NOVEMBER 2024

CURTIS GILLESPIE Understanding Justin Trudeau **ADAM GOPNIK** Aislin's Beloved Expos
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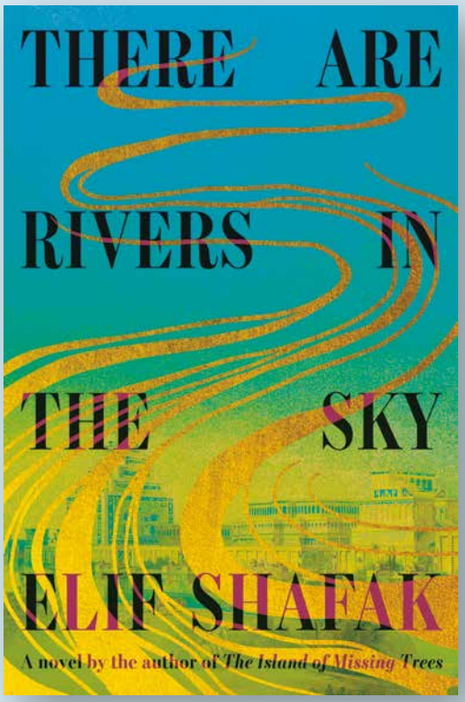
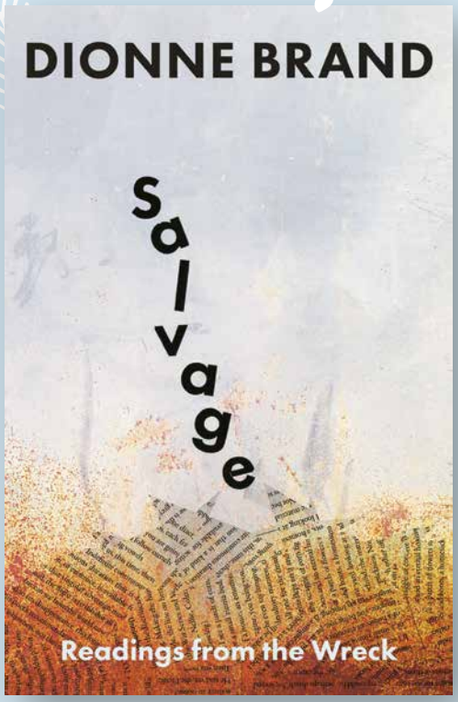


An enchanting new novel by Booker Prize finalist Elif Shafak that transcends history and fate



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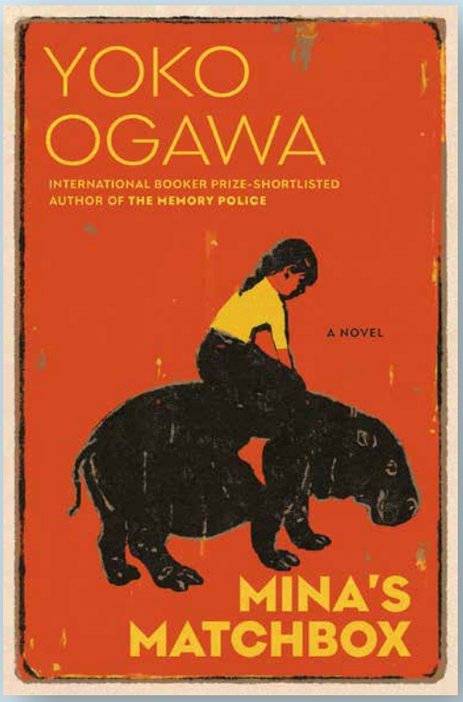

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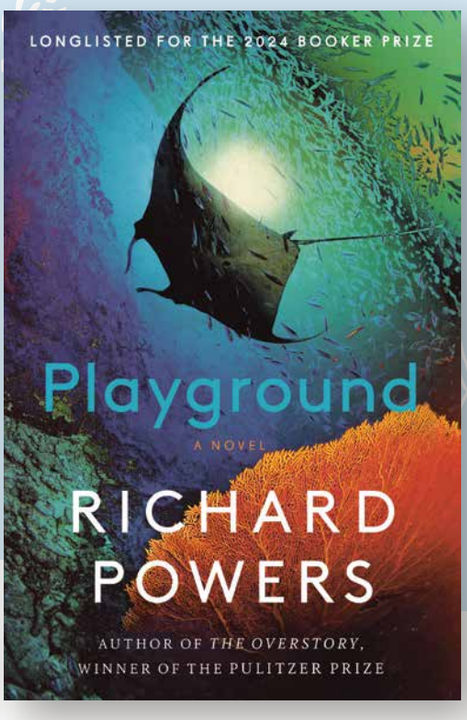

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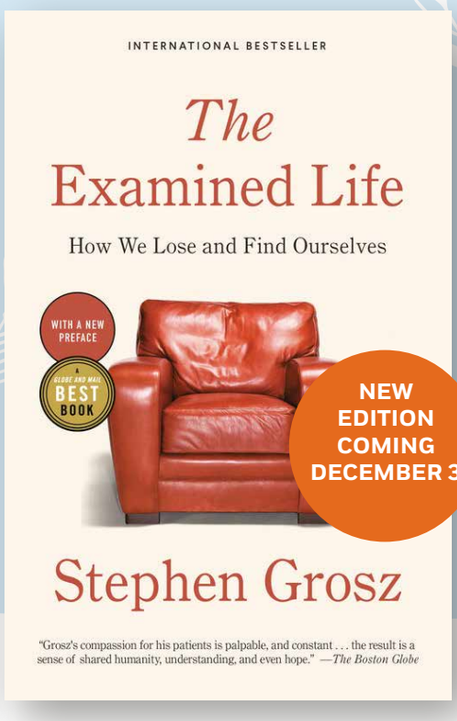

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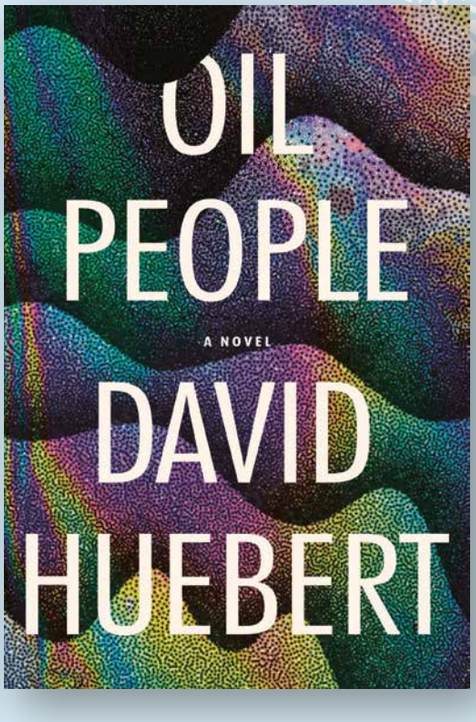

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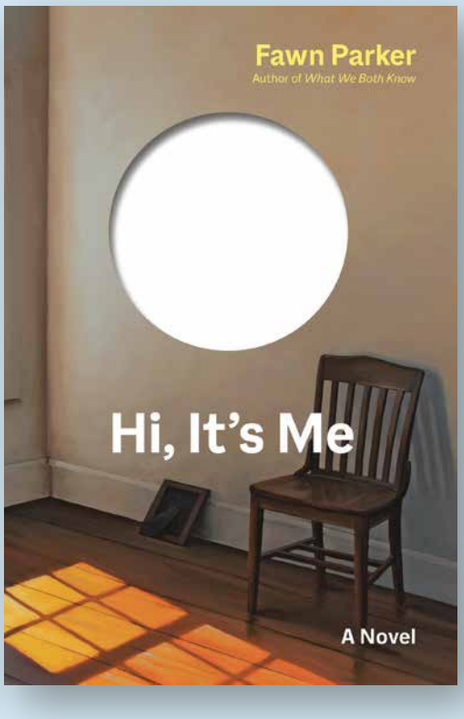

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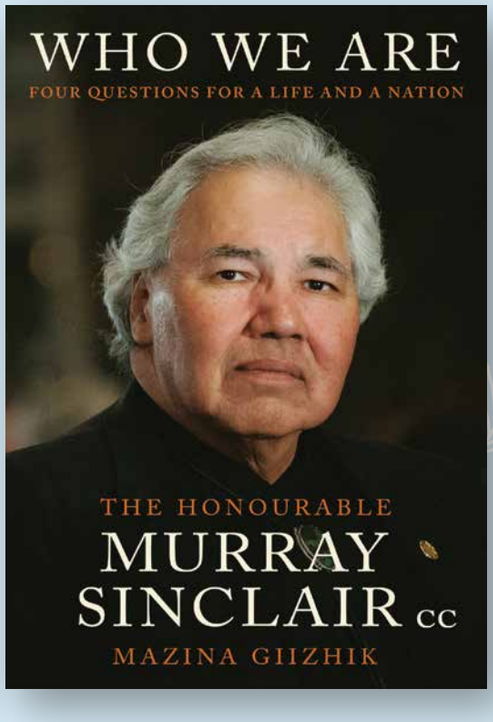
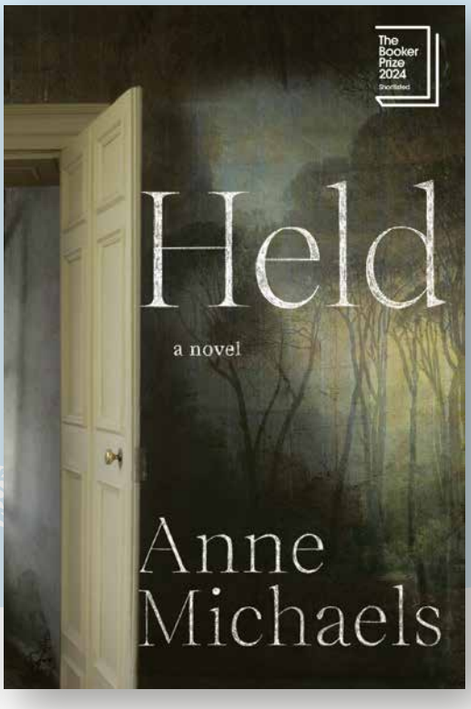
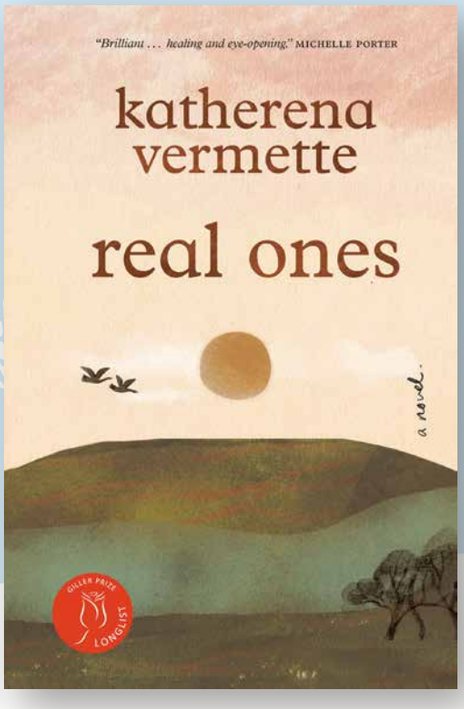


One of Canada's greatest leaders shares the story of his remarkable life—and vision for our nation



The 2024 Giller and Booker Prize–nominated novel, from the internationally bestselling author of *Fugitive Pieces*



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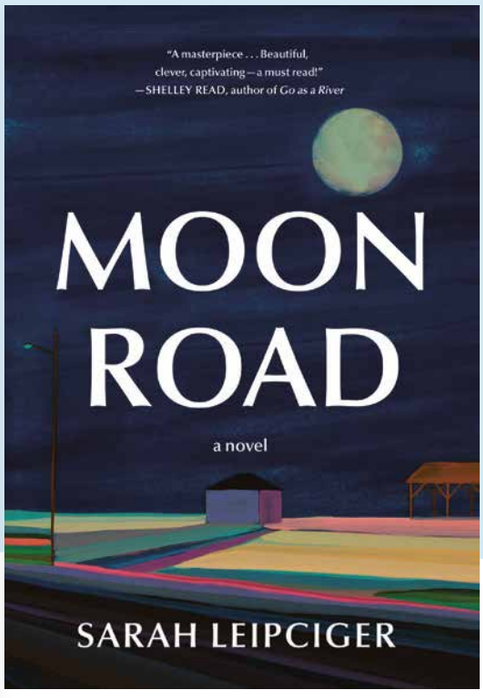

An estranged couple journey across Canada to finally lay rest to the mystery that pulled them apart in this powerful novel

NOVEMBER 2024 ◆ VOLUME 32 ◆ NUMBER 9

Literary Review of Canada

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

John Allemang *can do a word-perfect rendition of "God Save the King" in Latin — just ask.*

James Brooke-Smith *teaches English literature at the University of Ottawa. His most recent book is* Accelerate!: A History of the 1990s.

Kelvin Browne *is writing a gay romance novel to pass his winter onshore in Nova Scotia.*

Frances Bula *has covered Vancouver city politics and development for the last thirty years. Her reporting regularly appears in* BCBusiness *and the* Globe and Mail.

George Elliott Clarke *is the E. J. Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto.*

Graham Fraser *is the author of* Sorry, I Don't Speak French *and other books.*

Gary Geddes *has written or edited over fifty volumes of fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry, including* The Oysters I Bring to Banquets.

Curtis Gillespie *is the winner of seven National Magazine Awards.*

Adam Gopnik *is the author of* Paris to the Moon *and* A Thousand Small Sanities, *as well as numerous essays in* The New Yorker.

Charlotte Gray *lives in Ottawa and will never write her memoirs.*

Kevin Jagernauth *is a film critic in Montreal.*

Emily Latimer *reads and writes from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.*

Ruth Panofsky *recently received the Royal Society of Canada's Lorne Pierce Medal.*

J. R. Patterson *was born on a farm in Manitoba. His writing appears widely, including in* The Atlantic *and* National Geographic.

Amanda Perry *teaches literature at Champlain College Saint-Lambert and Concordia University.*

Shazia Hafiz Ramji *is the author of* Port of Being *and is currently at work on a novel.*

Amy Reiswig *writes on topics ranging from dance films to Faroese Viking metal.*

David Marks Shribman *won a Pulitzer Prize for beat reporting in 1995.*

Jeffrey Simpson *was the* Globe and Mail's *national affairs columnist for thirty-two years.*

◆

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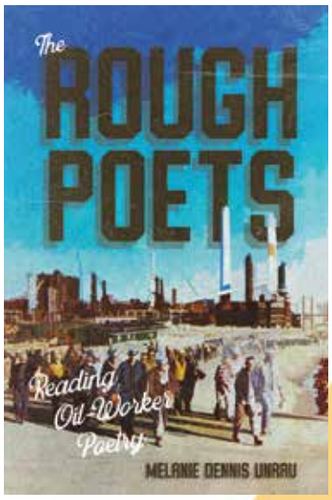

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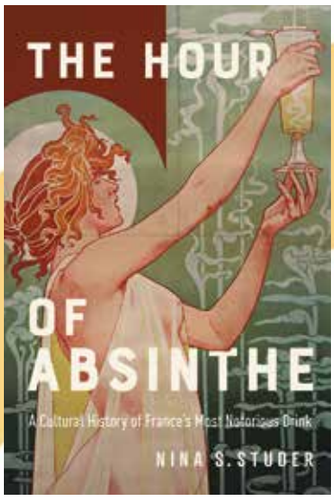

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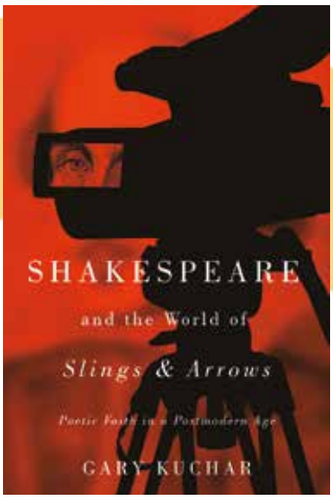

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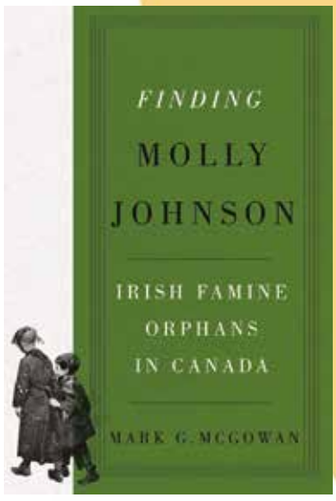

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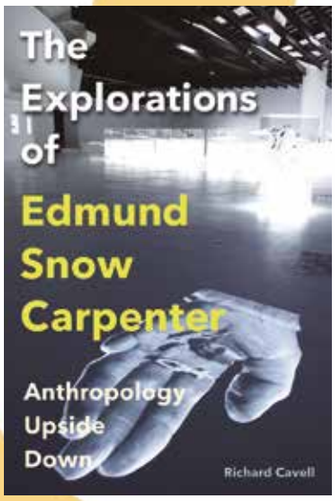

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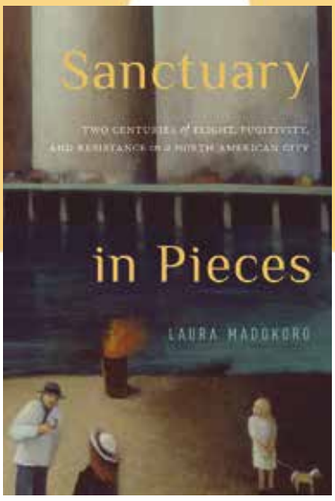

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Cookie Crumbled

I cast my first vote in Canada at the Muriel Collins Housing Co-operative in downtown Toronto. Initially, I was struck by the simplicity of the ballot: just a list of names where I was to place a single X next to my preferred candidate for member of Parliament. And then, as I headed toward the door and back home, I was struck by the lack of cookies.

I have not missed a federal, provincial, or municipal election since becoming a Canadian citizen, but my sentimental point of reference for voting remains my hometown of Albion, Nebraska. I was eighteen when I entered the basement of the local Baptist church to participate in the primaries for the first time. A few months later, I voted again, in a general election that became synonymous with recounts and hanging chads. In both cases, the double-sided ballot asked a whole host of questions. Whom did I back for president and as my representative in Congress? Whom did I want to serve as university regent? What about county sheriff and commissioner for the natural resource district? School board member and judge of the workers' compensation court? Did I support amending the state constitution to outlaw same-sex marriage?

For exercising my civic responsibility, I was rewarded with an "I Voted" sticker and offered a variety of baked goods near the exit, supplied by a group of volunteers, likely congregants of the church. A similar scene played out again two years later, during the mid-terms, and two years after that, when I voted in person in the United States for what proved to be the last time. I haven't sat out a primary or general election since moving to Canada, but I have sent each of those ballots to the county clerk's office by mail. No stickers, and certainly no cookies.

When I received my official ballot for the November 5 general election, I counted fifteen races for federal, state, and local offices, as well as seven initiatives or referendums, including two proposed amendments to the Nebraska constitution regarding a woman's right to choose. It's a lot to digest, especially compared with the Canadian ballots I've become accustomed to. Would those Cornhuskers voting at their library or community hall, I wondered, be rewarded for their efforts this year with baked goods and the non-partisan bonhomie that such a small gesture powerfully represents? I asked my parents and my older brother — who laughed at my naïveté.

Gone are the days of ballot box brownies, and gone are the days, it sure seems, of camaraderie that crosses party lines. When a would-be assassin shot Ronald Reagan in 1981, the top House Democrat, Tip O'Neill, visited the Republican president in the hospital. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the left-leaning United States Supreme Court justice, was a long-time friend of her right-leaning colleague Antonin Scalia. The Democrat Ted Kennedy and the Republican Orrin Hatch made for an odd couple, as did John Adams and Thomas Jefferson centuries earlier (though the two Founders famously fell out for a while). Today some members of Congress, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Marjorie Taylor Greene, won't even speak to each other when they pass in the hallway, preferring to trade barbs on social media. "In this age of partisan rancor, when political rivals often describe each other as enemies," a *Los Angeles Times* columnist recently wrote, "we easily forget that Americans once took a revolutionary pride in being friends."

I desperately want that pride to return. During university, some of my closest friends and I vehemently disagreed on Initiative 416, which did, in fact, outlaw same-sex marriage and remains part of the state constitution (though it can no longer be enforced). We disagreed on the president, on abortion rights, on the death penalty, and on the invasion of Iraq in 2003. I'm still close to many former classmates, including some who have championed presidential campaigns that I find objectionable. That puts us in the minority, according to the Pew Research Center, which reported in 2020 that fewer than a quarter of American voters "have more than a few friends" from the other side of the aisle.

Much ink has been spilled on the causes for increased polarization in American politics and, regrettably, here in Canada. From our siloed news sources to manipulative algorithms, we have become conditioned to distrust one another, to associate evil or monstrosity with politicians as well as with fellow citizens who dare see the world differently.

As I mail my completed ballot back to small-town Nebraska, I suspect my sealed envelope will be opened by someone who supports a platform that I do not. Perhaps I *am* naive, but I trust that they will dutifully count my raised hand. And I want to believe that if I were still voting in person, and if such things still happened, I would graciously accept a cookie from someone like them on my way out.

Kyle Wyatt, Editor-in-Chief

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Furthermore

RE: *Skippy*
by Jeffrey Simpson (September)

IN HIS REVIEW OF ANDREW LAWTON'S *PIERRE Poilievre: A Political Life*, Jeffrey Simpson establishes what may well be the Conservative leader's most threadbare pledge. Simpson quotes the long list of personal freedoms that a government under Poilievre would bestow upon Canadians. A few paragraphs later, the reader learns that he forbids his caucus members from attending gatherings like those of the World Economic Forum and the Trilateral Commission. How should Canadian citizens reconcile Poilievre's promise to make us the freest people on earth with his regimentation of the people we elect to represent us in our Parliament?

André Carrel
Terrace, British Columbia

RE: *Canada Daze*
by Stephen Marche (July | August)

WHILE STEPHEN MARCHE'S ESSAY PROVIDES AN engaging and worthwhile account of the Frog Lake Massacre of 1885, it concludes with an unconvincing and surprisingly venomous attack on current Canadian culture: Marche asks us to believe, with no supporting evidence, his derogatory propositions that Canada has never possessed an original culture, that it gives only lip service to reconciliation, and that it is not interested in promoting writers and artists on the basis of their talent.

Marche's raging negativity with regard to Canadian culture leads him to state, "If you are young and creative in Canada, you should leave. It will be generations, if ever, before the people in power care more about your talent than the service your identity can provide to their institutions." He goes on to say that "to be a writer in Canada today is to operate within a bubble of insignificance," which suggests that the *Literary Review of Canada* is itself operating in a "bubble of insignificance." To find these propositions within the pages of a journal that promotes and celebrates Canadian writing was surprising. Clearly, neither Canadian writers nor the *Literary Review of Canada* is insignificant, and young creatives should not simply leave the country.

As to Marche's conclusion that we are doomed inescapably to a racist colonialist future by our racist colonialist history ("History keeps coming, no matter what you cry out"), well, clearly, he's incorrect about this too. During the past sixty years, women, gays, people of colour, Indigenous groups, and many other historically wronged communities in Canada have made huge progress toward equality. And this proves we actually can overcome our history. It's a long, slow, and still ongoing process, but it can be done.

While one may disagree with Marche's views, one can still marvel at the colourful language that he uses to set out his rather fanciful conspiracy theory of Canadian culture. As he sees it, Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples has caused Canadian culture to be controlled by unnamed "sanctimonious elites," who, with "annihilating stupidity," do not foster Canadian talent but rather play "pointless, endless expiation games" that make Canadian culture "a junkie mother" whose "drug of choice is virtue." As a result, he writes, "so much is worthy in Canadian culture, and so little is worthwhile." Harsh! Maybe he was having a bad day?

Ron Argue
Ottawa

RE: *The Operatives*
by Sandra Martin (July | August)

SANDRA MARTIN'S REVIEW OF NAHLAH AYED'S *The War We Won Apart: The Untold Story of Two Elite Agents Who Became One of the Most Decorated Couples of WWII* does what a good review should: It makes me want to read this account of Sonia Butt and Guy d'Artois. However, one small passage in her review needs elaboration; another is extraneous.

Regarding the former, Martin writes that Butt visited restaurants patronized by Germans, which "provoked smears that she was a collaborator," but she doesn't go any further with this speculative, tantalizing tidbit. Regarding the latter, Martin writes that Butt had an affair with an agent who later "went back to his wife, at least temporarily." That agent doesn't seem to figure prominently in the overall Butt-d'Artois narrative, so I don't understand the relevance of the marital details.

One other passage gives pause. Martin writes that Butt and another agent "cohabited as man and wife." This may have worked better as "lived together as man and wife" (the language at the time) or "cohabited as wife and husband" (the language today).

Those critiques aside, Martin's review prepares the reader for an intriguing book.

Mel Simoneau
Gatineau, Quebec

RE: *Heart and Home*
by Menaka Ponnambalam (June)

AS A HEART SURGEON AND A FORMER COLLEAGUE of Arvind Koshal, I thoroughly enjoyed this review of *Transplant: A Cardiac Surgeon's Story of Immigration & Innovation*. I thank the *Literary Review of Canada* for spotlighting contributions of "compelling people" like Koshal to Canadian medicine by commissioning it. The book offers a candid chronicle of the history of heart surgery in this country, a journey driven by science, skill, and altruism — in other words, the remarkable "human ingenuity" of those who dedicated their careers and lives to providing exceptional care.

I find it noteworthy how cardiac surgery stands out as a unique field that continually pushes the boundaries of innovation and calculated risk — an aspect of the field that may not be fully appreciated by the public. In it, for example, we find the only form of therapy where circulation to the body may be deliberately stopped for a prolonged period — typically under one hour — for a procedure known as deep hypothermic circulatory arrest, to allow the repair of intricate areas near or within the heart. Additionally, this is the sole area of medicine where an intervention with a 200 percent risk of death was designed and routinely performed: it occurred when healthy parents underwent surgery to provide cross-circulation for their child in need of open-heart surgery. For those of us who work in the field, it is truly a privilege. These stories need to be told by legends like Koshal and Thierry Mesana, whose own recent memoir also captures the essence of cardiac surgery in an epic and personally riveting manner.

Marc Ruel
Ottawa

An illustrative comment…

CONGRATULATIONS TO YOUR ARTISTS FOR THE innovative, humorous, and whimsical covers. I'm a little behind in my reading, but I have noticed a distinct evolution in the design, use of colours, and subject matter. Excellent work should be celebrated and praised, so thank you to all the magazine's illustrators.

Michael Juarez
Green Lake, Saskatchewan

And a correction…

IN HIS REVIEW OF *BARFLY AND OTHER POEMS*, "Another Round" (October), John Baglow stated that a publishing house actively sought out Michael Lista for his first book. In fact, Lista submitted his manuscript the old-fashioned way.

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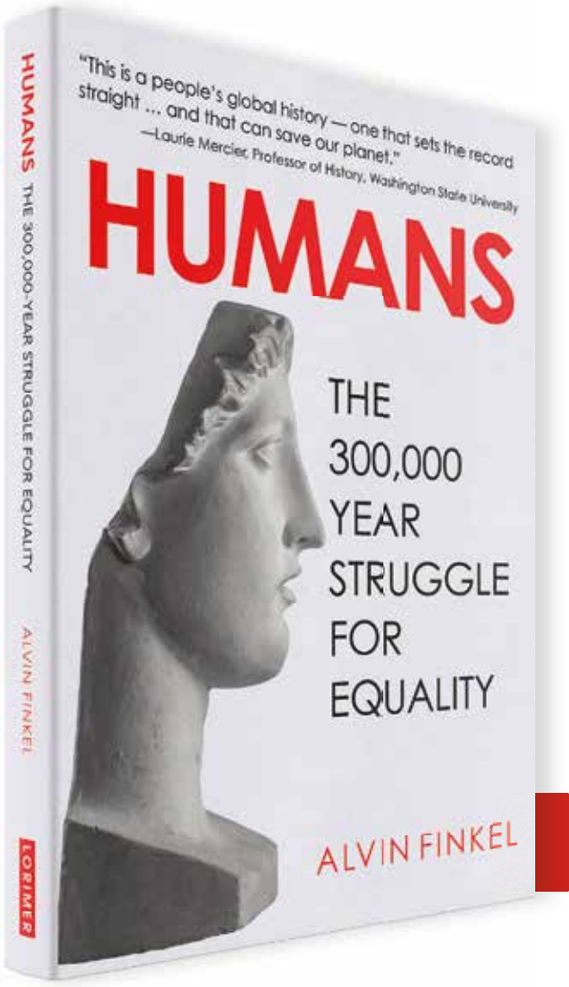

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ALVIN FINKEL is a founding member of the Alberta Labour History Institute and emeritus professor of History at Athabasca University and the past president of the Canadian Committee on Labour History.

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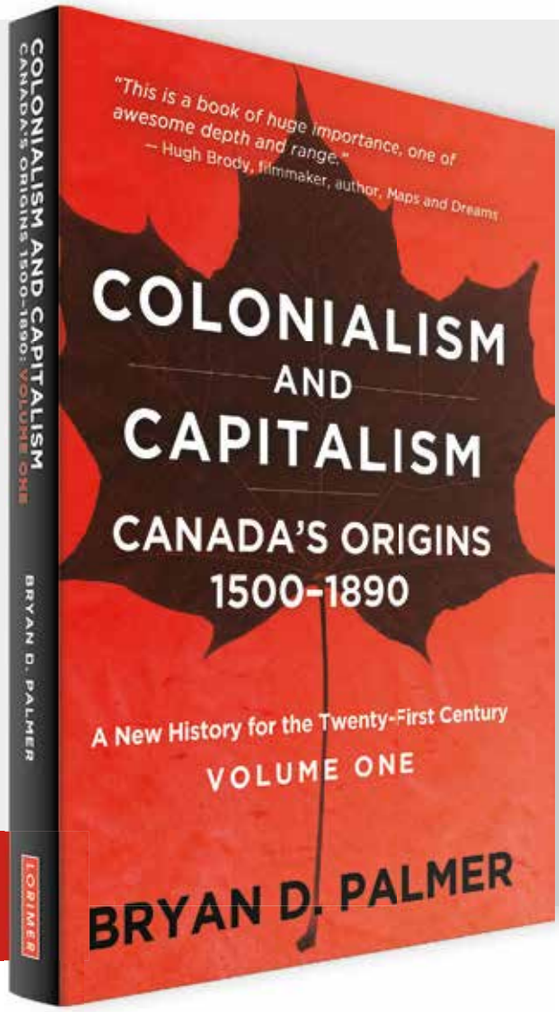
— Audra Simpson, Columbia University, author of *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*

BRYAN D. PALMER is professor emeritus and former Research Chair of Canadian Studies, at Trent University, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and former editor of Labour/Le Travail.



Colonialism and Capitalism: Canada's Origins 1500–1890
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The End of the End

Revisiting a famous declaration

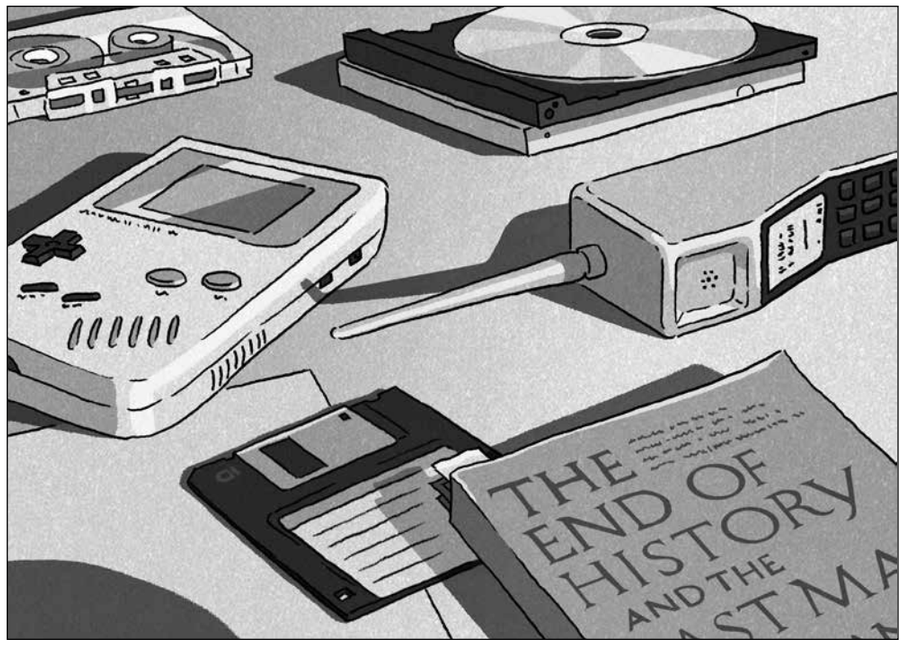
James Brooke-Smith

The twentieth century, it is safe to say, has made all of us into deep historical pessimists.

— Francis Fukuyama

It's the end of the world as we know it
And I feel fine.

— R.E.M.



Longing for an age that wasn't exactly golden.

Does anyone else feel, against their better judgment, a slight twinge of nostalgia for the 1990s, after the Berlin Wall came down and the internet came into our homes? It is possible, after all, to feel longing for ages that weren't exactly golden, especially if the one you are experiencing is filled with uncertainty and dread. This is shown in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, Wolfgang Becker's film from 2003, in which a young man recreates the conditions of the recently defunct German Democratic Republic in his family's Berlin apartment, in order to soothe his mother's heart condition when she awakes from the coma she slipped into before everything changed. Ironically, their place becomes a haven for their nostalgic neighbours, who find themselves adrift in the baffling world of consumer capitalism and European integration unleashed by the end of Communism.

A quarter of the way into the twenty-first century, against the backdrop of war in Ukraine and Gaza, the rise of the far right, the migrant crisis, increasing economic inequality, and the looming threat of climate catastrophe, it is quite possible to feel a wistful pull for the bland security of the late twentieth century. As an era, the '90s shine because they came before so many distasteful realities hove into view. At the very least, they are the last epoch of the recent past when the term "troll farm" suggested merely Nordic folklore.

Of course, the '90s were also when Francis Fukuyama famously declared the "end of history." With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later, the ideological and geopolitical schism that had defined so much of the century was over. The West had won. History itself — that is, history understood in the grand manner as the dialectical conflict between such polarized forces as slaves and masters, peoples and kings, Communists and capitalists — was coming to a close. In the words of Margaret Thatcher, there was "no alternative" to liberal democratic government and free market economics.

Thatcher had used that phrase — "there is no alternative" — as a cudgel with which to beat her political opponents in the '80s. By the early '90s, however, it was taken by many as a simple geopolitical reality. The neo-liberal "shock therapy" that was administered to the centrally planned economies of former Soviet satellites was convulsive in the extreme, but at the time few commentators foresaw the rise of Vladimir Putin or the klepto-oligarchic imperialist petro-state that Russia would become. On the other side of the world, China responded to the tumultuous events of 1989 by accelerating its own transition toward consumer capitalism. At its 1992 National Congress, the Chinese Communist Party announced its commitment to a "socialist market economy," and by late 2001 it was a fully paid-up member of the World Trade Organization. At the time, the Western commentariat confidently predicted that the Chinese state would eventually introduce democratic reforms to accompany its free market system. These pundits tend to be much less sanguine today.

In the 1990s, centrist politicians like Bill Clinton cast free market globalization as "the economic equivalent of a force of nature, like wind or water." A whole new web of transnational institutions, highly technocratic and barely accountable to national electorates, was formed to administer world trade. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty ushered in the new European Union, creating the largest free trade area on earth. In 1993, Clinton relied on the votes of Republican lawmakers to ratify the North American Free Trade Agreement. In 1995, the WTO was formed, and the anti-capitalist protests at its meeting in Seattle in 1999 made for an exciting spectacle on the nightly news. But no one — least of all the protesters themselves, who favoured carnivalesque street performances over direct pressure via the mechanisms of state power — took them as a meaningful threat to the new global order.

Fukuyama was not simply describing a contingent set of conditions within world affairs. His argument was more ambitious — much more ambitious — than that. According to his theory, the events of 1989 and 1991 were the culmination of a rational process that was woven into the very fabric of human history. Democracy and free market economics weren't just the least bad systems available, to paraphrase Winston Churchill; they were expressions of the fundamental properties of human nature, as discovered through the slow march of historical progress.

In this respect, Fukuyama was intervening in a long-running debate between the heavyweights of nineteenth-century German political philosophy, Karl Marx and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Of these two giants, he claimed, it was Hegel who had got things right. The arc of history bent not toward a Marxist utopia, as the revolutionaries of 1917 had believed, but toward the bourgeois liberal nation-state, a kind of permanent European Union of the soul. Hegel claimed to have seen this historical destiny embodied in the all-conquering figure of Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Jena in 1806, famously dubbing him "the world spirit on horseback." For Hegel and his followers, this was the beginning of the end of history, the point at which the philosophical achievements

TIM BOUCKLEY

Friends You Leave at the Head of the Tunnel

I'm all caught up in the wellspring of you
which gulps up old air.
And birds howl through the day, you see —
their bones are empty, you see —
I don't know anything you don't. Just that

I knew you better than anyone
Salt-of-the-earth girl,
when did the sun get so low in the sky? And
can we trap it
strip of tracks narrowed, braced for the pitch and groan
of a too-quick sun. The two of us,
never coming the same way
more than once

I mean
I can't remember getting older but
I remember the wingbeat of train lights against your cheeks
and the dark of the tunnel. I think
I've forgotten all the ways I used to love you

This, the long
and lonely time after
like a great pit in the sky. Like how love and people, too
seem endless, seem
like trains stepped on so thoughtlessly
the curvature of the earth pulls the steel platform
and light
and you away, too

Maya Somogyi

Maya Somogyi is from British Columbia's Sunshine Coast.

of the Enlightenment — the universal rights of man — were detached from the bloody turmoil of the French Revolution and enshrined in the durable form of the rational state. Neither Hegel nor Fukuyama claimed that there would be no more historical events. There would still be wars and politics, palace coups and popular uprisings, religious movements and scientific discoveries, but these events would all unfold against a settled backdrop of political theory, which enshrined freedom and equal rights as the necessary conditions of political order.

The other plank of Fukuyama's construct was the fundamental human need for recognition, a concept with a long lineage in Western philosophy. In Plato's *Republic*, the key term is *thymos*, which is usually translated as "spiritedness" and forms the third essential part of human nature alongside the more familiar concepts *logos* and *eros*. Like reason and passion, thymos must be properly managed to ensure social harmony. Unchecked, it leads to domination and exploitation. Tyrants demand not simply more power and wealth than their subjects but also excessive forms of recognition. Hence the giant palaces and bad public art erected by the likes of Joseph Stalin and Nicolae Ceaușescu to monopolize their underlings' attention; hence the needlessly provocative tweets of Elon Musk, who cannot be satisfied unless his status is also validated by millions of eyeballs on X. But Fukuyama also recognized the importance of thymos in the plight of social minorities who seek recognition in the eyes of the state. The campaigns for women's, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ, and disability rights all emanate from the thymotic desire for recognition by our peers. This is why, according to Fukuyama, liberal democracy constitutes the rational end point of human history, as it is the only form of government that grants equal recognition to every citizen.

Fukuyama's wide-ranging proposition is apt to make *The End of History and the Last Man* sound like a work of Western liberal triumphalism, which is precisely how many readers interpreted it. Critics on the left, for example, accused the author of simply casting the political ideology of American capitalism in universalist language. For a brief time at the end of the 1990s, Fukuyama threw in his lot with the Project for the New American Century, the neo-conservative think tank that provided the ideological blueprint for the second Gulf War and George W. Bush's misbegotten attempt to spread American-style democracy in the Middle East. But Fukuyama was always a more complex thinker than either his critics or supporters tended to recognize. Notably, he stressed that there were more ways to organize a market economy than the American consensus allowed for. As he moved away from the neo-cons, Fukuyama increasingly aligned himself with Denmark's social democratic model of regulated capitalism — not the libertarian one found in Texas.

Fukuyama was no simple booster for "freedom" and "capitalism" in the tedious sense so familiar to viewers of Fox News. The phrase "the end of history" has come to denote a cultural mood as much as a political theory, what Hegel might have called the zeitgeist of the '90s. Indeed, *The End of History and the Last Man* is shot through with melancholy descriptions of the post-historical scene. Consumerist anomie and spiritual nihilism were now the dominant moods. When all of the big questions of government and society seemed to have been resolved, civic life lost much of its relish. The great political passions that once animated the breasts of men and women had dwindled and dimmed. An empty formalism had crept into the culture, as the avant-garde breakthroughs of the past gave way to stasis and repetition.

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SO MUCH OF '90S POPULAR CULTURE WAS DEFINED by a sense of sped-up purposelessness and hedonistic resignation. The mumbling apathy of grunge and slacker culture, the narcotic escapism of rave music, the nihilistic entrepreneurialism of gangsta rap, the postmodern irony of Quentin Tarantino movies: these were all expressions of what it was like to live in an era in which there was no alternative to consumer capitalism, when the best we could do was to retreat into subcultural niches or ironic gestures of pre-commodified dissent. This is why nostalgia for the decade is doubly ambivalent. All nostalgia is a fantastical idealization of the past, but '90s nostalgia is an idealization of a past that was already soaked in nostalgia, already highly aware of its own alienation.

During the halcyon days of the internet, the only really compelling vision of an alternative future emanated from the digital realm, where "jacking in" and "logging on" were cast as edgy ways of making contact with a sci-fi hereafter that was in the process of being born. With their predictions of virtual reality telecommuting and digital democracy, the tech gurus at the MIT Media Lab and *Wired* magazine peddled a vision of social transformation via the super-abundant wealth of networks. One of the few genuinely trailblazing movements of the '90s was commerce itself, the free jazz of high finance and cyber-bluster that inflated the dot-com bubble as investors scrambled to own a slice of tomorrow. But the world that was being built turned out to be simply an enhanced version of the post-historical present: seamless, personalized, networked, and user-friendly on the surface but with the whirring machinery of libertarian turbo-capitalism under the hood. In July 1997, *Wired* proclaimed the advent of the "long boom," during which the digital revolution would power unbroken economic growth for the foreseeable future. "We're facing 25 years of prosperity, freedom, and a better environment for the whole world. You got a problem with that?" bellowed its cover. Read it and weep.

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AS WE LOOK BACK FROM TODAY, FUKUYAMA'S dream of the end of history seems like a curio from another age. As every sentient human with an internet connection is aware, world politics has become increasingly turbulent in recent years. American unipolar dominance is badly frayed, if not entirely threadbare; it lasted roughly until the 2010s, or the amount of time it

took for Washington to pour trillions of dollars into a series of unwinnable foreign wars, while Beijing spent roughly the same amount on its Belt and Road Initiative throughout Asia and Africa. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's excursions into Taiwanese airspace presage a new multipolar reality.

The great financial crisis of 2008 pulled the rug out from under the neo-liberal consensus of the preceding thirty-odd years. As governments bailed out the banks and passed the costs on to citizens in the form of fiscal austerity, the rigged game of global capitalism was made plain for all to see. We have been living with the ramifications ever since in the form of widespread distrust of civic institutions and the rise of both right- and left-wing populisms.

So much that was blithely accepted as settled has been thrown into question once again. This has been an era of mass protest: the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, the Yellow Vests, Extinction Rebellion, and student encampments have all brought politics back to the streets. Challenges to centrist orthodoxy have emerged throughout world affairs, from the traction Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn found in America and Britain to the authoritarian populisms of Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, and Jair Bolsonaro.

But this kind of analysis makes the recent past seem too orderly, too readily amenable to neat op-ed-style narratives. So much of everyday life in the twenty-first century has taken on a feverish, even bizarro tinge. We've seen a reality TV star in the White House, the mainstreaming of conspiracy theories (from progressive fantasies about Russian *kompromat* to conservative paranoia about vaccines and pets in Ohio), freak weather patterns and a biosphere breakdown, mass quarantine and state-mandated mothballing of entire sectors of the economy, an angry mob encouraged to invade the U.S. Capitol by an outgoing president, and angry truckers blockading Parliament Hill and threatening to execute the prime minister. Norms have been busted, expectations scrambled. The Overton window — the measure of how long it takes on average for a fringe idea to make its way into the political mainstream — has been itself thrown out of the window.

It seems as though the end of history has itself come to an end. This is the argument made by Alex Hochuli, George Hoare, and Philip Cunliffe in *The End of the End of History*, from 2021. As they put it, the great financial crash of 2008 created the material conditions for the end of the end of history; the Brexit referendum and Trump's election victory in 2016 announced its arrival in the political sphere; and the lockdowns and related derangements of the pandemic made it definitive. Crucially, though, their analysis comes with a major caveat: just because the end of history is at an end, it doesn't mean that the political struggles of the pre-1989 world — a world that was shaped by mass political parties, the organized working class, and radical alternatives to the status quo — have been brought back to life.

The constituencies that drove mass politics for much of the second half of the twentieth century have been transformed beyond all recognition. As we exit from the end of history, we find ourselves in a political landscape in which large swaths of the working class no longer vote for the old social democratic parties, and equally large swaths of what Thomas Piketty calls the Brahmin Left (educated, affluent, progressive, intersectional) prefer moralizing about identity politics to allyship with the "traditional," which is to say white, provincial, uneducated working class. Even as the neo-liberal consensus frays, mainstream politics keeps on serving up the unappetizing choice between bland technocrats and populist frauds. In place of a potential new politics of inequality, we get posturing blowhards and endless culture wars.

Checkmate against Fukuyama, then? Well, maybe check, but certainly not mate. In fact, some of the most intriguing sections of *The End of History and the Last Man* are the ones in which Fukuyama speculated on the possible conditions that might bring about the end of the end of history, not least because they foreshadowed much of what is happening today. Even back in the triumphalist atmosphere of the early '90s, Fukuyama recognized that the principal threat to liberalism is economic inequality. He predicted that any future alternative to liberal democracy would emerge either from "those who for cultural reasons experience persistent economic failure" or from "those who are inordinately successful at the capitalist game" — what we would today call the economically "left behind" and the global billionaire class. These two groups exist at the radical edges of the liberal order because they have the most to gain from its discontinuation. They have already proven fertile ground for post-liberal, even anti-democratic political ideas, from far-right authoritarianism to the secessionist fantasies of Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, who dream of a

purer, more heroic form of capitalism in their offshore enclaves and future Martian colonies.

Another potential threat is sheer boredom at the conditions of existence within bourgeois consumer societies. The basic conditions of life for the vast majority of citizens in the affluent West remain unchanged: we work, we shop, we eat, we sleep, and occasionally we cast a vote for one of the parties that operate within the narrow bandwidth of mainstream political ideology. The mechanisms of liberal democracy afford relatively weak forms of recognition, which leave a large reservoir of surplus thymos circulating within the population. These urges can be expressed in a variety of benign ways, from volunteering at your local soup kitchen to training to climb Mount Everest. They can also take less savoury forms, such as the clamour for recognition by celebrity activists, alt-right provocateurs, and self-appointed "influencers" in the ceaseless churn of social media. Thymos is the double-edged source of both our capacity for self-transcending acts of heroism and our capacity for affront and offence, grudge and grumble. All too often, political life at the end of history caters only to the latter half of our thymotic natures: our narrow sectional identities and petty resentments.

Since the publication of his surprise best-seller, Fukuyama has revised parts of his argument, but he has never jettisoned the basic theoretical framework. In a recent *Financial Times* op-ed, for instance, he contended that the prospect of another Trump presidency should be met with a concerted process of institutional reform (in particular, of campaign finance, the electoral college, and political primaries), but he did not cast the Republican nominee as an existential threat to democracy itself nor as a refutation of his core thesis about the end of history. While there may be much still to recommend Fukuyama's theories, his policy provisions, while sensible, seem rather milquetoast in relation to the deep corrosion of civic life in recent years.

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IF WE LOOK BEYOND THE BRIEF SPAN OF TIME between the fall of the Berlin Wall and our own age of anxiety, we see that history has ended several times before. We also see that those endings themselves came to an end. Hegel understood Napoleon's victory at Jena as the end of history, but so too did Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky interpret the Bolshevik Revolution as the beginning of the end of a historical trajectory that led from czarist serfdom to the abolition of the class society. Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures on Hegel at the Sorbonne in the 1930s (published in 1947) were a major influence on Fukuyama, cast the postwar formation of the European Economic Community as another "end of history" moment, a restatement of Hegel's original thesis but in a new set of institutional arrangements that charted a middle way between the twin excesses of American capitalism and Soviet Communism. In 1960, the American sociologist Daniel Bell declared the "end of ideology," maintaining that mass prosperity and civil rights had extinguished the grand political ideologies of prior epochs. Each of these supposed endings presented a different answer to the abiding questions of human freedom and recognition.

When he formulated his theory, Fukuyama glossed over a central ambiguity in Kojève's definition of freedom. The French philosopher saw the end of history as encompassing two potentially contradictory concepts of freedom. The first was the freedom of the marketplace, as expressed in the equivalence of values in the cash nexus and the liberty to buy and sell as one chooses. The second was the freedom of the polis, or the equal rights of all citizens in the eyes of the democratic state. Postwar social democracy was the political system that emerged in order to balance those two forms of freedom. Since 1989, it has all too often been economic freedom that has dominated. This makes any potential exit from the end of the end of history all the more difficult, as it requires us to go against the grain of entrenched orthodoxy, which casts freedom in highly individualistic and economic terms.

"It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." This phrase has become something of a refrain in cultural criticism. Popularized by the blogger and academic Mark Fisher, it highlights the disparity between the dystopian fantasies of contemporary popular culture and the narrow ideological range of mainstream politics. If the ironic postures of Kurt Cobain and Quentin Tarantino characterized the '90s, then it is the apocalyptic catastrophism of *The Road*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Walking Dead*, and their ilk that captures the mood of the twenty-first century. But while our own era might seem turbulent and chaotic, it is also a moment of significant opportunity as the excesses of neo-liberalism are laid bare for all to see. Perhaps, as the century reaches its second quarter, our biggest challenge is to imagine a future that is neither boring nor catastrophic but merely better than the present.

The F-Word

How politics and language mix

David Marks Shribman

At a Loss for Words: Conversation in an Age of Rage
Carol Off
Random House Canada
368 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

So it's come to the insight we need for this fraught age — when the culture wars are, in part, language wars — is an egg's. "'When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'" The line, of course, comes from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, and it is followed by a rejoinder that the veteran broadcaster Carol Off might have employed in her thoughtful examination of the weaponization and abuse of language today. "'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'"

The publication of Off's insightful volume came after the two political conventions in the United States, but I devoured an advance copy during the Democratic conclave in mid-August and was struck by how the book underlined the principal theme of the gathering that sent Kamala Harris into the general election campaign against Donald Trump. Indeed, in phrasing that could have been ripped from *At a Loss for Words*, the right-leaning *Wall Street Journal* editorial page began its summation of the proceedings by saying, "Democrats in Chicago this week are casting themselves as the party of 'freedom,' which is surprising since liberty is usually a Republican theme. But like so much else in U.S. politics these days, it pays to inspect what they mean by the word." This book certainly offers a payoff, especially with its detailed inspection of the various uses of the word "freedom" in contemporary politics.

It's worth recalling what the delegates heard at the Democratic convention. "We believe that true freedom gives each of us the right to make decisions about our own life — how we worship, what our family looks like, how many kids we have, who we marry," the former president Barack Obama said on the second night. "And we believe that freedom requires us to recognize that other people have the freedom to make choices that are different than ours. That's okay!" The next evening, the Pennsylvania governor Josh Shapiro said, "It's not freedom to tell our children what books they're allowed to read. No it's not. And it's not freedom to tell women what they can do with their bodies. And hear me on this, it sure as hell isn't freedom to say you can go vote, but he gets to pick the winner. That's not freedom."

When Tim Walz, the Carhartt-wearing governor of Minnesota who identifies on social media as a "veteran, hunter, gun owner, and dad," rose to accept the nomination for vice-president, he said, "When Republicans use the word freedom, they mean that the government should be free to invade your doctor's office. Corporations free to pollute your air and water, and banks free to take advantage of customers. But when we Democrats talk about freedom, we mean the freedom to make a better life for yourself and the people that you love. Freedom to make your own health care decisions, and yeah, your kid's freedom to go to school without worrying about being shot dead in the hall."

Common terms but contested meanings.

This kind of tug-of-war over the word is not exclusively an American phenomenon. Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservative Party in a country whose governing class struggled to understand the meaning of the so-called Freedom Convoy, is on record saying, "Together, we will make Canadians the freest people on earth, with freedom to build a business without red tape or heavy tax; freedom to keep the fruits of your labour and share them with loved ones and neighbours; freedom from the invisible thief of inflation; freedom to raise your kids with your values; freedom to make your own health and vaccine choices; freedom to speak without fear; and freedom to worship God in your own way." Such pronouncements bring to mind those of John Diefenbaker, who famously proclaimed, "I am Canadian, a free Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship God in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, free to choose those who govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind."

But it is in the United States, a country that defines itself as the "land of the free," that the word has its most poignant and seemingly malleable power. There it is tossed around like a verbal grenade. It is the fulcrum on which the lever of politics pivots, because for every volley of freedom talk the Democrats may deploy, there is the Lee Greenwood ballad that I first heard at the Republican National Convention in Dallas forty years ago — a de facto national anthem that became a standard element of a Trump rally. It goes this way: "And I'm proud to be an American / Where at least I know I'm free / And I won't forget the men who died / Who gave that right to me."

Set to music or not, this freedom fetish — the underlying principle unassailable, its use in American politics apparently unavoidable — has a long history, and it is against this background that its potency is revealed.

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The end of the nineteenth century brought a collision between those who, in Off's characterization, "demanded equality with those who enjoyed wealth" and those who "tried to keep government out of their lives, so their privilege remained intact." A generation later, Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke bravely of the Four Freedoms in his January 1941 State of the Union Address. Soon thereafter, four Norman Rockwell paintings were reproduced in consecutive issues of the old *Saturday Evening Post* that riffed off the president's remarks: one painting each for freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These paintings remain some of the most beloved images in American culture.

After the Second World War, "freedom" was part of the rallying cry against Soviet Communism, with the West describing itself as the "free world." (I suppose it's okay to share this now that George H. W. Bush is dead: the domain of the former president's private email address was @lotfw.com, a playful adaptation of "leader of the free world.") Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the greatest American speech in the twentieth century — his "I Have a Dream" address — as part of the August 1963 protest that was officially known as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. For Democrats, the word grew increasingly prominent in abortion debates over the freedom for women to control their own bodies.

MATTHEW DALEY

For Republicans, it animated their holy grail of economics: free markets. The pep rally for Trump supporters on the eve of January 6, 2021, began at Freedom Plaza. Of course it did.

In this context, the advice that Off provides is sensible if not easily attainable. What is necessary, she argues, is "bringing everyone — left and right — into the tent and working out a balance between personal liberty and social responsibility in full recognition of the complexity of our societies." She notes that that was "something the Greeks and Romans failed to do." It's a tall order for a country that has no special preference for complexity, except in the new NFL regulations governing who can move when and who can stand where and when one team kicks off to the other. (There's probably a book to be written about "freedom" in pro football, though I wouldn't review it in these pages.)

Americans love to quibble about the difference between a democracy (one of the other fighting words examined by Off) and a republic, and they continually argue about whether the United States is one or the other. Strictly speaking, the distinction is clear, and as long ago as 1787, Benjamin Franklin, responding to an inquiry after the Constitutional Convention completed its work, told the prominent socialite Elizabeth Willing Powel that the delegates had produced "a republic, if you can keep it."

Yet all of us, perhaps especially the author of a book that also examines words like "democracy," know what we mean when we speak of democratic values. The term is easily understood but hard to define. Here's my try: a political system whose leaders are chosen by voters; constrained by constitutional and historical values; dedicated to the advancement of the entire polity rather than a narrow faction or a single leader; suffused with a sense of fairness; guided by the assumption of a shared destiny; dedicated to broad rights; and determined to produce or preserve fluid social mobility. (Actually, the complexity of the idea struck me as I set out to write this paragraph. I started out easily enough but found myself continually adding phrases and clauses, mindful that I left out a few elements — proof, I suppose, that democracy and simplicity are mutually exclusive concepts after all.)

Given such complexity, is the common description of democracy, etymologically rooted in the Greek *demos*, meaning "the people," and *kratia*, meaning "power" or "rule," sufficient? Or is it merely an efficient shorthand? One way or the other, it is bracing to remember that, as Off points out in her discussion of Alexis de Tocqueville, North American democracy had little appeal in early nineteenth-century Quebec. (Clearly, the war against Indigenous people there, and elsewhere, was at base anti-democratic.) Later, a number of Quebecers displayed an unseemly congeniality to fascism. As Pierre Elliott Trudeau wrote in 1958, "Historically, French Canadians have not really believed in democracy for themselves; and English Canadians have not really wanted it for others. Such are the foundations upon which our two ethnic groups have absurdly pretended to be building democratic forms of government."

Modern democracy's gravest tests, at least until now, occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in Italy and Germany but also in North America. The greatest contemporary test, foreshadowed by George Orwell, has arrived in the United States. The left believes the challenge comes from Trump, who in his four years in the White House produced 30,573 false or misleading claims, according to the *Washington Post*. But the claims that democracy is in crisis come, too, from the right, whose denizens believe just as fervently that democratic rule is under assault. In reality, the threats are everywhere, and especially on social media and other forums that traffic in untruths. "The platforms that disseminate the most information to the widest number of people are biased against facts," Off observes. Two pages later, she adds:

> Perhaps the most insidious effect, or perhaps the goal, of the fake news industry isn't just that we no longer know what is true or whom to trust. The message throughout the new media landscape is that the elites and the deep state are preventing you from knowing what's really going on; the real truth is being hidden and so you shouldn't trust anything you hear from journalists or the government.

There are fewer and fewer independent mediating forces to separate truth from fiction — and fewer and fewer of us who believe them.

Off also takes on the awkward and ill-defined word "woke," a quite old African American vernacular term that has been stretched in both meaning and geography. Poilievre sees it everywhere and criticizes it constantly. "Woke has one purpose and only one purpose," Off quotes him as saying in the House of Commons. "It has plenty of pretexts but only one purpose: control. It is designed to divide people by race, gender, ethnicity, religion, vaccine status and any other way one can divide people into groups." Its predecessor was "politically correct," which, of course, was intended as a contradiction in terms when hurled as an accusation. So effective a phrase was it that Trump used it as a one-sentence dismissal of the news anchor Megyn Kelly's question about his boorish behaviour. A related epithet is "critical race theory," which has seeped into the popular argot from academe and, in time, become incendiary when employed by conservatives. In all these cases, the backlash against the terminology has been perhaps more pronounced than the backlash against the original concepts being described.

Newsrooms have struggled with the labels "pro-life" and "pro-choice" for a generation. (When I was the executive editor of a metropolitan newspaper, I banned both, preferring "abortion-rights advocates" and "opponents of abortion rights," both imperfect but perhaps less judgmental.) But "choice" is yet another fighting word, meaning — to those who support legal abortions — that those who are pregnant should have the choice of whether to abort or carry the product of that pregnancy. (Note how carefully I crafted that sentence.) "The problem with brands like pro-choice and pro-life," Off writes, "is that they exclude the ambiguities and contradictions in people's attitudes toward abortion." She's right. Besides, "choice" really is an over-broad word, with meaning beyond the American abortion wars.

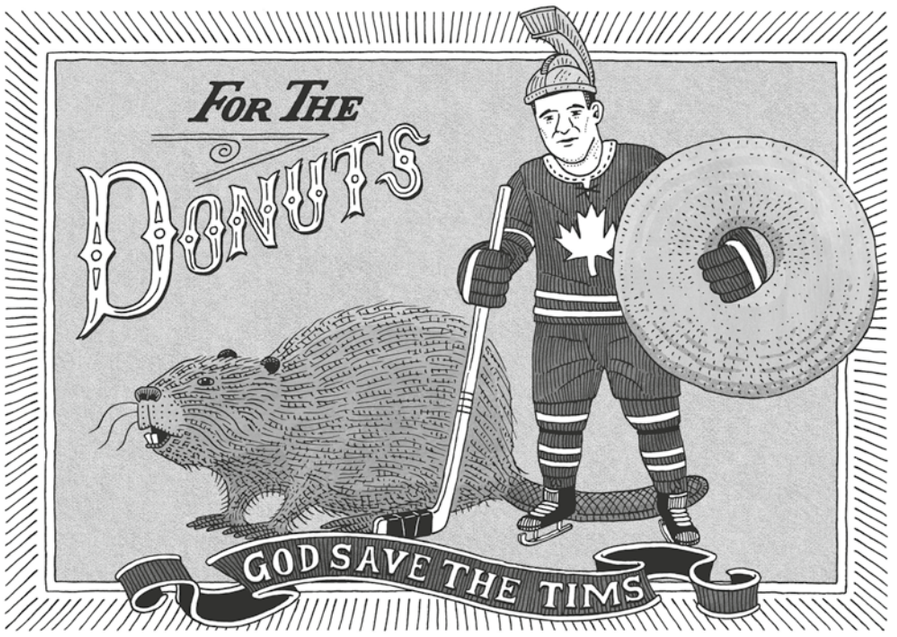
Perhaps it isn't, as Alice said, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." Perhaps it's whether we can mount an offensive for the truth in our discourse and in our politics, cease fighting about the strict definition of words, and make peace with the ambiguities and contradictions of life. If we could do all of that, Off rightly suggests, we might finally make our world safe for democracy.

Country Music

Please stand and remove your cynicism

John Allemang

The Worst Songs in the World: The Terrible Truth about National Anthems
David Pate
Dundurn Press
336 pages, softcover and ebook



Originality is rarely a virtue in the crafting of a national anthem.

TOM CHITTY

National anthems are tricky things. As enforced relics of a previous age, they're a bad fit for an enlightened era that doesn't feel the need to conform to an older generation's invented traditions. Words offend, ideologies become outmoded, regimes change, friends morph into enemies, native lands turn into contested domains, patriotic death is seen as a waste of life, and what some out-of-touch composers and flattered rulers once considered the best tunes for rallying a reluctant nation become, in David Pate's arresting phrase, the worst songs in the world.

There are many degrees of worseness in modern music — and national anthems are a surprisingly modern invention, starting with an impromptu "God Save the King" in 1745, picking up speed with the nationalistic movements of the nineteenth century, and becoming a definitive global phenomenon only in the twentieth century as dozens of independent states emerged from the rubble of anthem-defined, potentate-led empires and then settled the score, so to speak. For each new cohort, the cringeworthy music of our younger years only gets worse when replayed incessantly in dental offices and liquor stores and during gloomy public-television fundraisers. Compared with an endless diet of saccharine pop hits, the anthems passed down through the ages and mouthed repetitively from childhood can feel more like comfort food, the musical equivalent of Grandma's apple pie.

But the critical difference with anthems is that we're asked, and in many countries told and admonished by officialdom, to become a part of them. The sounds of antiquated marches and hymns and royal salutes and ripped-off arias and purloined drinking songs emanate from within your own rigidly upright body, as your individual distinctions and choices are muted amid an off-key crowd singing an anthem that may or may not represent your musical or philosophical ideals. The object of all that collective crooning — a crown, a flag, an idea of a nation worthier in the abstract than in day-to-day particulars, a call to arms, a defeated enemy on a bloody battlefield, or a glorious death, depending on the vagaries of history — is almost certainly out of step with modern, democratic, peace-loving, trouble-avoiding sensibilities. We're stuck with someone else's idea of who we are and who we want to be. And on the off chance that the anthem monitors are watching us as closely and critically as they scrutinize insufficiently proud athletes on playing fields and podiums, we're expected to stand on guard and sing out the words with true patriot love, whatever that means now.

So far, so bad. The creation of an anthem on which so much of our national identity rests can be unexpectedly random, as Pate points out. The music for Malaysia's anthem, one fanciful story goes, descends from a tune supplied by an aide to the sultan of Perak during an 1888 visit to London in honour of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. (Others suggest a later visit for Edward VII's coronation.) The band set to welcome the sultan was instructed to play his land's equivalent of "Hail to the Chief" — brassy military tributes being an essential perk for powerful leaders — and since there was not yet any such thing, the unprepared aide whistled a popular song called "Bright Moon," which transcribers quickly arranged for a diplomatically appropriate welcome.

When Perak was folded into the federation that ultimately became Malaysia, a competition for a new anthem was announced; a national song was seen as a necessary precondition of independent statehood. After poring over hundreds of submissions, including entries from Benjamin Britten and William Walton (veteran practitioners from the British school of special-occasion tunesmithing), the judges fell back on the much more hummable local folk tune — which was actually a popular Indonesian number tracing its improbable beginnings to the Seychelles, where the sultan had spent years in not uncomfortable exile.

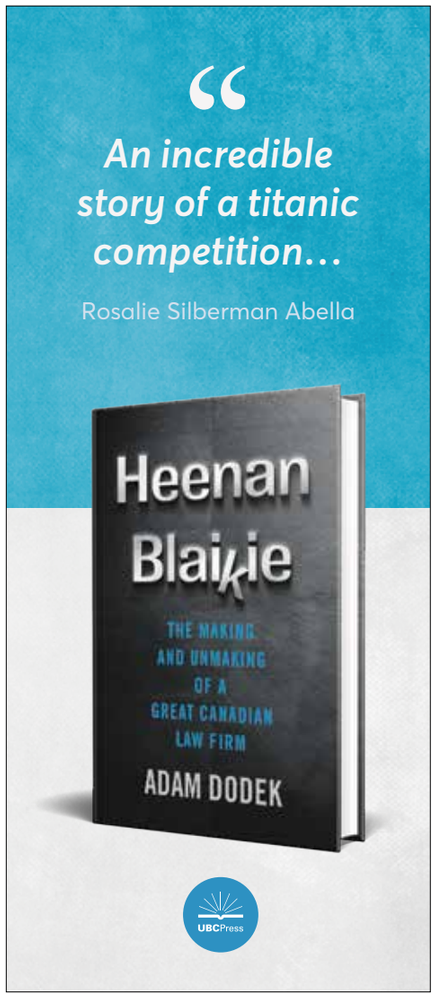
But when it comes to the inventive originality of quickly composed anthems, sometimes it's better not to inquire too far. The challenging music for "The Star-Spangled Banner," with its one-and-a-half-octave vocal range, is based on an old English drinking song. (Some critics, given the inept renditions performed by over-refreshed sports-stadium soloists, consider the tune the original sobriety test.) If you find yourself absent-mindedly humming "O Canada" while listening to "March of the Priests" from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, keep in mind that Calixa Lavallée was working to an impossibly tight deadline and not writing for the ages when he composed his stirring version of a national march for the 1880 Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day celebrations.

For the short leap from an instant to an enduring composition, it's hard to beat "God Save the King." The prototype of the national anthem was introduced at London's Drury Lane Theatre one Saturday night in 1745 as an afterthought to a production of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. This reassuring expression of fealty to George II, based on an existing melody and familiar lyrics, was arranged by Thomas Arne. He also composed the much more rousing "Rule, Britannia!," which continues to be an over-the-top singalong number ("Britons

never, never, never will be slaves") at the BBC's populist Last Night of the Proms concert and is preferred by many as an alternative to the dour anthem. "God bless our noble King," as the first version of "God Save the King" put it, has priority on its side and certainly passed the genuflecting loyalty test of those troubled times, when the Jacobite forces were on the march in Scotland and proclaiming Bonnie Prince Charlie the true sovereign. But as a vehicle for collective carousing that just as easily might have equated patriotism with self-affirmation, happiness, and even fun, Arne's dirge-like tribute definitely wasn't the best model for anthems to come.

Originality isn't a virtue in anthem making. The simple, repetitive, devotional rhythms of "God Save the King" (itself an amalgam of traditional melodies) became the standard for other nations' patriotic songs, including imperial Russia's "The Prayer of the Russians," Norway's royal anthem, little Liechtenstein's "High on the Young Rhine" ("Where the chamois leaps freely/The eagle soars boldly," like a Rhenish "Home on the Range"), the original Swiss anthem, the American classic "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," and Prussia's "Hail to Thee in the Victor's Crown," which a unified Germany chose as its anthem in 1871, with the unintended consequence that British and German troops in the First World War pledged their patriotic fervour and marched deathwards to exactly the same tune.

This wouldn't do. European anthems had become as inbred as their royalty — unsurprisingly, given that the original king whom God was implored to bless at the Drury Lane Theatre



was German born, after all. But what does it mean to be an independent people if you don't have a song to call your own? And this is where the history of a seemingly straightforward thing like an anthem becomes especially murky and troublesome. "Das Lied der Deutschen" may not have been the worst song in the world, at least in the beginning. Its infamous opening lines — "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles/Über alles in der Welt" — as much as they sounded like an especially aggressive battle song in the tradition of, say, "La Marseillaise," could be construed by charitable historians as a preference for national unity over divisive loyalties to local princelings. The melody had a respectable pedigree, which is a polite way of saying that it was borrowed in that complimentary anthemic style from neighbouring Austria. The celebrated composer Joseph Haydn wrote the original music to honour the Hapsburg emperor Franz II, closely following the formula of the genre-establishing "God Save the King." But the association of those lyrics with Nazi Germany's murderous mantra of Aryan superiority tainted them irredeemably. East Germany devised a new anthem in the postwar era fittingly titled "Risen from Ruins," which lost traction in the 1970s as Communist ambitions waned before it was finally abandoned upon reunification. "And that's a pity," writes Pate, "because it's a great tune and would have been a good choice for a unified Germany."

West Germany, created in 1949, opted for a return to the traditional music of "Das Lied der Deutschen" after several years of hesitation, so powerful is the lure of the familiar when it comes to a national song. But the opening stanza's connection to Nazism forced a shift to the more benign third verse, with its anodyne championing of unity, justice, and freedom. (The postwar reconstructors carefully bypassed the second verse, with its chauvinistic praise of German women — and wine — but still anachronistically compelled the ladies in the crowd to sing of brotherly striving in the best interests of the fatherland.) Predictably, unapologetic German rightists have been campaigning for years to restore the more triumphant, belligerent first verse.

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ANTHEMS AT FIRST GLANCE SEEM UNALTERABLE, the national version of Holy Writ, the sung-aloud pride of identity rooted in tradition, respect, stability, and generational continuity. The modern idea of a nation, with its promises of shared governance, participatory decision making, and social mobility, is a fragile construct that challenged the established hierarchy and unquestioned rule of absolute authority: old-style autocrats hardly needed reassuring songs performed by the people to remind themselves that they were in full control, that they were adored beyond all measure. But as power decentralized, boundaries fluctuated, people mixed and migrated, and commonality could no longer be enforced or assumed, these songs became an essential part of the artifice in bringing disparate individuals and conflicting values together under one flag. It's no wonder victorious national teams and proudly sung anthems are such a potent patriotic combination, echoing George Orwell's comment that sport is "war minus the shooting."

However much politicians like to adhere to the if-it-ain't-broken-don't-fix-it rule book of leadership, anthems change all the time. Necessity is the strongest motivator. Those de-nazifying West Germany had no choice but to cut ties with "über alles," even as they held on to the Haydn tune appropriated from their neighbour. Austria, which lost its lyrics along with its independence when it was annexed into the Third Reich in 1938, clearly needed a do-over after the Second World War. Haydn's music had acquired a bad odour by association with the Nazis. (Even some West German leaders wanted to ditch the tune, though they were overruled by their first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer.) Austria's new national song, despite its lyrics being written by a woman, was still a creature of its time and its genre and arrived replete with references to sons and brothers and a fatherland, all of which took another six decades to change — though, as Pate notes, tradition-loving Austrians, of whom there are many, refuse to honour the updated gender-inclusive version, turning a symbol of national unity into an emblem of political disagreement. Faced with a similar issue in Germany, ever-pragmatic, don't-overthink-it Angela Merkel brushed off the foes of the word "Vaterland" by saying simply that she didn't see any reason to fuss with it.

Of course, there's a powerful external motivation for change, even if it's not perceived as a pressing political need — just listen to the voices of the people clamouring for it. "Aux armes, citoyens," as one of the original revolutionary anthems puts it, is a defiant reminder that there is more than one way to hymn a country and champion an ideal. Why be so wedded to archaic language of exclusivity, the orthodoxy of a different world, when an anthem is meant to unify and inspire rather than divide and deny?

The devil-you-know attitude has its merits in the fractious political realm, where proposing to tamper with the traditional and familiar is the equivalent of stirring up toxic sediment or removing old asbestos. Observed from afar, it's easy to make suggestions for other people's anthems: the Dutch, for example, have many good reasons to renovate their national song, starting with its outlandish premise. The lyrics, which schoolchildren are expected to learn, constitute a first-person statement by the sixteenth-century leader William of Nassau, who starts out pledging lifelong loyalty to the king of Spain (for various arcane Hapsburgian reasons) but who eventually, over many verses, comes round to the cause of Dutch independence.

The only adequate defence for the song, apart from its marginal relevance as a cultural artifact and teaching tool, is that it is almost impossible for the average modern-day singer to care too deeply about what they, in the guise of William of Nassau, are singing. Did I mention that the original fifteen verses are written in the form of an acrostic that playfully spells out William of Nassau's name? This has proven too much for the Dutch, who have chosen to limit their patriotic confusion by singing only the first verse and, occasionally, the sixth. Even if uncritical deference to the status quo is an innate characteristic of most anthems and those who love them, the fact of the matter is that, as *The Worst Songs in the World* illustrates, anthems can and do and, frequently, must adapt.

Many older anthems are ridiculously long for modern audiences and have been pruned back to the point of being little more than jingles.

Where's the outcry from anthem originalists that the Dutch people, by singing just a single verse, are ruining a good acrostic? Global bodies like the Fédération Internationale de Football Association and the International Olympic Committee are major patrons of anthem culture (despite the founder of the modern Games, Pierre de Coubertin, wishing that nationalism be kept at a safe distance). Both incorporate a larger anthem-playing membership than the United Nations and normalize abbreviated versions by mandating playable recordings that are no longer than ninety seconds (FIFA) or eighty (IOC). "God Save the King," "O Canada" (in French and English), "La Marseillaise," the 158 verses of the original Greek national hymn, and almost every fine old anthem you could name have been truncated to TikTok length to suit the limited patience of busier times — to say nothing of modern sensibilities that aren't eager to salute "stalwart sons and gentle maidens" while awaiting the Resurrection ("O Canada," English version) or to repeat the conquering cry "For Christ and the King" while submitting to the yoke of faith ("O Canada," French version).

Abridgement is the rule, not the exception, and the only regret may be how rarely we get to hear sweet-voiced British choristers sing these memorable lines, addressed to their God, asking for maltreatment of the monarch's enemies: "Confound their politics / Frustrate their knavish tricks." "The Star-Spangled Banner" (which wasn't proclaimed the national anthem of the United States until 1931 as a cheery Depression mood-lifter) does go on a bit, especially when mangled by note-prolonging narcissists making the musical case against American exceptionalism. But there are three verses (one including an unwelcome reference to slavery) that fell by the wayside, which would have delayed ceremonial F-16 flyovers and glorious opening kickoffs even further. Not even the most diehard flag-wavers are crying out for their return.

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WE MAY LAMENT THE SHORT ATTENTION SPAN OF our scattered contemporaries, but in this case they have it exactly right. The language in the extended versions is often mystifyingly specific about old wars and enemies ad infinitum and offensive to modern ears as a matter of course. The original Greek national hymn included a roll call of bad guys and an itemizing of carcasses that simply don't fit the decorum of international diplomacy — especially when the song is played at the end of every Olympic Games. (Organizers usually go with the instrumental version, just to be safe.) South American countries that won their independence from Spain had a natural tendency to exact verbal vengeance against their oppressor through their post-colonial songs; nothing inspires revolutionary anthems, stirs up their singers, and justifies lyrics that proclaim the longing for a glorious death like a tyrannical overlord. But times change, and economic factors trump ancient hatreds; as early as 1900, Argentina's president was trying to smooth things over with the old enemy by paring anti-Spanish verses and explaining, "The national hymn contains phrases written for another era which over time have lost their contemporary relevance." See — it's not that hard.

But of course it is. Take Canada. Like many countries once aligned with the British Empire, we have had a two-track problem with the altering of our anthem: first, finding a more representative one, and second, making it fit our vague and ever-changing national values. "God Save the Queen," championed by Conservative anglophones, lingered surprisingly long and, despite nationalist protests at venues like the monarchist Conn Smythe's Maple Leaf Gardens, was still being sung in public schools in the 1960s. It was not until 1980 that "O Canada" was declared our official anthem, a century after the French version was composed. It took another thirty-eight years of intense linguistic reflection to alter "in all thy sons command" — that troublesome line from the early twentieth-century English version — to "in all of us command." God, the intrusive protector and defender beloved by traditional anthem authors, was absent from the first verse of the long-accepted English version but managed to sneak in thanks to a 1968 parliamentary committee's rewording, on the pretext of deleting a superfluous "We stand on guard." And there the omnipotent power remains, a divisive presence in a diverse country, keeping us glorious and free but ever more reluctant to sing someone else's misbegotten theocratic words.

Meanwhile, we still need to confront "our home and native land," an awkward, exclusionary phrase for a country that has been dependent on immigration for so much of its history. "Our home and/or native land" doesn't quite have the right lyrical ring. In 1991, Toronto's city council proposed "home and cherished land," which is an improvement but a bit too greeting-card bland and difficult to sing. Then at the 2023 National Basketball Association All-Star Game in Salt Lake City, the R&B singer Jully Black used the troublesome word in a different sense by changing the line to "our home on native land." (I imagine that David Pate, who sadly died before *The Worst Songs in the World* was published, would have understood this gesture and even appreciated it.)

> "This wouldn't do. European anthems had become as inbred as their royalty."

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PATE MAKES IT CLEAR WHERE HE'S COMING FROM in his criticisms of anthems. As a young boy at a Scottish boarding school, he was beaten for not singing "God Save the Queen," an anthem for an English head of state rooted in anti-Scottish sentiment. How, he wondered, could his loyalty be inculcated through corporal punishment and compulsory singing? He learned to subvert authority, while saving his skin, by mouthing the words instead of intoning them. Most of us who take issue with the lyrics of our anthem, or the overenthusiastic gusto with which it's sung by people who consider themselves the truest of patriots, similarly learn the value of playing along by not drawing attention to our disagreements. It's not very noble and certainly not the best expression of personal liberty, but when they tell you to rise, you rise.

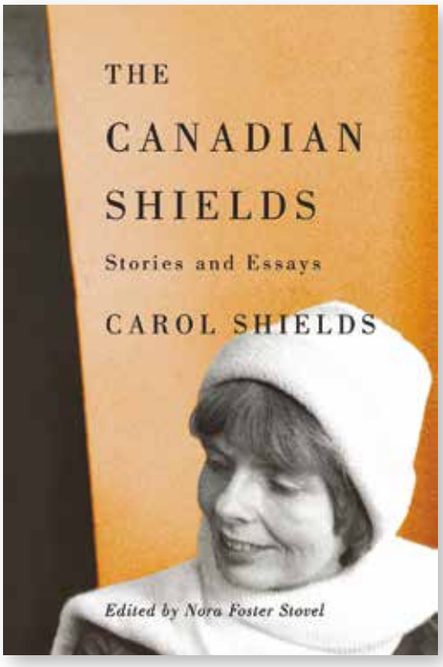
One can understand why official anthem changers move slowly and almost too carefully. Consider the anger that ensued when a member of the Tenors quartet went off script at the 2016 Major League Baseball All-Star Game, amid Black Lives Matter protests, and dropped two lines of the French version of "O Canada," replacing them with the dismissively contentious words "We're all brothers and sisters / All lives matter to the great." If anyone can change the lyrics at will, there is no national anthem, just individual statements and group protests. And thus anthems begin to lose their point. Perhaps a country like the United States with its many possible national songs ("America the Beautiful," "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," "God Bless America," "This Land Is Your Land," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "We Shall Overcome," "Lift Every Voice and Sing") is better off with this multiplicity of choices, however imperfect, especially when they're easier to sing than the authorized paean.

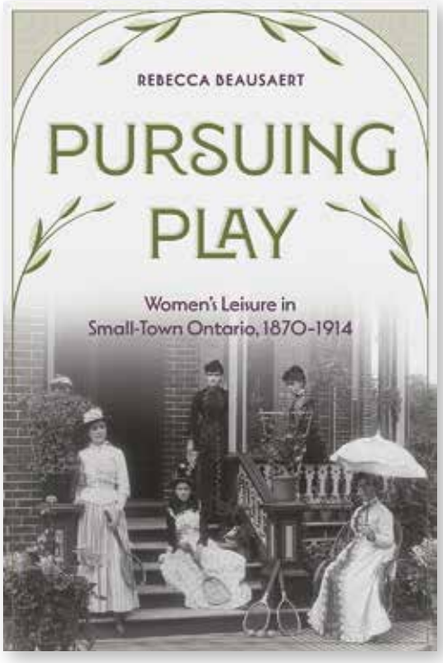
Other anthems often look more attractive than our own, in large part because we can savour them as beguiling music full of fundamental human emotion rather than as sources of conflict. Why does the defiant singing of "La Marseillaise" (with a problematic reference to impure blood watering French fields) so readily move us non-French viewers of *Casablanca* to tears? Who can forget their surprise and amazement at hearing the first notes of the wordless Soviet anthem at the beginning of the 1972 Canada-U.S.S.R. hockey series: "That is one powerful song!" The crowd in Montreal, including Pierre Trudeau *en boutonnière*, erupted into applause when the music ended. A degree of detachment can be liberating: if the performing of a patriotic melody was more like a campfire singsong or Christmas carolling or school choiring or even (may the God of anthems help us) *Pitch Perfect* a cappella showboating, we wouldn't have to commit to the content quite so wholeheartedly, while still savouring the certifiably good-for-you pleasure of singing together.

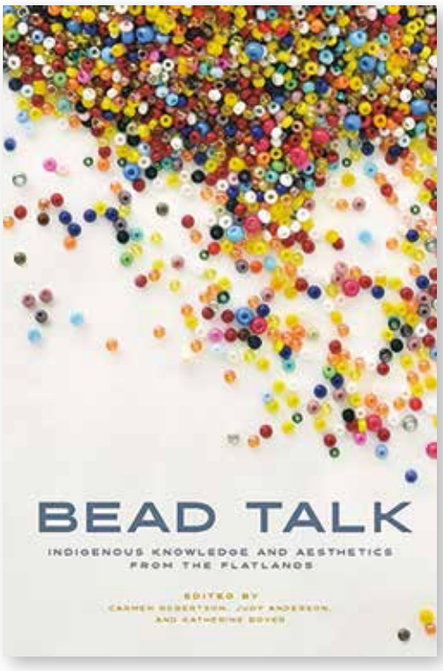
Just such a pleasure was experienced en masse at, of all places, a Toronto Maple Leafs game in 2014. The Nashville Predators were in town, and as the young anthem singer began her task, her microphone faltered. She restarted with a new mic, and once again she couldn't be heard. Silence. And then the crowd picked up the tune, and before long thousands of people were singing together, quite beautifully, doing their best to rescue and console the soloist but also enjoying the unexpected thrill that singing together can still provide.

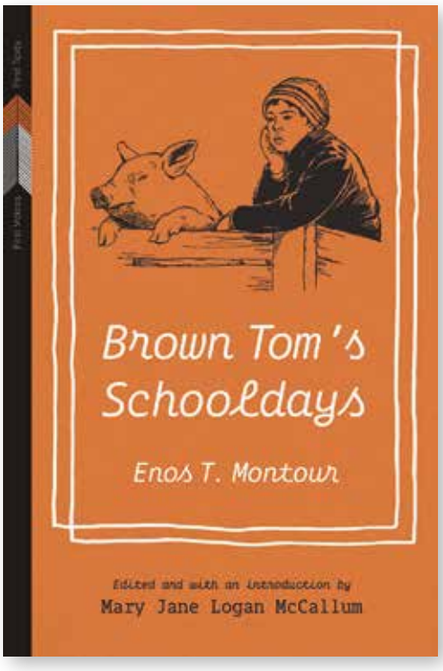
The weird and wonderful part of that spontaneous occasion was that Toronto hockey fans were singing not "O Canada" but "The Star-Spangled Banner," articulating the complex lyrics without missing a beat and even hitting the high notes respectably — the choral equivalent of the wisdom of the crowd. Watching videos of the performance, which has been replicated in other Canadian arenas to the point that it's become a tradition, and reading comments from grateful Americans on social media, it's hard to believe that anthems bring out the bad in us, that they deserve to be labelled the worst songs. If singing someone else's anthem can be such a glorious experience, why shouldn't we be able to find good feelings in our own?

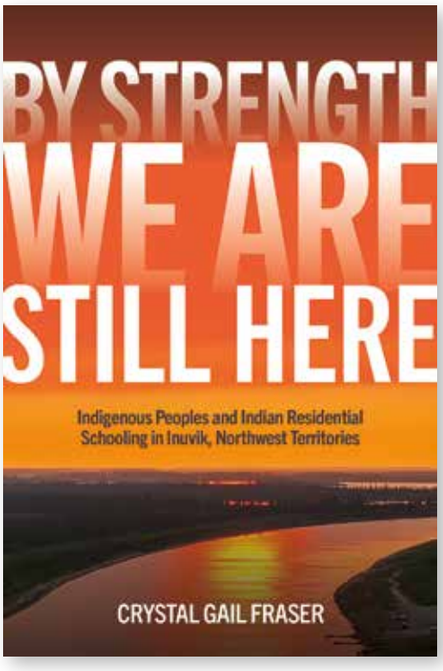
Well Written, Well Read











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University of Manitoba Press

Wait, You Have a Backyard?!

City planning and Canada's housing crisis

Frances Bula

The Joy Experiments: Reimagining Mid-sized Cities to Heal Our Divided Society
Scott Higgins and Paul Kalbfleisch
Dundurn Press
224 pages, hardcover and ebook

Broken City: Land Speculation, Inequality, and Urban Crisis
Patrick M. Condon
UBC Press
274 pages, softcover and ebook

Why does the state of our housing appear so upside down to so many?

BLAIR KELLY

Gotta say, after being handed two books with the titles *The Joy Experiments: Reimagining Mid-sized Cities to Heal Our Divided Society* and *Broken City: Land Speculation, Inequality, and Urban Crisis*, I had to admire my editor's effort to force me to confront the galaxy-wide spectrum of human emotion related to one of Canada's favourite topics: Why are our cities and the state of our housing so messed up, and what can be done about it? On the one hand, "joy" (a term the authors chose long before Kamala Harris memed it). On the other hand, "broken" (used by a writer whose previous book, from late 2020, was *Sick City: Disease, Race, Inequality and Urban Land*). But it turns out that the authors of these very different works share a common perspective. Scott Higgins, president of HIP Developments in Cambridge, Ontario, Paul Kalbfleisch, a creative director, and Patrick Condon, a University of British Columbia professor of landscape architecture, are all more than alarmed about the way housing markets (and, as a result, cities) have been contorted by modern trends.

"Shitty capitalism," the blunt phrase that Higgins and Kalbfleisch use, has wrecked many cities as big global firms that are devoted to efficiency and maximum profit have wiped out smaller, local businesses, then sent off the extracted revenue to corporate head offices far away. The current housing situation is a crisis "that grips almost every city in North America," they write, one with "roots in the widening gap between haves and have-nots, the globalization of our economy, the fact that our homes have become the primary investment vehicle for most citizens, and the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) movement." Condon, who spends many more words outlining housing dysfunction in several countries, emphasizes how markets — distorted by bad government policies that favour homeowners and their equity and warped by speculative activity, profit-oriented construction, and the segregation of the wealthy and the poor — have led to inequality, health problems among those forced into crowded housing, and untenable outcomes.

From there, the solutions diverge sharply. Higgins and Kalbfleisch highlight community-building projects they have developed in the Ontario region of Waterloo, along with examples from other cities, primarily in the United States and Canada, that aim to create connections among residents. Interactive art installations, cycling expeditions, murals and art spaces, and overpass parks are just a few of the initiatives they include. I should note that their book makes for a pleasant reading experience, very suited to those whose brains have been short-circuited by social media and are unable to focus for more than five minutes. It's composed of bits and pieces: interesting illustrations, quickie descriptions of successful "joy experiments," short essays, and Q&As, plus lots of colour. It's a different universe over in Condon's broken city, which is a policy- and citation-heavy look at the very complex question of how governments can shape housing markets to better serve all of their citizens, not just the increasingly elite group of homeowners with equity.

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I've been talking to Patrick Condon on and off almost since I began covering the housing development/homelessness/urban policy beat thirty years ago. When I first got to know him, he and some of his UBC students were involved in helping Surrey plan a new kind of suburban neighbourhood, one that would be much denser than the norm, with townhouses and rental suites and with less land given over to gigantic streets and more to green space.

When he started writing books, beginning with *Sustainable Urban Landscapes*, from 2002, he examined ideas not that far removed in aspirations from those of the *Joy Experiments* team. Published in early 2020, his *Five Rules for Tomorrow's Cities* mainly emphasized how communities can use design to tackle emerging issues like climate change, the disappearance of the middle class, and explosive urban sprawl. But somewhere along the way, Condon became a serious critic of the financial side of housing development, arguing that the tool most cities have used when trying desperately to lower housing costs — rezoning land for greater density and often allowing smaller homes than were normal in the past — is accomplishing nothing. Basically, that's because increasing density just raises the cost of land that has been rezoned and doesn't actually result in housing with a lower cost per square foot.

That preoccupation, which dominated *Sick City* as it does *Broken City*, led him to run for mayor of Vancouver in 2018, before he bowed out for health reasons. Now he's one of the major flag-bearers for the anti-developer, anti-development, anti-density, anti-most-current-city-housing-policies faction in this very polarized place. Condon regularly reiterates his base position on social media and on the news. "No other NA centre city built more infill housing, relative to population, than Vancouver," he

wrote on X in early September. "If adding new infill housing lowers prices, why does Vancouver have NA highest housing costs."

Condon is a patron saint for the group that believes Vancouver is being destroyed by all the high-density developments (as it happens these days, many of them Indigenous-led) and just-build-more-supply policies in the city and province. Many see him as a prescient guru, a champion in bucking current conventional wisdom on how to solve the housing crisis. At the same time, he has variously exasperated, enraged, or baffled local builders and active Yes in My Back Yard housing advocates, who repeatedly insist that Condon doesn't seem to understand math or financials; that he has never talked to an actual builder to test any of his theoretical calculations on how affordable housing could be achieved; that he misrepresents the Vancouver situation by focusing on the amount of supply added only in the central city, instead of the whole region, which has grown by 1.1 million people since 1990; and that he comes up with wildly unrealistic solutions given the actual facts of contemporary North American politics.

So I expected hundreds of pages of non-stop polemic. But this book isn't that at all. Instead, Condon starts by going through a lot of basics about housing policy and outcomes that many in the YIMBY camp would likely agree with. He points out that large lot sizes in the U.S. were instituted as a way to keep poor (mainly Black) families from buying homes. He notes that landowners have become so wealthy through rising prices caused by shortages that they are opposed to any political efforts that might cause those prices to decline. He questions why land value increases are taxed at a much lower rate than income or even capital gains.

Condon spends a whole chapter on Henry George, the nineteenth-century political economist who is much beloved by housing economics wonks for his thesis that the value of land is something created by the community where it sits — and that this value should go back to the community. That could be through a higher tax on the land than on buildings (particularly relevant in Vancouver, where the land often represents 90 percent or more of a property's assessed value). Or it could be through some other mechanism that allows the community, rather than all the individual home sellers, to reap the profit that is created when land gains in value because it exists in the middle of a city that has invested in good schools, parks, community centres, public safety, and all the other things that support thriving urban life. (Several years ago, I received support to attend a seminar at Harvard University that was organized by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, which is dedicated to exploring and amplifying Henry George's ideas.)

Condon also presents a concise summary for the TL;DR crowd of the various policies that have been tried in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as they've wobbled between heavy government intervention in housing supply (outright investment, tax policies to encourage apartment construction, supports for non-profit and co-op models, light versions of George's land value tax idea) and other measures aimed at facilitating the market to just build more and more, with perhaps some density bonuses in exchange for small amounts of housing that could be sold or rented at below-market rates.

In *Broken City*, Condon acknowledges that some theoretically ideal solutions are not going to fly, because suddenly putting in place a big land value tax is not politically viable: "A clear majority of citizens throughout the English-speaking world own at least some small share of urban land and thus are now disinclined to support a 1,000 percent increase in their property tax." That pragmatic take seems more grounded in reality than a proposal Condon made while campaigning for mayor: that properties along the planned Broadway subway line should all be zoned for co-ops, a massive downzoning that surely would provoke a minor civil war if enacted. But when Condon starts setting out his own calculations on how to produce cheap, affordable housing, and when he lays out his preferred policy solutions, things take a sharp turn away from those who proclaim that one of the main solutions to the current state of housing unaffordability is to simply build a lot more. That's where I'm left with questions that I had hoped would be answered.

Condon makes no effort to address the oft repeated statistics from both Canadian and American economists and analysts showing that one major reason for today's housing crisis is that both countries have been unable to replicate the level of home construction seen in the postwar years, even as populations have soared. He never takes on the YIMBY argument that housing production slowed because established residents in almost every city, powered up by the anti-development, anti-government sentiments of the 1970s, threw obstacles in the way of any serious efforts to increase supply. He simply asserts his own thesis: "that the housing crisis is not caused by an impeded supply of homes but by the asset value of the land below them." He does not grapple with whether a shortage of available land to develop might be the reason for that ever-increasing land cost. And he cites only one person from the housing supply camp, the Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, mainly to dismiss the idea that land prices would moderate if all controls on land development were removed — a pretty far-out proposition that you don't see any pro-supply politician actually endorsing. Instead, Condon leans on analysts who support his kinds of housing ideas.

Another point Condon makes frequently is that rezoning for higher density without putting in a mechanism for the government to capture some of the land lift just results in higher land prices. That is true. When land is rezoned so that two families or forty families or a hundred families can live on it, it ends up being purchased by developers for much more than if it were a

Jr.

Listen to me brother.
I don't claim to be a wise man
but curiosity has imparted to me
a pocketful of lessons.

Don't be afraid to ask questions
but remember to leave a door as you found it.
Even the fool can share with you
if nothing but a fresh perspective.

Cupboards and dressers have drawers
for a reason. Organize your thoughts.
Befriend the stranger who smiles in passing.
These waters are lonely. It's good to know sailors.

Sometimes the bull shits as you pass the pasture.
Most times a banana in your backpack results in disaster.
The breeze that cools your neck on a summer's day
is the same breeze that chills your spine in the rain.

Don't blame the breeze. Don't blame the rain.
Attitude and effort are easy substitutes for skill.
Respect the man who tries to peel his orange
in one shot. A second set builds muscle, a third

builds character. Don't tread through fresh snow
when someone's footprints have formed a path.
The only thing riskier than a bad poem
is a good idea for one. The moon controls the tides.

We're all just made of water.

Ben von Jagow

Ben von Jagow is the author of Goalie, *due out in April.*

single-family house. But the resulting housing *does* mean that each household gets to pay less for land, even with the increased price. On my street, for example, a neighbour on one side has a single-family house. The land is assessed at just over $2 million, the house at $195,000 (it's old). On the other side are two families in two ten-year-old duplexes that are each assessed at almost the same value as the single-family house. But their land cost is only $1.34 million apiece: they saved almost $500,000 each by not being forced to buy large pieces of property surrounding their homes.

Condon takes the position that Vancouver did a better job than most at capturing the increased value that comes when land is rezoned. But he also argues that the city proves the case that adding density doesn't produce affordability. "Vancouver," he writes, has "done more than any other metro area in North America to capitalize on the engine of its rapid development to deliver social benefits." He notes that city planners aimed to capture 80 percent of the increased value of land due to a rezoning by having developers put that money back into social amenities. And he constantly claims that Vancouver added more housing than any other city in North America in the last thirty years but still ended up with the least affordable stock. So I'm left wondering: If the planners here did such a good job of capturing land lift for so long, as he says, how is it that we still have the worst house prices?

Finally, Condon praises two cities with policies that build on the idea of keeping land costs suppressed through other policy mechanisms. Interestingly, they are two cities that have chosen the mechanism most available in Canada and the U.S., one that many city planners have tried: providing permission to build more and bigger in exchange for some affordable housing. One is Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the city council voted in 2020 for the Affordable Housing Overlay. That policy allows owners or developers to build higher and denser — double the square footage that is normally allowed — as long as every new apartment is affordable to people who are making 80 percent or less of the area's median income. The other is Portland, Oregon, where that city's council, also in 2020, passed a policy allowing any residential owner or developer to build up to six units on a formerly single-family lot with the proviso that, if they do build six, three have to be permanently affordable to people making 60 percent or less of the city's median income.

But I did a quick check, and neither approach seems to have produced a housing revolution. In Portland (population 635,000), only two sixplexes are currently going through the permitting process (with another fifteen apparently somewhere "in the pipeline"). In Cambridge (population 118,500), there are 727 units in eight projects going through the approvals process, according to a February 2024 summary by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard. The policy has been tweaked in the intervening years to add even more density and to loosen the price restrictions a bit (the affordability limit now extends to anyone making up to 100 percent of the local median income), to make construction financially feasible for the mostly non-profit developers. As a Joint Center analyst noted, the 700-some units are better than just fifty or sixty social housing units a year, but "numerous obstacles and challenges remain." Needless to say, home prices and rents appear to be unchanged at this point, in spite of the efforts.

The results in Portland and Cambridge, along with various mechanisms tried in the Metro Vancouver region, show that it's a very finicky calculation to get affordable housing to work. Both Vancouver and Burnaby have recently seen developers withdraw from projects where they were going to be given extra density in return for some below-market apartments, saying that the requirements were so onerous that they weren't financially feasible, even with height and density bonuses.

Since Condon seems to be hugely invested in this topic, turning out two books in three years along with a proliferation of essays and social media opining, he might direct some of his energy toward examining in more detail how various other governments are working to find the right formula in the density/affordability equation. In the meantime, it would be lovely if the authors of these two books, who identify similar problems but concentrate on wildly different projects, could join up in some fashion. Imagine if the three worked on community initiatives aimed at getting people together in a non-polarized, constructive way to talk about how to create more affordable housing. They could design collaborative exercises for building political consensus, to at least minimize the huge inequities that exist in today's housing market, especially between the older and younger generations. Their next book could be called *Exploring Joyful Ways to Create Healthy, Unbroken Cities*. I can hardly wait.

Sentenced at Birth

On forced mother-child separation

Amy Reiswig

Prison Born: Incarceration and Motherhood in the Colonial Shadow
Robin F. Hansen
University of Regina Press
336 pages, hardcover and softcover

The allegorical figure of justice, with her scales and sword, was first blindfolded in the sixteenth century, and today she is seen as an embodiment of impartiality: a weighing of evidence and arguments that is unmuddied by prejudice. But some detect a much less noble reason for Justice's covered eyes: they represent the system's blindness to abuses right under its nose. Robin F. Hansen would likely agree. With *Prison Born: Incarceration and Motherhood in the Colonial Shadow*, she examines automatic mother-child separation and highlights abuses both personal and procedural. In doing so, she helps loosen the tightly tied blindfold of racial and gender bias to show that such policies have "no place in a fair legal system."

Every year, an estimated minimum of forty-five women in federal and provincial prisons give birth to babies they must then leave behind. The mothers are escorted back to their cells and sentences, and the newborns, with obviously no say in their fate, are mostly sent into foster care. Without due process, "the judge sentences the newborn." Key here are the terms "estimated" and "mostly," because consistent records are simply not kept — just as court decisions that incarcerate expectant mothers, despite the availability of non-carceral options, are often oral judgments rather than written.

Rooted in the case of "Jacquie," whose appeal Hansen worked on in 2016, the book's early chapters include a first-hand account of medical neglect, labour in leg shackles, and the traumatic prospect of having one's baby taken by the state. (Alternative sentencing was eventually arranged for Jacquie, which allowed mother and child to stay together.) Hansen then broadens out, identifying and dissecting colonially entrenched and androcentric norms that compromise the fair treatment of Indigenous women, like Jacquie, who are so overrepresented in the "'white' settled space" of Canada's criminal justice system.

An associate professor of law at the University of Saskatchewan, Hansen is an expert on the construction of legal personhood. Many of her articles — in *Canadian Journal of Human Rights*, *Global Jurist*, *The Modern Law Review*, and elsewhere — concern trade and investment law, as well as the status and behaviours of multinational enterprises. Although we might hope we wouldn't need to discuss legal personhood when it comes to actual persons in twenty-first-century Canada, this book suggests that we still do.

Hansen began researching the topic of prison-born children in 2014, before ever meeting Jacquie. She had come across a case touching on the termination of a British Columbia correctional centre's long-standing mother-baby program, which the provincial supreme court reinstated after concluding that the closure violated several Charter rights. Hansen, then pregnant with her second child, was "appalled" by the attempt to end the program: "These decisions showed a chilling disregard for children's welfare, deep disrespect for women, and bald ignorance of what it is to care for someone during early infancy." With both empathy and analysis, Hansen digs at the roots of this discrimination. While she uses systems theory and concepts of spatialized justice, readers don't need to absorb specialized terms to follow her argument. Writing with the procedural, logical tone of a scholar ensuring that her points are solid, clear, and backed by evidence, Hansen traces how Canada's legal system, despite ideals of impartiality, is grounded in "conceptions of space that deny or subvert Indigenous humanity."

Due process eclipsed by a colonial legacy.

This "purposeful blind spot," she wants readers to remember, is not in the distant past. Hansen makes sure to frequently reground us in the various biases that shaped Jacquie's experience and the experience of others who have had their rights — and sometimes their lives — trampled by various elements of the justice system.

Systemic discrimination is about perception; it hinges on "*ways of seeing* persons and spaces." How are Indigenous women and Indigenous parenting viewed and valued? Are criminally convicted women automatically deemed unfit mothers? Are Indigenous children still seen as better off under state care? What are the other options? Together, the legacies of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, medical and nutritional experiments, and birth alerts reveal how deeply "the colonial lens dehumanizes Indigenous children as chattel for the taking." The stakes for consciously changing perceptions simply couldn't be higher: "The sanctity of human life demands it."

In her final section, Hansen looks at which measures would actually pass the sniff test in the case of Jacquie and her son. "If colonial lens and androcentric lens expectations are rejected," she asks, "is automatic newborn-mother separation actually legal in Canadian and provincial law?" Here she demonstrates a deep respect and passion for both people and process.

At times, it could seem that *Prison Born* misses opportunities to hear additional human stories: through the voices of women who had their babies taken or in a glimpse of a functioning mother-child prison unit and its benefits to all involved. But that's not Hansen's project. Drawing upon her legal training and multiple access-to-information requests, she methodically examines what's happening, why it's happening, and why it's morally and legally wrong.

Such thoroughness builds convincing arguments, even if it slows down the reading. Peeling back the many layers of bias at play results in considerable overlap, often with overviews of well-known topics that risk making the impatient reader say, "Yes, we know that." But this type of casual reaction should remind us what we likely know all too well: that these cultural thought patterns are so ingrained that we need to see them in the aggregate in order to recognize how insidious and harmful they are. The repetition, if we allow ourselves to be shown our own blinders, reinforces how much work still needs doing. As Hansen puts it, "The legal system exists only as we make it."

The book's dedication reads simply, "For the people who change this." That sets a powerful tone: automatic mother-child separation is an unseen and unnecessary crisis that needs not just awareness but action, and readers must ask themselves, "Does she mean me?" Indeed, as *Prison Born* spotlights the need for procedural and systemic improvement, it challenges us as individuals to take off our own blindfolds.

MIN GYO CHUNG

Chartered Fight

When provinces and the bench butt heads

Jeffrey Simpson

Constraining the Court: Judicial Power and Policy Implementation in the Charter Era
James B. Kelly
UBC Press
428 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

Mayors in Canada's largest cities, as well as some who run smaller ones, complain about the financial burdens of asylum seekers and refugees on their budgets and physical facilities. Provinces correctly blame Ottawa for increased numbers of new arrivals and demand money for their care. A surge of migration has produced predictable results: ad hoc sheltering arrangements, additional homelessness, stressed social services.

The Immigration and Refugee Board, the agency charged with authenticating refugee claims, is overwhelmed. It has 200,000 claims on its docket but can process only about 140,000 of them per year, which means that if refugee flows continue apace, the backlog will get worse. Inevitably, some asylum seekers disappear into the underground economy or into the protection of friends or family members, while officials charged with tracking them down struggle to do so.

Canada is not alone among Western democracies in facing the immense challenges of mass migration. The United States, France, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Great Britain, Germany, Mexico, and Australia, as well as the Benelux and Scandinavian countries, are in the same predicament. Colombia, Peru, and Panama are among the top Latin American destinations for the estimated seven million Venezuelans fleeing economic collapse and political repression. But Canada, where they're also landing, is considered a soft touch: enter the country and ask for asylum, and the odds are you'll be able to stay.

Migrants seek an escape from political, ethnic, or religious tensions as well as a chance for better economic circumstances. A key difference between Canada and many other countries has been the lack of a political backlash, let alone the kind of anti-immigrant riots recently seen in Britain. There is no anti-immigrant party here, nor does the issue provoke the response we see in the United States, with governors of southern border states shipping thousands of asylum seekers north by bus.

Although about 80 percent of asylum applications in Canada are approved by the IRB, the federal Liberals want to make it possible for some of those who are turned down to remain in the country. So why have a tribunal at all if those rejected would be able to stay?

In short, Canada's refugee system is a mess. There was a time before the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, however, when it was less so. Border agents reviewed claims, and the courts were seldom involved. There was an appeal process, but it operated in private. Governments sometimes made special arrangements for those fleeing particular crises, such the 1956 Hungarian Uprising and the end of the Vietnam War. But this system, once hailed by the United Nations, was completely overturned by the Supreme Court of Canada.

What we have today, though few people would now make the connection, is rooted in a 1985 decision called *Singh*. Six Sikhs from India

Can provinces wriggle out of Charter rulings?

and a Guyanese citizen who had arrived in Canada between 1977 and 1981 claimed refugee status, alleging that they would face persecution were they to return to their home countries. Their claims were rejected by the Refugee Status Advisory Committee — the stage of first appeal — and then by the Immigration Appeal Board. The Supreme Court ruled that under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted three years earlier, "everyone" physically present in the country, whatever their status, was entitled to Charter protections — and that meant open hearings and appeals.

Such an interpretation was not what the politicians who drafted and approved the Charter had intended, as some of the members of the parliamentary committees who had worked on it later explained. They had intended the Charter to apply to people legally living in Canada, not those who weren't. No matter: the Charter, starting with *Singh*, would change law and government forever. The case belied predictions that the Supreme Court would move gingerly into Charter terrain. Ultimately, as the great Peter H. Russell of the University of Toronto observed, Canada went from a parliamentary democracy to a constitutional democracy.

Within four years of that first Charter-bending decision, the backlog of asylum claimants grew to about 100,000. The Federal Court of Appeal's docket was overwhelmed. Arguments for amnesty as a way of clearing the administrative backlog filled the air. Asylum advocates, of course, loved the *Singh* case, as it meant, in their view, fundamental justice. The judge who penned the decision, Bertha Wilson, reasoned that "a balance of administrative convenience does not override" the rights of refugees. But the resulting administrative inconveniences, as many observers put it, still plague us today.

The court's ruling in *Singh* had some ramifications for provincial and municipal governments, as a matter not of law but of providing services. It did not, however, drag Ottawa and the provinces into direct legal conflict. Other Charter cases did. In them, the court ruled on which rights should be respected and then left it to the provinces to give effect to those decisions.

This relationship between the court and the provincial implementation of its rulings frames James B. Kelly's *Constraining the Court: Judicial Power and Policy Implementation in the Charter Era*, a title as dry as the book itself. Not meant for leisurely reading, this is a work of detailed scholarship, by a professor at Concordia University. Kelly focuses on five cases where the federal government took a position that was more or less accepted by the court — a position provinces then had to administer. If the affected provincial governments disagreed with Ottawa and the court, what could they do? Delay is a hardy perennial. Adopt a law that looks on the surface like compliance but in practice circumvents the court's intentions. Pass legislation or adopt a regulation that partially — but only partially — remedies what the court considered an abuse of the Charter. Buckle up for a donnybrook with Ottawa by using the Charter's notwithstanding clause. Delay, defiance, disagreement, dilution are ways in which reluctant provinces can block or modify court decisions.

"The Supreme Court of Canada," Kelly writes, "is an 'implementer-dependent' institution, reliant on Parliament and the provincial and territorial assemblies to introduce legislative responses when the Court declares statutory

OLEH KHAVRONIUK; ALAMY

Dak Prescott

Number 4, quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys.
Best quarterback to never play a Super Bowl.
Thirty years old, a record holder:

pass complete pass complete

Just a jock. He's had his challenges, injuries.
Best known for his unique cue for the snap.

"Here we go"

Not in a brusque, staccato grunt, emphasizing the *g* "Here we go!"
but a slower, downward inflecting chant

"Here we gooooo"

that soothes this listener and brings us all

you me his team the other

to that point, where we take a breath, before.

Louise Carson

Louise Carson is the author of, most recently,
The Truck Driver Treated for Shock: Haiku.

provisions unconstitutional." Charter decisions often come in one of two varieties: judges say what absolutely cannot be allowed, or they hint or suggest what should be done. But the doing remains outside the court's remit; hence, Kelly argues, the court can be constrained at the provincial level.

Kelly follows the winding paths of his five provincial cases, showing various "constraints" on the court. Three involve English-language rights in Quebec; the other two are about medical assistance in dying and supervised drug consumption sites. The details of the language cases differed, but the essence remained the same. The Charter guarantees protection for minority language rights: English in Quebec, French elsewhere, in both instances "where numbers warrant." In these three cases, Quebec governments of different stripes — Parti Québécois, Liberal, and Coalition Avenir Québec — asserted the province's primacy over Charter-imposed language policy. The province claimed complete jurisdiction as the guardian of majority French-speaking residents in a predominantly English-speaking continent.

Quebec responded to the court's decisions in each case — involving English in education, public signage, and commercial communications — by offering legislative or policy changes that appeared on paper to comply with the Charter but essentially did not. This game of hide-and-seek went on for years, replete with hot rhetoric on both sides. English-language rights were eroded slowly until the CAQ arrived in office and sped up the erosion through the notwithstanding clause. The CAQ government did not so much "curtail" decisions involving Charter rights; it ignored them. In Ottawa, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government gum-flapped but did nothing. As Kelly puts it, "Legislative disagreements that operate in a complex implementation chain can change the trajectory of a judicial decision and confine judicial impact to the agenda-setting phase of the policy process."

The struggle over drug injection sites, centred in but not restricted to British Columbia, also went on for years. Although the federal government had a range of differences with the B.C. authorities, the major tussle was over the attempt by Stephen Harper's Conservatives to water down both the Supreme Court ruling approving the sites and the support these sites received from the province. The battle went back and forth, with the Tories consistently trying to circumscribe the ambit of site approvals by including consideration of the impacts on local communities through the Respect for Communities Act. Trudeau's Liberals gutted that legislation, only to find the essence of Harper's law inspiring Jason Kenney's government in Alberta. Kelly correctly summarizes the outcome: the Charter victory for the supervised drug injection site known as Insite, and therefore for the federal government, did not reduce the policy autonomy of provincial governments in the delivery of — or the decision not to deliver — a "non-core" health service. In this case, the "constraining the court" argument also applies.

Kelly's book certainly shows how the Supreme Court, even with the Charter as its sword, can be and often is blunted in whole or in part by legislative actors. The relationship between pre-Charter parliamentary supremacy and the power of the Charter now so frequently used by lawyers and so dominant in the nation's law schools might be called a draw. But while judicial power is constrained in the types of cases Kelly includes, there are others where the constraints are more limited or non-existent.

In *Singh*-like decisions, for instance, it's the federal government that must respond. These cases allow for few "constraints" and sometimes see the court telling the government what it must do, regardless of the cost or administrative toll. Recently, for example, the court ruled unanimously that Ottawa had not made adequate payments to First Nations north of Lake Superior and Lake Huron under treaty arrangements dating back 175 years. It gave the government six months to come up with a settlement with the Superior Anishinaabe, which it will then review and presumably approve or deny. The judges, therefore, turned themselves into the court of last resort — "implementers," in other words. A broadly similar case involving First Nations in northeastern Ontario resulted in a $10-billion settlement, meaning the payments in the newer case will likely be of a similar size. Both cases will surely be relied upon by Indigenous groups elsewhere in Canada, meaning that governments will be out of pocket many billions of dollars — the overdue price of justice in the eyes of some, money lost for other causes in the eyes of others.

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SCARCELY A MONTH NOW PASSES WITHOUT Charter arguments of all kinds raised in federal and provincial courts. Charter law is the hottest subject in our law schools, much more interesting than dull old property or torts law and certainly more appealing than old-fashioned constitutional law, which is about which level of government is responsible for what.

We live — and have done for some time — in the Age of the Charter. Today judges are more popular than politicians, courts are more respected than parliaments, judges wrestle with how much power they should exercise, and governments sometimes grind their teeth over decisions made by the unelected judiciary, which is unschooled in the inconveniences of their decisions and not much interested in them either.

Rumble on Parliament Hill

In the ring with Justin Trudeau

Curtis Gillespie

The Prince: The Turbulent Reign of Justin Trudeau
Stephen Maher
Simon & Schuster Canada
400 pages, hardcover and ebook

Justin Trudeau on the Ropes: Governing in Troubled Times
Paul Wells
Sutherland House
100 pages, softcover and ebook

Poor Justin Trudeau. The guy has never been able to catch a break. The house he grew up in had so many silver spoons in the kitchen drawer, he didn't know which one to put in his mouth. His dad wasn't around much, given that he was arguably the most famous Canadian in the world in the 1970s (with a side hustle as prime minister). Not to be outdone on the fame thing, Justin's mom ran away and partied with the Rolling Stones when the tyke was in grade school. After years of home-front drama, Justin finished a bachelor's degree and moved to the West Coast to teach — what else, drama. As a young man, he seemed to focus primarily on attending the least politically correct parties possible. After talking himself into entering politics, he convinced enough Canadians that great hair with a magnetic smile was the same thing as depth, and bang — he was running the country. Which was when his real problems started.

Now, nine years into his tenure, the custard seems to have set around the opinion that Justin Trudeau might not be the worst prime minister we've ever had but neither is he anywhere close to the top tier. He's had a few wins as PM — negotiating NAFTA 2.0 and on child care, gender, Indigenous, and environmental issues (though with some qualifications on the latter two files) — but he's also struggled to drive straight along two major avenues of activity. The first is inductive performance, the stuff we can directly point to. He has racked up or had revealed a string of boneheaded moves that would leave most sensible observers wondering how he's managed to remain in office. The SNC-Lavalin and Jody Wilson-Raybould affair. Vacationing on the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Wearing traditional garb in India. Being exposed for his various brown- and blackface escapades. The WE Charity scandal. Fumbling the election interference issue. The cynical pandemic election call. The mishandling of the two Michaels and the Chinese government. The multiple posh vacations at the homes of billionaire friends. It's quite a list.

But the second lane of failure, while less measurable, is more powerful and therefore more damaging. There are fancier and more intellectual ways to put this, but basically it's about the vibe he creates. Positive energy was clearly what won him his first and, so far, only majority. The vibe he gives off now is cringeworthy. His manner of speaking is sanctimonious, his words clichéd, his smile static, and so many of his actions seem performative, inauthentic. One watches Trudeau today and sees an actor struggling to sell a role. Canadians went with it for a while, possibly because even Trudeau himself believed he was perfect for the part of PM, but now the cracks are showing, and that smile looks more panicky than pure.

Round after round he goes.

All these and various other factors taken together have created a vessel most Canadians don't seem to really trust, a craft with a sail made of suspect judgment roped to a mast of situational ethics — which is not what we want to be aboard on turbulent seas. Justin Trudeau has consistently fallen short of providing strong liberal or Liberal government, but he might be the luckiest politician on earth, given the weak Conservative opposition he has faced during his three electoral victories: Stephen Harper had emptied the goodwill jar, Andrew Scheer was anonymous, and Erin O'Toole was impossible to imagine as PM. This trend continues with the disagreeable Pierre Poilievre, who, if he had any sense, would just keep his mouth closed and let people focus on Trudeau; it would be his best chance to take power. Trudeau is also fortunate that Jagmeet Singh wants to keep his job by avoiding an election, though he's ripped up the NDP's supply-and-confidence agreement. Trudeau even has history and the national disposition on his side. Canadians tend to be centrist and lean toward compromise, an inherently liberal position. Were Canada a more right- or left-wing country, Trudeau would most likely have been ousted a long time ago.

Fortune and favour will take you only so far, of course, and two books make the case that Trudeau appears to have run out of both. *The Prince*, by Stephen Maher, and *Justin Trudeau on the Ropes*, by Paul Wells, explore the increasing likelihood that Trudeau's political life will end not with a bang but with a whimper.

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Stephen Maher is a veteran Ottawa journalist and has ample credibility and experience when it comes to dissecting parliamentary hijinks. He has written for *Maclean's*, among many other outlets, and has won a variety of awards over the years. His time on the Hill gives him a strong platform from which he can both dive into the weeds on the many successes and struggles of Trudeau and assess him from a wider perspective.

In choosing his title, Maher is not so subtly drawing the comparison between Trudeau and the prince of Niccolò Machiavelli's famous treatise. He quotes that historic text and refers to Trudeau's princely behaviour at more than regular intervals. This causes problems early. The first reference to Machiavelli comes in the book's epigraph, which reads in part, "Only an exalted prince can grasp the nature of the people, and only a lesser man can perceive the nature of a prince." It's as if Maher is saying that Trudeau alone can understand the electorate and only Maher can understand Trudeau.

This is a curious way to begin a book, especially when raising the spectre of Machiavelli's dark, subversive, and complex work. The Florentine philosopher's argument, radically boiled down, is that the ends justify the means to remain in power. It can only be that Maher wants us to assume that the portrait of Trudeau he is about to paint is that of a knowing, shrewd, cynical, ruthless, and, yes, Machiavellian politician.

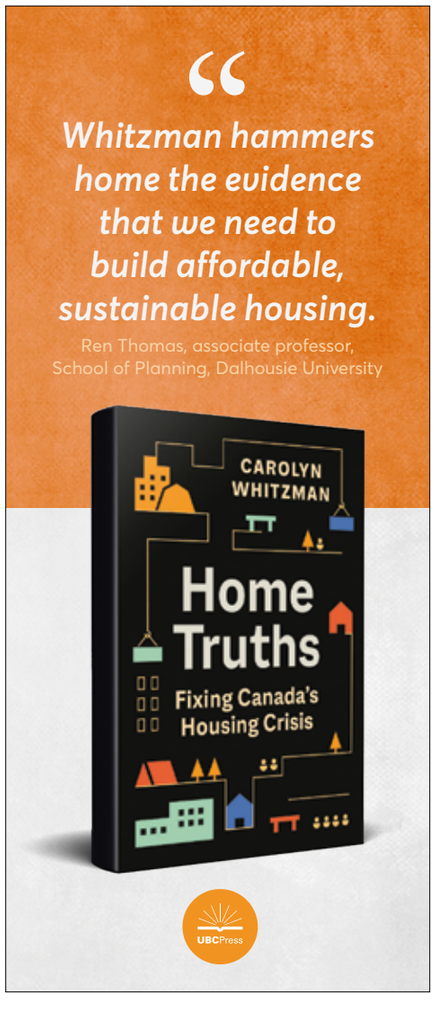
Which is fine. But that's not the book Maher writes, at least not exactly. We regularly hear stories of Trudeau's naïveté in various moments, of his optimism, of his desire to do things right. If anything, the portrait that emerges is more that of a person who entered

DAVID PARKINS

politics as a "sunny ways" true believer and evolved, or devolved, into a more cunning and narcissistic partisan.

Maher's book works best when he avoids over-analysis and instead takes the reader deep into Ottawa's backrooms and corridors of power. This is a world we rarely see as ordinary citizens, a world of power and relationships and hierarchies, of both grand vision and petty small-mindedness. We don't hear only about Trudeau: we hear about Gerald Butts, Katie Telford, Bill Morneau, Jody Wilson-Raybould, and many more. Maher is fair-minded and gives the prime minister credit where he deserves it (or lucked into it). His overarching thesis is that Trudeau is a gifted performer, a man with genuine magnetism before a crowd, but who all too often keeps to himself. We hear such shocking anecdotes as the fact that even his closest cabinet ministers have not always had access to him and are unable to reach him directly when needed. Although able to withstand the worst barrages of criticism from political opponents, he has been notoriously thin-skinned when it comes to hearing from his own staff.

It's a great set of tales Maher has to tell. None of it is new exactly, but the research, connections, reporting, and overall background work are impressive, and that alone makes *The Prince* worth reading. Do you wonder why Trudeau has had such inconsistent relationships with his ministers over the years? Maher illustrates how difficult Trudeau finds it to sustain personal relationships. Do you want to know what Trudeau was deliberating about when dealing with Jody Wilson-Raybould? Maher fills in the gaps. It's a book full of inside dope, and Maher seems to have extraordinary journalistic access to the main players in Ottawa.



That's not to say this is a perfect work of political journalism. The book's many strengths are diluted by a variety of weaknesses, the first being the belaboured Machiavellian prince references. One or two nods would have sufficed; I stopped counting at a dozen. Maher's sourcing and attribution is also problematic; while not untrustworthy, it does raise questions — questions that disrupt the flow of the narrative. Maher regularly makes assertions, relates stories, and offers quotes without supplying his direct source. The anecdotes always carry the ring of truth and buttress his primary narrative. And yes, Maher does caution us in his endnotes that many of his sources agreed to comment only with the assurance of anonymity. So he is doing the right thing by protecting his sources. But he leaves it too open-ended in the flow of the story. We still need to have a sense, as readers and citizens, of where all this material is coming from. What level of person are we talking about? What department? Where and when did the author talk to his sources? There are ways to contextualize conversations and interviews to give them validity, thereby removing the niggling questions that many readers will have. A magazine such as *The New Yorker* handles sensitive conversations with protected sources all the time, usually by supplying us with information as to the source's stature or relation to the moment. Maher doesn't do this. And too often the vagueness becomes a speed bump that temporarily interrupts the reader's engagement. Numerous times throughout the book, I found myself stopping and thinking, "Okay, but how do you know that?"

Nor is Maher a great stylist. The sentence structures are rudimentary. The language is basic. There are few graceful similes or analogies, and those he attempts (Trudeau the prince) are overcooked. To be fair, Maher is a newspaper reporter, not Margaret Atwood. He's not pretending otherwise. His book has an old-school journalistic carpenter's trustworthiness to it, but there are enough sloppy moments to make one withhold full admiration. He uses the word "acclimation" at one point, when he means "acclamation." There are verb tense inconsistencies. He pens mixed or clumsy metaphors, such as "Liberals had to get out of the way of the dumpster fire headed their way."

There is also the occasional foray into solipsism. Regarding Trudeau's assertion that he'd move Canada to proportional representation should he win a majority, Maher states, "I reported his comments, but I did not believe him — and, as things turned out, I was right not to believe him." Sentences like this blur the line between memoir and reporting. Are we meant to be reading *The Prince* to understand Maher's journey or Trudeau's? Both are interesting, and both are valid. But the tone, grammar, and structure make this a rather confusing read at times, as if Maher and his editors knew they had good material on two counts but couldn't decide which to focus on.

◆

LESS THAN A PARAGRAPH INTO *JUSTIN TRUDEAU on the Ropes*, readers will realize they are in the hands of a very different writer than Maher. Paul Wells immediately places us at the deeply underwhelming start of Trudeau's political career, in a moment of real crisis for the Liberal Party — shattered by Stephen Harper's demolition of Michael Ignatieff. "Surely," Wells writes, "the Liberals needed their best talent in crucial roles. Yet the party's interim leader, Bob Rae, had appointed Trudeau his critic for youth, post-secondary education, and amateur sport. Since Parliament never debates youth, post-secondary education, or amateur sport, on most sitting days Trudeau's attendance was strictly optional." Two pages later, Wells describes the environment in which this young MP had grown up:

> Trudeau has trafficked all his life in the currency of attention. Go ahead and look at him. People have been staring at him all his life. And whatever you think while you look, whether your reaction is awe or disappointment or the purest contempt, all I can tell you is, you're not the first. Somebody else had the same reaction long before you came along. Somebody else will have it after you leave. Attention is the medium through which he moves. It is his luminiferous aether.

Quickly, we have a rich sense of who Justin Trudeau is, or at least who the author thinks Justin Trudeau is. Wells does a masterful job of setting the stage for the black comedy to follow, which is no surprise, given that Wells is as much an Ottawa veteran as Maher, though primarily as an opinion writer and pundit. His credentials are deep. In fact, one of his earliest in-person experiences with Trudeau was when he moderated the first televised debate between Trudeau and Harper.

Wells's book is the quicker read of the two and the more insightful, even as it eschews the impressive primary research of Maher's approach. Where Maher is sober-minded and inductive, Wells is sardonic and impressionistic. There might not be a single joke in all of Maher's book, and there might not be a single page in Wells's without one. Wells is also hunting different game than Maher. He makes no claim to be writing a work of definitive journalism or reporting. His book is in fact a long essay of just under 100 pages, which frees him up from the burdens of attribution and sourcing. This also allows him to draft more of a Freudian character study than governance analysis.

Whereas Maher exploited the prince analogy, Wells relies on the boxing metaphor, which is fitting given how much Trudeau has leaned on his 2012 boxing match with the Conservative senator Patrick Brazeau to bolster his confidence and legend. Here again, we get the pleasure of Wells's willingness to offer insight into Trudeau's character:

> The image of Trudeau leaning against the ropes and taking his whacks is apt for another reason: because for all his pedigree and physical grace, the work of politics has never come easily for him. He is more intelligent than a lot of people are willing to believe, and at least as charming as you'd suspect, but he is no great public speaker or gifted debater. His judgment is often terrible. He has not surrounded himself with great talent; in fact, he has discovered a real gift for chasing talent away.

The picture of Trudeau that emerges under Wells's precise eye is that of a man with a real but limited skill set who found himself sitting in the highest office in the land and has always struggled to feel comfortable there, moving from optimist to realist to someone who says he believes in collaboration but shows no evidence of following through on that belief. Wells writes that the cynicism was so bad before the 2021 federal election, Trudeau might as well have "taped a sign saying OPPORTUNIST to his forehead on his way to Rideau Hall."

In many ways, the story Wells relates is one of pathos, not cynicism, that of a man who could have been a game changer but who let the game change him instead. Wells, for instance, gives Trudeau ample credit for renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement amid the chaotic circus of the Trump presidency. It was a successful effort on Canada's behalf, but Wells questions why such statesmanship and competence haven't surfaced more often. "I sometimes wonder," he writes, "what would have happened if Trudeau had picked five other big intractable problems and applied the same level of ingenuity and concentrated effort on them. At least he picked one."

The chief take-away from *Justin Trudeau on the Ropes* is that the prime minister's main problem is character-related rather than tactical or strategic. It's the story of someone who is capable of both extreme callousness and penetrating self-awareness, someone who sees his weaknesses and who "is an introvert who has become skilled at pretending the contrary." As Wells states bluntly, Trudeau is "a mixed bag." Apropos of the Liberal government's handling of COVID-19, Wells notes that a staffer once told him that Trudeau gets big things right and everything else wrong. He did well with NAFTA and the pandemic but bungled everything else. Justin Trudeau has "built a government that can't stop announcing bright new days, even though it seems increasingly unable to deliver."

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NEITHER MAHER NOR WELLS LEAVES THE READER feeling optimistic about Justin Trudeau the man or the politician in what both describe as his political end times. These are harsh character indictments, but, as they say, politics is not for the faint of heart. Readers would do well to spend time with both books, since they arrive at their conclusions via different routes and each offers what the other does not. Maher's might leave you hungry for deeper analysis, while Wells's may have you craving more reporting. Reading the two as a linked set should satisfy the desire to learn more about the what *and* the why. Wells has written the more enjoyable book, but Maher has produced the one more likely to be cited in future political science dissertations.

And where do these writers expect Justin Trudeau to go from here? Maher does not offer an opinion but makes it clear that he does not see Trudeau changing in any substantial way. As for Wells, it would be possible, he writes, "to imagine Trudeau coming back yet again if he had lately shown any inclination toward introspection or humility, or a driving urge to improve his game." Which, Wells opines, he has not.

That doesn't mean he can't or won't win again. Canadians are already tired of listening to the scratchy broken record that is Pierre Poilievre, which means he might very well become the fourth Conservative leader Trudeau beats. The shame of it all, Wells argues, is that what Trudeau promised when he first came to power — transparency, simple competence, smart decisions — are the same basics that Canadian voters still crave. Trudeau, he says, has abandoned those things in favour of turning every challenge he sees, big or small, internal or external, into a boxing match, an opponent in the other corner, a thing to be defeated. He's lost whatever ability he once had to tackle complex problems with innovative solutions and has become a blunt instrument. It's worked, if measured only by his stay in power. If you go by other standards, such as sound government, ethical behaviour, good judgment, collaborative citizenship, and respect for your peers, then the grade is much lower.

Notwithstanding Joe Biden's decision to suspend his final presidential campaign, it's hard to remember the last time a politician in a democracy retired at the appropriate moment — when they could say they went out on top, had completed what they set out to do, or possessed enough insight to recognize they had simply run out of juice. Politicians tend not to see the writing on the wall. In fact, they usually walk face first into the wall. It's difficult to say what will become of Justin Trudeau in the near future. When he finally gets the axe, the blow will most likely be delivered by his own party, not by the electorate. After all, most Canadians have already told Justin Trudeau what they think of him and yet, somehow, he's still our prime minister.

Her Grace

Private lessons with the people's princess

Kelvin Browne

Dancing with Diana: A Memoir
Anne Allan
Sutherland House
200 pages, hardcover, softcover, and ebook

John Travolta dances with the Princess of Wales at the White House, on November 9, 1985.

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE; ALAMY

Diana, princess of wales, believed that "dancing makes you feel heaps better." But I'm not sure Her Royal Highness would feel that way after reading the book her dancing instructor and friend, Anne Allan, has written about her. It's not that *Dancing with Diana* has negative things to say about the princess (it doesn't), nor is Allan anything but empathetic (she's non-judgmental to the point of credulousness). It's just that this is yet another work that proves if you're a celebrity, the question isn't *whether* your acquaintances will exploit your notoriety; it's simply a matter of *when*. Diana never learned the lesson, strictly followed by her in-laws, that it's best to never complain and never explain — especially to the hired help.

Originally from Glasgow, Allan trained at the Royal Ballet School in London. In 1981, while she was ballet mistress of the London City Ballet, she was asked to be the private dance teacher for Diana. Lessons continued for nine years, with breaks for her pupil to give birth to William and Harry, do royal tours, summer at Balmoral, and so on. Later, Allan directed plays and musicals in Canada and served as artistic director of the Charlottetown Festival for a decade. She now lives in Toronto.

Diana has been quite the gravy train for writers. There's the classic 1992 Andrew Morton biography, *Diana: Her True Story*, which was written with the princess's participation as part of her revenge tour against Buckingham Palace and Charles, then Prince of Wales. Morton returned to the trough in 2004 with *Diana: In Pursuit of Love*. Tina Brown, the former *Vanity Fair* and *New Yorker* editor, has done double duty as well, publishing *The Diana Chronicles* in 2007 and *Remembering Diana* a decade later. And there's *Diana in Search of Herself: Portrait of a Troubled Princess*, by Sally Bedell Smith, who has also dipped into the royal well to produce books about King George VI and his queen consort, Elizabeth, as well as their daughter Queen Elizabeth II and her eldest son.

Some maintain that authors who write about Diana have only been doing their job, just like all those paparazzi who stalked her for photographs. And while the princess may have felt those in the media were her adversaries, she was adept at using them for her own purposes. Recall the post-separation television interview that was adroitly choreographed to stick it to Prince Charles. Remember the brilliantly staged photo ops, the most iconic being of Diana sitting alone in front of that great symbol of spousal devotion the Taj Mahal. Replay in your mind scenes of Diana touching an AIDS patient or her land-mine walk in Angola. Regardless of who was using whom, Diana didn't have any illusions about reporters and editors. Surely she'd be devastated that the greatest exploitation has come not from them but from those closest to her: friends, lovers, and employees.

Diana's brother, Charles Spencer, who appeared a tad opportunistic with his attention-grabbing attack eulogy (as it's been called) at her funeral twenty-seven years ago, made circumspect references to his big sister in *The Spencers: A Personal History of an English Family*. Brotherly love also prompted him to create the must-see attraction of her grave at their ancestral estate, Althorp. (One wonders whether the stately home would attract many visitors today without this shrine.) But at least Lord Spencer hasn't written a tell-all about his sister.

Leave that sort of thing to Wendy Berry, who published *The Housekeeper's Diary: Charles and Diana before the Breakup*, in 1995. Perhaps inspired by Berry's domestic espionage, Diana's butler Paul Burrell revealed even more eight years later with *A Royal Duty*. (He continues to be asked for comments about her and her sons, William and Harry.) In 2002, one of Diana's bodyguards, Ken Wharfe, collaborated on *Diana: Closely Guarded Secret*. Not to be left out, Diana's psychic and alternative healer, Simone Simmons, co-wrote *Diana: The Last Word*. Over the last five years of her life, the princess had shared a lot of confidential stuff with Simmons, who seems to possess a prodigious memory for juicy material. And just recently, Diana's long-time hairdresser co-authored *It's All about the Hair: My Decade with Diana, H.R.H. Princess of Wales*, a slightly gimmicky "interactive book" about her "timeless influence on fashion, culture, and the hearts of millions."

If Diana asked her staff to sign non-disclosure agreements, they had little impact. It's certainly trickier to ask a lover to sign one. Most egregious among that cohort is James Hewitt, with whom Diana had her first extramarital affair. Hewitt's the cad who kissed and told and told and told, in *Love and War* and then in *Moving On* and then again in *A Love like No Other: Diana and Me*.

In publishing their books, those whom Diana trusted usually suggest they have little interest in cash or fame. They're just compassionate insiders who want to set the record straight! So it is with Allan. "I have often been bitterly disappointed with interviews regarding the Princess," she explains in her publisher's marketing materials. "There was always so much more to this incredible woman than what was depicted." Allan's book is intended as a "fresh look at the more personal side of Diana." And, of course, reading it is supposed to give us "a deeper understanding of just how extraordinary she was."

Unfortunately, there's not much new to be learned in this telling. Diana liked to dance, she enjoyed attending the ballet and musicals,

and she was interested in artsy types. She was desperately needy for love and reassurance — and indiscriminate about where she sought it. Most writers portray Diana, as Allan does, as a modest, kind, well-mannered aristocrat with a penchant for writing sweet notes at appropriate moments. She had a sense of humour, something many commentators say her ex-husband lacks. She did the things devoted moms do, Allan gushes, as others have gushed before. Diana might have been less saintly and more of a real mom if she had survived that car crash in Paris or had to confront, eventually, an emotional emptiness greater than her own: that of her "spare" son, Harry. We'll never know, and Allan doesn't speculate.

Even without major revelations, *Dancing with Diana* does offer some amusing observations. Allan recalls Diana's first lesson, when "her underwear was showing below her leotard and tights — what looked like Marks and Spencer knickers were very evident." (Just imagine one of those iconic couture ball gowns concealing the most egalitarian of underwear!) Allan also remembers how the princess "came bounding into the studio" after she had "confidently danced" with John Travolta at the White House: "I was delighted to see that she had stretched her arms beautifully and lifted her head as she moved." The prurient or cynical reader waits and waits for Allan to spill something shocking, to be critical or at least skeptical of her idealized student. That doesn't happen, because this book sits firmly within the Diana Fan Club School of Writing.

Allan begins her story with a "very British upper-class voice" on the phone informing her she's to teach Diana. Aware she was being considered for this role, Allan knows it's not a crank call. She doesn't speculate on why *she* got the job, though given the longevity and apparent intimacy of her relationship with Diana, she might have asked — at least eventually. That phone call isn't much to fill a chapter, so we're presented with a long description of Diana's wedding, just in case we'd forgotten the fairy-tale frenzy of it all. Elsewhere, similar riffs are all but non sequiturs, including the plot of *Swan Lake*, a snippet about notable ladies-in-waiting, a definition of a "Sloane Ranger" (an upper-class lady living in tony Chelsea), and a quick history of Kensington Palace.

With an insider view of the dance world, including ballet life and the staging of musicals, Allan does offer some fascinating asides. In this manner, her personal story drifts in and out and gives context to the fleeting moments she had with Diana. Allan changed jobs, had children, went on tour to Japan, got divorced. Although these memories are heartfelt, they're disjointed in presentation.

Their classes, Allan confesses, often involved as much conversation as dancing. Clearly Diana loved to chat and had the ability to make people feel that they were among her most trusted confidants. But did she solicit or accept advice? Even if she did, most interlocutors likely didn't feel empowered to offer any. They were there to listen (or, as it turns out, listen and transcribe). "She was a little worried about the attention she got as it seemed to bother Charles a bit," Allan concedes, though that concern didn't stop Diana from wondering "how lovely it would be to feel what it was like to do a performance." This musing led her to ask Allan to organize a Covent Garden dancing debut at the high-profile Annual Friends Gala. Allan couldn't resist: "I decided to see if I could make this dream of hers happen."

A friend might have pointed out that surprising your insecure husband with an unprecedented royal performance would certainly make international news and would once again upstage him. They might have suggested it was not a wise move. All these years later, Allan describes that evening at Covent Garden as something of a coup, because Diana performed so well. Allan does not grant that she might have enabled a willful, naive impulse by the princess that she should have discouraged instead.

Throughout the book, Allan refers to her student's difficulties with body image and eating disorders. The two discussed both in regard to other dancers, and one day Diana finally confessed, "I suffer from bulimia." Her transformation from a healthy-looking young woman to a rail-thin fashion plate was always an excuse for media innuendo. Allan certainly knew about the rumours and was staring at Diana's body regularly as it melted away. She wonders if she "should have been more forceful when suspecting there might be a problem," but she ultimately lets herself off the hook. Perhaps proximity to stardust is not something anyone wants to jeopardize by telling their famous friend what they don't want to hear.

Lots of unhappiness and many tears accompanied the lessons, and Allan describes the requisite breakdown moment shortly before Diana's divorce, though she's somewhat reticent to do so in full. Diana was unhinged after the Palace phoned Allan to say, "The Princess may want to stop her dance classes and do something else." If gaslighting was part of the Firm's plan to discredit her and move her off stage, it was certainly working, given Diana's volatile emotional state. And here is where all those "extraordinary" qualities feel the most like PR concoctions. Diana obviously needed help and wasn't getting it. She acted not like an extraordinary person but rather like an average one — unprepared for the exceptional circumstances that had swallowed her, with the entire world relishing her indecorous flailing.

Like many others no longer useful to the rich and powerful, Allan did the dutiful thing and receded into the background after the lessons ceased. While she may have felt rejected or forgotten by Diana, her consolation prize was the material for an effusive moneymaker about their ephemeral friendship.

How to Be a Bird

When the storm blew in, the door
to my chest shuttered. I became private as Lincoln
who stole away in the night to hold his dead child, Willie.

Your thinning body, my hand curled
around your waist. Too dumbstruck to let go.
When you were a small boy I carried you too.
It was not enough.

Embarrassed in the end by how I yelled *fight, fight.*
I'm a child you said, trembling with a plastic sword.
The swell of the king tide. The war over before it began.

How is it possible? No one came to claim you.
Mother, father, sister, brothers; crippled
by our failures to love.

I wept for old wounds while you grew feathers
like strands of hair. Taking shape as a small bird.
A life, fed by music, you became the song.

Out of moonlight, I spun a nest
for you. It smelled of musk, sage, salt air.

I said your name, opened a window, became an accomplice.
You left our house midway to an upstroke. As the seabirds ascend
vast cliffs, with their full-throated cries, soar to the heavens.

Out of this border, everything eventually turns
to the light — freed to the other side of silence.

Only a bird knows the position it is assigned. But it knows.

Mary MacDonald

Mary MacDonald is the author of The Crooked Thing.
She lives in Whistler, British Columbia.

Behind the Books

A biographer becomes her own subject

Charlotte Gray

Ghost Stories: On Writing Biography
Judith Adamson
McGill-Queen's University Press
192 pages, softcover and ebook

The subtitle of Judith Adamson's charming memoir implies that she will be imparting tips to biographers. She certainly offers a few useful reflections on the art of biography, but her main title, *Ghost Stories*, is more precise.

On the life-writing spectrum, Adamson veered away from the pole occupied by biographers who reveal brutal truths and toward the one where sit the amanuenses, whose job is to write what others speak. That's not to say Adamson merely took dictation. In works on the author Graham Greene, the publisher Max Reinhardt, and the feminist writer Charlotte Haldane, she helped to shape her subjects' stories, and her memoir features both stylish prose and attention to detail. As she explains, she began each of those projects by developing close relationships with the person of interest or their friends, and she usually wrote the version of a life that they wanted to give readers.

Adamson, who carefully erased both her presence and her own insights from her biographical works, embarked on her writing career by interviewing Greene for an article on his movie reviews and scripts. Later she produced a biography of him and went on to work with him on a collection of his writings. But only now does she reveal such delicious details as his declaration, at their first encounter, that he would talk to her only if she did *not* use a tape recorder. (She is convinced this forced her to listen more carefully during interviews.) She also describes her "trial by martini" at that same meeting, where Greene insisted that she down a large vodka martini and "too much wine" before she earned his trust. "He was a prankster, no question," she writes. "He liked raw stamina. And he liked women whose beauty went before them, its recognition taken for granted."

Adamson rarely cites dates in her memoir, but I gather her most active writing years were between 1970 or so and the early 2000s. Her best-known work is a remarkable book of edited correspondence published in 2002: the love letters that Leonard Woolf and the artist Trekkie Ritchie Parsons exchanged between 1941 and 1968. For twenty-six years, Parsons had lived half the week with the recently widowed husband of Virginia Woolf and the other half with her husband, the Chatto & Windus editor Ian Parsons.

Personal contacts were always crucial to Adamson's choice of subjects, and she heard about Parsons through friends in Montreal. She intended to write a biography, but when she started reading the correspondence, she decided to let the late principals speak for themselves. Parsons's executors, who guarded her reputation fiercely, gave Adamson the go-ahead. They recognized that she would respect Parsons's choices and not allow her to become a footnote to the Bloomsbury circus.

While Adamson was editing the letters, interest in women's lives was exploding, and the author caught the literary wave. In her introduction and notes, she explored the conflict for Parsons between her heart and her professional life. It turns out Adamson identified with the dilemma. "I too had been stretched between loyalties to my husband and son, my students, and my desire to write whatever I was writing," she explains in *Ghost Stories*. Even as she insists that she did not identify with Trekkie Parsons herself, Adamson concedes that "however much I tried to get out of the way," the stories of her subjects "were mine on the page." She then quotes the British writer Alan Bennett, who said in the film *The Lady in the Van*, "You don't put yourself into what you write. You find yourself there." (This may be true for Adamson, but I don't think it is for many biographers. And I certainly don't believe that it is actually true for Bennett, a detached and subversively witty observer of the human condition.)

Ghost Stories is a period piece. Adamson describes her childhood in Montreal and the limited professional choices then available to women; her enduring love for her husband, Alan Adamson, a history professor at Concordia University who was twenty-two years her senior; and her professional experiences, first as a nurse and then, after earning a doctorate at McGill, as an English teacher at Dawson College. Adamson's warmth, humour, and love of gossip shine through the rather disconnected memories, whether she is writing about the stoned students sprawled on the floor outside her office or the serial monogamist in London who was infuriated when one of his conquests, the Canadian academic Phyllis Grosskurth, did not mention him in her autobiography.

In her final chapter, Adamson reflects on the fundamental challenge of biography, which bothered her for decades: "To whom do the facts of our lives belong?" Over the years, she discovered "so much about people's secret lives that I knew was enticingly publishable." She decided, though, that she was never going to be what the American journalist Janet Malcolm described as "a professional voyeur." Instead, she styled herself as a "literary biographer whose job it was to understand the work's relation to the life." In other words, she omitted details that reflected badly on her subjects.

The approach that Adamson took has particular resonance in 2024. This is the year of Alice Munro's death and of the revelation that Robert Thacker chose to omit from his biography of her, when it first appeared in 2005 and when it was updated in 2011: the fact that Munro's second husband had sexually assaulted her daughter Andrea Robin Skinner. Thacker knew of the abuse because Skinner had told him about it and because he had discussed it with Munro. However, as he explained to the *Washington Post* in July, he decided to omit the information because "I wasn't writing a tell-all biography."

It seems that Munro asked Thacker to withhold what he knew, not least because she was still living with that second husband. Ultimately, he decided that family history was beyond the scope of his book. Douglas Gibson, Thacker's publisher at McClelland & Stewart, as well as Munro's, also knew the story and agreed with that decision. Indeed, *Quill & Quire* described Thacker as "non-invasive" when his book came out — as an author "revealing little more of Munro's life than we already know."

Adamson too decided, on moral grounds, that she would "hold back anything that didn't add to our understanding of literary and cultural history." But shouldn't a skilled biographer incorporate darker facts into a larger exploration of how artists create their most profound work? Can one ever again read Munro's stories without knowing that the Nobel laureate drew heavily on her own experiences, that she had a gift for transforming actual misery into narrative gold? Can one really understand "Open Secrets" or "Vandals" unless one knows of Munro's intimate relations with a pedophile?

In Thacker's defence, his subject was alive when he published his biography, and any major revelations would have undoubtedly disrupted her private life (though it would also have been of therapeutic value to her daughter, who was traumatized by the abuse). And while Adamson suggests that protecting a subject's privacy is morally appropriate, it is harder to defend that stance today, when the linkage between life and work is examined more rigorously and when self-revelations, social media exposés, and constant surveillance have eroded discretion. Such respect for privacy is decidedly old-fashioned. Most publishers would challenge it, and most biographers now swerve toward the brutal truth.

Ghost Stories itself is not a biography; it is a memoir covering more than eight decades. The author is entitled to include — or omit — any facts, anecdotes, and truths that she wants. This is not an essential reference volume or addition to the canon. Nonetheless, Judith Adamson has produced a lighthearted, slim book that is a pleasure to read.

Pluck of the Draw

Skewered by pre-Confederation cartoonists

Graham Fraser

De l'hydre au castor: Imaginaire et représentations de la Confédération dans la presse de l'Amérique du Nord britannique, 1844-1867
Anne Trépanier
Septentrion
276 pages, softcover and ebook

Ernest Renan, the nineteenth-century French intellectual, is largely remembered for having written that "forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation." What is less often cited is his reasoning: "Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality."

I recalled Renan's comment while reading Anne Trépanier's book on the pre-Confederation press. I had thought that the current vilification of Sir John A. Macdonald, which has led to his name being taken off buildings and his statues being taken down, was the result of relatively recent revelations, like those in James Daschuk's *Clearing the Plains*, from 2013, about his government's treatment of First Nations. I had assumed that their fate was a matter of little awareness or concern generations ago. And I had thought John Wilson Bengough, the pioneering political cartoonist, was just making gentle fun of Macdonald in those iconic images of his.

As a result, I was astonished to discover that Bengough had illustrated a cover of *Grip* magazine in 1888 that shows the prime minister exchanging bags of money with a cigar-smoking capitalist as an Indigenous family begs for food next to them, with a sign near their teepee reading, "STARVED by a 'Christian' Gov't." Another cartoon for *Grip*, which Bengough drew eight years earlier, casts Macdonald as an auctioneer in England, with a First Nations woman standing on a block labelled "Governm't Policy." Here Macdonald's crowded bill of sale proclaims, in part, "To be SOLD! The People of the North West." Underneath the drawing, a caption reads, "Startling Affair in London! A Promising Young Woman Offered for Sale to the Highest Bidder!!"

That J. W. Bengough had a sharper, harsher view of Macdonald and a better understanding of his now-reviled policies than his best-known caricatures would suggest was only one of the surprises in Trépanier's informative look at historical Canadian newspapers. Indeed, she uncovers in *De l'hydre au castor* (From the Hydra to the beaver) a wide range of fears and concerns surrounding Confederation.

A Canadian studies professor at Carleton University, Trépanier notes how the historical record tends to ignore the political engagement of nineteenth-century First Nations: "Figuring among the great excluded of the Canadian Confederation in 1867, Indigenous people paid a price for the profoundly racist policies introduced by Confederation. Nevertheless, they were not passive witnesses." In describing lengthy debates and proposals before and after the British North America Act of 1867, she demonstrates how tribal leaders had as sophisticated an understanding of the stakes involved as did the politicians in the Maritimes: "In both cases, emancipation and Confederation, it was a question of choosing citizenship in a new country and concluding a pact with a political community larger than any of them could have imagined until then."

Public angst and the pre-Confederation press.

The prospect of Confederation raised numerous concerns for its constituent parts: "Could one become Canadian without losing their identity? Who will be the first Canadians of Confederation? Who will be obliged to sign the agreement, who will be excluded?" Canadians asked themselves such questions while wrestling with other, more existential ones: What would their links with Great Britain be? How could they unite French Canadians and English Canadians? And how would they live beside their American neighbours?

Among the complications of political life during the period was the transformation of a number of politicians from rebels to reformers, *contestataires* to conservatives. The classic example is George-Étienne Cartier, who had been a militant Patriote in the 1830s, before becoming a lawyer for the Grand Trunk Railway, an influential Conservative, and ultimately Macdonald's right-hand man. Like Cartier, the former republican idealists Denis-Benjamin Viger, Étienne Parent, and Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine became allies of the British Crown and beneficiaries of favouritism. Cartoonists took note: Cartier and Viger were attacked as *vire-capots* (turncoat), for example, alongside Hector-Louis Langevin.

In 1854, eleven years after the publication of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, the magazine *Le Scorpion* ran a parody. Three ghosts appear before the governor: the first insists that he do away with seigneurial rights, the second that he abolish the clergy reserves, and the third that he support annexation by the United States. Shuddering in fear, the governor agrees. In real life, Lord Elgin, the governor general of the Province of Canada, enacted two of these policies. Trépanier doesn't mention it, but it is worth noting that, as governor general of British North America several years earlier, Lord Durham had recommended measures that would abolish the use of French and assimilate French Canadians. He is still often discussed in Quebec, while Lord Elgin, who would eventually reintroduce bilingualism, is all but forgotten. Bad news resonates; good news vanishes.

Cartoonists and satirists played on fears that Confederation might destroy the economies and self-sufficiency of the smaller colonies. Thus the concept was drawn in Quebec as a multi-headed creature, each head threatening the lamb that was French Canada. Similarly, the *Liverpool Transcript* in Nova Scotia described the plans that had emerged from the Quebec Conference of 1864 as an octopus, able to seize its prey with its eight arms and, when attacked, escape into the darkness created by its ink. Ten years later, a multi-headed dragon represented "The Election Monster" in the *Canadian Illustrated News*.

In studying the public anxieties captured by cartoonists and satirists, Trépanier set out to explore "in all their relief and contrast, the opinions, the fears and the dreams that the projects of Confederation fed in the societies of British North America." She found discussions of gains and losses, virtue and necessity, conservation and calculated risk. And with her book, she has shown how some of the "forgotten" parts of Canadian history — like brutal policies toward Indigenous people — were once truths lying in plain sight.

SILAS KAUFMAN

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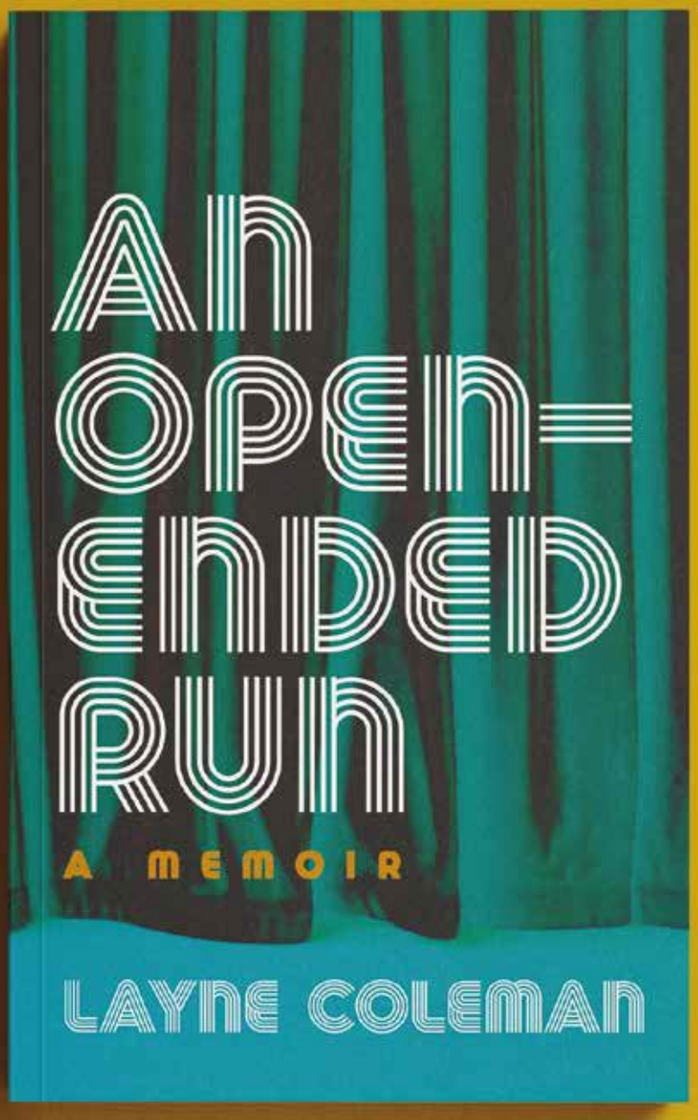

"A memorable memoir about life's messiness and the beauty that emerged despite and because of the pain."

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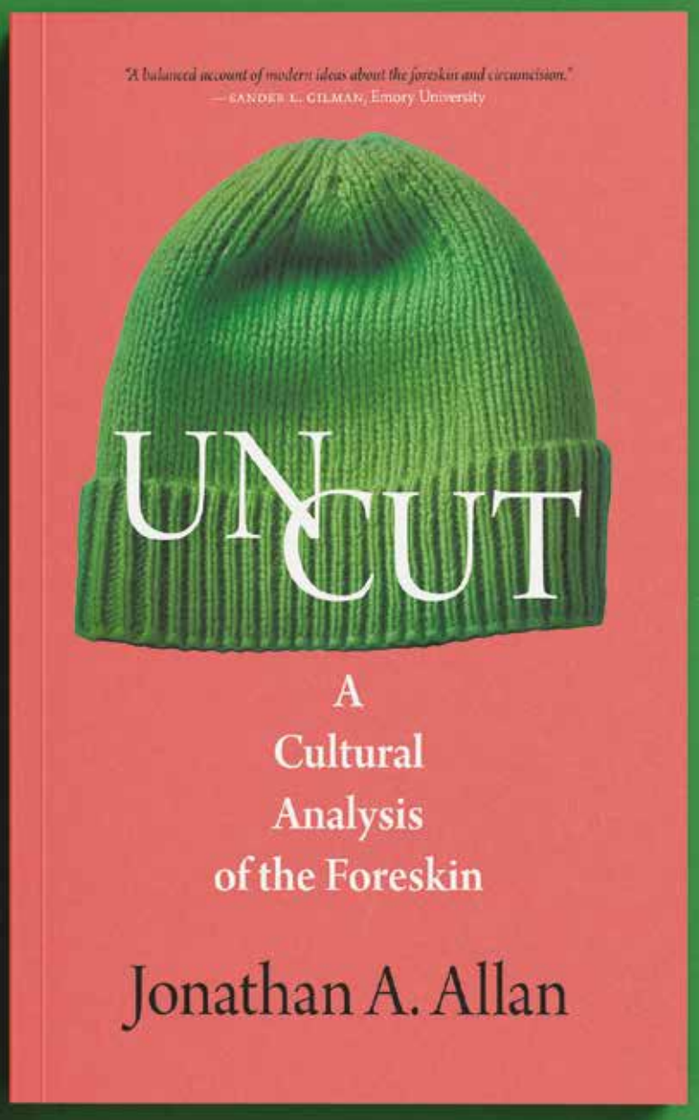

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—MEREDITH JONES

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Our Team

What the Expos meant — and mean

Adam Gopnik

Aislin's Montreal Expos: A Cartoonist's Love Affair
Terry Mosher
Aislin Inc. Publications
336 pages, hardcover and softcover

As Aislin, the cartoonist Terry Mosher chronicled Montreal's boys of summer.

For anyone who grew up in Montreal between 1968 and 1994, as I was lucky enough to do, or at least for any anglophone, to use the term that replaced "English Montrealer" in the course of that time, Terry Mosher's *Aislin's Montreal Expos: A Cartoonist's Love Affair* is almost too painfully resonant to read. Here, from the hand and memory of the artist who (under his daughter's name, Aislin) chronicled the time and the team for the *Montreal Gazette*, are all the images of an era. It was one that started very badly, with the October Crisis, then took (from the anglophone point of view) a wrong turn with the referendum that made it plain that independence might not be a long way off. But it ended in the fortunate way of Montreal, with political things more or less in place and in many ways much improved and with a kind of cultural renaissance that, for the most part, continues to this day. What is now called and valued as the Plateau was then still the student ghetto, while the wide area around Jarry Park, today filled with cafés and tech start-ups, was a bleaker and more unvariegated place, to an outsider's eye anyway. (I say "outsider" because, of course, to a Michel Tremblay it was as filled with incestuous energies and comic extravagance as Tennessee Williams's New Orleans.)

The Expos voyage announced that era, as the demonstrable excellence of the Canadiens in the Jean Béliveau era announced the Quiet Revolution. (If we can play hockey that well, why are we hiding our excellence behind an altar?) The bulwark of anglophone insularity was already breaking. I recall my friend Eliot Rubinoff, whom I had dragooned from Northmount High into skipping (the Canadian verb; in the United States, they'd say "cutting") class on the very first Expos opening day, catching himself and carefully articulating, to a Québécois alongside us in the bleachers, "Avez-vous un crayon?" (He wanted to keep score.) Eliot asked for, and got, a pencil. It was a quiet revolution of its own.

The vibe of Mosher's book is not melancholy at all but joyous in its way, even as it delineates a story that's in many ways sad. The team failed. The city altered. And it turns out the beloved cartoonist and author, a fixture of the *Gazette* in those years, had to go into rehab after too much partying with too many players. But the memory remains, at least, clean and pleasurable. Whereas other erstwhile teams — the Vancouver Grizzlies, the first Winnipeg Jets, the Seattle Pilots, the original Alouettes — leave messy memories, the Expos come to mind as a sharp if woefully lost ray of sunlight. It was a good ride, with an unhappy ending, which is the most you can say about just about anything human.

As Mosher narrates it, the decision to send a team to Montreal was a bit antic on the part of Major League Baseball, as well as an after-effect of the triumph of Expo 67. That festival is also still golden in memory, though most historians wrongly, or too exclusively, credit it to Jean Drapeau, who used that built-up credit to eventually create the disaster of the Olympic Stadium. (This is commonplace civics: in New York City, Rudy Giuliani inherited the revival of Times Square and then took credit for it, credit he is still largely, and wrongly, given.) Still, it was the long-serving mayor who helped bring the Expos, with money from the Bronfmans, to town.

Originally, the Expos were supposed to play in the Autostade, an oddly interrupted — the stands had huge spaces between them — motorsports stadium left over from the world's fair. I have, or had, a weird affection for the Autostade, since it marked the outer edge of the Île de la Cité, to which my family had moved to live in Moshe Safdie's Habitat, another, more glorious leftover from Expo. I learned to ride a bike circling around the abandoned pavilions — the Labyrinth, a site that showed advanced films, and various other structures — where I experienced an odd and enchanting feeling, with the St. Lawrence, one of the few rivers to earn the epithet "mighty," not far away.

The Autostade, as I could have told the team's management, was clearly unsuitable for baseball, while Delorimier Stadium, home of the old Montreal Royals field, was still standing but too antiquated to host a Major League club. The brilliant idea to rehab a small municipal field, Jarry Park Stadium, out in the east end was a more or less last-minute inspiration. When it opened, on a chilly but sunny April day in 1969, it was embraced by baseball fans as one of the best places in the big leagues to watch a game. (This was long before the craze for retro parks that began with Camden Yards in Baltimore.)

For the next decade, I never missed a home opener. Indeed, I can still recite the names of that first starting lineup against the Cardinals. Shut your eyes, no cheating: first base, Donn Clendenon; second base, Maury Wills…No! First base, Bob Bailey; second base, Gary Sutherland…Shortstop, Maury Wills; third base, Coco Laboy; catcher, John Bateman; centre field, Don Bosch; right field, Rusty Staub; left field, Mack Jones. (Not bad, and I say this as one who, in middle age, uses a mnemonic to remember the number of his locker at a New York City shvitz, based on the Canadiens' uniforms of the '70s: 11 is best remembered as Yvon Lambert, 12 as Yvan Cournoyer, 14 as Mario Tremblay, and so on.)

SILAS KAUFMAN

The Expos were witness to a complicated moment in a complicated way, since the players and managers were completely innocent of the provincial quarrels they were plumped into, being Americans who had come here, one secretly suspects, *faute de mieux* and eager to go play in big-league American towns. *Faute de mieux*…Using the French reminds me that there was a long period when the insularity of North American language politics was never more evident, as sportswriters and broadcasters would come north to chortle at the existence of French terms for familiar positions: *arrêt-court* for shortstop, *voltigeur de gauche* for left fielder, and the like. All those funny names! Can you imagine! It made one proud to be at least a semi-bilingual Montrealer.

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THE HISTORY OF THE EXPOS, TOLD BEFORE, IS HERE told again. The comic start. The slow-growing excellence of the team in the '70s. And how it ended with as good a lineup, offensively anyway, as any in baseball, anchored by not one nor two but *three* bona fide Hall of Famers: the uniquely able do-it-all catcher Gary Carter, the matchlessly graceful centre fielder Andre Dawson, and the "explosive" second baseman Tim Raines, a hero of the new on-base percentage appreciation society. Yet they never quite scaled the mountain, losing to a Los Angeles team in 1981 on "Blue Monday," when the Dodgers' Rick Monday hit an improbable homer and the Expos failed again to reach the World Series.

After that team was disassembled by free agency and dumb trades — Carter went to the Mets for nothing much at all and then led them to their legendary 1986 championship — another first-rate team got put together. "They had the best record in baseball in 1994"— Expos fans know these words by heart, and can and will recite them as plaintively as any prayer — when the strike ended the season without a World Series. After that, the team fell apart through bad management and worse ownership and left for the American capital.

The fall of the Expos is often blamed as well on the limitations of Montreal's Olympic Stadium — designed Olympianly by a French architect, without baseball in mind. Although there is some justice in this argument, it is wildly overstated. The Big O was a fine place to watch nine innings on a summer night, if the team was strong and the weather nice. It would have had to be replaced by a modern (that is, retro) ballpark eventually, but it was no worse than Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia or Three Rivers in Pittsburgh, other big round concrete stadiums of the big round concrete period.

Mosher recounts this familiar tale, but his major preoccupation is the culture that surrounded the team itself. The inebriation problem on the Expos was perhaps predictable, although, ounce for ounce, the classic Yankees lineups probably had an even larger problem, given that both Babe Ruth and Mickey Mantle were hard-core alcoholics and substance abusers on a gargantuan scale, a truth covered up by sportswriters of old, many of whom shared the same drugs. When the culture changed, they got wrong-footed.

A large part of the Expos story in the '80s — and implicitly, perhaps, the hidden reason for their puzzling failure to get over the hump — seems to reside in the truly awesome extent of the partying. It is pitiful to see great careers gone wrong — though, of course, we moralistic commentators conceivably had our own great careers gone wrong in other ways. It is always easier to stand in judgment on athletes, since the Dwight Goodens and the Ellis Valentines, figures of immense talent and at best uneven or precocious accomplishment, are easier to condescend to and shake one's head over than their equivalent in literature: those first novelists who never quite land a second or third successful book, of whom there are many. (Some of them, to be sure, are substance abuse victims, too.) One of the things athletes are there to do is give us someone to be judgmental about. This happens in ways both pleasurable — who's the GOAT? — and puritanical. If only Valentine had done otherwise! That Mosher — whose cartoons of the referendum period ("O.K. Everybody take a Valium!") are still well remembered — succumbed to the same virus of addiction reminds us that the fault lies in ourselves as much as in our stars.

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COULD THE EXPOS HAVE SURVIVED? THE STORY seems to be one of inadequate or incompetent capitalization more than of simple small-market blues, but I suppose in a sense they're the same thing. The Expos story can't be told as social history, anyway, without an ironic glance at the parallel growth and departure of the Quebec Nordiques — ironic because in this case it was the Montreal Canadiens who played the role of the New York Yankees while the Quebec City team was, so to speak, the Expos, too undercapitalized a club in too small a town to survive. Quebec City in the National Hockey League, like Montreal in Major League Baseball, clearly had the requisite passion and local enthusiasm but not, it seems, the infrastructure of exploitation in the media that was also necessary.

For a moment or two a few years ago, it appeared that the dream of bringing the Expos back was not quite the fantasy it might have seemed. The '80s star Warren Cromartie fronted a mission — financed by whom, exactly, it wasn't clear — to build a new ballpark near the Bell Centre and perhaps bring the Tampa Bay Rays away from Florida and to us. Our ravished, wintry hearts — to borrow a phrase the great sportswriter Roger Angell coined to depict Expos fans — were briefly warmed and then went cold again. A transplant now seems no more likely than a revived Nordiques.

Baseball gets to be an absurdly bigger business every day. Sure, people said that even when salaries were, shockingly, around four or five hundred thousand dollars. But now the average is genuinely unbelievable: around five million dollars, with the price of a star annually around fifty or sixty. That's a lot for a small town to finance. Only this year, the Bronfmans were still presenting themselves as optimistic about bringing baseball back. But it is hard to credit their hopes. Few small towns can compete anymore; given its increasingly monolingual market and population, Montreal certainly can't. Indeed, I have the impression — perhaps wrongly, though it's reinforced by this lovely book — that the imprint of the Expos is left more strongly on anglophone Montrealers, including those of us in exile, than on francophone ones. On Amazon, there does seem to be a two-volume French memoir of the Expos years available…but that is all. On the English

side, there are *so* many books, including one devoted solely to Blue Monday, written by Danny Gallagher.

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SO KEEN WAS MY LOVE OF BASEBALL AND OF THE Expos that my very first piece to appear in *The New Yorker*, the great event of my professional life, was about…the Expos. But my own appetite for the game has much diminished, in part because of the Expos' passing, no doubt, but also in part because of a genuine devaluation in recent years, in which baseball has become another example: in everything from tic-tac-toe to computer chess, a well-solved pastime is a dull one.

The analytics revolution begun by Bill James in those same 1980s has overtaken and transformed the game so that all of the classic one-run or one-out strategies that we delighted to watch Raines and Dawson execute — the suicide squeeze, the stolen base, the hit and run, the well-executed bunt — have been shown to be inefficiencies, completely irrelevant to the art of winning. Baseball is now won by hitting home runs and by never wasting outs, and so the game has become a confrontation between a hard-throwing pitcher and a hard-swinging batter: strikeouts go up, home runs go up, stolen bases disappear. (The "track team" of those days past — the speed punch of Ron LeFlore, Rodney Scott, and Andre Dawson — was, in retrospect, an illusion, which may help explain why the Expos lost so often in games they should have won.) At the same time, pitch counts have become so omnipresent that a seven-inning pitcher — remember him? — is now an iron man, while platooning left and right has never been so fierce, nor so exhausting to watch, as pitchers shuttle on and off the mound like tugboat captains in a busy harbour. And so we get the more one-dimensional modern game that's robbed of inefficiencies as well as entertainment — robbed of the vital experience of possibility seized and improvisational intelligence modelled that is at the heart of our love of spectator sports.

While I no longer have sufficient passion for the sport, I still have a passion for my passion, which is perhaps all that nostalgia is: a passion for a spent passion. Raines and Carter and Dawson, heroes of my youth, are in the Hall of Fame in their Expos caps, even if Dawson has petitioned to have his replaced by a Cubs cap (not an entirely unreasonable request as he had his most celebrated seasons, if not his best ones, in the more easily stirred media air of Chicago). The last time I was in Montreal — to lecture at McGill and to go to a hockey game with my son, blessedly a Habs fan almost as intense as his father — I was stunned to discover that Crescent Street was dominated by a twenty-one-storey mural of Leonard Cohen. The *echt* anglophone Jewish Montreal troubadour's stumbling French and foreign reputation — a god elsewhere, to locals he was a puzzling local boy minstrel — are now forgotten, while the warm heart and slightly mixed-up mysticism he offered are welcome in Quebec culture. (The Baha'i faith back then was uniquely popular in Quebec, and I suspect it still is.) Nick Auf der Maur Alley, named after another *Gazette* legend of the time, is there as well, right off Crescent.

Where, as the French poet didn't quite ask, are the *'Spos d'antan*? In our heads, and on them. You know us in exile by our tricoloured caps.

Eclectic Histories

Of ponies, paper, and paint

The Horse: A Galloping History of Humanity
Timothy C. Winegard

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THERE WERE BETWEEN 130 and 150 million horses in the world. Today, there are approximately 58 million, a figure that still makes them one of the most abundant mammals on earth, according to Timothy C. Winegard's superb new book. Even as their numbers have fluctuated over the past 5,500 years, their influence on us has remained constant: "With the first comforting touch and calming whisper on the Pontic-Caspian Steppe, humans and horses forged an unbreakable bond and the most dominant animal dyad ever witnessed."

The Horse (Allen Lane) follows Winegard's best-selling *The Mosquito*, from 2019. But whereas the main subject of that earlier book may have repulsed or at least irritated some readers, the star of this one will pull at their heartstrings. After detailing the origins of prehistoric horses in North America, as well as the many flukes of evolution that set them up for domestication on a distant continent, Winegard presents a sweeping world history, from ancient times to today. "Horses changed the way we hunted, traded, traveled, farmed, fought, worshipped, and interacted with one another," he writes. "They reconfigured the global human genome and the languages we speak."

Whether he's describing Alexander the Great's relationship with his beloved Bucephalus, the origin of the phrase "parting shot," the reintroduction of horses to the western hemisphere in 1493, the reason North Americans drive from the left-hand side of a car, or the original antitoxin serum for tetanus (one horse at Connaught Laboratories in Toronto supplied enough of it to treat 15,000 soldiers during the First World War), Winegard blends scientific, historical, linguistic, and cultural evidence in a substantial book with a fine pedigree.

The Notebook:
A History of Thinking on Paper
Roland Allen

THE TECHNOLOGY ITSELF IS BASIC AND LARGELY unchanged since its introduction seven or eight centuries ago: a number of blank pieces of paper bound together, for to-do lists, doodling, and generally keeping track of things. But that tactile simplicity belies the more profound impact notebooks have had on business, art, science, literature, and even policing. Roland Allen explains how in *The Notebook* (Biblioasis).

Allen begins his enjoyable tale with an accessory known to affectatious hipsters and bona fide creatives alike: the iconic Moleskine. When Bruce Chatwin referred to Moleskines in his 1987 novel, *The Songlines*, they were no longer in production: "I used to get them in Paris," one of his characters explains. "But now they don't make them any more." The passage inspired a literary translator in Italy, Maria Sebregondi, who partnered with the company Modo & Modo to bring the beloved notebook back to market. Twenty years later, in 2016, a Belgian car distributor paid half a billion euros for the upmarket brand.

Big business and notebooks have gone hand in hand, as Allen shows, ever since Florentines invented double-entry accounting at the turn of the fourteenth century. The office supplies needed for that innovation led to sketchbooks and Renaissance art. Since then, Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Marie Curie, Patricia Highsmith, Bob Dylan, and countless others have made their marks in notebooks before making them on the world.

River of Dreams:
Impressionism on the St. Lawrence
Anne-Marie Bouchard and Sarah Milroy

TOWARD THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, French impressionists abandoned their studios, ventured outside, and learned to sketch with their brushes. Featuring essays from artists, scholars, and curators, *River of Dreams* (Goose Lane) charts the arrival and development of their radical movement in Quebec.

This book complements an exhibition by the same name, on display at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, in Kleinburg, Ontario, until January 2025. The co-editor and co-curator Anne-Marie Bouchard introduces the key figures of the show, who were working with — and challenging — a new mode of artistic expression. She draws a suggestive connection between the French impressionists and the Group of Seven, whose landscapes — sometimes lauded as uninfluenced by European conventions — later became synonymous with Canadian art.

From there, other contributors demonstrate how the St. Lawrence River was an irreplaceable muse for many Quebec painters. Chapters travel successively northeast along the shoreline, from Montreal to Charlevoix, as the water becomes more brackish on its way to the Atlantic Ocean. While full of insight about art, trade, and transportation along the major waterway, *River of Dreams* is perhaps best understood as a meditation on light. Replete with full-colour reproductions of dozens of paintings, as well as archival photography, its pages offer an arresting display of artists learning to capture it as it interacted with clouds, ice, snow, and the surface of an ever-changing river.

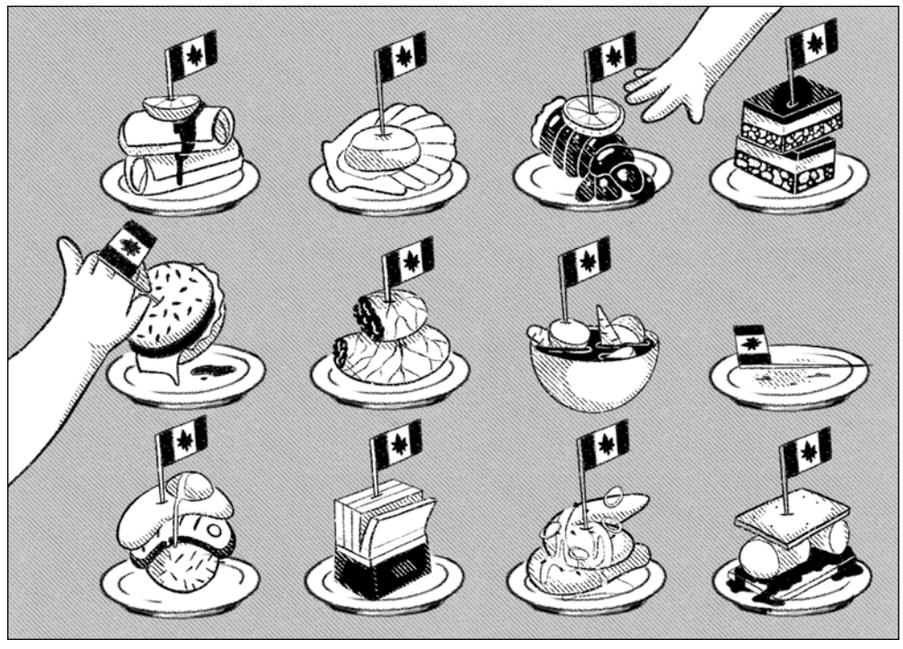
Whose Menu Is It Anyway?

Nibbling and noshing across the land

J. R. Patterson

Mmm…Manitoba:
The Stories behind the Foods We Eat
Kimberley Moore and Janis Thiessen
University of Manitoba Press
312 pages, softcover and ebook

LaHave Bakery: The Building, the Baker, and the Recipes That Revitalized a Community
Jane Morrigan and Susan Ivany
Nimbus Publishing
240 pages, softcover



Sampling the many dishes that constitute a national cuisine.

Canadians of a certain age may remember when schools released cookbooks. Recipes were drawn from the student body, teachers, and parents, with the collected results then sold to raise funds. My elementary school in Gladstone, Manitoba, released a few during my time there, and I still have one, *Gladstone Elementary School Recipe Book*, from 2004. Inside are such culinary nightmares as "jellied cabbage deluxe," "creamed cucumbers," "burpless onions," "taco quiche," "microwave manicotti," and "pizza schnitzel." What to make of this nauseating mishmash?

"These recipes," my principal wrote in his introductory message, "are representative of the variety of cultures found in our community." The word "variety" in this case was doing a lot of heavy lifting: "Japanese chicken wings," "Danish meatballs," "Baja lasagna," "Applebee's Chinese salad," "Aunty M's chop suey," "Land of Nod cinnamon buns," and "beef international." But you can be assured that the authors of these dishes were not as cosmopolitan as the titles may suggest. With few exceptions, they were white prairie folk who ate white prairie food, all of them embodying a commitment to speedy preparation and refined sugar.

There were, back then, six places to eat out in Gladstone, which wasn't bad for a town of 1,000. The options included two greasy spoons, a bakery ("Get yer buns in here" was its slogan), the golf clubhouse, a drive-through on the highway, and a Chinese restaurant called the Paris Café, which stood so close to the rail line that when a train passed, the cutlery would rattle, unattended chicken balls would roll across the tables, and the swinging paw of the *maneki-neko* cat would adjust to a new rhythm.

The intervening twenty years have seen one restaurant burn down, the bakery shuttered, and the arrival of Tim Hortons. Another significant shift in my hometown's food scene came with the influx of Filipino migrants, who brought investment along with adobo stew. McKinley's Supermarket became Vego's Kitchenette, which offers sweets and treats of the Philippines, like taho, paksiw, and puto calasiao. The area butcher shop also traded hands and now sells lumpia and pork tocino alongside chuck roasts and beefsteaks. If my alma mater produced a cookbook today (if such things are still done), it would reflect a different town altogether, one with a different concept of variety.

It is progressions like these that *Mmm… Manitoba* is all about, using individual stories and historical records to chart the presence and changes of cuisine in the Keystone Province and trying to discover what, if anything, our food is. Kimberley Moore and Janis Thiessen, both professors at the University of Winnipeg, travelled near and far in the summers of 2018 and 2019, often with a food truck, inviting Manitobans to tell their food stories and cook up a recipe or two. In Dauphin, they found Ukrainian perogies and holubchi; in Steinbach, it was Mennonites melding German noodles with barbecue. They talked to cookbook authors and chefs, from Churchill to Winnipeg, one of whom, Steven Watson, is committed to making meals primarily from ingredients that could be found in Manitoba before Europeans arrived.

Mmm…Manitoba is the book component of the Manitoba Food History Project, which also includes a podcast and a website where interviews, stories, maps, and recipes are collected. Those interviews are unpolished and colloquial, but the sense is that, as they ate their way across the province, Thiessen, Moore, and their colleagues were having a damn good time. Who wouldn't, when sampling slow-roasted bison with burned sage, Ichi Ban cocktails, or snow goose tidbits is part of the job?

As I read their book, the definition of Manitoban and Canadian food nagged at me. Inspired by Moore and Thiessen, I sought help with the definition by asking around. "Ketchup chips," my sister in Victoria said, revealing her (our?) debilitating junk-food addiction. "All-dressed chips, Nanaimo bars, Coffee Crisp, Caramilk, and Caesars," she continued. People I know in Nova Scotia variously came up with lobster, scallops, hodgepodge, Beaver Tails, poutine, and blueberry grunt. A second-generation Ukrainian friend who had me over for dinner answered, simply, "Cabbage rolls." A German visitor to Canada pointed to s'mores, while an Australian tourist said, "Just generic North American tucker." On a visit to Churchill, I put the question to a young lady from Sanikiluaq. "Oh, muktuk!" she replied, with reference to beluga blubber. "Raw's good, but I love it fried." I wanted to try it and asked her to get me some while I was in town, but it never turned up — difficult to procure, it seemed.

"Meat and potatoes," my father the beef farmer said, while declaring a preference for a nice pork roast. "Hot dogs and hamburgers," explained my English-born mother, who mostly prefers salads and other things that are meant to help one live forever. "But are you saying Canadian food or what people actually eat?" she asked. In other words, one answer is theory, the other is fact.

TESSA PRESTA

That global institution of fact and data, the United Nations, listed in its 1967 cookbook Canada's national recipes as cod soup, tourtière de la Gaspésie, beefsteak pie, sucre à la crème, butter tarts, and blueberry crisp pudding. Such variety sounds a lot like indecision. Hamlet could never make up his mind, either, and described himself as subsisting on "the chameleon's dish" and "the air, promise-cramm'd."

While their project makes for an interesting look at what meals are being served in Manitoba, Thiessen and Moore seem to acknowledge that answering "What is Manitoban/Canadian food?" is as difficult as separating out the flour, sugar, and eggs from a fully baked cake. They dither over whether Indigenous cuisine should be the baseline of Canadian food, but they stop short of making a definitive statement: it's too political, too cultural, too nationalist a claim. They over-worry that certain foods are ethnicized, racialized, or flattened by culinary colonialism, but that is the very nature of cookery: an experimental mathematics that produces something more or less than the ingredients. Their fair rebuttal is "Why are you asking that question?"

Indeed, the question seems to belong to another time — before lumpia could be bought in Gladstone, for instance — and subverts the notion of the Canadian melting pot, where, presumably, we are all reduced to a dense, indistinct goo.

Yet food is territorial and engenders strange feelings of ownership and proprietorship. Even Thiessen and Moore are not immune. In a chapter devoted to Winnipeg's drive-through culture, they plant a proprietary flag on Fat Boys and Nips: two burgers originating in town, the former topped with chili, the latter the signature of the local Salisbury House franchise. "These are ours," the authors write, implying that Fat Boys and Nips made in Los Angeles or Toronto are imitations, that the real thing can be had only in Winnipeg.

These feelings aren't easily understood. Can a people "own" a burger? Is food something around which Canadians need to form an identity? Thiessen and Moore hold up the Fat Boy as something that can make Winnipeggers proud amid a "perceived lack of national status in the geographic centre of Canada, and negative headlines that declare us frigid, racist, or impoverished." Yet I have doubts as to whether a sauced-up patty can unite the city, especially as Thiessen and Moore posit that the "question of authenticity is also a racist one."

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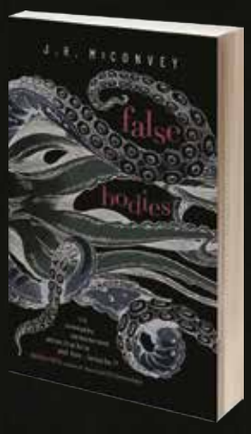
FOOD CAN BE LINKED TO NATIONAL IDENTITY, BUT it doesn't need to be, especially not in Canada, where it seems to provoke our unique brand of mortified jingoism. It is, however, irrefutably linked to memory and work. A meal in this country never springs from nowhere. I found a good example of this fact in *LaHave Bakery*. Told in alternating snippets by the proprietor Gael Watson and a cadre of co-workers, friends, family, and community members, this book is the charming tale of a shop on Nova Scotia's South Shore. The story of these entrepreneurial and enterprising women is more engrossing than it might at first seem, with its behind-the-scenes look at what it takes to build a successful food business in Canada. Watson's forty-year journey, from buying a dilapidated outfitter on a wharf to turning it into a lodestar bakery-cum-grocery-cum-bookshop, reads like a particularly Canadian tale, with its emphasis on civility, honesty, shopping local, and seeing potential in wackadoo ideas. The recipes don't hurt either.

LaHave Bakery offers a different kind of narrative than that of *Mmm…Manitoba*, one that is less academic, less abstract. Watson's statements don't dither in intellectual purgatory: "Eating with a conscience is just an extension of living with a conscience," for example, or "You don't have to know everything about something, but you need to be able to trust what you're eating." When someone questions the tradition of her "traditional" bread, her reply reminds me of many culinary Canadians I know — not apologetic, but self-assured: "My only answer to that person was, 'It's traditional to me.' This is my tradition and almost forty years later, it's become a tradition for all the little babies who started eating the bread and grew up with it."

The book is like an ode to elbow grease, no doubt the most venerated Canadian ingredient. Of the LaHave Bakery, one employee says, "We have to do it the long, hard way so that it's ethical and good." That is how Canadians see their food: hard-won, unanalyzed, personal. That is the iron edge we are comfortable with, happy that our need to be accommodated is overruled by our desire to be useful, practical, uncomplaining.

There may not be any particular Canadian food, but there is a *way* of eating that is distinctly Canadian: the potluck. Variety is our life-spice, and we're better for the gathering of different foods, so that we can try a little of this, a nibble of that. I'll bring the beef international.



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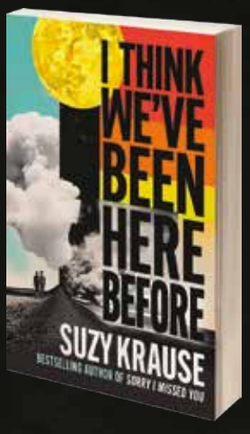

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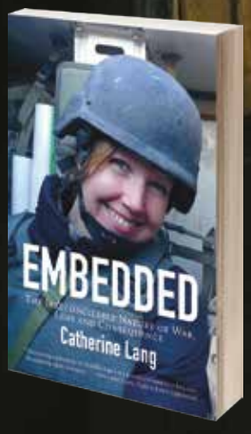

Remembering Michelle Lang, the Canadian journalist killed in Afghanistan.

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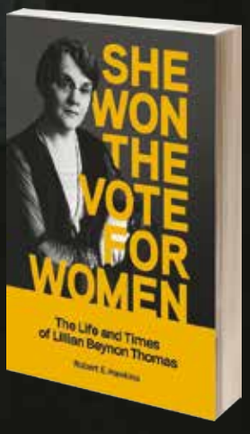

Thomas' suffragist campaign succeeded where all others had failed.

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The Life and Times of Lillian Beynon Thomas
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The Beaver Has Landed

A poet takes on America

Gary Geddes

There's much talk these days about Canada's "Cool North" providing a sort of escape valve for Americans overwhelmed by climate change, world events, off-kilter right-wing presidents, and their nation's divided self. I could sense this "warming up" to the cool northern neighbour happening as early as 1967, when the Vietnam War sent many young men slipping across the forty-ninth parallel, and again in 1998, when I was invited to be the Distinguished Professor of Canadian Culture at Western Washington University in Bellingham, on the West Coast twenty minutes south of the border. I quickly accepted the invitation but assured them that "Extinguished Professor" would have been a more appropriate title.

The university president's original residence, a modest bungalow, now called Canada House, contained the offices of the program director and a secretary, as well as meeting spaces for faculty devoted to things Canadian. Several of my colleagues turned out to be former Canadians; others had studied in Canada; and the remainder listened to CBC Radio and were devotees of Thomas King's political send-up, *The Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour*.

I did not get as warm a welcome, however, during my first few border crossings. When I presented my J-1 visa to the American border guard at the Peace Arch on the way south, he noticed I was teaching at WWU and asked about my subject. I explained that I would be teaching Canadian literature.

"Seriously?"

"Sure," I replied. "Are you surprised we have a literature of our own?" I was not expecting the answer I received.

"Yes," he said, without a hint of irony, and handed me back my documents.

On my way through the border the following week, the same scene was replayed, this time with a different customs officer. "Surely," I said, leaning out the window to see this tall figure more clearly, "you're not surprised Canada has its own literature?"

"Not at all," he said, "but I'm surprised we have to study it."

I was better prepared the third time. When asked what I was doing at the university, I said, with a big smile, that I was part of a fifth column of Canadian poets planning to take over the United States. The border guard looked me in the eye, shifted the wad of chewing gum from one cheek to the other, and, adjusting his holster, handed over my passport with a begrudging half grin: "Piss off."

These three encounters got me thinking about Canadian involvement in the U.S. over the previous century, which resulted in a talk I delivered at my welcome banquet in Bellingham's former city hall, now part of the Whatcom Museum. I began with my previous adventures at the border. Then I proceeded to list the work of special Canadian operatives in the States, starting with Mary Pickford, one of the first great silent movie stars, whose most recent biography had the provocative subtitle *The Woman Who Made Hollywood*. Of course, I said, we all know that Tinsel Town was established to distract Americans and the world from what was going on behind closed doors: in other words, as a means of shaping and subverting the national narrative. Pickford, born in Toronto as Gladys Louise Smith, had

One Canadian's subversive relocation.

quickly become "America's Sweetheart" and "Queen of the Movies." She was one of the founders of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The only temporary lapses I could find in her career as a Canadian subversive came when she supported the election campaigns of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, which may have been part of her strategy for avoiding suspicion, or the first signs of mental deterioration.

After Mary Pickford, many Canadians were sent to win the hearts and minds of Americans, none more successful than the handsome, Toronto-born high school dropout Peter Jennings, whose career as a reporter and television journalist catapulted him to the position of lead anchor at ABC News. Jennings was noted for those irresistible Canadian qualities of calmness, comfort, and humour: he once had his photo taken during an interview with suit coat but no pants. He was, of course, described by colleagues as "genuine, a nice guy." While Jennings slowly assumed control of the television medium, offering a Canadian interpretation of American and global events, an Ontario farm boy named John Kenneth Galbraith had already risen in the world to become a scholar, economist, Harvard professor, and U.S. ambassador to India. He had the ear of the Democratic presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson, working tirelessly behind the scenes to breathe into those ears the dubious but much lauded and treasonous Canadian values of decency, diplomacy, tolerance, public enterprise, and economic responsibility. With this level of indoctrination, it was only a matter of time before the United States folded into that cool northern embrace, suffering a slow and apparently easy death from freezing or boredom.

To keep Americans laughing and unaware of this gradual takeover, we sent legions of comedians south, including Wayne and Shuster, Rich Little, John Candy, and so many others, while we quietly gained control. I managed to restrain myself from mentioning to my rapt audience at the Whatcom Museum that other cadre of subversives: those infamous poets who'd been clever enough to be born to Canadian parents working in the U.S. or who had emigrated as adults to carry on the work of subtle indoctrination. This group included Elizabeth Bishop, Mark Strand, Heather McHugh, David Wevill, and Daryl Hine, just for starters. I also neglected to mention that I had played my own part in the takeover by contributing my first wife, Norma, who became a director of nursing in Richmond, Virginia, and my eldest daughter, Jennifer, who became editor of *The Hedgehog Review* in Charlottesville and a professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, specializing in (what else?) evil. Both, you'll have noted, were well placed to keep an eye on activities at the Central Intelligence Agency's Langley headquarters.

The local television station in Bellingham, desperate for material, filmed my talk and ran it seven times over the next couple of months. Then one day, while I was eating a cheese sandwich, the phone rang in my office at Canada House. With my mouth half full, I answered it and heard an official voice claiming to be the head of the U.S. Customs Service in the State of Washington. I panicked and almost choked on the dry, extra-old cheddar, thinking law enforcement was going to arrest me for subversive activities or some serious infraction, such as not

PAIGE STAMPATORI

properly registering my foreign sailboat when I arrived in Bellingham's Squalicum Harbor or smuggling an uneaten Florida orange back into the States. However, as it turned out, I was being invited to give the same talk to border guards as comic relief at their next official luncheon. I was so flustered, and still trying to swallow the antiquated cheese, that I made up an excuse and declined the invitation.

Of course, such a conversation could have happened only before 9/11 or, for that matter, before they stopped Ahmed Ressam trying to enter from Canada on December 14, 1999, with a trunk full of explosives and timing devices. He was planning to use his homemade arsenal to blow up the Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Eve and was apprehended when he disembarked from the *Coho*, a ferry that crossed from Victoria to Port Angeles, Washington. Three years later, my little joke about taking over the United States would surely have resulted in my arrest and rendition to torture chambers in Syria.

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MY EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY of Western Washington proved to be enjoyable and instructive. The job, well paid, saved me from some difficult financial negotiations and embarrassment resulting from early retirement and a marriage breakup. I commuted to Bellingham by car each week from my cabin at French Beach, west of Victoria, leaving Tuesday morning and returning Thursday evening or Friday morning. I used to joke about heading south to go home, because although most of my colleagues knew I had to go north to the Canadian mainland border, Victoria and the lower tip of Vancouver Island are actually well below the forty-ninth parallel and farther south than Bellingham — thanks to the peculiar deliberations of the German kaiser Wilhelm I, who helped to determine the international boundaries following the infamous Pig War.

I was well treated and welcomed by the university, given an office, and told I could teach as much or as little as I liked. When I proposed a course on Wednesdays from 4 to 8 p.m., I was advised that WWU had a mostly rural clientele who would likely be going home for dinner around then. "I can solve that problem," I said. "So let's try it." The maximum twenty signed up, with others on a wait-list hoping to join the fun, which took place in what had been the living room of former university presidents, all windows, with a view of the ocean, boats, passing gulls, eagles, and whales. After an hour-long introduction to the material, I told the students to go into the kitchen, take a plate and utensils, and help themselves to the salad and pasta with a vegetarian tofu sauce. Dessert would follow. There is something about the intimacy and informality of eating together and sharing ideas that appealed to me and to my students. In fact, enough of them enrolled in other courses I offered during the following terms that I had to warn them that taking multiple classes from a known Canadian subversive might not look good on their academic records.

To present Canadian literature in the best possible way, I requested and received a modest grant from External Affairs, which enabled me to invite and host forty-three Canadian writers to read from and talk about the poems, plays, or fiction of theirs that we were studying during my three years in Bellingham. That list included Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Mel Dagg, Lee Maracle, Ron Smith, Howard White, Sharon Thesen, and Tomson Highway. When I picked Tomson up at the Vancouver International Airport, he warned me to expect to stop the car every ten minutes, as he had the habit, for health reasons, of starting each day with eight glasses of water. He proved to be a great success, not only for frequent urination but also for inspiring students, especially when I arranged for him to talk at the nearby Northwest Indian College. Three years later, as a visiting writer at the University of British Columbia's Green College, I would have the pleasure of inviting Tomson again, this time to address an audience of 500 at the old Frederic Wood Theatre. Backstage, moments before I was to introduce him, he looked at me earnestly and asked, "Gary, what were you wanting me to talk about tonight?" Then he laughed and nodded toward the gap in the curtain leading to the stage. After my brief introduction, as I disappeared backstage, I could hear his opening remarks: "I was born so far north in Canada, we didn't get hemorrhoids; we got polaroids." This was followed by a huge roar of applause. He had the audience in the palm of his hand.

It was said, only partly in jest, that Canadian authors were the major entertainment in Bellingham for those three years, a perfect moment for the annexation of Washington State. Instead of that, I brought each of my classes back to French Beach for a weekend of study, relaxation, and, of course, indoctrination. By the time the fourth car in our convoy arrived at the border, the Canadian customs official, looking in the window, said, "I suppose you're going to that poet's house as well." Numerous students became lifelong friends, sending birth announcements, copies of their publications, and invitations to weddings. One of the bolder ones asked if she and her fiancé could use my waterfront house for their honeymoon, which I could hardly refuse. I gave them my key and my blessing and disappeared for a week on my sailboat.

For much of the first year of teaching at WWU, I slept on that boat, for which I'd rented a berth at Squalicum Marina. My students considered this *pied à l'eau* quite romantic. I never disabused them of this illusion or told them how cold, damp, and noisy a night on the water could get in winter, with the clanging of improperly secured lines striking the aluminum masts. Or how frightening it was when a disturbed blue heron emitted a blood-curdling scream that sounded like corrugated sheet metal being shaken. Or how my early morning ablutions and evacuations in the marina washroom were often greeted by a pair of legs sticking out from under one of the adjoining toilet stalls, belonging to some hapless individual trying to warm up after a night on the street. Later, I was able to abandon this dreary *pied à l'eau* and lucked out with some of the comforts of good old American hospitality. But *that* is another story.

Although I loved much about the country, including its poets, and was both honoured and grateful for the three years I spent there as Extinguished Professor of Canadian Culture, I never failed to tease my students for not knowing how to spell English words, especially that crucial one: "neighbour." I also tried out on them the observation of the Canadian philosopher George Grant, author of *Lament for a Nation*, who insisted that so-called internationalism was promoted to produce not internationals — he insisted there were no such animals — but Americans. I took pleasure too in reminding my friends in Bellingham, apropos of the "global village" and the ostensible benefits of the new free trade agreement, of Stephen Leacock's witty remark: "Whenever an American tells you you've driven a hard bargain, you know he's taken you to the cleaners."

◆

WHEN I TOOK MY LEAVE OF WESTERN WASHINGTON University in the summer of 2001, the students came to my office to present me with the gift of twenty second-hand copies of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, which we'd studied in class and which they knew I loved so much that I was giving copies to all my friends and acquaintances. It was the surprise book in a course about the lyrical novel, with all but one of the authors being Canadian poets; the objective was to see if we could detect in novels by poets any special poetic or lyrical elements not found in what is considered "ordinary" fiction. As it turned out, the most poetic of the group was the American novelist Robinson, not a poet by reputation, but her work positively sang. You could take any page of *Housekeeping* and break it into what looked like poetic lines that were beautiful and lyrical enough to make most poets weep with joy — and envy. The students had scoured every used-book store in Bellingham to find those copies, which were the perfect parting gift for the alien poet and academic who'd tried, but failed, to take over the United States and who turned out to be bringing more beauty home than he'd left behind.

A Crude Patrimony

David Huebert returns to the well

Shazia Hafiz Ramji

Oil People
David Huebert
McClelland & Stewart
328 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook

The defunct oil well remains part of an Ontario family's land and identity.

KARSTEN PETRAT

In *Global Warming and the Sweetness of Life*, the environmentalists Matt Hern and Am Johal take a road trip to the oil-sands of northern Alberta. There they are dramatically reminded how "we are all implicated in the oil economy; every single one of us is bound up with petro-logics. We are all simultaneously witness, victim, and perpetrator of climate crimes." This perspective characterizes *Oil People*, David Huebert's debut novel, which returns to the region of southwestern Ontario that was the setting of his second book of short stories, *Chemical Valley*.

In 1987, Jade Armbruster, a girl on the verge of fourteen, begins to feel an inexplicable connection to her ancestor Clyde. A diehard oil man, he spent years of his life in search of bitumen, stomping "on his treadle over and over," even when it seemed futile. "Mindless of the men who had abandoned him," he drilled throughout the 1860s, until he found success. Ultimately, he fell to his death in his own well in Lambton County. That defunct well is still part of Jade's family's land, where she lives with her parents and older sister, Angie. The property — which features "creeks and fieldstones, small period outbuildings, vintage manor" — is also home to the Canadian Petroleum Legacy Museum, founded by Jade's grandmother Sandra.

The museum, housed in the old manor, is eerie, gloomy, and Gothic. Secrets unfurl slowly as Jade's interest in Clyde grows. Although the intergenerational plot could be revealed with a simple sketch of their genealogy, Huebert's descriptive, lyrical writing carries the story far beyond family dynamics. As the curious teen digs deeper into her ancestral lore, the narrative strikes a good balance between predictability and surprise. The plot unfolds circuitously but with great skill in an elegant five-part structure. Time is not linear but runs in loops and echoes, mirroring the way the past is always with us. As Jade puts it, "This is a story of remnants and revenants, of things that bubble up."

Credibility and evidence are in question throughout. The prose switches between timelines and perspectives; it folds in reportage and the official historicization of the land. Premonitions and relics appear to Jade and invite further suspicion. Even parts of a screenplay, from a documentary about the museum, are reproduced, providing some context for the period between the 1860s and the 1980s. The film's narrator intones, "What is perhaps most remarkable about history is not how it shaped the past but how it lives on in the present."

A geologist in *Oil People* observes that history "lives on in the rock," that oil "distills time, curves it." Huebert's poetic evocation of the two dark fluids — black gold and blood — allows the deep past to surface. When Jade's mother tells her that "we're not poor people. We're oil people. It's in our blood," she feels this profoundly. She senses her innate relationship to the resource, much like Clyde's, even though he turns out not to be her biological relative. On an outing to the well with her friend Marc, Jade has a supernatural experience: "I felt the black veins flashing beneath me, black rivers in the flesh of the rock. I felt the veins I had crawled in, the veins that crawled now in me, and I thought the words *blood* and *stream* until they turned, churned — blood stream, blood stream, blood's dream."

Oil has mystical properties, and it is the sole interface between family and home for the Armbrusters. Why are both Jade and Clyde so affected by it? In a diary that Jade finds in the attic, Clyde's wife, Lise, describes him as having "a species of passion total and resolute." She details his overwhelming, innate predilection for extraction, the years he spent "drilling and drilling as if to find his own meaning in the rock." Huebert does not offer easy answers, and the inexplicable moments resonate well beyond the scope of the book. He asks the unanswerable: What makes us kin? How important is it to follow a feeling? And what does it mean to be connected to land that is not yours?

"Why on earth would you stay here?" a woman asks Lise. Instead of responding, she thinks, "How to tell her it was intuition, written in rock?" Instinct forms the bond between Clyde and Jade, drives most of the decisions characters make, and is the salient force behind the historical Armbruster settlement. It also becomes the reason for its downfall. Angie causes a small-town revolution with her boyfriend, Jules, who writes an exposé about petroleum extraction in the region. "Angela is a brave young woman from a family that represents much of what's wrong with our exhausted Western culture," reads the article. He argues that the Armbrusters "refuse to wake up to the approaching environmental crisis, refuse to address the injustices against their Native neighbours."

Weaving together outside criticism with the abject and lonely solitudes of a local family fuel business, Huebert crafts a poignant coming-of-age story that is also a saga of intergenerational guilt. *Oil People* is a cautionary tale, but it does not focus on the irreversible damage corporations have done to the planet. Instead, the danger lies in what has been passed down between people. With great nuance, Huebert poses questions about complicity, inheritance, and allegiances. Through no fault of her own, Jade, like her relatives, is simultaneously a witness, victim, and perpetrator. Although she is only on the cusp of young adulthood, will she have time to reckon with the hand she's been dealt?

Island Time

Pasha Malla's intricate moral fable

Kevin Jagernauth

All You Can Kill
Pasha Malla
Coach House Books
220 pages, softcover and ebook

There is something pernicious about the luxury wellness retreat.

In the near-future setting of *All You Can Kill*, humanity continues to face timeless and familiar problems. People search for love, guidance, acceptance, someone to follow, and spaces where their beliefs can be validated. Despite technological and social advances, they look for answers to these existential concerns in all the wrong places. Playful, witty, and lightly sardonic, Pasha Malla's multi-pronged satire may not offer much hope for where we're all headed, but it has a riotous time envisioning what our destination might look like.

The book begins *in medias res* as the unnamed narrator and his inadvertent comrade, K. Sohail, find themselves drifting through the sky in each other's arms — "as if we were dreaming the same dream." Survivors of an off-page, undescribed incident, they are in a strange predicament, inexplicably aloft over the open water, without another soul in sight. As the mysterious force keeping them airborne dwindles, a helicopter suddenly appears, signalling the possibility of rescue, but it just as quickly enters the water in a plume of fire and smoke. Before long, the distressed pair land on the shore of a mysterious island.

A single word stamped on a sign — "Retreat" — is their only clue to what lies beyond the thick stretch of jungle before them. Disoriented and famished, the duo eventually stumble upon Jerome, a robot-cum-butler that speaks to them with a precious formality, punctuating every response with "Regards, Jerome." The automaton assumes the people standing in front of him are Mr. and Dr. Dhaliwal, who have signed up for the "Ten Day 'Love Intensifier Reboot'" at what turns out to be an elite wellness retreat. Piecing together that the Dhaliwals were the occupants of the downed helicopter, the castaways quickly take on their identities, if only to get a warm meal and a roof over their heads. But it's not long before this seemingly innocuous environment grows more ominous.

The next hint that all is not well comes from Professor Sayer, a counsellor who leads their personalized "Daily Sessions." She instructs the couple to watch an uninterrupted stream of pornography on the television in their room and record themselves replicating the on-screen contortions. But it's hirsute Brad Beard, the celebrity motivational speaker, who is the most concerning resident of the retreat. Revered by the attendees — couples as wealthy as they are insecure — the cultish leader preaches the elusive concept of "Trunity" (truth and unity), an aspirational state of being that can be achieved only by reaching an ever-changing set of goalposts (and by buying Brad's inexhaustible supply of recordings and books). Soon enough K. Sohail believes something pernicious is afoot. She bails for the jungle, leaving the protagonist to fend for himself. His ruse grows harder to maintain on his own and is further challenged by an unexplained murder and the unwelcome arrival of the real Dhaliwals.

Malla launches an ambitious gambit. He creates a lexicon that imbues the first-person prose with an eerie sense that we are just a few steps removed from reality. Popular sayings are rearranged by the verbose and expressive narrator into new shapes such as "a bird's view from its eyes" and "justice of dessert." The effect is uncanny, leaving questions about the stranded main character unanswered — Where is he from? Is English his first language? — and further tilting the stereotypical island getaway into the bizarre. Heightened surrealism puts *All You Can Kill* into the territory of *The Lottery* and *Lord of the Flies* as well as films like *The Wicker Man*, but Malla's writing creates an original, cockeyed world in which his thematic preoccupations are revealed with incomparable precision and acuity.

While the reader follows the increasingly harried narrator through an atmosphere of escalating hostility, the author tips his poisoned arrows toward narcissistic wellness conjurers, therapy capitalism, cancel culture, and the false comforts of consumerism. His critique is presented in a setting that's inundated with X-rated content, blooming with abundance for the one percent, yet damned with people blistered by insecurity. At the same time, Malla deploys a surprising well of sympathy for all his characters. He waltzes around easy cynicism and condescension while grappling with the contradictions of modern life. These struggles are especially apparent in his protagonist, who eagerly tries to fit in and desperately embraces being thrust into companionship with K. Sohail, referring to her as "my wife." And even as Brad berates and humiliates his disciples, who willingly suffer his insults in the quest for personal betterment, we feel empathy for their delusions.

All You Can Kill is an intricate moral fable, but it steps deep into the thorny briars of spiritual and economic disadvantages. With a narrator who muses on the fact that "all of us are loaded at birth onto a conveyor belt that slurps us to our invariable end," Malla plays with the concept of survival and how it has the dangerous potential to warp our individuality. The story gives way to chaotic mobs, groupthink, and violence, but at its root, there is a profound longing to make sense of agency in uncertain times. The novel concludes with a perilous trip into a strange yet wholly recognizable void, and it's here that Malla puts on the perfect, final smirk, revealing that boundless consumer choice to heal our existential wounds is really not a choice at all.

NEIL WEBB

Dawson's Clique

Emmanuelle Pierrot goes north

Amanda Perry

La version qui n'intéresse personne
Emmanuelle Pierrot
Le Quartanier
368 pages, softcover and ebook

Emmanuelle Pierrot's debut novel, *La version qui n'intéresse personne* (The version no one cares about), has all the ingredients to be terrible. It follows Sacha, a young Montrealer who winds up in Dawson City, doing drugs, fooling around, and becoming deeply attached to her dog. At some point, her new punk friends begin to shun her. Yet rather than sinking into melodrama, the book has the immersive energy of a Beat narrative, one that subtly shifts from celebrating to critiquing its milieu. The disintegration of Sacha's social capital is at once a deeply felt disaster and a case study of how misogyny reproduces itself.

The story is largely chronological, with a first section labelled "Paradise." An ominous prologue, however, signals that all will not be well: "One day, the village no longer wanted me. It trapped me, crushed me, and it spit me out." This simple structure proves effective, as it primes readers for warning signs that the protagonist blows right past. She and her best friend, Tom, are thus introduced as "two incarnations of the same entity, an unviable two-headed alien," their teenage bond both strong and suspect. Neglected by their parents in Montreal, they snort coke, eat Fudgee-Os, and worship *The Lord of the Rings* alongside the controversial Quebec comedian Mike Ward; the evidence of their youth makes their cynicism all the more jarring. Female celebrities are exclusively targets for ridicule. As Sacha observes, "We hated all women and pretended not to know that I would become one and he wouldn't."

At eighteen, the pair strike out for the West and end up in the Yukon, settling in Dawson City, with its tourist-packed summers and year-round population of 1,500. There they become part of the "folk punk" scene: a rebellious, bohemian set who organize music festivals and anti-capitalist protests with the authority of the rarely employed. Pierrot presents this lifestyle without condescension, blurring the lines between liberation and dysfunction. Drug and alcohol use can get out of hand for the group, but more often it's a source of fun. Sexual permissiveness is the order of the day, as people cheat and swap partners and embark on casual threesomes. Refreshingly, Pierrot does not treat any of these behaviours as problems, in and of themselves. The issue instead is that even this counterculture is shot through with social norms that punish women and protect men.

The cause of Sacha's fall from grace is thoroughly banal. After years with Tom as her roommate, she falls in love with another man. Tom becomes jealous and complains to whoever will listen. Soon the rumour mill converts his old confidante into "Sacha Drama," a manipulative and promiscuous stealer of boyfriends.

Pierrot has described the inspiration for her book as partly autobiographical. Luckily, the result reads less as an exercise in self-justification and more as an exposé of how people tear one another apart. Sacha is quietly dropped from a group chat, maligned on Facebook, and insulted in the village bar by strangers who have been served up her reputation as juicy gossip. Her situation gets progressively darker, until she is trapped in pandemic quarantine with a man who might assault her. Meanwhile, these same folk punks disown the singer Jesse Stewart over accusations that he abused his girlfriend. "I felt a wave of admiration for our community, we stuck together, we didn't compromise our principles, we didn't let ourselves be impressed by a woman-beating punk just because his video had seven million views on YouTube," Sacha observes. The irony is multi-faceted. On the one hand, these seemingly feminist political beliefs lure Sacha into a false sense of security, as her social circle will not hesitate to call her a whore. On the other, the book informs us that the shunned musician later overdoses in Edmonton, turning Stewart into a parallel example of how quickly this community abandons its own.

Mixed fortunes and fickle friends.

Part of the attraction of *La version qui n'intéresse personne* is its setting in a part of Canada more often mythologized than experienced. Pierrot eschews references to Jack London in favour of Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Kurt Cobain. But there are still plenty of Nordic tropes mixed in with the whisky and ketamine, including the northern lights that appear at emotionally dissonant times, a treasured white dog that may be half wolf, and a "typical early spring evening" at twenty below zero. As Pierrot details the relationship between Dawson City's "cheechakos" (the summer residents) and "sourdoughs" (those who brave the winter), her own account straddles the line between insider and outsider. Sacha spends five years as a tour guide, and some expository passages read like promotional copy, describing the town's "washed-out coloured facades, stripped of logos, that gave us the impression of walking in a western." Most of the clichés are kept at bay by this tale's contemporary edge, which sends characters to the century-old Westminster Hotel to use the Wi-Fi.

Pierrot opens the novel with a kind of land acknowledgement that details the Klondike gold rush from the perspective of the area's Hän Hwëch'in community. This nod in the direction of political correctness works because Pierrot goes on to thematize the ideological inconsistency of Sacha's social group. These early passages also introduce Sharon, an Indigenous woman who occasionally rents a room to Sacha on the condition that she not drink or do drugs. Sharon provides a sober counterpoint to Sacha, treating the youth with a mixture of compassion and exasperation as her social situation unravels. As the true local, Sharon warns Sacha about the "omertà surrounding violence against women" in Dawson and encourages her to leave. Yet she also reads as a real person who shocks her guest by mentioning that she is "not totally against pipelines or totally against hard rock mining," later mentioning a nephew set to visit from Fort McMurray. With such details, Pierrot hints at the range of complex lives in the North that lie just outside the view of Sacha's clique.

La version qui n'intéresse personne was a breakout hit in Quebec this year, and a film adaptation is already on its way. Unsurprisingly, this accessible book about the social dynamics of young rebels earned the Prix littéraire des collégien·ne·s, assigned by college students. But Pierrot also received the Prix des libraires, which leans more literary. The combination testifies to an unusual balancing act. Like the dive bar built on the permafrost where its characters congregate, this novel has coarse aesthetics and a sturdy foundation.

AMERY SANDFORD

Coming to Terms

Ayelet Tsabari's sweeping debut novel

Ruth Panofsky

Songs for the Brokenhearted
Ayelet Tsabari
HarperCollins
400 pages, softcover, ebook, and audiobook

An Israeli Canadian of Yemeni background, Ayelet Tsabari is the award-winning author of *The Best Place on Earth*, a story collection from 2013, and *The Art of Leaving*, a memoir from 2019. Her latest, *Songs for the Brokenhearted*, is a sweeping novel that spans decades — 1950 to 1995 — as it traces the lives of several interconnected characters while moving between Tel Aviv, New York, and a camp on the banks of the Yarkon River in Israel. This is the work of an accomplished writer who is certain of her subject and her craft.

Songs for the Brokenhearted centres on three generations of Mizrahi Jews, including those who arrived in Israel between June 1949 and September 1950 as part of Operation Magic Carpet, which airlifted approximately 49,000 of them out of Yemen. These émigrés, alongside countless others from Djibouti, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, were housed in overcrowded transit camps under prison-like conditions. Surrounded by barbed-wire fences, they slept in tents and endured hunger, disease, and desolation.

The novel unfolds over thirty-five chapters that chart the past and present lives of three main characters and that shift between third person and first person. A prologue introduces Yaqub Hason, a young storyteller who in 1950 is orphaned and living in "an all-Yemeni immigrant camp in Rosh HaAyin, once a British air force base and now a large tent city, in a new country born of hope and despair, built on the dreams of some and the catastrophe of others, on an ancient land, soaked with blood." In the first chapter, we meet the protagonist and only first-person narrator, Zohara Haddad, in her thirties, recently separated and on leave from her doctoral program in New York. It is August 1995, and Zohara's mother, Saida, has just died. Within hours of receiving the shocking news, Zohara leaves her retreat in Thailand and flies to Tel Aviv. Upon landing, she takes a taxi to Segula Cemetery and joins the mourners, who watch as her "mother's small body, covered in a white sheet, was lowered into the earth." Two chapters later, we meet Yoni, Zohara's seventeen-year-old nephew, who found his beloved grandmother slumped on her kitchen floor and is angry at himself for not having arrived in time to save her. He longs to give "one last hug" to the woman "who raised him, who sang to him, who told him stories, who loved him."

The characters are linked via historical events that affect them in profound ways. In the camp, Yaqub meets Saida, also an orphan from northern Yemen. They fall in love, but Saida at eighteen is already married with a young son, Rafael. Yaqub and Saida's moving story of separation and eventual reunion takes place against the backdrop of the infamous Yemenite Children Affair. Between 1948 and 1954, as many as one in eight Yemeni Jewish babies and toddlers were removed from immigrant camps — often carried off to hospital and then reported dead. While many did die, others were either given or sold to Ashkenazi Jews, some of whom were Holocaust survivors. When Rafael

Finding identity through kinship and song.

disappears from the nursery, Saida is heartbroken. Years later, a conscription order from the Israel Defense Forces arrives for him, and Saida wonders if he might be alive. All efforts to locate him prove futile, however, and he remains lost to her forever. Tsabari is possibly the first English-language writer to feature this shameful period in her fiction, and she treats the resonant and unresolved trauma with care and compassion.

Saida goes on to have two daughters, Lizzie and Zohara. "I had been born into the pit my brother's death or kidnapping — depending on which one of my parents you asked — had left in our lives," Zohara explains. "Born out of the hope that I might alleviate some of that pain, light up a house steeped in darkness." We follow the self-described "expert at grief" as she struggles to come to terms with her brother's absence, her father's death when she was eleven, and her mother's secrets.

Zohara's search for understanding leads to revelations about her heritage. She learns about the camps and the missing Yemeni children; the truth about her parents' unhappy marriage; and that her mother was a second wife who nonetheless grew attached to Bruria, her father's first wife and true love, whose barrenness led him to Saida. Zohara also discovers that her mother composed and sang love songs in Arabic, in the Yemeni tradition of unnamed female poets. To honour Saida — despite their strained relationship — Zohara has those songs translated. Later she decides to expand the scope of her dissertation on feminist Israeli poetry to include Mizrahi voices and a critique of the literary canon's emphasis on Ashkenazi writers.

Of Lizzie's three children, Zohara is closest to Yoni, who does not know his father and feels "lonely in his own home, an outsider in his own family." He is most at ease with Saida, a nurturing and protective figure who helps raise him. After her death, when Yoni becomes observant and takes up with a right-wing group that opposes Yitzhak Rabin for having signed the Oslo Accords, it is out of his desperate need for community. He protests at the peace rally on the evening of November 4, 1995, when the prime minister is assassinated by Yigal Amir. Since Yoni, like the assassin, is of Yemeni descent, he is arrested at the scene and briefly detained — an experience that affords him fresh insight. He chooses "a life of questions" over religious certitude and the support of family — his aunt, mother, stepfather, and half-sisters — over the company of ideologues.

In this rich tapestry, Tsabari weaves a nuanced tale that eschews absolutes. She acknowledges the violence that marked the founding of Israel and the country's constant state of conflict, the discriminatory treatment of Yemeni Jews, as well as the lasting effects of domestic assault. But she also gives Yaqub, Zohara, and Yoni a greater understanding of identity and home. Zohara, in particular, seizes on kinship and song to help ground her in place. She accepts the advances of Nir, a fellow Yemeni Jew. And she joins a group of Yemeni women singers — they knew and admired her mother, who sang "like clear water drawn from a deep well" — and finds her own voice. "It was as if my body knew the songs, as if they'd been folded in there, imprinted, as if the other voices, my ancestors' voices, became my own," she says near the end. "I opened my mouth, and they flowed through me."

JAMIE BENNETT

Rough Waters

From Martha's Vineyard to personal hell

Emily Latimer

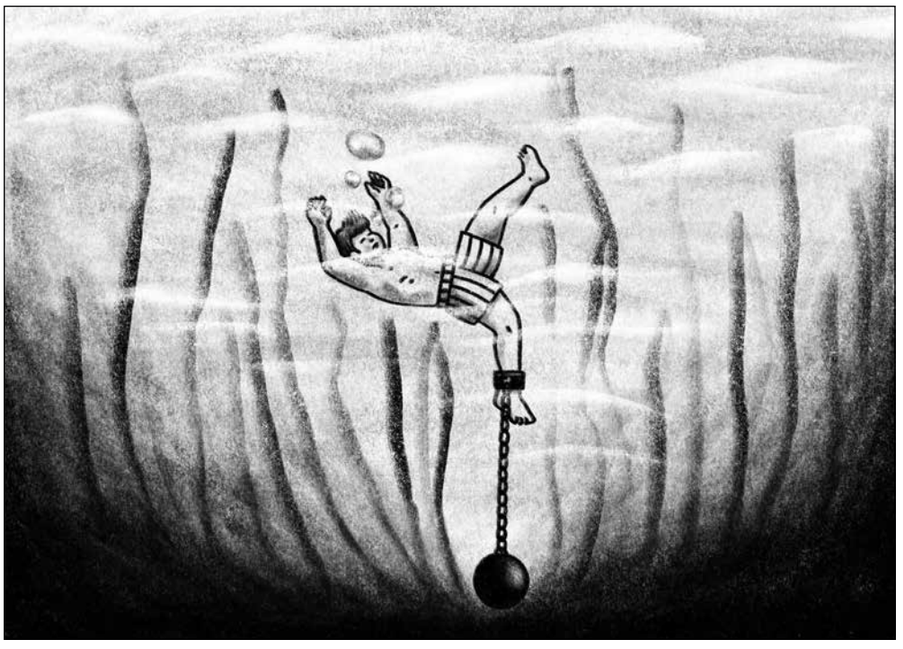
Sugaring Off
Fanny Britt
Translated by Susan Ouriou
Book*hug Press
228 pages, softcover and ebook

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith has trouble crossing the street. Set over the course of one day, the narrative follows the shell-shocked veteran as he battles with flashbacks to the First World War. His wife, Rezia, chaperones him around London in search of a distraction. When a car backfires, pale-faced Septimus feels everything stop: "The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames."

Adam Dumont, the protagonist of Fanny Britt's Woolfian *Sugaring Off*, suffers from a shell shock of his own, though his PTSD stems instead from a distinctly modern episode. For the forty-seven-year-old chef and television host, a trip to Martha's Vineyard quickly turns from a luxury vacation into a personal hell. While attempting to surf, he collides with Celia, a local teenager, leaving her with a severely dislocated knee and a hefty medical bill. In the following days, Adam oscillates between shame and anger, shifting the blame from himself to the victim and back again, until he finally asks himself, "Wasn't she entitled like everyone else to enjoy the beach without wondering if some thrill-seeking idiot would have so little control over his board?"

The beach collision catalyzes a mid-life mental breakdown. For weeks, Adam can't sleep, work, or shake the "troubling sorrow that weighed on him." He obsessively relives brutal scenes from the crash, remembering "the rough contact with the board, the wave that swept him under, the sand that slid beneath the lining of his bathing suit, the undertow tugging at his body, neither ocean bed nor surface for endless seconds." In the aftermath, his remorse festers and worsens, fuelled by the realization that he walked away without any serious physical injuries.

Readers also gain insight into how Adam's girlfriend, Marion, is affected. After the accident, she comforts Adam as he sobs. But she quickly tires of his dramatics, and her sympathy is replaced with bewilderment: "How had it come to this?" She refuses to see her boyfriend as traumatized; she thinks the incident was alarming but not worthy of the "loud, high-pitched sobs" he cried on the beach nor of the ensuing weeks of strange behaviour. As time passes, she feels increasingly alienated from his new, guilt-ridden personality. While Adam and Celia alternately question what it means to be a victim, Marion wonders what role we should play when a loved one is suffering.



GWENDOLINE LE CUNFF

Weighed down by privilege and guilt.

Adam might be a purely sympathetic character if he were not the picture of excessive privilege. His flippant, uncritical relationship to wealth becomes obvious once he and Marion are back at their home in Hudson, an affluent suburb of Montreal. Standing in the kitchen of his upscale home, he looks down to the fields below and agonizes over a new power line that interferes with his view. As he does over the run-in with Celia, he obsesses over this "disfigurement" and the loss of control it represents.

Britt deftly uses a stream-of-consciousness technique to explore the schism between people's innermost thoughts and their actions. Her writing is introspective, with language that packs emotional heft while capturing deep interiority: musings, feelings, and anxieties that most people wouldn't dare articulate out loud. Mid-conversation, Adam digresses internally, and the reader is privy to the difference between what he says and what he thinks. Upon meeting the kind owners of a family-run maple sugar stand, he'd like to open up to them. "I just about died this summer," he imagines saying, "and ever since I've had trouble sleeping; I fall asleep exhausted, wake up with a start, terrified, on the verge of drowning, my heart racing." Instead of exchanging niceties, he wants to tell them that he's "acutely aware of the finite nature of things, the impermanence of any possible serenity, and that observation hurts." But he struggles in silence.

In *Sugaring Off*, Britt examines the psychologies of Adam, Marion, and, to a lesser extent, Celia. The book could have been balanced with more from the victim's racialized perspective, which is in stark contrast to that of the rich white couple. In addition to the bookending chapters focused on Celia and her recovery, there's a short one toward the end that feels misplaced. In it, her life is quickly outlined: her excellent academic reputation, her absent father and sick mother, and the economic downturn on the island. This brief foray into her world before the accident is far less developed than Adam and Marion's backstory. Without a thorough understanding of Celia, the seemingly climactic final chapter falls noticeably flat.

Still, Britt's empathetic prose, translated from French by Susan Ouriou, makes a case for sympathy toward Adam despite his superficial advantages, while also showing the wide-ranging effects of trauma. The nature of his romantic relationship — and the role that guilt, complicity, and wealth play in it — is laid bare for readers to scrutinize and challenge. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Rezia, while shepherding her husband through the city, is hopeful that Septimus might be healed by the beauty of something. "But beauty was behind a pane of glass," Woolf wrote. Similarly, *Sugaring Off* reveals comfort to be an illusory commodity that, once gone, becomes nearly impossible to access again. No one is untouched by pain — physical, emotional, or any other kind.

As Adam's tailspin progresses, Marion shifts her focus to herself, allowing a chasm to open between them. Britt's astute character study of the couple underpins a criticism of class privilege that is as complex as it is incisive.

Read for the Very First Time

Never has it been more important to defend free expression, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience and opinion than right now — when opponents of terrorism are slagged as oppressors, and opponents of war (crimes) are attacked as bigots; when the supreme court of a supposedly constitutional democracy suppresses the voting rights of minorities and the right to bodily autonomy of half the population; when internet-sheltered thugs run hateful lynch-mob campaigns to destroy reputations and lives; when even the intelligentsia refuse to defend the right of all to share research or utter opinions that may dismay a multitude of protesters (including financiers). All of the above has happened — is happening — and I do not need to spell out the examples. But that is why I delight in a set of essays, interviews, and stories, edited by Éric Falardeau and Simon Laperrière, about a late-night television series once beamed into homes in Quebec and the National Capital Region every Saturday by Télévision Quatre Saisons: *Bleu nuit: Histoire d'une cinéphilie nocturne* (Midnight blue: History of a nocturnal cinephilia).

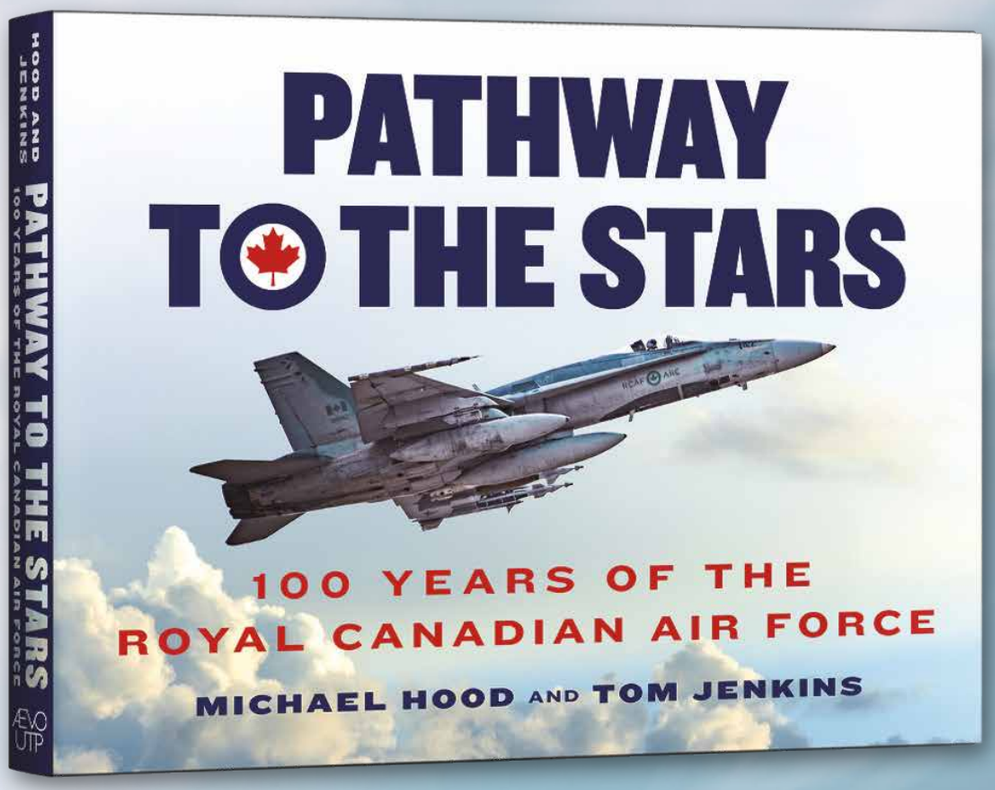
An ex-lover, a devotee of French literature from around the world (which she would translate into Finnish), often gifted me teasingly inscribed books, including this one, from 2014. When I finally, sheepishly, read it, I wondered if I was as embarrassed as Pierre Berton might have been when he admitted, in 1985, to writing *Masquerade: 15 Variations on a Theme of Sexual Fantasy*, a story collection centring stiletto heels, ropes, whips, and other fetishes. Yes, my Baptist self is ashamed to confess to consuming untold hours of T&A fare on weekends when I worked and lived in Ottawa for several years beginning in 1987. Yet I can say that, as a child of the now long-forgotten but not surpassed sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s, I believe that consenting adults were freer then than they are now. Today Pierre Elliott Trudeau's famous line "There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" strikes our freshly prudish ears as licensing rampant wantonness, endangering minors (who are already — alas — at risk within the sanctuaries of the sanctimonious, where they are often prey for those most outspokenly pious and those most flush with cash). There is a new McCarthyism afoot that seeks to quash, through raw, brutal, ham-fisted censorship, anything deemed "upsetting" for one group or another. So even as my brown face blushes a tad in allowing the confession just given, I believe works like *Bleu nuit* represent an important impediment to the forces of repression and suppression that are now operative in society, demanding the banning of books, the cancellation of lectures, the non-screening of documentary films, and even the defamation of artists due to purported moral (not criminal) failings.

So what do the twenty-six writers and four illustrators assembled in *Bleu nuit* have to say? Principally, they recall the adolescent discovery of the adult experience of sexuality and how the televised glimpses of breasts, bottoms, and only occasionally genitals served to educate their imaginations about the perils and pleasures of coupling, of copulation, of mutual ecstasy — along with the double trouble of heartbreak and health hazards, of legal problems and moral quandaries. Falardeau points out that, between 1986 and 2007, TQS programmers canvassed "the great diversity of the erotic genre," including classics and franchises (such as *Emmanuelle*), literary adaptations (such as *Fanny Hill*), sexploitation (such as *Desideria*), action films (such as *L'exécutrice*), comedies of manners (such as *Weekend with Sarah*), auteur cinema (such as *Last Tango in Paris*), and sketches and skits (such as *La maison des plaisirs*), as well as other "unclassifiable curiosities." The variety on view ran the gamut from the salacious to the romantic, from sexual obsession to carnality. It provided titillation but also, in some cases, a pedagogy of the orgasm and its psychological dimensions and sociological ramifications.

All of the *Bleu nuit* contributors offer sage perspectives, including the film scholar Marie-Josée Lamontagne, who reminds us, "In a society that values work ethic and self-sacrifice, hedonism is thought to be criminal." True, true, true. Although I also remember a Chinese proverb that I read somewhere, insisting, "Food and sex are human nature." Hedonism may be the best retort to the repressions abounding today. I'm glad I saw those blue movies all those years ago, and I'm glad to have read this book of reflection on and analysis of the possibilities of pleasure. Yep: Make love, not war!

George Elliott Clarke has served as Canada's parliamentary poet laureate.

Celebrating **100 Years** of the Royal Canadian Air Force



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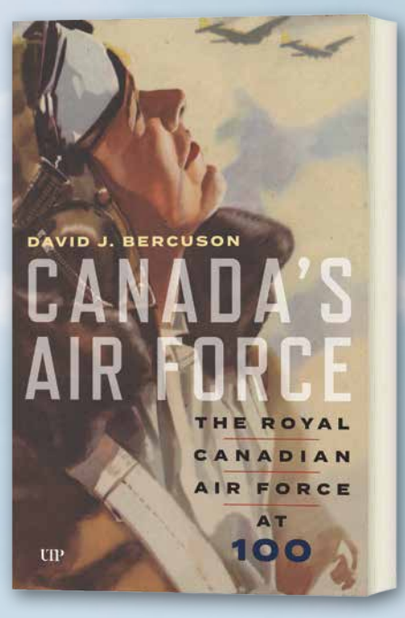

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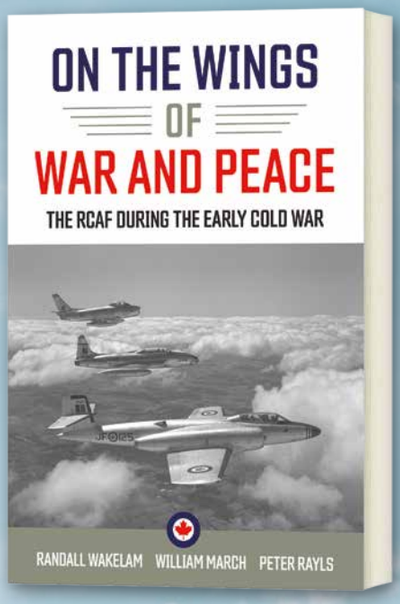

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