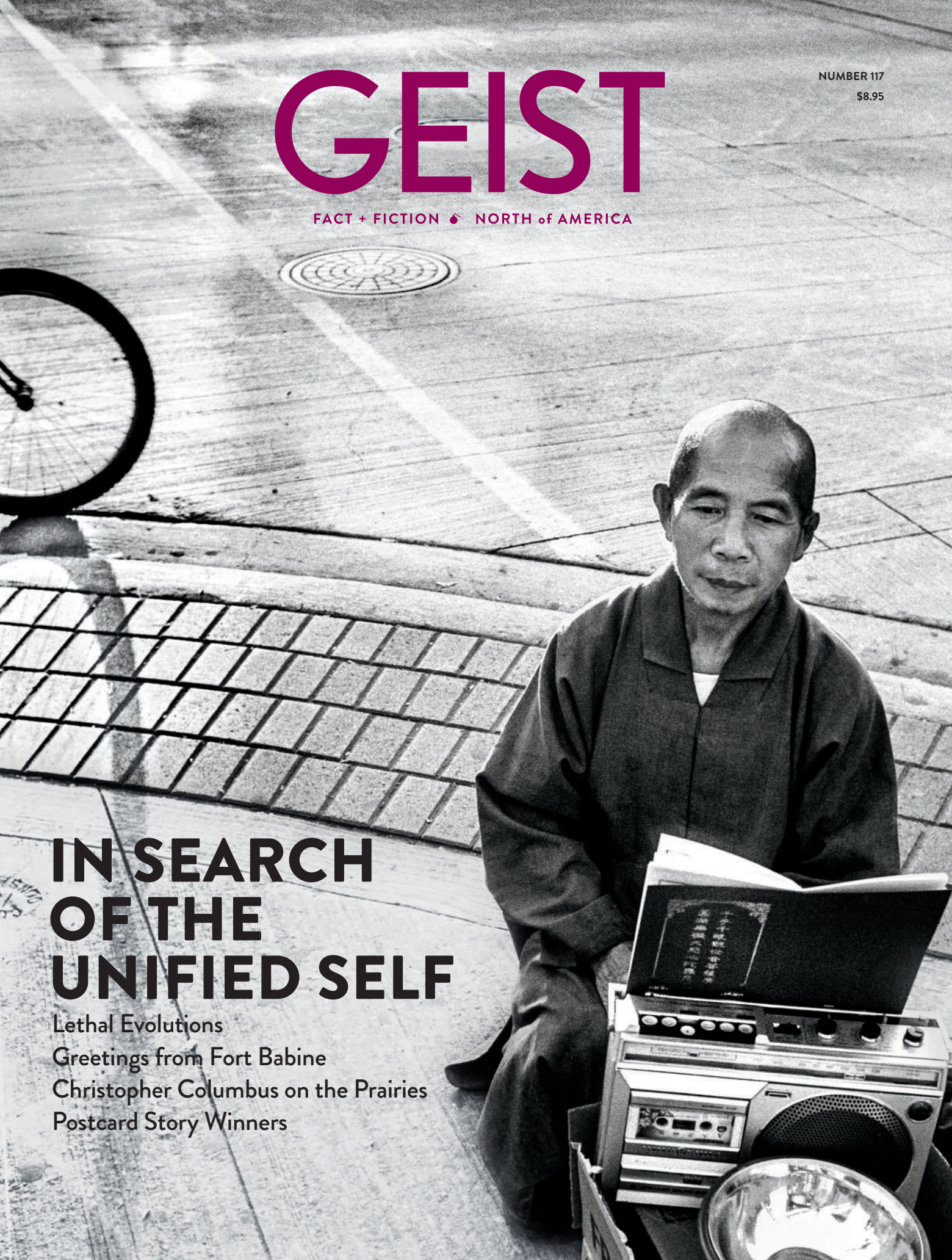
NUMBER 117
$8.95

GEIST

FACT + FICTION NORTH of AMERICA



IN SEARCH OF THE UNIFIED SELF

Lethal Evolutions
Greetings from Fort Babine
Christopher Columbus on the Prairies
Postcard Story Winners

OVER $100,000 AWARDED TO CANADIAN WRITERS

THROUGH COMPETITIONS THAT SUPPORT EMERGING TALENT AND WRITERS WITH AN ESTABLISHED PUBLISHING HISTORY

$15,000 Carter V. Cooper Short Fiction Award

$10,000 for Best Story by an Emerging Writer
$5,000 for Best Story by a Writer at Any Career Point

$3,000 Gwendolyn MacEwen Poetry Award

$1,500 for Best Suite by an Emerging Writer
$1,500 for Best Suite by a Writer at Any Career Point

DEADLINE: MARCH 20, 2021

Due to Covid-19, we extended the submission dates for the competitions, till we again see Spring days shine!

Details at: ExileQuarterly.com – under "Competitions"

13 WINNING AND SHORTLISTED AUTHORS HAVE GONE ON TO FULL BOOK (OR FIRST BOOK) PUBLICATION WITH EXILE EDITIONS:

Silvia Moreno-Garcia*[1] Christine Miscione*[2] Matthew Loney* Veronica Gaylie Linda Rogers Leon Rooke
Martha Bátiz*[3] Hugh Graham*[4] Rafi Aaron Austin Clarke[5] George McWhirter[5] Jeff Bien
Coming 2021: emerging winner Katie Zdybel's* collection, *Equipoise*

*Author's first collection of stories. [1] Aurora Short Fiction, finalist. [2] ReLit Short Fiction, winner.
[3] International Latino Book Award for Best Popular Fiction, winner. [4] Danuta Gleed First Book, finalist. [5] ReLit Short Fiction, finalist.

all books available at www.ExileEditions.com / free shipping within Canada

ADVICE FOR THE LIT-LORN

ARE YOU A WRITER?

Do you have a writing question, conundrum, dispute, dilemma, quandary or pickle?

Send your questions to **advice@geist.com**

We will reply to all answerable questions, whether or not we post them.

Dear Geist,

Which is correct, 4:00, four o'clock or 1600 h?

—Floria, Windsor ON

I have been writing and rewriting a creative non-fiction story for about a year. How do I know when the story is ready to send out?

—Teetering, Gimli MB

In my fiction writing workshop, one person said that the dad character is superfluous and I should delete him. Another person said I should write more about the dad character. Both of these writers are very astute. Help!

—Dave, Red Deer AB

As featured in the weekly *Geist* newsletter!

SUBSCRIBE AT **GEIST.COM/NEWSLETTER**

READ MORE AT **GEIST.COM/LIT-LORN**

GEIST

FACT + FICTION NORTH of AMERICA

GEIST
Volume 28 • Number 117

FEATURES

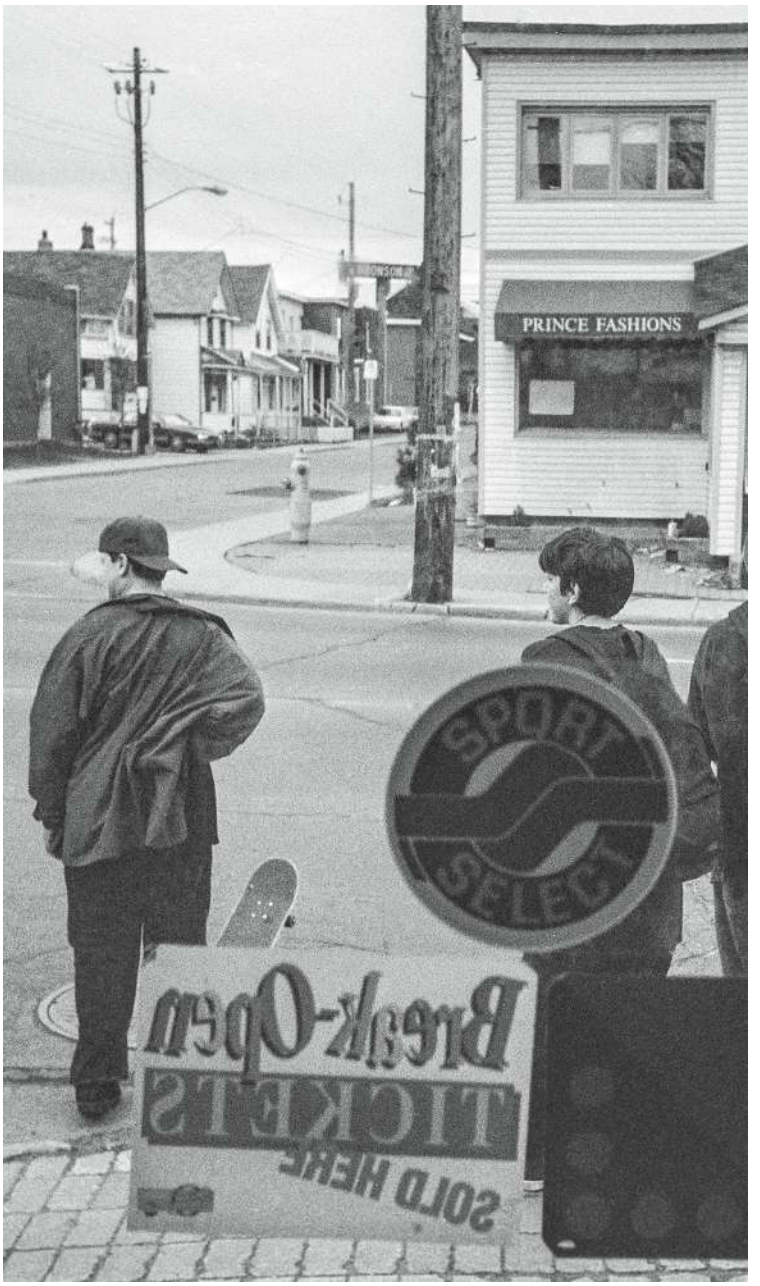
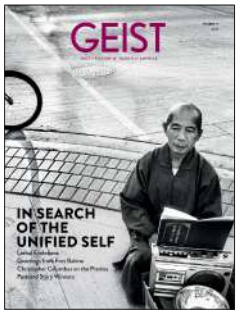


Photo: Fabrice Strippoli (see page 44)

GEIST

until the rising pressure clears the air



COVER: Buddhist monk, Spadina Avenue, Toronto, 2000, by Fabrice Strippoli. See more on page 44.

GEIST

PUBLISHED BY
The Geist Foundation

PUBLISHER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
AnnMarie MacKinnon

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Michał Kozłowski

OPERATIONS MANAGER
Lisa Fedorak

ADMINISTRATION
Interns: Sylvia Tran, Sam Scott
Volunteers: Kelsea O'Connor, Patty Osborne, Jennesia Pedri

BRAIN TRUST
Stephen Osborne, Mary Schendlinger
Co-founders, Consulting Publishers

DESIGNER
Eric Uhlich

LAYOUT
Vancouver Desktop Publishing

PROOFREADER
Helen Godolphin

ACCOUNTANT
Mindy Abramowitz CGA, CPA

CIRCULATION
Larry Wyatt

WEB ARCHITECTS
Metro Publisher

DISTRIBUTION
Magazines Canada

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Barbara Zatyko

FIRST SUBSCRIBER
Jane Springer

MOST VALUABLE PUZZLERS
Jim Lowe & Brian Goth

ENDNOTES EDITOR
Michael Hayward

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Jordan Abel, Bartosz Barczak, Kevin Barefoot, Kathy Battye, Trevor Battye, andrea bennett, Jill Boettger, Jesmine Cham, Anson Ching, C.E. Coughlan, Lauren Dembicky, Melissa Edwards, Robert Everett-Green, Daniel Francis, Randy Fred, Lily Gontard, Michael Hayward, Jonathan Heggen, Gillian Jerome, Jocelyn Kuang, Brian Lam, Thad McIlroy, Billeh Nickerson, Christine Novosel, Kelsea O'Connor, Patty Osborne, Eric Peterson, Dan Post, Debby Reis, Kris Rothstein, Norbert Ruebsaat, Jane Silcott, Roni Simunovic, Paul Tough, Eric Uhlich, Michelle van der Merwe

SUPPORT THE GEIST FOUNDATION:
GEIST.COM/DONATE
WWW.GEIST.COM

GRIN AND BEAR IT

This year has been all about keeping people safe: we've sheltered in place, avoided touching our faces, worn masks and washed our hands raw to protect our fellow humans from illness. But it may be time to take a good hard look at ourselves and ask if we are really doing enough to keep people from harm. Particularly during bear season.

A story by Oliver Milman in the online edition of the *Guardian* on August 7, 2020, reported on a post on the Facebook page of the US National Park Service. In the post, the Park Service warned park goers against pushing their hiking companions to the ground in an attempt to save themselves from a bear attack "even if [they] think the friendship has run its course." Perhaps this post was a shift away from the rugged American individualism we north of the 49th parallel have grown accustomed to seeing in our neighbours and is instead a subtle nod toward a burgeoning embrace of more socialistic tendencies. We can only hope. For now, vis-à-vis bears (and perhaps other areas of life), we suggest relying on the advice—a little more Canadian in timbre—given by this editor's dad for bear season: you don't have to be the fastest, you just can't be the slowest.

FELONIOUS LIT

Our judges spotted an alarming trend among the many wonderful entries for the 16th Annual Literal Literary Postcard Story Contest. A disproportionately high number of submitted stories featured a female protagonist who kills or fantasizes about killing her male paramour. Admittedly, each year there are a few instances of stories that contain this as a main theme, but this year … well, it's been a tough year, clearly. But isn't this one facet of the purpose literature serves—to explore life's "what ifs" in a safe, non-felonious way?

The judges of the 2020 Postcard Contest were: andrea bennett, Anson Ching, Lauren Dembicky, Helen Godolphin, Kate Helmore, Kathleen Murdock, Patty Osborne, Jennesia Pedri, Debby Reis and Michelle van der Merwe. A hearty thanks goes out to the judges for their diligent reading (and for not calling the cops on contest entrants)!

The winners of the Postcard Contest appear on page 35.

CAUGHT READING

Bryan Hansen reads Geist 114 *in his all-season, indoor hammock.*

CONGRATULATIONS…

… to long-time *Geist* contributors Ivan Coyote for winning the BC and Yukon Book Prizes Jim Deva Prize for Writing That Provokes for their book *Rebent Sinner* (Arsenal Pulp Press); to Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas for winning the BC and Yukon Book Prizes Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize for his book *Carpe Fin: A Haida Manga* (Douglas & McIntyre); and to Henry Doyle, whose poetry won the Muriel's Journey Poetry Prize.

Photo: Stuart Jacobsen

From the Philosophy Matters page on Facebook. As readers of Hegel doubtless know, Pür Geist is the finest of boozes.

OOPS

In "Enclosing Some Snapshots: The Photography of Métis Activist James Brady" (No. 116), the Métis scholar Dr. Sherry Farrell-Racette was referred to as Sherry Facette. We regret the error.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

John O'Sullivan was a professional photographer in the 1980s. After working as a marketing executive for twenty years, he retired and returned to photography in 2012. See more of his work on Flickr under josullivan.59.

The images that accompany "To Coronavirus, C: An Anthropological Abecedary" by Hilary M.V. Leathem on pages 38–43 are from *Breathe*, an exhibition of masks at the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, which runs from September 24, 2020 to January 17, 2021. The co-creators, Nathalie Bertin and Lisa Shepherd, both Métis artists, invited other artists to create masks to reflect emotions felt around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. See more at whyte.org/breathe.

WRITE TO GEIST

✉ Thoughts, opinions, comments and queries are welcome and encouraged, and should be sent to:

The Editor, *Geist*
letters@geist.com
Snailmail:
#210 – 111 West Hastings Street
Vancouver BC V6B 1H4

Letters may be edited for clarity, brevity and decorum.

Geist is published four times a year.

Subscriptions: in Canada: $25 (1 year); in the United States: $40; and elsewhere: $45. Visa and MasterCard accepted.

Correspondence and inquiries: subs@geist.com, advertising@geist.com, letters@geist.com, editor@geist.com.

Include SASE with Canadian postage or IRC with all submissions and queries.
#210 – 111 West Hastings Street
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 1H4
Submission guidelines are available at geist.com.

ISSN 1181-6554.

Geist swaps its subscriber list with other cultural magazines for one-time mailings. Please contact us if you prefer not to receive these mailings.

Publications Mail Agreement 40069678

Registration No. 07582

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
Circulation Department,
#210 – 111 West Hastings Street
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 1H4
Email: geist@geist.com
Tel: (604) 681-9161, 1-888-GEIST-EH;
Fax: (604) 677-6319; Web: geist.com

Geist is a member of Magazines Canada and the Magazine Association of BC. Indexed in the *Canadian Literary Periodicals Index* and available on Proquest.

The Geist Foundation receives assistance from private donors, the Canada Council, the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver and the Cultural Human Resources Council.

Photo by Romain Pelletier

Photo by John O'Sullivan

Lights on Queensway

OLA SZCZECINSKA

I'm not saying it's okay to mail hallucinogens after your father dies

It was a Monday in December and I was driving along the Queensway in Toronto with my mother. I was silently praying to the neon cross made up of tiny white Christmas bulbs stationed on the roof of the tallest building because ten days earlier I couriered two boxes of illegal drugs from California: one to my parents' home in Toronto where I'd be staying over Christmas; another to my friend Jason in Arizona. The box I sent to Jason had a large, marble-sized ball of hash in it. The other contained six marble-sized balls of hash, four marijuana vaping cartridges, ten fuzzy-peach jujube edibles, a small jar of magic mushrooms and a vaping cartridge with about a hundred hits of DMT.

I never used to be the kind of person who mailed drugs. Never used to be the kind of person who prayed to neon crosses. But then my father died in January that same year and I began talking to the air around me. I began to imagine he was just off in the periphery somewhere, maybe sometimes helping me out.

I remember being in the Bay one evening with my mother the week after my father died. I was in the changing room, agonizing over which black dress to buy for his funeral the next day. When my mother brought me yet another black dress to try on, I began to cry. I couldn't think anymore. I leaned against the wall and wept, asked him out loud to please tell me which dress he wanted me to buy. A firm voice then rose up from within me, and I knew it was his. He said he wanted me to wear the velour jumpsuit with the matching jacket. I felt such relief, grabbed the outfit and left.

I'm not saying it's okay to mail hallucinogens after your father dies. To be honest, I had done this before, about two or three times, in fact, without incident. I had never sent this much before though, not even close. And I only ever used the USPS. But the USPS was closed—it being a Saturday afternoon—and I'd be returning to Canada the following day, so I had no choice but to use the courier. When they asked to see my

passport as a form of ID I readily handed it over.

The next day I returned to Canada.

On Tuesday Jason called me. His voice was shaky. "I just got a call from a detective. He asked me if I'd been expecting a shipment of marijuana in the mail."

"You're fucking kidding me," I said. Hot blood exploded beneath the skin of my cheeks.

Jason said he'd denied everything to the detective, who in turn had told Jason that it was a small amount, "barely a misdemeanour." The detective also told Jason there were some candy canes in the box: "Who would do that?" He said: "If it ever occurs to you who might have sent you such a gift, tell them not to do it again."

Jason assured him that he would, if it ever occurred to him who sent the box. Then the detective hung up.

I hoped that was the end of it for Jason, but what about the other package? The one the size of a felony? Wouldn't the cops think to check that package now too? The two packages were, after all, on the very same waybill.

I refreshed the tracking over and over for days, watched the package's slow progress across America. It headed south from Sacramento to Nevada, then to Arizona and then New Mexico.

"I just need it to get into Canada," I told Jason over the phone one day, for the hundredth time.

"It's nothin'," he said. "Don't even worry about it."

"Once it gets past Customs, everything will be all right," I said, also for the hundredth time. "Canada Post won't care. Right? They won't care."

"It's not like it's fentanyl," he said. "It's nothin', it's nothin'. Don't even worry about it."

In the meantime, I had to help my mother. I cleaned the bathroom, emptied the attic, drove to the Polish grocery store for bread and meat and pickles. I called her internet service provider to get her a better deal and installed Spotify on her phone. I sat at the kitchen table with her, drank tea with milk and chatted about plans. I smiled a lot, as if I wasn't going to be locked up.

On Friday night I went out drinking with a friend. We sat at the bar and in the pauses of our conversations I snuck glances at my iPhone and checked the whereabouts of my drugs. They were getting close, travelling all day across Ohio. Finally, at eleven-thirty, I received the update I'd been waiting for: Package Arrived in Vaughan, Ontario.

Relief exploded like pure light inside my chest: I was free. Everything would be okay now, I told my friend. I had learned my lesson. I was not going to jail. And I will never, ever do anything like this again.

Then I got super drunk.

The package did not move at all after arriving in Vaughan. Which was fine because mail generally doesn't get processed over weekends.

When Monday morning came I opened my eyes and immediately reached for my phone, hoping my drugs would be out for delivery. But the tracking update read: "Customs Delay."

I felt sick. I was unable to get out of bed. I googled "jail," "felony," "cost of legal defence of a felony charge in Ontario." I pictured myself behind bars slowly wasting away, alone, in the dark.

After about an hour of this I got up. I had to help my mother.

She wanted to go to the Bay that day to return some cashmere sweaters she'd bought online. She liked to buy enough items to qualify for the free shipping, then return the items she didn't want to the store.

"The purple one, definitely," I told her, a few hours later, when we were at the Bay.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

I refreshed again: Customs Delay.

"Uh-huh, definitely," I said.

It was five-thirty in the evening.

We got into the car and drove back home along the Queensway. The sky was like a bright blue bruise and suddenly the neon cross loomed into view. I gripped the steering wheel, stared at the cross and began to pray. I begged my father to get me out of this one, swore to him I would never ever do anything like this again. Never break any laws, never lie, just let me get out of this one and I'll get on the straight path. A straighter path, I qualified, because I can't do the corporate thing, if that's what you want. "You know I can't do the really straight path," I said to him, silently. "But I swear I'll smarten up, get serious. You're right, I hear you, I've taken everything for granted. I see that now: I'm an idiot, an idiot."

At home I prepared myself to destroy my mother by telling her that I would need a lawyer due to the fact that I mailed myself a bunch of drugs. I refreshed my phone one more time and in that moment the status changed: Released for International Shipping.

I grabbed my mother and hugged her for a long time in the kitchen while she smiled and hugged me back. Then I hurried to the bathroom where I fell on my knees, thanked my father and cried really hard.

Ola Szczecinska was born in Poland and immigrated to Toronto with her family in 1984. She completed an MA in History at the University of Toronto. She moved overseas to teach ESL and began to write short stories. When she returned to Canada she continued to write, while working in bars and bush camps. She lives in Madawaska Valley, Ontario.

My Week in Tunisia

JEFF SHUCARD

Enjoy the fresh kebab while your freshly dented fender gets fixed

It's a sunny spring morning in Tunis and I am seated at a sidewalk café enjoying a café au lait, waiting for my guide, Yusef, to begin our week of exploration in north and central Tunisia. This is my first visit to the African continent, to the fabled empire of ancient Carthage.

Frenetic activity abounds. Cars on blocks being torn apart. Engines, transmissions lay scattered about the sidewalk. Islamic fashion boutiques, beauty salons buzzing with activity. Across the street goats and sheep are tethered on the sidewalk outside a butcher shop awaiting slaughter. The carcasses of their recently departed brothers and sisters hang all around them. Soon they too will become kebab. A group of children on their way to school affectionately pet the heads of the doomed sheep. They are dressed in ubiquitous global mall fashion. NY Yankees caps are all the rage. American jeans culture unites all humanity.

I love this place, its energy, the barely contained chaos. But it's the traffic in the four-way intersection that is most fascinating: a big, anarchist bumper-car free-for-all. The proximity of the auto repair shops and eateries is fortuitous for those who don't make it safely through—enjoy a fresh kebab while your freshly dented fender is straightened out.

I arrived in Tunisia in the dead of night after my evening flight from Lisbon was delayed three times. It was much too late to check in to my Airbnb. There was no internet service at the airport and my Portuguese phone did not work. This made it impossible to contact my host, Sema, and advise her of my predicament. I got in a taxi and asked the driver to take me to a hotel, any hotel.

"Reservation?" he asked.

"No," I said.

He pulled away, burning rubber. I could see him eyeballing me in the rear-view mirror. We entered a grim industrial zone that looked like a perfect place to dump the corpse of a naïve tourist arriving at 2 a.m. without accommodations.

We entered the city, drove down a broad avenue and pulled up in front of a massive, block-long hotel. I ran inside and asked for a room. The night clerk produced an old wooden box of dog-eared index cards and began flipping through them. Had I stepped into a time warp? Eventually I was handed a key. An ancient bellhop in full regalia suddenly appeared at my side and took my bag. We squeezed into the tiny elevator and rattled upward. The elevator came to a shuddering stop on the seventh floor. The bellhop pulled open the scissor door. "Je suis sur le neuvième," I said, showing him my key. He acknowledged me by beckoning me to follow him. I glanced at the elevator button panel: the seventh floor was as high as it went.

We stepped out of the elevator into a war zone. I followed the bellhop's pillbox hat down a long, dark hallway that looked as if it had just been bombed and the rubble had yet to be cleared away. Sections of the ceiling were missing, and bare electrical wiring hung down like metal vines. Piles of plaster lay on the floor. A shoe buffing machine sat forlornly against one wall, still plugged in.

I thought of making a run for it. But where would I go? It was almost 3 a.m. Then a staircase appeared before us. We climbed up to the non-existent ninth floor.

This floor was intact and the room seemed fine, although there were no pillows on the bed. I asked for a pillow. The bellhop left the room and returned with one. I looked over the bathroom: no towels. Again, the bellhop went off to find one, then departed. I got ready for bed. Brushing my teeth in the bathroom, I noticed there was no toilet paper either.

I awoke at 8 a.m., pulled the curtains open and was astonished to see a maze of flat white sun-drenched rooftops stretching out before me. I made my way back through the war zone to the lobby to check my email. I found a long list of messages from my Airbnb host: 12:30 a.m.: Mr. Jeff, Where are you? 1 a.m.: Mr. Jeff, Are you OK? Please call, I am waiting. 1:30: Mr. Jeff, I am very worried. Please call… On and on through the night. The final message was sent at 5 a.m.: Mr. Jeff, Please, please call me. I can't sleep.

I felt terrible this woman had spent a sleepless night due to my ignorance. I obviously had much to learn about Tunisian culture. I immediately sent her an email explaining my plight and we arranged to meet at her place in the afternoon.

Outside the hotel, a long procession of activist groups was peacefully marching along while an indifferent police presence stood by. I asked a fellow standing beside me what was going on. He chuckled and said that since the revolution (of 2011), such demonstrations were routine.

Just then a large group of women paraded by. "What do they represent?" I asked.

"Women's equality at work," the man explained.

"My wife is with them," he added. "Mine would be too," I reassured him.

I joyfully wandered about. A neighbourhood of exceptionally marvellous fin de siècle decrepitude appeared before me. I ordered a café au lait and croissant at a café. The men seated about paid me absolutely no attention, as if I didn't exist. I felt like the Invisible

Man. I finished my coffee and continued on my way. I wandered up and down funky sun-drenched streets, past sprawling street markets, tiny ateliers, cafés and eateries. By noon I'd had enough and took a taxi to Sema's address in La Marsa.

Sema's place was near the archaeological sites of ancient Carthage, my main interest in Tunisia. I had long dreamed of climbing up to the heights of Byrsa, the walled citadel, to look out over the bay in which the magnificent harbour had sheltered hundreds of war and merchant ships. Since about 1200 BCE the Phoenicians had sailed throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, trading with the native peoples. Their outpost in Tunisia grew into a city and empire that lasted until Rome finally sacked Carthage in 146 BCE. How different the world might have become had Hannibal and his elephants succeeded in taking Rome.

Sema greeted me like a long-lost brother. The charming rooftop apartment exceeded all expectations. We sat and chatted over mint tea. She is an engineer in her twenties, bright and sophisticated. I asked Sema to please help me find a guide with a car. That evening she informed me that she'd found one. He would meet me in the morning.

So it is that Yusef now appears at my table. I invite him to join me for a coffee. I'm not sure he knows what to make of me. He is a university-educated tour guide used to conducting group tours for travel agencies, not for flâneurs more interested in hole-in-the-wall shops and daily life. "Let's just stroll around, see the sights, have a coffee here and there. Tell me about your kids, your family. I'll ask you about the nuances of your culture. For instance, why am I invisible here?"

Yusef is fine with my suggestion, but he does not answer my question. We plan a four-day road trip, but there is a slight problem: A strike by the petrol transporters has just begun, and long lines of vehicles are forming at every gas station in the country, attempting to fill up before supplies run out.

"Will we have enough gas for today?" I ask.

"Perhaps," he replies, offering me a cryptic smile.

I immediately like Yusef, but his driving skills mystify me. We get in his car, an old battle-weary Fiat. Traffic is heavy and Yusef starts pulling on the handbrake to stop the car. This constant ratcheting of the brake handle is worrisome. These cables, I know from experience, often snap. I am afraid to ask him if he is aware that there is a pedal for this function. I'm more afraid to ask if we even have any brakes. No petrol, no brakes. This should be interesting.

We spend the morning visiting the ruins of Carthage, and the afternoon strolling through the Tunis medina. The medieval warrens are well preserved, but, unfortunately for the hundreds of shopkeepers there, devoid of tourists. The horrific 2015 terrorist attacks on the Bardo Museum devastated the Tunisian tourist industry, leaving hotels and splendid beach resorts virtually empty. If tourism has picked up again, I have yet to see any evidence of it.

The following morning, I meet Yusef again to begin our journey. I follow him to the car. For a moment I am confused. I could have sworn his car was white. This one is blue.

"Is this the same car?" I ask.

"No," he explains, "it's my sister's."

"No petrol?"

"All closed up," he confirms, "but this car is full. We have enough fuel for today. Then we will have to see."

"Let's do it," I say.

If we run out of gas, I muse, there are plenty of camels wandering around. Now that would be something. And we won't freeze to death on the side of the road under these balmy Mediterranean skies. Or starve either: all along the roadways are locals selling fresh escargot, fruit, breads, mint tea and other foodstuffs.

We arrive in the popular beach resort of Sousse, Yusef's hometown. Like many others in the region, his

BAROMETER

It knows how much pressure you've been under,
that you could use a change of atmosphere.
Your seasonal depressions, rain and thunder,
are easier to predict than they appear.

Now at the bottom of this cloudy heap,
this ocean of wind, this black gloom of despair
will hang like high fog or a fitful sleep
until the rising pressure clears the air.
—*James Pollock*

James Pollock is the author of Sailing to Babylon *(Able Muse Press) and* You Are Here: Essays on the Art of Poetry in Canada *(The Porcupine's Quill).*

TELEVISION

This medium who sees visions at a distance
and reveals them to you upon demand,
channels all she can with the assistance
of one remote control to guide the hand.

The full depth of the trance all this induces,
transfixing the eye with what it views,
depends on the emotion this produces,
and on how much grief one has to lose.

He has been a finalist for both the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. He lives in Madison, WI, and at jamespollock.org.

---

family owns an orchard of some two hundred olive trees. Each winter, the entire family joins in the annual harvest. Such time-honoured tradition produces not only the finest olive oil, but a connection to nature that is swiftly disappearing as we inch our way ever farther from the taste, smell and feel of the natural world.

"Not a bad life, I would imagine?"

"A good life," Yusef responds. "People are happy here. They have what they need. They have lived here for many generations. A better life than in the city."

"Abundance," I suggest.

"Yes. Exactly. Abundance."

Everywhere we go for the next few days—Kairouan, El Jem, El Kef—the markets are chock full of produce. Great heaps of fruit and vegetables, nuts and grains, as well as all the edible creatures of land and sea. So, too, the abundance of history. Tunisia is a millennial layer cake of civilizations. This living connection with the ancient world ignites my imagination.

The next morning Yusef meets me at my hotel with yet another car. The petrol strike had better end soon before he runs out of cars to borrow. We drive along roads bordering vast olive tree orchards, through modest villages, past camels wandering about, and we arrive in El Jem in time for lunch. The Roman amphitheatre here, a magnificent, awe-inspiring structure, rises out of the centre of the dusty unassuming town like a giant spaceship from the distant past. I stare at it in disbelief as it comes into sight, unable for an instant to comprehend how something so remarkable could exist in the middle of nowhere.

We lunch in a cramped little eatery just a block from the amphitheatre. As I chomp away on my kebab, gazing upon the greatness that was Rome, I imagine that these theatres were to Roman communities what the extravagant shopping malls of today are to us now: vast amusement centres designed to pacify the plebeians while the empire goes about its business.

From El Jem we head for the marvellous Roman forum temples of Subaytila, then leisurely begin making our way back to Sousse, where we must drop off car number three. It has been a wonderful trip; I've seen more than I can readily process and made a new friend.

In Sousse, Yusef leaves me at a café while he makes the final car arrangements. I have a coffee, open my map and look over my notes. Before long Yusef returns in another car that looks familiar. Yes, it's his younger sister's again. We'll use it for the drive back to Tunis—but what's this I see? Two young women in the back seat, Yusef's sister and a girlfriend joining us for the drive.

The young women, dressed in jeans, are shy at first, but I am determined to shed my Invisible Man persona, to take this last opportunity before leaving Tunisia to be seen. Hayfa, Yusef's sister, is a successful entrepreneur. She manufactures a line of women's clothing. Her friend is an agronomist. I use an old classroom icebreaker to get them talking: Canadians, I explain, know very little, if anything, about Tunisia. What three things would they want Canadians to know about their country? They think about it and return with their answer: cuisine is one; the seaside, the beautiful beaches is two; and their culture—the welcoming, sincere nature of the people is three. I applaud their choices. "I couldn't agree more," I tell them.

From there we go to music. Have they listened to Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell? No, they haven't. They dial these iconic names up on their phones and in a minute, we're listening to "Everybody Knows" and "Carey." By the time we reach Tunis that evening, we are old friends trading contact info. But I still have one bit of unfinished business. "Why am I invisible in your country?" I ask.

They don't understand, but Yusef does. He smiles and explains the question in Arabic. Now they get it. They think it over for a minute. "It's a way we show respect," they tell me. "You have white hair, you deserve respect." We share another laugh. "Thank you,"

I say, "that's just perfect." Yusef and I exchange a knowing smile.

They drop me off at Sema's. Yusef and I embrace. We promise to stay in touch. I sit on my rooftop terrace that evening and reflect on my experience there. Tunisia is the only democratic country in the Arab world; political and social activists demonstrate freely and, according to my guide, there is freedom of the press as well. The Tunisian Code of Personal Status of 1956 abolished polygamy and arranged marriage and gave women the right to run for seats in Parliament. I never for a moment felt unwelcome or unsafe anywhere I went—aside from Yusef's unique approach to braking. The cuisine, the mint tea and coffee were delicious. I fulfilled my dream of standing upon the Byrsa Hill and gazing out over the splendid sea and I followed the 3,000 year timeline of Phoenician, Roman, Moorish, Ottoman and French culture that has played out here in the towns and cities themselves, and in impressive museums and archaeological sites throughout the country. Best of all, I leave Tunisia feeling that now I too am a small part of this fascinating land having offered my new friends a generous slice of Canadian culture: *the wind is in from Africa and last night I couldn't sleep…*

Jeff Shucard was born in Paterson, New Jersey. He attended the Minneapolis School of Art and Franconia College. After a decade of foreign travel, he settled in Vancouver for twenty years and worked in education and music. Now he lives in Portugal.

The Art of Shaving Oneself

JONATHAN MONTPETIT

In search of a unified self

I learned how to shave from my father. His was a face of leather; it could take a razor, daily. Just lather, a blade, a steady hand, then two slaps on the cheeks and my dad would say, "I feel like a new man."

•

At the age of seven, I'm given an old Gillette, the blade removed. I drag it across my face in time with him. He sings Johnny Horton, "North to Alaska." And I sing too, as if growing up were just a matter of imitation, of going through the motions until we inhabit bigger bodies and thicker skins.

•

Who did the first men learn from? In 1772, Jean-Jacques Perret writes *Pogonotomy, The Art of Learning to Shave Oneself*, a how-to guide and manifesto, a cry for emancipation from the sloppy surgeons who moonlight as barbers.

"What is certain," writes Perret, "is that men who shave themselves have a face more unified and more pleasing than those shaved by strangers."

Perret counsels patience in the beginning so that, in time, we are able to practice the art as masters: "It is essential to shave with freedom and audacity."

"Above all," he writes, "pay attention to the movement of the wrist."

•

It is unthinkable to me to shave every day. I rash too easily; I burn with the pull of a razor across my face. And so, I am unable to make myself new again with the same frequency as my father.

I keep too much of myself from the day before, and the day before that. By five o'clock I'm shadowed by the marriage that didn't quite work out, by the car I wasn't able to fix, by the wars I refused to fight.

When I meet myself in the mirror, there is no son next to me, seeing in my face a leather cured by the eyes of an expectant child.

•

The time has come for others—the young, the callow-cheeked—to learn the art of shaving. Will they crib from experts, or learn from those who know them best?

I was made one way; the other is what's left.

Jonathan Montpetit is a journalist with CBC Montreal. He is the recipient of numerous awards for his reporting from Afghanistan and about the far-right movement in Quebec. Find him on Twitter @jonmontpetit.

Illustration from "La pogonotomie, ou L'art d'apprendre a se raser soi-meme" by Jean-Jacques Perret, 1770.

Solace

KRISTEN DEN HARTOG

Bud was one of the few who'd seen Stewart's face as it was

I'm writing a non-fiction book set in a World War I military hospital in Toronto, so I spend a lot of time in the past. An influx of wounded led to the hasty creation of the hospital in a cash register factory on Christie Street, in the west end of the city. The original building no longer stands, and the site is home to a sprawling seniors' residence with a plaque that commemorates the hospital. I sometimes walk there and wander around, trying to imagine the site as it was, with veterans soaking up the sun, nurses in their long blue dresses and white veils, and now and then a train rolling by. Through service records, old newspaper accounts, letters and diaries, I'm coming to know patients and staff in an intimate way, even though a century separates us.

One of the patients I've been most intrigued by is Stewart, a farmer from rural Quebec who enlisted in the Canadian army at age twenty. His service record says he had red hair and blue eyes, and travelled overseas in spring 1917. By autumn, he'd entered the Battle of Passchendaele. Images taken by official war photographers capture the desolation: pack mules sink in mud amid miles of wending duckboards; mist drifts around blackened trees; remnants of ragged forest stretch to a bleak horizon.

Stewart was one of about 12,000 Canadians wounded at Passchendaele; more than 4,000 Canadians died there. The number of casualties is hard to fathom, and balloons to something like 500,000 when you add in other nationalities, including the enemy. Shrapnel pierced Stewart's thigh, hip, abdomen, forearm and shoulder, but worst of all, "Rt eye and nose carried away," as one note in his file put it. "Face badly destroyed," wrote the first doctor who tended him at a makeshift station near the front line. He administered morphine, bandaged the wounds and sent Stewart on to the next level of care.

In England, and later in Canada, Stewart underwent nearly thirty operations as surgeons attempted to rebuild his face. The field of plastic surgery blossomed during this time, with a constant stream of wounded on whom to try out bold new medical procedures. Cartilage, bone and tissue were excavated from one part of a body and moved to another; artists drew the stages of each meticulous operation and helped surgeons define what a finished face should look like. Sculptors produced exquisitely detailed copper masks to hide lasting disfigurements. Much of the literature of the time praises the miraculous work of both the doctors and the artists: in most cases, one article claimed, the surgeries "remove all horror and grotesqueness and make the sufferer quite normal again." Another writer stressed that, when surgery failed, masks banished "timidity and self-consciousness," and ensured the men were "no longer objects of repulsion to every onlooker."

In reality the rebuilt faces not only looked maimed, they often functioned poorly. Stewart's remaining eye teared and his nose ran. Because of other wounds, he couldn't reach his face. "This is a greater disability than usual," one doctor noted, "since his facial condition requires constant attention involving the use of his hands.… He complains of disfigurement and liability to cold. Unable to stand any exposure."

Stewart was still living at the hospital well into the 1920s. I learned that he married in Toronto in 1928 and moved to a small community in northern Ontario. There the information ended, and although I had enough compelling detail for my book, I was curious about Stewart's

Photo: "Mud and barbed wire through which the Canadians advanced during the Battle of Passchendaele," November 1917. William Rider-Rider / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-002165

life after the war. I discovered brief mentions in modern-day newspapers of a man named Bud, who shared Stewart's surname and lived in the same community. In the middle of April 2020, unable to find any way to contact Bud online, I wrote a letter to an address listed on Canada 411. I waited. Mail had slowed because of COVID-19, but finally an answer arrived. My name and address were written in a shaky hand on the envelope, which was so light that I knew it contained just one sheet of paper. Perhaps Bud was unrelated, or a know-nothing great-nephew—or he knew everything and was only writing to tell me to mind my own business and stop poking around in other people's family histories. Instead, the letter read:

Dear Ms. den Hartog,

Thank you for your letter recently received.… Due to the virus and now living in a nursing home, the usual amenities are not at hand, so this note paper and terrible writing will have to suffice for now. My father was the most courageous man one could ever know. Despite grievous wounds rendering most people as candidates for suicide, he went on to become a husband, father and pillar of his small community.… I will be pleased to help you in your research.

So began a series of exchanges. Bud was, by his own admission, "computer illiterate," so we talked on the phone a couple of times a week. Sometimes I sent questions by mail so he could think a while before answering by phone. COVID-19 prevented me from visiting, but we agreed that one day we would meet in person. He'd just turned ninety and had no children. As he put it, the exchanges were "to our mutual benefit," and an unexpected friendship formed.

From Bud I learned that his mother and father met while Stewart was still a patient in Toronto. Just after the war, young women regularly visited men cooped up in hospitals, and newspapers reminded people not to forget the soldiers. As much as I wanted love and romance for Stewart, Bud reined me in. "If it would've been nowadays, they probably wouldn't have stayed together." His father always wore what he called his bandage—not the elaborately painted copper masks made by artists, but a simple cotton one knitted by his sister, which came up over his missing eye and down over his crudely rebuilt nose. It tied behind his head and left a permanent groove, the way that glasses deepen the bridge of a nose after years of wearing them. Bud didn't think his mother ever saw his father without the bandage, through nearly forty years of marriage.

But Bud did. When Stewart washed and shaved, young Bud helped him retie the mask. "My father was a pretty scary-looking creature without his bandage," he confided. Yet Bud, one of the few who saw Stewart's face as it was, easily grew accustomed to it. Though he didn't romanticize his father, a tenderness accompanied each story Bud shared. His father was "all blown up out of hell" in Europe but found solace on his patch of land in northern Ontario, where he dug a pond that ducks frequented. "He got so much joy from that place. You're the writer. I can't explain how much that meant to him."

As I learned about the father, I came to know the son as well: his sharp memory, his curiosity, his frustration when his gravelly voice gave out, his wish to be out of the nursing home and "back to where I want to be." I knew about his battles with his cell phone, technology he was mastering in part for my sake. Then suddenly Bud stopped calling. His number gave the message that the caller "wasn't available," and calls to the nursing home didn't get me anywhere because of privacy rules: I wasn't family; they couldn't tell me anything. Sometimes the day nurse suggested to call in the evening, and sometimes the night nurse suggested to call in the day.

Eventually I received a letter from the executor of Bud's estate, a man who'd been his friend for almost forty years. A few days after our last conversation, Bud had fallen and broken his hip and been moved to hospital. He'd undergone an operation, but rapidly declined after the procedure. "I know that Bud was excited and interested in talking with you," his friend wrote. "It really did help him to help you." Through this new series of exchanges, I learned that Bud wore Stewart's regimental badge pinned to his baseball cap, and that he was renowned in his community for sharing and preserving local history. I even received images of Stewart, which Bud had hoped to dig up for me on his return home: a snapshot taken on the ship returning from England, and a formal portrait in suit and boutonnière. In each photo, the mask covers much of his face, but his mouth and one eye smile.

There was something especially moving about "meeting" Bud when I did, with COVID-19 illuminating the crisis in our nursing homes, and the general public coming to greater awareness of the loneliness of so many elderly people. He trusted me with his father's intimate story so that I could share it with others. "I have long thought that someday my dad's story might be told," Bud wrote to me in his first letter, "but I never expected to see that day."

Kristen den Hartog is a novelist and non-fiction writer whose most recent book, The Cowkeeper's Wish, *was co-authored with her sister Tracy Kasaboski. She lives in Toronto. Read more of her work at geist.com*

N'awlins

EVELYN LAU

with a closing line from Ted Hughes

Festooned with beads, dusted in beignet sugar,
baubles clank against our soft stomachs
as we trip down filthy streets
reeking of lust, pools of urine steaming

beneath bricked and shuttered shotguns. Masked figures
rear like horse heads against a wrought-iron
sky. Is this the America he promised us?
Now that he's gone, his ghost remains restless—

unappeased by altars in voodoo shops, spells dissolved
in a glass of water under the bed, snags of Spanish moss
and alligator claws. Kratom in my purse and codeine
fizzing my blood, we gag at shoeless scruff

who parades Bourbon St. with his cardboard sign:
Will lick pussy for anything. In the Lower Ninth Ward,
lots of overgrown weeds and grass form
a kind of parkland, slabs of foundation visible

like cemetery stones. Did you know a football field
of wetlands succumbs to saltwater every hour? On the cover
of *USA Today*, it's the farm states now where the levees
are gone. The couple from Huntsville says you just

keep moving on, rebuild in the wake of tornadoes,
hurricanes, floods. *What else y'all gonna do?*
Prepare to live in a motel by the freeway, food-shop
at gas station marts, camp under the overpass

littered with chopsticks, tampons, tire skins.
Still the trees are blue-black with grackles,
sunset a peach haze behind the water tower,
oil refinery. We are walking where maybe no one

has walked before. *Beautiful, beautiful America!*

Evelyn Lau is the Vancouver author of thirteen books, including eight volumes of poetry. From 2011–2014, she served as Vancouver's Poet Laureate. Her most recent collection is Pineapple Express *(Anvil, 2020).*

From Greetings from Fort Babine *by Whess Harman. Whess Harman is Carrier Wit'at, a nation amalgamated by the federal government under the Lake Babine Nation. They are currently living and working on the territories*

Lumberjack Politicos

GAIL SCOTT

From Heroine. *Republished by Coach House Books in 2019 (originally published in 1987). Gail Scott is the author of several novels, as well as collections of essays and stories. She is the cofounder of* Spirale *and is co-editor of the New Narrative anthology* Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative.

On the mountaintop a sinking sunray hits a tile floor. Shining through the public chalet's glass doors. The coffee machine guard has gone home. But there is a troubled rumour in the room. Suddenly the place fills up with freaks. Hippies left over from the sixties. And some striking hospital workers. Everybody's stoned. The sky is gathering like a stormy sea. On the radio, a voice says: 'Bonsoir, les amis. Nous voilà à presque dix ans de la Crise d'octobre. Notons, par ailleurs, l'approche d'une tempête de neige vers 20 heures.'

The tourist awakes with a start. From the chalet loudspeaker comes an interminable waltz. Across the enormous room, the Canadian Olympic champion rowing team draped in maple leaves and posing for a picture. 'Let them eat cake,' shouts a voice in the tourist's head, still partly from his dream. Now the presidential candidate is on the radio: 'My fellow Americans. The good news is we've bombed the Russians. (This turns out to be a joke—he didn't know the microphone was on.) And now we'll have peace, for our nuclear weapons have wiped the place out.' To erase the horror, the tourist clutches at his throat. Trying to think of something nice.

Puttin' on the ritz.

of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. Their multidisciplinary practice includes beading, illustration, poetry and curation. Current projects include the Potlatch Punk *series, various text-based works, zines and comics.*

He steps out into the sparse snowflakes again, a funny smile on his face.

Yes, tomorrow's winter. I love the solitude of white. Tonight the storm will do it, do it. Sometimes rigidity of the body precedes catharsis. That's okay. Flying high. Then appears that country road going by the gravestones and Her cameo in the sky. Just focus on something else. That passage from Colette. *Au haut du ciel, le soleil buvait la rosée, putréfiait le champignon nouveau-né, criblait de guêpes la vigne trop vieille et ses raisins chétifs, et Vinca avec Lisette rejetaient, du même mouvement, le léger Spencer de tricot …*

Shh, for a novel I have to be more rational. The heroine could be from Brecht. Emphasizing the external the better to distance from inner chaos. What was it that Dr. Schweitzer said on the radio? Women often lack the moral courage to synthesize what they know. Due to fragmentation of consciousness resulting from current upheaval of their roles. What does he mean? Maudit chauvin. We're not scared. Just exhausted from wanting to change the world and have love, too. Anyway, a heroine can be sad, distressed, it just has to be in a social context. That way she doesn't feel sorrier for herself than for the others. We're all smarting from retreat. Two steps forward, one step back. The trick is to keep looking toward the future, thus cancelling out nostalgia. Standing there among the dark oak booths in the Cracow Café was just a moment in passing time. (For a thing begun has already started to end.) The hookers were dancing, the politicos talking politics in their lumberjack shirts. Very seventies.

The place also had a slot machine, reminiscent of the fifties. They used to have one in the restaurant back in Lively. You put your quarter in and a steel hand came down to grab a present: rhinestone rings, water pistols, pink-rimmed glasses. Faute de quoi faire I stood in line with the other well-

combed ducks in leather jackets waiting for my turn. Suddenly, my love, you were standing behind me. 'Cigarette?' you asked. 'Yes,' I answered, thinking: 'to get through the walls of prayer.' I always thought that with the first smoke in the morning. It was my declaration of revolt. Because, Sepia, Her sickness led to Her conversion. So when She found tobacco traces in Her little beaded evening bag I'd borrowed, She stood in the night garden adding tobacco to the list of dancing, cards, fornication, and other pleasures Christians aren't allowed. I know it's silly, but that first smoke always gave a kick smack in the guilt-lined stomach. After that, each transgression seemed easier.

We took to meeting at the Cracow daily. My love, you said you liked my toughness. It's too bad, then, that the paranoia poked through the surface. Starting the night they called me to the office at the wire service. And the boss said: 'I've been told you have subversive links.' I was astounded because as yet I hadn't even joined the group. After my shift, rushing in the grey dawn to the Cracow for one more cup of coffee and some sausage before I slept, I kept thinking maybe I should never see any of you again. Then what to my surprise, my love, but to find you weren't even there. Because your group had to keep moving to avoid cops at counters listening in on conversations. And word had come, without my knowing, to change to Figaro's. The new café has a NO EXIT sign on the brick wall. (Some kind of existential joke.) I guess the fear of losing what I'd found struck pretty deeply. Because later, my love, when the comrades showed me a group photo round the jukebox taken on that very morning, I immediately noticed your absence. 'Where's Jon?' I asked, my voice rising as I looked harder at the picture. You had told me you were there. The comrades stared with hostile eyes. Probably thinking: 'Uptight anglaise. No resistance.' Janis was singing that song about freedom equalling nothing left to lose. Turned up loud so people at other tables couldn't hear Comrade X advising new recruits. He was talking of the need to be professional, to have total commitment to the group. Revolutionaries, in view of the effort required for the collective project, had to share everything. This included, uh, personal things (his pock-marked cheek twitched). He added: 'Never leave evidence for cops of *appartenance* to the group. Because they'll charge you with sedition.

Naturally, there were certain *zones libres* (where a person could really be himself). Dans ces lieux, on vivait déjà les lendemains qui chantent. One was that funny high-up apartment of the surrealists, standing on the knoll overlooking St-Denis. Spring of '79, I'm there dancing in Comrade N's arms (while you, my love, sleep nonplussed in an upstairs room). I loved the image. That redheaded woman getting skinnier and skinnier from cigarettes and coffee at all those meetings. But also more intense, more knowledgeable, more daring. N and I move across the floor, ever closer, under a huge eye painted by Salvador Dalí. Past those bedrooms our new surrealist friends call Hiroshima, Nagasaki. Thanks to them, our political actions are becoming pure theatre. This excites me. Soon we're going to occupy the Chilean consulate. N and I neatly sidestep a red banner on which they're painting: PINOCHET = DICTATURE = TORTURE. So huge that every letter has to dry and get rolled up before they start the next one. The idea is to shock by unfurling banners the passing bourgeois people can't avoid.

'Tis a beautiful May day. Across from the cement-block consulate is a hill on which rises the phallic tower of l'Université de Montréal. On appelle ça le pénis d'Ernest Cormier. He was the

TOUCH OF DEATH

Selected cause-of-death categories from the Cinemorgue, a wiki dedicated to tracking, by actor, how various TV and film characters died. See more at cinemorgue.fandom.com/wiki/Cinemorgue_Wiki.

apocalypse
black hole
brain removal
cannibalism
ceasing to exist
chestburster
constipation
crucifixion
defenestration
dinosaur attack
ejection into space
flatulence
head explosion
hiccups
karma
life-force draining
orgasm
overeating
petrification
time paradox
plague
planetary destruction
quicksand
rapid aging
spine removal
sunlight
touch of death
vampire bite
vaporization
vomiting
voodoo
walking
werewolf attack
wood chipper

architect. The mayor wants to match it with one of his own on the mountain or somewhere. My role is peripheral but essential: that of a bourgeois woman. Pretending to be chatting, chatting in a strategic telephone booth near the consulate. (The costume is a tailored skirt, nipped-in waist, lipstick, kid gloves. Very French.) That way the phone will be free to warn the occupying comrades when the cops arrive. Now the comrades are unfurling the giant banners listing tortures committed by Pinochet: DOIGTS COUPÉ À GUITARISTE DE GAUCHE. This banner bleeds down against the wall. Another, marked DES CENTAINES D'ENFANTS DISPARUS slowly folds and unfolds in the breeze. FEMMES ENCEINTES VIOLÉES EN PRISON reaches over and catches on the branch of a tree.

Oh, this is kind of fun. Outside my booth the air is perfumed with budding maple. A cute couple from the university strolls by. I smile at young love. And thank God I'm not up there with the others. I hate closed spaces, locked rooms, elevators. If I'd been in there and got arrested, the dark tight space of a paddy wagon would make me panic. That happened to a comrade who got picked up pretending to prostitute herself in support of the hookers. In the Black Maria she felt terrible, scared as she was her parents would get the wrong idea. She cried and cried. Finally an older woman arrested at the same time said: 'Don't worry, honey, you can get used to anything after a while.'

Still, I wondered why Comrade N gave me the outside job the way he did. His voice sounded ironic when he said: 'In your telephone booth you'll be safe.' As if the English weren't as tough. We were in the revolutionary headquarters waiting for the others to come back from postering for the next week's action. The room was chilly and kind of dreary, due to the black cop-proof curtains. N handed me a Gauloise, his nose twitching. The sexual tension was phenomenal. I loved the scent of his long brown hair, the tan skin which in certain lights made his eyes look turquoise. On the radio, coincidentally, they were playing 'Dancing with Mr. D.' He took my hand and started moving, left foot over right. I followed, breathing in his earthy odour. My love, for both of us I was about to smash monogamy. What better way to end my jealousy? Just as my head and N's moved close enough to kiss, the door opened. A group of comrades came in.

Sepia, the guilty part was that even though I did my part of the consulate job right, it didn't help. The cop cars came so fast the comrades didn't have time to organize their forces. From my little knoll I watched them getting dragged from consulate to paddy wagon. Later, Denise, a bank manager's daughter from Mont Laurier, said she was held in a steel elevator between floors at Parthenais prison. And felt up by three big cops (she has beautiful full breasts) to make her talk. Then she looked at me kind of suspiciously.

Well, I wasn't the only one who deep inside felt cowardly. A member of the central committee didn't even show. He said it was because he'd had to save his rare collection of *poissons rouges*. For the tank broke as he was moving from a burnt-out flat on St-André, torched by the landlord for the insurance. Making him, he pointed out, another victim of the greedy capitalist gentrification rampant in the city. His friend Comrade X said it was unprofessional to think everyone must put themselves at risk. A serious organization never permits more than minor amputation in order to remain vigorous.

For a while after, N and I hardly spoke, due to ending up in different F-group factions on account of organizational tensions arising from the occupation. But despite the problems, the operation was deemed successful. It got good press. There was a picture of our banners in the newspaper.

Light, Camera, Action

STEVEN HEIGHTON

From Reaching Mithymna: Among the Volunteers & Refugees on Lesvos. *Published by Biblioasis in 2020. Steven Heighton received the Governor General's Award for Poetry for his 2016 collection* The Waking Comes Late. *He lives in Kingston, ON, and at stevenheighton.com.*

A few nights ago, when I helped here briefly, the refugees were too cold and desperate to form a patient line. Today it's the rainstorm pushing them in—seeking shelter as much as clothing. We need to do this fast. For a few minutes Klaus and Larry and I hold our own, the two men calling requests back to me—*pants, large … coat, small boy's … shoes, size eight*—while I scramble, ducking the two hanging bulbs in the dully lit tent, locating stuff. Dieter and Oskar must have been here this morning; the tent's contents

have been ferociously curated; the good order is helping me keep up.

But every time I return with something, the front of the crowd has splayed wider and is pressing in harder. A young man edges sidewise around the barrier of the tables, speaking in Arabic as he points at his shoes and lifts his foot. The shoe flaps open like a puppet's mouth. Larry orders him back. The man shrugs, tries again to explain. Two men are slipping in around the other side. Now a beefy man with a broad, aggressive smile—he is used to ordering, not asking—shoves to the front. None of the men he has bumped aside protest. I signal to the other two who are trying to slip in: please wait. They pause and nod, but as I hustle back toward the clothing bins I see them, peripherally, pushing in again. "Get the hell out of here!" Larry snaps, the first angry command I've heard any volunteer issue.

The big man is suddenly next to me at the back of the tent: carnivorous grin, black eyes flashing as he gestures toward a pair of oxblood brogues. His own shoes look scuffed but solid. I point back at the queue: "Please go wait in line." He snatches the brogues and walks off, meanwhile raising his free hand like a stop sign, ordering the other men back. For a moment they retreat. Then they resume pushing in. Within minutes the tent is steaming with wet, shivering men rifling through bins and boxes. Their clouding breaths are rank with the ketones of hunger. Klaus, Larry and I have been demoted to mere observers trying to ensure that no one grabs more than one of anything.

"Larry, this guy here"—I nod toward a haggard adolescent, who's pointing at his shredded trainers—"he still doesn't have any shoes."

"He checked all the shoes," Larry snarls. "He just didn't like the style."

But Larry's mood doesn't affect his work ethic, and when the rush finally dies off he once more radiates fatherly goodwill toward everyone, refugees and volunteers alike. Does he mind if I go help out at the buses now? "Sure thing, Steve. You too, Klaus. We got a lot of folks into nice dry stuff, huh? I can hold the fort here on my own."

I put on my fedora and splash past the two UNHCR tents, full of people sitting, eating a hot meal, waiting for their turn to board a bus. Kanella's barking, muffled by the pelting rain, comes from inside the canteen hut where she has to stay at busy times. I join the other volunteers at the bus-boarding zone: five roped-off lanes sloping down to the lower parking lot, where a fleet of buses sit idling. The ropes, slung from rebar stakes pounded into the dirt, are trimmed with ribbons and parti-coloured scraps like prayer flags. These could be ticket lanes at an indie music festival.

On a wooden post at the head of each lane hangs a board painted with a symbol: red heart, black diamond, green flower, blue lemniscate, yellow circle (on which someone has drawn a happy face). Refugees travelling together receive chits marked with one of the symbols and line up accordingly, so that family and village units, as well as ethnic and linguistic groups, stay unified. Today I'll be collecting the chits, counting out sixty—one busload, minus small children, who can sit on their parents' laps—then admitting the group to a boarding lane closed off at the lower end by another volunteer.

Refugees are emerging out of the tents into the rain. A Dutch film crew is recording everything for a news documentary, the cameraman hunched under a streaming black poncho like a Victorian photographer under a cape. From the base of the lane, the shift foreman, an MFA student from Baltimore named Jaquon, yells something I can't quite hear over the music now thumping out—the Clash, *London Calling*—but I think he said *Two minutes*.

The buses are backing into position. I turn to face the refugees—they're getting soaked all over again—and raise two fingers. "Two minutes!" A man of about twenty-five stands at the front, a step away. His blue eyes bulge at me. His red hair, receding at the temples, is plastered to his skull. Trimmed goatee, skin sunburned pink. Among the darker, black-haired Syrians he looks almost albino. One of the men says something to him and he—keeping his eyes on my face—replies in Arabic. Then to me, in barely accented English: "Will there be enough buses?"

"I can't say for sure"—I have to raise my voice over the Clash—"but I hope so. We hope so."

"Why are you not allowed to say? This is some secret?"

"No, I mean I'm not sure."

"You are not sure." He stares, blinking rain out of his eyes. It's pummelling down, dripping off the end of his nose, sluicing in streams off my hat brim. My jacket is damp and heavy. The people behind him look back and forth between us.

"You're the first fluent English speaker I've met so far," I say.

"Yes, I am acting as translator on our journey."

"I've wanted to ask … I hope you don't mind … the crossing … what was it like?"

A blank look—then he nods. "Good luck was with us. The water was only to our knees. I was scooping with a pail. But some were too afraid to do anything."

"You weren't afraid?"

"Something gave me strength," he says, "for the crossing."

At this point in the script, the cut and paste Muslim should praise Allah for lending him strength. This man shows no inclination to attribute his strength or survival to mediation divine or otherwise. His protrusive eyes look ready to pop from his skull in fury, as if I've done him some personal harm, though I sense he always speaks bluntly and maybe more so when translating his words.

"You ask me why I left Syria?"

"No," I say, "but—I mean—I would ask."

"I left because my president is trying to kill me. And because ISIL is trying to kill me. And because the Americans"—he blinks, eyelids red, as if unconsciously including me in an accusation he is trying not to spell out—"the Americans are trying to kill me. And the French are trying to kill me. And now the fucking *Russians* are trying to kill me."

Seeing light and feeling heat, I glance to the side: the camera under the rain poncho is nosing in while a crewman gaffs a small arc light above it. The Syrian looks over, clears his throat with the word "enough" and melts back into the crowd. The camera halts, pans away downhill.

At the bottom Jaquon waves a limp, sopping baseball cap and yells up to me, "Let's do it!" The frenzied opening bars of "Brand New Cadillac" rip through the rain as if on cue. I yank back the rope and the refugees start down while I collect their chits, trying to keep count.

Probably the Syrian's brief speech was rehearsed—maybe while bailing out the raft during the crossing this morning? Maybe he sensed that his only chance to deliver it was now—that later, while queued up at European borders, he would be well-advised to say nothing.

While the refugees flow down the five lanes toward the buses, I notice several NGO reps standing around the film crew. There's Andromache—a social worker from Mytilene, the island's capital—who's on subcontract with the UNHCR. Unlike the regular reps with their various team-logoed rain gear, she in her light parka and jeans is sodden, her blond curls pasted flat. She's the only rep not making a point of constantly, flagrantly passing in front of the camera to log media hits for their brand. She smiles gamely and gives me the thumbs-up. I nod back, trying to keep my count.

When I look up again, a Dutch NGO rep across the lane is eyeing me from under the sagging brim of a Tilley hat. "Can we not turn off this *ridiculous* music?" Her pleading eyes are not unkind and for a moment I think I see what they see: OXY's manic, make-do informality, the rutted bus lanes bannered with rags, the shingle overhead with its smiley circle like a sun in a toddler's finger painting, the soggy chits, the shriekingly unsuitable playlist, the volunteers in their unmatching civvies …

Moments later, just after Joe Strummer bawls *Jesus Christ*, *where d'you get that Cadillac*, her wish is mysteriously granted. The music stops, its raving replaced by scores of voices, English and Arabic overlapping, some arguing ("Stop now, man, I think we're over sixty!" Me: "No, I counted fifty-five!" Jaquon: "Better count again!"), and the rumble of buses, and the lashing patter of rain on

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS ON THE PRAIRIES

From the Response of Weeds *by Bertrand Bickersteth. Published by NeWest Press in 2020. Born in Sierra Leone, Bertrand Bickersteth grew up in Edmonton, Calgary and Olds, AB. His poetry has appeared in numerous publications. He lives in Calgary.*

You always wonder what you will see
next when you are the first to arrive.
He must have been disappointed,
though, when confronted with all that gold
growing in the fields.
Wild roses
Wild canola
Goldenrod
Golden wheat
At this point of his journeying
having achieved the very heartland of the continent
even the Great Discoverer
would have been getting tired of El Dorado myths.
It probably didn't occur to him that
walking the long walk back
to the boats would give him the opportunity
to misname the largesse
of his own luck.

mud. I start recounting and discover a note pencilled on a scrap of newsprint: WE THANK YOU. Runnels of muddy water are gushing down the lanes. Somewhere Shayn calls repeatedly, "Mind your step, mates!" And now—just as randomly as it cut out—the music revives, this time a Bollywood dance medley.

Despite the rain and cold, my own discomfort, my concern about the refugees (how can they not be exhausted and hypothermic by now?) and my novice fear of fucking things up, the day has become exhilarating, in fact beautiful. The refugees are clearly pleased, relieved to be making progress. Their feelings are contagious. The young ones high-five me as they stride past. The older men put a hand to their hearts—a gesture I've always loved and now mimic—or else shake my hand and chant, "*Assalamu alaikum*!" A few young men bearing chits for later buses try to push into the queue, but mostly everything clicks along. I'm swaying a little to the Bollywood bass line, in part to keep warm but also because of the unspoken esprit de corps now encompassing both volunteers and refugees.

Night falls early, the rain tapers to a trickle. By 7 p.m. the last available bus groans away and by the time my shift ends, at eleven, just a dozen refugees—three families—remain in OXY. They have one of the space-heated big tops to themselves. Maybe the extra room is a slight consolation; what they wanted, of course, was to move on with the others. We've served hot soup, pita bread and fruit to these few overnight guests, whom we get to pamper.

A car arrives from town and Omiros climbs out of the passenger seat with an unlit cigarette between his lips. He's here for the overnight shift. I and a few others will return to town in the car. I put out my hand for a shake and he counter-offers a fist. As we bump fists, he says in his villainous Spanish basso, "I hear that some refugees will stay here tonight and take a rest."

"They were disappointed at first," I say. "They seem happier now."

"I will go see them. I wish I could speak Arabic." (I keep forgetting that he can't, although his father was Syrian.) "I wish all of them could stay overnight, for a rest. More and more, they go straight to Moria, which is much too full."

He issues me a statutory cigarette (all the volunteers smoke) and while I peer at my fingers holding it, he draws a lighter from his trenchcoat.

"Here, Stavros."

"OK," I inhale. "Thanks."

THE BLOCK WATCH CO-CAPTAIN EMAILS REGARDING MORE B AND E'S

From Earle Street *by Arleen Paré. Published by Talonbooks in 2020. Arleen Paré has published five collections of poetry. She is a winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. She lives in Victoria.*

found poem

the police would like to remind you to keep your eyes and ears open for persons suspicious or vehicles beaters or hummers moving trucks flatbeds in your neighbourhood skateboards persons not wearing seasonal clothing or wearing sunglasses in inclement weather there have been residential B and Es in the area between five and six in the morning suspects are targeting homes with no activity police encourage you to keep locked and secure report suspicious activities fires set on the curbside wearing masks if you plan to leave vacation or business here are some tips have a friend stay in your home or many friends lock your doors ask a friend to come by make many friends put newspaper and mail deliveries on hold or picked up by a friend right away lock your doors lock your windows have a friend one of many use an alarm keep your eyes and your ears report flatbeds hummers fires on curbsides early-morning human activity with or without `balaclavas and masks

From The Cursed Hermit: A Hobtown Mystery #2 *by Kris Bertin and Alexander Forbes. Published by Conundrum Press in 2019. Kris Bertin and Alexander Forbes are childhood friends who studied separate disciplines in order to reunite and make comics as adults. Their critically acclaimed graphic novel series, Hobtown Mystery Stories, is available from Conundrum Press. They grew up in Lincoln, New Brunswick, and live in Halifax, Nova Scotia.*

Sentimental Decadence

LARRY TREMBLAY

From Impurity, *translated by Sheila Fischman. Published by Talonbooks in 2020. Larry Tremblay has published more than twenty books as a playwright, poet, novelist and essayist. Tremblay teaches acting at l'École supérieure de théâtre de l'Université du Québec à Montréal.*

Something is choking him. He touches his face. It's not his. The violent beating of his heart drives him out of bed. Then, all at once, it all comes back. He fell asleep with his wife's herbal mask on his face. He showers. Greenish water runs off his face and disappears, swirling down the bathtub drain.

He has slept for a long time. It's nearly noon. He goes out to buy the papers.

It's the kind of day he likes: humid, sultry, heavy. He arrives at the terrace of the Fleur d'oranger, on avenue Bernard. Orders bacon and eggs. He can't remember the last time he was so bold. Generally, he strictly follows his doctor's orders: a fat-free diet. His cholesterol is high. He's not overweight, doesn't take escalators, walks as much as possible. But he doesn't play any sports and the mere thought of physical activity bores him. He laughs at the over-fifties, in head-to-toe Nike, sweat-stained, breathing like hopeless cases longing to postpone the moment when they'll breathe their last. He observes with disgust the grimacing faces of Sunday joggers, their twisted lips seeking air, their expressions demented, as if they were being pursued by death itself.

Antoine eats with gusto, plunging into his newspapers. Nothing about Félix Maltais. Not even a snippet. For the media, file closed, subject exhausted. The way that Félix had chosen to put an end to his life unsettles Antoine. Ever since hearing of his death, memories keep recurring. He orders another coffee and drives this wave of nostalgia from his mind. He prefers not to reopen that page of his life. He doesn't like emotivity and its jolts. Just as he can't stand tearjerker films and, even less, TV shows that deal with family reunions. He is appalled by emotional exhibitionism. Why must millions of viewers, transformed into slimy voyeurs, witness the misfortunes of others, their heartbreaks and their minor happinesses when the camera zooms in on their shameless embraces? A son, a mother, a twin sister lost for ten, twenty, thirty years, has been found for them and here they are, snuffling on the set of a TV show, surrounded by lights, their outbursts encouraged by a presenter with an impeccable smile—irrefutable proof of the depth of her intentions. Why participate in this media circus to deal with your relationship problems, to confess to the woman in your life that you've been cheating on her from the start, to tell your parents you've been a sex worker since you were thirteen, to announce to your children that you're going to start changing genders in one week's time?

When his son was still in his teens and living at home, Antoine quarrelled with him more than once about that kind of program. Jonathan was not ashamed to let his tears flow when a mother embraced a daughter who'd just been found. Though he explained to the boy that it was just a trick to hike up profits, Jonathan refused to listen to his arguments. He couldn't see how bringing together people separated by the vicissitudes of life could be a malevolent venture because it was taking place under spotlights.

"I think just the opposite of you, Dad. Reunions or confessions, when they get media attention, become exemplary, and those who experience them come out of them magnified."

"I doubt that."

"For once in their lives they emerge from the shadows. They can finally be seen. Their struggles and their joys are legitimized."

"Know what you are?"

"I have a hunch you're going to tell me."

"A sentimental decadent. You can't analyze a phenomenon from its causes, you're too obsessed by its shimmering effects."

"Thus sayeth the philosophy prof!"

Antoine has often imagined that his son's taste for cultural products manufactured with a view to exciting the tear ducts of their consumers originated in his first name. He'd never liked "Jonathan." But it was Alice, at the birth of their son, who had won. She had imposed her "Jonathan" so vehemently that he had to retreat with his "Philippe" between his teeth. Would he have been a better father, a different one anyway, if he'd held a "Philippe" in his arms?

Alice had wanted to give birth to a little seagull like Jonathan Livingston, who had so moved her that she'd sworn that one day she would have a little Jonathan of her own. She and Antoine had

had a heated discussion about the work of Richard Bach, author of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Actually, neither of them had read the novel, but they'd seen the film a few years after the book came out. Antoine had hated it and enjoyed ridiculing it in front of Alice, who'd been overwhelmed by it. Yes, the metaphor was exaggerated, sure, it was somewhat sanctimonious, but the message was so profound and the values so universal that one could only be touched by the story of that bird.

"Jonathan," she argued, "represents the search for oneself. He recognizes his own difference. He knows that life is a journey. He must find the road that will lead him to himself. You see, Antoine, it's simple: gulls only fly to look for food. They spend their time quarrelling over fish heads. They rummage in garbage cans. That's their life and for them, it's fine. No one questions their way of doing things. Little Jonathan, though, is different. He wants to fly for the sake of flying, not just for food. He is thirsty and hungry for freedom, don't you get it? It's simple, maybe a little too facile for you, but it's genuine: not to live to eat but to eat to live. That film is a hymn to audacity. It's an appeal. We must fight against all the conformity that prevents us from being what we are. We have to leave the clan that forces us to be content with garbage piled up in dumps when the pure and infinite sky is shining above our heads."

"You're just babbling clichés. You don't hear yourself: to be what we are! But we are what we are. Find our difference! Yes! What a discovery! I'm born. Fine, so far, so good. Then one day I discover that I'm different. Fantastic! So what do I do? I go out to search for what I am. What an adventure! And what do I discover? I discover that I am what I am. Let's hear it for Jonathan Livingston Seagull and his flights of philosophy!"

"You're a cynic. If I have a child I'll be his nest and also the sky where he will spread his wings."

Alice had murmured that sentence. Antoine had been careful to point out that her lyrical style contained quite a few contradictions and announced nothing good for the future of the child.

"How do you want to be his nest and his sky at the same time? Don't you think that after a few flights he'll realize that staying or going amounts to the same thing?"

"Antoine, I'm pregnant."

For once, he didn't answer back. Startled, he remained silent as he held Alice very tightly in his arms.

Moments of Doubt

ADAM LEITH GOLLNER
& DANY LAFERRIÈRE

From Working in the Bathtub: Conversations with the Immortal Dany Laferrière. *Published by Linda Leith Publishing in 2020. Adam Leith Gollner's writing has appeared in the* Paris Review, *the* New York Times, Vanity Fair, *and other publications. Dany Laferrière is an award-winning Haitian-Canadian poet, essayist and novelist. In 2015 he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada.*

ADAM LEITH GOLLNER: In his Paris Review interview, Hemingway was asked what he thought about the idea of being politically engaged as a novelist. He said he had no problem with being a political writer, but that "All you can be sure about in a political-minded writer is that if his work should last, you will have to skip the politics when you read it." It stops being relevant.

DANY LAFERRIÈRE: Yes, that's it. It's as simple as that. For me, being political is speaking about literature. It's writing books. It's being available and free, meeting people, travelling. Politics for me means drawing in a neat way the figure of a writer. For me a writer is the most subversive being, the most interesting. They are in this moment what priests used to be throughout history, these beings that were paid by the population to speak about spirituality. Whether we like it or not, I've always liked the figure of the priest.

ALG: What is it that you find interesting about priests?

DL: A priest is a type who is financially covered, who lives tax-free. He's there, and all we ask him to do is speak about the soul three times per day, hold mass, take care of church affairs, hold rituals. People die, and he goes into their homes and greets the family. He blesses the children that are born, he marries people. I always found that it's one of society's best inventions, to create trades or groups that are completely removed from time, removed from the present, removed from urgency. To me, the writer is the modern embodiment of that.

ALG: In a secular way?

DL: It's more secular, yes, because we are no longer a society dominated by faith, except perhaps in the Middle East, which is increasingly so. In the West, we're no longer ruled by faith. The writer has to fill that need. And to do it well, he cannot endorse others. He has to have a deep understanding of the force of that spiritual function, so that he cannot take on any other functions. For me, a writer who is too engaged politically is a writer who has forgotten the energy that came over them when they wrote their first big book. When you've seen someone persist in that battle—Melville's white whale, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Les misérables*—if you become too engaged in the concrete realities of politics, it's because you've forgotten that energy. That energy, it takes a life to get to the point where you've made something that contains that energy. And that absolute quality, you can find it in a book from any century, you open it, and you find that same energy. That, to me, takes a lifetime. For me, a writer who engages politically is a writer who doubts their own talent. Because they should have the talent to touch everyone everywhere at all times.

IRON CURTAIN TACTICS

From Free Expression in Canada *by Robert Ivan Martin. Published by Stairway Press in 2012. Robert Ivan Martin is Professor of Law, Emeritus at the University of Western Ontario.*

There are said to be two sub-branches of scandalizing the court. The first is described as directing scurrilous abuse at a judge. It is difficult to define what is meant by scurrilous abuse, but some examples can be found in Canadian cases: describing a judge and a jury at a murder trial as themselves murderers and adding that the judge was a torturer; saying that a judicial decision was silly and could not have been made by a sane judge; saying that a court was a mockery of justice; writing of a particular trial that the "whole thing stinks from the word go"; accusing a court of intimidation and "iron curtain" tactics; and, finally, saying of a particular magistrate, "If that bastard hears the case I will see to it that he is defrocked and debarred."

So, what exactly is scurrilous abuse? It is using language about a judge or the judiciary which is vulgar, abusive and threatening. In the 1980s a court in New Brunswick said that any criticism that was "ungentlemanly" amounted to scandalizing the court.

ALG: But you have to doubt your talent, don't you?

DL: The engagement in writing is so profound, and requires so much energy, that it should take all of our mental, psychological, and aesthetic faculties. If we see that we have time to do other stuff, it's that we're no longer in it. If we feel we have to do other work to be part of our age, it means we've dropped it. In that case, it's better to drop literature and go completely into the other role. Because your writing will disappear like the others. You know it, deep down, when you are no longer putting your life into a sentence. And when you know that, you should do something else. Even if you're really talented. It's lost time, because it will erase itself, it will sink. And we aren't lacking books. That's not what's lacking. There are enough books out there to get us through to the time when the next batch of dinosaurs goes extinct.

ALG: But I imagine that you have had moments of doubt.

DL: All writers have doubts. That's inside of the writing. There's only doubt at the core of writing. It's strange, I don't have many doubts, because I seem to be speaking here as though literature was resting on eternity. And that's not the way I write. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not saying, "Don't write if you aren't a genius." Not at all, au contraire. Writing itself is linked to doubt, it moves forward that way. It's an engine that advances by explosion. There's a moment when the motor is stalled and we write a sentence and, boom—it's back on. It nourishes itself on doubt. We can't write without doubting the very universe to begin with, our own universe, our own reality, our own writing itself. That's within the system. I'm saying if you really believe you can do something else better, do it.

ALG: To get back to this idea of the writer as priest, as a person who speaks about the idea of spirituality and the state of the soul—are you a spiritual person?

DL: No! I mean yes, certainly, like everyone else that is. Otherwise there wouldn't be any readers, we wouldn't listen to any music. That spirituality is a kind of eternity. We are in a total materiality and yet at the same time we have a need for spirituality that has nothing to do with God or reli-

gion. Spirituality is a leap beyond the present moment. We are jumping, right now, we're leaving… Let's say we have a very serious problem, a sick child. We meet our friend and we tell them our problem. We could be in Haiti, we have no medicine, no money. But then our friend tells us a story, and we start to laugh. For me, that's spirituality. We start laughing. We leave the present moment, which is completely intense, and then brusquely, we have the impression that there's another space in which we can laugh, which also means that all our problems are ephemeral. As though we were instantly transported forty years into the future. In forty years, we will have lost our grandparents, or parents, we will have known death, and got over it. It's as though we are lifted out in that peal of laughter, by that peal of laughter. That's what I call spirituality.

Perfectly Good Beans

GEORGE K. ILSLEY

From The Home Stretch: a Father, a Son and All the Things They Never Talk About. *Published by Arsenal Pulp Press in 2020. George K. Ilsley is the author of the story collection* Random Acts of Hatred *and the novel* ManBug. *He lives in Vancouver.*

The morning after I arrived on my first trip, Dad wanted to go grocery shopping. I said I had to clean first. I had to clean the fridge. "I'm not putting groceries in that fridge," I said.

Inside the fridge was covered with dead fruit flies.

Hundreds of them.

The house was infested. I made a trap and caught a bunch of larger ones, and the fruit flies kept getting smaller and smaller—but they also kept coming. Where were they coming from?

I investigated, searching for the fruit fly factory. In the basement, I found the problem. Dad had left some turnips (I think) in the cold room in plastic grocery bags. He had probably intended to deal with the produce later but then forgot. This was October—they were not from this year. The rank brown slime in the bags appeared to have already been processed through a digestive tract. That is a polite way to say it looked exactly like shit, and smelled even worse. Putrefaction slid from the bags and seeped into wooden crates. All this disgusting mess had to be hauled out of the cold room, up out of the basement, and taken outdoors.

The house immediately felt cleaner.

The fruit fly situation improved rapidly, but the cleanup in the cold room was just beginning. What else might be sitting in there, rotting? There were rows of bottled preserves, decades old, which should never be eaten. What about in the back corner, under that pile of boxes? Oh yes, the tub of beans.

I recognized this tub. It was the perforated tub from a large old automatic washing machine that Dad had repurposed to store dried beans. He grew long rows of Jacob's Cattle beans every year, and they were a lot of work. They had to be planted, and weeded, and then in the fall, once the plants had died and the bean shells were dry enough the beans had to be harvested. All this work was done by hand. Sometimes the entire plants had to be pulled and dried indoors if the weather did not cooperate. Once the plants dried enough, indoors or out, we had discovered the easiest way to get the beans out of the shells was to hold the plants by the main stem, and whack the top part of the plants against a big board. We used the headboard of the garden trailer, and the beans flew out of the dry shells and collected in the trailer bed.

More than little white-and-maroon beans collected in the trailer. Dirt and leaves and stems and weeds were all mixed with the beans.

The work, really, was just beginning.

The beans had to be cleaned. On a breezy day, you could try winnowing out the dirt or frig around using a screen of some sort, but mostly you ended up picking through and handling almost every single bean. Nothing less than perfection was acceptable to Dad—all the dirt had to be removed and not a single bean discarded in the process. Of course there are machines to do this job, but why spend money when your kids work for free? This was painstaking work, and incredibly boring. It was high on my list of most detested jobs—though I must admit, the top of that list was very crowded.

The whole process was heavily dependent on child labour, and even then there was no money in it. Dad sold some of these beans for pennies a pound. When I go to a grocery store today,

decades later, and handle a pound of premium organic beans priced at $2.89, I think about how those two or three cups of dried beans would have taken so many tedious, backbreaking hours to plant, weed, harvest, clean and sort.

The old washing machine tub in the cold room held a massive stash of vintage Jacob's Cattle. The beans are white and all shades of maroon, and the top layer looked fine. Not far down, the beans were mouldy. I didn't dig any deeper. If some of the beans were mouldy they all had to go. I certainly was not going to pick through them another time.

That tub of beans represented hundreds of hours of work. Dad had bumper crops and no market. He rigged that old tub, probably forty years ago, as a place to store his beans. Boxes were placed on top, and before long, he never thought about them again.

He planted more beans each year, while keeping at least 150 pounds in his damp basement.

Dad became suspicious whenever I focused on a project. The stir of activity in the cold room had him on high alert. He worries that I am going to throw something away. When he was growing up, nothing was ever discarded. Every can and jar and piece of string might have a future use. He still has that mindset.

"What are you going to do with those?" he asked, when he saw me coming up from the basement with the first of many buckets of beans.

"Compost heap."

"Nothing wrong with those beans," he said.

"Look at them," I said. "They're mouldy."

He picked up a handful and let the beans dribble through his papery fingers back into the bucket. "Not all of them," he said.

"I'm not picking through them," I said. "These beans are forty years old and they're rotting. I want them out of the house. The place stinks."

"What a shame," he said. "Perfectly good beans."

At this same time there was a good-sized cardboard box of Jacob's Cattle beans on a shelf in the garage. These beans were only about five or ten years old, and there was enough to feed a bean-eating family for years. Dad never remembers these beans exist. Several times, when he was still planting in the main garden, he'd start talking about how many rows of beans he should grow.

I said, "Let's use up the ones we have first. No need to plant any more."

"Where do we have any beans?" he asked. "We don't have any beans."

I'd remind him of the box in the garage, but directly below his living room chair, in that very same corner of the house in the cold room, sat a washing machine tub full of beans that we all had forgotten about.

Hundreds of hours of child labour spent filling that tub of beans in the basement cold room. Still more work decades later lugging the beans back outside and dumping them. Once the tub was light enough, my brother helped carry the whole damn thing upstairs and out the door. Dad hated the sight of me throwing out his good beans. I hated the thought of all the hours of my youth wasted on those beans, just to have them languish in the basement.

During my teens, I was considered lazy because I'd rather read classics of world literature than do real work. In one memorable episode, in the midst of plowing through the relentless heft of The Brothers Karamazov instead of mowing the lawn, my mother told me, "You're so lazy you stink."

Each bucket of beans I lugged out of the basement cold room had more than a physical weight. Each represented a lost opportunity.

For my own bitter amusement, I started naming the buckets as I carried them out. These two were *Crime and Punishment*. The next two were *Pride and Prejudice*. Four especially heavy buckets were designated *War and Peace*, books one and two. The beans were *The Plague*, I was *The Idiot*, and the jars of toxic preserves lined up on the bare wooden shelves spoke to me of *Cannery Row*.

So much waste all around. Still more time spent justifying my actions to Dad, over and over, every time he brought it up. Finally, he once again forgot all about the washing machine tub of beans in the basement and never mentioned it again.

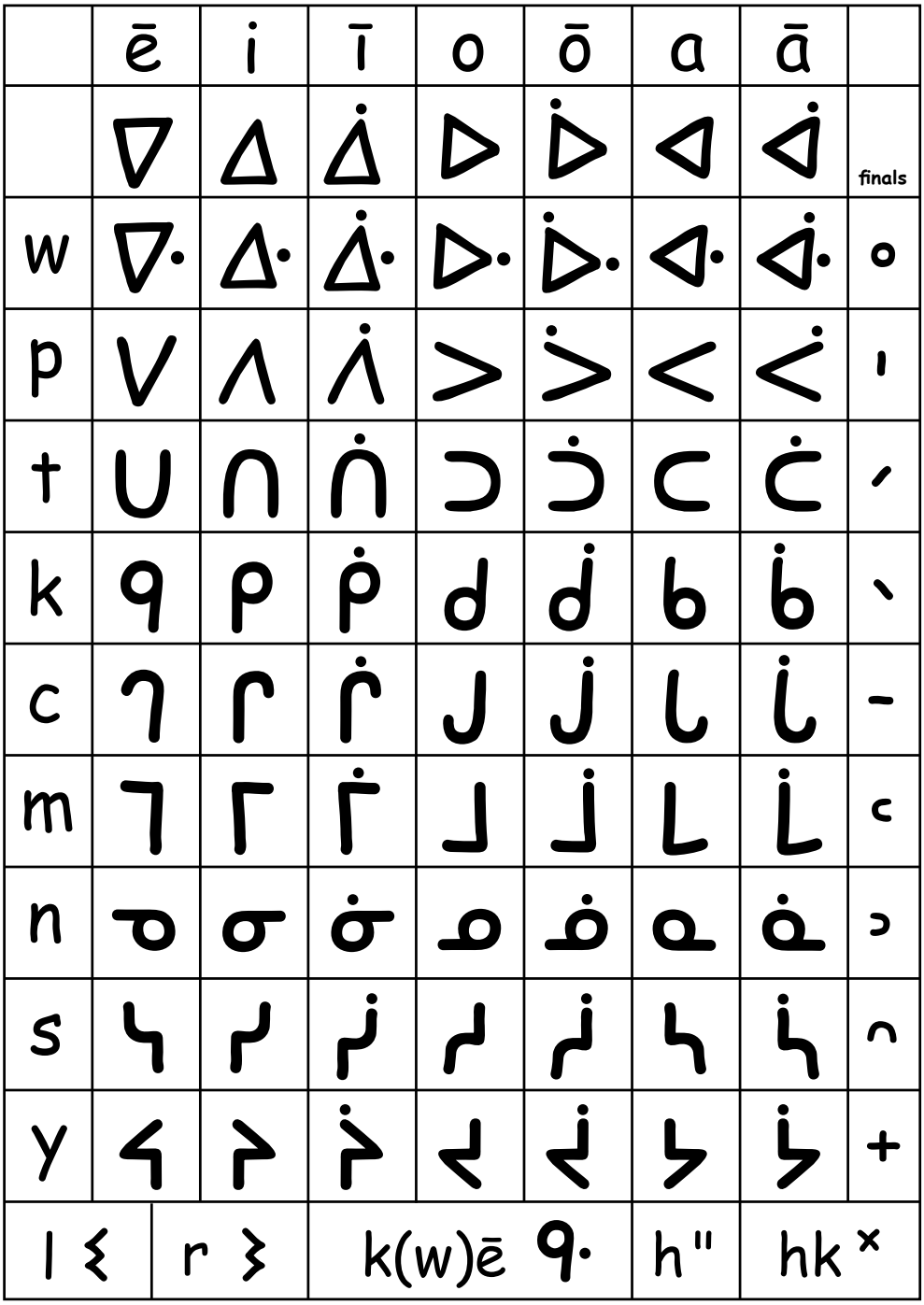
The fruit flies, though. That is another story.

What might that story be?

Once the flies are gone, and I am gone, the events settle in Dad's mind.

On my next trip to visit my father this is what he said to me: "Don't know what you did, but last time you came home we had fruit flies something fierce. I had a heck of a time getting rid of them. I don't want to go through that again. So be careful how you do things."

CREE COMIC SANS



Cree Comic Sans *by Joi T. Arcand. Joi T. Arcand is an artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, SK, Treaty 6 Territory. She works in photography, digital collage and graphic design. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums across Canada, including the National Gallery of Canada. Arcand is the co-founder of the Red Shift Gallery and the founder and editor of the Indigenous art magazine,* kimiwan. *She lives in Ottawa and is currently the artist-in-residence at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto.*

Mom, Dad, Other

ANDREA BENNETT

From the essay "Mom, Dad, Other" in Like A Boy but Not a Boy: Navigating Life, Mental Health, and Parenthood Outside the Gender Binary *by andrea bennett (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2020). Another portion of this essay appeared in* Xtra. *andrea bennett has published four books and has written for many outlets, including the* Atlantic, *the* Globe and Mail, Maisonneuve *and the* Walrus. *bennett has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. They live on the West Coast.*

In hetero-parent families, the words "Mom" and "Dad" generally delineate the roles each takes in the relationship, both with each other and with their kids. Although nothing is ever as simple as it appears, it remains true that for the majority of straight couples with kids, Mom handles the bulk of child care, housework, cooking, and household coordination, often while working; Dad works and pitches in with Mom's duties. This seems exhausting, a situation in which parenthood both erodes one's sense of self for many mothers and shores up outdated gender roles for both parents. We expect more of Mom, we're intensely critical of Mom, and to Dad we assign the condescending burden of lowered expectations. (In capsule form, thanks to Zoe Whittall: "I just want to be as universally revered by everyone as the man who holds his own baby in a coffee shop.")

When you're a queer parent, there is no automatic delineation of roles; every family looks a little different, but somebody has to bathe the child, teach her to read, do the laundry. There's no falling back on cultural expectations, so a negotiation follows: What's important to you? What do you like, dislike? How will we share things in a way that seems fair and sustainable? For my partner and me, this negotiation extends from things that are more minor—I never vacuum and he rarely cooks dinner—to those that feel more meaningful. Our kid carries my last name, for example. And another of her first words was "butt," indicative of the fact that my partner has been her primary nine-to-five caregiver—I would have taught her, if I were changing the lion's share of diapers, to say "bum."

It feels surreal to be comfortable tackling the gendered expectations of parenthood but to have no warm, loving way to voice who you are to your own child. Non-binary folks have adopted pronouns like they and ze, to carve out space for ourselves in language. Parenting labels could use a similar revision—to establish terms that are recognized not only in queer communities but also more broadly in our culture.

I've learned you are the best parent to your kid when you take time to triage your own needs and wants alongside theirs. When I was pregnant in Montreal, I thought, for the sake of not appearing too "weird" or "difficult," that I could stomach nine months of maman and madame from medical professionals before returning to my real self. It's worth noting that after Sinclair was born there was no change in gender presentation for me—I'm masculine-of-centre but often read, I think, as a queer or butch woman—but rather a return to being more assertive about pronouns, honorifics, titles, and the assumptions people make about my family structure.

But then, it wasn't that simple: as the parent of a young kid, your "real self" is more often than not necessarily tethered to your relationship with your child and the way that relationship is read in the world.

On the ferry from Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver to Langdale on the Sunshine Coast, I often walk up and down the aisles with Sinclair, who likes to stop and make new friends. It is bewildering the number of grown adults who talk to her, referring to me, in the third person, as Mom. Since I am the same person who often receives a quick gender-check on my way into the women's bathroom on those same ferries, my guess is that this happens to me now for the same reason it happened when I was pregnant: pregnancy and child care are seen as inherently feminine acts, most often associated with women. Being spoken about in the third person while I was immediately present was not something that occurred to me nearly as often pre-parenthood. I've considered buying "they/she" pins (I'm comfortable with both pronouns) and carpeting my body with them, but I don't know if it would help. Maybe a "Not the mama" iron-on?

The experience of being misgendered in this way comes with the added weight of feminism, despite its best efforts, having managed to undermine less the idea of "motherhood" than it has something like "woman." While feminism has tried to move the needle on gendered divisions of labour in parenting, we are still culturally stuck in 101-level conversations about mothering and fathering—school pickups, caregiving, household management. "Motherhood" is a field that has not expanded nearly as much as "woman." Because I present as masculine, I don't deal with garden-variety sexism—catcalls, assumptions about work-related competency, sexual harassment—nearly as often as feminine women. Having a kid, though, has undermined that, reinscribing both a womanhood that doesn't suit me and the corresponding binaristic ideas we hold about parenting.

Case in point: another common refrain, when I travel alone and a stranger learns that I have a toddler, is "Who's taking care of her?!" Once, an older man followed up with "You trust him to do that?" When people call me Mom, I dissociate for a moment before returning to my well-worn body. But when they ask me what I've done with my child in order to travel away from her, I leave an accidental long pause, unable to get to the premise of the question nearly quickly enough.

Gender was also something we considered when it came time to choose Sinclair's name; before we even conceived, we'd narrowed our list to names that could work for a girl, boy, or non-binary kid. In raising her, we're hopefully creating the circumstances where she'll feel free to be herself. But it's conversations like the ones we have ad nauseam while travelling and in other public spaces that led us to choose the path of least resistance when it came to her pronouns—statistically, she's more likely to align with the gender she was assigned at birth, and I know from personal experience that "they" is still somewhat of a social burden to carry, one I wouldn't feel comfortable imposing. We'll change to suit Sinclair's needs if and when she shares a different preference.

The year after Sinclair was born, people wished me a happy Mother's Day, and a little piece of me felt like it had been hole-punched out. My loved ones weren't being harmful on purpose, but it actually felt worse than when a stranger misgendered me: I wondered if I wasn't legibly trans enough, if I hadn't made myself known, if I could correct someone I cared for deeply for the twenty-fourth time without causing harm to our relationship. I wondered how people thought about me, talked about me, when I wasn't around. (Was my request for gender-neutral kinship terms seen as something quirky, rather than something foundational?)

It hurts, but I recognize that it's a problem that's both interpersonal and cultural—it wouldn't be as hard for friends and family to conceive of me correctly if they'd grown up in a place that made space for me. In a place that had a parental term for me, like it has for most people. I deeply hope that all the recent mainstream discussions about trans identities and queer identities has brought some understanding, some shift that will make it easier for the generations of queer parents who follow us.

Thankfully, the actual experience of being a non-binary parent to my child is worlds apart from my interactions with others as a parent. My kid cares about being loved, about snacking, about going outside, about reading books. I love her, I give her snacks, we go outside, I read her books. And when I asked my partner if he'd be a different dad if it wasn't for me—if he'd ended up with a woman, someone comfortable with mothering—he said no. The whole point of having a kid, he said, is to raise her.

I'm not sure if I am queering parenthood just by being a parent. I guess I am if I'll be asking my kid's schools to edit their intake forms so that there's a space for me to put my name, to render myself a bureaucratic part of her world on top of being a daily cornerstone of it. There are days when I don't think about the ways in which being non-binary and being a parent intersect, mesh, and clash, when my top priorities include picking all the fish-shaped cheese crackers off the floor and making sure the toddler doesn't do a header off a kitchen chair. And then there are others when my internal monologue is the Manifesto of the Happily Boring Queer Parent: I need the world to make just enough space for me that I can become completely unremarkable.

Give Geist.
Get love.

Take advantage of the *Geist* gift offer: give your loved ones the year-long gift of *Geist*—that's four issues of the Canadian magazine of ideas and culture, delivered right to their door.

Order today using the handy form on the other side.

GEIST
FACT + FICTION ✦ NORTH of AMERICA

YOUR INFO:

☐ Please start my own subscription, and count it as **my first gift**.

I AGREE TO PAY $ _____ for _____ subscriptions.

☐ Cheque enclosed ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Name _____

Credit Card # _____

Expiry _____ Signature _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

☐ Sign cards and mail directly to recipient(s):

from: _____

GIVE TO: _____

☐ NEW GIFT ☐ RENEWAL

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

GIVE TO: _____

☐ NEW GIFT ☐ RENEWAL

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Email _____ Phone _____

GIVE TO: _____

☐ NEW GIFT ☐ RENEWAL

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

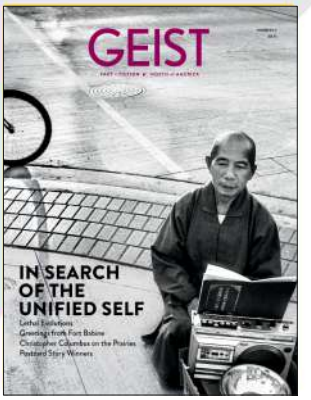
Email _____ Phone _____

US & International: add $15 per subscription for postage.

Geist does not share phone numbers and email addresses but we sometimes share snail mail lists with other like-minded organizations. Check here if you do not wish us to share your address. ☐

FILL OUT THIS FORM

...and give the gift of Geist!



YOUR OFFER

$19 each

TWO OR MORE SUBSCRIPTIONS
2 Gifts = $38
3 Gifts = $57
4 Gifts = $76

$23

ONE SUBSCRIPTION
Your own or a gift

Note: gift rates apply to one-year subs only. Postage and tax included.

MAIL THIS FORM TO

GEIST
210 - 111 W Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC V6B 1H4

OR GIVE GEIST NOW

call 1-888-434-7834
email subs@geist.com
go to geist.com/gift

GEIST
FACT + FICTION NORTH of AMERICA

Winners of the Literal Literary

POSTCARD Story Contest

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL EDITION

1ST PRIZE

The Course to the Horizon

SHENA MCAULIFFE

We were fast men and the media loved us: John Cobb and me, George E.T. Eyston, friendly rivals and fellow Brits, racing across the American salt. At dawn, we gathered near the silver tent and took turns with the binoculars, inspecting the mountains that looked blue, though we knew they were brown and would show it when the sun was high. Everything was illusion at the Salt Flats: what looked like snow was salt. What looked like a scurrying lizard was the sleekest, fastest car in the world.

I watched from the tent as eight men carried the shell of Cobb's Railton Special. It looked like one of those Chinese dragons that dance in parades, a dragon from the future walking on a million human legs. The crew lowered the shell carefully over the frame, over Cobb himself who was sitting in the seat wearing his goggles and hood. My own car, the Thunderbolt, was heavier, but more powerful. It looked like a blowfish with bulging eyes, an open mouth for air intake, and a fin to keep it steady. I loved the focus that driving demanded. My attention narrowed to the black line that marked my course to the horizon.

By midday the salt rose like fog in the wake of our tires. Cobb broke my land speed record that day, but I broke his the next. I hit 357.5 miles per hour, but a year later, in 1939, he took the record back, and then there was the war, and we all stopped racing for a time.

Postcard inset photo by Jakub Fryš

The next time Cobb broke the land speed record was in 1947: 394.19 miles per hour. I was home in London then, a man with a wife and daughters, a man who had seen two wars, a tired man with a paunch. My Thunderbolt was on display in a New Zealand museum, and then it burned up in a warehouse fire, poor girl. But Cobb kept on. He broke my record and came home to London triumphant, married a woman named Glass, and turned his attention to the water, seeking new types of speed.

Every day for six weeks, he drove his speedboat on Loch Ness. I was there on the day the Queen came and shook his hand and wished him well, for we were friends, John Cobb and me. And I was there, too, on the day he drove his boat to 240 miles per hour. I was one of the crew, holding a clipboard, the competitions manager, standing on shore beside Cobb's wife who leaned down and kissed him before he fired up the engine. But the water was not as smooth as it appeared. The boat hit a wake and disintegrated in a puff. What looked like a water bug, what looked like an ice skate, what looked like a fishing lure or a lightning bolt or a flimsy piece of tin, was a man airborne, a man flying free, the body of the world's fastest man.

Shena McAuliffe is the author of a novel, The Good Echo, *and a collection of essays,* Glass, Light, Electricity. *She is an Assistant Professor at Union College in Schenectady, New York.*

2ND PRIZE

Western Child

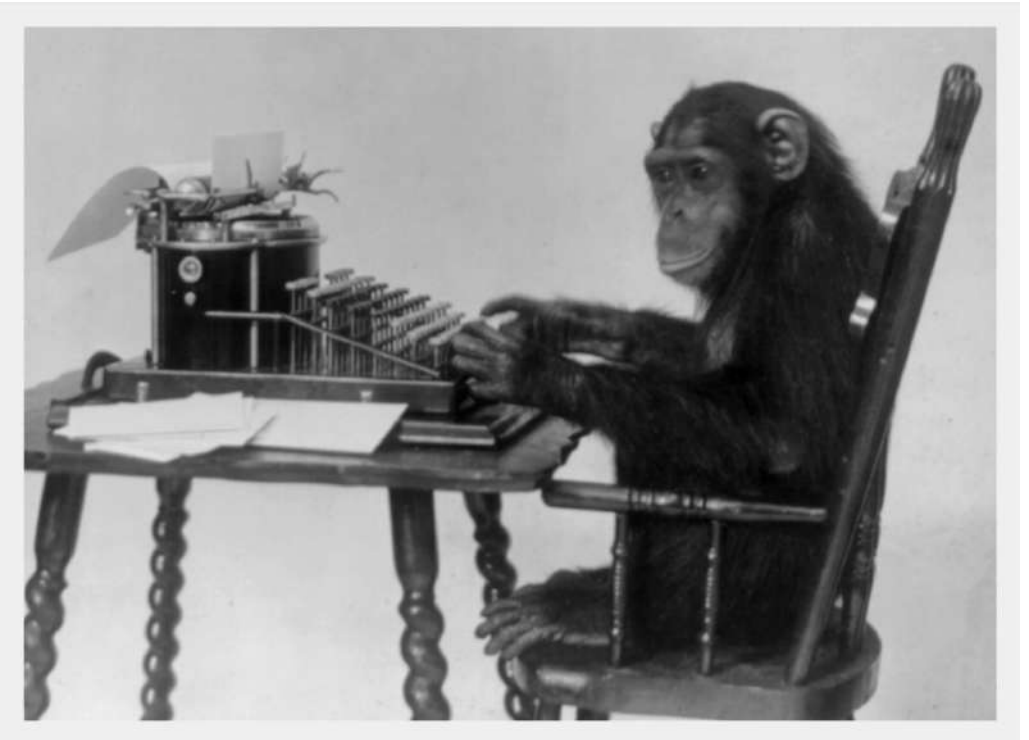
KENDALL POE

Someone throws a TV into the bonfire, which sends the thickest black smoke you've ever seen into the sky and subsequently ends the party. We all slide into Tyler Taylor's pickup truck like seals. No one wants interference from the Dust Devils—what we call police. Then we drive to a cemetery and play with the thermostat of a mausoleum until it's like a sauna. Heat stifles our laughter as the door claps shut behind us. It's 2005, and we are not nice people, although three-quarters of us are Mormon. At least we aren't addicted to gambling or working at Little Darlings. At the end of the night we roll down the hill of Lone Mountain Park to coat ourselves in fertilizer. This new skin makes it better, but what we really want is for someone to notice. Adults only have eyes for their destruction or their salvation, depending on which part of the valley they live in. Parents pick a side: church or casino.

The next day we snake through northern mountains until we get to the woods with the abandoned ski resort. Reckless energy pours out of the sedan as soon as we stop. Cold air snaps us into action. We stamp at the dry ground, duck under the rope with the No Trespassing sign to ascend the gentle slope. The empty chairlift creaks in the breeze above us. Cedar and dust and primrose swirl through our hair. None of our parents knows where we are. Eventually someone runs uphill. The others give chase, but the one in front stops just as suddenly. There's a mustang grazing two hundred feet ahead of us. The horse looks but doesn't stop chewing on late spring grass. Another horse joins it, then another, and another, until they skew the horse to human ratio in their favor. We are a mix of fear, reverence and confusion. Some of us sit to watch them. The more faint of heart inch back towards the car.

Adults say that with each passing year wild horse sightings in Lee Canyon have become more and more rare. We don't know this yet, but in the sunshine, on the snowless slope, bald except for patches of thistle and shooting star, we see the mustangs, and in that moment, they see us.

Kendall Poe is a writer. When not working, she likes to bike. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, and at kendall-poe.com.



3RD PRIZE

To Whom It May Concern

TOM GRAINGER

To whom it may concern… I write to you from Moncton's Magnetic Hill Zoo with a miracle. (The "I" in this case not referring to anyone in particular as this letter, and as such, I, the facsimile essence of a correspondent, are just the borderline-inconceivable product of coincidence).

That is to say, it's happened! The captive chimpanzees' pecking has finally borne fruit. While what you're reading may appear to be a dispatch penned with sentience, intent and situational awareness, it is nothing of the sort! It is, rather, an eventuality of typewritten chaos. A message utterly absent of intellect. Raindrops on a tin roof singing the national anthem in Morse code.

They say if you give a monkey infinite time… well, infinity has arrived early!

The odds of this: galactically improbable. Not even a millionth of a millionth of a part per million chance. Illustrated mathematically, one simply takes the reciprocal of the 88 character options on a standard-issue ape typewriter to the power of the 2,339 characters in this message. You'll have over 4,500 zeroes to the right of the decimal before a natural number rears its head.

That is to say, if a bulletin of equivalent length were generated once per millisecond since the Big Bang, a veteran bookie would still take a snowflake's chance in hell over you ever reading this message. Yet, here you are!

But alas, it will go uncelebrated. What a tragedy. A miracle in our time, but nobody's going to care because it's not Shakespeare, now is it? No "To be, or not to be." Nary an "Out, damned spot!" The whole thing desperately lacking in pentameter, let alone of the iambic variety.

It's trite, of course, but that's what the folks upstairs have in mind. Bard William's plays, plucked out, letter-for-letter on antique keys. And to what end? Redundancy? Of all the one-in-a-zillion outcomes, to pick one that's been done before. Where's their sense of adventure? (Up their asses with their sense of taste if what they've been feeding the monkeys is any point of reference!)

I digress. No sense in lamenting further. It is what it is. This camel will never be a canary no matter how well it sings. Besides, I fear our tme grows shorth,. ih woud seeemr luhksrunning oat n th3 rand7op//nes iswnce hagainimpauzzif(le to +\]coimpeehind>>';

jst lettrsdfgl7 8*jpua oj^flaliuh

[[lkjmh

:)

Tom Grainger is from London, Ontario. Most recently, his work has involved launching businesses in regenerative agriculture & at-home care for the elderly. He shares essays and humour at tomgrainger.ca.

To Coronavirus, C: An Anthropological Abecedary

HILARY M. V. LEATHEM

After Paul Muldoon and Raymond Williams

A, ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology is the study of the past and its adherents are archaeologists, who would rather die than be compared to their popular counterparts like Indiana Jones or Lara Croft. Archaeologists are curious beasts. Excavations are marked not only by scientific rituals, like mapping and licking stones to see if they are bones, but by traditional mating rituals that feature alcohol, meat, and sex. Their informants are primarily the dead, alongside close examinations of rocks, pots, and architecture, which allows them to amass pools of empirical data designed to recreate life in the past. Their preoccupation with the dead and predilection for figurative resurrection means they're astoundingly well-equipped for understanding the spread of viruses, how contagion works, and the physical or sensuous traces viruses (non-humans, if you will) leave on our bones. There is an entire field within archaeology focused on societal collapse. Archaeology already knows what lies ahead for (and with) the Coronavirus.

B, BLACK DEATH

The Black Death occurred in the fourteenth century and was spread by the fleas riding the bodies of rodents. It is credited with completely rewriting Western civilization, probably because it killed off most of the population, allowing for change in a way that basic strikes and shifts to legislation could never deliver. Before the Black Death,

Image: Corona Covid *by Towanna Miller*

people slaved away under the feudal system, which extracted as much labour as possible for no remuneration save for a place to stay (sometimes!). Sound familiar? After the Black Death, because labour became scarce workers were able to fight for better compensation and rights.

C, CAPITALISM

If one imagines a god to be something we serve and dedicate our finite energies to, then capitalism is contemporary society's god. Pundits might expound the glory of this system, but capitalism is a so-called "modern" reconfiguration of slavery or feudal practices, predicated on the extraction of labour to create commodities of value. Capitalism depends on a constant surplus of value, conceived of as infinite. The problem? Resources—and human lives and bodies—are anything but infinite. Some anthropologists say we live in an epoch called the Capitalocene, arguing the defining feature of humans today is our obsession with commodities. America is capitalist. Europe is primarily socialist. Coronavirus loves capitalism. Coronavirus was made possible by capitalism and will continue to spread because of capitalism's conditions. Capitalism is not a defining feature of Civilization; rather, the mark of a coherent society is, as Margaret Mead once said, care. P.S. Read Karl Marx.

D, DOUBLE-BIND THEORY

The theory of the double-bind, first described by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, describes a situation where individuals or groups receive conflicting messages that negate one another. At issue is not simply communication, but logic. The double-bind can plague groups across society when they are presented with two conflicting demands that initially seem paradoxical, but when unravelled manifest as two distinct logical propositions that are irreconcilable. This causes distress. The Coronavirus creates a double-bind for healthcare workers. If healthcare workers want to save lives, they must stay clear of Coronavirus, yet they must be around the Coronavirus in order to save the lives.

E, ECOLOGY

The most concise way of understanding ecology would be to point out its etymological roots, which come from the Greek for habitation, *oikos*. Ecological anthropology is the study of how humans adapt to and shape our myriad environments and, in turn, how these unique environments produce differences in our political, social, and economic lifeways. Our environments and landscapes once determined what foods we ate, and even influenced the development of particular architectural styles. Ecology in the time of Coronavirus asks us to consider how the virus will reshape us and our surroundings; we already are seeing how Coronavirus utterly changes our forms of sociality and everyday rituals. Will we alter or extinguish the Coronavirus? Enchantment and magic appear at this juncture. To quote from Max Gluckman's 1954 BBC Radio address entitled, *The Magic of Despair*: "New situations demand new magic."

F, FUNCTIONALISM

Functionalism compares society to a living organism; it imagines society as constituted of different parts that must function correctly in order for it to survive. Each part of society, or the "living organism," is a social institution, such as religion, economy or law. These social institutions developed over time to keep society functioning. So, too, do social institutions have their own distinct function, meaning they fulfill physiological and psychological needs, and are governed by their own set of norms and technologies. Though functionalism is now considered outmoded in anthropology, its primary proponents, Bronisław Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, were highly influential and their ideas echo today. The Coronavirus is an invader disrupting society. Our social institutions, such as science, medicine and law, are designed to remedy the situation and restore function. But therein also lies the potential for alternative approaches, through institutions like religion or magic, which might explain the "function" of the virus as a supernatural event. Functionalism, when taken to extreme ends, can fuel conspiracy theories.

G, GOVERNMENT

Government is a hallmark of civilization designed to wield power and create order from chaos by imposing the rule of law. As a social institution, it is given to many shapes or systems. We know of democracy, oligarchy, monarchy, fascism, or tyranny. Dictatorships, undesired monarchs in a way, count here, too. The last two centuries have witnessed the rise and fall of all these systems of government. Governments can be good—they can save and protect human lives; governments can be bad—they can enact genocide and wipe out great swaths of their citizens based on their race, ethnic identity, language, class, sexual orientation, religion, and more. With government comes governance, the act of governing—or its failure. Coronavirus challenges governments everywhere and exposes the cracks in our legal foundations. The failure to act in the face of the pandemic is a failure of government, which signifies what, exactly? If government truly is a hallmark of civilization, then does its collapse foretell our downfall?

H, HERITAGE

Heritage is a paradoxical inheritance. The word's contemporary usage is inextricably entwined with the singular

vision of UNESCO's World Heritage list of properties. Heritage can be material—our monuments, landscapes, architecture, antiquities and heirlooms—or it can be immaterial—cuisine, language or oral literature. Many people argue that the most powerful form of heritage is the monumental: the grandiose ruins of palaces or temples, from Greece and Egypt to Mexico, Peru or Zimbabwe. Embodiments of History or proof of the passage of time, heritage is also emotional, symbolic, and moral, as the archaeologist Lynn Meskell writes (2015). This is evidenced by the ways that these sites, as well as the immaterial forms of heritage, mediate human relations. Heritage is genealogy, and not only about property but possession. Coronavirus is the universe's response to the question that has plagued heritage studies for the last several decades: to whom does heritage belong? Coronavirus is true universal heritage; it does not discriminate and infects bodies regardless of background. Viruses are communal and collective property; it will own everyone and we will own it. Future humans will look back to the virus as their irrefutable shared past.

I, IMMUNITY

Ideology, a system of ideas (and ideals) that shapes our legal, political, and economic worlds (among others) fits here, but Immunity is more poignant. Political leaders and scientists throw the word around often, and Boris Johnson and the Tory party touted the notion of herd immunity as one approach or solution to the Coronavirus. The concept of immunity—or being immune—is used not only in science, where it simply means one can no longer contract the virus, but also in the legal sphere, where immunity equates to freedom from liability. In other words, the individual cannot be prosecuted. Immunity emerges as something that is at once empirical and grounded, but also moral. This also extends to sovereign immunity, wherein the government cannot be convicted of committing any wrongs. Coronavirus is not only about a scientific struggle for immunity, but it is a polarizing figure that galvanizes us to scrutinize our governments and those in power—did they commit rights or wrongs?

J, JINGOISM

Even before the advent of the Coronavirus, the United States and United Kingdom were practicing jingoism, "belligerent nationalism," to quote from *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Both the US and UK are hotbeds of virtuous and aggressive patriotism, though they tend to take different forms. The attitude of "Britain before all else" underpins the Brexit movement, and resembles, quite insidiously, Trump's "Make America Great Again." Current conservative parties on both sides of the Atlantic gesticulate wildly about the inferiority of those outside their borders. The Coronavirus aggravates jingoistic tendencies, driving wedges between and among communities by weaponizing patriotic statements in such a way as to repress counterpoint and oppress whoever is glossed as different.

K, KINSHIP

Are there fictive kin? Perhaps not. The old adage goes: "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." Anthropologists once made kinship charts of societies across the globe in order to understand if there was a universal law governing kinship, such as the idea that one must be related by blood. There is none. One creates their own modes of kinship through adoption, for example, or through disowning family members who might be too toxic or abusive. Kinship is a form of social cohesion. Coronavirus stands to utterly reconfigure our notions of kinship through the ways it modifies or severs typical relations. Most citizenship laws are products of nation-states that envisaged nationality and kinship as the same, tied to blood and thus the land. After the virus, we may think of kinship differently.

L, LANDSCAPE

Coronavirus alters the landscape: the ways we view it, the ways we relate to it and the ways we inhabit it. Anthropologists (and archaeologists) of the landscape might look at what it means to dwell, the emotions that different landscapes evoke and how they are built and utilized. Humans, it is said, transform landscapes and are, in turn, transformed by the landscapes. Lands are natural and cultural assemblages full of multiple meanings. A land might be locally conceived of as happy, blessed, depressed or haunted. Some say landscapes absorb energy from past events and human activity leaves psychic imprints or wounds in the land. These sedimentations of meaning paint landscapes as dynamic and important focal points of our collective existence. Landscapes in the time of the Coronavirus are suddenly conceived of as either facilitating or inhibiting the virus's flow, as scientists and politicians speculate on whether certain climates or seasons and other natural features render Coronavirus more or less powerful.

Image: Wildman *by Howard Lafortune*

M, MASK

Masks emerged as ritual or ceremonial objects. Deeply symbolic, their purposes are myriad and may be used for disguise, transformation into preternatural beings or animals, amusement, or protection. They may even offer avenues into communing with ancestors. Yet rather than donning masks to ward off evil spirits or contact deceased loved ones, our masks protect us from another invisible enemy: the Coronavirus. During previous plagues, doctors wore masks for both literal and figurative protection. Scientists tell us to wear a mask, but the power of masks originates in the rituals that assign them Magical efficacy. Rituals, argued the symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner (1967), make the obligatory desirable. While we may find masks aesthetically displeasing, their sudden necessity quickly integrates them into the seams of our social fabric, transforming our world.

N, NATION-STATE

Amidst the outbreak of Coronavirus, Governor Gavin Newsom declared California a nation-state. On the other side of the Atlantic, Brexit finally crystallized, which may be another re-emergence of the nation-state. What does this mean, and why does it matter? States are geo-political entities, but nation-states presume that there is a common cultural core. Imagined communities, Benedict Anderson once wrote, nation-states have all the same parts as a simple state but are festooned with extra trimmings that can, in some instances, make for dangerous sentiments, such as bigotry. A common ancestral, ethnic background or shared past and traditions can make societies cohere by instilling pride and belonging. When skewed far to the left or right, however, ethnonationalism takes over. The Coronavirus ignites nationalist sentiments because nation-states imagine themselves as independent yet cohesive socio-political entities; the nation-state protects the communities by defeating what's foreign and invasive, fortifying its mythic borders. Brexit and a sovereign California represent insular fantasies just as much as they provide commentary on the successes and failures of government. Designed to be global players, the nation-state preserves the local.

O, ORIENTALISM

Derived from the Orient, meaning east of the so-called Occident or West, the purported epicentre of civilization, the term is colonial and oppositional, creating difference by imagining the East as the West's Other. Orientalism was elaborated by the Palestinian-American scholar, Edward W. Said, in his book *Orientalism* (1978). One of the foundational texts of postcolonial studies, Said excavated Orientalist fantasies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to highlight the patronizing attitudes inherent in Western representations and imaginings of Arab societies, but the term (and its attitudes) extend beyond this region into East Asia. Considered exotic and backward, these cultures are simultaneously uncivilized and desirable. Trump's gloss of the Coronavirus as the "Chinese Virus" is deeply powerful, resurrecting Orientalist discourses, which re-create and reinforce difference between imagined West and East.

P, POSSESSION

Possession has multiple connotations. It can be socio-economic in its usage, denoting an item that belongs to an individual or a people. Patrimony is both an individual and collective possession, as it refers to inheritance in all its forms. Possession, then, is about property. Yet possession also can be spiritual or religious. Traditionally, an anthropology of possession means dealing with how and why spirits, demons, or other invisible entities come to occupy or possess human bodies. It is also medical. Folk medicine in Mexico, for example, revolves around cases of *espanto* and *susto* ("terror" or "fright"), illnesses caused by being possessed by "bad winds" acquired via deities or witchcraft. A sort of exorcism is performed by a *curandera* as the remedy. The Coronavirus is a harbinger of fear and uncertainty; it possesses our bodies and is a plague of fright that cannot be exorcised in any religious sense. Whether it is a bad wind or not, the virus incites deep fears regarding control and the inhabiting of our own bodies. It begs the existential question: why this, why now?

Q, QUARANTINE

A medically enforced isolation that is often imposed on only the infected. The life and path of the Coronavirus makes it unique. Delayed symptoms and easy transmission force the whole of society to shack up indoors. Anthropology is defeated by quarantine because we work with people. What does the anthropology of quarantine look like? Will it be ethnographies of Netflix consumption or investigations into human relations with machines and animals?

Image: All That We Need *by Nathalie*

R, RACE

Race is a social construct, which means exactly what you think—humans create it through social relations. Biological anthropologists have even shown us that more genetic variation exists between members of one group (like Italians or Koreans) than geographically distant groups. Translated: my Croatian grandmother may share more, genetically speaking, with someone in Peru than a neighbor in Dubrovnik. Since race is a social construct, its persistence depends on its belief and performance; part of the reason society sustains race is because it is instrumentalized and weaponized in the name of power. Race plays a pivotal role in pandemics, currently and historically. Coronavirus exposes gaps and cracks in a system purportedly designed to serve everyone equally; America's ever-increasing death toll echoes with the ringing of massive disparity. As Chicago and Detroit reported, nearly 70% of all Coronavirus deaths are amongst African-Americans from underserved or working-class communities. This is not at all new. Smallpox and yellow fever are pandemics from previous ages that ravaged Indigenous or non-white populations because of their lack of immunity, reinforcing further racial hierarchy through what some call immuno-privilege. In this instance, the death toll is less about a biological immuno-privilege and more about socioeconomics or access to healthcare.

S, SEX

One of the most recent health crises of the last century was the AIDS pandemic, where sex—and Sexuality—took centre stage. Given that HIV, and consequently, AIDS, was primarily spread through sexual transmission or other forms of swapping bodily fluids, one of the first concerns regarding "Love in the Time of Coronavirus" was whether sex would be safe—can the virus also be sexually transmitted? The AIDS pandemic was deeply stigmatized not only because of the mechanisms of its transmission, but because of the ways sex, sexuality, gender, race and class became intertwined to fuel more prejudiced attitudes toward the LGBTQ2SI community. This previous pandemic disproportionately affected gay, Black, working-class men. Coronavirus is working in a similar way. While it may not primarily affect the LGBTQ2SI community, it undoubtedly affects those late-capitalism does not favour. Furthermore, that this pandemic is one where we are quarantined makes sex one of the few available pleasures. Anthropologists like Margaret Mead recognized the human need for sex and the expression of desire. Sex toy sales are booming, but there is also a dark side: a rise in domestic abuse and violence. Post-pandemic, rather than a baby boom as some media outlets have predicted, we may see divorce rates skyrocket. In addition, we may also witness the return of past struggles. For example, women and the LGBTQ2SI community might find themselves needing to reassert their rights in both the domestic and public sphere.

T, TABOO

Various news outlets assert that a Chinese man ate a bat, leading to the emergence of the Coronavirus. The sentiment that he should not have eaten the bat forces us to reckon with the notion of taboo. Eating bats is taboo according to Western perspectives, as bat meat (and many other forms of animal flesh) is not consumed. A taboo is relative; it is a socially sanctioned and unspoken rule. Because taboos are designed to protect individuals in a society, violating or flouting a taboo may create fear and lead to punishment. Its etymology comes from Polynesia, though which exact language it's derived from is unknown. *Tabu*, they say, means forbidden or sacred. Classic anthropology says that taboo lends society a sense of order and establishes boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Food is a popular subject of taboo; the anthropologist Mary Douglas wrote *Purity and Danger* (1966), which sought to explain the logic of Old Testament food prohibitions. Taboos, she concluded, operate via a dichotomy of what is pure and what is dirty, the latter being dangerous.

U, UNIVERSAL

The Coronavirus is a universal; it affects (and infects) everyone. Structuralism, a school of anthropology pioneered by Claude Lévi-Strauss, posited that what British anthropology termed social institutions were cultural universals, cognitive traits like mythology and ritual, that structured societies across the world. Lévi-Strauss was an aide to UNESCO, shaping their cultural policy and may have introduced the language of (or offered intellectual support for) universal human rights and values. Today political organizations mobilize the language of the universal frequently.

V, VIRUS

An infection, an invader, or an invisible enemy, formal encyclopedic entries cast the virus as an agent that infects all living organisms, whereas its etymology links it to poison. From a linguistic standpoint, the vocabulary sur-

Image: Wild Roses *by Amanda Roy*

rounding and defining the word *virus* is alarmist and akin to language taken up during war. In her book, *Geontologies* (2016), the theorist and anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli, views the "Virus" as one of three critical figures of what she terms *geontopower*, a form of governance that regulates the distinction made between life and non-life. She links the Virus to collective speculation of the figure of the Terrorist (again, echoes of an unstoppable invader). But most important here is how the Virus, and the Coronavirus specifically, disrupts our previous social arrangements. Viruses exist outside the normal boundaries of what we think of as containing life or being dead. Even before Coronavirus was Trump's "Chinese Virus," it was already a foreign threat. The phrase "going viral" will never be the same.

W, WITCHCRAFT

While the persecution of women that characterizes American witchcraft hysteria is particular, there are cross-cultural ideas of witchcraft that focus on the ways that the witch, who might be male or female, acts as an anti-social being that destroys social relations. Anthropologists are less interested in assessing whether witchcraft and the Witch are real, and are more taken with the role or impact of a belief in witchcraft on any society. Witchcraft, according to a classic study by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (who notably saw "witchcraft on its path"), is an innate ability, and its role in society is to offer logical explanations for the misfortune of others. Alongside conspiracy theories, the Coronavirus pandemic will spur new speculations on its magical or human-made emergence as people confuse the borders between science, magic, and religion. The virus is witchcraft.

X, XENOPHOBIA

As several of these entries make clear, one of the consequences of Coronavirus—and indeed what allows it to possess its powerful hold over people, inciting fear and panic—is xenophobia. Fear of the other or fear of the foreign, Coronavirus is unknown and foreign on two counts: it is both a newly identified and transmitted virus and first emerged in China. Pandemics, war, famine, and other traumatic events in history see the twinned phenomena of humans practising either care or violence. Xenophobia is sustained or buttressed by polarizing media, which teaches us that, as the "Chinese Virus," we should fear anything associated with Asia.

Y, YOUTUBE

Coronavirus troubles or kills off our daily routines or rituals. It has disrupted our normal modes of socializing, making us more reliant on social media and the digital world as a way of connecting and sustaining our relationships. Yet the problem with platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, or even Zoom lies in how they are cesspools of false information. Because of the extraordinary coupling of social media's sudden necessary role in our life and its accompanying lack of regulation, lies and "alternative facts" proliferate. Previously spaces for the occasional and playful reimagining of human relations, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms become dangerous supplements or, even more, substitutions for actual human face-to-face connection. This is far from better than the real thing.

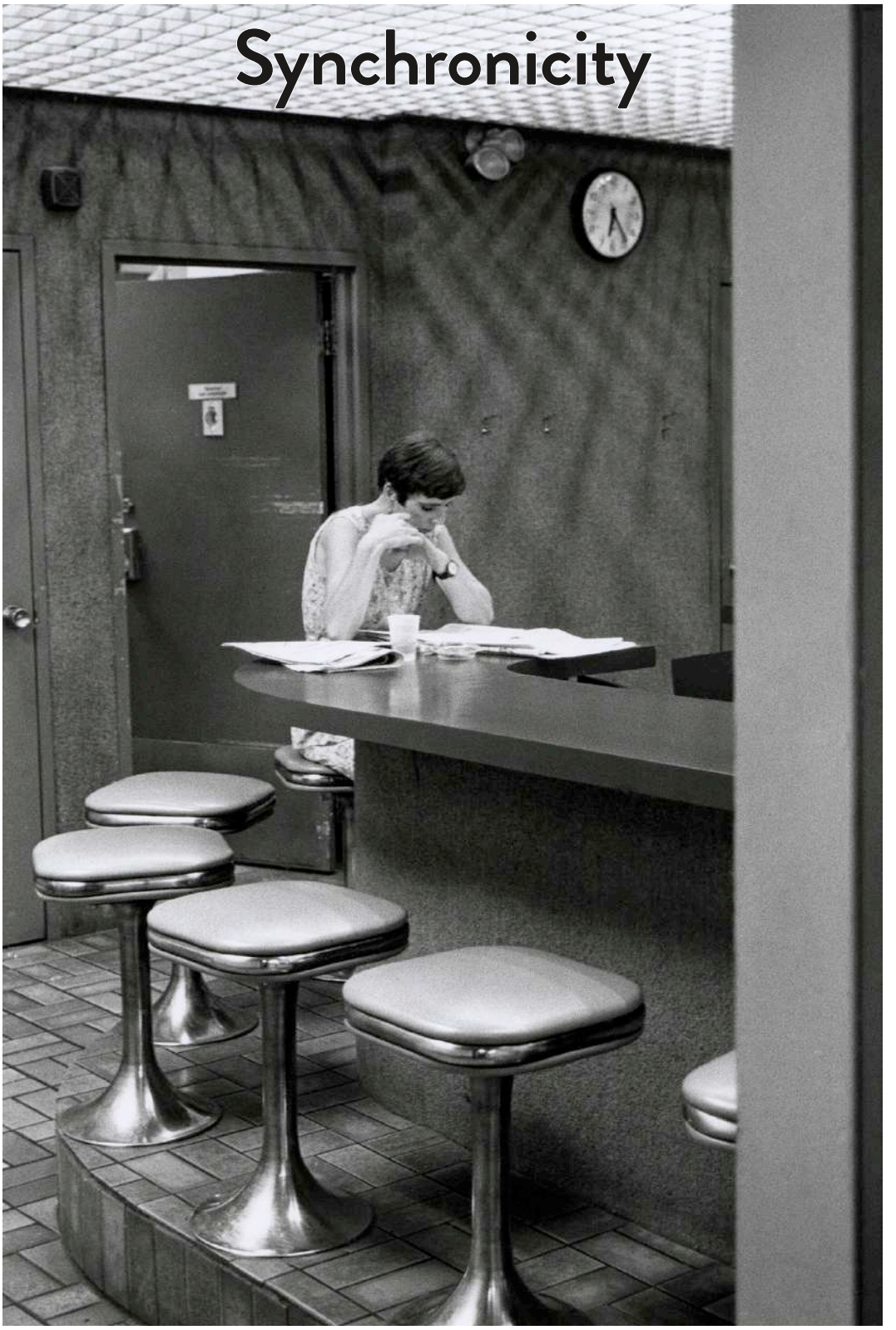
Z, ZOONOTIC

Zoonotic diseases are infections transmitted between humans and animals or insects, or in other words, between humans and non-humans. Most people have heard of Lyme disease and rabies; by contrast, most had not heard of coronaviruses until February. Zoonotic is a musty, limited classification of our world—it entails the construction of a dichotomy that is quite futile. It presumes that categories like nature and culture are neatly bounded, when they are in fact porous, dynamic, and prone to wild confluences. The Coronavirus's sweeping success proves there are no boundaries between humans and nonhumans and that these separations are shaped by epistemologies and cosmologies. Archaeology has long recognized humans and nonhumans are entangled; anthropology that pursues multispecies research would view zoonotic as a Western artifact. However corny, Earth, humans, polar bears, raccoons and that mould in your shower are all one.

Hilary M. V. Leathem is a writer, anthropologist, and editor. Currently a Digital Knowledge Sharing Fellow at the American Philosophical Society, Leathem's research in Oaxaca, Mexico, explores the moral and emotional dimensions of heritage preservation and destruction. Leathem's essays have appeared in the Archaeological Review from Cambridge, Folklore Thursday *and* Jadaliyya, *among others.*

Image: Every Bead a Breath *by Adele Arseneau*

Synchronicity



Photos by Fabrice Strippoli

Image: Greyhound bus station dinner, Sainte-Foy, Québec, 1991

Under Niagara Falls, Niagara Falls, 1998

Queen St. trolley stop, Yonge & Queen, Toronto, 1997

Downtown worker smoking. Ottawa, 2005

COVID encounter in front of Union Station, first lockdown, Toronto, 2020

Religious procession spectators, Dundas St., Toronto, 2003

Spadina Ave., Toronto, 2016

Young girl crossing the street, downtown Calgary, 2015

Crossing the street during FIFA celebrations, 2014

Boy on the Yonge line subway going downtown, Toronto, 1999

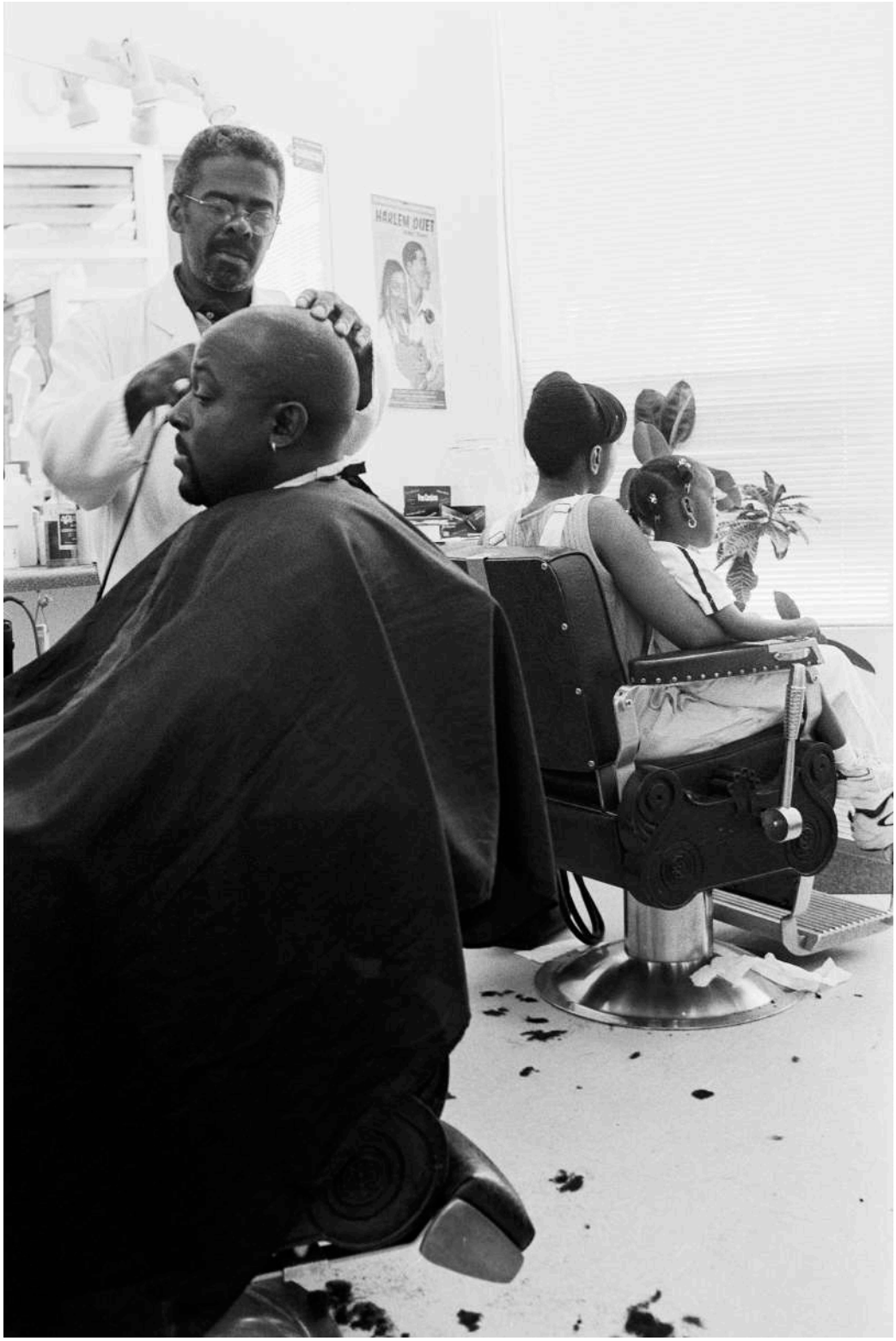
Construction watchers, Montréal, 1997

Queen St. East diner waitress, Toronto, 1997

Queen St. West thinker, Toronto, 2006

Kensington Market fishmongers, Toronto, 1999

The photos here are selected from *Synchronicity*, Fabrice Strippoli's upcoming book of photographs—most of which were taken in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Montreal—spanning his thirty-year career. Synchronicity is the idea that meaningful coincidences are clusters of events that have no causal relationship yet appear meaningful to the viewer. It is a way of seeing the world, "an ever present reality for those who have eyes to see," as Carl Jung wrote. Fabrice Strippoli is a photographer and photo printer. He lives in Toronto and at fabricefoto.com.
—Michał Kozłowski



Waiting for my haircut, barber shop on Vaughan Rd., Toronto, 1999

Lethal Evolutions

STEPHEN HENIGHAN

Our society is formed on the assumption of a healthy immune system

When I was fifteen, I lived in North Berwick, Scotland for four months. Located on a promontory on the south shore of the Firth of Forth—a wide, tapering bight on Scotland's east coast that narrows near the capital of Edinburgh, then bends inland—North Berwick was the site of two striking natural features: the Bass Rock, a steep-sided island that dominated the bay in front of the beach; and the North Berwick Law, a mound-shaped hill of volcanic origin, from the top of which Arthur's Seat, the extinct volcano that looms over Edinburgh, thirty kilometres away, was visible. The writer Robert Louis Stevenson, having spent several summers in North Berwick, devoted a chapter of his novel *Catriona*—the sequel to *Kidnapped*—to the Bass Rock. The central character is imprisoned on this island of "crags painted with seabirds' droppings like a morning frost, the sloping top of it green with grass." The reaction provoked in me by the North Berwick high school that I attended for almost four months resembled that of Stevenson's protagonist: I felt imprisoned. I escaped from this dour institution through a regime of solitary walks. The walks that made the deepest impression on me took me along the nearby beaches. During the chilly autumn, North Berwick's beaches were empty of visitors. Yet they were not vacant: two macabre features drew me back to these otherwise barren stretches of sand. First, they were bolstered with concrete bunkers that had been placed there during the World War II: defences against a German invasion that had failed to appear. Second, they were littered with dead rabbits.

The rabbits had died of a viral disease called myxomatosis. Their corpses lay on their sides, the upfacing eye swollen shut into a black nub that resembled a knot in a sheet of plywood. The cadavers were everywhere. One day I made a two-hour hike west from North Berwick along the beaches to the village of Gullane. My attempt to keep track of the dead rabbits I saw on the way faltered: there were too many to count. The rabbit mortality rate from myxomatosis in Scotland, I later learned, was over ninety-nine per cent. This highly communicable disease caused the rabbits' faces to swell until they became blind. If they didn't starve, or weren't run over by a car, they would die of a secondary infection within two weeks. On asking about the illness, I was told that it had been used to control rabbits in Australia, where the rabbit population had grown into the hundreds of millions. As a result of its success in reducing the impact of rabbits on agriculture, the disease was introduced into Scotland in 1954 at the request of farmers who regarded rabbits as pests. The proliferation of rabbit corpses shocked me, yet the steely Scots were unmoved by the slaughter on their sands. Scottish farmers, whose hilly,

Illustration: Johann Daniel Meyer, published by Fleischmann in 1748

rocky land made agriculture precarious at the best of times, had argued forcefully that without a rabbit cull their farms would not survive. In the gentler pastureland of animal-loving England, by contrast, the introduction of myxomatosis became a source of controversy, pitting farmers against animal-rights activists.

The image of beaches strewn with dead rabbits stayed in my mind for decades. Years later, in Guelph, Ontario, I was at a party with a group of veterinary researchers. Their conversation slipped effortlessly from animal viruses to the inevitability of a human virus sweeping the land. "I would expect it to kill three per cent of the human population," one researcher said in a tombstone voice. The dead rabbits on the beach returned to my mind. They, and the party conversation, returned once more when the COVID-19 pandemic began. By that time I had made a number of return visits to Scotland. During a visit to North Berwick with friends, I was astonished to find that the beaches were pristine. What had happened to myxomatosis? I read that it had grown less virulent and become no more troublesome to the rabbits than a slight fever was to humans. I hoped that the coronavirus, too, would evolve toward milder, non-lethal strains.

Alexander Van Tulleken wrote recently in the *Times Literary Supplement*, "The standard story is that myxomatosis became milder, allowing the rabbits to once again flourish." Yet this, it turns out, is not what happened. Recent DNA research, based on samples taken from rabbits over the last one hundred fifty years, has refuted the theory that myxomatosis grew less fatal. The research demonstrates that in response to myxomatosis European rabbits began an accelerated process of natural selection. Those few rabbits who had genetic mutations that made them immune to the disease became the breeding stock for future rabbits. The same genetic evolution in rabbits' immune systems occurred simultaneously in Australia, Great Britain and France. The disease was defeated by evolution—until it came back. In Australia, in 2017, myxomatosis returned in a more deadly form, killing off even genetically fortified rabbits. In both Australia and Europe, rabbit populations are once again in decline.

I returned to Scotland in October 2019, my last trip prior to being grounded by the pandemic. In Edinburgh, I climbed to the top of Arthur's Seat. From the summit I looked far down the coast until I found North Berwick. I thought about the time I had spent there; foolishly, I didn't think about the dead rabbits. Life's continuities felt as immutable then as the stones of the Bass Rock, the North Berwick Law, or Arthur's Seat. By early 2020 we were reminded that, contrary to what these indomitable geographical formations might lead us to believe, nature is not fixed and eternal; it is restless and ever-changing. Like the rabbits, we inhabit a society that is founded on an assumption of a healthy immune system. Unlike that of the rabbits, our social organization enables us to take measures to mitigate the effects of a virus: medicines, social distancing, mask-wearing. Our biology, though, is not superior to that of other mammals. COVID-19 may not be as devastating to human demographics as myxomatosis was to that of rabbits, yet, like them, we are caught in the eternal, see-sawing struggle between the evolution of our genetic defences and the equally relentless evolution of disease.

Stephen Henighan's sixth novel, The World of After, *will be published in late 2021. Henighan teaches Spanish American literature at the University of Guelph. Read more of his work at geist.com and stephenhenighan.com. Follow him on Twitter @StephenHenighan.*

Library as Wishful Thinking

ALBERTO MANGUEL

Libraries are not only essential in educating the soul, but in forming the identity of a society

One afternoon in April or May 56 BCE, Cicero wrote to his friend Atticus from his country house in Antium yet another letter filled with details of his daily life, and also with a few requests. "I shall be delighted if you can pay me a visit," he wrote. "You will be surprised at Tyrannio's excellent arrangement of my library. What is left of it is much better than I expected: still, I should be glad if you would send me two of your library slaves for Tyrannio to employ to glue pages together and be of general assistance, and I would tell them to get some bits of parchment to make title-pieces, which I think you Greeks call *sillybi*." Tyrannio, as the serviceable note in Loeb's edition of the *Letters* tells us, was a grammarian and teacher brought to Rome as a prisoner and served at one time as a tutor to the young Cicero. Cicero's library would be properly ordered and labelled.

But "what is left of it" requires an explanation. Cicero had returned to Rome a year earlier, after the newly-elected tribune Clodius passed a law denying Cicero "fire and water" (in other words, public shelter) within four hundred miles of Rome. In despair, Cicero let his hair grow long and straggly, and dressed himself in a dark-coloured mourning toga; Clodius's gangs hurled abuse at him when he was out in the streets, as well as stones and excrement—it is possible that they also ransacked his library. The Senate and the consuls, fearing the violence of Clodius's hoodlums, said nothing, and Caesar, who was still encamped near Rome, declared, with more than a touch of *schadenfreude*, that under the circumstances, he could do nothing to prevent the harassment.

Cicero, who had studied the Greek stoics both in Rome and in Athens, turned to "what was left" of his books for consolation. He wrote to Atticus: "Since Tyrannio has arranged my books for me, my house seems to have had a soul added to it." And to his friend Varrus he advised, with words that are now printed on T-shirts and coffee mugs: "If you have a library and a garden, you have everything you need." This Stoic advice was certainly intended for himself.

In Cicero's Rome, most private libraries were not built for the purpose of housing books. Rather, a *bibliotheca* would normally be an ordinary room set aside in a wing of the main building, with shelves stacked with papyrus rolls and wax tablets; often next to the garden or courtyard; simple or luxurious, depending on the wealth of the householder. Cicero's library, though more modest than that of his friend Varrus, for instance, was nevertheless well stocked. In these books, lovingly collected over the years, Cicero believed that he would find not only consolation and a cautionary warning about the limits of one's own knowledge, but also positive mirrors of his own ethical virtues. In October of that same year, he wrote to his brother Quintius who was then stationed in Gaul: "Don't be idle; and don't think the proverbial *Know yourself* was only meant to discourage vanity: it means also that we should be aware of our own qualities."

For Cicero, his library was not only the soul of his house but also, in a deeper sense, of his own self. His persona as a thaumaturgic rhetorician, so keenly tuned to foster his political career, was nurtured by his readings and by his exploration of Greek philosophy, both in his early days in Rome and Athens, and now in his later years, enjoying his own library and those of his friends. Though in practical terms, Cicero knew perfectly well that his beloved volumes would not be an effective tool of survival against the murderous plotting of his political enemies, they seem to have served him as a promise, or a hope for something better, if not in his remaining years then possibly after death. In his essay on friendship

Cicero wrote: "For I do not agree with those who have recently begun to argue that soul and body perish at the same time, and that all things are destroyed by death. I give greater weight to the old-time view, whether it be that of our forefathers, who paid such reverential rites to the dead, which they surely would not have done if they had believed those rites were a matter of indifference to the dead; or, whether it be the view of those who lived in this land and by their principles and precepts brought culture to Great Greece, which now, I admit, is wholly destroyed, but was then flourishing." Cicero imagined that his library, filled with those ancient Greek works, would grant him a sort of intellectual immortality.

Wishing your library to be a place of learning, a place where you acquire the wisdom of your elders through the books they left behind, is part of the belief of the Stoics, whose teaching Cicero as a reader admired, though perhaps he did not quite follow their precepts in his political life, at least no more than the Stoic Seneca had done yoking himself to Nero's service and at the same time recommending the path to an ethical life. Like Cicero, however, Seneca believed that you could choose your ancestors; they need not be strictly those of your blood lineage—parents, grandparents and great-grandparents—but also the authors on your library shelves: Aristotle, Plato and the rest of the Greek savants. The Stoic library of learning was largely a wishful library.

Some sixteen centuries later, thanks to the whims of the Counter-Reformation, the conversation with our Greek ancestors so dear to Cicero was divided into two antagonistic verbal factions, and the libraries of Catholic countries divested themselves of most of the books written in the venerable tongue of Plato that Rome now associated with the spawn of Luther. In Spain, Portugal, Italy, and also in France, from the late seventeenth century onwards, the libraries of the Enlightenment consisted mainly of Latin works: Virgil rather than Homer, Seneca rather than Plutarch. The enlightened Petrarch, who had discovered in 1345 in Verona a copy of Cicero's letters to Atticus unknown at the time, complained of keeping in his library a beautiful manuscript of the *Iliad* that he could not read because he had no Greek.

Five centuries later, the leaders of the independence movements in the South American colonies, educated according to the inherited values of the Counter-Reformation as well as those of the Romantic school, all swore by Cicero, and learned from him the art of rhetoric, the craft of political strategies and the skill of refined prose style, as well as the duties of loyal friendship and the hidden benefits of old age. The libraries of these men (they were mostly men) from Mexico City to Lima, from Caracas to Buenos Aires, all boasted of keeping faith with Cicero's words, and no lawyer's study (they were mostly lawyers) was conceivable without a copy of Cicero's *Epistles*. The ideas of Demosthenes and Aristotle indeed flourished in Latin America, but largely through Ciceronian assimilation and interpretation. Also, through their readings of Cicero and other Latin masters, these learned men fostered the notion that a library was a core component of an enlightened and free nation, essential not only in educating the soul, but principally in defining each citizen's identity, as well as the identity of that conglomerate of souls which we call society.

In 1810, seeking to free the Provinces of the Río de la Plata from the yoke of the Spanish crown, the young lawyer Mariano Moreno proposed that one of the first acts of the revolutionary council should consist in the founding of a national library that would contain all manner of books, without censorship of any kind. "Truth, like virtue," Moreno wrote, "has in itself its own indisputable apology. By discussing and making it known, it will appear in all its luminous splendour. If restrictions are opposed to intellectual discourse, both the spirit and the matter will languish, and errors, lies, despair, fanaticism and stultification will become the banner of the nations, and will be the eternal cause of their abasement, their misery and their ruin." Moreno justified the need for "a library for all" in these unequivocal terms: "If nations do not become educated, if their rights are not made for everyone, if each citizen does not know what his worth is, what he can achieve and what he is owed, new illusions will replace the old, and after vacillating for a time between a thousand uncertainties, it will be our lot to change tyrants without doing away with tyranny." These cautions are the *Nachleben* of the words Denis Diderot had written a half-century earlier, and which Moreno had certainly read: "To educate a nation is to civilize it. To do away with its education is to return it to its primitive state of barbarism."

Moreno's fear of a new tyranny proved justified. The library, under the name of Biblioteca Pública de Buenos Aires—it was not called Nacional until 1884—did not fulfill its wished-for function. Set up under the Ciceronian notion of "a place for the instruction of the soul," its mere existence did not suffice to prevent the rise of Argentina's first tyrant, Juan Manuel de Rosas. Charles Darwin, during his expedition aboard *HMS Beagle*, met Rosas and assessed him as "a man of extraordinary character." Rosas himself agreed, and admitted: "I have always admired autocratic dictators." He said he believed that the manipulation of elections was

necessary for political stability "because most of the country's population is illiterate." In his journal Darwin notes that an English merchant told him about a man who had murdered another; when arrested and questioned on his motive the man answered, "He spoke disrespectfully of General Rosas, so I killed him." Darwin adds laconically: "At the end of a week the murderer was at liberty." Darwin saw clearly "that Rosas ultimately would become the dictator," and explains with a touch of irony that "to the term *king*, the people in this, as in other republics, have a particular dislike." After leaving South America, Darwin heard that Rosas had been elected "with powers for a time altogether opposed to the constitutional principles of the republic." The Argentinian historian Carlos Ibarguren described Rosas as little inclined to scholarly pursuits or to careful and reflective reading. "He was an autodidact, not fond of theories or literary notions. Life itself, in its elementary and rough force, was his great teacher." The anti-intellectual movement in Argentina had begun.

Rosas's state terrorism was carried out by his secret police, called the *Mazorca* or "ear of corn" in reference to the group's unity, like the symbol of the *fasces* bundle under Mussolini. The *mazorqueros* would burst into the houses of suspected members of the opposition, arresting whomever they chose, and then torturing or butchering them. Many opponents had their throats slit, some were castrated, or had their beards or their tongues cut. It is thought that some two thousand people were killed between 1829 until 1852 by Rosas's henchmen, foreshadowing the crimes of the military Junta in the 1970s. As a perusal of any library will tell us, History seems to have the tedious habit of repeating itself.

Rosas's reign ended in 1852. A *caudillo* from the province of Entre Rios, Juan José de Urquiza, with the support of the emperor of Brazil, defeated Rosas at the Battle of Caseros. The tyrant fled and, under disguise, boarded a ship for Britain, where he died in 1877, an embittered exile. "It is not the people who have overthrown me," he remarked shortly before the end. "It was those apes, the Brazilians."

Under the tyranny of Rosas, the Biblioteca Pública de Buenos Aires continued to stand, but it no longer served Moreno's wishful purpose of educating the people according to the ethical precepts of Cicero. The "restorer of the Laws," as Rosas chose to be called, began the noxious practice of turning the job of director of what would later be called the National Library into a political post, a practice still in effect in Argentina today. Rosas chose to name as director a brilliant scholar, Pedro de Angelis, the first historian of the new nation who in 1830 had written a flattering biography of the tyrant. He gave De Angelis instructions to broadcast the government's "intellectual projects," a charge that earned De Angelis the loathing of almost all of his fellow intellectuals.

During Rosas's time, Argentina's intellectuals lived mostly abroad, in exile across the river in Uruguay where, after escaping Rosas' *mazorqueros*, they attempted to keep the original spirit of the now distant Biblioteca Pública alive. Esteban Echeverría, the most remarkable Argentine writer of the time and a fierce opponent of Rosas, affirmed his wish for intellectual freedom in the new and now martyred nation: "Freedom," he wrote, "is the right each person has to use without any constraints his faculties in service of well being and to choose the means that will serve to achieve that goal." The Biblioteca, he believed, would, in better days, serve that freedom.

Borges, in a late story, "Utopia of a Tired Man," suggested that history is a tale constantly revised and transformed, and that the ogres of the past become the saints of the future. In the story, Borges travels to the future and is shown by his guide tall buildings used as crematoria. "They were invented," his guide explains, "by a philanthropist whose name, I believe, was Adolf Hitler." In 2013, during the presidency of Cristina Kirchner and 136 years after Rosas's death, Mauricio Macri, as head of the governing body of the City of Buenos Aires, gave the name of Juan Manuel de Rosas to a municipal subway station.

My question is the following: how is it possible that a new nation (or an old one, for that matter), built on the belief in the importance of having a strong cultural institution at its core, an institution capable of holding the memory of its ancient roots and its modern experience, capable of educating its readers in free thought and civic ethics—how is it possible that this nation could so blatantly disregard its high purpose and instructional intent? How could things have gone so wrong?

I can think of three possible answers.

One: Any cultural institution is only as powerful and efficacious as the use we make of it. A knife can serve to butter bread or to murder Duncan. A library can educate a nation or sit dumb and helpless while the nation goes up in flames.

Two: Any cultural institution, however strong its potential, can be reduced to a mere adornment if a nation sees its own purpose as strictly limited to political power. Witness Anchises' speech to his son Aeneas concerning the true purpose of Rome: "the true purpose [is] not cultural pursuits but lording over others," thereby laying the ground for a long tradition of imperialistic ambitions still very much alive today:

> Let others fashion from bronze more lifelike, breathing images—
> For so they shall—and evoke living faces from marble;
> Others excel as orators, others track with their instruments
> The planets circling in heaven and predict when stars will appear.
> But, Romans, never forget that government is your medium!
> Be this your art:—to practice men in the habit of peace,
> Generosity to the conquered, and firmness against aggressors.

Three: Any cultural institution entails both the possibility of learning and of imaginative change, and also the duty to understand the use we make of these tools of survival. Perhaps that possibility and that awareness are all we can consciously wish for. The future is undoubtedly bleak, but I believe that we still can make use of our wishing powers. Wishful thinking may be nothing but smoke and mirrors, but it is still thinking. I know I must sound naïve in saying this, but I believe that our libraries, as realms that foster thought, will continue to bear witness to our more noble human endeavours as well as to our malicious human madness, and to carry for future readers (if the stars are kind) clues about how to undertake the former and fend off the latter. And to teach us also the consequences of either choice.

Alberto Manguel is the award-winning author of hundreds of works, most recently (in English) Fabulous Monsters, Packing My Library: An Elegy and Ten Digressions, Curiosity *and* All Men Are Liars. *He lives in New York. Read more of his work at manguel.com and geist.com.*

ENDNOTES

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

ROUND THE CLOCK COVERAGE

Recorder: The Marion Stokes Project is a documentary film by Matt Wolf about Marion Stokes, a Black librarian, collector, communist and television commentator, who recorded 24-hour-a-day television news on Beta and VHS cassette tapes from 1979, starting with the Iran hostage crisis, until her death in 2012. Stokes recorded multiple news channels at the same time on televisions and videocassette decks in her home in Philadelphia and created a collection of 71,716 tapes of local and national news recordings, which trace the early years and growth of CNN and Fox, as well as closed captioning technology and the decline of local cable network news. Wolf focuses mostly on Stokes's life story, her relationships and family life, and how her family and friends perceived her and her documentation and collecting activities. Contemporary interviews are cut with news footage digitized from Stokes's recordings and attempt to discern a motivation behind her mammoth thirty-five-year project. There's plenty of historical footage to choose from, and Wolf focuses on the most iconic news events from those thirty-five years to demonstrate the influence television news has on our understanding of society and the world; seeing Obama elected president on grainy VHS footage is a jarring reminder of how dedicated Stokes was to a technology long abandoned by most. But Stokes's project and person is best expressed in the clips of her on Input, a panel discussion show on public access television in Philadelphia, where she was a panelist from 1968–1971; her fearless intelligence, bravery and commitment to a better world shines in nuanced and challenging conversations about race and social justice difficult to find on television today.

—Shyla Seller

KING OF BICYCLES

While camping near Vancouver at Golden Ears Provincial Park—huddled around a cooler, drunk at noon, reeking of campfire and weed smoke—I became enamoured with the joker card, bearing the image of a king on a bicycle, in a pack of Bicycle brand playing cards that my friends and I were using for a game of cribbage. The king, in his standard-issue red, yellow and blue garb gazes listlessly past the viewer, as if staring out at swaths of land over which he once presided, feeling loss and, deeper down, a secret sense of relief. Desperate to explore my attraction to this king, I dug around online and found the blog of John Edelson, a collector of joker cards. There I learned that in the *Hochman Encyclopedia of American Playing Cards* this Bicycle playing card joker has been delighting players since 1905; Edelson owns sixty different "bicycle jokers," all of which depict a king, jester or clown on a bicycle. I know now that the connection I felt with this solemn king couldn't have been singular: after 115 years in print, surely someone else has looked at this tiny man and thought, "Now here is a man of gravity; here is a man who has loved and lost." I wonder whether there's an opportunity to start a fan club. To browse Edelson's collection of 6,000 plus jokers, visit his blog at amusedbyjokersami.com.

—Roni Simunovic

BORDERING

If you're looking for a well-written armchair travelogue, try Kapka Kassabova's **Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe** (Graywolf), a poetic, thoughtful, and timely exploration of the borderlands of the eastern Balkans, a tangled, troubled landscape where, for centuries, east and west have faced each other across boundaries that have vanished from (and reappeared on) maps, in lockstep with the rising (and falling) fortunes of empires and nations. Kassabova, now a resident of Scotland, was born in Bulgaria in 1973 during that brutal period when the southern border of Bulgaria was the most isolated section of the Iron Curtain and a magnet for the faint and often fatal hopes of those most desperate to make their escape to the west. Many died in the attempt, shot by border guards, their remains hurriedly buried in the nearby forests. The ghosts of these dead haunt Kassabova's account, as she drifts back and forth across the frontier—between Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey—talking with those she meets along the

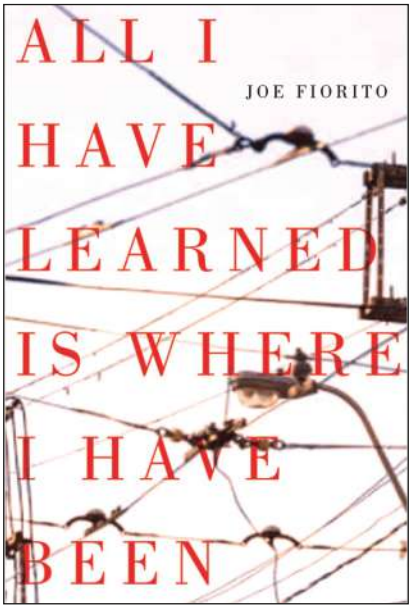
way: "retired spies, smugglers, hunters, botanists, healers, artists, Roma, forest rangers and border guards," and, increasingly, the newly displaced: refugees from conflicts further to the east—Syria and Iraq—whose exodus to the west stalled abruptly when borders, briefly open, hardened once more.
—Michael Hayward

SHOCKED AND DISCREDITED

Something That May Shock and Discredit You (Atria Books) by Daniel Mallory Ortberg is an essay collection in conversation with high and low culture, ranging from Sir Gawain to the Golden Girls, as the author works to understand and to validate his trans identity. Building on his long-held assertion that Captain Kirk is a lesbian, Ortberg reframes other aspects of pop culture as a means to understanding his transition, such as: the stages of working on an impression of the TV detective Columbo, who, thanks to testosterone, has a newfound vocal range, to reimaging '90s Cosmo headlines for confused future trans men. Ortberg also examines Biblical stories to help understand his transition as viewed through his Christian faith. The one I found most powerful is Ortberg's multiple reframings of Jacob wrestling with an angel—Genesis as an analogy for transition. With each essay, I looked forward to seeing how Ortberg was going to remould a piece of pop culture or literary canon into an earnest-yet-humorous take on trans issues. While the essays maintain a clever jocularity, a current of vulnerability runs throughout them as Ortberg reflects on his bewildered younger self and his attempts to navigate his new relationship to his own body, his social circle, and wider society. This collection shows what Ortberg has gained through his transition, and what he's lost, in the oblique, conversational, genre-blending style that is his signature.
—Kelsea O'Connor

LIFE IN THE TALL TOWERS LOST

Joe Fiorito's **All I Have Learned Is Where I Have Been** (Véhicule Press) is at first glance a sequel to his 2018 collection, *City Poems*. The main difference is that, while *City Poems* takes place in Toronto's inner confines, *All I Have Learned* covers wider ground, from Etobicoke to Montreal and—in "Open Season" and "Woman Skinning Seal"—



to the far reaches of Iqaluit. What is common to all of Fiorito's poems is their description of life's conditions on the edge. One of the women in "The Roma of Etobicoke" talks about her apartment, in sentences familiar to anyone living in the land of Single Room Occupancy: "…I taped my windowpane. / I flush with a bucket, / My door won't close in / the winter. / I have no electricity / in my bedroom (laughs, / stops laughing.)" "The Statue of Bethune in November," consisting of four minimal lines, brings Remembrance Day in downtown Montreal to life: "red poppies drip / from his stone hand / as if he'd cut himself / again." A stanza from "Bus Trip" evokes specific memories for anyone who used to travel by Greyhound: "tobacco smoke; / a bus station mural, / Canada geese…" Rolling into Toronto, "Angel in a Shelter" makes visible a young woman in an unsafe and crowded environment: "My injection, twice a month; / Am I the only person in here who, / out of body, sees me?" In "Epitaph," the author captures a visit to a friend in palliative care, now only a shadow of his larger-than-life, former self: "last snap: a cup of tea / a knitted cap, a pretty blanket, / hands in lap…" Reading the author's notes at the end of this collection is well worth the time, as they provide insights into the succinct nature of these fine poems.
—Jill Mandrake

FORGETTING THE QUESTION

Why would Rachel Vanderlinden accept, without comment, a stranger who knocks at her door and introduces himself as her missing anthropologist husband? This question is at the heart of **The Dutch Wife** (Penguin Canada) by Eric McCormack, a story told by Thomas, Rachel's son, who is now an old man. Thomas's story soon becomes his mother's story, which in turn becomes her husband Rowland's story. Then we go back to Thomas's story, then to the stranger at the door's story, and then more of Rowland's story, until we've forgotten all about the question that originally caught our interest. Through the different narratives we travel from small-town Ontario, to places: where it is taboo to eat anything (in this case a banana) while in a boat; where a man is punished for desecrating a fetish (in this case the bough of a fig tree); where women drink and fight while men take care of domestic tasks; and

where Thomas licks a fish and then experiences erotic hallucinations—all events that keep us glued to the story. Then, as Thomas and Rowland travel by train across our own sedate country, we realize that we are about to learn the answer to the original question. As the story winds down, readers might be tempted to turn to Google to fact-check some of the places and events they've just read about—until discovering that the author (who was Thomas's next door neighbor) has listed his own research results. This is a book you can get lost in—which is why it got me through the first weeks of the pandemic.—*Patty Osborne*

AN APARTMENT BLOCK IN ANGOLA

In **Transparent City** (Biblioasis) by Ondjaki (and translated by Stephen Henighan) an apartment block with a magical burst water pipe is a microcosm for post-war Angola coming under the grips of the transnational corporations and agendas to privatize public goods. This is a refreshing addition to the sub-genre of apartment block fiction (i.e., *Tales from Firozsha Baag* by Rohinton Mistry and *Uhuru Street* by M.G. Vassanji). The way Ondjaki weaves together people struggling to live in urban Angola is reminiscent of the way Rohinton Mistry or M.G. Vassanji deliver rich portrayals of subcultures by exploring hyperlocal relationships. But beyond the illuminated relationships is an absurd yet realistic portrayal of a country transitioning from civil war into a world where water can be privatized, and oil profits can be made anywhere, even from under the city itself. The story begins and ends with the city of Luanda in a raging blaze, but in the pages framed between the opening and closing descriptions of the catastrophe is an examination of beauty, love, justice, and dignity pursued by lives on the margin, lives that have to compromise every day, for even as they are about to be engulfed by the flames, a blind character pragmatically says to his companion, "Don't let me die without knowing the colour of the warm light."—*Anson Ching*

EKPHRASTIC LITERATURE

In 2017, Ben Lerner was included among *Granta* magazine's "best of young American novelists." His short story **The Polish Rider** first appeared in the Summer 2016 fiction issue of the *New Yorker*. If a short story were capable of ambition and could dream, it might dream of exactly this: a second life as a slim hardcover volume published by MACK, a UK-based small press, with embossed lettering on the cover, the text accompanied by full-colour illustrations printed on fine paper. *The Polish Rider* is a meta-fictionalized take on a real-life event that occurred to Lerner and his friend, the painter Anna Ostoya: just before a gallery showing of her paintings, Ostoya accidentally left two of the canvases in an Uber in New York City. The story describes the efforts of an unnamed narrator (Lerner) and the artist (renamed Sonia) to recover the lost paintings. Along the way the narrator muses on "platform capitalism," the clash of technologies, high art and popular culture, and differences between the visual arts and literature. At one point the narrator, who describes himself as a writer of "ekphrastic literature" (consult your OED if needed), confesses to a feeling of jealousy, his sense that "a work of visual art is more real, more actual, than writing," before eventually taking some comfort from the realization that "literature's lack of actuality relative to the plastic arts [is] a power, not a weakness." Ironic, then, that the beauty of this book comes in

part from its non-literary elements, which include reproductions of a number of Ostoya's paintings.

For even more Ben Lerner, check out **The Snows of Venice** (Spector Books), another beautifully produced collaboration, this time between Lerner and the German writer, philosopher and film director Alexander Kluge. The book brings together eight of Lerner's poems (from his 2004 collection *The Lichtenberg Figures*) and fourteen brief stories by Kluge, which were inspired by individual lines from those poems. There are also conversations between Lerner and Kluge, which touch on art and angels, on Paul Klee and Walter Benjamin, on sleepwalking, and on Lerner's 2016 book *The Hatred of Poetry*. There are "slow sonnets" written by Lerner, for Kluge; there are photographs of Venice by Gerhard Richter, accompanied by texts from Kluge; and there are photographs of the Lichtenberg figures themselves, the stigmata left by lightning on landscapes, and on humans. It makes for a fascinating and thought-provoking miscellany. —*Michael Hayward*

COACH HAS A VEHICLE

The maverick sound of Vancouver indie pop band Coach StrobCam immediately pulled me in as I listened to the six tracks of their eponymous CD. The opening tune, "The Problem (Is You)," staggered me with the gritty voice, and grittier lyrics, of Pete Campbell (also a member of David M's No Fun band). The second track, "Milk and Honey (Don't Grow on Trees)" switched styles with a ¾ time signature: a surprise waltz. This made me think of the early Beatles hit, "Baby's in Black," and how it was the first song their fans could waltz to (I mean, if they felt like it). Then "Sensible" ("you're being sensible / you know I hate when you do that") featured keyboards that oscillated like the transistor organs of Vancouver's early garage-punk bands, such as The Chessmen and The Painted Ship. By "transistor," I'm thinking of the cheesy sound that reverberated through a tinny receiver; it's a difficult tone to emulate, but this number nailed it. Next, the accordion, tambourine, and jangly rhythm guitar of "You Can't Look Away" reminded me of Queen Ida and her Bon Temps Zydeco Band. "Under the Stairs" followed, with a similar good-time feeling, except that it morphed into a combination of Queen Ida and Jefferson Starship. Coach StrobCam reserved the best for last: "The Question" is comprised of tormented vocals and mellifluent shrugs: "When your life's a mess / you don't blame your best laid plans / When he breaks your heart / you don't blame his wife and kids." As you may have guessed, the unasked question which remains is: "Are we gonna do it anyway?" It had me answering aloud, "No, don't, you'll regret it!" If early Beatles were a big influence on this CD, and if Coach Strobcam covered the Beatles song "I'm a Loser," I guarantee they'd do an empathetic, bang-up job. —*Jill Mandrake*

MIRROR IMAGE

When reading Jia Tolentino's debut collection of essays, **Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion** (Random House), I was initially disappointed—for a book that promised to be an analysis of millennial angst and disillusionment, an area that does call for serious study, it offered little in terms of concrete resolution. I struggled with the inconclusiveness of her essays; I found myself scanning them for a thesis that I could cling to or contend with, but often what I found was only a careful extrapolation of a

topic, with the occasional stinging sentiment directed at an easy target: Trump, hard-right politics, misogyny. But what eventually emerged after further consideration was, in fact, the conclusion I had been searching for, one that aptly describes the millennial's struggle—between consumption and overconsumption, simplicity and oversaturation—to a tee. In Tolentino's words: "In the end, the safest conclusions may not actually be conclusions. We are asked to understand our lives under such impossibly convoluted conditions." I was reminded of a sentiment popularized by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. When asked what method he'd use to upend capitalism, he replied, "Now is not the time for action. Now is the time to think." Now, more than ever, the trick mirror is a demand for a sense of morality from a system that cannot offer it, that only offers delusion the longer it's stared into. Our struggle is to carefully distinguish truth from fiction, and to avoid being drawn inside. —*Jonathan Heggen*

SCRATCHING THE PRINT-MAKING ITCH

Print/Maker is the sixth volume of *Uppercase* magazine's *Encyclopedia of Inspiration*, profiling forty-eight artists, designers and entrepreneurs of the printmaking profession. Each profile features an artist discussing their method, their preferred type of printing (letterpress, screen print, linocut, and other types, many of which were new to me), their sources of inspiration, their business model and their tips for success. As is only proper for an art book, most of the real estate is taken up with beautiful colour photographs of the artists' studios or retail spaces, their printing presses, tools and stamps, their works-in-progress, and, of course, their art: a feast of lush bolts of printed cloth, vibrant prints, crisp greeting cards, bright posters and more. *Print/Maker* features artists from all over the world and includes significant Canadian representation; I was delighted to find two of my own favourites: Papirmass, an art subscription business out of Toronto, which I have subscribed to for several happy years, and the Regional Assembly of Text, a Vancouver and Victoria stationery shop that sells beautiful, screen-printed ephemera (and whose monthly letter-writing club I have longed to attend). It was refreshing to learn that, while all the artists featured in *Print/Maker* are professionals, not all of them have separate studios or storefronts—many described working in spare bedrooms, converted backyard sheds or right at their kitchen table. For a person like me, who cannot seem to stop collecting things like notebooks and art prints and vintage letterpress stamps, this book scratches all those same itches, inspiring me to get cracking on my own art. —*Kelsea O'Connor*

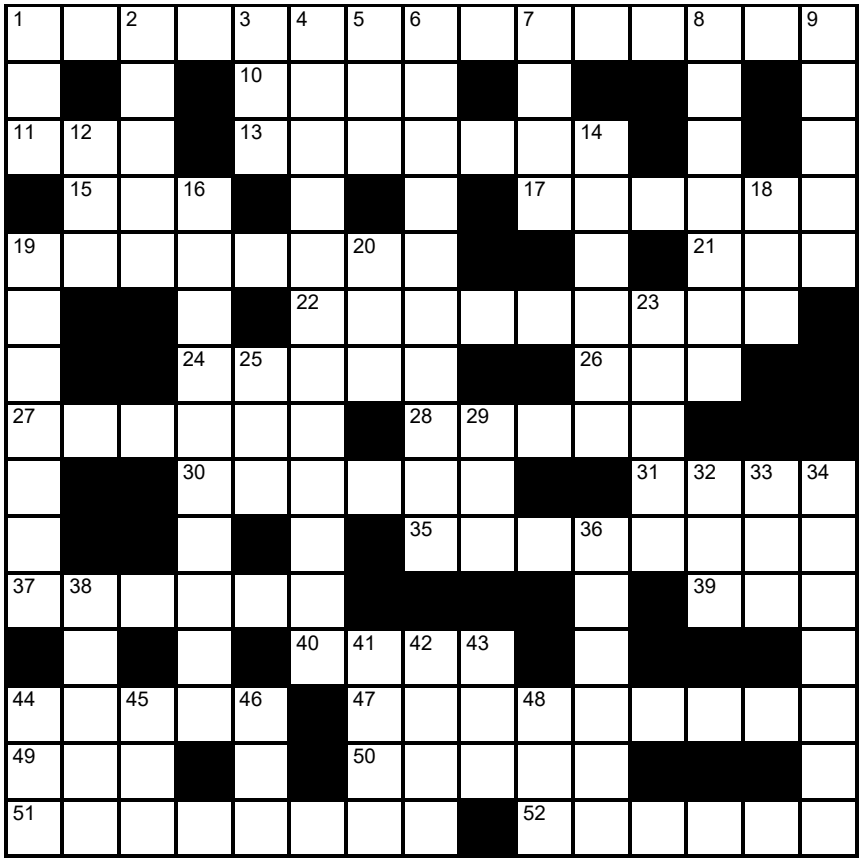
The GEIST Cryptic Crossword

Prepared by Meandricus

Send a copy of your completed puzzle, along with your name and address, to:

Puzzle #117 GEIST
210-111 West Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC V6B 1H4
or geist@geist.com

A winner will be selected at random from correct solutions and will be awarded a one-year subscription to *Geist* or—if already a subscriber—a *Geist* magnet.



ACROSS

1 Oh gawd! When you don't want to do anything, send Great Expectations! (3)
10 Is that wiley outfit the best one or just the first on the list?
11 Start with hockey in Nunavut but also cut it short!
13 Well la dee da! Doesn't he like to rev up an Aston Martin
15 Pierre thinks I'm a friend
17 Midnight prohibitions really bite
19 I'm all for things
21 When you spill, modern Bostonians won't gossip!
22 If you get here early it'll actually be no exaggeration
24 Often there is more than one asshole in the room
26 Oh, it sounds fine to end up flying to Florida or French Guiana
27 I give up! You can be earlier than him!
28 Now she's using verbs as nouns to give them jobs!
30 The Dutch guy who keeps having sex in public should go fishing
31 Are you playing a virtual concert again?
35 Let's pretend we'll explain things thoroughly without jumping off the deep end (2)
37 All my peeps are wearing designs from other clans
39 Caught in an endless array of information might be the end result
40 Those birds in the sky should have saddled up and taken cover before the season starts
44 Come on! Just eject it.
47 When you cannot zig, just say you know and be done with it!
49 At 43 the two of them had a celebratory breakfast.
50 In Africa some cats have their own language
51 When existing is not enough reason for revelry, a word is added (2)
52 I dunno a person, place or thing that qualifies

DOWN

1 I wonder how that one died
2 Please add a mop or something to the offer
3 She would be a bad judge for the syrup contest
4 At the beach in Mexico a local cop dug a weed up (2)
5 We can see that the mixture has, at its heart, an attractive vibe (abbrev)
6 Were they really totally destroyed or did they just feel really bad?
7 Even with intestinal distress, she scored three times in Montezuma
8 Push on the button to agree
9 Saucy music!
12 Get one of these in to tell us how to move forward
14 Did you just get back or are you going to explain it all to me?
16 I couldn't believe it when Berlin iced up
18 It's crucial that you don't make a typo and damage my car
19 The exact time may not be the best time
20 Social distancing quashes the plans of a classroom pest
23 It sounds like he just sat around with his light amplifiers
25 Siggy made decisions there
29 She just wants them to BE something
32 I can't cotton onto that card game
33 When one has been or done something
34 I love to tinge my reputation (3)
36 According to Gene, that town could never have sympathized
38 It won't be rough when she's mayor of the district
41 A taco should start with eight toppings
42 The service included weird happenings by hardworking miners
43 Urge it on so it will come first
44 Why the congestion? There's only one person in there! (abbrev)
45 In spring make it imperfect
46 Neither here and not there
48 He's cold and dead but his arms aren't (abbrev)

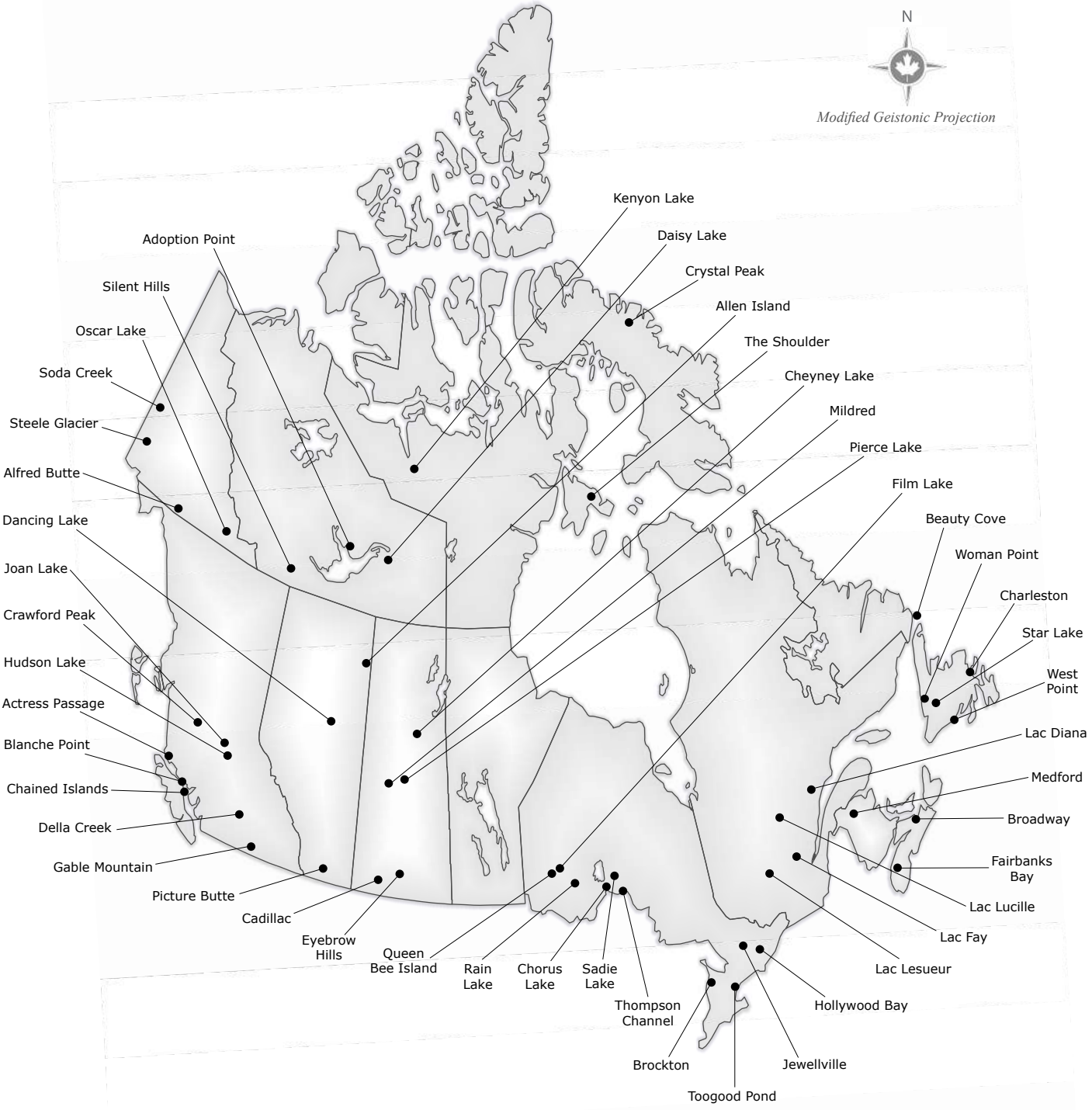
There was no winner for Puzzle 116.

S	O	L	I	T	A	I	R	E	■	C	A	B	I	N
O	R	E	S	■	B	■	■	Z	O	O	■	■	■	A
C	R	Y	O	M	E	T	E	R	■	M	O	U	N	T
I	■	■	L	A	D	A	■	A	■	M	M	N	■	U
A	D	M	A	N	■	W	A	L	K	O	N	A	I	R
L	■	■	T	O	C	■	■	O	■	N	I	C	■	A
G	■	■	I	■	L	■	■	O	R	B	■	C	A	L
A	■	■	O	S	O	L	E	M	I	O	■	O	■	L
T	W	I	N	■	I	■	D	I	D	O	■	M	A	Y
H	■	■	■	■	S	A	S	S	■	K	E	P	T	■
E	■	■	P	O	T	S	■	P	O	L	K	A	E	D
R	■	B	I	D	E	T	■	O	■	O	E	N	■	R
I	N	A	N	E	R	■	L	U	L	U	■	I	R	E
N	I	N	E	■	E	V	E	N	■	S	■	E	■	A
G	A	S	S	E	D	■	A	D	D	E	N	D	U	M

I Am Just Too Much

The National Map of Joan Crawford

by Adam Vajda & Jill Mandrake



New from Quattro Books, Alberto Manguel's magisterial achievements in the novella form

A RETURN ($20 CAD/USD)

Every exile is offset by a return, or at least the possibility of a return. N.A. Fabris's return to his home town brings him face to face with a reality that owes its existence to both recent history and his memory of disappeared friends, altered landscapes, secret nightmares and a woman he once loved.

©Craig Stephenson

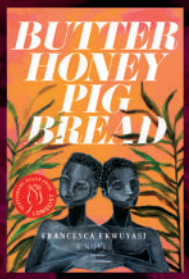
THE OVERDISCRIMINATING LOVER ($20 CAD/USD)

A genius of erotic minimalism, Anatole Vasanpeine is a little-known (and imaginary) character from the early 20th century town of Poitiers. History remembers him for one extraordinary trait: his passionate love not for whole things but for small details, in other words for the intimate, anonymous and tragic world that surrounds us.

QUATTRO BOOKS

www.quattrobooks.ca | info@quattrobooks.ca

BOOKS *for* LIFE

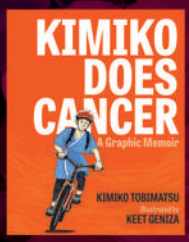


BUTTER HONEY PIG BREAD
Francesca Ekwuyasi

Longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize: an intergenerational saga about three Nigerian women – a novel about food, family, and forgiveness.

LOVE AFTER THE END
Joshua Whitehead, ed.

A bold anthology of Indigiqueer and Two-Spirit speculative fiction. "Smart, stunning, and imaginative." —Alicia Elliott, author of *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*



KIMIKO DOES CANCER
Kimiko Tobimatsu & Keet Geniza

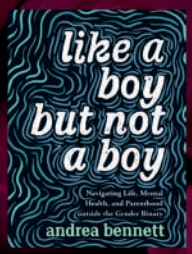
A moving graphic memoir about the unexpected cancer journey of a young, queer, mixed-race woman. "Candidly written and lovingly illustrated." —*Ms. Magazine*

THE GIRL WHO WAS CONVINCED BEYOND ALL REASON THAT SHE COULD FLY
Sybil Lamb

Set in a rusted unnamed city, this visionary illustrated YA novel features a homeless girl who knows how to fly. "Lamb brings fairy-tale wonderment to the cityscape." —*Quill and Quire*

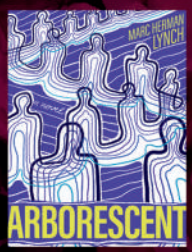
GOD LOVES HAIR: 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
Vivek Shraya & Juliana Neufeld

A tenth-anniversary edition of Shraya's first book: an illustrated YA story collection that celebrates racial, gender, and religious diversity. Includes a foreword by Cherie Dimaline.



LIKE A BOY BUT NOT A BOY
andrea bennett

A relevatory essay collection about gender, mental illness, parenting, work, class, and the task of living in a non-binary body. "Moving and illuminating." —*Publishers Weekly*



ARBORESCENT
Marc Herman Lynch

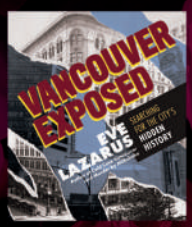
Ghosts, doppelgängers, and a man who turns into a tree: a startling novel that articulates the immigrant body. "A novel that is both socially daring and full of wonders." —Larissa Lai, author of *The Tiger Flu*

BURNING SUGAR
Cicely Belle Blain

A poetic exploration of Black identity, history and lived experience. "An intimately powerful debut." —*Quill and Quire* (starred review)

RENDER
Sachiko Murakami

Searing poems that render a history of trauma, addiction, and recovery through dreams and waking experience. "A touching, insightful, and introspective collection." —*Bustle*



VANCOUVER EXPOSED
Eve Lazarus

A full-colour history of Vancouver's best-kept secrets, by the author of Murder by Milkshake. "Think you know Vancouver? Well, Eve Lazarus has some stories for you." —Aaron Chapman, author of *Vancouver After Dark*