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GEIST

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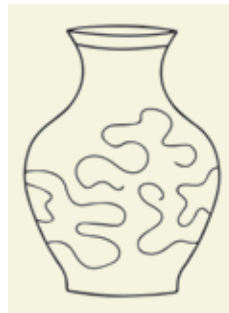
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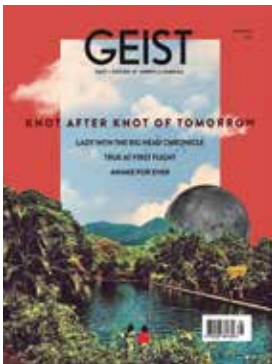
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MISCELLANY



GEIST IN ICELAND

No. 123 with *Geist* correspondent Kelsea O'Connor on a summer hike of the Falljökull Glacier and at Reynisfjara Black Sand Beach during her Icelandic adventures, June 2023.

HERE'S THE THING

What a treat to read the poems in the Fall issue. Molly Cross-Blanchard's poem made me laugh out loud—I loved its boldness and small moments of happy solitude. Reading Owen Torrey's "Short Talk" felt like being gently pulled into an intimate space: the diner, the city in fall. Amazing poets!
—*Jessica, Halifax, NS*

Readers can enjoy Molly Cross-Blanchard's "Here's the thing" and Owen Torrey's "Short Talk on Summer Ending" in Geist 124.

"Photons hurled at mystery," a wonderful line to make your Maglite feel magical. From James Pollock in *Geist* magazine—@aquietroot

Glowing praise for James Pollock's poem "Flashlight," published in Geist 119. A Quiet Root shares one piece of stellar poetry or flash fiction from literary magazines every weekday. Find them at aquietroot.com
—*The Editors*

REVOCAATION, REVOCALIZATION

Writers are taught to avoid cliché, but maybe there should be exceptions. "Stuck in a rut" is a good cliché, for example, because to be stuck in a rut is to be mired in banality, and the act of using a cliché emphasizes how mired one is. This prompt is about rethinking rules, and will make you write poetry so unrecognizable you'll wonder if you wrote it at all.

1. List ten exceptionally poetic words. Don't use them.
2. Pick a form or device you've always wanted to try, or always tried to avoid.
3. Change your pronouns, change your POV.

OVERHEARD



Summer 2023, Templeton Park Pool, Vancouver, BC. Overheard by April Thompson, comic by April Thompson. Find out more at geist.com/overheard.

4. Ask your friend, or the dictionary, or your friend the dictionary, for an arbitrary starting concept.
5. Begin the poem.
6. After breaking a line, suture it, and break it somewhere else.
7. Write ten additional lines after you think the poem is done.

—Jade Wallace

Thank you to Jade Wallace, prize-winning poet and Geist 125 contributor, for sharing this writing prompt—so full of

opportunities for reinvention. Find their poem “Drinking Game with Ghosts” on page 14.

CORRECTION

In “Theft” by Valérie Bah (No. 124), we incorrectly referred to the author as she/her. Valérie Bah’s pronouns are they/them. We sincerely apologize for this error and are working to improve our processes.

—The Editors

WRITE TO GEIST

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

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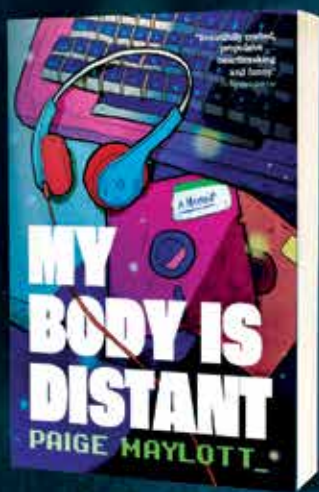
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MY BODY IS DISTANT



“Maylott’s gripping debut memoir covers her gender transition, divorce, and experiments with online relationships in thrillingly nonlinear fashion ... This will buoy readers facing similar challenges and offer invaluable guidance to their allies.”

<i>Publishers Weekly</i>
on <i>My Body Is Distant</i>

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Jenny Bou creates retro-style collages with images she finds in magazines and used books. Her collages are all handmade, with a lot of love and a glue stick. She lives in Quebec City, QC. Find her on Instagram @jenny_bou_collage.

Rebecca Clouâtre is a full-time paper collage artist. In 2020, CBC Arts created a documentary film about Clouâtre and her artistic process as a part of their *Paper Cuts* series. Her work “Maternal Collections” was exhibited at the WKP Kennedy Gallery in North Bay, ON in 2023. She lives in Ottawa, ON. Find her at rebeccaclouatre.com.

Alexander Hernandez is the creative artist behind the contemporary surreal art endeavour DIGOUTTHESKY. Born and raised in Ontario, he sought an artistic outlet and found great liberation in collage/digital art. Being able to slice elements, arrange colours and invent new worlds gave Hernandez the creative expressions he craved. Find him at digoutthesky.com and on Instagram @digoutthesky.

Paige Jung (she/her) is a Chinese-Canadian illustrator, muralist and artist. Her illustrations make bold use of colour and gestural shapes to tell stories of joy, wonder and connection. She lives in Vancouver, BC. Find her at paigejung.com.

The images from Jung’s series “Lunar Objects” can be found throughout this issue. These images were originally created for a collaboration with tattoo artist Bethany Wat,

to raise money for the Yarrow Intergenerational Society for Justice, an organization supporting youth and low-income immigrant seniors in Chinatown and the Downtown East-side in Vancouver, BC. Find them at yarrowsociety.ca.

Nandita Ratan is an illustrator who works with storytelling, creating visual narratives and representing South Asian culture. Her work explores the everyday, seeing beauty and magic in the mundane. She lives in Hyderabad and Vancouver, BC. Find her at nanditaratan.com and on Instagram @nanditaratan.

Marika Echachis Swan / ʔupinup is an artist of Tla-o-qui-aht, Scottish and Irish descent. Her main creative practice explores feminist Tla-o-qui-aht values through print-making, often layered with carving, stencil and photography. “Cryer” (page 33) honours the sacred role of those brave enough to release the intergenerational burden of grief passed down so that the next generation walks a little lighter. Marika balances her creative practice with various community arts projects. She lives in Tofino, BC. Find her at marikaswan.com.

Dianne Twombly is a photographer and visual artist. Her surreal digital assemblages explore themes of decay, renewal, and cycles of life and death in both natural and constructed environments. She lives in Hamilton, ON. Find her at diannetwombly.com and on Instagram @diannetwombly.

The Trap Door

EIMEAR LAFFAN

This invertebrate does not go looking for prey



1. Since I wrote on my Tinder profile that my kink is the apostrophe, I have had exchanges with perfect strangers about the oft-wasted promise of the semi-colon. On whether the word *semi-colon* necessitates a hyphen, opinion is divided. If you attend to my grammar, you will see on which side I stand.
2. How did we leap from apostrophes to semi-colons? I ascribe it to the expectation of speed embedded in dating platforms. “What is a dating platform?” my mother might have asked, were language available

to her tongue. I imagine posterity too will ask this question, eager to ascribe to my generation a dismissiveness of humanity they cannot comprehend. Swipe left. Of course, if their becoming has depended on the existence of such a virtual location, this may complicate their politics. Swipe right.

3. I met one of the semi-colon characters who proceeded to announce his *theory of me*. I was, he *theorized*, a trap door spider. This was our second encounter, the construction of the theory presumably done during our

initial meeting, a walk that began and ended in a parking lot. Dating is not what it used to be. Suitors are not lined up at the door. No bouquets of flowers sit in the receiving room—another kind of obligated existence to be sure. This is only to say I have been watching *Bridgerton*, living vicariously by way of Daphne. People used to tell me they lived vicariously by way of me, but this experience died with my natural hair colour.

4. For Freud, train phobias were caused by the repression of sexual impulses. In “Three Essays on Sexuality” this comes under the minor heading, *Mechanical Excitations*. Pleasurable sensations were, according to the good doctor, produced by rhythmic agitations of the body. Something then in the reverberations. His theory arose out of his own fear, assuming it universal. He suspected he had seen his mother naked during a train journey at the age of two, the first child ever to have to cope with the trauma of a garmentless mother. He had to temper the libido this event gave rise to—precocious child of story—and so began his disinclination to the iron line.
5. How much of psychoanalysis is memoir? How much of memoir failed psychoanalysis?
6. The German term Freud uses for train phobias is *eisenbahnangst*, to bang against your own angst—my translation. My theorist was engaged with his own unrest

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“

Tenant resistance and
government gentrification



”

It colonized but is
now *decolonizing*



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as I untangled myself from the discomfort of the newly imposed bodice. Different era, different texture to the gown, without doubt. Like everyone else these days, I am clothed in petrol.

7. The term *eisenbahnangst* was coined by Johannes Rigler in 1879 when industrialization was advancing quickly, on its own collision course.
8. I did not dismiss my theorist. He was a consummate conversationalist and for all my allusions to impropriety, I am partial to “a good theory.” A list of items we discussed over dinner, documented for posterity:

Beau Travail

Desert psychogeography

What it is to say *I* and *you*

George’s assault-kiss of Lucy in

A Room with a View

Italy

The personal correspondence

of Kathy Acker & McKenzie

Wark

The intestines of a goat

How facial expressions give a

person away

Polyamory versus monogamy

The semi-colon as the aftermath

of a gunshot

When sugared ginger on a margarita glass should be eaten

(Him: Immediately.

Me: Needs savouring.)

Which Eastern European country

Garth Greenwell’s books

are set in

(Him: Hungary.

Me: Not Hungary.)

Lost crystals

Getting your shit together

Ways of Seeing (Different)

9. I google the word “consummate” to ensure I am making adequate use of it, but something goes wrong with Safari. It takes me to

a page called *the knot*. There is a sketch of an abandoned event, balloons on an empty dance floor. Beneath this sketch is written: *Oops. Looks like this page has already left the party.*

10. If my list were a sonnet, it would be difficult to know where to place the turn. For the life of me, I have been unable to reduce this list to fourteen items. I want to write that from the outset this encounter was overburdened with excess. I like the sound of this sentence, its motion across the page, but it is not entirely accurate. I often impose on experience a gravity it does not naturally possess. Am I willing to scrap a lyrical sentence at the foot of accuracy?

11. A jury returns its verdicts on a case by case basis.

12. If *the life of me* did depend on the reduction of this list, I would not be beyond an arbitrary choice. Writing throws out clichés in the midst of the assignation of words to the page. Do you see what I did there? Blamed writing as if there were no hands at this keyboard, no mediating *I* in sight.

13. Let me return from the wilds of digression. Why did I take the time to document the list of subjects we discussed? The event did not aspire to retention. I am not throwing shade. Recall a second date you had with someone ten years ago or two even. What do you remember of such a brief collaboration in time? I wanted to commit it to language because it would be so easily confined to the landfill of memory. Does a life not consist of its often unrecorded corners too? Are these the spider spaces? Was my theorist onto something?

14. Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology posits that all objects should be treated in the same way, all objects given equal attention. Harman's flat ontology idea of what constitutes an object is broad. Events are included; semi-colons are included; cobwebs are included. Tinder and the theorist and the theory are all included.
15. One aspiration of flat ontology is to move us away from anthropocentric views of the world. Consider the Argentine artist Eduardo Navarro, who dons a leather bodysuit, a helmet and a shell, and crawls about on all fours in an effort to understand the Umwelt of a turtle. Navarro's performance piece was part of show called *Surround Audience*. The sensory data that encloses us can be easy to ignore, existing outside our conscious mind. "If man sometimes acted as certain insects do, he would possess a higher intelligence," wrote Freud's reluctant pupil, Carl Jung.
16. My initial image of a trap door spider was no more than a house spider. My education did not extend to spider varieties. The trap door spider, I came to learn, builds a tunnel in the earth and rarely emerges. Its hovel has an earthen lid attached by silk on one side—a spider hinge. This invertebrate does not go looking for prey. On the contrary, it stays concealed behind its camouflaged door. It senses passing creatures of interest by way of the hairs on its legs—it is a sensitive recluse.
17. If Freud is a master of suspicion, as philosopher Paul Ricoeur posited, the trap door spider is a master of stealth. A cricket should not pause to preen anywhere in the vicinity of its door.
18. In *Philosophy for Spiders*, McKenzie Wark writes that "perhaps it's better to be a spider than a human anyway, particularly if female." She is thinking of Kathy Acker—writer, punk icon, motorcycle rider, performance artist, stripper—who signed herself *the black tarantula* on occasion. Acker is for Wark a low theory philosopher, her philosophy more of the street than of academia. Hers is a philosophy "for brutes: women, slaves, beasts. A philosophy whose skill is threading words together as its own kind of carnal love." One can aspire.
19. Though Arachne's head hurts from being hit over her now smaller head with the non-proverbial shuttle, the girl as spider retains her creative capacity. "The Spider as an Artist / Has never been employed—," the esteemed em-dash poet wrote, but it is a mistake to conclude that the artist-spider is ever unoccupied.

Eimear Laffan's aboutness was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in September 2023. She was a finalist for the Bronwen Wallace Emerging Poetry Prize in 2022. Her work can be found in Ambient, Funicular, the Ex-Puritan and wildness. She lives in Nelson, BC.

True at First Flight

J.R. PATTERSON

The unmistakable buzz of an approaching aircraft is enough to send my family onto the lawn

The omission of airplanes in much artwork is understandable. It's not a question of talent, but of choice and visibility. When used in art, the most visible kinds of planes—those used for war and commercial purposes—signal the glorification of aviation's base functions: to carry and to kill. There is no shortage of propaganda art featuring aircraft within the scope of warfare: smoking wrecks going down over a muddy European

battlefield, or fighters strafing a South Pacific island. Airplanes' other function—commercial—draws, blessedly, even less interest. There is something inherently tacky and inartistic about the jumbo jet, with its tuberous body, lumpy frontal node, bulbous engines. The same could be said of the jets' central node, the international airport. As a criss-cross of double-wide highways overseen by watchtowers and featureless

grey buildings, these depots have all the charm of a postmodern prison. Through these portals, flying has become an accessible part of life, but as a passive event. We are flown, we do not fly.

There is one painting that records that difference. Painted by Frank Johnston, one of the Canadian Group of Seven artists, the work depicts a biplane performing aerial tricks high above a tapestry of rolling cropland. Titled *Sopwith Camel Looping*, it captures the dizzying effect of flight, the splendour of movement, the possibility and freedom offered by a clear, open sky. You can smell the wet dog tang of fuel, feel the grip of the pilot's hands on the stick, sense the buffeting

against the wings. The earth, threatening in its middle proximity, not far below, yet not close, is “above” the upturned pilot’s head. The effect is one of thrilling vertigo.

The pinnacle of aircraft beauty is unquestionably the open cockpit biplane, such as the one in Johnston’s painting. The perfect landing spot is a grass strip in a field. Like most ideas of perfection, this one coincides with an early memory. The first plane I can remember is a canary yellow biplane landing on the short turf runway at the Gladstone Municipal Airport. The airport, some nine miles from my family’s farm in southwest Manitoba, is more accurately called an uncontrolled airport, or, even better, an airstrip.

At Gladstone Municipal Airport, there are no shops, no duty-free; engine oil can be topped up by cranking the handle fixed to a 55-gallon barrel. Likewise, a self-service pump with 100LL aviation fuel. There are no overpriced restaurants, but a bottomless supply of coffee and creamer can be taken with a gaggle of farmers. There is no control tower either, and therefore no custodian to sweep their eyes over the skies and maintain a semblance of order on the hidden aerial highways. Whereas a large airport allows access to the world, the airstrip provides access to the sky. There are only the limits of flight to consider—weight and balance, lift and thrust. Pilots and passengers taking off from Gladstone Municipal don’t do so to travel anywhere, but to fly, and to take in the view. It is flight in its original intention: to see and soar as a bird does, so that we might change our perspective.

At the time of its peak operation in the late 1980s, the airport supported an aerial spray business, a restaurant, and the Glad-Air Flight Training

Centre, which, between 1976 and 1987, graduated over one hundred students. Learning to fly was cheap then, and a kind of piloting craze swept through the area. Farm kids got their wings, bought small, single-engine monoplanes, and began cruising the skies. My uncle was one of them. He growled over his farm and others’ in a little underwing Piper, a single-seater. I only saw it fly once, when he landed it in my parents’ field, en route to its winter storage. Though I have no clear memory of that moment, perhaps a seed was sown that day—seeing someone I knew and loved emerge from the cockpit of this intangible freedom machine.



In my mid-twenties, I took the necessary steps: studied physics, mechanics, and weather, sat the theoretical and practical exams needed to get a licence of my own. When I told my uncle, he offered me a leather bag full of maps and charts, the textbooks and circular slide rule he’d used to calculate wind correction, weight and balance, and other flight technicalities. Those tools, by that time fifty

years old, aligned with my longing for a kind of antiquity. I didn’t want the experience dulled by too much technology. I eschewed GPS for dead reckoning—navigation based on geographical inference—and that way came to know the land as its own one-to-one map. Threading an invisible needle over the patchwork quilting of farmland I’d known my entire life, I saw it anew, with an improbable perspective.

In those moments lay the finest discoveries. Concealed scars emerged—old railway lines, oxbow lakes, abandoned yard sites—to reveal a hidden history. Herds of cattle looked like handfuls of scattered rice. In the spring, thermals rose from plots of black, seed-primed earth to rock the airplane with violent turbulence. In summer, there were stamps of yellow canola, green blocks of immature wheat, and flaxseed so blue it seemed to reflect the sky itself. When the midsummer heat reached a head, clumps of storms swept over the land, fired through with fissures of lightning. The worst of them were grey and black, angled at the fore, like a locomotive’s cowcatcher. In winter, the air was smooth over the cool, rippled top sheet of snow. At any time, it was the kind of landscape one can imagine a de Havilland Tiger Moth bouncing over, or Antoine de Saint-Exupéry laughing about—the landscape of

1920s barnstormers, such as those depicted in the 1975 film, *The Great Waldo Pepper*.

Much like in that film, a plane passing over the farm is still an event. Ordinary people did not fly, and their presence over us was an occasion that drew us all in, made us part of the extraordinary. The unmistakable buzz of an approaching aircraft is always enough to send my family

onto the lawn, where, with hand to brow, we scan the skies for the source of the furor. Each year, a pilot-cum-photographer knocks on the door to sell photographs he has taken while flying over our farmyard. These annual aerial shots grace the walls of homes across the prairies, cataloguing the year-by-year changes taking place around us.

Today, only the crop-spraying business remains at Gladstone Municipal; the restaurant has closed, as has the training school. The airport is unstaffed except for a mechanic, whose workload is markedly light. A few crop-dusters—Pezetel M18B Dromaders and Air Tractor AT-400s—take to the sky each spring. A row of pleasure crafts, mostly single-engine Cessnas and Pipers, gather dust. There are no longer so many who take to the sky for pleasure.

The other day I drove past the airport. A yellow biplane, the one of my youthful memories, lay upside down, resting on its top wing. The metal plating of its underbelly was exposed, giving it the distressed look of an overturned insect. A few years before, while coming in for a landing, it had skidded in too fast, jumped the runway, and come to rest in a slough. It stayed there for years, its yellow tail jutting from the marsh reeds.

The day was hot—approaching 40°C—and there were no takeoffs planned. In that hot air, windless and thin, it would take the entire runway, maybe more, to create the lift needed to take off. Instead, the only action was a farmer baling a thin cut of hay along the near side of the runway. On the other, a sallow crop of canola withered in the heat.

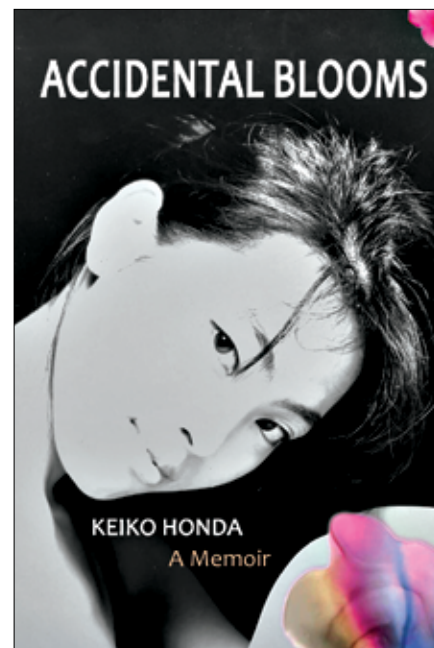
“Ask ‘Why fly?’ and I should tell you nothing,” wrote Richard Bach in *A Gift of Wings*, his devotional to flight (its French title, *Liberté sans limites*, captures better its aspirational writing). Another pilot tells Bach: “I suspect the thing that makes us fly, whatever it is, is the same thing that

draws the sailor out to sea. Some people will never understand why and we can’t explain it to them. If they’re willing and have an open heart we can show them, but *tell* them we can’t.”

From Gladstone Municipal, I’ve taken family and friends with me into the skies. We rose into the sweet spot, 1000 feet or so above ground level, where the visual connection to the earth is still palpable, but the distance is immutable. For some, it’s a muddling height (more than a few were unable to recognize their own houses and farms from above), for others illuminating. My father, for one, was always keen for an aerial crop inspection, to see where the water lay in relation to his pastures.

The journeys are typically quiet, the thrum of the engine unbroken except by an occasional interjection to look at this or that. There is little to say when everything, one’s entire world, is spread out, laid bare, minimized and expanded all at once. It is an abeyance of one’s life, a chance to look and think without needing a question to answer. As Beryl Markham has written, in her wonderful book about flying, *West with the Night*, “There are all kinds of silences and each of them means a different thing... There is silence after a rainstorm, and before a rainstorm, and these are not the same. There is the silence of emptiness, the silence of fear, the silence of doubt... Whatever the mood or the circumstance, the essence of its quality may linger in the silence that follows. It is a soundless echo.”

Each time I take off, I battle the silent fears of crash reports, of self-doubt, and a distrust in the immutable laws of physics. Flying becomes a confidence trick played upon the self. Up there, drifting upon nothing and through nothing, there is only one’s own reserves to pull from. There is nothing but context, and one’s reaction within it. If something should go wrong, there is no help, no out, no withdrawal. The silent fears of flying are the same as those of loss—that ultimately, we are alone.



Keiko Honda is living a successful life as a scientist of cancer epidemiology in New York City when one morning she wakes up suddenly unable to walk.

"[M]uch more than a memoir ... [Honda] is sharing a philosophy of love and care in a time of anxiety and uncertainty."

-Bernard Perley, associate professor for Critical Indigenous Studies, UBC

 CAITLIN PRESS

I never flew with my uncle. He is dead now, and another of life's opportunities has gone forever. The time was never right, or our paths did not cross in that way. His charm was coupled with a shrewd remoteness that few, if anyone, could access. But knowing that he and I shared the same sky, the same flat stretch of land, the same sense of limitless destinations, is something to bridge that

distance. It is, as I prepare for takeoff, something to help me face the aloofness of the earth below—not far, yet not close.

J.R. Patterson was born on a farm in Manitoba. His work has appeared in a variety of international publications, including National Geographic, the Walrus, the Atlantic and the Literary Review of Canada.

Elizabeth Smart's Rockcliffe Park

ROB MCLENNAN

For the sake of the large romantic gesture

The other night we happened to drive by Rockcliffe Park's Elmwood School, a private "independent day school for girls" originally established in 1915 as the Rockcliffe Preparatory School. This was where a young Elizabeth Smart attended studies from 1922 to 1929, during which time she began work on her infamous diaries. Smart, of course, is best known simultaneously for her tumultuous affair with the married British poet George Barker, which resulted in four children she raised solo, and her remarkable lyric novel that emerged from that initial turmoil, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945).

Rockcliffe Park is a bit off our usual Ottawa routes and routines: what were we doing out there? Christine had scheduled a photography session for our young ladies and the photographer was running a sequence of sessions among the trees, blossoms and foliage of a late spring early evening in the village park. There seems something otherworldly about Elizabeth Smart's origins in this village patch of old money, yet her presence hangs, incongruously, in the air across these tree-lined streets. Hers was an upbringing of private schools and luxury travel, hanging with Ottawa's

political elite, including prominent politicians and civil servants, and at least one future prime minister.

The reality of Rockcliffe Park, nestled just north of Beechwood and up against the Ottawa River, suggests a far different Ottawa than any I might usually encounter. We drove slow through narrow streets unencumbered by sidewalks but lined with embassies and grand homes. This is a walking neighbourhood, with few cars on the roads, and certainly no public transit. A twenty-minute drive straight north of our 1950s-era suburban Alta Vista, it might well be a foreign country.

I keep digging around our house for the biography by Rosemary Sullivan, *By Heart: Elizabeth Smart, A Life* (1991), a book I would have read during the same period I discovered Smart's work, so as to confirm where exactly the Smarts had lived. They were just a bit west, into Lowertown. I move dozens of volumes in a variety of corners of my office, but still can't locate the biography. Must every essay I write include a missing volume? Smart has long been one of those authors I return to, almost as touchstone, as a way to renew or reinvigorate my own navigations

through prose. As Kim Echlin's *Elizabeth Smart: A Fugue Essay on Women and Creativity* (2004) writes of Smart's debut, "The great originality of *By Grand Central Station* is its use of the first-person voice. The voice belongs to a twentieth-century woman who is ironic and passionate, in love with a married man and pregnant. She knows her literary classics and she has a good ear for the advertising jingles and song lyrics of popular culture. It is a classic romantic love story told from a fresh point of view."

It is this ear that allowed Smart to become, as part of her subsequent years as an advertising copywriter in London, the highest paid copywriter in England. While I always admired the daring originality of her lyric voice, Smart initially became important to my twentysomething Ottawa-based self as someone "from here" who was able to not only write, and make a life out of that, but to produce such masterful work.

This first foray of ours through Rockcliffe Park has me reconsidering Smart's particular influence on my own approach: perhaps it was more than simple geography. Perhaps it was how Smart managed, eventually, to escape the burden of Ottawa's deep-seated provincialism and conservative social considerations for the sake of the large romantic gesture. She seemed fearless, unrestricted by expectations on the prose sentence or the social expectations of her upbringing. And of course, unlike most authors one might be interested in reading, one can't look at Smart's writing without considering her life. Digging around the internet, I discover a 2015 article in the *Independent*, "Yann Martel on the genius of Elizabeth Smart: Author's great novel has been republished," that argues the point of comparing Smart's art with her life: "Elizabeth fell in love with George, it took time, tricks and money to

meet him, they got into trouble with the law, they became social outcasts, it was killing for her heart—and she had four children with the man, children whom she raised all on her own. This is a woman who took seriously not only the premise of love, but its consequences. This is a book about one creature’s obdurate desire to love and be loved, no matter what. Smart was lucid, resilient, hard-working, and responsible in her love-madness.”

Earlier this year, Christine went through my Paladin paperback of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* for the sake of a reading series solicitation: each performer selecting passages by writers who had influenced them. I hadn’t been conscious of Smart’s influence on Christine’s work, although her own engagement with the lyric gesture, far different than my own, is one that also favours density, language jumbles, emotional intensity and a flow of clear music over any straightforward narrative meaning. The music in Smart’s work is unmistakable, there from the moment her debut novel begins: “I am standing on a corner in Monterey, waiting for the bus to come in, and all the muscles of my will are holding my terror to face the moment I most desire.”

Elizabeth Smart spent a lifetime working a daily journal, which allowed her prose style to flourish, and includes multiple fragments and drafts of what evolved into her novel. She wrote daily, but in scraps, fragments, journal entries and a variety of works-in-progress, blending fiction

with non-fiction. There have been some curated selections published as books, but not nearly enough for my liking.

I spent years attempting to compose my own journal, but could never sustain my diaristic interest, instead incorporating my thoughts directly into my other writing. The closest I’ve come has been through assembling book-length essay accumulations, including my current

began writing out her own thoughts and feelings in a notebook she refers to as her diary. We avoid reading her entries, obviously, as she deserves her own space in which to gather her thoughts. Where might that lead, if anywhere? What voice might emerge for our dervishly brilliant and imaginative nine-year-old?

The push to create and articulate can be strong, rewarding and lifelong, as might also be that doubt that any-

one is listening. But is the listening important? How best to be heard? And how does one, as a parent, encourage the potential for creative self-reflection without potentially setting her up for a silence? On April 6, 1979, at the age of sixty-five, and echoing a sentiment that could be part of any life, Smart wrote this in her journal, collected as part of *In the Meantime* (1984): “It is possible there are people hearing me? There are tiny signs, but it seems too good to be true. Would this be a help to me? Or too much of a responsibility? O a help, I think, a help to know one was not a totally mistaken person, piling up a small heap of old rubbish. It’s a heady thrilling thought to think that things *do* get

through, might, *have*.”

rob mcInnan lives in Ottawa, despite being born there. His most recent titles include a suite of pandemic essays, essays in the face of uncertainties (Mansfield Press, 2022), the poetry collection World’s End (ARP Books, 2023), and a forthcoming collection of short stories, On Beauty (University of Alberta Press). He regularly posts reviews, essays, interviews and other notices at robmcInnan.blogspot.com.



Image: Jenny Bou, *L’Eveil de la Bienveillance*, 2020, handmade collage on cardboard

Drinking Game with Ghosts

JADE WALLACE

Does he ever visit the
spectres of our past selves,
who sit eye to eye
on his rent couch,

furiously swallowing
the prosecco we said
we'd save for a new year?

Sometimes, in the middle of
the day, I drop my spoon, go
alone to the museum to
see our dramatic tableau,
eternal as an urn.

Every time, there I am,
eyes glossy as the tulip glass
in my hand, saying:

I have never been hit by a car
that I could not see coming.

(And him, a cedar
tree, replying:)

*It was a streetcar.
It missed me.*

(And me, repetitive and petulant:)

I have never cancelled plans
because I was hungover.

(And him, unmoved:)

Never.

(And me, leaf-fringed and haunted:)

I have never forgotten that I
cancelled plans because I was
hungover.

(And him, marble
philosopher:)

*How can I
answer that.*

(We are fully in it now:)

I have never forgotten that I only
cancelled plans on a Saturday afternoon
after my sweetheart called to ask me
where I was. Then I absconded again,
left it to them to make my excuses to
their friend whom I was supposed to meet.

*Human error is more endemic
than alcoholic.*

I have never left my sweetheart waiting
for an hour—

You take a drink.

—waiting for an hour, alone among
thousands crowded into an amphitheatre,
trying not to dissolve into rosewater as
timbrels ring and the chorus intones
it hurts to love you, not knowing if I will
actually show up but certain that they
are the oldest they have ever been.

*I arrived though, didn't I,
only to find you wearing
jewelled bruises on your
neck in the shape of
someone else's teeth.*

(Now we come to my dry-tongued
fever, my inarticulate delirium:)

I have never been too drunk
to fuck when I wanted to.

(He is still as chilled as our
bottle of sparkling white:)

*Every lover is a liar with
a righteous cause.*

I have never been told that
I have a drinking problem.

*I drink;
you have the problem.*

(Our cups are nearly
light as air. It is time for
our final play:)

I have never wanted to
rinse my salt-crusted skin
in a grotto where the
water is flecked with
sugar cane and ginger.

*Do you know why it's
called getting clean?
Because it's like bathing;
you have to do it every day.*

This is my exit.
I walk out of the museum,
and I am back in my kitchen,
wrist-deep in dish soap,
washing myself
of him again.

Jade Wallace (they/them) is a writer, editor, reviewer and co-founder of the collaborative writing entity MA\DE. Wallace's debut poetry collection is Love Is A Place But You Cannot Live There (Guernica Editions, 2023) and their debut novel will be Anomia (Palimpsest Press, 2024). Keep in touch at jadewallace.ca and ma-de.ca.

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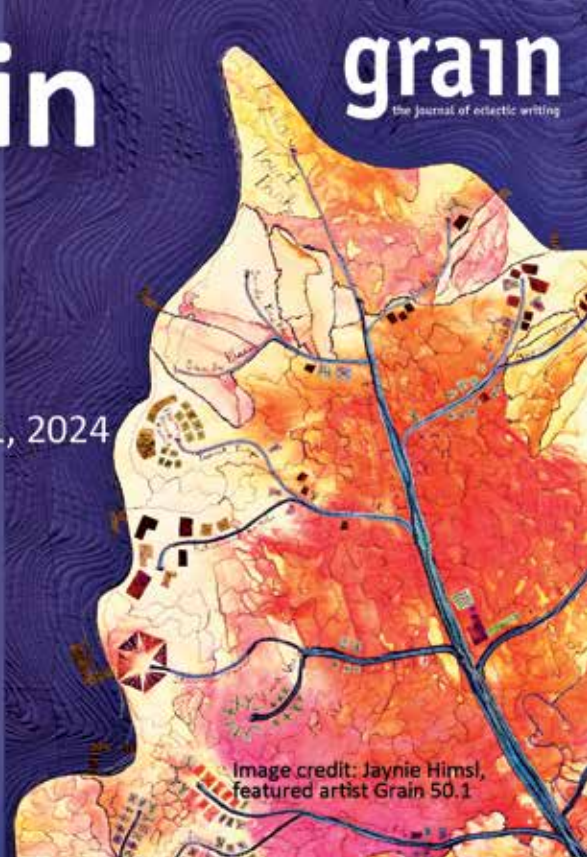
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51 SASK LOTTERIES

grain
the journal of eclectic writing

Image credit: Jaynie Himsel, featured artist Grain 50.1



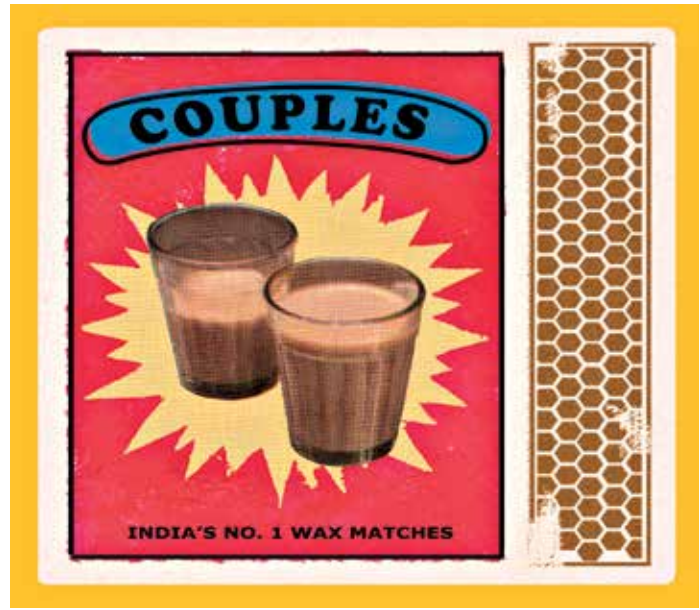
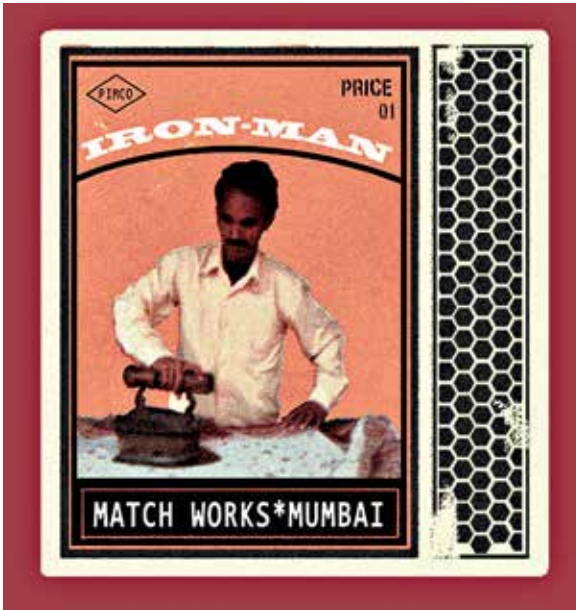
Winner of the Trillium Book Award

"Ross is a generous writer; he wants this ease for others, even if his own nature has a tendency toward melancholy. He would rather avoid the whimpers: If you want to cry, then cry. If you want to rage, climb to the top of the highest building and howl at the moon. When it comes to his own pain, he calls his deflections cowardice. But a more forgiving term would be 'human.' A burger might be a means of avoidance, but it is also a reminder, a treat, a touch of levity in what can be a cruel and trying existence. Grab a chair. Order up."

Literary Review of Canada

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FINDINGS



Matchbox Labels, 2020, a series of digital illustrations by Nandita Ratan. These images explore India's seemingly kitschy visual culture through the changing face of the matchbox label. Matchbox labels have represented various

Cart of Misplaced Tomes

BROOKE LOCKYER

From Burr by Brooke Lockyer. Published by Nightwood Editions in 2023. Brooke Lockyer has been published in numerous publications including Geist. Burr is her first novel. She lives in Toronto, ON. Find her at brookelockyer.com.

Meredith doesn't realize how much she's missed the library until she sees it. She ducks under the familiar awning when it starts to rain, wanting to be close to her place of work but not inside. Through the small side window, she watches Mrs. Beatty, her boss, type and wonders if she made a mistake by taking a leave of absence. She misses the cart she pushed steadily through most of her adult life, the squeak of wheels on carpet accompanying her through singledom, marriage and motherhood.

She met her husband Henry in London, Ontario, when she was in her first year of university, struggling to cover tuition with shifts

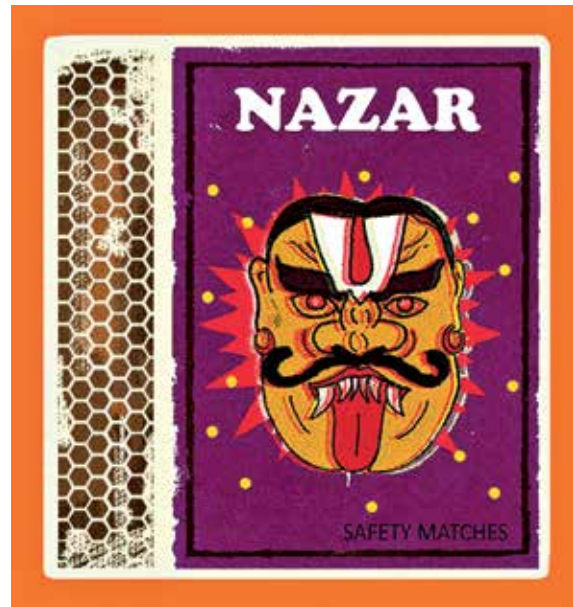
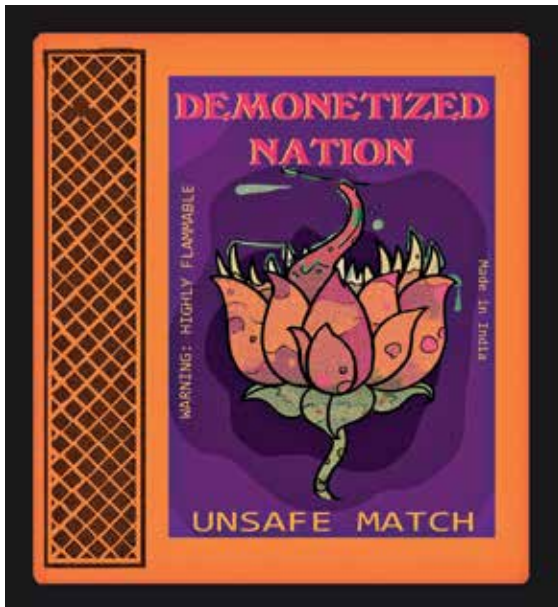
at Huron College library. He'd watched her over the top of *Fifth Business* five Wednesdays in a row as she strode past his chair. He barely turned a page when she was in sight.

She discovered later it was Henry who had hid books for her to discover. She uncovered *Dance of the Happy Shades* nestled with *Love Story* in her cubbyhole when she pulled out her scarf (how he snuck into the employees' room, she didn't know). In the shadowy corner of the Politics section, Meredith found *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Where the Wild Things Are* heaped on each other, pages shamelessly spread.

The same afternoon, after her supervisor left and they were finally alone, she wrote her number on his bookmark. When he said goodbye and turned to walk away, she pulled him to her, biting his lip when they kissed.

A few years later they got hitched and moved to Burr. Meredith worked weekdays at the small library there, while Henry commuted to his new job in London where he worked as a risk analyst.

Even though Henry no longer flirted with her in the library, she still loved finding misplaced



points in India's history by drawing from and shifting with its cultural, political and social transformations. With this project, Nandita cultivates a visual language of labels to engage in contemporary narratives of a changing India.

comes hiding in foreign territories, left there by the lazy and absent-minded. She'd ponder their significance, as if they were tarot cards or tea leaves.

Usually her findings were modest, her interpretations mildly life-affirming. *Feeling the Shoulder of the Lion* mistakenly slotted in Fiction, *Life Studies* left open on a ledge. But when she discovered *Invisible Man* and *The Sound and the Fury* leaning spine by spine against the side of a windowsill, an unexplained premonition spread through her body. A pervading chill, like when she was six years old and swallowed all the ice cubes in the tray.

Another time she found *Beloved* and *In Cold Blood* lying face down on a cobwebbed shelf. Thrilled and nervous, she crept to the phone to cradle Henry's voice against her ear.

On weekends, Meredith and Henry rocked in wooden chairs on their porch, dipping their knees and faces into the sun, awed by what they'd done, by the new life they'd begun. They took horseback riding lessons from their neighbour on Saturday afternoons, breathing in horsehair and leather, spurring flanks with their thighs.

On summer evenings, they walked through the countryside as the heat began to ebb, stepping around fox dens and catching fireflies, feeling the wings throb inside their hands for a moment before they let them go, to blink like tiny lanterns through the trees.

Ever since the library switched to a computerized system, it had been Meredith's job to beam the red light along barcodes as she checked out books for customers. Before reading the information that flashed on her computer screen, she would peek at the person across the counter and guess whether they read romance or crime novels, if they returned their books on time, and if not, whether they requested extensions or allowed the fees to accumulate. She was pleased when she was right, and also when she was wrong. She was happy when people surprised her. It was like finding a watermark in an old book, or deciphering marginalia on a page.

Henry had surprised her. The way he'd shed his gentleness in the change room and emerge a big stealthy cat in his wrestling singlet, eyes bright as he and his opponent circled around

and around on the mat. Henry almost always pounced first, almost always won. From practice bouts at Huron College in London, Ontario, to the World Wrestling Championships in Toledo, Ohio, he'd crouched over dozens of surrendered bodies, shyly victorious, looking up to see her reaction.

She'd prop her head with an elbow while he slept, willing his parted mouth to disclose its secrets. The childhood in Paris, Ontario, he refused to speak of, changing the subject and carefully turning away from her when she pressed. The family she'd never met. The reason he sometimes shouted in his sleep. Unfamiliar names that sounded Seussian, made-up. A diatribe about a man who lived in a shadow. Once, he pointed at her and claimed he saw a mountain lion in the trees.

ROLLOVERS

From Tumbling for Amateurs by Matthew Gwathmey. Published by Coach House Books in 2023. Matthew Gwathmey is the author of Our Latest in Folktales (Brick Books) and the forthcoming Family Band (Gordon Hill Press), to be published in 2024. He lives in Fredericton, NB.

The Juggler – extravaganza of different gorgeous displays.

The Bumbler – enterprising entry to a game of dominoes.

The Trumpeter – grasping southernmost throughout a torso bouquet.

The Colander – legs between arms, pinkies clasp moisturized elbows.

The Stumbler – arms between legs, fists on freshly laundered Mondays.

The Bundler – open. Approaching the decadence of ratios.

The Hustler – hungry look northside, vertical to fly with birds of prey.

The Londoner – starting on left arch, then over and double bulldoze.

The Thumbler – triple up close and finish transformed on potter's clay.

The Customer – lying flat as you level out to the Fate Atropos.

The Grumbler – commence by swinging foremost for detours underway.

The Shuffler – shins crossed via rush and purple moor-grass meadows.

The Crumpler – with a half-turn to defy a downward per se.

The Muscular – repeat all forward moves backwards. Rigid.

Enclosed.

The time she woke to him standing on the bed, pressing his hands against the ceiling and grinding his teeth, as if he were holding up the room, the whole house, as if everything might collapse the minute he let go.

Meredith dreamt during the day. When the books were organized and the library quiet, she'd sit at the checkout counter reading royal biographies. As she turned the pages, the ceiling rose into the sky and the faded carpet gave way to a floor inlaid with gold.

When she'd walk home afterwards, the houses on Main Street were dumpier than before, the hedges more disgruntled. She would dart from the library as if she were late, giving quick waves to the neighbours who turned their heads, methodically moistening their lips to talk.

Since Henry's death, people keep telling her to rest, but she feels nervous all the time. She no longer strides about town, spine straight, dress flirting. Lately, she hesitates, she questions, she shivers. She wears tights but her legs still tremble. (Unlike Henry who had crackled with heat. He wore T-shirts year-round and, in the dead of winter, opened all the windows of the house.)

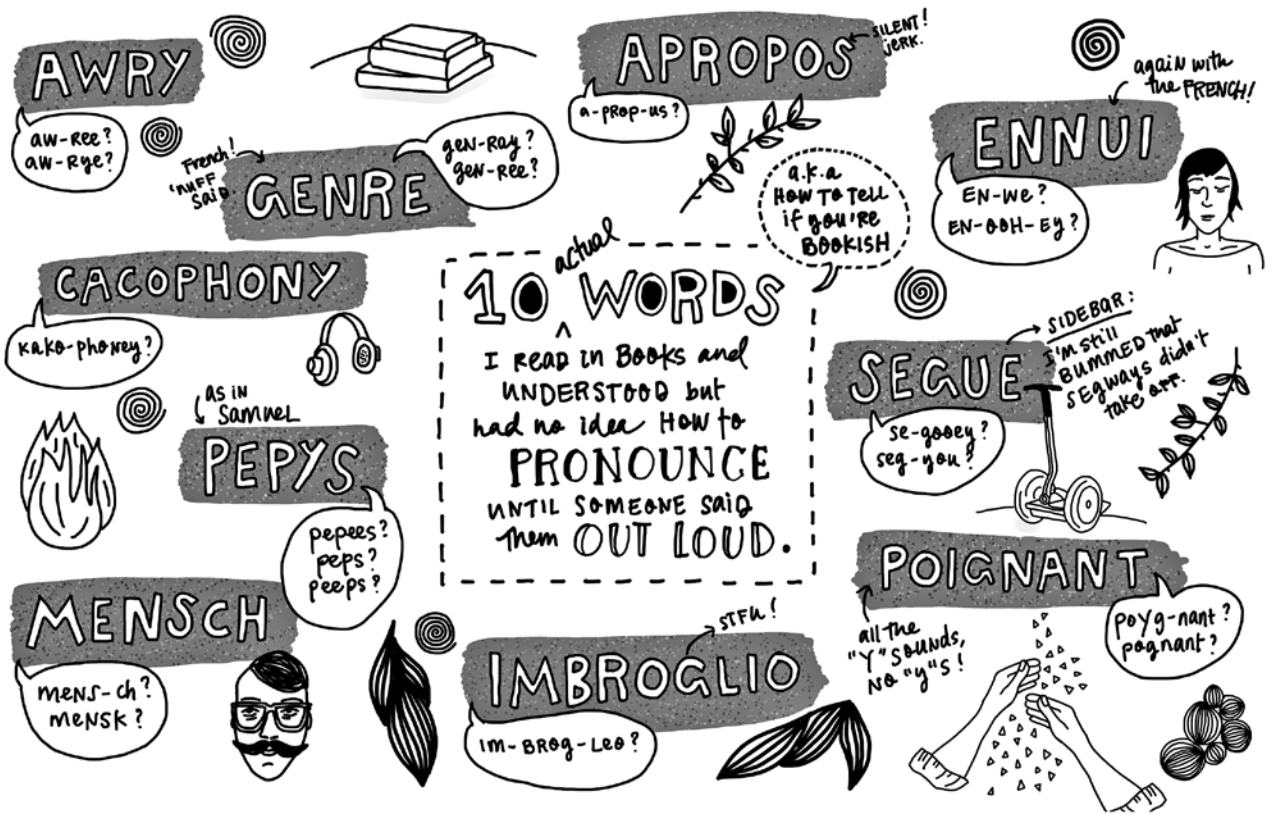
She doesn't tell anyone how restlessly she sleeps. Instead, she goes over to Ruth's house for biscuits and tea, grateful her friend lets her pretend everything is fine. At home, she talks to her daughter Jane over defrosted dinners and curls up with the cat to watch period dramas. But Henry won't let her rest.

Meredith backs away from the window, into the rain. She doesn't want Mrs. Beatty to know she's there. She's almost reached home when she passes old Ernest Leopold, ambling by in the opposite direction. If he sees her, he doesn't let on.

He holds a cane with one hand, and a tattered black umbrella over his head with the other. Water streams through, pasting down his hair and soaking his pinstriped pyjamas. He's paler than the last time she saw him, his blue-white skin almost translucent.

Meredith crosses her arms over her chest and bows her wet head. She'll go back to the library next month and work shifts once Jane's back at school. She misses the paper cuts. She was secretly proud of those thin red lines, of their humble, manageable sting.





From *Bookish*, a zine by Amanda Etches, published in 2016. Amanda Etches is a librarian by day and artist by night. You can find her at etches.ink and on Instagram @etches.

Gramps vs. the Real Santa

G.A. GRISENTHWAITE

From Tales for Late Night Bonfires by G.A. Grisentbwaite. Published by Freeband Books in 2023. G.A. Grisentbwaite is nle?kepmx, a member of the Lytton First Nation. His first novel, Home Waltz (Palimpsest Press), was a finalist for the 2021 Governor General's Award for fiction. Find him at gordongrisentbwaite.com.

First off, let me tell you I do not now nor have I ever lived at the North Pole and not the South Pole, either. I have a private island about three hundred miles north of Fiji. If Gramps ever figures out he won't ever find me at the North Pole, I'm one dead Jolly Old Elf™. One thing the stories get right, maybe the only thing, is that elves once crafted—as they like to say nowadays—toys for all the boys and girls. The naughty list is pure bullshit, piled onto a bunch of old bullshit stories.

Let's face it, no little boy or girl is always naughty; okay, so I can name a bunch, but the mostly-good ones far outnumber them. Even those hateful brats get something, and not a lump of coal. If I hear one more parent threaten their child with a lump of coal instead of the latest fad toy...Ghaaa!

Those empty threats render me speechless. Speaking of toys, the elves demanded a living wage. They seemed satisfied with our working relationship: they work, and I supply them with food and shelter and uniforms. My little helpers were satisfied and happy until 1 January 1863. Then the ungrateful bastards demanded land, living wages, and one day off each week.

"Or else," they threaten.

"Or else what? You little fucks have nothing without me."

"Give us what we want, or we won't make another toy, gewgaw, recorder, or ukulele. Nothing!"

"You strike and I will toss you out of your dormitories. Take back all the clothing I've supplied you. Take back all the cafeteria vouchers

I've lavished on you. Leave your naked and sorry asses on the beach. You'll come back begging for the way things used to be. You'll come back begging for your old jobs back."

Those little bastards sit naked on the beach, about six hundred of them, for three months. Sitting on the beach and singing something about overcoming. They sing about overcoming while the Pinkertons I hire to resolve the standoff beat the living snot of each and every one of my elves. Fuck me, that strike hurts my bottom line. This is 1895, the first year with no gifts from me, *The real Santa*™.

And the missus comes down with suffragette fever in 1903. I love her anyway. That thing with me and Granny Lanny, also in 1903, is just a mistletoe moment run amok. But my eye started wandering, and I lusted for a good old-fashioned woman, one who appreciated the *obey* in the original wedding vows. She didn't walk the Earth and I doubt she ever only lived in some bible-thumper's dream of the ideal woman. So I gave up on finding the biblically obedient woman, and let that thing happen with Granny Lanny in Christmas, 1903. And my one indiscretion has haunted me ever since. Now another thing the stories have fucked up completely is about my ride. Reindeer could fly until 1722, but the air gets so bad that asthmatic deer kept falling from the skies. That song "It's Raining Men" starts out as the Scandinavian ballad "It's a Reindeer Rain." Don't get me wrong, I love the idea

of a team of reindeer pulling my sleigh through the night. I love the names they have in those stories too. Especially Rudolph, his name has none of his cohort's poetry. His shiny, red nose, that blinking beacon of hope and love and dedication warms my calloused heart or some other Grinchy cliché. Granny Lanny also warms, and heals, my calloused heart. The memory of our brief encounter

grows warmer with each recollection. That fire, if unleashed on the multiverse, would reduce it to irretrievable ashes.

How she gets under my skin baffles me. How she's stayed under it baffles me more. I see why Gramps jealously protects her, why he wants to hurt me; I know I would demand the same were Granny Lanny mine. But

I have neither intention, nor inclination to mow Gramps' grass again. One day I'd like to put his vendetta behind us, talk it through over a glass or six of fine Kentucky bourbon. Even though we suffer the same curse-blessing of nearly eternal life, I don't want or need anyone penetrating my personal space, not since the missus falls prey to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918. She survives the bubonic plague pandemic. She survives the white plague. Scarlet fever. Yellow fever. She survives the 1820 cholera pandemic. But the Spanish flu undoes her.



In a Big, Sea-Blue Boeing

CAROLINE DAWSON

*From As the Andes Disappeared by Caroline Dawson, translated by Anita Anand. Published by Book*bug Press in 2023. Caroline Dawson was born in Chile in 1979 and immigrated to Québec with her family when she was seven. She is the author of Ce qui est tu (Triptyque 2023). She lives in Montréal, QC.*

The days preceding our departure were entirely taken up with preparations. My mother wrote lists on anything she could find; crumpled slips

of paper littered our house, the same house that was so quickly clearing us out. Our vacated furniture gave way to sudden emptiness, and yet there was no space for my childish fears as I tried to both understand our present and glimpse our future. Although I'd never been on a plane, I have no memory of being excited to board the flying monster that would take us to Canada. I couldn't fathom how those huge engines would manage to stay suspended in the air with so many people and suitcases strapped to their bellies. Faced with my parents' resolute march toward our new life, I was floored by the very idea of this flight; it presented itself as a metaphor for all that eluded me.

I saw how my parents' worries overshadowed the last days of December. I didn't talk about it; I kept it to myself. It was only once inside the plane, after the flight attendants completed their safety demonstration, that I—immobile, the seat belt tight around my waist—finally fell sick. My body spewed out all its worries in an endless stream of diarrhea. My poor parents had to spend most of this trip that was bringing them to a new, unknowable life taking turns going back and forth between the airplane's tiny bathrooms and their uncomfortable seats, so that their daughter could empty herself of her anxiety.

After the third time, my mother said, "You know, you can ask me if you have any questions."

"Okay. Is Canada far away?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"About nine thousand kilometres."

"What are kilometres?"

"It's what we use to measure long distances."

"Oh. So nine thousand kilometres is far?"

"Yes."

"But are we going to get there before tomorrow?"

"No. When we get there, it'll already be tomorrow."

"What?"

"When we get there, it'll already be tomorrow."

"But then we'll miss Christmas!"

"No, no. We'll celebrate Christmas on the plane. You can sleep now, and tomorrow we'll be there."

My parents had actually chosen December 24 to begin our family's exile. Could that be right? We wouldn't have Christmas that year? Imprisoned mid-flight in that huge plane, I went on with my list of questions. Does the sky have a middle? How does the plane stay up in the air? Could it fall? Where exactly are we when we're in the air? And especially, how was Santa Claus going to find us?

That's when I realized I was nowhere. Out the window, way down below me, the only things visible were clouds. Nothing in front of us, nothing behind us, the world had disappeared from my sight, carrying with it, it seemed, people living there, playing soccer, hugging, kissing, mourning their dead or departed loved ones. From up there I saw only clouds, thick clouds that took up all the space and obscured my vision.

"What are clouds, Mamá?"

"Water vapour. Go to sleep now, my baby."

"But how does water vapour stay up in the sky?"

"I don't know. Ask Papá."

My father, with his wrinkled forehead and haggard features, was too far away, both physically and in his own thoughts, for me to ask him anything. To me, clouds would always remain air, emptiness, nothing. A kind of nothingness that began to weigh heavily on my shoulders, knotting itself into a clump, an icy mass, like the one

INEFFABLE FEELINGS

From The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows by John Koenig. Published by Simon & Schuster, Inc. in 2021. John Koenig defines new words that attempt to pinpoint the nebulous human emotions that the current language fails to capture. Selected list of words compiled by Kelsea O'Connor.

Anecdote, n: a conversation in which everyone is talking but nobody is listening—instead merely overlaying words like a spoken game of Scrabble, each player borrowing bits of others' anecdotes to build out their own, until we reach a point when we all run out of things to say.

Bye-over, n: the sheepish casual vibe between two people who've shared an emotional farewell but then unexpectedly have a little extra time together, wordlessly agreeing to pretend they've already moved on.

Halfwise, adj: suddenly aware that you're more than halfway through a vacation or semester or other positive experience, noticeably closer to the end than the beginning, as if someone had flipped your mental hourglass overnight, turning a rush of fun surprises into a trickle of last hurrahs.

Ludiosis, n: the sense that you're just making it up as you go along, knowing that if someone asked why you do most things, you couldn't really come up with a convincing explanation.

Rubatosia, n: the unsettling awareness of your own heartbeat, whose tenuous muscular throbbing feels less like a metronome than a nervous ditty your heart is tapping to itself, as if to casually remind the outside world, *I'm here, I'm here, I'm here.*

Waldosia, n: a condition in which you keep scanning faces in a crowd looking for a specific person who would have no reason to be there, as if your brain is checking to see whether they're still in your life, subconsciously patting its emotional pockets before it leaves for the day.

in my little stomach. How the heck was Santa Claus going to find us through these clouds? My questions accumulated in my throat. I was having trouble breathing through all this fog. Once again, it had to come out; I threw up. Over and over again, until there was nothing left.

In addition to the stale air and breath of five hundred passengers cramped together, the plane now also smelled of vomit.

“Can we open a window, Mamá?”

“No, we can’t.”

“Why not?”

“They’re sealed shut.”

“Sealed shut? Why?”

“Because of the air pressure. If we opened a window, the people would get sucked outside.”

“Outside? So they’d die?”

“Yes, they’d die.”

“So we can’t open anything?”

“Not while we’re flying, no. Now say your bedtime prayer and try to sleep.”

The altitude overwhelmed me. The pressure snuck into my empty stomach and made it heave. A gap in a door, a crack in the windows, could send us falling to our deaths. We’d accepted that risk; my parents had bet on the unknown—the void ahead of us—to save us from our *before*.

At the age of seven, I became profoundly aware that it was possible to leave everything and never return.

At the age of seven, I learned to say “adieu” and not “bye-bye,” not “see you tomorrow,” not “see you soon,” not “goodbye,” not even “see you again one of these days.” Adieu, which means farewell forever, “to God,” ’til never again.

At the age of seven I stopped believing in God and in a predetermined fate.

At the age of seven, on a plane for the first time, I pretended to pray; I’d figured out that we were the ones who decided. We could just ditch everything and start a whole new life. But I continued to wonder how, if nobody could open anything, Santa Claus would manage to come in.

Finally, I succumbed to exhaustion and my questions faded away. I was asleep at last, but my mother’s worries were far from over. She’d had to plan every detail of this giant leap into the unknown. Among the thousands of things she’d had to think about—the passports, visas, clothes for winters she was completely unfamiliar with, our safety, saying goodbye to her own mother, to

her sister, to her brothers, to her friends, to her life, the police, the dictatorship—there had also been the unrelenting needs of children, which never disappear, not even when you’re fleeing a country that is ripping apart—snacks, presents from Santa Claus. It moves me to imagine how, as she was cramming our lives into a few suitcases

bought on credit, she took the trouble to hide some toys in the hand luggage. In the middle of this voyage into political exile, hanging on to a bit of normalcy for her terrified children meant that among a great many slips of paper, she included a reminder to bring along the list for Santa.

When I woke up to the stale air of the plane, a brand-new Barbie was lying next to me. She was fresh, pink, clean, radiant, and perfect. She smiled at me. As my appetite slowly returned amid the rattling of the breakfast trays, I began to believe we’d land somewhere after all. Despite the knot in my throat, I took a bite of the bread that had been placed before me. It went down; I didn’t throw up. I put some butter on it. It was good. I’d just turned seven, my mouth was full, and I had a new Barbie, a real one finally, not some cheap imitation.

I straddled two worlds now: I didn’t believe in God anymore, but I’d keep believing in Santa Claus for a long time. Too long—*years*—until I was finally told that he didn’t exist.



Instead of “Aray!” say “Ouchie!”

JENNILEE AUSTRIA-BONIFACIO

From Reuniting With Strangers. Published by Douglas & McIntyre in 2023. Jennilee Austria-Bonifacio’s work has been published in numerous anthologies and literary magazines, including Geist. Reuniting With Strangers is her first novel. She lives in Toronto, ON. Find her at jennileeaustriabonifacio.com.

It has taken me a long time to come to this realization, but you and I have to pity Ma’am.

Before I explain to you about using Tagalog in the house, you have to understand where she is coming from. She grew up in a rural Québécois town called Bedford in the 1970s, at a time when there were no Filipinos in books or on television, no Filipino songs on the radio, no Filipinos in politics or in the movies. There was no one for her to look up to.

Her parents worked as home-care nurses, struggling so much as they mastered French that they never spoke Tagalog to her. They didn't introduce her to any Filipino children because there weren't any. They sent her to schools where she wasn't just the only Filipino, but she was the only student with black hair.

Ma'am wasn't like us. She didn't grow up learning about national heroes like José Rizal, Andrés Bonifacio, or Gabriela Silang. She didn't know about Gloria Diaz being the first Pinay to win Miss Universe, or Maria Ylagan Orosa bringing her banana ketchup from Batangas to the world, or Dado Banatao and his amazing journey from Cagayan Valley farm boy to Silicon Valley billionaire. Nobody told her anything. For her, the Philippines wasn't a place to admire, to honour, to respect.

It was just the place that her parents left behind.

So try to be empathetic towards Ma'am when she asks you not to speak Tagalog to the children.

Since they are learning French and English, she'll say they might get confused—but as you know, back home, children learn Filipino and English, and some even go to special schools to learn Mandarin or Korean or German. A child's mind is elastic and capable of so much, but Ma'am doesn't see it like that.

When you get frustrated, remember that Ma'am and Sir are already being kind because they aren't making you learn French. So in return, even the smallest Tagalog words are off-limits.

- Instead of "Aray!" say "Ouchie!"
- Instead of "Hayyy!" say "Oopsie!"
- Instead of "Huwag!" say "Please don't do that!"

And above all, remember that Ma'am doesn't want them to learn "po" and "opo." No "May I

have this, po?" or "Can I play downstairs, po?" or even "Opo, Maman."

"But it's a sign of respect to their elders," you'll say. You'll think that you're already making it easier by not asking the children to learn how to use "ho" like Batangueños, but she won't see it that way.

"Those words are so old-fashioned. We don't use them in Canada," she'll snap back.

AWAKE FOR EVER

From Stedfast by Ali Blythe. Published by Goose Lane Editions in 2023. Ali Blythe is the author of Twoism (Goose Lane Editions) and Hymnswitch (Goose Lane Editions). He lives in Victoria, BC. Find him at hialiblythe.com.

I moonlight.
As a ghostwriter

who responds to
burned or buried

letters. They all seem
to begin, *Yours, ever—*

*I wish you'd go back to writing
me love poems.*

To which, *You Romantic*,
I must once again reply,

*Just what on Earth
do you think I'm doing here?*

It was once said that to write
any love poem

you must first invent
the poet who will write it.

There is no return post
from ashes or dust.

But don't worry,
I am nearly there.

It's not that she thinks that the kids shouldn't learn about the Philippines. If there's been an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, or a typhoon, Ma'am will point it out when it shows up on the news. "Kids, look at what's happening in the Philippines!" she'll say, pointing to the horrific images flashing on TV. "See, not everyone is fortunate enough to live in Montréal."

When the disaster is especially bad, Ma'am will look at you with concern and ask if you know anyone affected. Even if you actually do, you must always say no. Why?

Because then Ma'am will want to make them a balikbayan box (note that she'll insist on calling it a "Care Package") and she'll fill it with the most useless things: old plates that are one chip away

from shattering, baby onesies with food stains on the front, old puzzles with missing pieces, and children's toys that need batteries but she won't send batteries. She'll send black plastic containers and plastic cutlery that she collected from take-out meals, overpowering perfume-scented candles that she was planning on regifting anyway, a few pairs of stilettos with broken heels, and a bunch of tarnished necklaces that get all tangled up together in a reused Ziploc bag. When she mails all of this junk to your affected friend, you'll get a bewildered all-caps text in the middle of the night like **HOY! WHY DID YOU SEND ME CANADIAN GARBAGE?!!?** And you'll have to say that it comes from a good place even though you're not totally sure if it does.



Ode to Big Two, Hakka Noodles, and the Most Canadian Place on Earth

ARJUN BEDI

From The Blood of Five Rivers by Arjun Bedi. Published by Palimpsest Press in 2023. Arjun Bedi is a second generation Indian-Canadian writer born and raised in Mississauga, ON. The Blood of Five Rivers is his first novel.

I'm in the back cab of the '97 Ford Ranger with the First Man and the Toucan up front, and we're flying down the highway and every gentle manoeuvre of the ship sends me sliding back and forth. We're young and stupid and intoxicated, the three of us, and we're chasing immortality in all the wrong ways. Trees whizz by in my peripheral vision on either side, and the sky is black and naked and beautiful, and the air is crisp and clean, and I can't stop grinning up at it, because all I can think is that the '97 Ford Ranger is the best thing ever created. On the sheer, vast, untarnished canvas I splay out my thoughts and compose my ode. Here it is:

The school's named after a Saint, St. Someone or other. The building's a hideous, uninspired, utilitarian concrete block. Kills your imagination before you step inside. But when you do step inside you learn the following:

Jatts don't like the other Punjabis, like the Shimbas, and the Khattris—but all Punjabis don't like other Indians, the Hindus and the Christian Goans and the Christian Tamils. And some of these feelings are reciprocated, like the Muslims who dislike all other religions. But what is most true is that all Indians do not like West Indians. The national moniker is already shared with the American Indians and it does not need to be further diluted. Punjab is as far west as you can go as an Indian.

The Viets don't like the Flips (that's Filipinos for the layman), but both hate the Chinese. Koreans are sometimes the arbiters of these feuds. But woe to him who confuses followers of Confucius, with followers of Buddha, with followers of Christ, simply because they all eat noodles.

The Canadian Blacks don't like anyone, except the Muslims if they're black enough, which mostly means the Somalians born in the west. But they especially don't like the African Blacks born in Africa and the feeling is mutual. Also notable: the Canadian Blacks who live on one side of St. Someone High School deeply detest the Canadian Blacks who live on the other side of it. (Everyone likes the Caribbean Blacks.)

Most of the whites do not have explosive grudges, but keep in mind that the Italians aren't fond of the Portuguese. And don't ever in your life seat a Croatian next to a Serb. Don't even think

SOME TERMS USED IN TEXTS

From A knife so sharp its edge cannot be seen by Erin Noteboom. Published by Brick Books in 2023. Erin Noteboom is the author of three books of poetry and a memoir. She is also the author of six novels under the pen name Erin Bow. She lives in Kitchener, ON.

Memory

They say heart of Jeanne d'Arc could not be burned
in the fire that killed her.
Imagine instead it could not be quenched.
See it lifted from the ash and held aloft,
ablaze and speaking.

Metaphor

Deep in our history
a bowl of milk
became the moon.

Perspective

Parting, my father holds me
like a newspaper.
Says, "I can't get far enough away
to see you."

Specifics

The graveyard at dawn.
The stonemason
parks a red pickup,
slowly blasts a name.

Recombination

One day, the universe
became transparent.
This has nothing to do with love.

Structure

When a strange frost killed his beloved orchids,
English eccentric Edward James built a garden
of concrete, upright and immune
to ice. In time,
the vines entangled it.

Niche

There is for each hollow of the world
a thing that is held. November was empty
until the chrysanthemums bloomed.

History

After the war, Mathew Brady
went bankrupt, glass negatives sold to creditors.
Useless for windows, of course, but greenhouses—
The dead of Antietam lose their shadows
across the drifts of ferns
and orchids.

Storytelling

In Nagasaki, after, only the smokestacks
were left standing. They were spared
by vortex shedding—round sides sloughing wind.
Nothing to do with symbol,
though the urge towards symbol
is irresistible. This freighted world.
Oh help us carry it.

about it. The Polish are not friendly, but they can sit anywhere they like.

The whites—and I mean the whitey whites, with their parents happily divorced and remarried, who are happily doing kickflips in the parking lot, with their dirt-brown hair matted against their foreheads, and who say, "brooo suuuppp?" with their faux deep voices that are projected unnaturally from the back of their throats—are painfully inoffensive and are welcome nearly everywhere but they prefer the company of other whitey whites.

I imagine that this is the case in classrooms and cafeterias of all ugly brick buildings across the nation.

But none of this true.

Because I only see Dao the Viet in the parking lot, sitting on the edge of the back cab, shuffling a deck of playing cards originating in the Tang Dynasty of China, speaking fast and loud, "Five dollars a game, five dollars a chop, if you don't know how to play, please kindly fuck off," pitching his voice high on the last word before each comma or period. Polish Daniel, Arabic Zain, and Isiah from the Ivory Coast each slap down a crisp blue bill with bald Willy Laurier staring solemnly up into the crisp blue sky. Taneesha and her sassy henchman approach from the Italian bakery run by the nonnas who love *Bapu ji*—pizza slices in hand—peering over the side of the cab, heckling

the losers. Chen Zheng, Josh Ming, and Tony the Tamil are munching on deep fried samosas from the New India restaurant across the main road—three for a dollar—waiting for their turn. Tony is actually Sinhalese, but everyone calls him a Tamil because it gets on his nerves. The wheezy voice of Louisiana’s own is pounding from the open cockpit windows. *Da Drought 3*, the hottest mixtape of the summer, and the next one besides. Universally loved are pho and shawarma, but only the thoroughbreds can stomach the suicide sauce on the wrap, and with scorched tongues they earn the right to call the rest of us “fucking pussies.” Craig (the whitest of the whitey whites) astonishes Arabic Zain, Zain



from Pakistan, and Maryam, by wolfing down an unprecedented double suicide shawarma. Dao says, “If you wanna play for free, go and talk to Tommy.” Tommy is Dao’s cousin and is parked to the side in his German made ’95 BMW 525i. Tommy lets you know you can play a free game if you buy a half-quarter of homegrown purple haze, and Gurvir and Amandeep are haggling with him, trying to trade a bottle of garage-brewed desi daru for a quarter. It’s made by Gurvir’s chacha* who lives next to the 401, so the fumes are a pleasant pick me up for the commuters contemplating gridlock suicide on the Highway of Heroes. The daru is slowly peeling away layers of plastic from the water bottle, so time is of the essence. But then Luca Bianchi offers to buy the bottle for the same price as a quarter of Tommy’s kush, because he likes how the daru reminds him of a stronger tasting sambuca. Everyone gets what they want. The back lip of the cab is down and Abdul Mohammad and Cindy Ngo and Tayshawn Jackson are passing a blunt rolled with Tommy’s kush back and forth, and it’s straining the suspension of the truck, but it’s worth it. Luca joins them with the moonshine. Isiah says, “Passe ça ici” and Tayshawn says, “In English you fuck,” and there’s a collective chuckle at Isiah’s expense, but he still gets the blunt and he’s grinning now, too. Dao slaps a chop down on Daniel’s hand and Taneesha shouts, “He just shoved a Kolbassa right up yo ass!” and Chen Zhang nearly chokes on the crispy folded lip of his last samosa. Now the freestyle from the track “Seat Down Low” enters the portion that sticks in the collective imagination. Tommy shouts out his window, “Yo jack the volume up!” Lil Wayne’s wheezy voice splits the air and everyone

is singing along. Dao allows a pause in the game—a rare thing reserved for sacred occurrences—he mouths the words too. Taneesha clasps her dexterous fingers together, contorting them to spell out “blood” and continues the verse. Tayshawn inhales deep and recites the last part, and then he exhales a thick white cloud of kush that happily pollutes the air around the truck. Dao is the first to say “Bomb track!” and directs the attention back to the game of Big Two, where he slaps another chop down on Arabic Zain, who responds by saying, “Fuck you, habibi.” Bellies are full with Indian samosas, Turkish shawarma, Italian pastas, Vietnamese pho, French Canadian poutine, Russian potato salad, Portuguese

barbeque chicken, American hamburgers, Southern American fried chicken, Indo-Chinese hakka noodles, and desi daru drinkers wince and pound their chests, and blunt smoke wafts in the air, and we worship a pantheon of monotheistic deities, and we are unified through rituals of sin, and the universal language of laughter fills our hearts, and the ’97 Ford Ranger is the best thing ever created, because the cab of a ’97 Ford Ranger is the most Canadian fuckin’ place on Earth.



*Uncle, specifically your dad’s younger brother.

Textiles of the Real

RENÉE SAROJINI SAKLIKAR

From Sharp Notions, edited by Marita Dachsel and Nancy Lee. Published by Arsenal Pulp Press in 2023. Renée Sarojini Saklikar is the author of five books. Her most recent book is Bramah’s Quest (Nightrwood Editions 2023). She lives in Vancouver, BC, on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples.

PANDEMIC PIECE

My husband brings home a quilt, provenance unknown, a gift from his workplace: a large square coverlet enriched with complex designs, thin black border encasing a background of

creamy-white fabric nubby with top-stitched spirals. In the centre of the quilt, an eight-point star made of narrow folded panels, dark brown with small sparks of amber-and-white flowers. Scallops encircle the straight edges, framed by a continuous series of connected loops sprouting serpentine leaves.

These finely wrought details make themselves known only in the wear and tear of daily living, by touch and by eye. Pattern bringing comfort, spread out over our sofa. Every time our hands reach for the quilt, we promise to one day count each leaf but never do. It's only after months of laundering that I notice the inscription sewn on the upper back corner. All that remains of the makers' message to us is the ghost cursives, undecipherable. It is winter 2020 and our first wave of COVID. Two years later, after cycles of wash and air-dry, the care of the makers still appears in shadow, trapunto, stuffed, raised, boutis—terms I look up on the internet. I am but a watcher who loves the feel of the worked fabric, and I wonder: whose hands gathered, saved, mapped, drew, pieced, stuffed, stitched, pressed?

THE GREY SHAWL

My mother telephones from her care facility and speaks to me about our life, settlers landing first in Newfoundland, then sojourning across the continent, from Nova Scotia to northern Ontario, from Quebec to Saskatchewan, “fetching up finally” as relatives would say, in “the town of towns,” New Westminster.

My mother says she's freezing cold in her shared room. They keep the window open “because of the COVID.” It's the fourth isolation in outbreak protocol. “Deekrah,” she says. “Do you remember Grandpa Saklikar gave you that wool shawl? Where is it?” I mumble something indeterminate, not wanting to remind her we haven't seen that shawl in decades, and I've now no idea what's become of it. As my mother speaks, though, I can smell the Kashmiri wool, and my shoulders long for its light, strong, rough-edged texture. Or do I imagine it, a grey shawl, large enough to wrap round and round?

TEXTILES OF THE REAL

And what about all those family textiles: drawers and drawers full, kept by my mother, from India to Canada. Fabrics stored away until this

past autumn, released into the air of the Good-bye Condo, dusty with age. Instead of sifting and sorting, and although I intended to curate a small extraction as a keepsake collection, when the time came and the junk-removal folks were at the door, I just gathered and packaged and turned my back on old saris and silks. In my mind's eye, my mother's fabrics are still in place in the condo that is now sold. The cloths in a textile memory bank, where each fold remains unchanged, as if in a museum I once saw in Ahmedabad: batik, silk, Rajasthani, dyed Kerala cotton, Jaipur and Dupioni silks. At night, dreaming of fabric, I wake longing to see, if not to touch, the rough-rough of silk-cotton, yards of peacock blue bordered with gold thread. Mornings, with a cup of tea placed by the computer, I click on digital artifacts from the time of my parents, Gujarati, Marathi: wall hangings, dupattas (shawls), saris, lehenga (wide skirts held up with elastic or drawstrings), and choli (midriff-baring and fitted short-sleeved tops). The real accessible only through transmittal, memory as an electric pulse, past to present. And how can I reach them, these lost objects only partially known, half-remembered ghost presences, except piece by piece?

TO BEGIN A PRACTICE

When writing, I first touch paper, my skin dry enough to require black-cotton gloves. Then I rip, cut, piece, shape, glue oddments of white computer paper from the recycling bin. Once the pieces are fixed in some fashion, either by painter's tape or by a staple or stitch, I layer on ripped cut-outs from old books, cast-off magazines. Touching paper produces dreams of my ancestors, crafts people from Gujarat and Maharashtra. They hail from the Republic of India, and as an immigrant-settler raised to be as “Canadian” as possible, it's only lately—as I make the poems that fit inside a long epic poem, whose heroes turn to making as a form of resistance, including the fibre arts of weaving, spinning, and quilting—that I think about the way craft and textile seem to sing to me with atavistic resonance; maybe my ancestors, farmers and textile workers whose later generations became doctors and lawyers, have ceded to me some faint memory of what it means to work with one's hands.



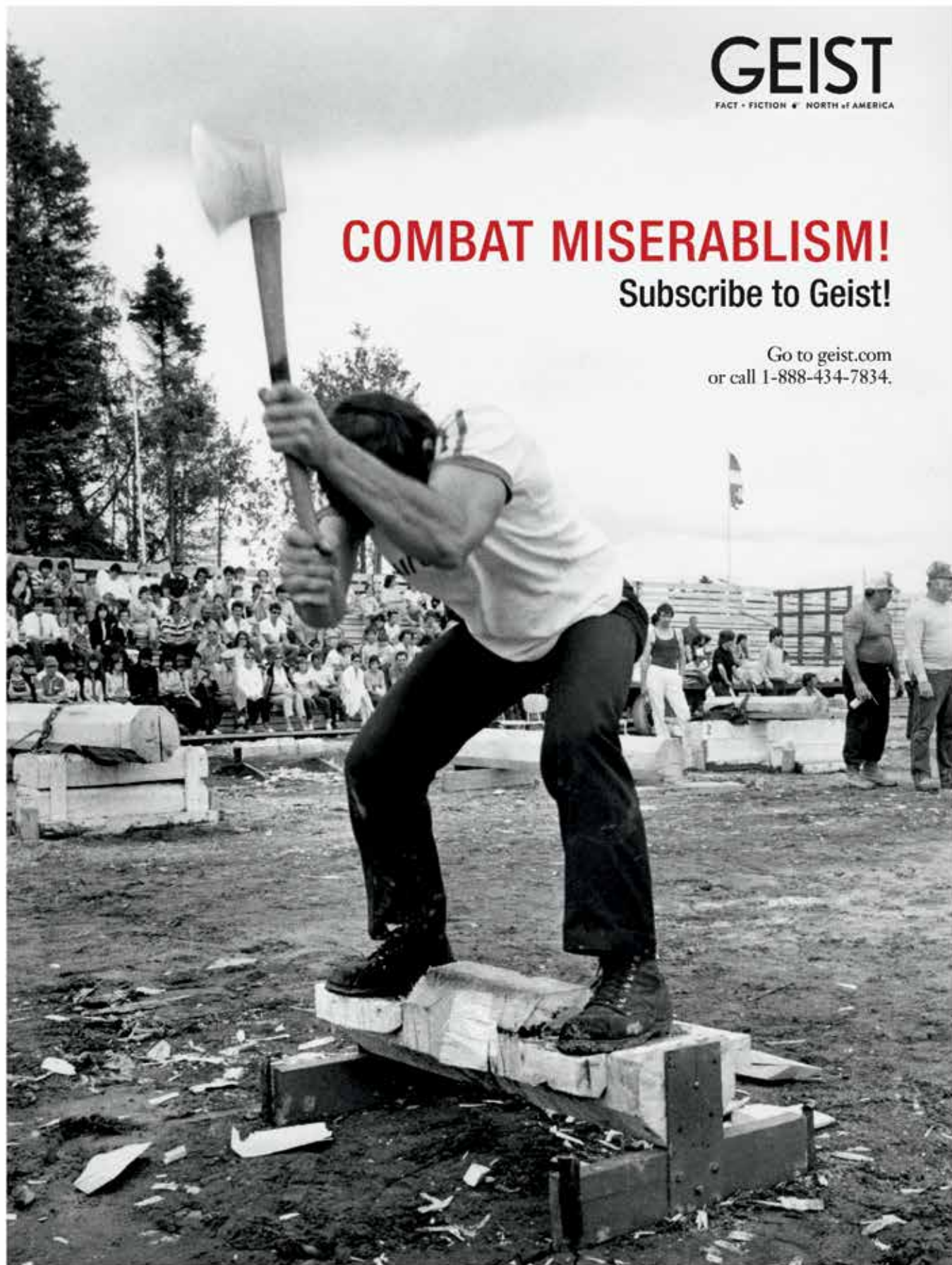
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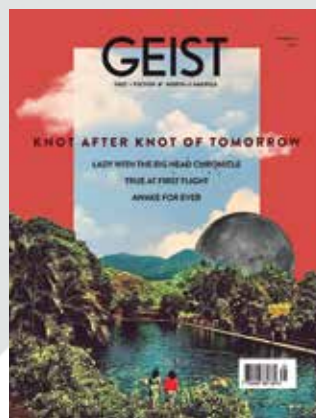
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Lady with the Big Head Chronicle

ANGÉLIQUE LALONDE

*I am wholly unimportant—just a witness to her shapeshifting,
possessed of a voice that can be compelled into song by the land's unfolding*

The lady with the big head wants me to keep writing about her even though I thought I had understood her story and typed it all up, then put that story in a book and shared it with other people. All along she knew I would keep going but didn't let me in on her knowing. She relishes in showing me I am wrong about so many things because she is a somewhat ghost who appears and disappears to me, wearing veils that morph between the faces of my ancestors, descendants and kin-folk, the world that awes me, and all of the things I fear.

She likes to obscure herself. She reminds me every day that I will die, that this life is a finitude in which I walk and breathe and shit and love and fuck and taste and joy. Such is her kindness. Such are her trickeries. She knows time and unknowns knowledge in me every time I walk into the bush and am taken apart bit by bit, made to sense that I am coherence and incoherence, one small emergence gathering rose petals and psychic impressions in an emergent world.

It is all very nerve-racking. The lady with the big head gets quite fed up and consistently morphs into the fabric of the world beyond my thinking, drawing me out of myself and toward the world beyond my thinking. She makes me think when I am down at the river that I should always and forever be down at the river and never, ever go home. Then my rational mind reminds me that William needs to be picked up from school and that I have a pot of herbs brewing on the fireplace and that it is time to be going back up the slope. The lady with the big head stays out there doing whatever she feels like all the time, always attuned, while I tune in and out and in and out like an uncertain piano unable to hold a tune through an entire song, or sometimes almost maniacally, like a basketball bouncing on a gym floor.

LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD'S BAKERY

I do or do not want to open a bakery in the forest with the lady with the big head, hoping she'll bake me flaky croissants every day, and sometimes Danishes with fresh berries when in season. The problem is that I would have to be the one to work there full-time and take on all the responsibilities of ordering flour and butter and salt, and keeping the levain going and ordering the stainless-steel counters and getting the electricity hooked up, though the lady with the big head might consent to building the hearth. She might consent to secret baking when I'm not around to ask her a million questions about what she is doing and

why, though she would never commit to doing it regularly because doing things regularly is mundane. The lady with the big head leaves mundanity to me, delighting in the ways that I struggle with my boredom—finding such safety and comfort in predictable routines, then longing to break away as soon as I feel some measure of solace.

When ruminating on her trickeries and imagining making croissants together that I might later sell to augment my income, since wandering in the forest brings no financial return, I try to communicate to her that I am not looking for a production baker but she doesn't care what I have to say about production baking, and has no grounding in capitalism.

When I close my eyes and inhale the scent of the warm soft pastry as I bite into the croissant's insides, I feel as though everything in the world is glorious for eternity, even though the feeling only lasts the duration of the croissant.

This conversation, like many of our conversations, takes place in an imaginal realm that is always an adjacent possible to the realm in which other humans who cannot imagine the same things as me might assume that I am just sitting in a chair looking out the window. While in another reality I am heavily invested in folding butter and flour in ever-so-delicate layers to ensure a proper flake, attempting to demonstrate reason to a partway ghost.

The lady with the big head declares she will participate in the bakery only if there are no shelves or jaunty display baskets of any kind. She makes it clear that I am not to advertise the bakery, or attempt to offset costs by selling the surplus to the neighbours.

In order to play a trick on her, I try to have her wear a hairnet that I pretend is a sort of tutu veil for her head so that none of her bits will fall in the dough. She purposefully exfoliates her face into the dough to scorn me.

I'm not sure how I feel about eating croissants flecked with her otherworldly skin cells, but when I close my eyes and inhale the scent of the warm soft pastry as I bite into the croissant's insides, I feel as though everything in the world is glorious for eternity, even though

the feeling only lasts the duration of the croissant. This is why I desire the bakery more than anything, but the lady with the big head mocks me, because my desires are so predictable. I am always trying to make the things that please me repeat ad nauseam and pushing as hard as I can at the things that repulse me or make me feel sad. The lady with the big head thinks this is both futile and absurd and does not consider the possibility that she may be the absurdity because no one in their right mind would ever consider her exactly real.

LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD HAS TRANSFORMED HERSELF INTO A SALAMANDER

The lady with the big head has transformed herself into a salamander manifesting itself in my body. It is such a kindness, but makes it difficult for me to go through my daily tasks in this human-made world. For instance, my skin is so moist now. I slip from myself constantly, and my smart phone no longer recognizes my pads. Although I am slippery and my skin reflects light as a sheen back into the earth's visual unfolding, I am so vulnerable to drying out.

My wife Alma is always applying moisturizers to my skin when she notices patches of dryness. She is a good wife who is always worried about my health and well-being so has been doing a lot of research about salamander habitats and proper pH portfolios. She wants to make sure the moisturizers she applies will not seep right through my porous membranes and poison me or poison the landscapes I ooze myself into. There are a lot of lubricants for humans that can harm a salamander, so Alma makes her own. She digs up pond grasses and scoops of tender green algae, then dries them out with plantain, chickweed and calendula petals. She flakes these into mud and borrows fat from the fall-slaughtered pig that we keep in our freezer and were intending to make into gifts for the birds but never got around to because we were spending so much time thinking about my skin and how to keep it from drying out with the wood heat. She mixes it all together with clay from the riverbed to make a greasy paste that soothes me so deep inside it's like my whole nervous system settles whenever I see her approaching with the jar.



Although Alma now tends to my dryness, I have to admit that it has been a hard winter during which I have struggled not to become desiccated. We thought perhaps it was akin to a hibernation, or a sort of fugue state from which I could easily rehydrate myself, but after repeated negligence to my moisture content I came to understand something was seriously wrong. The lady with the big head had moved away from me, bringing her salamander sleekness out of my dry crackles—guiding herself back into the forest where there are always wet rotting places to burrow into and recover from all of my failings to give her a proper home. I had no means to lend myself to her gifts without snapping back toward my comforts. Still, my body refused to yield back to what it had been before she entered me and made me into more than I had ever been before.

She didn't exactly ask me before initiating the transformation, and perhaps did not know of me that I do not know how to stink of earth without feeling I should wipe myself down with lavender soap made from the milk of goats. The soap freshens me, and dries my skin out. Like her, I practice land swimming as I walk through the forest in my Gore-Tex coat. Animals flee from the swishing sounds of my chafing. The coat is not a suitable skin in which to belong in the forest, keeping me absurdly dry.

Despite Alma's encouraging potions, I don't know how to maintain my wetness. I dip my hands into the sink and take long baths so hot I come out a different human, better than I was before because of the way fire and water interact with one another under the right conditions, blessing me from the outside in. During my soaking, the lady with the big head swims inside me again, but the water cools and after towelling myself off, my skin shows little cracks, as though all my moisture went out of me and into the bathing tub, then drained away back into earth along with the salamander the lady with the big head had become.

I often forget that I am a salamander as well as a human when I'm busy with all the things I deem important in life—like sharing food with Alma and cleaning up afterward, like procuring good soap and helping the neighbour with her sick laying-hen, the one whose vent had prolapsed and frozen solid, then crusted over with vile substances from inside her body. There was nothing we could do for her but chop

her head off to end her suffering, and with her body make an offering far off in the forest where we know scavengers pass.

Or like playing video games with our son William, because it's the only way he spends any time with me lately without complaining. And to be quite honest, I've become a little obsessed with the latest iteration of *The Legend of Zelda* on William's Switch that takes me back to the hours I spent with my buddy Trent as a preteen on his Super Nintendo, immersing ourselves in the heroic task of saving the Kingdom of Hyrule. I pretend to Alma that I'm only doing it to cultivate an interest in William's interests, but I suspect she's onto me because she looks at me with a little cock to her left eyebrow and a tiny pursed smile every time I ask William if he wants to do some gaming with me on the weekend after we head out on a family hike and he's tackled a few things on his chore list, like turning the compost and mucking out the goat barn.

One night when William and I are fully immersed in an epic quest to free the dragons' spirits from the evil forces we are always combatting in our gameplay, Alma calls me to the front door. The lady with the big head is there in a salamander body, and as we stand looking out at her, she walks across the threshold. I squat down and put out my hand and she raises her head to bestow me with a salamander's kiss on the knuckle of my right pointer finger. I do not know what I have done to receive such a gift and responsibility as this, but I heed her.

She walks in as though she intends to explore the house more fully, but I am aware of our cat Alice, who will not abide a somewhat ghost in a salamander body to exist beyond her predatory mouth's sharp incisors and her desire to devour small moving things. I gently pick the lady with the big head from the porch floor and carry her back to the forest, across the threshold of her home, and place her down where she belongs.

We are now guests of one another. A magic that confuses and awes me. I know she cannot survive in my dry world. There are so many changes I have to make before I am truly able to receive her, and I am so often a blubbery fool oriented to loops of disassociated thinking that leave my body untethered in the world.

I often think of my dead dogs, who helped me transcend my separation. In trusting me,

they taught me to know beyond the confines of my humanity, seeking always to communicate with me, though so often—in my silo of human knowledge limited by dominant empirical beliefs in individual and human separateness, which makes us numb to our own embodied beingness, and illiterate in the more-than-human world's reaching—I failed to expand my thinking to learn what they were telling me. Over time, through their devotion and patience, through their nervous systems honed to enfold me, through my need to know how to be in better relations, I learned to know them, and in turn to know beyond myself. Still, I am barely an apprentice in knowing. I pretend myself in the forest in my Gore-Tex coat. Sometimes I am not pretending myself. Sometimes I go naked, without the Gore-Tex coat.

I write letters to the lady with the big head on compostable paper with biodegradable inks that I place in little crooks all over the forest. I tell her how soothing my warm blood can be. I tell her my blood cannot regulate my organic systems when I am cold for too long. I draw her my beauty and the beauty of all my befallen human kin with so many apologies. My shame rots beneath logs, amidst leaf litter. Sometimes there are frozen months in which salamander lies coiled in burrows under earth, and the lady with the big head dreams salamander dreams or goes about being the many other things she is while cold winds blow across fields of frozen water made of minuscule crystalline flakes that amass into thick white-blue blankets, under which the land sleeps.

At home we stay busy burning fires, eating up our stores and mastering potion-making to regulate Link's body temperature in the fluctuating temperatures of Hyrule, while Alma heads off to work to determine what kind of pathogens and chemicals are coursing around in people's body fluids.

LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD'S PRONOUNS

The lady with the big head has much in common with no one. Sometimes she goes to the city and does what wraiths do. She yells but no one hears. They all have their earbuds in and are riding in loud machines to get

where it is they need to go. People are busy with their lives and heartaches, with their lusts and consumer goods and news bites. People have a lot to say about what they think. They know how to do it fast and in under fifty-five words. They know how to use images instead of words to approximate feelings, to render complex influxes of feelings into easily communicable emoticons.

I write letters to the lady with the big head on compostable paper with biodegradable inks that I place in little crooks all over the forest.

I thought for a while that the lady with the big head was etching smiley faces and poop emojis with hearts on them into some of the birch trees in the forest around our home, which caused me a lot of distress. More distress than the erotic sketches she was making of likenesses of me and Alma and William engaging in sexual play with mosses and lichens and mushrooms, some which looked like giant seafoam-green phalluses and others like earth-brown vulvas so intricately fissured I felt like I'd entered an eternal labyrinth, losing my mind wandering the pathways. She was trying to demonstrate that all of these beings are constantly making their sex on us, even though we rarely realize it—except for Alma, who suffers from allergies.

Alma notices when the birch trees are spewing yellow clouds of sex material all over the valley, her eyes red leaking slits as she wipes thick layers of pollen off the car every morning before she drives into work, kicking up plumes of it as she picks up speed—pollen intermixed with road dust, cosmic particles, dried bird droppings become wind-borne, and all manner of invisible microscopic life. Her body is incapacitated by their sex drive, which makes her both lonely and cranky. She envies William and I our unaffectedness, upset that her bodily sovereignty becomes a lark to her every time she breathes.

Nonetheless, Alma and I continue to read feminist theory, which does not apply exactly to the lady with the big head and her doings because she exists outside of patriarchy. She is not, we also come to understand, a she at all, and is more like a they, we learn from queer writers, who insist we get our pronouns

in order. The lady with the big head doesn't exactly give a flying fuck about which gender pronouns we use because English is not their language and it is only our limited mindframes that make us want to gender ghosts. We do not know what their language is, but we do know the power our language has to shape our very looking, and shape what we understand as freedom, therefore we do what we can to adjust. Alma and I encourage one another to try harder to de-binarize our thinking. William is better at this than we are because he is learning how to allow fluidity to be what it is at a much younger age than either me or Alma, whose inclinations toward fluidity were put down hard and fast in social worlds that had no words like nonbinary in their lexicon when we were both becoming girls.

**They look back at me, shake first their head,
rippling the shake through their whole body
like a wet dog, and then shedding all
wolfishness, morph into a large black bear.**

William is also learning about how to etch into birchbark, which I discovered when he left his sketchbook open on his bed to the page that had a poop emoji and happy-face drawing on it, and found an antique carving knife underneath. When questioned about it, he gave a wry smile and told me that the lady with the big head had left the knife on his windowsill and that he thought they were looking for an artistic collaborator.

I worried that William might corrupt the lady with the big head's artistic practice with his potty humour, but who am I to intervene if the lady with the big head invites William to co-create with them, knowing full well that he's a teenage boy? They draw more cock and balls and vulvas on the trees than he does, exploring the genitalia of various forest creatures in exacting anatomical detail. Although I would rather see neither detailed animal genitalia nor heart poop emojis in the forest when I am trying to do my walking meditations, I also understand that the lady with the big head and William are helping me come to terms with my aversions, which are just attraction's dualistic other, and in this way, pushing me further in my awareness than I could ever go alone.

It is helpful that we don't have to think exactly in words when we are near the lady with the big head, that in fact our words themselves often become indefinite in their presence, bulging and deforming, becoming other possible words, or no words at all, and we are able to sense a wordless world imbued with meanings we can sense but make no sense of. In this way the lady with the big head enlightens us.

She abolishes our theory and invites us to exist in the thrum of them. We no longer know how to speak of them. We mix and match our words. William insists we also sometimes refer to the lady with the big head as a he, because sometimes he is. He sex shifts and gender shifts or has no binary sex or gender at all. He is, after all, a partway ghost, and we have yet to learn about how to theorize partway ghosts in the philosophers we are reading.

The lady with the big head suggests we lick some lichen, so we do.

It is scratchy on our tongues and tastes like dust. The next day I find myself longing for more.

The next day I find that my tongue feels numb when I try to speak, as though my words were foam.

The next day I feel as though my body is spiralling outward from a core, ever so infinitesimally expanding, and this process is called aging, and it is bringing me toward death.

I notice this in photographs of myself lately, wherein my skin appears to be floating above my musculature, some interstitial layer underneath that flows in unison with the interstitial space under earth that is all wound through with mycelial networks conducting vast choruses of life that we cannot see and barely know how to measure with the scientific methods we have at hand.

The lady with the big head is sometimes a lady and sometimes a tardigrade. Sometimes they are a colony of lichen taking a thousand years to spread across a rock and sometimes he is a bull moose calling loud that he is ready to inseminate someone, and to contend with any other bull moose nearby that might have the same intentions as he does toward the cow moose with the long eyelashes that often feeds in the swamp nearby.

They, or she, or he, or all of these things at once are difficult to make meaning of, often

obscuring the very words we seek to use with their multiple magical and erotic agilities.

LADY WITH THE BIG HEAD FLOATS DOWN THE RIVER

I see something black floating down the river. At first I think it's a log shorn from the riverbank by high water, then I see it is both being swept by the current and moving horizontally against it. I notice a trailing veil, sweeping downstream from the body. A wolf I think, or a bear, but what is trailing from it? It is swimming across to the other side of the wide river, away from where I sit beneath a cedar, dripping river water from my naked skin and only somewhat moved to be on alert for my life.

Last week the neighbour texted to say there was a huge black wolf in the field beyond his yard, and today, after emerging cold and shimmering from the river's ice-cold holiness, in which time is washed away, shocking me to renewed liveliness from all the accruals that froth in my mind and get piled up like logjams in my body, I found wolf tracks twice the size of my lab's paws, imprinted in the sandbar where I'd just plunged myself in.

I am anew, my eyes attune to a numinous world. The lady with the big head emerges from the waters on the opposite bank, at first on two legs, then they place their front paws down, draw up their veil from the river, absorbing what might have been an overlong lupine tail. They look back at me, shake first their head, rippling the shake through their whole body like a wet dog, and then shedding all wolfishness, morph into a large black bear.

A song emerges from my throat, skimmers across the surface of the water, and the world around me vibrates, becoming amorphous, pulsing with whatever force it is that makes sound into song, that dwells between the interstices of minute particles of matter to cohere them into form.

Either the lady with the big head become bear is reckoning with me, or she is afraid of something on the same side of the river as me, further upstream, and I am wholly unimportant—just a witness to her shapeshifting, possessed of a voice that can be

compelled into song by the land's unfolding, in which the lady with the big head plays a communicative part.

I cannot cross over as they do, my fragile human form unable to undertake the vastness of the river.

Yet bestowed of the gifts I have here received, I return to my own humanness, slip my clothes back on and head home to make corn dogs for William, who berated me enough at the grocery store yesterday that I broke down and bought him a box, secretly thrilled at the thought of dipping them in bright yellow mustard and eating them right off the stick, as I used to do as a child. Alma frowned and held the box in her hands like a dirty diaper when she saw them.

**I planned to ask the pigs for forgiveness
as the corn dogs roasted, to burn some
cedar from the riverbank for the pigs'
nightmares to pass through us, for their life
forces to feed our bodies, and for our
digestion to offer them some kind of release.**

"Really?" she asked. "You're going to let him eat these? You know they are made from slaughterhouse pigs whose lives and deaths are an atrocity, the meat filled with irredeemable violence that will infect your and William's dreams?"

I planned to ask the pigs for forgiveness as the corn dogs roasted, to burn some cedar from the riverbank for the pigs' nightmares to pass through us, for their life forces to feed our bodies, and for our digestion to offer them some kind of release. I held Alma's hands and looked in her eyes, and responded, "It was my plan all along to free them, to honour their abused lives with the tasty joy of my tongue and then return them to earth through my bowels, and sing for their spirits with smoke."

Alma barely buys it because she believes in wholesale consumer boycott and cannot abide the coins that passed from our purses to the meat people, but I try to frame my method of eating corn dogs as a possible act of resistance by inscribing sacredness to the process as I chew.

Neither of us is ultimately going to prevent future horrors from taking place, but Alma feels herself the purer, since she remains free of the tainted meat. I know we are always already tainted and search for methods of release among the layers of violence we move between, in every space humans have organized themselves in over time, which is to say the world's entire history. And outside of humanity, there is just the plain stuff of life's violence, and matter's violence, the sheer destructive power at the very heart of formation. But more vital than all that, more immediate, we are living on colonized land and our very living here when we are not from these lands detonates violence, whether or not we pretend to be holier-than-thou.

Alma questions my morality when I take this line of thought. She wants our ethics to be firm. She worries these universalisms offer excuses framed in reductionism, instead of being liberatory.

I apologize for the corn dogs, but William and I eat them anyway, because otherwise it's a waste, and Alma and I have not even broached the subject of the genetically modified maize that is likely coating the meat. William and I have seconds, and William, even thirds. He is a growing teenage boy, after all.

William will not deign to tell me his dreams, but I do dream of heartbroken pigs. I dream of their snouts and teeth. My heart offers them a light, a song, a something. The lady with the big head emerges from the river, over and over again, looking back. Everything becomes amorphous. None of it makes up for their enslavement. I continue to hover between life and duty, attempting to learn how to read.

Angélique Lalonde dwells on Gitxsan Territory. She has been shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and was the recipient of the 2019 Journey Prize. Her first novel, Variations on a Dream, is forthcoming from McClelland & Stewart. Find her at angeliquelalonde.com.



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Dear Nani

ZINNIA NAQVI

Gender performance and colonial mimicry through the family archive



I wish I could say that I had a closer relationship with my Nani, but like many children of immigrants, our ties were strained by distance and language. My mother's mother was a quiet person. When I was young, Nani would often come from Pakistan to visit my Ammie and Khala (aunt) in Canada. Because Nani's English was limited and my Urdu was poor, I cannot recall any profound conversations between us. To her questions, I remember responding "Muje nehi patha he," meaning *I don't know*, a phrase I had mastered in Urdu by about age five. She would giggle in response.

In 2015, at my Khala's home in Toronto, I found images of Nani in an album. It had been damaged when the basement flooded, and Khala asked me to repair the album for her. Most of the photos were small black and white images, yellowing with age, held together by fifty-year-old Scotch tape. This album included photos of my grandparents when



they were newlyweds and my mother with her siblings when they were children in Karachi, Pakistan.

As I went through the album, I came across the images used in this project—of Nani dressed in my grandfather's clothing, the photographs taken by him. I asked my parents about them immediately. The images were not a secret; Ammie and her siblings knew of their existence, but what they knew had been pieced together over the years. The relationship they had with their parents was a formal one and they would not have dared to ask them directly. It was not a child's place to ask about the personal photographs of their parents.

Gulam Abbas Tapal and Rhubab Tapal, my Nana and Nani, were married in 1948 in Karachi, one year after the Partition of India and Pakistan. They both came from upper middle-class Bohra Muslim families, a close-knit community with roots in Gujarat, India. Both families had been living in Karachi for many generations. In the community and at home they spoke Gujarati. After Partition the official language of Pakistan became Urdu, but at school my grandfather studied in English.

Some of the images in this project were taken during my grandparents' honeymoon in Quetta, the capital of the province of Balochistan, a mountain region close to the border with Afghanistan. This northern region of Pakistan continues to be a popular vacation spot because of its cold, lush and mountainous landscape. My grandparents stayed with distant family members while there. It was likely the first time in their adult lives that they were allowed to be alone together.

Children appear in many of the found photographs of Nani. In the image of Nani in the garden, two young girls with long braids



are playing with a paternal figure. I see my position in this project as akin to the position of these children—as someone who is looking and attempting to make sense of this performance. For this reason, I created self-portraits in which I re-enact Nani’s poses but also re-enact the poses of the children; often my figure is only partially visible or out of focus. This keeps the focus on the original artifacts and also acknowledges my hand in bringing these images to light and unpacking their significance. In some of the self-portraits, I wear a white ribbed tank top, or banyan as it’s called in Urdu. I chose to wear it because it’s something that my father still wears as an undershirt, and I used to wear it as a child before I hit puberty. To me, the banyan represents a state of being in one’s body that is at times masculine, feminine, and childlike.

My Nana was very particular about photography and documenting family occasions, insisting that my mother and her siblings had their photo taken at a studio every year on their birthdays. He had a passion for the arts, although he was never able to pursue them himself. When considering where my Nani and Nana might have gotten the idea for gender play, I instantly thought of Bollywood cinema of the 1940s. All the pictures are staged with different props, poses and outfits, and have the feel of a movie set. I know that my grandparents were avid cinema-goers in their youth—I’d heard stories of my mother sneaking off to the theatre with her Dadi, my Nana’s mother, then running into Nana himself alone at the cinema.

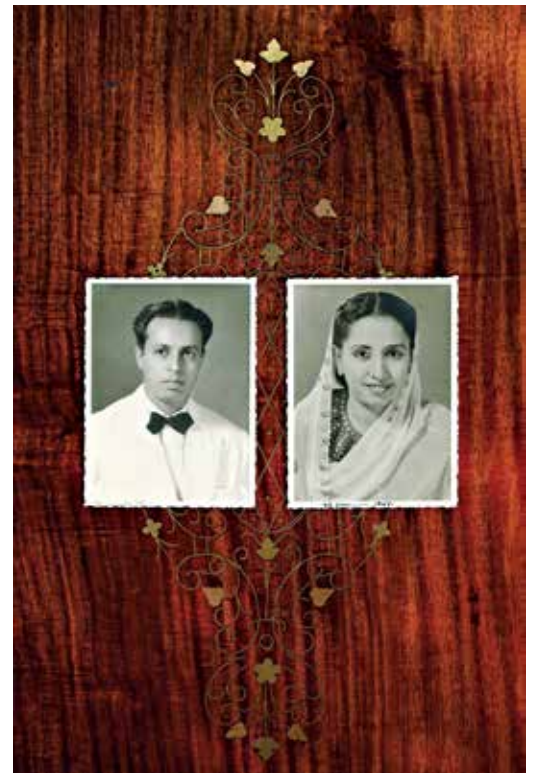
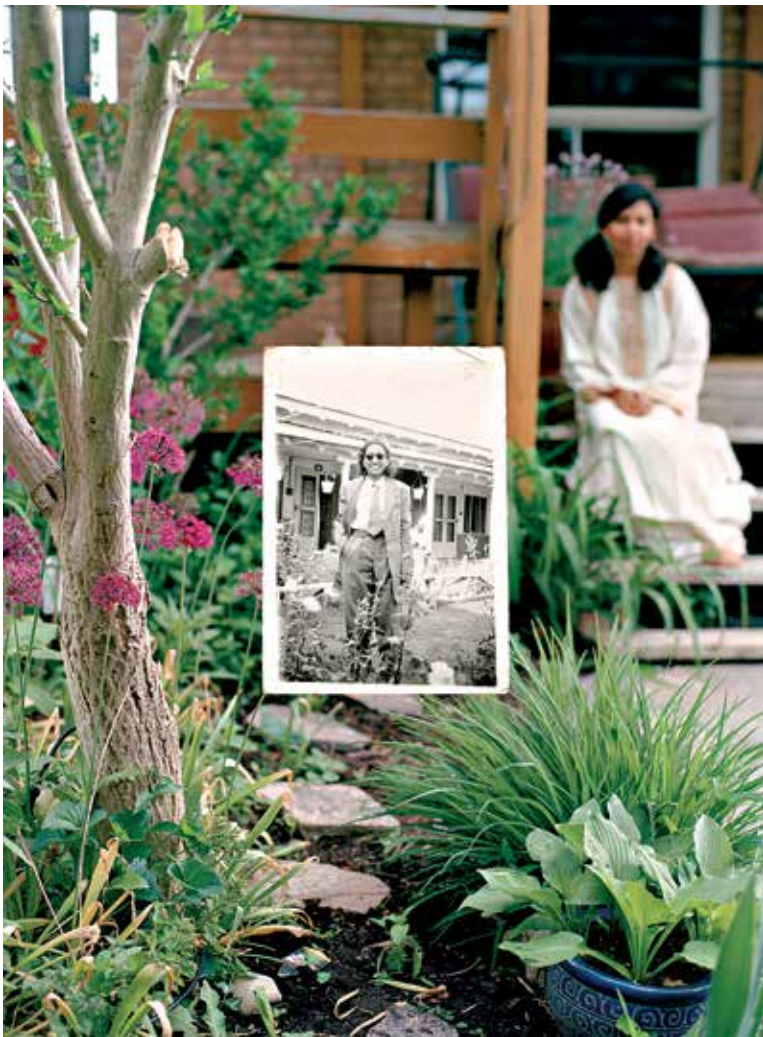
Rosie Thomas suggests that Bollywood cinema of this time employed techniques of “the mimicry we associate with sites of anticolonial struggle.” During the Partition era, many Indian filmmakers looked



to figures from pre-colonization to inspire public support for the independence movement. One of these figures is known as the virangana. Kathryn Hansen describes the virangana as a “woman who manifests the qualities of virya or heroism,” a type of character in Indian folklore dating back to the Mughal period, and commonly depicted in male dress. Both authors discuss the Bollywood actress Fearless Nadia as a virangana figure. In many of her film roles she wore boots, trousers, masks and cloaks, and was famous for her stunt work, such as fighting and horse-riding. In *Baghdad ka Jadoo* (1956), she even dresses as a man to woo a princess and fool the king.

When I look at these images of my grandmother, it’s clear to me that Nani’s performance is not just about gender but also about representing ideals of modernity. Educated under the British system, the modern ideals taught to my Nani and Nana would have been modelled after the colonizer. In this process of re-enactment, Nani’s performance expresses this sense of mimicry or double theatricality. She is not only performing the role of a man, but she is performing the role of an Indian man who is performing the role of a British man, or a subject mimicking their ruler. Nani is pushing up against patriarchal society while being embedded in it.

Another apparent symbol that leads me to consider the duality of Nani’s performance is *The Children’s Dictionary* she is holding in one of the photographs, and which I hold in one of the self-portraits. The book is from a set of illustrated dictionaries given to my Nana by a school-teacher, and were beloved by the whole family. The dictionaries were produced by a British publisher and include racially insensitive illustrations. For example, one illustration shows racialized people from all over the world happily offering gifts to two British children, perpetuating the narrative that colonies were happily contributing their resources to the British Empire.



I began this project from a place of intuition and activated it through what I learnt from my mother's memories and history. From my perspective as a maker working in the West, I see these photographs as complicating what we expect historical images of South Asian women to look like and depict. From my perspective as a daughter and granddaughter, I see evidence of a young couple at the height of their love for one another. There are socio-political layers beneath this act of performance, but alongside them run currents of romance, youth, liberation and the hidden lives of our elders, which children do not often have the opportunity to witness. Through these images I can interact with a version of Nani that I did not have access to in my life.

Zinnia Naqvi (she/her) is a lens-based artist working in Tkaronto/Toronto, ON. Her work examines issues of colonialism, cultural translation, social class and citizenship through the use of photography, video, the written word and archival material. Zinnia dedicates this piece to her family: "To my Nani and Nana, thank you for taking such amazing photos, and to Ammie and Abbou, thank you for telling all your stories."

Text and images from this piece were first published in Dear Nani by Zinnia Naqvi (Anchorless Press, 2021).

Knot after knot of tomorrow

JANE SHI

CATALOGUE OF TEARING

dewy decimal isn't a system
of organization but a unit
of water open the library
in refractions ribs you a cage
flight of cormorants *Brittle*
that summer I met you by brittle
publication date: 2013 a hard vowel
a hard life ask me a question
what is the stinkiest chemical
what kind of crying
are you looking for
welcome condensed catacomb
on this floor the spines are soft
a visitor cranks each movable shelf
sink forks to bilge-bottom locate each
feathery karyotype careful not to crush
each sweet ROM

Jane Shi lives on the stolen and occupied lands of the x̣ʷməθḳʷəỵəm (Musqueam), Sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish), and səlikwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. She is the author of the chapbook Leaving Chang'e on Read (Rabila's Ghost Press, 2022). Her debut poetry collection echolalia echolalia is forthcoming with Brick Books in 2024.

1-STAR MOTEL IN YR SAN JUNIPERO HEART

X's a Japanophile & Canucks fan.
Being his second (third?) Chinese something
or other was like picking chewed-up bones
with yr teeth—a close-up scene of sea soup
we slurped from inside a trench kitchen. Man,
I still love that guy though. Every friend's all,
“You dodged a bullet made of normie/weeb.”
But I'm like. Let me have this one. Nothing
is quite the same as your early twenties:
we drank milkshake & didn't hold hands. Phones
connect our spooled blood vessels—DMs keep
our fingers tied like rubber promise rings
we wouldn't wear. Train passes Hangzhou. Plenty
of times I would lie there, synapse a loop
of if only. I jumped into men's beds
to survive. I could tell him now. *Thank you*
for this temporary home. Why I'm not
mad, why I won't excavate meaning from
our clumsy reticent bodies is cuz
“What does this remind you of?” is boring.
I'll psychoanalyze myself later.
After poking him with my hairclip (knot
after knot of tomorrow in our heads),
I blocked him on FB but not on Skype.
Tomorrow is an impulsive fog. Clones
of bad men were everywhere. So were sneers
behind each queer *shhh, you're safe with me.*

X wasn't bad. X will forever be
my sweet bare minimum against whom all
others will be judged. Wait, hold on. Will you
hold me like he once did. Will you hold me
like lovers in San Junipero. Fall
sizzled, sighed. My elephant feet crater
heart stomped out recollections of mirrors,
twisting our faces into denying
their stinkbug jarred fates. Won't let you wipe
my crater-crow umbrella feet dry. Dupe
me into staying until the years fuzz
& fade. I know it's not twenty
sixteen anymore. A fusion of gems
is all I want to curl myself inside.
Let this become an experience you
can't market as blankets. I wade beside
you inside an overflowing Cháng Thames,
a dam of seconds but not second best.
Inside this one-heart motel of autumn
stars are raptors of mourning. Kept the rest
of these memories a secret. Help me
conceal parts that healed her shrapnel wounds. Sing
the OST until you believe in
yourself again. Silly, we're not alone.

Looking for a Place to Happen

MINELLE MAHTANI

What does it mean to love a band? A friend? A nation?

When I got the text, it was July 2019. I was on a flight from Vancouver to Paris, sandwiched between my son who was reading a picture book about a pigeon who drove a bus, and my husband who was reading a book by Theodor Adorno. It was going to be our first trip to Europe together to see my husband's family. I had just started a new academic job and I was exhausted. I needed a respite. But the text read: "Please come now. The doctors say it is imminent." It was a message from my friend's husband, Tim. His wife, Ing Wong-Ward, my dear friend, confidante, wise-cracking genius and radio producer at the CBC was dying.

Ing and I had become fast friends when we were in our twenties. We were ambitious journalists in training, both of us longing to make a difference in national television news. Over icy blue slushies at the Lone Star restaurant near the CBC on Front Street, cheeks flushed, we would passionately speak about our shared hatred of injustice and our love of fashion, not always in that order. Ing's particular obsession were Manolo Blahniks—Ing absolutely adored a great pair of shoes. As a woman of colour and a woman with a disability, she would go on to become one of the country's leading journalists telling stories about disability and race.

I knew she was dying, and I was in denial. But when I got that text, I knew I had to go. We landed and I turned right around, catching the next flight to Toronto, leaving my husband and child in Paris.

The flight back felt interminably long. I sat numbly through film after film, not knowing what I would do when I got there. How could I say goodbye to a friend whom I had loved so dearly—and for so long?

What happened next was what you might expect—the rotating door of guests coming in to say their goodbyes. I said the things I needed to say. I heard the things Ing wanted to tell me.

My goddaughter, Ing's daughter—the look on her face at ten years old, a look one should never hold, even at a much later age, the grief sketched through. We went for a long walk in the Distillery District in the blinding July sun, she and I. The heat was desultory. We tried not to talk about the anticipatory grief we were feeling. It was overwhelming both of us.

That night, Michael D'Souza, another CBC journalist, came in to say his goodbyes. He took one look at me and said, "Minelle, you have to get out of here."

With my face I told him I disagreed.

Michael was having none of that. He said, "This is just hubris on your part. Come tonight to a dinner party I'm having. It'll be good for you."

I reluctantly agreed.

When Michael's front door opened, I heard the raucous laughter that only grizzled old journalists telling loud stories can share. One kind-looking woman smiled sweetly, patted her side of the couch, and said, "Come sit by me."

That woman was Jody Porter.

Maybe you know Jody's name by her byline. You've probably heard her voice on the radio, too. Jody's reputation as a white woman reporting on Indigenous matters with care was renowned. That night at the party, she was both generous and modest, telling me about the stories she was working on back in Thunder Bay. We kept things simple. I told her I was in town because a friend was ill. I left it vague, didn't offer any names. Why should I? I didn't want to get into it. I knew what would happen as soon I offered details: the inevitable pity, the cocked head.

Somewhere over the third course, though, I said something about the Tragically Hip and my fascination with Gord Downie, the lead singer. I'm not sure how this came up. I mentioned something about feeling depressed over his recent diagnosis of brain cancer. Maybe I did want to talk about my grief and I just didn't know how to, a sign of my passive-aggressive tendencies taking shape.

She looked at me, took a sip of her chardonnay, and said, "I met Gord once."

"Are you a fan?" I asked, incredulous.

"I am." She nodded a little sadly, which surprised me.

"So am I!"

Everything closed down around us as we launched into our own private fandom of the Hip—reciting the songs we loved, ones that harkened back to our memories in our twenties, thirties, forties. Jody recalled taking her baby sister to her first Tragically Hip concert at the old Molson Park in Barrie, Ontario, in the mid-1990s. Later, she'd remember it this way, writing:

It might have been Canada Day for all the national pride on display. Not the hokey, hand-on-heart, flag-waving patriotism of the USA, but rather the more subtle, self-effacing devotion to a nation still "Looking for a Place to Happen."

Introducing [my sister] to the Hip, in concert, felt like I was fulfilling my role as big sister, showing her the kind of people we were, or could aspire to be. It was exhilarating.

I loved hearing this same story from Jody that night. This experience of music—as not only

placeholder of time, but as sustenance, spoke to me so plainly. Because I shared that with her, too.

I was introduced to the Hip in the late 1980s, by a boyfriend, as many of us are—through someone who loves something so much they are bubbling with excitement to share it with you, just like Jody had shared the Hip's music with her sister. I had an ugly breakup with that boyfriend a few years later, but my love affair for the Hip flourished. I loved everything about them: their bluesy-rock sounds, their powerful riffs. Most of all, I loved seeing them perform live.

I saw them for the first time when I was a student at Dalhousie. I caught them at a dive bar called the Misty Moon. When Gord came on stage, the entire crowd took a deep breath. The charismatic nature of the lead singer was palpable. The audience sang along hoarsely to the lyrics, and I left jubilant and satisfied.

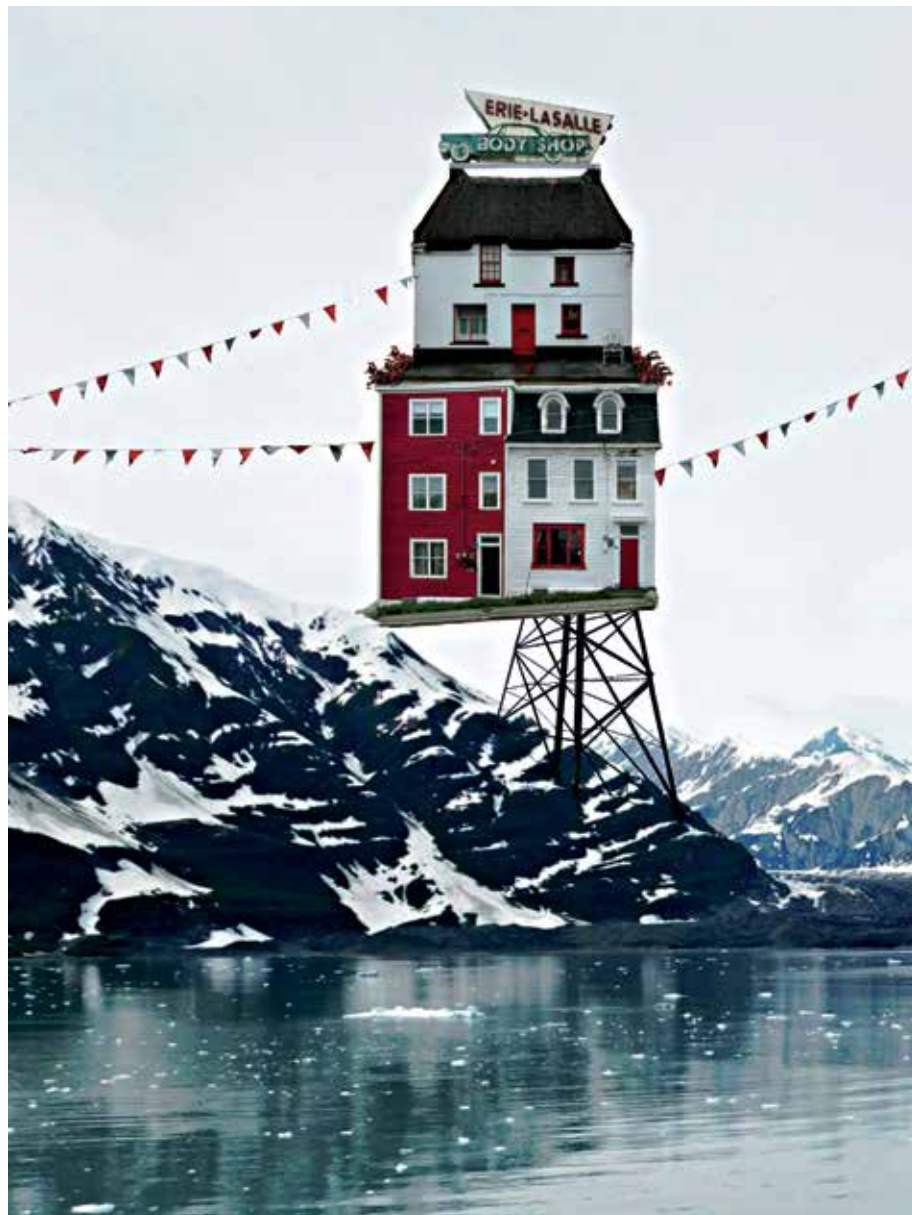
After that I couldn't get enough. This little brown girl? She loved them with all her heart.

When I went to London, England, to pursue my PhD, I caught them at a small venue in Shepherd's Bush; Gord and the gang appeared dishevelled and sweat-stained for their encore of "Little Bones," and I noticed crazed fans swinging Canadian flags over their heads. I screamed along with them. I was crazed, too.

Friends would ask why I adored them. Didn't I know the Hip were the quintessentially stereotypical Canadian band? The Hip have a relentless reputation as emblem of Canada, they would say with not a little disgust, and now we were trained, nay, were teaching the next generation, to abandon the idea of the nation-state. How could I love them, my friends insinuated, and still call myself a social justice scholar? I was a hypocrite, a sellout. They could reluctantly justify my childlike love of Shawn Mendes as indicative of a sweet admiration for a part-Portuguese kid (being mixed, he made it under the radar) and my appreciation for Vancouver-based Matthew Good—well, I could like him because he was at least up front about his mental health challenges. But the Hip? Good Lord! How could I explain it?

I couldn't. I just loved them with a wild abandon.

That wild abandon would lead me to bring my adoration to bear upon my intellectual



pursuits as a geography professor. Many academics pretend they don't do this—study something purely out of love—but don't be fooled. I know they do.

In 2000, I started writing about the Tragically Hip. Along with Scott Salmon, another geographer whom I had introduced to their music (and who had fallen in love with them too), I explored the relationship between the Tragically Hip, globalization, popular music and the expression of national identity. We wrote: "In the Canadian context, the music of the Tragically Hip has provided a vehicle for the expression and assertion of national identity amongst many of their fans." But who are we kidding, really? I can't hide behind my

academic persona on this one. The paper was really just a love letter to the Tragically Hip.

Strangely enough, the paper took off, as much as something can in the quiet corridors of academe. It was republished twice in other anthologies. Professors put it on their course syllabi. Folks wrote to say it resonated with them. But the truth of the matter was that I had mixed feelings about what I was writing. My love affair with the Hip was growing, while at the same time my love affair with Canada was waning.

When I was a graduate student, full of hope and excitement about the future, I heard Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the great Black prison

abolitionist and prison scholar, speak. She said something I will never forget. It was: “First you infiltrate—then you innovate.” Take over what already exists, she said, and innovate what’s still needed. I remember thinking that was a brilliant suggestion. That once you get into a system, infiltrate a corporation, a university or even a country, you can make change for the better. *One day you will become prime minister, Muni*, my dad would tell me, proudly.

My body remembers the many times I tried to infiltrate. If you are brown, if you’re a woman, if you’re queer, if you’re all those things together, maybe you too have those moments. The ways you bent your voice to sound more like the people in power. The way you covered up aspects of your identity, all to try to make it in Canada. I know I have those moments. The way I would often say yes, it’s Michelle, in order to prevent botched attempts at verbalizing my first name. The way I would learn to speak using what I read as Canadian vernacular—fancy-dan, rat’s ass—in order to seem more white. None of this worked, of course.

I also felt counterfeit in that my family’s origin story was founded on love of the nation—a nation that would never love them back.

I am only here because in the 1960s, my parents’ best friends in England, ironically also Iranian and Indian respectively, told them, “Canada wants us! We should immigrate there together!” And they did. My parents moved to North York, Ontario, from London in 1969 in an attempt to offer their not-yet-born children a better way of life, just two years before multicultural policy was inaugurated in Canada.

I’ve already said that I think sometimes we end up loving the things our loved ones love. My parents’ idealistic and naive love of the nation was passed down to me. This included, but was not limited to, their uncritical adoration of Pierre Elliott Trudeau: his dapper style, the way he held court and without irony told the country the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation. He was my parents’ prime minister, to paraphrase from the song “Wheat Kings” by the Tragically Hip, and he became my prime minister, too.

Family legend goes that I was born on the day Trudeau got married. This was told to me in hushed tones, as somehow indicative of the love my parents had for me. It would only be later that I would learn that this was, in fact, not

true—that Trudeau got married the day before, flying into Vancouver on March 4, hopping in a car to St. Stephen’s Roman Catholic Church in North Vancouver, where at 6:30 p.m., to quote from the *Vancouver Sun*, “the most-eligible bachelor of international politics” married Margaret Sinclair of West Vancouver.

That marriage would not survive. My parents’ marriage would not survive, either. But on that date, the entire country seemed in the thrall of Trudeaumania, in love with the idea of Trudeau being in love, the promise of their love fuelling a particular kind of patriotism. In turn, my parents’ love for each other waned, and uncomfortably tightened around their love for me, thus naming me “Wish Come True” in the hopes that I would ensure all their dreams for me, and for them, would take flight. But this country would never be the land of unending hope and promise they hoped it would be—for them or for me.

Family legend goes that I was born on the day Trudeau got married. This was told to me in hushed tones, as somehow indicative of the love my parents had for me. It would only be later that I would learn that this was, in fact, not true

I want to return to that night in Toronto, to that dinner party I attended when I was coming back to say goodbye to my friend Ing. Over Niagara strawberries with whipped cream, Jody’s face darkened between our exultations of the Hip. I told Jody that my love affair with the Hip was complex, because the Hip was now so roundly equated with a particular kind of love of the nation-state, and my love affair with Canada had soured so significantly. There was no way I could still love Canada, knowing what I did now about Trudeau’s legacy with the White Papers, with the Chinese head tax—the list of atrocities was long. But something else complicated this story. And it had to do with Indigenous lives.

Before Downie passed, he became obsessed with telling Chanie Wenjack’s story. Gord’s brother Mike had heard a documentary on the CBC about Chanie, a twelve-year-old Anishinaabe boy who had fled a residential school

near Kenora, Ontario, in 1966, and frozen to death on train tracks he thought would bring him home. It moved Gord so much that he wanted to give that story a national spotlight, culminating in a multimedia storytelling project called *Secret Path*. It included a ten-song album, a tour, graphic novel, and an animated film by Jeff Lamire. It was covered by almost every big media outlet, the campaign so slick it seemed ubiquitous.

The documentary that sparked it all was produced and voiced by Jody. But at the dinner party, I didn't know that. I just confessed to Jody something about my inability to make sense of my love for this band, and my intuition that something was wrong with the project as Downie had conceptualized it. I just couldn't put my finger on it.

Jody didn't tell me it was her moving work that catapulted this story into Downie's hands. But she confessed to me her own ambivalence about *Secret Path*.

As a careful reporter on Indigenous issues, Jody had invested years into understanding the complex issues facing Indigenous peoples, addressing their stories with depth. But something about the project wasn't right, and Indigenous writers explained why.

Clayton Thomas-Müller, a member of the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation and the author of ecojustice memoir *Life in the City of Dirty Water*, explained: "At a time of reconciliation the most visible face in the discourse around residential schools and reconciliation should not have been a white rock star." He said that white translators of Indigenous stories have an obligation to think about how they capitalize upon those tales. There's a place for settlers to stand alongside their Indigenous allies to offer support, he said, but not when they become the story.

Another of Thomas-Müller's lines in particular stayed with me: "My challenge to Mr. Downie is to have him push forward the stories of our living survivors: Let us speak for ourselves about our collective resilience."

The late Mi'kmaw comedian and radio host Candy Palmater, a self-proclaimed Hip fan, wrote:

When I read that [Downie] was receiving the Order of Canada not just for music but for his leadership as

an Indigenous activist, I was stunned. Surely this was a misprint. After all, I know so many Indigenous people who have given their whole lives to furthering our cause without ever being recognized. Not only that, but so often, their lifelong anti-racist work has taken a toll on their health and careers.

Jody spoke about some of these tensions that night. I told her, "This is important. You have to write about it."

She hung her head. "No, I'm not the story. I don't want to become another white saviour."

I told her she was not telling me that story. That maybe by leaning into those critiques, she could offer readers a way to understand what it meant to challenge what felt like empty expressions of reconciliation as a white woman. I said again, "You have to write about it."

She did.

In "Pathfinding," the piece Jody eventually wrote for *Maisonmeuve*, she expressed her ambivalence about her role as a non-Indigenous reporter on Indigenous issues, and her own experience covering Chanie Wenjack's story and Gord Downie's *Secret Path* in particular:

I thought my years of engaging on Indigenous issues had protected me from the white saviour complex... Instead, I was blindly galloping around on my white horse, not seeing the wholeness of Indigenous lives and experience. Not seeing my own brokenness. In focusing so much on the hurt in other people's lives, I'd missed the lessons they offered about healing. I failed to imagine the possibility of writing stories with this kind of headline: *Residential school survivor helps aging rock star confront death*—and failed to consider how such a story might help me.

When I read Jody's essay, it brought me right back to that dinner party, where I was in so much shock over the impending loss of my friend. It reminded me that not all our stories about inequality and colonialism have to include stories of white benevolence

or white guilt. There are other stories to tell. Jody had shown me that. Jody admitted when she got it wrong. And she offered a different path toward repair, as if such a thing was ever possible, or ever enough.

I remembered something my friend Ing Wong-Ward had told me in an email a few months before she died. “Stories disappear into the ether. Good ones are remembered. I rather see life like that too.” Jody’s story was one I would remember.

That night at the party, just as I was about to leave, Jody handed me a gift bag with a blue ribbon. She said, “Please give this to Ing’s daughter. It’s a present for her.” I hadn’t realized that Jody knew Ing, too. Maybe I should have.

The next day my goddaughter opened the present carefully but without enthusiasm. I thought back to the days of seeing her rip open wrapping with zeal. Now, gone.

The present was a butterfly game. My goddaughter and I played the game for a while that day. Each butterfly was its own tile. We spread them out, and tried to find the matching butterfly, each one in its own paired cocoon, until we had a pile of butterflies spread out on the ground.

When I looked up the symbolism of the butterfly later, I found this: “The butterfly has become a metaphor for transformation and hope; across cultures, it has become a symbol for rebirth and resurrection, for the triumph of the spirit and the soul over the physical prison.”

I thought about the body as a prison, as my vivacious friend lay languishing in her hospital bed mere steps away, barely breathing.

Ing died a few days later.

A year or so passed. Jody’s piece about the Hip was published in *Maisonneuve*, and my own piece about racism and names was published in *This Magazine*. Jody and I hadn’t stayed in touch, one of those bright bursts of friendship that disappear sometimes, but I reached out to her when I saw we were both nominated in the same category that year for a National Magazine Award. We laughed at the serendipity of it all.

We both virtually attended the awards ceremony, me in Vancouver, her in Thunder Bay, messaging back and forth through Twitter.

I hope you win! Jody wrote.

I hope YOU win! Heart emoji, celebration emoji, heart emoji again.

I looked up our text thread yesterday to make sure I got that right. When I did, I found only my replies to her: full of exclamation marks and excitement.

Her side of the text thread was gone.

That’s when I realized that Jody’s account had been deleted and all text threads related to her had vanished.

Jody died of cancer on July 19, 2022, on her fiftieth birthday, not long after we had texted with each other. At the time, I had no idea.

To this day, whenever I see a butterfly, I think of Ing. I think of Jody. And I think about the butterfly game she gave to Ing’s daughter.

The last thing I had tried to send to Jody was a story about butterflies by Maria Popova. I thought she would find it poignant. It was a story about two sisters, Harriet and Helena Scott, who meticulously and with great love and care captured the science and splendour of Australian butterflies and other Lepidoptera. Even a century after their death, their stunning paintings are praised for their technical accuracy, artistry and contribution to the field.

I thought about the body as a prison, as my vivacious friend lay languishing in her hospital bed mere steps away, barely breathing.

I think this way about Jody and Ing now. They weren’t naturalists like the sisters, but as journalists, they too were committed to observing and illustrating, as Popova describes, “in real time the metamorphoses unfolding in the span of an hour, [even in] minutes,” in our world. Some of the sisters’ work required such precision that they used the single hair of a paintbrush, and their illustrations rendered the complete life cycle of the butterfly in exquisite detail. Ing and Jody, in turn, used stories to wield the power of a single question to inextricably alter the terrain of our social landscape.

The power of a good question.

Ing and Jody taught me to continue to question the simple scaffolding of the nation. To always question the ways socio-political

constructs of disability and race work to ensure power is kept in place. To remember how complicated and complicit our love of the nation can be. As Laila Lalami, the Moroccan-American writer, teaches us: “Patriotism means a constant questioning.... It means to question rather than accept the answer.”

I tell my students now that we must heed the words of the Black Canadian scholar Rinaldo Walcott. He once told me that if we study Canada from an anti-colonial context, we can't forget to bring in the three L's: law, land and labour. I have appreciated those signposts. I speak about them all the time in my classes. But I notice, now, when I try to write signposts, I always write songposts instead, as if the Hip's songs act as markers for me throughout my life, providing me with more solace and care than I ever deserved to have, to hope for.

The band was playing at the Royal Canadian Legion and I couldn't help but be taken aback by all the reverent references to royalty: large dusty framed pictures of the Queen on the wall, a Union Jack pinned up in the back corner.

I still draw from Walcott's significant signposts to be sure, but now I have added my own. My own three R's. I tell students to think about risk, relation and repair. That one needs to take risks to reach out, to think about relations, and attempt to repair. I think about the importance of relationality—acknowledging the networks of relations and histories of relations that pervade our professional and personal lives... those constellations not only forging our identities, but what we think of as possible in the world.

You'll notice that the word *reconciliation* is not there.

In January of this year, I came across an ad for a cover band of the Hip playing on Commercial Drive in Vancouver. The band was playing at the Royal Canadian Legion, and when I arrived, I couldn't help but be taken aback by all the reverent references to royalty: large dusty framed pictures of the Queen on

the wall, a Union Jack pinned up in the back corner. The place was packed. For a moment, I dared not go inside. I felt my brownness more than ever.

But then I looked around.

I noticed the crowd was full of... people like me. Brown women in their forties and fifties. And many Indigenous people, some of them wearing Hip paraphernalia. Eleven teenagers at the door wearing “Land Back” hoodies. I sang and danced with such uninhibitedness that night, and I was sure the checkerboard floors would break with the brute strength of all our feet pounding on the ground. Women I did not know reached out their hands to me as we screamed out the lyrics to each and every song. I was sweat-stained again, buoyant. I felt new for the first time in years, out in a crowd after pandemic, my N95 mask on so tight but my bodily presence so palpable, sharing this moment with others, so real and true and joyous. An “ecstatic” geography, as Ben Malbon might put it, from his writing on crowds, music and dancing, noting their roles in communal and interior experiences of resistance and vitality.

I want to return to the words of Ruthie Gilmore: first you infiltrate what exists, then you innovate what doesn't. What Ruthie was saying was that to innovate, you have to tear down and rebuild. To imagine something altogether different. Patriotism has a powerful pull. I had to commit to something else.

How do we honour our truest self in the stories we tell? How do we refuse the seductive nostalgia of the nation? It's hard, I admit, when that love of the nation is so emotionally felt. Gayatri Spivak asks: “When... does the comfort felt in one's corner of the sidewalk, a patch of ground... or church door—when does this transform itself into the nation thing? And how?”

The power of a good question.

I wrote this for you, asking: What does it mean to love a band? A friend? A nation? How is that love similar? How is it the same? What does it mean to be patriotic now, during this end of times, when finally, patriotism is rightly being recognized as a dirty word? What do we do with the shame of that love?

Reading the work of Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott helped me to answer these questions.

In her essay “CanLit Is a Raging Dumpster Fire,” she writes: “It’s complicated to love a country that still actively hurts so many of the people who live within it. Do you let your love make you blind, do you stop loving the country entirely, or do you acknowledge its imperfections, shrug and try to love it anyway?”

Elliott continues:

All of us as writers know the blessing and curse that is constructive criticism. Though we can objectively recognize that it ultimately makes our work better, when we’re hearing that constructive criticism, *it hurts*. Sometimes for days, weeks, months, years. But eventually, we all sit down, assess the criticism and *do the work to fix the problems*.

I too hope that you find ways to love. But maybe we also need to ask what we love, and why and how. Loving hard means loving with both abandon and critique. Embracing that

ecstatic geography while also pointing out its flaws. A tough love, if you will.

The poet and critic Hanif Abdurraqib reminds us: “I don’t have time to write critiques of things that I don’t actually love, right? Critique, for me, has to be an act of love—or else it’s a waste of time.”

The answers came to me slowly, and then abundantly, that night on the dance floor, and then later took stronger shape in the classroom, and in hard conversations.

Infiltrate, then innovate. Do the work to fix the problems. Imagine a different place to happen.

Minelle Mabtani’s writing has appeared in This Magazine, Maisonneuve and the Walrus. She has been nominated for a National Magazine Award and won a gold medal in the Digital Publishing Awards for best personal essay. Her book, May It Have a Happy Ending, is forthcoming with Penguin Random House/Doubleday in September 2024.

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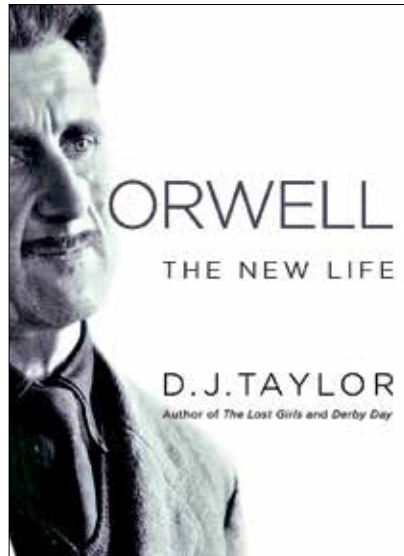
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ENDNOTES

REVIEWS, COMMENTS, CURIOSA

WRITING FROM AN EARLY GRAVE

George Orwell enjoyed making life hard for himself. He often lived in conditions so spartan that even a monk might have preferred the nearest motel. One imagines that if a bed of nails was available, Orwell would choose to sleep on it. Despite a chronic lung condition, he went to fight in the Spanish Civil War, spending five long winter months in the trenches, an experience that came near to killing him. (He was wounded by a bullet through the neck; if he'd been a couple of inches shorter it would have been through his head.) In failing health, you or I might prefer to be close to medical help. Not Orwell, who chose to spend his final days living in an isolated cottage on a Scottish island so remote that in letters to visitors it took several paragraphs to explain how to get there. It is this indifference to



ordinary bourgeois comforts that makes Orwell at the same time admirable and exasperating, at least as he emerges from the pages of D.J. Taylor's biography, **Orwell: The New Life** (Pegasus Books). The one thing that is indisputable was his determination to write. Once he had decided in his mid-twenties to become a writer he let nothing stand in his way. Publishers' indifference, critical neglect, political opposition, even the ever-present ill health, nothing kept him from his typewriter. The last days of his life he spent revising what became *1984*, mostly in bed, smoking

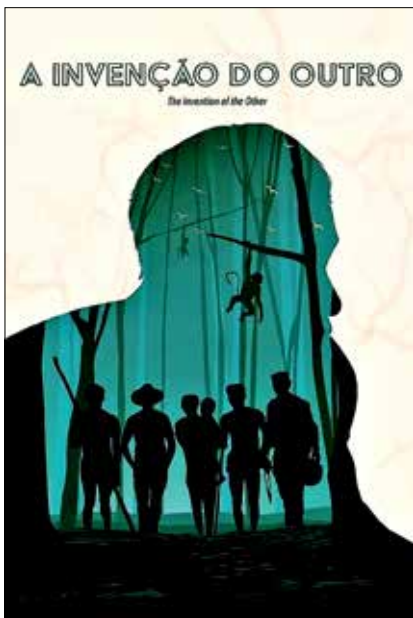
like a chimney and coughing his lungs out. Orwell once wrote that "any life when viewed from the inside is simply a series of defeats." It is perhaps the tragedy of his own life that when the victories finally came—his last two novels *1984* and *Animal Farm* were huge successes—it was too late; he was already in an early grave.

—Daniel Francis

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN

The Invention of the Other, a 2022 documentary feature film by Bruno Jorge, follows a mission by FUNAI—the state agency which protects and promotes the rights of the Indigenous peoples of Brazil—in their attempt to make first contact with the Korubo, an isolated group living in the Vale do Javari, near the tripoint where the borders of Colombia, Peru and Brazil meet. This part of the rainforest contains the greatest concentration of

uncontacted or isolated peoples in the world. The FUNAI expedition team was made up of a group of Indigenous experts, or *indigenistas*, medical personnel and some members of the Korubo who had split from their community and who had since become accustomed to the world of “pasta, cookies, and beer.” Their separation began with their wanting a machete from a neighbouring group which had already made contact with non-Indigenous peoples, the encounter escalating into a series of murders and fatal disease. *The Invention of the Other* is at risk of being so artsy that it might alienate some viewers, but it will also leave many lasting impressions, such as witnessing the pure wonder and marvel of first contact between two fundamentally different worlds. I am still ruminating on the scene where one of the Korubo members of the expedition acts out, in comic fashion, how he single-handedly killed five men from a rival group, only to later recount how his son and wife were dispatched one night by other rivals. The honesty, theatrics and lack of judgement in this scene reminded me of Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2012 film *The Act of Killing*. I will also remember the moment when three Korubo family members



reunited. They crouched low and embraced each other, crying and laughing as they stroked each other’s heads and chests—actions that, taken out of context, resemble acts of grooming. It is strange how foreign, and yet how familiar, humans can be.
—Anson Ching

GETTING PAST THE PAST

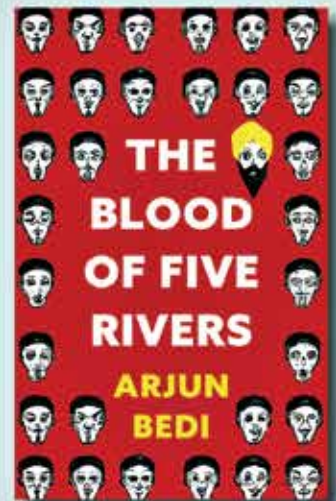
Margaret Atwood called Lewis Hyde’s 1983 book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* “a masterpiece”—and she should know. Hyde’s books are *sui generis*, and his most recent one, **A Primer for Forgetting: Getting Past the Past** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is a persuasive exploration of the process of forgetting, and its connection to our ability to forgive. Does forgiveness require forgetfulness? Hyde believes that it does, that forgetting is essential to forgiveness. Drawing on sources both ancient and contemporary, from Hesiod to Jorge Luis Borges and Desmond Tutu, Hyde finds insights and wisdom in many different cultures and traditions. The structure of *A Primer for Forgetting* is unusual, but effective. Hyde declares himself to be “weary of argument, tired of striving for mastery, of marshaling the evidence, of drilling down to bedrock to anchor every claim, of inventing transitions to mask the native jumpiness of my mind, of defending myself against imaginary swarms of critics.” *A Primer for Forgetting* is part commonplace book and part notebook, divided into four “Notebooks,” which Hyde labels Myth, Self, Nation and Creation. Each notebook is further subdivided into a series of one- to six-page expansions on different aspects of memory and forgetfulness. In “Notebook IV: Creation,” for example, Hyde describes a concept in law where, “before the widespread use of written records,” the accepted definition of “legal memory” was the period of time which could be

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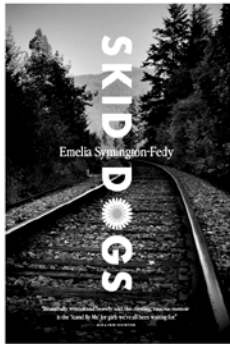




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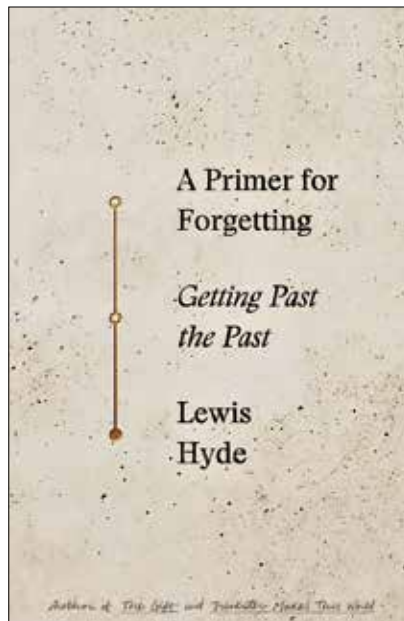
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A Primer for Forgetting

Getting Past the Past

Lewis Hyde

recalled by living persons, “any prior period being [thought of as] ‘time out of mind,’ or ‘time immemorial.’” We are all familiar with the exhortation to “Never forget!” and the belief that, by forever remembering a trauma or an offence, we can ensure that it will never be repeated. *A Primer for Forgetting* will make you think twice about this simplistic point of view.

—Michael Hayward

HAUNTED HOUSE GUEST

Emily Carroll’s latest graphic novel, *A Guest in the House* (First Second), is a horror fairy tale that tells a deeply unsettling story of an isolated woman trapped in a modern haunted house. Set in a lake house in a small tourist town, the protagonist is the lonely Abby, who recently entered into a loveless marriage with David, a volatile misogynist who can’t keep his story straight about what happened to Sheila, his previous wife. Amidst the drudgery of housework and a dead-end job, Abby connects with her stepdaughter Crystal through the ghost (?) of Sheila, whom they both keep seeing in the water and around the house. Thirsty for answers about what happened to Sheila, and for connection to another creature, Abby

both seeks out and fears the ghostly visitor, afraid of upending her own unfulfilling but placid heteronormative life. The visitor’s appearance shape-shifts, appearing to Abby alternately as Sheila, and as the glowing fairy-tale princess of her fantasies. When the visitor is trying to entice Abby, it appears to her as a grotesque, dripping monster cloaked in shadow. Things come to a head when “Sheila” convinces Abby that David murdered her, and Abby takes action. Abby’s elaborate interior fantasies are shown in vivid colour, which contrasts starkly with the monotone life that she actually leads. In these fantasies, Abby is shown as a knight in armour, who attempts to rescue a princess from a tower and defeat the threat of the dragon. This is clearly a metaphor for queerness, and it’s telling that Abby sees her transition into being a wife as putting “on a suit of armour and twist[ing] a key at the side, chasing the air out, fitting it closer and tighter to [her] flesh with every turn,” and can only remember a version of the story where the knight is killed by the dragon (a.k.a. heteronormativity). Carroll draws creepy things so well, and is so good at creating an ominous atmosphere through black panels, facial expressions and empty space. Blending aspects of fairy tales—such as knights, dragons, sirens, Bluebeard, and Rapunzel—*A Guest in the House* is a chilling narrative that keeps the reader guessing about who the villain actually is. —Kelsea O’Connor

THE PERIPATETIC POET

When COVID-19 lockdowns caused borders everywhere to close, the world suddenly felt a much smaller place, and it seemed as if certain words might become obsolete from disuse. I wondered, for example, if we would ever again be able to describe someone as “peripatetic”—as the late Beat poet Allen Ginsberg is described (“the peripatetic chronicler”) on the

back jacket of his **Iron Curtain Journals: January–May 1965**. In just the first five months of 1965 Ginsberg visited Cuba, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Poland, as well as England. In Cuba, Ginsberg attended a writers’ conference and visited Hemingway’s house; in Prague he was elected May King (“I want to be the first naked King”); in the Soviet Union he met with dissident poets Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Andrei Voznesensky. *Iron Curtain Journals* is the first of three volumes of Ginsberg’s journals, all recently published by University of Minnesota Press and edited by Michael Schumacher. In **South American Journals: January–July 1960** we read about Ginsberg’s exploration of Machu Picchu, and his search for “a native herbal brew called Ayahuasca which reportedly gives visions—similar to peyote, Mescaline, & Lysergic Acid” (Ginsberg’s and William S. Burroughs’s experiences with ayahuasca are also described in *The Yage Letters*, first published in 1963). The final volume, **The Fall of America Journals: 1965–1971** covers a tumultuous period in American history: escalating Vietnam War protests and the killings at Kent State; the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Throughout this period Ginsberg was experimenting with “auto poesy,” aided by a Uher reel-to-reel tape recorder given to him by Bob Dylan. Much of Ginsberg’s poetry from this period appeared in his collection *The Fall of America*, awarded the National Book Award for poetry in 1974. The Beat Generation ended long ago, and most of the writers from that circle have left us: poet Michael McClure in May 2020, Diane di Prima in October of that year, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, founder of City Lights Books and publisher of Ginsberg’s *Howl*, in February 2021, at the age of 101. Only Gary Snyder, who celebrated his ninety-third birthday in May 2023, remains. Allen Ginsberg’s journals



help to recall a bygone era, when a poet might be crowned a king.

—Michael Hayward

SAILING THE ROARING FORTIES

This past summer I had the chance to go aboard the *Cutty Sark*, a British clipper on exhibit in Greenwich, England. The *Cutty Sark* was one of the last tea clippers to be built, and was used in the waning days of the Age of Sail. Being inside its hull prompted me to reread Eric Newby’s **The Last Grain Race** (Collins), an account of Newby’s experiences as an eighteen-year-old apprentice onboard the *Moshulu*, a four-masted barque built at the turn of the 20th century. The *Moshulu* was a true windjammer, designed with an iron hull to withstand conditions in the Roaring Forties—the westerly winds that shriek across the southern hemisphere between the latitudes of 40° and 50° south. These were the ships that brought raw exports like guano, grain, ore or wool from Chile, Argentina and Australia up to Britain and the rest of Europe. On this trade route in those days, sail was still faster than steam. I started the book with preconceived notions of what life onboard a windjammer would be like, only to come out

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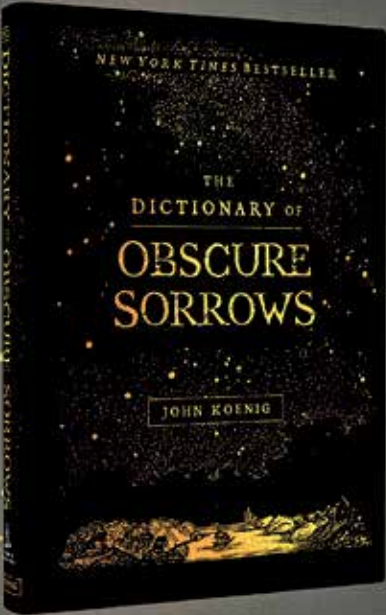
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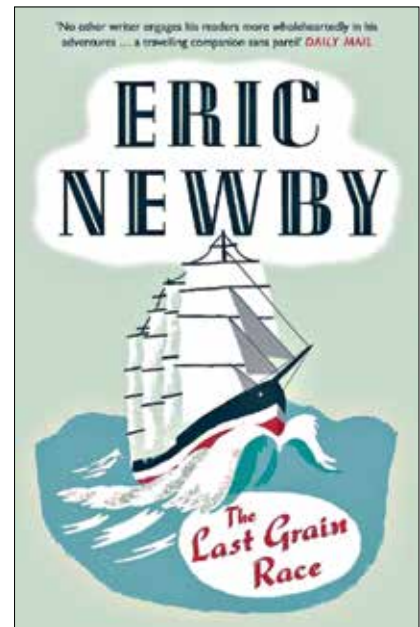
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more enthralled than before, while also being certain that it was a life that I could never have endured. I hadn't imagined the hordes of fleas which colonized the cracks within the beautiful teak and other hardwoods of such ships. Details like this, as well as descriptions of the preparation of daily meals, were eye-opening, and I relished them as much as I did Newby's account of climbing the rigging in gale force winds, 130 feet above the deck. And then there were the interactions with his crewmates. Newby found himself caught up in petty escalations of machismo as well as camaraderie, without having the ability to communicate (the crew used a sort of Baltic pidgin to talk with each other). *The Last Grain Race* is a classic adventure tale, with just the right dash of ethnography and memoir added to the mix. —Anson Ching



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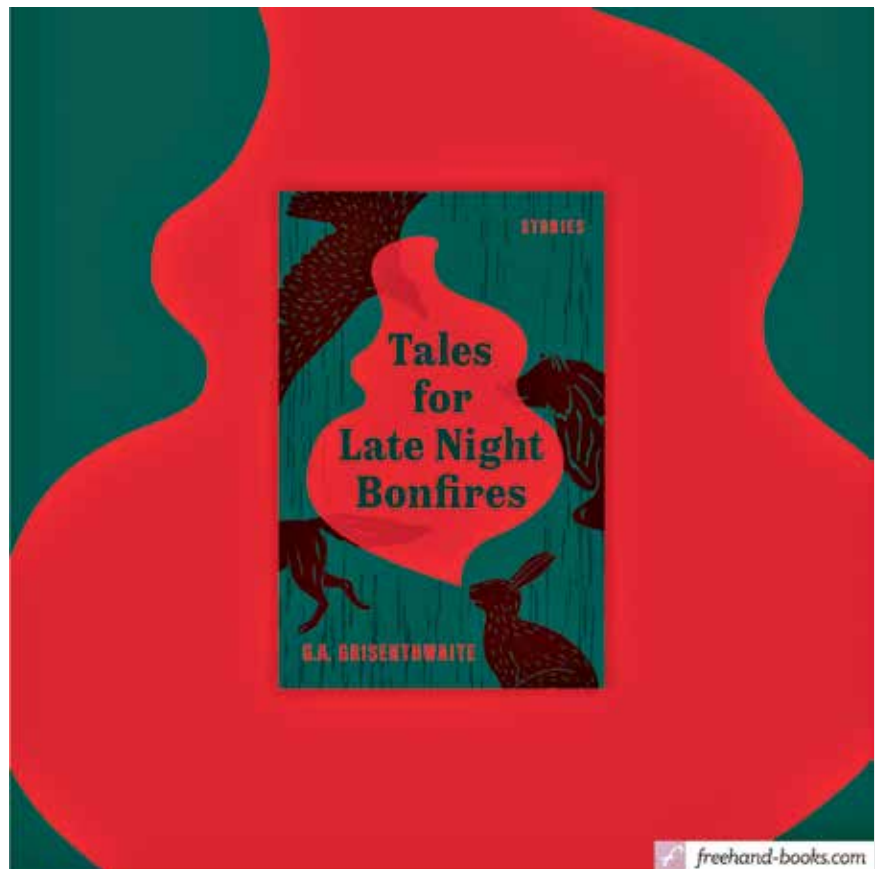
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BEYOND THE EVENT HORIZON

Charlie Kaufman has become a cult figure in the world of film, beginning with his Academy Award-nominated script for *Being John Malkovich* in 1999. Kaufman has earned a reputation for writing (and later, for directing) movies that critics describe

as “highly original” and “dazzlingly singular”: *Adaptation* (2002), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), and *I’m Thinking of Ending Things*, released in 2020 on Netflix. *Antkind* (Random House) is Kaufman’s first novel, a seven-hundred-page brick of a book that tells the story of B. Rosenberger Rosenberg, a would-be film critic who accidentally destroys the only copy of a hitherto-unknown cinematic masterpiece. The destroyed film was a work of stop-motion animation, one which took a full three months (yes: three months) to view. It was the work of “a psychotic African-American man named Ingo Cutbirth,” and all that could be salvaged was a single frame, from which Rosenberg hopes to reconstruct the film in its entirety (with the assistance of hypnosis). *Antkind* is jam-packed with in-jokes and scattered puns, larded with skewed references to pop culture and high culture. There are extended dream sequences and surreal scenarios, liberally seasoned with non sequiturs. The main obstacle to Rosenberg achieving his goal is that he is a film expert in his mind alone: he misattributes and misspells the titles of classic films; he praises Judd Apatow as an underrated comic genius. So, is *Antkind* funny? Yes, intermittently, but it’s the kind of humour where your smile begins to stiffen as you try (with limited success) to make sense of it all. At times *Antkind* reads like the outpourings of someone with no internal editor, whose every thought leaps immediately to the next like a cricket on a skillet. The resulting text is so lacking in structure that it virtually collapses into itself, so that *Antkind* becomes, in effect, a literary black hole, a book so dense with intention that no coherence can ever possibly emerge. Kaufman reportedly intended *Antkind* to be unfilmable; I’d say that he succeeded.

—Michael Hayward



B*

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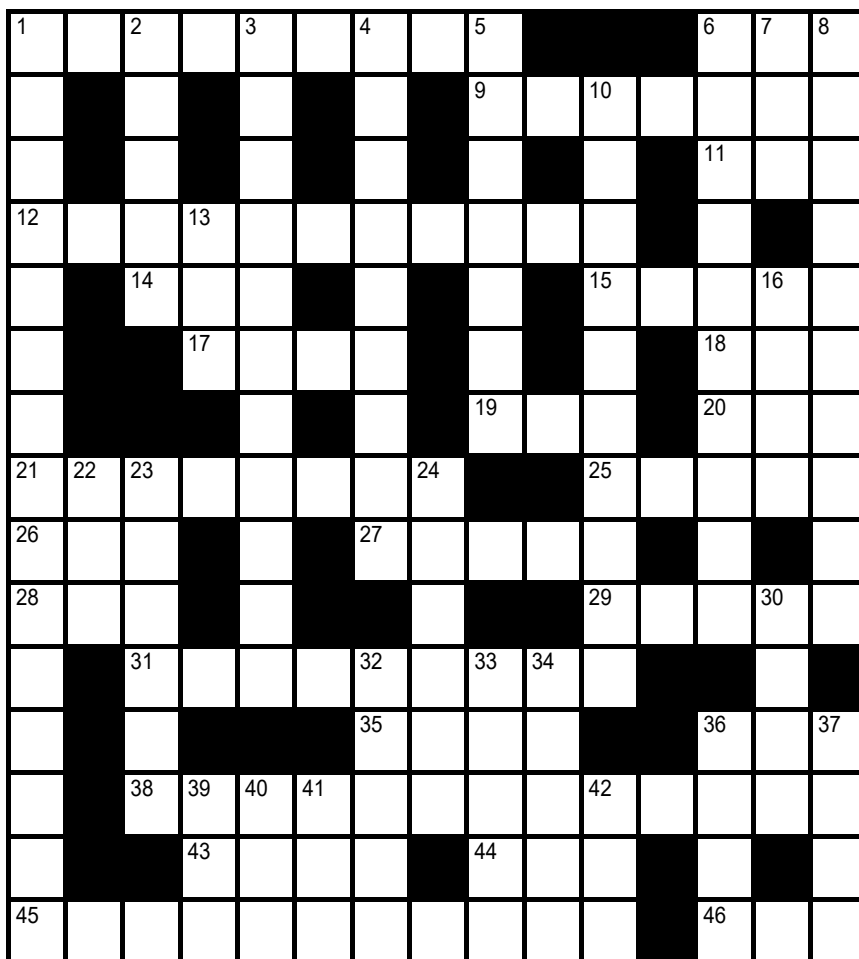
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ACROSS

- 1 It's not always sad when a band bucks the trend (2)
- 6 He'll get here shortly (abbrev)
- 9 When Ron came to a sunny island, he was befuddled
- 11 Now don't lie to me, can you draw a loonie?
- 12 I'm convinced she loves me—she's famously screwed up and she's American too!
- 14 I can count several (abbrev)
- 15 So sweet! My little goat did OK
- 17 She wrote that tale with other people (abbrev)
- 18 I heard you might lend me one
- 19 Sounds like the sun came out on the 5th
- 20 Oh brother!
- 21 Hey Mister! Go through one of Bill's preferred exit routines
- 25 Hide in the shade so I won't see you
- 26 Remember DOS? Remember the file list? (abbrev)
- 27 That ape is browner than in the photo
- 28 What a relief to run into John!
- 29 The coder stated her beliefs
- 31 It's not funny how many CIA wrecks are out there
- 35 Hey, caddy, let's drive to the party!
- 36 Sadly, Lou could no longer play ball (abbrev)
- 38 When it comes to calligraphy, it helps to belong to a trendy gang from Kingston (2)
- 43 I wrecked that joint in Hamilton! Now who's gonna pay? (abbrev)
- 44 Barbara doesn't take me seriously!
- 45 In that group, the broken canoes slice through the sound (2)
- 46 Sounds like that baby sure likes his food!

DOWN

- 1 With Ike as bandleader, women won't need a clothing allowance (3)




- 2 When Jack got married in London, he draped himself in the flag
- 3 Among the ostriches at Etobicoke, there were variable resistors
- 4 I never imagine a male dress—I just sleep
- 5 Will that anthology get us all to work?
- 6 Does that hot group play video games at the Raider Cafe? (2)
- 7 We heard that the US group knows where our remote is (abbrev)
- 8 Those Acadians know how to wrap it up but they do repeat themselves (2)
- 10 When they finished playing, I wanted my 5 cents refunded
- 13 Write that digit on the line!
- 16 Now I'll have to mend the damn thing!
- 22 Does the big river flow to Brazil?
- 23 Rig two lights so we can get high for free (2)
- 24 Measure the band: height, thickness, rim etc.
- 30 Celine loves the smoke in that place
- 32 He cuts my hair pretty quickly
- 33 She's not really searching for one, she's just bumbling around (2)
- 34 He hasn't got the guts to mark a proper introduction
- 36 Upon arrival, Christopher waved and called out a greeting
- 37 What's with those emails about canned pork?
- 39 Put some money in and see what you get back! (abbrev)
- 40 Yes, I found it!
- 41 He blithely courted Anne, despite a rough start
- 42 Such a caustic untruth!

Solution to Puzzle 124

C	O	N	C	H	I	N	G	T	E	M	P	E	R
H	I	N	O	N	R	A	H	O					
O	B	E	R	O	N	I	E	L					
C	C	D	O	W	N	L	O	A	D	I	N	G	
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L	R	A	T	E	R	E	D	A	C	T			
A	T	W	I	T	T	E	R	O					
T		G	O	O	D	A	M	E	A	D	O	W	
E	C	L	A	I	R	M	R	I					
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A	O												
S	I	N	G	L	E	O	R	I	G	I	N		
I	N	B	D	M		D	U	S	T				
S	E	A	R	S		B	E	A	N	T	O	B	A

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