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GEOFF WHITE Reframing Huawei **JESSICA DUFFIN WOLFE** The Tree House
WILLIAM THORSELL The Penthouse **CHARLOTTE GRAY** A Question of Agency

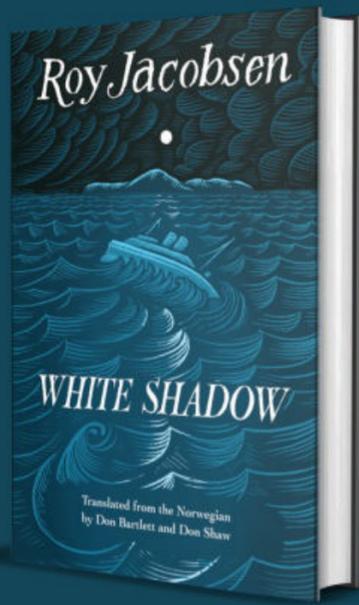
Literary Review of Canada

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS



"As profoundly quiet as the first in the trilogy, it's also a page-turner that has swept me up like a storm at sea."

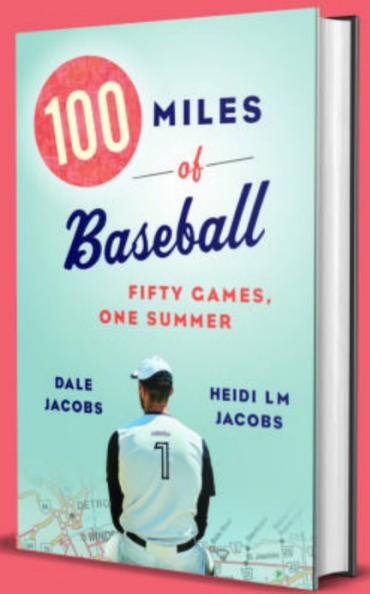
—Molly Parent, Point Reyes Books (Point Reyes Station, CA)



reading

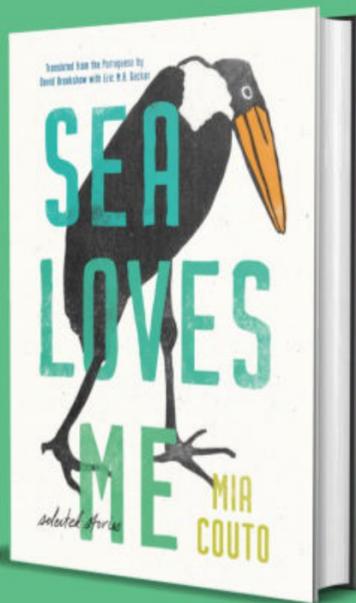
"100 Miles of Baseball is about endurance, nostalgia, hope, and gratitude, and is a book that handily affirms the game's very best rule—that baseball is for everyone."

—Stacey May Fowles, author of *Baseball Life Advice*



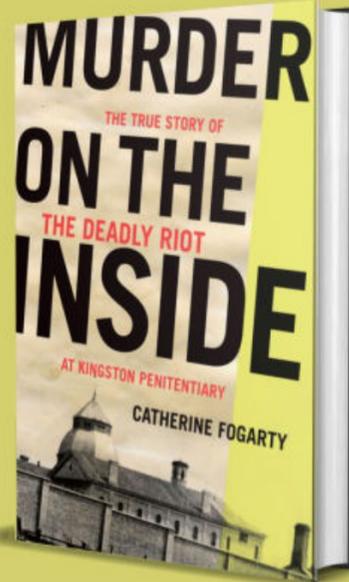
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the world.



"A career-spanning collection from the Mozambican writer, seeking an intersection between his country's folklore and its colonial past ... A worthy ... introduction to a unique and atmospheric African writer's work."

—Kirkus



nonfiction.

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"Well-researched and moving ... For readers who have ever wondered about life behind bars, this is a must-read."

—Publishers Weekly

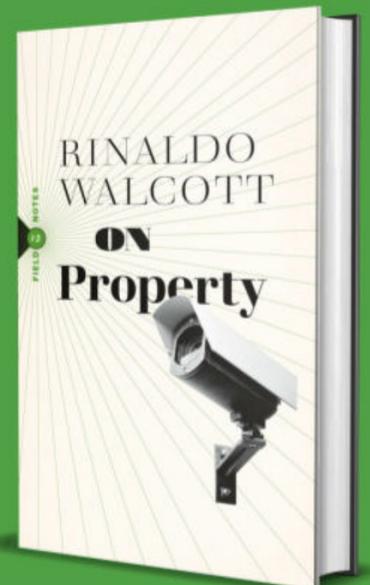
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—Toronto Star



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—Canisia Lubrin, author of *The Dyzgraphxst*



wrestling

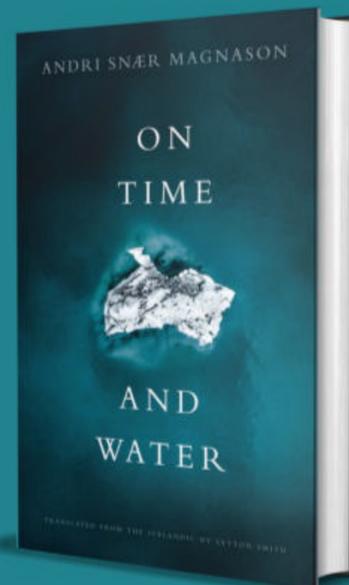
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fiction.



"Foregone is a subtle meditation on a life composed of half-forgotten impulses and their endless consequences."

—Marilyn Robinson, author of *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*



with the world.

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—The Economist

Literary Review of Canada

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Kelvin Browne converted to Catholicism in 2014, at Easter.

Leah Allyce Canali is a singer, songwriter, and producer, often to be found in Toronto's Village.

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Aaron Kreuter recently received his doctorate in English literature from York University.

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♦

On the cover: Illustration by *Nathalie Dion*, from *The Big Bad Wolf in My House*, written by *Valérie Fontaine*.

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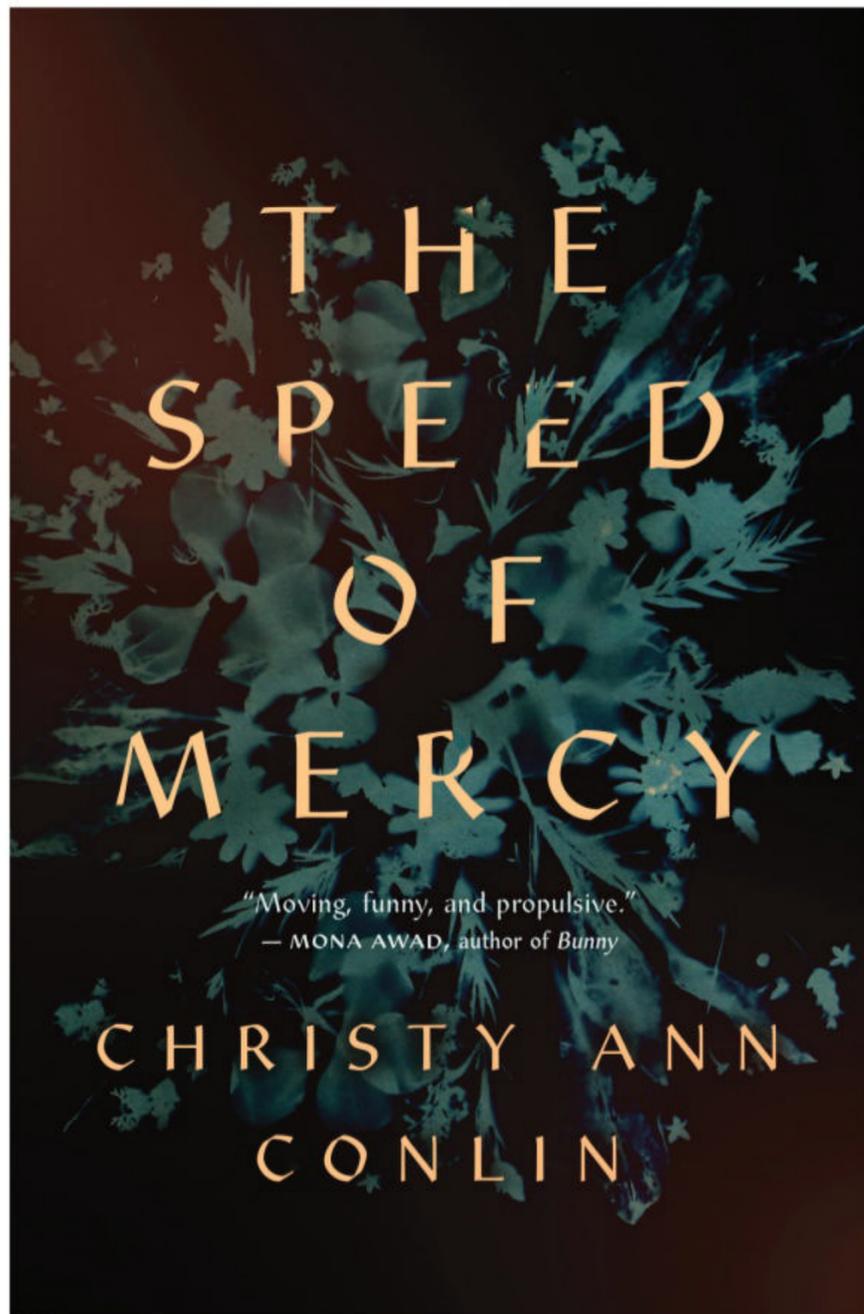
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The Roundup

IN 1980, THE BEAT WRITER WILLIAM S. Burroughs gave a public reading at the Centennial Planetarium, in Calgary. Eight years later, another counterculture icon, the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, attended a gala as part of the Olympic Writers Festival. In 2009, the humorist David Sedaris grabbed one of those famous milkshakes at Peters' Drive-In. Spider-Man once attended the Stampede, as did Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. And when he stopped in Calgary for "one lively half-hour" in 1907, Rudyard Kipling declared it "the wonder city of Canada."

These and other tenuous associations with Cowtown are captured in *A Literary Map of Calgary*, a new interactive exhibit curated by the local public library's outgoing historian-in-residence, Shaun Hunter. To be sure, the online map, which seeks to capture "the extensive and surprising dimensions of Calgary's literary landscape," charts scores of bona fide connections: Esi Edugyan's childhood home, W. O. Mitchell's rosewood writing room, Aritha van Herk's Hawkwood haunts, Grant McEwan's final resting place. But many of its pins — the milkshakes purchased, the superheroes spotted, the whistle-stop book tours noted — bring to mind those faded celebrity headshots that greasy spoons and mom-and-pops tack to their walls: Catherine Zeta-Jones loves our peameal bacon sandwiches! Paris Hilton once shopped here!

On the first literary map to detail these parts, Paul Mayo Paine's *The Northward Map of Truthful Tales*, from 1926, Calgary is decidedly Sidney Groves Burghard country. The British writer and Yukon-gold-rusher set many of his Westerns in the area, including *The Trail of the Axe*, one of several oaters adapted by Hollywood. Poor Burghard doesn't have a place on Hunter's map (nor does his alter ego, Ridgwell Cullum). Another absent cowpoke: Everett C. Johnson, who retired to Calgary after working the nearby Bar U and inspiring Owen Wister to write *The Virginian*. Wister, who spurred on an entire genre and who joined his muse for the Stampede in 1912 (the first year it was actually called that), doesn't make the cut either. Considering the boosterish cupidity at play in *A Literary Map of Calgary* — that time the writer and physician Arthur Conan Doyle gave a talk, that other time the novelist and screenwriter Leon Uris booked a hotel room — such omissions are striking.

Literary maps are a lot like anthologies. With shorthand references, they gather together the stories and voices that an editor deems worthy; they guide a reading public that seeks to understand the character of a people or place; by necessity, they exclude as much as they include. "No kind of book is easier to attack than an anthology," Northrop Frye wrote, in 1943, as he reviewed A. J. M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry*. I take his point, and I'd say, on the whole, that Hunter has done an admirable job.

In that same 1943 review, Frye observed, "The patriotic avarice that claims every European as 'Canadian' who stopped off at a Canadian station for a ham sandwich on his way to the States is, no doubt, ridiculous." But at least there was a bit of agency in such claims; ridiculous or not, Canadians were the ones making them. Now, with the potential sale of Simon & Schuster to Penguin Random House's parent company, Bertelsmann, for more than \$2 billion (U.S.), we may soon gaze upon a literary landscape that doesn't offer much of a choice at all: Where a single publisher controls some 40 percent of this country's book business. Where what passes for Canadian print culture is reduced to the courtesy flybys of a smaller and smaller coterie of authors, the lucky few who manage to land lucrative deals and who occasionally touch down at the Palliser hotel. Where we are left to celebrate the trivial celebrity sightings, because the fiction, non-fiction, and poetry that actually says something about who we are and where we live is increasingly drowned out or rendered undiscoverable in our bookshops and libraries.

Penguin Random House tells us not to fear. "The industry is healthier than it's ever been," the company's chief operating officer explained to the *New York Times* in late February. There will be plenty of benefits for authors, booksellers, and readers. But the Association of Canadian Publishers and the Writers' Union of Canada are not so sure; the latter has called upon the Department of Canadian Heritage to "tighten regulations over publishing in Canada, and to better protect the rights of Canada's authors."

If the heritage minister hears those calls and does review the potential merger of Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster, he may also want to explore Shaun Hunter's literary map — and listen closely to the cautionary tale it whispers. 

Kyle Wyatt, Editor-in-Chief

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OUR DISTANCE**



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Furthermore

RE: *A Pronounced Problem*
by Kyle Wyatt (March)

I PICKED UP YOUR JOURNAL FOR THE FIRST TIME and thoroughly enjoyed it. And thank you for the instructive and timely editorial. I find myself annoyed and frustrated when listening to CBC Radio or when local news channels focus most of their airtime on U.S. news.

I agree that we can't ignore our southern neighbour, but there is something to be said for focusing on Canada, its politics, its cultures, its challenges and opportunities, and its vast and beautiful landscapes. It's for this simple reason that I've subscribed to the *Globe and Mail*; it's for this reason I told my friends that I would like to spend more time exploring our national parks.

It's not only a matter of U.S.-focused airtime and social media, but more importantly the "Canada knowledge" that is missing from our upbringing and everyday conversations.

Ali Hussein
Markham, Ontario

RE: *Around the Bend*
by Robert Girvan (March)

IN HIS OTHERWISE WELL-WRITTEN REVIEW OF Philip Lee's *Restigouche*, Robert Girvan seems to suggest that the Mactaquac hydroelectric project dams northern New Brunswick's great salmon river. Just so it's clear, the Mactaquac Dam is in New Brunswick but on the Saint John River, almost as far away from the Restigouche as you can get and still remain in the province.

Marc Allain
Chelsea, Quebec

SO PLEASED TO SEE *RESTIGOUCHE: THE LONG RUN of the Wild River* considered alongside the wonderful *Magdalena: River of Dreams*, by Wade Davis, which is on my shelf at home.

Philip Lee
via Facebook

RE: *At Daggers Drawn*
by J.L. Granatstein (March)

I READ THIS REVIEW OF MARGARET MACMILLAN'S *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* with pleasure, and I have reflected on Granatstein's remark that Canadians were uninterested in celebrating the War of 1812, even though there would be no Canada had it been lost. Remember that we academics give papers at meetings of American societies and that our scholarly worth is judged by them. How many attendees would there be for

a session of the American Historical Association titled "Canada's Genesis and the War of 1812"? That's no way to get recognition as a historian.

Anyway, the consensus of American scholars has been that the United States didn't want Canada; Canadians are wrong to imagine that it did. Rather, it was a defensive war against the greatest empire on earth.

We have incompatible foundation myths. Loyalists founded anglophone Canada, yet according to the U.S. revolutionary myth, there were no Loyalists. A professor from Harvard once explained that to me. What can an American do with a neighbouring country founded by non-existent founders?

James Allan Evans
Sidney, British Columbia

RE: *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me*
by Krzysztof Pelc (March)

BETWEEN WHAT I THINK I KNOW, WHAT I ACTUALLY know, what I should know, and what I have to know, I don't know if I want to know.

@BezzazMeryem
via Twitter

RE: *The Prophet*
by Shannon Hengen (March)

SHANNON HENGEN'S THOUGHTFUL, APPROACHABLE, thorough essay on Margaret Atwood's *Dearly* is brilliant, lyrical, hopeful, funny by times. Honest and wise as ever. No, not the prophet of happiness, but a prophet for now — fearless as ever.

@sherfitch
via Twitter

RE: *Wild Rose Diplomacy*
by Bruce Campbell (March)

IS IT MERE COINCIDENCE THAT TWO OF THE THREE editors of a book promoting Alberta's possible union with the United States are U.S. citizens?

Dan Cameron
Regina

RE: *An Arctic Fable*
by Sandra Martin (January/February)

FARLEY MOWAT WAS A COMPULSIVE LIAR AND A fraud. He is the Stephen Glass and James Frey of Canadian literature. Out of his own neurotic compulsions, and for his own aggrandizement, he slandered the work of federal departments

and lied to present himself as independent of them. Mothers with happy memories of reading *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be* to their children might feel inclined to defend Mowat and perpetuate his falsehoods, but Sandra Martin has a chance to serve her grandchildren better.

Martin says that James Raffan hopes we will share his "apocalyptic vision" of the polar bear. But according to the London-based Global Warming Policy Foundation, "Since 2005...the estimated global polar bear population has risen by more than 30% to about 30,000 bears, far and away the highest estimate in more than 50 years." Will Martin share these findings with her grandchildren as well?

The long-term trend in the polar bear population remains a subject of dispute. Martin might at least invite her grandchildren to glimpse the other side of the story. "Arguing about books is one of the great pleasures of reading them together," she writes. Will she give her grandchildren a chance to debate whether Raffan's *Ice Walker: A Polar Bear's Journey through the Fragile Arctic* amounts to a work of scientific insight or a piece of climate propaganda?

John Goddard
Toronto

RE: *For Your Reference*
by Michael McNichol (January/February)

MICHAEL MCNICHOL DESCRIBES *KILLING EUROPE* AS Islamophobic. That is a misrepresentation of the documentary propounded by those who have not seen it or who want it suppressed. The film is an exposé of the censorship, in some countries, of the reporting on issues deemed inappropriate for public discourse — in particular, the conflicting values of Europeans and Muslim migrants.

Lawrence Bennett
Toronto

...and Consumers, Beware!

WHILE THE NOMINAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE TO YOUR periodical is entirely reasonable, there are hidden costs that should be disclosed clearly in your marketing materials. It seems that following every issue of the magazine, I am compelled to buy three more books, raising the monthly damage done to my wallet by a further \$50 to \$75.

Joel Henderson
Gatineau, Quebec

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Sometimes the Big Bad Wolf doesn't live in the woods.



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and the prospect of escape all give language to
an experience of abuse and let readers in similar
circumstances know that **they are not alone.**”

— *Publishers Weekly*

Not Safe for Work?

Huawei in the crosshairs

Geoff White

The Huawei Model: The Rise of China's Technology Giant

Yun Wen

University of Illinois Press

256 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

Negotiating Our Economic Future: Trade, Technology, and Diplomacy

Geoffrey Allen Pigman

McGill-Queen's University Press

224 pages, hardcover and softcover

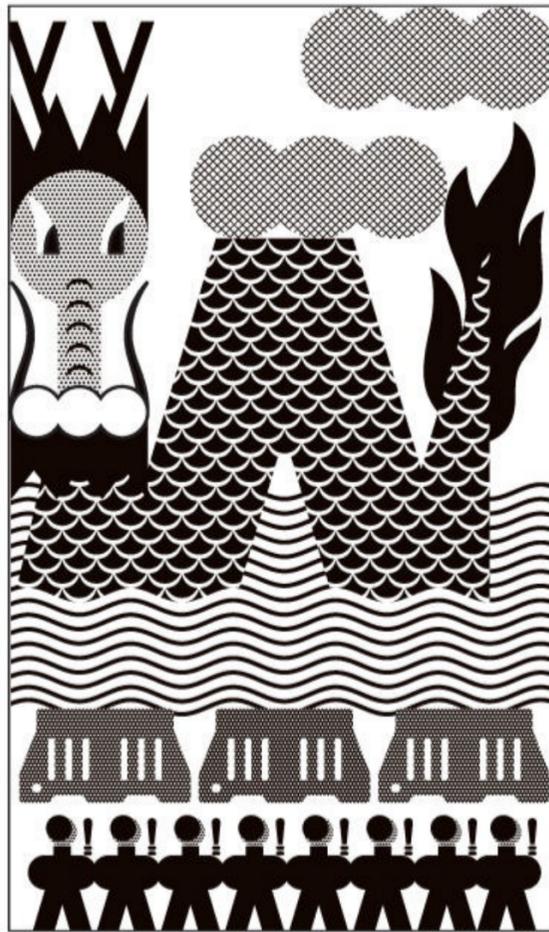
IT WAS ONCE TYPICAL OF COUNTERCULTURE nonchalance to dream of a benign technological future full of easy rewards. "I like to think/(it has to be!)/of a cybernetic ecology/where we are free of our labors/and joined back to nature," the American poet Richard Brautigan wrote, in 1967. "All watched over/by machines of loving grace." While Brautigan's glib vision is no longer just a fanciful prospect, the reality is anything but a blithe utopia.

The domination of our daily lives by digital technologies, including those that watch and listen around the clock, has grown with remarkable speed. Global internet traffic will soon rise to 150,700 gigabytes per second, compared with 100 gigabytes per second in 2002. And the information and communications technology, or ICT, sector now represents 15.5 percent of the world's total wealth, as measured by gross domestic product. Of the ten largest companies by market capitalization, seven are tech firms. Two on that list, Alibaba and Tencent, are based in China. The coupling of transformative cybernetic technologies and the extraordinary growth of Chinese transnationals, in particular, means more than just e-commerce platforms and video games that free us from our labours. It reflects an increasingly defining characteristic of the global economic order itself, and a fraught testing ground for international diplomacy. Case in point: Huawei.

By now, Canadians should be uncomfortably familiar with the legal, political, and diplomatic standoff over the arrest of Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, who was detained at the Vancouver International Airport on December 1, 2018, on a U.S. extradition request, while en route to Mexico. Washington alleges she misled an American bank about Huawei's commercial relations with Iran, while that country was under U.S. economic sanctions. In an apparently retaliatory move, Chinese authorities took into custody two Canadians: Michael Kovrig, a diplomat on leave with an international consulting company, and Michael Spavor, an entrepreneur. All the while, Ottawa

has been deciding whether Meng's company can supply Canada's emerging 5G telecommunications network—a decision in abeyance due to national security fears.

With *The Huawei Model: The Rise of China's Technology Giant*, Yun Wen offers an exhaustive history and analysis of a company in the diplomatic crosshairs. Huawei was founded in the early days of China's "opening up" era, in the 1970s, when the Chinese Communist Party chairman Deng Xiaoping turned Maoist dogma on its head by declaring, "To get rich is glorious." In the first days of Deng's structural economic reforms, a former People's Liberation Army engineer, Ren Zhengfei, "plunged into the



To block or not to block a digital giant.

sea" to found a private company in the city of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. The firm was not a government entity or even a "state-owned enterprise," but rather a wholly private concern, albeit one that drew on government connections.

The story of Huawei's subsequent growth is one of remarkable initiative and strategic calculation, of taking advantage of economic policy shifts through the successive regimes of Deng, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and the current supreme leader, Xi Jinping. Initially established as a trading firm, Huawei branched out into supplying and later manufacturing telecommunications switching equipment. Still later, it began designing and building integrated ICT networks of its own.

Local entrepreneurs were not favoured during Deng's "outside in" economic strategy, which encouraged inward investment by foreign multinationals. These companies, including Canada's Nortel, came to dominate the Chinese telecom market. But once a policy of foreign investment had borne fruit—and had supercharged growth—the Communist Party wanted to take greater control of its economy by promoting homegrown companies. (The foreign telecoms came to be known as the "seven countries and eight product systems," in an uncomplimentary comparison to the Eight-Nation Alliance of early twentieth-century imperial powers.)

Under this revised economic strategy, Huawei was particularly well positioned. The company had stood somewhat apart from the foreign investment boom, choosing to concentrate on developing its services within the underserved rural market, a choice echoed by an adopted Maoist slogan: "Encircling cities from the countryside." By designing its own equipment and then developing its own software, it secured a strong regional presence. And when Beijing encouraged an "inside out" entry into world markets, Huawei was ready.

The company quickly leapfrogged over China's own saturated urban markets and entered foreign ones. In ways that paralleled its domestic approach, it began "encircling developed markets from emerging markets." Moving outward from Asia and Africa, it gradually broadened its reach and established footholds in the most advanced economies, including in the European Union, the United States, and Canada. Today, Huawei, whose name roughly corresponds to the Mandarin phrase "China can," has proved itself an impressively successful transnational corporation.

Wen brings a cosmopolitan perspective to *The Huawei Model*. She was born and raised in China and obtained her bachelor's degree from Sun Yat-sen University, in Guangzhou. After coming to Canada, she earned a doctorate in communications from Simon Fraser University in 2017 (her book builds upon her dissertation) before joining the consulting firm Infinite-Sum Modeling as a senior economist. The account she presents is occasionally eye-popping and tests some conventional assumptions and, perhaps, our credulity. For one thing, she roots Huawei's initial access to technology—before Deng's reforms—in Mao Zedong's efforts to establish indigenous ICT prowess. This part of the narrative runs counter to the consensus about Mao's economic policies, usually deemed utter disasters, and may reflect a Xi-era sensibility of not disavowing any part of post-revolution growth. Wen also argues that much of Huawei's domestic workforce is motivated by an

attachment to formally socialist ideals, through which workers see themselves as contributing to the broader wealth of their society. This does not prevent her from describing with great candour their obsessive and gruelling work schedules, which make the infamous loyalty of Japanese company men seem like a stroll through cherry blossoms. Wen also notes extreme inequity in employee compensation, socialist ideals notwithstanding.



SINCE ENTERING CANADA IN 2008, HUAWEI HAS built a significant presence. Until recently, it was the second-biggest seller of smartphones, after Apple. The company supports research at many Canadian universities. Huawei has even been a regular sponsor of *Hockey Night in Canada*. Based in Markham, Ontario, Huawei Technologies Canada behaves, in many ways, like any other foreign-owned subsidiary. Like its competitors, it has a business model predicated on creating value and earning profits in an internationally competitive environment, one characterized by extensive cross-border trade and widely dispersed supply chains. And these conditions depend on multilateral networks of rules, which over decades have brought about progressively lower trade barriers.

But, as the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has stressed, Huawei is also characterized by features not shared by many of its competitors. In the debate over its participation in this country's 5G network, CSIS has repeatedly pointed out that Chinese companies are subject to their home government's directives to "support, co-operate with and collaborate in national intelligence work." They also must submit to Communist Party oversight committees. This potential subordination to state objectives lies at the core of Ottawa's suspicions. In its current hesitation about whether to definitively block Huawei from 5G, Canada is alone among its Five Eyes intelligence partners, which have variously banned outright or sharply limited Huawei's 5G activities.

For nearly three decades, I worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs (now Global Affairs Canada), and I would on rare occasions have conversations with diplomats from the Chinese embassy. When these encounters were outside of formal meetings, I would later hear

from CSIS officers seeking a debrief. Each time, the agents' preoccupation was whether my Chinese interlocutors had asked about Canadian technology.

I am sure these inquiries were based on legitimate concerns about unauthorized access to our state and commercial secrets; however, there was a certain dissonance in the interviews. Canada's official stance in those days was to welcome China's economic reforms and the country's integration into the global marketplace. This shift was seen as an important geopolitical development, since the more intertwined economies became in the pursuit of prosperity and growth, the more secure and peaceful the world would be. Through mutually agreed upon initiatives, both countries promoted investments by Canadian firms, who would transfer technologies to their Chinese partners. Perhaps the diplomats I encountered *were* trying to steal a march on that process, but I always had difficulty viewing this potential espionage with the same gravity as CSIS did.

Discussions about Huawei and our 5G network remind me of these past exchanges. Sometimes the national security argument against the company's participation in the network's construction is about engineering: its equipment and software are not of adequate quality, some argue, to prevent hacking by third parties and the exposure of key Canadian assets, public and private, to malicious damage. But more often than not, the line is that Huawei would be a digital Trojan horse, installing software that could be activated for clandestine surveillance or, worse, cyberattacks on key domestic infrastructure.

Cyberattacks are not unprecedented, of course. In June 2010, the Stuxnet computer virus was used to overwhelm Iran's security systems and cause malfunctions in its uranium enrichment centrifuges, part of its suspected nuclear weapons program. In November 2014, North Korea hacked Sony Pictures in retaliation for *The Interview*, a film that parodied Kim Jong Un. And, it should go without saying, Russians manipulated social media platforms to spread misinformation and political incitement during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. But were any of these subterfuges achieved by special software that the perpetrators had earlier embedded in

the victims' networks? The answer, according to the engineers and technicians who actually manage such systems, seems to be no.

Setting Huawei aside for a moment, what do we owe a regime with an aggressive bent and values that increasingly diverge from those of the West? Beijing has deployed an array of manoeuvres against Canada following Meng's detention, including a ban on pork products, questionable phytosanitary restrictions on canola, and the abrupt end to collaboration on a COVID-19 vaccine. Some of these actions have been cast as legitimate trade remedies, but the timing always appears calculated and the supposed infraction dubious.

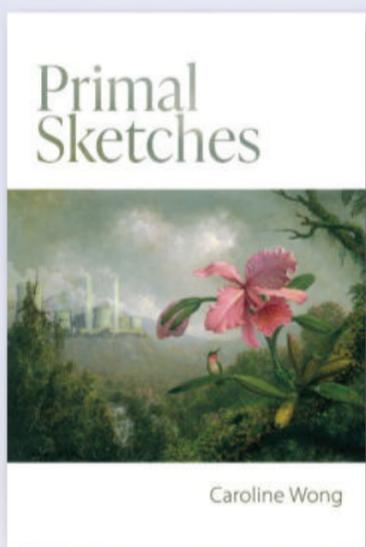
More broadly, China continues to unilaterally extend its security perimeter by building militarized islands in the South China Sea; to incarcerate tens of thousands of Uighurs in Xinjiang province; to suppress freedoms in Hong Kong, in contravention of its treaty commitments to preserve the city's liberal and democratic way of life; and to engage in hostage tactics, as in the case of Kovrig and Spavor. All this is accompanied by "wolf warrior diplomacy" that seeks to use insults, rather than carefully chosen words, to advance national interests. To put it mildly, China is a difficult global partner. In this context, Global Affairs Canada is under pressure from many, including a list of distinguished former ambassadors to China, to take a tougher line against the Xi Jinping regime; Parliament, including many members of the Liberal backbench, has declared that China is committing a genocide; and the House of Commons has called for the upcoming 2022 Winter Olympics to be relocated out of Beijing.

But back to Huawei. Although Wen draws on interviews with the company's employees, she does not wade into the efficacy, or lack thereof, of its embedded Communist Party. Nor does *The Huawei Model*, otherwise so painstakingly detailed, make any mention of Beijing's declaration that companies must serve its security aims. Wen does note an irony, however. In the wake of revelations, by the former security analyst Edward Snowden, about the U.S. government's illegal surveillance of Americans' personal data using privately owned networks, China itself has adopted a protective stance, with plans to

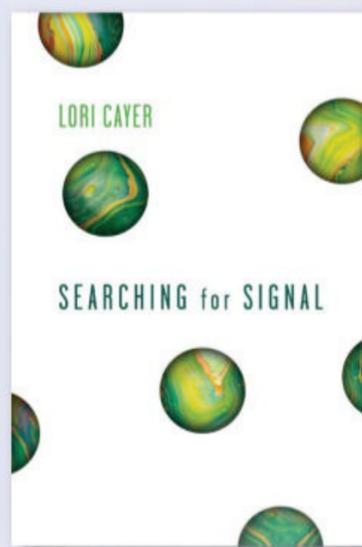
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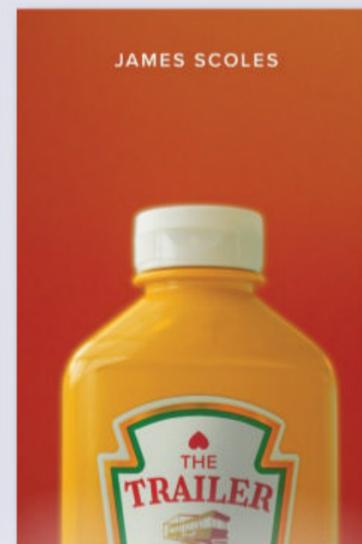
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“gradually remove foreign technologies from banks, the military, state-owned enterprises, and key government agencies, replacing them with homegrown technologies at all layers, including infrastructure hardware, networking equipment, servers and operating systems.” Given mutual suspicions, what is sauce for the goose may well be sauce for the gander.

THE UNFOLDING DYNAMIC AMONG CANADA, China, and Huawei takes place within the broader deterioration of multilateral, rules-based trade, which has been under attack from populist, protectionist, and ultra-nationalist forces for years. Inward-looking authoritarianism has re-emerged in eastern Europe, the United Kingdom has withdrawn from the European Union, and a disgraced former president has unleashed nativist clamour in the United States. And while the nationalism of Xi’s regime has emerged independently of the Western backlash against neo-liberalism, it is adding to the crisis.

But more and more developments, everything from climate change and the increasing digitization of the economy to the growing power of artificial intelligence, speak to the need for a multilateral system with an even broader scope than before. It’s an expanded system of this sort that the policy and strategy consultant Geoffrey Allen Pigman considers in *Negotiating Our Economic Future: Trade, Technology, and Diplomacy*. With visionary qualities not normally found in books about trade policy, Pigman anticipates a world of easy physical abundance, machines more intelligent than their creators, and human populations that must increasingly find satisfaction in enforced leisure.

Given the international dimensions of such a future, now is not a time to retreat into silos or bunkers. It’s worth noting that the current Chinese government exhibits a greater authoritarianism than all of its post-Mao predecessors; as a full member of the World Trade Organization for the past twenty years, today’s China is also more integrated with the global economy. As great powers are wont to do, it feels free to bend and ignore the rules, but it at least pays obeisance to them. That is why

Pigman insists that China be kept in the multilateral tent. A full break — the separation of China and the West into two “closed, exclusive economic systems” — would represent “a chilling scenario,” in Pigman’s words. “The Chinese government’s establishment of a ‘Great Firewall of China’ monitoring and limiting cross-border internet traffic has already generated fears that the global internet will become a ‘splinternet’ of ring-fenced data zones.” Further mutual suspicion and defensive posturing would be a “lose-lose,” while the gains from “continued cross-border economic activity, extending from trade in goods, services, data, and information to investment and to scientific collaboration..., would be sacrificed.” Quoting the investor and philanthropist George Soros, Pigman notes that things would be even worse if a less engaged China were to oversee the growth of “data-rich IT monopolies that would bring together nascent systems of corporate surveillance with an

“Huawei might represent more of an entwined Gulliver than a Trojan horse.”

already developed system of state-sponsored surveillance.”

It’s enough to bring to mind Orwell’s *1984*, with a world divided into hardened blocs, each under its own universal surveillance system. To prevent dystopian fiction from becoming twenty-first-century reality, Pigman issues a legislative and policy call to arms, with seven key steps that are “critical to meeting the near-term challenges of the global economy and trade posed by technological change.” Right behind averting “ecological Armageddon,” he argues we must “stabilize diplomacy between China and the Western powers.”

One way to do that, Pigman suggests, is to be mindful of the interests of transnationals like Huawei: “These firms’ growth prospects are integrally linked to expanding global markets for their products, participating in global supply chains, and having access to global sources for inputs.” Companies from both China and

the West have better prospects for continued profits in a single market, rather than in two autarkic ones. In other words, Huawei might represent more of an entwined Gulliver than a Trojan horse; in trying to pursue its autonomous interests in Canada and elsewhere, it could help keep Beijing from recklessly erecting barriers to the West. Because existing links of trade, investment, and technology are not easy to break, they constitute a stabilizing force for the current multilateral system, which is under increasing pressure. By trying to expand and strengthen the rulebook, negotiators could work toward “verifiable assurance to Western governments that Chinese technology will not be used for surveillance.”

Is Pigman simply building pagodas in the air? About a decade ago, there was a growing belief that certain business freedoms of the post-Deng era would naturally stimulate a greater civil freedom among Chinese citizens to pursue their individual interests, and that this loosening, in turn, would stimulate an open marketplace of ideas and a more democratic state. Since 2012, however, Xi’s government has moved to stifle democratic tendencies and to restrain businesses, as demonstrated by its recent refusal to allow Alibaba to launch an initial public offering for its affiliated financing subsidiary, Ant Group.

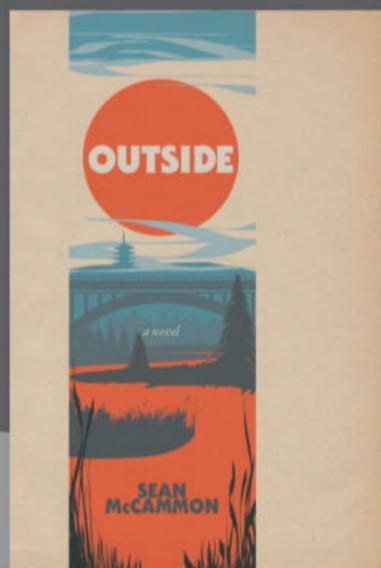
The move against Alibaba (and by extension its billionaire co-founder Jack Ma) has dampened Pigman’s hopes that Chinese businesses can help restrain state actions; he wrote to me in a recent exchange that he anticipates more “hardball diplomacy” now than he did when drafting *Negotiating Our Economic Future*. But there are still alternatives to autarky, if only we can keep the dialogue going. Wen’s and Pigman’s books help us do just that, by stimulating thinking about the power and influence of modern companies, their relation to governments, and their role in the global spread of technology.

The future that Richard Brautigan envisioned five decades ago still promises rewards. But we now know they won’t be won easily, and there may be little “loving grace” along the way. We must prepare for the tough diplomatic campaigns that can help us bridge divides and safeguard the promise of the digital age. ▲

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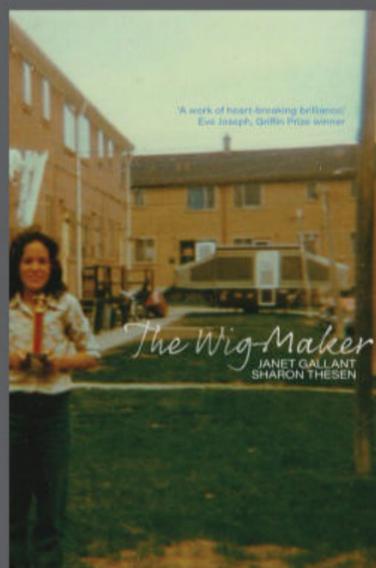
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There Shall Be a Sitting

Canada's forty-third vote

Graham Fraser

The Canadian Federal Election of 2019

Edited by Jon H. Pammett and

Christopher Dornan

McGill-Queen's University Press

368 pages, hardcover and softcover

THE POPULAR ELECTION NARRATIVE was born with Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President 1960*. The book, which won the Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction and dominated bestseller lists for months, "revolutionized the art of political reporting," in the words of William F. Buckley. White's compelling prose, his access to John F. Kennedy's team, and the exciting nature of an election that saw JFK narrowly (and, perhaps, illegally) defeat Richard Nixon combined to produce something of an ur-text. Similar volumes emerged after every presidential race for the next several decades, some penned by White himself and others written by Jules Witcover, Jack Germond, and teams of *Newsweek* reporters.

These books always set out to capture the excitement, the drama, and the conflict that characterized the contest. At their best, they conveyed the personalities of the candidates, the policies they presented, and the strategists behind them. It was Martin Sullivan, a writer for *Time* magazine, who imported White's model to Canada, with the publication of *Mandate '68*. Sullivan zeroed in on the progressive roots in Quebec that led to Pierre Trudeau's sensational rise, first as Liberal leader and then as prime minister. But whether in Canada or in the United States, the popular election book seems to have run its course. Perhaps it's because access to candidates is so tightly controlled these days, or because travelling on campaign trips is so expensive, or because the publishing industry has changed, or because political journalists now tackle more specialized aspects of electoral politics. "The campaign book deserves to die," the American historian Garry Wills wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* twenty years ago, "and it is doing its duty."

An altogether different type of election book, however, was pioneered by the Queen's University political scientist John Meisel. His *The Canadian General Election of 1957* was more analytical, more statistical, more detached than something White or Sullivan might have written. It was also less immediate: Meisel published his book in 1962 — five years and two federal elections after the fact. A generation later, in 1992, Richard Johnston followed suit, publishing *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election* four years after the 1988 votes were counted.

While the journalistic model may have outlived its purpose, the academic side of the equation has evolved alongside modern campaign complexity by divvying up the fragments of elections — the political parties, the polling, the media, the digital canvassing — and producing collections of essays. It's the approach Alan Frizzell and Anthony Westell took in 1985 with *The Canadian General Election of 1984: Politicians, Parties, Press and Polls*, which spurred a series. Now their successors, Jon H. Pammett and Christopher Dornan, have produced a detailed account of Canada's forty-third general election.

The first reaction that *The Canadian Federal Election of 2019* produces is astonishment at



A view from the before times.

how long ago that campaign, from the dropping of the writ on September 11, 2019, to the final vote on October 21, now seems. The book is like a message in a bottle from the before times — before the pandemic, before the lockdowns, before the post-election volcano in the United States that so transfixed the rest of the world. It begins with a preface by Christopher Dornan. "In the end," he shrewdly observes, "it was an election in which almost all the parties lost but almost all the parties won." The Liberals, for example, lost their majority. The Conservatives lost the election. The New Democrats lost fifteen of their thirty-nine seats. The Greens, with only three seats, lost by falling well short of official party status. Maxime

Bernier's People's Party lost in every riding where it ran candidates. And the Bloc Québécois failed to achieve any bargaining power.

At the same time, Dornan points out, almost every party won: the Liberals by remaining in power; the NDP by retaining official party status, gaining leverage with a minority government, and not being eclipsed by the Greens; the Bloc by being able to claim to speak for Quebec and also having a voice in the minority government; the Greens because of the new importance of climate change; and the Conservatives by winning more votes than any other party, "making them the stewards of a political viewpoint that cannot be dismissed." (Of course, the People's Party won nothing, a fact that has acquired greater significance in light of the paroxysm at the end of the Trump regime.)

Dornan's insight — that each party suffered but survived in an election that will be either a minority respite or the first stage in a change of government — is reiterated throughout the book, starting with chapters that examine each party's campaign. Dornan himself writes an effective chapter on the context of the election, reviewing the renegotiation of NAFTA, the seizure of the two Michaels by the Chinese government, and Justin Trudeau's blackface debacle. Next is Brooke Jeffrey's essay on "the chastened Liberals," where she goes over Trudeau's embarrassing trip to India, various campaign preparations, the SNC-Lavalin saga, and the narrative the incumbent party offered to Canadians.

Faron Ellis presents an expert critique of Andrew Scheer's dissimulations and contradictions, from his lack of accreditation as an insurance broker and his dual Canadian-U.S. citizenship to his attack on the new Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (while saying he would vote to ratify it anyway). "Each of these incidents demonstrated a lack of authenticity and furthered the impression that he was not being as transparent as he could be," Ellis writes, "or as he believed others should be." That Conservatives stooped to a new low of embellishment near the end of the campaign — falsely accusing the Liberals of planning to decriminalize all drugs, to increase the GST, to tax profits on sales of principal residences — widened their credibility gap with the electorate. "The aggressiveness, evasiveness, and fabrications repeatedly took the party off-message and contributed to its inability to promote its own platform."

David McGrane explains how the NDP benefited from soft expectations. Party strategists so lowered the bar, in fact, that despite disappointing losses under Jagmeet Singh, it "ended up doing better than many believed that it would." The election in Quebec, Eric Montigny argues in his chapter, unfolded just as "an autonomist

vision" of the province and its relationship to Confederation re-emerged:

The autonomist vision is based on the national character of the Quebec state. This implies that the Quebec premier is the heir of New France and must protect a francophone national culture in North America. Even though the Yes-No divide has been eroded, this is not the case for Quebec nationalism. It is now based on pride in its international economic and cultural successes and on the integration of newcomers into a French-speaking host society.

This alternative to flat-out independence has its roots in the nineteenth century, with echoes under Maurice Duplessis, Daniel Johnson, Jean Lesage, Robert Bourassa, and, now, François Legault. It's this context — alongside the emergence of the secularism legislation as an issue and Yves-François Blanchet's skills as a debater — that put the Liberals on the defensive in Quebec, while the Conservatives were coping with mixed messages on abortion and social conservatism and Jagmeet Singh struggled to overcome suspicions of his turban.

The Canadian Federal Election of 2019 also includes focused examinations of the climate issue, the media, the polling, and digital campaigning, as well as a detailed analysis of the results. In his concluding chapter, Jon Pammett points out that the second election is traditionally problematic for a majority government: Mackenzie King and Pierre Trudeau both recovered from setbacks in their first attempts at re-election, while Robert Borden, John Diefenbaker, Lester Pearson, and Brian Mulroney never fully got over the problems that occurred in theirs. Others, including Arthur Meighen, R. B. Bennett, Joe Clark, and Paul Martin, "did not survive their second election at all."

Thus, Pammett sees Justin Trudeau's second campaign as a test: "Will it be the Trudeau dynasty or the Trudeau interlude?" Ultimately, we do not yet know the full results. The prime minister may recover a majority (as his father did), continue with a minority government (like Pearson), or lose what seems to be a looming third election (like Diefenbaker). "It is in the

Holy Week

Tuesday I left my house and a whole lot of leaves from last fall
sped ahead like they were running to catch up with something.
It was all hurrying so fast.

Wednesday my sister had a Seder and read the plagues
without a hint of irony. I ate a frozen dinner at home.

On Good Friday, it was reported nurses everywhere
had the taste of death in their mouths.

Monks wore long brown robes and face masks
into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

On Saturday, a girl in the road was practising the names of days,
changing their order with her mouth power. Tuesday is at the back!
Why not? The days are as shapeless as sweatpants.

I lie awake with millions of other insomniacs,
marvelling at how it is
that midnight belongs to no one.

Next week will also be holy.

Ronna Bloom

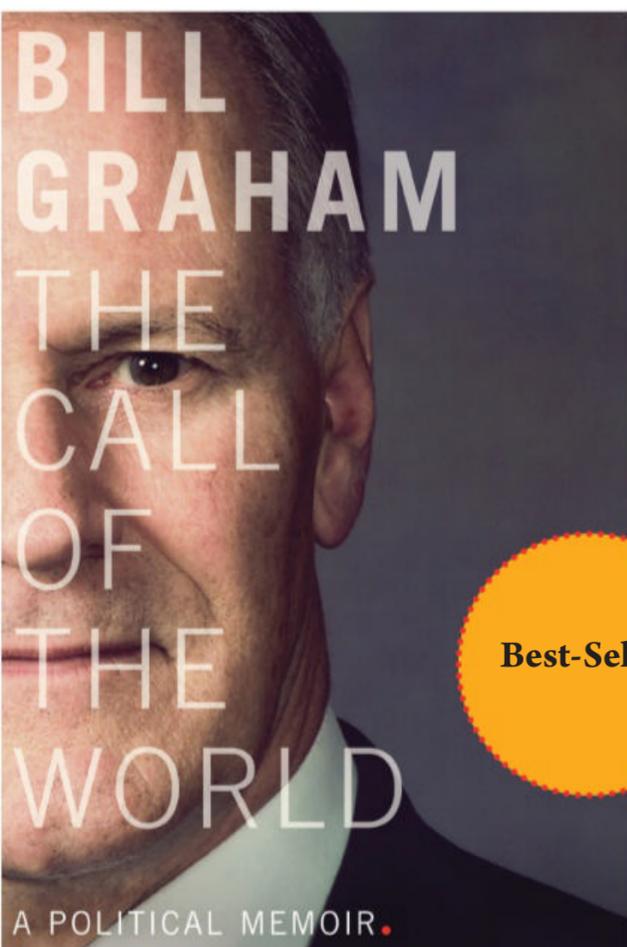
Ronna Bloom has published six books of poetry, most recently The More. She created the poet-in-residence program at Sinai Health, in Toronto.

mastery of the important issue areas that take prominence in Canadian elections that dynasties are established and maintained."

For all candidates, federal elections are now fragmented and focused exercises, as sophisticated campaigns target micro-electoralates through online platforms, extensive polling, and pinpointed messaging. Political parties are losing their significance as social organizations, with delegated conventions giving way to members — many of whom have been signed up only days before — now selecting the leaders. All

the while, the Senate is no longer a chamber of partisan elders and organizers (for the Liberals, at least), which perhaps strengthens its public credibility but further undermines the parties.

Ultimately, the strength and the weakness of this essay collection is that it mirrors the fragmentation and focus of that seemingly distant campaign itself. Election books used to have compelling, singular narratives, something *The Canadian Federal Election of 2019* lacks. And that is a reflection of contemporary politics, which so often resists tidy explanations. ▲



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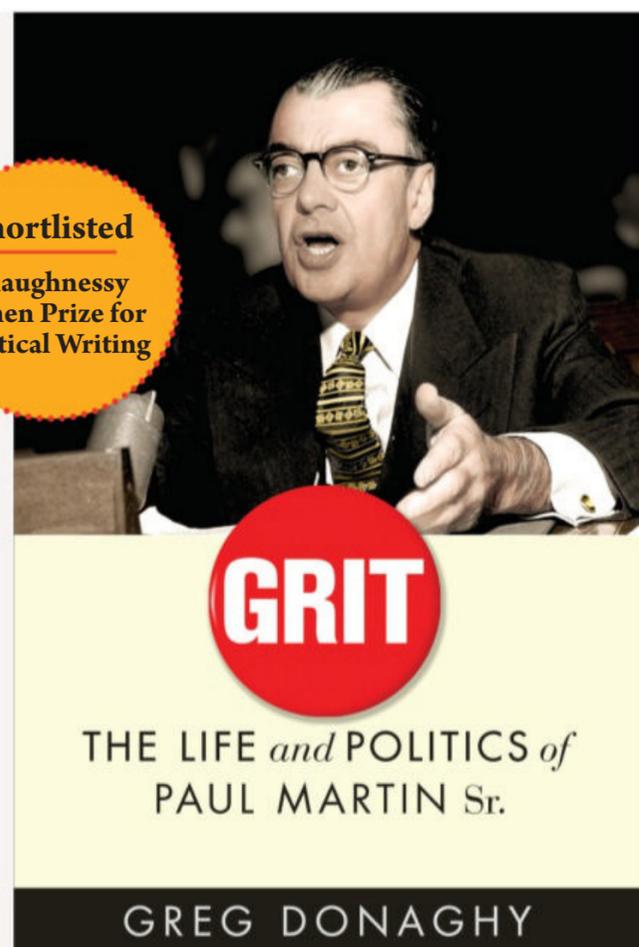
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Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New "We"

Samantha Cutrara

UBC Press

256 pages, softcover and ebook

MY LAST YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL was spent at L'Amoreaux Collegiate, in northern Scarborough. The middle-class Toronto suburb was heavily Jamaican (both Black and Chinese), but it also included kids from Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, Africa, and all over Europe. More than half of the L'Amoreaux student body had just immigrated or had immigrant parents. That year, I took two senior courses in history: Canadian and American. There were at least thirty students in each class, their backgrounds vividly reflecting the school overall.

We had good teachers. I especially remember Mr. Stewart, who started the first day with a provocation: "Why is Canadian history so boring?" I recall thinking how rather silly the exercise was, as most students had practically no clue about the subject. They responded with the usual rants: It's not flashy like American history. It's not violent enough. There are few interesting characters.

What we studied with Mr. Stewart was serious stuff. We covered such milestone events as the British takeover of French territory, the War of 1812, the Rebellions of 1837–38, Confederation, Louis Riel, Chinese exclusion policies, the Winnipeg General Strike, the world wars, the Japanese internment, the rise of Québécois nationalism. And no matter where we came from, Canadian history turned out to be not so boring after all. I don't recall any of us complaining that our own individual situation was not embraced in the curriculum; most of us were too busy trying to get the grades necessary to go to university.

Forty years later, things have evidently changed. In *Transforming the Canadian History Classroom*, the curriculum specialist Samantha Cutrara observes that today's history is "disconnected from the Canada" that students see in their daily lives. The result is an "explicit hatred of the textbook" and the lessons it contains.

Cutrara is not writing from experience, it's worth noting. Her actual work in the classroom amounts to a few months in 2011, split between two typical grade 10 history courses and two others in special education settings. However agonizing history lessons may be for Canadian students, you would not know it

from reading this book. Like many people who teach in faculties of education — and who write provincial curriculum guidelines — Cutrara has a particularly narrow view of the discipline. And while she calls for a "transformation" of the subject, she is evidently unfazed by the fact that only three provinces — Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba — currently require a course in Canadian history for high school students to graduate. Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island require such a credit, but only for their minority of francophone students. All the other Canadian teenagers, it would seem, simply don't need an education in their country's history.

In most provinces, what little Canadian history our students learn when they are eight or nine years old will do just fine, thank you. And that's what makes this book important: it contributes yet another argument for knowing less about our country. This is what passes as "thinking about history" in today's faculties of education — maybe even in some classrooms. Cutrara is on a mission, and it is not about teaching students about the past. Rather, it is about rejecting any version that "leaves out the violent history of colonialism, the state's perpetration of continu-

"Just how much priority should be given to an individual student's past?"

ous racial injustice, and the desire (and actions taken) to make, and keep, Canada white." To treat the subject any differently is simply to be a racist.

♦
LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING: CUTRARA'S TITLE itself is misleading. *Transforming the Canadian History Classroom* is not about transforming the Canadian history classroom at all, but about making a subject relevant to heavily multicultural Toronto cohorts. Cutrara divides the book into six long chapters that are heavy on sociology and intersectionality.

The first chapter, "Meaningful Learning," offers an extended discussion of how those who teach need to imagine a new "we" — one that is more sensitive to the pupils in front of them. "This does not just mean ensuring that a diversity of perspectives is heard, but rather capturing how the *structures* of our nation enable some stories to define how we understand the nation and other stories to be superfluous, or peripheral, to these understandings." What is key here is to teach not actual history but something altogether different. She offers a litmus

test: is the subject matter relevant to immigrant teenagers and children of immigrants? The knowledge required to understand this country's historical evolution becomes secondary to understanding the collective identities of the present classroom. To be *meaningful* (her emphasis), history must bolster the student's sense of self. This can be done only if students *see themselves* in the lesson plan. Cutrara sees her proposed transformation as part of a broader mission of Indigenizing and decolonizing Canadian culture. (What she is really talking about is not history class at all but social studies, which simply does not emphasize the skills required to evaluate the past critically.)

Cutrara's argument is that the material presented to those who do take a class in Canadian history is racist, because it actively promotes false narratives that do not incorporate the role of minorities and because students want a curriculum that "brings together more than separates." Her revised approach seeks "to put stories back together again in ways that decentre the voices and aims of our country's founders who tried to legislate away the very cultural and ethnic diversity Canada is known for today." Her real concern is not the discrimination that came from within society; her target is the oppressive state.

Throughout, Cutrara is arguing against one of the most promising curriculum innovations of the last twenty years, the Historical Thinking Project. This initiative, which has been widely followed across the country by those who care about history, argues that students must learn six interrelated concepts in order to think critically about the past:

1. Establish *historical significance*.
2. Use *primary source evidence*.
3. Identify *continuity and change*.
4. Analyze *cause and consequence*.
5. Take *historical perspectives*.
6. Understand the *ethical dimensions* of historical interpretations.

I confess that I find this method, initially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, to be pithy, logical, and effective. Cutrara, by contrast, does not see much merit in the framework. Perhaps her view is understandable; she comes at the discipline not from a historical perspective, but from one of "critical theory" and "critical pedagogy." Because Canadian history is "so messy, so complicated, so violent" (compared with what, I ask?), she believes it can be taught only through critical race theory, feminist theory, and post-structuralism. Only these lenses, she contends, are effective in challenging the "sys-

tems of oppression like white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism that structure our society.”

Cutrara’s biggest problem with “historical thinking,” I suspect, is that it does not sufficiently orient the student to historical significance. For her, the importance of noteworthy figures and events — say, Confederation or the Battle of Vimy Ridge — cannot be taken for granted; the student must personally accept them as significant, and that can happen only if the student is willing to even consider them in the first place. Could such logic ever apply in other established fields — whether science or technology or mathematics? Cutrara does not address such a question; she seems utterly defeated by it.

This could be, in part, because her “cultural capital” (her words) is not as well developed as it should be. At one point, she confesses that she was too unfamiliar with the Cold War to respond to certain questions about it. She also admits to a lack of familiarity with heavy metal — to the point that it once stumped her when a student made an observation about history and music. Still, she relishes the fact that this pupil, who loved heavy metal so much, saw parallels between it and the French Revolution — because both represented some sort of “riot.”

Personally, I care little for heavy metal beyond the Iron Butterfly and Black Sabbath classics, but I can affirm that there is no parallel. The French Revolution may have started with a few street riots in Paris, but its historical significance had a lot more to do with systematic state-sponsored terror than with workers who revolted over the cost of bread in 1789. To equate the revolution to a riot, musical or not, is to misinterpret history.

Here is another frustrating example from the book. To illustrate how Canadian history can give meaning to her students of colour, Cutrara created and tested a teaching module on the destruction of Africville, the small Halifax enclave founded by Black Loyalists. It reached its zenith of 400 people during the First World War, before the city tore it down in the 1960s to make way for a new bridge. Was there a racist impulse at play? Probably. But there’s more to the story: Most of the houses were fire hazards, and it was local *progressives* who decided it was time to relocate the community.

Cutrara’s purpose in highlighting Africville was to show the cruelty of relocation: “How do we make sense of the eradication of non-white peoples in Canadian history when multiculturalism has been lauded as a defining Canadian value?” The story has a tidy finality that unquestionably stands in her mind as a historic injustice. It was an easy choice (there are many teaching guides on Africville), though its relevance to Toronto teenagers was not obvious. For a lesson from Nova Scotia, she might have instead focused on the life of Viola Desmond, who challenged racial segregation at a New Glasgow movie theatre in 1946. (Desmond, incidentally, appears three times in the Ontario curriculum, just like William Lyon Mackenzie King, who was prime minister for twenty-three years and is recognized by professional historians as this country’s most important leader.) But if the idea is to give “meaningfulness” to Toronto teenagers, why not introduce them to the struggles of the Black train porters in Quebec and Ontario? Or to Black Torontonians like Stanley Grizzle, Bromley Armstrong, and so many others who

challenged racism in the 1950s — well before the U.S. civil rights movement? That story, at least, is not over; it actively invites a connection between the events of yesterday and today.

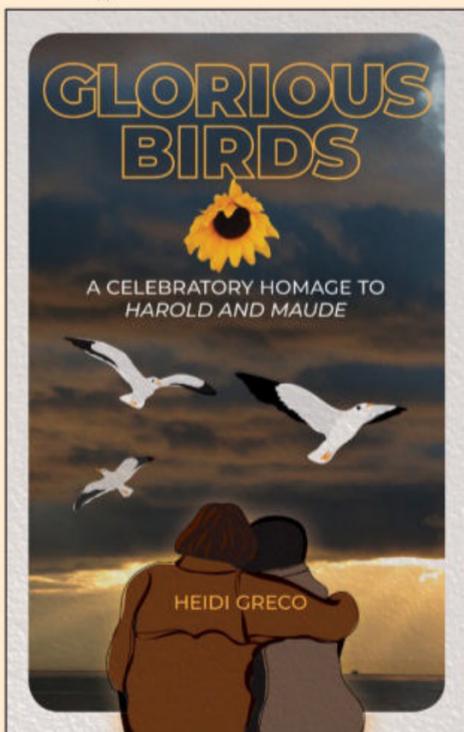
Cutrara does not want to show the arc of progress, however. She prefers using Canadian history as a static scapegoat to illustrate the existence of sustained, unchanged, and inflexible racism. If she were logical, she would encourage her students (mostly children of immigrants) to examine the reasons why their parents left their homelands. Is this not a vital part of their personal stories, of their historical consciousness? I can just imagine what my friends — including Chinese classmates who had left the Caribbean just a few years earlier, as well as my East Indian and Ismaili Muslim friends who were chased out of Uganda and other parts of East Africa — would have said if given the opportunity.

Just how much priority should be given to an individual student’s past when history, as a whole, is already losing its place in our schools? Cutrara is too busy trying to shoehorn her tidy ideology into the serious task of teaching history to answer that question, or to actually examine what is being taught.

There are at least thirteen faculties of education in Ontario, including Cutrara’s own at York University. One wonders what research such places are doing on how the past is actually presented in our schools. These are the same faculties that hold power over the curricula across the land, and that stranglehold — supported by governments of both left and right — must be challenged. Otherwise, the end result will be a society that is awesomely ignorant of its own history, not to mention the history of the world. ▲

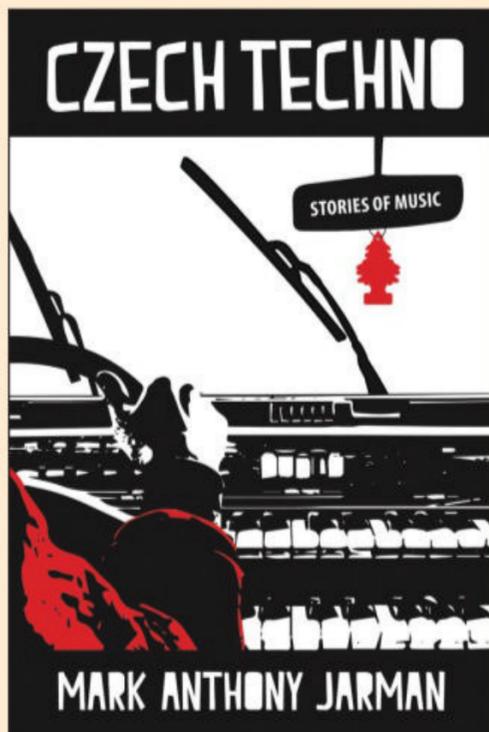


FRESH FROM THE FORGE



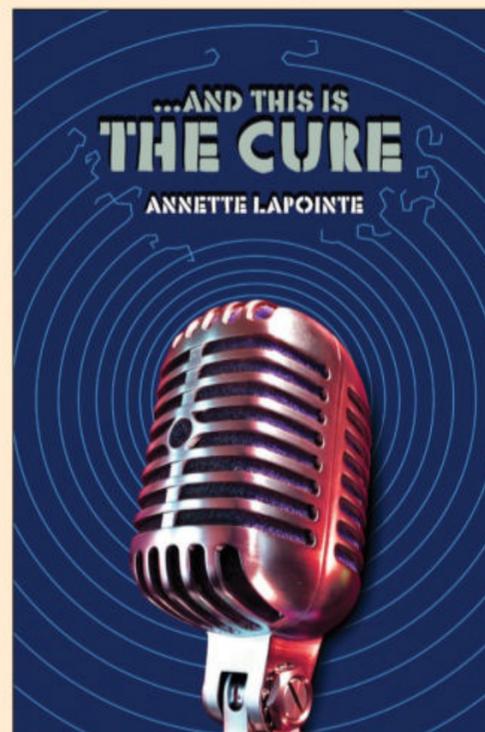
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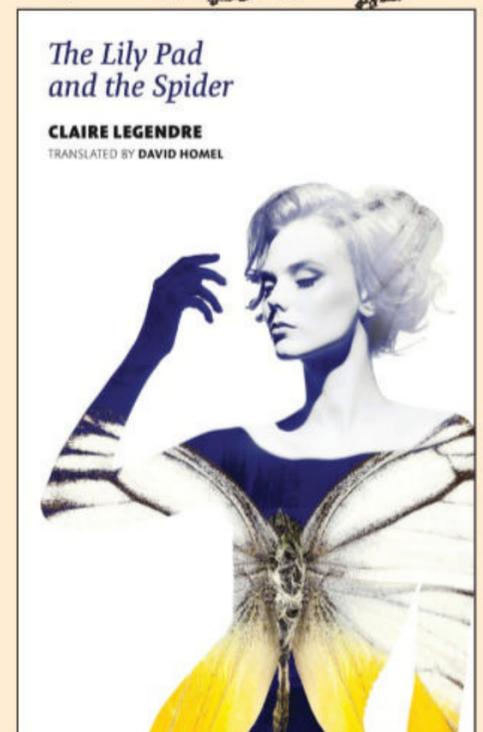
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Sheets Cost Too Much

An account of hooded figures

David MacKenzie

The Ku Klux Klan in Canada: A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom

Allan Bartley

Formac

320 pages, softcover and ebook

IN JANUARY 1930, A SMALL GROUP OF white men drove to the home of a white woman who was allegedly living with a Black man in Oakville, Ontario, and kidnapped them both. This was the Canadian Ku Klux Klan in action: The captured man was not tortured and lynched; he was driven to his parents' home and told to stay there. And the kidnapers did not disappear back into the murky depths; they were arrested on their way home, still dressed in their robes. Three were charged but only one was convicted — of wearing a disguise after dark — and fined fifty dollars. Their trial became a minor sensation, and the verdict was appealed, ultimately leading to a jail sentence for the Klan member, a Hamilton chiropractor. As for the couple, their house was torched — the Klan was suspected — but they reunited, married, and lived out their lives in the Toronto suburb. It also turned out that the kidnapped man was a war veteran and not Black after all; he was of Indigenous descent.

This episode says something about the nature of the Canadian Klan, an imported racist fraternity that, once here, took on a few of the distinguishing characteristics of the True North strong and free. Compared with that of the United States, as the former intelligence analyst Allan Bartley explains in *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada*, the "Canadian scene was similar — but not the same." With the Klan came its structure and regalia and its unique, contrived vocabulary of klaverns, kligrapps, kleagles, and cyclops. Under it all lay a message of hate directed at non-whites, non-Protestants, and non-British people. It was "an organization foreign to Canada but one that found fertile soil to take root."

IN THIS THOROUGH STUDY, BARTLEY TRACES THE origins of the Canadian Klan to the First World War and to the widely popular screenings of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. The three-hour silent film, with its depictions of hooded Klansmen on horseback terrorizing former slaves and northern carpetbaggers, is credited with sparking a Klan revival and with introducing the signature flaming cross. Canadian moviegoers by and large embraced the film, famously the first one screened at the White House, and the primarily white audience lodged few complaints over its flagrant bigotry.

Bartley documents the Klan's appearance in the early 1920s and the establishment of its national office in Toronto, in 1925. Early leaders, or kleagles, actually came from the United States. Some were fleeing American justice and others merely saw virgin territory, where they could sell a handful of memberships and robes and then move on: "The opportunity to skim cash, abscond with cash or simply embezzle proved irresistible to the average kleagle." The ineptness, scheming, and other shenanigans of the new arrivals would be laughable if their message of hate weren't so offensive.

A kind of pattern emerged as the Klan dipped into this country's deep well of religious and



There were always those who stood against it.

linguistic animosity between Protestants and Catholics, English and French. The first stop for most organizers was the local lodge of the Loyal Orange Order, the staunchly pro-British fraternal group. Selling itself as a "good Protestant organization," the KKK would launch a recruitment campaign, perhaps even renting the town's Orange Hall as its local headquarters. Next came the initiation ceremonies, parades through town, and the cross burnings, which were part public spectacle and part threat — intimidation aimed at Catholics, Jews, racial minorities, immigrants, and francophones. Public support tended to fade rapidly, especially if the Klan actually engaged in violence, and there was considerable opposition from local and national

newspapers, community associations, activists, prominent individuals, and even some politicians. Everywhere the Klan appeared, at least in Canada, there were people who stood against it.

Nonetheless, KKK branches in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick followed the Toronto office, and cross burnings dotted the Maritime countryside for much of the 1920s. Rallies, parades, and cross burnings that were staged across Ontario attracted crowds in the hundreds and sometimes in the thousands. In the West, the Klan took positions on gambling, prostitution, and public morality, and its members were willing to lie, cheat, and intimidate to get their way. In British Columbia, it was those of Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian backgrounds who were the focus of intimidation, threats, and attacks. In the Prairies, it was the Catholics who were the main target of the Klan's wrath, with Jews and anyone who couldn't speak English not far behind. Only in Saskatchewan did the Klan turn to direct political activity, helping to defeat the supposedly Catholic-loving and pro-immigrant Liberal provincial government of Jimmy Gardiner, in 1929.

By the end of the decade, the Canadian KKK had begun to fade away. That did not mean that racism and bigotry left with it; those things had never needed the Klan to flourish, and they would continue after the Klan had gone. But the organization's Canadian roots were not that deep; certainly there were more-established groups drawing on religious bigotry, anti-French nativism, and anti-immigrant feelings.

Secrecy makes it hard to ascertain how many Canadians joined the group, but deeply committed members were probably in the hundreds, somewhat active members in the thousands, and occasional participants in the tens of thousands. Even if most of them eschewed violence, there were enough to perpetrate, or at least condone, threats, vandalism, and in some cases physical attacks. But, as Bartley argues, the Canadian Klan was far less violent than its American counterpart. Its impact in Saskatchewan notwithstanding, it never played an outsized role in everyday life or politics as it did in the U.S. Even when it tried, it was far less influential than the more mainstream Orange Order.

THE KLAN LARGELY DISAPPEARED FROM CANADA IN the 1930s and returned only in the 1980s, somewhat surprisingly, in reaction to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms brought in by the Liberal government. Like its predecessor, this modern Klan never seemed to get off the ground.

A small number of thugs and misfits (many of whom were ex-military) had big dreams of a "whites-only" country, but they could not organize themselves out of a cardboard box. When they attempted to, they were regularly

met — and usually far outnumbered — by local opposition. Before too long, the revived movement was infiltrated by the police, and members were more likely to murder each other than to target anyone else. It also dropped its anti-Catholic and anti-French edge, making a Quebec wing — with its homophobic and anti-Indigenous emphasis — possible.

Bartley's section on the KKK's involvement in the Mercier Bridge blockade, part of the larger Oka Crisis, in 1990, is one of the best in the book: "The Klansmen began distributing anti-Mohawk pamphlets to the predominantly white onlookers, highlighting their presence with placards urging the Quebec government to take a hard line." Days later, a large group "collected at the north exit from the bridge in the suburb of LaSalle, watching the Mohawks negotiate their way through the police line." These were Klan members and other angry locals, who "pelted the cars full of fleeing Mohawks" with "volleys of large rocks and jagged pieces of asphalt." Bartley also includes a detailed chapter on the Klan's remarkable if dubious plan to invade the small Caribbean island of Dominica, in the early 1980s. It is a fascinating story, but because the plot was financed and run out of the U.S., supported primarily by Americans, and not sanctioned by the intolerant fraternity, it doesn't shed much light on the Canadian KKK.

Times changed, and robes and hoods were replaced by suits and ties. The Klan became more elusive as the lines between right-wing extremist groups, neo-Nazis, and skinheads became blurred. Whatever limited momentum the renewed KKK had was soon dissipated, and it met the dawn of the twenty-first century largely as an online hate organization adrift in racist cyberspace. Bartley ends his book with the election of Donald Trump, in 2016: "Events in the aftermath of the Trump victory spoke to the enabling nature of the relentless and crude hate flowing north to Canada. The months after Trump's election and inauguration saw a spike in anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Black and homophobic incidents and attacks across the country, many of them referencing the Ku Klux Klan but without real Klan organizations to back them." Only time will tell if the one-term presidency represents the end of the group's story here or the beginning of a new chapter.



DID THE ARRIVAL OF THE KLAN CHANGE THE nature or direction of Canadian nativism, bigotry, and racism? Is it even a good model through which to examine racism in this country? Among the largest documented acts of Klan violence was the 1926 bombing of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, in Barrie, Ontario. One of the three men arrested was an Irish immigrant and an ex-soldier who claimed his wife had been murdered by Irish Republicans in Belfast. The bombing was his revenge. Even if he was a card-carrying Klan member, was this really the KKK at work or was it part of a larger — and deeper — Canadian story of bigotry stretching back to the Protestant Protective Association and other nineteenth-century nativist organizations?

The Klan appealed to many of the same people and causes and differed primarily in its more open advocacy of violence and intimidation. The regalia and the cross burnings were new, but it was an expression of the same religious animosity, bigotry, and racism that had long been entrenched in Canadian society. ▲

PLAYTIME

Blowing Changes

Life lessons from the jazz club

Jamieson Findlay

I AM NO EXPERT ON JAZZ. IF SOMEONE WERE to ask me if the theme to the classic television special *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is jazz, I would say yes — because it's jaunty, and, for me, jauntiness is an essential characteristic of the genre. I know a few iconic tunes and albums — Dave Brubeck's "Take Five," Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, a few Billie Holiday songs — but that's about as far as I go. And although my nickname in high school was (briefly) Jazz, it never stuck. I suspect I scored too low on the jauntiness meter.

Nonetheless, I've seen enough live jazz and jam sessions to know something of its soul. The guy at the piano starts laying down a lazy, meandering theme. The guitarist listens for a second — yes, key of D — and starts noodling along. The drummer joins in, and pretty soon there's a game of syncopated hacky sack going on, with everybody bumping and nudging the theme to keep it in the air.

These people are improvising.

Improvising is a vital life skill, which should be taught to students of all ages. And I mean improvising in the broadest sense: Letting go of excessive forethought and strategizing. Taking your cue from what's happening around you instead. Improv theatre can teach this, as can freestyle rapping, debating, charades, and jamming in your best friend's garage. All these pursuits present a call-and-response situation where you have little or no time to prepare. At their best, they require you to spontaneously create a unique form within a larger framework.

I once took an excellent workshop on how to use the techniques of improv theatre for science communication, taught by the radiology professor Jeff Dunn, from the University of Calgary. In one exercise, Dunn had us pair up and improvise a dialogue in front of the group. There was only one rule: every line had to begin with the last letter of the last word spoken by your partner. For example, if I said, "I often think of the rivers of music, and fireworks, I made in my first life," you might say, "Eek, a mouse!" (which was actually spoken by one of the workshop participants, as she pointed realistically at the floor).

The value of this exercise, besides being a hoot, was twofold. First, it forced you to be fully present. You couldn't be off somewhere in your head, trying to scare up a witty reply; you had to be alert for that last word and ready to act. Second, it required you to completely accept your partner's gambit. This openness to the situation is, in fact, a pillar of improv and is expressed in the mantra "Yes, and..."

I learned other things from that workshop — the value of stature (literally standing tall) and how your harsh inner critic can fall away completely when you're forced to think

fast. But maybe the most important lesson was how to brazen things out. Of course, the principle of "Yes, and..." applies to mistakes, too. If a jazz guitarist plucks a blatantly wrong note, she can (if she's quick) change the pitch by sliding her finger up or down the fretboard, so that the discordant tone becomes a melodic one. Then it's no longer a mistake; it's what those in the know call a blue note.

Yes, sometimes you just screw up royally, and all the jazz tropes in the world can't save you. That's when you *really* need your brazening skills. The practice of improvising creates a kind of mindful limberness that helps you hold on to your groove even after you bomb.

I'm not discounting the importance of the script, the song sheet, the instruction manual, the comfort of certainty that comes from a quick Google search. But we tend to rely overmuch on these things in stressful situations, like giving a speech or performing. There almost always comes a point when it's a good idea to throw away the notes and wing it. Doing this again and again will create confidence and a repertoire of responses.

Doing it again and again — that's the key. The great jazz musicians spend many years practicing scales and spinning out various scenarios to hone their ability to respond. But then they find themselves, palms sweating, on a stage, with people and critics watching, and maybe somebody in the room they really want to impress. That's when they must call on their inner resources and improvise.

We will all someday find ourselves on stage — figuratively or literally — without a script and be compelled to act. That can happen in small situations, as when you're asked to say a few words at a gathering. But it can also happen in longer-term, higher-stakes scenarios — as when a novel coronavirus undercuts your usual way of doing business or living life and you have to find a workaround (or several).

Ralph Waldo Emerson once defined beauty as the readiness to flow, to be "metamorphosed into all other forms." Such readiness — to react, to bend, to stretch, to recover after a stumble — is not just the preserve of great athletes and artists. We all need it to survive, especially during the straitened times of a pandemic. Overthinking and self-consciousness are the prime inhibitors of flow. If you improvise enough, you gradually overcome these impediments. A part of you becomes transmutable.

Maybe that's the ultimate value of improvising: it allows you to change yourself, your perspective, your life. So try winging it, playing it by ear, riding the wave, going with the flow. And don't worry if you lose the script — you can't read it while playing hacky sack anyway. ▲

Material Concern

In a world that's all mixed up

Nicholas Griffin

Concrete: From Ancient Origins to a Problematic Future

Mary Soderstrom

University of Regina Press

272 pages, hardcover and softcover

AS KIDS, MY BROTHER AND I SHARED a room on the third floor of our house, directly across the street from a modernist grade school, its mostly windowless facade a slab of concrete four storeys high. From the vantage point of my bed, all I could see was an expressionless grey presence, brought to life only by the buzz of a giant ventilation system. And though I looked at it every day for years, I never gave the monolithic expanse much thought.

Whether we realize it or not, the beauty and the menace of concrete stare us in the face throughout our lives, so much so that we're more or less desensitized to its omnipresence. That solidified mixture of gravel, sand, and cement covers the ground we travel. It undergirds our skylines and waterfronts. It defines how we live. Long ago, our forebears celebrated concrete as a symbol of technological progress; now its pervasiveness means we largely ignore it.

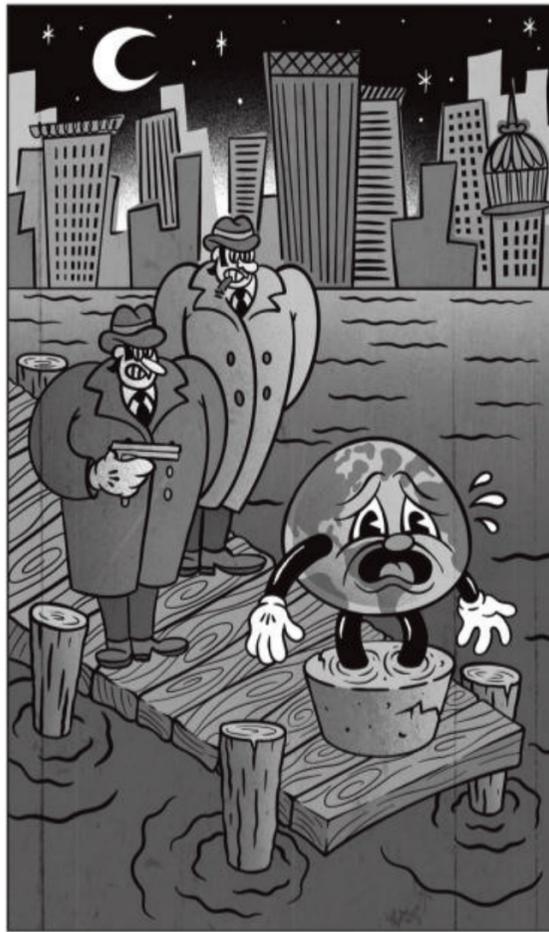
For many, an interest in playing with the earth starts and ends in the sandbox, but for others — like the 58,000 who typically attend the World of Concrete convention in Las Vegas each year — “dirt work” becomes a lifetime obsession, an obsession to mould the earth. For the ancient Romans, this impulse fuelled a quest for beauty — so that citizens could commune with the gods. And where better to do just that than the Temple of All the Gods? Two thousand years later, tourists and engineers alike still marvel at the Pantheon's soaring rotunda, topped by the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world.

In modern times, secular practicality tends to win the day. Concrete helps on that front too. It's strong, durable, and cheap. It can be formed into almost any imaginable shape. It lets builders get the job done quickly and with relatively little skill (pouring liquid concrete from a mixer or assembling structures with Lego-like concrete blocks is hardly the stonemasonry of the past). Best of all, its raw materials — limestone and aggregate — can be found almost anywhere on the earth. Along with water (also a key ingredient), concrete is now among the most abundant substances in the world, certainly the most widely used building material in history.

That's a staggering fact but maybe not a surprising one. “Concrete” literally means “grown together,” and that's what it has allowed us to become. The skyscraper was born in Chicago just 136 years ago. Now 4 million high-rise buildings

dot the planet, with another 3.5 million in the works. Concrete makes most of those possible. It also makes possible the massive pipes and aqueducts that deliver water to our taps. We owe our diet, in large part, to extensive concrete irrigation systems that keep farmers producing year-round. If not for hydroelectric dams built of concrete, millions would be without power.

When it comes to “providing security, protecting populations, establishing stability and eliminating terrorist threats,” John Spencer of the United States Military Academy has argued, nothing has more going for it than concrete. The atomic bomb would not have been possible without the concrete barriers used to protect



Built upon and threatened by concrete.

scientists from their atom-splitting experiments. Similar structures now keep radioactivity contained in nuclear power plants. Chemotherapy and X-ray technologies also owe their existence to the resiliency of concrete, which is leveraged to keep practitioners and patients safe.

The United States, a superstar of twentieth-century development, was by far the largest consumer of concrete between 1901 and 1999. It built thousands of towers and iconic dams expected to last eons, not to mention the longest and most sophisticated highway system in the world, resting upon a concrete bed. But America's consumption of yesterday is a drop in the bucket compared with what's happening in Asia today. China, which now pours 60 percent of the world's

concrete, went through more of the stuff in just three recent years than the U.S. did over a full century. With unprecedented population growth and dozens of countries developing at previously unimaginable paces, have we simply fitted the planet with concrete shoes?

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IN *CONCRETE*, MARY SODERSTROM AIMS TO DEEPEN our awareness of a substance that shapes and, increasingly, threatens our lives. While she acknowledges its many undeniable benefits, she focuses on the very real effects of its continued use in an era of climate crisis. This is the tragic tale of ubiquitous invisibility.

Consider the production of cement — the glue that keeps concrete's ingredients together:

Two elements of the process of making cement produce CO₂ directly. First, the temperatures needed to reduce limestone or other similar rock to its basic components are extremely high, requiring burning great quantities of fuel. Second, the chemical process itself liberates much CO₂....After all, what's happening is that calcium carbonate is becoming calcium hydrate, and what's left over is CO₂.

Soderstrom visits one producer in Quebec, McInnis Cement, which is that province's single largest carbon dioxide emitter and part of an industry that accounts for 4 to 6 percent of global carbon emissions. Factor in the trucks, tractors, and other machinery used to mine aggregate and to pump concrete into those skyscrapers, and all of a sudden the sector is sitting with the big boys of GHG emissions: electricity and transportation.

Soderstrom also details concrete's collateral damage — how it enables and perpetuates our environmentally destructive habits. New roads lead to new cityscapes, which lead to more sprawl and higher overall consumption. As far as she's concerned, we need to curb our use if we are to have any hope of avoiding our impending doom. But instead of offering concrete solutions (you'll excuse the pun), she only half-heartedly explores carbon taxation; alternative building materials, including wood; and different approaches to urban planning.

While the numbers speak for themselves in *Concrete*, not much resonates beyond them. This has a lot to do with how Soderstrom organizes her thoughts — around chapters devoted to earth, fire, water, and air. The thematic use of the classical elements is interesting in concept but convoluted in execution. The result is an aggregate of unconnected statistics. But for many readers, even that will be enough to finally reveal the hard facts before our eyes.

Decidedly Disconnected

Three months in a monastery

Chad Kohalyk

Blue Sky Kingdom: An Epic Family Journey to the Heart of the Himalaya

Bruce Kirkby

Douglas & McIntyre

336 pages, hardcover

IN 2014, BRUCE KIRKBY SET OUT WITH his family to live for three months at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the western Himalaya. Kirkby is a man who operates at extremes. He is an adventurer and photographer who crosses hot deserts by camel and cold mountains by horse; he is also a travel writer and the former host of the CBC's short-lived version of *No Opportunity Wasted*.

Kirkby mines his many expedition experiences for corporate keynote addresses, mainly on the topics of grit and resilience. But the resilience he needed to properly support his own son, diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, was being undermined by an addiction to his iPhone and social media feeds. He decided the best place to detox from technology—and to build stronger family ties—was in an isolated valley in northern India, far away from their home in the Rocky Mountain town of Kimberley, British Columbia. Since life is about the journey, not the destination, the Kirkbys eschewed air travel and made the Homeric trip over land and sea. In just two duffle bags, Bruce and his wife, Christine, along with their two sons, aged seven and three, packed “everything required to survive three months amongst the world’s highest peaks.” As an extra challenge, they invited along a sixteen-person television crew, which would film the whole trip for the Travel Channel.

The first third of *Blue Sky Kingdom* recounts the getting there. Starting out on two canoes lashed together, the family paddled down the Columbia River to Golden and took a train to Vancouver. They then boarded a cargo ship to Korea; headed through China, Tibet, and Nepal; and finally arrived at Karsha Gompa, a thousand-year-old monastery of the Gelug tradition. For the next three months, the Kirkbys stayed in the small guest room of a senior monk’s simple mud-brick home, witness to the daily lives of monks and villagers. The “abundance of time, stillness and attention” that the rural community afforded, a world away from the distractions of modern life, helped bring them clarity. Each day offered another bucolic and decidedly disconnected bonding experience: hiking, watching puja, taking a trip to a nearby village, helping local farmers thresh barley. When the iPad’s battery finally ran out, the boys discovered joy in a universal toy—the humble stick. At night, the family arranged themselves head-to-toe in their bedrolls and were lulled to



A world away from the distractions of modern life.

sleep by the blowing winds. In a strange land, they found refuge in one another.

Karsha Gompa clings to the cliffs along the Zaskar Valley, in Ladakh, the northernmost territory of India. The region was once part of the greater Tibetan Empire. Now it is hemmed in by lines of control, the tracings of past wars with Pakistan and China. Although remote, Ladakh is much easier to access than Tibet; many tourists visit to see how this “Little Tibet” continues its traditional culture. Despite his own temporary stay at the monastery, Kirkby scoffs at the bused-in day trippers—with their expensive outdoor gear, stingy donations, and “insensitive use of cameras.” But he offers little more than cursory commentary on modernization, tourism, and Western notions of progress.

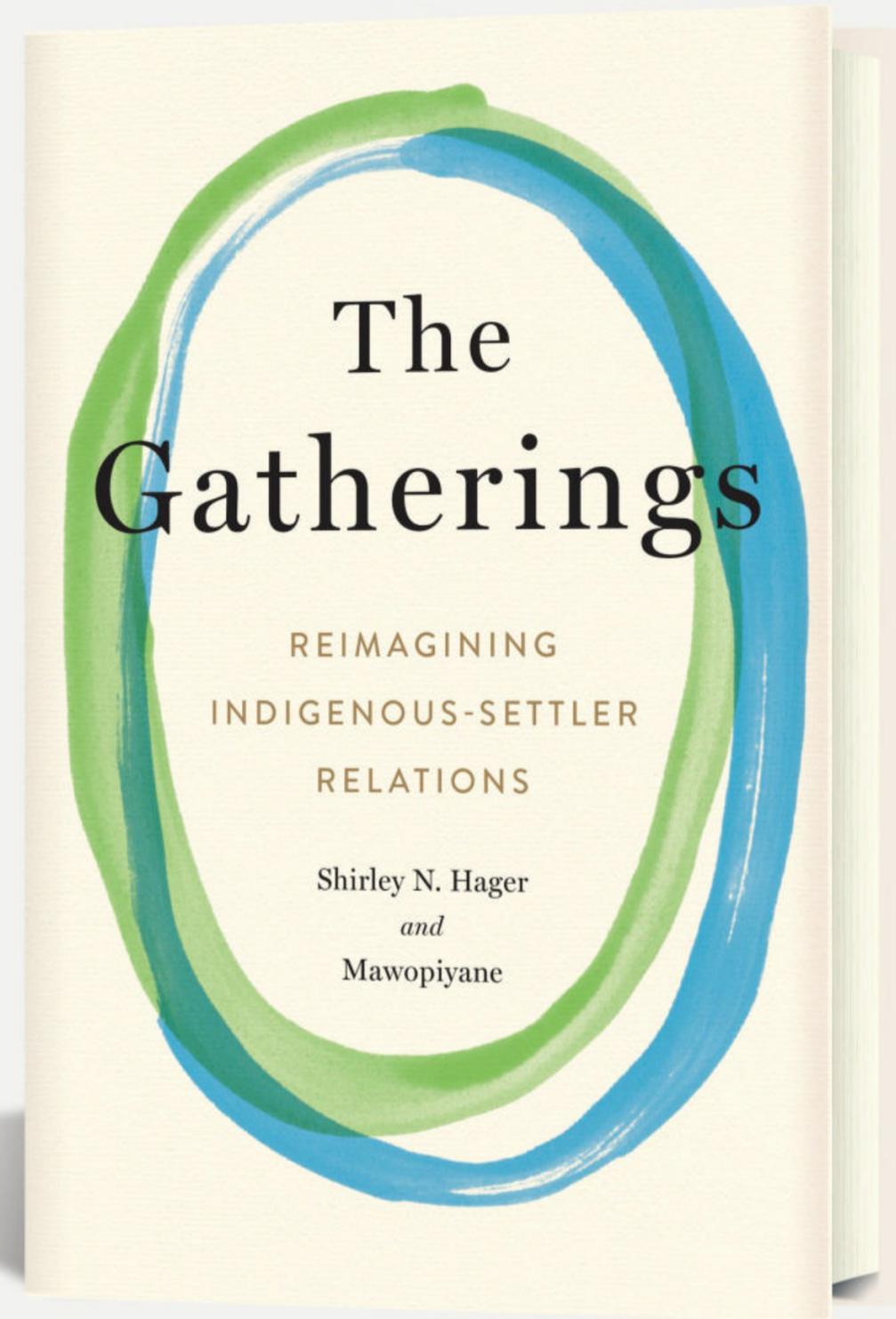


KIRKBY AND THE CAMERA-TOTING SIGHTSEERS were not the first outsiders to visit Zaskar, of course. In early 1820, the Hungarian orientalist and father of modern Tibetology Alexander Csoma de Kőrös began an overland quest to compile the earliest Tibetan-English dictionary. He would spend sixteen months at Zarla Monastery—just up the valley from where the Kirkbys stayed—while learning Tibetan under the tutelage of a local lama. In the winter months, student and teacher took turns uncovering their hands to turn the pages of the canon. Csoma travelled under the moniker Secunder Beg (Alexander the Great) and was later picked up as a suspected spy by British authorities. This was during the buildup to the Great Game, the

geopolitical competition between Russia and the Raj to control “the roof of the world.” It was also a time of worry for the German Romantics, who feared that the soul of Europe was being debased by the new “religion of progress.” In the face of modernism, they looked to the traditional cultures of Asia, funded expeditions and textual translations, and searched for spiritual succour.

Perhaps unintentionally, this is the tradition that Kirkby continues. Although his book touches on the history and culture of the region, too much of his research remains hidden away in his bibliography, which, admittedly, lists some of the classics of the field. With his photographer’s eye, Kirkby has a knack for describing scenery, and *Blue Sky Kingdom* includes some breathtaking images (complemented by highly detailed pencil sketches by Kirkby’s talented older son). But his formidable skills as an adventurer do not help him as a writer to manoeuvre through complex societal issues.

At one point, perched on a wind-shorn outcropping and viewing the dry valley floor, Kirkby muses on a new road below and the inevitable destruction of traditional life: “It doesn’t blend into the landscape the way a footpath can, giving way to rises and dips, gracefully following contours. Instead it ploughs straight ahead, an incongruous line in a world of curves.” While the journey is certainly a remarkable one, the book that details the impressive feat struggles with the cultural nuance of its location. In the end, Kirkby’s observations on creeping modernity are merely two-dimensional. ▲



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Thirty years ago, in Wabanaki territory, a group of Native and non-Native individuals came together to explore some of the most pressing questions at the heart of Truth and Healing efforts in the United States and Canada. *The Gatherings* tells the moving story of these meetings in the words of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. Reuniting to reflect on how their lives were changed by their experiences and how they continue to be impacted by them, the participants share the valuable lessons they learned.

“*The Gatherings* brings together voices and perspectives, rarely shared so openly and bluntly, on the long road and commitment needed to cultivate understanding across cultures, and particularly across Native/non-Native communities.”

HOLLY WILKINSON
Executive Director, WholeHeart, Inc.

“*The Gatherings* calls me back to the deepest roots of my own faith tradition. Several times it brought me to tears. There is deep healing here, and truth, and an even deeper love.”

NOAH MERRILL
Secretary, New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Out of His Own Way

And the rest is drag

Leah Allyce Canali

**Outrageous Misfits:
Female Impersonator Craig Russell
and His Wife, Lori Russell Eadie**

Brian Bradley

Dundurn

360 pages, softcover and ebook

PICTURE IT: 1960S HOLLYWOOD. THE young, fresh-faced president of the Canadian Mae West fan club had just set foot in Los Angeles to meet his idol, befriend her, and become her personal assistant and all-round Agador Spartacus. Craig Eadie had seemingly done the impossible. He'd turned groupie-level infatuation into a real relationship. He'd left Toronto for the City of Angels, where he was brought under the wing of one of its most notorious icons. He needed a change of scene, a place where his talent for impersonation would thrive and his feminine side would be celebrated. And then — imagine — in sashayed Mae West, with an invitation to come up and see her sometime.

West was about to become a new mother — a drag mother, that is. Now picture a make-over montage, with wigs, dresses, jewels, where the star of *I'm No Angel* delights in turning her young protégé into a funhouse-mirror version of herself: brazen, sensual, and steeped in intrigue. Under her tutelage, Craig Eadie transformed into Craig Russell, who would become a legend in his own right. Before RuPaul brought drag to every suburban household in North America, Russell walked the mainstream drag tightrope. We might have been tuning in every Friday night to watch *Craig Russell's Drag Race* if not for his self-sabotage.

There are many places in Brian Bradley's meticulously researched and immensely readable biography that conjure up the now-classic Tyra Banks moment, when readers might find themselves screaming, "I was rooting for you! We were all rooting for you!" And it's true: we do root for Russell. Throughout this account, from childhood trauma to tremendous talent, from the heartaches and disappointments to his marriage to his rock and number one fan, Lori, *Outrageous Misfits* delivers a Tinseltown fairy tale with a hefty dose of hard knocks. After all, in the immortal words of Mae, "Good girls go to heaven, but bad girls go everywhere."

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WHEN RUSSELL STARTED OUT, "DRAG QUEEN" wasn't a common term. Later in his career, he actively shied away from it, as his artistry skewed toward masterful impressions rather than unique characterizations. (Bradley refers to him as a female impersonator or impressionist.) Whichever way he chose to identify, his singing

and comedy, with his repertoire of more than thirty Hollywood dames, certainly make him a contender for the drag hall of fame.

Back in Toronto, Russell's star rose in the '70s. With his act polished and his wigs coiffed, he delighted crowds at the clubs of Church and Wellesley as Carol Channing, Bette Davis, and, naturally, Mae West. *Outrageous Misfits* takes us on a gleeful walk through the gay village of yesteryear, before the fire at Club David's and before even more condos replaced Zipperz. It was a time when the neighbourhood brushed up close, but not too close, to the straight downtown elite and served as a space where self-expression was key and drag ruled supreme.



Something special, even magical.

For the price of admission and a watered-down vodka soda, plus a couple of bucks in tips, clubgoers could watch Russell bring his beloved broads to life night after night. Live vocals, glittering floor-length dresses, and immaculate impersonations were the staples of these shows, in contrast with the lip-synching familiar to modern audiences. In a period when the gay community was largely considered "out of sight, out of mind," and when Pierre Trudeau's remark "There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" was still fresh, there was something special, even magical happening in the visibility of Craig Russell.

Many years after Russell's reign, I had a regular gig at a little piano bar on the strip. Statlers,

which closed its doors in 2018, was one of the last venues to focus on live music, transporting us back to a time of cabaret, to the moment when boundary-breaking acts like Russell's were crossing over into public consciousness. In 1977, he starred in his first feature film, *Outrageous!*, which set up a typical straight woman and gay man trope: imagine *Will & Grace*, but Will is a female impersonator and Grace is a writer with mental health issues. The movie created buzz at Cannes and the Toronto Festival of Festivals and should sit firmly on the same cult classic shelf as *Paris Is Burning*, *Pink Flamingos*, and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*. Russell's fame should have skyrocketed him to the same heights as Divine, named by *People* magazine the "Drag Queen of the Century." Yet it didn't. I'm embarrassed to admit that, before reading this book, I'd never heard of *Outrageous!*, despite being a devoted follower of this genre. The film's failure to reach iconic status can be attributed partly to its distribution missteps, but the blame also lies with Russell — a man who could never quite get out of his own way.

As with any golden era, there comes a tipping point when the glory starts to fade. If Russell was a drag trailblazer in the '70s, the following decade gave him pause. He was no longer the bright light in a relatively unknown subculture. Gay liberation was growing increasingly vocal in Canada and around the world. There were various riots and sit-ins south of the border before "Toronto's Stonewall," in 1981, and activists like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were breaking down societal misconceptions about gender. At a point when more gay voices were being heard, Russell's drag, which was based on classic techniques and appealed to bourgeois, straight audiences, was falling flat. A Mae West act in the '80s didn't hold the weight of a Madonna performance. Funny how quickly the culture can shift from subversive to tame.

In ten short years, Russell went from being a big fish in a small pond to a big fish in a much larger pond — a position no diva wants to be in. He became increasingly erratic and more destructive, and *Outrageous Misfits* sparkles as a performer's lament. "They don't love me," Russell once told a friend. "They love my characters." What is seen onstage is a carefully calculated, practised, polished version of a performer. Beyoncé has Sasha Fierce, and Craig Russell had his arsenal of leading ladies. But he didn't just *play* these women, he *was* them, pulling these personas from deep within. And he would lose himself in them too. Of course, substance abuse played a tragic part in Russell's downfall, as he increasingly struggled with his mental health and turned to self-medicating with cocaine. He soon found himself on a path similar to the

Of Muses

"Are you the one," I ask, "whom Dante heard dictate the lines of his Inferno?"

—Anna Akhmatova, "The Muse"

We usually think of them
on their ethereal Olympian slopes,
bathing in its coolest streams,
flying to the side of moon-struck lovers
or grief-stricken bards
mourning the dearly departed.
Yet they are no less at home with pestilence and martial
settings,
Homer with a plague decimating the Greek contingent on
Ilion's plain,
the Mahabharata with its feuding Kaurava and Pandava
princes,
Shakespeare with his bombastic celebration of Agincourt.
The muses are all too human in their stances,
and just as cruel.

Philip Resnick

Philip Resnick taught political science at the University of British Columbia for decades. He is the author of numerous books, including his forthcoming *Pandemic Poems*.

offstage life of Judy Garland, around whom he had built one of his finest characterizations.

This was not the end of the show. Waiting in the wings, as the spotlight beamed down on Russell, was Lori Russell Eadie. Where Russell is the face of the story, Lori is the heart. Where he shines, she supports; where he falters, she remains strong. They were two people who made each other whole, two "square pegs in a world of round holes." As Lori said, "Nobody's perfect. But we were perfect together."

Lori Jenkins also grew up in Toronto and had a similar desire to break free from her old life—in her case, a physically and emotionally abusive parent. She first heard about Russell while she was still in high school, where she had

stitched a tapestry of him, titled *All about Craig*. The poor girl was smitten, and she carefully planned a way to meet him. (Her pursuit was reminiscent of the way Russell had courted Mae West all those years before.) Lori was intense, she was persistent, and her efforts were ultimately rewarded when Russell took her on as his dresser and assistant. As Bradley's cozy commentary acknowledges, "Craig loved to be loved."

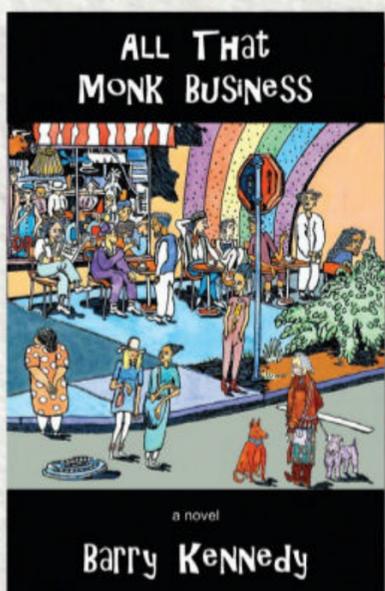
They were married in 1982 and remained together until Russell's death, in 1990, of a stroke related to complications from AIDS—a part of the story that Bradley, a journalist at the *Toronto Star*, handles with the utmost respect and care. The pair didn't live together for much of this time, and Russell would refer to himself and

Lori casually as "just legal friends." His sexuality was complicated and nonconformist. He had relationships with men and women, some serious, some casual. There was also a night with his Toronto roommate that gave him a daughter, Allison. But then his wife's sexual preferences were a mystery too. Her family had assumed she was gay and had even given her a cake shaped like breasts for her sixteenth birthday. Lori never actually came out. It's fitting that these two individuals, whom everyone else was trying to figure out, would find common ground with each other. Where Craig embraced a love of glamour and sequins, Lori cultivated a more androgynous look. As such, they made an unlikely set: a peacock and his hen.

The idea of a chosen family, a concept so important to the wider LGBTQ community, is central to the book. Craig and Lori's connection was enigmatic and unknowable, and that's the beauty of it. To explore their relationship is to dive headfirst into preconceived notions of what it means to be husband and wife and to emerge without any answers. Perhaps only this: there's no such thing as one-size-fits-all.

AS RUPAUL FAMOUSLY SAYS, READING IS FUNDAMENTAL. In a world that is becoming ever more drag hungry, there's an important place for *Outrageous Misfits*. If we are to truly appreciate the acts of today, we must learn more about the performances of the past, the forefathers and foremothers who paved the way for current gender expression. Familiar faces such as Carlotta Carlisle, Allysin Chaynes, and the Canadian legend Michelle DuBarry dot the landscape of the text, making it a homage to the working queens of today as well as a history.

"I believe that the desire to write a book, make a record, paint something beautiful or star in a film, is the desire for immortality," Craig Russell said. "None of us want to get lost in that big world out there." There is an immortality to his drag, and his contribution to the art of gender performance cannot be denied; nor can Lori's unwavering support of the community. *Outrageous Misfits* gives the "king of queens" and his "number one" the credit they deserve. I'll leave it to Mae West to take us home: "You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough." Craig and Lori: they did it right. ▲



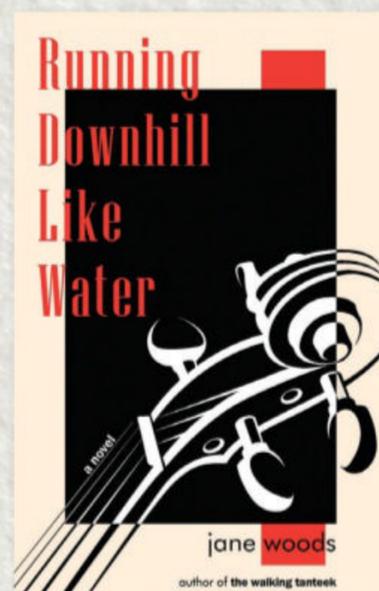
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—SUSAN DOHERTY, AUTHOR OF THE GHOST GARDEN: INSIDE THE LIVES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA'S FEARED AND FORGOTTEN

Agent Zero

Her tale of delusion

Charlotte Gray

Who Was Doris Hedges? The Search for Canada's First Literary Agent

Robert Lecker

McGill-Queen's University Press
288 pages, hardcover and ebook

A COMPELLING BIOGRAPHY MUST answer two crucial questions. The first is "Who is this person?" The second is "Why is she or he important or interesting?" In that sense, this biography is an anomaly, since after reading it I knew tombstone data about the Montreal writer Doris Hedges but had little idea of her personality and motivations. And Robert Lecker's assertion that she was "Canada's first literary agent" is ridiculous. That might have been her claim, but since she never made any deals, she might as well have claimed to be "Canada's greatest literary hoaxer." Doris Hedges turns out to be neither important nor interesting.

But wait! Lecker's subtitle offers a further hook. Its mention of "the search" implies that the reader will also learn about obsessive detective work and a biographer's empathy with his subject, along the lines of A. J. A. Symons's classic, *The Quest for Corvo*. There are a few such glimpses. One is in the acknowledgements section, where the author, a professor of English at McGill, thanks "several research assistants whose dedication was invaluable" and mentions further help from somebody who was "seriously infected with the Doris bug." But Lecker mentions his own emotional investment in this project only in the introduction and the epilogue.

Enclosed by these bookends are a bare chronology of Hedges's life and some brutal assessments of her literary output. Strung between these facts are a lot of rather long quotations from other people's books about Montreal, the evolution of Canadian culture, female sexuality in the Cold War era, mid-century fears of nuclear war, residential schools, and many other subjects.

None of the standard reference works on Canadian literature mention Hedges, and she doesn't appear in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. However, Lecker has a rationale for exhuming his subject from obscurity: "Faced with the erasure of Doris Hedges, I became determined to find her again." Hedges, he contends, was an ambitious writer who failed to establish herself in the English Canadian marketplace because it was dominated by men. Despite her efforts, she could not get past the gatekeepers. "We cannot understand success unless we understand failure," he writes.

But Lecker faced a couple of serious challenges as he tried to make the case.

The first impediment was the shortage of primary material with which to bring life to a narrative about Hedges. The author himself laments the scant traces she left: "There are no business records. No manuscripts. No family albums. No memorabilia. Nor were there any family documents, and, as far as I could discover, only one person living in my own time had spoken with Hedges in person." There were no children to prod for memories or personal correspondence to mine for psychological insights. But Lecker is determined to read between the lines; this is why, he says, the story *should* be written. Because of so many gaps and unanswered questions, Hedges's life "invites us to fill in the blanks, to



Writing her own pedestal.

explore the city she inhabited, to ask questions about the nature of being a female writer when Canada's literature was coming of age."

From official records, passenger lists, and newspaper clippings, Lecker establishes that Hedges was born Doris Edith Ryde in 1896 in Lachine, Quebec. The daughter of a wealthy brewing family, she was cocooned in privilege from the outset; during a trip to Paris in 1910, she met Gertrude Stein, Isadora Duncan, and Vaslav Nijinsky. During the First World War, she worked with the Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance Brigade, and after the war she made frequent trips to England. In 1926, she married Geoffrey Hedges, a successful businessman. Mrs. Doris Hedges was active in the Montreal Junior League

and frequently mentioned in the social columns of the *Gazette*, which described her fashionable outfits in detail. A 1941 studio portrait captures a glossy Westmount hostess, with a haughty gaze and an RCAF pin that her husband, then serving overseas, likely sent her. (And, I have to add, there is an unnerving resemblance to Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor.)

The first Hedges piece that Lecker discovered was a poem titled "Apathy," in the April 1936 issue of *Canadian Poetry*. In the three and a half decades that followed its publication, she was an active public speaker and radio commentator; a talk to the Canadian Authors Association poetry group in 1944, for example, was titled "The Place of Poetry in Modern Education." Four years later, she represented Canada in the arts competition at the London Olympics (along with Gérard Bessette). In total, she would publish six books of poetry and three novels, as well as several short stories. Her early poetry was championed by no less a literary icon than Lorne Pierce.

Although based in Montreal and regularly reviewed in the *Gazette*, Hedges does not appear to have actively participated in that city's vibrant literary community. Was this because she was not invited, or because she was uninterested? She was definitely out of step with such macho modernists as Frank Scott, who pilloried writers like her in his 1927 satirical poem "The Canadian Authors Meet." She was too privileged and her literary output too old-fashioned to be taken seriously by the literati clustered around McGill, including Hugh MacLennan.

But none of these facts illuminate Hedges's thoughts and feelings; the reader of this book is left on the outside looking in. Lecker acknowledges that "little is known about Hedges's private life. She never mentions her husband except to note that she is married to him, or to observe that he is ill or away." So the professor looks to her poetry for clues and suggests that the romantic yearnings in many of them indicate extramarital attractions and lovers. He also mines her novels: "It is hard to ignore the fact that so much of Hedges's writing focuses on dysfunctional families, strained marriages, frustrated sexuality, and dreams of imagined lovers." The mind races — but there is no finishing line for such frustrating speculation.

Lecker's second challenge was that most of Hedges's work is dire (even he has to admit this). In the introduction, he suggests that although her writing "was not strong, it was no weaker than much of the work published by her male counterparts of the same generation." He then argues that her erasure from CanLit is due to twentieth-century misogyny. But was that why her critics were so harsh? One poetry reviewer mentioned the "tonal poverty of so many of the

lines." Another suspected that Hedges the poet hoped "the force of feeling would blind the reader to the frequent thinness of realization." Much of the poetry published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by men as well as women, has not survived — and with good reason.

Hedges wrote indignant letters to William Arthur Deacon, the long-time *Globe and Mail* book reviewer, about his failure to cover her latest work. In one letter, she enclosed a photo, "in case you might like to use it" (I wonder if it was that supercilious 1941 portrait). When he did not respond, she wrote two letters of complaint to the newspaper's editor. Deacon was vexed but eventually replied, noting her letters to his boss and offering a reasonable excuse for his silence. Not surprisingly, the *Globe* never reviewed anything more by Dorothy Hedges.

When Lecker himself analyzes her work, he cannot resist a slightly sneering tone. He points out that her first novel was about a man who is resurrected as a dog; her second described a man who reverses the age process by drinking a magical potion; and her third (self-published) novel often sounds "like it was written to promote upper-class, white Canadian values." Perhaps Hedges's books were ignored because they had little resonance in postwar Canada. After all, they appeared during a period of intense upheaval in Quebec politics and in Canadian culture, a time when Gabrielle Roy, Farley Mowat, Adele Wiseman, P. K. Page, and Robertson Davies were all writing. Then and now, there are a lot of would-be novelists out there whose material is painfully bad, and who are forgotten for a reason.

So that echo of *The Quest for Corvo* in Lecker's subtitle goes nowhere. Hedges was no Baron Corvo. Under this pen name, Frederick William Rolfe wrote *Hadrian the Seventh*, published in 1904, republished in 2001, and listed in 2014 by the *Guardian* as one of the best 100 novels written in English. Her novels, by contrast, will never be phoenixes, ready to rise from the literary ashes as tastes change and other forgotten works by Canadian women are rediscovered. They simply do not compare to Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (published in 1925 and republished in 1989), Ethel Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* (published in 1947 and republished in 2008), or Helen Weinzwieg's *Basic Black with Pearls* (published in 1980 and republished in 2015).

And Hedges's claim, amplified by Lecker, to be Canada's first literary agent? This is a tale of self-delusion. In 1946, Hedges and two partners (one a junior member of the Southam newspaper empire) established an agency and rented space in the Dominion Square Building, one of Montreal's most prestigious business addresses. Advertisements for Hedges, Southam and de Merian stressed the partners' "considerable experience in the publishing field, both at home and abroad." But as far as Lecker's team could discover, the firm never did any deals.

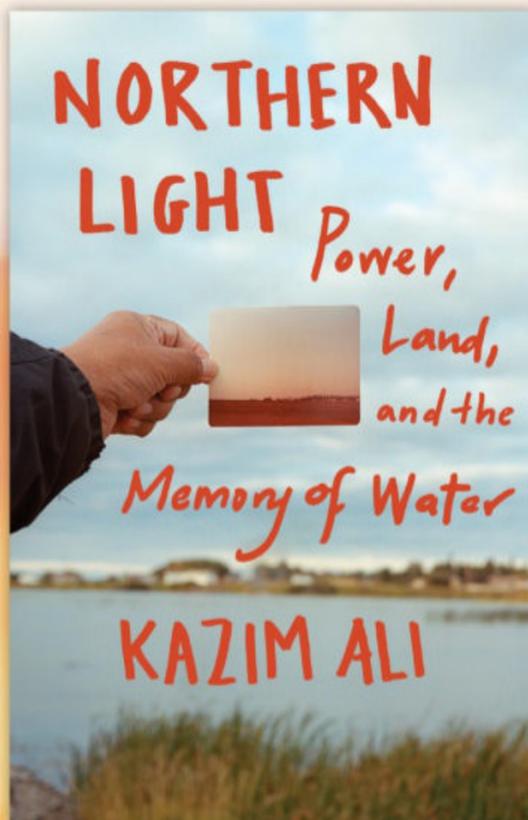
Publishing was difficult throughout the English-speaking world following the Second World War, and Hedges's agency was doomed from the start. She had no business experience and few contacts, and she was unknown within Toronto literary circles. There was also little demand for Canadian work within or outside Canada. Those writers who were successful during this period, such as Morley Callaghan or

Sinclair Ross, already had agents in New York or London. Moreover, potential clients were likely put off by Hedges's tendency to publicly deride Canadian writers as suffering from "defective education" and "sloppiness." One client who did come her way was Hugh Garner, with his novel *Cabbagetown*, but he was so frustrated with her treatment of him that he declared to his editor, "I will do my own huckstering."

Hedges's venture soon closed, but her claims to be a pre-eminent agent lived on. She told a *Gazette* interviewer that she was handling "some 2,000 manuscripts sent by approximately 1,000 clients." She told William Deacon that she represented eighty-five clients in Toronto alone. While acknowledging that such statements must have been barefaced lies, her sympathetic biographer writes, "There was a deceptive, self-promoting side to Hedges that intrigued me. At some level, she was making herself up." He deplores the near-complete erasure of "her imaginative forms of self-representation," which "set her apart from most other writers of her time."

DORIS HEDGES DIED IN 1972, AT THE AGE OF seventy-six, and Lecker has spent years "pursuing her elusive story...with a passion I cannot explain." After reading this work of literary history, I can't explain it either. Lecker is right that one must always look beyond the main actors in the cultural foreground and explore blank spaces in the background, to see if interesting characters are lurking there. There are usually at least a handful. But sometimes they don't justify a whole book, let alone the dedication and efforts of several research assistants.

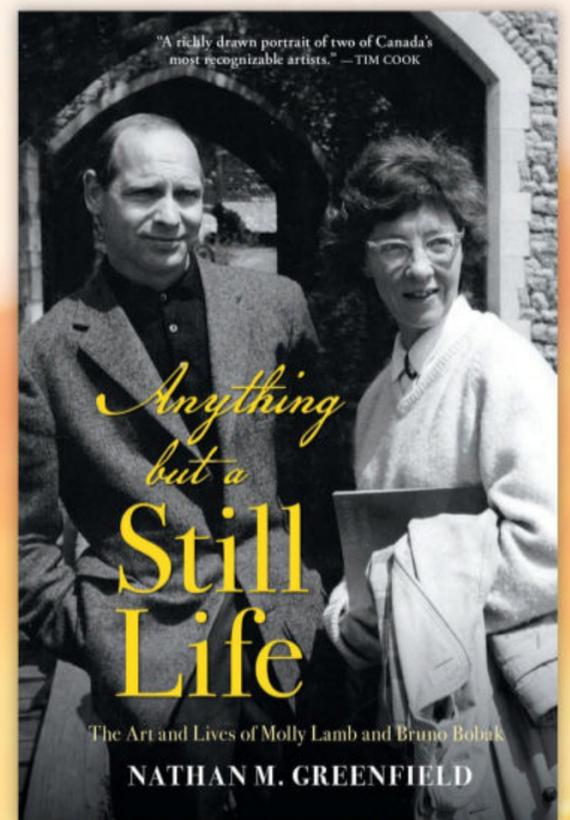
Changing the landscape



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This Lenten Season

Where they were all alone

Kelvin Browne

IT'S ALMOST AS IF I'VE GIVEN UP CHURCH for Lent, the annual commemoration of Christ's trials in the wilderness. Before Ontario went back into lockdown, worship had been strange enough. But since Boxing Day, it's become the spiritual equivalent of curbside pickup: a few are allowed in the building for essential services, for the briefest of moments, while the rest of us attempt another do-it-yourself project at home.

Even when assembling was merely limited, not outlawed, I often wondered if God was in the room — it didn't always feel like it. If God was there, I thought I should ask for an explanation of this modern "plague in the congregation of the Lord." One Sunday, I was the lector, reading one of the two Biblical passages that lay people are permitted. It was unsettling to survey my spiritual brothers and sisters who had gathered for Mass — socially distanced and masked in the pews. I froze, and my mouth went dry. I removed my mask for the reading, but that made the situation even odder as I was exposed to the parishioners, who could see my face but not vice versa. As I made my way through Ezekiel — "Therefore thou shalt hear the word from my mouth, and shalt tell it them from me" — I wondered where the comfort and familiarity of pre-pandemic church had gone.

"The word of the Lord," I said as I concluded the reading, perhaps too ponderously, attempting to compensate for my lack of coherence. I sat down and put my black cloth mask back on. The modified service continued. Eventually the priests approached the sparse congregation with Holy Communion. "Stay in your pew," they told us. "Keep your mask on until you're handed the Eucharist." Before the final prayer, there were other announcements about keeping our kneelers down so they could be sanitized, which exit to use, and yet another reminder about staying two metres apart.

However strange, this was all preferable to watching Mass on a screen, because the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is something you cannot experience virtually. It is essential to be physically present in the pews (unless the Host is brought to you, as it can be if you're sick or housebound). Online services also feel wooden, a peculiar performance-art piece where we are spectators. It's too easy to change the channel. I find it impossible to leave the real thing, however, which means I generally feel better for attending, regardless of my emotional state when I walk into the sanctuary.

I read a few more times before the doors closed on us, and though the awkwardness lessened, the oddness lingered. I would think of early Christians, who we're told huddled in the catacombs of Rome. And of church services



Where has the pre-pandemic church gone?

in the bunkers, during the world wars. And of those places where Christianity is still forbidden or not sanctioned. With little by way of atmosphere — no hymns, choirs, incense — there's nothing to ease you into the moment or viscerally convince you that you are, indeed, part of the Body of Christ. The pared-down COVID-19 service gets straight to the point: it's faith, not emotion, that confronts you en route to salvation. This hasn't been easy, as the music and the ritual have often helped make God more appealing and accessible for me, especially around Christmas and Easter.

Nothing is certain, I told myself after a few coronavirus Sundays. As we've all been reminded, so much can disappear or change in an instant — jobs, travel plans, immutable friendships, poignant ceremony steeped in tradition. *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

Another thing that's disappeared is my hyperactive social life. Since so much of my job is done online these days, I'm alone more than at any point since early childhood. Now that I'm used to it, being at home most of the time has made for a more contemplative workday. I tend to get the same amount accomplished as before, but I have the chance to meditate (even when I don't realize that's what I'm doing). I also have more time for prayer: with gratitude, anger, frustration, and hope all commingling.

I walk past my church on occasion, and even from the outside there's a hint of sadness to the building I know is empty. So many people of so many faiths are missing the communities that

have long sustained them. Priests, like others who have dedicated their lives to something bigger than themselves, are unable to minister to their flocks as they once did. Weddings and funerals are shrunk to fit regulations and Zoom screens. And there are new financial concerns in the rectory: fewer people each Sunday mean less in the collection basket.

For some, the diminishment of the physical church is a good thing. It suggests more attention will be paid to faith than to the human-created apparatus that channels it. "Freed from the shackles of maintenance," a minister wrote in *Broadview* magazine last summer, "churches could have more time and energy for doing good." Perhaps that's true. Perhaps we'll discover more compassion and spirituality, fewer rules and judgments and artifice. You can find God in a cathedral or just as easily on a park bench. This pandemic is many things, including a lesson that obedience to ritual doesn't guarantee a reward of transcendence. Faith is struggle, and it's more obvious than ever.

Each time I read in church last year, I felt strange doing it. I believed this unease would mean growth — something I did not want to give up for forty days (or longer). But forced dislocation is helping me and others look at the world anew, helping us reconsider our purpose and how faith is often the only constant. I look forward to more comfortable times, but I don't want to forget that being uncomfortable in church, when so much of what is normal disappears, is something of a revelation. ▲

That Nightly Hoots and Wonders

Listening to the natural world

Tom Jokinen

Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl

Jonathan C. Slaght

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

368 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

Vesper Flights

Helen Macdonald

Hamish Hamilton

272 pages, hardcover and ebook

EACH SPRING, THE BIRDS RETURN to nest at Oak Hammock Marsh, twenty kilometres north of Winnipeg. The first Canada goose usually shows up in March (there's a contest for spotting it) and then thousands follow. They take over the wetlands, pair up, manage their offspring. In the fall, they're loud and communal, making migration plans. But in the spring, they're less social, keeping to themselves before heading even farther north, in some cases all the way up to Churchill.

It was dead quiet the night my wife and I were at Oak Hammock Marsh. As we drove back to the highway, windows open, a huge white bird suddenly flew through the beam of our headlights without making a sound. Not a goose. We figured an owl, like in *Harry Potter* (we're not birders, clearly). What struck me most beyond its size was the silence, even as it flapped away.

This is evolution. The flight feathers of an owl are fringed and comb-like so that they displace the air before it reaches the wings. The effect is pure physics: the arrangement acts to muffle the sound. The result is practical: the quiet hunter catches the mouse. This fact turns up like a narrative gold coin in *Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl* by Jonathan C. Slaght, who reports that the bird's characteristically round face is likewise the result of natural selection: it helps channel the faintest sound to the ears. Acoustics are everything for owls. They're built to hear the slightest movement: built to kill without alarming their prey.

At least that's the case for your run-of-the-mill Oak Hammock Marsh snowy owl. Slaght's book is about a different, much rarer bird, the Blakiston's fish owl, found in Russia's Far East, an animal with no interest (or evolutionary advantage) in keeping itself quiet, since its prey is underwater. The fish owl eats salmon, so it can make as much racket as it wants. The biggest member of the parliament of owls, this is an odd-looking raptor, with a sharp face, massive eyebrows, and long dark feathers that bring to mind, Slaght points out, one of Jim Henson's more bizarre Muppets. Slaght is an American wildlife biologist on a quest to track down, tag,



Who goes there?

and study the rare bird for his doctoral thesis. The result is an adventure tale about how, when it comes to human efforts to control and categorize the natural world, even with the best of intentions, nature always refuses to cooperate.

Owls of the Eastern Ice is obliquely part of a larger genre: the bird-as-metaphor-for-something-bigger book. A few years ago, the English author Helen Macdonald had a bestseller in *H Is for Hawk*, a richly written narrative about the year she spent training a northern goshawk — but it's really about how she came to terms with the death of her father. Her follow-up, *Vesper Flights*, is a collection of like-minded essays about birds and the natural world, and about how we (with Helen Macdonald as our stand-in) make sense of the bigger issues of how we live. Which is fine. But what carries both *Owls of the Eastern Ice* and *Vesper Flights* is the details, the gold coins, like the reason for the owl's round face. The books succeed on sharp observation more than on deep reflection.

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IN 1967, THE ENGLISH AUTHOR J. A. BAKER HELPED launch this bird-as-metaphor business with *The Peregrine*, which the filmmaker Werner Herzog credits as a cinematic ur-text: "In a way, it's almost like a transubstantiation, like in religion, where the observer becomes almost the object — in this case the falcon — he observes." Put another way, *The Peregrine* is about obsession. Baker tracked his subject daily, from October to April, for reasons he never fully explains. The reader is left to wonder, What is this all a substi-

tute for? What's he hiding or escaping from? Is it, as the wilderness writer Robert Macfarlane has written, an "act of self-destruction," an attempt to run away from death? Follow your mood to the existential if you like, but Baker's book is a masterpiece of observation.

Likewise, Macdonald's best essays in *Vesper Flights* are about discovery — not so much about self-discovery as about the world outside. The one called "High-Rise" is full of surprises. What is the nature of wildlife in Manhattan, she asks, above the skyscrapers and round-the-clock lights and noise? Surely it's limited to surly pigeons, with a gull or two on a diet of cold french fries. "But like the ocean," she discovers, "this is a vast habitat full of life — bats and birds, flying insects, spiders, windblown seeds, microbes, drifting spores." She compares New York's iconic buildings to "machines that work like deep-sea submersibles, transporting us to inaccessible realms we cannot otherwise explore." It's a striking image: in the city, one goes up, very high up, to find the wild ecosystem. It's there. You just can't see it from the street.

Researchers around the world use radar to study high-altitude movements of birds and insects. In England, they've determined that more than 7.5 billion bugs can pass over a square mile of farmland in a month, amounting to 5,500 pounds of biomass. But the numbers and density of those passing over New York are even higher. It is, after all, a gateway to North America: "The tallest buildings, like the Empire State, One World Trade Center and other new

super-towers, project into airspace that birds have used for millennia. The city lies on the Atlantic Flyway, the route used by hundreds of millions of birds to fly north every spring to their breeding grounds and back again in the fall." Up high, on the roof of a skyscraper, "the distinction between city and countryside has little or no meaning at all." Depending on the winds, "birds, bats and migrant dragonflies all feed on rich concentrations of insects...just as fish swarm to feed where currents congregate plankton in the ocean."

With patience, Macdonald spots three pairs of black-crowned night herons, birds she's seen only on rural lakes and ponds. Her guide, an ornithologist from Cornell University, uses a smartphone to study radar patterns out of Fort Dix, New Jersey. The system is so sensitive that it can detect a single bumblebee fifty kilometres away, and on a "big night," it reveals flocks, too far away to see in the dark: "You're talking about one thousand to two thousand birds per cubic mile potentially, which is almost as dense as it gets," the ornithologist explains.

Slaght has more limited technology in *Owls of the Eastern Ice*, but he has human ingenuity and help from two Russian stalkers who lead him in endless ice and snow past logging camps and traplines in search of a breeding pair of fish owls to trap and tag. On a village road, outside of Maksimovka, they encounter a radon hot spring, below a looming Orthodox cross. There are no owls here but rather a lone drunken, naked man taking a soak in the radioactive waters. "Who the bloody hell are you guys?" he calls out, as he stumbles on the rocks. "Ornithologists," they call back, by way of explanation. Struggling into a pair of boxer shorts, the man decides this makes enough sense in the middle of nowhere and, realizing that Slaght's driver is from his own hometown, embraces them.

It's hardly a spoiler to reveal that they do eventually find fish owls, but only with great effort. Along the way they meet up with more drunken Russians in the bush, who are there not to preserve nature but to cut it down, trap it, fish it, trade it, which Slaght doesn't mind in moderation. People need to survive too, but some balance is in order.

Both *Owls of the Eastern Ice* and *Vesper Flights* follow grander themes: the fish owl is in danger of disappearing thanks to development and logging. Slaght is in a race to find them to protect them. And Macdonald makes it clear that bird migration over urban centres, however remarkable, is fraught with danger. "We cherish our cities for their appearance at night," she says, of the bright lights of the Big Apple, "but it takes a terrible toll on migrating songbirds: you can find them dead or exhausted at the foot of high-rise buildings all over America." More than 100,000 of these warblers die each year in New York alone.

In the end, detail adds up to a mission: To pay attention, not so much to ourselves (there's an epidemic of solipsism, and we can all afford to take a break from it) but to everything else. To see nature not as something separate but as continuous and bigger than us — just like the gaggles of geese at Oak Hammock Marsh. It's nature's planet; we're just wrecking it. That's a take-away from Slaght as well as from Macdonald, who reminds us that "we are living in an exquisitely complicated world that is not all about us." ▲

THIS AND THAT

French Fold

All the snowbird news that's fit to print

Amanda Perry

THE SNOWBIRDS ARE REVOLTING. On the one wing, the migrating seniors are challenging Ottawa's mandatory hotel quarantine in the courts, balking at paying thousands for a few days in "hotel hell." On the other, they have become targets of popular disgust. Who do they think they are, the righteous want to know, basking in the sun while the rest of us have been told to stay put? Such reactions are fuelled by legitimate concerns about contagion and a reflexive scorn against perceived rule breakers. Having spent a recent week reading *Le Soleil de la Floride*, I must admit there's also a less noble emotion in the mix: jealousy.

The very existence of *Le Soleil de la Floride* is a testament to the francophone settlement of the Sunshine State. Owned by Louis S. St-Laurent II, a retired attorney and absolutely the grandson of a former prime minister, the newspaper was founded in 1983 and has thirty-two print issues a year — weekly or monthly, depending on the season. Its readership draws mostly from Québécois retirees, who cluster along the southeast coast, near Fort Lauderdale (an estimated 150,000 Canadian francophones live in the area year-round, with over a million visiting each winter). Soon there may also be an online TV channel, Télé Floride.

These days, the paper's website, with its shining palm-tree logo, functions as a gateway to a parallel reality. It leads with links to the most important information: gas prices, currency conversion rates, and weather. Beyond that, one finds cost-conscious wine recommendations from a former MuchMusic host, which remind me how much cheaper alcohol is in the States. Then comes a long profile of Réjean Tremblay, a retired journalist who is making a documentary on the '90s-era rivalry between the Canadiens and the Nordiques. The seventy-six-year-old insists that he feels safer near the beach than in Quebec these days — "above all because of the weather." That and his thinly veiled bragging about his art collection and motorcycling through the Keys make me want to grab some spray paint and stir up a bit of class conflict. Too bad I have to be home for Montreal's 8 p.m. curfew.

The blows keep on coming. There are advertisements for \$22 hockey tickets, because apparently they're letting 5,000 people at a time gather to watch the Panthers at BB&T Center. After a game, sports fans can even enjoy their own Schwartz's, which serves poutine and smoked meat alongside such culinary heresies as fajitas. It is currently open for *indoor dining*! There are also notices for boat shows, festivals, and tribute concerts to Michael Bublé and the Eagles.

Of course, the most striking difference between the francophone north and the francophone

south — and a major reason why so many decided to head down this winter — is the state of vaccination. Anyone over sixty-five who owns or rents property in Florida can receive the shot for free. And, according to the paper, our fellow Canucks have been busy rolling up their sleeves in pharmacies, parks, and Walmarts. Meanwhile, back in Quebec, vaccination of most seniors still feels a long way off. (The per capita death toll here remains by far the worst in Canada, and only slightly lower than Florida's.)

The coverage of the pandemic in *Le Soleil de la Floride* contains hints of defensiveness and plenty of contradictions. Condemnations of medical tourism from Argentina and Brazil are printed alongside detailed instructions on getting inoculated. An online video on medical insurance reminds viewers of Canada's advisory against international travel but encourages them not to judge themselves. An article on New Year's Eve celebrations insists that Quebecers on the beach were easy to spot, because they were the ones practising proper physical distancing. Good to know that we are still better than Americans, even during taboo trips abroad.

Among the snowbound set, the easiest reaction to the snowbirds is blanket condemnation. With flights to the Caribbean and Mexico cancelled until at least April 30, and the border closed to non-essential car travel, those who hightailed it to Miami seem to have violated the spirit of restrictions, if not the letter. Especially with the new variants, are they not placing all of us at risk?

Ultimately, I'm not so sure that they are. *Le Soleil de la Floride's* target audience may be tone deaf, but so long as they quarantine upon return, they are not a particular danger to public health — especially if they come back vaccinated. It's the Floridians who really have a right to complain, but their governor seems all too happy to give seasonal residents a shot in the arm in exchange for their spending power.

So allow me to abstain from the moralizing pile-on. I won't condemn transnational lives just because borders have hardened and the state's power to command has become more obvious. Not everyone has just one home. The demand that we all suffer through this winter of confinement seems less about science and more a form of weaponized FOMO: If I must miss out, so should everyone else. Or, harsher still, may there be nothing left to miss out on.

SARS-CoV-2 is a virus, not a moral agent, and it does not spread only when you are having fun or bending rules. Let the snowbirds enjoy their golf courses, I say. I'll console myself with the thought that they'll be stuck in an overpriced hotel room for a few days on their return, and that I've never liked Florida anyway. ▲

Somewhere above Bloor Street

What Noah and Rose built

William Thorsell

How much of the apartment did Mr. Johnson, a towering figure in 20th-century architecture, actually design? How should new architecture relate to heritage architecture? The stand-off also raises questions about how far into private homes preservation should be able to reach.

—Globe and Mail, January 30, 2021

IN 2001, THE PRESIDENT OF THE FOUNDATION charged with raising money for the Royal Ontario Museum, where I was director and CEO for ten years, suggested we contact a retired businessman named Noah Torno. Soon after, Noah agreed to lunch with me at the museum's restaurant, JK ROM. I read the briefing notes and headed upstairs to meet him. It was the start of a particular friendship.

Noah was already seated at the far end of the bistro when I arrived, some ninety years of age and elegantly attired in a blue blazer and ebullient tie. As I settled in, he was sipping from a large glass of red wine. He had stories to tell and proceeded to do so.

He spoke of his time on the ROM board some thirty years earlier, portraying the museum as a hive of scheming characters indulging diverse appetites and engaging in mutual vendettas. He had rather enjoyed the drama, he said with an impish grin, and asked if anything had changed. I indicated that, in my term so far, the ROM was considerably more boring in that respect, though the vagaries of human nature kept us distressed and entertained, within bounds. I set out our vision for the next decade—what would turn out to be a \$300-million renovation and expansion project known as Renaissance ROM. Unlike the very few retired board members I had met, Noah did not express doubt or mirth; the plans intrigued him.

"Now, please tell me more about yourself," I said as two more glasses of excellent wine appeared. He did so with gusto and with whatever added colour, embellishment, and elided fact he wished.

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NOAH TORNO WAS BORN A JEWISH KID IN Toronto's west end in 1910. By high school, his family had moved to the east end, and he ended up at Jarvis Collegiate Institute, where he excelled. In his graduating year, a recruitment team appeared from the University of Toronto, seeking to attract the best students. Noah indicated his interest in medicine or law. Neither faculty was open to Jews, the recruiters said, and suggested commerce and accounting instead. Noah could look forward to a back-office job in the finance department at Eaton's—a solid place for a Jew in Toronto those days. That was not to be.



Everything was as it had always been.

Noah's father was prepared to put up tuition. Noah asked how much that would amount to over four years. He then made his father an offer: Hand over that sum now, and if he could not double it within two years, he would go to university at his own expense. The elder Torno reluctantly agreed.

Noah bid on an industrial building that had come up for auction in lower Mimico, then a small town west of Toronto's High Park. He offered too much and got it. Short story: he ran low on cash, then more than doubled his money in two years, and never went to the University of Toronto. So began Noah's career in real estate, where he built a substantial portfolio over time.

He also wanted to be a fiction writer. He once wrote a pornographic novel and tried to sell it to a guy who had an office above some shop on Queen Street West. Noah didn't say where the manuscript ended up. We ordered more wine.

Noah told me how he had met Rose Laine and fallen in love. Rose was among the first women to graduate in law from the University of Alberta. She had married, had a son, and had gotten divorced at a time when the Senate had to assent to such things. She then moved to Toronto and volunteered for the armed forces during the Second World War, where she crossed paths with Noah, who was working in army intelligence. Formidable both, they married; Noah inherited a stepson, and Rose Torno became a defining presence in Toronto's social scene. After the war, Noah went back to real estate.

Sometime in the 1950s, Noah stumbled across a beleaguered winery for sale in Georgia and bought it. It so happened that Jordan Wineries attracted the interest of the Montreal liquor titan Sam Bronfman, and, in the context of some accidental encounter on a plane ride down south, Noah met Sam's people. To hear it from Noah, Sam made an offer Noah could not refuse. And there was another thing: Noah Torno would represent Sam Bronfman's nascent real estate ventures in Toronto: the Fairview Corporation (later Cadillac Fairview). Done.

The portfolio grew to include a sleek modernist office building of some fourteen storeys on Bloor Street West, opposite the Colonnade. That offered the opportunity to build a residence on the roof, and Noah went for it. Initially, plans also included a luxurious apartment for Sam's nephew Peter, whom Sam wanted to move from Montreal to be the family man in Toronto. Peter didn't like that idea, so Noah was charged with designing Peter's apartment secretly, including a private elevator attached to the west side of the building for security. Peter found out and refused to move, and Noah continued planning, now with the whole rooftop to himself.

Meanwhile, Sam Bronfman went into partnership with the Toronto-Dominion Bank on its new headquarters at King and Bay. The bank, under Allen Lambert, had publicly committed to building the tallest concrete structure in the Commonwealth. Then Phyllis appeared.

Phyllis Lambert, Sam's second daughter (and no relation to Allen), had worked with her



One and Half of You
Leanne Dunic

A poetic-memoir exploring sibling and romantic love and the complexities of being a biracial person looking for completion in another.

Includes links to recordings of three songs.
Forthcoming March 15, 2021; 978-1-77201-286-6



still
Anahita Jamali Rad

A powerful follow-up to Jamali Rad's *for love and autonomy*, *still* proposes an alternative to action, a way to jam the signal by refusing receptivity. *still* disclaims language, writes without writing, divests in itself, is non-living and unlife. This book begins and ends in emptiness.

Forthcoming March 29, 2021; 978-1-77201-285-9



Then Now
Daphne Marlatt

Written in response to the discovery of letters by Marlatt's father, these poems explore a sense of place and home on Canada's West Coast now on the brink of global climate change. "There Then" permeates any "Here Now" of immigrant consciousness and highlights the impermanent quality of "home".

Forthcoming March 15, 2021; 978-1-77201-287-3

father on the Seagram Building, at 375 Park Avenue, in Manhattan. Designed by Mies van der Rohe, it was a triumph of the International Style and included the Four Seasons Restaurant, itself designed by Philip Johnson, another force in modern architecture. Phyllis looked at TD's plans and insisted she visit Toronto to convince Allen to change them. She then took him to Chicago to meet Mies, argued fiercely for the precedent of the Seagram Building, and convinced the CEO to forgo the concrete leviathan for what would become TD Centre. Noah would be the local point man for the Bronfmans on the iconic project and have a large corner office on the fourth floor of the highest tower, where he would overlook the plaza for decades to come.

(It so happened that Allen Lambert was an honorary trustee of the ROM when I arrived in 2000. We bonded as he, too, recalled these stories. Allen had started his banking career in Yellowknife, and to mark Canada's centennial, he insisted that TD amass a significant collection of postwar Inuit sculpture. The collection was housed in a small museum, attached to another one of the TD Centre buildings, on Wellington, and I went to see it. I drew up plans to move the gallery to the ROM, and Allen embraced them. He said he would make it happen, though it was a bit delicate, as the bank's CEO at the time, Charlie Baillie, was also president of the Art Gallery of Ontario. Allen died shortly thereafter, in his nineties, a civic hero for bringing Mies to Toronto—but the Inuit sculptures stayed at the bank.)

As plans were under way for TD Centre, Noah and his formidable wife linked up with Philip Johnson to design and build a 10,000-square-foot apartment on the roof of Bronfman's Bloor Street office building, with a local architect as partner. Noah and Rose would go over the plans with Johnson in New York and supervise every detail of construction in Toronto. It turned out rather well, Noah told me over lunch, pointing through the window to the east, where a grove of trees protruded from the skyline. Would I like to walk over with him right now to see it?

A door off the Bloor Street lobby led to the private elevator (you could also arrive via a long enclosed walkway from Cumberland Street), which took us to a large cube of space, two floors high and clad in travertine. A small fountain splashed beside a sculpted nude under a wide bronze staircase that floated to the second floor. The ceiling was a glowing lacework of undulating panels lit from behind. "Let's go into the library," Noah said, "and meet Rose."

Rose was almost 100 years old and sat in an elegant dress on a couch beside her live-in caregiver. From time to time, she had donated wonderful pieces of her jewellery to the ROM, as well as couture from her closet. We had tea as Noah filled her in about me and the museum's new plans. He also told me the high oak doors into the library and the panelling around the room had come from one huge oak tree in North Carolina, so the grains could repeat throughout the room.

Then we toured the two-storey apartment that looked over downtown Toronto to the south and Yorkville to the north. Everything was as it had always been, including mid-century furniture and, in the living room, an art-deco-style Steinway grand (which I found to be completely out of tune). The dining room was high with East Asian flavour, including stunning Chinese

wallpaper that Noah had bought at auction in New York, sent to Hong Kong for refurbishing, and installed here in the sky. Indeed, the ceiling had been raised slightly to accommodate the wallpaper, which Noah refused to trim.

A classic kitchen faced Yorkville and overlooked a Kyoto-style garden of raked gravel, boulders, and small evergreens. The large terrace off the living room featured an enormous olive tree in a large planter, with soil that was warmed in the winter, and pine trees lining the perimeter. Upstairs, the master bedroom faced south, flanked by his and hers baths and dressing rooms. Noah pulled out small drawers on Rose's side, showing me her collection of exquisite gloves.

As we walked around, I knew this was surely one of the most ambitious private apartments in town, with the ROM visible just out the windows to the west. I told Noah that his museum view was about to change, and I took the elevator down to the street.



WE WOULD LUNCH TOGETHER FREQUENTLY AFTER that, red wine always setting off Noah's expressive ties. As our plans for renovation and expansion came together, I would show him around our design studio, and on the day that we started demolition to make room for Daniel Libeskind's Crystal, in 2003, Noah sent an eight ball over to my office, saying I was behind it now for good. He knew construction.

That same year, Phyllis Lambert was set to give a lecture about architecture at our Institute for Contemporary Culture, which would be a reunion for her and Noah. He demurred from the talk itself, saying he could not leave Rose alone with her caregiver before she went to bed, but joined us afterwards for dinner. We all had a pleasant if somewhat formal conversation.

After Rose passed away, at 101, Noah and I had lunch, and we toured the apartment again. He was obliged to move out, he explained. Some fifteen years previously, the office building had been sold and two gentlemen had come to visit on behalf of the new owners. Noah and Rose had been paying rent on their apartment, but it was time to make new arrangements, the gentlemen suggested, which meant the Tornos relocating. Noah said Rose put on a great show, trembling and misting up, saying that she would surely die if forced to leave the home they had so lovingly built. She had always vowed to die there. The two men looked at the couple and relented, saying they could stay until Rose died—assuming, said Noah, that this little frail woman in her eighties would not be here much longer. Now the time had come.

At Noah's request, I returned with our senior curator, Dan Rahimi, and toured the apartment with an eye to accessing works of art and couture. We chose a few. I showed Dan the dining room and explained the history of the wallpaper. "Do you want it?" asked Noah. It was meticulously removed and is now at the ROM. Noah sent the Steinway down to Remenyi House of Music, across the street from the museum, for rebuilding and refinishing before sale. In his nineties, Noah was ready for a relaunch.

"I am a bachelor again," he exulted. It was time for another elegant apartment and a return to the dating circuit. He chose an almost complete penthouse in a new rental building on Bay Street, just north of Bloor. There was a Pusateri's grocery store on the main floor, and



Lost?

You could do worse than ask Dante
at what circle should you take a left
to avoid being ambushed by the dead.
The dead, it seems, are never done.
Beatrice he met when he was nine.
Saw her around town and then boom!
Her time in this vale of tears was done.
But by then his heart was branded
— try ridding yourself of a young ghost! —
he was all in, all hers, a lifetime.
Sure, he exaggerated a bit:
lovers tend to when they write.
But I digress. Let me return to the point:
you awoke, hesitant but sober,
stared into the dark of that room
and knew not who or where you were.

Ricardo Sternberg

*Ricardo Sternberg is an award-winning poet and professor emeritus at the University of Toronto. His several books include *Map of Dreams* and *Some Dance*.*

wine could be had at the LCBO just kitty-corner at Manulife Centre.

Noah loved new projects, style, and social life. He hired two guys as his interior designers and invited the three of us to dinner at the University

Club. He said word was already out that he was dating, and one woman had come in by limo from nearby Oakville for drinks. He had gotten together with several more, but, he said, “they either want to be my nurse or have my purse.” Noah had been around and was prepared to play the field. It was going to be a lot of fun, he was sure.

He said his new penthouse had an ample rooftop deck facing south and west, and I proposed that we host a large martini party up there in the spring to launch both it and Noah’s exciting social life. This became an enthusiastic vow.

Some weeks later, Noah asked to meet on the sidewalk at Bloor and Avenue Road, just outside the ROM. We made our way to Remenyi, where the restored piano sat in the large front window. He was walking with some difficulty and explained there was a cyst at the bottom of his brain, on the top of his spine. Doctors were planning to remove it soon.

Noah called a month later to say his Steinway had not sold. Could he give it to the museum? We put it in the Glass Room, above the Queen’s Park lobby, and I found it lovely to play.

By spring 2004, Noah had moved into his new penthouse and was scheduled for surgery to remove the cyst. His sister was staying with him, and I went over with a book, *The Da Vinci Code*, for his convalescence. He had donated the large sculpted nude from his old

atrium to the lobby of this other building — continuity, to be sure. He was at his desk, dressed in a thick white robe. “Look,” his sister said, pointing to a glassed-in cabinet against the wall. “Noah told me about the martini party, and we had no stemware.” The cabinet was full of pristine martini glasses sparkling in the light.

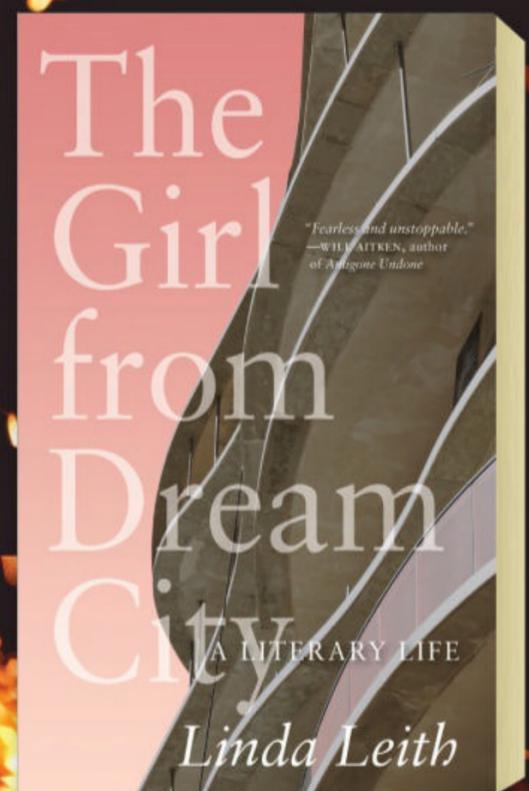
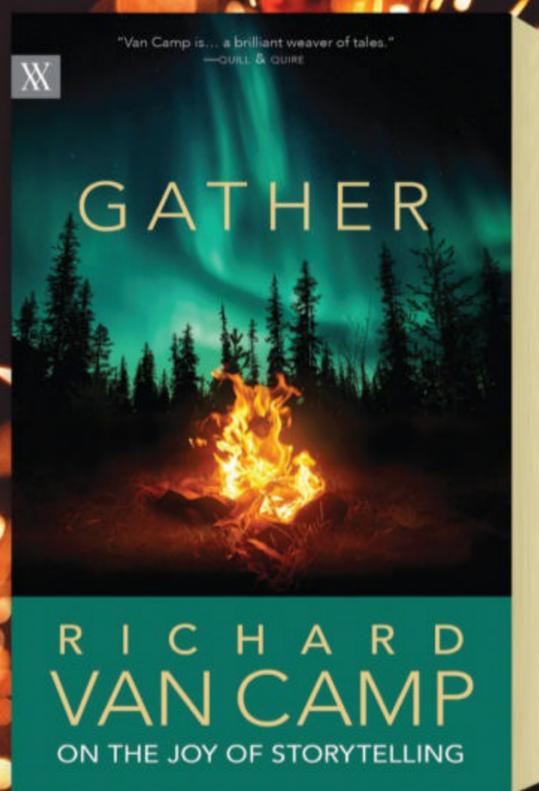
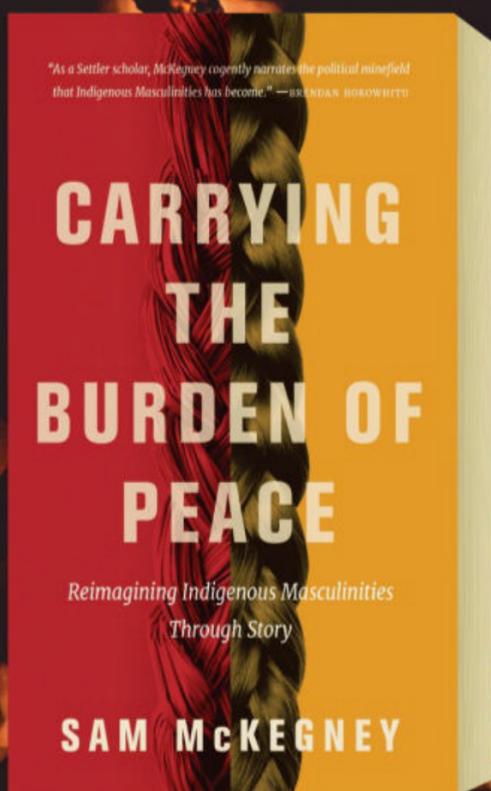
Noah went to hospital just as I was leaving for a two-week trip to Japan and China. The night before my departure, his sister called from the hospital saying the operation had gone well: Noah was awake and had asked her to confirm the martini party on the roof. I told her to start on the guest list, and that I knew some attractive mature women who might be of interest to a gentleman.

Several days later at breakfast in the Okura hotel in Tokyo, I received a message that Noah had died of pneumonia at ninety-three. This time, the infection was not “the old man’s friend.”

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IN SUMMER 2004, I DECIDED THAT THE MARTINI party would simply have to go on. We contacted his extended family and invited them and others to drinks in the Glass Room, to honour Noah and Rose as individuals and for their contributions to the museum. We created a dramatic bar with suitably elegant servers. We brought the grand piano into the centre of the room, and I sat down and played “I’ll Be Seeing You.”

Over the years that followed, developers added several floors above Noah and Rose Torno’s penthouse. The original apartment was renovated and sold. One day, I was invited to visit it once more, and did so. I knew it could never be the same. ▲

EVOCATIVE, EMPOWERING READS



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A Shelter for Dreams

As we haunt our houses

Jessica Duffin Wolfe

IN MY MEMORY, IT'S A ZOOM CALL OF A house, a collection of two or three irregularly shaped buildings of five storeys or so, with amorphous facades of windows coming out on all sides and little decks with houseplants. Each apartment-sized facet was so different from the others that it seemed as though the whole couldn't have been built as one project, yet the units couldn't have been built separately either. Together they formed a perfect apartment complex — it was clear that's what they had to be — though had they been built on a smaller scale it's possible they could have been just single-family homes. When I first saw those pieced-together houses, after ambling away from the Bauhaus Archive on a grey Berlin afternoon, everything about them bespoke different lives happening separately, but in tandem. Fourteen years later, and three months into our experiment in living exactly this way — alone, but together — I wanted to see those shapes again.

I thought I'd find the site by googling "unusual apartment buildings" or "notable buildings in Berlin," but you can imagine the sorts of structures I found: famous ones, big ones, places where nobody lived, and certainly not ones where many people lived together. Of course, apartment buildings are not always thought of as architectural landmarks — maybe Gaudí's Casa Milà and Safdie's Habitat are the exceptions. The humble low-rise is a modest, human-scale expression of architecture, compared with, say, a Mies van der Rohe tower, and its livable model of sustainable density is something to celebrate.

As I filtered through hundreds of images of interesting buildings, I missed the one in Toronto I had fled at the beginning of the pandemic and wondered whether the apartment way of life would hollow out over time, whether a sudden digital turn really would spread everyone out across the landscape to pursue our lives over screens, and whether, as I searched from the farmhouse where I grew up, I'd have any neighbours left when I finally got back to the city.

I couldn't find it. All out of synonyms, I loaded Google Earth onto my tablet to search by place rather than term, but the Bauhaus Archive, where I'd begun my walk that day, was a rubble of renovations in the footage, as were several surrounding blocks. The complex could have been torn down, I realized, thinking of how that week in Berlin I'd tried to visit the spot where my grandfather had lived, only to find a place so wrecked that the street itself had vanished. Still I knew that if I couldn't find the curious buildings, I wouldn't be able to let them go. Early in the pandemic I'd misplaced some earphones, and, mired in a dopamine feedback



And then a shape that seemed right.

loop, flooded by desire to find what I'd lost without regular exposure to outside faces to regulate its peaks and troughs through the day, I couldn't stop looking for them. I was concerned that my hunt for the missing houses would roll into the same ongoing and fruitless search for control.

Going upstairs after dinner, I told myself that I would have to be content with never finding that place again. This would be part of a practice of letting go, of disavowing attachment to things, and so on. But I was snagged on the idea of finding it, as though some COVID-19 riddle could be solved through its retrieval. Having remembered it, I wanted it back, along with a sense of reality in a memory. I wanted an address on a map, a name, some pictures in Google Image Search, a couple of German blog posts, anything to confirm that this vision wasn't mine alone. I craved a demonstration that, in having this memory of this unusual assembly, I was part of a knowable world of other people, and that I could control things by finding them. That, despite my loneliness, I was part of a hive whose walls, the structures that connect our lives, are real.

So I kept going. Late that night, I wandered Berlin from above, joining in yet another new pastime to stir lockdown wanderlust. Roving Google Earth alone in the dark felt like a virus-induced form of dreaming that made me into another one of the ghosts who haunt the capital's streets. Over and over, I would start from the Bauhaus Archive and spiral out. Nothing. Just massive Cold War apartment blocks built on bombed lives. And then I'd start again. Finally,

I noticed the little river, or is it a canal? That week in Berlin I'd been fascinated by the small houseboats and barges that some of the locals called home. Surely, I hadn't just wandered out from the archive for no reason; surely, I'd been following the water, to look for more of these little houses, little lives. Like a drone, I started tracking the stream from on high: one block, two. Had I crossed that busy road? I must have. And then I saw a shape that seemed right. Nothing regular about it, completely opposed to fascism. I tilted the perspective down just a bit and yes — there — the windows. There it was.

◆

ONE OF THE STRANGENESSES OF THIS PANDEMIC has been its invitation to undertake massive collective action in solitude, at home. Through the various shutdowns, the walls of our homes have supported our isolation and our efforts to keep others and ourselves from infection. Early last spring, as we became birders and watched nests get built stem by leaf, Pinterest's numbers also jolted upward, with millions poking about for twigs of their own: the perfect little balcony chair or candle holder or other reminder of the outside world — anything to define a space by choice, rather than entrapment. Our dwellings, no longer simple oases away from work, protected us from contagion and locked us in with our own miasmas, made us lonely, and made us free. If architecture shapes our lives, quarantine gives architecture a new shape.

Though the home may always be an overdetermined symbol, I had never noticed my own

transform so many times per day—from haven to snare, lock-up to respite. Most often it settled in as both cage and refuge, revealing a new paradox in the idea of home. This pendulum swing of unwelcome ironies replicated itself again and again in our dwellings over the last year. The virus has made shelter both more dangerous to occupy and more difficult to access. Children have played on top of working adults. At first, bringing the elderly back to live with family seemed like a risk, and then the safest option. Office workers wondered whether their workplaces or their dwellings were changed most but then found the question silenced by the collapse in contrast between the two. The prospect of office buildings repurposed for affordable housing, with little Zoom stations set up in every corner of every new apartment, overlaid itself on a vision of a city emptied by a general flight to the countryside. Questions about space abounded—Can the city endure? Are we alone or are we together?—while “home” changed with the speed of a door slammed shut to include both solitude and too much company.

Real estate markets have registered a general surge toward the suburban and the Muskokan as prices shoot up in those areas, but space on its own is no panacea. The dense, multi-generational life of apartment buildings may actually support physically distanced living, with grandparents around to help mind the children during the workday, younger adults ready to buy that massive load of groceries once a week, neighbours available to pick up the slack in the case of a sudden hospital stay or self-isolation. Counterintuitively, we are perhaps better able to isolate while living side by side.

It’s not always easy, though. In my own small building, in Toronto, angst surged a year ago, in mid-March, when it became clear someone in our complex had the novel virus. Some fearful individuals made aggressive demands to know the identity of the sick person, before their voices were supplanted by calls for greater compassion and the organization of a stronger support network. By disrupting the balance, this incident heightened a sense of the community’s proper, gentler homeostasis, but the tension at its root lies at the heart of every multi-unit dwelling: How can residents defined above all by their individuality live well closely together?

Those buildings I suddenly remembered seeing in Berlin, with their collective independences, seemed to propose a habitable solution to this very quandary and a joke that turned on its irony.



THE ÖKOHAUS SITS ON CORNELIUSSTRASSE, BY THE Landwehr Canal near the Tiergarten and the Bauhaus Archive, in Berlin. The Ökohaus, which means “eco-house,” was imagined as a collective project, led by the German architect Frei Otto, who won the Pritzker Prize shortly before his death, at eighty-nine, in 2015. It’s not listed as one of his notable works on his Wikipedia page, perhaps because other architects designed most of its visible components. As part of a plan commissioned for the 1987 International Building Exhibition and completed in 1992, eighteen of 1,300 applicants were invited to build homes with their own architects, on two of the concrete structures; Otto designed eight units in the third structure himself. The architects were constrained only by a few key ecological parameters, including large walls of windows for passive heat and light, as well as by construction methods that protected the forested grounds. Built to let city people live in communion with nature on the site of the former Vatican embassy, the dwellings congregate with so many trees and bushes that if I had not wandered past in winter, I might not have noticed them through the leaves. At around 1,400 square feet each, the twenty-six units are about twice as spacious as the average Toronto condo. They rest on the underlying concrete platforms, not on each other, so they are structurally and therefore aesthetically independent. The architects did not coordinate their plans, save for one afternoon meeting to insert mock-ups onto a common model, to ensure all the edges lined up. The project cost more than expected and took longer to build, but the anarchic yet harmonious patchwork result is bewitching, strange, and, by all accounts, livable.

The Ökohaus gives structure to a particular hope, one that we have all become familiar with during the pandemic: the idea that together we can accomplish a collective goal while operating as individuals alone. The place reminds us that we are all different, but to support each other, and the planet, we can live together and apart,

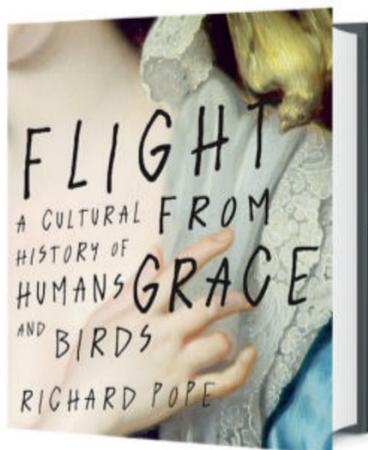
and this irregular shape of living can be beautiful and strong. The ecological cause of the project signals its modernity, but so does its reliance on variability within a pattern. In a 2008 manifesto, Patrik Schumacher, the current head of Zaha Hadid Architects, named this form of algorithmic architecture parametricism. Otto, whom some now call a proto-parametricist, offered the prospective inhabitants of the Ökohaus an algorithm to fulfill: he let its variable be their unique desires, and then he sat back to watch something marvellous and smart emerge.

It was important to Otto—whose first name, Frei, translates as “free” or “open”—that individuals have a sense of their homes as their own, so he pursued a concept of units built on a common structure like nests in a tree, rather than the beehive model of regular apartment buildings that allow for no individuality. In a short documentary from 2012, he said that with the Ökohaus, he had been driven by a question: How can a “poor terrestrial” achieve the satisfaction and beauty of creating one’s own home within a high-density urban area? In the crowd of the city, the challenge is to build something that provides for solitude and individual identity, while also helping residents support the social and physical needs of their communities, their collective life. There is a tenderness in Otto’s vision that may be traced to his experiences in the Second World War. In 1943, while still in school, he was drafted into the Luftwaffe. “Cities in flames seen from above,” he later recalled, “are one of the toughest semesters for an architectural student.”



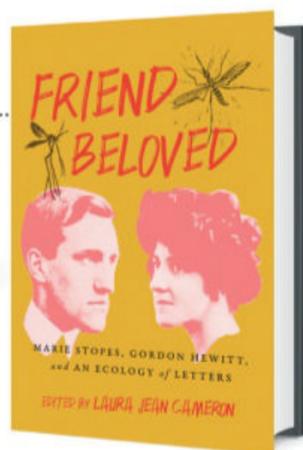
NOT AN INFERNO BUT THE CYTOKINE STORM OF a million immune systems, the pandemic overtook our cities and homes like fire but is taking its time to leave. As we wait for the post-vaccine aftermath, with no after yet in sight, we’re living out a history that has revealed the home as clink, getaway, and the scene of our weird solo work for the collective. The experience may revise how we view multi-unit residences. Human-scale examples of this mode of architecture, like the Ökohaus, imagine us as individual nesters building up our dwellings and ourselves as unique supports to the community, both part of the whole and comfortably alone. Sweet home, now, is a place where we can be trapped alone for the

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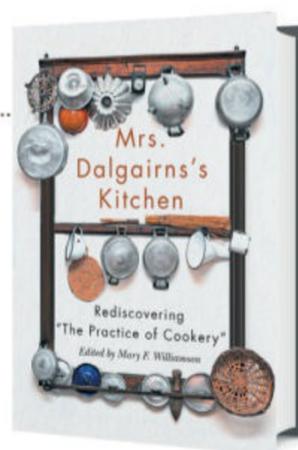
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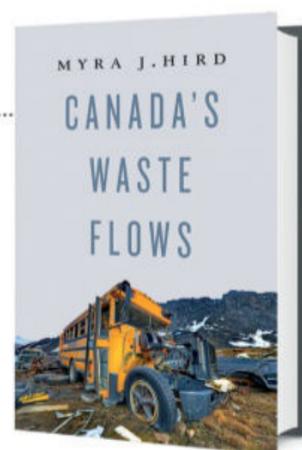
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good of everyone just beyond the walls and still feel like ourselves, as if we are free.

The house is above all a shelter for dreams, said the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, so being stuck at home has confined us all to a time of dreaming. Over the centuries, some rare individuals have sought this seclusion out, to achieve some further release of the spirit, but this past year, nations across the world have grown whole populations of anchorites, mystics whose strange visions are both the gifts and the symptoms of solitude. As each person's window on the internet arches over an individual world, together they form a novel cloister where we now circle each other in a kind of silence, pressing separation into intimacy to fire a new meditative tradition and, with luck, keep delirium at bay. We strain through our machines to see each other inhabiting common otherworlds and to feel, despite being glassed in by our screens, some measure of separated companionship. In quarantine, I have found, memories seem more real, but thoughts more deranged. Gathered by our loneliness into a moment of forced contemplation, we live our social lives mostly in reminiscence, and, as we pace the inner courtyards and gardens of the mind in a long dark artist's residency of the soul, faces surface from the past. So do houses. I was driven by restless isolation to googling my own memories; I opted, as though it were a choice, for time travel over tourism; and, behold, it worked.

Shut away from the past we've known, struggling not to be defined by the uncertainty of the future, it is a relief to pinpoint a recollection, clarify it, make it something to hold and return to, to live inside. Since that afternoon in Berlin, I now realize, I've gone noodling down the internet's cow paths many times, trying to find the Ökohaus, retrieving and then, for some reason, forgetting it again. My meandering walk from the archive hasn't ended: I'm still chasing little lives to look at, to better see my own. Each time I've gone through this ritual, I've found a bit more about the Ökohaus online: a whole blog post in English, a recent *T Magazine* piece. Now I too am adding to the pile. This time, going through my routine of looking up the house felt like visiting a lost way of spending and remembering time, not just because we could still travel then but because my stroll that long-ago day

She Came as Light

She came as light — darkness, a backdrop for her glow.
She moved with the slow speed of her walker
(before wheels were added to them) the constant
up-and-down rhythm.

He could hear
the scraping.
He was in bed,
the door wide open —

and saw the approaching light.

They say sightings happen
during the span of three days after death.

The soul, if you believe in the soul
as a form of energy, is released

from the body like the remaining warmth
after a television's switched off.

The nest inside the heat.

Catherine Graham

*Catherine Graham teaches creative writing at the University of Toronto. She is the author of *Æther: An Out-of-Body Lyric* and *The Most Cunning Heart*, a novel out next year.*

happened offline, in a prehistoric land before smartphones and streetside internet searches.

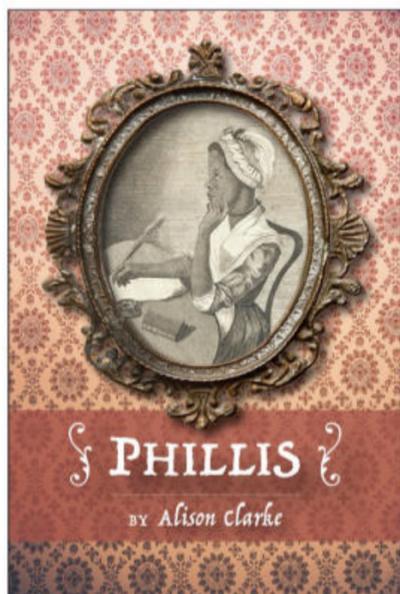
I didn't snap a photo of the house to text to a friend or post to a feed. But I've been haunted by it, always forgetting and remembering it, ever since. Now, as our social connections are not just deliberate but usually mediated by screens, retrieving some offline memory feels unusual, if not illicit, and then somewhere outside the fabric of everyday life. In the past, had I wanted to, I could have gone back to Berlin and searched, done interviews, visited more archives. But now I can't. The internet is all I have. So let this piece stand as a permanent memo to myself. Next time I forget the Ökohaus, I may even google this essay to remember what it stands for, and perhaps, rather than feeling haunted by it, I'll invite it in to nest longer with my own wandering soul.

Alone, we haunt our houses, while drawing vitality from the presence of others living around us, if not face to face, then side by side. I see this way of life in the collective action that has atomized us to slow the pandemic, I see it in how we socialize now, and I see it foreshadowed in the work we'd need to do to stave off our environmental disaster. I see it in how the Ökohaus imagines a way of hiving together while maintaining the individuality we need. Its version of collective life enshrines through its diverging windows one of the major opportunities of being a person: the chance to experience the world through your own perspective. Frei Otto's vision builds us all up, everything different and nothing the same but a common concrete floor supporting us, as our solitudes greet each other by looking out, alone together. ▲



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A VOICE FOR ALL TIME



PHILLIS Alison Clarke

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98 pages
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These poems reach through time to tell the remarkable story of Phillis Wheatley, the first African-American woman to publish a book of poetry, who did so while she was enslaved.

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—TERESA ZACKODNIK

Composite Sketches

Two tales of true crime

Basil Guinane

The Seventh Shot: On the Trail of Canada's .22-Calibre Killer

Ann Burke

Latitude 46 Publishing

174 pages, softcover and ebook

Watching the Devil Dance: How a Spree Killer Slipped through the Cracks of the Criminal Justice System

Will Toffan

Biblioasis

200 pages, softcover and ebook

THE BIBLICAL TALE OF CAIN AND ABEL is the original true crime story. Murder ballads were once quite popular throughout Scandinavia and the British Isles. Victorian penny dreadfuls, with their grisly chronicles of wrongdoing, often sold millions of copies. Magazines from *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* to *True Detective*, with its classic lurid covers, have long sated people's appetite for deadly sins.

In 1966, Truman Capote struck gold with *In Cold Blood*, which details the gruesome murders of the Clutter family, outside of Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959. That "non-fiction novel" opened the floodgates even wider. Since then, countless bestsellers have followed, about the likes of Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, and Charles Manson (Vincent Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter*, from 1974, being the most successful of them all).

Of course, Hollywood has also mined the true crime vein. HBO's *The Jinx* and *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* and Netflix's *Night Stalker* have enjoyed large audiences, as have feature films like *The Boston Strangler* and *The Zodiac Killer*. Charlize Theron won an Oscar for her portrayal of the serial killer Aileen Wuornos in *Monster*. But perhaps nothing has done more to expand the genre's appeal in recent years than podcasting. *Serial*, which re-examines a single case over an entire season, helped lead the way back in 2014. Seven years later, *Marie Claire* magazine has just ranked its fifty-seven favourite true crime podcasts, explaining, "There are some things a Lifetime movie cannot capture."

I've experienced the genre's marketability first-hand, as a reader, watcher, and journalist. I was on staff at *Maclean's* during the trial of Paul Bernardo, the serial rapist and killer who terrorized Scarborough, Ontario. From the time of his arrest, in February 1993, until well after his conviction, in September 1995, Bernardo was on our cover several times, as was his accomplice, Karla Homolka. There was never any question that the accounts of their misdeeds would do well on newsstands; we just knew that readers across the country wanted all the details.



Okay, hand over all the details.

"If it bleeds, it leads," the adage goes. But what explains true crime's deep-seated popularity? Does it speak to our inner Peeping Tom? Do we get a vicarious thrill from being present in our imaginations, witnessing what transpires from a very safe distance? Do we crave that little adrenaline rush we get when thinking that it could have happened to us?

However tantalizing for its entertainment value, true crime can also serve to bring genuine injustice to light. For a number of years, Robert Pickton preyed on marginalized women in British Columbia. Many of these women were involved in the sex trade or battled substance abuse. He was able to get away with it, in large part, because the authorities did not take their disappearances seriously. By writing about Pickton and his victims, Stevie Cameron and others showed how society—from law enforcement to social services and the justice system—too often dismisses those on the edges.

Done right, true crime can treat victims with respect and empathy; it can avoid sensationalism and make consumption of the genre a little less voyeuristic. Two new books do just this. Both offer detailed reports of horrific acts and provide insights into criminal motivations, as they trace the lives of infamous perpetrators, the impact of their crimes on their victims' friends and families, and the successes and failures of the justice system in bringing them to account.

Ann Burke's *The Seventh Shot* deals with the rapes and murders of two nurses, which took place north of Toronto in 1970 but remained

unsolved until 2000. The killer proved elusive, in part, because he was a police officer himself and knew how to cover his tracks. The book reads like a procedural drama, as Burke highlights the importance of little details and dogged pursuits. And she shows how valuable luck can be for solving a case with few leads.

Burke's title nods to the importance of luck and to what eventually helped authorities identify Ronald Glen West as the .22-Calibre Killer. West shot his first victim seven times, which prompted one officer to ask, "Who shoots someone six times and then stops to reload and shoot a seventh?" Eventually, West's gun—a nine-shot revolver—was found and helped answer the troubling question.

Burke, a former journalist and social worker, was drawn to the West case for a couple of reasons. For one, she attended high school with the killer in the early 1960s. "I felt a very personal and compelling call to document this story," she writes, noting "the shocking crimes, the interminable wait for justice spanning nearly thirty years, and the actions of those who were to finally reveal the identity of 'the ghost.'" This personal link was heightened when, as a social worker, she helped thwart another murder by another "homicidal cop." These "strange parallels" inform her meticulous narrative.

The Seventh Shot burrows into West's personal life and criminal past, including a string of violent robberies. "I don't leave witnesses," he once told investigators. But Burke finds witnesses in the form of family members and

colleagues who knew West, whom she remembers as “a rather odd young man who seemed particularly uncomfortable around women.” She thoughtfully profiles the officers who eventually solved the case — one of Canada’s oldest cold cases at the time — from their early careers to where they are now. As for her former classmate, he remains behind bars.

Will Toffan’s *Watching the Devil Dance*, meanwhile, tells the story of Matthew Charles Lamb and his June 1966 shooting spree in Windsor, Ontario, which left two people dead and one wounded. The description of his crime and his subsequent apprehension is riveting, but it is his trial and what transpired after his conviction that makes for a truly troubling story.

Lamb was acquitted of murder by reason of insanity, a verdict that saved him from the death penalty, on the books in Canada until 1976. Instead, he was sentenced, for an indefinite period, to the Oak Ridge Facility for the Criminally Insane, in Penetanguishene, Ontario. Six years later, he was released and joined the Rhodesian Light Infantry, where he served as a lance corporal until his death in combat in 1976.

Like Burke, Toffan has an association with the story he tells: he was next-door neighbours with one of Lamb’s victims, and he had talked to her as she left her house on the night of her murder. It’s something that has tormented him ever since: “With this book, I am going back to that first ghost that haunted me, to tell the whole story for the first time — now informed by modern understandings of criminal psychology.” Toffan combines his personal connection to his subject with his background as a historian and former RCMP officer. He draws upon numerous interviews with the killer’s family and acquaintances to produce a profile of a disturbed young man — one who seemed predestined to kill.

In detailing Lamb’s trial, Toffan betrays a slightly jaundiced view of psychiatry and its relationship to calculating criminals: “Law enforcement officers have long been familiar with the psychopath’s predictable antics and proven ability to con medical professionals,” he writes. “The psychopath’s objective is fairly simple: to portray himself as incapable of appreciating the nature of the crimes he commits in order to minimize punishment.” Toffan’s fellow officers used to describe this determination to confuse and manipulate as the “devil dance” (hence the book’s title). “According to his few friends,” Toffan continues, “Lamb learned the essentials of the devil dance at a much earlier age, mastering the manipulative verbal skills and hyper-physical displays of performance art at which the psychopath naturally excels.” Psychopath or not, Lamb ultimately received treatment at Oak Ridge that almost beggars belief.

In similar ways, *The Seventh Shot* and *Watching the Devil Dance* deal compassionately with those who were most traumatized by the loss of friends and family members. West’s victims had young children who grew up motherless, while Lamb’s targets had friends who witnessed the shootings and lived with survivors’ guilt for the rest of their lives. In both cases, the families had a nagging fear that the murderers would one day strike again. And that is perhaps the saddest and most compelling aspect of true crime stories, no matter what form they take: the gripping demonstration of how violence doesn’t end once a case is solved. It lives on, embedded in the psyches of the survivors. ▲

UNLAWFUL ACTS

The Wrong Lake

What really happened to the prospectors?

Laura Robinson

Cold Case North: The Search for James Brady and Absolom Halkett
Michael Nest, with Deanna Reder and Eric Bell
University of Regina Press
312 pages, softcover

AS JAMES BRADY AND ABSOLOM Halkett waved goodbye to the twin-engine Beech plane on June 7, 1967, they did not realize they’d been dropped off at the wrong lake. The men would soon have recognized the pilot’s mistake, though, and they would have known to sit tight. But when a third man, Berry Richards, arrived with more supplies on June 16, all he found was an abandoned camp, with a canoe tied to a birch tree. Richards knew Brady, a Métis leader and Second World War veteran, and Halkett, a band councillor, would not have tried tackling the dense bush alone; he reported them missing to the RCMP.

It was Richards who had hired Brady and Halkett to look for uranium in the rugged mix of Canadian Shield, boreal forest, and muskeg that is northern Saskatchewan. Prospecting was just one of their many skills. Brady was also something of a radical intellectual. The walls of his cabin were lined with books, everything from the Bible to *The Communist Manifesto*; he spoke Michif, English, French, even Latin. In 1932, he’d helped found the Association des Métis d’Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, and in 1963, he’d tried to convince Tommy Douglas that the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation should address the plight of Indigenous peoples (the revered socialist rebuffed his advice).

Although it was already June when the men went missing, fresh snowfall had obliterated any tracks. Nonetheless, skilled trackers found clues that didn’t add up. Why would Brady and Halkett tie their canoe to a birch tree, when everyone knows birch roots have a tendency to disintegrate? One respected tracker, McIvor Eninew, found “quite a bundle of white moss and straw (reeds) with stems as wide as a man’s thumb” near the shore. But it didn’t belong there. And there was also a mark on a rock, from where a boat — not a canoe — seemed to have docked. Still, the Mounties chalked up the disappearance to “misadventure” and ended their search after less than a month.

Rumours have been whispered ever since. Was the settling of political scores involved? Had the two men hit a deposit worth killing for? One member of the La Ronge community, Frank Tomkins, never believed Brady and Halkett had, as the police concluded, “gotten so lost in the bush that they had decided to try to walk out.” He was always sure that his friends’ bodies had

been dumped in the lake, where the cold temperatures would have preserved them for decades. And, eventually, he decided he had found a resource to help solve the case: his niece, the Indigenous studies professor Deanna Reder.

“No one would mistake me for an outdoors-woman,” Reder writes near the beginning of *Cold Case North*. “I do not think that I have the ability to lead searches on land or under water.” But in 2016, she agreed to help her uncle, then nearly ninety, to look for answers. Her cousin Eric Bell, from Lac La Ronge Indian Band, joined her, as did Michael Nest, a researcher from Montreal. Together, they searched the Lower, Middle, and Upper Foster Lakes and the surrounding forest, as well as archival maps and registries.

Nest, Reder, and Bell draw some conclusions in their book. They rule out Richards as a suspect, for example, as well as the young pilot who dropped the men off. They also point out that the Foster Lakes region never proved to have enough uranium worth mining. And while circumstantial evidence seems to implicate someone from the men’s home community, most people still won’t name names.

Even without solving the mystery, *Cold Case North* underscores the long-standing indifference the RCMP and other police forces have shown Indigenous people, including, of course, the thousands of missing and murdered women. The book also places northern players within the larger history of uranium and nuclear power in this country, a history that too often focuses on southern dramas at Chalk River, Darlington, Pickering, and Douglas Point.

For decades, Ottawa didn’t talk about how uranium was first transported from the mines to the shipping containers that took it to power plants and, before that, to the Manhattan Project. But in 1999, the Ontario filmmaker Peter Blow produced *Village of Widows*, a searing documentary about the Sahtu Dene, who once carried the material in cloth sacks — on their backs and in their canoes. The year before, a delegation had travelled from the Northwest Territories to Japan, to apologize for their community’s role in developing the atomic bomb. At home, however, they have yet to receive an apology from the government that exposed them to the radiation that made Little Boy and Fat Man possible.

Whether in the ‘40s, in the ‘60s, or today, uranium veins are worth fortunes — far more, in the eyes of many, than the lives of two Indigenous prospectors. While *Cold Case North* doesn’t offer a lot of answers about James Brady and Absolom Halkett — or any of the others who have lost their lives so that southern Canada could have seemingly endless supplies of energy — it does include many important lessons about this country, then and now. ▲

I Must Confess

Zsuzsi Gartner's debut novel

Aaron Kreuter

The Beguiling

Zsuzsi Gartner

Hamish Hamilton

288 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

BETWEEN 1980 AND 1995, ANONYMOUS callers in New York could leave voice messages on an answering machine known as the Apology Line. The recorded regrets were fascinating and sometimes terrifying, from a woman who was sorry for being white, rich, and female to men who admitted to mugging and even murder. The Apology Project, the brainchild of the conceptual artist Allan Bridge, tapped into the need to share, to feel heard, and to be absolved. It also revealed the dark weight of secret offences, and the cost to the confessor.

A similar sense of morbid curiosity drives Zsuzsi Gartner's debut novel, *The Beguiling*. Lucy, the first-person narrator, develops the ability to draw confessions from strangers, neighbours, anyone after her beloved cousin Zoltán's death. (He commits suicide following a bizarre event in which he is buried alive by a mysterious gathering of women.) Wherever Lucy goes, people approach her, speaking in "Mandarin, Oji-Cree, American Sign Language." Miraculously, she understands it all. "I had transformed into some kind of confession magnet or a lay confessor," she says. "A flesh-and-blood Wailing Wall."

At first, the revelations provide tidbits of rule breaking and joyful nihilism: "The head caterer came up behind me and announced that she had squirted her own breast milk into the cold mint-pea-soup shooters. She was just that tired of it all." As the novel progresses from Zoltán's death in 2011 into the near future of 2024, the confessions become bigger, more macabre and fantastical. Toward the end, it's not just humans who bare their souls to Lucy but plants, dogs, cats. "And why should they not have things to confess?" she says. "Everything was so alive, so excruciatingly alive and clamouring to be heard."

GARTNER HAS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED TWO collections of short fiction: *All the Anxious Girls on Earth*, in 1999, and *Better Living through Plastic Explosives*, in 2011, which was shortlisted for the Giller. With her new title, she is on familiar ground, as she treats many of the confessions as complete narratives. While Lucy's story provides the frame, her journey through grief, the fallout of her divorce, her guilt (or lack thereof) over abandoning her young daughter, and her preference for her dog take a back seat. One of the few stand-alone plot lines, Lucy's brief affair with Oisín, an Irish wannabe terrorist, is nearly indis-

tinguishable from the other stories that crowd the book. In an interview with *Quill & Quire* last year, Gartner explained, "I don't like writing connective tissue and making links obvious." In this, she is sometimes too successful.

The novel casts a wide geographic net across the Pacific Northwest, Toronto, Ireland, Germany, Australia, and Suzhou, China. It's at its strongest when set in Vancouver — where the author lives — and in particular the city's east end, with its "tidal funk of caffeine, nicotine, weed, and moustache wax" that ebbs and flows along Commercial Drive. Themes of transgression connect the disparate locales, as the stories brood on cultural mores, laws, marriage, gender



A place of confession.

dynamics, religious obligations, taboos, and higher morality.

The longer confessions are the meat and potatoes of these pages. Here, Gartner's imagination, keen eye, and narrative brilliance are most alive. In one tale, a man named Martin relives the time when, as a boy, he burned down the refectory of his Catholic school — "a petri dish of ritual run amok" — in a jealous fit sparked by mistaken identity. In another episode, a man ensconced in the avant-garde art world of 1970s Germany changes sex in order to make the woman he loves notice him. A fetus kills his twin sister in the womb, strangling her with her umbilical cord as she gouges his eyes out. A woman frames a different set of twins for a gruesome murder

so that they won't leave Ireland for their native Lithuania. Some of these topics — especially blindness as a sign of bad behaviour and the trans storyline — are dealt with too cavalierly. Gartner often short-circuits any critique by ironically referring back to these incidents later in the text. But the glee in telling inappropriate or culturally insensitive stories, mixed with an overall apolitical outlook, at times confuses the intent.

Add to this elusiveness Gartner's writing style, which is dense with allusion, wordplay, metaphor, and references. Take Zoltán's observation shortly before his death: "The air swished with feminine voices, like taxis whizzing by him in a downpour." Or Lucy's description of giving birth: "The pain came screeching into the station right on schedule — at first bold and show-offy, a Norma Desmond, a Lady Gaga of pains; then cavernous, voracious, lacerating my nerve sheaths like a skua gull tearing apart a baby penguin." Gartner's propulsive, rhythmic energy carries the reader through the narratives, and through the odd subject-matter bump.

In its flow of characters who come in and out of the narrator's life, the book starts off as a distant relation of Rachel Cusk's *Outline* trilogy, especially when Lucy attends a writers' festival. Like Cusk's narrator Faye, Lucy draws people and their accounts to her. Unlike Faye, who operates as a window into others' lives, Lucy is pushed by the weight of these confessions to a mental breakdown (a similar fate befell the artist Allan Bridge with his *Apology Line*). By the last quarter of the novel, the Cusk association seems a distant memory. *The Beguiling* turns into something more akin to George Saunders's explosive stories or André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* — and not just because there are, indeed, talking dogs. At the decidedly postmodernist ending, where the fabric of time fractures, identity disintegrates, and narrative cohesion collapses, things — which had more or less stayed within the realm of realism — go blissfully wacky. These are the most exciting and compelling pages of this challenging, kaleidoscopic book.

A confounding question remains: What is the novel about? (As Lucy herself wonders, "Surely the confessions had to mean something.") There is the author's refrain, "Those cracks where the light gets in," which riffs on Leonard Cohen's famous line in "Anthem" — itself a gloss on kabbalistic thought. Another possible response is the idea that everything has a story to tell and that those tales deserve to be heard. Perhaps the book is simply a virtuosic snapshot of what Lucy calls "the unravelling human experiment across the planet." In the end, the meaning doesn't matter so much as *The Beguiling's* range, its insight, and its sense of risk and experiment, which yield dazzling results. ▲

Significant Others

An impressive collection by Jack Wang

David Staines

We Two Alone

Jack Wang

House of Anansi Press

296 pages, softcover and ebook

AFTER GROWING UP IN VANCOUVER, Jack Wang studied in Ontario, Arizona, and Florida before taking up a creative writing position at Ithaca College, in New York. The author of several children's books, Wang now adds to his bibliography an impressive first book for adults, *We Two Alone*, with stories that capture significant moments for the sprawling Chinese diaspora. It's a collection that announces an important new voice in contemporary fiction.

The fast-paced "The Nature of Things" opens in the 1920s with Frank and Alice Yeung, who have "known each other all their lives, ever since they were urchins scrabbling over the one and only playground in Vancouver's Chinatown." Then their lives change. With no medical school in the city, Frank travels to Toronto for his degree: "No one was surprised that he wanted to go to medical school, even though he couldn't be a doctor, not really, at least not in Canada." After he graduates, the only job open to him is in Shanghai, where the married couple arrive in fall 1936. Frank makes his rounds at the hospital; Alice becomes pregnant. During the Sino-Japanese War, Frank asks his wife to leave for Wuhu, 300 kilometres west of the city, to reside with his aunt and uncle and await him there. No word is heard from him again. In time, Alice escapes from China. Much later, her only grandchild, the son of her own son, will kick a soccer ball on King's College Circle and walk "in cap and gown through Convocation Hall in Toronto, just like his grandfather."

In this story, as in five others and a concluding novella, Wang traces the evolution of the Chinese immigrant experience by focusing on individuals, from a sixteen-year-old boy trying to play hockey in Vancouver to an aging actor struggling with his failing marriage and memory in New York City. No matter their age or where they live, these characters are outsiders to the world around them. Even in China, Alice Yeung visits "a little park whose first rule, posted on a sign outside, was *The Gardens are reserved for the Foreign Community*. All of this made Shanghai feel painfully familiar."

In "The Valkyries," which opens the collection, an ominous foreboding hangs over Vancouver: "These days it was risky, leaving Chinatown at night. Just last month a man out on his own had been kicked and beaten. Now that the Great War was over, jobs were scarce,

and angry young men were once again roving the streets, seeking rough justice." Nelson is a young laundry boy who "just wanted to play hockey." But the coaches ignore his skills and the other players refuse to pass him the puck. Only when disguised as a girl does he succeed at joining a local league. Ultimately, though, he meets that rough justice in both the white and the Chinese community. "Did you think I wouldn't see this?" the laundry's owner says when he finally confronts him. "That no one would recognize you?"

"The Night of Broken Glass" is the story of a Chinese consul general in Vienna who tries to save as many people as possible at the beginning



Snapshots of a sprawling diaspora.

of the Second World War. "My father had continued to sign visas until he was found out and a black mark placed in his file," the narrator says near the end. "I see him still, gazing into the distance, mourning all that couldn't be saved."

Wang turns to Kabega, the Chinese area of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in "Everything In Between." There a doctor and his family are repeatedly scorned in acts of apartheid-era racism, especially when looking for a new house. "At last Ah Ba said, 'We're moving,'" the doctor's daughter recalls. The family abandons South Africa for Australia. "I am, of course, leaving out a good deal. It wasn't always easy, but we made the best of things." In Australia, they watch "the final and still more terrible paroxysms of

apartness on television" and know they had "done the right thing."

In "Belsize Park," the son of immigrants meets a girl at Oxford: "I couldn't quite believe I had fallen in with someone like Fiona, so clever and lovely and thoroughly English." But when they visit her home in London, they soon realize their budding relationship can never sustain the forced politeness of her parents. They also know she will never meet his parents, who run a takeout shop in Stoke-on-Trent. "I saw it all," he confesses as their plans unravel. "The long walk back to the house, the longer train ride home, the baffled looks of my parents."

Beyond Vancouver, Shanghai, Vienna, Port Elizabeth, and London, the stories in *We Two Alone* encompass Tallahassee, Los Angeles, and Boston. Wang is committed to rendering his backdrops accurately; with perfectly presented details, he showcases the disharmony of the Chinese diaspora, as individuals endure salient moments in twentieth-century history and more recent times.

♦

WITH THEIR FULLY DEVELOPED CHARACTERS, authentic settings, and formidable plots, the short stories that make up more than half of *We Two Alone* paint impassioned portraits of those trapped by the label of "other"—a designation that separates and dislodges, marginalizes and defeats. Beaten, reviled, or abused, these individuals witness and suffer "the paroxysms of apartness" in countless ways.

The closing novella, "We Two Alone," is the fictional biography of Leonard Xiao, "the founder, director, and lead actor of the Asian American Shakespeare Company." Narrated in the third person, it weaves back and forth in time, touching upon Leonard's upbringing, his courtship of Emily Gardner, their childless marriage, their pursuit of acting careers in L.A. and New York, their separation after twenty years, his ambivalent relationship with his father (a Harvard professor), and, finally, his inability to recall his lines: "One moment his mind was full and the next it was empty, like a lake instantly drained, and the feeling was eerie. He scoured his memory, expecting words to leap to his tongue, to rush back in, but none came." There is no overt animosity here, as there is elsewhere in the book, only the tired responses of a failed and failing man taking refuge in a self-restricted realm.

We Two Alone shows that Jack Wang is a master of the short story, a writer who has mapped his own space, neither Canadian nor American, nor anywhere else. Each episode in this collection is a moving tribute to its characters as well as an indictment of the ostracism that remains when racist taunts and human failures continue to bedevil the modern world. ▲

A Hopeful Reckoning

IN THE IRISH INDIE FILM *ONCE*, TWO struggling musicians write a song called “Falling Slowly,” an appeal of sorts to “raise your hopeful voice.” Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová didn’t have nursing homes in mind, of course, but when I set out to investigate the best in long-term care, those lyrics, that sentiment, followed me.

It travelled with me across Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands, where I visited seniors’ communities that aspired for more. In these homes, residents were not shut up indoors, confined to the TV room, but lived with freedom and purpose. How energizing it was to witness the inclusion of people with dementia in everyday activities, to see the embrace of daily walks and dance parties. These places offered the familiarity of small households, where residents could tend the garden or roast marshmallows over the firepit. So-called dementia villages had plans to mix generations by incorporating day-cares, libraries, and cafés. Each one rejected the industry standard of boredom over risk.

Still, this idea of pushing for change by examining the positive was not immediately apparent — at least not to an investigative reporter. I’ve spent nearly twenty years at the *Toronto Star* focusing on nursing home abuse and neglect. These are the articles that made people cry, including a former Ontario health minister, who promised a revolution. Some stories led to incremental change, even new legislation. Yet tips on troubled facilities kept coming.

In 2018, I wrote a story called “The Fix” about a dementia unit that had transformed itself from an institution into a community. Half an hour outside Toronto, Malton Village Long-Term Care had freed staff from the traditional task-focused system to allow them to emotionally connect with residents. When the piece ran, granddaughters emailed with exclamation marks of joy. Sons and daughters called, looking for homes for loved ones that offered life, not solitude. This reaction, the outpouring of elation, was the inspiration for my book.

Not long ago, a retired city councillor told me that to transform ideas, one must first plant the seeds of new thinking. “Change is glacially slow

until the philosophy and principles become embedded in the culture of the organization,” he said, after reading one of my stories. “Keep leading the charge.” If “The Fix” was my contribution to the seed, then now, with a pandemic forcing a reckoning in seniors’ living arrangements, it’s time to grow the idea of relationship-focused care. It fits right in with current calls to create national standards, address funding issues, and establish minimum hours of daily care.

The musician Jann Arden has written eloquently about her mother’s experience with dementia, and when she read my book, she said that it “managed to give hope to something that for the most part seems hopeless.” These words take me back to a group of women I met at a retirement community in North Carolina. They had all spent careers in positions of power — one member had worked as a high-level bureaucrat in the U.S. Department of State — and they were now coming to terms with cognitive decline. One woman confessed that she struggled to remember names, but rather than feel embarrassed, she chose to greet everyone with a simple “Hi!” They spoke about dignity and choice. They spoke about family, music, and the detailed reminders they had to keep in order to access their voice mail. They laughed. They were honest. And while memory loss is devastating, it was clear that they were still *living* because their humanity was nurtured.

It might seem strange to publish a book with a positive outlook during a pandemic that has ravaged nursing homes. It’s true that COVID-19 has exposed the terrible, systemic flaws in long-term care. It’s also true that these problems existed before the virus arrived and, if we’re not careful, they will remain after it’s brought under control. The reality is that our population is aging. There isn’t much time to transform senior care before vast numbers of us will need it.

When “Falling Slowly” won an Oscar, the previously unknown songwriter Markéta Irglová told the crowd, “Hope at the end of the day connects us all, no matter how different we are.” Now is the moment to raise our voices and demand a better way forward. Old age should be a privilege, not a punishment. ▲

Moira Welsh is the author of Happily Ever Older.

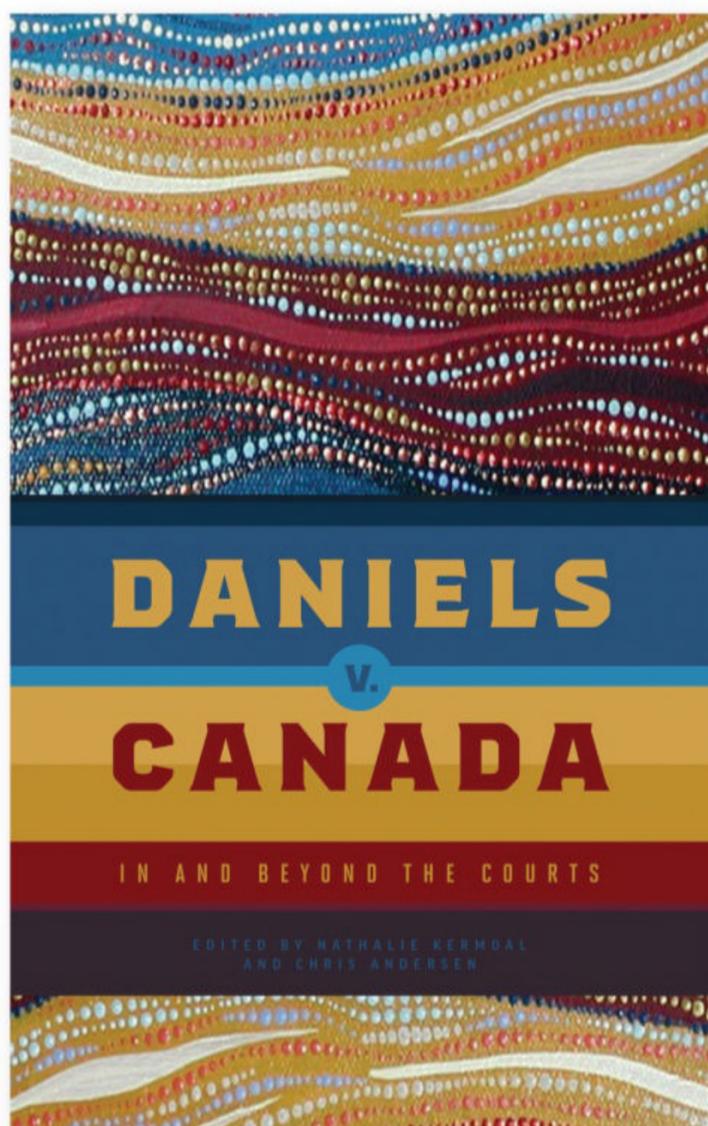


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