HOW TO LIFT A LOCKDOWN

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Hand in hand

Canada's food banks are facing unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, but a critical donation of hand sanitizer from the Labatt Canadian Disaster Relief Program is helping them serve communities in need

BY TINA ANSON MINE

For more than four million Canadians, food insecurity is an everyday reality. When the novel coronavirus arrived in the country in early 2020, providing food to people in need became a monumental struggle.

During the pandemic, Canadian food banks have seen a surge in demand. By late April, many had experienced a 20 percent increase, says Chris Hatch, CEO of Food Banks Canada, a charitable organization that supports agencies across the country working to alleviate food insecurity. "As we see a rise in company closures, layoffs, and Employment Insurance applications, we know that will have a trickle-down effect to food banks," he says. "Over the coming months, we anticipate reaching 50 percent."

Meanwhile, supply levels have waned. "There has been up to a 50 percent drop in food donations in some areas," says Hatch. Food banks also face fierce competition for essentials due to public stockpiling at an already critical point in the year when donations typically slump. Add to this a sharp decline in mission-critical volunteers and staff, who are following public health guidelines around physical distancing. "The combination of challenges hitting food banks all at once is hard to deal with," says Hatch. "It puts tremendous pressure on the front lines."

And there's yet another roadblock: finding enough personal protective equipment (PPE)—such as masks, gloves, and sanitation supplies—to keep volunteers, staff, and clients safe. "Proper hygiene and disinfection is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the risk of infection," says Hatch. While hand washing is one of Health Canada's top recommendations, public health agencies agree that alcohol-based hand sanitizers are a good alternative when soap and water aren't available. But good luck finding any in local pharmacies or supermarkets—many stores have long since sold out.

When Labatt staff heard about the hand sanitizer shortage, they realized they were ideally positioned to make a difference. "This is a national crisis like we haven't seen in our lifetimes, and we feel an obligation to do everything we can to help through our Disaster Relief Program," says Charlie Angelakos, vice-president of legal and corporate affairs at Labatt Breweries of Canada. "Our goal is to get hand sanitizer to those who need it most, especially individuals on the front lines serving their communities."

A response team from Labatt facilities in Vancouver, London, Edmonton, Montreal, and Toronto got to work identifying facilities that could process flammable liquids and earmarking

special brewing tanks and manual bottle fillers for the project. "We had to source and purchase two of the necessary ingredients—hydrogen peroxide and glycerol—as well as 250-millilitre plastic bottles," says Eric Carteciano, brewmaster at the Labatt brewery in London, Ontario. The good news was that the team already had plenty of the most critical ingredient in hand sanitizer: alcohol.

They then collaborated with Health Canada to create a formula that met the strict disinfectant criteria set by the World Health Organization (WHO). The first run of 50,000 bottles contained 80 percent alcohol. Meanwhile, "the safety of our employees was an absolute priority," says Carteciano. During production, the team took the proper precautions for dealing with flammable liquids, and followed physical distancing protocols in the workplace.

A second run brought the Disaster Relief Program's total donations to 100,000 bottles. "With the help and direction of Food Banks Canada and their national network, we were able to distribute hand sanitizer to communities across Canada where it was most needed," says Carteciano. Food banks received 70,000 bottles, and the remaining 30,000 went to essential employees in Labatt's breweries and distribution centres, as well as to frontline workers in restaurants offering takeout and delivery to support physical distancing measures in their communities.

Labatt launched its Canadian Disaster Relief Program in 2012. It has delivered 683,000 cans of clean drinking water to residents and frontline responders across the country—including in Fort McMurray, Alberta, which was hit by devastating wildfires in 2016, and Saint John, New Brunswick, which experienced historic flooding in 2018. This is the program's twelfth deployment, and its first non-water donation.

Angelakos is proud of his team for mobilizing quickly. "Their response really speaks to the values and the core beliefs we have at Labatt," he says.

Hatch confirms that the hand sanitizer donations have made a difference to frontline workers. "Having this product available to them helps provide some peace of mind. We are thankful for Labatt's donation to support frontline food bank workers and volunteers."

One resource that isn't in short supply is hope. "The network of more than 3,000 food banks and community organizations across Canada is resilient," says Hatch. "They are innovative and adapt to the changing needs of their communities—whether they're caused by COVID-19 or something else. As one food banker simply stated, 'If it's impossible, we'll do it anyway. It's what we always do.'" ●

More to give

Various Labatt brands have also been doing their part to help reduce the negative effects of COVID-19.

Budweiser Canada has created the One Team initiative, which has redirected $500,000 of the brand's sports-investment budget to the Canadian Red Cross Fund to help distribute emergency supplies to local health authorities and provide economic and mental-health support services across the country.

Meanwhile, Stella Artois has created the Rally for Restaurants gift card program, which encourages Canadians to buy gift cards to their favourite restaurants and bars. The money raised will either help the venues provide takeout and delivery now, or recover more quickly once physical distancing is over. As an extra incentive, Stella Artois will add $10 to each gift card purchase to aid recovery.

Darcie Bernhardt
Daydreaming About Icefishing
2018
Oil on Canvas
137.1 cm x 121.9 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

Elevating the art community who enrich and inspire us all.

Artist Darcie Bernhardt's first institutional sale was a momentous one:

Image courtesy of Inuit Art Foundation

As the featured artist for the Inuit Art Foundation's presentation at Art Toronto this past fall, Bernhardt's painting *Daydreaming About Icefishing* (2018), was acquired by the RBC Art Collection.

Bernhardt's emerging practice shifted from representational drawing to more abstract imagery during her time at NSCAD, but she maintained a narrative element in her titling—and as a reminder of her source. With *Daydreaming About Icefishing*, "I was thinking about the colour palette of the ice-fishing hooks I would use all the time," she says, reflecting on the process of imagining the work.

"The RBC Art Collection is proud to actively acquire the work of emerging Canadian artists" says Senior Curator, Corrie Jackson. Through the RBC Art Collection, and the RBC Emerging Artists Project, organizations like the Inuit Art Foundation receive support that directly impacts artists. "With the addition of this painting we hope to establish a dialogue with the many works by Canadian artists in the collection and create a platform for the conversations that drive reflection and engagement with our contemporary moment."

Bernhardt reflects on the effect this acquisition has had on her artistic practice moving forward: "I think it's amazing. This is a catapult with all these connections," she says. "I feel very lucky and fortunate to be a part of the collection."

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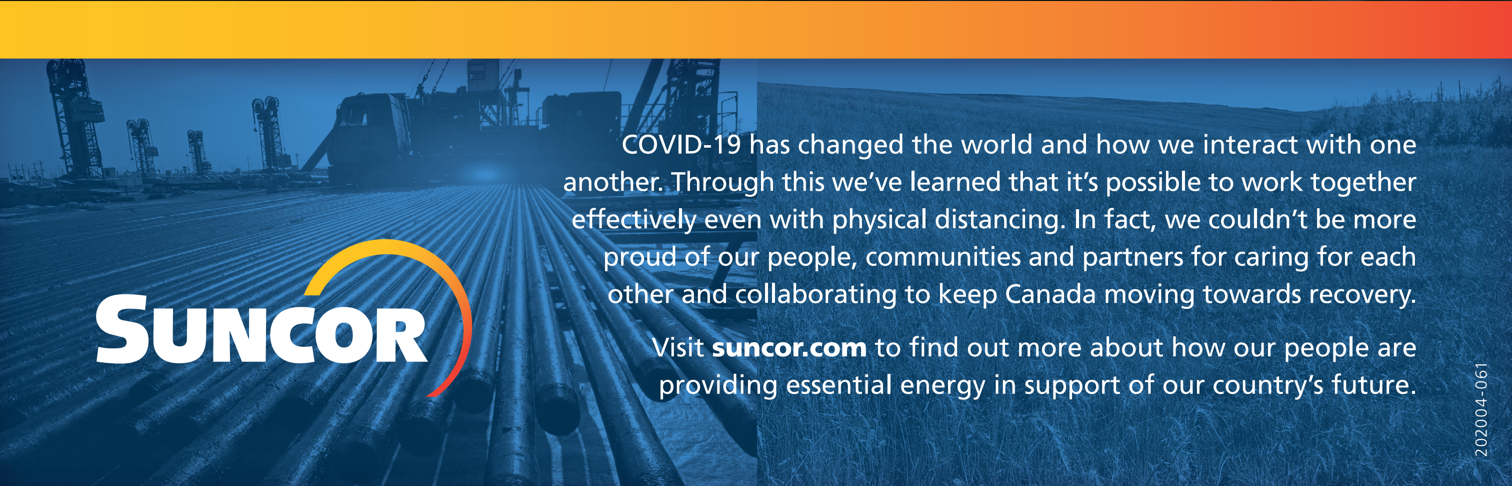

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ON THE COVER
Illustration by Jillian Tamaki

Jillian Tamaki is a cartoonist and illustrator based in Toronto. Her most recent children's book, *My Best Friend*, written by Julie Fogliano, was released in March.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NAOMI HARRIS

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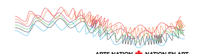

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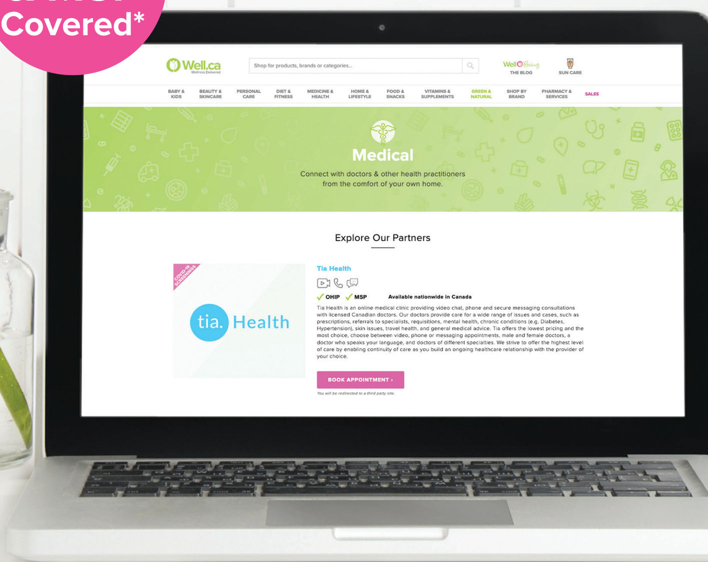

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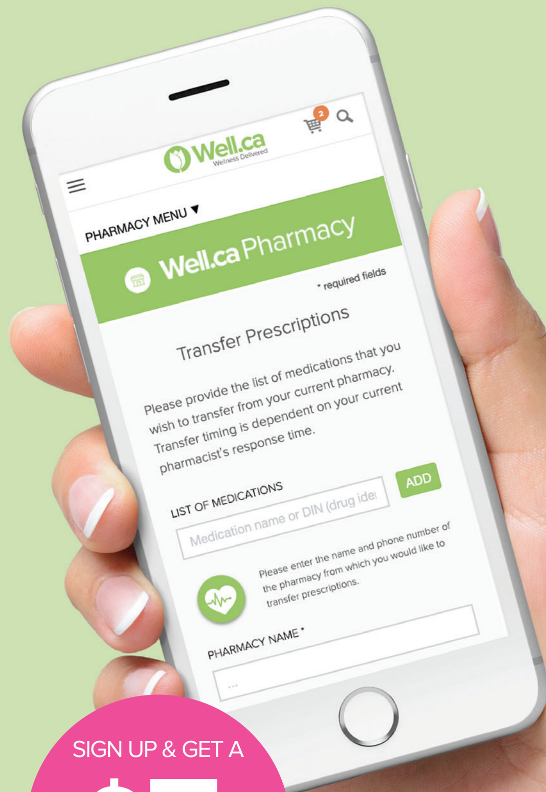

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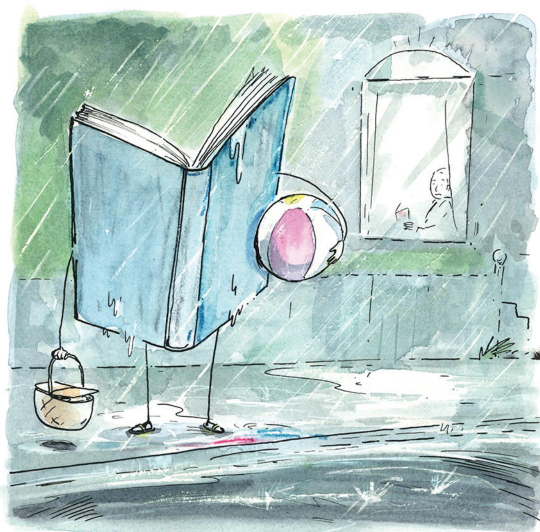
Editor's Letter

The annual Summer Reading issue of The Walrus is traditionally among our most popular. It's one that, ordinarily, subscribers may be found reading on a dock by a lake or on the train. Of course, this year, none of us are quite sure what the summer vacation will bring, and there are fewer chances to pick up any literature at airport lounges or newsstands. The last thing the world needs is another staycation joke, but I will say that the decision to read this in your bathing suit while sipping a "quarantini" on your chaise longue is entirely yours. Instead of normalizing what none of us can realistically say is normal, this issue is dedicated to one thing that remains consistent wherever we are: the love of reading.



Physical distancing and social isolation have given reading a special meaning. It's the way many of us keep up with news about the progression of the pandemic and the fight to control it. Like you, perhaps, I'm also reading for pleasure more than ever—and not just because I'm a captive audience, so to speak, in my own living room. In a world that offers us little autonomy and many unknowns, reading is one thing we can turn to for information, comfort, or escape. But what appeals to us varies according to the moment. Over the past month, I have tried (and failed) to read a number of high-minded literary works set in times of plague. They felt too close to home. Instead, I've read a ton of trashy paperbacks and have revisited beloved novels. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I've read a number of books on people who are setting up or decluttering their homes. Maybe it's the wrong impulse to try to find greater meaning in the crisis; now is the time for the literary equivalent of sweatpants.

With that in mind, we've created this issue of The Walrus in hopes of reflecting the range of what you might want to read right now—pandemic related and otherwise. Danielle Groen's cover story, "How to Lift a Lockdown," addresses the tensions of a society keen to restart some social and economic activity even when to do so the wrong way could worsen things. "Vine Intervention," by London-based contributor Ellen Himelfarb, charts BC's bid to become a contender in the highly competitive global wine industry—and profiles the French expert helping the province's winemakers do it.

The traditional Summer Reading lineup this year includes artists who've responded creatively to COVID-19. In Kevin Chong's short story, "Lottery Poetry," a fortune teller launches Curbside Divinations, a contact-free service in Vancouver. Other contributions reflect the realities of being an artist in this lockdown period. Photographer Naomi Harris spent the summer of 2018 on a canoe trip in Quebec and northern Ontario, following in the footsteps of British painter Frances Anne Hopkins. As she waits for the reopening of the gallery that planned to exhibit the photos, we are delighted to share a sampling of this window into another place and time ("Finding Franny"). And, having just released a novel into a world where live events have been cancelled and bookstores closed, Katrina Onstad faces a conundrum shared by many artists right now: In times of crisis, is art essential? Her essay, "Words' Worth," gives the eternal question about the role of the artist in society a pandemic spin.

Like everyone, the country's creatives are adapting to their times. Here at The Walrus, we're doing the same. It's been heartening to see some innovations come out of this period—including videos by our staff and contributors designed to keep us in touch with you while we're self-isolating (*thewalrus.ca*). We hope something in this issue speaks to what you might need right now, whether that's fact or fiction. The reasons we read may change, but the pull of storytelling endures.

—*Jessica Johnson*

ILLUSTRATION BY GRAHAM ROUMIEU

Contributors' Notes

ASHLEY MACKENZIE
Illustrations for Summer Reading, beginning on p. 41

"As I sketched illustrations for the Summer Reading package, I kept thinking about the pictures I've seen of an empty Toronto during the pandemic, which is very bizarre to me. I lived there for five years. That's not a city that was ever empty. Even if you were out at one in the morning, you could see people out and about and cars all over the place. I wanted to echo a bit of that. The lights in the illustration are everyone's homes—there's still life there."

Ashley Mackenzie is an Edmonton-based artist and illustrator. Her work has appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, *and* Scientific American.

DANIELLE GROEN
"How to Lift a Lockdown," p. 24

"I have never before been in a position where I've had to report on something like the COVID-19 pandemic, which is such a moving target. No expert I talked to pretended they knew what was going to happen. They had to hedge and speculate, and there is something almost reassuring in the fact that we are all waiting to see what this virus will reveal. It's another way that we're in this together."

Danielle Groen is a Toronto-based writer and the winner of the 2018 Allan Slaight Prize for Journalism.

KEVIN CHONG
"Lottery Poetry," p. 50

"I went with my father, who's now deceased, to a fortune teller in Hong Kong over a decade ago. I hadn't been to Hong Kong in twenty years, so I was a full-on tourist. My dad, a skeptic, rolled his eyes when we went to the palm reader. And yet, as the woman was reading my fortune, my dad leaned in and asked her, 'When is he going to get married?' That's my only memory of that visit."

Kevin Chong is the author of six books, including the 2018 novel The Plague. *He lives in Vancouver.*

SARA O'LEARY
"The Ones We Carry With Us," p. 46

"In this short story, which is about memory and truthfulness, the narrator certainly likes lying more than thinking she has been lied to. When I was young, I used to enjoy lying in innocuous situations, like when it was okay to make up a ludicrous excuse for why you were late. It's the accumulation of detail that makes a lie sound true. And that's really what my stories, and this piece in particular, are about."

Sara O'Leary is the author of a number of children's books, including This Is Sadie. *Her debut novel,* The Ghost in the House, *is being released by Doubleday Canada.*

KAYLA CZAGA
"The Peace Lily," p. 52

"I've been working a lot on grief lately and writing about the unexpected death of my father a few years back. Being able to talk about that in poetry, through a flower that I found at a grocery store, opened up a lot of possibilities for me. Since the pandemic started, I've gone back to this poem as an easy entry point to more writing because it can be harder to find meaning when you're not in a community. Focusing on what you do have and what you can try to control, even if it doesn't go anywhere, can be really powerful."

Kayla Czaga is a mentor for online workshops at The Writer's Studio at Simon Fraser University. Dunk Tank, *her latest poetry collection, is a finalist for the 2020 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELENA VILTOVSKAIA

Thank you, Shelley!

After fourteen years, Shelley Ambrose stepped down as executive director of The Walrus in June. Under her leadership, The Walrus has published exceptional journalism and convened essential conversations on the most pressing issues of our time.

Please join us in recognizing Shelley Ambrose for her extraordinary contributions to Canada's conversation.

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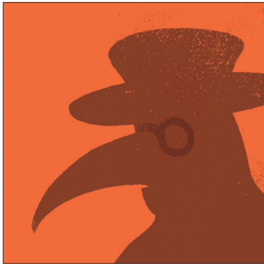

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Kevin Patterson's article ("Anatomy of a Pandemic," May) contextualizes our current crisis in the centuries-long history of pandemics. However, in Canada, it is public health's more recent history that has put us in a precarious position. Over the last decade, government investment in public health infrastructure has been so limited that our ability to respond to the current challenge has been compromised. Public health is about whole systems. It's about not just controlling communicable diseases but establishing favourable conditions across entire communities—whether supporting policies that provide equal access to health resources or nurturing the ecosystems that maintain food security. These vital objectives rarely meet shortsighted budgetary pressures, and this has left us vulnerable in ways beyond those COVID-19 has exposed.

Shannon Turner
Public Health Association of BC
Victoria, BC

Patterson's piece outlines the link between fear and pandemics throughout history. And, while there is once again a pervasive sense of fear among Canadians, one advantage we have is that the COVID-19 pandemic is happening in the digital age. The rapid sharing of information we're seeing now—globally as well as from different levels of government—can give Canadians a sense of determination and allow us to act collectively, with measures such as physical distancing. The emergence of this virus has also brought research to the forefront, and scientific advances, like the use of AI to track the outbreak and the use of genetic sequencing to develop diagnostic tests, have shown that this pandemic can be mitigated. It is now up to the international community to ensure that the researchers behind these efforts are properly resourced.

Steven J. Hoffman and Charu Kaushic
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Ottawa, ON

SAVE THE DATA

I'd like to thank Brian J. Barth for his powerful, in-depth look at what happens to our data when we die ("The Digital Afterlife," May). As a graphic designer who creates digital assets for a living, I now realize that I must change my will to account for these assets, that I need to reconsider how I store and protect my data, and that I should be more careful about what I put on social media. A few years ago, when I rewrote my will, none of this was even on my radar. More lawyers need to discuss these complex topics with their clients, and teachers of all digital media need to cover them in their courses. It's a brave new world, and we are not yet prepared.

Peter French
Kimberley, ON

Tech firms seem to love using privacy concerns as a way to shroud the debate on data access that Barth examines in his article. I agree with the point raised by privacy consultant John Wunderlich: tech companies care more about protecting their digital assets than they do about protecting your right to privacy. Their push against next-of-kin access is about ensuring their commodity—your thoughts, your photos, your online life—is secured for their benefit. Don't be fooled: these same companies seem to have no qualms about selling your data to third parties when it is in their financial interest to do so.

Guy Taylor
Montreal, QC

MAGIC WORDS

Anita Lahey's review connects the poetry of Bronwen Wallace to her work as a feminist activist ("Poetic Justice," May). This kind of biographical and sociopolitical focus is certainly useful in illuminating the life behind the career, but it misses, in part, the magic of Wallace's writing: the transmutation of mundane life into high art. Like James Joyce, Wallace sanctifies the ordinary. In her poem "Common Magic," an old man on a bus sings to a young child, and "his voice is a small boy / turning somersaults in the green / country of his blood." The numinous makes its sudden, inevitable appearance. More than the activist, this is the Wallace I meet when I read her poetry.

Dale Wik
Nanaimo, BC

"The time has come," The Walrus said, "to talk of many things." Send us a letter, email (letters@thewalrus.ca), or tweet, or post on our Facebook page. Comments may be published in any medium and edited for length, clarity, and accuracy.

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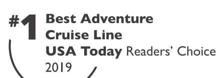

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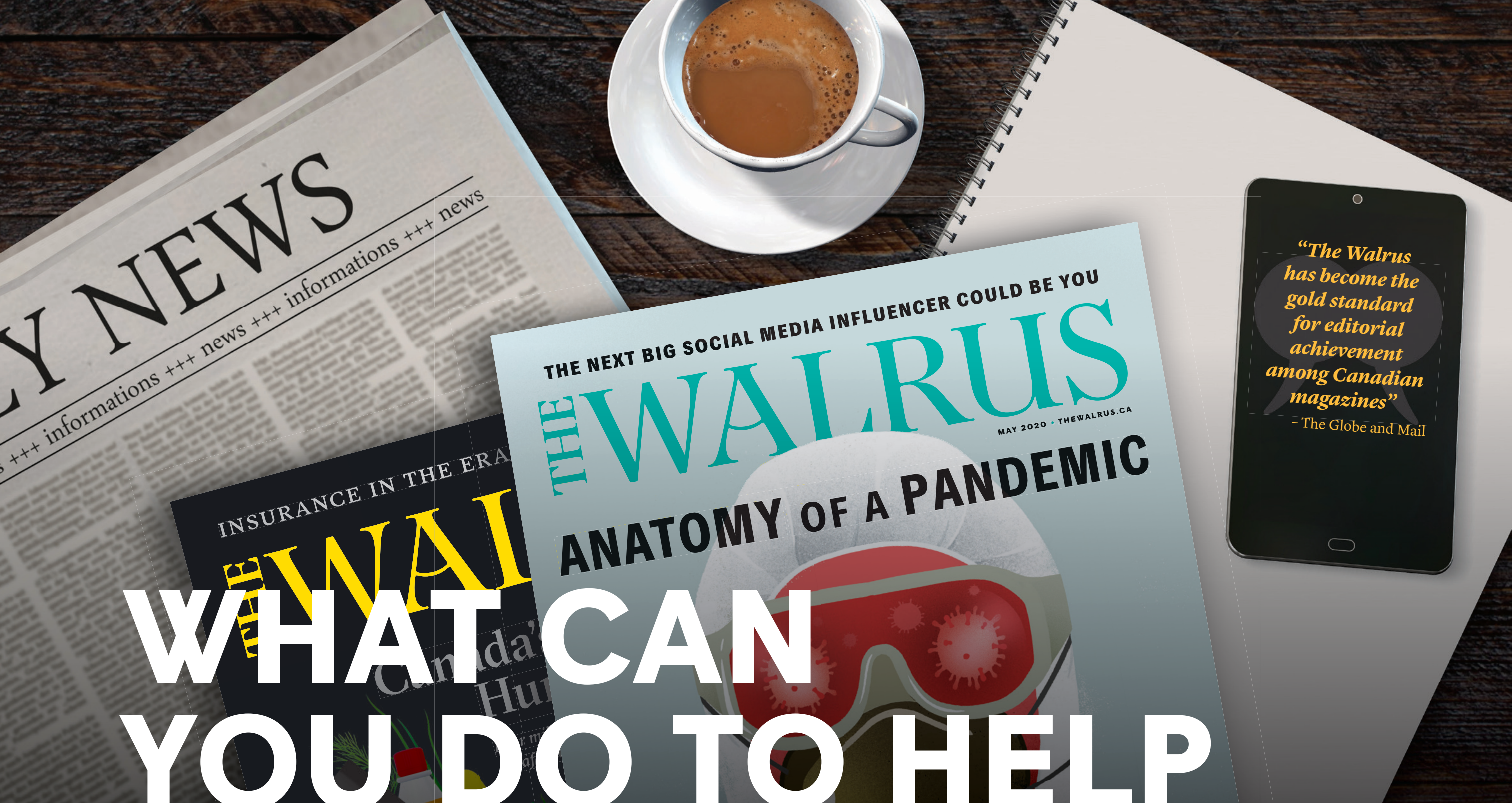

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SCIENCE

How to Make a Solar System

What the world's largest telescope is revealing about the birth of planets

BY VIVIANE FAIRBANK
ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA YAN

ONE OCTOBER DAY a few years ago, astrophysicist Sean Dougherty opened an email to find an astonishing image. On his screen was a sun-like star located about 450 light years away. Rendered in unprecedented detail, the bright yellow circle was surrounded by fuzzy rings darkening from orange to red with gaps interspersed in between. The whole thing looked like a hot element on an electric stove.

What Dougherty was seeing, for the first time in such fine resolution, was evidence of new planets forming.

The image had been created thousands of kilometres away, in Chile, by the largest ground-based telescope array in the world. At the time, the observatory hadn't been fully completed, and astronomers were just starting to grasp the worlds it would open up to them. For Dougherty, who was then working as the director of a small observatory in Kaleden, BC, just south of Okanagan Lake, the image of the star, which is called HL-Tau, was almost too beautiful to believe. It hinted at what the solar system looked like in its infancy, more than four billion years ago. And, because it showed the dark gaps that astronomers had predicted in their calculations, it was a landmark in the history of astronomy.

The telescope in Chile that produced the image is called the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (colloquially referred to as ALMA), and it is actually a collection of sixty-six antennas that are programmed to shift in sync, coordinated to follow an object as it progresses across the sky. Though they work together, the antennas are separate and mobile so that researchers can position them anywhere from 150 metres to 16 kilometres apart; they can be combined in thousands of possible ways to focus on different distances. (The main telescope at Dougherty's Kaleden observatory had seven antennas—tiny by comparison.)

Set in the Atacama Desert of the Chilean Andes, at 5,000 metres above sea level, where the atmosphere is very thin, ALMA's antennas are surrounded by some of the harshest environmental conditions on Earth. The rusted desert is dotted with ancient volcanoes and plagued by bitter winds and dust storms, with temperatures typically below zero. Conducting research here is not a simple endeavour: workers on the site, who move the antennas with tank-like specialized vehicles, are susceptible to UV radiation, and they are required to wear oxygen tanks. Moss colonies and the occasional animal—donkeys, llamas, and alpacas have all been spotted—are otherwise the only signs of nearby life.

The atmospheric clarity and the variability of ALMA's antennas means they can explore the universe to an accuracy smaller than the thickness of a sheet of paper; if the astronomers using the array wanted, they could pick out a golf ball at a distance of fifteen kilometres. ALMA's

ability to view distant objects, such as HL-Tau, that are still in the process of forming, makes it the most powerful tool at humanity's disposal for understanding how our solar system came into existence. And, though he had no idea the day he first looked at that image of a distant star, Dougherty would soon be running the observatory that produced it.

A STAR FORMS from collections of dense gas and dust in the universe. Some molecules collapse under gravity and become part of the star itself; others form what's called a protoplanetary disc: a thin, wide swath of rubble surrounding the star. Over time, within that disc, astronomers had hypothesized, clusters of this rubble would meld together to become sand, pebbles—and eventually, asteroids, comets, and planets quite like our own. That's what the dark circular gaps in the ALMA picture were letting astronomers see and confirm: nascent planets sweeping away debris as they orbited.

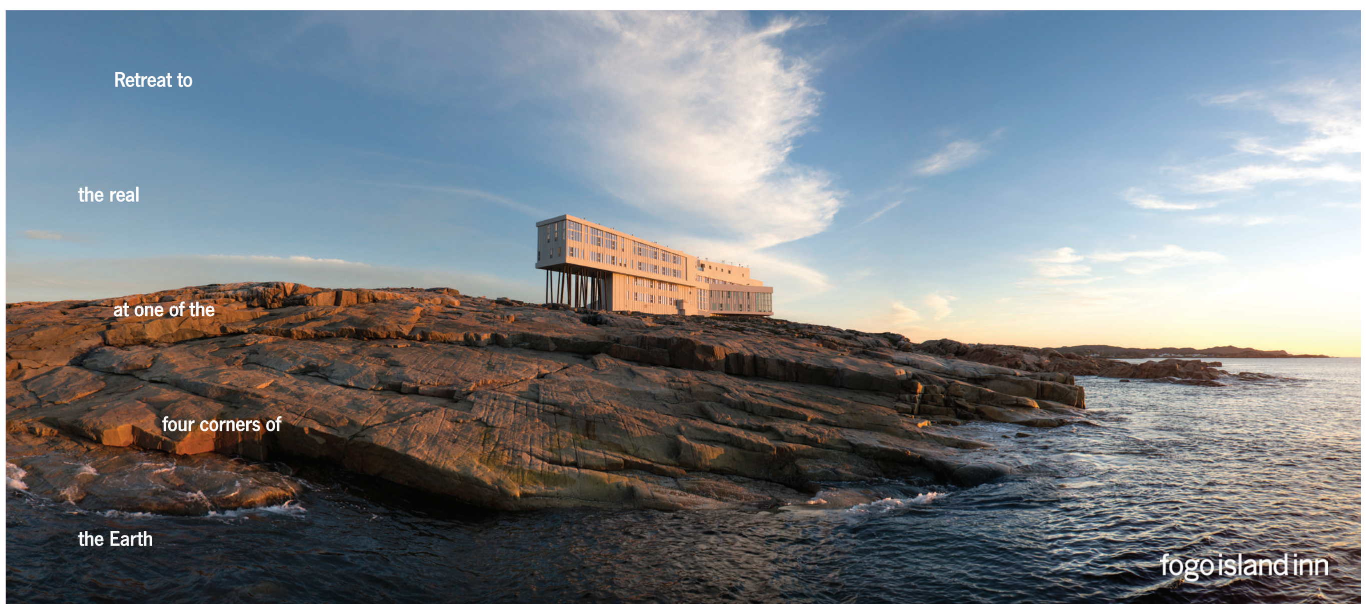
Astronomy is in many ways an exercise in visualization. Primitive astronomical observation, which began with the first telescope more than four centuries ago, was done using mirrors and lenses, zooming in on objects that could be seen with the naked eye. These are what we call optical telescopes. Early optical telescopes effectively extended the reach of our eyes: they enabled a person to see the kinds of things they could see anyway, just from farther away.

But, even with assistance, there is only so much our eyes *can* see. Light exists on a spectrum, from high-frequency gamma rays to low-frequency radio waves, and very little of that range is visible to us regardless of distance or proximity: our eyes aren't built to capture it. Though humans can easily see the sun and other stars, which are extremely hot and so produce many frequencies of light, including some on the visible spectrum, we can't see the majority of the cold, dark universe, with its temperatures near absolute zero and extremely low frequencies. The universe isn't painted for human eyes.

To understand a distant object, astronomers need to pull together information from as much of the light spectrum as possible. So contemporary astronomers build antennas that can capture light waves at different frequencies—including ones our eyes cannot see. ALMA operates between the radio and the infrared, and it is designed to observe electromagnetic waves that are 1,000 times longer than those of visible light. The resulting data is sent via fibre-optic cables to the highest-altitude supercomputer in the world—which, with its 134 million processors, performs 17 quadrillion operations per second to combine and compare the antennas' signals.

Six years after ALMA produced the first detailed image of HL-Tau, breakthroughs have become common. In late 2018, astronomers released high-resolution photos of twenty similar protoplanetary discs—discoveries that showed that large planets, such as Neptune or Saturn, likely form much faster than originally thought. Helen Kirk, a researcher at the Herzberg Astronomy and Astrophysics Research Centre, in Victoria, is interested in star formation. She and her research colleagues are focusing ALMA's antennas on the core of certain molecular clouds, where stars may begin to emerge. "Someone had tried to do similar work before ALMA existed," Kirk says. "They needed to stare at a single core for eight hours, and they couldn't find anything. In ALMA, we get deeper and better images in less than two minutes."

DOUGHERTY, who is now fifty-eight years old, didn't start out with any idea of being an astronomer. After growing up in West Yorkshire, in the UK, in the 1960s and '70s, he studied physics and mathematics at university. In the 1980s, his love for mountainous landscapes led him to western Canada, where he eventually worked on new methods of searching for oil in Alberta. His specialty was reconstructing areas deep underground: with mapping software, he could help locate what he called "geological layers"—hidden troves of oil in the earth. After some time, though, Dougherty wanted more of a balance in his life and decided that



he needed to do something as far removed from making money as possible. So he went back to school and applied his methods to the heavens instead. As a PhD student in astrophysics, Dougherty specialized in radio astronomy, which employs similar methods to the ones he had used for oil exploration. "You're trying to take sparse information," he says, "and pull out the reality of the sky."

One of the primary constraints on astronomy is that only a few places in the world are suitable for hosting telescopes capable of producing major results. Astronomers seek isolated areas at high altitudes, such as mountain summits, where the weather is calm and windless, the air is dry and cool, and the sky is clear of clouds, water vapour, and light pollution. Consequently, many major observatories on the planet are located in Antarctica, Hawaii, and Chile—places with the highest number of cloudless nights and little interference from human civilization. And, because sophisticated telescopes require a huge amount of money and resources, only a handful of these research facilities have ever been built.

This scarcity makes astronomy a highly collaborative discipline, one in which scientists routinely work together internationally. ALMA, say researchers, is the best realization of this cooperative model yet. It was conceived of and created as a collaboration between space agencies in North America, East Asia, and Europe, with Chile as the host country. Christine Wilson, an astronomer at McMaster University, in Hamilton, was the Canadian project scientist with ALMA for fifteen years, helping to coordinate the array's scientific undertakings as it was being built. "It is really the first," says Wilson. "A world observatory... Almost all the major players are partners."

This isn't to suggest that the observatory's launch was entirely smooth. When Dougherty saw HL-Tau, he was working as a new board member for ALMA—the only Canadian member in an international coalition of astronomers governing the new observatory's operations. Though the telescope was already being pointed at the sky, the facility itself was still in the final stage of construction—the last antennas were still being tested. At the time, he says, there were tensions between different stakeholders, and Dougherty saw an opportunity for détente: "This," he told his colleagues in an email, "is exactly why we built ALMA." He spent the next two years heading the observatory's budget committee. "I was seen as the friendly Canadian," he says. "Neutral, happy, always fair—the classic Canadian cliché."

By 2017, the observatory was operational and seeking a new director. Dougherty applied, buoyed by his successful experience running the budget, and he got the job. The next year, Dougherty moved with his family to Chile, leaving behind his small observatory in British Columbia to lead astronomers in the search for humanity's cosmic origins. Of necessity, his job involves a lot more human resources and a lot less science than one might expect. "My day-to-day work is probably not so different to that of many other managers around the world," Dougherty says. One of his primary responsibilities is overseeing a process that involves nearly 200 scientists who decide how to allocate precious research time at the observatory each year. "We get typically 2,000 proposals from around the world," Dougherty says; they accept about 400.

At least once a month, Dougherty dons an oxygen tank and visits his crew in the desert. In his occasional spare time, he goes biking and climbing in the Andes, traversing the volcanic mountains that surround ALMA's antennas. Dougherty loves hiking without an oxygen tank—a choice that ALMA's safety team disapproves of—so he does it far from the observatory, where his colleagues can't see him. Climbing in the Atacama Desert, where the sky is exceptionally clear, is a remarkable experience. "The stars come all the way down to the horizon," Dougherty says. "It feels like you could reach out and touch them." ☼

VIVIANE FAIRBANK is a writer living in Montreal and the associate editor of The Walrus.

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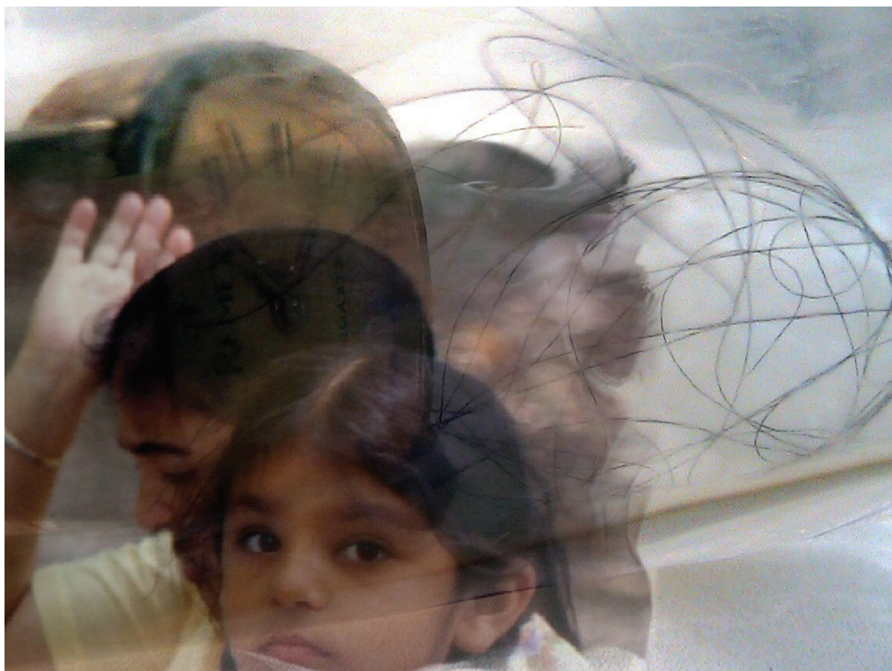
SOCIETY

Forgotten Disaster

Few Canadians commemorate the 1985 Air India bombing, the biggest terror attack in the country's history

BY JORDAN MICHAEL SMITH



LEFT *Tangle*, from Eisha Marjara's 2010 photo series *Remember Me Nought*, layers a childhood photo of the artist and her mother, who died in the bombing, with recovered evidentiary items.

LAST JUNE 23, Chandrima Chakraborty was on Toronto's waterfront, visiting the city's small memorial to Air India Flight 182. On that date in 1985, a bomb, hidden in a checked suitcase, detonated on the Toronto–Montreal–London–Delhi flight, killing all 329 people on-board — the vast majority of them Canadians.

Chakraborty makes a habit of visiting the monuments to the attack that are scattered throughout the country, in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Montreal. On each anniversary, she often runs into a few others, invariably family members of the dead. Chakraborty is always asked the same question: Which of her relatives was killed? When she gives her answer — none — the mourners seem taken aback: they never imagined that someone unconnected to the event would care enough to visit. Thirty-five years on, few Canadians seem to remember the largest terrorist attack in their country's history at all.

The public apathy around Air India began immediately. In the days following the bombing, then prime minister Brian Mulroney phoned his Indian counterpart to express condolences—odd, considering 280 Canadian citizens had been murdered. Demonstrations of grief or solidarity in the country were scarce at the time—later, a 2007 Angus Reid poll found that less than half of respondents considered the attacks a Canadian event. The bombing was followed by a botched police investigation and failed criminal trials. It appears that, for those left behind, there has been no justice, not even the catharsis that can come from a nation mourning in solidarity—as was the case this January, when a Ukraine International Airlines jet was shot down by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, killing 176 people, including eighty-five Canadian citizens and residents.

Remembering the Air India massacre has instead fallen to family and friends. Alongside them is Chakraborty, a forty-six-year-old professor of English and cultural studies at McMaster University. Over the past decade, she has made it her life's work to amass the world's first Air India archive. Housed at McMaster's library, the project features testimony from surviving relatives as well as artifacts from the deceased. Chakraborty's goal is to bear witness and counteract the widespread ignorance concerning the attack. As she says, it's never too late for Air India to become a public memory, a collective tragedy for all Canadians to mourn.

CHAKRABORTY was twelve and living in Kolkata, India, when Flight 182 exploded off the coast of Ireland. "I remember the front page of the newspaper," she recalls, as well as her father's shock.

The attack, plus a second luggage bomb detonated that same day in Tokyo, killing two baggage handlers, was linked to a Sikh separatist movement in India. Radicals with similar beliefs had assassinated prime minister Indira Gandhi one year earlier. The movement had adherents in Vancouver and, before the bombing, there had been warning signs that something was imminent: Canadian intelligence had been monitoring certain extremists in British Columbia—including one of the men later arrested for the attack—and Indian authorities and members of the Sikh community had been warning about potential attacks targeting Air India flights. But the RCMP and the newly formed Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), then engaged in a heated turf war, did not take the threat seriously enough.

The subsequent investigation was a disaster. It came out that CSIS agents had

IMAGE COURTESY OF EISHA MARJARA

been monitoring the extremists (later charged) building and testing explosives. Still, it took fifteen years for the authorities to make three arrests. During one of the trials, it was revealed that agents had erased critical wiretap tapes, severely damaging the Crown's case. The bomb maker eventually pleaded guilty to manslaughter, and in 2005, two other suspects were acquitted. After that, when Air India was discussed in the media, it was often as a massive intelligence failure. The victims were, for the most part, forgotten.

Chakraborty came to Canada as a student about fourteen years after the attack. But it wasn't until 2010, when she was teaching a course at McMaster on her specialty, South Asian masculinity in literature, that she realized how little the attack had permeated the collective consciousness here. That semester, she had decided to assign Anita Rau Badami's novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, which is partly about Indian immigrants in Vancouver at the time of the bombings. Chakraborty was shocked to discover that her students knew nothing of the attack. "I had put [the book] in the course because I assumed it would resonate," she recalls.

The more Chakraborty learned, the more it seemed that the atrocity simply hadn't penetrated mainstream consciousness. There were few television shows or movies about Air India, and though there were some books on terrorism that mentioned the attack, little scholarship existed that delved into its effects on the wider community—just a single 1987 text and a couple of journal articles. It was almost as if academics hadn't considered the aftermath of the country's worst terrorist attack to be worth studying. In contrast, Quebec's 1970 October Crisis launched a small industry of books, journal pieces, and memoirs.

Chakraborty says that the lack of empathy paid to the Air India dead gave her a distinct sense of who is at the centre of the nation. She realized that, to many Canadians, the victims were not seen as neighbours or compatriots—they were just "brown people on a plane." Chakraborty explains that many of the surviving relatives are first-generation immigrants and won't use the word "racism" to describe why so many other Canadians have ignored the attacks. After all, there is pressure to be grateful to their newfound country. But she notes that frustration over bigotry is still there. "It makes them feel like second-class citizens," she says.

Chakraborty felt that she had to do something to educate the public. In 2014, she arranged an interview with a man who was active in the Air India 182 Victims' Families Association. She was not a journalist or historian, but she wanted to know how the bombing and its fallout had reverberated through his life. "He was very keen to talk because he'd been twelve years old when he lost his mom in the Air India bombing, so it was a deep trauma," Chakraborty says.

Through the association, she began contacting other families. Not all agreed to speak at first. For some, the event still felt too recent—"[as if] they had just lost family last night," Chakraborty says. Others were jaded: when justice never arrived, they lost faith in outsiders. "There was a loss at their grief not being recognized by Canadians," she says. But Chakraborty was patient. She returned to the Air India memorials year after year and began curating work about the attack for scholarly journals. In 2017, she coedited the book *Remembering Air India: The Art of Public Mourning*.

Chakraborty has seen how recognition and empathy from society can have lasting effects. In 2016, she hosted a conference with McMaster titled "History, Memory, Grief: A 30th Air India Anniversary Conference." The public event attracted approximately 250 people, and she says it marked the first time that many victims' families gathered together—about thirty in all, from India and across Canada.

Before the event, Chakraborty had invited a man named Anant Anantaraman, whose wife and two daughters had died in the attack. He was adamant that he would not be attending. Rehashing the past was pointless, he told her—his family was dead. He hadn't participated in the Canadian government's official inquiry, which lasted from 2006 to 2010, for the same reason.

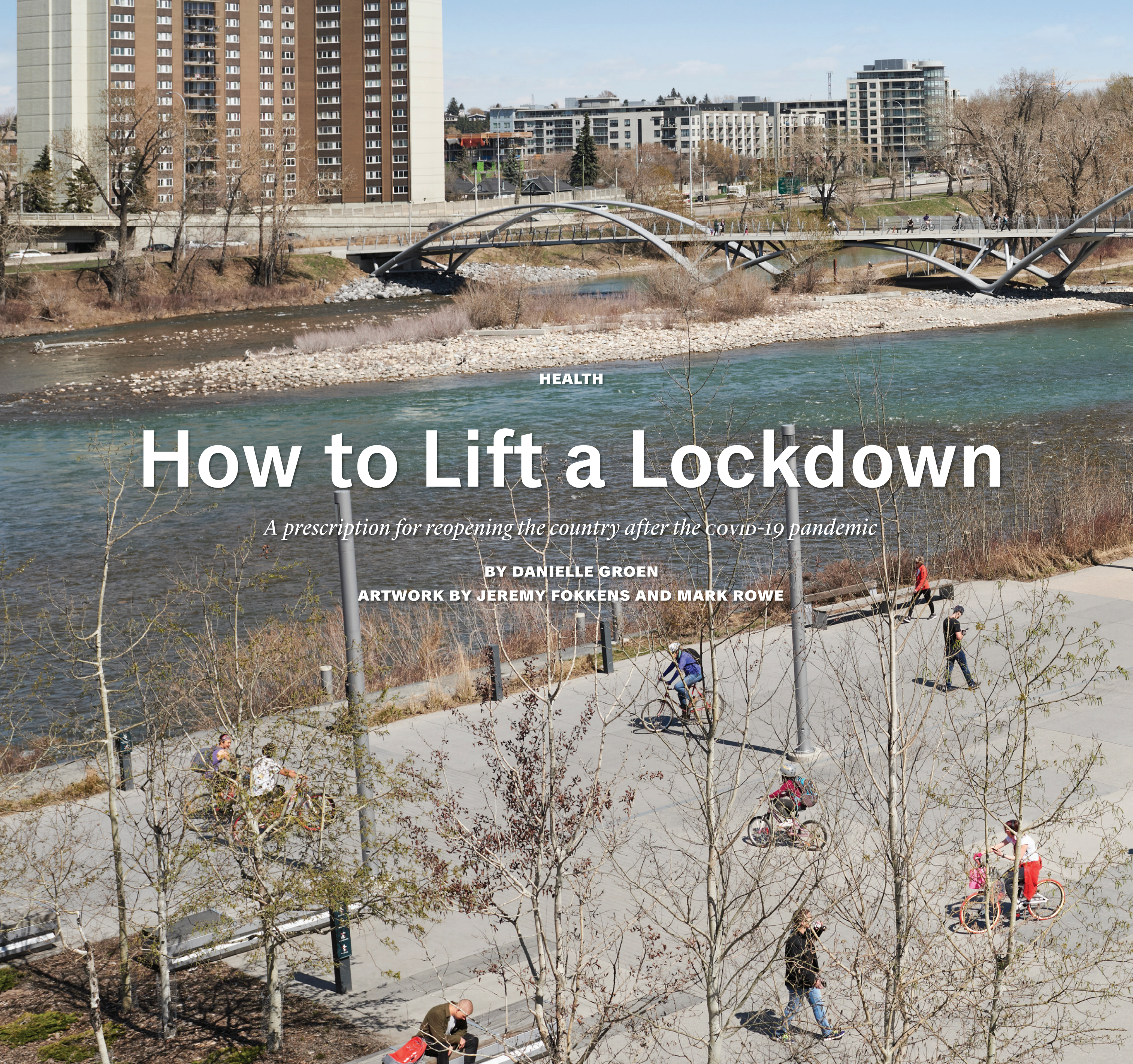
But, over time, Anantaraman reconsidered. That May, he travelled to Hamilton and even spoke after the panel "Air India Family Perspectives." Tearing up, he shared his losses with the crowd. He also told them why he had changed his mind: "When I first came to know about this conference, my immediate reaction was, 'What is this? Do I have to go through this history and subsequent grief?' I decided after some dispassionate thinking that maybe we have to learn from history. And maybe I have a role to play."

Chakraborty has travelled around Canada to interview approximately thirty family members to date. People have been eager to share mementoes with her: poems, newspaper clippings, photographs. At first, Chakraborty wasn't sure what to do with all the material she had gathered. Other tragedies have expansive public spaces devoted to remembrance. New York City's National September 11 Memorial and Museum, for example, has welcomed millions of visitors since opening in 2014 and uses images, artifacts, and multimedia exhibits to educate the public and honour the dead.

Chakraborty felt that some kind of public collection was necessary for Air India. After speaking with a colleague at McMaster, she decided to create a repository herself. Last year, she received a small federal grant to continue her work: when complete, a collection of artifacts she's gathered will be held at McMaster's library and joined by the Air India Digital Archive, allowing all items and interviews to be accessed from anywhere in the world.

"It's not easy to work to do," Chakraborty concedes. "Sometimes I think, Why me? I don't deal well with grief." But she feels an urgent duty to history, as well as to the families she's encountered, to keep collecting memories. As time passes and relatives get older, the risk of having anyone overlooked and forgotten is too great. The Air India Digital Archive will serve as an educational resource, but just as importantly, it will serve as a reminder to families that their grief mattered in 1985 and will always matter. ✈

JORDAN MICHAEL SMITH has written for the *Globe and Mail*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*.



HEALTH

How to Lift a Lockdown

A prescription for reopening the country after the COVID-19 pandemic

BY DANIELLE GROEN
ARTWORK BY JEREMY FOKKENS AND MARK ROWE

AFTER CANADA BEGAN to emerge, in 2003, from the spring outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus—SARS-CoV, first of its name—Ross Upshur thought it might be worthwhile to study public perceptions about quarantines. At the time, he was a family physician at Toronto's Sunnybrook Hospital who, thanks to his background in public health, had found himself in charge of enforcing the quarantine of hundreds of people; all told, more than 25,000 people in the Toronto area were kept isolated for ten-day stretches in their homes. Upshur understood that the practice raised plenty of ethical issues: Was it a proportionate response to the risk? Did restricting individual freedoms prevent a greater harm to society? Could the government ensure that the needs of those in isolation would still be met? But he was also curious: Just how bad did Canadians think it was to violate a quarantine order? Was it like running a stop sign? Was it like roughing someone up? Was it like…*killing them*?

The Canadians surveyed back then gave the question some thought, and a full half of them concluded that, yes, breaking quarantine was the equivalent of manslaughter. An additional 27 percent compared it to felony assault. "We were shocked when we got the results," Upshur says. "We went, 'Holy crow, Canada is really bullish on quarantine!'"

Over a decade later, this bullishness has served the country well in its far more difficult fight against the far more infectious SARS-CoV-2. Canadians have, by a significant majority, been very supportive of the widespread distancing measures required to bring the pandemic under control. Once the entire country had the

distinct experience of sheltering in place for months, though, and once places like Germany and New Zealand declared the first phase of this long pandemic behind them, we turned antsy and started eyeing the exits. Unfortunately, shutting a nation down is considerably easier than opening it back up. Politicians and public health officials are attempting to figure out, in real time, just what it takes to safely emerge from an extended state of mass quarantine—and what exactly life will look like over the twelve or eighteen or twenty-four months that may still stand between us and a vaccine.

Even health economists, who model epidemic-mitigation strategies, are working in uncharted territory with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the illness of COVID-19. "A lot of the pandemic plans around the world are based on influenza, where you don't need to develop a whole new vaccine," so containment measures can be more nuanced, says Beate Sander, Canada research chair in economics of infectious disease. As the H1N1 influenza virus spread in 2009, she helped produce a study that examined the costs of different interventions to curb the disease. "School closures were the wildest scenario we tried," Sander says. "You couldn't even think about the situation now, with COVID-19—it [would have seemed] just so far out there."

The introduction of restrictive measures in Canada seemed—like falling in love or going bankrupt—to happen slowly, then all at once. First travel alerts were issued, then schools were shut down, then states of emergency declared across provinces; within days, aside from the once-weekly grocery trips and two-metre-buffer strolls that turned us all into anxious geometers, those who weren't essential workers just stayed home.

As the lockdown stretched on, however, excitement started to build around schemes that might get us out of it. Politicians, talking heads, news reports, and uncles on Facebook went through exuberant periods of discovery, touting the possibilities of antibody tests or immunity passports or contact-tracing apps that would ping if you had come too close to someone who later tested positive for COVID-19. But the coronavirus pandemic is a complex, hydra-headed creature wreaking considerable havoc—3.3 million people infected worldwide in its first four months—and these strategies don't amount to a silver bullet: some won't work, some shouldn't, and some can't yet.

"It's very difficult to know what to do in this type of situation," Sander says. Comparisons to previous health emergencies offer limited guidance: although SARS hit Toronto hard, it remained relatively contained around the world, while Ebola was not a respiratory illness. "With COVID-19, you have a virus that spreads very easily, often among asymptomatic people, and can still cause quite severe disease," Sander says. "I don't have examples for how to go about relaxing interventions."

"Everyone is looking for the cavalry to come," Upshur says. "We want an approach that's going to get us out of here quickly. But I've worked on pandemic preparedness since the mid-'90s. You learn one thing: respect the virus."

When a new virus invades the human body, the two branches of our immune system set to work. First up is the innate immune system, the foundational protection against pathogens. "It recognizes that something foreign and noxious has entered our bodies, and it turns on all sorts of alarm signals," says Jennifer Gommerman, a professor of immunology at the University of Toronto. The innate immune system generates antiviral proteins called interferons, which, fittingly, interfere with a virus in order to limit its ability to reproduce. While this system is critical, "it's not exactly a special-ops team," she says. "It's more like a barrier that the immune system puts up to deal with the virus." That barrier causes a ton of collateral damage: you get a fever, which helps power up the immune system to fight off infection, and are left feeling lousy.

Over time, this crude defensive effort gives way to the adaptive immune system, a more sophisticated response that emerges once the body has had a chance to learn about a virus and tailor its counterattack. We have a seemingly limitless repertoire of lymphocytes, the subtype of white blood cells that are fine-tuned to respond to the particular protein causing all the chaos. Those lymphocytes produce giant quantities of antibodies, which target a virus's vulnerabilities, prevent it from hijacking host cells, and clear it from our system. The adaptive immune system also has the ability to remember that virus, so if you're reinfected with it, your lymphocytes respond quickly and vigorously, generating immunity to the pathogen. The tricky bit is that, if your body has never seen a virus before—a virus, let's say, like SARS-CoV-2—it can take one to three weeks for those lymphocytes to start working.

Until a vaccine arrives, how can we target our response only where it's needed? How do we trade the sledgehammer for a scalpel?

The innate immune system is a sledgehammer: it assumes that a threat could spread anywhere. Quarantine is a sledgehammer too: it assumes the same about all of us. Most diseases circulating in our population have been around long enough that we've either acquired natural immunity, thanks to the long memory of our adaptive immune systems, or we've developed a vaccine. This way, when an outbreak occurs—as it did last summer with measles in Montreal—it unfolds against a backdrop of some existing immunity, so efforts to contain the spread can be more surgically applied to the individuals and places at risk. But no one had developed any immunity to SARS-CoV-2 because no one had contended with this coronavirus before. "We very rarely see a completely susceptible population," says Ashleigh Tuite, an epidemiologist at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health. "That's why we're all hiding in our houses—because a very good way to keep the infected people away from the susceptible people is to keep everybody away from everybody else."

But, also like the innate immune system, quarantine causes all manner of collateral damage. Nearly 6 million Canadians applied for COVID-19 employment benefits in the first month of the pandemic alone. In some parts of the country, rates of domestic violence have risen as much as 30 percent. Close to 100,000 people had their surgeries cancelled or postponed in order to free up hospital beds for COVID-19 patients, the CBC found. And half of us reported in a recent poll that our mental health had deteriorated as a result of the uncertainty and isolation. So, until a vaccine arrives, how can we build the equivalent of an adaptive immune system for COVID-19—targeting our response only where it's needed instead of everywhere at once? How do we trade the sledgehammer for a scalpel?

During the first wave of the pandemic, Canada, like most countries, followed the spread of COVID-19 by testing people who had symptoms of the illness. That's done through polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, which detect markers of the SARS-CoV-2 genome in the genetic material collected in a nasal swab. PCR tests will be crucial throughout the pandemic to diagnose new cases of COVID-19 because they identify traces of the virus while it is still present in our bodies—they tell us where the virus is now. But those traces

vanish once antibodies have cleared it from our systems, so PCR tests neither reveal where the virus has been nor offer a picture of all the people who've had it.

For that, you need to look at a person's blood serum through a serology test. These tests scour for particular antibodies to SARS-CoV-2; the most refined of them can search specifically for antibodies that meddle with the interaction between the SARS-CoV-2 spikes—the knobby, crown-like proteins that give coronaviruses their name—and receptors on the surfaces of our own cells. Determining how many people have developed antibodies illustrates the progression of SARS-CoV-2 through a population, which is vital for establishing a more nuanced response to the disease.

That's why, as restrictions loosened and focus shifted to managing COVID-19 until the appearance of effective therapies or a vaccine, serological testing gained traction. The UK announced a large-scale study that aimed to test upwards of 20,000 people in its first wave and 300,000 within a year. In the Netherlands, where as many as 10,000 people donate blood each week, serological tests are now part of screenings. At the University of Toronto and Sinai Health, researchers across disciplines have collaborated on a robotic system that can detect the antibody response in up to 10,000 blood samples a day.

In each of these serological surveys, the goal is to monitor the virus's prevalence within communities in order to better understand how immunity might be developing and how deadly COVID-19 is proving to be. For all our talk about the curve, there's an equally important shape in epidemiology: the pyramid of disease severity. Deaths are at the very top of the pyramid, followed by hospitalizations, then ER visits. Below that, there are the people who consult their doctors, and then, at the bottom, those who are sick but never seek medical care. "We see the more severe outcomes: the hospitalizations and the deaths," Tuite says. "We're less good at finding the less severe outcomes, which tend to be much more frequent." Serological testing helps epidemiologists fill in the base of the pyramid so they can use that information to make more precise estimates of how many susceptible people remain.

But what if, policy makers mused, serology testing could benefit not just the community but recovered individuals as well? The idea—floated by countries including Germany, Italy, the UK, and Chile—is that a positive antibody test could locate the lucky citizens whose immunity would allow them to rejoin the workforce and anchor the economy while physical distancing continues. These individuals would qualify for an immunity passport, some sort of government-issued documentation that would permit them to leave the house, head into the office, or shop for groceries with zero concern about catching the illness.

In Canada, Kumanan Wilson, a specialist in general internal medicine at The Ottawa Hospital, has been investigating the ways proof of immunity might work here. Eight years ago, Wilson and his colleagues created the mobile national immunization app CANImmunize, and now he is collaborating with Canada Health Infoway, a federally funded nonprofit, to determine how best to issue digital certificates to people who are no longer susceptible to COVID-19. "It would be almost like a boarding pass, with a scannable bar code that says you have the requisite lab results that identify you as immune," Wilson says. That certificate could then be scanned before entry is granted to sports arenas, airports, or large gatherings. "When Trudeau says twelve to eighteen months for a vaccine, people are looking to whether there's anything we can do before then," Wilson says. "It's a bit Orwellian—it's not an ideal solution. But we're not living in an ideal situation now."

IN EARLY MAY, Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche racked up international headlines when it revealed details of its SARS-CoV-2 serology test—one far more promising than any yet on the market. Germany struck a deal to purchase 3 million of the tests that month and 5 million for every month that followed. The US Food and Drug Administration also cleared the test for emergency use. (Health Canada had not, by that time, approved the sale of any serology test.)

There are two ways to measure the accuracy of a serology test, and on both counts, Roche's numbers are unmatched. For its sensitivity—how well the test identifies the people who have had SARS-CoV-2 and developed antibodies to it—Roche says it works 100 percent of the time. That means every positive is a true positive; there are no false negatives, where you have the antibodies but the test says you don't. Still, says Brenda Fine, an instructor in the mathematics department at the British Columbia Institute of Technology, "that's the kind of error we don't care as much about. Someone is safe to go out, but we don't send them."

Then there's the specificity of the test: how well it rules out the people who have not developed the requisite antibodies. Those are the true negatives. Roche claims a specificity of 99.8 percent, which means that 0.2 percent of the time, the test will give a false positive. "That's the dangerous mistake," Fine says. "Those are the people who, according to the test, are good to go to work, to a play, to a party, when they're not safe at all."

A 0.2 percent error rate sounds pretty good. But the extent of that mistake hinges on the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 in a population: how many people have or have had the disease. The lower the prevalence, the higher the number of false positives. In a community of 1 million people, for example, with a prevalence of 50 percent, 500,000 people would still be susceptible to the virus. Roche's error rate means that 1,000 of them would get a false positive. When prevalence is 10 percent and 900,000 people are susceptible, 1,800 of them would be incorrectly told they have antibodies. When prevalence is 1 percent, that number rises to 1,980.

The greater the population, the worse the consequences. In a country of 40 million, with a prevalence of 1 percent, nearly 80,000 people would be under the mistaken impression that they were safe from COVID-19. That's why, however much we might all wish otherwise,

serological tests can't give any single person a clean bill of health or enable them to blithely bypass distancing protocols. The better the group fares—the lower the prevalence of the illness in the population—the less we're in a position to know how any individual within the group will do.

So just how prevalent is this virus? The World Health Organization's best guess for the global population is 2 or 3 percent. In Canada, we haven't a clue. "Because the PCR testing was so poorly done, especially at the beginning, there are so many people who were asymptomatic and could have transmitted it," says Anne-Claude Gingras, a senior investigator at Sinai Health's Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute. "We don't know if we're dealing with a prevalence of 0.1 percent or 1 percent or 10 percent." Those people given false positives aren't just risking their own health by rejoining the outside world—they're well positioned to then spread the virus to others, causing new community outbreaks. The same thing that makes serological testing so crucial for a community makes it so risky for any one user to rely on its results. We're still completely in the dark.

What's more, prevalence is going to vary region by region, city by city: Canada might well have an average national immunity of 10 percent, but those rates will look very different in Vancouver, which was initially hit hard by the virus, and in Charlottetown, where cases are low. "At this stage, I don't know why we're talking about national policy," Fine says. "That might be useful if we were thinking about flying across the country, but we're still at the stage where we're wondering if we walk to the store a kilometre away. This is something for cities to decide one at a time." Upshur, now an epidemiologist at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, agrees: "Most of the countries that have managed the pandemic have been islands or small populations," he says. "Canada is so huge that this is going to have to be done on a local level."

Even if we did manage to devise an absolutely iron-clad serology test, one that never returned false positives at all, it still wouldn't be a perfect solution—because scientists don't yet have any clear sense of how natural immunity to SARS-CoV-2 works or how long it will last. "The immunity of respiratory viruses is extremely tricky," Upshur says. "They mutate quickly and, for some reason, unlike measles or mumps, we don't get this permanent, enduring immunity." Immunity could perhaps last two years, as with the first SARS; it could also be more like six months. We won't know until we have the benefit of two, three, five years' hindsight. "It's really nice to think that serology is going to come to the rescue, but I'm not convinced it's going to be the tool people think it is at the current time," Upshur says. As for immunity certificates? There, he's less inclined to hedge. "The idea that we would have anything like an immunity passport is science fiction."

"I've worked on pandemic preparedness since the mid-'90s. You learn one thing: respect the virus."

As the Great Plague advanced through seventeenth-century London, red-painted crosses sprouted on sealed wooden doors: the stamp of the infected. In 1940s Canada, yellow quarantine signs took their place, alerting passersby to the polio or whooping cough or diphtheria that lurked inside. Immunity certificates reverse the indicator—here, it's the healthy who are marked. Maybe that's enough to mean the idea "actually might have some merit, under certain circumstances," as US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director Anthony Fauci said in April. As politicians (both the elected and armchair kind) have argued, even in the absence of a foolproof test or a better understanding of the illness, this lockdown can't continue indefinitely. Trade-offs need to be made: a little more COVID-19, a little less economic pain. Does that tip the balance in favour of these passports?

Not when the effect would still be to divide families, workplaces, communities, and the country into two castes: the immune and the vulnerable. "You've introduced an 'us' and a 'them'—*you're* a vector of danger, *you* are to be feared, whereas *I* am the good, clean one," says Françoise Baylis, a professor of bioethics at Dalhousie University. "That's deeply problematic. It's a bifurcation of the world." It creates enormous ethical and social concerns.

To begin, it means that the prize for everyone who has faithfully obeyed the rules and avoided unnecessary contact—and therefore the illness—is that they must keep sheltering in place for some unknown period of time. "You went home from work, you took the financial hit, and now the government is setting a precedent that says, 'Well, we're glad you followed the rules, but you don't get to go back to work because you haven't been infected and you haven't survived it,'" Baylis says. That also makes it difficult for public officials to come back at the outset of a new wave of cases and ask citizens to quarantine again. "Why would you do that the second time around? Why would you believe that you should?"

In a world where immunity is rewarded, there is every likelihood that some people would start to take chances with COVID-19 not out of carelessness or frustration but as a conscious choice to contract it—that they would endanger their own health because they've been punished for their efforts to preserve it. "There are people who are particularly desperate to get back to work," Baylis says. "If this is the only way, haven't you created an incentive for them to get themselves infected?"

There's also the not-inconsiderable dilemma of how a system like this would be designed and enforced. "Are you talking fines? Are you talking imprisonment? Are you going to spot-check? Is this going to be a visible or invisible system?" she asks.

And how would you map out the deployment of the antibody test itself? Who, after essential health care workers and the especially vulnerable, would have first crack at them? How long would it take to roll something like this out? There's no quick way to test nearly 40 million people, and when that test determines freedom of movement, the stakes are enormous. "We already know that there are all kinds of discrimination built into many of our public systems," Baylis says. (Recall that, in March, the entire roster of the Brooklyn Nets was checked for coronavirus as symptomatic New Yorkers clamoured for testing.) "So the idea that it won't be the wealthy, the powerful, and the elite getting access to serological tests—that's just not the case."

AND YET, a return to some form of life is already underway. Since immunity certificates and at-home antibody tests can't structure that return, what should? The answer is a three-part strategy that will shape much of our short- and medium-term future: test, track, isolate.

It demands, for starters, widespread testing—far more widespread than we have right now. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, said that, before any restrictions could be loosened, provinces and territories would need to be running 60,000 PCR tests a day, more than twice as many as they were able to in early May. It is not possible to fight this pandemic without testing both those who are already ill and the so-called silent spreaders, who can transmit the virus before symptoms kick in. It looks increasingly like there are a lot of them out there. After testing 6 percent of Iceland's population—both those who felt sick and those who felt fine—researchers found that 43 percent of the people who tested positive were asymptomatic at the time.

Testing is the backbone of any country's response to this pandemic. However, once a person receives a positive diagnosis for SARS-CoV-2 and is safely placed in isolation—whether that's in their own home, separate from other family members, or in a medical facility or designated recovery site—contact tracers must go to work. These trained public health employees feature prominently in the response to any communicable disease because they're essential to identifying and then breaking chains of transmission; now, that means working with someone infected with COVID-19 to pinpoint everyone they were exposed to in the forty-eight hours before the onset of their symptoms. Those contacts are then called by tracers and told they must also isolate at home or monitor for symptoms. It's time-consuming gumshoe work: in normal circumstances, it takes eight to ten people working for about twelve hours to complete one case, says Richelle Schindler of Alberta Health Services. (When robust physical distancing measures are in place, she says, one investigator can wrap up an average case in about nine hours.)

Unsurprisingly, many people in the tech industry are eager to disrupt this labour-intensive work and have offered new ways to expedite the process. Digital contact-tracing harnesses Bluetooth-equipped smartphones to detect when two people have been in close proximity.

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Once a person tests positive for SARS-CoV-2, they report their diagnosis to a purpose-built app, which notifies close contacts through that same app, prompting them to isolate or get tested. In April, Google and Apple announced a rare collaboration to produce an opt-in contact-tracing platform that would work on their respective Android and iOS phones—without tracking user locations or necessitating any identifying data.

Other countries are test-driving their own approaches to digital tracing. When someone in South Korea tests positive, for example, health authorities issue regional text messages, alerting residents to a website that omits the person's name but does include details about their age range, gender, and the various places they've recently visited. New Zealand is reportedly considering passing out "Covid Cards," a system that swaps a smartphone for something the size of a credit card, with Bluetooth capability and a battery life of roughly a year. In Quebec, deep-learning pioneer Yoshua Bengio proposed an app that would calculate your COVID-19 risk score depending on where you've been and who you've encountered.

Some provinces, including Alberta, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador, have launched or are close to launching their own voluntary contact-tracing apps. But these digital tools raise serious questions about abuses of power, says Sean McDonald, a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation. "Often, in the tech community, there's the idea that responsibility ends at the product, not at the impact. I think people are asking themselves, 'Did I produce good location data?' and not, 'Am I shouting *fire* in a movie theatre with no exits?'" Can it be possible for these apps to link back to an individual's identity? Will they be marshalled for discrimination? Is there a risk of what the American Civil Liberties Union called "surveillance creep" once the pandemic has passed? "If you're inventing it now," McDonald says, "chances are it's not ready."

Even setting those questions aside, contact-tracing apps run the very real risk of simply being ineffective. Unlike human contact tracers, apps don't seem to be able to distinguish between two strangers who are in so-called contact as they pass each other in a park and two family members living in the same house. They also don't appear to distinguish between open and closed space: since Bluetooth signals can sometimes pass through walls, the apps will not know if people have been separated by car doors or are in entirely different apartments. In Israel, an app used by the security agency Shin Bet sent a woman into quarantine after it flagged contact with her infected partner. She had been waving at him from outside the building.

To achieve what they promise, contact-tracing apps also need considerable uptake among prospective users: researchers at Stanford and the University of Waterloo estimated that 50 to 70 percent of a population would have to sign up. That's a problem when half the world doesn't own a smartphone. In countries where their use is pervasive, researchers at the University of Oxford found that 80 percent of smartphone owners would need to install the app before it could be effective.

Technology isn't anathema to human contact tracers: they draw on texts, location history, digital calendars, and transaction records to find the people who've entered an infected person's orbit. "But technology doesn't replace that clinical judgment of how close is too close, how long did people actually spend together, and what constitutes the onset of a symptom," says Schindler, who, in the first month of the pandemic, hired roughly 400 medical students, residents, and recently retired health care providers to help Alberta Health Services with this work.

Human tracers don't need to capture every contact an infected person has had in order to be effective, she adds. The government of Ontario, for example, says it must reach about 90 percent of new COVID-19 contacts within twenty-four hours as part of its plan to reopen the economy. It's hard to pin an exact number on how many contact tracers we need: California, which has a similar population to Canada, plans to hire and train 10,000 tracers to do the job, though much depends on how well we've observed physical-distancing measures. But, as those measures relax and as more asymptomatic people are able to be tested and diagnosed, contact tracers will continue to be essential to containing community spread. The federal government launched a national recruitment campaign in early April to help with case tracking. By the time applications closed a few weeks later, the CBC reported, nearly 58,000 people had offered to take part.

AS RON KLAIN, former president Barack Obama's Ebola czar, has said, the virus is more patient than people are. Places like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, heralded in March as models for containment, had to contend a month later with a new wave of cases, leading to stricter physical-distancing measures and additional shutdowns. The mass quarantine in Wuhan, China, where the novel coronavirus was first detected, was only relaxed after seventy-six days—and even then, the more modest lockdown that followed looked a lot like Canada's initial approach, with sweeping residential restrictions, school closures, and restaurants open for deliveries only.

The process of reopening will, by necessity, continue to be painstaking and slow. The challenge for policy makers and politicians is that, because we shut a bunch of things down at once, it's hard to know which measures have worked best and which ones can be walked back. "We're flying blind right now," says Fabian Lange, a professor of economics at McGill University. "There are lots and lots of variables that we have very little idea about, both epidemiologically and in terms of the economy."

Each province has undertaken its own risk-benefit approach to relaxing some of the physical-distancing measures in a targeted way. "It seems like younger individuals are not getting into as much medical trouble, even if they've been exposed," says epidemiologist John McLaughlin, who retired last year as the chief science officer for Public Health

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Ontario. That notion informed Quebec premier François Legault's push to reopen smaller daycares and elementary schools in the middle of May, even over the objections of parents. New Brunswick, which had called off its school year completely more than a month earlier, allowed two households to form a shared bubble, permitting some social interaction while minimizing the risk of spreading the disease. Manitoba kept its schools closed but let hair salons, restaurant patios, and museums reopen at reduced capacity, while Ontario sent seasonal businesses like garden centres to the front of the line. Ontario's road map for recovery also said sectors could reopen if they modified operations to meet public health requirements. Though, as University of British Columbia Sauder School of Business professor Harish Krishnan notes, if everyone pegs plexiglass sneeze guards as a great way to separate customers at a restaurant, "we're going to see a bottleneck of plexiglass in the global supply chain emerge very quickly."

Every change made to the interventions requires being incredibly responsive to the first sign of danger: greater numbers of still-susceptible people out in the world result in rising COVID-19 cases. When Quebec announced it would reopen schools, the province's director of public health, Horacio Arruda, promised to change course if hospitals became too crowded or too many people died. Ontario likewise insists a surge in cases will result in tightened measures, as do Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Upshur compares easing restrictions to sparks shooting off a campfire: "As soon as one of those sparks gets loose onto a pine needle lying around, it's tinder for another fire." Ease too many measures too quickly and the tinder ignites—and we're back to contending with an out-of-control pandemic.

That's why epidemiologist Ashleigh Tuite and her colleagues at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health proposed a strategy they call dynamic physical distancing, which turns the potential for freshly tightened measures into part of the actual long-term plan. "You look at what's happening in your ICUs and, based on their capacity, you then dial your interventions up and down," she explains. They chose ICU capacity because it is, right now, a barometer Canada has a good sense of; with more consistent and comprehensive testing, that barometer could instead be the virus's reproduction number, which is the average number of new cases one infected person generates. Either way, the approach is the same: as long as the virus can be managed, distancing measures can be eased, but the moment that new cases begin to reapproach that threshold, stricter interventions are turned back on. "Cases go up a bit, we react, they go down, up and down," Tuite says. It's another kind of shape we might soon get to know well. Instead of the curve—one line that rises, flattens, and eventually declines—this model looks more like an ocean wave, rising and falling as we toggle between bouts of distancing that respond to new outbreaks.

In Tuite's models, flattening the curve so it stays at a level that does not overwhelm our health care system requires at least a year of physical-distancing vigilance. "I definitely think there is going to be fatigue in terms of twelve to eighteen months of complete shutdown," she says. On the other hand, dynamic physical distancing—call it riding the wave—"allows us to come up for air once in a while, and that's important." A week after Tuite's study was published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, a Harvard study in *Science* magazine proposed similarly intermittent phases of distancing directed by the prevalence of outbreaks and the capacity of health care systems in their respective communities. The idea is now guiding our national approach: in a joint statement with the premiers, Justin Trudeau said that public health measures should be flexible and proportionate, relaxed and possibly reintroduced based on the level of threat. That could also help ease apprehensive citizens back into the world, since an Angus Reid poll found that only 11 percent of Canadians say they'd resume their former routines as soon as restrictions lifted. Everyone else would wait and see.

Okay, then: How long would we need to ride this wave? "We ran this model for two years under the hopefully-not-overly-optimistic idea that, in two years, we'll have a vaccine," Tuite says. The Harvard researchers reached that same conclusion: to avoid exceeding critical-care capacity, intermittent physical-distancing measures would be required until 2022.

Upshur worries that developing a safe, effective vaccine in eighteen or twenty-four months "would be breaking land-speed records." McLaughlin is more optimistic. "Compared to any other public health challenge in the past, the vaccine will come fairly soon, I believe," he says. "It's fascinating to see what happens when nations and disciplines of science work together." In late April, the World Health Organization convened heads of government, global health experts, and philanthropists in a pledge to work together on the development and production of tests, treatments, and a vaccine; in early May, Trudeau and other world leaders promised to raise nearly $12 billion for the cause. "We could get clinical trials starting in six months, maybe sooner," McLaughlin says, "and, if there's evidence of safety and efficacy within a year, that's fantastic. That is a tremendous accomplishment."

But we need to accept that we aren't anywhere near the end of this pandemic. Until the vaccine arrives, and unless SARS-CoV-2 mutates into a more benign virus, we must make these small, careful adjustments as we emerge tentatively from our lockdown and settle into the next phase. And that reality brings with it the distinct possibility that we'll engage in some version of physical distancing again, and again, then again. "The virus doesn't care about our dreams and aspirations," Upshur says. "You can't reason with a virus to go away." So, for now—and maybe for next year too—we should take our cues from the virus itself. We're going to have to be patient.

DANIELLE GROEN is a Toronto-based writer and the winner of the 2018 Allan Slaight Prize for Journalism.

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CANADA'S CONVERSATION

BUSINESS

Vine Intervention

BC's bid to become the next great wine region

BY ELLEN HIMELFARB
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KYLE METCALF

On a drizzly November evening, the Palais de la Bourse shines like gold, its Ionic pillars lit from below, its cupola poking through the mist. The palace, built at the centre of Bordeaux's eighteenth-century riverfront and bearing a striking resemblance to Paris's Place Vendôme, is an apt venue for a gathering of winemakers. When Jacques-Olivier Pesme strides into the banquet hall, his trench coat the same honey hue as the antique stone, he looks right at home.

He scans the room. "Let's start with Mendoza."

The wine-tasting party is a hot ticket at the Great Wine Capitals conference, an annual gathering of the world's ten most powerful wine-producing regions. And on this, the twentieth anniversary of the Great Wine Capitals Global Network, Pesme, fifty-two, is a marquee name, headlining talks and generally holding court to more than 100 high-octane delegates who have flown in from five continents. Pesme's expertise in tourism, brand identity, and global positioning has earned him a reputation as a sort of wine whisperer. It's also led him to his current position at the University of British Columbia, where he has the unusual academic mandate of supporting the development of the province's wine industry at home and abroad. The goal is that, one day, the Okanagan Valley will be as well-known as the Loire.

Pesme seems less egghead than rock star this evening—it takes us ten minutes to advance from the coat check to the ballroom's threshold, so steady is the barrage of air kisses in his direction. I leave him to the crowd and escort myself around the room, sipping Spanish Riojas, Napa Cabernets, Bordeaux Supérieurs. Finally, I arrive at Argentina's Mendoza.

"My friend told me I should have started here," I say to the man holding the bottle.

"Who's your friend?" he asks. I give Pesme's name.

The man informs me that my friend is a genius. I chuckle politely. But he's not joking: "Here he comes now."

Pesme walks toward us with his million-euro smile, and the two of them hug.

The Argentine pours glasses of Malbec. Pesme swirls his around as he enthuses. "Wine is like music. Everyone has their own taste, even though you have to admit that Beethoven is objectively beautiful."

He clarifies. Just as there are fantastic wines all over the planet, every region has a distinctiveness that endears it to people on an emotional level. Like a fragrance, a certain wine can remind you of a particular time or event or lover. Or it could simply be a stand-in for an aspiration—a geographical ideal. Pesme says that Mendoza wines—produced since Spanish colonization but only exported widely since the late 1990s—are a prime example of how this sort of intimate relationship can be forged quickly. He explains that the region's success can be credited to the promotional body Wines of Argentina as much as to the wine itself. It comes down to the branding, the coherent message that each sip offers. When a person buys a Mendoza wine, no matter what winery is listed on the label, they are buying the immense landscape, the local cuisine, the character of its people, all bottled up together.

I look around the room at the ten international tasting bars, each with a toqued chef finessing foie gras and mini soufflés, and can't help but question Pesme's grand scheme for BC. Good marketing is one thing, but wine is a business synonymous with historical pageantry, stuffy hierarchies, and inscrutable assessments. Could a Canadian city really belong here, alongside Bilbao, Porto, and Bordeaux? Or are we destined to have oenophiles relegate us into the lower leagues, considered alongside Austria, Greece, and China?

Pesme, for one, is optimistic. "Canada is not ready…yet. But it has huge potential." If anyone can help elevate the province, it's him. He reckons that, if British Columbia takes a few right steps now, in a few years, it could become the new Mendoza.

Before her death, in 2014, Baroness Philippine Mathilde Camille de Rothschild, of the famous Château Mouton Rothschild vineyard, near Bordeaux, was once quoted in the *Economist* sharing the secret to her success. "Wine-making is really quite a simple business," she said wryly. "Only the first 200 years are difficult."

Bordeaux has more than 6,000 wine estates, with some vineyards dating back to the Romans. In Ontario—Canada's biggest wine producer by acreage, volume, and revenue—wineries began to establish themselves about 150 years ago. BC wine emerged nearly seventy years after that. The west-coast province's temperate climate, arid valleys, and fertile soils had proven conducive to grape growing, but according to the *Washington Post*, it wasn't until the late 1980s that entrepreneurs with ample time and money migrated to the lands around Lake Okanagan en masse to take up viniculture.

In certain lights, BC's business, some three decades on, seems robust. The province has more than 280 wineries, sales have risen more than twentyfold in as many years, and its vineyards welcome over a million visitors annually. Producers make more than 25 million litres each year, according to the BC Wine Institute—mostly European varieties like Pinot, Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet. (Growers ripped out and replaced the region's indigenous grapevines to better compete around the world.) Today, Okanagan's Mission Hill is known internationally for its award-winning VQA Chardonnays; Nk'Mip Cellars, the first Indigenous-owned winery on the continent, has thrice been feted with the Chardonnay du Monde accolade. BC's wine industry is now worth some $2.8 billion.

Yet the competition, too, has exploded. Pesme says that, in the 1980s, only about thirty-five countries could seriously

call themselves wine producers. Today, about twice as many nations have skin in the game. Worldwide sales are expected to top $423 billion (US) by the end of 2023, according to Zion Market Research. Meanwhile, Canadians are still learning how to drink local: the country is estimated to be the world's fifth largest wine importer, and according to the BC Wine Institute, the province still brings in about half the wine its population drinks. As for exports, only a small fraction of BC's wine is sent abroad, mostly to China, Taiwan, and Japan.

Now consider its close-by competitor, California. The state earns more than twenty times BC's wine revenue. Ditto the number of wine tourists, who amount to nearly 24 million annually. And Napa Valley wines have become synonymous with "American fine wine"—in 2018, they enjoyed a 61 percent market share not across the state but across the country. These are the sorts of numbers BC would need to pull in order to become a wine power.

The challenge of elevating BC's wine business has become something of a *cause célèbre* for the University of British Columbia (UBC). When the university opened its Kelowna campus, in 2005, one area of focus was wine, and it soon developed courses that incorporated viticulture, wine sales, and marketing.

When Roger Sugden came on-board as dean of the faculty of management, in 2012, he was tasked with supporting the development of the province's wine industry. He thought the school's research could help address some of the area's hot-button issues: the wine sector was too fragmented, with inconsistent labelling and sustainability standards; it had no adequate plans for addressing climate change or competition from the burgeoning cannabis industry. Sugden had no background in wine himself, but a UBC colleague passed along the name of an expert that he ought to speak with: Jacques-Olivier Pesme.

Pesme, born in Bordeaux to doctor parents, had no relationship to wine in his youth other than drinking it with dinner—a common occurrence for Bordelais as young as eleven, he says. After university and a stint in Nantes exporting electronics, he returned home in the 1990s to start an economics PhD at the University of Bordeaux. Back then, he recalls, the word "sustainability" was starting to bounce around management circles, but only American schools were teaching business students how to address ecological and environmental concerns within their work. Pesme did a joint PhD program between Bordeaux, the University of Florida, and the University of the Virgin Islands. He came back to France a rare authority. When Kedge, France's largest independent business school, launched a wine MBA, in 2000, the multilingual, sustainability-focused academic was hired, joining a small cohort of global scholars who focused on wine. He advanced to director and dean of the school's wine program, all the while making gold-plated contacts when advising bodies like the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.

Unsurprisingly, Pesme had never heard of the Okanagan before he got UBC's call in 2012. But he was ready for a change—for the "exoticism" of Canada's west coast, for the challenge of helping the province become a worldwide player. He accepted a position as an affiliate professor (later becoming Sugden's senior adviser), booked his first visit, and started learning "what it *is* to be a winemaker in BC and what it *should* be."

THE PROBLEM with British Columbia is not its wine—today, just about anyone is capable of producing the good stuff. Pesme has attended enough Pepsi-style blind taste tests to see plenty of old-world elitists mistake a new-world wine for their own. The challenge is to keep people wanting *your* stuff.

The regions that make up the Great Wine Capitals, that exclusive alliance of the world's ten preeminent producers, have spent years perfecting their images in order to woo drinkers and engender loyalty. BC is another matter. Few people outside the country know that Canada has a wine culture, let alone a British Columbian wine culture. Branding sells bottles, and though the province has good wineries, Pesme says, there isn't a story that only BC is telling: "As a winery, you don't exist if you're alone."

Unlike Verona or Porto, Kelowna doesn't have the luxury of centuries to establish itself, not when it's up against Cabernets from China, now considered the ninth-largest producer and growing quickly. That's where Pesme comes in. His job is not to reward the best wines, help make bad wine better, or bolster production. The root of the wine business may be delicious wine, but a large part of what makes a region is how that wine is positioned, for locals and for tourists. It's knowing the territory and appraisal of soil, that effusive mix of climate and culture that we call *terroir*.

Pesme makes a case for Adelaide, Australia—specifically McLaren Vale. In the past decade, the region has directed government funding to massive marketing campaigns that paint a unique proposition for day-tripping local drinkers: a sunny all-rounder with an abundance of beaches, farm-to-table restaurants, and scenic trails, all just forty-five minutes outside the city. That strategy works within Australia, where over 80 percent of the market for wine is domestic. Yet, when these wines show their faces to the world, McLaren Vale becomes "South Australia" to some, simply "Australia" to others. "Adelaide may compete domestically with regions like Margaret River, but as soon as they go abroad, they're seen under one umbrella," Pesme says. "They agree there is no success that's not collective."

When Pesme visited Kelowna, he found no heritage estate, no boutique hotels — only a lonely outpost of vines.

Resolving that disconnect for BC is Pesme's raison d'être. He's so often on the move in the province—meeting with growers, establishing relationships between parties—that he's never even rented an apartment in Canada. In 2017, he and Sugden went on a workshop tour from Duncan, on Vancouver Island, to Penticton, with the goal of challenging the industry to create a collective identity that BC wines could project internationally. Rendezvousing with industry players in six winemaking centres, they explored themes of authenticity, regional narrative, and terroir. They hashed out differences and commonalities, testing the merits of buzzwords like "pioneering" (rejected as too loaded) and "prestige." After all the word clusters had been drawn and PowerPoints shown, Pesme extracted the characteristics they all seemed to share: "diversity," "welcoming," "free-spirit," "cool North," and "boutique." That last descriptor is key. Pesme says BC wine has great potential if it sticks to the right script: positioning itself as a premium collective of boutique wineries and targeting the $20-to-$45-per-bottle price point.

In an effort to challenge vintners and spur growth, he and Sugden established the Wine Leaders Forum, an annual retreat where leaders from Canada and abroad form a collective strategy to make the province more competitive for the months ahead. Last year, the focus was tourism. This is where, in the Venn diagram of terroir and territory, the two overlap. "If you get it right, they should go hand in hand," says Sugden. "How you present yourself to visitors is intimately tied up with how you present yourself at a table in Bordeaux or London or Melbourne. The way forward for tourism is coherent with the way forward for identity."

Wine tourism is a new-world development widely agreed to have started in Napa Valley, California. Winemakers like Robert Mondavi put the area on the map in the 1960s and '70s, a time when leisure travel and wine were both being democratized. Cellars were opened, offering visitors an unprecedented look behind the scenes, and chefs and musicians were invited to ply their trades on-site. The idea spread, and soon people began taking day trips into farmlands around the world—including Cape Town, Melbourne, and Seattle—exploring vineyards by bus or bicycle, or simply drunk-driving.

The phenomenon was soon everywhere—except in Bordeaux. "Until twenty years ago, you could not go to a winery or château in Bordeaux and buy wine," says Catherine Leparmentier Dayot, who works for the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce. "It would all go through wine merchants." Back then, Leparmentier Dayot says, the French didn't even have a phrase for "wine tourism."

To catch up with shifting demands, Leparmentier Dayot launched the Great Wine Capitals Global Network (GWC) twenty-one years ago. She'd been watching the wine map evolve, identifying new competitors and seeing old ones mature. She recognized that Bordeaux was at risk of falling behind up-and-coming regions and that it would benefit from a symbiotic alliance of peers to create commercial exchanges, pool marketing resources, and network. "We were not promoting wine—wineries can promote wine—but best practices, innovation, tourism," says Leparmentier Dayot, who is the GWC's managing director. The collective was launched with cohorts in Porto, Portugal, and Bilbao, Spain, among others, gradually expanding to include new-world comers like Adelaide, Australia, and Valparaiso, Chile.

Prospective member cities must go through a strict recruiting process and should have a base population exceeding 250,000, an international airport, transport links, name recognition, and critical acclaim. The GWC considers one applicant per year, and some years it admits no one. Hitting ten members in 2018 was a feat. "There aren't many cities that meet our criteria," Leparmentier Dayot says.

Today, wine tourists spend about 3 billion euros (approximately $4.6 billion) annually in Bordeaux's province. That's still shy of California's $10 billion but strides ahead of BC's $600 million. It was because of the GWC that Bordeaux realized, in the ever-shifting landscape of drinking habits, visitor experiences are now what make or break a region. In 2016, the city opened the Cité du Vin, an amorphous glass wine museum with a "global wine cellar" stocking bottles from Syria, Ethiopia, Namibia, Peru, Bali, and even BC's Osoyoos Larose. It's since welcomed more than 1.5 million visitors.

Across the border, Mainz, Germany, hosts the Mainzer Weinmarkt, an annual wine fair, in its quaint, old-timber city centre. And, in Portugal, Porto is set to open World of Wine, a museum complex stretching more than seven acres that boasts a collection of bars and restaurants as well as a wine school. The city, long famous for its port wines, is now facing local competition from nearby Vinho Verde. That region's light, green wines, relatively new in Europe, are proving to be a hit, says Miguel Ribeiro, who runs Hotel Monverde, a "wine experience" hotel that features its own sprawling vineyard some seventy kilometres outside Porto. "It's not easy to be disruptive in this business," Ribeiro says. But, as Vinho Verde shows, it is possible.

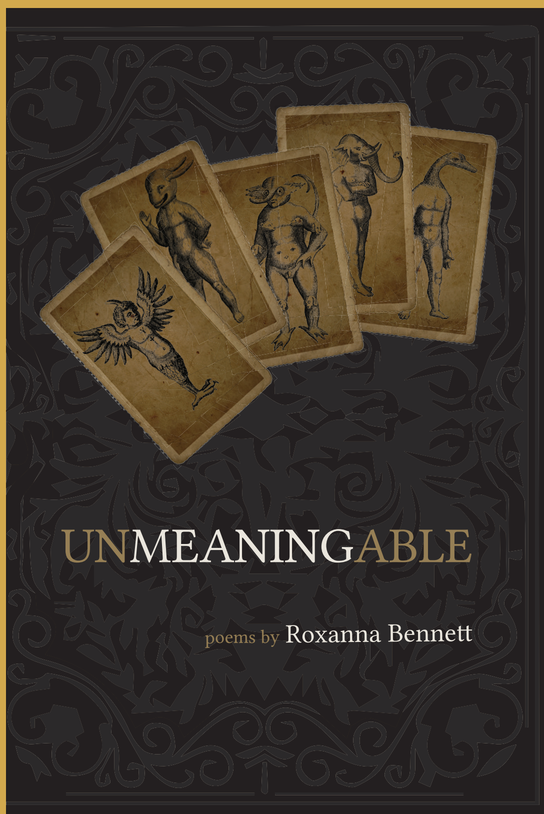
If British Columbia is to earn a spot in the GWC, the Okanagan Valley—the heart of BC's wine country—will likely need to evolve to become its main selling point. When Pesme first visited Kelowna, he found no heritage estate, no flagship museum, no boutique hotels, no statement architecture. There was no *there* there—the Okanagan seemed little more than a lonely outpost of vines. "BC wine is like drinking pure nature," says Pesme. "In the southern part of BC, lakes have favoured a good cultivation of arable lands. There's a sort of natural energy. First Nations understood that a long time ago. But you can't take beauty for granted anymore. You need to understand your uniqueness beyond pristine nature."

It also helps to know where visitors will be coming from. Linda Reiff, president and CEO of Napa Valley Vintners, says that, in her region, 80 percent of tourists are domestic. BC, a large province with a medium-size population in a very big country, can't rely on the same localized strategy. Instead, it must consider following the lead of Portugal, where hotelier Ribeiro says that 60 percent of visitors are foreign. Luckily, BC does have a few hundred million Americans at hand—and, as Reiff notes, "Americans are consumers. When they visit, they buy."

Still, tourism faces one significant challenge: with no effective public transportation from the provincial hub of Vancouver, the best way into the Okanagan for many visitors is a four-hour schlep by car. (Though big spenders can shell out $10,000 for the Sky Helicopter.) If BC can nail its unique selling proposition and work out how to shuttle visitors into the interior, more tourists will come knocking. "After the US, Canadians should be looking at Russia," says Ribeiro. He describes it as an ideal match: BC's food-friendly wines pair well with Russians' predilection for vinegary dishes. "Portugal only has 1 percent of that market," he estimates, "and Russia has a lot of people."

Tastes are evolving, climates are changing, and the closely guarded conservatism of the wine world is all but gone. Two hundred years from now, just about any city could be on top. As Ribeiro says, "If you think Bordeaux has the best wine, we should all give up."

ELLEN HIMELFARB regularly contributes to the *Telegraph*, *Wallpaper*, and the *Sunday Times*.



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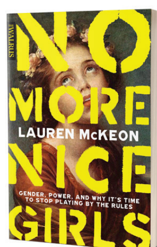
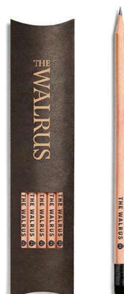
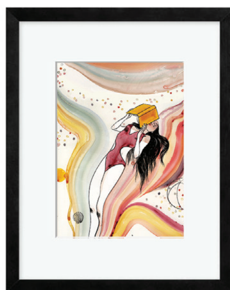






CANADA'S CONVERSATION

SUMMER
READING
New fiction, memoir, and poetry by
John Barton, Kevin Chong, Kayla Czaga,
Dimitri Nasrallah, Eric Ormsby, and Sara O'Leary
Illustrations by Ashley Mackenzie

MEMOIR

DANCING BEAR

BY DIMITRI NASRALLAH

WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD, my family's neighbourhood in Beirut turned into a battleground between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Israeli military, and so we left Lebanon. It was 1982, and the country had already experienced seven years of civil war; there was nowhere for us to go but the sea. We slept atop a crowded ferry deck in two fold-out beach chairs, our suitcases leaning against us, as we made our way to Greece.

I remember hearing a low growl, a sound that couldn't have come from any of the humans at the market.

During our first months in Athens, I spent my mornings standing out on the balcony of our apartment, studying the busy street below. As lunch approached and the days grew hot, the stores closed one by one. The shopkeepers stopped shouting at beggars and locked their doors, disappearing into the dark recesses of their living quarters. While everyone else slept through the sun-baked afternoons, I watched cartoon animals speak in Greek overdubs I could not understand.

I did a lot of staying quiet in those days. We still carried with us a stench of war. My parents instructed me to not open my mouth in public, to try to blend in as much as possible. My father had hastily arranged for us to sit out the siege of Beirut by securing work at his advertising agency's small Greek office, but we didn't know how long the company would allow us to stay. We had brought only our clothes and some photo albums with us. Everything else had been left behind.

In the long Athenian dusk, the city's streets became busy again when shopkeepers and residents took advantage of the cooler air. One evening, to lighten our moods, my father decided to take us to a night market, where locals would gather to socialize and stroll after slow days at work.

I'd never travelled beyond the small supermarket two streets away. After crossing a main road, we entered a new neighbourhood with less garbage lining the sidewalks and no graffiti in sight. I remember climbing stone stairs and passing through narrow, crowded alleys that gave way to walls covered in baskets and purses, where bins overflowed with nuts and fruit. In a butcher's window, a ladder of ribs dangled from a chain. The savoury aroma of grilled meat wafted through the air as men shouted prices at passersby, bread in hand, ready to assemble sandwiches. I followed my parents, unable to see where I was going through the waists of all the people around us. As the crowd thickened, I remember hearing a low growl, a sound that couldn't have come from any of the humans at the market.

We turned onto a packed plaza. High above the swell of curious onlookers, a giant brown bear was standing on its hind legs. Its hair was matted, its eyes gazing blankly over our heads, a muzzle

covering its mouth. A leash hanging from its neck led into the hand of a man making announcements in Greek into a megaphone.

We moved toward the spectacle. I'd never stood so close to such an immense animal. The man holding the leash appeared to have the bear fully in his control. He tugged and the animal turned his way. When he held up his hand, the bear sprang onto its hind legs. When he asked questions into the megaphone, the bear crouched or let out a whimper that sounded like an answer to its captor's words. The creature was trying to talk, I marvelled. A ripple of laughter rose from the crowd. I laughed too.

Our lives had been so difficult for as long as I could remember. For months before we boarded that ferry, my school had been closed and I had rarely left our home. On a night like this in Beirut, we would have been sleeping underground, in constant fear of another explosion. Now, the strange sight of a bear mimicking human actions was a balm, a source of wonder and amusement for a child who hadn't laughed in a long time. Yet, at the same time, there was something so sad about the way the animal stood there, different from everyone, hovering over us in defeat.

On the asphalt in front of the bear lay a cassette deck, which I only noticed once the man set down his megaphone and bent over to press play. He untied a whip from his belt as pop music filled the plaza. At the man's beckoning, the crowd began to clap in unison. He cracked the whip at the bear's feet, and the bear leapt onto its hind legs with a yelp and began hopping from one foot to the other.

THAT NIGHT, whenever I closed my eyes, the bear was there, standing awkwardly on its back legs, wanting to set its paws down but afraid of the consequences. Its eyes magnified before me, and they were filled with immense sadness. I felt that way too. Like the bear, I'd danced my way along the edges of a world that had no interest in my well-being. How had this brown bear ended up in a city with garbage in its streets, in a world that was too hot and dry? How far had it been made to travel? Had it, like me, been tricked into moving overnight, cajoled out of its bed, made to run barefoot in the dark, and smuggled onto a boat?

When I finally fell asleep, my dreams returned to the night market. Now I was the bear, standing in the middle for all to see, the reluctant attraction. I felt a muzzle around my mouth, its leather straps and silver buckles digging into my fur. The muzzle made a show of shutting me up in front of all the people who didn't look or sound like me. My parents had warned me: the locals don't like brown boys barking in Arabic in their supermarket aisles or along their sidewalks. They already thought there were too many of us here because of our wars. In my dream, I had committed the crime of speaking too loudly in my own language. I gulped at what air I could get through the muzzle, certain that, at any moment, a whip would snap and I would be made to hop. My feet twitched in bed.

I remember waking up in my mother's arms. "It doesn't want to dance!" I cried.

"Of course it wants to dance," she said. "It's very good at what it does. It has a talent." I felt better, but I knew it was more a reaction to my mother's warmth than to her words.

The next morning, my father sat down at the kitchen table as I ate breakfast. "I hear you're worried for the bear," he said.

I nodded sadly, perplexed at how a bad dream could garner the attentions of both my parents.

"You feel bad for it."

I nodded again.

"When you grow up," he said, "don't forget that feeling."

WE WERE ABLE TO STAY in Athens after that summer, and we lived there for seven more years. I studied at an American international school, where I learned English and met other kids from all over the world, many of whose parents worked for the US embassy or on the military bases that fed the flow of troops into the Middle East. But there were quite a few others like me, Arab kids whose families were on the move because of conflicts at home. That school was where, in the second grade, while playing soccer with a crushed pop can, I remember first being put on the "dark team" in a game of "darks" versus "lights."

At first, I was proud to be on the dark team. We won as many games as we lost, and we were all the same. Then, one day, after tripping over another soccer player, I was pushed into a fence and told to fuck off back to my own country where everyone else was the same colour of shit as me. After that, I always knew when to push myself into a fence before anyone else could. I learned to hang around the edges, circling only in the outer orbits of friendships, developing hobbies meant for one.

I was ten the first time I was ever called a nigger. The boy who used the word was a close friend of mine. I knew he meant it as a whip he could snap. But I didn't want him to see how to get to me. Then he'd know how to get me every time. So I danced around his insult and told him he had it wrong, that he was thinking of the wrong brown, that he was a moron for not being able to tell browns apart, and he laughed because I was trying so hard to make it sound like we were just joking around. "But you're still a nigger," he said.

I learned years later that kids acquire the language they use from their homes. My friend was part of a Cub Scouts group that his dad and several others from my school helped organize. The group doubled as a social club for the American kids to learn the values of life they were missing back home. I joined because I wanted to learn to tie knots and make s'mores. I was always envious of how my friend looked up to his father; I looked up to him too. His dad was in the navy and was very popular with the other military dads, with whom he would drink beer and tell provocative jokes.

The Scouts went on camping trips, which my own dad only begrudgingly attended because an adult had to accompany me. My dad embarrassed me. Scouts didn't interest him. He didn't speak English well or tell the kinds of jokes the other fathers did. He was often the first to leave the fire at night, bowing out of the drinking sessions the other fathers enjoyed after all the kids went to sleep.

I remember my friend's father taking me aside one day to tell me I had disrespected the Pledge of Allegiance. The pledge was one of the first things we learned as Scouts, and American or not, we had to recite it. I knew it by heart. I remember him telling me I hadn't stood straight enough while mouthing the words, that I kept looking around, that my voice didn't have enough conviction, that I needed to whip myself into shape, that the flag meant something to him and others, and that I wasn't trying hard enough.

So I tried harder. I threw myself into every race and worked intensely toward every badge. I energetically pledged allegiance to someone else's flag at every event after that, but I was never quite able to enjoy Cub Scouts the same way again, and at the end of that year, I quit.

WE NEVER RETURNED to Lebanon. Almost four decades have passed, and I now live in Montreal with my own family. I still think about the bear. I remember how it danced and what it made me feel. Every time I step out of the shower and look at my reflection, blurred by the steam on the bathroom mirror, in stark contrast to the white tiles behind me, I think of the bear, and for a moment, my skin looks like fur.

A few years ago, as I sat with my eight-year-old son at our kitchen table, he told me that two of his friends had called him *un nègre*. He attends a French school, where he always feels a little on the outside because he identifies more with English, the language we speak at home and the one in which I first learned to be on the outside too. The slur suddenly reminded me of people I hadn't thought of or spoken to since elementary school.

But it doesn't appear to have bothered my son much. Like me at that age, he doesn't understand

School of Xerez Fino

BY JOHN BARTON

for J-F, January 1987

Toxic, the club where we met, rundown now
Rundown then, the johns sequined with beer, dim
Crush of moon-flesh dancing, the strobe's freeze-frame

History painting a stock animation

Mirror balls, matches, condoms, sweat-raw limbs
Shedding shirts, shedding disco; shrill amyl
Nitrate; Doc Martens; plucked or pierced eyebrows
Ripped chinos zigzagging tans; shyness shunned

Sherry your cheeky decanted ploy to haul
Me home to fortify us both, pouring
Dryly from our clothes after scorching cold
Flamed our skin, run-from din making you bold
Air smokeless, one candle lit, till you wore

Me out and down, our legs dawn-slaked and sprawled.

that the true value of a word comes from its accumulated usage, its baggage, not simply its utterance.

I thought back to how I'd tried to defend myself in Greece by telling my friend that he was mixing up his browns. I decided that wasn't the defence I wanted to pass along to my son. I wanted to tell him, as he ate the grilled cheese sandwich I'd made him, that trying to deflect hate on a technicality is a useless exercise, that some language doesn't exist to distinguish, that inaccuracy is part of its insult.

I guess I'm writing this because my father was right: I haven't forgotten any of those feelings. But I still don't know what to do with them. I don't want my son to dance like I did. I don't know how to tell an eight-year-old that moments like these will only accumulate over the years, leaving small but ever-present chips in his personality that will one day carve out a hollow of distrust. I want to tell him that it's so easy to dehumanize a person this way. I want to tell him that a schoolyard insult will one day have greater meaning when it links up with some other person's words, or a sideways glance, or a step back, and together they'll form a tapestry of evidence against all sorts of people and what they believe about him. I want to tell him to guard against the kind of paranoia this breeds. I want him to know that paranoia can be a cage that we back ourselves into, after the dance is over, when we're left to ruminate on the performance.

I have all this to say, but I won't because I once again feel muzzled. I can feel the silence chafing against my face even as my eyes gesticulate wildly, dancing to a rhythm only I can hear. My son doesn't notice anything amiss. After he takes the last bite of his sandwich, he wanders down the hall to watch TV.

DIMITRI NASRALLAH is the author of three novels, most recently *The Bleeds*.

FICTION

THE ONES WE CARRY WITH US

BY SARA O'LEARY

A FEW YEARS AGO, I accidentally midwifed a death. She was an elderly woman who had lived alone for many years, and though her death should, on some level, have been expected, it came as a shock to me. Her name was Agatha, but she told me once that she'd had another name given to her by her grandfather because Agatha was an old family name and had already belonged to too many people.

At Agatha's funeral, I would learn what her secret name was, and it would make me sad because, the whole time she was dying, I was calling out the name I knew. She was getting further and further away, and it wasn't that I thought she would come back but just that I wanted her to know I was still there. But I was calling her by the name that had already been worn out when it reached her.

When writing fiction, it is as much about what you leave out as what you leave in. Writing a police statement seemed the same.

FOR A WHILE, I volunteered at a seniors' centre where most of the clients had dementia. I became very fond of a woman named Marjorie, who was in her nineties but was more alive than most people I knew. Marjorie was convinced that we'd been schoolmates. "Chummed around together" was how she put it. I'd get her to tell me stories and then, the next time I saw her, I'd remind her of things we had done together when we were both at boarding school in Rothesay, New Brunswick. Sometimes we would talk about what it had been like at McGill just after the war. The larks we'd gotten up to. It was all lies, of course. But it was also true.

THERE'S A STORY I've never quite been able to tell. It's about something that happened to me one Halloween when I was in my twenties. We lived at that time in a haunted house, but this story is not about that. Our apartment was part of a building of row houses that opened right onto the sidewalk of Milton Street in Montreal. During the day, if you sat in our living room, you could listen to the conversations of passersby, a thing I used to do that proves I knew how to waste time even before we had internet.

But this was nighttime. I was alone because I'd decided not to go to the Halloween party that night. I didn't like Halloween, and I wasn't crazy about parties. There were too many parties in those days. I stayed home and probably read a book because we didn't own a television and there was, as I said, no internet. I have a picture of myself from that time standing in front of our bookcase, so it's possible I could even work out what book I was reading. It might have been *Nightwood* as those were my Djuna Barnes years. It could have been a book I loved at the time called *That Kind of Woman*. It's extraordinary to me that, in those days, all the books we owned fit into one bookcase. And that this still felt like untold riches.

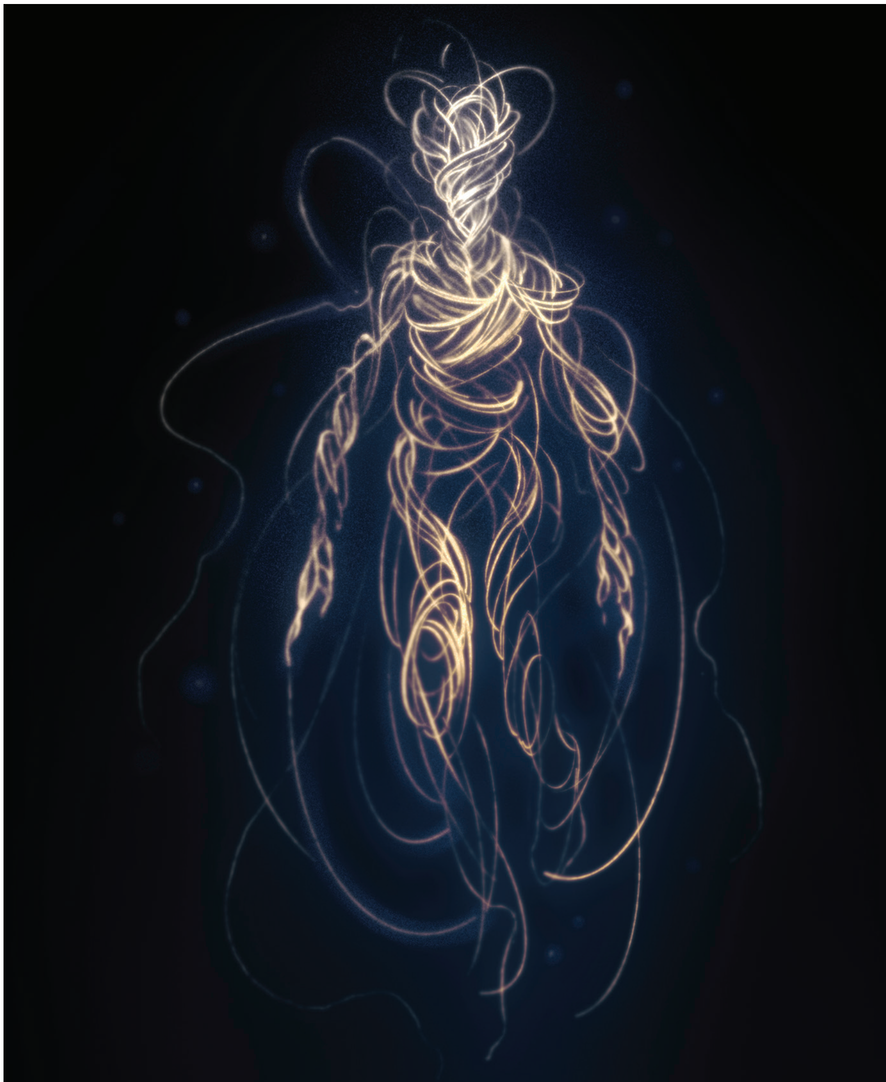
There I was, in the living room that was practically right on the sidewalk, and there was a knock at the door. A loud, frantic knock. I went and opened it. Did I think it was someone I knew? Did I just open my door to anyone in those days? Yes, probably.

It was a young woman, roughly my age, much, much smaller. Shaking, cold, frightened. "Help me," she said, and so I let her in and closed the door behind her.

She said her boyfriend was chasing her. That she was frightened. That she wanted to call her mother to come and get her. Could she use my phone?

I watched her dial, listened to her talk. "Yes, again," she said. "I know," she said. "Milton Street," she said. And then she hung up.

She asked me for a glass of water, and I went out to the kitchen to get it for her. The kitchen was my favourite part of that apartment. I stood there for a moment, letting the water run. I knew there was something wrong with her story. I knew something was wrong. I didn't know how it was going to end.



I HAD NO IDEA that police come out in the event of a sudden death at home. When my friend Agatha died, I first called my husband and then asked him to call 911. I had to open the door to the first responders, who turned out to be our local fire brigade, then the paramedics, then the police. Agatha's apartment was small, and it filled quickly. I kept having to explain who I was. Not a granddaughter. Not an employee or a care worker. A friend.

The police officer and I had been operating at cross-purposes with my poor French and his poor English, so when he asked me if he could read what I write, it seemed a bit of a non sequitur. Flustered already, I grew more flustered and told him that I had a review in that weekend's *Globe and Mail*. He shook his head impatiently. "No, no," he said (*non, non*). "Can I read your *hand*writing?"

He then gave me a pen and paper (looking back, I see something like the exam booklets we hand out to students), and I wrote my statement. When you are writing fiction, it is as much about what you leave out as what you leave in. Writing a police statement seemed much the same. I kept wondering what it was that they were looking for. Evidence that her death was somehow my responsibility? It felt that way.

I wrote that I had made her breakfast shortly before she died. That I had to insist because she was so weak and I was worried that she hadn't been eating in the days prior, which she had spent locked away in her apartment with what she'd told me was a cold. That she finally agreed to a boiled egg but then stood over me as I leaned into her fridge, and that, when I opened the carton of farm eggs and instinctively chose the largest one, she put out her hand to stay mine. "I'm saving that one for someone," she said.

I USED TO HAVE a newspaper column. When my son was small, he opened the paper one time and looked at my little headshot in there and said, "Why is your picture in the paper every week when you aren't even famous?"

Writing weekly book reviews for the newspaper is exactly the sort of job I would have dreamt of in high school if I could have even dreamt of such a thing. I worked from home and, practically daily, books would be delivered to my door. As if things couldn't get any better, I then got a similar job but for radio instead of print. Every week, I would be interviewed by the hosts of the afternoon show about a different book. I wrote both their questions and my answers, and we worked from that script. Sometimes I would begin my answers with the phrase, "Funny you should ask that," because it amused me.

I think I'd do a lot better in life if I could always write both the questions and the answers. All my life, I have been bothered by the question of whether things happen for a reason. I try to imagine myself reciting a scripted response to that, but all I hear is silence.

As a child, I was taught to tell the truth. Only later would I learn that sometimes you have to tell it slant.

Once, I heard my son and his friend quietly conversing as I walked behind them through a forest on a perfect sunny day.

"I don't want to die," my son said.

"I know," said the other boy. "But we have to."

SOMETIMES MY FRIEND Marjorie—friend of my fictional youth—would move forward in time and begin to worry about where her husband was. She would anxiously scan the faces in the room, looking for the one she knew best. She would imagine that we were all at a party together and, if she was there, then he must be too. Sometimes she would turn her chair so that she could see the door in case he came through it. "I hope he hasn't forgotten me," she'd say. He had died years ago, but I would always reassure her by saying he was on his way. "Of course he hasn't forgotten you," I'd say. "He called. He told me he would be here soon."

As a child, I was taught that lying was the worst thing you could do. I was taught to tell the truth. Only later would I learn that sometimes you have to tell it slant.

THAT HALLOWEEN NIGHT on Milton Street, I returned from the kitchen with the glass of water to find the young woman shaking even harder than before. She said she would go out to the corner to wait for her mother. She said she would be fine. I didn't want to let her go and I didn't want her to stay. Just before I closed the door, she took my hand and looked me in the eyes. "You're a good person," she said.

I think about that all the time. Am I a good person?

When I called the police, they told me that I was not the only one in my neighbourhood who had been conned. They said they would let me know if they recovered my wallet but not to get my hopes up.

When that woman had told me her story, I knew it didn't ring true. I knew there was a lie in it somewhere. But what I didn't know, and what I still don't know, is why she said what she said at the end. I don't know if she really did think I was a good person. I don't know why I care.

HERE'S THE THING I now know about dying. It looks like almost anything else. It sometimes looks like sitting down to eat an egg. It looks like just resting for a moment. It looks like just slowing down. The difference between the slowing down and the stopping is nothing at all.

At Agatha's funeral, people I didn't know would come up to talk to me about the fact that I had happened to be there with her when she died. Somehow everyone seemed to know this about me, which was unsettling. "Things happen for a reason," they kept saying.

Agatha once told me that she believed her son had sent me to be with her, but I didn't see how that could be true. While Marjorie couldn't remember the death of her husband, Agatha couldn't forget the death of her son. She'd been abandoned by her husband, and her son had been everything to her. Then, when he was twenty-one, he died, and even though he was gone, she never stopped being his mother. I can't imagine being in the world that long after your child has left it. Wouldn't it be a kindness to be able to forget?

I used to think that the fear we have of dying was tied to the fear of being forgotten. But now, I think that what we're really afraid of is the ones we love being forgotten. The ones we have lost and carry with us. I knew Agatha for only a very short time at the end of her long life. But, before I left her empty apartment that day, I picked up a photo of her son, which she had left out, meaning to show me, and I took it with me.

SARA O'LEARY is the author of a number of children's books, including *This Is Sadie*. Her debut novel, *The Ghost in the House*, is being released by Doubleday Canada.

Lord Mayor Magpie

BY ERIC ORMSBY

Because he sticks his chest right out
when he condescends to the ground,
we think him arrogant:
there's parade-ground posh
to his strut. Shrewdest
of our local lords,
Magpie idles in a limousine
of black feather with a slash of white
piping that outshines all chrome,
and this makes of him the spiffiest parade;
he has the brazen glamour of a motorcade.

I've seen royalty arrayed
in the print of his greedy feet.
Lord Mayor Magpie,
in his ermine and brocade,
doesn't merely foot the lawn:
he processes.
An invisible cavalcade
canters behind him as he strides.

Once I saw him drop
from a derelict rooftop.
There was furious pleasure
in his swoop.
He checked his plunge and soared.
And there was braggadocio in his fall.
He flexed and corrected the air
with the mischief of a pedant
as he emended the dead letter
of descent. Though he meant to refute,
he turned acclamatory
between the third and fourth storey
and flew up to his mate
perched there on the parapet.

Our vacant crevices, our dull lintels,
are Lord Mayor Magpie's ballroom.
There he waltzes,
this debonair
line dancer in mid-air,
domino dapper
with morning-coat manners,
stiff tailed, caustic of caw,
parliamentary of demeanour,
our nimble-kneed Astaire

who refuses all obeisance
to Lagerfeld or Wintour.
His black eye crackles, his attire is dour.
He favours classic all-occasion wear.

FICTION

LOTTERY POETRY

BY KEVIN CHONG

MAISY WU HAD LEARNED fortune-telling from her mah-mah, who'd read faces and palms in a stall in Temple Street Market, in Hong Kong. A decade later, as a university student in Vancouver, Maisy would tell fortunes at parties. Her dorm mates invariably thanked her for the advice she'd given while buzzed on hard lemonade.

Eventually, she decided to quit her job at the Vancouver Public Library and monetize her talent, specializing in Chinese forms of fortune-telling and divination. With a small-business grant, she rented a studio on a gentrifying stretch of Pender Street, where she read palms and offered her own interpretation of *kau chim*, or lottery poetry. The space was clean and white, with a chrome kitchen table at one end opposite a shrine for the god Wong Tai Sin.

> She retrieved a bamboo tube that contained red-tipped sticks, each with a number from one to 100.

At first, when the strange new pandemic hit Vancouver, there was no drop-off in Maisy's clientele. Apparently, people wanted her reassurances more than they cared about social distancing. But, when her business was declared nonessential, Maisy felt absolutely unprepared. She had only $300 in her savings account. Moreover, she was single. Her internet access was limited to the data on her phone. There was no laundry room in her building.

Maisy, whose estranged mother had come from wealth, had always preferred living close to the bone. Now, she wished that bone was encased in $100 bills.

Out of desperation, she made her fortune-telling business mobile, renaming it Curbside Divinations. Inspired by the takeout drivers and delivery trucks speeding past her window, she envisioned cycling up to a quarantined house and reading fortunes from the gate. Or from the hallway outside an apartment. Either would be more human contact than she'd had in weeks. She composed a press release and blasted her socials.

A few people clicked "like" on her posts. None of them hired her. Who could blame them? No business felt more ridiculous, in those spring days of the pandemic, than fortune-telling did. *If you're so good at predicting the future, why did you book a trip to Mexico for March? Why didn't you get your haircut when you could?*

Her bank account was zeroing and her credit cards had hit their ceilings when she received a notification.

"Can you help?" read the text message. "Come over ASAP."

The client, who said his name was Pete, lived on a street off the bike pathway on East Tenth Avenue. The road was pasted with the fallen petals of magnolia and cherry trees. Arriving at his address, Maisy saw him standing behind the sliding-glass door to the second-storey balcony of a Vancouver Special.

Like the boxy house he occupied, there was something ubiquitous and forgettable about Pete. He was a pot-bellied white man in sweats, anywhere between forty-five and sixty-five years old. He slivered open the door of the balcony and cupped his hands around his masked face as if to yodel over the sound of distant traffic. “I was just looking around and found your ad,” he told her. “You are pretty young to know the future. Do you read tarot cards?”

From the edge of the sidewalk, Maisy shook her head. “I mean, I know how.” The market was flooded with tarot card readers. “But I specialize in lottery poetry.”

Pete had given up on the mask. When he curled his mouth, he flashed yellow teeth. “If you Chinese were so good at predicting the future, how’d you all get us into this in the first place?”

Maisy took hold of her handlebars and lifted her kickstand. “I’m leaving,” she said.

He called down to her, “But I’ve already paid in Bitcoin!”

A few nights earlier, Maisy had pulled open her window to scream at a group of teenagers playing basketball in the park across the alley. Instead of defying her as she’d expected, they slumped away. Couldn’t one of her social interactions—there were so few of them these days—turn out differently?

She decided to stay. From her pannier, she retrieved a bamboo tube filled with red-tipped sticks, each with a number from one to 100. She lit a handful of incense and swirled it around the tube. “The incense is for purification. Normally, you’d be doing this part and there would be an altar to the god we’re seeking help from,” she said. “What’s your question?”

“When will this all be over?” he asked.

“That’s not how it works. Give me a yes-or-no question.”

“Will I die from COVID-19?”

For divination purposes, she asked for his full name and date of birth. He should have been glad she wasn’t an identity thief. Serving as Pete’s proxy, she knelt down on the edge of his lawn and shook the tube until one of the numbered sticks fell out. When she looked up, he had edged out onto the balcony.

“Eighty-one,” she announced.

Pete leaned against the railing and nodded, looking pleasantly surprised. “Now what?”

“Each number corresponds with a divination—a poem.” Maisy flipped through a booklet until she found poem eighty-one. “Ah, this one is about a crown prince who is switched at birth with a dead fox.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, sounds creepy, but wait, the dead fox was doing the prince a solid because there were assassins who wanted to kill the prince. When danger passed, the prince reclaimed his identity. If you apply this poem to longevity, it suggests you should trust your eyes, not what you read on Reddit. Do you feel healthy?”

“Are you asking me if I’ve got the virus? No.”

“What about your health in general?”

“Aside from these extra pounds, yeah. I’ve been washing my hands.”

“There’s your answer.”

Pete messaged her again that weekend. Soon, he’d set up daily

The Peace Lily

BY KAYLA CZAGA

The peace lily I bought
at Thrifty Foods for $4.99
taught me something
about beauty. When I saw
its poker-green leaves
and flowers, like studded
Jacobsen Egg Chairs,
I rushed it into my cart,
wheeled to the till, carried
it home, and centred it
atop a sunny bookshelf.
Within a week, its leaves
had black spots. A second
week saw its flowers gone.
My mother-in-law said
it needed repotting
and took it—returned it
in a larger pot, trimmed
of rot. Still it withered.

The internet told me to
shield it from breezes,
to mist it, fertilize it,
and comb for mites. I did
everything, and in return,
it sent out one new flower,
alive as a child's hand,
which drooped before
ever really blooming.
To say the peace lily died
would be an understatement.
Like a famous connoisseur
of death, it took its time:
every last leaf withered
into a black ash that stuck
on the shelf, and what
remained in the pot
resembled the dregs
of a great forest fire.

I am not someone
who if you smashed all
her mirrors or splattered
her canvases with tar
would suffer very much,
but I admired the lily
and wanted it to thrive.
Yet the more I did for it
the less interested
it seemed in living,
and in the end—tipping it
out into my compost bin—
a bit of me loved
being done with it.

appointments. Others would seek Maisy's divination, but Pete ended up effectively paying her rent. At first, he limited his questions to whether his friends and family would survive or whether he'd see them again. Eventually, he strayed from the virus in his queries. He asked Wong Tai Sin whether his ex-wife still loved him, whether his son was bisexual, and whether the Canucks would ever win the Stanley Cup. Not every lottery poem yielded a positive interpretation, but even a bad outcome divined for him provided a kind of security.

Once, Pete asked Maisy how she had learned lottery poetry. "My grandmother taught me," she said. Later, Maisy recalled the summer she had spent in Hong Kong: throngs of people at Wong Tai Sin Temple holding bundles of incense sticks like bouquets. Closing her eyes, she could hear the click of her mah-mah's bracelets and the scuffle of her slippers on the floorboards of her Mong Kok flat, could feel her mah-mah's cool hands and smell their sandalwood soap.

Her mah-mah had suffered a heart attack, narrowly avoiding the pandemic that so many others were suffering now. In the hospital, her mah-mah had held up three fingers. It was her final prediction. She was admitted on Wednesday and died on Saturday.

Even decades after the pandemic, memories of Maisy's mah-mah remained filigreed in her mind's eye. By contrast, her lonely days under lockdown, endless yet interchangeable, could easily be overlooked. One strange day after another bled into a teary blur. If the pandemic ever came up, she would summarize the period as succinctly as possible. "It was tough for us, but toughest for the front line workers. We were all in it together. That's how we got through it."

One day, Maisy's favourite granddaughter came to visit after being deserted by her partner. Maisy had foreseen this eventual split. Her son's only child sat next to Maisy on the sofa, placed her head on Maisy's lap. "Mah-Mah, I just want to know. When will this pain end?"

Maisy blotted her granddaughter's tears with her thumb. A portal appeared. Through it, she saw herself, decades earlier, on the sidewalk. Pete had opened the door of his house and invited her inside for a glass of lemonade. That was when she'd known it was finally over.

KEVIN CHONG is the author of six books, including the 2018 novel *The Plague*. He lives in Vancouver.

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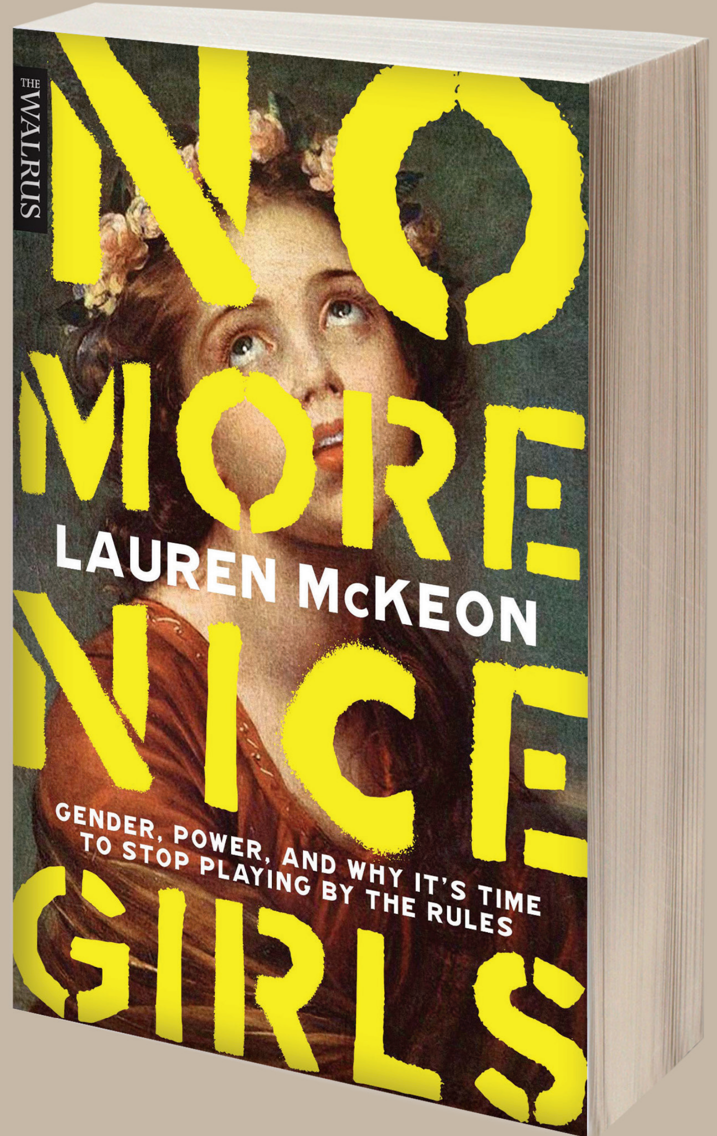

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VISUAL ESSAY

Finding Franny

On a seventy-day canoe trip, I traced the journey of a Victorian painter

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAOMI HARRIS

Adopting the persona of Frances Anne Hopkins in Beatty Cove, Lake Superior, Ontario

During the 1860s, British painter Frances Anne Hopkins accompanied her husband, a high-ranking official with the Hudson's Bay Company, on at least three excursions with voyageurs. Hopkins sketched the daily life of the fur traders and, upon her return to England, produced large-scale oil paintings whose accuracy provides an unparalleled glimpse into this chapter of Canadian history. Despite exhibiting at the Royal Academy of Arts, in London, she always signed her work "FAH"—effectively concealing her identity in a male-dominated art world that typically excluded women.

In the summer of 2018, I decided to channel Hopkins on my own odyssey. Dressed in nineteenth-century period costume, I embarked on a seventy-day canoe trip along the fur traders' route in Ontario. Using Hopkins's paintings and sketchbooks as a starting point, I recreated her final, 1869 voyage in reverse: from Lachine, Quebec, to Fort William, Ontario. Accompanied by a guide, I paddled, portaged, and did many of the daily chores needed to make camp. I've always been drawn to documentary projects. In 2011, I drove for four months, coast to coast, to rediscover my roots. In 2017, I set out across the United States to chronicle Donald Trump's first 100 days in office.

This time, my ambitions hit closer to home: to explore what it meant to be a female artist during the nineteenth century as part of a wider investigation into my own career. As a middle-aged woman, I increasingly experience a sense of disappearing—not just from the art world but from society. We exalt the young and beautiful in popular culture, and this celebration of youth is further reinforced in our art. Female mid-career artists face not only gender disparity but also ageism.

ABOVE The trip was to start on May 26, my forty-fifth birthday, but we had to push the start date. Instead, I had this daguerreotype made for the occasion.

OPPOSITE At the height of the 2018 heat wave, The Tintype Studio met us along the French River and created these tintypes.

I felt a profound affinity with Hopkins, who, balancing the roles of wife and mother while navigating the choppy waters of a patriarchal society, persevered in her practice. The trips couldn't have been easy. An upper-class European woman, Hopkins likely didn't portage or do any of the physical work necessary to set up camp. Still, she must have had a terribly difficult time, dealing with blackflies, orchestrating getting in and out of birchbark canoes, and sleeping in tents.

Using a variety of photographic practices, I set out to experience what she had, creating a mythological world where I cross in and out of her life. She often painted her husband and herself in the canoe. Likewise, with Hopkins as my muse, I created self-portraits. By intertwining my adventure with her biography, I hoped to create a new vision of Hopkins—and of myself.

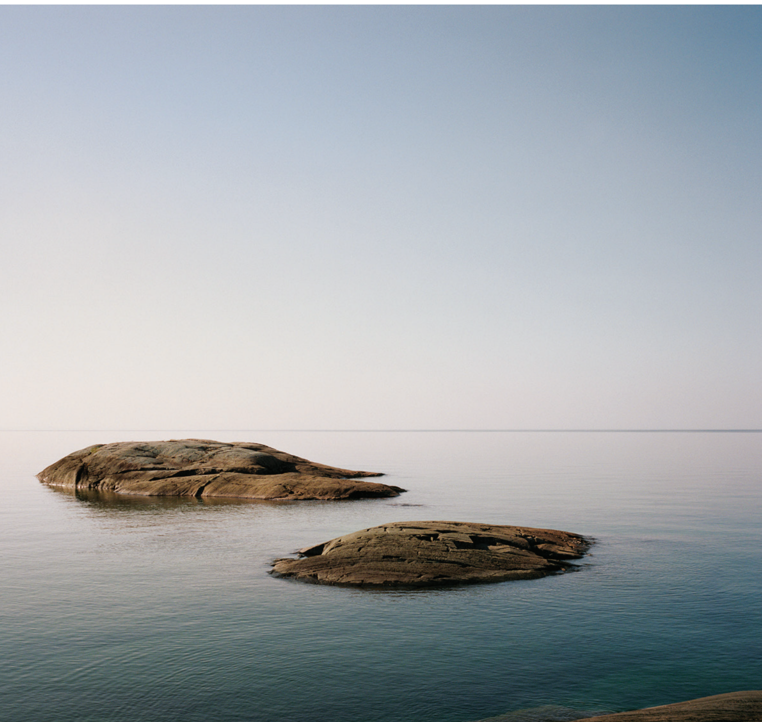
—*Naomi Harris*

I, Voyageur... In Search of Frances Anne Hopkins *was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts' New Chapter program.*

DAGUERREOTYPE IMAGE COURTESY OF MIKE ROBINSON

TOP Otter Cove, Lake Superior, Ontario (left); Beatty Cove, Lake Superior, Ontario (right)

BOTTOM Water lilies where the French River empties into Lake Huron (left); small islands during a particularly calm day on Lake Superior (middle)



ABOVE Frances Anne Hopkins's painting *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall* (1869)

IMAGE COURTESY OF FRANCES ANNE HOPKINS / LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

RXBAR
CLIF BAR
RXBAR
CLIF BAR
QUESTBAR
RXBAR
STRONGER
25g
Nut Butter FILLED
PRO BAR
Meal
CLIF BAR

TREATS 8 GARMENTS
Do not apply to skin. Apply to fabric only.
PREMIUM
INSECT
REPELLENT
A TREATMENT FOR
CLOTHING, GEAR & TENTS
TRIGGER SPRAY
ODORLESS PERMETHRIN
ZIKA, WEST NILE VIRUS,
DENGUE, CHIKUNGUNYA,
AND YELLOW FEVER
SAWYER

OPPOSITE Camping gear packed for the journey (clockwise from top left): powdered milk and powdered eggs, 120 protein bars, waterproof food barrel, industrial-sized insect repellent

RIGHT My cedar-canvas canoe, *The Franny Anne*, along the French River

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BOOKS

Sense and Sensitivity

Publishers increasingly lean on outside experts to vet books for cultural insensitivity. Is it working?

BY TAJJA ISEN
ILLUSTRATION BY KA YOUNG LEE

AMERICAN DIRT was supposed to be a major book of the year. Jeanine Cummins's novel, which follows a Mexican bookseller and her son as they dodge cartel violence and attempt to cross the border into the United States, had all the makings of a blockbuster. Cummins's publisher, Flatiron Books, had reportedly paid out a seven-figure advance and was sparing no expense on marketing; the book was blurbed by heavyweights Stephen King and John Grisham; and, sealing the deal, it was chosen for Oprah's Book Club. More than a mere bestseller, though, *American Dirt* was positioned as the next Great American Novel. (Crime author Don Winslow called it "a *Grapes of Wrath* for our times.") The book was meant to illuminate the politics of the present, when migrants of all ages are being detained en masse along the US border. Then, a few weeks before its January release date, the backlash began.

In one viral review, author Myriam Gurba tore into the book's stereotypical characters and simplistic moral dichotomy, which positions America as a beacon of hope and goodness and Mexico as all criminality and death. Another review, in the *New York Times*, called *American Dirt* "determinedly apolitical"—surprising, given its themes—and noted the author's odd fascination with "gradients of brown skin." It emerged that, though Cummins has a Puerto Rican grandmother, she had identified as white up until at least 2015, when she'd penned an op-ed claiming that race was something she "*really* [didn't] want to write about" (emphasis hers). It was only last year, during early promotion for *American Dirt*, that she began publicly identifying as Latinx.

Her publisher leaped into damage-control mode. It cancelled Cummins's book tour, and its president apologized for the "deep inadequacies in how we at Flatiron Books address issues of representation, both in the books we publish and in the teams that work on them." Even Oprah responded to the controversy, hosting a group interview with the author and several Latinx writers who shared their thoughts on how, though more books are being written about people of colour, the literary world continues to invest in fewer books by them.

American Dirt was still a stunning commercial success—it has spent three months and counting on the New York Times Best Sellers list. Critically, however, it's been a disaster. As the social media flak and denunciatory essays piled up, a common theme emerged: Cummins and Flatiron could have sidestepped much of the backlash if they'd hired a sensitivity reader to make sure the book's representations were accurate. "[Cummins is] a seasoned writer, and *American Dirt* is her fourth book," wrote Aya de Leon in *Guernica*. "In her author's note, she expressed concern that she might fall short: 'I was worried that, as a nonimmigrant and non-Mexican, I had no business writing a book set almost entirely in Mexico, set entirely among immigrants,'...But it never occurred to her to *pay someone to make sure she got it right?* In the publishing industry, sensitivity readers are common knowledge. With a seven-figure advance, Cummins had plenty of resources to hire one."

In recent years, writing authentically across difference—whether race, gender,

sexuality, or some other axis—has become a charged issue, and as the *American Dirt* saga suggests, a book's critical reception can be defined by how accurately or not it represents its characters. Central to these discussions has been the amorphous role of the sensitivity reader. In many respects, the work is not especially different from that in any other writer-editor relationship: sensitivity readers are hired to help ensure a manuscript's authenticity, making recommendations about potential issues with cultural veracity and tone. These freelancers have an expertise that comes from personal experience: a Jewish reader might note that a devoutly Orthodox protagonist ordinarily wouldn't be working late on a Friday night; a Black reader can flag the racism of dialogue that veers into stereotype. In the case of *American Dirt*, a Latinx reader may have noted the many ways that the protagonist seemed more like an American tourist, constantly shocked by the realities of life in the country, rather than a Mexican citizen.

However, the seemingly straightforward role has become deeply contentious. Some proponents have begun treating sensitivity readers as a panacea: a cheap and effective way of achieving diversity in the ranks of publishing that doubles as insurance against future criticism. Meanwhile, detractors have built these readers up into all-powerful agents of censorship, harbingers of the death of literature. Sensitivity readers, of course, are none of these things—what they are is a piecemeal fix in an industry that continues to push minority voices to the margins.

SENSITIVITY READERS first became common in young adult and children's fiction, likely due to the theory that diverse characters can play especially formative roles in shaping young readers' ideas of identity. In the past four years, sensitivity readers have moved toward becoming mainstream across all genres, at the Big Five publishers as well as at independent presses across North America. But, unlike copy editors reading for grammar or proofreaders scanning for layout errors, there isn't yet a strong consensus on how the sensitivity-reading process should work. Sometimes these readers are hired by publishers, other times by authors at their own expense. A number of publishers contacted for this article were reluctant to comment on how they use sensitivity readers beyond asserting that they commission them "on a case-by-case basis" and that the practice is "something we see ourselves doing more of in the future." This lack of openness implies that the process is somehow shameful, as if the fact that a writer or editor may need help depicting an experience outside of their own is a failing.

No one is disputing any white writer's right to dream up whatever material they desire—but, if they fail to do so convincingly, the public will hold them to account.

More transparency would bring some necessary understanding to the work, especially considering all the misconceptions around sensitivity readers' allegedly absolute powers. "The day my novels are sent to a sensitivity reader is the day I quit," Lionel Shriver, columnist and author of *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, wrote in one article, lamenting the "gagging effect" on creativity. Shriver despairs of what she sees as political correctness run amok and fears a future in which all fictional characters speak with the same sanitized courtesy. "If books don't adhere to the party line," she added, "they'll not see print." Author Francine Prose echoes these concerns: "What this suggests is that books are being categorized—and judged—less on their literary merits than on the identity of their authors." This kind of bad-faith alarmism misses the point. No one is disputing any white writer's right to dream up whatever material they desire—but, if they fail to do so convincingly, the public will hold them to account. Sensitivity reading is simply an additional step in the research process.

Kai Cheng Thom, author of *I Hope We Choose Love*, has worked with Canadian authors and publishers as a sensitivity reader for several years, usually assessing representations of characters who are trans women or Chinese. She's found that, when expectations around the job aren't clear, it can lead to confusion and resentment: writers or editors may worry that they'll lose control of the work; sensitivity readers may worry that writers will co-opt parts of their life stories in exchange for nominal fees. Thom has responded by developing a contract in which the parameters are well defined. "I lay out that I respect the author or publisher having final say over the work, that my recommendations are only suggestions, and that I won't be held responsible for the final product," she explains. During her editing process, she takes care to explain why she has a particular response—"What in my experience in the community of trans women has taught me that this is offensive?"—rather than just noting that something is offensive. For Thom, the process is more valuable than a mere way to correct stereotypes: "It adds depth to the character and it gives the author a glimpse into the nuance and complexity of a marginalized community," she says.

As for the notion of sensitivity readers being all-powerful, compensation for their work is low in an industry already famous for low wages. Rates vary, but reading a 300-page manuscript for a major publisher usually hovers at around $300. Meanwhile, a freelance copy editor working on the same book would likely earn multiple times that amount. Casey Plett, author of *Little Fish* and a sensitivity reader who also assesses representations of trans women,

says few in the industry seem sure about how to put a price on the process. "While people probably have a pretty good idea of how much to pay a freelance editor or how much to pay someone to work in an office every day, both sensitivity readers and the people who hire them are in the dark," she says.

It's important to note that sensitivity readers are often minoritized writers in an industry that has long failed to invest in minoritized writers. Around the peak of the *American Dirt* controversy, publisher Lee and Low released the results of its 2019 industry-diversity survey: of the employees who responded, 76 percent were white—much higher than US census data, where non-Hispanic white Americans account for some 60 percent. In addition, the diversity that does exist in publishing tends to be concentrated among interns—the lowest-paid workers, often brought on for only a few months at a time. Based on the data, it seems likely that, if a sensitivity reader is hired, they could be the only person of colour who sees a text before it goes to press.

The fact that more publishers are using sensitivity readers may appear to be a move in the right direction. But, in Thom's experience, people don't always enter into the process to meaningfully engage with other experiences or cultures. Instead, the process is done for what she calls "moral insurance." Publishers want to scrub a manuscript of offensive material in order to minimize liability. "[Some publishers] will send the manuscript out to sensitivity readers to say it has been 'stamped': 'We have done this thing so you can't come after us,'" Thom explains. Plett has also seen widespread misconceptions about the job, like the idea that sensitivity reads are akin to submitting work to a tribunal and that, if someone hires one, "you have to do everything they say or they're going yell about you on Twitter."

There are ways to push back against this culture of fear. Writers' unions could develop a set of guidelines for sensitivity reading. Creating a more diverse workforce, especially in executive editorial positions, could help make sensitivity reading an organic part of the publishing process rather than an afterthought outsourced for a pittance. The media conversation around sensitivity readers also needs to change. It's often framed as a debate over white writers' licence to imagine rather than a conversation about the value that a range of perspectives can bring to any book's development. Thom has found that some of her most exciting work has been helping minoritized authors write about other identities. "We have to reward that kind of courage and create the kind of structures to support authors when they're doing things that are boundary pushing," she says.

To do this, sensitivity readers can't be treated like a Band-Aid solution. A sensitivity reader may have helped Cummins address some of the inherent racism of *American Dirt*'s one-dimensional Mexico, the "landscape of carnage." But, as for the much-criticized soiree that Flatiron threw to celebrate the novel, featuring table centrepieces adorned with barbed wire at a time when children are being locked in cages? That's a problem no underpaid freelancer can fix.

TAJJA ISEN is the digital editor at The Walrus.

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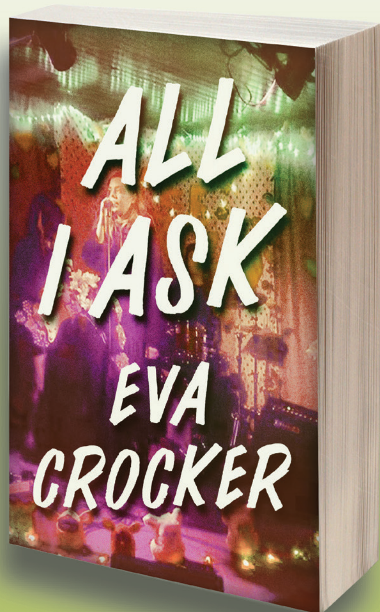

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FIRST PERSON

Words' Worth

On the value of art at the end of the world

BY KATRINA ONSTAD

LAST SPRING, I ran into an acquaintance outside our local YMCA. She's an actor and screenwriter married to a musician; I'm a writer. We exchanged the usual anxious banter about working in creative fields: the shrinking budgets, the unpaid invoices, the fears about getting old and irrelevant.

Then she told me she was thinking about learning plumbing—a useful pursuit in the event, she half-joked, of environmental collapse. I was alarmed and impressed. For those of us in the arts, the idea of abandoning one's life's work to do something perceived as more valuable was, until recently, an ongoing joke: What use would we be, with our guitars and fountain pens, in any kind of crisis? "But we're Fredericks!" I exclaimed. "We don't have to know plumbing!"

I was referring to *Frederick*, the classic 1967 children's book by Leo Lionni. In it, a "chatty family of field mice" prepares for winter. They all pitch in, gathering berries and nuts, except for Frederick, who engenders low-grade scorn for lolling around and saying: "I do work…I gather colours, for Winter is gray!" He gathers words, too, while the other mice are hauling corncobs twice their weight. Later, after all the food is eaten and the mice seem ready to kill one another, Frederick gently suggests that his brethren kick back and listen. He holds court, describing in detail the sun and the world beyond the stone wall in which they live. He contributes stories. Enraptured, the mice forget their near starvation and forgive Frederick's slacker ways, calling him a poet, to which he responds, blushing: "I know it!"

"Oh, Frederick," my acquaintance said, rolling her eyes. "Fuck Frederick."

I remembered this moment recently from inside my own home, with my self-isolating family breathing irritatingly nearby. My new novel had just been released at the end of March. I worked on it for five years, supplementing my small advance with writing and teaching jobs. Of course, releasing a novel during a pandemic means there's no book launch; the readings have been cancelled, interviews banked for later. In the meantime, I'm expected to prove my utility through self-promotional videos and tweets, anything to help sell copies. But I feel powerless, skinless. I know this is a minor strain of suffering, a blip measured against that of the paramedics who entered the home of an elderly neighbour one recent morning. Still, it's painful. My novel's arrival at this moment has seemingly thrust my uselessness into the light.

Artists have always had to ward off the impression that we're the tribe's lollers and dilettantes. Our compensation often reflects that perception: a recent government-funded report pegged the median income of artists at $24,300—that's 44 percent below average. The value, artists hope, isn't in the dollars but in the emotion generated, the reflection forced, the realignment of the inner self that might occur in one's audience. Those payoffs are hard to quantify, and in a crisis like this one, what's valuable is one's utility, one's productivity. It helps to know plumbing.

When the US government announced $75 million (US) of emergency funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, a former governor tweeted, "How many more people could have been helped with this money?"—the implication being that artists aren't real workers struggling like everyone else. Musicians and actors and writers have stepped up charitable efforts during this crisis, donating money and talents to help food banks and health care workers. The post-hardcore band Thursday turned its concert T-shirts into face masks. Useful, certainly, but isn't art, in and of itself, contribution enough?

I still want to be a Frederick, to move readers even if it feels awkward or unseemly to release a book in the middle of a disaster. In these jagged, brutal moments, we seek the unreal for comfort and synthesis. It's why we're watching the movie *Contagion*, reading the apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven*, and playing REM's "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)" on repeat. Art provides a gasp of air, a road map out of the disaster. I found my own route through Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach": "Sophocles long ago / Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought / Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery; we / Find also in the sound a thought, / Hearing it by this distant northern sea." The crisis we're in isn't unprecedented, and how comforting, how useful, to see that the poet does know it, as ever.

KATRINA ONSTAD's most recent novel is *Stay Where I Can See You*.

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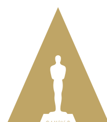

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