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FALL 2014 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS



Freedom Bound

KATHLEEN WINTER
SETS SAIL TO THE SOUL

QWF's Awards Gala

See page 5 for a complete list of this year's QWF Literary Awards nominees

INSIDE: KIM THÚY'S *MÃN* | DANIEL J. LEVITIN'S *THE ORGANIZED MIND*
PEARL ELIADIS'S *SPEAKING OUT ON HUMAN RIGHTS*

Books & Breakfast

FALL 2014

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 9 at 10 a.m.

Host: Anne Lagacé Dowson

BRUCE COCKBURN
RUMOURS OF GLORY
HarperCollins

JEAN-CLAUDE GERMAIN
OF JESUITS AND BOHEMIANS:
TALES OF MY EARLY YOUTH
Véhicule Press

ROCH CARRIER
MONTCALM & WOLFE
HarperCollins

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 16 at 10 a.m.

Host: Anne Lagacé Dowson

KIM THUY
MAN
Penguin Random House

CHANTAL HÉBERT
THE MORNING AFTER
Penguin Random House

DANIEL J. LEVITIN
THE ORGANIZED MIND
Penguin Random House

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THE SENIOR TIMES

features

- 4 **Kathleen Winter**
By Kimberly Bourgeois
- 11 **Kim Thúy**
By Elise Moser
- 12 **Daniel J. Levitin**
By Joel Yanofsky
- 13 **Pearl Eliadis**
By Yves Engler
- 19 **The Mile End Café**
By Dru Oja Jay

poetry

- 6 **The Scarborough**
By Michael Lista
- Radio Weather**
By Shoshanna Wingate
- Magnetic Days**
By Roland Pemberton
- The Absolute is a Round Die**
By José Acquelin
- The Winter Count**
By Dilys Leman
Reviewed by Bert Almon

non-fiction

- 7 **The Village Effect**
*How Face-to-Face Contact Can
Make Us Healthier, Happier,
and Smarter*
By Susan Pinker
Reviewed by Sarah Fletcher
- Brave New Canada**
*Meeting the Challenge of a
Changing World*
By Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson
Reviewed by Jean Coléno
- 8 **Of Jesuits and Bohemians**
Tales of My Early Youth
By Jean-Claude Germain
Reviewed by Dane Lanken
- The Black Doctors of Colonial Lima**
*Science, Race, and Writing in Colonial
and Early Republican Peru*
By José R. Jouve Martín
Reviewed by Yasmine Espert
- 9 **Patrician Families and the
Making of Quebec**
The Taschereaus and McCords
By Brian Young
Reviewed by Joël Pedneault
- You're Not Dead until
You're Forgotten**
A Memoir
By John Dunning with Bill Brownstein
Reviewed by Sam Woolf

fiction

- 15 **Hysteric**
By Nelly Arcan
Reviewed by Anna Leventhal
- Chloes**
By Dean Garlick
Reviewed by Veena Gokhale

theatre

- 16 **Michel and Ti-Jean**
By George Rideout
Reviewed by Alexandria Haber
- Motherhouse**
By David Fennario
Reviewed by Nikki Shaffeeullah

young readers

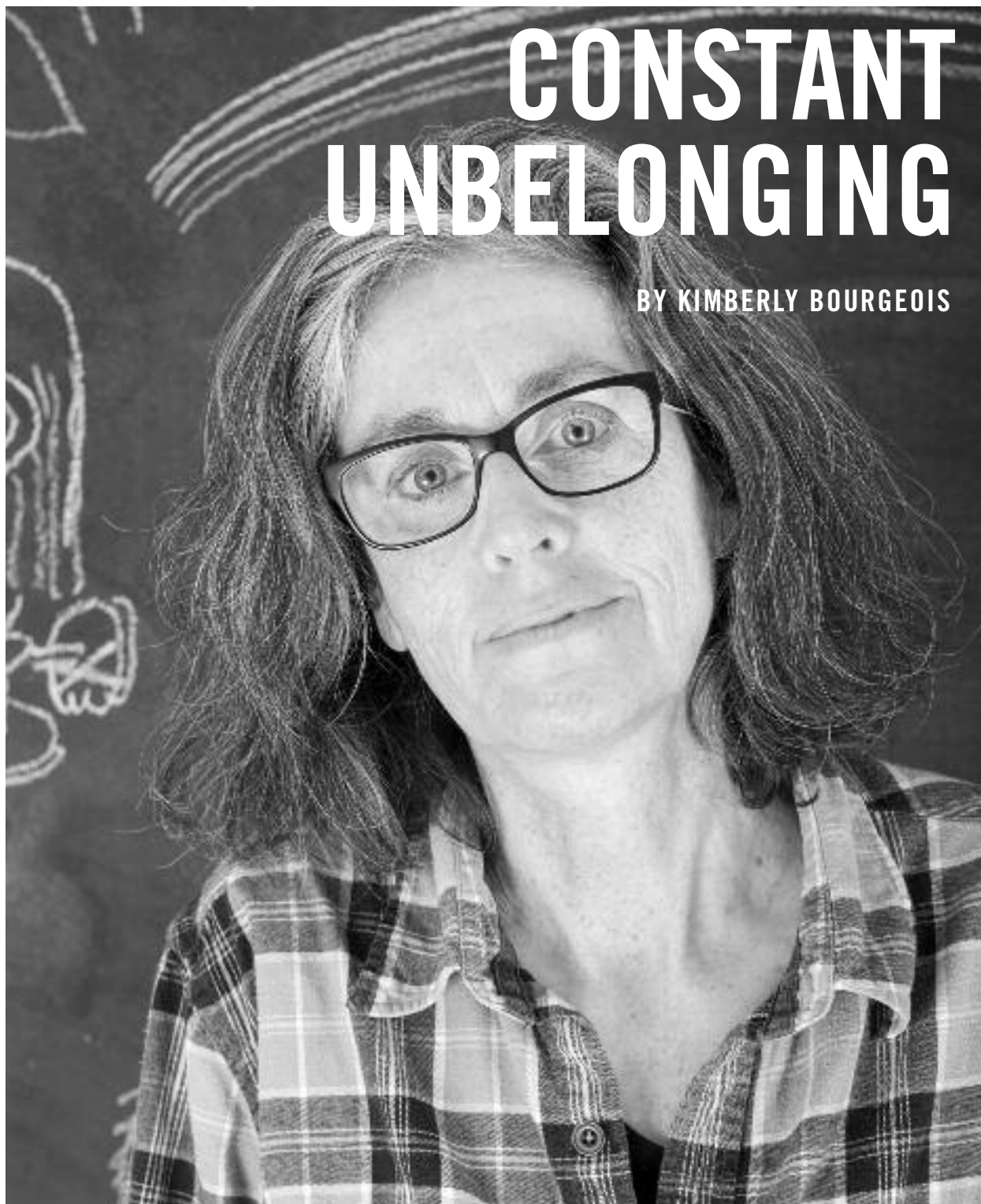
- 18 **Highlights of the season's books
for young people**
Reviewed by B.A. Markus



ILLUSTRATION BY LIAM MATTHEW BYRNE

CONSTANT UNBELONGING

BY KIMBERLY BOURGEOIS



“Water, land, wind, sky – these are the only ones with absolute freedom,” remarks Bernadette Dean, an Inuk woman quoted in the epigraph of *Boundless*, Kathleen Winter’s exquisitely poetic, poignant, and periodically playful account of her 2010 journey across the Northwest Passage.

Boundless is only one of two excellent books released by the bestselling author this fall, and Dean’s words foreshadow a motif that ripples through both. Freedom and its dicey dance partners – loneliness, risk, and consequence – weave seductively through Winter’s collection of short fiction, *The Freedom in American Songs*. In the title story, the power of song unleashes love between two teenage boys. Yet, when the boys are caught off guard, love is tragically clipped by a culture too narrow for such expression. “My dad always used to quote to me the saying that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance,” comments Winter in our email interview.

Revisiting gender identity, the story recalls the Montreal-based writer’s rise to prominence in 2010 with *Annabel*, her debut novel about a child growing up intersex in Labrador. A finalist for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, the Governor General’s Literary Award, the Rogers Writers’ Trust Fiction Prize, and the Orange Prize for Fiction, *Annabel* even stretched beyond literary

realms, inspiring British band Goldfrapp’s haunting song of the same title. A tough act to follow, yet, with two new page-turners, the former Newfoundlander appears to have caught the wind in her sails.

In *Freedom*, Winter expands her focus well beyond gender identity to study other triggers of alienation, including ageing, homelessness, and poverty. Stunning beauty intertwines tough emotional truths, while sucker-punch endings leave you reeling. Meanwhile, an oddly alluring hue of loneliness tinges the collection and leaks into her non-fiction title.

“For a writer, loneliness is magnetic,” the author confesses in the opening pages of *Boundless*. Her relationship with others embodies the ebb and flow of a tide, at times tucking in, connecting with the shore, and then withdrawing back into the unknown. Having moved from England to Newfoundland at the age of eight, she investigates “a state of slight yet constant unbelonging, a rootless unease” leftover from childhood (“when you’ve

left a country as a child, you don’t know where you belong”). And yet, she also inherited a sense of adventure from her father. She recalls asking him the reason for their relocation, to which he responded, “‘Freedom’ ... as if any fool knew that.” When invited on short notice to journey among strangers across the Northwest Passage, Winter’s immediate response reveals a romantic, independent streak heightened by humour and a healthy thirst for spontaneity: “My bags,” she said, “are already packed.”

From Greenland to Baffin Island, Winter connects with fellow passengers, including the Greenlandic-Canadian lawyer Aaju Peter, who, like Bernadette Dean, teaches about the North as one who has lived there all her life; singer-songwriter Nathan Rogers, son of the iconic Stan Rogers; and a variety of scientists, artists, and historians whose observations and wisdom overlap, offering depth to the voyage.

Winter’s sense of unbelonging is soothed onboard: “On our ship, roots

no longer held the key to life: here, wind and water rocked me.” Yet her unique sensitivity makes one wonder if being an experienced outsider contributed to her calling as a writer. Asked if longing is a necessary component of creativity, she replies:

I think there are lots of creative people whose work has a different emotional temperature than mine. I wouldn’t know if other artists need to be, at any point in their lives, outsiders. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if my father had stayed in England – would I have become something different. But I remember that even there, as a child, I wrote, and knew I was a writer. I think for me the essential spur is a sense of the miraculous – an inability to see anything as ordinary. Ever since I can remember, I’ve marvelled at everyday things. Dogs and trees and the moon. Rivers. Bread. Cranes. There isn’t a day goes by that I don’t marvel at how humans ignore the fact that we

cannot create the tiniest spark of life – we can only use and propagate the life that already exists in and around us. We go around acting as if we made the whole show.

Winter's reverence sparkles throughout *Boundless*, even when facing beauty that is as heartbreakingly precarious as an ice castle in the sun. While exploring disquieting issues like climate change and the government's reshaping of indigenous peoples' lives ("We'd come to see the last great wilderness before it melted and before humans sprinted to the finish line in our collective race to homogenize the planet"), her transcendent pen, infused with starry wonder, never loses its dreamy, emotional pull. Inner and outer worlds overlap in heightened waves of awareness, and throughout her journey the author's shamanic sensitivity increases, as does her connection to her fellow travellers and to the land. "I felt the land begin to speak louder than it spoke in cities," she notes while in Dundas Harbour. "The human settlement of the RCMP below the muskoxen's ridge was an unutterably lonely place and I could hardly bear it, but here with the animals and the tundra plants, I felt no loneliness."

Assuming such transformative experiences trickle down into everyday life, does Winter continue to hear the land's wisdom back in bustling Montreal? "Since going North I've had to move to a new apartment very close to the riverbank so I can spend more time with trees and the river," she admits. "I've gone North again since I wrote the book and am planning more time away from the city. I'm not sure where this will lead."

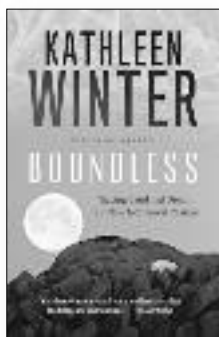
Throughout *Boundless*, cultures collide, highlighting globalization's impact. Tradition tangles with commercial products, as does the sacred with the profane. Aaju Peter performs a lamp-lighting ceremony,

Winter notes, while "drinking coffee out of a Starbucks travel mug." Nathan Rogers encourages a group of Inuit teenage girls he meets in Pond Inlet to learn Mongolian throat singing the same way he did – on YouTube. Reading this, one absorbs the absurdity while considering current opportunities to reach out, exchange, and be inspired by other traditions. Will this improvised dance between cultures unify humanity – help us to find a common thread – or further divide us? "That's something I want to investigate by traveling," replies Winter. "It's easy, living in North America,

Winter's reverence sparkles throughout *Boundless*, even when facing beauty that is as heartbreakingly precarious as an ice castle in the sun.

to feel discouraged by homogenization. One night I had a dream that everyone in the world finally had a pair of Nike sneakers, and I woke up sobbing. But the minute I go out of mainstream Western society I become heartened by how strong and vital real cultures are. Yes, they are oppressed on all sides by imposing multinational powers, but they are, in important ways, more powerful." This past summer, she adds, she visited Labrador's Torngat Mountains and met with Inuit elders and youth whose "power and intensity" inspired her to take classes in Inuktitut. Winter's closing comments leave the same impression as the final pages of her outstanding book: her 2010 voyage might well have been the first leg of an even greater, indeed boundless, soul journey. mb

Kimberly Bourgeois is a Montreal-based artist who paints poems that often turn out like songs: kimberlyandthedreamtime.com.



BOUNDLESS
Tracing Land and Dream
in a New Northwest Passage
Kathleen Winter
House of Anansi
\$29.95, cloth, 267pp
978-1-77089-399-3



**THE FREEDOM IN
AMERICAN SONGS**
Kathleen Winter
Biblioasis
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978-1-927428-73-3

QWF AWARDS GALA 2014

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Music: **Vanier College Jazz Combo**



Shortlist

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Marie-Louise Gay

Any Questions?
Groundwood Books

Monique Polak

Hate Mail
Orca Book Publishers

Monique Polak

Straight Punch
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Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction

Sponsored by Paragraphe Bookstore

Jon Paul Fiorentino

I'm Not Scared of You or Anything
Anvil Press

Sean Michaels

Us Conductors
Random House Canada

Guillaume Morissette

New Tab
Véhicule Press/Esplanade Books

Concordia University First Book Prize

Sponsored by Concordia University

Anna Leventhal

Sweet Affliction
Invisible Publishing

Sean Michaels

Us Conductors
Random House Canada

Caroline Vu

Palawan Story
Deux Voiliers Publishing

Mavis Gallant Prize for Non-Fiction

Sponsored by Champlain, Dawson, Heritage, John Abbott and Vanier Colleges

Issa J. Boullata

The Bells of Memory
Linda Leith Publishing

Chantal Hébert with Jean Lapierre

The Morning After: The 1995 Referendum and the Day that Almost Was
Knopf Canada

Margaret Lock

The Alzheimer Conundrum: Entanglements of Dementia and Aging
Princeton University Press

A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry

Sponsored by Richard Pound, in memory of his brother Robert

Angela Carr

Here In There
Bookthug

Jon Paul Fiorentino

Needs Improvement
Coach House Books

Sina Queyras

MxT
Coach House Books

Gillian Sze

Peeling Rambutan
Gaspereau Press

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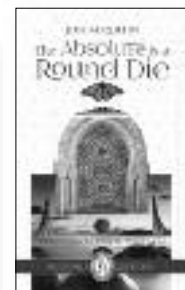
Tickets to the ceremony without Cocktail are also available at selected bookstores.

BMO



poetry

Speaking of Perfection



THE SCARBOROUGH

Michael Lista
Signal Editions
\$18.00, paper, 68pp
978-1550653885

RADIO WEATHER

Shoshanna Wingate
Signal Editions
\$18.00, paper, 64pp
978-1550653878

MAGNETIC DAYS

Roland Pemberton
Metatron
\$10.00, paper, 52pp
978-0-9936174-3-0

THE ABSOLUTE IS A ROUND DIE

José Acquelin
Translated by Hugh Hazelton
Guernica Editions
\$20.00, paper, 92pp
9781550719994

THE WINTER COUNT

Dilys Leman
McGill-Queen's
University Press
\$16.95, paper, 134pp
978-07735244130

Ezra Pound wrote, in an early poem, “Come, my songs, let us speak of perfection— / We shall get ourselves rather disliked.” Likewise, Michael Lista has set very high standards for the poetry he reviews and has gotten himself disliked by some: there have been notable disputes in print and on the Internet. He has set the bar high for his own poetry, too. A formalist with many tools in his kit, Lista uses a variety of forms and metres in *The Scarborough*. One of the great modern formalists, William Butler Yeats, told a fellow poet that her technique was sloppy: “there is no difficulty to force you under the surface—difficulty is our plough.” Lista has chosen a terrifying subject for his plough: one of the murders committed by Paul Bernardo, the “Scarborough rapist,” and his wife, Karla Homolka. He does not present Bernardo directly, thereby avoiding events so horrific that the courts ordered the videos made by the murderers to be destroyed.

Dante, one of the poets Lista alludes to frequently in *The Scarborough*, tried to represent the Devil at the end of *Inferno*; the description is powerful but falls short somehow, just as attempts to take us into Hitler’s mind are always problematic. Instead of depicting Bernardo, Lista focuses on a single weekend in 1992, Easter weekend – the days marking death and resurrection – when fifteen-year-old Kristen French was abducted. The point of view stays close to Lista himself, who, age nine at the time, experienced the anxiety that pervaded Scarborough, an atmosphere of terror he evokes very well. Events in suburban life resonate strangely with the tragedy performed off-stage, and allusions to pop culture (like the R.E.M. song, “Superman,” played by Bernardo during the rape and murder) and folk culture (fairy tales are full of grisly murders) are functional rather than decorative. Lista gives his poems two pillars to hold up the diverse structure: the story of Dante and Beatrice and the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Yet in *The Scarborough*, we know that Eurydice is not brought back from the dead, and Beatrice is not enthroned in heaven but rather buried in the woods. Lista’s ability to make every detail significant shows mastery. The allusions to voyeurism are especially chilling when the murderer is also a stalker – and the poet knows that the artist is a kind of voyeur as well, a moral ambiguity that is confronted in “Heaven,” a poem in which the narrator visits the crime scene and is confronted by a suspicious neighbour. Here and there Lista may be too clever: a poem about Florida is relatively trivial, and his daring rhymes occasionally go over the edge and fall into bathos. But an artist who can bring off rhyming “trochees” and “chickadees” can certainly control tone.

Shoshanna Wingate’s first book, *Radio Weather*, is not as dazzling as Lista’s, but the light is usually intense. She draws on a complicated past: an

impoverished child of self-im-poverished hippie parents, she spent part of her childhood in a backward part of South Carolina. Poets sometimes talk about the poem that practically writes itself. Wingate rarely falls into the triteness that poems can write for an author – she is a maker, not merely a witness. One of her best poems, “The Murderer,” shows how an actual encounter with evil can be unrecognized at the time. As a child of ten, she went with her father to the state prison to visit inmates. One kindly man, she learned later, had taken part in a remarkably callous crime – the murder of three men after a trivial robbery – and was executed some years after she knew him. Like Paul Bernardo, the murderer was very charming. Wingate knows that you may not know the Devil when you meet him. The poem, written in impeccable quatrains, shows a memoirist’s skill in handling interplay between the child narrator and adult narrator.


Another poem, “Spring,” is never hackneyed, despite its familiar theme: it abounds with precise observations of Newfoundland weather, like the “tendrilly fog.” “Aids Ward,” Wingate’s poem about her father’s death from AIDS, is structured on the old pattern of “This Is the House That Jack Built.” As her couplets proceed, the appalling medical details unfold with the cumulative power given by the structure. The poems that do not work in this otherwise excellent book are based on the sad letters that conscientious objectors sent to her father, a War Resister’s League counsellor, during the Vietnam War. The poet lets the materials speak too much for themselves, and they aren’t powerful enough to be successful. Not everything that is found is found poetry.

Roland Pemberton is aiming not at perfection but at capturing the moment, giving us news of the street and the hubbub of urban life. He was Edmonton’s very successful poet laureate from 2009–2011.

Pemberton’s appointment was unusual: he is a rapper who performs under the name “Cadence Weapon.” He now lives in Montreal. *Magnetic Days* captures the bustle of streets – such as the corner of St-Zotique and St-Laurent – with stanzas that flow like rap lyrics, which is what they essentially are. One exception in form is the title work, an elaborate prose poem about a rare day when everything goes right and others can feel the magnetism emanating from the lucky person, though in the conclusion he says that such a day should be treated carefully, “like a hot pitcher in the bottom of the eighth.” The poem summons up Frank O’Hara or Apollinaire in its droll urbanity. There are original metaphors in the collection, like “the iron wedding of tooth and nail,” but in his poetry Pemberton is a talented hobbyist rather than a professional.

The perfection that José Acquelin aspires to is a mystical union with the absolute, that which is everywhere at once – or, in his own metaphor, a spherical die. Rather than come to rest, it will roll endlessly. His diction is full of words like “soul,” “infinite,” “breath,” and “light.” He likes to create paradoxes and some lines take the form of aphorisms: “the shadow is the invention of a poet / who’s afraid of himself,” or “eternity is time / that has lost its memory.” Acquelin can be more precise, as in the exquisite lines, “a breeze plays the accordion / over the water’s skin.” He shows real wit in using “The Omar Khayyám Hotel” and “The Rumi Tavern” as settings, and, like those great Persian mystics, he uses alcohol as a metaphor for visionary experience, though Acquelin’s favourite beverage in the poems is coffee. One way that he pursues the absolute is through love, and he includes a section of delightful love poems. Acquelin’s style employs the easy-rolling parallelism of the surrealists (often starting lines with “I” followed by a verb), and he likes surreal metaphors in the

manner of André Breton: “the present is a fox of light bulbs / the present is a wine skin filled with beyond.” Yeats would say that there isn’t enough difficulty in these poems to force the plough very deep, but the Infinite is a hard soil to break.

Dorothy Livesay suggested in 1971 that Canadian poetry had created a new genre, “the documentary poem.” The Riel Rebellion has generated many documentary poems, including some important book-length works by Don Guttridge, Kim Morrissey, and Gregory Scofield. Dilys Leman is a great-great-granddaughter of Augustus Jukes, the chief surgeon for the North-West Mounted Police at the time of the rebellion. In *The Winter Count*, she makes excellent use of family history in dealing with the rebellion and its aftermath for the Plains Natives and Métis who were under the surgeon’s care. Jukes was also a member of a secret commission set up to inform Prime Minister John A. Macdonald about Riel’s sanity (under the premise that the Government shouldn’t hang a man who is insane). He decided that Riel was sane, but had second thoughts and wrote urgently to Macdonald asking that Riel’s diaries be examined for signs of insanity. The plea was ignored. Leman presents the conflict through the viewpoints of many historical figures, some famous, some ordinary. She includes historical documents that work as found poems – because she found poetry in them. She moves with dexterity between quoted documents and her own poems. The original poems are dramatic when they need to be dramatic, descriptive or lyrical when required. Even readers thoroughly familiar with the history of the rebellion will learn a great deal here. Leman shows that the documentary poem is still a healthy genre. It has its own perfections. 

Bert Almon has professed poetry at the University of Alberta for forty-four years.

non-fiction

It Takes a Village

THE VILLAGE EFFECT

How Face-to-Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier, Happier, and Smarter

Susan Pinker

Random House

\$32.00, cloth, 384pp

978-1-4000-6957-8

Psychology is something of an anomaly in pop science, inclined as it is to pander to neurotic North American readers hungry for personal solutions. More than a few of its superstar academics are guilty of encouraging the self-help epidemic we're currently struggling to stave off, and what is occasionally lost in the overzealously prescriptive approach is a scientific appreciation for nuance. Susan Pinker's *The Village Effect: How Face-to-Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier, Happier, and Smarter* integrates research about human community and social interaction in a perceptive and timely study. But in Pinker's impulse to serve readers straightforward prescriptions for this troublesome human condition in which we flail about, she occasionally neglects to balance her thesis with more subtle insights into our minds and bodies.

"Social contact and the drive to belong is a powerful physiological appetite, like hunger," Pinker argues. A renowned Montreal-based social psychologist,

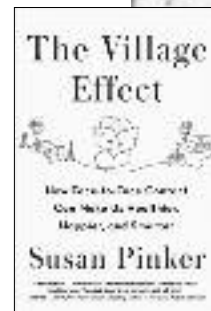
Pinker was awarded the William James Book Award in 2009 for her bestselling title *The Sexual Paradox: Men, Women, and the Real Gender Gap*. In her new book, she writes that "neglecting to keep in close contact with people who are important to you is at least as dangerous to your health as a pack-a-day cigarette habit, hypertension, or obesity." According to Pinker, if your spouse is your only confidante – often the case among Americans, apparently – then you are perilously close to having no security at all: "Immunologically speaking, you're almost naked."

The argument seems to stand up to scrutiny in terms of the psychological demands of modern-day living, but is the need for companionship a truly innate stricture of human biology? If so, what are we to make of hermits who eschew companionship altogether? How are their immune systems doing? I suppose they are not of interest to your average troubled North American looking for health and happiness in the pages of a \$32 book. But the spontaneous impulse to play devil's advocate has left me wondering.

I struggle to wrap my head around the implications of what Pinker calls the "Female Effect" – the oft-replicated finding that women's behaviours spread more readily through their social net-

works than do men's. What accounts for this bizarre reality? Pinker has a well-established predilection for distinguishing the sexes neurologically, though it's a practice I've always met with skepticism: where does the "hard-wiring" of gender end and learned behaviour begin? Is the spread of female behaviours simply a result of the biology of human beings who have a surfeit of estrogen coursing through their brains – or is it a cultural thing? These questions go un-addressed.

This skepticism, however, doesn't take away from the strength of Pinker's thesis that we silly technology-consumed humans would do well to spend more time with each other in the flesh. The take-away is that maintaining an integrated social network is currently the single most powerful predictor of a person's life span. Pinker applies this principle in her own life by consciously pursuing face-to-face social contact every day. She argues that technology, while no doubt a blessing, is also a curse – a false connector that fails to provide the face-to-face rapport our psyches need and a time-sucking device in an already temporally-challenged culture. Among the most convincing arguments, Pinker explores how technolo-



gy can compromise education. It's a courageous stance to take in an age when "Educational Technology" is a bona fide college degree, but Pinker's call

to return to the basic values of face-to-face education proves hard to rebut.

It's unfortunate that Pinker only cursorily acknowledges that people differ in the degree of their need for social contact, and her blanket treatment of the words "happiness" and "health" overlooks what variations on those words might mean. But that's enough neurotic deconstruction for one day. *The Village Effect* provides endless fodder for amusing party anecdotes – Strippers earn half as much when menstruating? Some parents in China pay teachers to hug their children? – so quit analyzing and get thee to a party, friends. It's good for you. **mrb**

Sarah Fletcher is a Montreal-based journalist.

A Whole New World

BRAVE NEW CANADA

Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World

Derek H. Burney and

Fen Osler Hampson

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$29.95, cloth, 244pp

9780773543980

Brave New Canada argues that our country's foreign policy requires decisive change. The book's authors, Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson, urge us to stop lamenting the bygone age of Pearsonian diplomacy. Instead of "looking at the world from a rear-view mirror," we are advised to survey the fast-changing political landscape and seek pragmatic policies that advance Canadian interests.

Burney and Hampson assert that Canada remains too focused on trading with the slow-



ing economies of the United States and Europe (the United States alone accounts for over 70% of our total trade). In recent years, the vast share of the globe's economic growth has taken place in "emerging" markets, yet less than 8% of our exports go to these areas. China's GDP will soon surpass that of the United States, but Canada still views itself largely in relation to its southern neighbour. Unlike the bold Australians, who have forged strong and successful links with the economies of the future, Canada has remained "comfortable and protected within a North American cocoon."

For obvious reasons of geography, the United States will always be Canada's diplomatic priority. Burney and Hampson argue that we can maintain our close relationship with the United States while actively seeking

new ties with emerging markets. By diversifying our trade, we will not only ensure our continued prosperity, but we will also have more clout when dealing with the United States.

This book's central thesis is less provocative than the authors seem to think. Canadians with a passing interest in world affairs are doubtlessly aware that the rise of China and other rapidly developing countries will require major changes in our foreign and trade policies. Many of the book's other claims are equally commonplace. For example, the authors argue that some global organizations such as the G20 may have outlived their usefulness, that education should be more closely aligned with employment needs, that Canadian companies are overly timid in seeking new markets and spend too little on research and development. Regardless of what one thinks of these opinions, no daily newspaper reader could possibly have avoided them.

Derek Burney was a chief of

staff to former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and served as Canada's ambassador to the United States in the later Mulroney years; the book's other author, Fen Hampson, holds the position of Chancellor's Professor at Carleton University and is director of the Global Security and Politics program at the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

Despite its warnings against nostalgia, *Brave New Canada* looks back with fondness at Mulroney's foreign policy, which comes as no surprise given Burney's background. The authors take occasional shots at such liberal targets as Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Barack Obama, and "zealous environmentalist supporters." Burney and Hampson present no serious arguments against these targets and thus alienate readers not already predisposed toward their ideological leanings. This tendency to preach to the choir is common in political non-fiction, but it is no less irksome for

being common. Why write books that are intended to persuade if potentially persuadable readers end up pointlessly repelled?

Brave New Canada does contain moments of genuine insight, the best of which are found in its sixth chapter. This chapter includes brief but constructive suggestions on promoting democracy in places where the franchise is in danger of being used for sectarian purposes (for instance, the suppression of minority rights). Among other useful suggestions, the authors recommend focusing on such prerequisites for healthy democracy as constitutional restraints and judicial reform. If the rest of this book had been as thoughtful as this chapter, it would have been well worth reading. **mrb**

Jean Coléno holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Toronto and teaches in the Humanities Department at Dawson College.

Both Sides Now

OF JESUITS AND BOHEMIANS

Tales of My Early Youth

Jean-Claude Germain

Translated by Donald Winkler

Véhicule Press

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Jean-Claude Germain, the Montreal journalist and playwright, published a very charming book a few years ago entitled *Rue Fabre: Centre of the Universe*, in which he recalled, among other things, accompanying his father, a distributor of candies and cigarettes, on compelling and sometimes puzzling trips about the city and district.

Germain returns now with *Of Jesuits and Bohemians*, an equally charming reminiscence of his slightly older youth spent at the long-gone, Jesuit-run Collège Sainte-Marie on Bleury Street in Montreal, and his joyous discovery of sights and sounds just beyond its walls. "How happy we were to find ourselves a few hours later in a bustling, modern thoroughfare," writes Germain. It was downtown Montreal in the early 1950s, a paradise of big stores and cafés and movie theatres, of nightclubs with display-case



photos of women "with their shimmering dresses, their opulent bosoms, their trembling lips, their outrageously made-up eyes, and their blond or jet-black hair."

The Jesuit teachers were haughty, sometimes bullying, and their lessons outdated, but Collège Sainte-Marie stood adjacent to the Gesù church and theatre, and it was there that the young Jean-Claude, escaping from the dreariness of school one day, chanced upon a stage rehearsal that marked him for life. From his seat in the last row, he saw "the demigod who revealed to me how one might remake the world with actors and light. His name was Jean Gascon.... I couldn't believe my eyes. You could alter reality and live another life, grander, wilder, freer, and infinitely more accommodating."

Germain went on to a distinguished career in theatre. He wrote plays, encouraged other playwrights as artistic director of the Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, and taught at the National Theatre School. Clearly, what he discovered in the Gesù theatre that day was worth the two-hour detention he suffered.

Germain's theatrical imagination was further stimulated by the movies. His family moved to the South Shore, and it happened that the Victoria Theatre in Saint-Lambert was one of those movie theatres where the Quebec law banning kids under age sixteen did not apply. Thus, "going to the pictures gave you the power to become someone else for the distance of a few street corners. Ah! The way it felt to walk the width of the sidewalk after an Errol Flynn pirate film, head high, chin raised, face to the wind, a knife between your teeth, a pistol in one fist, and a drawn sword with its naked blade in the other."

Here Germain touches on the duality of French culture in North America: home-grown on the one hand and inevitably drawn to the wider stream on the other. Sure, he writes, *La famille Plouffe* and the rosary over the radio were important, but "the high culture mass on Sunday night was the Ed Sullivan Show, a classy nightclub spectacle with its dog prodigies, jugglers, magicians, acrobats, high-energy comedians, and a cocktail of stardom past, present, and future, from the world of comedy or of song."

Still, for the young Germain, the greatest enticement was Montreal's own artistic community: always impoverished, usually friendly, and often ambitious. Its hangouts were refuges – the libraire Tranquille on Sainte-Catherine, the beatnik clubs on lower Clark Street, the Swiss Hut on Sherbrooke – and its stars magnetic. These were the bohemians, a group that included the sculptors Robert Roussil and Armand Vaillancourt (who "dominated the dance floor with the elegance of a Greek god"), the writer Claude Gauvreau, the actor Gilles Latulippe and the artists Ferron, Letendre, Molinari, Pellan, Riopelle.

These were interesting people, doing interesting things: lending a soul to the city, pushing the boundaries of art and society, leading Quebec out of its darkness. Germain writes of them affectionately, and gratefully. mb

Dane Lanken author of *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great theatres of the golden era 1884-1938* (Penumbra Press, 1993), was a co-founder in 1973 of the heritage group Save Montreal.

Folk Healers and Physicians

THE BLACK DOCTORS OF COLONIAL LIMA

Science, Race, and Writing in Colonial and Early Republican Peru

José Ramón Jouve Martín

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$45.95, cloth, 244pp

9780773543516



Imagine Lima, Peru, in the 1800s. In this city of slaves, "free" persons, and colonial elites, a majority of the medical practitioners – doctors, surgeons, nurses – were of African ancestry. José Ramón Jouve Martín's latest book, *The Black Doctors of Colonial Lima: Science, Race, and Writing in Colonial and Early Republican Peru*, highlights this era's most prominent black male physicians: José Pastor de Larrinaga, José Manuel Dávalos, and José Manuel Valdés.

By focusing on these three practitioners, Martín shows us the peculiarities and ambiguities that characterized the nineteenth-century world of medicine. Larrinaga, Dávalos, and Valdés were exceptional figures whose racial identifications varied: *negro*, *mulato*, *pardo*, *zambo*. Their stories are relatively well documented by the procedures and publications that brought them notoriety during their lives, yet Martín reminds us that the archives rarely dignify the contributions of Latin America's lower *castas* (racially organized social classes). Still, the book synthesizes a range of archival documents and secondary sources to explain how three *mulatos* negotiated the gendered, racial, and professional expectations of their time.

As Peru inched toward its eventual independence from the Spanish Empire in 1821, Lima's black physicians increasingly entered the public arena. Many of these doctors and surgeons voiced their political passions while strategically placating colonial powers. Their work, in all of its forms, aimed to glorify the lower *castas* as generous contributors to a soon-to-be independent nation.

Martín's close study of the prestigious medical journal *Mercurio peruano* shows how the act of writing helped *mulato* practitioners champion the crusade of respectable citizenship. This Lima-based publication greatly impacted the city's larger social order. A point of constant debate for contributors was what constituted a "true" sexual transformation, that is, one that would be sanctioned by the church. Martín presents several cases at length where physicians and enthusiasts described such "exceptional deviation[s] from the order of nature."

Elites of the medical sector were predominantly white, male, and wholly invested in a colonial standard of reform. Consequently, only two authors of African descent featured work in *Mercurio peruano*: Larrinaga and Valdés. When those "not whiter than cinnamon" were accepted to this inner circle, they were not treated as equals. So it is no great surprise that, while writing for the journal, these *mulato* physicians sometimes used pseudonyms to promote their practices and theories. A presumed-to-be-white identity temporarily kept their ideas flowing and the naysayers at bay.

Martín also offers examples in which individuals, residing both in Lima and far across the Atlantic, directed antagonistic messages to Larrinaga, Dávalos, and Valdés. He points to the *Mercurio peruano* and other public forums of the time, showing how they now serve to document the debates concerning the integrity of Lima's black doctors.

The ghosts and shadows of a few more characters appear in Martín's historical account, as well. Female and male "folk-healers" paved the way for black physicians in Lima. Their healing methods leaned on indigenous, African, and European traditions to restore morale across all *castas*. However, the shift from "healer" to "doctor" was not a smooth one. Prejudice against the darker and mostly illiterate classes remained. For this reason, when the names of these folk-healers are found in the archive, it's usually in the context of an alleged criminal record.

Martín explores the real and artificial chasms between these camps of healers, while turning a critical eye to Larrinaga, Dávalos, and Valdés. Yes, these black physicians spoke in and against spaces of privilege. But, in defending their own abilities, they sometimes degraded groups whom the colonial regime deemed abject. A look into *The Black Doctors of Colonial Lima* begins to untangle these exceptional, complex, and understudied narratives of nineteenth-century medicine. mb

Yasmine Espert is an Art History PhD student at Columbia University specializing in the arts of the Caribbean and its diaspora.



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PATRICIAN FAMILIES AND THE MAKING OF QUEBEC

The Taschereaus and McCords

Brian Young

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$100.00, cloth, 464pp

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The highbrow McCord Museum, on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal, and the more lowbrow Taschereau Boulevard on the South Shore have something in common: both are named after members of two prominent Quebec families whose power was established in the eighteenth century and lasted well into the twentieth. In *Patrician Families and the Making of Quebec*, Brian Young traces the history of these two families over four generations marked by conquest, wars, rebellions, revolutions abroad, and the piecemeal democratization of Quebec society.

The McCord family were originally Scots from Ulster, in Ireland; the Taschereaus had roots in Tours, in France's Loire Valley. Both families built their power on a combination of aristocratic titles, land, influence within the Catholic or Protestant churches, and sway within important institutions such as universities and the legal and criminal justice systems. The author uses the word "patrician" to describe these particular elites: those whose high status, prestige, and institutional influence far surpassed what could be acquired with wealth alone.

From the Taschereau family history, one gets a sense of the persistence of feudal power in Quebec well into the nineteenth century. Having settled in New France before the British conquest, this family of minor aristocrats not only successfully consolidated the seigneurial (i.e., landlord's) privileges that they had acquired during the New France period, but they also managed to continue developing their possessions in the Beauce region south of Quebec City, thanks to the British recognition of French feudal institutions. Building upwards and outwards from this secular power base, Taschereau family members leveraged what power they had to acquire other positions: police commissioner of Quebec City, Archbishop of Quebec (whose titles included "Prince"), and even Premier of Quebec (the namesake boulevard was built during Louis-Alexandre Taschereau's mandate). By focusing on family history over multiple generations, Brian Young draws shockingly straight lines connecting the power of *ancien régime* French aristocrats to the power within Quebec state institutions that persists to this day.

The McCords, on the other hand, did not have it as easy. From their start as merchants (acting, among other things, as one of the major purveyors of alcohol in the newly conquered British colony), this family rose to a more reputable rank thanks to land ownership in what became Montreal's Griffintown and Lachine Canal area. However, by the time the Taschereaus occupied some of the highest places in the pecking order, the McCords' status had diminished. It was a somewhat *déclassé* family head who oversaw the foundation of the McCord Museum, perhaps in an attempt to symbolically regain some prestige for his name.

In spite of the significance of both these families, the author does not make it sufficiently clear why the two were chosen as the subjects of his book. The histories are interestingly juxtaposed and certain contrasts – for instance, between a landowning French Catholic family siding with the British Crown during the American invasions at the end of the eighteenth century and an English-speaking Protestant family supporting the revolutionary Americans during the same period – are striking and challenge facile notions. But conjecture about the similarities or differences between these two families, or between them and other elite families in Quebec during the same years, is largely left to the reader. Nonetheless, the sheer depth of fascinating detail uncovered by the author's original historical research into these two families' trajectories more than compensates for any shortcomings of this nature. **mRb**

Joël Pedneault studies history at the Université du Québec à Montréal and works as a community organizer and popular educator.

The Godfather of Canadian Cinema

YOU'RE NOT DEAD UNTIL

YOU'RE FORGOTTEN

A Memoir

John Dunning

with Bill Brownstein

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$29.95, cloth, 244pp

9780773544024



“Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in,” moaned Al Pacino's infamous gangster Michael Corleone in the third *Godfather* picture. John Dunning – producer, writer, and cinematic Renaissance man – earned his rightful title as the godfather of Canadian genre filmmaking, but may also have envied Corleone the privilege of being able to leave the family business. Unwillingly roped into the celluloid trade following the untimely death of his theatre-owning father, Dunning rose through the ranks: he began as a concession hawker at age thirteen, was a theater manager at seventeen, and co-founded Montreal's Cinepix Inc. at thirty-five. Along the way, he caught the film bug and put Canadian genre cinema on the map, introducing the world to influential filmmakers (David Cronenberg) and memorable exploitation trash (*My Bloody Valentine* and *Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS*).

His memoir, *You're Not Dead until You're Forgotten*, paints a portrait of a man who would have preferred to remain out of the public eye. Born in 1927 in Montreal's Verdun suburb (“the Brooklyn of Montreal,” to hear him tell it), Dunning had a life marked by poor health, frequent automobile accidents, and a crippling stage fright that plagued him until his death in 2011. The memoir, unfinished at the time of his passing, has been collected by Bill Brownstein and bookended with testimonials from Brownstein and a coterie of industry names who owe at least part of their fame to Dunning, one-half of a pair dubbed “the Roger Cormans of Canada.”

With great humour, warmth, and modesty, Dunning emerges as the beating heart behind the titillating soft-core dramas and schlock horror pics that pushed filmmaking boundaries and were often censored for nudity or gruesome imagery. While partner and lifelong friend André Link handled the business end of Cinepix, Dunning scouted risqué world cinema to distribute across Canada and eventually developed original productions. In the process, auteurs such as Cronenberg gained notoriety under the Cinepix label and occasional clean hits such as *Meatballs* helped change the narrative of the Canadian film industry's viability (or lack thereof).

Despite those achievements, it was always the sleaze that best defined Cinepix and Dunning.

Never finding much success with anything that wasn't outré, Dunning's cultivation of grotesqueries and “maple-sugar porn” gave Canadian film a bad name in the eyes of some, but to others this was better than no name at all. The recollections in *You're Not Dead until You're Forgotten* are rapid-fire – scarcely is any anecdote or film allotted more than a page – yet Dunning's passionate belief in each Cinepix picture shines through. Quietly prolific, he rarely shares a harsh word about anyone in the industry (at least not those he is willing to name), but when it comes to the censors and institu-

continued on page 17

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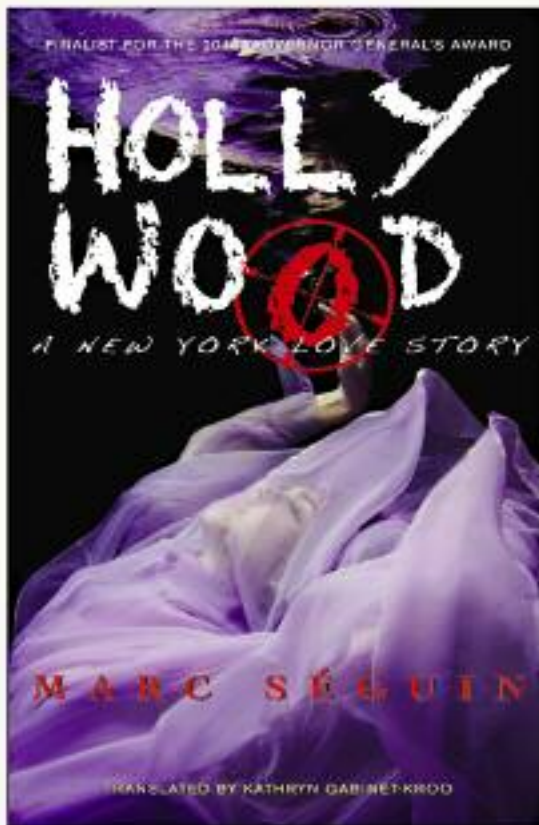
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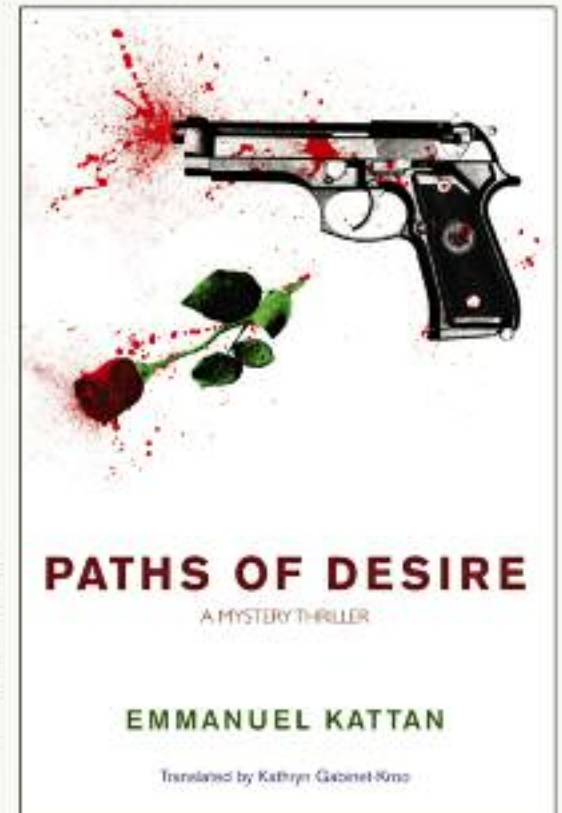
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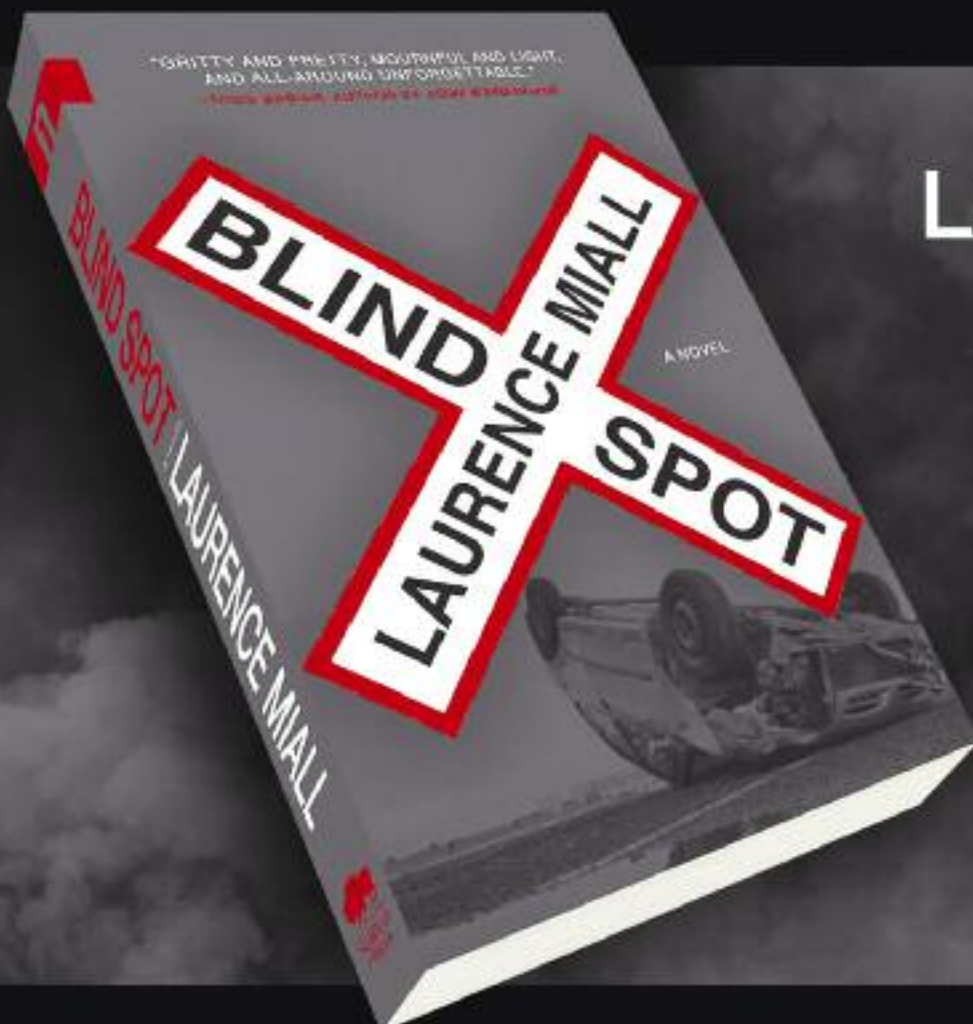
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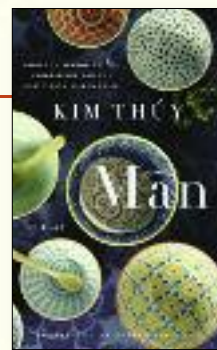




By Elise Moser

For the Love of Words

Kim Thúy “has a thing” for ice cream. On her Italian book tour, she wanted to eat gelato. Her publicist took her to a tiny shop. “I thought there would be, you know, thirty flavours.” But no, there were only ten. “I said I wanted all ten,” she says, eyes twinkling. But there were only three scoops per cup. Okay, she said, she would have three, three, three, and one. She only made it through six – white chocolate, roasted almond, mascarpone, pistachio ...



MÃN
Kim Thúy
Translated by
Sheila Fischman
Random House
Canada
\$25.00, cloth, 139pp
978-0-345-81379-4

She is a marvellous storyteller, full of energy, vibrant and animated, quite unlike the jewel-like precision and restraint of her writing. The question of ice cream arises again, demonstrating the way attention to small things can exalt a life, a theme that runs gently through her new book, *Mãn*, recently translated into English by Sheila Fischman. She speaks of a Japanese ice-cream maker who only makes eight scoops of green-tea ice cream every year, when the tips of the tea leaves are at their tender, flavourful peak.

After bursting onto the scene with her first book, *Ru*, winner of the French-language Governor General’s Award for Literature, Thúy has followed up with *Mãn*. Like *Ru*, *Mãn* is the story of a Vietnamese immigrant woman living in Montreal. Similar also is the way Thúy wrote the books, each in a long unbroken text that was divided into short sections with her editor. “In my mind it’s always one story. One breath,” she says. “To me, it’s almost like calligraphy. Yes, you have many lines, but it should just be one stroke.... People sometimes say they can read each page alone, but to me it’s impossible.”

“The next book will be about the same,” she says. “It’s my breath. I can only do that size. It’s rhythm, probably, and my rhythm is that short.” It is typical of Thúy to offer a realistic assessment of her work with both humour and humility. “I’m very loud in person, and I can never tell a short story,” she laughs. “But when I write I become very economical. Because I don’t have the vocabulary, and the knowledge of the language. I don’t feel I have the leisure of a real author who can play with the structure. So I remain quite primitive ... My knowledge of French is quite restrained, so I don’t have the luxury to spread myself. I can’t fly. I fly like a chicken, only for half a second. My writing is like a chicken trying to fly.”

Of course, not every flying chicken wins the Governor General’s Literary Award on its first flapping foray. “Every word for me is a jewel, a treasure,” she says. “I worked very hard to gain that ... I can sometimes understand a word very well for a long time before I know how to use it ... I love those words. I have carried them.” In both books she has listed in the margins Vietnamese words linked to the text, with their French or English transla-

tions. This is intimately connected to Thúy’s experience of moving between languages and cultures. Thus the reader shares her discovery of the words.

She offers examples that demonstrate the richness to be found between languages, and the generosity of her impulse to draw the reader into her lush bicultural space. “In French when you say goodbye it’s *adieu*, you give someone to God. In Vietnamese when you say goodbye to somebody it’s to accompany somebody to the next starting point. So in one culture it’s the end, in the other it’s the starting point.”

She also says, “I appreciate the words for love in Vietnamese ... in English and French it’s more limited.” In Vietnamese there is a word for love of a spouse, a

word for love of a parent, another for love of ice cream. In French and English we have only the one verb. “If I *only* knew Vietnamese, I wouldn’t have appreciated this richness.”

Thúy is conscious of the distance she has traveled from her refugee childhood. She is a constitutional lawyer who also has degrees in translation and linguistics, an accomplished cook and restaurateur, wife, mother to an autistic son, and now internationally acclaimed writer. Many of the stories in her books come from her experiences or those of women in her family, but she was also a lawyer in Vietnam for three years, where she made a point of meeting ordinary people and

continued on page 14

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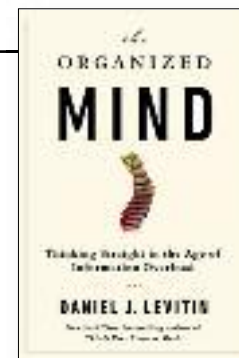
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A Penchant for Order



THE ORGANIZED MIND
Thinking Straight in the Age
of Information Overload
Daniel J. Levitin
Penguin Random House Canada
\$30.00, cloth, 496pp
9780670067640

Confusion isn't a reaction you'd expect from a cognitive psychologist. But Daniel J. Levitin, the James McGill Professor of Psychology and Behavioural Neuroscience at McGill University and the author of the bestsellers *This Is Your Brain on Music* and *The World in Six Songs*, was clearly confused when I showed up at his home in Outremont.

We were meeting to discuss his new book *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*. Or so I thought. It seems there was a mix-up. Our appointment was nowhere to be found on Levitin's busy schedule. For an instant, anyway, he wasn't sure how to categorize me in his highly organized mind. I was either in the right place at the wrong time, or he was. Of course, given the way Levitin's brain works, and always has, it was unlikely to be the latter.

Levitin's penchant for order started early. "In the third grade, my teacher asked me to go into the supply closet to get something she needed. I noticed right away it was a mess," Levitin told me once he'd made time for me. "There were things of the same kind spread out across all the different shelves and levels. I had already arranged all my books at home in what seemed to me a logical way. I'd even put little catalogue numbers on them. It was my own seven-year-old's version of the Dewey Decimal system. So I asked my teacher if I could stay after school and organize her closet. I found I liked doing it; I liked the different ways things could go together."

That's one origin story for *The Organized Mind*, a meticulously researched and

deftly written study of how our brains organize, categorize, and make sense of a multitude of data. Levitin's book was already number one on Canadian bestseller lists and number two on the *New York Times* bestseller list when we met in September – lists whose very existence is no doubt related to the fact that we all have more data than ever to organize, categorize, and make sense of.

"In 2011, Americans took in five times as much information every day as they did in 1986," Levitin writes in his opening chapter on "the history of cognitive overload."

The range of subject matter in *The Organized Mind* is appropriately wide as well as eclectic. But the book didn't start out that way. When Levitin began working on the manuscript four years and some forty drafts ago, his main focus was considerably narrower.

"The idea was to write a history of filing cabinets (Where did it come from? What came before it?), combined with the latest research on how our brains organize memories and create categories," Levitin said. "Filing cabinets were fascinating but it turned out I could tell that story in a few pages."

So he did, devoting the rest of *The*

Organized Mind to exploring everything from why we're always losing our keys to how World War II's D-Day operation succeeded against the odds.

"The secret to planning the invasion of Normandy was that, like all projects that initially seem overwhelmingly difficult, it was broken up deftly into small tasks – thousands of them," Levitin explains in his chapter on time-management. "This principle applies at all scales: If you have something big you want to get done, break it up into chunks – meaningful, implementable, doable chunks."

Taken as "a chunk," the blend of analysis and advice in this passage is a telling example of the distinctive strengths of *The Organized Mind*. Levitin walks a fine line between presenting the latest research in neuroscience and popularizing it, between being descriptive and prescriptive. Like his first book, *This Is Your Brain on Music*, *The Organized Mind* is at its best explaining science to the "average reader."

It's also intended to be practical, without being a self-help book.

"I'm a scientist, self-help is not what I do," Levitin said. "If *The Organized Mind* was going to have tips, I wanted them to be grounded in science."

Or math, in the case of "Organizing Information for the Hardest Decisions," one of the book's most compelling and sure-to-be-useful chapters. Indeed, Levitin devises a kind of logarithm for dealing with life-and-death medical decisions, a formula that begins with him encouraging readers to become "the CEO of their own health care."

Another useful tip from *The Organized Mind*: no multitasking. That uniquely con-

temporary activity is, according to the latest scientific evidence, a disaster of misguided effort. According to neuroscientists, multitasking not only causes information "to go to the wrong part of the brain," it plays havoc with our ability to make effective decisions.

Still, it would be easy to mistake Levitin's own surplus of interests as a kind of multitasking: he dropped out of university as a young man to pursue a successful career as a session musician, music producer, and music journalist; then, a decade later, he dropped out of the music business to earn a PhD in psychology.

"For the past few years, I've been playing music professionally, running a lab, writing books, and teaching. It's true that I've always pursued two or three different

interests with great enthusiasm, but it's not multitasking in the main definition of the term. I try to structure my day so I'm never doing more than one thing at a time. Think of it as multiple tasking," Levitin said.

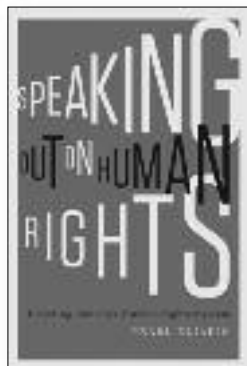
And if his interests – in music and neuroscience, for instance – connect in interesting and surprising ways, you could argue the same is true for the connections in the brain that Levitin has spent a lifetime studying. *The Organized Mind* is all about the unlikely, sometimes unexpected links between disparate things: from how our memory really works to the real reason we keep junk drawers. (The common denominator: junk drawers counterbalance the profound unreliability of memory.)

For all its advice on effective time-management and organizational skills, *The Organized Mind* also makes room for

continued on page 17

By Yves Engler

Trials and Tribulations



SPEAKING OUT ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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Pearl Eliadis
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Speaking Out on Human Rights is a powerful response to the right-wing backlash against human rights commissions and tribunals. In this readable book, lawyer and McGill University lecturer Pearl Eliadis details the positive contributions these commissions have made to the advancement of human rights and points the way forward to strengthening these important institutions.

The book is chock full of interesting and important nuggets on struggles for equality. In 1939, for instance, the Supreme Court maintained “a tavern owner’s refusal to serve a black man, Fred Christie, a beer after a hockey game,” and seven years later a black woman – prosecuted for sitting in the whites-only area of a Halifax theatre – had her conviction upheld by the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal. It wasn’t until 1985, Eliadis reminds us, that the Supreme Court ruled that “everyone” physically present in this country is entitled to life, liberty, and security of the person under section 7 of the Canadian Charter. It was only three years ago that aboriginal peoples won the right to file human rights complaints in relation to the Indian Act.

Speaking Out on Human Rights delves into the history of discrimination in this country, how human rights commissions and tribunals have helped, and how various forms of discrimination persist.

Yves Engler: The book is partly a response to the media frenzy towards human rights commissions spurred by two cases in 2007. Can you tell me about them?

Pearl Eliadis: The first case was the conservative online magazine *Western Standard*’s re-publication of one of the Danish “Mohammed-as-bomber” cartoons, and the second case involved three complaints initiated by Canadian law students

against Rogers Inc. and its editor for refusing to publish a rebuttal to a string of allegedly anti-Muslim articles in *Maclean’s* magazine, a Rogers property. The students announced that they would be filing complaints in three jurisdictions in Canada because they argued the articles were beyond offensive and were discriminatory, painting Muslims with a broad and tarred brush, depicting them as prone to bestiality and sex with nine-year-olds.

An avalanche of articles and editorials in the media appeared, in a concerted and coordinated effort to repeal the human rights laws that regulate hate speech. Outrage against the bureaucracy of human rights commissions was not new, but the *Maclean’s* hate speech complaints blended free speech, the “Muslim menace,” and national security threats to create a toxic brew that brought the simmering stew of rage-against-the-government-machine to a full boil. The net result was that many Canadians, spurred on by media reports and by politicians who thought they saw an opening to attack these institutions in the name of “freedom,” began to believe that human rights institutions in Canada were no longer acting in the best interests of Canadians. It became commonplace to see public calls for the abolition of these institutions or the rolling back of human rights legislation.

YE: You quote the president of the *Canadian Human Rights Reporter* who cited a series of “pillar cases” from the Supreme Court of Canada that began in human rights commissions and have gone a long way in strengthening women’s, workers’, religious rights etc. Isn’t this an indication of the importance of the tribunals?

PE: The cases discussed in the quote started at the level of human rights commissions and tribunals and then made their way up to the Supreme Court of Canada. Far from being irrelevant or petty administrative tribunals, these institutions have played a leading role in developing case law that now forms the backbone of equality law in Canada and is something that we now all take for granted. These include key cases that have outlawed sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace, and protected the rights of kids with disabilities to an education.

YE: You write about how human rights commissions are not solely about compensating claimants but also about helping to eradicate discrimination through public education. The courts, on the other hand, do not address the underlying systemic causes of discrimination, which you see as an argument for the tribunals, correct?

PE: This is an important point of the book. People often associate human rights commissions and tribunals with human rights complaints alone. This is understandable because

complaints are the main point of contact with the human rights system. However, human rights commissions also have a legal obligation to speak out about human rights and to promote public awareness of human rights – these are very important parts of their mandate and fundamental to what these institutions are supposed to do as a matter of law. So when the Ontario Human Rights Commission spoke out against Mark Steyn’s writings about Muslims in *Maclean’s*, it was doing so as part of its legislated responsibility to speak out and to address issues of social tension independently of any human rights complaint.

I don’t think this is well understood among the public and it certainly is not a part of the work of human rights commissions that is being adequately addressed in many jurisdictions today. If people were more aware of this aspect – namely that promoting human rights is integral to what human rights commissions do – much of the so-called scandal around free speech in human rights would have been muted.

YE: For much of Canadian history a laissez-faire approach prevailed, whereby the legal system refused to palliate inequities. Can you explain how this was upended partly by social movements?

PE: There’s a sad string of cases in Canadian law where courts were unable or unwilling to do much of anything about blatant discrimination and inequality. It really took the civil rights movement and the work of the labour movement to take the bull by the horns and push society at large as well as legislators to enact protections for workers, tenants, and those seeking public services. Had it been left to the courts or elected politicians

alone, not much would have happened.

YE: Certainly the employers who’ve had human rights cases lodged against them – and who own much of the media and fund many right-wing institutions – dislike these human rights commissions. And many of those hired to be commentators in the dominant media share this sentiment, if not always openly. So it seems naïve to write, as you do, that, “it is difficult to believe that anyone would want to return to a pre-rights world or move to one where market incentives are the sole or main policy response to discrimination.”

PE: I don’t think it is naïve. It is hard to believe that anyone wants to go back to the days of refusing to serve Fred Christie a beer. And it is counterfactual: polling data mentioned in the beginning of the book shows that the only issue dearer than healthcare to the hearts of Canadians is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That has to say something about the distance between the “dominant media” and the average Canadian. I believe the majority of Canadians are aware that human rights are important and support them. They are central to not only our constitutional structure as the fundamental law of the land, but also to Canada’s important international human rights commitments and its multiculturalism. What does strike me as naïve is that we should, as a country, entrench constitutional rights and then assert that it is an unintended or unwanted consequence of those constitutional commitments that we would actually have to respect them. ■

Yves Engler is the author of seven books. His most recent is *The Ugly Canadian: Stephen Harper’s Foreign Policy*.

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Congratulations to these excellent playwrights and translators! See CBC.ca for the full shortlist. Winners will be announced on November 18, 2014.

And Slowly Beauty

Michel Nadeau

Translated by Maureen Labonté

Mr. Mann is a buttoned-down, middle management type whose life consists of meetings, schedules, and an endless inbox of work. All of this changes after he attends a production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. Having become obsessed with the story, Mann's life begins to unravel. *And Slowly Beauty* is a drama that explores the way art can change life.

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Christina, The Girl King

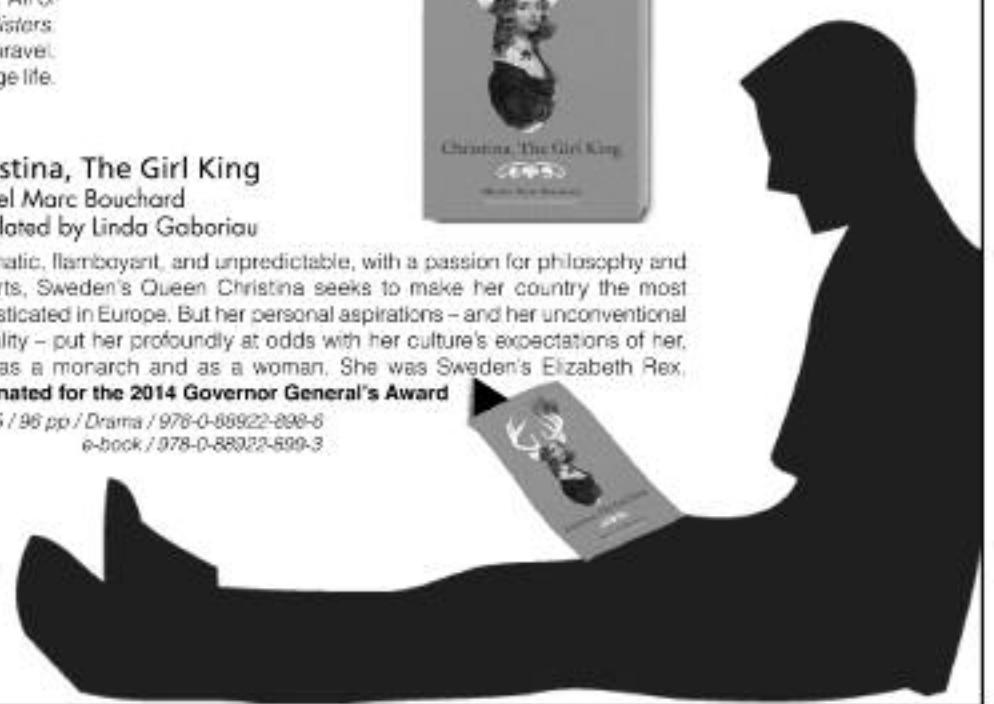
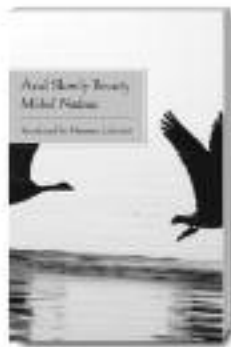
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Enigmatic, flamboyant, and unpredictable, with a passion for philosophy and the arts, Sweden's Queen Christina seeks to make her country the most sophisticated in Europe. But her personal aspirations – and her unconventional sexuality – put her profoundly at odds with her culture's expectations of her, both as a monarch and as a woman. She was Sweden's Elizabeth Rex.

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Thúy (from page 11)

hearing about their experiences of the war and its aftermath. She is sensitive to the many small acts that make a life, and how many of those are the daily hard work, small attentions and sacrifices of women caring for their families – even more so in time of war. “We tend to forget that without these mothers, Vietnam would have disappeared. Ordinary, everyday heroes.”

Mãn is one of those heroes, and the daughter of one. Her mother marries her to a Vietnamese man who lives in Canada. The marriage is never passionate; Mãn focuses on daily acts of care. She finds her talent for cooking in his restaurant, building a community by creating dishes that have emotional resonance for the Vietnamese immigrants who eat there, evoking the lost past of their country of birth.

Thúy has created a gorgeous fusion not only of languages and cuisines, but of a double-cultured life.

Then, slowly, Mãn emerges into the wider society. She meets Julie, who has an adopted Vietnamese daughter and an interest in Vietnamese culture. Julie helps Mãn open herself to friends' love and affection, and encourages her to expand her career. Julie teaches Mãn to laugh out loud, to let go some of the restraint that allowed her to survive her childhood and marriage. The passionate love into which Mãn falls with blue-eyed Luc is a logical next step – another form of love, another enlargement of life. “Julie came in and gave her something very tangible,” Thúy says, “that Julie loved her and cared for her, that the shop would have her name, and have the plates printed with her name, and then with this Luc it becomes tangible and physical. That she could touch love.”

Julie is a composite of people Thúy says helped “carry” her. “If there is one character in this book who is close to me it is Julie. Because I am Julie now, I try to pay back by being the person who carries. I want to have the strength to carry someone. I know how to smile today, so I want to help someone who doesn't smile.”

In *Mãn*, Thúy has created a gorgeous fusion not only of languages and cuisines, but of a double-cultured life. “I feel rich,” Thúy says. “You can have one culture, but when you have two you can appreciate them both, because you have a point of comparison. I'm lucky enough to have two, to know both cultures intimately.”

Elise Moser is the editor of *Salut King Kong: New English Writing from Quebec* and the author of *Lily and Taylor*. She is also a member of the board of PEN Canada.

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fiction

Hysterical Paroxysm

HYSTERIC

Nelly Arcan
Translated by David Homel
and Jacob Homel
Anvil Press
\$20.00, paper, 168pp
9781927380963

In 2001, Nelly Arcan published *Putain* (*Whore*, in its English translation), a book whose frank depiction of sexuality and sex work propelled its author into the literary spotlight.



In 2009, Arcan committed suicide at her home in Montreal.

In between, she wrote *Folle*, a novel whose protagonist, also named Nelly Arcan, is a writer who at age fifteen made a pact with herself to commit suicide at the age of thirty. The novel depicts the narrator's thirtieth year and the brief but intense relationship that shaped it. *Folle* has been translated into English for the first time as *Hysteric*, bringing a work of one of Quebec's most original and courageous au-

thors to an English audience.

For the sake of clarity I'll call the author Arcan and the book's protagonist Nelly, though if the roles happen to blur, it's probably not for the worst – *Hysteric* deliberately muddies the waters of narrative. The line between fiction and memoir is generally a sacred one, and readers are frequently cautioned not to mistake story for truth, or vice versa. Arcan blows up this narrative convention, challenging

us to get caught in the slippery grey area between the real and the invented. What is memory, anyway, but a kind of story we tell ourselves; a story in which we star as the protagonist? Still, it's unnerving to read lines like, "My girlfriends were great fans of fashion magazines; when they saw I was happy they let down their guard, for them love couldn't coexist with the desire to die."

In ancient Greek medical theory, the uterus was conceived of as "an animal within

an animal," a being with its own desires that could wander at will inside the body. Without regular sex to anchor it in place, it could end up on a woman's brain, resulting in a condition termed *hysteria*. This was only the beginning of the fascinating and sordid history of attempts to identify and treat women's "unmanageable" emotional nature. There's something very apt about this history in relation to *Hysteric*; Arcan takes her place among the pantheon of women who write books about obsessive, pathological relationships; relationships where feelings spill over,

jects with the rigour of ritual. In her hands, hysteria takes the form not of a woman screaming uncontrollably in a fit or spasm but a woman returning again and again to the same subjects, circling them, ordering and disordering – a kind of OCD hysteria. Nelly sifts through the past year's events, a series of subjects (or objects) taking on



Her gaze is relentless and unflinching, but Arcan's prose is not sloppy or sensationalistic

metastasize, and well up in the wrong places. Like Djuna Barnes (*Nightwood*) and Chris Kraus (*I Love Dick*), Arcan's interest in love and sex is mainly about shame, abjection, and ultimately the loss or destruction of the self, rather than love's (or sex's) potential to redeem and uplift. In that sense, *Hysteric* is kind of the anti-50 *Shades of Grey*.

Instead of discovering herself through sex and its power dynamics, Nelly disappears.

Arcan approaches her sub-

talismanic weight under the stress of her obsession: her aunt's tarot cards, her lover's roster of brunette ex-girlfriends, her abortion, her sex work, and a Polaroid photo of herself from her first porn shoot when she was twenty. Her gaze is relentless and unflinching, but Arcan's prose is not sloppy or sensationalistic. Fans of Chris Kraus in particular will appreciate Arcan's detached but exacting style, translated with masterful understatement by David

Homel and Jacob Homel. She writes from a place that is both deeply embodied and highly intellectual – if someone's womb really did end up on their brain, and that person then wrote a book, it might read something like *Hysteric*. English readers are lucky to have access to more of Arcan's brains and guts, and this translation is hopefully a herald of growing appreciation for a uniquely talented and brutally brave writer. mrb

Anna Leventhal is a writer living in Montreal. Her first collection of short stories, *Sweet Affliction*, is out with Invisible Publishing.

Magic Mushrooms and Paranormal Parrots

CHLOES

Dean Garlick
Illustrated by Nicole Legault
Lodge Press
\$16.00, paper, 80pp
978-0993714108

The back cover of Dean Garlick's novella, *Chloes*, and its opening quote about the disassembled self – sourced from the inimitable Haruki Murakami – let you know that you are going to encounter some kind of self-fracturing in this book. But when it happens it nonetheless takes you by surprise, and holds your interest till the very last page.

Chloe is a twenty-something bank teller with a broken heart. Anson, her charming but feckless boyfriend has walked out on her after freaking out at their housewarming party, where a guest arrived with mushroom-and-pot brownies. Now Chloe would rather mope at home in her pyjamas than show up at her dull job. Into this sce-



nario enters a parrot – one capable of magic – and Chloe's life takes a "fantastic" turn.

The stark contrast between responsible Chloe and bohemian Anson, the hilarious house party where everything goes wrong, and the description of first love gone awry are all clichés of sorts that could have made for a conventional tale. But Garlick shows a talent for surprise, tightly constructed plots, clever but believable dialogue, and the

ability to brush his narrative with comic undertones. And despite its lean eighty pages, both Chloe and Anson acquire a bit more complexity as the story moves on.

The silent parrot, Suraj/Viktor, is a great character, and the two other humans in the story, Chloe's friend Mykah and the bird-dealer Ron

Boyd, are well developed. The writing uses some inventive turns of phrase – "Heaviness takes hold like an anaconda, squeezing consciousness into submission" – and the black-and-white, watercolour illustrations by Nicole Legault add to the book's charm. I particularly enjoyed the psychedelic flavour of the housewarming party's il-

lustration, though the placement of visuals within the layout feels awkward at times. The marriage between text and graphics is not always easy, but the design works overall.

If there was some deep, dark meaning in *Chloes*, I missed it. But not every

book needs to make a grand, ponderous statement. This is a smart, sassy read – and a quick one at that. mrb

Veena Gokhale's *Bombay Wali and other stories* was published by Guernica Editions in 2013.

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MICHEL AND TI-JEAN

George Rideout

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\$17.95, paper, 128pp

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George Rideout's *Michel and Ti-Jean* is the story of an imagined meeting between two great writers: Michel Tremblay and Jack Kerouac. The meeting takes place during an afternoon in a bar in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1969, a few months before Kerouac's death.

As the play begins, we find Jack Kerouac attempting to drink his afternoon and life away while playing a solitary game of pool. He is no longer writing. His main activity appears to be drinking. He is at odds with the world and himself. Enter twenty-seven-year-old Michel Tremblay, fresh off the bus from la belle province, armed with optimism, a copy of his first big hit – *Les Belles-*

sœurs – and a burning desire to meet his literary hero. A hero who, it turns out, has very little interest in meeting anybody, especially another writer... at least not until the beer is bought. Tremblay is undaunted by Kerouac's less than enthusiastic greeting and ventures onward in his quest to get to know Kerouac, even a little. He is certain that they will understand each other. After all, as Tremblay says to Kerouac: "There aren't many young boys who dream about books, but we did. And it's not just the words and the story we love – you wrote about the smell of books and the sound of the pages turning, and the style of the print, and the weight of the book when you held it in your hands and, everything you felt, I felt too."

By the end of the first act we realize that Tremblay didn't ride the bus for a



couple thousand kilometers simply to pay homage to his literary hero. He came to ask him to read his play. If Kerouac thinks it's a good play, then Tremblay will believe it's a good play. Tremblay will believe he is a real writer.

At its core, this play is about the granting of permission and forgiveness. Tremblay seeks permission to succeed where Jack, his hero, has failed. He wants permission to accept that literary gods are merely human beings, which makes them interesting and exciting, but also messy and complicated, and in Kerouac's particular case: drunk and very broken. And what he wants most of all is permission to write.

What Kerouac wants from Tremblay is more complicated, but it seems to boil down to forgiveness. Kerouac blames himself for many failings: not being good enough to his mother, not being the "right kind" of son for his father, putting his writing above everything and everyone else. But above all, what he really blames himself for is being alive while his brother, who died at the age of nine, is long dead.

In the end, Tremblay does not need Kerouac's permission at all. As he puts it, "I write because I am a writer. It's the only thing I know how to do." And as the literary world knows, Michel Tremblay continued to write; as for the forgiveness that Ti-Jean seeks, it's not Michel's to bestow.

Kerouac needs to forgive himself, but by the end of the play it doesn't seem that he can. So he keeps drinking and playing pool. Someone once said that Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is not a play about three sisters who never make it to Moscow – it's a play about three sisters who fight like hell to get there. Similarly, *Michel and Ti-Jean* is not about a man who gave up on himself but, rather, one who is fighting like hell to believe in himself again. **mb**

Alexandria Haber is a Montreal-based actress and playwright.

The Battle of Verdun, QC

MOTHERHOUSE

David Fennario

Talonbooks

\$17.95, paper, 128pp

9780889228281

"I didn't write *Motherhouse* with the intention of challenging the current mainstream approach to performance in Canadian theatre, but that's what seems to have happened." That's how David Fennario introduces his latest play, *Motherhouse*: with a bold – and merited – assessment of its potential.

The script of *Motherhouse* tells a compelling story. It paints a picture of working-class Verdun during World War I and the impact the war had on the community, particularly the women at home, left to labour in the British Munitions Supply Factory. Our narrator is a woman named Lillabit, although it seems Fennario's true protagonist is the city of Verdun, itself a tragic hero of the Great War, and a site of warfare: close-knit conflict between the poor of Verdun and wealthy of Westmount; between the French and English ("Very important to learn certain nouns right away when you're working with gunpowder"); between Protestants and Catholics ("the kind of job a peasoup or a paddy would get, not a Protestant"); between protestors and police ("if you're sick or hurt or pregnant, they don't care but they don't like you peeing in their van").

Of course, this text is a play, and plays are not meant to be read in isolation but to be performed before a community of audience members. This is



especially true of *Motherhouse*, because it is in the script's offerings for performance that Fennario takes his biggest risks. *Motherhouse* challenges Canadian theatregoers' expectations of what it is to experience a one-person show. The work is a piece of staunch anti-war activism that channels its message through Lillabit; it is more a poetic political essay told through a theatrical character than it is a theatrical exploration of character involving political themes.

While there is plenty of new work on Canadian stages that explores political content and new forms of audience engagement, it is rare in mainstream theatre to encounter a play that actively makes the personal political and, moreover, so confidently follows Brechtian traditions. That is, it privileges a critical (anti-war, anti-capitalist) message over "objective" and "universal" modes of storytelling that handhold the audience through catharsis. Lillabit often reminds us that she's a vehicle for "the playwright"; the audience is not even introduced to the munitions factory, the setting of the play's main action, until a third of the way through the work, after Lillabit has adequately monologued about the social, political, and economic context. Mainstream work has not trained Canadian audiences for this style of political work.

Fennario implicates the audience. We are reminded throughout the play that the politics are

not simply history, but an ongoing reality: the striking workers during World War I were the 1910s incarnation of Verdun's working class revolutionary spirit, which continues to manifest through movements like the 1970s protests for tenants' rights and the massive student protests against tuition hikes in 2012.

Although he claims it wasn't his explicit intention, it is clear that with *Motherhouse* Fennario is working against the practices in theatre-making that serve to depoliticize creative output. He tasks us to tell real stories that can facilitate change: "No more pretending to be someone else on or offstage." The play tasks those who stage it to reimagine the relationship between actor and character, artist and audience. Just as Lillabit's anti-war storytelling interrupts the militaristic, romanticized, red poppy-filled narrative of World War I that permeates Canadiana, Fennario's script is an attempt to interrupt dominant practices of theatre-making. It will be up to others in the process – producers, directors, designers, actors, and audiences – to determine if the politicization in *Motherhouse* can, in practice, successfully carry forth to the rehearsal room, stage, and streets, or if it will remain on the page. **mb**

Nikki Shaffeullah is a theatre director, facilitator, and performer, and is editor-in-chief of *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*.

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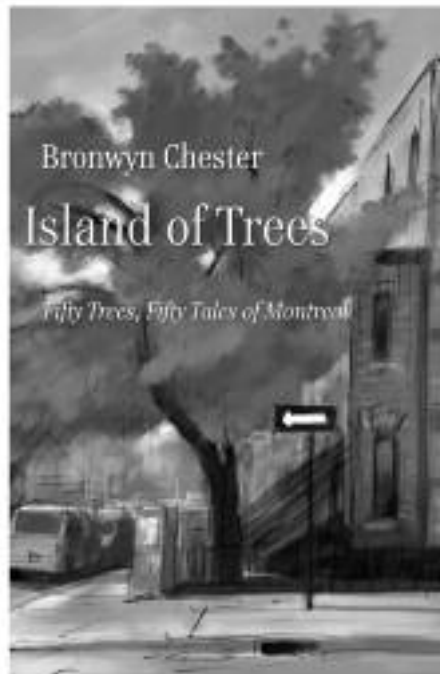
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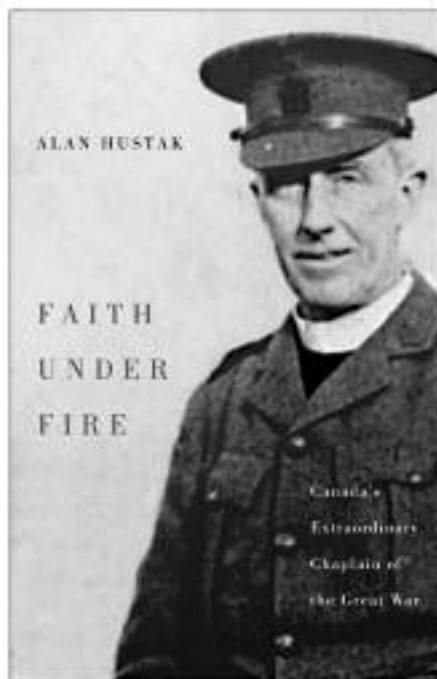
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Dunning (from page 9)

tions that meddled with his provocative programming, he's more candid.

Indeed, a cleaned-up Cinepix would have seen Dunning's career end with a tragic quietude unbecoming of his macabre, grindhouse roots. Cinepix's combative dealings with American studios ceased only upon its acquisition by Lionsgate in 1998. Dunning evolved his father's business with the times, but in the new millennium the world outpaced him. His memoirs mirror the industry's dispiritingly bureaucratic progression: exciting quick 'n' dirty shoots and

Dunning's cultivation of grotesqueries and "maple-sugar porn" gave Canadian film a bad name in the eyes of some ...

small-time boundary-pushing gave way to the boardroom meetings and corporate head-butting of the big leagues. The closing testimonials lavish more praise on Dunning than he would likely have appreciated, but that's because, like the screen idols he was raised on, Dunning was the rare white hat in a field of grey. **mrb**

Sam Woolf is a Toronto-based freelance writer and critic with *We Got This Covered*.

Levitin (from page 12)

serendipity. The more information we have easy access to, the more important it becomes not only to filter out what we don't need to know, but also to figure out what we *want* to know. According to Levitin, "the twenty-first century's information problem is one of selection."

Levitin practiced what he preached while writing *The Organized Mind*, allowing himself to be guided whenever possible by serendipity. He did research in libraries and not exclusively on the Internet, often discovering books and ideas he wasn't looking for and didn't even know he was interested in. "The thing about Google and Wikipedia is that they take you exactly where you want to go. I found I didn't always want to take the direct path."

One indirect path led to Joni Mitchell's backyard. "I met her about 15 years ago when I interviewed her for *Grammy* magazine. We just hit it off." Then when Levitin was working on *The Organized Mind*, Mitchell invited him to visit her new home in B.C. Another bit of serendipity. "I wrote while she painted," Levitin said.

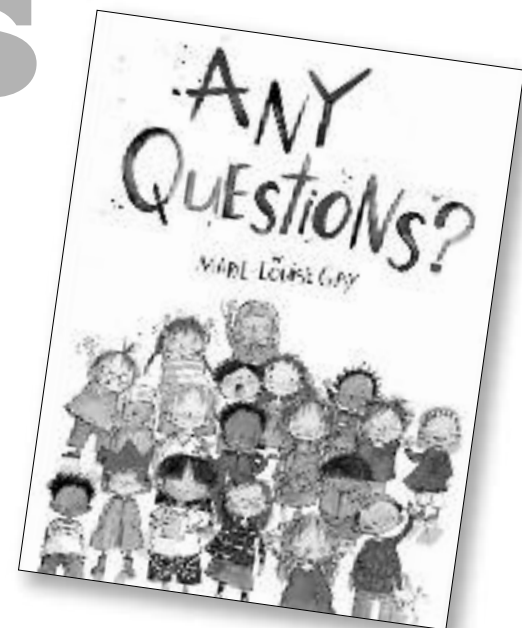
Mitchell, the perfect example of what Levitin calls HSPs in the book or "highly successful people," also proved to be an exceptional role model for the art of multiple tasking: doing one thing at a time and doing it well. **mrb**

Joel Yanofsky is the author of the memoir *Bad Animals: A Father's Accidental Education in Autism* and, most recently, co-author with Morris Goodman of *To Make a Difference: A Prescription for a Good Life*.

young readers

Twenty Questions

It's the harvest season and the prolific illustrators and authors of Quebec have produced a bumper crop of beautiful and delightful picture books that go a long way to answering some of the many questions children ask us.



Research shows that the average four-year-old asks more than 300 questions a day. Some of the questions are easy to answer ("Can I have candy floss for breakfast?"). Some of them are more serious. As adults, these questions twist us up and make us cringe. They are important questions often asked in excessively inappropriate places. They are questions that force us to confront and declare our political beliefs and our cultural biases. We have the best intentions; we want so much to give the little ones the right answer, an answer that will satisfy them but also inspire further questions and conversations. But let's face it: it's hard to deliver a meaningful discourse on questions of life and death when you're sleep deprived and wiping up someone's mess. Thankfully we are not alone, and we have this autumn's selection of picture books to fall back on.

Not My Girl tackles the question: "What does it mean to belong?" We are fortunate to live at a time when the truth about the residential school system is being told. Christy Jordan-Fenton and her mother-in-law Margaret Pokiak-Fenton have written stories for young people about Margaret's life in and out of residential schools. Their 2011 memoir, *A Stranger at Home*, sequel to the award-winning *Fatty Legs*, recounted the story of Margaret's painful reintegration into her Inuvialuit home after two years in a residential school. *Not My Girl* is the retelling of this story for the early reader set.

When Margaret returns to her Arctic home she is excited and happy. But within moments of her arrival she realizes that coming home isn't as simple or pleasant as she had imagined it would be. Her regulation residential school haircut, her inability to stomach her mother's traditional cooking, and

the fact that she's forgotten her language mean Margaret is summarily turned away by her family, her neighbours, and even her best friend. Margaret's ten-year-old voice leads us forward through painful memories of the residential school, her feelings of shame and alienation, and onwards toward her rediscovery of her Inuit self.

Gabrielle Grimard's luminous watercolour paintings capture fiery northern sunsets; the icy blues, greens, and whites of an Arctic ocean; the moods and emotions playing across a mother's face; and the astounding spectacle of the northern lights. This book is a great way to introduce important questions about identity and ethics to young readers and is, additionally, a pleasure for the eyes.

A serious question doesn't always demand a serious answer. If the question, "Where do babies come from?" doesn't necessarily send you scrambling for the anatomically correct teaching aids, you'll enjoy *Loula and the Sister Recipe*. Even readers who didn't meet the protagonist in last year's *Loula is Leaving for Africa* will quickly come to appreciate the spunky and resourceful heroine. Undeterred by the derision flung at her by her terrible triplet brothers, Loula sets out to make herself a little sister. Her parents provide some hints – including a few inside jokes that the adult readers can chuckle about to themselves – and Loula collects the ingredients. The search for all the necessary elements takes our heroine and her gangly, obliging chauffeur on a trek from a chic *chocolaterie* to a butterfly-laden wildflower

field. Under a full moon in her parents' garden, Loula waits for the magic to happen and for her new baby sister to arrive. But instead of



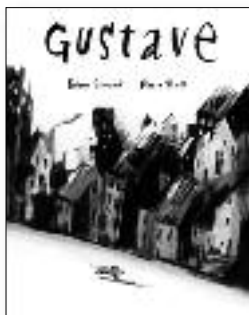
a tiny baby, a very large and very hungry dog leaps onto the scene.

Undaunted in her quest for a companion, Loula promptly accepts the dog as her favourite sibling. Anne Villeneuve has succeeded in both writing and illustrating

a book that charms and entertains. While it doesn't provide any practical information on conception, it will likely provoke some probing questions about how it's really done.

Marie-Louise Gay's latest picture book, *Any Questions?*, doesn't answer the where-do-babies-come-from question, but it answers pretty much any other question you can think of. Gay compiled a list of questions children have asked her during her many workshops and readings. Many of the questions have to do with the creative process. Gay has published over sixty books for children and she gives readers of all ages real insight into both the nuts and bolts of her illustrative techniques and the many ways stories come to mind. In *Any Questions?*, she even manages to teach us that taking chances and going off script is what being creative is all about.

Gustave is the first collaboration between the award-winning team of Rémy Simard and Pierre Pratt since 1998. Their latest offering answers the question of how to live through loss. In *Gustave*, the



illustrations by Pratt are haunting and spine-chilling. The opening image of a black cat with glowing green eyes, the terrible finality of the empty

corner where the missing Gustave was last seen, and the menace of the dark city streets all translate to a terrifying world for a tiny mouse. According to the publisher, this picture book is a strangely funny tale, but it reads more like a horror story for little creatures. Two mice stray farther from home than they should. Suddenly a cat appears and pounces. One escapes. The other is eaten. The survivor returns home and confesses to her mother about the fate of her friend. The mother consoles the child mouse and then goes to a cupboard and gives her a stuffed mouse as a replacement. At this moment the reader is supposed to realize that the eaten mouse was never alive, but was also a stuffed companion. Perhaps it is the fault of the translation that we don't realize that Gustave was made of stuffing and fleece, or perhaps the humour at the end is not strong enough to make up for the suspenseful anxiety built up throughout the text, but this book is only recommended for kids who are fond of being frightened while they read.



Have you ever wondered what it takes to tame your temper? *Sam's Pet Temper* helps adults and children understand how it feels when your temper is stronger than you are – and what to do about it. Marion Arbona's illustrations capture beautifully both Sam's temper – a scrawled mass of dark lines with a wicked mouth and blood-red tongue – and Sam's quirky world filled with intricately stylized landscapes combined with simple line drawing. Author Sangeeta

NOT MY GIRL
Christy Jordan-Fenton
Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
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Gabrielle Grimard
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9781554516247

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ANY QUESTIONS?
Marie-Louise Gay
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GUSTAVE
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Translated by Shelley Tanaka
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SAM'S PET TEMPER
Sangeeta Bhadra
Illustrated by Marion Arbona
Kids Can Press
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Bhadra has a lot of fun imagining all the trouble Sam's temper can get into before she gives us all some simple advice for getting things under control.

Still have some questions that need answering? If this selection of fall picture books didn't satisfy your curiosity, rest assured. Quebec's indefatigable community of illustrators and authors are hard at work as we speak, writing books for young readers that are sure to answer questions, big and small, for many years to come. **mrb**

B.A. Markus is a writer, teacher, and performer who likes to ask questions but doesn't always believe the answers.

By Dru Oja Jay

THE
MILE END
CAFÉ

True North

British explorers who ventured into the Arctic were a stubborn sort. Though many of them possessed the unrelenting tenacity and unstoppable work ethic memorialized in song, it was the nearly universal refusal to change their ways that truly defined European seekers of the Northwest Passage.

I refer, of course, to the decades-long refusal to learn from Inuit, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic. In the thousand years and more before frontiersmen like John Franklin arrived with the best equipment available, Inuit had developed technologies – the snow house, the kayak, sleds pulled by dogs, caribou-fur parkas – and a worldview that allowed them to survive and even thrive in the extreme cold of Arctic winters.

The Europeans considered Inuit ways to be so inferior as to be unworthy of consideration. They refused to eat seal meat, insisted on using ungainly ships, and wore clothes made of fabrics that became useless and dangerous in wet conditions. The results, again and again, were disastrous. British explorers and their crews perished in harsh Arctic conditions, in many cases resorting to cannibalism – refusing until death the Inuit methods that would have saved their lives.

In *Our Ice is Vanishing / Sikuvut Nunguliqtuq: A History of Inuit, Newcomers, and Climate Change*, author Shelley Wright makes it clear that the colonial arrogance that led to the death of many British explorers has also been disastrous for the people of Nunavut. While cannibalism, shipwrecks, and the frozen tombs of adventure-seekers aren't in the picture, that arrogance – the fundamental belief that Inuit don't know what's good for them or for the North – is alive and well.

Wright's book lucidly renders the arrogance of the *qallunaat* (the Inuit term for southerners) and its results: the trauma wrought by residential schools, the starvation and misery of forced relocations, the exorbitant cost of food and the total inadequacy of the imposed sedentary living conditions, the disregard for impacts of resource extraction on the animals and ecosystems that Inuit still depend on for their survival and way of life.

Colonial arrogance and its horrors are on display in *Our Ice is Vanishing*, but it's the historical facts that are polemical, not this book. Wright's work is an ambitious synthesis of climate change analysis, history, mythology, and storytelling – an attempt to build a bridge where walls have prevailed for centuries.

The book walks its culturally sensitive walk by presenting Inuit knowledge, mythology, and worldview alongside European history. The Inuit version of events, on the level of empirical accuracy, often compares quite favourably to the *qallunaat* version. For example, Inuit knew – and would tell anyone who asked – where the Franklin expedition's boats sank. It took a hundred years, big budgets, and cutting-edge technology for Canadians to catch on. And even though Inuit accounts guided their high-tech efforts, southern Canadians are unabashed about cutting Inuit out of the picture. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in a gleeful opinion piece for *The Globe and Mail*, celebrated the "discovery" of Franklin's ship as bolstering Canada's "Arctic sovereignty." He does not mention Inuit once.

In *Sikuvut Nunguliqtuq*, historical accounts of Inuit groups travelling thousands of kilometres blend with surprising, moving stories (including tales of Kiviuiq, a sort of Inuit Odysseus) to reveal the deep Inuit relationship with the land and the animals of the Arctic. The fact that it lets Inuit writers, storytellers, and leaders do much of the talking makes it a refreshing break from endless *qallunaat* pontificating about "the North."

For Wright, Inuit are "witnesses and messengers of climate change," and have much to teach us *qallunaat* about sensitively observing our environment. "There can be no learning," an Inuk elder tells her, "and no good life without listening and keeping an open mind and heart."

If we *qallunaat* could find a remedy for our colonial hangover, Wright seems to say, we'd have a lot to learn from Inuit: an ethical relationship with the ecosystems that sustain us, a fine-tuned awareness of climate change, and a head start on how to adapt to it.

Perhaps because *Sikuvut Nunguliqtuq* is mainly a work of history, Wright is a bit more gentle with the players of the present. "Incoming southerners bring their preconceptions with them," Wright suggests, and they "may be recommending policies that have little to do with the realities on the ground."

Wright breaks from this kind of massive understatement by noting in passing that the federal government is committing "gross negligence" of its obligations under the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Unmentioned is a billion-dollar lawsuit brought by the Nunavut Inuit against the federal government on account of this neglect. The dispute boils down to this: Canada got title to one-fifth of its land mass, and Inuit who live there got broken promises.

The deep, painful irony is that the federal government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to send *qallunaat* workers to fill government positions as administrators, technicians, teachers, and police; they often know little of Inuit culture, and seldom bother to learn. Training Inuit to fill the same government positions would actually save money. Echoing their explorer forebears, Ottawa is willing to *spend* money to keep Inuit in a state of desperation.

Wright may have plenty of reasons for taking a gentle approach, but the impacts of the history told within her book can hardly be overstated: Canada's hostility to Inuit, enabled by our prevailing colonial attitude, is the primary cause of the ongoing social and economic crisis in Nunavut. When *qallunaat* take responsibility for that relationship, we'll begin to learn what Inuit can teach us. **mb**

Dru Oja Jay is a Montreal-based writer and organizer. He is a co-founder of the Media Co-op, and is co-author, with Nikolas Barry-Shaw, of *Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's development NGOs from idealism to imperialism*.

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Shelley Wright
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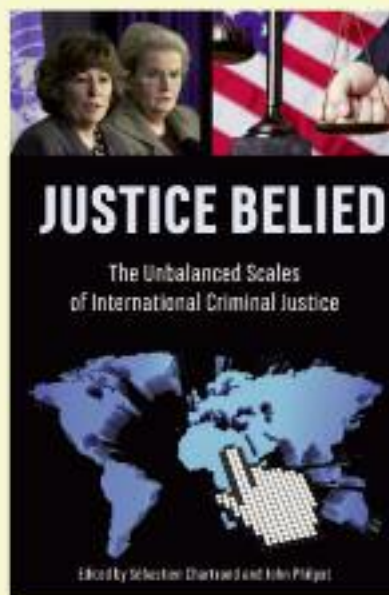
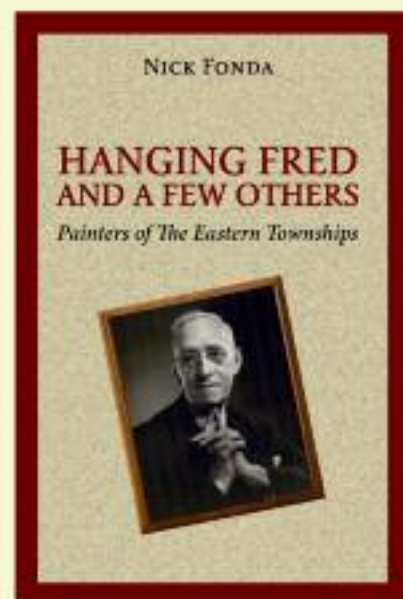
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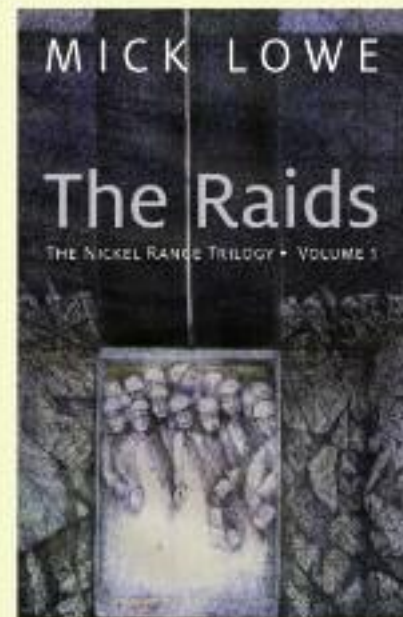
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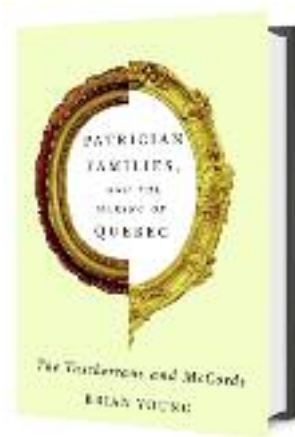
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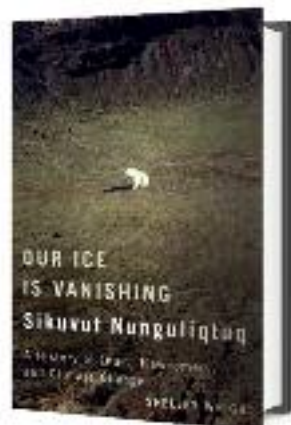
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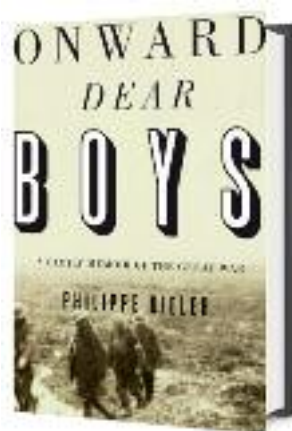


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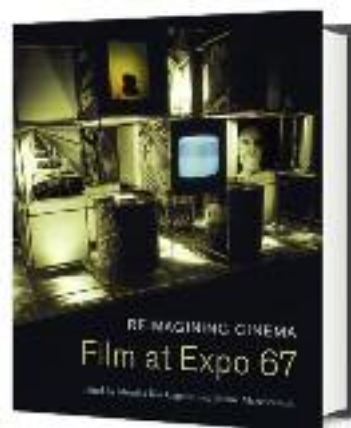


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