay in roses and green shade under the cherry tree," enjoy a rest while on a hike along a seaside trail. "High on our hill" we witness the wartime shipbuilding on the "shorelines ripped and boxes set in tidy rows." From this distance, the workers appear as "a herd of thundering hard heels" and an "anthill swarm." This salubrious landscape itself—rather than contract negotiations—has improved working conditions. Whereas formerly these people toiled in dangerous coal mines and drought-ridden fields, in the "sea-coast air" they "breathe now," they "find voice/and sing with the throat bare." Here, the working class has found its place in the nation.

The same year *Day and Night* was published, Mackenzie King authorized Order-in-Council 1003, a piece of landmark labour legislation that enshrined rights to collective bargaining and required employers to recognize unions. Along with unemployment insurance, passed in 1940, and family allowances, made law in 1945, the move helped the Liberals defeat the surging CCF in the first postwar election. Livesay's book advances the belief that workers were finding their place in the nation, that a reasonable compromise between capital and labour was being managed by the government. While it lasted, the welfare state brought material gains to the working class, allowing many of them,

with their increased spending power, to think of themselves as middle class. To left-wing critics, however, the welfare state rarely involved democratic ownership and management of the economy, meaning these gains were vulnerable.

Winning the Governor General's Award for *Day and Night*, Livesay solidified her stature in the Canadian literary establishment. Her reputation was further burnished with the publication of *Poems for People*, in 1947, which also won the Governor General's Award. In that book and after, Livesay's attention turned away from the working class, with her interests growing in other social justice issues, such as the internment of Japanese Canadians and the history of Indigenous peoples. Somewhat ironically, only when she settled to raise her family did her memoirs mention worrying about money, as the family struggled on her husband's modest salary as an accountant and, at times, relied on financial help from her own well-to-do father. Livesay finally achieved financial stability after her husband's sudden death in 1959: Making good use of her education and her prestige, she found a position with UNESCO, which took her to Paris and Zambia. Upon her return, she used her earnings to buy a house in Vancouver.

During the Cold War, Livesay distanced herself from her Communist past, but in the radical atmosphere of the late 1960s and '70s, she could write and publish a memoir of her Communist years, *Right Hand Left Hand*. When she died in 1996, at the age of eighty-seven, Canada had already seen the rolling back of many of the achievements of the welfare state, whose birth she had witnessed from "the green shade under the cherry tree."

I READ "WEST COAST: 1943" SITTING ON A FOLDING chair on our narrow third-floor balcony. Throughout the pandemic, I have been reading outside, surprised by how many people come through our alley in a given hour. Some poke through the garbage and recycling bins. Others lead their Labradoodles and Shih Tzus on leashes. They glance up at me, move on. I have begun to see the same faces, although we don't wave or say hello: "The harbour a great world of moving men/ Geared to their own salvation."

Livesay's poem is filled with wonder at the country's vast resources, and optimism that they will be used well. It's hard to muster that type of hope and awe now. If the betrayal of the working class began decades ago, much of the so-called middle class now shares its fate, as workers are increasingly subject to the whims of labour markets and the abuses of profit seeking. We never were above it. Can a renewed working class create solidarity, organize for the public good, build better institutions? The path ahead seems dark, and no one should travel alone. "The graveyard shift still hammering its way/ Towards an unknown world, straddling new day." ▲

Inspirations

Day and Night: Poems

Ryerson Press, 1944

Right Hand Left Hand

Press Porcépic, 1977

Journey with My Selves:

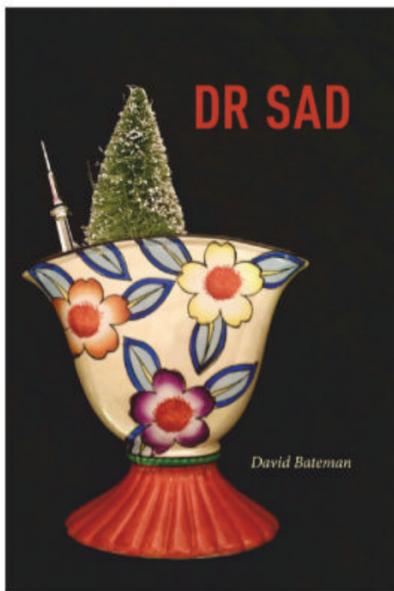
A Memoir, 1909–1963

Douglas & McIntyre, 1991



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press

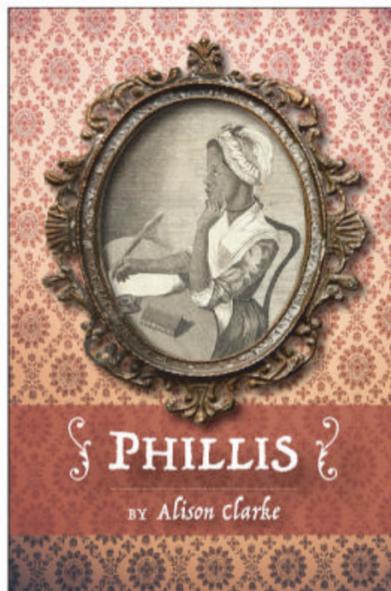
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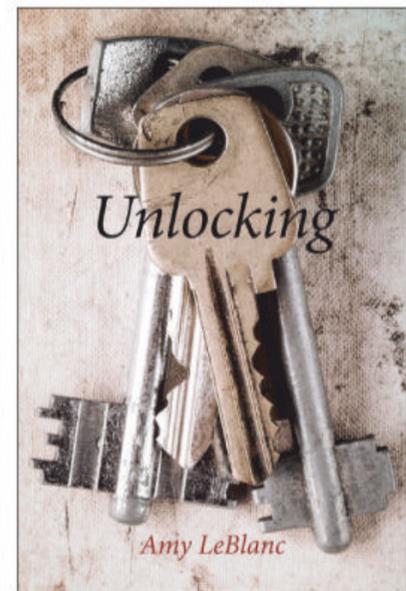
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The Worlds

For fifteen minutes every morning
it's the last lap of the championship

road race in Utsunomiya, Japan,
in 1990 and I am twelve.

Dhaenens and De Wolf made the break stick
till the lucky end. Eight seconds back,

Bugno for bronze, just ahead of my man,
LeMond, the American,

who helicoptered in from his hotel
in Tokyo to teach the virtues

of panache, who finished fourth to warn
me of overconfidence. For fifteen

minutes (maybe twenty) each day I take
all comers and corners at speed, become

a lung in flight, battle gradient
in grey light, revive spent names: Gayant,

Wegmüller, Claveyrolat, Lauritzen.
When winded I reach the office

and am past forty once again,
I set bicycle aside and dwell

on unstoried endings—the flat,
the musette in the spokes that sends it all

sharply to the ground. The live camera
moto slows to focus on panic

and gore. Wincing riders wait for service
and spare wheels while the pack drifts past.

The stopwatch races. Hapless chasers, gapped,
are running out of road. Come evening,

I pedal home, the patient, rumbling *voiture-
balai* not far behind. For a few more

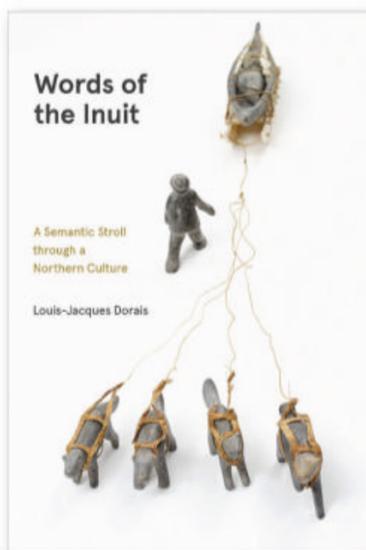
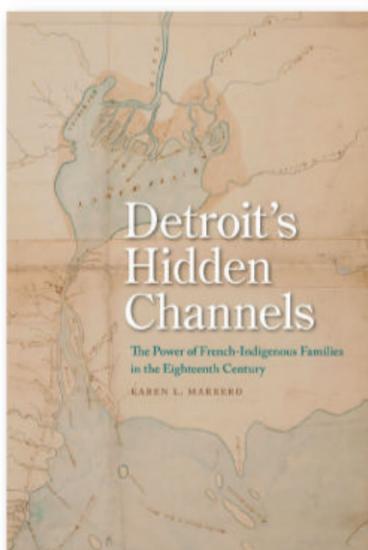
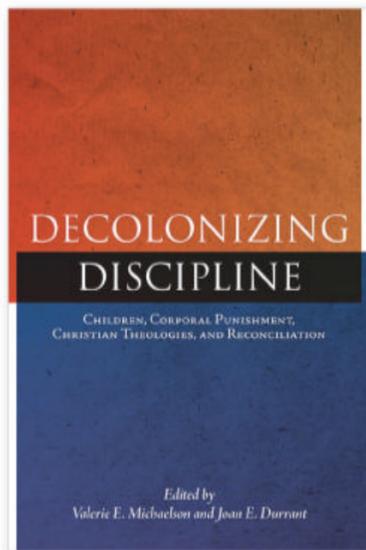
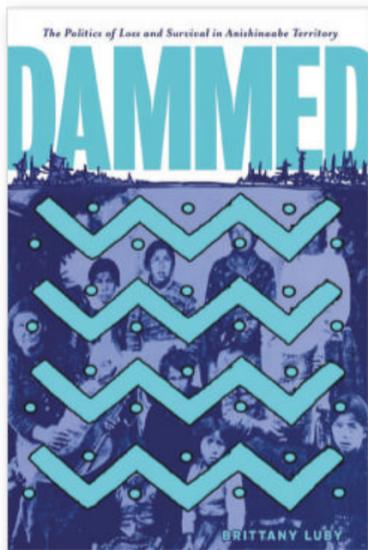
kilometres, fantasy: *les bleus*,
gli azzurri on the final drag.

Then the world waves its checkered flag.

Nicholas Bradley

Nicholas Bradley is the author of Rain Shadow, a collection of poems, and the editor of An Echo in the Mountains: Al Purdy after a Century.

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Portraits of Tragedy

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How to Pronounce Knife

Souvankham Thammavongsa

McClelland & Stewart

192 pages, softcover, ebook, and audiobook

FROM SUSANNA MOODIE AND CHARLES G.D. Roberts, Pauline Johnson and Lucy Maud Montgomery, to Margaret Atwood and George Bowering, Joy Kogawa and Michael Ondaatje — and along with such writers as Michael Crummey and Katherena Vermette — there has been a strong and unique feature of Canadian literature: authors working in poetry *and* in prose, first as accomplished poets, then as sophisticated novelists and short story writers. It seems only Thomas King and Robert Kroetsch have reversed the pattern, becoming poets after they established careers as novelists.

To the list of writers who successfully blur the line between poetry and prose, it's time to add the name of Souvankham Thammavongsa. Born in the Lao refugee camp in Nong Khai, Thailand, and raised and educated in Toronto, this forty-two-year-old poet has published four acclaimed volumes. Now a collection of fourteen stories, *How to Pronounce Knife*, marks her debut in fiction, and it is remarkable.

Thammavongsa's meticulous, often austere poetry captures the joys and the agonies of her childhood memories. She writes of the deathly nature of war and its enduring legacies, and she chastises modern commerce for its inhumanity. She does all this with plain, direct vocabulary, where the reader must think; her poetic silences, created through carefully controlled line structures and elongated pauses between the lines, make personal introspection absolutely necessary. "My poems don't think for you," she has stated, "they think *with* you."

Her short fiction follows a similar pattern, employing plain, direct vocabulary to present portraits of people trapped in their own problems and their own tragedies. She captures feelings and thoughts with scalpel-like precision and disarming humour. Her characters are transplanted men and women from Laos, "a bombed-out country in a war no one ever heard of." Having lost their former rootedness, these refugee-immigrants are fixated on their fight for new and impoverished homes in a nameless country.



THAMMAVONGSA'S OPENING STORY, "HOW TO Pronounce Knife," crystallizes many of the features that appear throughout the collection. Joy, a young elementary student, lives with her father

and mother "in a small apartment with two rooms." Her father scolds her, "Don't speak Lao and don't tell anyone you are Lao. It's no good to tell people where you're from." What is she to make of this when he's wearing a T-shirt on which "four letters stood side by side: LAOS"? When Joy's school sends a note home for her parents, inviting students to wear something special, they toss it in the garbage. A few days later, Joy is the only one in her classroom not dressed appropriately: "All the girls showed up wearing different variations of pink, and the boys had on dark suits and little knotted ties. Miss Choi, the grade one teacher, was wearing a purple dress dotted with a print of tiny white flowers and shoes with little heels."

On another occasion, Joy asks her father how to pronounce "knife." He replies, "Kah-nnn-eye-ffff. It's kahneyff." The narrator explains, "That's what it was, what it sounded like to him." The next day, having been corrected by a "yellow-haired girl in the class," Joy returns home, wanting "to tell her father that some letters, even though they are there, we do not say them." Noticeably shaken by her father's mispronunciation, Joy still seeks to protect her parents from

"Thammavongsa writes with scalpel-like precision and disarming humour."

similar criticism. "She decides now is not the time to say such a thing. Instead she tells her father only that she had won something."

In these stories, the Laotian people survive, though only barely. There is always a cultural clash, with the younger generation adapting somewhat to the new land and the older generation unwilling or unable. Thammavongsa maps the new worlds her characters encounter as they try to adapt. They have lost their place and are frequently compelled to reinvent their lives. In "Paris," a young woman has "that simple, uncomplicated, lonely love one feels for oneself in the quiet moments of the day." She lives an isolated life, cut off from human intercourse: "It was there, steady and solid in the laughter and talk of the television and with her in the grocery aisles on the weekend. It was there every night, in the dark, spectacular and sprawling in the quiet."

How does one overcome such loneliness? In connections that only increase the loneliness? The seventy-year-old narrator of "Slingshot" begins a romance with her thirty-two-year-old neighbour. When their passion inevitably

subsides, so does the relationship. In "The Gas Station," Mary, a thirty-six-year-old accountant, has a brief affair with a "grotesque" but "unforgettable" man, who had "a reputation for being someone women fell in love with" even though "he was known to abandon them when that happened, leaving them wailing in the street below his window." Aware from the beginning that the affair will not last, Mary abruptly leaves town. "What was the difference between someone who lied about love and someone who didn't love you? Nothing."

In perhaps the finest story in the collection, "You Are So Embarrassing," a woman parks her "small blue car" in an alley, with hopes of catching "a glimpse" of her estranged daughter, "who left work every day at around four in the afternoon." She then recalls a day, almost twenty years earlier, when she went to meet her daughter in front of her high school locker. "And can you *not* talk to my friends, please?" the girl scolded her mother. "You are so embarrassing." Now sitting in the alleyway, the woman, who has recently recovered from a stroke, cannot even approach her daughter. She stays put: "It was hard to tell now what was happening inside the car and out. The blur, the wet, the rain, the sobbing." In this story, as in so many in this volume, the plights of the Laotians, with the desires and the disappointments that mark their lives, are singularly heartbreaking.

To counteract the lonely rootlessness in this new homeland, some characters resort to yearning for personal betterment. In "Mani Padi," Raymond tells his sister, "Don't you go reminding me what dreams a man like me ought to have. That I can dream at all means something to me." Yet something always prevents him from realizing his hopes. As they sit in her car, Raymond and his sister can hear a "young and fragile and innocent" family giggling in their backyard: "It was the kind of giggling they themselves did as kids. Now, that kind of giggle seemed foolish for them to do. It was like a far distant thing, a thing that happened only to other people. All they could do now was be close to it, and remain out of sight." Other people can dream and have their dreams come true. But for these characters, there is almost no room to dream, to see their fortunes rise, to aspire to higher things.

How to Pronounce Knife captures men and women searching for meaning in a desolate world. All fourteen stories are haunting and bleak. Souvankham Thammavongsa is indeed an important voice. And she rightly joins that talented list of Canadian writers who have transferred poetic skill into exceptional works of fiction. ▲

Twitter Fingers

Vivek Shraya's new novel

Jean Marc Ah-Sen

The Subtweet

Vivek Shraya

ECW Press

248 pages, hardcover, softcover, ebook, and audiobook

CHARTING THE FRIENDSHIP-CUM-rivalry between two Toronto musicians, Vivek Shraya's second novel, *The Subtweet*, offers a pop parable about the diverse ways relationships are mediated by politics and technology. Rukmini, a transgender writer at an arts magazine, idolizes the experimental musician Neela Devaki but is seeking validation of her own musical efforts through their burgeoning friendship. After she releases a cover of Neela's "Every Song," a paean to independence, Rukmini's internet stardom suddenly skyrockets and outstrips her idol's popularity. Not long after, she agrees to be the supporting act on the rock megastar Hayley Trace's world tour. Growing tired of her friend's aloofness as she basks in her new-found celebrity, Neela voices her displeasure on Twitter, accusing Rukmini of pandering to white audiences. Her subtweet — the practice of maligning another Twitter user without identifying them — goes viral and snuffs out Rukmini's career with the characteristic velocity of the internet.

The women who populate *The Subtweet* are university-educated, gainfully employed, and miraculously banking enough leisure time in the most expensive city in the country to devote to musical recording. They are conversant in the writings of Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, and other luminaries in the field of cultural theory. Despite these advantages, they do not excel at the kind of emotional honesty needed to cultivate long-standing relationships. As would befit jumped-up pop stars, never mind those dialled in to social media, their behaviour is coloured with self-indulgence. It is these depictions of flawed, complex human interactions that make the characters' inability to make good on their embarrassment of intellectual riches both jarring and realistic. But that's the point: the spectacle of shaming others for moral lapses often has little to do with enlightenment and says more instead about the pressures of modern living.

A revealing passage by Arundhati Roy precedes the novel: "Big capital uses racism, caste-ism and sexism and gender bigotry in intricate and extremely imaginative ways to reinforce itself, protect itself, to undermine democracy and to splinter resistance." Shraya extrapolates Roy's formula for capitalist misery and applies it to the contempers developing between the two singers.

Rukmini's hiring of a musician in Neela's employ and Neela's vicious betrayal are social manifestations of an economic system that exploits labour, and not the actions of free moral agents. Economic scarcity — in *The Subtweet's* case, the notion that people of colour experience diminishing "value on the diversity stock market," or worse, that only *one* brown musician of prominence can exist on the world stage — is responsible for Rukmini not inviting Neela to perform with her. Rukmini's own admissions of this slight, which she attributes to her reluctance to present an established musician with an insulting business proposition, are apparently meaningless. Where individual responsibility



Facing the spectacle of shaming.

begins and economic perversion of these actions ends is the unanswered riddle that coils itself tightly around the text.

♦

THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN INTENTION AND PERCEIVED BEHAVIOUR is the emotional engine that drives the book, but Shraya's choice of political register impedes her narrative's comprehensibility. Every episode is overbalanced by a question of its inherent moral deficiency in relation to Roy's epigraph. It becomes difficult to parse the exact nature of the characters' motivations and self-deceptions. Is Rukmini aware that the social advancement she desires through her association with Neela can be construed as exploitative? Does Neela understand the same could be said

of her wanting to have a hanger-on as a friend? For as much as the two women stand revealed, through discussions on white supremacy and cultural appropriation, or through their passive-aggressive texts to each other, they remain equally shrouded in darkness (Rukmini actually disappears halfway through the novel).

In what is likely the most penetrating glimpse into Neela's psyche, she writes a heartfelt letter to Rukmini apologizing for her career-ending tweet. "Like thousands of other artists, I believed if I didn't bleed in the creation process, I wasn't making art," she says. "For you, art was exploration, not excavation. And this was what made me most jealous."

Neela's atonement is, unsurprisingly, short-lived. She accepts an offer to be Rukmini's replacement on the Hayley Trace tour, after voicing some initial pro forma resistance. It is a provocative about-face for the most morally principled character in the novel, whose concern with artistic integrity — "the slipperiness of brown cultural production" in white hegemonies — and desire to repair her friendship incongruously go out the window. It is the most mystifying moment in *The Subtweet*. But this is no garden-variety hypocrisy. Again it poses the question: Is Neela at fault here, or is the system that hoards resources in the hands of a privileged few more to blame?

Neela's reasoning is never given its due, though the ramifications of her actions are explicit. There is no cheating market forces, only surrender to them; no amount of theory can safeguard against capitalism's untrammelled advances. If she does not want to be passed over by another up-and-coming brown artist, she has to take her chance at superstardom. There is a fatalistic quality to these goings-on, and that fatalism has the unintended effect of rendering shocking turns of events artificially overdramatic at best, unbelievable at worst.

The tension between characters being in control of their destinies or acting under the influence of an exploitative economic system is never resolved. Neela and Rukmini behave in ways that incite drama, but the unarticulated rationale behind their decisions serves only to frustrate the reader. The realism of a rock 'n' roll tell-all runs up against allegorical dogma; the book has difficulty consolidating these two impulses. As a statement on the fragility of millennial friendships and the impossibility of the pop world incorporating radical politics within its convoluted structure of money and influence, *The Subtweet* is profoundly relevant. As a study of the intricate ways political power is exerted on individuals, and the role that power plays in the social fallouts of capitalist economies, it leaves much to be desired. ▲

The Royal Treatment

IT'S ALL MADONNA'S FAULT, REALLY. AND *Downton Abbey's*. Neil Gaiman shares part of the blame: he was the first author who managed to so completely immerse me in his world that I didn't notice when I put my foot through a plate-glass window, leaving me with five stitches and a determination to one day craft similarly consuming stories. I'd be remiss not to mention Anderson Cooper, given that it is about his family. And the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, though they weren't even dating when I started writing.

The list of acknowledgements for my debut novel, which came out this summer, does have a dash of Hollywood flair to it. After all, it's a book about celebrities, filled with interwar socialites and silver screen princes; champagne corks flying across the moonlit Riviera; glamour and gossip played out beneath the crenellated towers of country homes. That's what drew Madonna to the tale of the king who gave up his crown for love, no doubt. In rendering Wallis and Edward's story on the big screen in her 2011 directorial debut, *W.E.*, Madonna makes only glancing reference to Lady Thelma Furness. Played by Katie McGrath, she comes across as sweetness and light, a beautiful airhead who puts her lover, the Prince of Wales, in the hands of her trusted friend while she travels to the States. "Take care of him for me, won't you?" Thelma purrs onscreen, her long fingers curled around the end of a cigarette holder.

That, for me, was the genesis of my interest in the woman who came before Wallis Simpson. But where Madonna goes forward in time to show the scandalous fallout from Thelma's request, I decided to go back to learn more about Lady Furness herself. Was she truly blind to Wallis's intentions? Or was she implicitly giving her friend permission to take a tiresome lover off her hands?

Take care of him for me. Those six words defined Thelma Morgan Furness's life. Her affair with the future king was enough to warrant a novel, but her connection to the "trial of the century" — the 1934 custody battle over her niece Gloria Vanderbilt Jr. — made her story so much more than a royal romance. As one half of the "Magnificent Morgan" socialite sisters, Thelma grew up as a proto-Kardashian of sorts. Famous

first for her beauty, then for her glittering marriage to one of England's wealthiest industrialists, she reached new heights of celebrity with her involvement in her sister's reputation-ruining trial. In many respects, hers is a cautionary tale about choosing a life in the spotlight: a lesson that, in Edward VIII, the Windsor family learned only too well.

Of course, in the case of the royals, the decision doesn't lie in *choosing* such a life; it lies in walking away from it. Twice now, immediate members of the family have decided to reject what many consider to be their birthright: fame and recognition, power and privilege. The circumstances naturally lend themselves to comparison: the Duke of Windsor and the Duke of Sussex both left "the Firm," seemingly at the behest of their American brides. But while Edward stepped down in December 1936 because he didn't want to rule, Harry walked away this past year to protect his family from a toxic press. Edward's decision nearly toppled the monarchy; Harry, sixth in line to the throne, didn't leave nearly so gaping a hole.

It can't be lost on the prince that there are lessons to be learned from his great-great-uncle's abdication; it shouldn't be lost on us that the Duke and Duchess of Sussex have had to grapple with institutionalized racism. But a point that unites the two Windsors is the suspicion that they believed a break from the crown could be accomplished on their own terms: that they might retain the deference afforded to them by the very system they threatened to collapse. For both men, leaving their palaces didn't result in a withdrawal from public life: it left a lingering fascination with their stories. The spotlight they sought to escape became harsher and brighter than ever before.

And what of Thelma? As a seasoned socialite, perhaps she was better prepared than Edward or Wallis to anticipate the fickle nature of public adoration. Unlike Thelma, who gains a cruel education in the realities of modern celebrity at her sister's trial, Edward stakes his reputation on the notion that, once won over, the court of public opinion will remain loyal. "It doesn't matter. Not to people like us," he says at the end of my book. But then, such is the blinding nature of privilege. ▲

Bryn Turnbull is the author of The Woman before Wallis.

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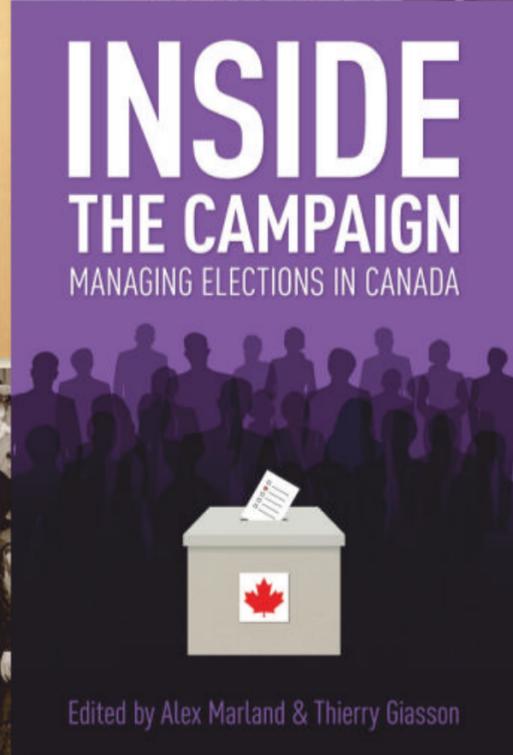
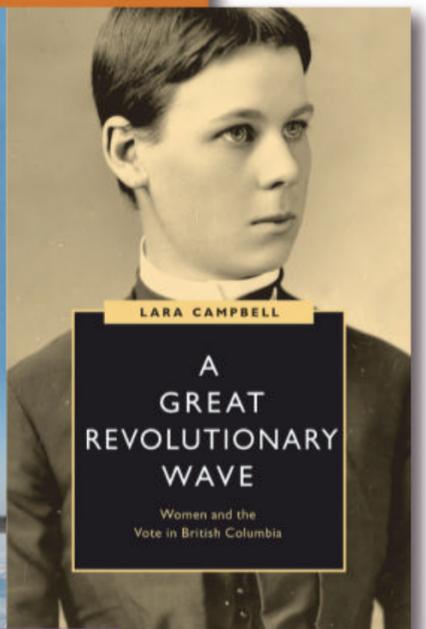
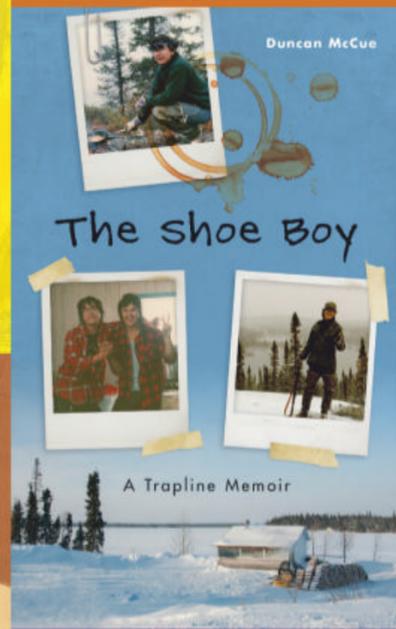
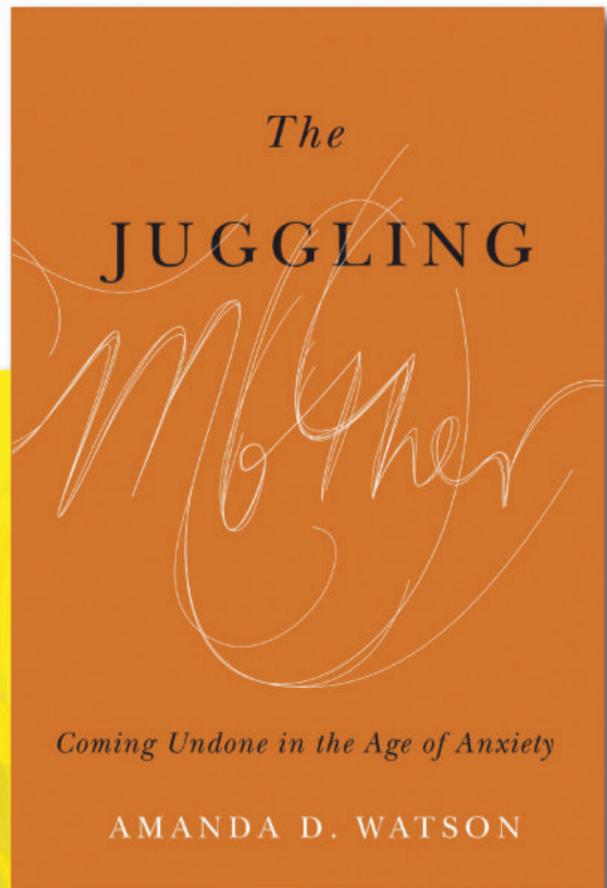
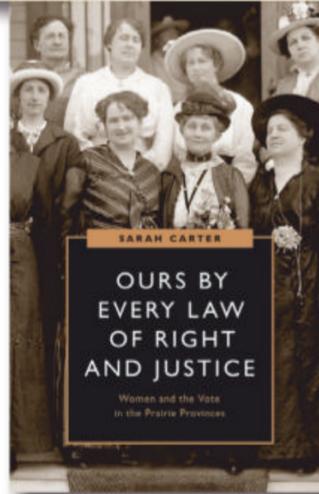
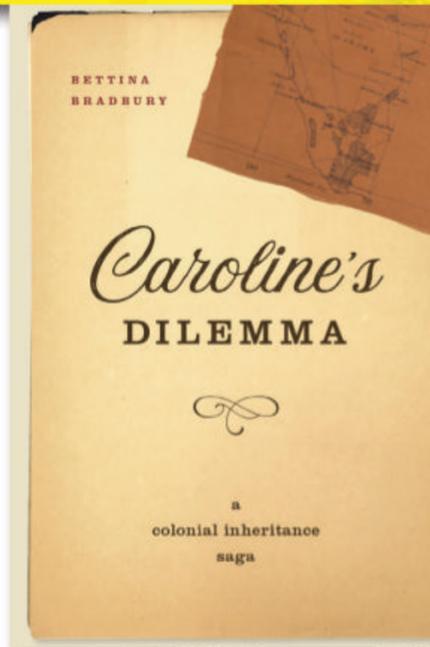
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OURS BY EVERY LAW OF RIGHT AND JUSTICE
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