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MAGDALENA MIŁOSZ A Polish Bestseller GAYATRI KUMAR Polar Latitudes

IAN SMILLIE Philanthropy SARAH SHEEHAN Cartooning with Duncan

Literary Review of Canada

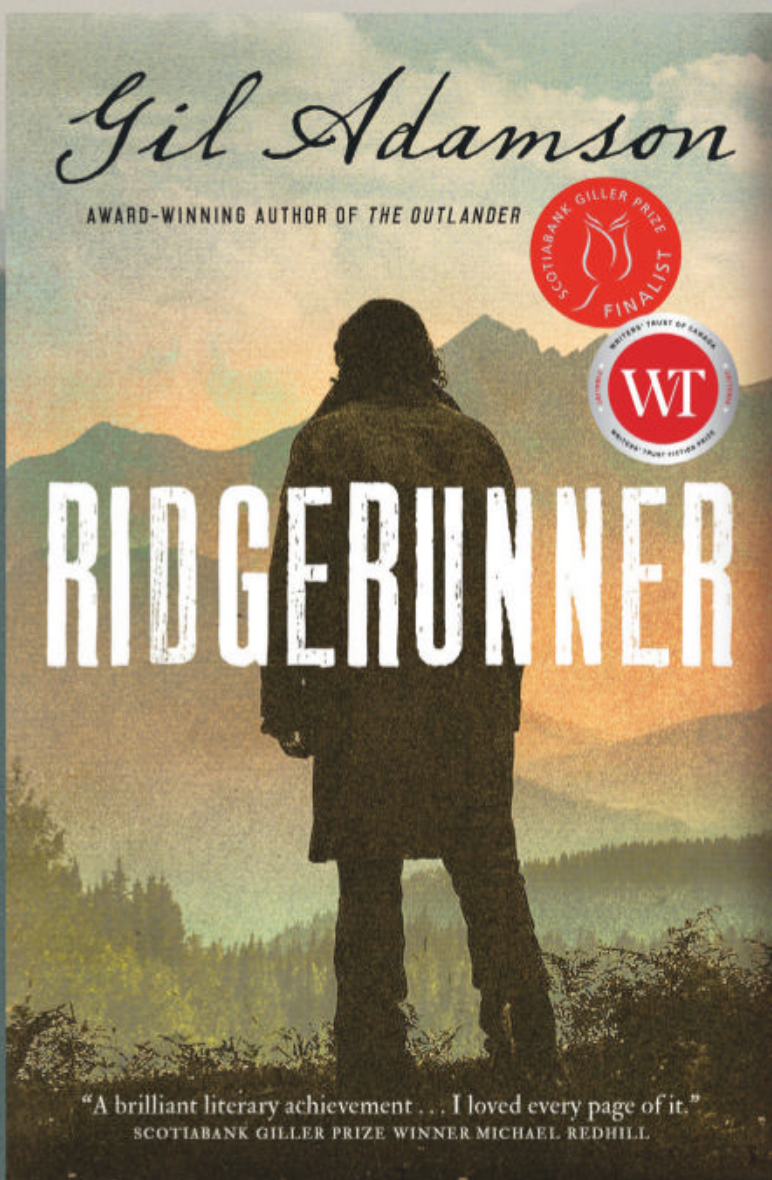
A JOURNAL OF IDEAS



"TRULY MAGNIFICENT"

– Robert Olmstead, award-winning author of *Coal Black Horse*

**FINALIST for the Scotiabank Giller Prize
and the Writers' Trust Fiction Prize**



**"A WILD ADVENTURE
SPUN IN EXALTED
PROSE: THE BOOK I'VE
BEEN WANTING TO
READ FOR YEARS."**

– Marina Endicott, award-winning author of *The Difference*

"A BRILLIANT LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT."

– Michael Redhill, Scotiabank Giller Prize-winning author of *Bellevue Square*

Literary Review of Canada

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Katherine Ashenburg will publish a new novel, *Her Turn*, this coming year.

Jennifer S. H. Brown is a professor emerita of history at the University of Winnipeg. She lives in Denver.

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

Dan Dunsky was executive producer of *The Agenda* with Steve Paikin, from 2006 to 2015, and is the founder of *Dunsky Insight*.

Dan Falk is the author of *The Science of Shakespeare* and *In Search of Time*.

Keith Garebian has published several books, most recently *Mini Musings: Miniature Thoughts on Theatre and Poetry*.

Sheilla Jones writes about quantum physics and Indigenous politics in Canada.

Gayatri Kumar lives and reads in Toronto.

Geoff Martin was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for "Baked Clay," an essay about Mennonite and Black land histories in rural Ontario.

Magdalena Milosz is a doctoral candidate in the school of architecture at McGill University.

Sarah Sheehan is a critic and former academic living in Hamilton.

Ian Smillie is the author of *The Alms Bazaar* and a co-author of *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World*.

Michael Strizic is the magazine's new managing editor.

Christina Turner studies Indigenous literatures at the University of Toronto.

Ian Waddell served in Parliament from 1979 to 1993. He is the author of *Take the Torch: A Political Memoir*, among other titles.

Jessica Duffin Wolfe is a professor of digital communications and journalism at Humber College, in Toronto.

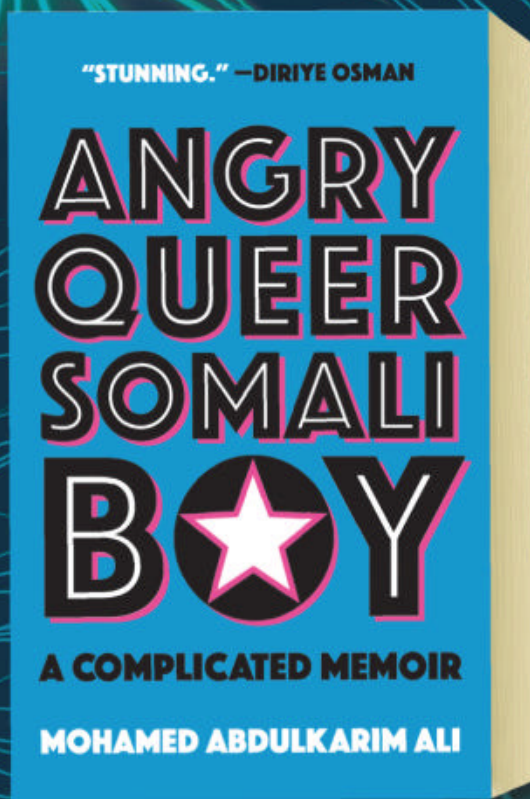
Jonathan Yazer holds a master's in global governance from the University of Waterloo.

♦

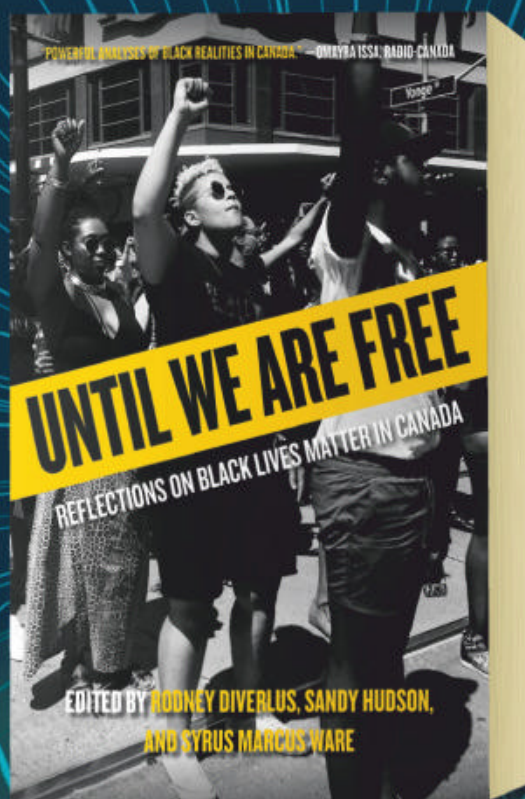
On the cover: Lecce, Italy, by **Kevin Ward**.

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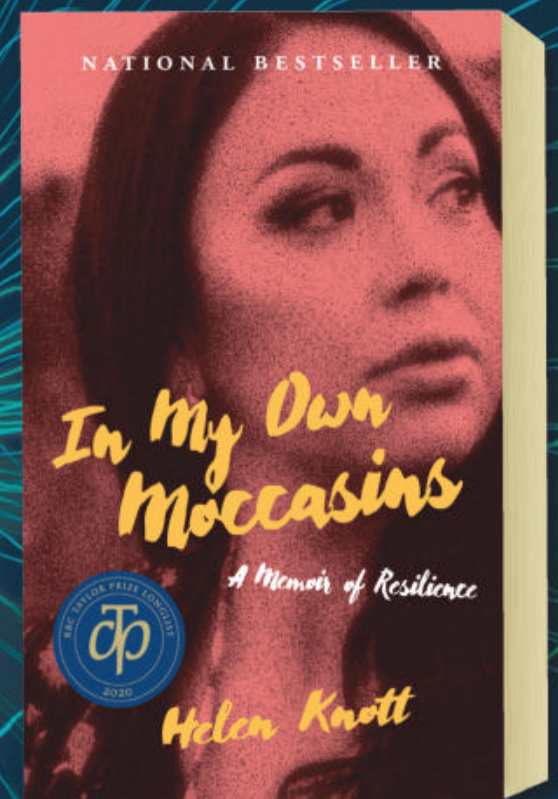
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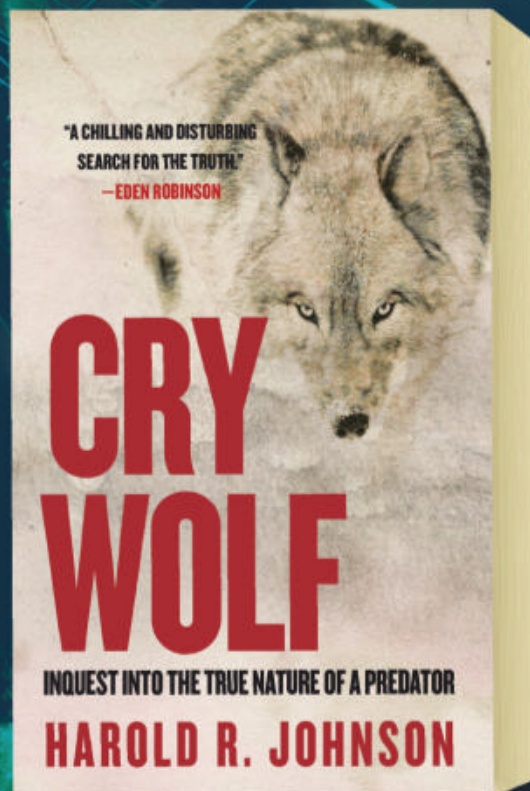
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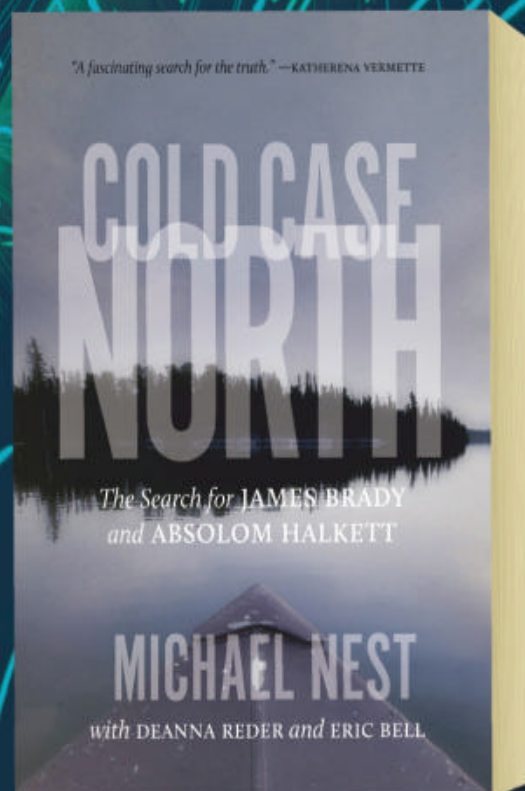
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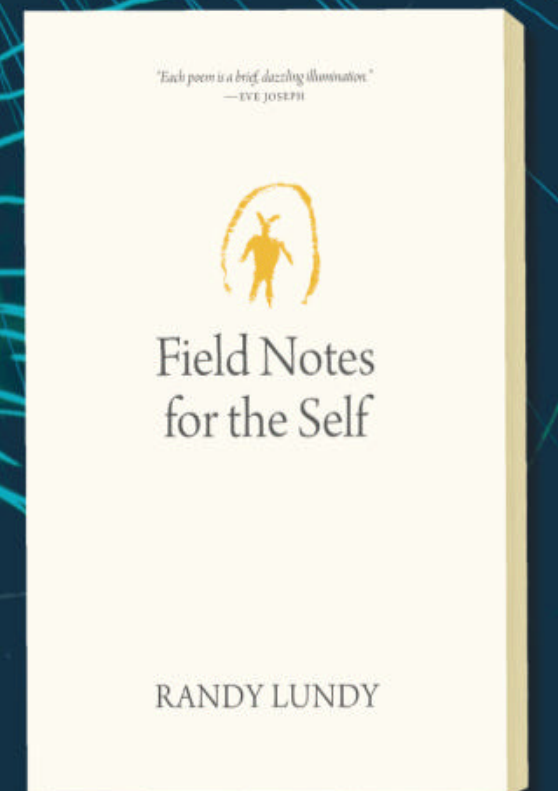
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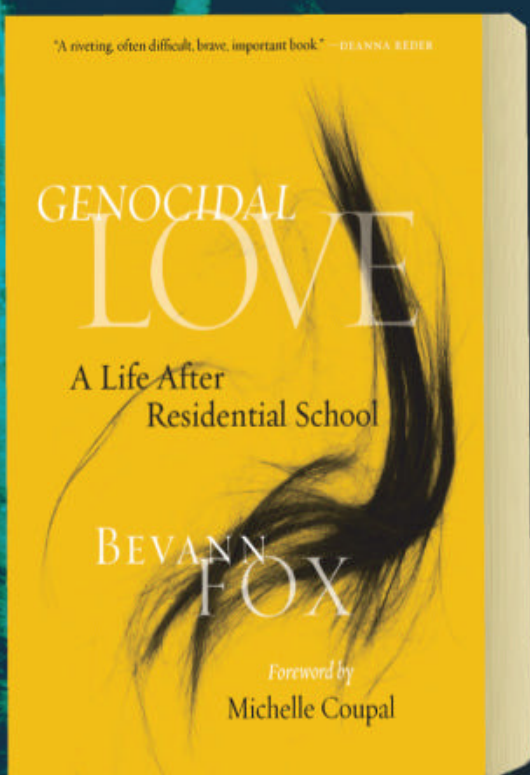
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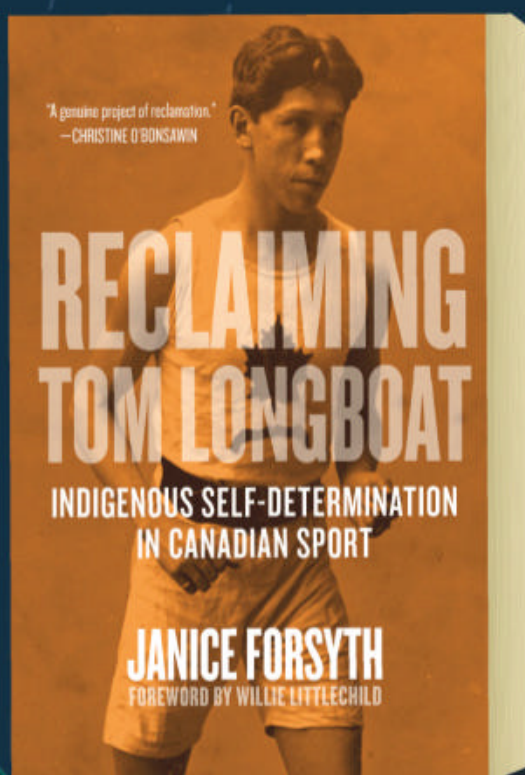
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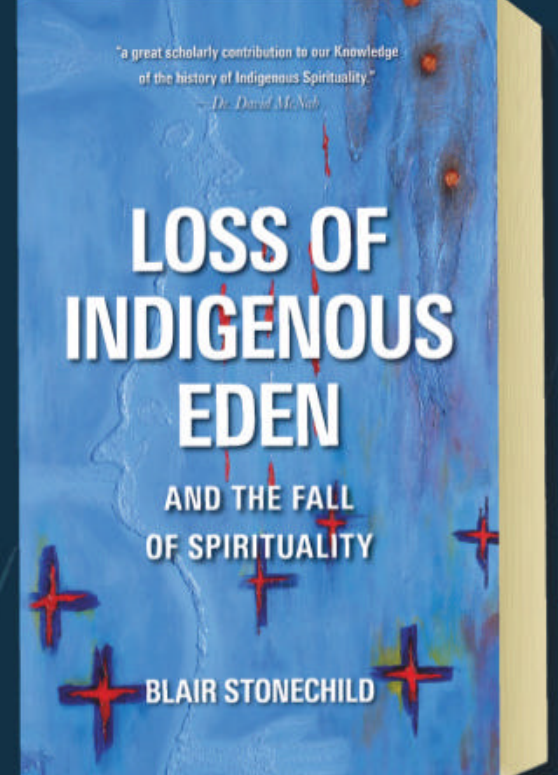
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The Hole Truth

IN HIS MONUMENTAL WORK, *A DISPLAY OF Heraldry*, first published in London in 1610, the antiquarian and officer of arms John Guillim wrote of a stone “that being once kindled and set on fire” will “never extinguish or goe out.” Such a stone possessed “admirable vertues . . . whereby strange and unwonted effects may be wrought.” Guillim thought this unusual rock, which he called asphestus, was to be found in Arcadia, that most pastoral of utopias. Had he lived another three hundred years or so, he would have learned that a lot of it was also to be found not far from Montreal, in the Eastern Townships.

In 1879, a Welsh miner discovered what he thought was a small deposit of asbestos near Quebec’s Nicolet River. A few years later, an entrepreneurial pair realized they were, in fact, standing on pay dirt. What became known as the Jeffrey Mine opened in 1881 and steadily grew into the world’s largest source of the fibrous silicate material. For decades, workers would cross Boulevard St-Luc each day to dig into the earth and to pull out of “the hole,” as the locals called it, an essential ingredient for modern industry. The stuff went into the ships and airplanes that defeated the Third Reich. It went into schools, hospitals, and homes all over Canada and the world. It made the village, and later the town, of Asbestos rich.

In 1949, thousands of those miners went on strike and helped lay the foundation for the Quiet Revolution. But after five months, they returned to work and continued digging. Then, suddenly, the well-paid workers and their thriving town found their wagon hitched to a carcinogen with few redeeming qualities; the strange and unwonted effects that Guillim once imagined turned out to be mesothelioma and other diseases. By the time operations ceased, in late 2011, the sprawling open pit that had been dug resembled an impact crater some two kilometres wide and 350 metres deep.

In the decade since, Asbestos has tried to reinvent itself — with a microbrewery, a duck hatchery, a pharmaceutical company, even an attempted adventure-tourism retrofit of the mine itself. But it’s been hard to attract new businesses and industry when return address labels will forevermore remind customers of cancer. For many boosters, the town’s name is a liability whose time has come.


So this past October, as record numbers of Americans cast early ballots for president, just under 3,000 Asbestrians — including some as young as fourteen — went to a drive-through polling place and elected to remediate the toponymic damage, rechristening the place Val-des-Sources, or Valley of the Springs.

A “car vote” in a town of 7,000 is not the most consequential act of civic engagement, but it is so wonderfully 2020: a metaphor for this longest of years, with its pandemic, its unrest and divisions, its engaged youth, and its lingering uncertainties around our collective health and identity and path forward.

Because, like most things 2020, the choice of Val-des-Sources is not without controversy. For many, especially older French speakers who refer to Guillim’s admirable rock as “amiante,” the historic name Asbestos speaks not to a dangerous substance now banned in scores of countries but to a proud heritage. To dismiss the town’s distinctive moniker is to dismiss its very identity. “You don’t change names for nothing!” one lifelong resident told the CBC before the physically distanced vote. (Swastika, a tiny place close to Lake Champlain in New York, took a similar stance when it recently doubled down on its own name, originally from 1913.)

Even though the voters were clear — that Asbestos’s appellation, like so many things, ought to evolve at last — the end is far from certain. The provincial minister of municipal affairs and housing must approve the change before it’s official, and hundreds have signed a petition that urges her to reject the results; they argue the entire process was somehow rigged behind closed doors. We may not know the final outcome for quite a while.

But we do know this: The mine that did some good and did some bad will never reopen, the old jobs are gone, the extraction-based economy that powered a century is over. We know social change is inevitable. We know that names — like monuments and statues — have powerful symbolic purchase. And we know that not even the ballot box will help us find common ground.

Whether future generations call the place Asbestos or Val-des-Sources or something else entirely, the take-away is the same: some fires are almost impossible to extinguish, and sometimes we find that we have dug ourselves holes we may never fully climb out of. 

Kyle Wyatt, Editor-in-Chief

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Furthermore

RE: *Bathroom Reading*
by Rose Hendrie (November)

ROSE HENDRIE'S ESSAY ON ALL THINGS DEFECATORY is pretty astounding, but I wonder about one issue. She writes that flush toilets date back to the Romans 2,000 years ago. Maybe that was true for hoi polloi, but when I lived on Crete in the 1970s, it was drummed into me by local historians that there was a flush toilet in the queen's quarters of the ancient Minoan palace of Knossos (1700 to 1400 BCE). John Bowman mentions it in *The Travellers' Guide to Crete*, my bible for all things Cretan.

Bronwyn Drainie
Toronto

RE: *Sales Report*
by Frances Bula (November)

BRILLIANT TAKE ON THE REAL ESTATE ECONOMY that drives and wounds Vancouver. Frances Bula encapsulates history and clear-eyed critique and inside jokes in this book review. Who caused our pain? Look in the mirror, she says.

@thehappycity
via Twitter

ENTERING MY SEVENTH YEAR LIVING IN VANCOUVER and Frances Bula's review connects so many dots about the housing situation here. Skip the book, read her review.

@davidplanders
via Twitter

RE: *Operative Words*
by Jeff Costen (November)

THANK YOU FOR REVIEWING *INSIDE THE CAMPAIGN*, which covers a subject that Canadians pay too little attention to — and that is a serious threat to our democracy. As a member of the generation who professionalized campaign management, I take my share of the blame for the rot that has infected the heart of our skeletal political parties.

Neither Costen nor the authors give enough attention to the reason why shallow, manipulative targeted political messaging is not quite the cancer in our system that it is in America: money. It costs a great deal to send out hundreds of variations of messaging simultaneously to handfuls of voters. Literally billions of dollars are spent on U.S. elections every two years.

The focus of outsiders' critiques is on the corrupting nature of the massive donors' influence on the players and the system. And it is fundamentally corrupt. An equally appalling feature

is the role consultants play in driving the raising and spending of those billions.

Several rock star consultants charge campaigns as much as \$100,000 per month for their wisdom, and they share their insights with as many as a dozen campaigns simultaneously. They push the fundraising needs of campaigns by calling for tens of millions of dollars in polling, television buys, and social media spending. Then they take a percentage of every dollar placed, as "communications advisors."

Of the estimated \$10 billion that has just been spent on the U.S. presidential cycle, as much as 5 to 10 percent dropped down to the array of operatives controlling the campaigns' spending. In comparative terms, that \$500 million to \$1 billion (or more) is several times the combined election spending of every party and candidate here. But some of our consultants have begun pushing an American-style dynamic: charging eye-watering fees to raise bigger budgets, with a good slice off the top to remain with them.

As we seem to import most American campaign "innovations" a cycle or two later, we would be wise to keep a tight lid on spending and therefore the need for massive fundraising, if we want to avoid the swamp that American politics has become.

Robin Sears
Ottawa

RE: *There May Yet Be Hope*
by Arno Kopecky (November)

REALLY APPRECIATE ARNO KOPECKY'S THOUGHTFUL and fair review of *Commanding Hope*. He pushes the book's ideas forward in important ways.

@TadHomerDixon
via Twitter

RE: *In the Holy Land*
by Patrick Martin (November)

READING PATRICK MARTIN'S THOUGHTFUL AND contextual review of Michael Dan's *The Two-State Dilemma*, I was reminded of the late Shira Herzog, the granddaughter of an Israeli chief rabbi, niece of an Israeli president, and daughter of an Israeli ambassador to Canada. For more than a decade, before she passed in 2014, she wrote a regular column in the *Globe and Mail* on Middle East affairs.

Herzog was a defender of the Jewish state and also loved the Palestinian people. She attempted to bridge the gap by spearheading projects on the ground to bring the region's people together. Sometimes frustrated by the ill-informed, anti-Palestinian attitudes that she

encountered in Israel (and in parts of Canada's Jewish community) and by the understandable but unhelpful anti-Israel hostility embedded in some Palestinians, Herzog believed that "both sides need deep therapy" in order to make any real progress.

As a retired psychotherapist who worked frequently with married couples, I share with Patrick Martin a gloomy prognosis for a harmonious relationship between the profoundly aggrieved Palestinians and the deeply traumatized Israelis. Intractable trauma and rigid fundamentalist attitudes on both sides will make peaceful coexistence extremely hard to achieve.

David Schatzky
Toronto

RE: *At What Price?*
by Alex Himelfarb (October)

THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IS DEFINED AS EITHER your health or the economy, with so little sense of how much more is at stake. In Italy, the prime minister begged citizens to accept restrictions on their liberty and the inevitable damage to commerce to save their grandparents, the generation that rebuilt the country after the Second World War. Where the pandemic has revealed so much that is ugly in human nature, the fact that this was a persuasive argument gives me comfort.

Jeannie Marshall
Rome

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

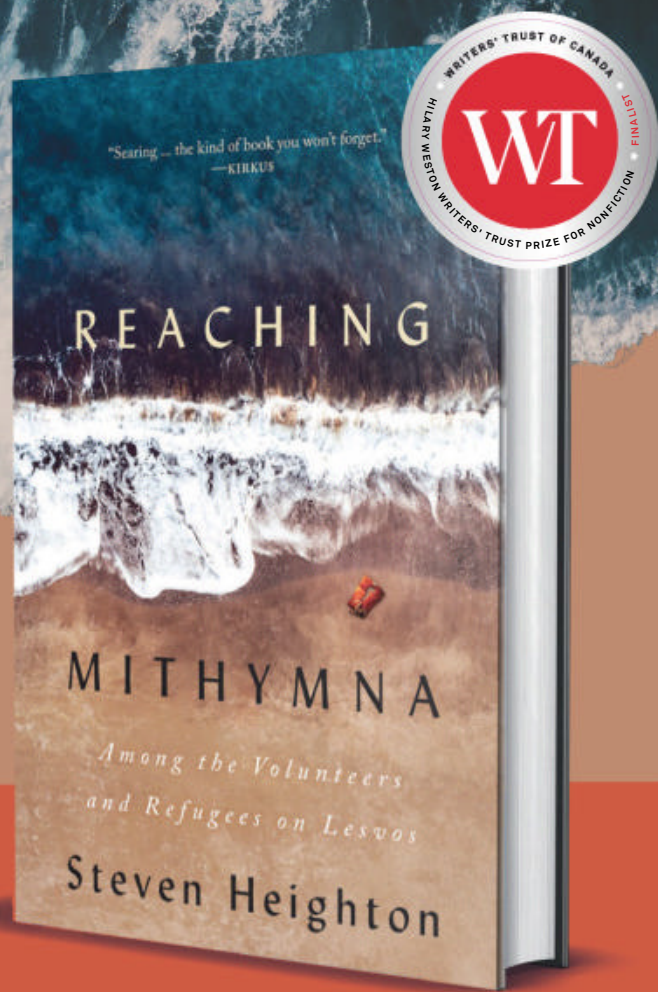
THIS WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT READ TO DATE. I cannot thank David Cayley enough for such a substantive piece. It should be required reading for every politician and infectious disease doctor. It should be on the front page of every newspaper. Every adult in Canada and in other democratic nations should read it.

Sanaz Harland
West Vancouver, British Columbia

I AM IN AWE OF THE WRITING AND THINKING OF David Cayley. This essay on COVID-19 captures everything we ought to be talking about.

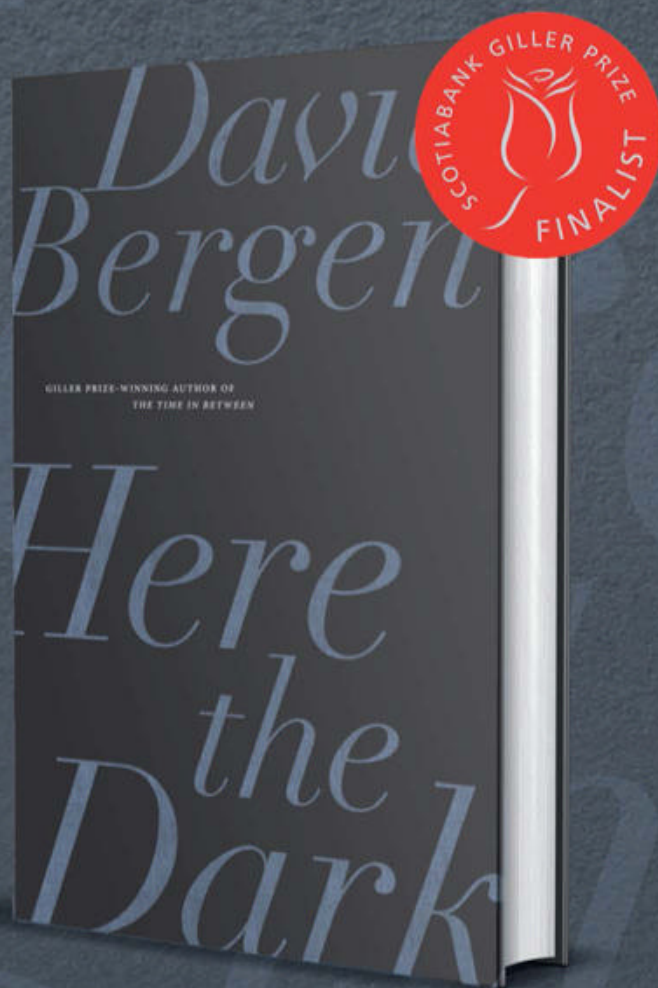
@drjohnm
via Twitter

THANKS TO DAVID CAYLEY AND TO THE *LITERARY Review of Canada* for authoring and publishing what is the most cogent and reasoned interpretation of these pandemic times that I have



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yet encountered. At last a position that is logical and rational and helps to convey the importance of reconsidering the assumptions that can swell and flood if not checked.

"The Prognosis" should be required reading, for anyone who is not transfixed by the routine syndicate news cycles defining this subject that is itself defining our very lives.

**Darren Alexander
Victoria**

TWO THUMBS WAY DOWN FOR DAVID CAYLEY, WHO wrote approximately 5,400 words on our collective response to COVID-19, and who mentioned the word "masks" only once. Let me repeat that: once!

**Evan Bedford
Red Deer, Alberta**

RE: *Lesson Plans*
by Katherine Ashenburg (October)

TWO THUMBS WAY UP FOR KATHERINE ASHENBURG'S grandson, with his apathy toward free verse and his enthusiasm for rhyming poetry.

**Evan Bedford
Red Deer, Alberta**

RE: *A Divided Nation*
by Kyle Wyatt (October)

PLEASE READ THIS ARTICLE FROM THE LATEST ISSUE of the *Literary Review of Canada*. So much of Canada is city-centric, often disregarding the unique problems of us folk living in rural and northern regions.

**@evanjpoet
via Twitter**

I REALLY THANK YOU FOR THE EDITORIAL CONCERNING the digital divide in Canada. The piece focuses on the North and Canada's most remote areas, but it's worth remembering that you can drive an hour outside many major centres in Canada and be faced with ten, five, or even two megabyte per second download speeds, no meaningful upload capacity, and even no cellular phone service.

Speaking from my experience as chief of staff to Bill Casey, former MP for Cumberland-Colchester, a rural riding in Nova Scotia, I see internet connectivity as the single biggest thing holding the rural economy back in this country. Long before working from home was the fashion, businesses could barely handle email in places like Glenholme, Earltown, Debert, or Economy — all within twenty minutes' drive of broadband and all within spitting distance of the fibre-optic pipeline delivering service to major centres. Despite the creativity of the locals in coming up with business ideas and their dedication to creating jobs in their rural communities, the infrastructure is against them. Now in the midst of the pandemic, when so many services are delivered remotely and so much work takes place remotely, we are paying a heavy price for underinvestment.

The internet is as important to rural Canada as public transit is to Toronto or Montreal. The federal and provincial governments remain unwilling to coordinate their actions or come

up with the funds to make meaningful progress on this front, to say nothing of the oligopoly of telecoms who control the infrastructure and charge Canadians some of the highest prices globally. While they are preoccupied with delivering 5G for the biggest cities, 3G wireless and 15 MBPS would be a major upgrade for huge swaths of the country and millions of Canadians.

The fact is, Canada is a rural country, and if we can't provide the basic infrastructure that rural Canada needs to participate in the twenty-first-century economy, the whole country suffers.

**Joel Henderson
Gatineau, Quebec**

RE: *A Noble Departure*
by Scott Griffin (October)

HOW REFRESHING TO READ THIS THOUGHTFUL essay on "the lost art of standing down." The act of an honourable resignation is another example of doing what is right for the greater civic good — and another example of an unwritten decency we have lost.

As the Supreme Court of Canada justice Rosalie Silberman Abella recently wrote in the *Globe and Mail*, "Democracy does not just depend on the will of the people, but on their humanity." So I will be sure my four teenage grandchildren read Griffin's piece.

**Diana Dunbar Tremain
Toronto**

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

ENOUGH WITH THE WHINGING, JOHN. YOUR WRITING is stunning, even if "your life's work is buried deep in a database, and even the fishmongers have moved on to fresher wrapping material." It's time for you to write a book! The rest of us are more than ready to read it.

**Kevin Keystone
Toronto**

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

ANDREAS SCHROEDER'S RESPONSE, PRINTED IN THE November issue, to Stephen Abram's recent piece is very specific about the unlikelihood of Public Lending Right payments for writers being appropriated by publishers, yet Abram can only counter with hand waving about secret publishers' files he won't reveal.

Is Abram perhaps confusing PLR payments for library use with Access Copyright payments for licensed copying of copyright work? As Schroeder explains, the PLR program pays authors, not publishers. Access Copyright encourages publishers to appropriate creators' shares of the reprography rights payments it collects, and Abram may well have seen this reflected in publishing contracts and receipts.

**Christopher Moore
Toronto**

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

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Socially Distant

Maybe the problem with Facebook is us

Dan Dunsky

Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas — only I don't exactly know what they are!

— Lewis Carroll

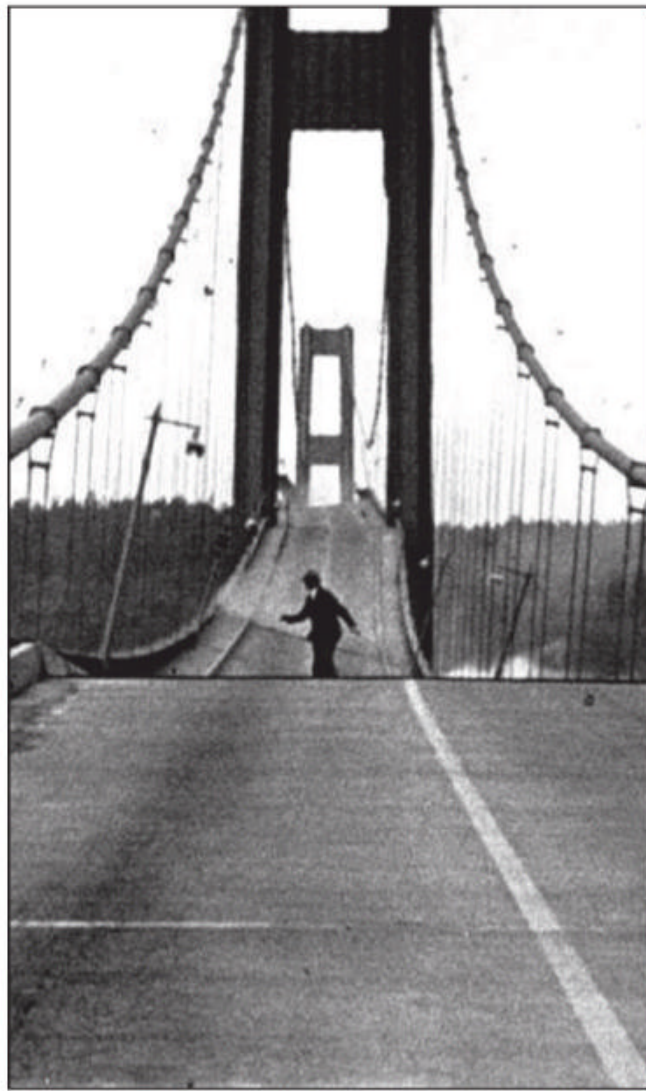
IS FACEBOOK KILLING OUR DEMOCRATIC way of life? If you believe the headlines, it sure is. The *Guardian* calls the social media giant a “Digital Gangster Destroying Democracy.” *The New Yorker* asks, “Can Mark Zuckerberg Fix Facebook before It Breaks Democracy?” Even Al Jazeera wants to know, “Is Facebook Ruining the World?” There are literally scores of pieces on this question, reflecting the view that, in these anxious times, the sixteen-year-old platform is a decidedly unique threat.

Three main arguments are commonly put forward to illustrate Facebook’s fecklessness: it is monopolistic, it runs roughshod over our privacy, and it is dangerously dividing people with its content, making it impossible to find the common ground on which democratic political participation — and legitimacy — depends. (Just think of your feed, if you were brave enough to look, on the evening of November 3.) Facebook is indeed guilty of the first two counts, although it is not alone. The third charge is far more complicated and far less convincing.

Despite the near-constant refrain about Facebook’s power, the company is actually the smallest of the big tech firms that are exerting so much influence on our lives (Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and Google’s parent company, Alphabet, are the others). Still, Facebook is an enormous entity. Its 2.5 billion monthly users are constantly enlarging a massive repository of information about themselves and their friends, families, colleagues, and contacts. Facebook recognized early on, as *The Economist* wrote in 2017, that data is “the world’s most valuable resource.” The insights the company draws from this vast resource mean it can target individuals better than any other advertising platform in history. The result? If you advertise, you really can’t afford not to be on Facebook.

The company’s dominance has led to its market valuation of nearly \$800 billion (U.S.), putting it within striking distance of \$1 trillion (the four other big tech firms are the only other American companies to have reached this milestone). It’s not Facebook’s size on its own that should worry us but its size relative to its competition. Depending on the year and the research cited, Facebook and Alphabet together control between two-thirds and four-fifths of the digital advertising market. In other words, every other website out there that sells ads — there are tons of them — is competing for the remaining twenty to thirty cents of every advertising dollar being spent digitally.

As any first-year economics student knows, competition is a key factor in our market system, providing innovation and improvements in products and services, consumer choice, and generally lower prices. The challenge here is principally a market-access problem: by dint of first-mover advantage, acquisition of other popular tech companies (Instagram, WhatsApp, Oculus VR), questionable practices, and scale never before seen, Facebook has become a platform that stifles competition. (In October, Democrats on the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee issued recommendations that could hinder the company’s ability to acquire rivals in the future.)



Can we successfully bridge our differences?

Monopolistic behaviour isn’t only an economic problem; monopolies are bad for citizens’ political power, too. Less competition in the marketplace reduces one’s ability to negotiate pay, for instance, or find better work. More ominously, monopolies may contribute to the erosion of political freedom as the wealthy and powerful use their resources to make governments work for them and their corporate needs, rather than for the common good. As the Vanderbilt law professor Ganesh Sitaraman, writing about the United States, has put it, “When a small number of people wield unchecked power, they can oppress their workers and employees, crush the opportunity of any entrepreneur or small business, and even control

the government.” We end up with an oligarchy or plutocracy, “in which freedom exists only for those with wealth and power.” And as Columbia Law School’s Tim Wu says, “When a concentrated private power has such control over what we see and hear, it has a power that rivals or exceeds that of elected government.”

So, on the first charge — that it’s monopolistic — is Facebook guilty? Yes. But similar charges have been levelled against other major tech companies. Congressional antitrust hearings have begun in Washington, the U.S. Justice Department has just sued Google, and the European Union’s tenacious commissioner for competition, Margrethe Vestager, has set her sights on some of these companies as well. (Microsoft, having had its brush with antitrust regulators in the late 1990s and early 2000s, seems to have learned its lesson and is keeping its nose clean, more or less.)

THE SECOND ARGUMENT IS THAT FACEBOOK IS cavalier with its users’ data — that it manipulates this vast treasure trove of data to perfect online behaviour modification. Using digital carrots and sticks, the platform induces its billions of users to react to emotional cues that benefit the company’s bottom line.

Anyone who has logged in recently knows the results of this manipulation: Ads seem to know exactly what we’re thinking, even before we do. We’re prompted to connect with long-forgotten friends and colleagues. The content in our feed magically matches our moods and mindset. Such manipulation and synchronicity are central to what has become known as “surveillance capitalism,” which the Queen’s University sociologist Vincent Mosco first identified in 2014. In this system, there’s a basic trade-off: you get free services (News Feed, Messenger, Instagram, and so forth), while the tech company gets your data and, with it, the ability to monitor your behaviour, draw insights from it, and monetize it. The truly creepy part about surveillance capitalism, as Harvard’s Shoshanna Zuboff observes, is how it “unilaterally claims human experience as a free raw material”:

Although some of these data are applied to service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary behavioral surplus, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as “machine intelligence,” and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace that I call behavioral futures markets. Surveillance capitalists have grown immensely wealthy from

these trading operations, for many companies are willing to lay bets on our future behavior.

Perhaps you don't mind being marketed this way. Perhaps the convenience of having products and services tailored to your behavioural patterns outweighs the creepiness of having a company know you better than you know yourself. Hundreds of millions — perhaps billions — of people don't seem to mind at all. That's if they explicitly understand the trade-offs they're making, which is a big if.

But what if these predictive practices go beyond the market for products and services and influence other behaviours? That's exactly what happened in 2012 when Facebook played fast and loose with its users' privacy, carrying out secret experiments and enabling the now defunct political consultancy Cambridge Analytica to build a "psychological warfare tool" in 2015, which was used to help elect Donald Trump a year later.

Again, Facebook is not the only company that is spending vast sums of money to keep you online to better understand your choices and consumer behaviour. Google does the same thing. So does Amazon, in its own way. Even Apple gleans enormous insights from the data it collects off its devices and off third-party apps sold on its App Store, although it doesn't directly sell advertising. But it's Facebook that has shown a willingness to allow the data it collects to be weaponized, as it were, to influence our most solemn democratic act: our vote. It should go without saying that that's bad for democracy.

American lawmakers actually have robust tools with which to limit or stop Facebook from damaging our democracies in this manner. (Canadian legislators, for their part, have been very slow to develop digital rules of the road.) For example, rather than consider monopolistic behaviour through a narrow "consumer welfare" lens — which roughly equates lower prices with the absence of a monopoly — Congress might follow the so-called New Brandeis approach to corporate monopolies, which considers a range of economic and political ends, and not merely consumer price, when determining whether a policy is anti-competitive. It could also beef

up data protections, as the European Union has done with the General Data Protection Regulation, which went into effect in 2018.

Traditionally, Washington has preferred to leave the tech industry to regulate itself, reflecting its laissez-faire approach to commercial relations. But the United States has regulated industry more heavily in the past, and anxious or outraged citizens have a way of changing politicians' minds. In fact, as the bipartisan case against Google demonstrates, reining in big tech — a twenty-first-century bout of trust-busting — may be one of the few moves that both Republicans and Democrats can support, though for different reasons.

♦

THAT LEAVES THE THIRD CHARGE AGAINST Facebook: that its platforms and algorithms are dividing us into irreconcilable camps whose lack of common ground is inimical to democratic participation. While such camps certainly exist on the site, it's not at all clear that the platform itself is responsible for the cleavages. Nor is it clear what can be done about them.

Again, Facebook makes money by selling ads. Since you are the product, the longer you stick around, the greater the insights the company has about you, the more advertisers want to be there, and the more Facebook can charge for advertising. The primary ingredient that keeps you endlessly scrolling through your feed is the old publishing trick of serving you what you want to see, watch, or hear. There's nothing particularly surprising or nefarious about that. Most of us certainly like to imagine ourselves as discerning consumers of a range of views and positions. But think of your actual news consumption. Do you frequently read, watch, or listen to sources that you disagree with? Probably not. Few *Toronto Star* readers also take the *National Post*. By and large, our media sources are mirrors that reflect ourselves back to us, feeding us stories that we use to buttress our already held beliefs. Facebook has merely perfected the recipe.

The second ingredient in the secret sauce is content that provokes strong emotional reactions. Unfortunately, posts that inflame negative emotions seems to work better at this than stories that arouse positive ones. This is one of the reasons the computer scientist Jaron Lanier, who

has done pioneering work in virtual reality, has become a vocal critic of big tech in recent years, especially of social media. It's why GQ magazine, which profiled Lanier in August, described him as "the conscience of Silicon Valley."

Lanier's 2018 book, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*, offered a stark warning. As he explained to *New York* magazine at the time, there's a real power to negative emotions on social media:

Unfortunately there's this asymmetry in human emotions where the negative emotions of fear and hatred and paranoia and resentment come up faster, more cheaply, and they're harder to dispel than the positive emotions. So what happens is, every time there's some positive motion in these networks, the negative reaction is actually more powerful.

Those reactions are powerful, in part, because of their habit-forming qualities. "People who are addicted to Twitter are like all addicts," Lanier told GQ. "On the one hand miserable, and on the other hand very defensive about it and unwilling to blame Twitter." Or, as the University of Toronto political scientist Ron Deibert puts it in his 2020 Massey Lectures, *Reset*, "You check your social media account, and it feels like a toxic mess, but you can't help but swipe for more." This quirk of human emotional behaviour is at the heart of the misinformation, the manipulation of information, and the sheer hatred that is all too frequently found on Facebook (Twitter, too, but it's a comparatively tiny platform).

In a very real way, the platform succeeds when we become more polarized, when we find less common ground. In other words, Facebook succeeds when we fail. But is the company actually responsible for the speech that exists on its platforms? It argues that it isn't — that it's effectively like the phone lines of days past. Did we hold phone carriers responsible for the contents of the conversations that took place on them?

Critics counter that Facebook inappropriately benefits from section 230 of the U.S. Communications Decency Act, which states, "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." That has shielded the company from liability over its users' posted content. If the company were regulated as a news organization, for instance, it would have to clean up its act quickly.

Neither argument is completely convincing, however. Yes, Facebook resembles the phone company in that it allows electronic communication over great distances, but, unlike phone conversations, much of that communication is public, not private. Yes, it disseminates information that may be called "news," but, unlike traditional publishers, it creates virtually none of that information itself. The fact is that we've never seen an entity such as Facebook before. The company has provided the means for billions of people to act as publishers themselves, free to post and share whatever comes to their minds. It is both phone company and news organization — even as it is neither one of those things — based in one country but operating globally. Taking away section 230 protections from Facebook might help enforce existing laws on certain types of speech (hate speech, libel,

Straightened

A shadow poem of Daisuke Tajima's painting gokinchotaikoku

lately all these rows of teeth groom weavers' work
down into the pavement of lines I go
down I go through chutes, reflect self in windows
count how glass prints cloud and what obliterates
meteorologically, all my feathers are metal, an internal
lightning rips the tower tip
and elevators dive to base
where at the waterfall face concrete is not so much
the surface of a quarry same as what is under it

Elea Kraljii Gardiner

Elea Kraljii Gardiner is the author of Trauma Head and serpentine loop. She also directs the Vancouver Manuscript Intensive.

incitement to violence), and that is probably an overdue correction. But lawmakers in the United States and elsewhere will still need to think of new forms of regulation for hybrid entities such as Facebook — as Mark Zuckerberg himself said earlier this year. (And he is not the only tech executive to warn of the absence of effective regulation in tech.)

♦
LET'S BE CLEAR: THE REMOVAL OF SECTION 230 protections and the addition of new regulations would do little to bridge our differences. After all, what law is being broken when anti-vaxxers spread their absurdities on Instagram or when QAnon followers (yes, they're in Canada, too) disseminate their crazy, conspiratorial pseudo-ideas? Facebook is no more responsible for the belief that vaccines cause autism than the printing press was responsible for the belief among some northern European monks that the road to salvation lay outside Rome.

Of course, that hasn't stopped Facebook veterans and other Silicon Valley VIPs from criticizing the company and the technology it has unleashed on the world. The Canadian-American venture capitalist and former Facebook senior executive Chamath Palihapitiya, for one, said in 2017, "I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works." Facebook's first president, the entrepreneur and philanthropist Sean Parker, who also created the peer-to-peer music program Napster, warned that same year, "It literally changes your relationship with society, with each other."

I suppose we should be grateful that insiders are warning about the dangers of social media, but only Silicon Valley types have the hubris to assume that their work is uniquely able to destroy democratic societies. Democracy is indeed a very slender reed if a company founded in 2004 can destroy it by 2020. Yes, democratic societies have big problems: the loss of faith in the institutions that help us provide meaning and order in our lives; the sclerotic governments that are being asked to shoulder ever greater responsibilities; the strident individualism and intolerance on the right and the left; the inequitable distributions of income and imbalances in the accumulation of wealth. These woes, and more, have led to and are exacerbated by zero-sum politics that lacks a conception of the common good. But such grievances predate Facebook and would exist without it. Ernst Zundel and Jim Keegstra didn't need social media to spread hate in Canada. The Warren Commission, which issued its final report twenty years before Mark Zuckerberg was born, spawned conspiracy after conspiracy. Social media didn't create the cultural cleavages of the 1960s and '70s, either. And Donald Trump didn't need it to cast unfounded doubt on the 2020 election results, or the validity of mail-in ballots (though it certainly helped).

In fact, in spotlighting and amplifying these problems, Facebook may actually be providing a civic service by showing us the challenges we face in preserving democracy and allowing it to evolve in a digital world. Consider this well-known passage from John Stuart Mill:

The whole strength and value, then, of human judgment, depending on the one property, that it can be set right when it is wrong, reliance can be placed on it only when the means of setting it right are

kept constantly at hand. In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and expound to himself, and upon occasion to others, the fallacy of what was fallacious.

Reasoned judgment is essential in the pursuit of truth, just as it is essential to our conception of democracy. It is the duty of citizens "to form the truest opinions they can" and, quite literally, govern themselves accordingly. Beyond a desire to separate opinion from fact, reasoned judgment requires time and the tools to do so.

We need to determine how we'll accomplish that in a digital world. Estimates are that within five years, we will create nearly 500 exabytes of data a day (that's 500 billion gigabytes). In such a world, how are we supposed to separate fact from opinion? But this is an epistemological problem, not a technological one — and much less one of bad corporate behaviour. Put simply, the challenge is to determine what we know, how we know it, and how we know it to be true.

All revolutions challenge our view of what's true by dismantling the status quo, by demolishing the familiar. The digital revolution in information and communication is no different. Facebook — and other successful platforms — have eliminated many of those arbiters who previously helped us define the truth. But there were always those who didn't accept the legitimacy of sanctioned referees; they just lacked the means to meet easily, share their ideas easily, and discuss them easily and out in the open. Removing or limiting their means of communicating may once again make them invisible to us, but it will not make their ideas disappear.

So, by all means, boycott Facebook. Delete it. Encourage your friends to do the same (you may well feel better). Canadian diplomats and elected officials may wish to encourage their American counterparts to impose tougher anti-trust and data-protection laws on the company in defence of our common interests. But let's be honest with ourselves: our biggest democratic challenge isn't Facebook. It is to find a newly acceptable standard of truth in an era of information expansion on a global scale. ▲

Inspirations

On Liberty

John Stuart Mill

John W. Parker and Son, 1859

Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now

Jaron Lanier

Henry Holt and Company, 2018

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power

Shoshana Zuboff

PublicAffairs, 2019

Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society

Ronald J. Deibert

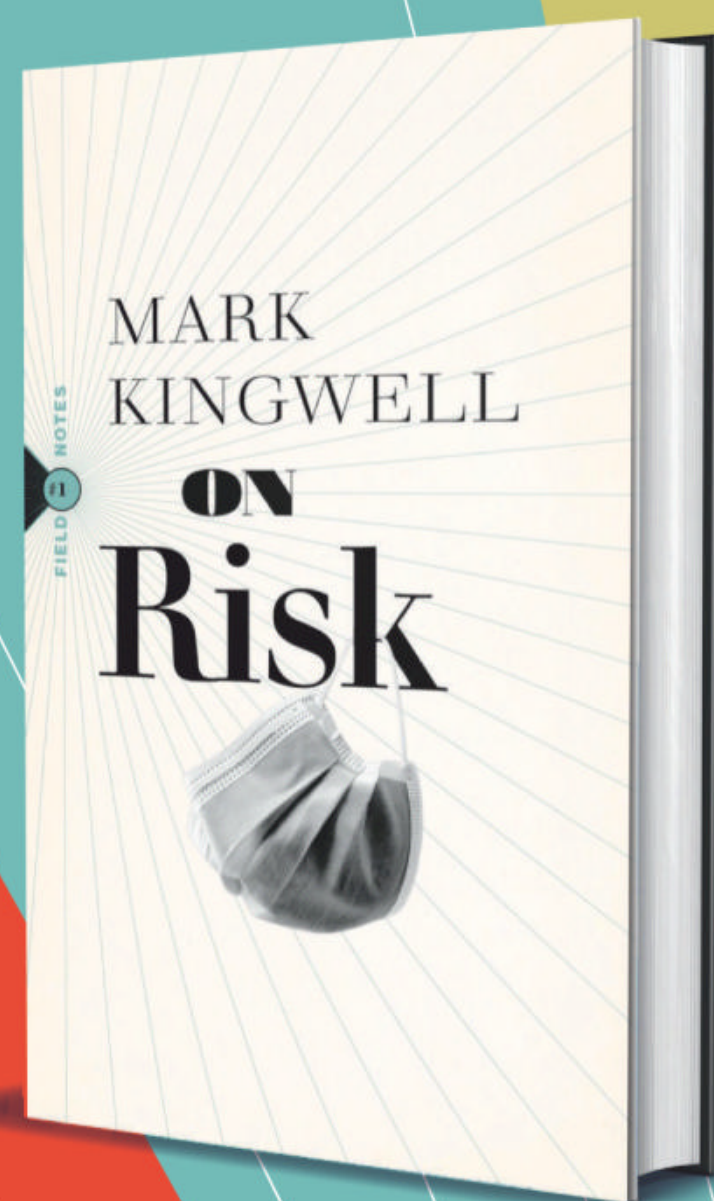
House of Anansi, 2020

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FIELD NOTES

#1

CAN WE HANDLE RISK?



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ON KILLING A REVOLUTION

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Gayatri Kumar

**Watermelon Snow:
Science, Art, and a Lone Polar Bear**

Lynne Quarmby

McGill-Queen's University Press

184 pages, hardcover and ebook

LYNN QUARMBY ALWAYS WANTED TO see the Arctic. "For much of my life," she writes early in *Watermelon Snow*, "I yearned to visit the north of my imagination." As a young girl whose great-grandfather was in the Klondike gold rush and whose father modelled an outdoorsy independence, she imagined "a romantic, ultimate wilderness of sublime landscapes." At ten, she built a raft and tried to pole her way across a small pond, toward that wonderful place, only to have her vessel sink into the mud. Now, almost fifty years later, the cell biologist wishes she could tell her younger self that "one day I will travel to the far north on a beautiful ship."

Watermelon Snow is the story of that ship and Quarmby's fifteen-day journey across the High Arctic in June 2017, when she was among thirty passengers — twenty-eight artists and two scientists — assembled by the Arctic Circle Expeditionary Residency to work on "rational, meaningful responses to the global environmental crisis." Sailing aboard the tall ship *Antigua*, they explored Svalbard, the Norwegian archipelago east of Greenland, always with armed guards keeping watch for polar bears.

Quarmby writes beautifully, with a particular fondness for colour. She notes the indigo, mustard, and rust houses of Longyearbyen, while clouds appear "grey, pink, and dusty purple, the colour of a fresh-picked plum before you polish it for eating." Sometimes "a quiet symphony of grey" plays across the water: "oyster, pearly, mousy, and leaden." Her keen eye can also tell the "bleached-white" of whalebone from the brighter white of "bergy bits" — the chunks of floating ice, sometimes the size of buses, that are "white like a popsicle you've sucked the colour from." But it's red that she seeks: she's made the trip hoping to find watermelon snow, a phenomenon that causes blankets of snow to darken like blood. The microbial bloom, caused by a species of algae that thrives in the cold, emerges when meltwater increases in warmer weather; the resulting hue then absorbs more heat, further speeding up the melt.

A palpable grief infuses Quarmby's prose. She feels the crisis facing the natural world as if it is "the weight of a black hole." Her body "aches" when she thinks of "the loss of the old growth forests where I grew up." Stripped of her youthful optimism, she only half-heartedly concedes that "if hope is what you need, it can be found"

in things like hydrogen cells, carbon-capture technologies, and even societal change. But "for many things I love, it is too late for hope."

When not recounting the expedition, Quarmby muses on the origins of life and our evolutionary links with microbes. At times, she's an endearingly geeky scientist, who compares *E. coli* to drunken revellers and is utterly unafraid to admit that she once penned a villanelle for Anton van Leeuwenhoek (who discovered microbes). She also describes her own environmental activism, which she came to relatively recently. Life had gotten in the way — "a son, a divorce, research grants" — and she had been content to let the government do its job. "It was a long time before



They assembled in Svalbard.

I finally accepted that those in power were not willing to help human civilization move rapidly away from fossil fuels." She can countenance the apathy no longer.

Armchair environmentalism? Easy. Electoral politics? That takes guts. Though she'd much prefer hunting algae to politicking, Quarmby ran in the 2015 federal election, as the Green Party candidate for Burnaby North-Seymour. She was "crushed by the campaign," which she likens to class IV rapids on the Chattooga River: "Ten months later, standing on the metaphorical shore, soaking wet and bedraggled, I was gazing at a smashed canoe, knowing without a doubt that I was better suited to running river rapids than running in an election." That she had little

activist swagger beforehand makes her foray into climate politics all the more compelling. She was first arrested in spring 2012, trying to block a coal train. The experience left her feeling afraid and embarrassed, but she continued with her new-found mission. In 2014, she was among those who flouted an injunction won by Kinder Morgan; the energy giant took them to court for "tortious interference." Quarmby contacted a journalist before she even called a lawyer: "Outrage trumped fear."

FOR ALL ITS MERITS, *WATERMELON SNOW* IS uneven and, at times, predictable. Most of Quarmby's activism has centred on Burnaby Mountain, and she has no problem whipping up eleven bulletproof reasons for opposing the Trans Mountain pipeline (in an excellent, damning chapter). But at the polar latitudes, she is fully a tourist. Her grief for the beautiful vanishing ice is couched in well-worn tropes. Yes, the Arctic is "ground zero for climate change," but it's also a fantastical place where Quarmby seeks adventure. Her writing, while alluring, can feel empty, as she meanders into breathless mythologizing. Who knew that walrus were so enormous! Skinny-dipping in the Arctic Ocean releases so many endorphins! And some of her musings are downright cheesy: "Will our god-like species find a way to unite power with wisdom?"

Ice is political. However we slice it, the Arctic is being shaped by struggles over resource extraction, human rights, and, yes, scientific exploration. The 1925 Svalbard Treaty, signed by over forty countries, resulted in "a demilitarized archipelago" that now hosts a research station and the Global Seed Vault, which stores over 900,000 varieties of seeds in the permafrost (which is quickly melting). Then there's Pyramiden, an abandoned Russian coal-mining settlement on Spitsbergen Island that is among the *Antigua's* last stops. The town once flourished and then disappeared — part of a larger Cold War environmental story. If only Quarmby had done more to engage with all of this, rather than treating it like a footnote in a souvenir brochure.

That's not to say Quarmby is unaware. She knows that her trip looks like yet another exercise in "extinction tourism," and she struggles with that pervasive guilt throughout the book. Her flights alone put almost four tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere, "more than the weight of eight adult polar bears or one baby blue whale." Can she make that up to the bears, the whales, her son? "Fleetingly, I wished it could be enough that going North was something I'd dreamed about since I was a child," she writes of her motive to travel. "But in the end, it is all about stories and I need a better one." ▲

The Philanthropist's Dilemma

Elsewhere they meet with charity

Ian Smillie

Philanthropic Foundations in Canada: Landscapes, Indigenous Perspectives and Pathways to Change

Edited by Peter R. Elson, Sylvain A. Lefèvre, and Jean-Marc Fontan

PhiLab

334 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS IN THIS country come in all shapes and sizes: private, public, “donor advised”; small, large, and jumbo. From none in 1917 to more than 10,000 today, they hold assets of \$70 billion. In 2015, foundations gave \$5.6 billion to other registered charities: hospitals, universities, research facilities, community associations, groups working internationally, and arts organizations (including the magazine you’re reading). They are a vital part of our social and cultural fabric, and their number, along with their largesse, is growing.

“To date, the story of foundations in Canada, with very few exceptions,” the editors of this new essay collection write, “has been told by the foundations themselves.” To a large extent, *Philanthropic Foundations in Canada* is cut from the same cloth. Its first five chapters discuss the history of foundations, how they are managed and regulated, and what the current landscape looks like. The final five, grouped under the heading “Pathways to Change,” describe various efforts at bringing donor coordination to bear on large, intractable problems: poverty, youth homelessness, and cutbacks in government social-sector funding. The various contributors describe the evolution of strategies and programs — all positive — with which they have been personally associated.

In these ten chapters, one catches only the slightest hint of doubt: for the most part, all is well; the sector is learning and building and moving forward in helpful ways.

By and large, however, foundations don’t deliver programs — they deliver money. These chapters are mostly about that: how foundations draw in resources; how they research, plan, learn, coordinate, strategize, and convene in order to ensure that grantees meet an objective. The book would have appeared incomplete without at least a few recipient voices, and in what looks like an attempt to kill a couple of birds with one stone, a middle section contains three chapters by Indigenous writers whose organizations are on the receiving end of the philanthropic spectrum. And what a usefully discordant tone these essays bring to the whole.

The authors here are understandably preoccupied with the historical impact of white

settler philanthropy and its manifestation in the residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and other endeavours that “have largely failed to alleviate the social issues produced by settler practice.” They speak of the need to decolonize funding, the need for reciprocity in the relationship between donor and grantee, and the need to “transform the way funders think, act and fund.” Trust, reciprocity, and transparency on the part of the donor are essential, they argue, to successful relationships.

Yes, yes, one might be tempted to reply, things have been awful between many foundations and Indigenous communities. And in the ten-year-old Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal



Keeping an eye on the nest egg.

Peoples in Canada, along with several other initiatives, the book tells us, foundations are at last starting to get it right. That all may be true, but the generic problem of philanthropy that these authors describe is far from unique to the settler mentality they bemoan. History is laden with wreckage trailing behind one Lady Bountiful after another. “If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good,” Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Walden*, in 1854, “I should run for my life.” In our own time, we don’t need to think much beyond everyday critiques of the World Bank to find egregious examples of donors failing to alleviate the social problems they have created.

If there is a shortcoming in the chapters on Indigenous perspectives, it is their tone of special pleading: Indigenous organizations should be excused from standard types of reporting and “bureaucratic application forms and evaluation criteria.” Requirements imposed by the Canada Revenue Agency embody “the conflicts inherent in making change in colonially produced social issues from within a colonial structure of organization and regulation still based in Canada on 15th-century British laws.”

It is true that Anglo-Saxon notions of charity hark back to the Elizabethan Poor Laws (from the turn of the seventeenth century, not the fifteenth), and it is true that the Canada Revenue Agency has a limited notion of what constitutes a “charitable purpose.” But there isn’t much in this book to suggest that the CRA is overly restrictive. In fact, in the wake of the WE controversy, it could be argued that the agency is far too lax in its oversight of non-profits, foundations included. One author says that the CRA imposes a “strong reporting system,” but in fact the annual T3010 that all charities must submit provides little information on sources of income or where and how donations are actually spent. (By 2019, the WE Charity and the WE Charity Foundation had become so entangled with ME to WE businesses and with WE charities in the United States and Britain that their T3010 forms, still openly available for public viewing on the CRA website, should have raised questions long before the damaging public imbroglio that developed.) Actual CRA audits are uncommon, and charitable status is rarely questioned once granted. The situation is a little like getting a driver’s licence at sixteen and not being tested again until you are eighty.

♦

“RESPONSIVE” IS A WORD THAT DOESN’T APPEAR much in *Philanthropic Foundations in Canada*. The idea of board members *responding* to a grantee’s requests for help with its strategies, goals, and programs (as opposed to the other way around) doesn’t arise, except perhaps in the Indigenous plea for “reciprocity.” In one of the few chapters that deal with foundation-supported activities, Natalie Ord describes her employer’s work on youth homelessness: the Vancouver Foundation combines seed funding with research, learning, and “convening,” which seems to be a euphemism for advocacy. There is, of course, no reason to argue that the organization shouldn’t convene, or fund what it thinks best, but the approach could also be seen as a bit colonialish. The same may be said for Centraide’s poverty reduction efforts, in Montreal, and the “greater openness” it has developed in the donor-grantee relationship. Greater openness, however, could even extend

to the possibility of a donor taking a seat on the board of a grantee organization. Settler philanthropy, here we come!

Modern donor hubris recalls “The Gospel of Wealth,” the well-known essay by Andrew Carnegie, from 1889, in which he wrote confidently about “the best gift which can be given to a community.” The great philanthropist and founder of one of America’s oldest foundations mentioned hospitals, medical colleges, laboratories, “and other institutions connected with the alleviation of human suffering, and especially with the prevention rather than the cure of human ills.” He put his own money into libraries, saying that readers were “of more value” than the “inert, lazy, and hopelessly poor.” The question of a government creating such institutions didn’t factor into Carnegie’s calculus. That way lay socialism, and he certainly wanted to protect “the legal right of the millionaire to his millions.” The answer to those who would “propose to substitute Communism,” he wrote, was for “the man of wealth” to give back “in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community. . . . Thus is the problem of Rich and Poor to be solved.”

Carnegie’s gospel was at the heart of what came to be known as “welfare capitalism”: companies developing welfare systems for their employees and establishing foundations as a means of heading unionism, socialism, and revolution off at the bank. Here we have the origins of the Russell Sage, Rockefeller, Kellogg, and Ford Foundations in the United States as well as the Massey and McConnell Foundations in Canada.

John Steinbeck had some thoughts on all this. “Perhaps the most overrated virtue in our list of shoddy virtues is that of giving,” he wrote in 1951. “Giving builds up the ego of the giver, makes him superior and higher and larger than the receiver. Nearly always, giving is a selfish pleasure, and in many cases it is a downright destructive and evil thing. One has only to remember some of our wolfish financiers who spend two-thirds of their lives clawing fortunes out of the guts of society and the latter third pushing it back.” The irony is that many of the largest, best-known family foundations of Steinbeck’s day went on to become leaders in supporting social justice, liberal democracy, and human rights, not just at home but around the world.

Annabelle Berthiaume and Sylvain Lefèvre, one of the co-editors, echo both Carnegie and Steinbeck in their chapter on the Collectif des fondations, established in Quebec in 2015, saying that the “context of heightening social inequalities brings back into the public debate the complex and delicate issue of wealth creation and redistribution and, more generally, the role of philanthropy in combating social inequalities.” Clearly, the problem of Rich and Poor remains to be solved.



ONE AREA UNTOUCHED IN THIS BOOK IS THE ISSUE of a recipient organization’s administrative and ongoing costs. Rarely do donors want to be shackled to endless recurrent costs, preferring time-limited innovation and social experiments that can be handed off and scaled up. Too often grantees are expected — somehow — to raise funds elsewhere for unattractive running costs or to squeeze them out of a patchwork of donor-

crafted “initiatives.” Implicit in much of this thinking is the idea that some level of government will take the successful initiative to scale. Berthiaume and Lefèvre’s chapter, however, describes the reverse: a provincial government cutting back on social services and expecting foundations to pick up the slack. “What is the role of foundations, the foundations asked themselves, in a context where public funding no longer provides, or even promises to provide, such support?” In response, governments in Quebec and elsewhere might well ask, What is the point in giving these foundations tax breaks — giving up income that would otherwise come to us — if they aren’t willing or able to assist with our priorities?

A concluding chapter of reflections by Tim Brodhead, former president and chief executive officer of the McConnell Foundation, draws out some of the book’s key messages, but it also hits a few nails that were missed in what he calls a “mostly upbeat story.” He concedes that “the old formula of foundation grants being used for pilot projects that, once proven, could then be scaled up by government money, has not worked for years.” If poverty, inequality, and social injustice are to be tackled effectively, “more attention is needed on how to make government more responsive, nimble and effective.” This will come only when foundations have the legitimacy to advocate — a legitimacy that will be derived not from the volume of a foundation’s spending, knowledge, independence, or “presumed disinterestedness” but from trust, diversity, public accountability, and the kind of voice that is earned through genuine reciprocity between giver and receiver. ▲



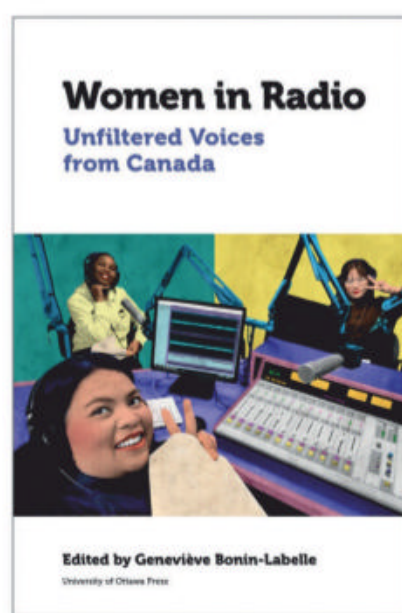
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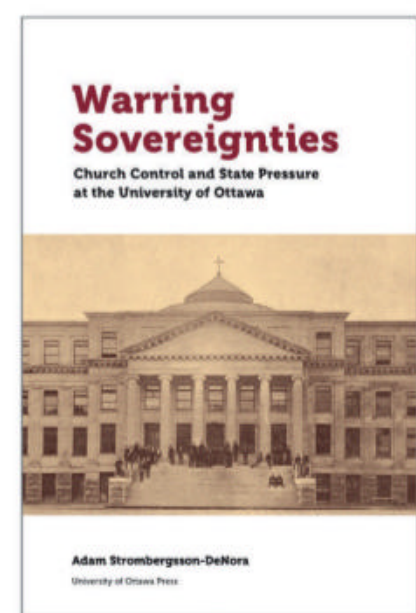
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Bank Account

An institution's history

Kelvin Browne

**Whom Fortune Favours:
The Bank of Montreal and the
Rise of North American Finance**

Laurence B. Mussio

McGill-Queen's University Press

752 pages, hardcover and ebook

IMAGINE IT'S REVEALED THAT YOUR STAID, quiet grandparents were once wild and crazy. It's the kind of startling revelation you want to have about grey-haired banks when you open Laurence B. Mussio's *Whom Fortune Favours*, a two-volume history of the Bank of Montreal. Once omnipresent in business and society, Canadian banks were far more distinct from one another than they are today. The outsize characters who ruled them were revered or reviled by the public and comparable only to government in their influence. Now banks seem to be bland corporate citizens that deliver commoditized products with very little to differentiate them. Not even vast amounts of branding and marketing—with what look like images of the same happy families and smiling faces—can lend banks individual personalities.

Established in 1817, the Bank of Montreal was Canada's first financial institution. All these years later, it's the forty-seventh-largest bank in the world, having been surpassed by three upstart compatriots: the Royal Bank of Canada (twenty-third), the Toronto-Dominion Bank (twenty-fifth), and the Bank of Nova Scotia (fortieth). In some respects, it's remarkable that BMO has survived all this time. "In the North Atlantic world, the small number of private and corporate institutions that have persisted for two centuries form an elite club," Mussio writes. "In Canada, very few companies can claim such a long pedigree: the Hudson's Bay Company (founded in 1670) and Molson (1786) come to mind. Yet even these are now managed, or owned partially or wholly, from the United States."

The early dominance of the Bank of Montreal is somewhat difficult to appreciate from today's vantage point: "This is Canada's first bank, its most influential bank, for a century or more the coordinator-in-chief of the Canadian chartered banks before the establishment of the Bank of Canada. The Bank of Montreal was the government's banker, the financier of vital public infrastructure from the telegraph to the railroad to innumerable public-work projects." The institution's founding involved the most prominent businessmen of the era; its history is the history of nascent capitalism in North America, under the watchful eye of English colonialist overlords. Its history is the history of a nation.



To study our banks is to study our nation.

Our banks have always had a greater impact on business and communities than their American counterparts. After all, it's a consolidated industry with monopolistic sway. There are only a few major players here—the Big Six—and each has thousands of branches across the country. The United States, by contrast, has hundreds of local and regional banks, many with only a handful of branches, and the overwhelming majority are small compared with the Big Six; only a few are large enough to have national prominence. With good reason, Canadians long believed that banks ran the show, and conspiracy theorists still maintain they are in collusion with the government and the churches to control our lives. And however diminished they are in their obvious dominance or flamboyance, they still support everything from the local minor-league hockey team to major-league cultural and health institutions, so you simply can't avoid the Big Six (even if you don't bank with them).

Are our banks as competitive or innovative as their U.S. peers? While it depends on what measures are used, the judgment is usually "no, but"—and that "but" is crucial. Our financial system's advantage is superior regulation. The government's payback for allowing an oligarchy—and for permitting consolidation of brokerage, trust, insurance, and other services in a single institution—is the banks' subservience to oversight and the expectation that they be model citizens, rather than risk takers aggressively pursuing growth à la Lehman Brothers.

Less competition and closer scrutiny meant that our banks did not recklessly grow their businesses, in the years leading up to the 2008 financial crisis, by giving out mortgages indiscriminately. The recession wasn't restricted to the U.S., but Canadian banks (and Canadians) did weather it better. Will Canadian banking ever suffer major calamities? Will Ottawa ever need to bail out our proudly sound institutions? Mussio doesn't engage the potential drama of such questions.

◆

WHOM FORTUNE FAVOURS BEGINS WITH A NOTE TO readers from Darryl White, the current chief executive officer of BMO Financial Group:

What... remains the same—and shines through in this history—are the values shared by ten generations of BMO bankers which motivated their actions. Today, we define them as Integrity, Empathy, Diversity, and Responsibility—but, whatever labels are used, they form the foundation that inspires us to help businesses and individuals to succeed and, by doing so, to make our nation and society more prosperous and purposeful.

If you're a survivor of the uber-capitalist rigour of the modern financial sector, you might think that White is speaking about attributes needed for social work, not banking. Lowly branch staff struggling to meet their sales quotas might be more cynical about the so-called BMO way. They

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likely don't subscribe to the self-mythologizing notion that their job is far above the squalor of making a few cents on every transaction or the relentless pressure to cross-sell products.

Mussio, who previously published *A Vision Greater Than Themselves: The Making of the Bank of Montreal, 1817–2017*, had full access to BMO's archives and with it the potential for new insights. However, writing about an institution when you have the boardroom's full cooperation is like writing an authorized biography of a celebrity. There are limits: Too sanitized, and no one is going to read it or believe it to be credible. Too revealing or provocative — well, that's just not going to happen. The arrangement makes it difficult to communicate the reality of decision making, as Bryan Burrough and John Helyar did brilliantly with *Barbarians at the Gate: The Fall of RJR Nabisco*, in 1989, or as Liaquat Ahamed did with *Lords of Finance: The Bankers Who Broke the World*, which won the Pulitzer in 2010.

By contrast, *Whom Fortune Favours* makes it seem that all decisions are rational, that all executives are collegial. The inner workings of First Canadian Place come across as rather boring, especially when the reality in most financial institutions — in most large companies, for that matter — is a continuing tumult as rapacious executive egos attempt to overturn whatever illusory methodology exists.

Mussio's first volume includes valuable historical material, but the second volume, covering 1946 to 2017, is more engaging: we're more cognizant of the newsworthy situations being described. For instance, it was a seminal moment when BMO decided, in 1984, to take over Harris Bankcorp. Canadian companies rarely bought U.S. ones; it was usually the other way around. "More than any other single acquisition, event, or initiative," Mussio explains, "the purchase of the Harris Bank of Chicago has been seen as the kind of big move that many banks and bankers are called to aspire to, but that few actually have the opportunity to realize."

On paper, the acquisition seemed promising. BMO would have access to Harris Bank's well-respected trust business and trading acumen and would gain its U.S. cash management skills and domestic loans experience, as well as money market, bond trading, and underwriting capabilities. With a solid position at home, significant international exposure, and superior account management and operations savvy, BMO believed it could exploit Harris Bank's attributes both in Canada and worldwide.

Although Harris grew to contribute about 25 percent of adjusted company earnings by 2017, the merger didn't start off well: "For many years, the culture at Harris Bank was reluctant to accept that a Canadian bank had taken over this Chicago institution. One veteran of the BMO-Harris experience recalled that more than a few Harris executives of the era seemed to 'resent being acquired and resentful that [BMO] was going to manage them.'" Perhaps the new bosses were guilty of "trying to be way too nice."

Through the 1980s and 1990s, many BMO suits thought the acquisition "a disaster" and let Harris continue to chart its own course. Not everyone believed the rocky relationship was the fault of the Canadians or an issue with their non-assertive demeanour; many just didn't think Bay Street could cope with the rougher world of American finance. While things have improved

since those early days, the Harris Bank story remains a cautionary tale for capital heading south — one that perhaps informed TD Bank's more successful move into the U.S. in 2008.

ONE OF BMO'S MOST INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES WAS its early foray into online banking, well ahead of most others and certainly as the leader of the Big Six. In October 1996, it launched mbanx, "an entirely new virtual banking enterprise designed to meet the needs of financially active consumers across North America at the highest standards of speed, convenience and service quality." The bank promised a game changer, telling customers that "you deserve better" and "maybe it's time for a new relationship." But BMO's operations and culture weren't prepared for the advertised revolution: "mbanx was almost certainly a visionary and bold move, but the project also proved to be a serious overextension." Mussio quotes one insider who said that "the launch looked very well done" from the outside, "but behind the scenes it was chaos."

It would be a mistake, Mussio argues, to view the digital experiment as a failure. In many ways, it "crystallized some of the enduring qualities of an evolving purpose for the Bank. One of the most persistent legacies of the mbanx era was the kind of cultural values that began to be articulated as a conscious program of organizational life. The five values were: (1) change is good; (2) we believe in better; (3) a promise is a promise; (4) make simple rules that work; and (5) everyone is important." Of course, only in Canada would a humiliating debacle like mbanx be seen this way, rather than getting the senior management fired or shaking public confidence.

Another high-profile failure: the unconsummated merger with the Royal Bank in 1998. To compete internationally, the argument went, Canadian banks needed to be larger, more capitalized. When it became known that BMO and RBC planned to merge, CIBC and TD didn't want to be left behind and decided to elope too. Public opinion was clearly worried about fewer banks — with even less competition and choice. In light of the prevailing sentiment, Paul Martin, then finance minister, declined to approve the mergers. The potential BMO-RBC deal involved high-stakes politics and finance, as well as a glamorous Irish Canadian big wheel in the form of Matt Barrett of BMO. But Mussio's scholarly recounting of events can feel more textbook than revelatory. You want to be taken behind the scenes. You want Barrett's titillating marriage with the playgirl Anne-Marie Sten, just the year before, to help spice things up.

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Whom Fortune Favours* is the photographs: all white guys all the time, except for the last few pages. One, a picture of the main Vancouver branch, in 1952, is captioned "A bustling workplace." But the word "bustling" feels incongruous with the book as written. As *Whom Fortune Favours* would have it, the bank business is always a dispassionate undertaking. There is little sense of the emotional impact it has on the people inside or their customers, let alone of what Canadians expect of a perpetually profitable enterprise. A history that truly places the storied institution within the broader societal context is yet to come. What Mussio has produced is a meticulous business case study, rigorously documented, that suggests the Bank of Montreal is best understood in its own world, not necessarily in the real one. ▲

This Is Not the End of the Story

The lasting promise of section 35

Ian Waddell

Rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

— Constitution Act, 1982

THIS IS THE STORY, OR AT LEAST ONE part of the story, of how section 35 came to be. Like any good story, it has to start somewhere, and it starts with Harry Chingee, chief of the Sekani people, who was showing me how to cast a fly rod, while my friend Jack Woodward was wading in the middle of a fast-flowing river. We were near the town of Mackenzie, in central British Columbia, although it did seem like the North to me at the time. It was summer 1977. Sitting on the grassy riverbank, in a forest clearing down a hill from Harry's log house, I was far from Glasgow, where I was born, and far even from Vancouver, where I had arrived via Toronto and set up a law practice. Jack and I were representing the Sekani band for a royal commission hearing, whose purpose I have long since forgotten. What I haven't forgotten is how Harry's people had been displaced from their homes the decade before, when the W. A. C. Bennett Dam was built on the Peace River.

As our catch sizzled in a small pan by the water's edge, a couple of big trucks thundered along the road. "Are they your trucks?" I asked Harry. "Are you kidding?" he replied. "They belong to the logging company, and they come and go as they please." Later, as we relaxed by a crackling fire, I pressed him again. Harry, who just passed away two years ago, was a quiet man, but after a long pause he replied, "Ian, I can't stop those damn trucks. I don't have that kind of power." I asked what he would ask for if he were to have some say over the loggers. He told me his people just wanted to be recognized and included, to have a "piece of the action," by which he meant having a say in the place and having their historic land rights recognized.

Later that week, after we'd left Harry's place, Jack and I flew in a small plane over Williston Lake, the vast reservoir behind the hydroelectric dam. Our pilot mentioned how many of the trees had been left standing in the river valley before the flooding, ironic considering all those logging trucks. BC Hydro had said there was no market for the wood, and, besides, it was in a hurry. But now those trees would sometimes rise up from the floor of the lake, shooting to

the surface like ballistic missiles. Occasionally, they hit Sekani canoes, holing or capsizing them. Other times, canoes would get caught in a tangle of debris. People had died in both ways.

I was a young, earnest lawyer at the time, and I thought I was familiar with Aboriginal rights. I had read the landmark *Calder* case. I had even spent three years with Tom Berger, the future judge who argued that case, as his assistant on the historic inquiry into a proposed pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley. But I was discovering that I still had a lot to learn.

♦

MAYBE THE STORY ACTUALLY STARTS IN THE LATE 1950s, in a small law firm in North Vancouver.



The catch sizzled by the water's edge.

The office belonged to Tom Hurley, a flamboyant and heavy-drinking criminal lawyer. His wife and secretary was Maisie Hurley, an immigrant from England who had founded a newspaper with Indigenous women, *The Native Voice*. One day, Tom returned from lunch with his studious (and sober) law student, Tom Berger, and chided Maisie for accepting an "Indian law case." She walked with the aid of a stick, and when she heard those words, she banged it on the desk: "They own this land. They never gave it up. The Royal Proclamation of 1763!"

After her husband died, Maisie Hurley asked Berger to take another "Indian law case." Two First Nations men from the Nanaimo area, Clifford White and David Bob, had been charged

with having six deer carcasses during closed season, contrary to the provisions of the Game Act. Berger argued they had a right under the treaties signed by James Douglas, British Columbia's first governor. That argument wasn't going anywhere with the magistrate, so Berger then raised the Royal Proclamation—for the first time in any court. No luck. But a reporter for the *Province* picked up the idea: "Lawyer Claims Indians Own Province," the headline read.

Berger received plenty of negative calls, and then he heard from Chief Frank Calder, who said the Nisga'a had been trying to argue the same thing for over a century. Berger took their case, *Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*, all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. In 1973, the court ruled that Aboriginal title had indeed existed when George III issued the Royal Proclamation centuries before. That decision was the first time the Canadian legal system acknowledged the existence of Aboriginal title and that such title existed independent of colonial law. The court was split, however, on whether the Nisga'a claim was valid. Three judges ruled that while Aboriginal title may have existed at one point, it had since been extinguished. Three other judges affirmed Nisga'a title, arguing that it had never been extinguished through treaty or statute. The seventh judge dismissed the case on a technicality. The federal justice minister, John Turner, was so impressed by Berger's legal skills that he appointed him to the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

♦

WE COULD PROBABLY START THIS STORY ANOTHER way entirely. In the early 1970s, I was the head of the Storefront Lawyers in Vancouver when I began working with Berger, by this time a judge, on a unified family court project. Not long after that, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who had a minority government dependent on the support of David Lewis, appointed Berger (a former NDP member of Parliament and B.C. party leader) to head a royal commission on the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, which would carry Alaskan and Canadian delta gas south. It was to be the largest private construction project in history. Berger hired me as his assistant.

The Berger Inquiry was officially launched by an order-in-council on March 21, 1974. It was Berger's idea to hold the bulk of the hearings away from Ottawa, a major departure from the way public inquiries were usually run at the time. "I want the people who live in the North, who make the North their home, to tell me in their own language and in their own way what they would say to the government of Canada," he said. One hearing, in Old Crow, Yukon, lasted almost a week; we listened to the whole town.

Because the hearings were held far from the country's population centres, extensive media coverage was crucial. CBC North broadcast every night in six languages, and the journalist Martin O'Malley brought the events to *Globe and Mail* readers almost every day. The inquiry was shown regularly on the national news. In fact, no previous inquiry had been broadcast the way this one was (and only the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has had such coverage since). Canadians began to notice.

The process helped develop a whole generation of Indigenous leaders. Nellie Cournoyea, from Inuvik, worked with the Committee for Original People's Entitlement, which represented the Inuit. She would become the sixth premier of the Northwest Territories, and later chaired the Aboriginal Pipeline Group and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation. Frank T'Seleie was a young Dene chief who publicly challenged Bob Blair of Foothills Pipe Lines. He said he would put his body in front of the construction equipment. After land claims were settled, T'Seleie became a proponent of the pipeline, which then included Indigenous partners. The boyish Stephen Kakfwi helped organize the Dene's presentations to Berger. He became president of the Dene Nation and the ninth premier of the Northwest Territories. Dave Porter, who used to carry equipment for CBC crews, was elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly and went on to be executive director of the Yukon Human Rights Commission and a negotiator for the Kaska Dena Council. Jim Antoine, then the quiet but charismatic twenty-six-year-old chief of the Fort Simpson Dene, greeted John Paul II on the 1987 papal visit and also became a premier of the Northwest Territories. And Georges Erasmus cut his teeth at the inquiry, appearing for the Dene Nation (called the Indian Brotherhood at the time). He became national chief of the Assembly of First Nations and co-chaired the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

◆

AFTER THE BERGER INQUIRY ENDED IN APRIL 1977, I returned to practising law in Vancouver, which led me to that Sekani client and the opportunity to fish with Harry Chingee. Before we left town, Harry took Jack Woodward and me, along with Jim Fulton, a local probation officer, and his wife, Liz, up a bumpy logging road to the top of Morfee Mountain. At the summit, a small group of Sekani were having a late-afternoon picnic. I recognized some of them from the Berger hearings, including a good friend of Harry's, who seemed like a sort of spiritual leader. As we watched the sunset, Jim and I confessed that we were going to try to win the federal NDP nominations in Skeena (for Jim) and in Vancouver Kingsway (for me). Both would be tough fights, and we knew it would be even tougher to knock off the incumbents in the general election that would have to be called sometime in 1979. Harry's friend told us that we were both going to win. Everyone cheered, and we did a little dance holding hands (it was the '70s, after all).

Harry's friend was right: Jim and I won upset victories in the May 1979 general election, which produced a minority government that lasted to December, under Joe Clark. In February 1980, Trudeau rose from the dead and formed a majority government — but with only two of

the seventy-five seats that represented the four Western provinces. (The Liberals didn't have a seat west of Lloyd Axworthy's in Winnipeg.) Fulton and I were re-elected.

In the run-up to the 1980 Quebec referendum, the Parti Québécois premier, René Lévesque, led the separatists, while Trudeau led the federalist side. Canada was lucky to have him there. (Joe Clark, when he was prime minister, had decided to leave the fight to the province's opposition leader, Claude Ryan.) It's impossible to predict what might have happened without federal involvement, but Trudeau and others campaigned actively against separation, and on May 20, three months after the Liberals had regained power, the No side, against sovereignty, won by 59.56 percent.

Before the vote, in a speech in Montreal, Trudeau stated that the referendum showed the need for change, and he pledged he would work with the premiers to "renew" Canada's constitution. He knew that he'd have more influence in any constitutional discussion if his cabinet included representation from the West. To this end, he was in talks with Ed Broadbent about tapping some NDP MPs as ministers. Broadbent ultimately rejected the idea but indicated he would support Trudeau's constitutional package. Unknown to Trudeau or the public, this produced what amounted to a revolt inside the NDP caucus.

A constitution is the fundamental law of any country — the rules by which it governs itself. In

"We took Jack's draft and tweaked it a bit more — made it simpler, really."

1980, Canada's constitution was essentially the British North America Act of 1867. Any significant changes had to be made by the Parliament of the United Kingdom on the advice of Canada. After numerous meetings with the premiers, and numerous tentative agreements that failed when provinces backed out or refused to support him, Trudeau rather courageously presented his constitutional package, which included a Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the promise of a national referendum on the amending formula, on October 6, 1980. It's hard to overstate the intensity of the debate that followed. At one point, the British ambassador, Sir John Ford, even got kicked out of Canada for suggesting things might not get past Westminster.

Trudeau soon found that only two provinces, Ontario and New Brunswick, supported his plan. The others — the so-called Gang of Eight — were vehemently against it. Quebec wanted a veto on any constitutional amendment; Saskatchewan and Manitoba were against a court-interpreted Charter; Alberta, Newfoundland, and Saskatchewan wanted provincial resource control embedded in the Constitution; and so on. Within the NDP caucus, Pauline Jewett and Margaret Mitchell wanted to see language around women's rights. Svend Robinson wanted the Charter strengthened generally. Lorne Nystrom and Simon De Jong wanted Saskatchewan's concerns addressed. And Jim Manly, Jim Fulton, and I wanted Aboriginal rights included.

OF COURSE, THE STORY REALLY BEGINS LONG, LONG ago, with the tragedies and injustices that Indigenous peoples have faced on this land for centuries. I began to appreciate this part of the story as a young criminal lawyer in Vancouver, working near Hastings and Main. And as counsel to Tom Berger during the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, I started to see how First Nations could regain real political and economic power within the modern Canadian framework through the formal recognition of their rights. The scope of those rights became clear to me during Berger's countless meetings, from Old Crow to Fort Smith, as people spoke of their love of the land and their use of that land for hunting and fishing since time immemorial. They had never surrendered title, even as they had lost access to those lands and the resources that went with them.

In the latter part of 1980, the constitutional debate was taking place in joint hearings before the Senate and the House of Commons. Jack Woodward had appeared there as counsel for the loquacious and determined George Watts, chief of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, who was arguing for a clause that would protect Aboriginal rights. Years before, in 1969, Pierre Trudeau had called those rights "historical might-have-beens." To his credit, Trudeau changed his mind over the course of the debate. This may have been because he needed the NDP's backing for his constitutional package. Whatever the reason, he sent his loyal

lieutenant and justice minister, Jean Chrétien, to negotiate our support. That is why I found myself in Broadbent's office — 653C — a few days later. As chance would have it, Don Rosenbloom, who was counsel with Berger in the *Calder* case, was in Ottawa; I asked him to join me, Ed, and Marc Eliesen, Broadbent's chief

of research, to help negotiate a deal. Woodward happened to be back in Ottawa, and I put him to work as well.

Eliesen concentrated on drafting the amendment that clarified provincial control of resources (now section 92A of the Constitution Act, 1867). This would help bring Saskatchewan and Alberta on board. Jack, Don, and I concentrated on the Aboriginal rights amendment. Chrétien was at first reluctant. "I have to report to the boss, you know," he said as the sun began to set over the Ottawa River. But with the help of some freshly brewed coffee, he hung in there. We discussed the issue and its potential ramifications. (I also knew that he was under intense pressure from Indigenous groups, who were literally camped in offices, buildings, and tents around downtown Ottawa.)

A vote was called in the House on another matter, so we took a break from the negotiations. I scurried back to my office, in the Confederation Building, to find Woodward at the typewriter drafting a clause. He was the only one of us who knew how to type. I took his draft back to Rosenbloom. Don and I thought the wording was too general, so Don went next door to Ed's secretary's office and called Vancouver. He talked to Tom Berger and Jim Aldridge and came back saying that Berger, in particular, had advised us to keep the wording general. This would give the courts space to develop the law. We took Jack's draft and tweaked it a bit more — made it simpler, really. And we gave this to Chrétien.

The next day, Chrétien took the clause to the joint parliamentary committee, co-chaired by Serge Joyal and Harry Hays. Harry Daniels, president of the Métis National Council and the Native Council of Canada, had been attending the hearings. He grabbed Chrétien by the lapels as he was going into the meeting and told him not to forget the Métis people. Svend Robinson, who was standing nearby, quickly scribbled down a definition: "Aboriginals include Indian, Inuit, and Métis." (I have always thought that if there is a heaven, a prominent place should be reserved there for Harry. I suspect Svend doesn't believe in heaven, but if he does end up there, he should get a prominent place too.)

Ultimately, the House of Commons passed the draft constitutional agreement in February 1981, but several provinces challenged Trudeau's plan to unilaterally patriate the Constitution. That September, the Supreme Court ruled that such an act might be legal, but that it violated existing constitutional conventions. So the prime minister was forced to go back to the premiers one more time. Finally, on November 5, 1981, Ottawa reached a deal with the provinces — all except Quebec. In the process, the clauses that had entrenched Aboriginal and treaty rights, as well as women's equality rights, in the new constitution were somehow removed.

Tom Berger responded to the removal of Aboriginal rights from the agreement in an op-ed for the *Globe and Mail* and in a speech he delivered in Guelph, Ontario:

No words can deny what happened. The first Canadians — a million people and more — have had their answer from Canada's statesmen. They cannot look to any of our governments to defend the idea that they are entitled to a distinct and contemporary place in Canadian life. Under the new constitution the first Canadians shall be the last. This is not the end of the story. The native peoples have not come this far to turn back now.

Because they must be appear impartial, judges are not supposed to speak on political matters. But should a judge remain silent if, by instead speaking out, he may prevent a great injustice to a minority?

Berger put his judicial career on the line, and he was rebuked by Trudeau (who eventually backtracked). A conservative judge complained to the Canadian Judicial Council, which cited Berger for an "indiscretion." In the end, Berger resigned. He spoke out, and he paid the price. It probably cost him a future appointment to the Supreme Court, which was a great loss for Canada. But that's what civil disobedience is all about. His unique voice made a difference in the constitutional debate, especially his advice to keep the clause general so it could grow legally.

If the Judicial Council had tried to impeach Berger, or if the government had failed to restore Aboriginal rights, I believe Broadbent and our NDP caucus would have withdrawn our support for Trudeau's package altogether, which would have tied the House of Commons in knots. As it was, Indigenous leaders and allies, including the Vancouver lawyer Louise Mandell and hundreds of others, flocked to Ottawa by train, aboard the Constitution Express. They forced the prime

minister and the premiers to restore section 35. The word "existing" was added to placate some premiers, but that had little effect. In fact, courts have subsequently said that it actually reinforces the phrase "recognized and affirmed."

As I look back on the negotiations, I think of the moral courage of Ed Broadbent, who had to step back from his original approval of the package and face the prime minister's anger. I think of Tom Berger, who put his judicial robes on the line. And I think of Pierre Trudeau himself, who had the intellectual courage to listen and change his mind. George Watts, Jack Woodward, Don Rosenbloom, Jim Aldridge, and Jean Chrétien — they all worked tirelessly. Above all, I think of the steadfastness of Indigenous people throughout Canada, with their leaders and their voices and their drums in all those villages and fish camps. They beat away our fatigue.

I'VE TRIED TO TELL THIS STORY BEFORE, INCLUDING in my 2018 memoir, *Take the Torch*. And maybe the right place to start all along would have been with Ronald Sparrow, a fisherman, who just passed away in September. Back in 1984, shortly before he turned forty, Bud was arrested on the Fraser River and charged with violating his Coast Salish band's fishing licence. But the charge, he argued, violated his rights.

Six years later, in 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed with him. In their landmark opinion, the chief justice, Brian Dickson, and Gérard La Forest held that section 35 should be given a generous, liberal interpretation: "It is clear, then, that s. 35 (1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, represents the culmination of a long and difficult struggle in both the political forum and the courts for the constitutional recognition of aboriginal rights." The so-called Sparrow test was born.

It's now been thirty years since Bud's case was decided and almost forty years since the passage of the Constitution Act of 1982. Section 35 has been cited in over 350 other decisions. In *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, for example, brought by the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and the Gitksan nation, the Supreme Court held that Aboriginal title still existed in the unceded territories and would have to be settled. The justices basically said: Government, get on with it. Then, under the leadership of Beverley McLachlin, from 2000 to 2017, the court gave further life to the clause, emphasizing that the duty to consult is grounded in the principle of the Crown's honour — that its purpose is reconciliation between Ottawa and Indigenous peoples.

Section 35 is a living clause that has revolutionized the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state — one that has moved from statute-based laws and old treaties to recognized land claims to enshrined constitutional rights. The courts, to their great credit, have done their part. Now is the time for the politicians. True reconciliation will require further changes in that relationship. The tools are all out there.

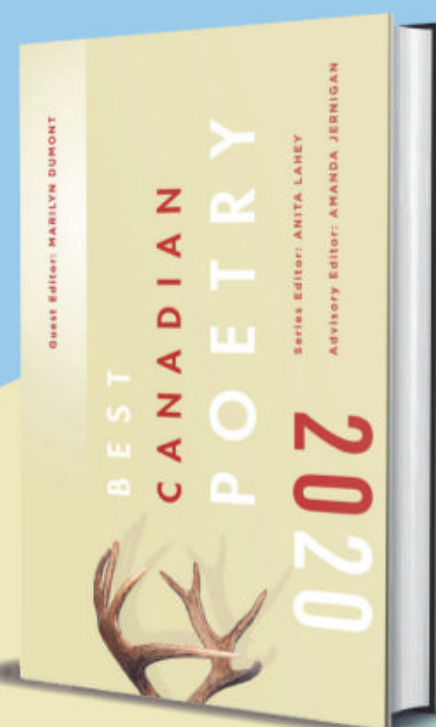
Today, we need the political will and perhaps a modern Royal Proclamation — one that will formally recognize Indigenous people as a founding nation of Canada and that will lay out a road map to a workable third level of government. But that is another story altogether, one yet to be written.

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Title Role

A failure of imagination

Jonathan Yazer

IN EARLY JANUARY 2020, THE OFFICE OF the Wet'suwet'en, representing that nation's hereditary chiefs, served an eviction notice to Coastal GasLink, the subsidiary of TC Energy that is building a 670-kilometre pipeline to transport liquefied natural gas from Dawson Creek to Kitimat, British Columbia. If completed, it will cut across territory roughly the size of New Jersey that is home to over 3,000 Wet'suwet'en people in the northwestern Central Interior.

The notice came days after a second injunction was issued by a B.C. Supreme Court judge against those who had erected a camp to block the construction and assert their ancestral land rights. Although TC Energy had signed agreements with the twenty band councils along Coastal GasLink's path — including five Wet'suwet'en bands — the authority of elected band council chiefs extends only over the parcels of reserve land created under the Indian Act, whereas the hereditary chiefs assert authority over all 22,000 square kilometres of the Yintah, or traditional territory. TC Energy failed to obtain the consent of these hereditary chiefs, including that of Knedebeas of Dark House, who helped establish the Unist'ot'en Camp a decade ago — a camp that the provincial judge also authorized the RCMP to dismantle.

The crisis that sparked solidarity protests across the country, in the weeks before the pandemic arrived, was yet another moment that illustrates the unresolved nature of the supposed nation-to-nation relationship between the Crown and Indigenous groups — or, put another way, the chasm between the two sides' understanding of consent.

In 2017, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled that Indigenous groups do not have a veto over natural resource projects. That decision, like rulings past and since, conflates *rights* and *interests*:

A decision to authorize a project cannot be in the public interest if the Crown's duty to consult has not been met. . . . Nevertheless, this does not mean that the interests of Indigenous groups cannot be balanced with other interests at the accommodation stage. Indeed, it is for this reason that the duty to consult does not provide Indigenous groups with a "veto" over final Crown decisions. . . . Rather, proper accommodation "stress[es] the need to balance competing societal interests with Aboriginal and treaty rights."

But the repositioning of Indigenous rights as Indigenous interests is a category error that

does not stand up to scrutiny. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and other Indigenous groups strongly disagree with the court; they view their land rights as deriving from natural law — whole, primary, and intrinsic — rather than as one element in a wider constellation of Canadian societal interests. In this sense, rights that can be balanced with interests are hardly rights at all.

In very limited ways, many groups *could* benefit materially from natural resource projects. It's a point the provincial judge emphasized: the "pipeline benefit agreements" had, in fact, been signed by some affected First Nations, including the elected band councils. So, arguably, by taking up opposition to natural resource projects,



When rights get conflated with interests.

some Indigenous groups are acting *against* their own interests. Why would they do that? The answer is conveniently, if ironically, found in the same ruling:

The elected Band councils assert that the reluctance of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en to enter into project agreements, out of concern that it might negatively impact their claims to Aboriginal title, placed the responsibility on the Band councils to negotiate agreements to ensure that the Wet'suwet'en people as a whole would receive benefits from Pipeline Project and other projects in their territory.

Confronted with a Hobson's choice of a pipeline and no benefits or a pipeline plus some benefits, the band councils resigned themselves to acting in their strictly material interests. But the Office of the Wet'suwet'en strives to achieve a more significant goal than can be captured in an assessment of interests alone: the realization of land rights.

In pipelines, we find a clash of public interests: an opportunity for questionable, short-term economic development versus pollution, climate change, and material harms to communities, Indigenous or otherwise. But the primacy of Indigenous title should make the public-interest test a secondary consideration. In a just world, it would not matter if a pipeline transported jelly beans and sunshine; the refusal of an Indigenous group would be enough to prevent its construction on its title land.

♦

CANADA HAS PROGRESSED TOWARD RECOGNIZING Indigenous title in recent decades but has stubbornly rejected Indigenous sovereignty. The Supreme Court first recognized Aboriginal title when deciding *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, in 1997. Yet even in that landmark ruling, the University of Victoria legal scholar John Borrows has observed, the court's "unreflective acceptance of Crown sovereignty places Aboriginal title in a subordinate position relative to other legal rights."

In the view of the Canadian state, the doctrine of discovery makes Indigenous land rights secondary. While courts have set increasingly stricter standards of consultation and accommodation, Aboriginal title continues to be violated because the Crown uses a "prove it" approach that acknowledges title in theory but not in practice. As the lawyers Eugene Kung and Gavin Smith have described it, this amounts to the government saying, "Yes, Aboriginal title and governance exist, but we don't know where exactly and it's quite complicated, so in the meantime we're going to continue making decisions as if it doesn't exist anywhere."

Consultation is not meant to sound out whether there is assent to proceed. Rather, it is meant to protect interests and reduce harms by layering on conditions, while accepting that a given project will proceed if conditions satisfying those interests and minimizing those harms are met. In a recent Federal Court of Appeal ruling, which dismissed an Indigenous challenge to Ottawa's Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion project, the justices quoted from a previous ruling by the B.C. Court of Appeal:

Here, the appellants have not been open to any accommodation short of selecting an alternative to the project; such a

position amounts to seeking a “veto.” They rightly contend that a meaningful process of consultation requires working collaboratively to find a compromise that balances conflicting interests, in a manner that minimally impairs the exercise of treaty rights. But that becomes unworkable when, as here, the only compromise acceptable to them is to abandon the entire project.

In other words, consultations are workable only when the conclusion is foregone. Indigenous groups can make efforts to minimize harms, but they have no right to say no. There is a circularity at play here: Indigenous peoples must be accommodated, accommodation requires a fair consideration of interests, and Indigenous peoples are accommodated by having their interests fairly considered. The federal ruling confirmed that, rather than their having a veto over Canada, Canada has a veto over them.

When the legal arguments are stripped away, two competing assertions of whose territorial authority should take precedence are apparent. From a statist point of view, sovereignty is a zero-sum game, and the latent self-determination of an internal group is an existential threat. So state institutions are unlikely to relent in their efforts to suppress Indigenous efforts at self-rule. That is especially true when institutional commitment to self-preservation is buttressed by an industrial policy still reliant on a resource economy, as well as by partisan and regional political motives.

◆

GIVEN THE STATE’S AUTHORITY AND POWER OF coercion, solutions that enable Indigenous self-determination without fundamentally threatening state sovereignty appear most realistic. One possibility is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its principle of free, prior, and informed consent, which British Columbia recently legislated and the current federal government promises to implement. Most legal scholars agree that FPIC does not confer an absolute, arbitrary veto over natural resource projects. From there, however, two camps draw different conclusions from the same facts.

The adherents of one camp think FPIC “does not require consent for a project to proceed, but instead only requires good faith effort to obtain consent,” a matter on which “Canada already meets or exceeds UNDRIP’s requirements” (this from the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, in 2017). This camp’s primary interest is a predictable resource development process: “The critical objective must be that the adoption of FPIC does *not* undermine the progress achieved in recent decades to establish real partnerships with lasting economic benefits for Indigenous communities” (as another Macdonald-Laurier paper stated in 2016). If such an interpretation of FPIC prevails, it will do nothing to materially alter the landscape, and Indigenous consent will be violated again and again.

Another camp favours a stronger interpretation of free, prior, and informed consent: “Critically, where FPIC is required, consultation processes, no matter how robust, cannot be a substitute for consent” (as the Assembly of First Nations has put it). Accordingly, true consent would surpass current consultation and accommodation standards. And that would mean

that some projects would not proceed where they are unwanted. Some maintain that such an interpretation would amount to granting an Indigenous veto. The Assembly of First Nations clarifies that, as others have also pointed out, the spectre of a veto is a distraction from the real issue of consent. This interpretation of FPIC is consistent with court rulings that favour dialogue and the judicial resolution of disputes, and the outlines of federalism more broadly. “No government in Canada has a ‘veto’ in relation to other governments in the valid exercise of jurisdiction,” the AFN observes. That was illustrated by the Supreme Court of Canada this year when it sided with Ottawa and said a B.C. law designed to prevent the Trans Mountain expansion amounted to a veto that contravened constitutional federal jurisdiction. But one would not describe this as Ottawa vetoing provincial legislation. Transferring defined jurisdictional authority to Indigenous peoples on title land, like decision making with respect to energy projects, can give substance to FPIC and be consistent with federalism.

Some in the pro-development camp are now less concerned with the legal interpretation of FPIC than with what its implementation might symbolize. In early March, Brian Pallister, the premier of Manitoba, worried in the *Globe and Mail* that UNDRIP “would enshrine in Canadian law renewed public signals that are already encouraging veto-based demands, as well as illegal blockade actions — in defiance of court orders.” Culturally speaking, the premier may not be wrong. Many Canadians are unlikely to appreciate the nuanced differences between respect for consent and the exercise of a veto. Practically speaking, if not conceptually or procedurally, the on-the-ground realities might not look any different, either: whether by withholding consent or through flat-out refusal, the result in the end is that a project does not get built where it is unwanted.

(The implications go beyond infrastructure. One example: In June, as British Columbia moved toward stage three of reopening, many Indigenous communities wanted to keep travel restrictions in place and screen outsiders for COVID-19. The president of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, Judith Sayers, said that British Columbia’s premier, John Horgan, “cannot forget our free, prior and informed consent over our territories, and that we have not given our consent to open up the province.”)

Some advocates in the rights-first camp push the FPIC-as-veto interpretation. The Ryerson University legal scholar Pamela Palmater has written, for instance, “Indigenous peoples could exercise their legal right to refuse to approve or authorize a project. This veto right stems from various sources, but primarily our inherent rights as Indigenous governments with our own laws and rules which govern our traditional territories.” When it comes to UNDRIP, Palmater offers an uncomplicated, common sense definition:

The absence of consent means no — in other words, a veto that has real legal power and meaning. . . . Imagine if sexual consent in law meant that a man could consult with the woman on whether she wanted sexual relations, and was even willing to accommodate (“where appropriate”) her wishes about how to have

sexual relations, but she had no right to say no — no veto over whether or not sexual relations occurred?

The University of British Columbia’s Jason Tockman also uses the analogy of sex, but, to illustrate why FPIC is not tantamount to a veto, he takes a slightly different tack:

Why might we think of withheld consent by Indigenous peoples for projects proposed on their territory as more of a veto than, say, a person declining a sexual advance or one person’s refusal to grant another permission to build on their private property? We would never describe those circumstances as a veto. Rather, we talk of obtaining “approval”—which conveys our perception of legitimacy— as opposed to an obstinate “veto” by which policy decisions are held hostage to an authority deemed illegitimate.

The differences between these analogies can be likened to differences between “yes means yes” and “no means no.” The latter makes one party the assertor and the other party a subject who has only the power to resist or accede, often under conditions of coercion or duress. However, the emerging “yes means yes” standard takes both parties as autonomous: that is, they proceed only if both actively agree to do so of their own volition. The party with greater power, then, recognizes its privileged status and does not use it to bully the other into agreement.

◆

CONSENT DISCOURSE HELPS POINT TO A WAY forward, because consent is tightly bound to autonomy, whether we speak of an individual’s body or a body politic. Autonomy suggests something that is less total, but in some conditions no less powerful, than sovereignty. It recognizes that parties operate in concert with one another, without one wholly ruling the other, and that their relationship will be defined and clarified by respect for each other’s basic boundaries.

Rarely have Indigenous groups called for secession, sovereignty’s logical conclusion. Their ask is considerably less than the demands of Quebec sovereigntists, who enjoyed the privilege of voting in not one but two secession referendums. Most want meaningful participation *within* Canada, including the freedom to practise traditional self-governance.

Quebec, of course, is territorially contiguous, and the Québécois people are, in the eyes of the typical sovereigntist, a single homogeneous category. By contrast, Indigenous peoples belong to disaggregate groups with aggregate commonalities, whose interests may overlap but also vary; only in a colonialist mindset are Indigenous peoples and interests homogenized. Within this context, autonomy expressed through consent is more workable than the sovereignty of many distinct, fragmented nations, à la *Kleinstaaterei*.

A Canada that is governable as a national community and that also makes Indigenous people full participants in federalism is as possible as it is desirable. Canadian sovereignty is animated by principles of federalism that govern relations between semi-autonomous, inter-related orders of government. It accounts for differences across a nation of diverse people and interests, and it enables good government by defining powers and jurisdictions and providing

for methods of resolution in case of disputes. The question is how to make Indigenous people full participants in this arrangement and expand their autonomy within federalism.

Even with a weaker FPIC standard, the layering of more legislation and regulations could have the effect of “thickening” the governance space around natural resource projects and contributing to an overall dampening effect on development. But that would be a paltry half-measure compared with real structural reforms that clarify Indigenous peoples’ powers within federalism. Gordon Christie, a law professor at the University of British Columbia, points to article 27 of UNDRIP, which requires forming an “independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples’ laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples.” This would involve blending Indigenous and Canadian laws. Without that, he says, the system “protects the state.”

A federal Aboriginal Parliament Act, which the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended in 1996, could be a first step on the long road to real structural reform. The creation of a third parliamentary chamber “would give Aboriginal people a permanent voice in processes of national decision making” with “the power to initiate legislation.” Although this idea was first proposed by the Native Council of Canada (now the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples) nearly thirty years ago, during the Charlottetown Accord negotiations, it remains anathema to any province tethered to oil and gas development. Even on its own terms, such an institution might be politically ghettoizing or culturally essentializing. Nonetheless, the discussion of such ideas can

help to expand the conversation on Indigenous participation in federalism.



IN FEBRUARY, THE OFFICE OF THE WET’SUWET’EN agreed on a memorandum of understanding with the governments of Canada and British Columbia. “Wet’suwet’en rights and title are held by Wet’suwet’en houses under their system of governance,” it reads. “Canada and B.C. recognize Wet’suwet’en Aboriginal rights and title throughout the Yintah.” The MOU also establishes a timeline for the negotiated transfer of jurisdiction on the basis of Wet’suwet’en rights and title, which will be exclusive or shared with Ottawa or the province, depending on the case. The parties expected to reach an “affirmation agreement” by mid-October.

With this document, the Crown appears to be reversing more than a century and a half of practice and planting its flag on the side of the traditional clan and house-group system — at last respecting the *Delgamuukw* decision. To the extent that it does, this move upends the band council system imposed by the Indian Act and legitimizes the traditional system of collective expression and leadership. And it does not mean new electoral processes can’t emerge from within the community. John Borrows, according to the *Globe and Mail*, thinks the dispute between chiefs “may provide a window for Wet’suwet’en people to develop governance systems that blend elements of hereditary and elected systems,” while Stewart Phillip, grand chief of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, has pitched “legitimate, legal” referendums as a way to measure consent for resource projects.

Yet consensus remains elusive. Three women belonging to the Wet’suwet’en Matrilineal

Coalition who supported the pipeline say they have been wrongly stripped of their hereditary titles. They say their group, which received seed money from Coastal GasLink and a provincial ministry, was formed to consider a community benefit agreement with CGL, but that they were bullied and sidelined by the other hereditary chiefs. The Office of the Wet’suwet’en, for its part, views the coalition as an illegitimate splinter group. Each side claims a large majority of support for its position, suggesting both agree that the majority opinion matters — even as they disagree on what that opinion actually is.

Meanwhile, band chiefs have said they felt excluded from the MOU process. An August newsletter from the Office of the Wet’suwet’en acknowledges that band councils requested a stop to the negotiations and that two of them passed resolutions of non-confidence in the hereditary chiefs, who have responded with commitments to engage and listen. (Before the pandemic, local media reported the claim of a member of the Wet’suwet’en Matrilineal Coalition that the hereditary chiefs “have not held large public meetings, only smaller clan meetings of 20 or fewer people.”)

The provincial judge in the Coastal GasLink injunction case cited such internal conflicts: “The Indigenous legal perspective in this case is complex and diverse and . . . the Wet’suwet’en people are deeply divided with respect to either opposition to or support for the Pipeline Project.” She might have interpreted the absence of unanimity as the absence of clear consent to the project, but she instead found it was unclear whether the emergence of vocal subgroups represents efforts to circumvent the traditional Wet’suwet’en legal process or the continuing evolution of Wet’suwet’en governance.

The Crown has signalled it has no interest in meddling in Wet’suwet’en affairs. But while its decision to recognize and negotiate with hereditary chiefs is surely a just corrective, the irony is that even if it does not meddle directly, Ottawa invariably influences internal governance by its choice of whom and whom not to recognize and legitimize in negotiations. The band chiefs, along with the women who allege their hereditary titles were stripped away, have grievances, and some have asked the federal government to be more forceful on behalf of their interests. Of course, it was the preceding centuries of Crown rule, imposition of band councils, and disregard for the traditional clan and house-group system that helped sow the seeds for the present discord.



PERHAPS THERE WILL BE FEWER LAND CRISES IN THE future, even without structural changes. There may come a day, once fossil fuels no longer drive the economy, when such conflicts are pushed below the surface for good. In the meantime, community benefits agreements may continue to pull some Indigenous groups into the pro-development camp, though recent mergers and the rise of automation in natural resource projects could lower the prospect of well-paying jobs and short-term material benefits.

Regardless of what the future holds, it’s plain that the status quo of consultation and accommodation does not satisfy legitimate claims to self-determination. It would be a shameful missed opportunity for all affected parties if they fail to imagine how to make Indigenous autonomy expressed through active consent an institutional feature of Canadian federalism. ▲

Beets

are not

attached to

any body

They do not keep

any thing, alive;

and yet

if you dropped one,

a thud,

heavy as a heart,

aware

of its own sound,

intense,

and bright,

manages

to stain

and beat

Souvankham Thammavongsa

Souvankham Thammavongsa is the author of four poetry books and the short story collection How to Pronounce Knife, a finalist for the 2020 Giller Prize.

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TOBY OBED WAS BORN IN HOPEDALE, a coastal town in northern Labrador. Like many places in Canada, Hopedale has more than one name; an old one, Agvituk, means “place of the whales.” Today, it is the legislative capital of Nunatsiavut, the self-governing homeland of the Labrador Inuit. When Obed thinks of his birthplace, he remembers a red uniform with evenly placed gold buttons. Its wearer, an RCMP officer, had just pounded on the door, then barged in, accompanied by some women. The strangers had come to take four-year-old Toby and his older brother and sister away. He doesn't remember if his family resisted, but he knows everyone cried. There, on the threshold of his childhood home, Toby died for the first time. He and his siblings were put on a float plane that took them to the Yale School, in North West River, some two hundred kilometres south. The year was 1975.

Toby's story is his own, but its broad outlines resemble those of countless others. The young boy was separated from his brother and sister. Staff meted out violent punishments for infractions like speaking Inuktitut. One teacher, nicknamed Miss Devil, made children watch as she beat their peers.

Toby died once again when he was eight, after he learned that he and his siblings wouldn't return to Hopedale. Instead, they were scattered among foster homes. Toby would die twenty more deaths before he aged out of the system — one for every time he was moved to a different family.

Decades later, survivors of over 130 schools like Toby Obed's reached a deal with the federal government. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement of 2006 mandated the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and meant financial compensation for many. Yet Obed and other survivors in Newfoundland and Labrador were left out: the Yale School and four others, Ottawa argued, had been founded before the province joined Confederation, so Canada bore no responsibility for what had happened there.

That is when Obed died for the twenty-seventh and final time. And then he did what he had always done: he survived. As Stephen Harper delivered an apology on behalf of all Canadians in the House of Commons in 2008, survivors from Newfoundland and Labrador were bringing class-action lawsuits against the



The Yale School was founded well before 1949, but Canada still owed an apology.

federal government. Obed was among them, and he played a leading role in seeking justice for those left behind.



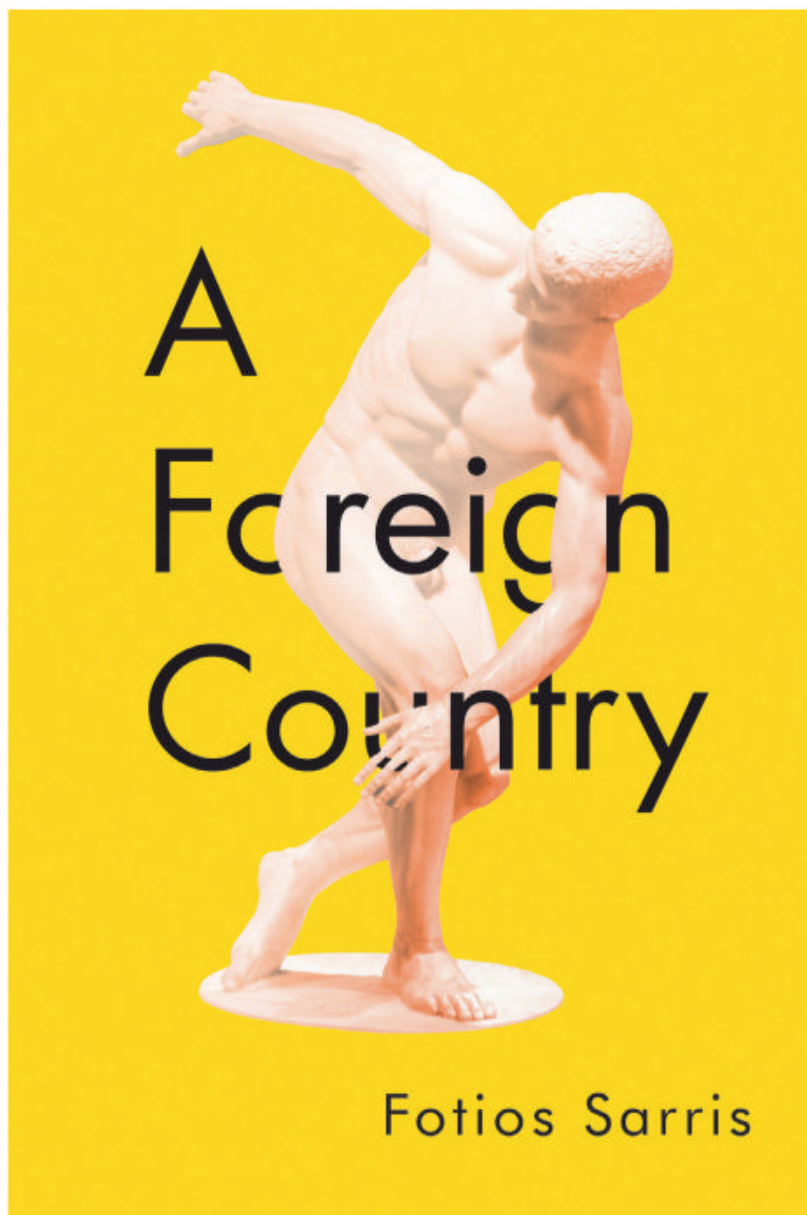
IN 2016, THE POLISH JOURNALIST JOANNA GIERAK-Onoszko arrived in Canada, where she would spend two years reporting for the centre-left weekly magazine *Polityka*. She first learned of Toby Obed in November 2017, through media coverage of the long-awaited federal apology for residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. Photos of Obed walking across a stage in Happy Valley–Goose Bay, toward the prime minister and his open arms, were splashed under national headlines: “Tearful Justin Trudeau Apologizes to N.L. Residential School Survivors” (the CBC), “Trudeau Hopes Residential School Apology Brings ‘Closure’” (the Canadian Press), “A Long Wait Ends: Trudeau Apologizes to N.L. Residential School Students” (Canada's National Observer). Gierak-Onoszko was struck by the juxtaposition — of two men, born around the same time, whose circumstances were entirely unlike. She tracked down Obed and asked him to share more about his past. The two never met in person, but they spent hours speaking together online. These conversations wound up being one of many strands in Gierak-Onoszko's deep dive into settler-Indigenous relations.

In 2019, Gierak-Onoszko published *27 śmierci Toby'ego Obeda* (The 27 deaths of Toby Obed) to popular and critical acclaim in Poland. The book blends interviews and research with personal

experience; it's a cross between reportage and creative non-fiction. Obed's story provides the opening and through line, but Gierak-Onoszko speaks to several residential school survivors, as well as to academics and other interlocutors, and she intersperses her own observations about Indigenous issues and life in Canada. For example, she meets Sue Lynn Manone Cornfoot outside the Toronto office of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, as it was known in 2017, during a weeks-long vigil over delayed funding for mental health services in remote First Nations communities. “Conversations with her,” Gierak-Onoszko writes, “have made me look differently at the diploma in my drawer, which states that I'm a highly educated person. Here, I start with the basics, borrowing children's books from the library.”

In addition to reading those children's books, Gierak-Onoszko takes a course in Indigenous studies and participates in a group discussion, at the Art Gallery of Ontario, about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. Her process and her missteps along the way parallel the vast cultural and experiential voids that her book tries to bridge: the history and present circumstances of Indigenous peoples in Canada are largely unknown in her part of Europe. Of course, one might say the same about large segments of Canada itself — from recent immigrants to those whose ancestors arrived generations ago.

Each of Gierak-Onoszko's sixteen chapters reads as a stand-alone essay, and most of them



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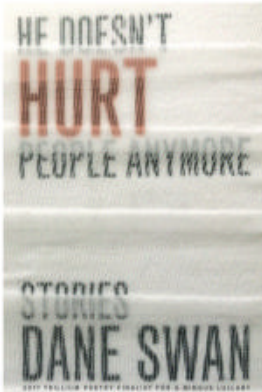
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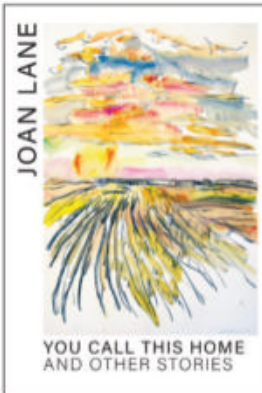
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revolve around a key protagonist. There is, of course, Obed, but also Phil Fontaine, the former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who was among the first to reveal publicly that he suffered abuse at a residential school, in a 1990 interview with Barbara Frum. And Chanie Wenjack, who escaped from the Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School in 1966, at the age of twelve. His subsequent death resulted in the first inquest into the treatment of residential school children.

As a journalist, Gierak-Onoszko is attuned to people and events that have already been amplified by the media, but she looks at them more deeply and takes stock of their significance in the larger landscape of Canadian cultural politics. Her prose is crisp and engaging, with fully developed scenes and memorable images: the jar of matches Wenjack had with him as he tried to find his way home, the sights and smells of a bus headed for a protest in Ottawa, a black and white photograph of a young Cree girl who grew up to become a nun.

Gierak-Onoszko also meets Robyn Bourgeois, a sociologist with Brock University's Centre for Women's and Gender Studies. "On the door of Professor Bourgeois's office," she observes, "hangs a poster with a photo of fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine. Her subtle smile has haunted successive Canadian federal governments." (Here, "prześladował," for "haunted," might also be translated as "accused.") As they visit, Bourgeois reveals her own harrowing experiences as a survivor of sex trafficking and her brush with the convicted serial killer Robert Pickton. The violent details that Gierak-Onoszko includes, often verbatim, make for sometimes difficult reading. Yet these descriptions help emphasize the importance of witnessing.

In Bourgeois's personal and cultural recovery, the book finds parallels with broader societal attempts to address violence against Indigenous women. The chapter ends as Bourgeois testifies, not without hesitation, at the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in October 2018. The inquiry's final report came out in June 2019, just after the release of *27 śmierci Toby'ego Obeda*. If Gierak-Onoszko had had the chance to describe its findings of genocide, she might have reflected on Bourgeois's ambivalence toward commissions and investigations — the proliferation of paper. "Words multiply," yes, but what is being done?

Two Catholic orders ran the notorious St. Anne's Indian Residential School at Fort Albany, in northeastern Ontario, which is another strand that winds through the book. Although included in the 2006 settlement, St. Anne's had already been the subject of an investigation by Ontario Provincial Police in the 1990s. Spurred by the advocacy of Edmund Metatawabin, survivors submitted hundreds of statements detailing physical and sexual abuse, as well as extreme cruelty — including the use of a homemade electric chair. Out of a total of seventy-four suspects, only five were prosecuted.

Angela Shisheesh and Evelyn Korkmaz are survivors of St. Anne's who have been fighting battles over access to documents and the church's refusal to take responsibility. (Korkmaz originally spoke to Gierak-Onoszko on the condition of anonymity, but she decided to go public in early 2019, when she travelled to Rome to attend the Catholic Church's first summit on sexual abuse.) Both Korkmaz and Shisheesh are literally struggling to reclaim their own words,

in the form of records from that early police investigation, which are now in the possession of the federal government. In many cases, the testimonies have been permanently suppressed, even when the speakers want those experiences known. "Survivors may certainly continue telling their stories," Gierak-Onoszko writes, with or without the documents held by the state. "That is, as long as — decades after leaving the schools — their memories permit it, and their hearts can stand it."

ISSUES OF TRANSLATION INEVITABLY CREEP UP in the book, and Gierak-Onoszko explores the nuances of one particular linguistic disparity. "Survivor," in English, refers to someone who endured, who made it through. The Polish "ocaleniec," however, more accurately denotes someone "who was rescued, so to speak, by an external force. They're like the victim of a disaster whom rescuers have helped." In this sense, it resonates as a term for survivors of the Holocaust. And that's why it's an imperfect translation: "If children from Canadian residential schools survived, it's because they withstood. They weren't saved by anybody; no help came for any of them." Nonetheless, it's the best word available.

Will *27 śmierci Toby'ego Obeda* eventually be translated into English? There are moments that might seem awkward to Canadian readers, like an explanation of the wind chill factor or a lengthy description of Tim Hortons. Yet, as it exists, the book is already something between an original and a translation. Gierak-Onoszko conducts her research in English, including interviews from which she quotes extensively, and translates all of this material into Polish. Even if it's a few years away from an English or French version, the book's deep focus on the personal accounts of survivors, the way they are vividly brought to life on the page, suggests a staying power. Another reason a translation might be worthwhile: last year Obed told the CBC, "I would really like to read it."

A bestseller in Poland, *27 śmierci Toby'ego Obeda* landed on this year's shortlist for the Ryszard Kapuściński Award for Literary Reportage (named for the well-known journalist and most-translated Polish author next to Stanisław Lem). It was also one of seven finalists for the Nike Literary Award, among the most prestigious awards in Polish literature, and it won in the readers' choice category. Why such intense interest in a book about residential schools and their fallout, half a world away? For one thing, it presents a compelling counterpoint to the rosy image Canada often enjoys in the international media — a more challenging companion to recent Polish books like Katarzyna Wężyk's *Kanada: Ulubiony kraj świata* (Canada: The world's favourite country). Another reason is its critical take on the Catholic Church, which ran two-thirds of the schools yet is the only denomination that has not offered an apology from the top.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for an apology similar to the one that Pope Benedict XVI delivered to Irish victims of abuse in 2010. And despite Trudeau's personal plea during a visit to the Vatican and an invitation by Parliament for the pope to deliver an apology in Canada, one has yet to take place. In Poland, whose history is intimately bound up with the church, about 93 percent of people



identify as Roman Catholic. The abuse that was rampant in many residential schools echoes the barely acknowledged histories of clergy abuse there. An independent documentary on the subject, *Tylko nie mów nikomu* (Tell no one), by the brothers Tomasz and Marek Sekielski, has had almost twenty-four million views on YouTube since May 2019. But it's a past that is only beginning to be unravelled.

27 śmierci Toby'ego Obeda has also been so successful in Poland because it speaks to how we can recognize and attempt to deal with shameful national histories. Despite its imperfections, Gierak-Onoszko argues, the reconciliation process that Canada has embarked on, thanks to the efforts of survivors, is an instructive one. In Poland, by contrast, the ruling populist Law and Justice party, whose presidential candidate Andrzej Duda was recently re-elected by a 2 percent margin, has gone the opposite way. In 2018, for example, it passed a bill that restricts statements about Poland's responsibility for or collaboration in Nazi war crimes. The legislation was meant, in part, to deter usage of the offensive phrase "Polish death camps," but it became widely perceived as a form of censorship — an attempt to bury unpalatable parts of the country's history.

That same year, the president apologized for the 1968 purges of Jewish Poles, many of whom were stripped of citizenship and forced to emigrate to Israel. Along with his words, however, came an explicit denial of responsibility, since the purges had been carried out under the Communist regime. Poland's difficult history precludes simple divisions between perpetrators and victims, yet selective interpretations add fuel to the fire of nationalist superiority and obscure a fuller, more complex picture of human relations — good and bad.

EACH YEAR, THE SOPOT BY THE BOOK LITERARY festival, in Poland, selects a country that serves as a theme. This year, organizers focused on Canada, and they put Gierak-Onoszko on a panel with the award-winning journalist Tanya Talaga and Steven Cooper, a lawyer who worked on the original residential schools agreement, as well as the Newfoundland and Labrador one. (In July, Cooper joined Obed in berating the province's outgoing premier, Dwight Ball, for

not delivering on a long-promised apology from St. John's.)

"What Canada has done, not only at the institutional level, but the conversations Canadians have had in schools, in the media, and at home around the kitchen table — this is something that gives me hope," Gierak-Onoszko said on stage,

as Talaga and Cooper joined remotely. "And I hope you all as well, in these increasingly dark times." Gierak-Onoszko knows that colonization in Canada is ongoing. But she also knows that Obed, Talaga, Cooper, and countless others will continue chipping away at the problem — even if it takes many generations to fully solve. ▲

Take Down

After Erik Osberg's Lipstick Kisses

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall," wrote the poet. "That wants it down." What to do now with six tubes of Chanel #25 distributed evenly across four walls, kiss by kiss. An affair compressed to one eleven-hour performance: 2,500 kisses/wall × 4 walls = how much space, time, really? I'd like to know: at any point did the whole thing snag on its own conceit? Did the lover fatigue, lose heart? Is loneliness, five times out of ten, nothing but our failed endurance? I undo each kiss as if it were hers, his. Onlookers at the install reported the artist kept kissing that wall like he meant it, every single time. Now I smudge and blur each mark, not to make it vanish, for it does not, but to remove sharpness. First with a rag, but finally by touching each lip with the tips of my fingers so the late-stage impression as the artwork disappears is of a regretful lover arrived too late to learn love by how it feels. So I am left without proof anything ever existed here — except this smudged mess which resembles nothing so much as bruises. "Poor wall," says the curator, who is up on a ladder, spraying solvent. "No more love."

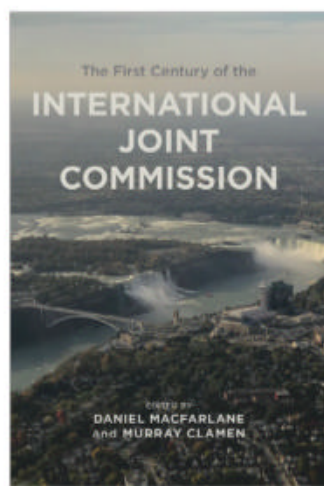
Lisa Martin

Lisa Martin is the author of the collections One Crow Sorrow and Believing Is Not the Same As Being Saved.



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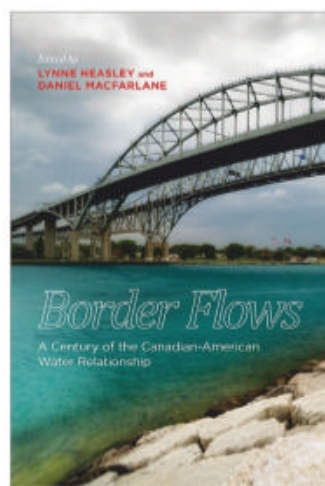
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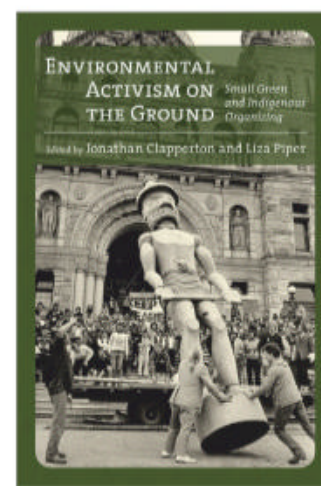
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Mennonite Descent

A journey through the colonies

Geoff Martin

Menno Moto: A Journey across the Americas in Search of My Mennonite Identity

Cameron Dueck

Biblioasis

328 pages, softcover and ebook

NEAR THE END OF *MENNO MOTO: A Journey across the Americas in Search of My Mennonite Identity*, Cameron Dueck finds himself sitting on a backless bench in an austere church in rural Argentina, the air torpid and heavy. A preacher plods through his sermon in High German, while the song leaders nap behind him. Having spent a cosmopolitan life outside of the religion, Dueck admits that some services still make him nostalgic for the faith of his childhood. (Now a journalist living in Hong Kong, he grew up on a remote turkey farm north of Winnipeg.) But here, on the edge of Patagonia, he feels “like an outsider”—though an outsider who knows “the secret of our shared history.”

It’s this history, with its genetic and cultural layers, that Dueck is searching for. Over the eight months he spends on the road, the freedom of his motorcycle and his ability to speak Plautdietsch, the Low German dialect, allow him to move fluidly through various colonies. As he travels south across the United States, Mexico, and Belize, en route to Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina, he profiles his host families, weaving each community’s specific separatist story into the larger tapestry of Anabaptist and Russian Mennonite histories. It’s an immensely accessible account of a confusing religious and ethnic diaspora marked by a central paradox: centuries-long familial and communal ties set alongside an ingrained tradition of dissent, out-migration, and isolation.

Menno Moto refuses to serve up a “pure” nostalgia product, thank God. Instead, it delivers historical nuance, explores minute but important group differences, and—quite often—presents an explicit insider/outsider critique.

THOUGH BILLED AS A PERSONAL JOURNEY AND travelogue, Dueck’s account, with its photographic documentation, reads more like an ethnography. The book “escapes the net of identity”—to borrow Magdalene Redekop’s phrasing from her recent work, *Making Believe: Questions about Mennonites and Art*.

Near the beginning, we venture across 120,000 hectares of commonwealth land in the state of Chihuahua. We witness the water wars—dam destructions by neighbouring Indigenous people and rival Mexican farmers known as *barzonistas*—sparked by the Mennonites’ industrial-

scale irrigation systems, which are sucking hard at the water table. We encounter a man living in fear of his past following his release from a U.S. prison for drug smuggling. In Belize, Dueck affords us a back-row view of a male stockholders’ vote on a 12,000-hectare purchase of “virgin” forest. We meet two finely drawn brothers, Klaas and Walter, living in neighbouring colonies but divided by differences over wealth and worldliness. At the book’s tender centre, we sit on a veranda with Dueck and a family friend from Manitoba, now living in Blue Creek, who is racked with grief over the recent loss of his son.

Throughout *Menno Moto*, Dueck’s travels are marked by a cyclical experience of the foreign



A cyclical experience of foreign and familiar.

and the familiar. “I grew lonely on the road,” he recounts midway through the book. “I went from hidden campsites in ravines and using a foreign language to order meals at roadside food stalls, to sleeping on clean sheets that smelled like those in my grandmother’s guest room, sitting around tables sharing dishes I’d known since childhood, and discussing our community in a language that I’d heard since birth. And then I’d return to the road, alone again. The contrasts were dizzying.”

Time, too, undergoes a strange distortion within the orbit of these colonies. Past and present coexist in the continued adherence to the Christian feudal order of sixteenth-century Europe; the amalgam of nineteenth- and

twentieth-century agricultural practices; and the *up plietch* (“secretive”) use of forbidden technologies, such as radios and cellphones, often secured through day labourers from outside who work on the farms.

Dueck’s mapping of this kind of time warp is a consistent “accent” that Redekop hears in the work of artists of Mennonite descent. Her focus in *Making Believe* is on the “Mennonite phenomenon”—the incredible flowering of literature, music, and visual art that began in the 1980s and ‘90s among descendants of Russian settlers who had put down roots in Manitoba. She argues that this art repeatedly stages a crisis of representation as old as the Protestant Reformation and, crucially, that it is never made in isolation. Rather, it emerges from cultural dialogue across multiple, overlapping communities.

Redekop’s analysis tracks best in *Menno Moto* through Dueck’s use of Plautdietsch. These italicized morsels of language—defined at first mention and then embedded into the narrative flow—offer insight into and intimacy with the way of life within these colonies, while also distancing us by the very act of translation. The repeated use of *weltmensch* (“outsider”) by Dueck and the speakers he profiles heightens the sense of division. Here, the Low German becomes, in Redekop’s terms, “a pressure that works from the inside of a literary text outward to the printed English surface.”

DIFFERING OPINIONS ON WHO’S IN AND WHO’S OUT—of the faith, the culture, even Heaven itself—continuously trouble the narrative’s representation of the larger Mennonite community. In Bolivia, where Dueck arrives amid the ongoing fallout of the “Ghost Rapes,” this disorientation comes not so much from the edges as from deep within.

Between 2005 and 2009, over a hundred girls and women of Manitoba Colony, northeast of the city of Santa Cruz, woke up bleeding and in pain, their entire households groggy as though drugged. Whispers grew into a quiet collective terror. Some blamed the Devil. People began to suspect that scopolamine, an animal anesthetic sometimes used in robberies by the FARC in Colombia, was being sprayed through bedroom windows. After one of the attackers was caught, a vigilante group from the community forced him to talk and then began rounding up others. One man, Frank Klassen, was lynched after refusing to confess. When the colony’s leaders handed the men over to the Bolivian police and the bribery-greased court system, the crisis made international headlines.

These horrendous crimes serve as the backdrop of Miriam Toews’s *Women Talking*, which

imagines a secret gathering where the women debate whether to stay and be forced to forgive (and thereby sin by lying) or to leave their husbands and sons (and thereby break their vows). Since they can't read or write, the women ask the schoolteacher, August Epp, a gentle man effeminized by his lack of interest in farm work, to take the minutes of the meeting.

Dueck can seem an Epp-like figure: a non-fiction narrator amid the convoluted aftermath of these crimes. He interviews a Canadian missionary couple who have counselled some of the rape victims. He travels to the Palmasola Prison to speak with the eight incarcerated men, all of whom proclaim their innocence. He sits with the "widowed" wife of one of them — a Canadian passport holder, it turns out — who is defiant of the church leaders and indignant at their abandonment of her family and children. Finally, he talks with two of the elders, one of whom served as the official translator at the trials. From his interviews, he gathers that sexual violence is ongoing and that many outside observers suspect that the court cases were a cover to distract from more widespread incest. (Toews, tellingly, stores the canister of "magic spray" in the bishop's barn.)

Both Dueck and the fictional Epp are born into the culture but return from the outside. Each works to record in English the subtle nuances of shame, anger, confusion, and betrayal expressed to them in Plautdietsch. They are earnest in their pursuit of the truth, yet they are unreliable narrators due to their own stakes in the accounts they write. Reviewing *Women Talking* in these pages, in September 2018, Madeleine Thien called attention to "the transcription-translation-narration filter that occurs via Epp." What we encounter in the imaginative space of Toews's novel and in the narrative space of Dueck's book is the limits of written language. The representation tries even as it fails. While Epp (spoiler alert) gets left behind, Dueck speeds away in disgust.

More trouble awaits at the boundaries of these complicated communities as Dueck travels deeper and deeper into South America. Noting that there are only small missionary outposts (no sprawling colonies) throughout Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, he explains that Mennonites have often moved "to remote, underdeveloped countries with fledgling or weak national governments" where "the indigenous population has little voice and their land is easily expropriated."

The various government *privilegia* granted officially, or unofficially, to Mennonite families have long offered "autonomy in exchange for badly needed agricultural production" — whether it be on Russia's steppe, far out on the Canadian prairies in the 1870s, or in the heart of Gran Chaco, the "Green Hell" of Paraguay, in the 1920s. These groups have spent 450 years "trying to escape from the world," observes the novelist Armin Wiebe. "But now there is no place left to escape to."

This repetitious cycle of dispossession and occupation yields another central paradox of this wandering people: though ostensibly pacifist and apolitical, agrarian religious communities often function as a vanguard for state claims to land. Even the most conservative sects, despite steel wheels and an aversion to electricity as a means of focusing strictly on God and family, still end up as strange agents of capitalist modernization and neo-colonial expansion.

Dueck runs smack into this fact in the Chaco, where two thousand Mennonites, disillusioned with Canada, arrived in 1920 to settle a new Promised Land. Though the colony was isolationist — and starving — at its inception, the violent Chaco War with Bolivia in the 1930s cracked open the settlement. They began trading food and water to the Paraguayan military and in the process helped to secure two-thirds of the disputed land.

Mud-battered and sore, Dueck turns off the long jungle road to find that the century-old Menno Colony "felt more like a town striving to match the rest of the world than one hiding from progress and integration." Whereas in Belize the austere colony of Lower Barton Creek had tried to avoid possessing a bank account by burying its wealth in a hole (only to have it stolen), this cooperative in the Chaco posts revenues of \$750 million (U.S.) per year. Its new cattle abattoir processes eight hundred cows each day, and the community's businessmen are sent to Asunción to serve in the boardrooms of the national banks and corporations. Though representing only about 1 percent of the population, Mennonites in Paraguay are on average ten times richer than their neighbours.

The thing with mythologies of settlement, Dueck notes, is that no matter what happens — suffering and struggle or wealth and success — the end result is framed as God's will. This repeated story holds true only when dissenting voices are sifted out: those dispossessed from the land on which the newcomers establish themselves, for instance, or members who gave up or faced excommunication and left.

♦
FEW OUTSIDE VOICES MAKE IT INTO *MENNO Moto*. That would be a different book. But their presence is marked from the brief opening prologue, which is written in the genre conventions of a nineteenth-century settler romance. Dueck depicts his great-grandfather as a boy on the 1874 journey down the Red River, curious about "the dark-skinned, long-haired crew of the ship." His father tells him, "Those are not our people," noting that they are the Indians he had heard about "who lived on the land. Their land." This possessive pronoun lacks a clear referent and is the source of continued conflict a century and a half later. The question "Whose land is this?" functions as another frame to the question "Whose community is this?"

Dueck ends the book with a similar return to genre convention, the prairie pastoral. At Remecó Colony, under wide Patagonia skies, the simple family farm of Hans Loewen serves as a classic representation of the horse-and-buggy Mennonite life. Dueck even fumbles the hand milking. The trappings of new wealth in Paraguay are now well behind him, as are the ongoing questions and traumas of Manitoba Colony. Dueck admits that these months spent in the homes of various tight-knit families made him envious. He tells Loewen that he knows a lot of city people who would want this life. "That's what you think now," Hans answers. "But this would never work for you."

Maybe not, but neither does that exclude him from claiming his Mennonite identity. When Dueck learns that Hans plants a hard

Benediction

Each winter night last thing
I bend to the bedroom window

slide open a crack and inhale
a taste of snow in the darkness,

of wood smoke from my chimney
if the wind is right,

and of the silent white mountains
that rise around me

who launch from their summit ridges
when the sky is clear

a myriad of stars toward the zenith
— those frosty pinpoints of light

shepherded by Orion
high over the trees to the southeast.

My mouth at the slight opening
between glass and frame

exhales gratitude for warmth, for
shelter, for the valley's stillness

and breathes in again a benediction
of icy air

that blesses my body,
my dwelling, my sleep.

Tom Wayman

Tom Wayman is the author of Watching a Man Break a Dog's Back: Poems for a Dark Time and The House Dreaming in the Snow, a new chapbook.

winter wheat that's good for baking bread, he grows animated and explains that it's likely a descendant of Turkey Red. Cultivated first by the Ottomans, he tells us earlier in the book, this was the grain that Dutch-Prussian Mennonites found in abandoned silos when they arrived in Ukraine. Imported to Canada in 1874, it became the parent to most red wheats still grown in the Americas today. Hans plays willfully ignorant of this history. "This seed didn't come from Europe. It's just seed we kept from last year's crop," he replies. "That's how we do it."

The scene is emblematic: Dueck seeks a wide definition of a complicated ethnic community enmeshed in the histories of agriculture and global migrations; his interlocutor refuses the threads, wanting to retain the isolation of his farm and the quiet borders of the mind. Ultimately, *Menno Moto* shows that what can seem like an endless narcissism of small differences among the Mennonites contains the seeds of entire, separate world makings. ▲

Tech Support

Who's helping who?

Dan Falk

Analogia: The Emergence of Technology beyond Programmable Control

George Dyson

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

304 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

AS GEORGE DYSON'S *ANALOGIA* opens, we find the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in the court of Peter the Great. It's 1716, and Leibniz, age seventy, is as full of ideas as ever. (We know, though presumably he does not, that he will be dead within a year.) Leibniz presents the tsar with three grand ideas. First, a great expedition across Siberia and into the Kamchatka Peninsula ought to be launched, with the goal of determining whether Asia and America were joined, and to study the peoples of those lands. Second, Russia should establish an academy dedicated to the sciences, modelled on the great ones of Europe. Third, work should commence at once on what we would now call a digital computer—a device that would allow all manner of problems, once suitably converted to numerical form, to be solved swiftly. The Russian Academy of Sciences was founded in 1724; an expedition set out for Kamchatka the following year. Although Peter seemed intrigued by a prototype computing device that Leibniz put before him, and even poked at it with a pencil, the idea went nowhere. "The powers of digital computing," Dyson writes, "were lost on the tsar."

But they are not lost on the author, a historian of science and keen observer of intellectual trends and of the forces that shape civilization—especially the many ways in which the history of *Homo sapiens* is intertwined with the history of the machines that we have crafted. In *Analogia*, we find an ambitious if somewhat convoluted meditation on this interwoven tale, with Dyson's own adventures carefully threaded into the narrative.

The author divides the story into four epochs. The first was pre-industrial, in which we made things with our hands. Then came the industrial age, in which we used tools to make machines. The third era saw the rise of programmable computers. The fourth age, in which the machines have become so complex that we are no longer quite sure what rules they're following, came upon us "so gradually that almost no one noticed. . . . Humans were still in the loop but no longer in control."

Dyson offers highly selective glimpses of each of these eras, beginning with a detailed account of the Great Northern Expedition, the second

journey to Kamchatka, a decade-long trek that covered thousands of kilometres by land and by sea. He has clearly immersed himself in the surviving historical documents and paints a vivid picture of the laborious quest: "The expedition requisitioned 4,280 pairs of saddlebags, consumed 180,000 pounds of rye flour per year, and descended on the local population like a plague of locusts as it made its way to the Pacific coast."

The harsh environment took its toll. Vitus Bering, the expedition's leader, succumbed to scurvy in 1741; his ship, the *St. Peter*, was wrecked off Alaska. A smaller boat was built from the wreckage, and the forty-six survivors arrived back on Russian soil in August 1742, at which point they learned "they had been declared dead, their salaries had been terminated, and all the property they had left behind had been sold." The crew of a second ship, the *St. Paul*, fared better, interacting with some of the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest and "losing only six men to scurvy on the return voyage."

We then leap ahead to the late nineteenth century, when we find the U.S. Army at war with the Apache Nation in New Mexico and Arizona. We also find the first hint of the computa-

"The tsar seemed intrigued by a prototype computing device that Leibniz put before him."

tional networks that Leibniz had envisioned: the Americans have appropriated an ingenious piece of traditional technology—signalling over great distances by means of sunlight and mirrors. General Nelson Miles used this "heliographic" system to send commands to his scattered troops, employing relay towers stationed as much as eighty kilometres apart. Dyson quotes an 1891 magazine article that says the technology "disheartened the Indians as they crept stealthily or rode swiftly through the valleys," realizing they could not outrun the army's information network. In fact, the army got the idea from the Apache people themselves. Miles would recall, "As to their being able to signal by the use of fire and smoke and the flashes of some bright piece of metal for a short distance, I thought we could not only equal, but far surpass them in a short time." (Miles almost certainly saw himself as a nation builder; today, many would view him as helping to perpetrate genocide.)

A central character here is Geronimo, the famed medicine man who was captured by U.S. forces and paraded around at various fairs as something of a carnival attraction; he eventu-

ally died in custody. His nephew, Daklugie, was among the last of his tribe to surrender. His weapons included "the last arrows deployed in war against the regular army of the United States." Dyson sees the moment as a turning point: "The day of the bow and arrow was over. The day of the data network was coming, and the Apaches were the first to see the signs."

These lines capture both the strength and, I think, the weakness of Dyson's storytelling. As history, it is vivid and engrossing; the depth of his research is evident at every turn, as is his eye for small details that exemplify larger cultural shifts. But framing a story about the demise of the Apache people as just another episode in the march of technology seems if not insensitive, at least somewhat contrived.

♦

IN THE MIDDLE SECTION OF THE BOOK, THE writer himself becomes a central figure. We meet the physicist Freeman Dyson (who died in February), though it is only several pages later that we're told he is the author's father. We also meet (in a similar roundabout fashion) the author's mother, the mathematician Verena Huber-Dyson. Both parents were employed at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

As a vignette of postwar life in one of the loftiest of ivory towers, this section is fascinating. The story of Freeman and Verena's courtship, in particular, is so imbued with nerdiness that it puts *The Big Bang Theory* to shame. Dyson recounts the romance

based on notes scribbled by Freeman in his copy of *The Consistency of the Continuum Hypothesis*, by the mathematician Kurt Gödel, which he presented to Verena. "By making certain alterations in the arguments of this tract," Dyson quotes his father, "we have therefore proved a stronger result than that stated in the text." The couple were married the following year.

Soon we find the author as a youngster chasing turtles in the woods behind his parents' institute, while his father concocts a somewhat far-fetched scheme to build rockets propelled by a series of nuclear explosions. (That effort is the subject of George Dyson's 2002 book, *Project Orion: The Atomic Spaceship, 1957–1965*.) Later, as a young adult in the early '70s, George distances himself from his cerebral parents and moves to the West Coast. Using only salvaged materials, he builds a tree house some thirty metres above the ground, on the shore of Burrard Inlet, west of Vancouver, and lives in it for three years. His reasons were not what one might imagine: "Today, anyone living in a tree in British Columbia for three years is assumed to be trying to save the rain forest. The only thing

LOOK BACK ON CANADIAN HISTORY

I was trying to save was rent." (Dyson is now a dual citizen of Canada and the U.S. and divides his time between B.C. and Washington.)

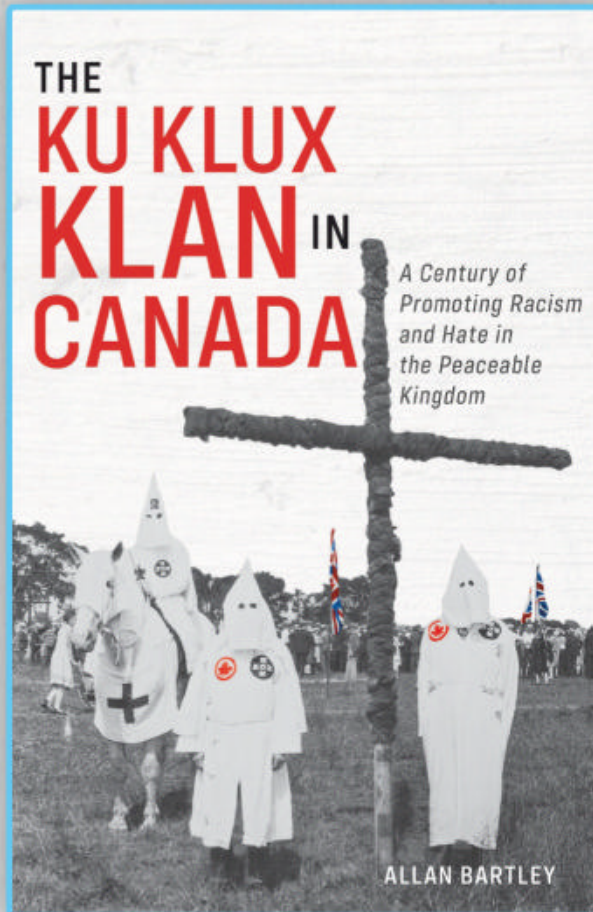
Dyson developed an interest in the region's Indigenous peoples, particularly their watercraft; he began building kayaks based on traditional designs, especially those of the Aleut people. In fact, Dyson's fascination with boats goes back to his childhood, when he encountered Thor Heyerdahl's *The Kon-Tiki Expedition*, an account of Heyerdahl's 1947 Pacific raft voyage. After reading the book, Dyson writes of his eight-year-old self, "All I wanted to do was lash things together and build boats."

Then we are back into the history, learning about the life of the Victorian novelist Samuel Butler — beginning with the fact that Butler's grandfather happened to serve as a headmaster in Shrewsbury, where Charles Darwin was a student. Like Darwin, the younger Butler seemed a grave disappointment to his father; disinclined toward any profession that his family might deem respectable, he set sail for New Zealand, where he took up sheep farming. There, he got his hands on an early copy of *On the Origin of Species* and wrote a commentary on it that struck Darwin himself as "so clear and accurate." Butler would go on to describe the new age of machines, seen through a distinctly Darwinian lens. "It appears to us that we are creating our own successors," he wrote. "The machines are gaining ground upon us; day by day we are becoming more subservient to them." Later, having returned to London, he observed, "We can see no a priori objection to the gradual development of a mechanical life, though that life shall be so different from ours that it is only by a severe discipline that we can think of it as life at all." These ideas would culminate in *Erewhon*, which Dyson read "by the light of a coal-oil lamp" in his tree house. The satirical book was published anonymously in 1872, and it sold well until it was revealed to have been written "by a nobody" (as a friend put it), at which point "the demand fell 90 percent." The revelation that Butler was that nobody is said to have hastened his mother's death.

In the fictitious land of Erewhon (an approximation of "nowhere" spelled backwards), the anti-machinists defeat the machinists, bringing technological progress to a halt. Our world, however, has seen the opposite outcome. "The machines we call 'servers' have become our masters," Dyson writes, "while we are becoming serfs." The fourth epoch is upon us.

THIS IS HARDLY THE FIRST BOOK TO WARN OF THE surrender of the human to the mechanical. Nor is it the most digestible; readers may occasionally wonder if they've missed some connecting tissue that binds these disparate episodes, or if the chapters have been lashed together like one of Dyson's watercraft.

On the back flap, the technology guru Jaron Lanier praises *Analogia* as a work that "pierces the fog of everyday life" and positions the past few centuries of human history "within a much larger, epochal frame." I'm not sure I find it quite as fog-piercing as Lanier, but *Analogia* is certainly provocative and engrossing, if occasionally ponderous. In a world where two weeks can seem like an eternity, Dyson's view of history, in which events are alternately inspected under the microscope and viewed through a wide-angle lens, is a welcome and challenging diversion. ▲



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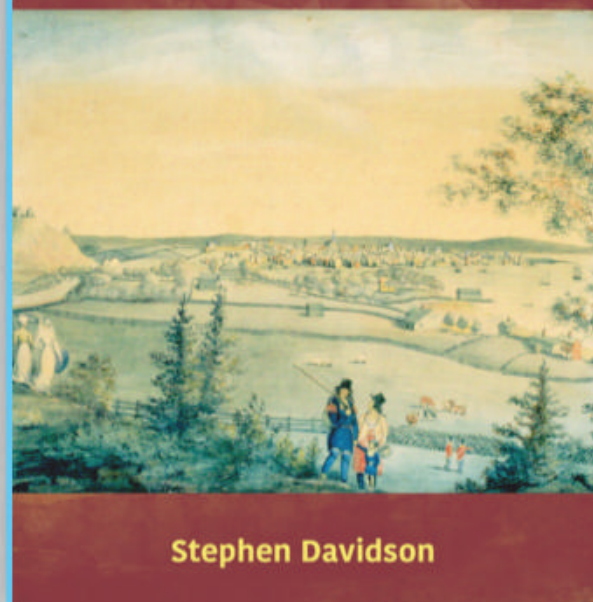
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Trailblazer

How one woman engineered change

Sheilla Jones

**A Woman in Engineering:
Memoirs of a Trailblazer**

Monique (Aubry) Frize
University of Ottawa Press
308 pages, softcover and ebook

THE DATE — DECEMBER 6, 1989 — STILL resonates with Canadians, particularly women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. On that Wednesday, a misogynistic gunman entered the École Polytechnique, in Montreal. He ordered the male students out of a classroom and shot the nine women, killing six. He then killed eight more, ranting about feminists taking jobs from men, before shooting himself.

Monique Frize was to start as the University of New Brunswick's first chair for women in engineering on December 11 — the day of the joint funeral for nine of the fourteen victims. "Instead of going to my office," she writes in her autobiography, *A Woman in Engineering*, "I was attending an especially poignant funeral." Frize left the service at the Notre-Dame Basilica with Claudette MacKay-Lassonde (the first female president of the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario) and Micheline Bouchard (who would become the first female president of the Canadian Academy of Engineering in 2000). "One thousand more women engineers," she vowed to them, "for each one who died."

Frize's role at UNB was to focus on the obstacles women faced in becoming engineers and on strategies to increase their participation in the field. Initially, she thought she would have time to slowly develop the chair's activities, but after the massacre, she felt she should quickly kick the program into high gear: "Since the chair was unique at that time, all of its activities, messages, and programs had to be built from scratch. For me, this was extremely exciting."

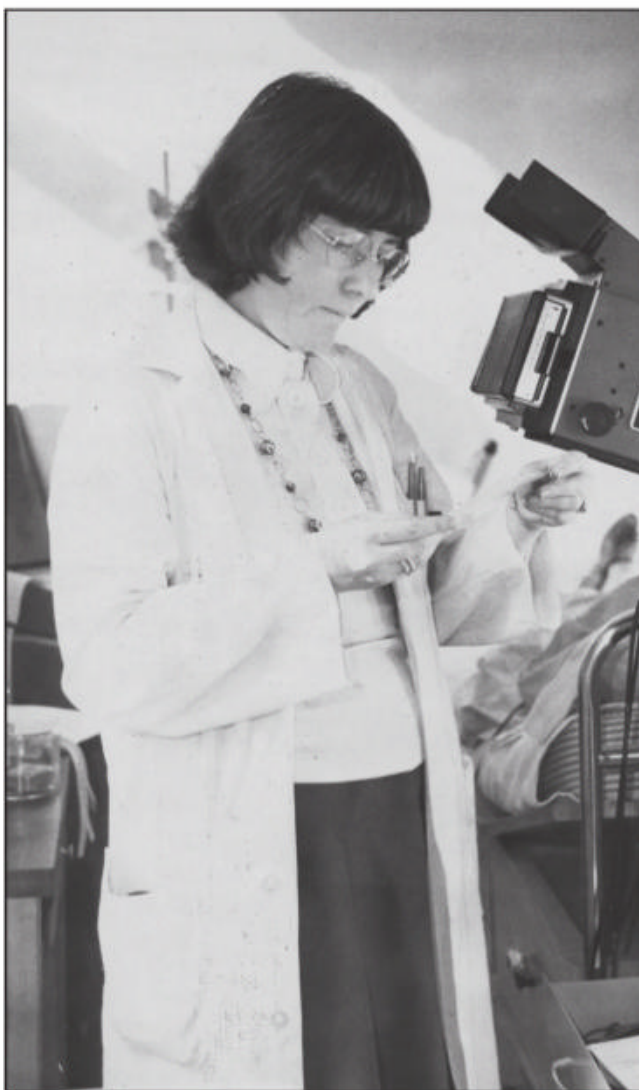
By assuming a leadership role at an enormously pivotal moment, with a bright spotlight showcasing the antagonism and backlash facing women in a traditionally male field, Frize launched herself to the forefront of a movement she was not quite prepared for. It took her until the first anniversary of the shooting to realize she was actually a feminist, and to publicly declare herself so. (By comparison, it took Montreal thirty years to change the plaque that commemorates the massacre, so that it describes the event as "an anti-feminist attack.")

Unfortunately, the drama of this historic moment is largely lost in Frize's retelling. She repeatedly underplays her own impact and significance and manages to make her remarkable achievements sound mundane. Perhaps

that is a by-product of staying focused on what she wanted to do — right from the time she was an undergraduate at the University of Ottawa. When you're the only woman in the classroom (or faculty meeting or boardroom), it can help to concentrate on what you want to achieve. It's not always easy to appreciate history when you're in the midst of making it.

♦

I AM MORE THAN A DECADE YOUNGER THAN FRIZE, but many women of my generation were still making inroads, in the 1970s and '80s, into traditionally male-dominated territory. We were doing "first woman" stuff as part of feminism's second wave, whether we realized it or



Advancing women in the STEM disciplines.

not. As a young farmer, I wanted to understand the equipment I was operating, and in the process, I became one of the first graduates of a college-sponsored equipment course for women. I became a journalist to understand what motivates people to do what they do, and that led to my becoming the first female editor of a century-old community paper. I wanted to understand the fundamental reality of our universe, and along the way, I became the first Canadian physics student selected by Cambridge's Institute of Astronomy for its summer program. You get the idea: I was just doing what needed to be done.

Frize's career before the massacre seems more in keeping with the seemingly unremarkable effort to plow ahead with what you're good at.

After graduating from Ottawa in 1966 — the only woman in the National Research Council auditorium for the iron ring ceremony — she was a clinical engineer for eighteen years. Her first posting was at the Notre-Dame Hospital, in Montreal, and then she became director of biomedical engineering for seven hospitals in New Brunswick.

Frize relies heavily on her diaries, which enable her to share many details of this time, including the experience of eating pork from the pig she and her second husband had raised on their little farm, and whom she danced with at an engineering conference in Houston, and the exact temperature when she attended a World Health Organization meeting in Copenhagen (minus 12). Despite all this colour, her matter-of-fact writing tends to read as a monotone.

The author does reveal more about herself when describing some of the tragedies she experienced, including the sudden death of her first husband in a car accident, just weeks after they wed, leaving her a widow at twenty-two. Then there was the accident in France, in 1968, when Frize was on a break from the Imperial College of Science and Technology. She was hit at high speed by a downhill skier, which resulted in a broken hip, a broken ankle, and two smashed vertebrae. It took three months of recovery before she could walk without crutches.

That Frize played a crucial role — nationally and internationally — in advancing women in the STEM disciplines, even after her retirement to Florida in 2010, is without question. She received multiple honorary degrees, was inducted into the Order of Canada, was presented with the YWCA Lifetime Achievement Award, and more. And her vow to see "one thousand more women engineers" for every one who died in Montreal was fulfilled by 1999, when there were 15,000 more women engineers than ten years earlier.

It is unfortunate that *A Woman in Engineering* does not convey the same kind of excitement that Frize showed when chronicling another remarkable woman in her 2013 book, *Laura Bassi and Science in 18th Century Europe: The Extraordinary Life and Role of Italy's Pioneering Female Professor*. While she fills *A Woman in Engineering* with details of her personal life, her work, and her heavy travel schedule, she misses an opportunity to analyze the social and political context of those experiences. Fortunately, some of this can be found in her 2009 book, *The Bold and the Brave: A History of Women in Science and Engineering*, which is an essential companion to the current work. Let's hope an enterprising writer will, at some point, build upon the pair and give Monique Frize's own remarkable story the rich treatment it so deserves. ▲

Cartoon Character

The legacy of a national lampoon

Sarah Sheehan

**Professional Heckler:
The Life and Art of Duncan Macpherson**

Terry Mosher, with a foreword by
John Honderich

McGill-Queen's University Press
480 pages, hardcover and softcover

IN THE BORA LASKIN LAW LIBRARY, AT the University of Toronto, there hangs a mischievous portrait of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The work is a curiosity. Painted in the 1980s, from photographs and memory, it was a guerrilla commission by Duncan Macpherson, the legendary (and by then semi-retired) *Toronto Star* cartoonist. The prime minister is shown seated and full-face, like a Tudor monarch. "A rose in one hand and a twinkle in his eyes," the critic Christopher Hume said of it. "Trudeau and the Commons have refused to have anything to do with the work." To library staff and patrons, Macpherson's rebellion in oils is probably more familiar than his life's work: some three and a half decades of brilliant, fleeting editorial cartoons. Yet Macpherson was both loved and feared as a master satirist.

Professional Heckler is the first biography of the celebrated cartoonist. It is also the first major writing project for Terry Mosher, who draws as Aislin for the *Montreal Gazette*. Mosher has been the unofficial historian of Canadian editorial cartooning since he worked on *The Hecklers*, an NFB documentary from 1975. Here he pairs interviews and reminiscences about the influential artist, who died in 1993, with material from an unpublished autobiography. He has also uncovered fresh troves of Macpherson originals at the *Star* offices and an unnamed New York institution. But don't expect too many scholarly details: Mosher is a raconteur and fellow satirist.

An ephemeral business, editorial cartooning: its subject is the politics of the moment. The Cold War era, neatly spanned by Macpherson's career, afforded ample opportunities for send-ups. Cartoons sold papers in 1958, when Macpherson was recruited to the *Star* by another legend, Pierre Berton; *Time* reported on his starting salary, which was equivalent to six figures today and rumoured to exceed the editor-in-chief's. The thirty-four-year-old had spent only two months on the job when he drew his most famous cartoon: John Diefenbaker, having just scrapped the Avro Arrow, exquisitely rendered as Marie Antoinette. The cutline read, "Then let them eat cake!" Berton later recalled, "The prime minister had been revered up till then. Macpherson turned him into a clown." Or as the cartoonist Guy Badaeux (known as Bado in the pages of *Le Droit*) has put it, the image is Canada's own *Mona Lisa*.



The devil was in the details.

Such panto fantasies became Macpherson's trademark and gave rise to the much-quoted epithet "a combination of Mary Poppins, Mark Twain, and Attila the Hun." For staid, mid-century English Canada, this savagery came as a shock — although somewhat of a welcome one, considering the acclaim Macpherson received during his lifetime. Feted with solo shows at the McMichael and the Art Gallery of Toronto (now AGO) and a career retrospective at the Public Archives of Canada, he was the first editorial cartoonist to join the Order of Canada. When he won the Molson Prize, in 1971, the award committee dubbed him "a stylist in chastisement."

While Macpherson's punishing world evokes the carnivalesque of fairground and vaudeville, his style — honed in London, Boston, and, of course, Toronto — is in the grand tradition of Anglo-American satire. *The New Yorker's* Edmund Wilson once praised him as a more "grotesque" Lewis Carroll — a view reinforced by Macpherson's own nods to the British writer and his illustrator, John Tenniel, like the "Cheshire banana" (Tory leader Robert Stanfield disappears; only his banana remains) or Stanfield and Trudeau as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, with the NDP's David Lewis as Alice. The latter work won Macpherson his record sixth National Newspaper Award. Printed in tangerine, it forms the very '70s cover of his 1973 annual.

Shy but physically imposing, the hard-drinking Macpherson was both mentor and enigma to Mosher, who was twenty-eight when

they met. Mosher traces Macpherson's early years in Scotland and in Toronto, where, in defiance of his father, he secretly studied art at Central Tech. After enlisting with the RCAF, in 1942, the championship high jumper won a war bond poster contest, which took him to London. Later, veterans' funding sent him to art school. Beyond the homosocial antics of the press club, the book tells us little of Macpherson's personal life. But he had a complicated marriage to Dorothy Blackhall, a friend of his younger sister, Fiona; their son, Ian, also became an artist.

Revival is Mosher's aim, and his book furthers it in spades with a wealth of Macpherson works — though, regrettably, it provides neither publication dates nor an index. The emphasis is firmly on politics and public life, yet Mosher's most arresting selections transcend the politics of their day, especially those dealing with war or human rights: an immigration minister building a wall, or the skull of an ancient soldier. These pieces show peerless draftsmanship in the classical tradition — savagery made sublime. Macpherson wanted to be a painter, but "making a living got in the way."

It is a measure of Macpherson's legacy that, many prime ministers later, it is his images that endure; the details forgotten, his subjects still resonate, as *Professional Heckler* shows. When he retired for the second time, in 1993, the *Star* published a special section. "A brawler and a gentleman," wrote one of his few close friends, the journalist Jack Brehl. One rival simply said, "He drew so bloody well." ▲

Collected Thoughts

Self-portrait of a curator

Keith Garebian

Talking to a Portrait: Tales of an Art Curator

Rosalind M. Pepall

Véhicule Press

240 pages, softcover

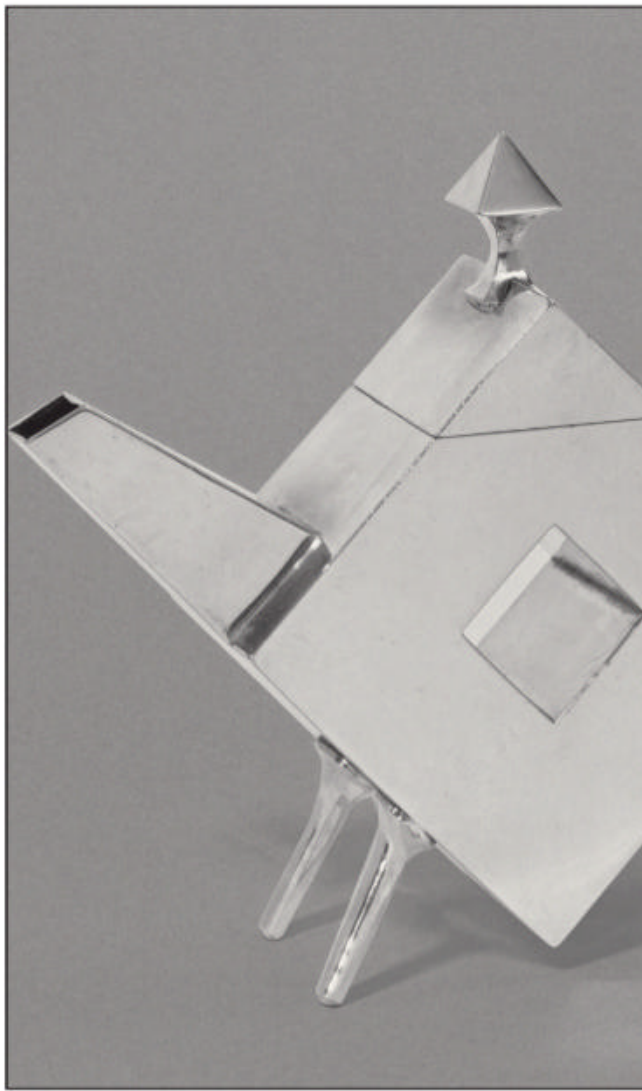
OUR CONSUMER-DRIVEN SOCIETY has vulgarized the terms “curator” and “curating.” It seems as if almost anyone with an Instagram account can be a curator and that just about anything can be curated. As Jason Farago has pointed out in *The New York Review of Books*, restaurants today sell “curated salads,” home goods stores peddle “carefully curated sheets,” and daycare centres offer “curated care.” There are legions of curated wines, curated dating apps, curated newsletters, curated books, curated audiences. And before the pandemic forced Heathrow’s Terminal 3 to close, well-heeled passengers could enjoy curated hamburgers at the Curator.

It wasn’t always so. In Roman times, curators were bureaucrats or priests who managed regions or parishes. According to experts such as David Balzer, who published *Curatorism: How Curating Took over the Art World and Everything Else* in 2014, the term “curating” entered the art world in the eighteenth century, usually to describe a private collector of unique curiosities. Initially, curators were passive caretakers of objects. They turned professional only once it became common for museums, like the Louvre and the Hermitage, to publicly display their material wealth. Curators developed an even more active and self-determined role in the late nineteenth century, when avant-garde art, with its abstractions that challenged ideological and commercial concepts, required experts who could help others make sense of the new forms. By the 1960s and ’70s, curators were full-time connoisseurs, working to secure, organize, and landscape their fields of expertise. With complex exhibitions, they transformed curating into a craft of its own. “In fits and starts,” Farago wrote in 2019, “the professional curator arrogated responsibilities once held by the artist, the collector, the historian, or indeed the critic.”

◆
WELL RESPECTED IN THE CANADIAN MUSEUM world, Rosalind Pepall believes that “a curator’s tastes and passions” contribute to an institution’s “permanent fabric.” As she explains in the preface to her fascinating new book, *Talking to a Portrait*, “Working behind the scenes, art curators select acquisitions, carry out research, install collections, court donors and interpret art, giving it meaning through exhibitions and publications.”

Recently retired, Pepall fell into her profession “by happenstance” in the 1970s. A friend

told her the Royal Ontario Museum’s European Department had an opening, and she accepted the “lowly position” because she was a twenty-three-year-old university graduate without a job. The ROM’s exhibition galleries with their wooden and glass cases were enticing, as were the “musty period rooms with their Georgian table settings, French salon chandeliers, heavily carved Elizabethan furniture and portraits of bewigged patricians.” Pepall was “smitten by this ‘old world’” in downtown Toronto, even before she fully understood it. One day, noticing that the director of her department sat “at an antique desk in a dingy, gloomy room full of dark bookcases, dark paintings and cracks in the wall,” she



The vividness of a modern teapot.

asked why he didn’t brighten up the office a bit with a bit of cheerful paint. “Oh, no, Rosalind,” he replied with a grin. “We must look poor and shabby, otherwise my visitors will think we don’t need any funding.” Such anecdotes add to the delight of the read.

Talking to a Portrait focuses on the curator’s active function in manifold ways, combining historical background with anecdotal foreground, biography, and aesthetic analysis in a manner that avoids the dryly technical and offers rich insights. Pepall left the ROM in 1978 to take a job with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in her hometown. When she served as the curator of Canadian art, she would admire “the luminosity of an Ozias Leduc painting, the roll-

ing hills of an A.Y. Jackson Quebec landscape, or Jean-Paul Riopelle’s *Vent traversier*, in which a violent breeze seemed to have whirled the rich reds, greens and yellows into a glorious expansion of colour across the canvas.” Later, as senior curator of decorative arts, she would wander through the storage rooms to examine “the simple beauty of Jean Puiforcat’s silver soup tureen, the playfulness of Carlo Bugatti’s armchair, or the Surrealist motifs by Jean-Paul Mousseau painted on a skirt that once swirled with its wearer on a discothèque floor.” From first to last, her fifteen chapters are full of lively stories about such things as oil portraits, a wilderness explorer’s sketchbook, Japanese *kogos*, and a beautiful private oratory.

Pepall’s professional enthusiasm is palpable as she recalls those early days at the Museum of Fine Arts on Sherbrooke Street:

Sometimes, instead of taking the employees’ back door, I would use the main entrance doors, passing through the four giant marble columns hewn from a Vermont quarry, each one cut from a single piece of marble. The lustre of white marble was carried over into the entrance hall, where I would continue up the stately staircase (its bronze railing copied from Paris’s Petit Palais) and arrive at the exhibition galleries, laid out like a European palace in *enfilade*.

The veritable mini-documentary is enlivened by sensory details and ends with a technical word that conveys a precise geometrical vista. Incisive thinking like this recurs throughout the book.

In the tradition of all first-rate curators, Pepall spends time pondering a work of art: “Who created it? When was it made and where? Why this style? The answers tumble forth, and they have taken me on journeys of discovery to Saint Petersburg, New York, London, Paris, the Barren Lands of the Canadian North and the canals of Venice.” It’s by asking and answering such questions that a curator contributes to the “permanent fabric of the institution.”

Putting aside the flawed title essay — an anticlimactic tale in which an old widow who owns an enigmatically cool portrait by Christian Schad frequently speaks to the painting like a cherished companion — Pepall’s writing is generally well wrought and opens up many areas of inquiry. Her first tale is in many ways a response to a question once posed to her: “Has a painting ever brought you to tears?” She carries us back to spring 2003 and a near-empty room in Ottawa, where she saw *Ludivine*. In that 1930 portrait by Edwin Holgate, a fifteen-year-old girl is numbed by grief and the burden of new responsibilities

after the recent loss of her mother. Pepall delays her comments on the painting till after a brief biography of the Montreal artist, stressing his importance and how he differed from the contemporaneous Group of Seven.

Only then does she focus on the colours, textures, angle of light, and overall composition of *Ludivine* to reach its distinctive essence:

Holgate places Ludivine in a rigid, frontal position, hands tightly clenched in her lap, the muscles of her neck taut. She leans to one side, as if shying away from the bright source of light on her left. Even the collar of her dress has shifted off-centre. All attention is directed to her facial expression and her striking eyes, which stare out directly at the viewer. Her gaze holds our gaze. Her hair, like her dress, is black, a long strand curling into her cheek. The warm hue of her skin softens the darkness and glows through the muslin of her sleeves, as if to say, "I am very much alive." The aquamarine background and vivid green of the sofa with its sharp-edged lines increase the emotional tension of the painting.

This is not simply good art criticism; it is perception linked to passion, where the viewer is connected emotionally to a subject who remains humanized despite the skillful artifice. But the essay does not end here.

Pepall continues her story of *Ludivine* with how A. Y. Jackson encouraged Vincent and Alice Massey to acquire it in 1930, for \$350; later the Masseys donated it to the National Gallery. She then moves beyond the painting to Natashquan, Quebec, the Côte-Nord fishing village where Holgate rented a house from his model's grandfather, and where Pepall herself visits decades later. In a dramatic moment, a distant relative of the girl shows Pepall a photograph: "There she was, Ludivine, whose youthful face Holgate had made eternal. She had grown old, a little plump, her short greyish hair held in a tight permanent. But there, unchanged, were those astonishing jet-black eyes, which set the photo ablaze."

CINEMATIC VIVIDNESS IS PRESENT THROUGHOUT *Talking to a Portrait*, especially in the chapters on the impulsive, outspoken, tart painter Jori Smith (whose 1935 portrait *Rose Fortin* also shows a solemn child, gazing at the viewer "with dark, doleful eyes"); on Christian Schad's glitteringly decadent *Baroness Vera Wassilko*; on the English designer Christopher Dresser's radically modern silver teapot; on Louis Tiffany's signature glasswork; and on C. P. Petersen's Stanley Cup modifications.

Pepall does not restrict herself to Canadian artists, craftsmen, designers, architects, sculptors, and engineers. Her essays make visits to Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City, the Arctic, Boston, New York, Haifa, Provence, Paris, Berlin, London, Venice—even outer space for an ambitious exhibition called *Cosmos: From Romanticism to the Avant-garde*. Without romanticizing her profession, she promotes the idea of the curator as a "treasure hunter," modestly and sometimes literally taking a back seat as she accompanies her precious cargo to and from exhibitions. And because of that, her book is a triumphant testament to the cultural value of a true curator, minus the vanity of ego. ▲

PANDEMIC

Don't Kid Yourself

A ruling on the rules

Jessica Duffin Wolfe

WHEN MY FOUR-YEAR-OLD left his first day of French immersion after months at home and said, "Comment ça va," he explained that the phrase meant "Clean up right now." This amalgam, mistranslation and all, seemed like the perfect inaugural lesson, because it combined the new language with the rules: you will inquire after the well-being of others, and you will clean up.

A clever friend's conversation starter with small children is to ask, "What are the rules in your house?" Because small children always know them, especially the ones the adults thought they hadn't said out loud. Rules are about self-preservation, maybe even more than our desire to socialize is. Do as we say, we teach the young, because conforming is essential to our lives as social beings, our way of belonging to a collective, our survival itself.

This year has reoriented us to rules, to obeying and disobeying them, and has thus made us all children again, from young to old adults, to the forty-fifth president of the United States. As individuals, we face our status as rule lovers or breakers every time we walk down the street with our snouts covered or not and cross ways with someone who's taken the other path—even though we're outside and one of us is sure masks are not strictly necessary. At thresholds, we signal to each other where we stand by the care with which we perform the viral dance move of 2020—the hand-sanitizer rub—or by showing up at gatherings and shouting, "Who's hugging?" I've had stress dreams about arriving at now-mythical in-person meetings not naked but unmasked. Ideally, rules free up our mental space by reducing the choices we have to make each day, but now, with so many new ones to try to fit together, they are instead adding straws to our camel's cognitive overload. I suspect many among us have had fits to match the tantrums parents throw when the rules shift once again and our inner four-year-old comes out to cry on the floor with our actual four-year-old.

Kids themselves don't seem to mind wearing the masks, though. Costumes are fun. It's the weird screening lineups and temperature checks that have been a source of terror and confusion, for my son at least. It's not that he has to stand in line: It's which line? And with his teacher unrecognizable in full PPE? I can relate. Lately, I've also had nightmares of schoolyards full of masked people and authorities shouting incomprehensible directions, as I, panicking, try to figure out where to go. So many in my family tree are mass-murder victims that being told to queue in a certain place by people in uniforms pointing machines at you and your terrified

children can be hair-raising. Of course, most if not all of us now feel that we have reason to believe in these rules, that the authorities imposing them have our survival and not our destruction at heart, while gamification alone can induce children to abide by new fiats. Winning small battles in private, even if it's just following a direction better than your little sister does, confers special prestige for a kindergartner.

The same can't be said for twentysomethings, for whom visibility is paramount and following boring rules confers no glamour. So in this reckoning with rules and their breaking, it's my students and not my children that I am most worried about. A little kid will learn new laws a thousand times a day and not question them (after a bit of testing), but young adults should be pushing boundaries—and, regrettably, they are. Charged with academic misconduct and with throwing parties, they are getting in trouble for ignoring mundane instruction, with negative consequences they may not fathom for months or years. Through our screens, I hear my students imagining a winter without restrictions and still struggling to focus on the relative permanence of this new way of life. Among some it seems their aversion to limits is just expanding with a pandemic that's telling them not to socialize when that's what they're built to do, or not to check their textbooks or google answers or look in spreadsheets created by their friends when their professors are silly enough to give them online exams. "Well, what did you expect we would do?" I imagine them asking. When all the rules seem made to be broken, it's harder to recognize the ones that should be. It's that source of constant and exhausting confusion that concerns me for the generation hitting adulthood right now.

The virus has pushed us down and said, "Everyone, do as I say." A new survey by the Innovative Research Group, in Toronto, suggests the experience has made us more interested in the opinions of experts, so perhaps it will usher in a more trusting era. My hope is that, having lived through this human health crisis, we will tackle the planet's next, by listening to and following its ageless rules. I have to hope this, because my dreams have all been supplanted by wishes for my children, which include now, I realize, the hope that they grow up as rule followers, and that others around them will too. Rule number two is to break rules you're sure are wrong or stupid. But rule number one is to just pay attention to the rules and try to understand them, so you know which ones to follow, and if someone smarter and more knowledgeable than you, whose morals you have cause to respect, tells you to stand over here and put this mask on your face, you do, and quickly. ▲

Lonely Hearts Club

Settling in with Helen Humphreys

Katherine Ashenburg

Rabbit Foot Bill

Helen Humphreys

HarperCollins

240 pages, hardcover and ebook

PICTURE YOURSELF FINDING A NOVEL somewhere with its cover torn off and no identifying marks. It is slim, told in the present tense and in the first person, and beautifully written. The protagonist is solitary, with a longing for love that is rarely satisfied. At the same time, nature provides a powerful solace, as does the protagonist's work, which is detailed, out of the mainstream, and intensely involving. Although the writing is usually unadorned, the author has a distilled, poetic way of describing how sunlight streaks across a path or how a river meanders its lazy way through a town. But these stylistic grace notes never slow the text's forward momentum: it reads quickly. It wouldn't take me long to guess that I had picked up a book by Helen Humphreys.

When an interviewer asked her in 2002 what she was reading, Humphreys mentioned a few titles: Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys*, and the works of Jean Rhys. "All those short novels that are so tragic and perfect," she said on rereading Rhys. It's not a bad description, if only slightly flattering, of her own achievements.

It would be hard to claim that Humphreys is neglected. She's won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and has been a finalist for a Governor General's Award, among others. She's also received the Harbourfront Festival Prize for literary excellence. In her earlier life, she produced four collections of poetry, and she was poet laureate for Kingston — the Ontario city where she lives — between 2015 and 2018. And yet she is one of those writers of the highest quality who consistently fly just under the radar. Surely this is partly because these are quiet novels about quiet loners. (If you don't find, fairly close to the beginning of a Humphreys book, that the protagonist is a bit of a recluse, you should check the title page.) In *The Lost Garden*, one of her three works set during the Second World War, Gwen speaks for many of the author's characters when she thinks, "I have never been good at dealing with people. I much prefer to work alone."

But pigeonholing these narratives as stories about introverts who contend with a strong undercurrent of melancholy, if not tragedy, doesn't do justice to Humphreys's unpredictability, her deft ways with plot, and, yes, her joie de vivre. Even her apparently conventional characters have disarming, revealing eccentricities. Rose, the heroine of *The Evening Chorus*,

another wartime tale, recovers a brass Royal Air Force button and a front tooth from the crash site where her lover died. With no idea who they belonged to, she wears the button on a chain between her breasts and every so often slips the tooth into her mouth. It's such a resonant image of the wish to keep something even tangentially related to a loved one as close as possible. Similarly, *The Lost Garden's* Gwen, a shy horticulturalist, regularly pinions herself under two enormously heavy volumes of an encyclopedia of roses, one on her chest and one on her stomach. It is, she says, a "ritual of comfort."

This novel's most bravura scene involves Jane, one of the young women assigned to help Gwen



Somehow, things are going to improve.

on the country estate where she is growing potatoes for the war effort. Worried sick about her fiancé, who is missing in action, Jane befriends a soldier from Newfoundland who knits sweaters for his sweetheart back home. Visiting with her one evening, the soldier announces that he is out of yarn and must return to his billet. "Here," Jane says. "Use this." With one movement, she pulls off her sweater and gives it to him. Gwen, watching this strange and disturbing scene — with Jane emaciated, sitting in her undervest — learns something fundamental about her friend: "There is no protection in the world for someone who loves like that."

Humphreys's plots are always tightly constructed, whether they are simple or compli-

cated. Take *Coventry*, the brilliantly paced story of the night of November 14, 1940, when the city and its cathedral were bombed. Two fire-watchers, a woman and a young man, walk through the wreckage, as does the young man's mother, who is searching for her son. They pass by vignettes of war's grotesqueries, cats sitting peacefully on the windowsills of houses burned down to their frames, a man shaving outside with water hot enough to make tea (his rain-water tank was heated by a blast). In the course of the night, there is a moment of love, a tragedy, and the birth of a bittersweet friendship. That's all, but it is more than enough.

When the subject demands it, Humphreys is more than willing to be daring. Her oddest book and one of my favourites, *Machine without Horses*, begins with a novelist, also named Helen Humphreys, reading the real-life obituary of Megan Boyd, a world-renowned but utterly private salmon fly tier who lived in a cottage in the north of Scotland. Part 1 takes us backstage in the author's world, showing us the research (which includes taking lessons in tying flies) and the back-and-forth that goes into giving fictional life and particularity to a woman who revealed little more than her obsession. Writers' methods are famously interior and of little interest except to the authors themselves, but this first section is as intriguing as the events that follow. Like Megan Boyd's beloved flies, made of tinsel, thread, feathers, and other bits, novels are also built of fragments, ruminations, and overheard conversations. Humphreys lets us watch these elements accumulate. Part 2 tells the story of Ruth, Boyd's fictional alter ego, her relationship with her dogs, her rarely consummated romance with a married woman named Evelyn, and her lifelong need to tie the perfect fly.

While tragedy marks most these novels, they don't always end in despair. In *The Evening Chorus*, a marriage falls apart, two women lose their lovers, and an English officer sees no point in being alive. Yet, almost as if she takes pity on the reader, Humphreys gives us one of her most optimistic endings. The bereaved women find the promise of love again: Enid with Margaret, a co-worker, and Rose with a man called Gregory. (Rose and Gregory have a canine connection, always a good sign with Humphreys.) And James, Enid's brother and Rose's ex-husband, is redeemed and given a reason to live by the sight of a flock of ducks moving into flight, their combined cries sounding like one voice:

And suddenly he can see how he belongs to all of it — to the morning and the ducks, to the men who were in the cage with him during the war, to his sister, even to Rose when she was his bride and their

life together was new and untried. He has a place in every one of them. He is carried forward by their lives, even though those lives are largely lived without him now.

Here, as is so often the case, the natural world brings consolation and joy. The exception is Ruth in *Machine without Horses*, who cannot reconcile her love of salmon with the knowledge that her flies help to kill them. But usually nature provides a less conflicted sense of comfort. In *The Lost Garden*, Gwen is happily absorbed in restoring a secret garden on the estate where she is meant to be tending potatoes. In *The Evening Chorus*, while James is being held in a German prisoner-of-war camp, he begins watching a pair of redstarts from his window. Aided by the German commander, he researches and writes a definitive work on the birds. It is this act that sustains him through his time as a prisoner.

◆

ALTHOUGH HUMPHREYS EMIGRATED TO CANADA AS a child, five of her nine novels take place in England, the country of her birth. Until this summer, only her first book, *Leaving Earth*, which was published over twenty years ago, was set this side of the Atlantic. Her new work, *Rabbit Foot Bill*, is planted firmly in Saskatchewan, and is another story that draws upon real events, revisiting a chapter in health care that was, until recently, all but forgotten except by psychiatrists and medical historians.

The novel opens in 1947, in a small town called Canwood, with a lonely twelve-year-old boy, Leonard. He is profoundly attached to the local tramp, Rabbit Foot Bill, and is happiest when visiting him in his shelter carved out of a hill. Laconic, comfortable only with animals or his young companion, Bill spends his days setting snares, selling rabbits' feet, and doing occasional odd jobs. When Leonard is bullied by an older boy, Bill murders his taunter without warning and goes to prison.

Twelve years later, Leonard, now a newly minted psychiatrist, arrives to take up his post at Weyburn Mental Hospital. In the 1950s and early '60s, Weyburn was a world leader in the therapeutic use of LSD. Viewed as a single-dose treatment that would give patients, especially those with schizophrenia and alcoholism, insight into their illness, the drug was also taken by the medical staff so that they could better understand what they were prescribing. Its proponents claimed that it was successful, particularly with alcoholism, and could cut health care costs significantly — one of the aims of Tommy Douglas's provincial government at the time. But LSD fell out of public and clinical favour, as people began taking it recreationally and stories of bad trips multiplied. (It is now making something of a comeback in psychiatric circles.)

Humphreys came to the murder in Canwood and to Weyburn's work with psychedelics through Hugh Lafave, to whom she dedicates the book. Growing up in the town, he knew Rabbit Foot Bill, and later he worked as a superintendent at the hospital. From Lafave's memories, Humphreys has concocted a tale of two killings, a long-held family secret (with its attendant guilt and responsibility), and a love story. The love story is that of Leonard and Bill. For the boy, it is a puppyish infatuation that no one understands, including him. When his father asks why he wants to befriend a tramp, he has no answer:

"I can't explain this feeling of running after Bill under the long, blue prairie sky. It is like he is leading me out of darkness, out of a loneliness I don't even know I have."

The second part of the narrative, which takes place at the hospital in 1959, reunites the two friends. Leonard had assumed that Bill was lost somewhere within the penitentiary system, but in fact he had been transferred to Weyburn, taking care of the farm horses in the vast hospital complex and living in the stable. Leonard is overjoyed: "I can feel it in my body, the pull of wanting to be near him, and I realize, with a shock, that nothing has altered with my becoming an adult, that I still love him as much as I ever did." In his euphoria at rediscovering Bill and his desire to be with him, Leonard sleepwalks through the rest of his life, entering into an affair with his boss's wife and neglecting his patients. At times, this part of *Rabbit Foot Bill* reads like an early Kingsley Amis novel about a man who is hopelessly incompetent at his job — but without the comedy.

The medical scenes are the book's only weak points. The dialogue where Leonard's boss and staff explain the rationale behind the LSD experiments is strained and unconvincing. Surely Leonard would have known about Weyburn's highly publicized experiments before he arrived. After a brief summary of their work, the doctors, including Leonard, each drink a liquid dose of the drug in water. "Bottoms up," the director says. Neither this incident nor the nebulous demands of Leonard's job, his inept dealings with patients, or the relative lack of supervision for a twenty-three-year-old newly qualified doctor struck me as believable. No doubt there is more than one fascinating novel to be written about the workings of Weyburn in those heady days, but I suspect that Humphreys's heart was not in this part of the story.

On the other hand, her heart is undeniably in the developing or redeveloping relationship between the two men. Humphreys's characters, although solitary, often crave a kindred spirit: they are constantly searching for love, and their author is always interested in parsing the different shades of intimacy. With Bill and Leonard, she has created her most complex relationship, one that remains, at some level, unknowable. When Leonard thinks of "the way my heart blooms in my throat whenever I see Bill," he doesn't wish to know what lies beneath their friendship: "I don't know that I want to be cured." Bill can seem a paternal figure, or at

other times maternal, and occasionally childishly dependent on Leonard. There is a moving scene where he feeds Leonard from his own dinner plate that feels almost sacramental.

A more opaque character, Bill can't help but express his love tragically. Believing that he is once again protecting Leonard, he kills an innocent man and is sent to prison, permanently this time. Leonard has been fired already for letting one of his patients escape, and he moves into an apartment in town. His former colleague, significantly named William, offers to be his psychiatrist, and they decided to do it "the old-fashioned way," without drugs. William believes that Bill abused Leonard, which Leonard agrees does sound plausible. But if this was true, why then did he not fear Bill? When William probes the nature of his desire — was it sexual? paternal? caretaking? — Leonard answers that it was everything: "All at once. He was everything. As a boy and then now, as a man."

◆

IN THE POWERFUL FINAL SECTION OF THE TEXT, Leonard returns to Canwood for his father's funeral. The family secret is revealed, making his attachment to Bill more understandable, and there is also a hint about the source of his friend's reclusive strangeness. Leonard and his mother, another of the book's strong, complex characters, have a poignant rapprochement. In *Machine without Horses*, Humphreys writes, "If just one scene, one line of dialogue, moves the reader to consider Megan Boyd not merely as an oddity, but as a fully realized human being, then I have done my job as a novelist." In *Rabbit Foot Bill*, she has done that job several times over.

After the funeral, mother and son sit on the porch of their family home. Leonard's mother says, "It's been a long, troubling day, hasn't it?" Then she adds, "But it's a peaceful evening." This is the resigned but quietly hopeful mood that often concludes these titles. Terrible things may have happened, but, somehow, life is going to improve. Leonard flies home to Toronto, to be with his wife and six-year-old daughter, and the narrative comes full circle. The book begins, "Bill never likes to leave town the same way twice," and continues with a picture of a man moving rapidly through woods, bogs, and grasses, accompanied by a boy who is struggling to keep up. When Leonard gets home, his daughter asks for her favourite bedtime story. Obediently, he starts the tale. "Bill never likes to leave town the same way twice," he says. "He strides out with an urgency I find hard to match."



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Voices among Us

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's latest

Christina Turner

Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

House of Anansi Press

368 pages, softcover and ebook

THIS PAST SPRING, WHILE WORKING from home in our downtown Toronto apartment, my husband and I began noticing a large raccoon that would waddle across the street and sometimes lounge on the roof of a nearby house. Fat raccoon sightings soon became our antidote to pandemic-related anxiety. "It's huge!" we'd giggle. "Think of all the garbage it must eat." Then, one night, we spotted the raccoon again, much thinner now and trailed by four babies. She hadn't been fat; she'd been pregnant. Suddenly, I felt like a bad neighbour.

Had I already read Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, I might have held my tongue. In this non-fiction work, from 2011, Simpson recalls being told by her elder Edna Manitowabi that Nishnaabeg do not tell animal stories in the spring, summer, and fall "because these beings are awake and active during this time and they could be around when we are speaking about them." Such a narrative ethic, requiring that these tales be recounted only in wintertime, assumes animals and other spirits have comprehension and feelings. It also goes some way to explaining Simpson's latest book, *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies*.

The novel opens with a being named Mashkawaji, who "fell through the ice" of a lake and is now "frozen stiff." Mashkawaji, it seems, was human once; they have a parent named Mindimooyenh and a younger sister. (Characters are referred to as "they" or "them" throughout, as Simpson follows the Anishinaabemowin convention of categorizing nouns as animate/inanimate rather than male/female.) "The details don't matter," Mashkawaji says, about how they came to be trapped there. One interpretation might be that they froze to death and are telling their tale from a watery grave. But our narrator resists this reading, claiming that "being frozen in the lake is another kind of life."

In this state of suspension, Mashkawaji shares stories of others who come to visit. These characters are wonderfully rendered, by turns tender, sardonic, wise, and neurotic. They include Akiwenzii, an old man trying to pass on bush knowledge to Lucy, whose enthusiasm for hunting deer is matched by their awful aim; Asin, who can sleep only next to a fire; and the aforementioned Mindimooyenh, a "bargoona"-hunting grandmother obsessed

with "Certified Value Tarps" from Canadian Tire. But Mashkawaji's visitors are not restricted to the human. There's also the maple tree, Ninaatig, who pushes a shopping cart between a Peterborough provincial park and downtown Toronto, unnoticed by most people; Sabe, a recently sober giant, who creates sculptures from the detritus of modern life; and Adik, a hipster backpack-sporting caribou spirit, who uses their Sony digital voice recorder to capture the "sound of hope" (green leaves moving in the wind, water flowing over rock).

The book's form is perhaps meant to mimic the snippets of sound gathered by Adik's recorder. Many pages contain only a single sentence or even a single word. Such sparseness brings to mind a textual fragment, as if the lines surrounded by blankness represent pieces of a narrative that has otherwise been erased. A visual analogue can be found in "Fringe," the photograph by the Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore that graces the cover. It depicts a woman lying down, facing away from the camera, with a diagonal line of stitching running across her naked back. What appear at first to be rivulets of blood oozing from her are actually strings of red beads,

"The blankness doesn't signify emptiness. It is a moment of necessary listening."

gesturing toward colonial violence against Indigenous women and the resilient beauty of their creative labour. The double valence of this image suggests that *Noopiming's* structure should be read not as fragmentary but as a reclaiming. This is a novel that takes up space, that insists on the value of a page containing only the word "Rebuilt" at the top. The blankness doesn't signify emptiness. It is a pause, a moment of necessary listening.

◆
NOOPIMING IS RICH IN ANISHINAABEMOWIN words, but, in contrast to many of Simpson's earlier works, English translations are notably absent. This shift marks another form of reclamation: the storyteller and musician is now in a position to push back against an industry that tends to centre the needs of white English-speaking audiences, who she has acknowledged are not her primary focus. The novel's narrator tells of life "in the bush," which is *Noopiming's* English meaning (words can be translated through the online Ojibwe People's Dictionary). As Simpson states in her acknowledgements, this title was motivated by Susanna Moodie's 1852

memoir, *Roughing It in the Bush*, which gives an account of her family's migration from England to the place some call Douro Township, right in the middle of Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogaming (the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg's name for their territory). Moodie's portrayal of "wild lands" of "primeval beauty," peopled by "dark and unlovely" inhabitants, has long held pride of place in the Canadian literary canon, appearing in anthologies and on university syllabi all over the country. *Noopiming's* subtitle, *The Cure for White Ladies*, positions the text as a remedy for the outsize role settler narratives have played in shaping mainstream Canadian perspectives about the land.

Of course, much of the region depicted in the book is no longer "in the bush." It comprises the north shore of Lake Ontario, including a large chunk of Highway 401, at least two nuclear facilities, the cities of Toronto and Peterborough, and several municipalities in between. The bush that these beings inhabit is a colonized space overrun by *zhaganash* (white people) driving Mercedeses, "tree cops" who prohibit the tapping of maple trees in the springtime, and municipal bylaws that bar Asin from lighting their much-needed fires. It's not the bush, and yet it remains the bush at the same time. In Tommy Thompson Park, on Toronto's waterfront, young Canada geese learn the art of flight formation from their elders. In the forest of the Mark S. Burnham Park, Ninaatig, the maple tree, is happily welcomed home by their children each spring despite the tree cops' surveillance. This welcome is just one instance of the care circulated among the story's non-human characters. Another example is the *esibanag* (raccoons): despite being "dispossessed, displaced and their habitat gentrified like everyone else," they have "moved the fuck back in" to build lodges, speak their languages, raise children, and look after each other, regardless of the "asshat humans."

Noopiming is a remarkable and unusual novel that is both tender and defiant. It tells of moments of intense Nishnaabeg joy that unfold in a colonized space through the medium of a colonial language. The book doesn't end in revolution or the cataclysmic rupture of imposed structures: the highways remain standing, the tree cops still patrol. Instead, characters flourish in "simple stolen moments," like the raccoons' brief, triumphant takeover of a backyard lily pond. Simpson leaves us with the *esibanag* and one of their mantras for living—something I'll recall next spring if I once again spot my four-legged neighbour waddling across the street. "Take very, very good care of each other, always, no matter what happens." ▲

Shipmates

It's a pirate's life for Clifford Jackman

Michael Strizic

The Braver Thing

Clifford Jackman

Random House Canada

448 pages, softcover, ebook, and audiobook

EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD PIRATE yarn, and history's seafaring rogues have firmly cemented themselves in the collective consciousness — the peg legs, the parrots, the eye patches — often in the form of Halloween costumes or scenery-chewing Hollywood types. But, as the latest from Clifford Jackman points out, pirates were actual people, who lived real lives and made real voyages. *The Braver Thing* gives an account of the experiences of these men not as legends but as regular "Honest Fellows" (as they styled themselves).

In the novel, pirates do not swagger and sneer through spyglasses, winking at the camera like Jack Sparrow; nor, it turns out, are they caricatures of their literary forebears in Stevenson, Cooper, or Scott. Rather, *The Braver Thing* positions itself within the realm of plausibility, bolstered by the author's extensive historical research. Jackman, a lawyer based in Guelph, Ontario, wrote *The Winter Family*, which was nominated for the Giller in 2015. With that work, he charted a vanishing American West, the myth of exceptionalism, the violence at the heart of humanity, and the illusion of progress — much in the vein of Patrick DeWitt's lauded *The Sisters Brothers* or, if you like, Cormac McCarthy. It is fitting, then, that *The Braver Thing* similarly invokes the end of an era.

Set in 1721 — the year Britain passed the Piracy Act and effectively ended the practice's fabled Golden Age — the novel launches as the men of a private company embark on one last grand "Adventuring Cruise." (While a more judicious editor might have stricken Jackman's incessant capitalization, this stylistic device helps to capture an eighteenth-century rhetorical feel.) The story quickly turns into an investigation of the ways and means of law and order aboard a pirate vessel. The *Saoirse*, under the single, jaundiced eye of Captain James Kavanagh, is first and foremost governed by "Articles" that are agreed upon before the crew set sail. This document, signed by many who admit they cannot read, pertains to the rhythms of life on the ship: the daily provisions (one pint of rum and eight of beer), the shares of prize (one to the able seamen, two to mates, boatswain, and quartermaster), protocols for settling private quarrels ("on shore, at sword and pistol"), and so forth. In demythologizing the pirate cruise, Jackman also deromanticizes it: there is far less yo-ho-ho-ing and much more Careful Attention

to Regulation than audiences are accustomed to seeing on the high seas.

Or, at least, that's the way things get going. *The Braver Thing* charts its course through seven broad sections, named for types of government, each one's arrival heralded by the shifting fortunes aboard the *Saoirse*. Epigraphs, from sources ranging from the Old Testament to Hobbes, provide signposts of Jackman's intent. The crew, initially squabbling over bureaucratic regulations about duels and honour, soon have their first taste of victory. But from there, the centre cannot hold, and things fall apart.

As Jackman takes the reader from an autocracy through a timocracy and onward to a true



The degradation swiftly gathers momentum.

(if parodic) democracy, the pirates' hierarchy of needs shifts too. What begins as a quest for riches and glory soon devolves into desperate vying for power, and then a scrabble for the bare essentials. Like an anchor chain speeding through the hawse pipe, the degradation of morale and morals gathers swift momentum. Factions form, merge, and disband. Mutinies rear up and are quelled. Once-dear shipmates are run through, shot dead, or heaved out of portholes with grim finality. And beneath it all, a quixotic sense of loneliness and futility lurks.

◆

JACKMAN IS AN ACCOMPLISHED, BUT NOT MASTERFUL, stylist. His characters are usually bland and forgettable when they are not advancing specific

plot lines. He also tends toward frustrating choices — like rendering phonetically the words of the crew member who speaks with a stutter. Nevertheless, he's done his homework. The *Saoirse* feels like a living, lived-in character in its own right, provoking wincing each time chain shot rips through the rigging. The nautical lexicon is so bafflingly complex that it could only be accurate; it is confounding that ships could be built, let alone sailed by such men. And as the political manoeuvring descends inexorably toward chaos, Jackman finds his heading. He may not be a McCarthy, but he does a good impression when violent islanders capture a pirate and press his head back "until the vertebrae cracked like the shell of a lobster." He echoes Stephen King in the deranged scribbles of a navigator found — in a brilliant, horrifying scene — to be doing anything *but* navigating. The ludicrous parodies of justice and law on the ship point to Kafka or Dickens or, closer to home, Dan Needles's *Letters from Wingfield Farm*. All told, Jackman borrows liberally from his antecedents but still manages a narrative that feels unique and engaging.

By the time *The Braver Thing* arrives at its abject, if not predictable, denouement, the men have abandoned all pretence of an egalitarian company. With democracy overturned for oligarchy and eventually for tyranny, Jackman's own thesis on systems of government emerges — and the sharks circle. At each turn, the crew's manipulations of law and order betray them. And at each turn, a persuasive minority can effect asked-for (and violent) change. When their best hope of salvation is a man who doesn't know how to read charts or winds but merely piles on more sail, brings more muskets to bear, and hides himself in the captain's quarters, it's hard not to find the book's narrative thrust. There's a nod to *Animal Farm* when the *Saoirse*'s final captain — we go through several — leads his dwindling crew in a dispassionate personal anthem to the tune of "God Save the King." Ruled by paranoia and gripped by doldrums, the ship edges closer to Ingsoc every day. Men aren't executed, so long as they confess, "which they always did."

None of the systems of government that play out aboard the microcosm of the *Saoirse* work properly. Ground down by the elements, by rival ships and vengeful locals, the pirates are, at best, playing at society and, at worst, descending into madness. If all governance is doomed to failure and corruption, as the novel posits, its author doesn't offer us an easy answer. Nor does he provide a simple analogue of present-day politicking. Then again, we don't have to look far to find the madman at the helm, or the barely literate mob willing to follow him into oblivion. ▲

A Mother, Wrapped in a Mystery

IN THE MID-1950S, I WAS A HIGH SCHOOLER living in a big old house in Providence, Rhode Island. My father, Harcourt Brown, a professor of French at Brown University, had a study that overflowed with books. And my adjacent bedroom was in the floodway. So he and my mother, Dorothy Stacey Brown, created an attic suite for me by blending two adjoining rooms into one.

As I moved long-unopened boxes into closets, I was startled to discover a large cache of my mother's writings. I had no idea that she had been an author in the years before I came along. After graduating from the University of Toronto, in 1923, she wrote columns for *Eaton's News Weekly* and placed a few short pieces in the *Toronto Star Weekly* and *Saturday Night*. Then, as the stock market crashed in 1929, my parents moved to New York, where my father undertook doctoral studies at Columbia. My mother became the main breadwinner, contributing to such magazines as *Better Homes & Gardens* and *House Beautiful* and rushing each cheque to the bank in case the publishers suddenly failed. In 1935, my father became a professor at Washington University, in St. Louis, and with the new financial security, she became more experimental and creative in her writing.

Over the years, I sometimes browsed through her files, but she always seemed dismissive of the work — as if it never amounted to much. After she died, in 1986, my father catalogued the contents in some detail, but only recently did I delve into the material myself and begin to realize what my mother was up to all those decades ago. In particular, I found myself reading and rereading a yellowed typescript, a mystery novel of almost 200 pages in an old brown binder.

My mother's most active writing years were 1935 and 1936. Like many authors, she had her share of rejections. But in April 1936, a short story that she titled "No Story" won first prize in a national contest held by *The Writer*. Buoyed by the success, she took up a new challenge: a "Mystery-Detective Prize Novel Competition" launched by Dodd, Mead and Company, publishers of the famed Red Badge mystery series. The deadline was July 31, and the specifications were strict. Manuscripts had to focus on a grave


crime — "murder or potential murder" — and a detective had to be "the intellectual hero of the case."

My mother started writing almost every day, even as my parents completed plans for fleeing from humid St. Louis each summer. An old friend had helped them purchase a small island in Georgian Bay, just south of Parry Sound, where they arranged for a precut Aladdin cottage to be delivered. While my father supervised its construction, my mother settled in at a nearby friend's place, with typewriter and cat, and typed and retyped vigorously.

She told the story of Michael Pierce, an FBI man (also a writer) on vacation in Brittany, travelling incognito for safety reasons. He finds himself solving the murder of an English archaeologist, who had provoked the locals by digging among the ancient megaliths of Carnac (the victim meets his demise on a huge dolmen). The place was familiar territory: my parents had bicycled all over Brittany for their wedding trip in 1927.

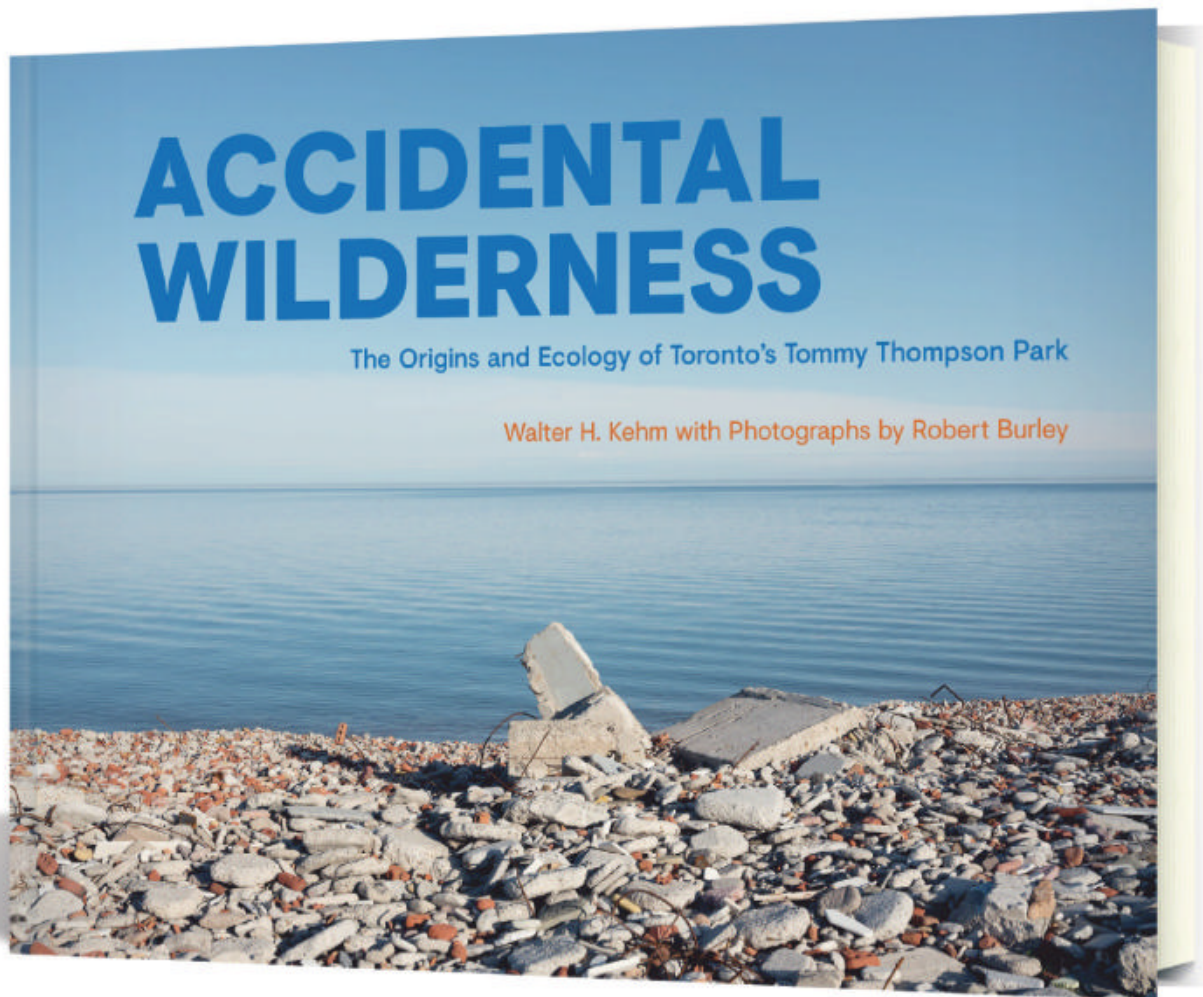
The novel is engaging in its portrait of Breton life and culture, and it is absorbing and suspenseful as a mystery. But, on returning to St. Louis, the author learned that she had not won the prize. Her detective was probably not heroic enough for the Red Badge series, and the judges may have been put off by her use of local colour. For a time, she poked at revisions, but eventually she set the manuscript aside.

Earlier this year, I tried running optical character recognition on the typescript, but the paper was too old. So I transcribed the whole text on my laptop — which took several days and allowed for quite close reading. My mother was an excellent stylist, but she of course lacked our digital tools for edits and corrections. I treated her gently, added a prologue to help set the stage, and independently published *Murder among the Standing Stones* with Amazon.

Dorothy Stacey Brown had stopped writing by the time I was born. The war, frozen professors' salaries, and minimal expectations and opportunities for faculty wives had dampened her ambitions. But my parents gave me opportunities that she never had. This book is a small return on that investment. 

Jennifer S. H. Brown is the editor of Murder among the Standing Stones.

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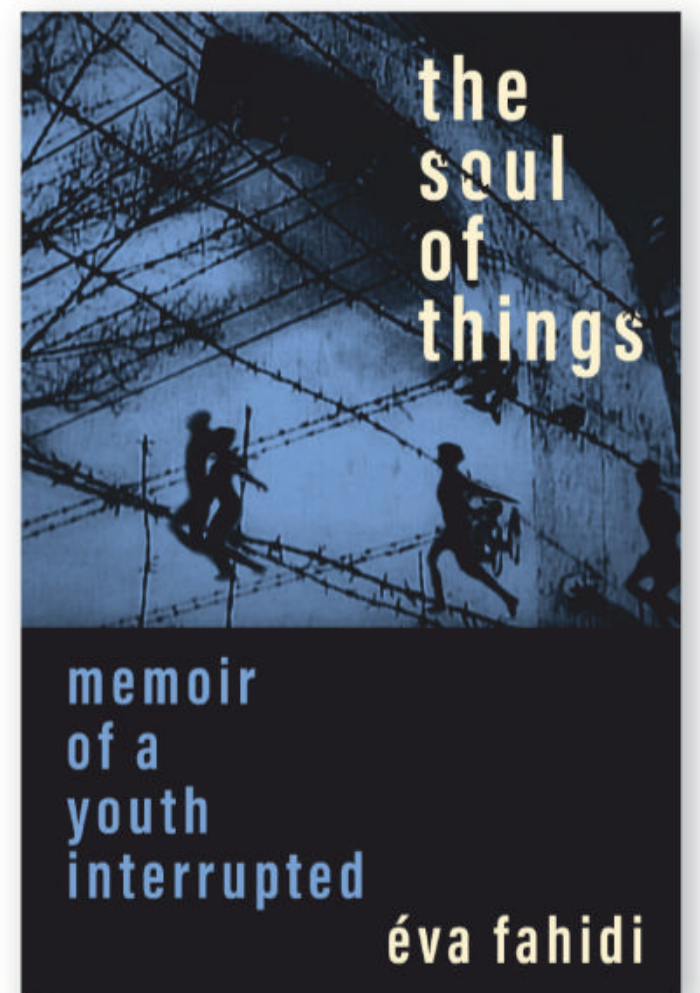
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