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**MARK NKALUBO NABETA** Unrest **MORGAN CAMPBELL** Race and the Media  
**DAN DUNSKY** China's Moment **SHEREE FITCH** Writing through Grief

# Literary Review of Canada

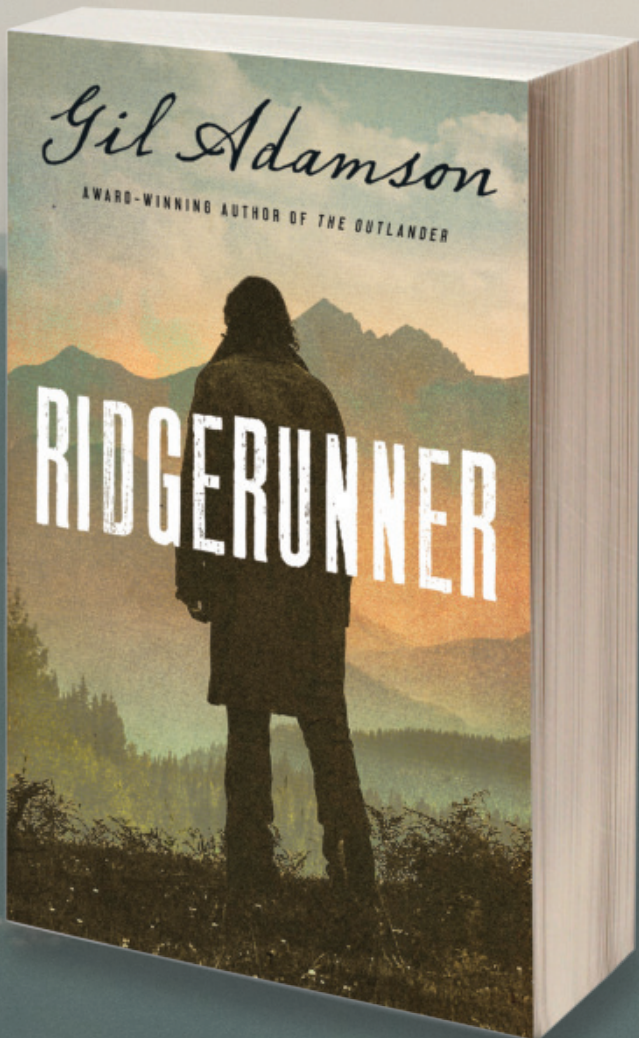
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## FIRST WORD

Summer School

*Kyle Wyatt*

3

## THE PUBLIC SQUARE

False Notions

Yes, certain conditions continue to exist

*Mark Nkalubo Nabeta*

5

Under the Guise of Research

Science and subjugation

*John Baglow*

6

An Act of Protest

Desmond Cole says his piece

*Morgan Campbell*

8

## THIS AND THAT

Waiting on Tables

When no one's being served

*Michael Humeniuk*

9

Uncorked

Keeping spirits up in isolation

*David Wilson*

10

## MONEY MATTERS

Heart and Solo

Beyond the Silicon Valley fallacy

*Rob Csernyik*

12

## THE ARGUMENT

China's Moment

Reckoning with an empire state of mind

*Dan Dunskey*

13

## PANDEMIC

A Northern Light

Nunavut's hope to avoid the outbreak

*Sarah Rogers*

15

## COMPELLING PEOPLE

National Personality

The legacy of Marcel Cadieux

*Bruce K. Ward*

16

## BYGONE DAYS

Harsh Treatment

Perspectives on internment

*J. L. Granatstein*

18

Neighbourhood Watch

Remembering a city of old

*Barry Jordan Chong*

20

Risky Business

The journeys of human curiosity

*Gregory P. Marchildon*

22

## GADGETS AND GIZMOS

Lawgivers of the Mind

The moral coding of artificial intelligence

*Brendan Howley*

24

## PLAYTIME

Snuffed Torch

Can the Olympic myth survive?

*Laura Robinson*

26

## THE ARTS

North and South

Cuba's Orwellian mystery

*Amanda Perry*

28

## LITERATURE

Trying Situations

A new collection from David Bergen

*David Staines*

30

An Urgent Realm

Mallory Tater's dark debut

*Cecily Ross*

31

## BACKSTORY

Labyrinth

*Sheree Fitch*

32

## POETRY

"Bluff"

by Neil Surkan, p. 11

"Commuter (Ontario)"

by Laurie D. Graham, p. 19

"Is It Safe?"

by Ronna Bloom, p. 21

"Twenty-First-Century Sonnet"

by Daniel Goodwin, p. 29

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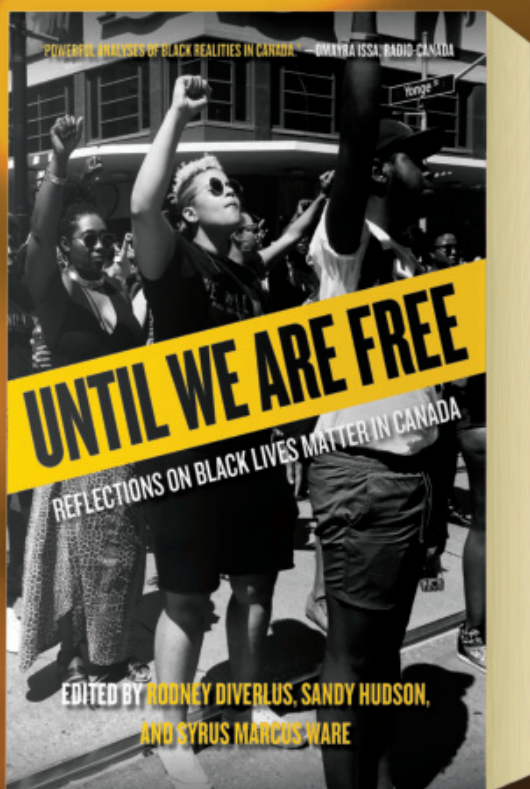
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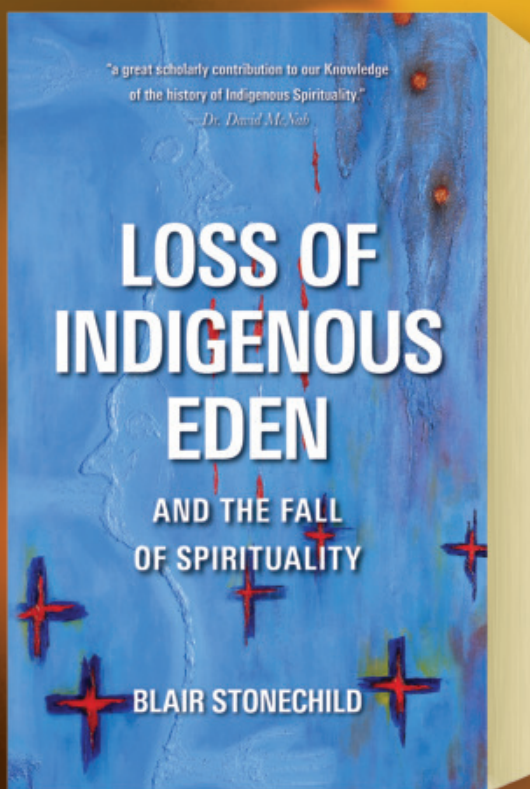
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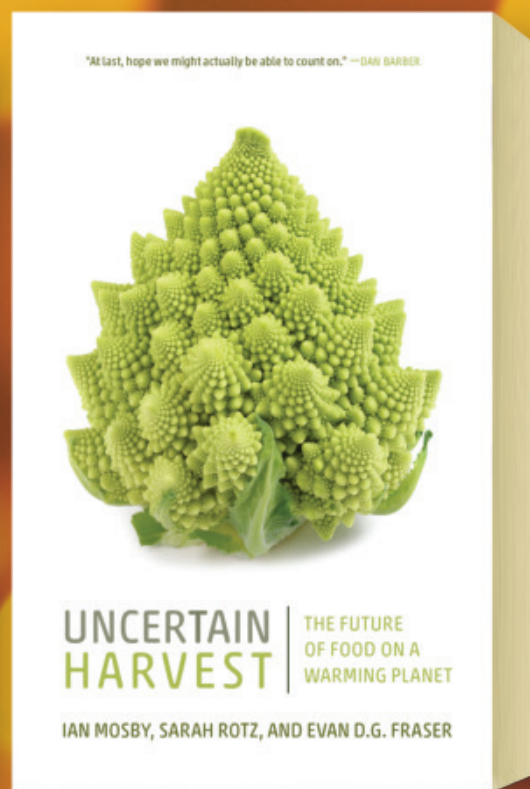
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## Summer School

**T**WO SUMMERS AGO, I DROVE TO Utica, New York, for my favourite road race. As I was picking up my bib, I happened to meet one of my heroes, the four-time Boston Marathon champion Bill Rodgers. He noticed the Capricorn tattoo on my right arm and fancied a chat. I couldn't believe my luck—Boston Billy is also a Capricorn. When Rodgers learned I had come down from Toronto, the conversation took a turn. All he wanted to talk about was Tom Longboat.

Born in 1887, the Onondaga runner from Six Nations of the Grand River, in Ontario, was a dominant force in athletics. He was virtually untouchable between 1906 and 1912, winning major races throughout Canada and the United States and setting numerous national and world records in the process. Before he served in the First World War, the Bulldog of Britannia represented Canada at the 1908 Olympics, where he collapsed in the marathon because of the heat. He turned pro the following year—a decision that polite society frowned upon.

Longboat is a modern-day idol, and not just to me and Bill Rodgers. One of the larger running groups in Toronto is named after him, Canada Post put him on a stamp in 2000, and two years ago even Google celebrated his legacy with a Doodle. But despite how we remember him, despite his accomplishments on the track and on the roads, the press didn't exactly lionize Longboat at the time. "He hated to train," *Maclean's* wrote long ago, "and he was a fool with his money." Many saw Longboat as a lazy, dim-witted natural talent gone to waste. "He made his own decisions about training, racing and the conduct of his life," Bruce Kidd wrote in 1983. "The criticism he received was a measure of his independence and self-determination."

In her new book, *Reclaiming Tom Longboat: Indigenous Self-Determination in Canadian Sport*, Janice Forsyth describes the runner as a "tragic hero," whose reputation largely hinged "on the desires and prejudices of writers who fused together ideas about nation, race, masculinity, and class to create a composite picture that barely resembled the man." Her title notwithstanding, Forsyth focuses not on Longboat but on the athletic prize the Department of Indian

Affairs created in his name, in 1951. Originally designed "as a tool for Indigenous assimilation," the annual Tom Longboat Awards are now administered by the non-profit Aboriginal Sport Circle and have been gradually transformed "into a symbol of cultural pride." By better understanding that often rocky transformation, Canada can better support Indigenous athletes—something the Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified as imperative with five of its ninety-four calls to action.

Throughout *Reclaiming Tom Longboat*, Forsyth dismantles a "widespread belief in the apolitical nature of sport" and shows how generations of athletes—from students in residential schools to men and women of today, on reserve and off—have had to defy racially inflected barriers in order to compete on their own terms. It's an extension of the wider prejudices and bias that many continue to deny even exists.

"It would be helpful to have some more details," Rex Murphy wrote in the *National Post*, on June 1, as he cavalierly dismissed recent statements by Justin Trudeau, Catherine McKenna, and many others who have acknowledged the racism and discrimination that shape Canadian society today. "Where do they manifest themselves?" he asked.

*Reclaiming Tom Longboat* is one of many texts that skeptics like Murphy might consult for answers. Indeed, North America tends to celebrate athletes of colour who adopt dominant assumptions about performance, competition, and comportment—on the field of play and off. North America tends to use sports as "collateral for teaching obedience," as Forsyth puts it. North America tends to link athletics to the most emotionally charged symbols of nationhood—the flag, the flyover, the anthem. All the while, too much of North America still has a problem when an athlete of colour makes his or her own decisions, speaks out, kneels down, or runs through the wrong neighbourhood.

I won't be driving down to Utica this summer, and none of us will be competing in road races for a while. But we can all spend time acknowledging and talking about uncomfortable truths made even more urgent by the injustices that are once again rocking communities throughout the United States and Canada. ▲

*Kyle Wyatt, Editor-in-Chief*

“This has been an extraordinary year for history writing, with some truly exceptional books that have changed how we look at the past. As we’ve all been learning during lockdown, making sense of the world around us has never been more important.”

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continue to publish throughout  
the pandemic. But there may be  
slight delays along the way.



# False Notions

Yes, certain conditions continue to exist

*Mark Nkalubo Nabeta*

**T**HE FIRST TIME A COP CAR STOPPED ME, I was living near York University. As I jogged down Gosford Boulevard, two police officers pulled alongside to “have a chat,” because I was clearly “new to the area.” Years later I moved to Summerhill, where I’d run along the quiet, lush streets of midtown Toronto. One of my favourite routes brought me from Yonge Street to Avenue Road, where I tackled that infamous uphill stretch along De La Salle College. One day, a woman flagged me down from her porch, asking where I lived and why I ran past her house so often. She wasn’t asking so she could welcome me to the neighbourhood.

In 2018, around this time of year, I was in great shape and training for a half-marathon. On a lunchtime run, with my shirt off on an extremely hot day, I passed a construction site. Waiting for a light to change, I heard some yelling. I looked around and caught several not-so-welcoming gestures aimed my way. Apparently, running without a shirt is one of the many things “we” do thinking we’re tough. But the construction guys reminded me that “we” aren’t tough at all—we’re just a bunch of slaves who ended up here. “Put your fucking shirt on,” one yelled as another reminded me this wasn’t Caribana. I’m of Ugandan and Burkinabe descent, but, hey, we’re all the same, right?

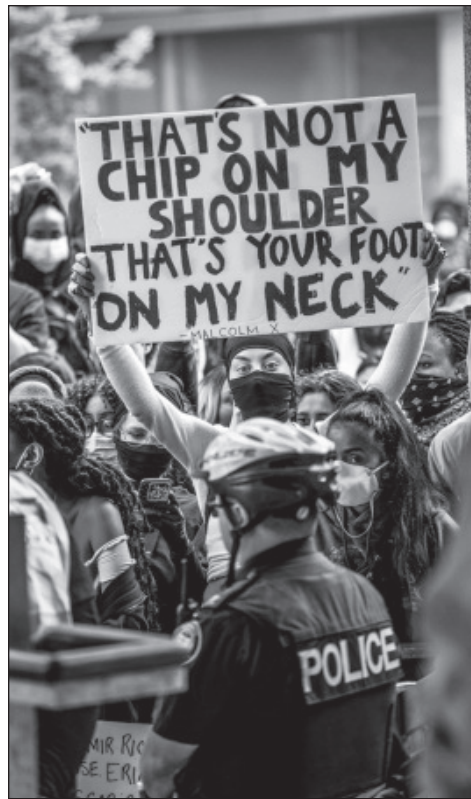
Running is sacred. It’s the one physical activity almost every able-bodied person can do to celebrate our shared humanity. It’s pure, and has given me incredible joy. But on May 8, I texted the artist Bank Moody: “How are we supposed to feel free when the simplest expression of freedom costs us our lives?” We had heard the news of Ahmaud Arbery, whose brutal murder and its subsequent cover-up in Georgia had finally come to light. I couldn’t quite summarize how tired, angry, and exasperated I felt. Not only about Arbery and the plight of black men in America, but also about the naive perception of race relations here. This story hit different for me: that runner could easily have been me.

AS I HAVE DONE HUNDREDS OF TIMES, ON SUNNY and snowy days alike, Arbery went out for a jog on February 23, in a community not far from his mother’s home. As he made his way down an empty road, he was chased, cut off, and confronted by two armed white men in a pickup; a third man followed close behind, filming the scene on a cellphone. Moments later, the former star athlete was dead.

Arbery was twenty-five. He was unarmed and wearing a white T-shirt in broad daylight. Allegedly, he matched the description of a local trespasser. But his real crime was running while black—one of the many transgressions in

America that white men with guns consider to be punishable by death. This is just more evidence of how the “social contract” doesn’t apply equally. From runners to birdwatchers, people of colour don’t get to follow the rules that white people do. Instead, we’re governed by what the Jamaican philosopher Charles W. Mills called the “racial contract”—a set of formal and informal dos and don’ts that perpetuate subjugation, discrimination, inequality, and oppression.

Racism is a global problem, and Canada is far from immune, as a United Nations panel of experts reported in 2017. But the racial contract does operate differently here. When I landed at Toronto Pearson seventeen years ago, I knew



A sign of the times.

that my experience wouldn’t be perfect, but I knew it would be different than if I were south of the border. And though running while black has not cost me my life, I can’t say that I ever live carefree. To be a black person, and a runner at that, is to be on constant alert, acutely aware of your surroundings and how you are perceived.

Even in the rain or the snow, I always run along certain streets with my hood down, so as to look non-threatening—so it’s obvious that I have nothing to hide. I always remove my earbuds when running through specific areas, so I can hear if I’m being yelled at or if anyone tries to pull up on me. Over the years, others have shared similar experiences and practices with me. And I am speaking only about running here;

our caution must extend well into other parts of our lives, for own protection and preservation.

Running is how I discover cities all over the world: I lace up, point myself toward the landmarks, and get moving. I travel everywhere with a pair of running shoes. But I also understand what I am allowed to do—and not allowed to do—as a six-foot-four black man who weighs 215 pounds. I know how the rules apply to me, because to many eyes, I am an all-powerful threat that requires extreme force to confront, subdue, and deter.

In that sense, I could also have easily been George Floyd, killed on May 25 while handcuffed on the ground and pleading for his life—with a white Minneapolis police officer’s knee pressing down on his neck while others stood idly by. The forty-six-year-old purportedly resisted arrest, a claim supported by no eyewitness accounts. What the evidence does show is a supposed custodian of the peace exerting extreme force and violence against an unarmed, shackled, and defenceless large black male. “I can’t breathe,” words we’ve heard too many times, are now among the last words of a man who had moved to a new city, hoping to live a better life.

I HAVE COME BACK ALIVE FROM EVERY RUN, AND I am grateful that our gun laws are stricter than those in the U.S. But racism is also found in the things one does and says, in public and private. It is the conditions, mentalities, and statements that guide and fuel ignorance, bigotry, and systemic discrimination. While it may look and feel different here, while it may take a more passive and less violent form, while it may be a taboo topic, racism is very much alive and pervasive. It is not confined to a few isolated incidents or to the few bad apples that people often try to dismiss. Denialism is as dangerous as apathy.

Canadians who are appalled and furious at the fate met by Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, and countless others have an opportunity to influence how we experience race dynamics here. We all can work toward equal access to resources and opportunities, and against the mental, physical, and social discrimination that disenfranchises and marginalizes us people of colour.

At its best, running is a microcosm of what equality might look like—a pure and beautiful act that can unify us all. Whether or not you run, take action against racism and educate yourself and others, starting with your family, your friends, your neighbours. Change starts with us all: how we speak up, how we protect, how we advocate, and how we stand with each other. And then, some day, maybe we can outrun the type of racism and bigotry that leads to so much unthinkable and unbearable tragedy. ▲

# Under the Guise of Research

Science and subjugation

John Baglow

**How to Argue with a Racist:  
What Our Genes Do (and Don't)  
Say about Human Difference**

Adam Rutherford

The Experiment

224 pages, hardcover and ebook

**Altered Inheritance: CRISPR and  
the Ethics of Human Genome Editing**

Françoise Baylis

Harvard University Press

304 pages, hardcover

**S**INCE AT LEAST THE 1605 PUBLICATION of Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*, scientific curiosity has been regarded as a positive emotion. But there are obvious downsides. While "curiosity-driven research" or "pure science" may sound abstract and detached from the so-called real world, it tends to find application down the road. It's what led to the atomic bomb, grotesque wartime medical experiments, and, closer to home, horrific nutritional tests in residential schools.

Whether positively or negatively directed, curiosity is inextricably bound up in the social and even the political. The field of genetics is a clear case in point. In the 1960s and 1970s, as struggles for racial equality became headline news, some scientists claimed that those of African descent were innately less intelligent and more prone to anti-social behaviour than those of European descent. Progressive social and public policy would therefore have little effect, the theory went, since the differences are primarily hard-wired.

Many of these researchers were associated with the racist Pioneer Fund. Prominent among them was the psychologist Richard Lynn, who wore his politics on his sleeve. "What is called for here is not genocide, the killing off of the population of incompetent cultures," he wrote in a widely cited book review from 1974. "But we do need to think realistically in terms of the 'phasing out' of such peoples."

Bigots continue to employ shoddy science and outright charlatanism to support their racial views, and it's this ongoing mischief that the geneticist and science writer Adam Rutherford counters with *How to Argue with a Racist*. His title is somewhat misleading: Rutherford is not out to bring racists around. In fact, he approvingly quotes Jonathan Swift: "Reasoning will never make a Man correct an ill Opinion, which by Reasoning he never acquired." Instead, Rutherford offers a general audience a compelling scientific refutation of racist claims that still enjoy wide circulation.



The shackles of bad science.

That refutation starts with a relatively new appreciation for the extraordinary complexity of genetics. "Single genes frequently do many things in the body at different times," Rutherford explains. "Genes work in networks and cascades and hierarchies." That means dozens if not hundreds of sequences of nucleotides in the DNA molecule "play a small but cumulative role" in traits that "can be summarized in a simple metric — height, eye or skin color."

Folk taxonomies like "race" don't map with our elementary understandings of genes and their expression — the transformation of genetic information into actual organisms. When we account for the countless environmental influences upon any individual life, the foolhardiness of making confident statements about racial heredity becomes readily apparent — or should. People and populations do differ, but "in the pursuit of power and wealth, the fetishization of these differences has been the source of the cruelest acts in our short history." Racism serves as a crude apologetics for such horrors, but it also pervades Western culture in subtler ways, through popular stereotypes and assumptions.

Rutherford dissects many of these assumptions, including those around athletic performance. "The Negro excels in the events he does," Dean Cromwell, who coached the Olympian Jesse Owens, once said, "because he is closer to the primitive than the white man." Others have pointed to slavery, which they claimed accelerated human evolution by selecting for strength and power. Rutherford demolishes such think-

ing. He points out that slavery involved numerous occupations that made few if any athletic demands: "Indeed, one 2014 study of the DNA of 29,141 living African Americans showed categorically no signs of selection across the whole genome for *any* trait, in the time since their ancestors were taken from their African homelands." He also considers slight genetic variants that have been detected among successful East African long-distance runners. But those variants also exist among Kenyan and Ethiopian populations that are not particularly athletic. What seems more important for the world's best runners is high elevation and, especially, a culture of running and intensive coaching. Genetics alone accounts for very little of their athletic prowess.

With respect to alleged differences in intelligence, figures are often fudged and cherry-picked by white supremacists. While low average IQ scores in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be wished away, they should be viewed critically — especially given the continent's genetic diversity. "This field is not just beset by ideological battles," Rutherford notes, "but some mountainous scientific terrain — and we are currently only in the foothills." The Flynn Effect — observed increases in average IQ scores that correlate to rising standards in education, health, and nutrition — applies across the racial board. In the 1970s, to cite one example, the average IQ in Ireland was 85, compared with 100 today. "That change, if real," Rutherford explains, "occurred within one generation, so genes cannot be the driving factor."



SURPRISINGLY, PERHAPS, RUTHERFORD HAS BEEN A somewhat uncritical exponent of “synthetic biology” in the past. In his 2012 BBC documentary, *Playing God*, he enthused about splicing spider genes into the DNA of goats, so they might produce spiderweb protein in their milk. He presented the possibilities as endless — and a positive scientific development. This sunny outlook seems somewhat at odds with the cautious approach to molecular genetics he takes in *How to Argue with a Racist*. After all, if we can alter DNA to manufacture spider silk and cheap drugs, or to engineer pest-resistant crops that are less likely to spoil after harvest, why not do so for human beings as well? Make them healthier, brighter, stronger, taller? Give them blond hair and blue eyes?

In fairness, Rutherford himself is no proponent of eugenics. In February he warned, in a lengthy Twitter thread, that trying to enhance specific traits in animals can result in “unforeseen and awful side-effects.” Yet the field is moving toward such ends at dizzying speed. The double-helical structure of the DNA molecule, which contains our genetic code, was discovered only in 1953. The first recombinant DNA, made by artificially piecing together strands of DNA from more than one organism, was created eighteen years later. The first entirely synthetic organism was created in a laboratory in 2010.

In 2012, the CRISPR gene-editing technology was invented, by which sequences of DNA in a human being can be cut out and replaced by others. In 2015, it was used to modify an embryo, including germ-line cells that carry

genes from one generation to another. That caused an international uproar, and rightfully so. Then last year, CRISPR — which stands for “clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats” — was used for the first time to treat a patient with the fatal blood disorder B-thalassemia. When it comes to this type of gene therapy, one individual assumes all of the risk. But altering human germ plasm affects future generations and raises fundamental ethical and social questions.

With *Altered Inheritance*, the eminent bioethicist Françoise Baylis, of Dalhousie University, sounds a much-needed note of caution as the research proceeds. CRISPR offers hope to

## “Bigots continue to employ shoddy science and outright charlatanism.”

individuals with various genetic disorders, such as Huntington’s chorea. But what if that disorder — and others — could be eradicated from the gene pool entirely? The problem with what Baylis calls this “heady enthusiasm,” as both she and Rutherford point out, is the sheer complexity of what genetic material does. What seems like a simple edit could conceivably cause cancer, for example. “Off-target effects” are unpredictable, and may always be.

But curing illness isn’t the half of it. Why not provide new generations with an “enhancement” or two? That is, of course, where all of this

science is inevitably leading. And the emerging ethical questions dwarf all of the preceding ones. What makes for a “desirable” enhancement? Could a well-intended CRISPR intervention lead to less diversity, and hence less tolerance of physical and mental differences? Could new (and expensive) technologies increase inequality among individuals and nations? Instead of trying to stop devastating environmental change, should we simply breed humans who are better able to cope with it?

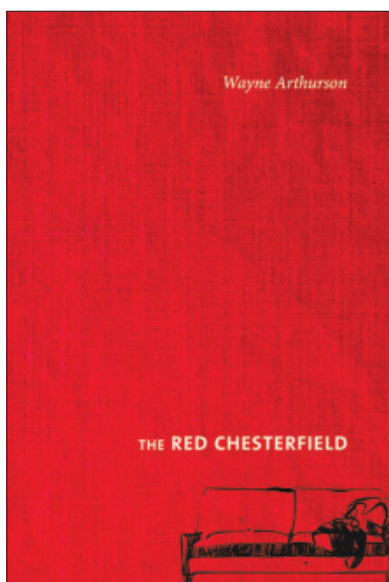
Until we can reach a “broad societal consensus” on where we want to go, Baylis advocates for a “slow science” with ethical brakes. But, as she concedes, “bioethical successes in the realm of policymaking have been few and fleeting.” In the meantime, curiosity-driven, profit-oriented, publish-or-perish science is hurtling onward, leaving ethics and off-target collateral damage in its wake.

Nearly twenty-five years ago, a scoffing editor of *The Lancet* argued, “The ethics industry needs to be rooted in clinical practice and not in armchair moral philosophy.” Steven Pinker echoed that view in 2016, stating bluntly that ethics should just “get out of the way.” Both bring to mind Peter Medawar’s comment in *Advice to a Young Scientist*: yes, curiosity might kill some cats, but it cures others. Somehow, as we peer into the CRISPR abyss, that jolly sentiment seems less than reassuring. Françoise Baylis and Adam Rutherford, in their timely books, urge us to pause and consider the motives and the consequences of scientific research. In the real world, it’s not just proverbial cats that are at stake. ▲



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M is a bylaw officer, living with two brothers, in their parents’ old house. While investigating a suspicious yard sale, M discovers a red chesterfield sitting in a ditch. Looking closer, M finds a running shoe—and a severed foot.

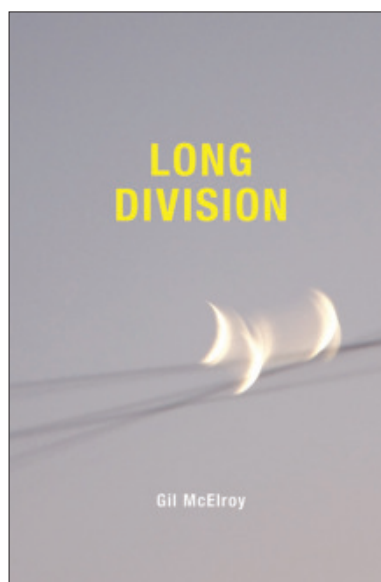
*The Red Chesterfield* is a delightful, unusual novel that upends the tropes and traditions of crime fiction while asking how far one person is willing to go to solve a crime, be it murder or abandoning a sofa.

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—Sam Wiebe

A ten!

—Peggy Blair



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Poetry that plots the process of a mind in thought, *Long Division* draws on Dada and Midrash to ruminate on time and chance, astronomy and biology, intertextuality and the interplay of the author’s and reader’s voice. Written with easy confidence, this is a conversation with spirituality, with philosophy, with meaning itself. It is contemporary experimental poetry at its finest.

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—rob mclennan

*Gil McElroy’s poetry is profoundly spiritual, shaped neither by an existential yearning for order, nor by the votive candle of the sanctuary, but by the implacable standard candle of the stars.*

—Karl Siegler

# An Act of Protest

Desmond Cole says his piece

*Morgan Campbell*

## The Skin We're In: A Year of Resistance and Power

*Desmond Cole*

Doubleday Canada

256 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

**A**ROUND THE TIME HE DEPARTED THE *Toronto Star* in May 2017, leaving behind a column that brought him a wide audience if not big money, Desmond Cole was pressed to confront a question: Was he a journalist or an activist? To the people who doubted Cole's fitness to write for the *Star*, those roles were distinct and incompatible. An activist takes a position, while a journalist weighs all sides and seeks the truth somewhere in the middle. The latter definition, which assumes that everyone operates in good faith and that no one is flat-out wrong, has been proven inadequate in today's media environment. For one thing, it can't deal with the lopsided polarization that gave rise to Donald Trump and that might see him re-elected this fall. When one side takes an extreme position, it drags the middle with it. But the truth usually doesn't budge: it just gets lost in the scramble for supposed balance.

A devotion to the appearance of neutrality spurred Cole's bosses at the *Star* to issue an ultimatum: activism or journalism. But even that didn't settle the question; it just inflamed the debate. Now, with his debut book, *The Skin We're In*, Cole chronicles a year on the front lines of anti-black racism and offers concrete answers about his place in Canada's media ecosystem.

As a writer and a familiar voice on the radio, Cole has engaged in painstaking research and has repeatedly unearthed facts to form compelling and true narratives. That's journalism. His activism has informed and coexisted with it, but it has never diminished it.

♦

DONALD TRUMP'S ELECTION AND THE RESURGENCE of hate groups in the United States have highlighted how little progress has been made when it comes to race relations in that country. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has killed a disproportionate number of Americans of colour — a disparity rooted in deep-seated inequality. It's a deadly example of the type of systemic discrimination that many Canadians swear doesn't exist here. But with *The Skin We're In*, Cole offers a timely reminder of the depth, breadth, and costs of racism north of the border. He yanks smug and complacent Canadians back to reality and forces all of us to confront the ways white supremacy thrives in this country.

Cole doesn't just recount a year spent fighting for justice. He also attempts a tricky task: find-

ing the common thread that connects a diverse set of black experiences. One connection, and a source of solidarity, is that all different types of black Canadians — straight and gay, urban and suburban, native born and immigrant — deal with the same business end of racism.

In 2007, for example, Jordan Manners, a black student at C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute in Toronto's North York neighbourhood, was shot in a school stairwell. His death prompted the Toronto District School Board to invite uniformed officers to roam the hallways. Though the initiative aimed to reduce crime and improve police-community relations, Cole illustrates how black students often became collateral damage: profiled, punished for trivial transgressions, and shunted into the criminal justice system. He connects the initiative to the 2009 arrest and expulsion of an unnamed black student at Northern Secondary School, where most students are white and many come from money:

According to several students who witnessed the incident, it escalated when the student referred to the cop as "bacon." So here was a Black student who had negative feelings about the police. An officer whose priority according to the police chief was relationship-building might have started a conversation, or simply said nothing at all.

Cole also offers a play-by-play account of the events that prompted Black Lives Matter Toronto to blockade the 2017 Pride Parade, as a way of protesting the presence of uniformed cops. The move wasn't just a knee-jerk lashing out, as some claimed; it was a logical response to an unspoken but very real police mandate to enforce anti-black racism. Bathhouse raids in 1981 and other violent incidents speak to how the Toronto police have often viewed the LGBTQ community: as people who deserve to be on the receiving end of force, not citizens worthy of service and protection. "Queer people of colour," in particular, "had to carve out their own spaces and services." Questioning the presence of uniformed police at Pride celebrations is more rational than condoning it, Cole argues, especially if you're black and LGBTQ.

And Cole details Nova Scotia's centuries-long cycle of racism and alienation. In the 1780s, the future province became the landing spot for slaves who had been promised freedom in return for supporting England during the American Revolution. A generation later, Halifax became the departure point for many of those same refugees. Sick of crippling racism, they sailed for Sierra Leone, where Cole's own parents were born many decades later. "British

imperialism, which led to the colonization of both Canada and Sierra Leone, produced me, and informed the stories I'm about to share with you," he writes early in the book. Then, in his final chapter, he writes about Abdoul Abdi. Born in Saudi Arabia to Somali parents, Abdi arrived in Halifax at age seven and quickly became a ward of the province, dependent on the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services to complete the paperwork that would make him a citizen. Fourteen years and a litany of foster homes later, Abdi pled guilty on several charges, including dangerous driving and assaulting police with a vehicle. The conviction jeopardized the only home he had ever known. "DCS never applied for Abdoul's citizenship, so when he was sentenced for a crime in his adult years, he became vulnerable to a deportation order."

♦

COLE MAKES A CONVINCING CASE THAT SEVERAL strains of racism are pervasive in — and native to — Canada. It's not just in Nova Scotia that we see the promise of a better life repeatedly followed by the failure to honour that promise. And then there's Cole's own experience.

He owes much of his public profile to a powerful personal essay he published in *Toronto Life* in 2015. In it, he detailed the dozens of times Toronto Police demanded to see his personal information, under the guise of a humiliating stop-and-frisk-style program we now call carding. Racial profiling might be an abstract concept to white Canadians, but Cole's essay made plain that it's a frightening reality for many black folks. The piece earned him a National Magazine Award and helped propel him into other mainstream media gigs, like an AM radio talk show and that ill-fated column at the *Star*.

The hiring of Cole by Canada's largest daily signalled that mainstream outlets were, at last, open to pro-black voices. But the dissolution of the relationship also revealed double standards, framed by race, that can make corporate newsrooms uncomfortable places for outspoken journalists of colour:

By the time I quit, the column had been reduced to every two weeks; I had no contract, no membership in the union, no benefits, no apparent prospects for advancement within the company; the president of the board of directors had suggested I write less about race issues; and I'd just been advised that I had violated the paper's code of conduct by staging a sit-in at a meeting of Toronto's police oversight board.

At an April 2017 meeting of the Toronto Police Services Board, Cole had admonished

members for the carding system, which “the *Star* had devoted an impressive amount of time and resources to documenting.” After speaking up, he refused to leave the proceedings. That’s when his editors at the *Star* said he had broken the rules of objective journalism “by engaging in public protest.” They told him he had a choice: “I needed to choose between my column and my activism; to restrict my Black struggle for the privilege of writing for the paper twice a month. Shit, I didn’t even have a dental plan.”

I was a reporter at the *Star* when all of this unfolded, one of just two black journalists on a staff of more than 150. Cole called me after a meeting with Torstar board chair John Honderich, and we talked about how the company’s attitude mirrored a cynical, industry-wide strategy. Hiring Cole as a freelancer allowed the *Star* to borrow his following and boost its online readership without having to invest in the writer generating the new traffic. And steering him away from writing about race sent a clear signal that decision-makers valued his audience more than they did his ideas.

The controversy concerning Cole’s dual role as activist and journalist laid bare other troubling standards governing the contemporary news business. A shrinking industry means applicants outnumber jobs, which renders many freelancers expendable and interchangeable. The trend also lets deeper-pocketed, more prestigious companies presume they can employ writers for two or three days a month and control how they spend the other twenty-eight.

Besides, the distinction between activist and journalist is a false one. Cole’s activism kept him on the mainstream media’s radar between gigs and helped build the following that those outlets leveraged when they hired him. Cole wasn’t even a reporter tasked with staying neutral. He was a columnist, paid to stake out a position and argue it. His activism doesn’t diminish his opinion writing but instead informs it.

People seem okay with this truth if the writer involved is, say, Naomi Klein. None of us would expect her, in the name of journalistic objectivity, to give equal weight to both sides of the climate change debate. We know what she publishes will be informed, presented in good faith, and biased toward saving the planet. “The same newspaper that told me I could not be an actor and a critic had somehow managed, before my time,” Cole writes, “to give columns to internationally known activists.” There was also the *Star*’s Catherine Porter, who had “misstated some facts” about an environmental demonstration she attended shortly before Cole was hired. “The same public editor who later admonished me for ‘becoming the news’ wrote that ‘Porter is right in her understanding that she has explicit permission — and encouragement — to take a public stand and act in line with her views on social justice issues.’” The rules shouldn’t have changed for Cole, but they did.

Cole could have spent a whole chapter of *The Skin We’re In* arguing the point, but he instead lets the facts and their context speak for themselves. In short, he does what journalists are trained to do. Instead of telling us about uneven playing fields inside Canadian newsrooms, he shows us. And he answers a question that underpins several of the book’s key events: Is Desmond Cole an activist or a journalist?

Simple. He’s both. ▲

## Waiting on Tables

When no one’s being served

Michael Humeniuk

**S**ERVING CAN BE AN UNDIGNIFIED JOB with little growth and long hours. It’s often a starting point for new immigrants, the maintenance income for drug addicts, the side gig for theatre kids, or the penultimate option for the failed and depressed. The day you start serving, you can see the “Dead End” sign on the faces of your new co-workers. But serving can also be one of the best jobs for the unskilled and the over-educated. No matter your situation, it’s reliably there. At least that’s what we thought.

In 1999, *The New Yorker* published a little-known writer whose most recent culinary failure had inspired him to become “a traitor to my profession.” He described restaurants and the practices that servers see but always try to hide from their tables. His name was Anthony Bourdain. The next year, he published *Kitchen Confidential* with the plot line of a classic Greek comedy: the hero rises from lowly beginnings in the kitchens of Cape Cod, out of drug addiction and failure, by dint of his own character and with the help of unlikely personalities. In *The New Yorker* and in his book, and as he would on television later, Bourdain offered tales of naughty behaviour and sexualized cuisine, and he made the chef a figure of intrigue: “Professional cooks belong to a secret society whose ancient rituals derive from the principles of stoicism in the face of humiliation, injury, fatigue, and the threat of illness.”

Bourdain was following in the footsteps of Marco Pierre White, the first of the cool celebrity chefs, and a long line of cook-cum-writers. Indeed, chefs have a proud tradition of literary achievement: *Le viandier*, which Guillaume Tirel may or may not have written 700 years ago; Brillat-Savarin’s philosophic *La physiologie du goût*, from 1825; Montagné’s encyclopedic *Larousse gastronomique*, from 1938; and Jacques Pépin’s illustrated *La technique*, from 1976. You can also toss in Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, from 1961, and the long-running show that followed.

But carrying all that food are the servers, who walk in circles without a grounding mythology of our own. We don’t have an inspiring equivalent to François Vatel, who we’re told killed himself one spring morning in 1671 over a fish order gone bad. We have no Auguste Escoffier (“La bonne cuisine est la base du véritable bonheur”), no equivalent to the Culinary Institute of America, and no Cordon Bleu. Even in Bourdain’s tell-all, he told all too little of us. But there we are, brandishing notepads, sporting fake smiles, and wiping tables. Chefs have the prestigious Bocuse d’Or, while we have a risible competition called the Coupe Georges Baptiste. To compare the two is to compare apples to Agent Orange. ▲

What servers often do have is money — that 18 percent added to your bill (after tax). It’s the reason we continue walking down this dead-end path. Otherwise, we’ll insist we’re *really* musicians, actors, or writers. Serving, we’ll tell you, is just the side order of life’s main course. When it comes to the big dream, we have everything *mise en place*.

Servers find the highest tips in restaurants where patrons pay their bills without looking. At these places, the unwritten rule is to avoid recognizing the customers: you never know when a man who is with his wife one night might have visited with his pay-as-he-goes girlfriend a few nights before. The luckiest servers can top up their paltry minimum wage with \$2,000 a week in tips (and most will declare only 10 percent of that). It’s not uncommon for them to make as much as the third-year Bay Street associates they’re serving any given day.

The restaurant where I serve isn’t at that end of the scale. Most of our patrons are make-work marketers in Condoland or hold administrative sinecures in the neighbourhood, made obvious by the gossip sessions they charge to the company card. Our only high roller, if you could call her that, is an interior decorator you often see on TV. Every day, she sits in a lounge chair that’s the same shade of violet as the McDonald’s character Grimace. It’s almost as if he’d been poached and turned into furniture.

Bay Street or Main Street, front of house or back, coke is everywhere. Servers walk faster, smile wider, and schedule more double shifts because of it. But absorb too much of the potent performance enhancer, and you’ll lose sight of the big picture — your brain “shrivelled by cocaine,” as Bourdain put it twenty years ago. As customers and orders wait, servers will polish stemware to perfection or set tables immaculately. Promiscuity remains common, and not even the neutering of “waiter” and “waitress” to “server” has helped. Fun affects customer satisfaction, though, and the success is tallied up at the end of every day. Servers compare their sales and tips in a highly competitive environment that many can’t handle. The best in the industry are skilled, competent, fast, and tough. Most of all, they are shrewdly intelligent.

But today, even as many chefs prepare mountains of takeout orders, the vast majority of servers, of all stripes, are still idle at home and collecting their CERB. Some wait, made patient with hash and the naive hope of getting back to normal. Others have taken an unexpected turn, replacing their nose coffee and cigarettes with exercise and routine. The lockdown has become an opportunity for an industry of server-musicians, server-actors, and server-writers to finally focus on their dreams and break free from the hyphen’s shackle. ▲

# Uncorked

Keeping spirits up in isolation

David Wilson

## How to Drink: A Classical Guide to the Art of Imbibing

Vincent Obsopoeus

Translated by Michael Fontaine

Princeton University Press

320 pages, hardcover and ebook

## Canadian Spirits: The Essential Cross-country Guide to Distilleries, Their Spirits, and Where to Imbibe Them

Stephen Beaumont and Christine Sismondo

Nimbus Publishing Limited

280 pages, hardcover

I HAVE A DRINKING PROBLEM, OR SO I AM told. It's not that I drink too early in the day or get stropo or do things I regret the morning after. My problem, apparently, is that I don't drink enough. You could say that alcohol and I got off to a bad start. I'll spare you the details, other than to say I was fifteen and it involved five rye and Cokes in quick succession at a cousin's engagement party. The hangover lasted about three years. What was a golden age of experimental drinking for my underage pals was a time of cowering abstinence for me. The sight, the smell, even the suggestion of alcohol could trigger the dry heaves.

This was awkward because I lived in a part of rural Ontario where drinking was almost a patriotic duty. There were high-minded exceptions, but for the most part, wherever you went, alcohol was never far behind. Fastball tournaments, community picnics, auction sales, and fall fairs were often cover for the real event taking place on the sidelines. The locals made moonshine in old whisky casks and downed it in frightful quantities at field parties in the summer. Cruising the back roads with a case of beer in defiance of the law and mortality was a time-honoured Saturday-night ritual. Eventually, I realized that if I was going to have any kind of social life, I had to at least pretend to be on board. I'd accept a stubby, then drift off into the bushes and secretly dump the offending contents. And I learned to keep a safe distance from alpha drinkers, for fear of being unmasked as a weakling or a traitor.

By my second year in university, the physical and psychological toxins of those early cocktails had worn off to the point where I was able to have a beer or a glass of wine and actually enjoy it. Note that I say *a* beer. I went to the purple Jesus parties and tequila sunrise all-nighters, but the intoxicant I abused typically came in Baggies and cost \$20 an ounce. For this I earned a nickname: Half-Miler.

Forty-five years later, I consider myself a regular drinker. Most nights, I pour a glass of wine



Mixology has continued unabated throughout the crisis.

or two with dinner. I love a cold beer on a warm summer day, the silky warmth of Irish whisky in the winter, or a tequila buzz anytime. But I still do not drink to get drunk. I still dread hangovers. I don't care if others outpace me. I know my limit, and I stick to it. This has earned me another sobriquet: Mr. Moderation.

The sixteenth-century German Renaissance humanist and poet Vincent Obsopoeus seems to have been a man after my own heart. As rector of an elite high school in the Bavarian wine-growing region of Franconia, he was dismayed by an upsurge in binge drinking and the associated bad behaviour among local men, many of them knights with too much testosterone in their veins and too few crusades to fight. They consumed alcohol in staggering quantities: per capita consumption was six times higher than it is in Germany today (in 2016, the equivalent of 11.4 litres of pure alcohol). The wine allowance for patients in hospitals was 7 litres a day; the doctors who cared for them got the same. Obsopoeus endeavoured to set things right by composing an epic poem in Latin that he hoped would provide the framework for a healthier approach to imbibing. No teetotaler himself, Obsopoeus believed the secret was not abstinence but self-control.

Modelling *The Art of Drinking* on Ovid's *The Art of Love*, Obsopoeus published a first version of the poem in 1536, when he was in his mid-thirties, and a longer edition a year later. The English version that Princeton University Press has published as part of its Ancient Wisdom for

Modern Readers series is only the third translation of the poem in nearly five centuries.

The translator, Michael Fontaine, seems like a guy who'd enjoy a pint or two. A professor at Cornell University, Fontaine is an iconoclast on a mission to raise Latin from the dead. The more offbeat the subject matter, the better. His previous book was a translation of *Pugna porcorum* (*The Pig War*), a 248-verse satirical poem first published in 1530, in which every word begins with the letter P. (He even listed his surname as "Phontaine" on the title page.) The effort wasn't all tongue-in-cheek: Fontaine believes the poem, about inequality among pigs, was an inspiration for George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. He supplements his scholarly pursuits by moonlighting as a Latin whiz-for-hire, listing museums, antiquities dealers, and collectors among his clients. His eye for authenticity helped him expose forgeries in Renaissance and Dutch Golden Age paintings. He's also *Psychology Today's* "Ancient Insights" columnist. (He recently assured readers who were housebound due to the coronavirus that it was perfectly fine to imbibe while isolated, citing no less an authority than Vincent Obsopoeus himself, who believed there's no place like home for getting a little tipsy.)

With *How to Drink*, Fontaine parallels the wasted knights of Obsopoeus's day with the excesses of modern bro culture, and he tailors the translation accordingly. He approaches Renaissance Latin not as a fortress but as a portal, listening for echoes of modern vernacular to give the 500-year-old verses a bracing shot of

oxygen. In the introduction, he writes, “My aim was to transmute Obsopoeus’ thought and spirit into clear and idiomatic English as it is spoken in the United States today, especially as I hear it spoken on college campuses.” Personally, I know precious little about Latin, but I suspect Fontaine’s translation will have hidebound classicists squirming in their tweeds. The text brims with terms like “get hammered,” “hooking up,” “blowhards,” “college kids,” “jerk,” “snotty,” “sloshed,” “belching,” “farting,” and “barf.”

Endavouring to systematize “the forms and norms of imbibing,” Obsopoeus divided his poem into three parts: “The Art of Drinking, Sustainably and with Discrimination,” “Excessive Drinking, What It Looks Like,” and “How to Win at Drinking Games.” While the translation offers a reprieve from the starchy conventions of Latin 101, what the verses actually say may put off modern readers who expect a degree of equanimity in literature and life in general. The poet is profoundly judgmental, not just about drinking but about everything from marriage and ex-monks to gossips. I couldn’t shake an image of Obsopoeus holding forth in the sixteenth-century equivalent of Tim Hortons: you name it, he’s the guy with an opinion.

I was tempted to dismiss Obsopoeus as a prig. Then I remembered news reports about thousands of spring-breakers carousing in Florida while the rest of the world cowered under the onslaught of COVID-19. Through my disbelief and rage, I realized Fontaine’s translation had nailed it: the sozzled brats in Daytona Beach and the debauched knights of Obsopoeus’s day share a moral vacuity. Their urge to get blotto prevails over reason. The poet’s indignation is just as valid today as it was then. I could picture the old boy patrolling the beach on a Segway, intoning, “*Moderation* must forever be your guiding principle.”

And to that I can only say: Amen, brother.

THE IMMODERATION THAT HAUNTED MY YOUTH was typically Canadian. According to the World Health Organization, our per capita consumption of alcohol places us in the top 20 percent of imbibing nations (less than Germany’s but still the equivalent of 10 litres of pure alcohol a year). We drink less than our forebears in the United Kingdom and France, but more than our hulking cousin to the south (or any of our neighbours in the western hemisphere, for that matter). While the pandemic has shuttered vast swaths of the Canadian economy, alcohol sales continue unabated — deemed essential. With about one-fifth of the population considered to be heavy drinkers, public health researchers openly worry about forcing the nation to quit cold turkey.

Alcohol is, of course, big business. Titans like John Molson, Hiram Walker, and Samuel Bronfman helped to whet Canada’s thirst, then earned their fortunes delivering the stuff to slake it. More recently, regulatory changes and the ascent of the drink-local movement have triggered a rush of entrepreneurs staking out a claim in the country’s \$30-billion-a-year market for alcoholic beverages.

Toronto tittle writers Stephen Beaumont and Christine Sismondo saw a story in the surge of artisanal and small-batch distilleries sprouting up in almost every region of the country. “It wasn’t too long ago that, in the eyes of most of the world, Canadian distilling was, to be quite

honest, a bit of a joke.” But then something changed. From when Beaumont and Sismondo decided to write a book in 2018 to when they actually put their pens to paper, the number of small-scale distillers had grown by at least fifty. And the cohort would continue to be a moving target as their project neared completion.

Beaumont and Sismondo profile more than 160 distillers, from such giants as Crown Royal and Hiram Walker to staunchly local operations, with limited-batch spirits that run the gamut from premium whiskeys to oddities such as bacon vodka and mushroom gin. “With devastatingly high shipping costs, it only makes sense to make the most of what you’ve got,” they write of the St. Lawrence Valley, “which has led to a region rich in esoteric gins made with seaweed, wild mushrooms, and a wide range of botanicals foraged from the boreal forest.” The book’s thumbnail sketches of these operations across the country are really the stories of the people who pour their hearts, souls, and sweat into their products. Common threads link them all: they tend to be young, risk takers, and passionate about producing spirits with character.

*Canadian Spirits* was slated to launch this past spring at BC Distilled, the country’s largest festival for artisan distillers. Like so many other things, the festival fell victim to the coronavirus. The moving target that challenged the authors while they were writing the book veered in the opposite direction not long after it was published. To get an idea of how the industry was weathering the crisis, I called Alex Hamer of Artisan Distillers Canada. He conceded it was hurting and that an unknown number of operations profiled in Beaumont and Sismondo’s book would likely fail in concert with the bars and restaurants that buy much of what they produce. (He also noted that scores of small-batch distillers had turned to making alcohol-based hand sanitizer.)

CANADIAN SPIRITS IS THOROUGHLY RESEARCHED, attractively presented, and fun to read. It’s clear that for the majority of artisanal distillers, crafting spirits is a labour of love. But in the long run, the book’s most enduring merit may be as a snapshot of the country’s imbibing culture before the coronavirus put everything in a chokehold. In that sense, it’s not unlike *The Art of Drinking*, which evokes the tipling landscape of sixteenth-century Germany.

Like everyone else, I miss normal, even if normal implies a drinking culture that consigns me

to its fringes. I would welcome the ragging of my pals if it meant we could be socially proximate again. If I could buy a couple bottles of wine without fearing for my life, I’d gladly pay for the experience with a hangover.

When the day of deliverance finally comes, I expect the country to go on a well-deserved bender. The words of Vincent Obsopoeus, echoing down the centuries, will never ring truer: “Let mugs brim with the juice of Your nectar; let Franconian wines flow in a never-ending stream!” I certainly intend to be part of the rejoicing, drink in hand. Maybe even two. ▲

## Bluff

If cornered, a gopher  
snake will slip  
his slender tail  
under a hash of leaves  
like a marbled auger  
and quiver  
till the raspy layers buzz.  
He and a real  
rattlesnake may never  
meet, and yet  
he imitates.

Does he believe  
somewhere out there  
a more potent being  
lends his gestures  
meaning? Or  
does he subsist  
on signification  
alone? Defensively,  
he loafs, belly full  
of poached eggs, hoping  
he’s mistaken.

Neil Surkan

*Neil Surkan is the author of Super, Natural and On High, as well as the forthcoming chapbook Desire Path. He lives in Calgary.*

“The patient is barely a child. The figure of a young slender adolescent body barely fills the trauma stretcher. His precious blood spills onto the floor as we open his chest to resuscitate his heart. Our hands grasp his young heart to coax it back to life. But to no avail. A bullet has torn it apart, shredding its perfect chambers into oblivion. What is this killing machine, so perfect and precise? It is a bullet from a handgun.”

Dr. Najma Ahmed, Toronto

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KEEP COMMUNITIES SAFE.

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# Heart and Solo

Beyond the Silicon Valley fallacy

Rob Csernyik

## The Soul of an Entrepreneur: Work and Life beyond the Startup Myth

David Sax

PublicAffairs

304 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

**A**S THE FORMER OWNER OF A RETAIL store, I've done my share of soul-searching — a weighty, agonizing task I wish only on enemies. Having closed my shop in one market and moved it to another, where it met the same fate, I've experienced the full life cycle of a business. I once believed going it alone meant a world of endless possibility. But in the actual trenches of entrepreneurship, I experienced the limitations of financing and the reality of how much a sole proprietor can reasonably accomplish in a given day.

Even though small businesses like the one I owned make up a large swath of the economy, our image and struggles aren't reflected when talk turns to entrepreneurship. That's why, in the years since closing, I've grown increasingly frustrated with how entrepreneurs are framed. Instead of hearing the modest mom-and-pop success stories, we're bombarded with praise for a hustle culture that lionizes endless workweeks and unhealthy sleep patterns. The idea of building a sustainable career has been usurped by the dream of netting a quick fortune or becoming a celebrity thought leader. Failure has also been gentrified as a mere hiccup or narrative device in the prototypical entrepreneurial journey, instead of the traumatic and costly experience it actually is.

Much of this framing centres on the sexy stories of Silicon Valley start-ups that have made it big: Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak with Apple, Larry Page and Sergey Brin with Google, Elon Musk with Tesla. The list goes on and on. But those, the Toronto-based business writer David Sax writes, are scenarios that actually happen to "very rare, very specific" individuals. What we end up with is a myth that leaves most entrepreneurs high and dry.

The Silicon Valley entrepreneurship fallacy is taught in business schools. It's become the yardstick for worthwhile investments. It's reshaped how we measure success. Although we live in a supposed golden age of entrepreneurialism, the actual statistics suggest the number of people working for themselves is stagnant at best.

So if it's a myth that drives the headlines, what actually drives real entrepreneurs on the ground? This question is Sax's starting point in *The Soul of an Entrepreneur*. He believes that a corrective shift from flashy tales to entrepreneurship's "soul" can make the entire business field more

equitable and satisfying: "Because no matter what kind of entrepreneur you are, from the modest side hustler to the most ambitious captain of industry, entrepreneurship is a constant process of soul searching." Unfortunately, the fluid and intangible nature of the soul makes it very difficult to pin down, particularly in a data-driven world.

Sax follows individuals — from the beauty guru in New Orleans to the Syrian restaurant owners in Toronto — whose stories, he thinks, will bring us closer to understanding the entrepreneurial spirit. Take, for example, Tracy Obolsky, who starts most days with a bong hit and some surfing before opening her Rockaway Beach bakery, in Queens. She works long hours but enjoys a beach-bum lifestyle rich with community. In choosing to profile her, Sax passes over the usual fatigue and mess of food service, the endless monotony of a six-day week, and the financial burden of doing business in New York. Obolsky's comfortable enough with her bakery's performance that one day she shuts early to catch some waves. Precious few sole proprietors could possibly join her in such spontaneity.

Often absent from Sax's account, yet omnipresent in the life of an entrepreneur, is the looming threat of failure. Even without a pandemic causing innumerable business collapses, large and small, overlooking failure seems strange. Because avoiding it, fearing it, and recovering from it are part and parcel of the lifestyle.

The closest we get to this hard truth is with a rancher in California who struggles to make ends meet. "Did you see that article on *Business Insider* about grass-fed billionaires?" the rancher asks Sax. "That's because it was never written." As Sax outlines the rancher's challenges, readers see a dead man walking — or rather spending his days driving from pasture to pasture to check on his cattle, because his attempt to purchase a single larger ranch fell through. It is here and in the book's final chapter, about an older entrepreneur chasing the last big project, that Sax draws near the intangibles that he seeks to illuminate.

For many, it makes perfect sense to get out of the cattle business before the financial and personal losses become insurmountable. It also makes perfect sense for a seventy-five-year-old to retire, rather than chase after a blockchain-powered renewable energy trading platform. But entrepreneurs are a different breed than those who seek comfort in consistent paycheques.

In recent years, social entrepreneurship has gone from a fringe theory to its own discipline; by creating social, environmental, or cultural change, it has an additional mission beyond traditional business activities. The examples of

social entrepreneurship are many, from Grameen Bank's microlending to Tentree's planting of ten saplings for each item of clothing it sells. But Sax largely resists such narratives: "I would speak with experts on social entrepreneurship or entrepreneurs who had created companies that sold t-shirts to fund eyesight research or made clothes where you could trace the working conditions of their factories, and I felt I was only scratching the surface of an entrepreneur's deeper values. I wanted more." Instead, in his least convincing chapter, Sax illustrates values-driven entrepreneurship with a business owner selling his company to employees through an esoteric financial mechanism.

Sax's personal story ebbs and flows throughout *The Soul of an Entrepreneur*. At one point, he interrupts his most fascinating discussion, of a troubled family-owned winery in Argentina, with a three-page personal digression. As he muses about his own entrepreneurial activities, as a speaker and a writer, we learn various trivia about him and the enterprisers in his family. But we don't learn anything profound about what drives them. Sax could have grouped these intermissions together, perhaps in the introduction or a stand-alone chapter; he could have mined the material he knows best more deeply.

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ULTIMATELY, SAX'S SUCCESS IN UNCOVERING AN entrepreneur's soul will be judged differently by readers who have been entrepreneurs than by those who have not. In his final pages, he offers something of a revelation: that all business owners can brand themselves entrepreneurs, that the word is not an exclusive term for rarefied individuals. And while that epiphany may surprise some outsiders, it will fall flat for those of us on the inside.

History is littered with more failed businesses than successful ones, yet people still believe that entrepreneurship can change their lives, that it can scratch an itch that traditional employment can't. Perhaps for us, this book will prompt some soul-searching of our own. What drives us is not actually a question I've spent much time considering until now. If pushed to say why I opened a business, I would drum up reasons like a willingness to accept risk, a desire for self-determination and flexibility, or the belief I could succeed in a fickle industry. But I see these as calculated, practical considerations — nowhere close to the core of my soul.

What drives the entrepreneur is a more pertinent issue than ever, as business owners around the world face a reality far from the glossy myths of Silicon Valley. In the journey with Sax and those he meets, there's hope to be found, even if the most pressing questions remain unanswered. ▲

# China's Moment

Reckoning with an empire state of mind

Dan Dunsky

**L**ET'S START WITH A HYPOTHETICAL: IT'S early 2022. Countries around the world are beginning to recover from nearly two years of social distancing, illness, and a shocking amount of death. Mass vaccination for COVID-19 has been under way globally for several months and — gradually, carefully — people are emerging from their isolation to resume a more normal rhythm to their lives.

Slowly, as friends, families, and colleagues gather to share their stories and remember the dead, conversations turn to the other pandemic casualty: the devastated economies of those countries where it hit the hardest. As governments dealt with an unprecedented halt to economic activity, they opened the spending taps; central banks printed money and bought bonds. Now, the bills are coming due. Faced with a mix of significant tax hikes, spending cuts, currency devaluations, and other unpleasant fiscal and monetary measures, people all over wonder if their countries should take advantage of China's post-pandemic answer to the Marshall Plan, the so-called Li Wenliang Plan, named after the ophthalmologist who first raised the alarm about the novel coronavirus back in December 2019.

While China did not emerge unscathed from the pandemic, it did manage to limit the severity of its own economic downturn by acting quickly in early 2020 to limit the spread of the virus within its borders. Even with depressed global demand for made-in-China products, the country's vast and growing domestic economy meant that its recession was relatively mild. Consequently, China was able to use its vast foreign reserves to launch its ambitious Li Wenliang Plan, with a goal of helping "strategically important" countries offset the costs of their own pandemic spending. Initial results will be reported back at the Twentieth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party later in the year.

Most Western governments initially balked at Beijing's offer. However, when faced with the reality of their debts, they began to reason, "Well, the virus did emerge in China. Why shouldn't it pay?"

◆  
FAR-FETCHED? PERHAPS. BUT WHY WOULDN'T China's leadership think this way? It would be a clever evolution of the country's growing global clout.

Internationally, China's economic influence has increased vastly over the past decade. The country's Belt and Road Initiative was launched in 2013 and has become one of the largest infrastructure and investment projects in history. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which China controls, has a subscribed capital base of \$100 billion (U.S.) and includes such Western



Toward a new world order?

countries as the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, France, and Canada. China is now the second-largest contributor to the United Nations and seeks understandings, connections, and closer trade, banking, and business relations with Russia, Europe, and key African and South American countries simultaneously. Depending on the model, China has either the world's largest or its second-largest economy.

In other words, China is projecting its economic might as we would expect a great power to do. At the Nineteenth Party Congress, in 2017, President Xi Jinping emphasized the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and proudly asserted that the country had entered a "new era," when it would "take centre stage in the world" and make "a greater contribution to humankind." So while a Li Wenliang Plan may be fictional now, it could certainly become reality tomorrow.

What might China seek to do with its enhanced power? Does it wish to reclaim the full scope of its erstwhile glory and once again project unique central power, this time at the head of a new global order fashioned in its image and around its interests? Is its ambition more parochial, extending regionally throughout the Asia-Pacific and Central Asia, where it assumes its place in a global balance of power alongside the United States and certain ascendant nations? Do the leaders think past the consolidation of China's dominant position at the centre of global supply chains, manufacturing networks, and emerging technologies driven by artificial intelligence? If

so, what do they see? Over the past decade, such questions have consumed elected officials, civil servants, business leaders, development specialists, and international relations scholars around the world.

And it may be too early to tell. After all, China remains, on a per capita basis, relatively poor, and it faces daunting challenges at home. However, while the country may not be launching an overseas Marshall Plan just yet — and nobody knows what the economic fallout of the pandemic will ultimately be — it is not unreasonable to assume that China's economic growth will continue.

Before COVID-19, the country had already begun to rebalance its economy from an over-reliance on export-led growth to greater domestic economic activity, and from labour-intensive manufacturing to higher-margin products and services. This trend will likely accelerate in the wake of the crisis, as countries that found themselves reliant on China for critical health care and pharmaceutical products (among other things) will likely bring home these and other critical manufacturing capacities, further encouraging China's development of its own domestic market.

Even then, given the country's scale and position in global supply chains and the sheer difficulty others will have in breaking away from overseas production, much manufacturing capacity will likely remain in China for the foreseeable future. Even Donald Trump, who was elected in some measure on the promise of

returning manufacturing capacity to the United States, has had difficulty delivering on this front. What limited success the Trump administration has had seems to have been a result of corporate tax breaks, a rollback of environmental and other regulations, and low energy prices — all fickle factors that can change rather quickly.

China's GDP may no longer be growing at 7 percent or more a year, but it's a safe bet it will continue to achieve the growth levels needed to sustain its transition from a developing to a middle-class economy. Beyond its commercial relationships, it is also reasonable to assume that China expects greater and greater deference as it reclaims the central position beyond its borders that it occupied for most of human history. There are numerous recent examples of this tendency, ranging from land and resource claims in the South China Sea to engineering and infrastructure projects in Africa to acquiring strategic ports in the Indian Ocean.

Canadians can see Beijing's increased demands for deference at play in the Meng Wanzhou saga. As deputy chair and chief financial officer of China's largest private company, Huawei, itself a world-beating enterprise, Meng is an example of her country's rising dynamism and global ambition. Authorities in Vancouver arrested her in December 2018, at the request of the United States, for her alleged role in Huawei's breach of sanctions against Iran. And Canada's move has led to significant retaliatory action: China has banned certain agricultural imports from Canada, for example, and has detained two Canadian citizens, the former diplomat Michael Kovrig and the development consultant Michael Spavor.

It's not that China's leadership doesn't understand the obligations Canada has under its extradition treaty with Washington; it just sees those norms as subsidiary to its own interests and grievances. Meng's arrest is seen as an affront to China's international stature and an unpleasant reminder of its relative weakness over the past century and a half.

In his 2014 book, *World Order*, Henry Kissinger wrote that the Chinese "expect — and sooner or later will act on this expectation — the international order to evolve in a way that enables China to become centrally involved in further international rule making, even to the point of revising some of the rules that prevail." That emerging global order is still taking shape, but to assume China will not play a central role in it is to deny reality.

To be sure, some prominent voices have argued that COVID-19 — far from being a strategic opportunity — may well end up being the Chinese Communist Party's "Chernobyl moment." (Even Mikhail Gorbachev has suggested the lies, cover-ups, and official dissembling during the 1986 nuclear disaster were "the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union" in 1991.) But the evidence is thin and may reflect more wishful thinking than thoughtful analysis. The pandemic is unlikely to lead to the outright collapse of the CCP, which is far more nimble and vigorous than the old Soviet Communist Party, with its plodding apparatchiks. If anything, the crisis seems to have persuaded many Chinese citizens to rally around their flag and has encouraged other authoritarian leaders to use the moment to augment their own powers.

China's mixed model of authoritarianism and state-directed capitalism has brought undoubted

benefits: according to the World Bank, the country's poverty rate fell from nearly 90 percent in 1981 to about 2 percent in 2013. Assuming a poverty line of \$1.90 (U.S.) per day, based on international purchasing power parity, this suggests more than 850 million Chinese people have escaped penury. Since the CCP cannot point to a democratic mandate for its legitimacy to govern, it touts such accomplishments as justification for its rule. And it has a point: owing to its vast geography, enormous population, and historic poverty, tens of millions of Chinese have perished during times of instability — from famine, drought, disease, natural disasters, war and warlordism, and other calamities. Democratic freedoms, the CCP argues, cannot take the place of social stability, which is the paramount proof of good leadership.

However, that stability comes at a frightening cost. To choose just two current examples, it is used to justify the monstrous extrajudicial internment of as many as one million Uighurs, to cleanse them of anti-party or anti-Chinese sentiments, and to defend the truly Orwellian mass surveillance punishment-and-reward system known as social credit, whereby the CCP aims to regulate the personal behaviour of all citizens.

Canadians might ask, So what? What the CCP does at home has no bearing on us. But, in fact, China's emergence as a global power means that its actions increasingly affect us all.

As COVID-19 began to spread, China's leadership tried to cover it up. Irwin Cotler and Judith Abitan have observed in the *Times of Israel*: "The world would have been more prepared and able to combat COVID-19 had it not been for President Xi's authoritarian regime's widespread and systematic pattern of sanitizing the massive domestic repression of its people." And in the *Sunday Times*, the historian Niall Ferguson has argued, "China's problem, like Russia's before 1991, is the One Party Problem. And so long as a fifth of humanity are subject to the will of an unaccountable, corrupt and power-hungry organization with a long history of crimes against its own people, the rest of humanity will not be safe."

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NEITHER CHINA NOR THE CHINESE PEOPLE ARE responsible for COVID-19. However, the actions of the country's leadership at the beginning of this crisis were unacceptably negligent. The CCP's reflexes of secrecy, censorship, and denial were the pandemic's original sin.

Unfortunately, this instinct seems to be a feature, and not a bug, of China's current political system. The great hope of the 1990s — that the country would liberalize politically as it grew economically — has not materialized. For now, its model of (increasing) authoritarianism and economic growth continues to attract popular support among its citizens. For now, the China we see is the China we've got.

The wish to see China liberalized is understandable to those in liberal societies who see the abuses to individual dignity and worth and find them in stark contrast to our values. At the same time, it has become unfashionable to defend liberalism: the political expression of the Enlightenment ideal of inherent individual autonomy, dignity, and worth. Many Westerners — from the so-called progressive left, which finds liberalism systematically exploitative of all minority groups, to the reactionary

right, which sees liberalism as inherently and dangerously disruptive of all tradition — feel the liberal creed has failed us. They may well agree with Vladimir Putin, who says that liberalism has "outlived its purpose."

Indeed, liberal democracy's ability to deliver a better future for its citizens has experienced some significant setbacks, notably the 2008–09 financial crisis and the rise of twenty-first-century populist demagogues, who have been elected because of deep and very real divides. However, despite these failings, feelings, and frustrations, liberalism is the most successful set of ideas of the last half millennium. (In defence of liberalism, one is tempted to say "Know history," but a more manageable task would be to read some recent books, including Adam Gopnik's *A Thousand Small Sanities*, Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, and, yes, even Martin Wolf's *Why Globalization Works*.)

Liberalism owes much of its success to its flexibility: when you cherish the rule of law, individual rights, equality of opportunity, and democratic elections, you are handed a powerful set of tools with which to identify and correct errors and injustices, and to bounce back from crises. Do liberal politics have problems today? Yes. Does liberalism provide a solution to these problems? Also yes.

Of course, China's rise is not occurring in a vacuum. It coincides with the relative decline of the world's leading liberal power, the United States. The country that Abraham Lincoln called "the last best hope of earth" is having one of its periodic flirtations with fascism (putting kids in cages is not a liberal ideal), which makes the job of defending liberalism in general, and the United States in particular, much more difficult.

The critically incompetent domestic American response to the pandemic further drives home that country's political shortcomings. For the first time in a long time, few (if any) countries are looking to the United States for leadership during a global crisis. And this shift presents a particular challenge for Canada. Our country has benefited enormously from the global order led by the United States since the end of the Second World War. Today, however, we're faced with the unpalatable prospect of maintaining relations with a country run by a sinister administration that seems uninterested in, exhausted by, or hostile to its leadership role. However, let's make no mistake: there is no country willing or able to take on America's role as the indispensable liberal power.

The next few decades will be marked by a growing rivalry between the United States and China, and Canada, which will remain a medium-sized power, has no choice but to maintain a close relationship with our neighbours to the south. Despite deep misgivings about the Trump administration, Canadians, on the whole, understand that our interests and values are inextricably bound to a liberal world order.

Canadians must continue to use whatever modest diplomatic and commercial resources we have to nudge Washington away from its current course. We must hope that American voters remember that liberalism is the animating feature of their country's political life — despite its illiberal lapses — and we must also hope they defeat Donald Trump this fall. The alternative, a world without a liberal great power — a world shaped by the Li Wenliang Plan — would be far worse. ▲



# A Northern Light

Nunavut's hope to avoid the outbreak

Sarah Rogers

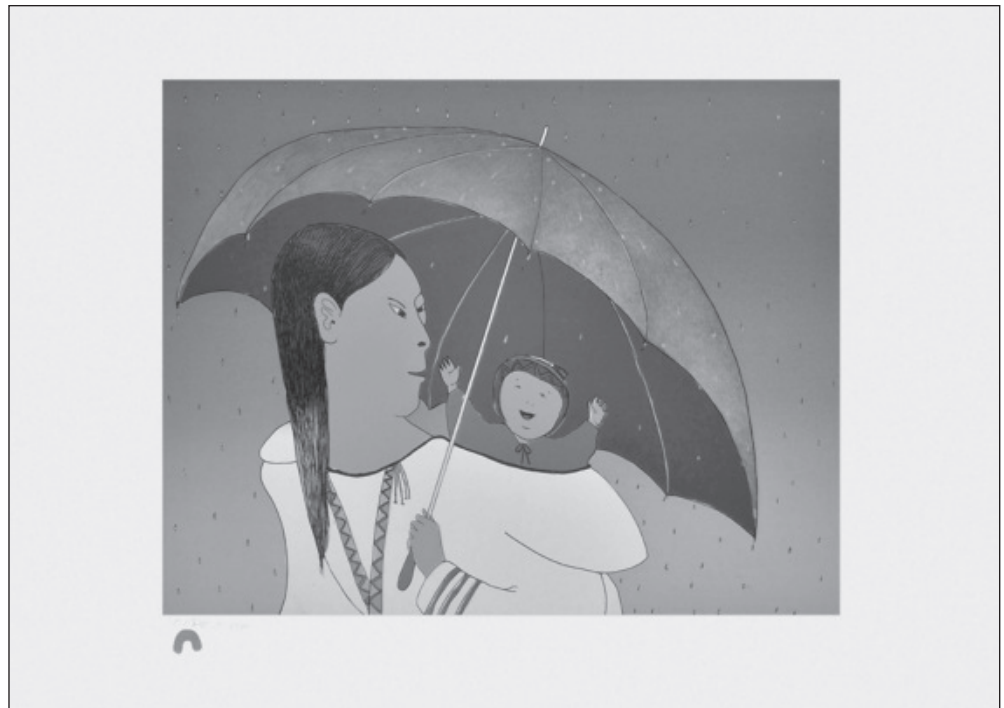
EVERYONE EXPECTED IT TO HAPPEN AT some point. But when it did, it hit with a heavy, frightening thud. Throughout April, even a good six weeks into the pandemic, Nunavut remained the only jurisdiction in Canada without any COVID-19 infections. Then, on April 29, someone tested positive in Pond Inlet, a community of about 1,600 on the northern tip of Baffin Island. There's no need to panic, officials said. But many reacted on social media that day with "Fuck." Nobody wants the coronavirus, but Nunavut, of all places, could really do without it.

Though the virus had already devastated regions around the world, there was a heightened sense of panic when it reached Nunavut. There is so much at stake. Many of the more than 38,000 people who inhabit the territory are members of large, extended families and kinship groups. A shortage of housing means they often live in overcrowded homes. In Pond Inlet, any food that isn't harvested locally must be flown in, and water is trucked to homes.

The Canadian Arctic is intensely familiar with epidemics. In the 1950s, one-third of Inuit in the region were infected with tuberculosis, a contagious and sometimes deadly lung disease. The legacy of TB still lingers across the North today; two young adults have died from the disease in recent years. It's just one of many examples that illustrate how the health and well-being of Inuit falls well below that of the average Canadian. And that buzzword "isolation" is a double-edged sword in Nunavut: living in a remote, fly-in territory may offer some control over borders, but it also means the closest hospital could be hundreds of kilometres away — and it may have only a handful of ventilators on hand.

Almost as soon as Nunavummiut had processed the potent danger of a COVID-19 case, they were able to exhale relief when news emerged that the test result was, in fact, a false positive. A burden was lifted, not just in Pond Inlet but across Nunavut. At the west end of the territory, people in Taloyoak paraded through town on snowmobiles to celebrate.

In Iqaluit, Gwen Healey Akearok, director of the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, says she feels lucky that Nunavut has remained free of COVID-19, but she also knows it isn't *actually* luck. The territory has always had a strategy to keep people safe and healthy — one that's rooted in compassion. We see it in the acts of kindness that abound during the pandemic: Checking in on elders and bringing neighbours fresh seal meat. The gentle reminders to children playing outside to keep their distance from each other. The live-streamed craft and cooking workshops.



A public health strategy rooted in compassion.

It's food donations and distributions to families in need, or the songwriter who regularly performs her Inuktitut music on social media. All of these things, and more, nurture a sense of community across Nunavut's expanse of two million square kilometres.

Nunavut is typically vulnerable to a narrative about how poorly its residents rank on health and social indicators. "We're actually doing so well here," Healey Akearok explains. "I want everyone to note where we're excelling and remember it."



THE SPRINGTIME IN THE ARCTIC IS ABOUT AS glorious as you'll get anywhere. On southern Baffin Island, the hours of sunlight stretch longer by six minutes each day, until the late evening skies glow orange all night. Groups head out on snowmobiles to distant frozen lakes; they drill holes, jig, and pull up beautifully pink Arctic char. This year, popular spring fishing derbies are under way with participants physically distanced across the ice, taking care not to congregate over the group's largest catch. There's no controversy over people heading to their cabins on the weekends here, as there is with the rush of urbanites fleeing southern cities. In Nunavut, there's endless tundra, fresh air, and snow etched with Ski-Doo trails. And even with a pandemic, some things never change — like the rhythms and colours of spring.

Nunavut itself is only twenty-one years old, but it has a weathered soul. There are Inuit alive today who grew up on the land and in snow

houses, or igloos. There are those who survived government relocation into settlements, and many more who were sent away to residential school and returned with scars. The people who have lived and thrived on this land are extraordinary in their resilience to the pain that colonialism has inflicted.

By the end of May, government and health officials were still hosting regular COVID-19 updates at the territorial legislature, a three-storey postmodern building in Iqaluit that draws inspiration from a *qaqqiq*, or meeting place. In a wood-panelled chamber, officials sit two metres apart in seats padded with sealskin. The territory will begin to reopen, ever so gradually, in the weeks to come. This does not mean that the pandemic is over, Nunavut's chief public health officer, Michael Patterson, insists. It does not mean that the threat has passed.

"Are you at all surprised that COVID-19 hasn't arrived in the territory yet?" a reporter asks him. "Ee," Patterson responds without skipping a beat. Onlookers laugh at the Inuktitut affirmation and nod, nervously.

It seems inevitable that the virus will touch the territory at some point; planes won't stay grounded forever in a place that relies on air travel and, in many sectors, an out-of-territory workforce. Summer is coming, and with it the urge to leave the homes where people have been cooped up for months. The hope is that Nunavut will have lived and learned enough to weather whatever storms are ahead — a never-ending task in Canada's North. ▲

# National Personality

The legacy of Marcel Cadieux

Bruce K. Ward

## The Good Fight: Marcel Cadieux and Canadian Diplomacy

Brendan Kelly

UBC Press

540 pages, hardcover and ebook

HERE HAS BEEN MUCH PRAISE FOR the Department of External Affairs (now Global Affairs) that oversaw Canadian foreign policy after the Second World War. Just as the British still take pride in the former reputation of their intelligence service, Canadians might point to the quality of their foreign service in the 1950s and '60s. Some might even be familiar with such names as O.D. Skelton and Norman Robertson, who were at the helm during the department's "golden age." Brendan Kelly's absorbing political biography, *The Good Fight*, makes a convincing case that Marcel Cadieux's name should be added to that elite cadre.

Cadieux's origins were far from elite. The son of a postal worker, he was born in 1915 and raised in a duplex on Boulevard Saint-Laurent, in a working-class district of north Montreal. In the mid-'30s, he began his studies at the Université de Montréal by taking night classes; he eventually earned a degree from its law school, although he considered the institution "a gigantic sham: a conspiracy to keep up appearances." His decision to pursue a career in the public service was met with disapproval from his family, who had entertained high hopes for his future as a lawyer. For his father, having a son "work[ing] for the English in Ottawa" was tantamount to "having a daughter who is a prostitute."

Nonetheless, Cadieux arrived in Ottawa in 1941 — a French Canadian nationalist about to join a DEA dominated by Anglo Canadians whose cultural ethos was heavily Oxonian. He faced enormous obstacles, including the expectation that he perform in English to the same standard as his British-educated colleagues. Rather than seeing only doors barred to his ambition and retreating resentfully back to Quebec, he took on the challenge and forced his way onto the larger stage.

The trajectory of the career Cadieux ultimately built — from a third secretary of External Affairs to an undersecretary (that is, head) and finally ambassador to the United States — testifies to a remarkable combination of energy, determination, and talent. He felt driven to demonstrate, both to the anglophile civil service and to his fellow Quebecers, that the federal stage should and could belong equally to both of Canada's founding cultures (his vision of Canada at this point did not include Indigenous peoples as a third founding culture). For almost a decade

before Pierre Trudeau burst onto the scene, Cadieux promoted a bilingual civil service, reflecting a Canada where the French language would not be confined to one province.

♦

MARCEL CADIEUX WAS LIVING TESTIMONY TO THE idea of the dedicated public servant, akin to a secular priest, whose position and influence are based on merit and hard work alone. He believed ardently in the role, the mystique, and the "higher interests of the state." Perhaps nowhere was the mystique better expressed than in *The Canadian Diplomat: An Essay in Definition*, which he published with the University of Toronto Press in 1963. It soon became required



At the centre of things in Washington.

reading for candidates preparing to sit the foreign service examination, as they endeavoured to join those "clever, quiet, well-informed young men" whom a British diplomat remembered meeting in foreign capitals. Doubtless, the book now appears dated. Yet its underlying theme remains as relevant as ever: Just what is a Canadian? Since a diplomat is "representative of his country," Cadieux thought that "we might apprehend through him . . . an approximate image of a Canadian" and become more clearly aware of our "national personality."

Cadieux was in a position to make major real-world decisions that would give shape to that image. Of course, these decisions had to be taken within certain real-world constraints.

Canada was a relatively young "middle power," finding its way in a world of rival empires, and was itself the outcome of a complex negotiation between distinct peoples.

Much of *The Canadian Diplomat* charts how this country gradually came of age through the first half of the twentieth century, ceasing to be a de facto British colony in its foreign policy. How a truly sovereign Canada would project itself into the next half of the century, Cadieux believed, would depend on decisions taken in the middle decades.

As head of External Affairs, Cadieux was the top bureaucrat overseeing foreign policy during the turbulent '60s, a time of high drama: the refusal of the Conservative government under John Diefenbaker to accept U.S. nuclear warheads on Canadian soil and the subsequent fall of that government in a 1964 election marked by American interference; the scene at Camp David in 1965, when Lyndon Johnson manhandled the prime minister, Lester Pearson, after the latter spoke at Temple University and called on the U.S. to halt its bombing of North Vietnam; and, in Canada's Expo year, Charles de Gaulle's cry of "Vive le Québec libre" from the balcony of Montreal's city hall.

Cadieux was at the centre of these events, discreetly, of course. But that discretion did not preclude his writing of a *journal intime*. It was a form of unofficial record keeping, as well as an outlet for venting about the various ministers and prime ministers under whom he served, including Howard Green and Paul Martin Sr. as well as Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau. Kelly's lively use of this previously unpublished material takes us behind the scenes of Ottawa decision making.

Cadieux's long-serving secretary was once asked if her boss was as funny in French as he was in English. She responded, "Much funnier." Kelly offers many gems that exhibit Cadieux's humour and insight. For instance, on the French president's state visit to Canada, he remarked: "De Gaulle could have been received with honour by the lady of the house in the stately rooms. He prefers to enter by the back door and to grope the maid." There is also this comment on the enigmatic Trudeau: "What is extraordinary about this young, vigorous, supposedly very articulate university professor prime minister is that we can never figure out what he wants."

When it came to Canada's most important international relationship, Cadieux's position was crystal clear. As Kelly puts it, the U.S. found in Cadieux "one of the most pro-American under-secretaries ever to hold the position."

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HAROLD INNIS ONCE SAID THAT IN A REMARKABLY short period, Canada moved from "colony to

nation to colony." This trajectory was in no small measure shaped by the belief among senior civil servants that Canada must, at all costs, be the "good ally" of the United States in the struggle against international Communism. In Kelly's words, Cadieux "had become a cold warrior, and a cold warrior he would remain until he died." His intense hatred of Communism seems to have been largely due to first-hand experience: short stays behind the Iron Curtain, in Warsaw and Prague, in 1951, and later in that decade a stint in North Vietnam as a member of the ineffectual international commission that monitored the peace accords following France's departure from the region. If his hawkish stance had a more theoretical origin, it might have been found, Kelly suggests, in the Roman Catholicism he absorbed as a youth in Quebec.

On every key issue of foreign policy during the '60s, Cadieux opposed attempts to lessen Canada's dependence on the United States. He was relieved when the defence crisis of 1963–64 resulted in the election of Pearson's Liberals, along with the government's immediate acceptance of nuclear warheads. In 1965, realizing that Pearson was determined to make a speech against U.S. policy toward Vietnam, it was Cadieux who suggested he call on Washington to pause its bombing in order to encourage the North Vietnamese to come to the peace table. But, as he confided in his journal, he made the suggestion only on the assumption that the North Vietnamese would not agree, thereby strengthening the administration's moral credibility among its increasingly doubtful allies. When the minister of external affairs, Paul Martin, met with the State Department's William Bundy to voice concerns about the lack of cooperation in a Vietnam peace mission, his own undersecretary backed up Bundy. As Chester Ronning, the retired Canadian diplomat leading the mission, observed, Cadieux was "deeply prejudiced" in favour of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Kelly's account of Cadieux's role in promoting Ottawa's complicity in the Vietnam War is not meant to impugn his loyalty to Canada or his devotion to the ideal of the selfless civil servant acting in the best interests of the state. It does, however, highlight an all-too-human fallibility: busy and powerful decision makers tend to fall back on ideas acquired decades earlier. An extremely close military alliance with the U.S. was necessary during and immediately after the Second World War. The Soviet Union was an expansionist power, and life behind the Iron Curtain was a miserable affair. But there were global realities that increasingly called for more nuanced attention from those overseeing a middle power's foreign policy twenty years later. There was a significant difference between the Soviet-style Communism that suppressed Polish and Czech nationalism, for instance, and a Communism that a nation like Vietnam might harness after decades of colonial rule. By 1965, as the Pentagon Papers later revealed, even the White House knew the conflict was an unwinnable debacle, though it continued to fight for another decade with hopes of salvaging American prestige. Still, as public opposition to the war grew, Cadieux felt "shock" at Tommy Douglas's statement that the intervention in Vietnam was legally and morally wrong.

In 1947, the senior diplomat Escott Reid circulated a report on the possibility of a war between

the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Cadieux rejected the report's underlying thesis that *both* countries were expansionist powers. Indeed, perhaps the most glaring reality overlooked by the overseers of Canada's foreign policy during these years was the nature of the United States itself: a democracy that is also expansionist, different than older European empires but an empire nonetheless.

As George Grant pointed out in his 1965 book, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, our country's history and geography have kept us from charting a defence and foreign policy entirely independent of the great republic to the south. But a middle power should strive for as much balance as possible, so that the "good ally" does not become a mere satellite — as Grant thought had happened to Canada. At least we had no troops on the ground in Vietnam. And with what little foreign policy sovereignty we've maintained in the years since, we avoided direct involvement in Iraq, another imperial debacle.

CADIEUX WAS A HAWK ON QUEBEC SEPARATISM, too. His conviction that France was meddling in Canadian affairs by supporting, overtly and sometimes covertly, the separatist movement was perhaps the most passionately felt of his foreign policy concerns. One colleague likened him to Captain Ahab, with *le général* as his great white whale.

Cadieux paid a heavy price for his determined resistance to the Quebec-France alliance. In his home province, his unflinching federalism earned him the opprobrium of the largely separatist intelligentsia; even in Ottawa, he was looked at askance by French Canadian colleagues. One of the best moments in Kelly's biography is the scene around the cabinet table the day after de Gaulle openly called for Quebec to become a sovereign state. When Martin reminded the cabinet that Cadieux had been warning for years about such interference, Pearson agreed. The ministers banged their fists on the table in Cadieux's honour.

While predicting that de Gaulle would use his visit to stir the separatist pot, Cadieux did hope to take the opportunity to bring the French president in contact with French Canadians outside Quebec, and with English Canadians who were seriously interested in the French language and culture. A desire to demonstrate that the French fact could endure in North America without an independent Quebec reflects Cadieux's own *beau risque*. He bet on the possibility that Canada could grow into a country able to preserve French Canadian culture without political separation. Two subsequent failed referendums, in 1980 and 1995, might well have vindicated that bet.

After overseeing Canada's foreign policy for a decade, Cadieux was appointed by the Trudeau government as ambassador to the United States, where he would serve from 1972 to 1975. As the first French Canadian to fill this most important of postings, Cadieux embodied a national personality at once Canadian and Québécois. Although he had spent his honeymoon in Florida and had often visited relatives in Massachusetts (descendants of the mid-nineteenth-century French Canadian diaspora seeking work in the textile mills), he felt hampered by an insufficient understanding of ordinary life in the U.S. In an effort to learn

more, he took his wife and two children on a caravan tour of the country. As he later told an American audience, he was deeply impressed by this "glimpse at the soul of a great country."

Yet, as Kelly notes, Cadieux's ambassadorial experience was also disenchanting, as he discovered that Americans were "generally uninterested" in learning more about the French dimension of Canada. Indeed, the Nixon administration seemed generally uninterested in Canada at all, except when the "good ally" acted out, for instance when Parliament passed a resolution deploring the massive bombing of North Vietnam. Cadieux's own support of Washington's Vietnam policy did not protect him from being cold-shouldered by the White House, and he seems to have spent much of his time fretting about the Trudeau government's inclination to "indulge in nationalistic binges to placate the anti-American element in Canada."

THE FINAL YEARS OF CADIEUX'S CAREER WERE devoted to files with a lower profile but of major significance. As a dutiful civil servant, he put aside his own skepticism about Trudeau's efforts to lessen Canadian dependence on the U.S. by forging stronger connections with Europe, and he successfully negotiated a framework agreement on economic cooperation with the European Community. He was not surprised that the agreement ultimately went nowhere, largely because the consensus among Ottawa's mandarins was that more integration with the U.S. economy was the way forward. After his mission to Brussels, Cadieux was tasked with negotiating an extensive agreement on maritime boundaries and fisheries with the United States. It was a tough slog — as Cadieux noted in his journal, "the small countries, Canada in particular, must never tire of demanding justice" — and only partially successful: the most important segment of the treaty was never ratified by the U.S. Senate.

Cadieux's last assignment, in 1980, brought him back to the national unity question, this time as a key adviser to the federal government on post-referendum planning. But health problems, as well as personal frustrations with Jean Chrétien, who was leading the No campaign, prompted him to leave his position just weeks before the vote. He did not, however, leave the question of Quebec and Canada behind. Less than a year after retirement, he had drafted a book about de Gaulle's role in promoting Quebec separatism, written from a French Canadian federalist perspective. Before his manuscript could be published, however, he died of a heart attack in Florida, in March 1981.

If, as Cadieux once opined, we can apprehend through the Canadian diplomat a clearer image of a still relatively young national personality — as it is and as it might become — we have in Kelly's biography rich material for reflection on two of the fundamental tensions within it: between French and English, and between those who want closer integration with the U.S. and those who favour a more independent Canada. In regard to the former tension, Cadieux's stance as both staunchly Canadian and Québécois holds out promise for the future. But as for the latter, the continentalism that was his default position has little to offer a country that seeks its foreign policy image in a world (dis)order where the U.S. itself appears bent on discarding the old concept of the good ally. ▲

# Harsh Treatment

Perspectives on internment

J. L. Granatstein

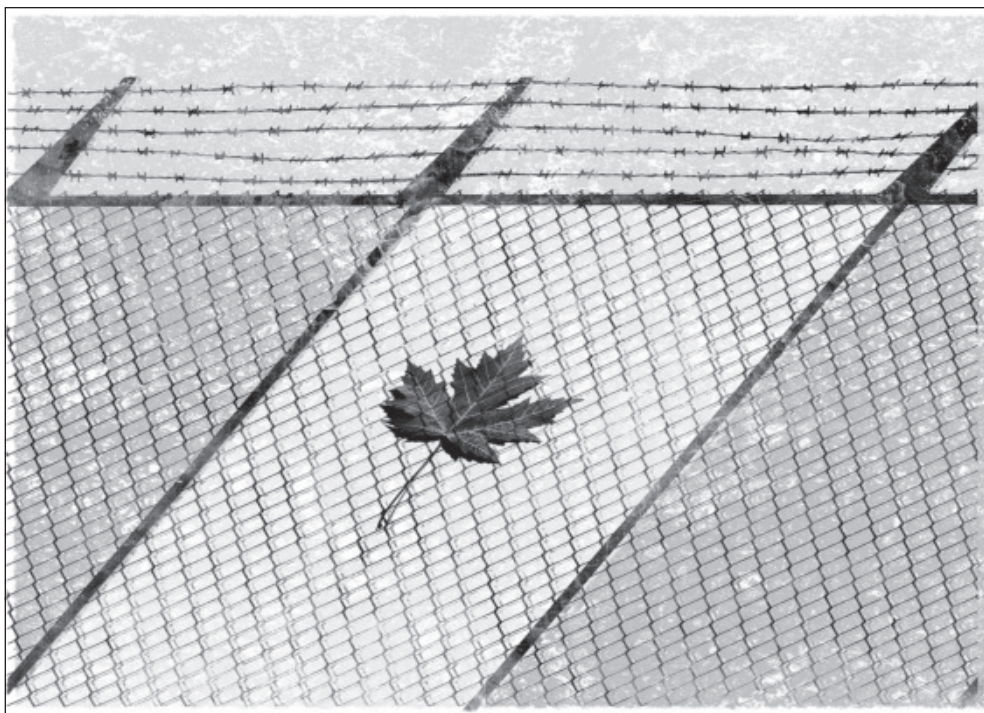
## Civilian Internment in Canada: Histories and Legacies

Edited by Rhonda L. Hinther and Jim Mochoruk  
University of Manitoba Press  
424 pages, softcover and ebook

**A** FEW DAYS AFTER GERMANY AND THE Soviet Union concluded their cynical pact in August 1939, which preceded the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police presented the Department of Justice with its plan for “suppressing subversive activities” at the outbreak of war. The RCMP proposed that Canada outlaw all Nazi, Fascist, and Communist organizations; ban all foreign-language political organizations of Fascist or Communist affiliation; and suppress the English-language Communist press, along with the Nazi, Fascist, and Communist foreign press. The Mounties also proposed to seize the assets and records of such organizations, including records kept in consular archives.

The RCMP proposal upset Norman Robertson, the senior External Affairs official who had been his department’s representative on the various committees that had been desultorily readying Canada for war. “I was appalled,” Robertson wrote to Oscar Skelton, the undersecretary of state. The plan would cause “bitter inter-racial resentment and the prospect of endless labour troubles,” and would drive organizations underground. “The Police should concentrate on their plans for the immediate arrest of persons suspected of treasonable activity.” Those procedures had been readied for a year.

When Robertson met with RCMP and Justice Department officials a few days later, the police argued “that the Communists are of far more importance than either the Italians or Germans in the event of war.” Pressed by Robertson, the group decided to leave the Communists alone for the moment and do nothing about Fascists — for fear of violating Italy’s neutrality. Instead, they would review the Nazi supporters to be arrested. The RCMP had produced a list of 641 names, 90 percent of them landed immigrants and only sixty-five Canadian citizens. On September 3, the day Britain declared war, and a week before Canada followed suit, the list had been whittled down to 265 German nationals and sixty naturalized Canadians. These men were arrested under the authority of the Defence of Canada Regulations, put into force under the sweeping powers of the War Measures Act. The DOCR gave the justice minister the right to intern “any particular person” who might be “acting in any manner prejudicial to the public safety or the safety of the State.”



This country’s failures of internment.

Robertson had vetted the list himself. In a letter to Walter Tucker, a Liberal MP from Saskatchewan, he noted that “too many naturalized Canadians of German origin have put themselves in an awkward and embarrassing position by their active participation, in peacetime, in Nazi and Nazi-controlled political and social organizations.” Many likely joined those groups, he went on, “in good faith without appreciating the strain which other people might think membership put on their loyalty to Canada.”

That was the critical point. Robertson believed that Canada had failed to integrate ethnic Canadians of German origin — as well as those of Italian and Japanese origin — whose activities looked very different once war had been declared. As he wrote a few months later, many German Canadians had been surprised to be arrested: “It had never been put to them clearly and unequivocally, at the time of their naturalization or afterwards, that continued membership in organizations under foreign control was incompatible with the loyalty they had promised to Canada.”

Nonetheless, by January 1941, Canada had interned 763 persons of German origin and 586 Italians (after appeals, it had released 127 of the former and 105 of the latter). Once the fall of France left Germany in control of Western Europe, Canada locked up eighty-seven Communists and twenty-eight domestic Fascists, members of the National Unity Party. When Japan entered the war in December 1941, some

700 Japanese Canadians were also interned, some because they were active supporters of the empire, others because they had protested and demonstrated too forcefully against the evacuation of all persons of Japanese origin, citizens or not, to the British Columbia interior.

These internments — and the internment of almost 6,000 Ukrainian Canadians in the First World War — have generated much public discussion, multiple government apologies, and a substantial scholarly literature. What too few of those studies do, however, is remember that Canada was on the losing side of war in the early 1940s and had the right to defend itself against internal enemies.

The internment process was far from perfect, of course. The RCMP, with its pre-war fixation on Communists and its almost total neglect of domestic Nazis and Fascists, was utterly incompetent. And when the Mounties did try to locate supporters of Hitler and Mussolini, they sometimes turned to informants with dubious motives. Italian Canadians were especially hard done by. But, to their credit, Robertson and others insisted that Canada institute an appeal process, and many of those initially interned were in fact released.

Regrettably, most of the writers in *Civilian Internment in Canada*, edited by Rhonda L. Hinther of Brandon University and Jim Mochoruk of the University of North Dakota, do not adequately define “internment,” a term that carries great emotive power. The usual definition places internees behind barbed wire and under

armed guard. The 700 or so Japanese Canadian internees, most held at the Angler Camp in northern Ontario, were under guard; the active supporters of Japan among them certainly met the definition laid out in the Defence of Canada Regulations of “acting in any manner prejudicial to the public safety or the safety of the State.” Perhaps those who protested the forced evacuations should not have been locked up, but in a feverish atmosphere they were also deemed to have fallen afoul of the DOCR. Interned groups had a “protecting power,” a neutral country that was charged by an international agreement to ensure their treatment met adequate standards (Spain, in the case of the interned Japanese Canadians). And it did. Even one of the critical essays in this volume concedes “the generally positive conditions of internment in Canada in regard to living quarters, nutrition, hygiene, medical care, and the like.”

But it is important to point out that the evacuation of 22,000 Japanese Canadians from the B.C. coast to the interior was not internment. Rather, those Canadians were victims of a wartime panic and long-standing, deep-rooted racism. Imperial Japan was running unchecked in the Pacific in late 1941 and early 1942, and many on the West Coast, including provincial and federal politicians and the senior military officers, were calling for action.

Officials separated from their families most of the fit Japanese Canadian men who were moved inland and put them to work in the forests or building roads. The rest were sent to hurriedly erected townsites or to small communities with vacant housing, usually not in good condition. Some towns greeted the influx of the evacuees as an economic boost. Other evacuees chose to go to sugar beet farms in Manitoba and Alberta, where some Japanese Canadians had been farming before the war. The work was extremely hard and the economic returns usually small, but this was not internment. Evacuees could also move further east with the permission of the British Columbia Security Commission. Internees had no such option. But today this distinction is usually forgotten.

Without a doubt, the vast majority of Japanese Canadians were treated harshly and unjustly during the Second World War. Despite the misuse of the word in almost all writing on the subject, however, they were not “interned.” In many ways, *Civilian Internment in Canada* completely wrenches the word out of shape.

Hinther writes about Gladys MacDonald, an activist with the Regina Communist Party. She was jailed from 1940 to 1942, and that might have been wrong. But it was not internment. Mochoruk focuses his essay on a Communist-run dairy and co-op chain in Manitoba that suffered “collateral damage” when the party was banned in June 1940. Again, that was not internment by any meaning of the word.

With the co-editors stretching the definition to the breaking point, it is no surprise that many of the other contributions to this volume wander off topic. One looks critically at German merchant seamen, hardly normal civilian internees, held in Canada. Other essays focus on German Jewish refugees in Britain, swept up in London’s wartime panic and sent to the Dominion for incarceration as enemy aliens; one considers same-sex desire among them. The phrase “informal internment”—whatever that might be—is used to describe Japanese

Canadian sugar beet farmers. In these twenty essays, interpretations of internment spin completely out of control.

Such looseness of terms matters in the context of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canadians believe in their civil rights, as they should; they often want to apply those beliefs retroactively, as they should not. Pierre Trudeau, we might remember, refused to offer apologies and redress for the state’s past errors, much preferring that Canadians try to do better in the future. But with Trudeau out of office, the Japanese Canadian community won an apology from the Mulroney government and monetary compensation in 1988. Two years later, Italian Canadians received an apology, without financial compensation, for the “brutal injustice” they had suffered. Ukrainian Canadians similarly worked to get recognition for their Great War internment, though not an apology. And in 2008, the Harper government created a \$10-million fund to support commemorative and educational work about internment.

Only German Canadians and Communists have yet to receive an apology for their internment in the two world wars. The public generally agrees with making amends and offering redress, but it might not look favourably upon an apology to Communists and Nazis.



IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT MORE DIFFICULT FOR Ottawa to contemplate internment in the future, no matter the circumstances. That’s because the Mulroney government, in 1988, scrapped the War Measures Act, passed into law in August 1914, and replaced it with the Emergencies Act:

Nothing in this Act shall be construed or applied so as to confer on the Governor in Council the power to make orders or regulations . . . providing for the detention, imprisonment or internment of Canadian citizens or permanent residents . . . on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

But does Canada yet work to integrate its immigrant communities, as Norman Robertson urged in the late 1930s? To cite only one example: During the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Canadian Serbs and Croats fought each other on Toronto street corners and raised funds for their warring relatives in the old country. One Canadian businessman, Gojko Šušak, even became the Croatian defence minister, a proponent of ethnic cleansing, and an undoubted war criminal. Here this country definitely failed to make its immigrants into Canadians.

More recently, a newly powerful and aggressive China has raised concerns in the West and throughout Asia, and Beijing has already spread its tentacles widely among the more than a million Chinese Canadians. To update Robertson’s note from eighty years ago, “Too many naturalized Canadians of Chinese origin have put themselves in an awkward and embarrassing position by their active participation, in peacetime, in Beijing-controlled political and social organizations.” We must hope fervently that no Canadian government will ever again intern any of its citizens, but the world remains a dangerous place, and anti-democratic forces are gaining strength. ▲

### Commuter (Ontario)

The longing, the lively, the study. What you do in trees, how you breathe here, how you know, why you have knowledge and what mode you have, what that knowing might mean here, for you, for the tree, why is this, the ground composition, what kind of soil, and again what kind, what do you tell people about yourself and where you live and where you come from, what do they understand, what are you doing here, why here, how long are you staying, are you putting down roots here, do you think this is where you’ll settle, are you there now, are you Ontarian, is that home, does it feel like home, are you going home this summer, are you going on any trips, do you think you’ll get some time to relax, what you tell people about yourself and all the places your friends live and how hard each time, how lonely, to start over again, and how digging in and staying put is impossible when you don’t have money, and how a home needs to be built from something, and how you can’t always build from what you’ve inherited, which means you have to listen better than you’ve been taught, which means that listening can be your home.

Laurie D. Graham

Laurie D. Graham is the author of two books of poetry, *Rove* and *Settler* Education. She is also the publisher of *Brick* magazine.

# Neighbourhood Watch

Remembering a city of old

*Barry Jordan Chong*

## Toronto's Lost Villages

Ron Brown

Dundurn

248 pages, softcover and ebook

**D**ECIDING TO MOVE APARTMENTS is one of the last privileges a Toronto renter has. Changing neighbours is almost like a freebie holiday: you get all the perks of being a tourist (freedom, anonymity, rejuvenation) and none of the disadvantages of being a foreigner (getting lost, not speaking English, being confused by the archaic transit system). It's like you're a kid again: coming upon an abandoned red-brick warehouse in the next neighbourhood is on par with unearthing pirate treasure. Until, of course, you find an even more amazing gem in the next-next neighbourhood over.

You get that sense of discovery while reading *Toronto's Lost Villages*, Ron Brown's recently expanded eulogy for neighbourhoods destroyed or altered beyond recognition by a citizenry that was — and in many ways still is — in its infancy. Like a family photo album, this is not a book you should feel obliged to read cover to cover. There's no consistent narrative thrust. The pages are dense by intention, peppered with musings both sentimental and forlorn, with loving chronicles of virtually every Hogtown haunt ever vanished, from the suburbs of Mississauga and Vaughan to downtown and the Toronto Islands. It's a book that's best consumed over an extended period, a time machine for revisiting your favourite area, or perhaps a companion to bring on long walks through parts unknown.

Brown, a geographer and travel writer, won a Heritage Toronto Award in 1997 for the first edition of this book. It's full of welcome details and historic observations, like Lady Simcoe's descriptions of "fallen logs in swampy spots" along Yonge Street. And he clearly has love for Toronto, as the short essays that precede his more textbook-like chapters show. But accounts of *how* the city came to be as it is, for better or worse, are mostly missing from *Toronto's Lost Villages*. Even with a rousing, writerly voice, Brown generally fails to explain why historic neighbourhoods are worth mourning in the first place, and what we've lost as a society by failing to save them.

The opening chapters illustrate Brown's broad ambition and flair for romance. He begins with the "List of the Lost," a directory of long-gone neighbourhoods that reads like a memorial for dead soldiers. About a third of the entries are marked with an asterisk, indicating "little or nothing left to see." Moving to the meat of



A mournful potpourri of Toronto's past.

the book, Brown paints the picture of Toronto's ancient past, when "human activity began with the retreat of the glaciers roughly twenty thousand years ago." It's an audacious stroke, like Stanley Kubrick choosing to open *2001: A Space Odyssey* with prehistoric apes using proto-tools to bludgeon their prey and each other. In fact, all of the book's early moments are grim, striving, and challenging. These are all good things.

The strongest bits in the remaining chapters conjure a wonderful nostalgia for old Toronto and its surrounding municipalities — and, ironically or not, reinforce how the city's conservative approaches to economics and aesthetics remain in place today. Brown really makes you detest the powers that were for destroying villages that, if still standing, would surely dispel the myth that Toronto is devoid of nature (thanks, Vancouver) as well as ugly and architecturally derivative (*merci*, Montreal). For Torontonians who actually love Toronto, there are a lot of savoury snacks here: accounts of Etobicoke's Long Branch district as a Victorian-era cottage getaway (complete with an amusement park resembling that of Coney Island); the fact that Danforth Avenue, the blacktop spine of current Greektown, is named after an American road maker who left Canada out of disgust for his patrons; and the portrait of early Scarborough as one of Ontario's best farming areas, rich with "fields of hay and grain" and cattle grazing "lazily in lush green pastures" (pastures that are now home to more than 650,000 people). For Toronto devotees, this seems like the city we

should reclaim or, at least, the one that our children should be studying in school.

Throughout *Toronto's Lost Villages*, there are biting metaphors for the contemporary city, though Brown prefers to mask them somewhat. He points to 1850s rich folk donating land for public train stations (of the two dozen built, only four remain) as a ploy to raise the value of their already valuable properties — sounds familiar. Later, Brown explains that Scarborough initially had problems attracting settlers, thanks to a lack of public transportation. Scarborough is still grossly lacking transit options, of course, an injustice that has fuelled deep resentment toward the "downtown elite" and helped give rise to neo-liberal populists like Rob and Doug Ford.

If you live in Toronto and care about heritage, you know that Brown is mildly shaking a fist at today's leadership with such historic parallels. "Sadly," he writes, "rich history has been obliterated by those who put profits first, or who perhaps were just never fully aware of the heritage they were destroying." Given the news that the Gladstone Hotel — a preservation champion and arts haven in the West End — was recently bought by a condo developer, you can only hope that Brown will once again unleash his raging pen in still other updates of *Toronto's Lost Villages*.

◆

BROWN'S GRUMPY, RIGHTEOUS DIGS ARE COMPELLING and often funny, but this strength only exposes what the book is lacking — namely, even more grumpy, righteous digging. Because

Brown is so concerned with detail, so dedicated to doing right by his lost villages, he misses the chance to tell a more emotional story, a shame considering his opinions are so clearly bolstered by matchless background information. Brown has done a fine job of cataloguing the city's untold history, but Torontonians who align with him ethically would be better educated (and entertained) by a lively harangue — something more akin to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. That may sound like a reach, but Toronto is a relatively young polity longing for a proud history.

Take Brown's assessment of Osgoode Hall, one of the Big Smoke's most cherished buildings, right in the downtown core. "When built in 1832, it stood majestically at the head of a country lane that is now called York Street," he writes. "The magnificent structure is a welcome relief amid the architectural tedium that now dominates University Avenue." That last sentence is a pesky little one-off that deserves more discussion; tedium always warrants some sort of roasting. But Brown just stops there, moving on to descriptions of Lakeshore Road in 1791. He describes Toronto's current physical state as "sad" and "unfortunate." The problem is that passing remarks tend to get... well, passed over when sandwiched by layers and layers of pure fact. Brown should be more expressive and attack the foes he's laid out in the text. He — and his audience — would have more fun that way.

In some cases, Brown's nostalgia has blinded him to the virtues of contemporary Toronto, particularly in Etobicoke and Scarborough. People living in these parts of town would be forgiven for accusing him of lacking awareness. Yes, good on Brown for praising the suburbs of old, an approach that rarely makes it into the work of today's travel writers and media personalities. But his characterization is simplistic: he blames the creation of condos, box stores, and monster homes for eradicating precious heritage sites, while ignoring the fact that most suburban residents demanded these things be built. He also fails to properly acknowledge that Toronto's unique diversity has made the suburbs more interesting, in many ways, than downtown, especially when it comes to the culinary scene and post-war architecture. In this way, he's

### Is It Safe?

Tell us, they said, no one died  
or killed or took their life  
and left it in the basement.  
Tell us there are no people ghosts or creature ghosts.  
Tell us what colour is a good colour and will it be safe?  
Will a condo rise above? Or a sinkhole below?  
Please tell us, they said, if you will leave the light on  
when you go, if you'll come back,  
and what you did here and with whom,  
and will we be lovely and will we be lonely  
and will we be lucky,  
how much will it cost, they said, and how loud,  
for how long, they cried, for how long?

Ronna Bloom

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

quite unlike Suresh Doss and Shawn Micallef, two celebrated writers who have forced downtowners to rethink their definitions of cool. The former has earned an international audience for showcasing the world-class ethnic cuisine that can be found only in the pastiche strip malls of Brown's nightmares. The latter — someone who might love Toronto even more than Brown — suggests that modern and postmodern suburban architecture is both beautiful and a pillar of Canadian identity.

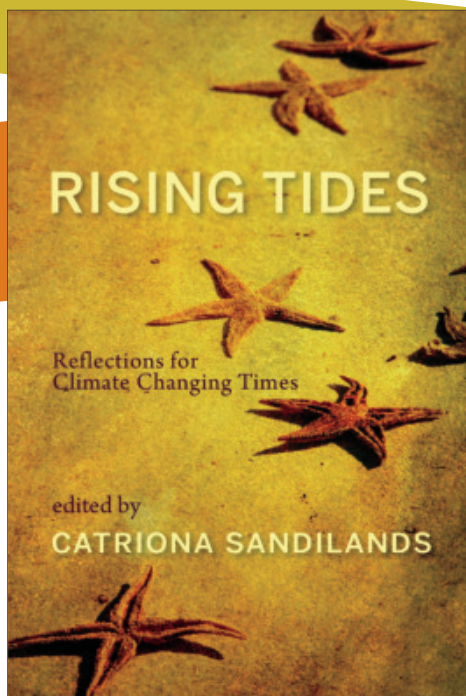
Although an Anglo-Protestant culture dominated Toronto's past, it does not dominate the design, taste, and ideals of today. Brown's case against new developments remains valid. Still, to borrow his own phrasing, he may not be fully aware of the heritage they are "creating" in the suburbs.

That's not to say that *Toronto's Lost Villages* is anti-progressive. In addressing the TTC's construction of Islington Station in the 1960s, Brown acknowledges that while most of the area's original charm had been stifled and evaporated, the new subway brought with it "improved

access to the city." This meant that "commuters began to demand rental housing, and they got it. Apartment and condominium towers began to pierce the sky." It's a tacit admission that destroying history for essential infrastructure can propel municipalities into new strata of socio-economic excellence. But Brown would surely deem the trend "unfortunate."

Still, Brown has written a book of great service. And even the quarrels readers will have with some of his ideas probably mean he's already won. That is to say, Brown's economy of opinion, by its very nature, ends up stirring heated debate. For what is a Torontonian if not a tolerant complainer — a passionate asshole who regularly takes his or her city to task but absolutely refuses to leave?

*Toronto's Lost Villages* is a compendious buffet of civic history. You flip pages, picking which ghost community you want to inhabit, just as a renter chooses which surviving neighbourhood to live in next. Then you move on to another one when your itch for exploration — and your love of your city — become too strong to resist. ▲



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# Risky Business

The journeys of human curiosity

Gregory P. Marchildon

**Beyond the Known: How Exploration Created the Modern World and Will Take Us to the Stars**

Andrew Rader

Scribner

352 pages, hardcover, softcover, ebook, and audiobook

**I**N 1997, JARED DIAMOND'S *GUNS, GERMS, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* made its dramatic appearance and won the Pulitzer Prize the following year. It was a blockbuster history book, and bookstores continue to stock large quantities. But it was not written by a historian.

Trained as an evolutionary biologist, ornithologist, and geographer, Diamond had zeroed in on a single question: Why were there such disparities in technology among human groups? His answer — the luck of the draw in geography — was a surprise at the time. Diamond argued that groups most proximate to a broad diversity of plant and animal species (as well as water sources) had the most opportunities to marshal the few food sources biologically capable of being domesticated. Such groups were also more immune to disease because of their proximity to livestock, the main source of contagion. Since Eurasian peoples won this lottery, they were the ones who ultimately conquered, displaced, or eradicated Indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, and Africa.

*Guns, Germs, and Steel* is a sweeping history, held together by a novel hypothesis. It's a formula that Andrew Rader has followed with *Beyond the Known*. From the beginning of time, he argues, our species has been hard-wired for adventure — constantly wanting to find out what lies beyond. We have always been trekking, with no choice but to boldly go where no one has gone before.

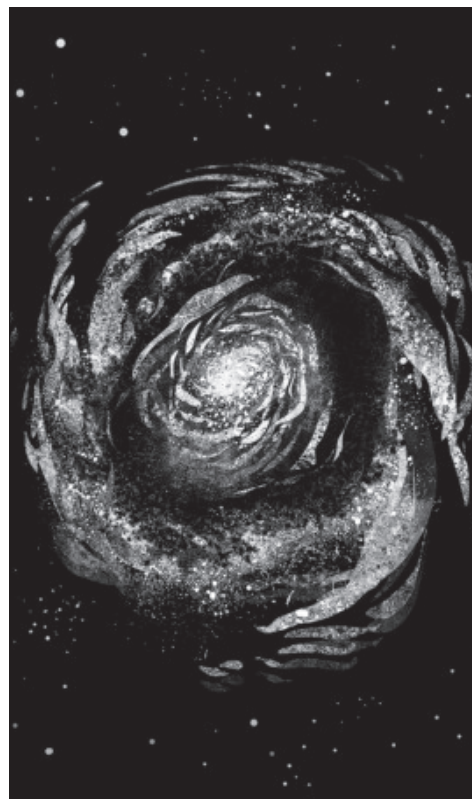
At first glance, this sounds like a story we've heard before: like the hominids in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, we can't help but touch the alien monolith that suddenly appears before us. But Rader's sweeping thesis is deceptively simple, focusing on the difference between risk and uncertainty.

We can't truly predict the outcome of any action, but if we have done something comparable in the past, we can roughly calculate our chances of success or failure. The insurance industry, for example, is based on the principle of calculable risk. If we have no comparable experience, however, we are faced with uncertainty, and what we do next is really a stab in the dark. Whether searching out new continents or searching for new life in other solar systems, these are uncertain enterprises driven by something

deep inside us, what John Maynard Keynes once described as our "animal spirits." While humans can never really know enough about what lies beyond to make any kind of calculation of risk, we nonetheless persist in exploring.



AS RADER TELLS IT, HUMAN HISTORY IS THE story of our inbred ease with unsureness. He devotes roughly a third of *Beyond the Known* to all of human exploration before 1492, when Christopher Columbus landed on an island somewhere in the Caribbean. He starts some 1.5 million years ago, with the migration of *Homo erectus* from the Great Rift Valley of East Africa to the Middle East, China, and Southeast Asia, and



We can't help but search the skies.

then tracks the migrations of *Homo sapiens*. As a species, our curiosity has been driving us for a very long time: from Africa to the Middle East some 120,000 years ago; to Australia roughly 50,000 years ago; and to Europe and Siberia about 10,000 years later. Around 12,000 BCE, we were crossing over from northern Asia to the Americas. We never knew what was around the corner, but we went anyway.

Civilizations — the word comes from the Latin *civilis*, which gave us *civitas*, or city — eventually emerged in Lower Mesopotamia and the Nile River Valley (3000 BCE), the Indus River Valley (2500 BCE), and along the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers (2200 BCE). In the Americas, Tlapacoyá was settled near present-day Mexico City as

early as 5000 BCE, and Aspero, in modern-day Peru, was built sometime between 3700 and 2500 BCE. As time progressed and hierarchical societies developed armies and navies, the need to find new accessible food sources — or to avoid danger — was supplanted by greed. The poster child of the greedy civilization, of course, was the Roman Empire, which lasted in the West until the fifth century. "An observer would hardly imagine that this tiny city would grow to dominate the entire Mediterranean," Rader writes, "but its inhabitants possessed one critical characteristic: curiosity. Rome was open to new ideas and quick to adopt them." Yet the real explorers of the Classical world were those who lived on the periphery, such as the Phoenicians who explored the Mediterranean and Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who made his way to present-day India and Afghanistan, driven by an "undying fascination with seeing and understanding the world."

The middle third of Rader's book looks at "rediscovering the world." The twelfth-century Muslim Berber adventurer Ibn Battuta travelled roughly 50,000 kilometres through Central Asia, India, and China. Like Alexander the Great, he was motivated by a "restless desire to understand the world"; the title of Battuta's travel account, *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling*, says it all. In the late fifteenth century, Western Europeans began sponsoring voyages to Africa, Asia, and the Americas to open up trade routes and plunder other lands. It was an era marked by a fierce competition among powerful states, the building of overseas empires, the exploitation and at times the eradication of Indigenous populations, the establishment of slavery as a global business, and almost constant warfare in Europe and its possessions beyond. But it was also an era indelibly marked by unquenchable curiosity.

In addition to their military duties, British, French, and Spanish navies were charged with discovering what remained of the unknown. In the eighteenth century, for example, Captain Cook sailed on ships named *Endeavour*, *Resolution*, and *Discovery* — all names that suggest the desire to fill in the gaps of human knowledge. By the twentieth century, many thought only the polar regions were left. The exploration of these frozen parts of earth had less to do with greed — though Robert Falcon Scott, Ernest Shackleton, and Roald Amundsen were certainly motivated by fame — and more to do with adventure and the acquisition of knowledge.

The last third of *Beyond the Known* deals with the literal final frontier: the sky and the planets beyond. This comes as no surprise, as Rader is a for-real whiz-kid rocket scientist. He attended Carleton University, where he obtained



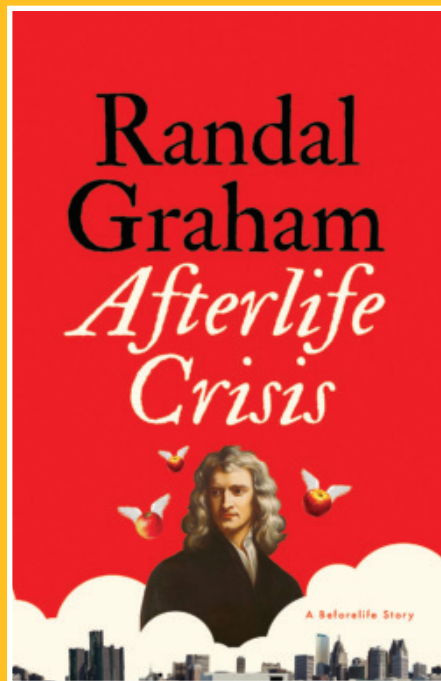
undergraduate and graduate degrees in aerospace engineering. He went on to get his PhD in long-duration space flight engineering from MIT. He was then a candidate for the Canadian Astronaut Corps from 2009 until 2017 (during that time, he won the Discovery Channel's competition show *Canada's Greatest Know-It-All*). In 2014, Rader was under consideration for a one-way settlement expedition to Mars, a mission for which he was ready to give up his life on earth. He now lives in Los Angeles, where he is a mission manager for SpaceX, the private aerospace manufacturer and space transportation service founded by Elon Musk.

But Rader doesn't focus just on human flight, or what he describes as the "massive strategic failure" of the space shuttle. He's also interested in how we have sated our inquisitiveness with robots — from the Soviet Union's Luna 1 and Venera 12 to NASA's Mariner 4 and Kepler Space Telescope — and will continue to do so. By searching the skies, we have the potential to change our thinking as an entire species. Given the size of the universe, or even our home galaxy of 250 to 400 billion stars, it seems more likely than not that some form of life more intelligent than ours exists. And maybe this life is avoiding contact with us, bound by something like the Prime Directive in *Star Trek*, until we are capable of managing the encounter. That's all the more reason to continue our explorations, in order that we can grow and learn enough to deserve such contact. "Eventually, perhaps, only species who are enlightened enough to survive will be permitted to join the interplanetary congress of worlds," Rader writes toward the end of his book. "May we be so lucky."

HISTORY IS FAR TOO IMPORTANT TO BE LEFT TO academic historians alone. Generalists as well as scholars who come from different disciplines can and should write it, because they are often the ones who have something new to say. In a time when so many professional historians are grappling with past injustices, Rader's examination of one of humankind's more enigmatic characteristics (in his highly accessible style) is a welcome break.

While *Beyond the Known* largely draws on popular secondary works, rather than new sources, Rader is careful in how he reconstructs his tale. As an engineer, he has developed an eye for the telling detail (comparing the Vikings' main hall at L'Anse aux Meadows, for example, to an NBA court). He also seems to have the social scientist's ability to piece together evidence in surprising ways, including how the global spread of sweet potatoes and coconuts indicates pre-Columbian contact between Polynesian explorers and Indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Ultimately, Rader shows that it's in our DNA to explore. The urge to figure out what we don't yet know — to experience what we have not yet experienced — is the hallmark of our species. That's why we'd be mistaken to apply a simple cost-benefit calculation to further exploration: We can't possibly know what we will find, and thus what material benefits we will ultimately derive from twenty-first-century adventures and beyond. Only through exploration and an inborn acceptance of uncertainty can we continue to work at solving the fundamental questions of science and the very nature of existence that have nagged at us since the beginning. ▲



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# Lawgivers of the Mind

The moral coding of artificial intelligence

Brendan Howley

## **Cognitive Code: Post-anthropocentric Intelligence and the Infrastructural Brain**

Johannes Bruder

McGill-Queen's University Press

216 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

## **Morality by Design: Technology's Challenge to Human Values**

Wade Rowland

Intellect

120 pages, softcover

**I**N THE ENTRANCEWAY TO OUR HOUSE, MY significant other, a long-time wearer of the smart hat, keeps her hat stand. It's a mock Victorian bust: on the surface of the ceramic head lies a phrenology map, created by one L. N. Fowler, Ludgate Circus, London, and "entered at Stationers Hall" some time around 1850. Natives of upstate New York, Lorenzo Niles Fowler and his brother, Orson, were an astonishing pair. Theirs was an international industry of touring, lecturing, and reading, all the while churning out vast numbers of journals, periodicals, and pamphlets and operating a phrenology museum.

L. N. Fowler & Co. mapped out what are now generally accepted as completely spurious competences for various volumes of the human brain. The "perfecting group," for example, occupies a quadrant roughly corresponding to the right temple. I've no idea what the perfecting group represents, but that's a serious chunk of cranial real estate. The "literary faculties" live just above the right eye socket. I imagine these sensibilities lurking beneath the echoing sinuses, awaiting discovery, perhaps even an agent in LA.

The brothers made real hay: They used phrenological mesmerism to prep patients for surgery. VIPs flocked to have their heads read, including Mark Twain, Clara Barton, and Walt Whitman, who counted phrenologists among "the lawgivers of poets." The Fowlers barely kept up with the demand for their ministrations. Lorenzo seems to have died of a stroke in 1896, perhaps due to sheer overwork in keeping the phrenological bubble aloft.

A century and change later, the "construction [that] underlies the structure of every perfect poem" (Whitman again) is no longer phrenology. Many want us to believe it's now artificial intelligence. With *Cognitive Code*, the perceptive and droll Johannes Bruder, who's clearly been around the scientific block more than once, has written a minor masterpiece, as neat an anatomy of the state of play of the "science" of AI as one could want. I'll make no bones about it: this Swiss researcher has lifted the veil and brought a sociologist's skeptical eye to a marketplace of

ideas that, if you ask around, is about as oversold as any real estate or phrenological bubble has ever been.

Consider the equation ( $y = \text{beta}_0 + \text{beta}_1 * x$ ), which DataRobot, a highly successful AI company out of Boston, explains on its blog:

Ordinary Least Squares is the simplest and most common estimator in which the two (beta)s are chosen to minimize the square of the distance between the predicted values and the actual values. Even though this model is quite rigid and often does not reflect the true relationship, this still remains a popular approach for several reasons. For one, it is computationally cheap to calculate the coefficients. It is also easier to interpret than more sophisticated models, and in situations where the goal is understanding a simple model in detail, rather than estimating the response well, they can provide insight into what the model captures.

Roughly translated, DataRobot is saying, "Well, between us and a computable reality is this one-size-fits-all mechanism that doesn't quite work, so we apply fudge factors (coefficients) to tighten the bolts, computationally speaking. Why? Because that's cheaper than, say, asking a subject matter expert — those guys cost real money. And then we'll call this Rube Goldberg contraption a model, just in case we need the wiggle room. (Which we will.)"

What I'm getting at is this: science is messy, perhaps especially the science of the brain. The whole point of the scientific method is to fail, fail again, and then fail some more, until something like a testable theory emerges (emphasis on "emerges"). Why? Because any truly useful scientific conclusion is but an interruption on a path to a greater understanding — a stepping stone. The core assumption of most AI as practised in 2020 is that there's something to be *engineered* that mimics the human substrate. Whitman's lawgivers, indeed.

What AI people want more than anything, as Bruder emphasizes, is the proverbial turnkey solution to a big problem: the problem of consciousness. There's money in that one. And this, as Bruder's dispassionate dispatch from the front lines of AI research makes lethally clear, is where things get sticky.

It turns out that many of the "advances" that AI researchers made when this stuff really took off (far earlier than you'd probably think, in the late 1970s) were predicated on brain scans, which were themselves statistically generated images. The MRI machines that made them were so primitive that the resolution of those images

(never mind the monitors on which the initiates interpreted them) was appalling.

I know this from personal experience. In 1981, at the dawn of a new era, my dad was thought to have a brain tumour behind his right mastoid, discovered by one of the first MRI machines in Manhattan, at the IBM Major Medical Plan's expense. He was rightly terrified of the pending neurosurgery, which more than likely would have killed him, because he had record-setting hypertension (240/180 at one point) and (as a later clinician would say) a circulatory system in a state of massive disrepair. I flew to New York to make farewells. It was that dire, my siblings and I thought.

Somehow, I smelled a rat in Manhattan, because the MRI technicians themselves told me (I wangled my way into the lab where they worked) that a meningioma (benign) tumour has different surface characteristics than a glioma (malign and highly lethal) one. But which did my dad have? When I asked, the techies basically shrugged and didn't even look up.

The tell was that those monitors — state of the art in 1981 — brought to mind Pac-Man graphics: you could drive a truck between the pixels, so coarse was the resolution. As I was growing increasingly skeptical of my dad's scan, I bumped into his cardiologist at the elevator bank. I asked the avuncular doctor if anyone could authoritatively vet the radiological images on those high-tech screens. Direct quote: "Jury's out on that one — if he were my dad, I'd get him the hell out of here." I had my dad on the Amtrak back to Poughkeepsie that afternoon. He lived another eighteen years with not a glimmer of a symptom except an outsize thirst for lager.

Here's the real scandal: those smudgy images were and still are used to make the case for serious investment in deconstructing brain functions in the name of neuroscience. Bear in mind these scans aren't *photographs* like you'd get with an X-ray; they're shadow images, generated by equations. They're mathematical constructs.

And guess what? Researchers near and far quickly grasped that even if there wasn't a one-to-one relationship between what's notionally the firing of synapses captured by an image scan and an underlying function, you could raise a pantload of cash to investigate things further. Bruder makes this point through a series of cautionary tales (which are at once troubling and Marx Brothers hilarious) with specialists in freshly minted disciplines riding waves of nuclear magnetic resonance hype.

Nuclear magnetic resonance isn't the Fowler Brothers reborn, you say. But it is. It's phrenology with topspin, derived from atomic resonances, all very defensible, until it isn't. This is not to say — nor does Bruder suggest — that there

isn't serious and valuable neuroscience under way with AI research. But Bruder's tempered sense of things is refreshingly clear: to name but one consideration, he warns that algorithm design bias is one red flag against putting psychological and political modelling in the hands of programmers and engineers.

There's another, even more intellectually corrosive problem: deploying AI without having a clear idea of what the hell a machine-learning interpretation layer really means with respect to existing psychological norms. To put it bluntly, do we want the people who gave us Uber creating an "infrastructural brain" in the cloud that determines what is and what isn't — say — mental illness?

It gets bigger still.



THE INTERNET OF THINGS IS WHAT YOU GET FROM a reductionist, mechanistic system on steroids, permeating human life with computational infrastructures and a whack of sensors sensing all around us and generating feedback control loops. In many cases, it does indeed create human value through sheer speed — largely leisure, for those who can afford it. This is the vengeful return of the *Jetsons*-era "labour-saving kitchen," which we know actually creates more work for someone.

For those who can't enjoy the free time afforded by sensor-driven convenience, there are AI-modelled time-and-motion performance "benchmarks" to be met, for \$16 an hour: the online fulfillment centre as sweatshop. The AI giveth; the AI taketh away.

Bruder makes a point in *Cognitive Code* that is as direct as it is fluently expressed: The human brain was once, in the Aristotelian sense, a stand-alone universe of astonishing computational elegance. It is now rapidly becoming a node on a network of ever-increasing computational power and reach — Arthur Koestler's "ghost in the machine" for the digital age.

The upshot of all this is one mixed bag indeed. There's the instructive case of the Boeing 737 Max, a nightmare where cost-benefit analyses met the very limits of computational modelling and design. Human beings died by the hundreds. Contrariwise, AI and deep learning can and does accelerate, through the cloud, cross-correlations of human behaviours that are highly valuable, and reliably so. But Bruder warns there must be a limit, both ethical and moral, to human advances won at the expense of human qualities: compassion, empathy, the ability to laugh and love and live with unresolved contradiction and still find meaning. That limit, in his view, lies where human psychology lives and breathes, as mysterious and singular as ever — where the imagination flickers and ignites and the new is made. "For if psychic life is to be colonized by the rhythms, waves, and patterns of machines," he writes, "we should make sure that it is, in this very process, infinitely queered and diversified."

It's a powerful *cri de coeur*. Bruder warns us about the limits of design in the hands of technology — or, rather, technologists — especially when such design can scale in unforeseen ways, virus-like. And he's right.



WADE ROWLAND'S *MORALITY BY DESIGN* IS ALSO A *cri de coeur*, a kind of twenty-first-century Ten Commandments. Human morality ought to inform technological design, Rowland contends,

so that it has known and knowable limits. There should be instinctual oversight of digital endeavours — by virtue of virtue itself. The book is beautifully written, with sparingly few platitudes. And Rowland, a communications scholar from York University, has put his finger on the type of response that almost always surfaces when technological achievement outpaces our sense of how best to apply new techniques and methodologies. Think of recombinant DNA technologies and the genomic revolution: *because we could*, we did things (and still do) that, whether by design or not, delimited a new sense of what it means to be human. We're still working out the consequences of the Crick-Watson-Franklin-Wilkins discovery of DNA structure a lifetime ago. We're simply incapable of digesting such advances overnight. They require massive adaptive resources and time — gobs of it.

Right now in Silicon Valley, managers of the big tech companies are striking committees to address, in part, what Rowland is rightly demanding: an ethical framework for engineering design, as if human beings truly matter. Rowland might well approve of these attempts at self-reflection in the digital heartland: he cogently argues that we all need to undertake ethical decisions out of our own right reason — our innate moral infrastructure, to borrow from Bruder. His approach is eerily close to the thinking of the Yale University atheist and ethicist Martin Hägglund, who also reasons that a moral approach to designing a life can be derived from first principles. Hägglund's central notion is that if there's no afterlife, we're actually in a better position — under a greater imperative — to treat one another as we ourselves would like to be treated. The approaches dovetail; Rowland's chapter on the "alchemy of capitalism," in particular, is a stellar exegesis on why human failings need not lead — linearly, if at all — to human failure in how we collectively create value.

We can reason our way to a better solution, less noxious, more humane. The question, for Rowland, is whether we have the effort and discipline required: an amalgam of reason and passion, of political acumen and empathy.



IN RADICALLY DIFFERENT FASHIONS, BRUDER AND ROWLAND make a remarkably similar point: there's always a choice in how we make and remake ourselves, not least because life itself is even messier than the science we try to apply to our realities. They both call for a moral philosophy of technology; they both suspect that unconsidered progress yields fertile ground for black swans and monsters of our own creation, simply because we lack the thoroughness of insight — the self-reflection — to understand the why behind a new gadget or technique.

These two books are far from abstract incitements to a moral philosophy of technology. They're far more practical than any phrenological construction. We're living through a case study in the limits of science and technology, of engineered life itself, with the salient lesson being that political expediency tops human benefit, time and time again. "Have you learn'd the physiology, phrenology, politics, geography, pride, freedom, friendship of the land?" Whitman asked. "Its substratums and objects?"

What we've learned is this: It ain't the tech. It's the politics of the tech we ought to watch. ▲

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 AU PRESS

# Snuffed Torch

Can the Olympic myth survive?

Laura Robinson

## **NOlympians: Inside the Fight against Capitalist Mega-sport in Los Angeles, Tokyo and Beyond**

Jules Boykoff

Fernwood Publishing

196 pages, softcover and ebook

**I**F THINGS HAD UNFOLDED AS THE International Olympic Committee ordained, you could be watching the basketball finals at the Tokyo Olympics instead of reading the *Literary Review of Canada* right now. But even a Swiss-based, self-appointed, ultra-wealthy, mainly male “non-profit” sports club that makes billions couldn’t stop the pandemic from shutting down the Summer Games. Who knows about the rescheduled Games, now slotted for late July and early August 2021, or the Beijing Winter Olympics, which would be only six months later? Without an effective vaccine against COVID-19, how could international broadcasters, the ever-expanding “Olympic Family” of sponsors and entourages, or fans be expected to show up for either eighteen-day party? More to the point, the athletes, whose brilliant performances constitute the goods that the IOC sells for those broadcast billions, would be no-shows — at least if the IOC wants to appear like it cares about the athletes’ actual health.

No one, including Jules Boykoff, author of *NOlympians: Inside the Fight against Capitalist Mega-sport in Los Angeles, Tokyo and Beyond*, could have predicted that a novel coronavirus would take out the well-laid plans of the closest thing sport has to a secretive, self-serving Vatican conclave. But even without the crisis, there has been a steady implosion of the Olympic Movement for at least a decade, which *NOlympians* only partially addresses. Using a Marxist lens and relying on interviews with scores of contemporary democratic socialists, Boykoff looks at NOlympics LA, the group agitating against the 2028 Los Angeles Games, and several other anti-Olympic organizations. His book culminates with the first Transnational Anti-Olympics Summit in Tokyo in July 2019, a year before the originally scheduled opening ceremony.

NOlympics LA grew out of a local chapter of the Housing and Homelessness Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America, or DSA, in 2017. As we’ve seen with the likes of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, socialism has had something of a renaissance in the United States, and Boykoff leans on its re-emergence in his treatment of the organization. “By focusing on one spirited DSA campaign in Los Angeles against the 2028 Olympic Games,” he writes in his introduction, “this book pulls



Heated reflections on the anti-Olympic movement.

back the DSA curtain, affording a robust look at how one of its most innovative and energetic campaigns functions, the strategies and tactics it embraces, the challenges it faces, and the way it negotiates an anti-capitalist stance in a hyper-capitalist country.”

When I read that, I went straight to the DSA’s website, which actually makes no mention whatsoever of NOlympics LA, specifically, or the anti-Olympic movement, generally. All I found when I typed “NOlympics” into the site’s search field was “Sorry — nothing to display.” Boykoff should have asked the LA chapter why it didn’t get the larger body to fire up a national dialogue on the Games; if the Angelenos did, in fact, ask for help, he should have explained why the DSA’s efforts fell flat. As it stands, I find the connection between the local movement and the Democratic Socialists of America — a connection used to market this book — to be disingenuous. This is just one of many troubling blind spots.

In September 2017, Los Angeles received the right to host the 2028 Games — a consolation prize after the IOC awarded 2024 to Paris, the only other city bidding for it. But Boykoff fails to mention that the city in Southern California started its lobbying efforts in 2014, well before NOlympics LA emerged. Where were these folks when the smooth talkers began their shilling? Boykoff doesn’t say. He does tell us many anti-Olympics activists work in the media. So didn’t they know that timing is everything in this game? NOlympics LA got to the starting line

three years late. If this were a race, we’d find DNS — Did Not Start — written by its name.

NOlympics LA, as presented by Boykoff, is fuelled by a lot of goodwill and energy from a lot of good people. I am not criticizing its strategy of using the Games to shine a light on the ways in which the poor can be stepped over and then kicked by a multi-billion-dollar militarized spectacle. I just hope no one at NOlympics LA thinks they have a hope in hell of stopping these Games.

♦

*NOLYMPIANS* IS PUBLISHED BY A CANADIAN HOUSE, Nova Scotia’s Fernwood Books, but the book makes no mention of the recent anti-Olympics campaign in Calgary. There, opponents to the 2026 Winter Games worked with city councillors who questioned why no level of government would give them straight answers about costs. In November 2018, over 56 percent of Calgarians voted to kill a bid to host the Olympics for a second time. Those who opposed the Games didn’t refer to each other as “comrade,” as is the case with the NOlympics website; they just didn’t want to see their money float down the Bow River into a bottomless whirlpool.

Boykoff tells us how LA’s city council, in August 2017, made a unanimous decision to play host — no referendum was put to the people. He describes the vote as “preordained” and “pre-cooked.” But if activists had organized sooner, NOlympics LA could have run candidates in the 2016 municipal elections, or could have made the Games an election issue. This goes unsaid.

Boykoff quotes dozens of activists who almost sound to me — a former athlete and journalist who has covered six Olympics and hundreds of sporting events — like blind-faith boosters. It's just that they're on the other team. He wraps up his second chapter, for example, by quoting one who says, "You can't be a socialist and just believe in it. You have to actually do something to fight to make socialism happen." Boykoff's conclusion? "NOlympics activists are doing just that." In the next chapter, Boykoff quotes another: "There are times when it really matters who wins and this is one of them." Boykoff's conclusion? "NOlympics has pressed ahead with determinism and optimism." If you take the N out, both of his sentences might have been lifted from IOC press releases.

Shortly after the IOC awarded the games in September 2017, some NOlympics LA folks headed to the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, which hosted the opening ceremony in 1984 and will do so again in 2028. The activists were there for a professional football game between the Rams and "the team from Washington, DC that features a dictionary-defined racial slur as its mascot," and they arrived with a twenty-five-foot anti-Olympics banner, brilliantly smuggled in as a sarong. "NOlympics is a great home for leftists who like sports," the woman who wore the sarong told Boykoff, and he concludes their actions were "certainly not anti-Rams."

Wait a minute: The Los Angeles Rams are owned by the real estate mogul Stan Kroenke. In 2018, *Sports Illustrated* estimated his net worth at \$8.3 billion, and the NFL team's at \$3 billion. Kroenke also gave \$1 million for Trump's inauguration. If the IOC is an enemy of the people, why isn't a billionaire Trump supporter? Again, Boykoff doesn't explain.

*NOlympians* offers no critique of the anti-Olympic movement — and it should, if only to make it a more effective book. Boykoff is a former professional soccer player. He is also a political scientist at Pacific University, in Oregon, and he should apply an academic's rigour to his interviews.

◆

OVER TWENTY YEARS AGO, I REVIEWED A BOOK FOR the *Globe and Mail* by the Canadian writer and researcher Varda Burstyn. In *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport*, she

laid out a Marxist analysis of mega-sports. Like Boykoff, she saw the Olympics and other mega-sports as the hijacking of public space for private gain. But she also stated the socialist argument that racialized and gendered bodies — of the performing athletes — are foundational to the political economy of sport:

If the fundamental relationships sport validates are competition and ranking; if the fundamental good is that of high performance (productivity); if the fundamental actions are of those of overpowering and dominating, it is because these qualities are inherent in the capitalist system.

However, something extremely important has been left out of [the socialist] account: sport's relationship to men as an organized gender-class. Sport mounts as spectacle a symbolic representation of the *masculinist* system and its fundamental principles. Indeed, masculinism must be seen as the primary ideological core of sport and its culture.

The system keeps the patriarchy in place and keeps the masses — who understandably love to watch those brilliant bodies move — silent. Without an athlete's compliant body, no labour can be commoditized. No show, no TV rights, no capital.

That key component is largely missing from *NOlympians*. Boykoff briefly writes about the personal financial challenges faced by athletes, but he does not interpret their bodies as a central part of the machine that keeps the political economy of sport so lucrative. Although he considers corruption among the IOC, the criminal convictions within its membership, the way any budget for an Olympics is guaranteed to triple, and the equal guarantee of doping (especially by the Russians), he does not connect the worldwide epidemic of sexual abuse of female athletes, in particular, to the structure that profits from their dreams turned nightmares. What of the smiling pixie on the outside who is ripped apart on the inside (sometimes literally)? The terrified, starved, exploited labourer who brings broadcast billions to the pimps in power?

"The Olympics are experiencing a protracted moment of vulnerability, due to wider public knowledge about the downsides of hosting the Games and dwindling bidder interest," Boykoff writes at one point. "Yet you wouldn't know it if you read IOC President Thomas Bach's 2019 'New Year's Message.' In his musings on 2018, Bach took credit for forging a peace path on the Korean Peninsula while ignoring the sex-abuse fiasco that has roiled sports like gymnastics, taekwondo, and swimming." But "fiasco" is the wrong word for Boykoff to use. Generations of female athletes have been sexually abused, while sport at every level has covered for the perpetrators and punished the athletes. It's not a fiasco so much as a decades-long crime that is embedded deeply in the patriarchal structure of organized sport. And even with his self-described Marxist lens, Boykoff ignores that too.

The IOC talks about the Olympic Family, as if the Games are a giant get-together for children (athletes), their fathers (coaches), and uncles (corporate sponsors and honorary members). Years ago, in 2001, the British lacrosse player and researcher Celia H. Brackenridge wrote, "The cosiness of the family metaphor backfires when sexual exploitation in sport is uncovered." When coaches act "*in loco parentis*" and when so-called fathers in sport "assume control of the 'family,'" she argued in *Spoilsports: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation in Sport*, "their disempowered subordinates" have little room to manoeuvre.

As members of NOlympics LA were being kicked out of that Rams game, Bach attended the Emmys across town, accompanied by the gymnast Nastia Liukin. That's the same Nastia whose father, Valeri, had to resign as the coordinator of the U.S. women's gymnastics team in early 2018, after 225 athletes disclosed that Larry Nassar, the team's doctor under his watch, had sexually abused them for three decades. Boykoff mentions the red carpet with Bach and Liukin, but he misses a perfect segue into the ugly but necessary analysis of labour, ownership, exploitation, human rights, and the Olympic Games. He wrote *NOlympians* while thousands of courageous girls and young women caused an earthquake by calling out uber-powerful sport institutions. If anyone has ruptured the Olympic myth, surely they have. ▲

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# North and South

Cuba's Orwellian mystery

Amanda Perry

## Orwell in Cuba: How 1984 Came to Be Published in Castro's Twilight

Frédéric Lavoie

Translated by Donald Winkler

Talonbooks

304 pages, softcover

RESEARCHING CUBA AS A CANADIAN living in New York was a disorienting experience. When I would describe my work, most people would react with surprise, curiosity, and even envy: Had I actually *been* there? At times, it seemed like views were as polarized as in any Israel-Palestine debate. Back in Alberta, Canada's supposed conservative heartland, my topic of study was met with shrugs. As I planned my first trip to Havana, a friend commented, "You can go there when you're sixty. Why not try someplace interesting, like Argentina?"

Such reactions were a constant reminder that Cuba means different things to different people in different places. They were also the direct results of different foreign policies.

Fidel Castro and his band of guerrillas came to power in 1959, and the United States has been pushing for regime change since 1960, when the famous embargo was born. Washington prohibits most of its citizens from visiting Cuba; even Barack Obama's 2016 reforms did not allow for unfettered tourism. Meanwhile, Canada is nearly the only state in the Americas to have consistently maintained diplomatic and economic relations with the island for the past sixty years (Mexico is the other). In a typical year, Canadians make over a million visits, mostly to beach resorts. In our popular imagination, Cuba is less "forbidden fruit" and more "Cancún with old cars and bad food."

There are no beaches in Frédéric Lavoie's *Orwell in Cuba*. But the journalist from Quebec evokes another familiar framework: Cuba as a crumbling Communist relic caught between the past and the future. This work presents itself as a time capsule, with its original title poignantly expressing a sense of temporal suspension: *Avant l'après*, literally "before the after." Having won the 2018 Governor General's Award for French non-fiction, it has now been translated into English by Donald Winkler.

♦

LAVOIE HAD EVERY REASON TO THINK CUBA WAS ON the brink of a major transition when he made three trips there between February 2016 and February 2017. His first visit immediately preceded Obama's arrival in Havana, which marked the most dramatic shift in U.S.-Cuba relations in fifty years. The president denounced the embargo, and the movement toward reconcilia-



Classic cars and now a classic critique of totalitarianism.

tion appeared irreversible. (Lavoie's observation that "no matter who succeeds Obama as president in November, a return to the past seems more and more improbable" now has a tragic ring to it.) By the time of the author's final visit, Donald Trump had been inaugurated and Fidel Castro had died, at the age of ninety.

Trump has not (yet) entirely reversed Obama's reforms, but he has scaled them back dramatically, and the end of the embargo is no longer in sight. Meanwhile, Castro's death in 2016 had little effect on the functioning of a state that had been run by his brother Raúl for a decade, and it certainly did not bring about the crisis of legitimacy some had hoped for. Last year, Raúl passed the presidency on to Miguel Díaz-Canel, a bureaucrat from a younger generation, while remaining head of the Communist Party. Again, there has been no upheaval. The "after" may yet be some ways off.

Lavoie visited the island, in part, to solve a mystery. In 2016, a Cuban publishing house announced that it would launch a new translation of George Orwell's *1984* at Havana's International Book Fair. The choice was puzzling. A one-party state with a long history of censorship was doing more than allowing the publication of a classic critique of totalitarianism: it was mass-producing it and promoting it at a major event. Was this a sign of how much had changed, or a cynical attempt to make Cuba appear more liberal than it was? Or was the publisher simply hoping for a bestseller, now that the state was inching toward market-based

reforms and had less time for ideological purity? Such questions, as well as a close dialogue with Orwell's writing, dominate Lavoie's book.

As an investigation of how censorship affects literature, the arts, and the media, *Orwell in Cuba* is nuanced and compelling. The central challenge in confronting Cuban censorship is its indeterminacy. The highly visible arrests of the artists El Sexto and Tania Bruguera are exceptions to a process that is generally much more covert. There is no official list of banned books, for one thing; unwanted titles simply go undistributed. Although all presses were nationalized in the '60s, the mechanisms of editorial decision making remain obscure. Individuals push the envelope, proposing new editions of material previously assumed to be unacceptable. The only clear red line is the explicit and named denunciation of the Castro brothers. Even then, different rules apply for foreigners, and Lavoie is able to cross that line with seemingly few consequences.

In his quest to unravel the details behind *1984*'s publication, Lavoie constantly runs up against these uncertainties. Some of his interlocutors may be lying. The vast majority have only a partial idea of what is going on. At times, he even comes off as paranoid — assuming acts of resistance when none were intended or being taken aback that some of his companions criticize the regime so openly. Indeed, it's almost commonplace among literature scholars in Cuba to discuss and condemn the intense censorship of the 1970s, as many writers banned during that period have since been rehabilitated.

But ongoing uncertainty about what is now allowed is also part of how censorship functions. People moderate themselves in an effort to avoid crossing poorly defined boundaries, making it only rarely necessary for the regime itself to enforce them.

♦  
IT WOULD BE CARELESS, IN DISCUSSING A BOOK that revolves around a translation and largely stars Cuban translators, not to discuss the translation here. Donald Winkler has three of his own Governor General's Awards, and his treatment of *Orwell in Cuba* is consistently expressive, hitting a tone at once educated and accessible. He has the opportunity to show his chops when Lavoie breaks with his reportage format to include a satirical miniature play and a long poem. For the most part, though, the style is deliberately straightforward, eloquent but not showy; one is reminded of the guidelines that Orwell himself laid out in "Politics and the English Language."

At times, Lavoie's own reliance on Orwell goes too far, suggesting that censorship is conclusive evidence for other forms of state repression. His analogies ask us to imagine Fidel and Raúl Castro as the leaders of a real-world Oceania, taking cues on how to manage a totalitarian apparatus from Big Brother. The implication is that any state seeking to control access to information, to limit perspectives on the present and the past must have other crimes to hide. This framing obscures a key feature of Cuba among twentieth-century Communist dictatorships: its low body count. The millions who perished in Stalin's gulags, the mass starvation in China's Great Leap Forward and the purges of the Cultural Revolution, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge — these instances of bloodshed have only the palest of equivalents on the island. Historically, the vast majority of the opposition to Castro's government has been exported to the United States rather than eliminated. Amnesty International identified

120 political prisoners in Cuba in 2018, which is a lot more than none and a lot fewer than some people might assume. Orwell's *1984* sees its protagonist being tortured. Lavoie's only truly harrowing account of state violence in Cuba dates to the early 1960s.

In other respects, Lavoie strives for balance, avoiding blanket condemnations and probing the contradictions of some of the Miami-based Cubans he interviews. I am tempted to attribute this position to Canadian impartiality, but it is more obviously an effect of his work as a journalist in the former Soviet Union. There, he witnessed the results of a "failed" transition to capitalism, which benefited a few oligarchs while

## "The central challenge in confronting Cuban censorship is its indeterminacy."

shredding social protections. Lavoie hopes that Cuba may avoid this fate and instead move to a form of social democracy. He dedicates significant space to the contradictions of the island's contemporary economic system, in which two currencies coexist and doctors, paid by the state, make far less than bartenders collecting tips from tourists.

Above all, Lavoie seeks to avoid the trap of romanticizing the country and, unintentionally, producing state propaganda in the process. This becomes especially clear in his portrait of Jean-Guy Allard, a retired Québécois journalist who relocated to Havana and found himself celebrated for writing material favourable to the government. Lavoie depicts Allard as a twenty-first-century "useful idiot," a term once used to describe Jean-Paul Sartre, another former Cuba admirer. He is in declining health when Lavoie first meets him, and his subsequent death is almost allegorical — a sign that seeing the

Cuban Revolution as the electrifying triumph of the 1960s is no longer tenable.

♦  
THERE IS, HOWEVER, ANOTHER COUNTERPOINT TO Lavoie's take on Cuba buried within these pages. After he gives a potentially incendiary reading at Havana's International Book Fair, an unnamed Puerto Rican writer in the audience speaks up: Lavoie must consider "capitalist totalitarianism" to fully understand the situation in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. Against the backdrop of Allard, it is easy to dismiss this anonymous writer as another useful idiot, but the comment is also a reminder of how our frames of reference determine the questions we ask.

Within Latin America, the Cuban state has long secured its legitimacy on the basis of anti-imperialism — not Communism. Its similarities to the Soviet Union have been far less important than its differences from the region's militarized, pro-capitalist dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, which frequently had U.S. backing.

Caribbean and African American observers, meanwhile, have often analyzed Cuba as a former plantation economy, asking how the 1959 revolution has confronted the lingering effects of slavery and racial inequality. But Lavoie has little to say about race, a prominent subject during Obama's visit, or about the history of U.S. intervention in the Americas. His framework remains resolutely North Atlantic; he is travelling with George Orwell, an Englishman, after all.

This is less a criticism than a reminder of all the ways in which Cuba is still "made to mean" by visitors. Allard clung to the romantic revolution, while most Canadians see a banal vacation spot. Lavoie sees an opportunity to avoid Eastern Europe's catastrophic surrender to capitalism where others look for the fight against racism or underdevelopment. And Cubans themselves? It is to Lavoie's credit that he concludes his book by placing the future — and the tentative hope that it may yet be brighter — in their hands. ▲

### Twenty-First-Century Sonnet

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
No I shall most certainly not, and I shall  
not call thee "thee" but the modern "you"  
because you is who you are  
and because it is not my right or inclination  
to perpetuate the male gaze and fix you  
like a linguistic taxidermist  
in the minds of many for eternity.  
And in a similar vein I shall also refrain  
from comment on your form  
as distracting and pleasurable as it might be  
because that is not really you either  
although it is easy to describe.  
Instead I shall dispense with form entirely  
to tell you that you remind me  
not of the weather, inconstant as it is,  
although there is something of the weather  
in all of us, its mutability, the recurring

cycles that make us warm and then cold  
and then turn us back again, and because  
unchanged weather metaphors are  
so sixteenth century, and as the world warms,  
so do we, seemingly helpless before ourselves,  
our altruistic and selfish genes.  
Because I love you and our children,  
I will drive less and turn down the heat,  
shrink my carbon footprint and buy offsets.  
As evening falls I will go down on one knee  
and profess my undying love for you,  
tell you that I can't compare you  
and tell you simply, as we all slip  
toward two degrees, that you remind me . . .

Daniel Goodwin

*Daniel Goodwin is the author of Catullus's Soldiers and, most recently, The Art of Being Lewis. His essay "A Novel Situation" appeared in last month's magazine.*

# Trying Situations

A new collection from David Bergen

David Staines

## Here the Dark: A Novella and Stories

David Bergen

Biblioasis

215 pages, softcover and ebook

**R**AISED IN NIVERVILLE, IN A DEVOUTLY Mennonite household, the son of a Mennonite pastor, David Bergen still calls Manitoba home. In his fiction, he raises fundamental questions about religious belief and prevailing doubt in the modern world. Honoured and celebrated with many awards, he is one of Canada's foremost writers.

Bergen published his first novel, *A Year of Lesser*, in 1996. Occurring in the four seasons of one year, it watches the machinations of an apparently unspiritual man, an alcoholic and a philanderer, as he copes with the death of his wife and the pregnancy of his lover in the town of Lesser (a thinly disguised Niverville). Eighteen years later, with his eighth novel, *Leaving Tomorrow*, Bergen published a classic *Bildungsroman*, without his usual autobiographical connections. Brought up in the fictional town of Tomorrow, Alberta, the first-person narrator, a sensitive individual who lives in the realm of words and writing, reveals his dreams as well as his failures. Bergen's most recent novel, *Stranger*, chronicles a young Guatemalan woman's affair with a married physician and her subsequent pregnancy; the wealthy doctor's wife steals the newborn girl and returns to the United States. As it follows the mother's relentless quest to locate her daughter, the novel sees her rising to heroic heights amid the shocking divisions between the rich and the impoverished.

Wherever his settings may be, Bergen captures characters in trying situations, where they reveal their strengths and their weaknesses. Reflecting his Mennonite upbringing, he often studies wayward people who deal with personal loss and their individual routes to possible redemption. His novels show people's desires and motivations on their path to a reasonable existence and — if possible — personal salvation.

Bookending his nine novels are two collections of short fiction, where he explores these same themes. *Sitting Opposite My Brother*, from 1993, examines authentic individuals dealing intimately with familial dislocations and heartaches. Now with *Here the Dark*, Bergen offers seven short stories and a titular novella. The book is a literary tour de force — jumping from Winnipeg to the Caribbean to Vietnam — that further explores notions of family, religion, and the written word.

The first six stories of *Here the Dark*, all of them previously published elsewhere, are character-centred, often revealing more about those characters than the characters suspect about themselves. In "April in Snow Lake," the opening story, the nineteen-year-old male narrator, devoutly religious, is spending his summer trying to become a writer. "She thought that my religious background, my faith in God, how I saw the world, would be a detriment to my writing," he tells us in the opening pages. On Sundays, his one day off, he organizes a day camp for youth: "I had asked Jesus into my heart. Everyone needs to do that, I said." As the story jumps between past and present, we find out that the narrator eventually marries a girlfriend who had spent a year abroad. "We are still together and she continues to read early drafts of my stories, offering advice, confirming at some

**"Bergen displays a remarkable sensitivity to his characters and their complex feelings."**

point that I have moved beyond sentimentality into clarity." Likewise, the story moves from the sentimentality of his nineteen-year-old self to the later clarity of his married state.

In "Saved," a lieutenant is questioning a fifteen-year-old Vietnamese boy about the murder of a nineteen-year-old American girl, who had tried to save the lad: "Her face tightened and her voice lowered and she asked him if he knew Jesus." The boy declared, "Jesus, I am a sinner but I want you to take away my sin and I want you to make me whole. I want to be loved. I want to be good. Please, Jesus." Then he murdered her. What good does the American's proselytizing accomplish?

There are also stories about human relationships that have a similar leaning toward and away from religion. "Never Too Late" features a complicated closeness between a rancher and a disabled woman. He scolds her in a moment of intimacy: "I'm a Christian as well." In "Leo Fell," an estranged husband cavorts with a waitress. "It's like you reached down your hand and guided Leo my way," she prays before making love. "Amazing. I want to say thanks for sex, too, for the joy of horniness, for how I feel right now. Wow. Thank you, Jesus. Amen."

In these short pieces, Bergen displays a remarkable sensitivity to his characters and their complex feelings. Each person is fully conceived through deft strokes, so that each is distinctly and fully drawn. Many stories, however, have an

incomplete ending. Does the young murderer of "Saved" get off scot-free or not? What happens to the rancher and the disabled woman? As in much of Alice Munro's fiction, Bergen asks us to contemplate the final outcome, which often arrives only after the story ends.

♦

THE COLLECTION CONCLUDES WITH TWO PIECES that appear for the first time, and it is here that a character-centred book becomes a character-biography. "Man Lost" follows the tale of Quinn from the age of six to his early thirties, spent as a fisherman in the Caribbean. Once again prayer plays a large role. His wife "went to church three times a week, and she attended prayer meeting with the women on Wednesdays and she made cakes for the children with AIDS at the local hospice." After being stranded at sea, and then stranded in federal prison, Quinn, too, "had learned to pray." The narrator tells us, "Where it is darkest there is only hope, and that hope was achieved through talking to a god that he needed during his time in prison. This was not sentimentalism or a deathbed conversion." We are left to wonder, What does prayer actually accomplish for its practitioners?

A novella, "Here the Dark," occupies nearly half the book. It recounts the astonishing story of Lily, a young Mennonite girl, from the age of thirteen, when "she gave her life to Jesus," to her fatal rejection of her religious upbringing. A questioning individual, she is constantly rebuffed: "It was dangerous to question and it was dangerous to doubt, for questioning and doubt were forms of sin and sin could only lead to hell." Through her childless marriage, through her inability to go to church, through her relationship with her husband's brother, she finds herself excluded from her relationship, from her church brethren, and from all that many believe is fine and sensible. The surprise in the final pages leaves the reader, once more, imagining what will happen after the story ends.

In the 1920s and '30s, Morley Callaghan introduced contemporary urban settings into his short stories. In the '30s and '40s, Sinclair Ross brought the contemporary drought and depression of the prairies to his. Bergen unites salient features of these two writers as he presents the conflicts and personal agonies of contemporary human beings trapped in their makeshift worlds. They often long to escape. Sometimes they do. At other times, they settle into their entrapment. "At that time in my life, at that moment," the narrator of Bergen's "April in Snow Lake" confesses, "I could make no sense of how to choose." ▲



# An Urgent Realm

Mallory Tater's dark debut

Cecily Ross

## The Birth Yard

Mallory Tater

HarperAvenue

320 pages, softcover and ebook

**A** PANDEMIC IS NOT A DYSTOPIA, Margaret Atwood recently said in an interview with the BBC. A dystopia is “an arranged unpleasant society you don’t want to be living in”—a frightening and usually totalitarian place. It is a cautionary tale that says, This is the house you could be living in if things continue this way. How do you like this house? But the COVID-19 outbreak, she pointed out, is an emergency situation that, for all its terrifying and disagreeable aspects, was not deliberately engineered by malign forces trying to control us.

Despite the distinctions Atwood makes, it sometimes feels as though the lines between the world of fiction and the world of this epidemic are beginning to blur, and that we are all captive in an alarming story we are writing together. Maybe, pandemic-wise, this is the house we are *already* living in—a real-life dystopia playing out in real time.

Indeed, Atwood admits that her own most famous foray into the genre, *The Handmaid's Tale*, has in recent years graduated from the realm of “Here it comes” to the rather more urgent realm of “This could really happen,” now.

In the tradition of the subjugated handmaids of Gilead and with striking overtones of Miriam Toews's *Women Talking*—another harrowing account of abuse—Mallory Tater's *The Birth Yard* is the latest addition to the dystopian canon. Tater's gripping debut portrays a patriarchal society run amok, where women are valued only as breeders and servants, are minimally educated, and are subjected to forced marriages, rape, and violence at the hands of the Men (the noun appears in upper case throughout the text) who control them. Events in the United States since the election of Donald Trump remind us that women's rights to control their own bodies are precarious indeed. As is the case all over the globe, women have historically lived, and in some cases continue to live, a version of the dystopia Atwood thought up thirty-five years ago.

Could it be that *The Handmaid's Tale* and now *The Birth Yard* are not merely cautionary tales but are the tale, albeit fictional, itself? Consider George Orwell's novel *1984*, where mass state surveillance and the degradation of language are omnipresent—an imagined society that long ago merged with reality. The book

burnings in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and the docility-inducing balm of Soma in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* both have frightening modern-day parallels too. The warnings implicit in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* have been rendered explicit as today's technology flirts with the dubious benefits of artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. Similarly, another prescient Shelley novel, *The Last Man*, which portrays a post-pandemic world where all traces of civilization have been destroyed, seems a little too close to our present reality for comfort. It's become a cliché, but Oscar Wilde's observation that “life imitates art far more than art imitates life” certainly applies here.

♦

AS MUCH AS IT MAY APPEAR THAT WE ARE LIVING IN one, we should remember that, as Atwood reminds us, a dystopia is not a real place. The

“‘Dystopia’ has been overused and is often taken to describe almost anything unpleasant.”

term has been overused and is often taken to describe almost anything past, present, or future that is unpleasant. In his recent book, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, the British historian Gregory Claeys describes how authors working within the genre depict societies that are substantially worse than anything they are living through. Surely this is true of *The Birth Yard*. It is difficult to imagine such an excessively cruel and oppressive world ever existing: a world in which Men's dominion over women is absolute. The Den, as the novel's breakaway society is called, is lorded over by a charismatic leader named Feles, who inherited his mantle from Lynx, his late father and the community's founder. We meet the narrator, Sable, on her eighteenth birthday. Like everyone in the Den—which goes back three generations since the group broke away from Main Stream, as the outside world is known—Sable was born in September. She is now ready to breed. Like the other virgins her age, Sable is assigned a Match: in her case, Ambrose, a kind and handsome former schoolmate who hopes to become a doctor one day. Sable's friend Mamie is not as fortunate; her Match, Isaac, routinely beats her and forces her to engage in unspecified sexual perversions.

Following the Den's month-long September birthday celebrations, which involve copious amounts of alcohol and the ecstasy-inducing effects of a drug called Reposery, the official breeding takes place. The girls, whose menstrual

cycles have been carefully synchronized with the help of another drug, DiLexa, reach peak fertility at the same time. The deflowering occurs during an elaborate candle-lit, flower-strewn public ceremony in specially erected “breeding tents” presided over by a televised image of Feles, who instructs the couples. “You have half an hour. The Man must ejaculate into His Match in that time. It must be sufficient,” and so on. Sable's “breeding” results in conception, sparing her the necessity of a repeat performance. And although she finds satisfaction in the knowledge that, like her mother and grandmother before her, she is fulfilling her proper destiny as a woman, a nagging curiosity about life outside her community makes her begin to question this role. When Sable prevents a Boy from sexually assaulting one of her former schoolmates, she is punished by being publicly spat upon by all the Men in the colony, in a scene reminiscent of ritual stonings.

As Sable and her friends enter their third trimester, they are taken to the Birth Yards, a labour camp in the woods, where they are subjected to healthy diets, fresh air, hard work, and more humiliation and degradation. In one of many bizarre rituals, the pregnant girls are made to drink a murky brown tea made from the blood and hair of Feles. “We get to ingest a Man who loves us,” Sable observes. “Protects us. Keeps us.” (There is also a violent scene involving a pig that I could barely read.) And they are dosed into docility with another drug, DociGens, which Sable refuses to take—an act of rebellion that ultimately allows her to escape what awaits her back at the Den once she is no longer suitable for breeding. For women past child-bearing age, their fate is to be gradually poisoned with micro-doses of a chemotherapy pill called Afterol.

If, like *The Handmaid's Tale*, Tater's *The Birth Yard* is a cautionary story, it isn't clear what the novel is warning against. The excesses of patriarchal society? The siren call of charismatic leaders? The perils of drug use? These things are already with us. With all their horrors, we recoil at the idea that societies like the Den, an isolated Mennonite-like sect (minus the religion) entirely under male control, could actually exist. And yet the real-life Bolivian inspiration for Toews's *Women Talking* reminds us that indeed they can, they have, and they probably still do. Today, as we ponder the causes of a pandemic, a situation few of us imagined, though the warnings were everywhere; as we wait for an unknowable future to arrive; as we try to imagine the forms that future might take—we should remember that in life, as in literature, anything can happen. ▲

# Labyrinth

**M**Y SON DUSTIN UNEXPECTEDLY died in March 2018, but we didn't know the cause of death for almost seven months. After a long history of mental illness and addiction, Dee had been in active recovery for four years and was trying to come off methadone. It might have been suicide. It might have been a relapse, an accidental overdose. When we finally received the medical examiner's report, we learned that he died, in fact, of pneumonia.

In those excruciating months, when I was still in shock and living breath by breath, minute by minute, a friend put a journal and a pen in my hand. At first, the pen was a sword. I slashed and stabbed the page. I raged on it. I wrote in a trance. I wrote from dreams, wrote not remembering what I wrote. I wrote drunk. I wrote because I needed to climb out and over the edge of the black hellhole of despair. I wrote to regather the shattered pieces of my unravelled myself. A children's writer of mostly joy and nonsense, I surprised myself with how often the word "fuck" appeared: I became a *fucking fierce warrior woman writer*, as I had been in my thirties. Years ago, when I wrote *In This House Are Many Women*, I wrote so I could move forward. This time, there was no moving *forward*. There was only moving deeper into the suffocating unknown.

There is no word like "orphan" or "widow" for a bereaved parent. But I eventually found one that seemed to fit: "undone."

Yes, we the undone  
 Let's go down by the ocean and scream  
 I am a heart storm  
 I am the tornado and the hurricane  
 I will roar and keen  
 I will dwell in the in between

Once more, I discovered that words, both profane and sacred, were my Ariadne's thread as I travelled through own labyrinth of grief. There was a minotaur waiting for me. But if I did not walk toward the pain, I'd spend the rest of my life running away from the monster that devours the mothers and fathers who have lost their children. The monster that feeds on the Undone.

"This above all, to refuse to be a victim," Margaret Atwood wrote long ago, in *Surfacing*. "Unless I can do that I can do nothing." I did not want to be Sorrow's *victim*. So, through my writing, I refused. Because I am a mother and grandmother, and that's what mothers and grandmothers do. At least mine did: both my mother and my grandmother lost sons. The title of my book comes directly from my mother. They were her words. Softer, she told me. The pain and the sadness will be there, yes, but the texture changes, the sadness will soften.

We built a memorial labyrinth for Dee. A simple one, of rock and grass. I walk there twice a day, with intention. Three Rs: Release, as I walk in. Receive in the centre. Return as I walk back out to the "real" world, which of course will never be the world I knew before.

Writers write. That's what we do. But the decision to publish was another matter. Grief unleashed, laid bare, too ugly, too raw, too intense, too private. Who wants to read that? There was also the stumbling block of pride: I hated the thought of being pitied or, worse, to be seen as someone looking for sympathy.

In "Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower," Rilke urges those in darkness to be the bell. His line "As you ring, what batters you becomes your strength" gave me hope. He also asks, "What is it like, such intensity of pain?" And that question gave me permission. So I began to edit and shape and sculpt. Release. Receive. Return.

Whitney Moran, my friend and brave editor, gently encouraged me, creating space and safety and reassurance. Like the best editors, she was midwife to this creature that became a book. I wanted something beautiful, and in the six months since its release, it has found its brave readers, the undone ones, the regathering ones. They write to me. The book is comfort to some, hope to others. This, of course, comforts me.

I write these words on Mother's Day 2020. Like so many, I can only FaceTime this year — with Jordan, Dustin's older brother. A screen is not even close to gathering and touching. I miss his hugs. I miss his brother's hugs, too. Sorrow is a love story, and I am grateful for the love I know as a mother. I am even grateful for a book that I never ever wanted to write. ▲

*Sheree Fitch is the author of You Won't Always Be This Sad.*



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