

SPECIAL WINTER ISSUE

THE WALRUS

CANADA'S CONVERSATION

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THE O'HAGAN ESSAY ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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When Spouses
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Cleaning Up
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The Growth of
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Can Reading
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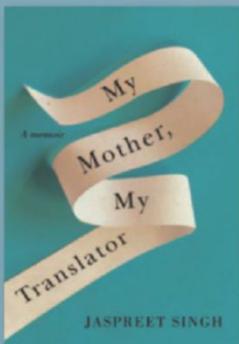
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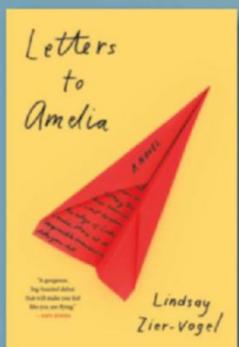
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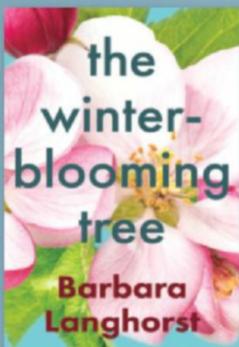
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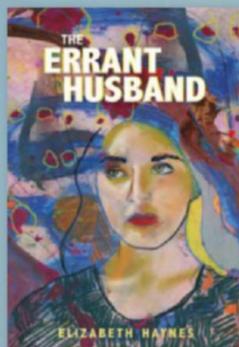
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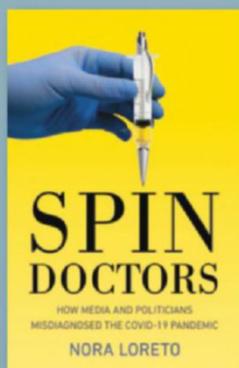
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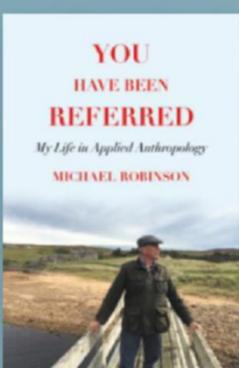
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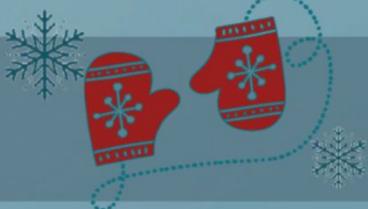
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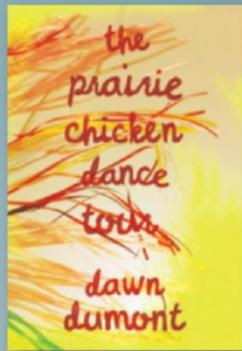


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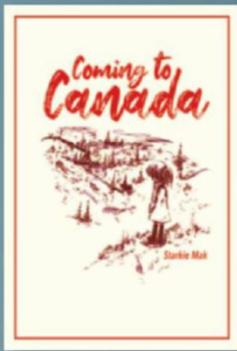


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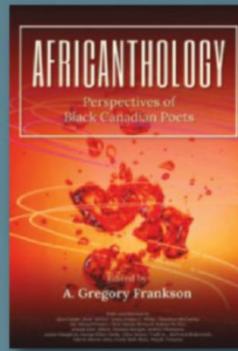


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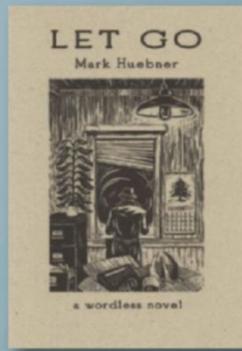
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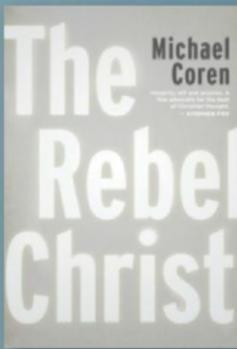


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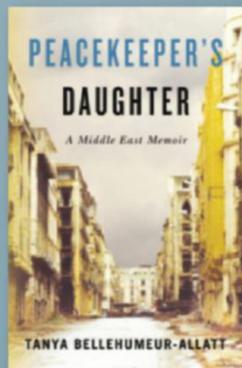
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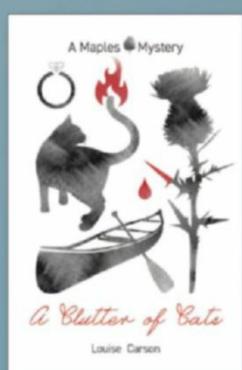
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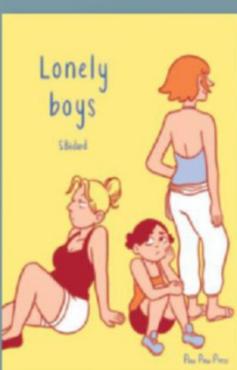


Fiction | Palimpsest Press



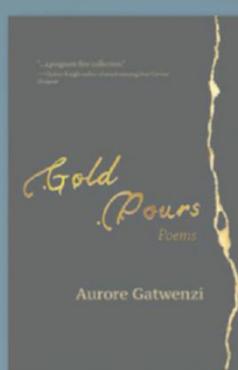
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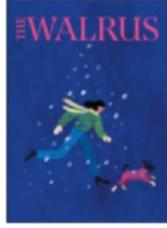
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Illustration by Tallulah Fontaine

Tallulah Fontaine is an illustrator and artist from Edmonton. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Pitchfork*, among others.

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Editor's Letter

THE LATE Richard O'Hagan worked as a journalist (writing for *Maclean's* and the *Toronto Telegram*), as an adviser to two Canadian prime ministers, and as a long-time member of The Walrus Foundation's board of directors. In 2016, with the support of his family, The Walrus launched The O'Hagan Essay on Public Affairs, an annual feature article that explores an aspect of public policy. Through my conversations with O'Hagan, who was almost ninety when we met, I came to see his profound belief in journalism's power to shape our day-to-day lives. He died in 2018, but the annual tradition lives on.

The O'Hagan essay is not aimed at policy wonks or bureaucrats. Its job is to take a complicated question and make it relevant to everyone. Over the past five years, the series has explored subjects as wide-ranging as free trade, bilingualism, and the carbon tax. In each case, the story's author was tasked with demystifying the relationship between the decisions being made in boardrooms and government backrooms and their implications for the rest of us. This describes the general function of all journalism, of course, but when it comes to broad issues that defy straightforward solutions, the reporter's role is heightened.

This year's essay, on the future of the media, is close to home. By all measures, traditional media is in decline: according to 2017 research by the Public Policy Forum, it has shrunk by more than half over the last decade, and recent reports demonstrate that the pandemic has accelerated the closure of local media outlets across Canada. I wrote this year's O'Hagan essay after realizing that, as a



registered charity that produces journalism and events, The Walrus has a front-row seat to the industry's big-picture problems. The story was inspired by countless conversations, meetings, and public events held over the last few years between institutions, journalists, government officials, and even platforms like Facebook and Google, whose growth has transformed the way we share and consume news. The feature, "Tomorrow's News," attempts to capture something about this moment for an industry at a crossroads—a time when technological, financial, and social disruption is sinking old business models before new ones can fully emerge.

Journalism, unlike many industries, defies the axiom that, if you build a great product, the money will follow. It feels like time to explain why. It's an ongoing surprise that The Walrus, now in its nineteenth year, is a veteran in a constantly evolving media climate. It has taken time, leadership, and a fair bit of luck to develop it into an established brand. Today, we have achieved stability by diversifying revenue streams: philanthropy, partnerships and sponsorships, and The Walrus Lab (an in-house agency that creates content and events for other organizations), in addition to traditional circulation and

advertising revenue. As of fall 2021, online readers can also become occasional or monthly supporters. Those regular contributions will help keep our website accessible to everyone.

Even with the right business model, it's not enough to produce journalism that is smart or addresses important topics—it also needs to speak to readers. In this issue, there are a number of what we'd call classic "Walrus" stories. Sarah Barmak's latest health feature, "What Women (Still) Want," could be seen as a report on why there is still no viable female counterpart to Viagra. Her reporting, however, paints a much bigger picture about the way women's sexualities are misunderstood and, therefore, often overlooked. In "Shooting Stars," photographer Lou D, who has had a backstage view of countless rock concerts, takes editorial fellow Connor Garel through his film archive—never before made public—to reveal our changing relationship to celebrity photography. What does a single 35mm print, lost to time, mean in an age when stars can create and control their own public images on social media?

And, in a moving memoir, seasoned journalist and editor Stephen Trumper uses his storytelling skills to chart the arc of his life's true love. In "The Love Letter," Trumper candidly describes the challenges he and his wife have faced over their decades-long marriage, such as her Alzheimer's diagnosis and his difficulties visiting her in long-term care during COVID-19. His drive to learn from his experience is reflected in every sentence. It's a reminder that we are better at navigating change the more we understand it. ✩

—Jessica Johnson

Contributors' Notes



TALLULAH FONTAINE
Cover illustration

"I've spent the past five years living in Los Angeles, so it's been a while since I experienced a Canadian winter. This year, now that I'm back in Montreal, I'm excited to go out into the snow for the first time with Reba, the nine-pound terrier I adopted during the pandemic. It's those quiet moments—the first snowfall, lacing up your ice skates, setting up your Christmas lights—that make winter special, and that's what I wanted to show in this cover illustration."

Tallulah Fontaine is an illustrator and artist from Edmonton. Her work has been featured in the New York Times, The New Yorker, Teen Vogue, and Pitchfork, among others.



ROSEMARY COUNTER
"My Uncle the Witch Hunter," p. 66

"In the fall of 2016, my mom convinced me to join her on a seniors' bus tour through the midwestern United States so we could learn more about my great-great-great-great-grandmother, who was from Walnut Creek, Ohio. Right before we left, I found out I was pregnant, and I was having trouble sleeping. I spent almost every night on *ancestry.ca*, thinking I might write a story about matriarchal histories. Instead, I stumbled upon John Troyer—a distant uncle in Canada who was a clairvoyant and a witch hunter—and was totally hooked. There's a lot that people don't know about their family histories, and I think anyone who invests a bit of time researching will find things that will blow their mind."

Rosemary Counter is an author and journalist whose work has appeared in the New York Times, The New Yorker, Maclean's, and Vanity Fair.



KAREN SOLIE
"The Climbing Vine," p. 80

"There was a vine that grew along a house I sublet in Newfoundland. Despite the homeowner's attempts to prune it, it kept reemerging with what seemed like almost sentient behaviour, growing so quickly that you could almost see the thing bending and twisting around whatever happened to be in its path. I came to like it, and I even started to think of it as an individual with its own personality. Then, one day, it was gone. I decided to bring it back the only way I could: through a poem."

*Karen Solie is the author of five collections of poetry. Her most recent, *The Caiplie Caves*, was published in 2019 and shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize.*



STEPHEN TRUMPER
"The Love Letter," p. 56

"Writing about love is difficult, and it's not something the modern-day man tends to do well. But my love for my wife, Judy, who has Alzheimer's, is too profound not to document. In the months after her diagnosis, she encouraged me to keep writing. I thought a lot about how to portray a relationship of forty-two years—the day-to-day gestures of love, the emotions, the challenges—and really tried to capture how much we leaned on each other in a way that throws standard disability storytelling out the window."

Stephen Trumper is a writer, an editor, and an instructor at Ryerson University's school of journalism.



KATRYA BOLGER
"Textual Healing," p. 77

"I've always been passionate about literature. My reading habits ebbed and flowed while I was a student, but during the pandemic, books became my companions again. I spent more time reading and realized just how therapeutic it can be. As someone who is part Thai, I've turned to Asian American and Asian Canadian authors in an effort to better understand my feelings toward my identity. They've helped me both feel empowered and defeat hate. Similarly, I think bibliotherapy can give people a new language to tackle whatever they might be dealing with and create space for them to confront uncomfortable things."

Katrya Bolger is a journalist whose work has appeared in Future of Good, the Globe and Mail, and the Montreal Gazette.

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Letters



DISMOUNTING THE POLICE

Upon reading Jane Gerster's "The RCMP Revisited" (November), a comprehensive overview of instances of incompetence and negligence in the RCMP, I concluded that the force needs to be disbanded altogether. Given how

large Canada is, policing should fall under provincial control, as it did a century ago, since local and regional forces are more adaptable and less bureaucratic. Existing police forces in Quebec and Ontario could serve as templates for other provinces reestablishing their forces. The question now is, Does our government have the wherewithal to propose this much-needed bottom-up overhaul of our nation's policing strategy?

Charles Leduc

Vancouver, BC

NO LAND'S MAN

In "Citizen of Nowhere" (November), Adnan Khan vividly outlines Deepan Budlakoti's encounters with arcane laws and byzantine processes in our immigration system as Budlakoti strives to gain recognition as a Canadian citizen. Each time Budlakoti has appeared before a tribunal or court, he has been told that he has tendered insufficient evidence to show that his parents, who worked for the Indian High Commission when they arrived in Ottawa, were not employed by a foreign government at the time of his birth. The courts have assumed that the burden of proving citizenship lies on Budlakoti because he is the one seeking a remedy. But our constitution imposes a fundamental duty on the government to act on behalf of its citizens, which it can do only if it first correctly identifies them. In cases of doubt, the burden should not be placed on individuals.

Donald Galloway

Victoria, BC

FOR PEAT'S SAKE

Edward Struzik enumerates, in "For the Love of Peat" (November), the reasons why Canada's wetlands are vital and overlooked. Sadly, Struzik writes that peatlands are found "from British Columbia to the Northwest Territories to Nova Scotia." Newfoundland and Labrador is once again dismissed by a central-Canadian perspective, except elsewhere in the article, where Struzik points out the province's 1,731 fens and bogs that the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project will "slice through." Yes, Muskrat Falls is an environmentally regressive project in many ways. Perhaps an article on the pathetic politics of how the project (which threatens the province with bankruptcy) came to be would educate readers from coast to coast to coast, including those from this province—the one just east of Nova Scotia.

James Case

St. John's, NL

KEEP ME POSTED

In "The Art of the Poster" (November), Meredith Holigroski delves into the history of the Polaris Music Prize and the stunning posters it commissions. Her visual essay reminded me of a road trip I took forty years ago, from Nashville back to Canada, when I brought with me a poster by lauded realist and muralist Thomas Hart Benton. *The Sources of Country Music* was Benton's last painting, and it also appears as a mural in Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame. I laminated the poster and it hangs in my dining room. It isn't a singular commemorative Polaris poster (though country music can be polarizing), but still, over salmon and new potatoes, I swear I can hear The Wailin' Jennys, Corb Lund, and music from Le Ranch à Willie.

Mel Simoneau

Gatineau, QC

TUSK, TUSK

In the December 2021 issue, the article "To Catch a Turtle Thief" stated that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) requires a permit to ship live turtles domestically and internationally. In fact, CITES applies only to international trade. The Walrus regrets the error.

"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.

**411 Richmond Street East, Suite B15
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A 3S5**



Canadian Multiculturalism: A Work in Progress

As we mark fifty years since the adoption of Canada's federal multiculturalism policy, human rights advocate **AMIRA ELGHAWABY** celebrates its merits and reflects on the work that is yet to be done when it comes to inclusion, acceptance, and fighting systemic racism in our country.

I've often joked that many of us have drunk the Kool-Aid, one with a distinctly Canadian flavour called "multiculturalism."

In fact, the sentiment that people of a variety of backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures could happily fit into Canada while holding on to, even celebrating, the aspects of their identities that make them who they are has long informed my life's trajectory.

Multiculturalism has marked many of my formative experiences growing up as the daughter of Egyptian immigrants. In elementary school, I was encouraged to share information about my faith and

culture with my peers. In high school, I was the president of the multicultural club at our incredibly diverse school overseeing an annual cultural showcase that attracted hundreds of young people and their families; families who were thrilled to see their home countries celebrated by their teenagers on stage.

While it has become a somewhat contentious concept over the years, multiculturalism remains a cherished belief for me, and for so many people who have long called this country home, or who have arrived more recently to build, or rebuild, their lives here.

And yet, looking at the history books, one could easily assume that Canadian multiculturalism happened by accident.

In 1963, then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson was trying to figure out how to stave off a national unity crisis threatening to tear society apart across linguistic lines. At the core of the crisis was mounting resentment by Quebecers toward Anglophone dominance, concerns about the preservation of their culture and language, and growing separatist sentiment.

Pearson created the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism "to explore issues relating to the languages

and cultures of the English- and French-speaking ‘founding peoples’ of Canada.”

But that narrow vision didn’t go over well with members of Canada’s ethnocultural groups, and so commissioners were also asked to “report on the cultural contribution of other ethnic groups and how to preserve this.”

The concept of Canada as a “mosaic” rather than a “melting pot” had been posited early on in author John Murray Gibbon’s award-winning book *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation*, published in 1938. Gibbon imagined various cultures holding on to their identities while contributing to the country’s progress. This thinking was furthered by Canadian sociologist John Porter in his study *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*.

As for the notion of an American melting pot, it emerged from a play by that name first staged in 1908 in Washington, DC. It depicted the story of a Russian Jewish family that survived a pogrom and immigrated to the US, longing for a society where identities melted away so as not to cause the types of deadly divisions experienced back home.

The concept became synonymous with cultural assimilation.

So, while bilingualism was embraced, the Royal Commission rejected the idea of “biculturalism,” which was defined as referring to the existence of two principal cultures in Canada, those of the French and English—Indigenous and other communities were rendered practically invisible.

Instead of biculturalism, the commission helped to usher in a different kind

of consciousness based on the mosaic: ethnocultural communities should be encouraged to maintain and celebrate their cultural heritage, while fully participating in Canadian life. The commission put it this way: “man is a thinking and sensitive being; severing him from his roots could destroy an aspect of his personality and deprive society of some of the values he can bring to it.”

These reflections nurtured the eventual articulation of a multiculturalism policy in 1971, exactly fifty years ago.

That policy, the first of its kind in the world, would shape the country in ways that have both garnered worldwide admiration and attracted some criticism throughout the decades.

and their families. It became a vision of Canada that was shared across a variety of partisan lines and promoted by various provincial governments, though was politically rejected in Quebec. (Quebec historian Gérard Bouchard instead introduced the concept of “interculturalism” as an alternative model for integration and the management of ethnocultural diversity. Within the intercultural model, cross-cultural engagement and acceptance are still respected and encouraged, but with French as the common language binding all groups.)

Following the adoption of the federal policy, Canada came to be considered worldwide as a country of immense potential, hope, and freedom; a place where families and individuals could hold on to who they were without having to assimilate into one narrow frame of what it meant to be “Canadian.”

Today, over 20 percent of the country’s population is foreign-born, with more and more people arriving in the country due to evolving immigration policies that have sought to make it easier to attract talented and skilled workers and their families.

“Canada rightly prides itself on its evolutionary tolerance for diversity and pluralism,” reads an excerpt from a 2007 Supreme Court ruling involving a couple’s faith-based marital dispute. “This journey has included a growing appreciation for multiculturalism, including the recognition that ethnic, religious or cultural differences will be acknowledged and respected. Endorsed in legal instruments ranging from the statutory protections

Half a century on, Canada as a mosaic continues to exist in the popular imagination of many of the first-generation immigrants who arrived in the initial waves of immigration following the policy’s establishment.

Half a century on, Canada as a mosaic continues to exist in the popular imagination of many of the first-generation immigrants who arrived in the initial waves of immigration following the policy’s establishment. Indeed, former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, under whose watch the official policy came into effect, has long been a revered figure for many immigrant communities for the promise that the policy held for them


Cultural Perspectives

I WAS BORN IN AFGHANISTAN, but my family fled that country and ended up in Canada in 1988 when I was eight years old. I also teach in an elementary school where most of the kids don’t speak English. The multiculturalism that Canada advertises doesn’t always trickle down, and many of the policies toward refugees don’t work in practice. That said, the reason I can criticize the government is because I was raised in Canada and was exposed to uniquely Canadian experiences. I have mixed feelings of having tremendous gratitude but also needing to advocate for voices that we rarely hear.” **Ajmer Darawal, Toronto, Ontario**

found in human rights codes to their constitutional enshrinement in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the right to integrate into Canada's mainstream based on and notwithstanding these differences has become a defining part of our national character."

It would sadly take decades for the irony of the treatment of Indigenous children and communities to break through the public consciousness in the same way—the realization that, while a mosaic was upheld as a part of Canadian exceptionalism, in essence Canada was founded with the same assimilationist attitudes that characterized the colonial mindset evident throughout European settlement and colonization.

Furthermore, while the mistreatment and abuse of Indigenous communities and the genocide committed against them remains a horrific and painful legacy, one that begs sincere reconciliation and repair, it was in fact Indigenous teachings that helped nurture the view that we should see the "other" as part of an interconnected whole.

As former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson noted in her book *Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship*, the testimony of Chief John Kelly at the 1977 Royal Commission on the Northern Environment attested to this grand design.

"[...] as the years go by, the circle of the Ojibway gets bigger and bigger," he said. "Canadians of all colours and religions are entering that circle. You might feel that you have roots somewhere else, but in reality, you are right here with us."

Being "right here" together has indeed translated into better outcomes for immigrants to Canada who seem to integrate far more quickly than their American counterparts. That being said, there are some signs that people here in Canada are

becoming increasingly aware we are far from living in a multicultural utopia.

On the one hand, there are polls like one released earlier this year by Ipsos, which asked people representing the demographics of the general adult population in twenty-eight countries, "to what extent do you agree or disagree that [your country] is divided by 'culture wars'?"

Only 28 percent of people who responded in Canada identified a divide; we did far better than many other coun-



tries on this front. Up to 46 percent of respondents in Belgium, 38 percent in France, and 32 percent in Great Britain saw division. In the United States, over 50 percent of Americans said they believe their country is divided by culture wars.

Yet, Canadians have nothing to be smug about. We've also seen disturbing surveys like one released a few years ago by Angus Reid and CBC that found that 68 percent of Canadian respondents thought people should assimilate rather than keep their own customs and languages.

A study by EKOS in 2019 found that while opposition to immigration remains low, there has been some ideological and partisan polarization on the issue, reflecting a shift toward "ordered populism," which includes hostility to "out-groups" (i.e., immigrants) and "rests on the belief in a corrupt elite, and the idea that power needs to be wrested from this elite and returned to the people."

This is evident in the growth of white supremacist groups, which have become increasingly active both on and off-line. It's also evident in how people continue to be denied job opportunities and housing, and continue to be harassed, assaulted, and even killed because of their faith and racial identities.

The most significant threat to multiculturalism—declared dead in some parts of Europe—may be populism, which is on the rise here at home and globally.

Nevertheless, considering how reliant this nation remains on the arrival of people from around the world to continue to build and strengthen this country's economic and social fabric, there is little doubt that Canada's ever-growing circle must be one that is based on mutual respect and free from racism and discrimination.

I believe we can get there, despite the history we must confront, the reconciliation we owe Indigenous communities, and the ongoing work we will need to undertake to address the systemic racism plaguing our institutions; systemic racism which continues to prevent the full and equal participation of far too many of our friends, neighbours, colleagues, and fellow residents of Canada.

For many of us, this has been our life's work, fuelled by the hope that we will one day live in a country that truly honours all of us.

Please pass the Kool-Aid. ■

Multiculturalism in Context

BY ELIZABETH CHORNEY-BOOTH

Many countries around the world boast very specific national traits—be it America's tales of rugged individualism or Italy's rich culinary heritage. For Canadians, one of our biggest points of national pride hasn't been highlighting what makes us different from other countries, but our ability to build a culture around a mosaic of the traditions immigrants bring from around the world.

As of 2021, multiculturalism has been on the books as an official policy for fifty years. The idea that anyone can come to this country and not only continue to practice but to share the customs that make their countries of origin special has been a key part of not just how the rest of the world views Canada, but how we see ourselves.



"MY PARENTS IMMIGRATED HERE in the mid-1960s from South Africa and I was born in Manitoba. I've always been supportive of multiculturalism because it's what makes my inclusion in Canadian society possible. Canada's multiculturalism policy is not perfect, and growing up, our family often talked about our experiences with racism and how we coped with that. But on the other hand, a lot of the time Canada is a very pleasant and welcoming place and that's the reason my whole family still lives here." **Ian Samuels, Calgary, Alberta**

Multiculturalism Through the Years

The road to true multiculturalism hasn't always been direct, but the underlying concept is something most Canadians aspire to uphold. Following are some of Canada's key multiculturalism milestones.

Canada becomes the first country in the world to officially institute a multicultural policy, which is embraced by many Canadians and faces little opposition in Parliament, but some French-language advocates argue it will fail to protect Quebec's distinct culture.

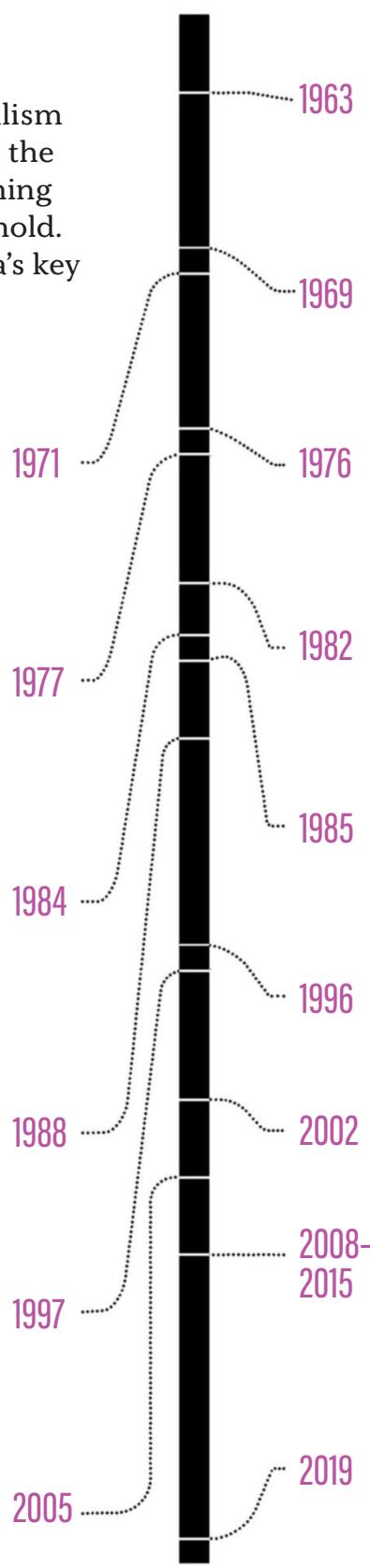
The Canadian Human Rights Act is created to protect all Canadians, including newcomers, from discrimination based on membership to marginalized groups.

The Special Parliamentary Committee on Visible Minorities' *Equality Now!* report suggests that even after a decade of official multiculturalism policy, BIPOC Canadians are not being given the opportunities to fully participate in Canadian life.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act receives Royal Assent, turning the government's multiculturalism policy into law and institutionalizing multiculturalism in all federal institutions.

The federal government updates its multiculturalism policy to focus more heavily on social justice, civic participation, and fostering a sense of belonging for all.

Canada's Action Plan Against Racism is launched, outlining more than forty new and continuing initiatives for combatting racism and discrimination.



Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson creates the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism to help shape federal and provincial language policy. Other ethnic groups in Canada take issue with the commission's limited focus and ask the government to consider all cultural groups while recommending policies.

The commission's final report is released, calling for a recognition of the cultural contributions of Canadians who are of neither French nor English heritage.

The federal government adopts the Immigration Act, removing some restrictions on immigration from non-European countries and solidifying Canada's dedication to welcoming a diversity of newcomers.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is introduced, dictating that the provisions within the Charter "shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians."

The findings in the *Equality Now!* report lead to the creation of a House of Commons Standing Committee on Multiculturalism, followed by the creation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act two years later.

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation is created as a federal Crown corporation to eliminate "all forms of racism and racial discrimination in Canadian society."

The government declares that Canadian Multiculturalism Day will be held each year on June 27.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada becomes a crucial means for reintroducing Canadians to the national importance of Indigenous perspectives and culture.

The federal government launches *Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022*, investing \$45 million to support and complement existing programs and initiatives aimed at eliminating inequality by focusing on three main pillars: demonstrating federal leadership, empowering communities, and changing attitudes.

Everyday Encounters

In our nation of immigrants, the traces of other cultures and countries are all around us, from the restaurant stalls that line our suburban strip malls to the party tunes floating from open windows on a warm summer night. Here, we look at just some of the ways we Canadians tend to experience multiculturalism in our daily lives.

BY JESSICA WEI



CUISINE

Just about every plate of food tells a story—especially in a country like Canada, where culinary tastes and traditions come from around the world, settle here, and then evolve based on locally available ingredients and changing trends.

As global food supply lines grow ever more sophisticated and waves of newcomers continue to fill out the demand for imported products, Canada's cities have emerged as some of the most exciting dining scenes in the world.

From the Vietnamese-inspired “pizza” on Bánh xèo crepes at the Richmond Night Market, to the Berlin-style döner kebabs or Japanese soufflé pancakes at Toronto’s Kensington Market, to the myriad restaurants, take-out spots, and food stands serving up bold culinary twists on traditional Indian, Mexican, or Chinese dishes, Canadians are spoiled for choice when it comes to experiencing the foods of our immigrant cultures.

Food for thought

While people in Canada are blessed with a rich and varied landscape of cuisines to choose from, class and racial barriers continue to prevent many talented chefs of immigrant backgrounds from rising to the national stage. Meanwhile, the word “inspired”—like Middle Eastern-inspired, Thai-inspired, or Japanese-inspired—is often thrown around loosely, giving license to mostly white chefs working for large restaurant groups to co-opt elements of these cuisines while their POC cooks are relegated to junior positions in the kitchen.



BOOKS & FILM

Unlike the Nordic noir of Sweden and Denmark, there’s no dominant storytelling genre in Canada. Instead, our books and films are as diverse as they come, with tales that blend styles, weave in multiple languages, and spotlight communities from coast to coast.

Over the last half-century, prolific writers like Lawrence Hill, Dionne

Brand, Lee Maracle, and Wayson Choy have penned poems and novels that have helped to expand Canada’s multicultural story, reflecting our rich diversity and its inherent conflicts.

And in recent years, more communities have come to colourful life through books, including Little Jamaica in Toronto (in the book *Frying Plantain* by Zalika Reid-Benta), the frozen tundra of small-town Nunavut (in *Split Tooth* by Tanya Tagaq), and Vancouver’s Chinese community (in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* by Madeleine Thien).

Toronto’s Chinese community, meanwhile, has recently been given a mainstream spotlight through filmmaker Domee Shi’s short film for Disney, *Bao*, and the feature-length *Turning Red*. Shi joins a long line of filmmakers who have turned the lens on their unique diasporic identities in Canada, including Mina Shum, Nicolás Pereda, Atom Egoyan, and Deepa Mehta.

Point to ponder

Despite a stated desire to create pathways for diverse voices in the creative arts, Canada’s media and entertainment industries still struggle with barriers to access. According to statistics from the Canada Council for the Arts, racialized artists represent only 15 percent of all artists in the country, and racialized artists have a much lower median income than non-racialized artists. Ironically, the media continues to celebrate and popularize aspects of various

cultures while sidelining many of the people who bring these rich traditions to the forefront.



MUSIC

Pre-colonization, the land echoed with the chanting and drumming of many First Nations people who believed that drumming was the heartbeat of Mother Earth. As European settlers arrived, they brought their musical traditions with them. The maritime fiddle music heard to this day in kitchen parties and weddings across the East Coast is a surviving tradition brought over by early Acadian, Irish, and Scottish settlers.

Meanwhile, Vancouver boasts a 150-year-old tradition of Cantonese opera, the largest scene of its kind outside of Hong Kong. And the jazz musicians who flocked to Canada in the early twentieth century to escape Prohibition and anti-Black racism in the US helped to create a legacy of jazz that is still celebrated through the country's major jazz festivals, including the historic Halifax Jazz Festival, the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, and the TD Toronto Jazz Festival.

Deep roots, future sounds

The Polaris Music Prize is given to artists for putting out the best new record, as judged by an impartial jury of music insiders and writers. After addressing criticisms over the perceived lack of diversity in the award nominees and jurors—its first eight winners were white indie-rock and pop artists—the prize has finally settled into its original purpose: to fairly identify, for mainstream audiences, the most promising artists and map the future sound coming out of Canada.

In 2014, Tanya Tagaq, an Inuk throat singer from Nunavut, took home the prize. From there, winners have been more varied and boundary-pushing, from Jeremy Dutcher's artful and moving tribute to his ancestral Wolastoqey language to Lido Pimienta's Latin-pop output, which draws from her Afro-Colombian and Amerindian roots.



pays tribute to the area's past, nodding to the traditions and cultural influences of its people. Take, for example, the statues of Sun Yat-sen greeting visitors to Chinatowns across our major cities. Or the large-scale murals honouring the late Portuguese fadista and icon Amália Rodrigues located in Little Portugals in both Toronto and Montréal and at the Portuguese Cultural Centre of Mississauga.

In Canada's public art realm, though, diasporic patriotism often doubles as a form of protest. The Chinatown Anti-Displacement Garden in Toronto was created partly as a statement against gentrification and urban development. And in Manitoba, the sculpture known as Kakigay-Pimitchy-Yoong Pimatizwin in Sagkeeng First Nation was created both to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women, and to protest centuries of neglect and abuse.

VISUAL ARTS

Art is everywhere—splashed onto the red brick of our neighbourhood alleyways, strung up on gallery walls, adorning our bodies, and bringing life to all of the interstitial places in between.

A neighbourhood's public art often



"I WAS BORN IN MONTREAL. My mom is Chinese and my dad is Vietnamese. I was lucky enough to grow up in the Asian community with a good mix of everyone's cultures. I could invite my Indian friends or French Canadian friends over to eat or I'd go to their homes to try their food. I was lucky, too, because of the location where I was living in Montréal—some of my other Asian friends did not have the same experience if they were living more remotely. I still live on the island of Montréal. It's so diverse here—the city is an emblem of multiculturalism. I see it every day and can really vouch for it." **Bellie Nguyen, Montréal, Québec**

Multiculturalism and Reconciliation

Métis writer and activist **DANIELLE PARADIS** examines Canada's multicultural policy through a modern Indigenous lens.

It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness," Tolstoy wrote in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. He was talking about the human assumption that attractiveness equals kindness and integrity. For a moment, apply this to the relationship between settlers and the beautiful land that is called Canada. In this gorgeous, expansive country, most Canadians who live here are happy to do so. They feel lucky. Surely such a beautiful place could not exist on the foundation of an ugly oppression.

But fortune has not fallen equally among the people who live here. Five decades after Pierre Elliott Trudeau's Liberal government adopted a formal multiculturalism policy, many Indigenous people are still searching for their identity within this land.

This is a country that thinks of itself as a model of multiculturalism for the world. One that defines itself to its school-aged citizens in opposition to the United States. We learn in early grades that in the US you have to assimilate into American culture. Here, instead, we are a cultural mosaic where all the bright tiles of diversity form a picture of tolerance. Canada was the first country in the world to adopt a multicultural policy, but it took until June 2021 for it to adopt the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

In general, the notion of multiculturalism has proved to be a fairytale. Something that obscures slavery, Japanese internment camps, and other dark chapters of Canadian history. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples wrote in its report, "a country cannot be built on a living lie." The lie today is that Canada has always been a place

that promotes tolerance and diversity. The multiculturalism policy that was promoted in 1971 was not designed to recognize Indigenous people. This promise of tolerance and formal equality was not extended to our inherent rights.

For fifty years, our multiculturalism narrative has told a positive story of



integration into a tolerant, liberal, and equal society. Yet even today, we live in a culture that prioritizes joining English and French settler societies. Our policies may be multicultural, but our institutions are not. We have Queen Elizabeth II as the head of state, Westminster-style legislatures, and towns, cities, rivers, and roads named after European colonizers or the Europe they left behind.

That is not so surprising, when you consider that the 1971 creation of our multiculturalism policy was at a time of rising Francophone nationalism. Although the policy was not greeted warmly in Quebec either—Claude Ryan of *Le*

Devoir claimed that in trying to separate language and culture, the prime minister minimized both.

While the two Canadas—French and English—fought over their own languages and cultures, the state continued to crush Indigenous languages. Young children were taken from their families and sent to a school that beat their mother tongue out of them. That sent them home, if they survived, with a language that forever separated them from their community.

Within this context, multiculturalism has been a tool to legitimize and strengthen Canada, but minimize and erase the First People.

These are the sorts of memories, that, as a country, we prefer not to dwell on. Chief Dan George, an acclaimed poet and First Nation leader, silenced a crowd of over 30,000 with his scathing "Lament for Confederation." There, he mourned the loss of his land and home, and said he witnessed his "freedom disappear like the salmon going mysteriously out to sea. The white man's strange customs, which I could not understand, pressed down upon me until I could no longer breathe."

The next fifty years must focus on a renewal of Indigenous culture. We must work to find a balance between Canada's European style of parliamentary democracy and the Indigenous ways of knowing. We must work to preserve the land of this beautiful country, as the Anishinaabe teach, so that in seven generations our ancestors may live as we do, or better.

We must teach the true history of Canada, and work to restore to Indigenous people the traditional knowledge that was taken away. ■

TECHNOLOGY

Damage Control

For a fee, reputation fixers can clean up your online presence

BY PAUL GALLANT

ILLUSTRATION BY ANSON CHAN



IN THE MID-2000S, Matt Earle was an internet marketer for an offshore bank in Bermuda, helping draw in new customers. Impressed with his skills, corporate clients hired him to boost their profiles online. But Earle soon realized that they would also pay to bury bad news—scandals, lawsuits, or run-ins with financial regulators. He returned to Toronto in 2010 and, the next year, launched Reputation.ca, a company that provides digital makeovers, helping people regain control over how they appear on the internet.

Earle became what is called a reputation fixer, joining an industry today worth,

according to one estimate, \$240 million (US) annually. Reputation fixers run the spectrum from high-profile PR firms—such as Toronto-based Navigator, which former CBC host Jian Ghomeshi first turned to in 2014, when he was embroiled in assault accusations—to smaller, scrappier services like Earle's. Many Reputation.ca clients are businesses worried about the effect of scathing customer reviews or social media rants from disgruntled ex-employees. (One 2020 survey found that negative feedback on public forums like Yelp or Facebook can drive away 92 percent of consumers.) But Earle and his competitors also hear

from individuals: students humiliated by an explicit photo on a revenge-porn website, professionals desperate to expunge trash talk from a former client's blog, or CEOs who can't shake outdated news stories that keep popping up on Google. The internet has a long memory.

Cleaning up your image, however, is not cheap. A serious campaign can cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000 or more and will usually run for at least four to eight months. Earle's twenty-four staff members deploy a suite of tactics to dilute or outright remove unwanted content. They have methods for contacting satisfied customers and encouraging them to leave positive reviews to bump up star-rated averages. They are also able to tweak Wikipedia entries in ways that pass muster with the website's volunteer editors, who can be relentless about deleting puffery. Appeals can be filed to major internet players like Facebook, Google, and Twitter in order to hide a damaging link or critical comments. If it's an unflattering story in the mainstream press, staff might provide the publication with research that prompts a correction or clarification. If that's not enough, there's the nuclear option: disappearing the content entirely.

"Almost all credible newspapers have a no-removal policy," says Earle. It's sometimes different with blogs, independent news, or review websites. Since they don't necessarily follow journalistic codes of conduct, they can be nagged, paid off, coerced, or threatened with lawyers' letters into deleting material. "We do whatever we can to get content removed," says Earle.

But the help that reputation fixers provide the shamed and the bullied—and the profits they extract from them—may also be incentivizing the shamers and the bullies. This is the dark side of online reputation management: websites can make money by removing the hurtful material they encouraged others to post in the first place. These publishers are often based outside North America and can be part of larger networks that share content widely. They may operate for a few months before disappearing, only to have their posts appear on another site with a



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different name. Whether they target businesses or individuals, call themselves consumer-advocacy sites or gossip sites, the content is never fact-checked, universally negative, and almost always designed to harm.

In the same way that paying hostage takers can inadvertently create a market for hostage taking, the booming market for reputation fixing appears to be encouraging more online defamation and an ecosystem to manage it. Do reputation fixers put everybody's reputation at risk?

THIS MAN not only has a major drug issue, he made me do crazy sexual things that I wasn't comfortable with. He cheated on me with another guy," reads a now-deleted recent post on The Dirty, published, as is typical, under a heading that includes the name and photo of the subject.

Founded in 2007, The Dirty publishes anonymous "tips" about average people, including Canadians, on a platform that resembles a celebrity news site. Users can browse stories by city, scrolling through seemingly endless allegations of cheating, fraud, sexually transmitted diseases, and general lasciviousness. Though The Dirty has a list of prohibited content—including "false, defamatory" material, hate speech, pornography, revenge porn, and images of minors—a visitor might be shocked by what does get posted. "We are not the Truth Police," reads their legal FAQ. "We cannot resolve factual disputes between strangers. Therefore, we will not remove posts simply because one party makes an unproven claim that a post contains false information."

Still, the posts on many of these sites can be removed for a price. Some, such as *badgirlreports.date* or *cheaters.news*, run sidebar ads for reputation-fixer services. The website Ripoff Report openly charges businesses to monitor and control what's said about them on its pages. Others, like The Dirty, have co-operative relationships with reputation fixers that allow those companies to boast a "100% removal rate." According to court documents, between 2016 and 2017, Brandon Rook, a Vancouver-based geological and business consultant, was called a drunk,

a cheater, and a liar in almost 100 posts on social media and websites including The Dirty. The court awarded Rook \$200,000 in damages plus costs against his ex-girlfriend. (Rook had hired an expert to link the false comments to an IP address associated with her home Wi-Fi.) But, even before his case was completed, he gave \$29,870 (US) to reputation consultants. Rook's successful court case now fills up most of the search results for his name—it's hard to find a single unpleasant item about him.

Seeing sites profit from the very slander they were created to peddle can feel like a shakedown. Herman Tumurcuoglu says he won't work with them. He co-founded Montreal-based Searchreputation.net in 2015, when he realized he could build a business around reverse SEO, or suppression. SEO—search engine optimization—refers to the practice of improving a website's ranking in search results. Most people never look past the first page of a Google search—over 90 percent of clicks go to a top-ten result. Good SEO makes sure that, when specific keywords are used, consumers can find you. But that process can also be inverted. By overwhelming negative search results with positive ones, you can sink unflattering content deeper into the listings, making it harder to find. That embarrassing video you fear prospective employers are running across? It now appears on page five as opposed to surfacing right away. The video still exists but is effectively out of sight.

The company charges between \$1,500 and \$2,500 (US) a month to keep unwanted results down—and to track, police, and repair reputation eruptions—on behalf of clients around the world. The monitoring can be tricky: because Google ties results to the geographic location of the person doing the search, its algorithm might deliver an unwanted result abroad but not in a client's hometown. At the start, Searchreputation.net considered offering comprehensive "full-on removal" services, but Tumurcuoglu quickly abandoned this side of the business. Pushing down unwanted results is less ethically painful and will satisfy most customers, who just want to limit the damage and know

that, in the Wild West of the internet, they can't totally eradicate it.

"There has been all kinds of shady stuff going on to achieve a full removal. We didn't want to get involved with anything of the sort," he says. Some fixers subcontract work to freelancers who may use no-questions-asked tactics to get material removed. One prospective client came to Tumurcuoglu after he had hired a removal firm and had started getting letters from publishers threatening legal action because of the firm's aggressive methods. "What started off as a little problem became a big problem," says Tumurcuoglu, who did not take on the client.

Maanit Zemel, a commercial litigator and internet lawyer who teaches at Ryerson University, says that some reputation-fixing services—not those previously mentioned—have connections to extortion sites. Businesses may discover a negative review only after a removal service points it out and offers help. On other occasions, personal details shared with a reputation fixer have even shown up on these sites. "The victims fall victim to these good Samaritans: they enter into a contract with them, they pay them a lot of money," she says. "The URL disappears. Then, a week later, new URLs appear with the exact same content. Then the victim falls prey again and pays them more money."

Many of Zemel's clients come to her after spending tens of thousands of dollars on reputation-management services that ultimately fail to get rid of stories about their supposed promiscuity or pedophilia. Yet she admits that the legal process, as painful and expensive as it is, often does no better. Suing somebody, whether for defamation or invasion of privacy, doesn't always fix the problem—the information can remain out there. Worse, legal action can exacerbate the damage. You're putting into a public document and filing with the court the very allegations you don't want exposed.

There's also little the law can do to dissuade someone who is determined. In 2018, fifty-two businesses and individuals were involved in a civil action against Nadire Atas, a Hamilton-area real

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estate agent who had been fired from her job in the 1990s. The court determined that, over almost two decades, Atas had posted an extraordinary amount of false material—almost 13,000 defamatory statements—about people (and people connected to people) she believed had wronged her. Last January, the Ontario Superior Court ruled in favour of the complainants. In February, Atas was arrested for harassment and libel. She was let out on bail under the condition she not contact the individuals or their associates directly or indirectly. She was also banned from using any device capable of connecting to the internet. According to the *New York Times*, some plaintiffs hired reputation fixers to deal with the offending material and moved on.

But Atas, it seems, kept at it. Luc Groleau is an IT professional whose online detective work was instrumental in building the case against her. (He had married the daughter of the man who fired Atas, which was enough for the real estate agent to call Groleau's child a pedophile.) In March, he discovered that Atas may have picked up right where she left off, targeting four new victims, including the daughter of a *New York Times* editor Atas had attacked last year after he refused to kill an article about her case. Tracking Atas's relentlessness, Groleau says, "has consumed me to the core."

FOR THE MOMENT, solutions are scarce. The ease and simplicity that has made online life convenient and empowering has also been convenient and empowering for those acting out of malice and for those who see financial opportunity in those urges. This bizarre online reputation economy exists primarily because of Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act. Passed in 1996, it protects internet companies—whether Google or *shesahomewrecker.com*—from liability when something illegal is posted by others on their sites. Without that law, platforms would be overwhelmed by the need to vet the vast quantity of user-generated content they depend on. Because so many of these websites are

hosted in the US, and because borders mean so little on the internet, and because it's hard to get one country's law enforced in another, Section 230 has had a global impact.

By contrast, the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act, passed in 1998, does compel websites to act on copyrighted material users publish, and as a result, most mainstream platforms have a process for removing it. In fact, some people trying to get certain kinds of unwanted content removed—say, a photo of them with "pedophile" superimposed on it—will claim copyright infringement rather than defamation because the removal process is more clear cut.

According to Zemel, Google will obey American court orders to deindex sites—that is, to delete them from search results—based on copyright infringement but, until recently, has only "voluntarily" deindexed material that's allegedly defamatory. The results depend on which of the company's moderators is handling the request. HONR Network, a Florida-based nonprofit founded to protect people from online abuse, has had success persuading Google to deindex pages on behalf of the victims it represents. (HONR volunteers helped get close to 2,000 pieces of content about Groleau's family removed.) In June, Google announced changes to its algorithm so that people slandered on multiple websites will have search results automatically suppressed.

None of it, however, is particularly easy for an ordinary person worried what an employer will see during a Google search, never mind a bullied teenager. Emily Laidlaw, an associate professor at the University of Calgary's faculty of law who has written about online harm, has proposed legislative reform to allow online tribunals to solve defamation and harassment disputes before they end up in the courtroom. Such

tribunals, she argues, can specialize in ways traditional courts can't, providing a greater range of tools to fix reputational harm, such as outside experts to scrub content from search results.

"The narrative that was out there for a long time was, 'If you don't like what's going on, don't go online, don't participate online.' That's no longer a supportable view. We're all online in our personal and professional lives," says Laidlaw. While Earle has built a multimillion-dollar business on saving people and companies from embarrassment, he agrees that it's become too easy to defame people. "You can sit there and cause \$50,000 worth of reputation damage in an afternoon." ■

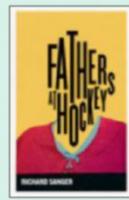
PAUL GALLANT is a Toronto-based journalist. His first novel, *Still More Stubborn Stars*, was published in fall 2021.

The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

Fathers at Hockey

by Richard Sanger



If you have any doubts about the mysterious appeal of the quintessentially Canadian game of ice hockey, I recommend without reservation Richard Sanger's exquisite gathering of poems, *Fathers at Hockey*. As a mother, I often found myself completely undone by the fierce parental love that drives these gorgeous poems, with their fineness of feeling and shape of grace that allows someone like me, born and raised on a tropical island and still trying to warm to ice and snow, into a world where "squire and knight errant ventur[e] forth / through the dark snow-clogged streets" in search of "ice by fate or divine grace."

LORNA GOODISON was the poet laureate of Jamaica from 2017 to 2020 and the winner of the 2019 Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. Her new book is *Mother Muse*.

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ENVIRONMENT

The Growth of Green Investing

So-called sustainable stocks increasingly speak to big business. Are they legitimate?

BY AINSLIE CRUICKSHANK
ILLUSTRATION BY ED KWONG



MORE THAN three years have passed since a panel of scientists convened by the United Nations issued a stark warning: to avoid the most devastating effects of climate change, the world has until 2030 to cut greenhouse gas emissions by almost half. With just under a decade left, transforming Canada's fossil-fuel-reliant economy in line with that monumental goal requires not only political commitment and innovation but also money—possibly as much as \$200 billion in capital spending over the next nine years, according to Ryan

Riordan, the director of research at Queen's University's Institute for Sustainable Finance. More windmills and solar panels need to be manufactured and installed, gas stations need to be upgraded with charging stations, diesel buses need to be swapped with hydrogen-powered ones, and buildings need to be retrofitted for energy efficiency. What's not yet clear is who will pay for it all.

Governments, as wielders of the public purse, have an undeniable role in shepherding this economic transformation. But, according to Basma Majerbi, a finance professor at the University of

Victoria's Gustavson School of Business, “the scale of the investments needed to green our economy and transition to net zero are massive, and government's money alone is not going to do it. We really need to mobilize private-sector financing to reach these goals.”

Collectively, banks, pension funds, and other investment firms control the distribution of trillions of dollars around the world; their money managers decide whether to finance Big Tech or clean tech, oil or wind. More and more of them are considering the environmental and human rights impacts of the companies they purchase shares in—a principle known as environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investing. Some experts say this growing focus on sustainable finance, including climate-conscious investing, can help shift countries like Canada, almost 10 percent of whose GDP stems from an energy sector dominated by fossil fuels, toward a low-carbon economy.

Several of Canada's big banks, including the Royal Bank of Canada, the Toronto-Dominion Bank, and the Bank of Montreal, have promised to whittle their financed emissions—emissions tied to their lending, investing, and other financial activities, such as insurance—to net-zero carbon by 2050. At the same time, the banks have committed hundreds of billions of dollars in financing to help address climate change through sustainable investments or loans. In November 2020, the CEOs at eight of Canada's largest pension funds committed to consider climate and other ESG issues in their investment decisions.

This growing focus on sustainable investment is forcing companies to change how they operate. Increasingly, access to capital depends at least in part on how a company manages its climate footprint, says Ravipal Bains, a corporate lawyer with McMillan LLP. In North America, “it is becoming more expensive to run a less sustainable oil-and-gas business,” he says. In April 2021, for instance, BMO Financial Group and Gibson Energy, a Canadian oil-storage and pipeline company, announced changes to an existing loan that would tie part of Gibson's cost of borrowing to the

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company's performance on certain ESG metrics, including a new target to cut greenhouse gas emissions intensity by 15 percent by 2025.

Meanwhile, the costs of financing renewable energy projects have fallen as the technologies have gone mainstream, creating a rush to invest in these initiatives in order to meet ESG objectives. In the first half of 2021, Canadian clean-tech companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the TSX Venture Exchange raised \$3.09 billion in equity finance through the sale of shares, up 335 percent from the first half of 2020, according to a report by the Institute for Sustainable Finance. The competitive marketplace has also helped push financing costs down. Some oil-and-gas companies are already diversifying with renewable energy projects. "These low-carbon projects can demonstrate their progress on sustainability and also support their capital markets profile," Bains says. Its increasing rates of return and lower climate risks make renewable energy attractive to investors who are also concerned about environmental performance.

There has been a flurry of net-zero or carbon-neutral commitments—from governments, financial institutions, and a range of companies including BlackBerry, Indigo Books and Music, and even some oil-and-gas producers such as Suncor Energy and Canadian Natural Resources—and a burst of new ESG funds on offer from banks and other investment firms. But some observers worry there's more hype than substance to the trend. In a March 2021 op-ed for *USA Today*, Tariq Fancy, a former chief investment officer of sustainable investing at BlackRock, compared sustainable investing to "PR spin." Fancy warned that there's often little difference between the funds that claim to be sustainable and others, with "irresponsible companies such as petroleum majors and other large polluters like 'fast fashion' manufacturing" showing up in both kinds of portfolios. In June, a study by Inrate for Greenpeace Switzerland and Greenpeace Luxembourg that analyzed fifty-one sustainable funds from those two countries found that the carbon intensities of the

sustainable funds were not "significantly lower" than those of conventional funds. In August, the London-based organization InfluenceMap assessed 593 ESG funds and found that 71 percent were "misaligned from global climate targets," raising further concerns about smoke and mirrors in sustainable investments.

Concerns of "greenwashing"—the idea that companies can frame themselves as better climate actors than they really are—highlight a major potential pitfall for ESG investment. Genuinely sustainable investing could help shift trillions of dollars toward renewable energy and other clean technologies, but only with strong parameters. So far, however, there are no stringent requirements in Canada for climate disclosures, nor is there a single set of standards for what counts as a sustainable investment—regulatory gaps that can make it hard for climate-conscious investors to know how to make the right choices.

HISTORICALLY, investors have signalled their disapproval of a company or sector by simply putting their money elsewhere—by boycotting whatever it is they object to. This is the case with climate change too: some see investing in fossil fuel companies as antithetical to mitigating climate change, preferring to direct their money toward environmental sectors, such as businesses that produce wind or solar energy.

While investment in these climate solutions is on the rise, much more is needed to meet climate targets. In Canada, for instance, research by financial-analysis firm Morningstar shows funds that market themselves as sustainable accounted for just 1 percent of overall retail, or noninstitutional, investment as of April 2021, and just half of that investment, about \$9 billion, was in renewable energy or other environmental-sector companies. The rest is invested in a range of companies and industries including banks, tech, and, in some cases, oil and gas.

This is why some investors are taking the fight inside companies contributing directly to climate change, first by investing in those very companies and then

by using that stake to try to influence decision making. Investors have various opportunities to influence a company's climate-related decisions, whether by writing letters to the board about tying executive compensation to emissions cuts, talking to CEOs about plans to align the business with a net-zero world, or voting on shareholder proposals at annual general meetings. Jamie Bonham, the director of corporate engagement at Toronto-based NEI Investments, says his company works to leverage its influence to spur emissions-reduction projects in oil-and-gas companies, for example. This pressure could have the added benefit of helping commercialize and scale up technologies like carbon capture and storage. "And, ideally, we'll see them transform their business," says Bonham.

However, the classification of funds can complicate this approach. In the absence of regulations or standards, it falls to individual investors to try to understand what exactly a fund is promising and whether it's delivering. Morningstar is part of the Canadian Investment Funds Standards Committee, an industry group working to standardize how Canadian mutual funds are classified in order to create a framework for categorizing sustainable funds. But, for these types of classifications to be most effective, there needs to be a global standard for what constitutes sustainability, says Ian Tam, Morningstar's director of investment research in Canada. There are signs that this could be on the way.

For the moment, the lack of standards even extends to requirements about reporting a company's climate impact: currently, publicly traded companies are under no obligation to disclose their greenhouse gas emissions. Of the 222 largest companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, only 150 did so in 2020, according to an Institute for Sustainable Finance report. Just sixty companies had released emissions-reduction targets, and only nine had detailed plans to reach them. In its April 2021 federal budget, the Canadian government said it would work with the provinces and territories to make climate disclosures "part of regular disclosure practices for a broad



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spectrum of the Canadian economy.” In October, the Canadian Securities Administrators, an umbrella organization of provincial and territorial securities regulators, published proposed rules that would require companies to disclose both direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions or explain why the information isn’t being released. Even if the regulations allow companies to opt out of disclosing, capital markets may decide, Riordan says, with firms that choose not to make climate disclosures finding it harder to raise funds.

Bains says standardized reporting could help prevent greenwashing by making it easy to monitor and compare a company’s progress against its competitors’. Companies that can’t back up their climate rhetoric with data, he says, may then have trouble accessing capital. “Traditionally speaking, capital market investors reward companies that do what they say.”

Roopa Davé, a partner in KPMG Canada’s sustainability services practice, based in Vancouver, is part of a team working with companies to develop sustainability strategies and determine what ESG data, including climate-related data, companies should ideally report and how. Assessing a company’s greenhouse gas emissions alone can be a complex process requiring expertise in science, engineering, and accounting. In a 2020 KPMG survey of sustainability reporting among Canada’s top 100 companies by revenue, 62 percent of respondents acknowledged that they face financial risks from climate change. But only 3 percent quantified those risks, says Davé.

Financial institutions are grappling with some of these challenges as they seek to understand the extent of their financed emissions—the greenhouse gases tied not to their direct operations but to their loans and investments. Vancouver City Savings Credit Union, or Vancity, has set out to reach net-zero emissions across everything it finances by 2040. It also committed to offering only responsible investment opportunities that meet certain ESG criteria. While the financial co-op doesn’t finance or invest directly in fossil fuels, it does issue loans for houses, commercial buildings, and to a lesser extent, vehicles. In Canada,

buildings alone account for nearly 13 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. In its 2020 annual report, Vancity estimated that the assets covered by its loans and the investments it manages on behalf of its members accounted for almost 160,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases that year—more than fifty times higher than the direct emissions from its operations.

THE GREATEST COSTS would be from failing to stop the climate crisis, but companies do face risks as they transition toward a low-carbon world. According to an online post by the Bank of England about the risks of climate change to financial stability, “If government policies were to change in line with the Paris Agreement, then two thirds of the world’s known fossil fuel reserves could not be burned. This could lead to changes in the value of investments held by banks and insurance companies in sectors like coal, oil and gas.” At the same time, fossil fuel infrastructure, such as pipelines, could become stranded assets, meaning their worth could decline faster than investors expected it would.

For pension funds, which manage the money millions of Canadians will rely on in old age, understanding the financial risks of climate change and opportunities in the transition to a low-carbon economy is critical. University of Victoria finance professor Majerbi and her colleague Michael King are working with one of those funds, the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation (BCI), to better understand the implications of climate change for its investments. The work could ultimately help guide BCI’s investment decisions and potentially lead the corporation to shift money from riskier fossil fuel bets to new opportunities in clean tech. This type of analysis

will only get better, Majerbi says, with more climate-related disclosures from individual companies about their climate risks and how they are managing them.

While some investors are further along the ESG-investing gangway than others, Tam, Morningstar’s director of investment research in Canada, sees reason for optimism. “It’s a new approach to valuing stocks and understanding risk,” he says. “Eventually, it won’t even be a conversation, everyone will just be doing it.” ■

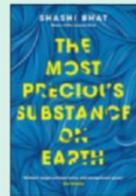
AINSLIE CRUICKSHANK has written for *Scientific American*, *Hakai Magazine*, and *The Narwhal*.



The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

The Most Precious Substance on Earth by Shashi Bhat



Shashi Bhat’s newest book, a novel made up of stories, is split into two parts: one takes place in a Halifax high school around the time of the Columbine shooting; the other jumps ahead to an era when online dating is the norm and blogs are long passé. Bhat’s narrator, Nina, is the constant here—first as student, then as teacher—musing, by the collection’s final pages, that “every memory you have is only a memory of the last time you remembered it.” Each story is witty and cringe inducing even as it trembles with loneliness or anxiety or regret. “Online dating,” Nina thinks, “is an embarrassing punishment for a mediocre crime: not finding love in a pre-internet world.” The incidents of one woman’s life flare up, recede, and repeat so that even the littlest moments begin to sting.

LIZ HARMER’s first novel, *The Amateurs*, was a finalist for the Amazon Canada First Novel Award. Her second, *Strange Loops*, is forthcoming with KnopfCanada.



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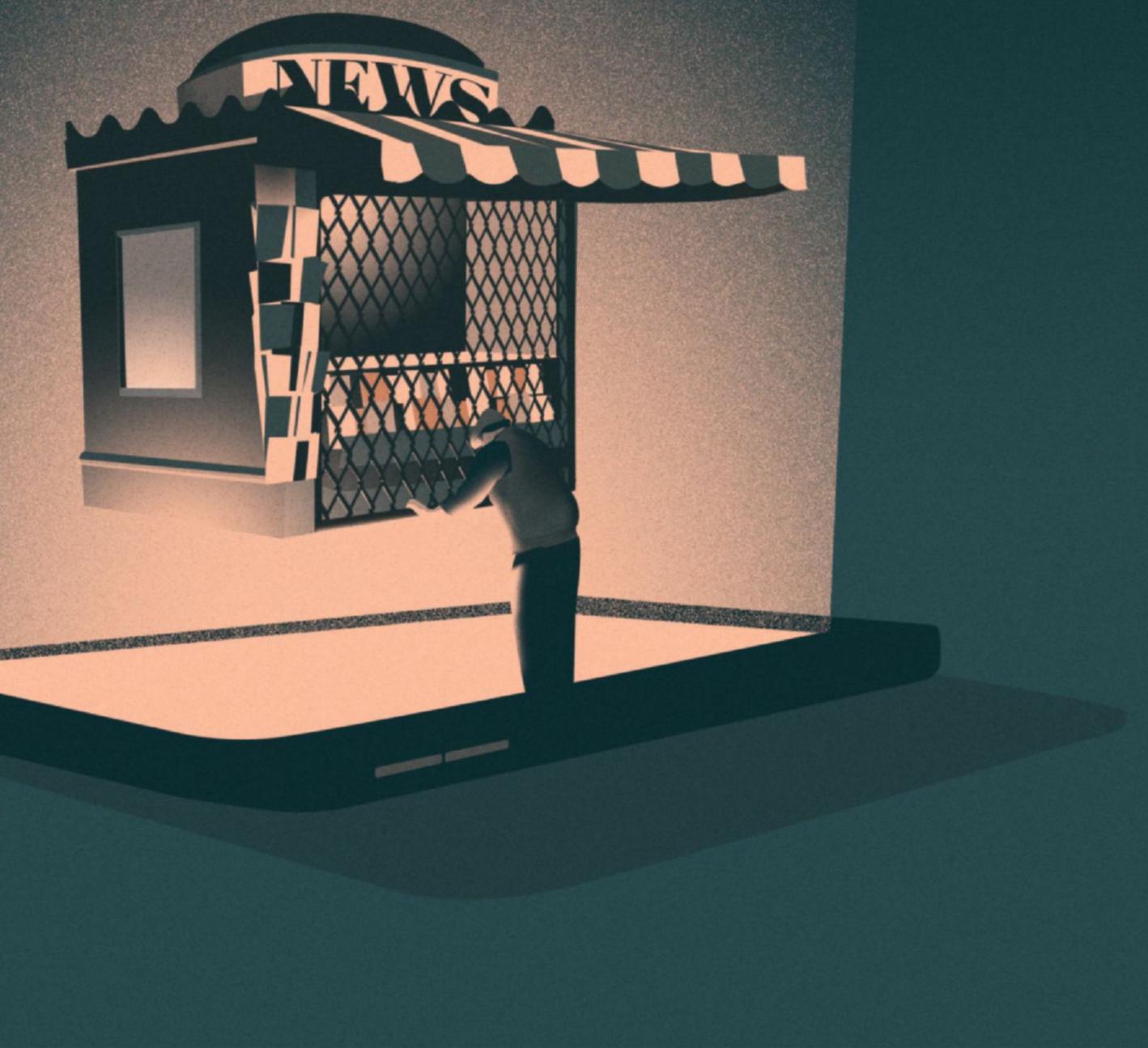
Tomorrow's News

*The death of journalism has been predicted for decades.
What would it take to avoid it?*

BY JESSICA JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROMAIN LASSER

FOR 100 YEARS, the *Cut Knife Courier* was the newspaper of record in Cut Knife, Saskatchewan. Every week, it reported on community news: 4-H club agricultural competitions, the RCMP police blotter, or notable events (the prime minister's 2019 visit made the front page). When I visited Cut Knife in 2018, after my father retired there, I felt that I already knew it through my email subscription to the *Courier*.



A forty-five-minute drive west of the Battlefords, Cut Knife is a town of 600 where many of the larger issues Canada faces seem magnified: retired farmers, commuters from the Alberta oil patch, and newcomers from a range of countries share space with as many as five churches and the residents of three reserves. Cut Knife is politically and demographically divided, and it's trying hard to work on its problems in the midst of economic uncertainty and cultural change. Perhaps because of this, the *Courier*'s most popular feature was a column written by a cat named Tuc. ("That cat," my father once remarked, "is able to say things about politics and religion that people couldn't.")

When the paper folded, in September 2020, it wasn't a surprise to anyone, but it was a blow. The *Courier* had often been lauded as a throwback—a community newspaper still alive in the age of media contraction. Ray and Andrea Stewart, both former horse racers and trainers from Alberta, had bought the paper in 2016. According to Ray, the *Courier* never made any money. Instead, it had always covered its expenses through a modest grant, over 600 print and email subscriptions, and advertising. But a 60 percent rise in printing costs, coupled with a drop in community advertising, brought it to a close. "When things got to a point where it was going to start costing us money," he says, "we said, 'No. It's time.'"

What happened to the *Courier* is an acutely local example of what has happened in communities across Canada, exacerbated by COVID-19. According to 2020 research, nearly fifty newspapers and upward of 2,000 journalism jobs were lost in the first six weeks of the pandemic alone. Daniel Bernhard, then executive director of the media advocacy group Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, referred to COVID-19 as the media's "mass extinction" event. As a declining number of people get their news from a traditional print newspaper, one could argue it was a change whose time had come. Here's a more existential question: What's going to replace the *Courier*? It would be great to point to a hot new digital outlet started by North

Battleford millennials. It's more likely that Cut Knife will join the growing number of Canadian communities without any local news coverage. The town's only media presence is now its new Facebook page.

The Stewarts say there's no question that the community would have been better served throughout the pandemic if the *Courier* or something like it were publishing. "Tuc could have said, 'Go and get your vaccination,'" says Andrea. Many of this town's older residents don't use social media, which is where information about vaccine appointments has often been shared. Others continue to doubt

rich, too old, and lacking diversity. In an effort to move beyond the grim headlines, I contacted the heads of influential outlets to ask what is succeeding. What do they know that everyone's overlooking? "It's time to stop mourning what's been lost," I wrote to them. "What could—and should—the industry look like in the next five to ten years?" I hoped to put together a "good news" report about the industry's future. What I heard back was sobering.

FRIENDS WITH JOBS in "functioning" industries, like law and real estate, often ask me why my business is so screwed. Here's what I usually say: the 2008/09 subprime mortgage crash and subsequent recession led to a diminished demand for consumer goods, taking down with it the advertising industry on which many of this country's best-known media brands, including CTV, Global, and Postmedia, were built. A former women's magazine editor recalls, "One month, we had a normal book size—120 or 130 pages. The next month, our book size was down to eighty pages. The advertising just dropped overnight."

Around this time, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter encouraged users to share links to articles and videos. News went online, usually without paywalls. The same tech companies also started to scoop up digital advertising revenue with powerful algorithms. Today, we take the stickiness of targeted advertising for granted (even if it's a little uncanny: search for men's underpants once and underpants ads will dog you on the web forever). But the ability to track our data is of serious value to advertisers. In Canada, Facebook and Google now receive more than 80 percent of all online advertising.

The media is also partly to blame. It lost faith in journalism and tried to compete with an internet awash in cat videos, listicles, and misinformation. Threatened by social media's ability to glue younger people to their phones as well as competition from online publications like *Vice* and *BuzzFeed*, traditional publishers began to post content online without charging for it.

The media lost faith in journalism and tried to compete with an internet awash in cat videos.

the safety and efficacy of vaccination. My father posted a selfie of himself getting a Pfizer shot on Facebook. "I hope this can show other people it might be OK," he explained. That's what now counts as journalism if you live in an area without local media coverage.

Platforms like Google and Facebook have transformed the way we consume and share news, but the digital revolution hasn't yet revealed an equivalent breakthrough in the way the media makes money. This is a paradoxical reality at a time of unprecedented innovation. What about podcasts and digital startups and TikTok? What about the reader-funded membership models favoured by independent media websites? Aren't subscription-based newsletter platforms like Substack the next big thing?

Articles, panels, and think tank reports on the media's demise abound—along with accusations that the media is too



(The rationale circa 2012 was: don't get left behind; bloggers are stealing your audience and can create content faster than you.) The revenue growth print publishers had been promised never materialized. Digital ads—the kind you see as website banners—garner mere pennies even if thousands of people see them. It's no surprise that many high-profile outlets, like CTV News and the *Toronto Star*, have struggled financially. (The CBC, the country's largest media outlet, is effectively publicly funded, and a handful of privately owned outlets, like the *Globe and Mail*, don't report their performance publicly.) A small number of independent journalistic nonprofits break even, including The Walrus thanks in great part to our donors. I suspect that a larger number of outlets are hovering around the margins of sustainability, like a failing restaurant whose owners keep throwing money at it, hoping it will turn around one day. After all, everyone thinks the food is great.

Talk to Facebook and Google and they'll tell you that all they did was build a better advertising model. Why reach only the number of viewers or readers defined by a traditional media outlet's audience when you can run ads targeted to each person on the internet? Digital ads reach more-relevant customers, and they reach many more of them. Even if the top four platforms were forced to redirect their digital ad revenue back to traditional media, their advertising clients would likely resist.

The handful of print outlets that have managed to turn a profit through online subscriptions and other revenue—like the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and the *Washington Post*—shows that, if you build a product that people value enough, you don't necessarily need advertising to survive; digital customers will follow. The problem for most media outlets in this country and elsewhere is that they aren't the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*—brands that draw big, international audiences, the Veuve Clicquots and Audis of news gathering. I'm aware of no comparable success stories in Canada. (While it's unlikely to get many readers outside of

Quebec, *Le Devoir* was unique in charging online readers early in the game, and it has maintained stability through a mix of subscriptions, donations, and traditional ad revenue.) According to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, only 13 percent of Canadians pay for online news in the form of subscriptions or paywalls, and more than a quarter of those paying subscribers support international publications.

It's possible to argue that the industry is not necessarily failing but is instead in market correction as old businesses that can't evolve, like television networks and newspapers, die out. Dwayne Winseck, a professor at Carleton University's school of journalism and communication, thinks we overlook the effect of market concentration: through a series of mergers and acquisitions, Canada has ended up with mega-outlets instead of the hundreds of independently owned local, regional, and national outlets that used to make up the country's media landscape. "CanWest utterly destroyed what had been the Southam newspaper chain. They completely gutted it," he says, referring to the 2001 takeover of Conrad Black's money-losing Canadian media empire. The business sections of the 2000s were filled with reports of printing companies (Quebecor) buying up the chains they used to distribute (*Sun Media*) or newspapers (the *Globe and Mail*) joining forces with networks (Bell Globemedia). When one of these big companies sinks, it drags an ecosystem of little players down with it.

"The decimation of journalism unfolded over a quarter century, and nobody did boo," says Winseck. "Instead of looking in the mirror and at their own complicity, the media is pointing fingers at Google and Facebook. And that's just crazy." Legacy media companies, in other words, have become the carriage maker who, after the invention of the automobile, stands around crying, "But we made very good carriages!" The industry's failure to make money is the industry's failure. The media, after all, is a business, and it has been since newsies tried to outsell one another by shouting out their papers' headlines to passersby.

No one owes us an audience, paying or otherwise.

But, if the media is a business, then a more fruitful way to assess it might be to look at it through the lens of the market in which it operates. Right now, the industry exists in a limbo where many of the old models are dying before the new ones have become profitable. It's not clear whose responsibility it should be to save these institutions. The government? The platforms that undermined them in the first place? Or the consumers who have never fully paid for content but who stand to lose the most if the media goes away?

N RECENT YEARS, governments of different countries, including Canada, have looked at regulating Big Tech platforms in an effort to shore up ailing media industries. These platforms, specifically those that use the work of creators to drive their algorithms, are sometimes collectively referred to as GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple). There are many elements to the proposed regulation. While efforts to address disinformation and online hate have received a lot of attention—ideas that recirculated in the wake of the documents whistleblower Frances Haugen released, dubbed the Facebook Papers—the aspect of this discussion most directly related to the media's financial survival is revenue. In 2021, Australia passed legislation that would require GAFA to compensate media outlets when users post links to their content—the social media equivalent, perhaps, of paying someone to reprint an article under copyright law.

Similar legislation was included in the Liberal government's recent election platform, to be completed in its first 100 days. Over the summer, the office of the minister of Canadian heritage solicited input from forty-six stakeholders on how the regulation of GAFA might affect their businesses and which platforms and media organizations should qualify for the regime. It also sought opinions on two different models for what form said regulation could take: individual arrangements, brokered by the government, to be

negotiated on a per-outlet, per-platform basis; or a standardized contribution from every platform, to be allocated to an independent pool and dispensed to outlets in a manner yet to be determined.

The difficulty of trying to align the needs of organizations and platforms as varied as Bell Media, the *Globe and Mail*, the Canadian Association of Black Journalists, and Reddit was encapsulated in the report's findings, which mention "polarized responses" to the revenue-sharing ideas. "There is a difference of views in terms of what would be the best model," agreed then minister of Canadian heritage Steven Guilbeault when I asked him about the disparity between different types of media organizations (broadcast, print, digital, think tanks), old and new platforms, and large and small voices. "Everyone agrees that the status quo is untenable," he maintained. "Some people would say we prefer *a* versus *b*, but everybody says, 'You have to do something.' You may not end up doing what we would have preferred. It's better than nothing."

Since the presidency of Donald Trump, it's become common to talk about the relationship between the media and democracy. "Without a healthy media sector, we cannot have a healthy democracy," said Guilbeault. "Whenever authoritarian or dictatorial governments want to take control of a country, to quash opinion, the first thing they go after is media. We've seen it happen." This is what media scholars often call a "public good" problem. In other words, the media is so crucial to the state of democracy that we must protect it even if it isn't economically viable. Similar collective decisions have had to be made in the past with respect to funding for street lighting and public libraries—things without which, we agree, our quality of life would be dimmed. There are challenges, however, to thinking of media as a utility, like electricity. The product on offer from power companies the world over is the same, but no one kind of media is like any other. For the purposes of this debate, should the *National Observer*, *Canadaland*, and Rebel News be treated the same way?

Canadians, despite having grown up with the omniscience of the publicly funded CBC, are relatively tetchy about the notion of government intervention in media. Last June, the Department of Canadian Heritage tabled Bill C-10, proposed legislation aimed at the intellectual-property obligations of streaming networks like YouTube, Spotify, and Netflix, which operate in Canada but are not subject to Canadian content regulations. Sparking a challenge from mostly conservative critics about the risks to free speech and the complications of federal meddling, the bill was struck down in the Senate.

Canadian journalism's wicked problem: Do we save what's being lost or invest in what's new?

In July 2021, *The Logic* CEO and editor-in-chief David Skok wrote an eloquent editorial in response to announcements that Facebook and Google had both signed licensing and / or promotion agreements with Canadian publishers—which many took to be preemptive contracts in advance of the Liberals' proposed legislation. "This is not simply private-market players paying fair-market value in exchange for products," he wrote. "It's private companies using their trillion-dollar market caps and immense bargaining power to steamroll an entire sector in pursuit of their own self-interest." In other words, can we trust the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*—which both signed on with Google News Showcase, a licensing program that will promote stories to help boost paid subscriptions—to cover news of regulation and the GAFAs reliably? Will their deals be sweeter than those of small outlets with less bargaining power?

Transparency concerns were also raised about the Australian model, in which the government may have overseen the contracts but the terms of the agreements between media outlets and GAFAs were not made public. (To avoid making payments, Facebook initially declared it would make its services unavailable to Australians.)

To be honest, I'm not that worried about objectivity in professional journalism: media has always been funded by someone, whether a beauty brand or an automaker—it just hasn't been the customer. (The Walrus, not included in any of the aforementioned deals, has partnered with Facebook to produce The Walrus Talks events and other initiatives. There is no relationship between Facebook and our editorial content.) My worry is different: Is it enough money? If those payments covered 10 to 20 percent of the cost of journalism, which is analogous to what advertising might bring in for many outlets these days, it's still not a lot to run a company.

In his 2019 book, *The Tangled Garden*, Richard Stursberg, who has helped lead Telefilm and English services at the CBC, compared the depth of Canada's investment in news with what we spend on film and television—which we fund via tax credits—and found it wanting. For years, the government has subsidized Canadian cultural products to protect them from the US market's dominance. Should our media receive the same protection from Silicon Valley-based tech companies? "To provide news with the same level of support as entertainment," he wrote, "would cost the federal treasury about \$430 million per year, \$200 million for the papers, \$30 million for magazines...and \$200 million for TV news." In 2018, the federal government allotted \$45 million in tax credits to the news industry. New legislation in June 2021 enables "qualified organizations" to claim up to 25 percent of their labour costs in tax credits—currently, 156 outlets meet the designation. Stursberg's proposed \$780 million in tax credits (just over half of the \$1.5 billion allocated to media in France, which has double Canada's population) would be a net increase to news organizations.

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I recently asked Stursberg if his views had changed in light of Canada's movement toward requiring GAFAS to negotiate payments to media outlets, and he held true to his thinking: he prefers the grand gesture. "Why wouldn't we treat news the same way we treat cooking shows?" he asked. "Surely news is as important to us, as a country, as drama or kids' shows or comedies."

"These are emergency measures. This is not a long-term plan," admitted Guilbeault about his department's recent proposals, which include a controversial \$595 million to create jobs at select news organizations (critics alleged that too much went to legacy media outlets within the traditional print news industry), set to end in 2023. "I really think we have to figure out, together, how to ensure the sustainability and viability of the media sector." When Guilbeault was appointed minister of environment and climate change in a cabinet shuffle this past fall, he was replaced by Pablo Rodriguez, who had previously held the role of heritage minister from 2018 to 2019. The government's challenge is essentially to solve Canadian journalism's wicked problem: Do we save what's being lost or invest in what's new?

AS THE EDITOR of one of the country's very few independent non-profit publications, my primary frustration is with the lack of innovation in this country. Canadian journalism schools are pumping thousands of graduates annually into a market with dwindling employment opportunities. Some of these young journalists launch startups in different regions to bridge the gap between citizen journalist, blogger, and corporate media. But who is supporting them? There are no government programs designed to further the kinds of small-business development from which journalistic innovation is likely to emerge. To be effective, journalists need infrastructure: server space, website domains, software licences, contributor's fees, image rights, a design identity, and sometimes lawyer's fees. All that is before they can even pay themselves or anyone else a salary.

Facebook and Google both offer training and financial support to select media organizations. Facebook's Journalism Project Accelerator Program and Google News Showcase provide fledgling newsrooms with crash courses in membership growth and audience engagement—skills crucial to building and retaining readerships. But their grants, which can range from \$50,000 to \$135,000, function more like top-ups to existing budgets than like investment capital. Gone are the venture capitalist investors of the 2010s—perhaps because they sense that media's a bad bet.

Earlier this year, an ambitious new outlet called *The Breach* was announced with testimonials from public figures like David Suzuki and Naomi Klein. The digital newsroom has better graphic design than most of Canada's legacy outlets and an impressive commitment to publishing news, in-depth investigations, videos, and podcasts, including "the stories the traditional media is afraid to cover." By my estimate, producing a bare-bones multiplatform "micro-newsroom" like *The Breach* would cost something like \$300,000 to \$500,000 a year. Not many recent graduates have that kind of money, and not many are in a position to pitch potential investors on a venture that, if it's lucky, will probably only break even.

Because that's where we are at. Journalism is an incremental, slow-to-develop business where success means staying out of debt in an industry where most struggle to do that. It has always been common for outlets to launch to fanfare, run through their startup funding, and fizzle out before finding a sustainable revenue model. (The digital record is no better than print's, from the *Toronto Standard*, an online newspaper that ran from 2010 to 2015, to various divisions of Vice Media.) In recent years, venture capitalists and private investors have stepped up to take over ailing media outlets only to step away when it became obvious that they were never going to scale up effectively. In early 2021, *HuffPost Canada*, which had operated in English since 2006, was abruptly shuttered after being acquired from Verizon Media by *BuzzFeed*.

The biggest success stories of the past few years, the outlets winning awards for their journalism and drawing in readers, are startups with focused offerings. Although their business models vary, all have matured past the premise of the internet's early days—clicks at any cost, growth before everything. *Xtra Magazine*, a digital publication dedicated to LGBTQ2S+ issues, grew out of Toronto's print tabloid serving the Village and surrounding communities. Revenue from a dating app has helped it survive and grow. Now, more than 50 percent of its audience is outside Canada, and top stories range from deep dives on *RuPaul's Drag Race* to how-to articles on talking to your kids about gay country singers.

The Local, on the other hand, is not trying to outgrow the Greater Toronto Area. Founded out of an innovation department at the University Health Network, it has a mandate to cover public health issues and to "impact" communities. *The Local* is funded by grants from seven community organizations, each worth at least \$25,000. It also recently opened up to donations from readers. "Our bread and butter is hyperlocal," says editor-in-chief Tai Huynh. However, the outlet's influence is profound—throughout the pandemic, other publications scooped up its reporting on vaccine distribution, inequality, and front line workers in the GTA. "At this point," says Huynh, "we want to do Toronto very well."

The Narwhal, which has a mandate to publish environmental journalism, has seen astonishing growth for an outlet of its size. Founded in 2018 by two Vancouver Island journalists, the startup has grown its annual revenue fivefold, from \$400,000 to just over \$2 million, says editor-in-chief Emma Gilchrist. Now, with a staff of fifteen, *The Narwhal* has expanded to Ontario. The online publication received support from Facebook, which included it in an incubator program designed to help small newsrooms develop revenue-generating membership programs. *The Narwhal* is also a registered journalism organization, a new classification by the federal government that permits readers to declare the cost of news subscriptions on their taxes.



ADVENTURE
CANADA

Explore Newfoundland with The Walrus



The Walrus has a long partnership with Adventure Canada, an award-winning, family-run adventure travel company. As the new executive director, I'll be joining their **small-ship expedition Newfoundland Circumnavigation**, July 4-15, 2022.

My family has roots in Newfoundland, and I'm excited to return. This trip will start in St. John's and cover the island's northeast coast, L'Anse aux Meadows, Red Bay, Gros Morne National Park, Miawpukek First Nation (Conne River), as well as other beautiful spots. I'm looking forward to the colourful homes, whale watching, and breathing in the fresh, coastal air!

During this trip, I'll join you on our daily excursions and host a special dinner for supporters of The Walrus, where I'll share some insights from our work in 2022 to spark a conversation on the country Canada could be.

One of the things I've missed the most over the last year is exploring. Travel gives us a unique opportunity to **learn more about our country and ourselves**. I would love for you to join us!

Jennifer Hollett, Executive Director, The Walrus

\$250 of each booking fee will be donated back to The Walrus Foundation.

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(So far, there are only five such outlets in the country.) But its biggest success factor is converting readers to “members,” who contribute financially. Timely reporting on COVID-19 and in-depth coverage of relevant ongoing stories, like the Fairy Creek old-growth-logging protests, helped solicit increased donations from readers this year.

Now four years old, *The Logic* is the most venerable of Canada’s new independent digital startups. When it launched, its proposition was almost shocking: a subscription-only news publication with an annual \$300 fee (about the same as an annual subscription to the digital *Globe and Mail*). “Canada had not reached the point where paying for news was in the public consciousness,” says Skok of his decision to fully paywall *The Logic* from the beginning. (In 2019, *The Logic* announced \$1.8 million in subsequent investment from a handful of funders including Postmedia, a venture capitalist, and an unnamed angel investor.) Because of the cost, many journalists can’t afford to read *The Logic*’s scoops; its audience is made up of the kinds of tech and financial analysts for whom the cost of membership is about the same as a Bay Street lunch.

A veteran of the *Toronto Star* and the *Boston Globe* and a fellow at Harvard University’s Nieman Foundation for Journalism, Skok keeps in mind that the *New York Times* took 150 years to become the world’s most recognized news brand. “We want to be the *Financial Times* [of Canada],” he says. For now, he’s proud of having built *The Logic* into an outlet people recognize as an authority on business. “It’s not about reaching the most amount of people. It’s about reaching the right people.”

TWOULD BE EASY to keep listing independent digital startups in this vein—“ones to watch” that are making their investors proud. But an industry cannot live by plucky new websites alone. According to Media Smarts, a youth literacy organization, 43 percent of Canadians ages eighteen to twenty-nine get their news from Facebook, and the next largest sources are TV (12 percent) and Twitter (10 percent). Most of the population isn’t

served by, or looking for, this kind of media at all.

“The Walrus, *iPolitics*, *National Observer*—none of you even show up,” says Winseck, referring to the market share information his team collects through the Canadian Media Concentration Report. “Audience reach is less than 1 percent.” This means that a fraction of 1 percent of the population is consuming news from the kind of place you’re reading and I’m writing for right now. Accrual of readership is like watching the interest grow in your savings account. Most Canadians get their news from big outlets like the CBC, Postmedia, Torstar (publisher of the *Toronto Star*), and CTV—the same legacy outlets that continue to struggle.

Realistically, only a small percentage of the population is likely to financially support independent journalism. Nonetheless, that is the model behind Substack, one of a handful of newsletter platforms that promises to cut publishers and distributors from traditional journalism by delivering revenue directly to writers in exchange for a cut of their subscription fees.

Substack doesn’t think it’s the answer to mainstream media’s problems. “We’re not claiming that this model will work for all types of news, and we don’t think it should be the only model,” says the platform’s statement of purpose. Substack, which was started in 2017 by a Canadian named Chris Best, “is not necessarily the sign of a healthy media climate,” says Jen Gerson, who turned to the platform a year ago to co-found *The Line*, a conservative-leaning political newsletter, with journalist Matt Gurney (both have contributed to *The Walrus*).

Because I’d heard some Substackers say they found the task

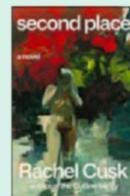


The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

Second Place

by Rachel Cusk



Rachel Cusk’s latest protagonist, a mid-career writer referred to only as M, lives with her husband on an isolated patch of English coast. It’s a secluded life, one in which she’s seemingly content, especially when playing host to a continual drip of artists who come for ad hoc retreats at her nearby guest cottage. One day, not long after a recognizable disaster halts the world, the acclaimed painter L arrives, making good on a long-neglected promise to visit and stay a while. L is both a stranger and the object of M’s long-time fascination—she feels a kinship with his work, and this one-sided relationship initially blinds her to the bad behaviour of the man behind the art.

Cusk models her novel on Mabel Dodge Luhan’s 1932 memoir, *Lorenzo in Taos*, which describes D. H. Lawrence’s stay at Luhan’s New Mexico home and the rifts he caused as a difficult guest. With this as her framework, Cusk toys with ideas of art, freedom, and gender. Tatum Dooley, creator of the newsletter *Canadian Art Forecast*, recommended this book to me, describing it as “a novel that portrays male artists as brats”—an enticing premise that is fulfilled by L’s constant disrupting of M’s domestic peace. There is a sense of humour and virtuosity in *Second Place* that makes it the perfect follow-up to the author’s *Outline* trilogy, proving Cusk’s masterful use of language and form with her signature acerbity.

MARLOWE GRANADOS is a writer and filmmaker living in Toronto. She is the author of 2020’s *Happy Hour*, a novel that the *New York Times* called “confident, charismatic and alive to the pleasure of observation.”

of reporting, editing, art direction, and social media promotion all-consuming (gratifying news to anyone running a professional newsroom), I asked Gerson, previously one of the country's most active freelance journalists, how she was finding the workload. "If you treat it like a part-time job, it works," she said. *The Line* has 8,500 paying and nonpaying subscribers, who receive newsletters three to four times a week. "We will probably be close to making a full-time salary in a year or so." (Which, for a nascent business founded in a dying industry, sounds impressive.)

Most of the people on Substack will reach audiences because they're already successful journalists or brands; last year, Substack reportedly offered high-profile writers \$250,000 (US) advances to populate the platform. Their success is exhilarating. But the Substack model faces the same challenges as all journalism everywhere: to build a reputation requires time, resources, and skills inaccessible to most amateurs. Newsletters also tend to emulate the kind of quippy op-ed writing that abounds on the internet already. Investigative journalism, on the other hand,

is one of the most trusted and valuable forms of media, but it's also one of the slowest and most expensive to produce.

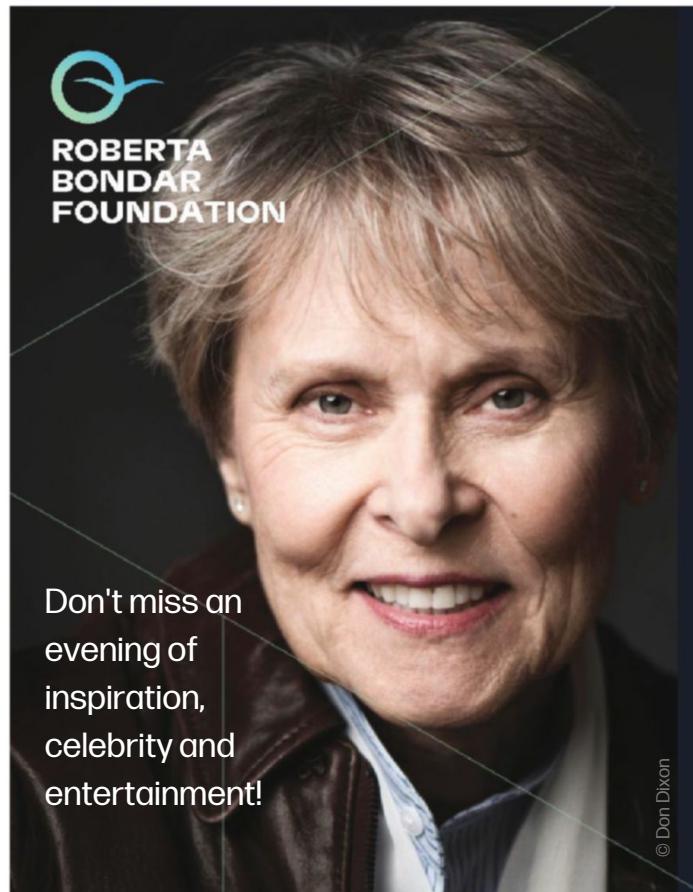
What emerges is that every player in the current ecosystem—journalist, consumer, platform—seems to envision a benign funder somewhere else picking up the tab. No one has developed a price for journalism that a critical mass of customers is willing to pay.

RELIABLE MEDIA, like nutritious food, should not become a luxury product. But, in some ways, it already has. According to a 2020 Ipsos report, 70 percent of Canadians "strongly" or "mostly" agree that they will consume only news they can access for free. If trends continue, the future of media will probably be very big and / or very niche: well-known brands like the *Globe and Mail* and the CBC on one side, a number of independents or specialized outlets on the other. At worst, high-quality journalism will be available only to people who can pay for it.

It's a world where some people subscribe to the *New York Times* and other

members of the Trust Project (a consortium of fact-based media organizations to which The Walrus belongs) and others think the cure for COVID-19 is a folk remedy they saw on Facebook. What may be gone are the TV stations, city newspapers, radio stations, and even generalist news websites launched in the internet's first flush—those middle-tier outlets and the programs whose perspectives are not essential in the age of social media, aggregators, and streaming. Maybe that's not as big a loss as it once was. Our very idea of "the media" is changing. A lot of the news I read on my iPhone is curated by Apple News editors. If audiences once treated outlets as authorities, we now follow news based on its relevance to our interests.

One of my initial questions was whether the government should invest deeply in the CBC—to restaff its bureaus with the reporters and photographers who have been lost to cuts. That would be the quickest way, to my mind, to reverse the tide of misinformation and distrust in media across the country and to bring back coverage to communities like Cut Knife. Many people dispute that consolidation at one outlet



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is the answer—even those who might have a vested interest in public broadcasting's success. Jennifer McGuire, who, after eleven years, left her job as editor-in-chief of CBC News in 2020, just spent a year studying collaborative media models at the University of Oxford's Reuters Institute. She says media outlets should find more ways of co-operating—in Canada, major news organizations already share photography and reporting during the Olympics and elections. One such program, called the Local Democracy Reporting Service, is underway through the BBC, which hires local reporters to cover stories picked by other journalists and shared on open-source networks.

What's been clear all along is that the media is suffering from a collective-action problem: everyone who normally thinks of themselves as rivals should be working together. But, as we turn this thing around, the weight of the media's future is significantly being carried by the reporters, photographers, and producers who got into the business because they wanted to make a difference. How insurmountable it feels to ask people to report

the biggest issues of our time—war, racial inequality, disease—at salaries that no longer cover the cost of an apartment in Toronto or leave room for a life outside of work. Add in something like the COVID-19 pandemic and resilience is being pushed to the brink. I can't promise young journalists the career this industry has given me.

I didn't expect this to be a referendum on my career, but that's what reporting a story on the future of media turned into. Senior media executives talked to me off the record or on background because they didn't want their personal pessimism attached to their professional titles. Everyone who had left the media altogether said they were so glad to be out of this terrible business. Everyone also urged me to keep going for as long as I can manage. "It's a vocation," said Irene Gentle, until 2021 the editor-in-chief of the *Toronto Star*. "If there are moments where you lose it, struggle with your role in it, that's normal. If you have that sense of vocation, you'll generally come through the other side."

For those of us who have chosen it, the job at hand is to steer an industry

through a transition, one as significant for us as the invention of the automobile in its own day. We know that the benefits of our work may not be felt for years or generations. Making Big Tech pay the media for content, as the government hopes to do, is only the beginning. It will also take serious policy change and industry collaboration to turn around a situation that's been deteriorating for decades. "If you step back and look at it," says McGuire, "you've got everybody doing little things to solve a problem that is humongous." □

The O'Hagan Essay on Public Affairs is an annual research-based examination of the current economic, social, and political realities of Canada. Commissioned by the editorial staff at *The Walrus*, the essay is funded by Peter and Sarah O'Hagan in honour of Peter's late father, Richard, and his considerable contributions to public life.

JESSICA JOHNSON is the editor-in-chief of *The Walrus*. Her fee for this essay will be donated back to *The Walrus*.



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HEALTH



What Women (Still) Want

Over the course of their lives, many women experience a loss of sexual desire. Where is their little blue pill?

BY SARAH BARMAK
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARIA NGUYEN

GENERATION X and older millennials came of age in the 1990s and early 2000s, a time of ecstasy, Lil' Kim, *Sex and the City*, and sex-positive feminism. It was not an era free of misogyny, but still, there was a sense that sex was something women enjoyed, not simply endured or navigated. They are arguably the first North American cohort to be steeped from puberty onward in a culture that allowed for the idea that women might be entitled to, and entitled to be public about, their own sexuality.

These women are also the first to reach maturity in the age of Viagra, which initiated a cultural revolution when it first hit the market, in 1998. Former presidential candidate Bob Dole went on TV and made it okay to talk about impotence—which had been given a new, less stigmatizing name: “erectile dysfunction.” Sales of Viagra (sildenafil citrate) hit nearly \$2 billion (US) annually by 2008. Viagra normalized both public discussion of sexual function in old age and the idea that medical science could provide a lifetime of satisfying sex.

Now, Gen X women are in or approaching menopause, with all its attendant complications—which, for many, includes the loss of the sexual desire and arousal they have always taken for granted. They are also starting to be more vocal about the toll that vanishing sex drives and medical indifference are taking—and to demand better. The force of these demands, and growing interest in the field from medical researchers, many of whom are themselves women of this generation, is spurring a new and far more nuanced understanding of sexuality and of what may be happening when desire goes missing.

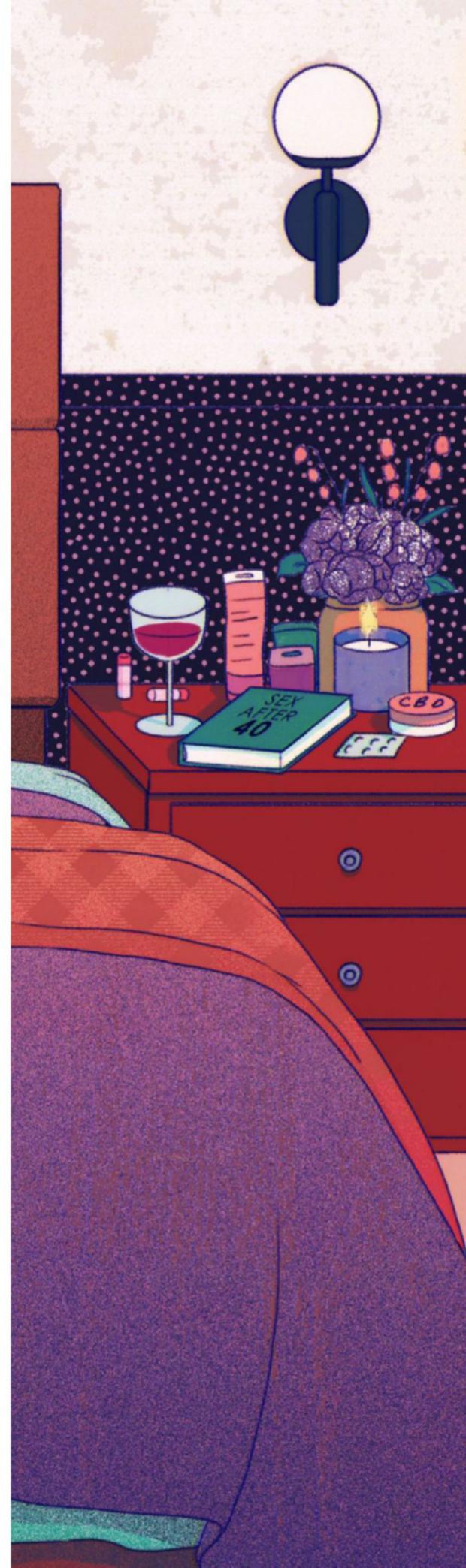
Diminishing sexual desire (an interest in sex) and arousal (the physical changes that happen when we are turned on) are difficult to understand and diagnose: there is no single cause, and it is not one *type* of thing. Diminished desire and arousal can be traced to everything from the physiological changes of menopause to the stress and lack of sleep that often characterize a busy mid-life to iron deficiency to the side effects of prescription drugs.

This can make it difficult for doctors to even know how to begin isolating why a woman may be experiencing frustrating changes in her desire. Doctors are not often deeply educated about the subject—nor is there a formal medical specialty dedicated to its study—and many do not take the loss of libido seriously. The lack of care is further compounded for transgender and nonbinary people, whose experiences are not generally included in the medical research that does exist about desire. Solutions for women are, correspondingly, difficult to come by. The few treatments that do exist are confusing, costly, ineffective, and in some cases, potentially harmful. Many GPs advise women to seek out sex therapy, which—though it includes some of the most research-supported approaches available—may or may not be appropriate for their particular situations, is difficult to access, and is not a well-regulated field of practice.

Distressingly low desire or arousal—that is, desire or arousal that are significantly lower than one wishes—is the most prevalent sexual complaint among women. As many as 40 percent of women experience low desire, and up to 10 percent are distressed enough for it to be a diagnosable condition, called female sexual interest/arousal disorder (FSIAD). The problem isn't isolated to any particular demographic—it affects single women as well as those in decades-long marriages, queer women as well as straight women, nonbinary and trans people as well as cis women—and it becomes more common after menopause: a 2018 survey of Canadians in mid-life in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* found postmenopausal women much more likely to report low desire.

The effect on quality of life can be profound. One study of 1,100 women found lack of desire comparable to the toll of chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, or hypertension. These women were also more likely to experience depression.

Some women are so frustrated by the limited options available to them that they are trying anything—including unproven remedies. A recent study of women with pelvic pain (one of the major, oft-ignored factors that rob women of desire) found that half were using a cannabis product such as CBD oil for relief and that, of those who weren't, 80 percent wanted to try one. One woman I interviewed for this article told me that she and her husband want to try the psychoactive Amazonian plant ayahuasca as a “reset.” On the internet, topical creams with questionable ingredients are available. Some Canadian providers even offer women the “O-Shot,” a clitoral injection purported to boost arousal that is not



recommended by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"That's what happens when medicine has these gaps," says OB-GYN Jen Gunter. "These voids get filled by people who are offering an easy solution." Her 2021 book, *The Menopause Manifesto*, which includes chapters on libido and vulval health, argues that women deserve better. Gunter is on a mission to banish stigma and misinformation around menopause and women's health, and she says women today are more open about sexuality and hungry for real facts. "The more the words are spoken, the less mystifying it is."

The study of women's sexual disorders is still in its infancy, long dwarfed by the brighter spotlight on men's sexual health. A huge market would exist for an effective medication for low desire in women. But, while drug companies have touted one-size-fits-all fixes, experts such as Gunter say there is no single solution to lower desire because there isn't one single problem.

Change hovers on the horizon. Mindfulness-based therapies developed at the University of British Columbia (UBC) have had the most clinically significant results, in part because of their ability to ease not just low desire but many of its causes, such as stress. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, a small research company called Emotional Brain says two of its drugs in development could usher in a new "personalized approach" to low libido. The hope is that we are on the cusp of a greater understanding not just that women are entitled to their desire but that pop culture and politics are not enough to secure it—that, to truly support women and their sexualities throughout their lives, we need to learn more, to research more creatively, and to develop a full range of treatments to address desire in all its complexities.

VIAGRA'S SUCCESS at the turn of the twenty-first century kicked off a gold rush to cash in on a female version. On the one hand, this ignited some much-needed research on women's sexual disorders. But the "little blue pill" skewed expectations of what a solution

for sexual challenges could or should look like.

The science of women's sexuality has always been shaped by cultural forces, whether prudence about the notion of women having desire in the first place or the tendency to use men's sexualities as a benchmark. Until the mid-twentieth century, physicians generally believed that women naturally had less desire for sex. Then, the human sexual-response cycle developed by sex researchers William Masters and Virginia Johnson asserted that the way men's and women's bodies responded to arousal was similar. The publication of their book, *Human Sexual Response*, in 1966, was a breath of fresh air for feminists tired of patriarchal norms that said women simply did not, and should not, enjoy sex as much as men did. But the influential model—particularly its 1977 update by researcher Helen Singer Kaplan, which emphasized desire—dictated that desire looked *exactly* the same for women and men: it arose spontaneously, triggering sexual activity and physical arousal, then a plateau, then a single orgasm. As traditionally understood by medical science, desire leads to sexual activity, which in turn produces increasing arousal.

We now know that map isn't quite right—it may capture what the experience is like for some women, some of the time, but it certainly isn't the whole story. For decades, however, it sent researchers astray, and that confusion shaped theories of what an approach to low desire required. It should go without saying that, if you're designing treatments to rev up women's sex drives, it helps to understand how those sex drives work.

In 2001, UBC psychiatrist Rosemary Basson published a paper that shared what she saw in her patients: although a small group of women felt desire spontaneously, it was more common for women to feel physically aroused and even begin sexual touching first, and *then* feel desire. The traditional sequence was reversed.

Basson's paper described a nonlinear, "responsive" model of female desire: women often begin by being open to sexual talk or touching, which in turn helps them get aroused and then generates

desire, which makes them decide to continue. She argues that women pressuring themselves to feel spontaneously "in the mood"—to have desire first—without enough time or stimuli to help them get there, produces anxiety that, ironically, quashes desire. While the responsive model has been characterized as saying women have sex "in response" to their male partners' advances, Basson has said that's a misunderstanding—and many men have responsive desire too.

Women's arousal, too, may work differently than has long been believed. From a physiological standpoint, arousal is a blood-flow event: increased blood flow to the pelvis readies our bodies for sex. Less blood flow equals less arousal. Simple, right? Yet even this basic description has become dotted with asterisks by newer research. Canadian sex researcher Meredith Chivers's surprising studies at Queen's University have shown that a rush of blood to the pelvis is sometimes just...blood flow. That is, it isn't necessarily correlated with desire. An increase in vaginal blood flow doesn't always mean one feels subjectively turned on or is even particularly aware of any sensation.

All that is just the physiology of sex, which researchers are still learning about. (The internal clitoris was only fully mapped in 2005.) When it comes to subjective sexual experience—why desire, arousal, and release *feel* the way they do—there is even more we don't know.

Most of sex, and 100 percent of the enjoyment of sex, takes place in the brain, an overwhelmingly complex organ and one that is notoriously difficult to study. Researchers have begun to explore the importance of the neurotransmitters serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine in the sexual response cycle, but measuring these in the human brain and creating a precise model of what they're up to during sex is a major challenge, says Lori Brotto, UBC's Canada Research Chair in Women's Sexual Health. (This may be why loss of arousal is among the common side effects of some antidepressants that affect serotonin.)

The complexity of sexuality thus makes low desire vexing to fix. The situation

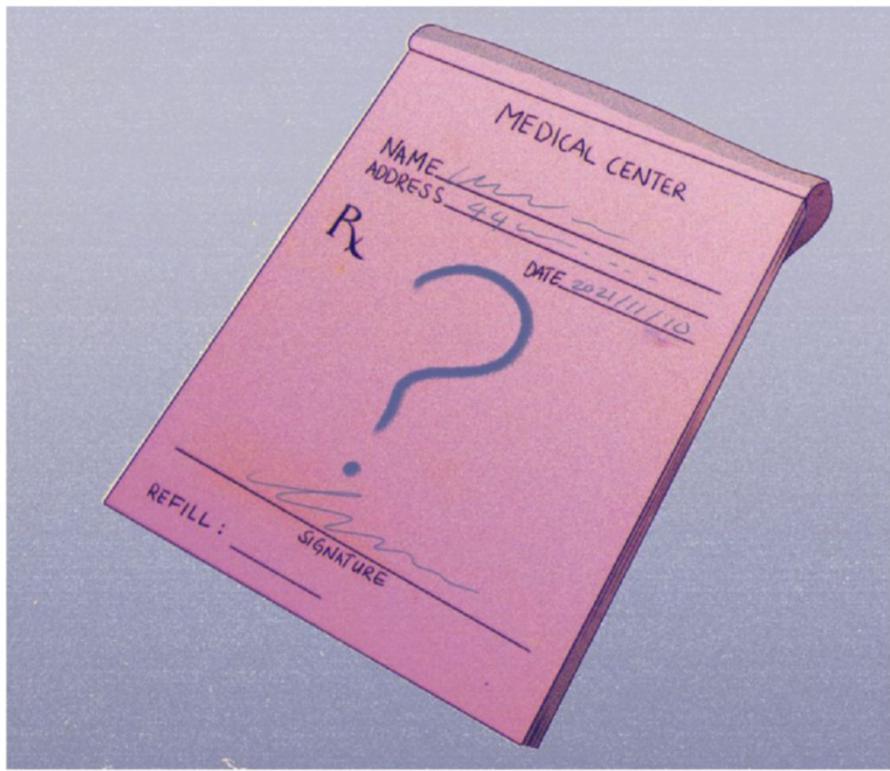
becomes even more complicated during the menopause transition, when multiple changes can impact sexuality. The body's production of estrogen and other sex hormones wanes, but the effect of this on desire isn't direct. Lower estrogen levels can reduce the flow of blood to the pelvis, causing the genitourinary syndrome of menopause, which means less lubrication and tissue changes that can cause dryness, irritation, pain, and diminished sensation. All of that can shut down desire for sex. Luckily, says Gunter, hormonal creams and estrogen tablets can

the muscles that contract during an orgasm. Physiotherapy and exercises can help in these cases.

It's important for GPs to be better educated about these basics, says Gunter, since they're typically women's first point of contact in their quest for help. The differential diagnosis should look widely at a person's life. "Is it estrogen in the tissues? Is it your pelvic floor muscles not contracting? Is it a relationship problem? Is it the fact that you've been stuck at home because of the pandemic with three kids?"

dysfunction, few significant differences were found.

It's also important to ask a patient what she means by low desire, says Gunter. It's normal to have ebbs and flows in desire over a relationship spanning decades. "This idea that you're going to have exactly the same libido throughout your whole lifespan is a very destructive message," she says, alongside the images we see on TV of (still mostly heterosexual) lust: women and men embracing at exactly the same time, desire perfectly choreographed.



work to restore blood flow and ease these symptoms; she calls them equivalent to a Viagra for women. But lowered estrogen also produces hot flashes, waking women multiple times at night. Lack of sleep is a huge indirect desire killer that is often missed by doctors, she says. "For many women, the menopause transition can trigger a mild depression, and depression can affect your libido," she adds. "So you have to think about this as a whole-body, whole-mind, whole-cultural-experience thing."

Other changes in menopause can include decreased muscle mass in the pelvic floor, especially in the levator ani,

"We are not simply beings that respond to hormones," Gunter says. "We are far more complex than that." Consider testosterone cream, a drug sometimes prescribed to women with low interest in sex, with side effects and mixed results. Studies have failed to establish a clear relationship between the hormones in our blood and the desire we feel in our bodies—meaning you can have high natural testosterone and still have low desire. In a 2010 study by UBC's Basson and others comparing blood levels of androgens (such as testosterone) in a group of women with clinically low desire and in a group with no sexual

GIVEN THAT THERE is no single biological cause for low desire, and given how partial our understanding of sexuality still is, it should be no surprise that attempts at finding a one-size-fits-all cure have failed. Many of the drugs we do have were discovered by accident. Viagra was supposed to be an angina drug. Flibanserin (marketed under the name Addyi), the only pill on the market for female low desire, was supposed to be an antidepressant. "The pharmaceutical companies have tripped over these things," says Stephen Holzapfel, who founded the Sexual Medicine Counselling Unit at Women's College Hospital.

These drugs have all faced criticism. Flibanserin, which received US approval in 2015 after a media campaign by its maker, Sprout Pharmaceuticals (Health Canada approved it in 2018), has been criticized by doctors because it must be taken daily, patients must curtail alcohol intake to use it, and it produces, at most, only one more satisfying sexual event per month over placebo—in exchange for a risk of unsexy side effects such as dizziness and nausea. (Sprout did not respond to requests for comment.) Bremelanotide, approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2019 for the treatment of low desire in premenopausal women, must be injected into the leg at least forty-five minutes before sex—not sexy either—and side effects may include nausea, headaches, or vomiting. In testing, some subjects *preferred* a placebo. Robert Jordan, a senior vice president of Palatin, the maker of bremelanotide,

counters that no one in its drug trials dropped out because of the injection and that side effects wear off quickly.

Viagra also made it seem as though quick and effective treatment for sexual dysfunction is the norm and women are, as always, the unlucky exception. That's not true. Patient data have long shown drug companies' well-kept secret: Viagra has a high dropout rate. Almost half of men taking phosphodiesterase-5 inhibitors like Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis quietly stop refilling their prescriptions after one year, according to a comprehensive review of multiple studies published in 2016 in the journal *Andrology*. Reasons cited included lack of efficacy, side effects, and "marital problems"—in other words, sexual complexities that a pill couldn't fix.

The notion that men always have strong sex drives despite emotional, psychological, or relationship factors and only require a boost to their hydraulics just isn't true, says Sarah Hunter Murray, a Winnipeg therapist and the author of the 2019 book *Not Always in the Mood: The New Science of Men, Sex, and Relationships*. "I see the men that Viagra doesn't work for," she says. "Viagra is not a desire drug at all," says Holzapfel. It's an arousal drug: it boosts blood flow to the pelvis. That's it. Sometimes, that sensation of blood flowing can spur feelings of desire. But, in many cases, an erection by itself doesn't address the deeper desire issues that many men find it hard to talk about.

Viagra's barrage of marketing, then, may have set up a mythical standard of what to expect in a drug for women: a pharmaceutical bypass for sex's complexities and insecurities. Hearing Big Pharma's line that men have a cure but women don't, Gunter says, can compound women's distress.

LORI BROTTÖ does research with the urgency of someone trying to make up for lost time. Women's concerns have long been excluded from medicine in general. "Up until the year 2000, women weren't even included routinely in clinical trials" for heart or diabetes drugs, says Brotto, the director of

UBC's influential Sexual Health Laboratory. Sexuality has also been sidelined. "We haven't known as much, scientifically, about sex function, especially desire, for men and women until really the last thirty years," says Holzapfel.

You might imagine that a condition both multifaceted and widespread in the population would attract a proliferation of specialists similar to those who study nutrition or sports medicine. Yet the number of professionals truly qualified to treat complex sexual health issues is low. Studying sexuality, particularly in women, has never been

lion's share of funding has gone to drug trials rather than to psychological or sex education treatments or even to testing how to combine new drugs with therapy, she says. Her own research focuses attention elsewhere: she's interested in how a woman's overall state of mind might affect her ability to experience arousal.

On the basis of her research, Brotto has developed a mindfulness-based sex therapy, which she hopes will both give women a more holistic approach to their sexualities and, by being something they can do on their own (an at-home guide will be out next year, and an online video series is in the works), expand access to care.

Diana Firican is one of the women Brotto has worked with: she participated in eight weeks of mindfulness-based therapy, part of a five-year randomized controlled study designed to test whether a mindfulness-based approach would be more effective than existing approaches to sex therapy. One group received sex education along with traditional group therapy; Firican's group learned mindfulness-based techniques as well as the sex ed.

The sex ed, which included learning about responsive desire, helped; Firican loved knowing she could start having sex for nonsexual reasons, or "start from zero desire," she said. But mindfulness, by helping focus attention first on the breathing, then on the whole body, and then on genital sensations, resulted in sexual feelings intensifying as distracting thoughts fell away. The key is not just noticing but fully accepting each sensation exactly as it is, a mindfulness skill called "equanimity." As women notice more pleasant sensations, desire to have sex increases because there is more incentive to do so. The mindfulness group also saw greater reductions in distress and rumination and more relationship satisfaction. This held for up to a year after the therapy ended.

Gunter, who says Brotto's therapies should be among FSIAD's first-line treatments, nevertheless understands why all these steps might be frustrating. "You wait four months to see your GP and then you get in and they ask you about

Ultimately, the ideal course of treatment will involve choosing from a suite of options, personalized to the individual.

a priority in Western medicine owing to deep-seated biases and doctors' discomfort. "We don't have a formal specialty called sexual medicine" in Canada or, indeed, in most places in the world, says Holzapfel. For example, while there is an organization, the Board of Examiners in Sex Therapy and Counselling in Ontario (BESTCO), that certifies Ontario sex therapists, membership is voluntary. A list of sex therapists certified by BESTCO shows only fifty-one for the entire province, most clustered in Toronto. That's one for approximately every 291,000 people. (By contrast, according to the Canadian Medical Association, there are 835 OB-GYNs in the province.)

Until recently, Brotto says, medical research in this area has also been constrained. "Because pharmaceutical companies were the primary source of funding for research, it really steered the kinds of questions that got asked," she says. The

your sleep and they ask you about your depression, and you're like, *Ugh....* It's hard for people to understand how something like talk therapy or mindfulness-based practices can improve this big problem. You know what you need for a big problem? You need a high-powered drug or an injection or a surgery."

MINDFULNESS-BASED therapy is showing promise for many—in particular, for those who experience lowered desire due to stress, distraction, or distress related to physical health and for those who aren't sure what the cause is. Those who don't see improvement after trying mindfulness or talk therapies and who have ruled out other factors such as vulval changes and general health issues may still benefit from medication, says Gunter. This is especially true if researchers can refine their approaches and target drugs to the specific causes that underlie FSIAD.

If women ever do get a libido pill, Kim van Rooij may have something to do with it. In her job as a GP in Amsterdam, she often sees patients with sexual difficulties. As a researcher, she has been working on a treatment with huge market potential.

"I think the mistake [pharmaceutical companies] make is that they want to develop something for all women," she says. "That's not possible." Until recently, Van Rooij was chief medical officer of Emotional Brain, which has developed two separate desire drugs—with the working names Lybribo and Lybridos—tailored to what its researchers believe are two subtypes of sexual brain chemistry. Although phase-two trials were promising and the drugs were initially expected to come to market in 2016, the company hit difficulty attracting funding for costly, much larger phase-three trials that would involve thousands of subjects in multiple countries. Emotional Brain is now in the process of being sold, and the new owners will be moving ahead with those more expensive trials.

Taking Lybribo or Lybridos would go like this: patients struggling with low desire would get a blood test. It would reveal whether they have a genetic

predisposition to be sensitive to some of the neurotransmitters and hormones that play key roles in regulating pleasure, desire, and sexual satisfaction—oxytocin, androgens, and serotonin, respectively. Based on the results, they would get a prescription for either Lybribo or Lybridos—on the theory that each drug will be more effective if it's targeted to the right kind of brain chemistry. Both drugs are taken on-demand, just like Viagra, and take effect within a few hours. Both have a coating containing a tiny quantity of testosterone to induce a heightened sensitivity to sexual feelings and suggestions.

If the pill is Lybribo, what's beneath the coating is the drug sildenafil citrate (that is, the medication marketed as Viagra), which would send blood flow to the pelvis at the same time. The interplay of these drugs would work for about half of patients with FSIAD—those with less sexual sensitivity. "The first group of women don't have as much sensitivity to oxytocin or androgens," says Van Rooij. "They never flirt. If they see a very attractive person, they don't think about sex."

For roughly the other half, however, taking Lybribo would be an extreme turnoff. The failure of an early trial led to this discovery. Researchers were testing Lybribo on a pilot group when they noticed some women responding worse to the new drug than to placebo. "And then they looked at the interviews," says Van Rooij. The screening interviews with participants who reacted negatively revealed histories of sexual abuse.

In a separate study of women without histories of sexual trauma, Van Rooij recalls, company researchers scanned women's brains to see how they responded to the medication

and found that, while they had expected testosterone to activate the limbic system in most women, for some, it instead activated the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in inhibition. They

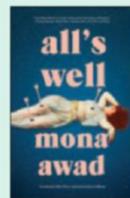


The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

All's Well

by Mona Awad



All's Well is a warped and eerie romp through the mind of Miranda Fitch, a theatre professor living with chronic pain that no one, not even her many doctors, seems to believe is real. Miranda grapples with her suffering and the social isolation, judgment, and rejection that come with it—that is, until a trio of enigmatic men arrive and make her a seemingly supernatural offer to take the pain away.

As a reader, I was forced to confront my impatience and frustration with Miranda's insistence on showing me precisely where and how it hurt. Cleverly, this seems to be exactly Mona Awad's point: I, too, became implicated in how we ignore women's pain and relegate it to the realm of the hysterical, excessive, dramatic, and unbelievable. Much like Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, a play that Miranda insists on staging, this work straddles the line between comedy and tragedy—no, pardon me, Awad entirely distorts it. Her novel is hilarious, creepy, and surreal. Can we believe this character? Is she losing her mind? Is any of this real? What's real for sure is Awad's mastery of the craft. *All's Well* is as compelling and mysterious as it is funny and scary. It will leave you wrung out and grateful for it.

FRANCESCA EKWUYASI is a writer and multidisciplinary artist from Lagos, Nigeria. Her first novel, *Butter Honey Pig Bread*, was nominated for the Giller Prize, the Lambda Literary Award, and more.



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hypothesized that a subtype of people with FSIAD were perfectly sensitive to testosterone but also had strong inhibitory reactions—an overactive serotonin system, which is involved in telling the brain you've had enough of something and it's time to stop.

"It's not only sexual abuse but people who had a very strict [upbringing], with parents who never told them about sex, or there was always a taboo," Van Rooij says. "Their first boyfriend or girlfriend experience was not what they expected it to be. Those kinds of experiences you take with you, of course, to other sexual activities." This group would be prescribed Lybridos (a placeholder name which will be changed to prevent confusion, says Van Rooij), which has the same testosterone coating but with a very small dose of the antianxiety medication buspirone underneath.

Less serotonin during the testosterone's active window would take the foot off the brain's "brakes," according to the dual-control model of desire, which Lybridos is based on. It's the theory that much of human behaviour, including sex, depends on balancing excitatory and inhibitory patterns in the brain. Sex educator Emily Nagoski has described desire as having gas and brake pedals. We often focus on our turn-ons, trying to hit the gas harder, but equally important to desire is eliminating what turns us off, like stress or distractions.

Not all women with low desire have experienced sexual violence. But desire difficulties may be more common in those who develop PTSD, according to a study by Brotto and sexual health researcher Julia O'Loughlin in 2020. It found that women with low desire were significantly more likely than a control group to meet criteria for having PTSD even though people in both groups had experienced comparable traumatic life events.

The idea of a pill that could soften the body's learned resistance to sex, whether from sexual trauma or just the general anti-aphrodisiac of being a woman navigating the world's dangers and judgments, invites obvious reasons to be uncomfortable. Would women be pressured into taking it by partners?

Would they pressure themselves into taking it?

Lybridos works only if taken under the tongue—it wouldn't work if dropped in someone's drink, so it couldn't be used as a date-rape drug, says Van Rooij. Nor does it have mind-altering effects: taking the medication would, if it worked, increase desire for something that a woman wanted—it wouldn't make her amenable to something she didn't. It would still be important to have frank conversations about potentials for partner pressure if these drugs came to market. Yet, with some women already turning to cannabis, wine, MDMA, or other ways of self-medicating in order to achieve the relaxation required to give pleasure a chance, a medically researched alternative would be welcome.

Ultimately, says Brotto, the ideal remedy for distress about desire will not be just one pill or one mindfulness technique for all, because these struggles don't manifest in the same way for everyone. The ideal course of treatment would involve choosing from a suite of options, personalized to the individual.

Gunter isn't sure if a game-changing pharmaceutical treatment for desire is in the cards or if desire is too complex to be addressed with medication. "Would it be good for us to have more solutions for people? I think so! Because the ones we have aren't really very good. But I don't know if that's because there isn't a medical option for that, if it's a far more complex thing, or if there is a medical option and we haven't come upon the research yet to shine a light on it."

And, even if we did find a new pill, bigger-picture cultural change would still be needed. "I think the biggest thing that could be changed is at the ground level, everyone having a better understanding about normal sexual functioning,"

Gunter says. "So often I hear people say, 'There's no female Viagra.' Well, no, actually, there is. Taking estrogen in menopause is the same as taking Viagra. Estrogen increases blood flow to the tissues. It improves how the tissues can function. Viagra just improves how the penis can function. It doesn't change libido. So I think it's important that we make sure that people are also having the right conversations." ♀

SARAH BARMAK is a journalist and author based in Toronto.

The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

The Singing Forest

by Judith McCormack



The best way to judge a book is by how long it continues to live in you. I read an advance copy of Judith McCormack's *The Singing Forest* in early spring and am still haunted by this novel. "It was a soft, deadly secret that had settled into the small forest, blanketing the ground, wrapping itself around the rough skin of the trees," McCormack writes. The secret concerns the elderly Stefan Drozd (*drozd* means "thrush" in Russian—this one's deadly) and by extension Leah Jarvis, the young Jewish lawyer in Toronto tasked with deporting Drozd for war crimes committed decades ago in Stalinist Belarus. Legal dramas are always fascinating, but there's more here. Moving hypnotically between present events and two motherless childhoods—Jarvis's eccentric upbringing and the loveless brutality of Drozd's—McCormack pulls off a little miracle. For much of the novel, we care about the monster. All this she accomplishes in sentences that wrap themselves around you.

CAROLINE ADDERSON is the author of, most recently, the novel *A Russian Sister*.

MEMOIR

The Love Letter

When my wife developed Alzheimer's, the story of our marriage kept us connected

BY STEPHEN TRUMPER
ARTWORK BY MICHELLE PATEROK

JUDY AND STEVE met on the most gorgeous day of the summer.” I have recited this sentence, or a longer variation of it, to my wife, Judy Wilson, thousands of times. Additional sentences always follow, and together, they form the longest-running love letter of our four decades together.

In December 2012, at age sixty-one, Judy received a diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's. The news was deeply distressing, igniting within me a burning anxiety over how I, a wheelchair user born with a spinal cord malformation and living with bunches of body parts that don't work so well, could possibly help my able-bodied spouse as the disease robbed her of not just mental acuity but also physical strength. Thankfully, Judy was still relatively spry and lucid, and I thought it would be more productive to channel my energies into anticipating her future needs, starting with a new avenue of communication between us.

The following spring, at the National Magazine Awards ceremony, I was expected to make a speech as the recipient of the annual outstanding-achievement

award. Even before I began to write the speech, I knew I wanted to include a short, simple passage that would serve as the opening for an evolving love letter I would recite to Judy every time we were alone together. I saw it as my best opportunity, through ample repetition, to reach into her heart at every stage of Alzheimer's. As I gave the speech, Judy smiled and laughed. When I arrived at the passages about her, tears flowed. “We met by chance, on Cumberland Street in Toronto, on the most gorgeous day of the summer,” I said while looking directly at her. “I was immediately smitten, remain smitten, and will always be smitten no matter what twists and turns of life await us.”

That evening, after we returned home, after we drank some wine, after Judy fell asleep holding my hand, I lay with her, wide awake, marvelling once again, as I had done thousands of times before, at my good fortune in finding her. Now, I had to prepare for a future of losing her, bit by agonizing bit. Fortunately—or unfortunately, depending on your perspective—Judy and I, individually and together, already had a wealth

of experience in living through difficult times. Still, on that night nearly a decade ago, and every day since, I have found myself, sometimes on the edge of panic, wondering: What will become of us? What will become of me without her?

JUDY AND I ATTENDED the same high school. She is three years older, and one of her close friends is the elder sister of buddies of mine, twins, who were my designated wheelchair pushers in grade nine. Though there were several other links between us, it still took us about twelve years to finally meet. If the fates had indeed been bringing us together, as Judy believed, they sure had been taking their time. Or maybe they had just been waiting for that most gorgeous day of the summer: a Saturday afternoon in late August 1979. I had spent much of that day at the *Toronto Life* offices, where I was a junior editor. The magazine was behind schedule, and several of us had agreed to work the weekend. However, I had to leave early: a friend's wedding was coming up fast, and in mid-afternoon, I headed to the shops to buy a gift.



Back then, the right side of my body was strong, robust even, but I had little use of my left arm and hand. My left leg was weak, so I walked with an ungainly limp and lurch, always a bit unsteady, which is why I frequently used a wheelchair for longer distances, such as high school hallways, museums, and airports. I could also drive, which is how I travelled that day: in my zippy Honda Civic, with windows down and jazz blasting from the speakers. After finding a parking spot, I clambered out, and seconds later, I heard, *Steve!*

The call came from a woman I knew from high school. We chatted briefly, and then she said, *I'm waiting for my friend, Judy Wilson. We're going for coffee. Would you join us?*

Oh yes.

Within a few minutes, there she was, sashaying sprightly toward us. Even from afar, Judy emanated merriment and mirth, her face brimming with cheer and her smile as inviting as the day itself. She was stylishly dressed in a wide-brimmed straw hat, a flouncy white blouse, and a yellow floral-print skirt. *Finally, we meet!* she said, laughing.

We headed to a café about ten steepish steps below street level with one small patio table. Judy could see the effort it took me to carefully descend. *I will get the drinks and bring them out*, she said. She did more than that. She treated me to a cookie along with my Earl Grey tea and then deftly peeled off the top seal of my plastic milk pod and poured the contents into the tea. That little bit of unexpected help was more elegant than my usual one-armed method, which was to plunge a fork into the pod's seal, trying to avoid spilling milk on myself (or anybody else), then turn the pod upside down, squeezing the milk out.

Judy told me she worked at the *Toronto Star*, where she had started as an airbrush artist. She spoke excitedly about her passion for creating art, dolls in particular, which she sold at a downtown gallery.

What struck me most about our first encounter is how much Judy and I talked about the importance of embracing joy wherever you found it—or it found you. We shared some of our most joyous

experiences, and with each example, our smiles grew bigger.

When the time came to say goodbye, I nervously asked Judy if, one day soon, I could treat her to lunch.

I don't do lunch, she responded, beaming. *Just dinner.*

OUR COURTSHIP started at a Greek restaurant specializing in seafood. As at the café, Judy was witty and ebullient, though I did begin to wonder: Was there a sombre, less rosy side? The first indication came when Judy abruptly said, with a sigh,

Great love stories begin with such heady promise and end with such grief—but, at least in my case, also with memories of immense joy.

Of course, I know that life can be horrible. With that observation, she briefly stared off into space, deep in thought, evoking the poignancy Amedeo Modigliani frequently captured in the faces of his portrait subjects.

I became more intrigued. I am drawn to people who have struggled. It usually forces them to think deeper about life, which, often, makes them relate better to disability. What struggles did Judy have?

Over dessert, she told me about her dad, who for years had been faltering from Alzheimer's, and her mom's commitment to caring for him at their home in Cobourg, Ontario.

I revealed that my mom was in decline as a result of an adulthood of dealing with the frequent, volatile bouts of

anger and paranoia associated with her schizophrenia. She had been hospitalized for it and lived at that time in a rural group home.

I drove Judy home that night. She did not ask me in, but she did give me a tender, lingering kiss. We made another date and, elated, I drove back to my apartment. A few days later, with the mail, came a card from Judy, which simply read, in her elegant, distinctive handwriting: "To Joy! Thank you!"

We would go on to send dozens of cards to each other during our two years of dating. As the relationship deepened, we'd each study the visuals on a card received, searching for clues as to how the other was feeling about us. I knew, for instance, exactly when Judy started to see a future together after I received several cards adorned with stylized stars, a reference to a lyric from her favorite musical, *West Side Story*:

But here you are,
and what was just a world is a star.

EVER SINCE our first encounter, Judy has continuously, unobtrusively assisted me, making my life much easier and giving me the opportunity to live larger than I had thought possible. It started small. At our early dinners, for instance, she was eager to cut up my meat entrees into bite-size pieces (almost impossible to do with one hand). On our first night together, she gleefully helped me off with my clothes and, the next morning, back on with them. Judy once said she tried hard to anticipate my needs so I didn't have to ask for help.

Throughout our first seventeen years, we often playfully explained our relationship to others by saying that Judy was my left arm and leg while I was her wheels. I loved driving; she loved being driven. The car gave me greater independence and a continuing opportunity to transcend the limits of what my body could do.

We would, during those years, take dozens of motor trips throughout southern Ontario and upper New York state. Judy was our onboard DJ, and her musical tastes are wide-ranging—pop, jazz,

classics, reggae—though, at heart, she is a '60s rock 'n' roll gal.

Judy is deceptively strong. I didn't discover that until she started pushing my wheelchair over all kinds of terrain, which included propelling me up and down several San Francisco hills as well as through myriad parks, shops, and museums in New York, London, and other big cities. She would say her greatest push came on a drizzly evening in Manhattan. We had tickets for *Cats*, but no cab would pick us up at our hotel—they

an issue. She looked relieved, and it wasn't long after this exchange, at a dinner date, when she gracefully, almost surreptitiously took hold of my paralyzed left hand, gently cupping my curled fingers with her hand and, seemingly, never letting go.

WE WERE IN THE CAR, stressed and rushing cautiously, around four on a crisp November morning. Judy was in labour, focused on taking deep breaths. The hospital at which



chose, instead, to ignore and speed by us (a frequent experience for wheelchair users). Frustrated and annoyed, she said, *I've got this*, and off we went, Judy in a favourite little black dress, green trench, and black leather heels, swooshing past throngs of soggy New Yorkers and tourists, tilting me and the wheelchair up and down dozens of curbs, arriving at our seats just as the overture began. *Yes!* she exclaimed, grinning, panting, and looking mightily pleased with herself.

A couple of years before that triumph, early in our courtship, a more tentative Judy asked if I was in constant pain. *I'm not sure I could handle that*, she quietly added. I assured her that pain was not

we were scheduled to have our baby had unexpectedly closed due to an outbreak of the Norwalk virus, nullifying all our carefully arranged plans for getting assistance on arrival. Instead, we headed to a hospital with which we were not familiar, the degree to which the staff would help us uncertain. This was the latest stage of a big journey into the unknown that began when Judy raised the idea of starting a family.

At first, the notion of having kids terrified me. As so often happens with disability, my early response was to focus on what I couldn't do: properly hold a baby, change a baby, pick up a baby, dress a baby, bathe a baby. I worried about

the possibility of our baby having a disability. I'm too aware of how that can often make everyday life frustratingly difficult, even traumatizing, particularly in childhood. I also worried about the extra physical work Judy would have to take on in the baby's early years. Might it be too hard?

For weeks, we talked seriously about the barriers and possibilities associated with having a child. Judy assured me she'd be able to deal with the additional physical effort required, and she was certain I'd be an ideal parent for a disabled kid should that eventuality happen. *You have so much of your own experience you could draw on*, she concluded.

After arriving at the hospital, we successfully marshalled assistance and were quickly led to a delivery room where, following several more hours of labour, our baby daughter was born. We called her Hannah, a name the editor in me fancied, in part, because it is palindromic.

As Judy cradled the beautiful baby Hannah in her arms, I gazed intently at both of them, filled with relief that the delivery had gone smoothly and that the arms, legs, head, eyes, and more of our newborn daughter were gloriously active. All early indications showed that we had a happy, healthy baby in our lives. Still, I worried. Signs of my disability hadn't shown until I was five. Indications of my mom's schizophrenia hadn't presented until her late teens. And I'd had a baby brother who lived for only three days.

These misfortunes did nothing to eclipse the excitement I was feeling, but they were much on my mind when the nurse brought baby Hannah over to me.

I looked deep into my new daughter's squinting brown eyes.

Hi Hannah, I'm your dad. Then I made my first promise to her. *If there is something wrong inside you, I whispered, I will do everything possible to help you through it. And to help your mom too.*

WE HAD OUR SHARE of sorrows early on. My mom died suddenly just two months into Judy's and my relationship. We each lost our fathers years later. Then, following

Hannah's birth, there was a series of miscarriages, which haunted both of us, and I frequently found Judy staring off into space with that same Modigliani poignancy I'd seen on our first date and many times throughout our first decade.

I suggested to Judy that she might consider seeing a therapist. She was reluctant at first but came to embrace the process. She slowly bounced back, though not without struggle. Her grief was

profound, but as it turned out, miscarriages weren't the only trauma darkening her soul.

At the time, we had a Saturday ritual: a nanny would come to take care of Hannah while Judy and I would jump into the car, go for breakfast, do some shopping, maybe catch an early movie, and perhaps talk at length about how each of us was feeling. Back then, we frequently picked up Saturday breakfasts of large cappuccinos with warm gooey cheese croissants from a French bakery and then drove down to the shores of Lake Ontario to eat and chat.

One morning, after we finished our croissants, Judy, sounding calm but nervous, said, *I have something I need to tell you*

We held hands and she told me a dark secret she never thought she'd reveal. Many years earlier, she had been sexually abused. She told me who had done it, over what time period, and what she intended to do about it now, which was to try to help me understand why it had taken so long to inform me and why she wanted no part of confronting her abuser.

Judy also explained that she and her therapist had talked about my possible reactions. In fact, they had role-played through several scenarios, including: What if I responded with intense anger and wanted to end the marriage?

As Judy spoke, my mind immediately went back to our first date, to that Modigliani look, when I first sensed some kind of turmoil within her that went beyond a father's Alzheimer's. Throughout our years together, I had gone back and forth over whether to press Judy on what was troubling her, but each time I had decided that she would tell me when she was ready. That time had now arrived.

I squeezed her hand as she hesitantly yet determinedly

continued with the words she clearly had rehearsed several times.

I have frequently been in awe of what my wife can deal with, but perhaps never more than on this morning by the lake, parked at a favourite vista, the lapping waves offering some soothing calmness. She was resolute in how she wanted to handle the situation and said she absolutely needed me.

When Judy finished, she asked, not without some fear, what I thought.

It makes me love you more, I said, in the most reassuring tone I could muster despite my rising ire toward her abuser.

We spent a long time that morning down by the lake, talking about summoning courage, hiding suffering, what I could do to best help, and how love can heal. When we ran out of words, we watched the swooping gulls, followed the passing parade of people and dogs on the boardwalk, and gazed at the waves, reflecting on the momentousness of what had just happened.

In the days and weeks that followed, we spoke often about the aftermath of abuse. Judy was candid about the shame, embarrassment, and guilt it had provoked within her. She told me she worried I would judge her harshly. I didn't. I couldn't. All I wanted to do was soothe and protect—and hold her closer than I ever had before.

SUCH DEVOTION, we overheard my neurosurgeon say to a nurse as they walked away from my hospital bed. He was referring to Judy and me. We had met with him a few times previously, and each time he commented on our closeness as a couple.

What had brought us to this hospital stay, in 1997, was my spinal cord. Something had gone wrong (again). In the summer of the previous year, when I was forty-three, I had noticed a sudden weakening of my body's right side. Moving my arm had become difficult, and my fingers were stiffening. Walking, never easy, got trickier.

In the years following my first spinal cord surgery, when I was seven, I had been assured by my parents and medical specialists that there should be no further

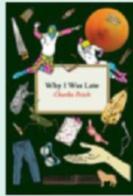
The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021



Why I Was Late

by Charlie Petch



Multidisciplinary artist and performer Charlie Petch's debut poetry collection, *Why I Was Late*, shows up on its own terms—and with accompaniment. Readers are instructed to pluck a ukulele and serenade Mike Tyson as "my first lisping hero" and to shake a jar of fake bacon bits for an ode to working a hot dog cart in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. The collection covers vast ground, but the poems are sharpest when Petch interrogates society's rigid views on gender. Petch coins the destined-to-be-iconic term "crotchmerized" to cover the obsession over what private bits we each possess. They deconstruct our strange euphemisms for the body. ("I often hear that my body is a vessel... Like a submarine? / Like the Millennium Falcon?") They confront dangerous extremes. ("Toxic masculinity/turned a Toronto rental van / into an automatic weapon / used to kill women.") Most of all, the book is just fun: even as a lifelong *Star Wars* hater, I can't help but snort at the surprisingly erotic tribute to Chewbacca set to a tango.

JUSTIN LING is a Montreal-based journalist and the author of *Missing from the Village*, an investigation into serial killer Bruce McArthur.

complications. My dad, an advertising copywriter, had described the medical predicament to seven-year-old me this way: two bones at the back of my neck had grown into each other—something like a wishbone—and, as I grew, they grew too, right into the part of the brain area that controls my body movements. The doctor, dad had added, would snap that wishbone and protect my head, neck, and everything else.

Thirty-seven years later, I was facing a modern version of the same surgery I'd had in 1960, a spinal decompression, complete with the same possibilities that I might not survive or that cutting into the base of my brain might provoke collateral damage. In our house, we refer to these times as *Spinal Cord I* and *Spinal Cord II: The Adventure Continues*, an eerie sequel starring rampaging scar tissue as the villain. Both were terrible periods, but both surgeries went as well as could be expected.

In the hands of many able-bodied writers, our story would most likely be portrayed as yet another example of what people in the disability community often call “inspiration porn.” These superficial, supposedly feel-good vignettes usually cast the disabled person as the hero, or superhero, and the able-bodied spouse or parent as the saint or angel. Those terms, as the diplomatic editor in me would say, are perhaps poor word choices. Judy was more direct.

Poppycock, she once stated, adding, *Calling me a saint or angel dehumanizes both of us. I can be crabby, judgmental, and impatient, and calling me either of those words insults you, suggesting you are so awful that no ordinary human would love you.*

I was in hospital and rehab for approximately three months. Every day, Judy was at my side after dropping Hannah, then eleven, off at school or at a friend's place. Every day, together, we discussed and explored our new realities for a life in which, aided by personal support workers and nurses, Judy would continue to be my left arm and leg but would also become my right leg and, sometimes, my right arm.

It took us about a year to return to something like our old existence. Finances were an urgent issue. Neither of us was working full-time, though Judy continued to create and sell her fine-art dolls. Debts were mounting after our insurance company resisted my claim for long-term disability benefits. We worried about losing the house, in which, a few years earlier, we had installed an elevator. But, thanks to the efforts of a determined lawyer, the insurance company succumbed, bringing in needed revenue until I went back to teaching part-time at Ryerson University's school of journalism and, eventually, to serving as an executive editor at the *National Post's* business magazine.

Still, I was mindful of Judy and caregiver burnout. She has always cherished her privacy and was rankled by the parade of often moody and insensitive PSWS, nurses, and other health care practitioners who marched through our doors to assist me after I was discharged. She called the worst of them “home invaders” and “scaregivers.” Judy once told me, *I can do all your caregiving. I want to do all your caregiving. I love you. We will, however, need to build in breaks and getaways for me and find ways to offset some of the grittier things that need doing.*

Though I could no longer drive, I could still deliver, arranging for spa escapes, fragrances, bath and shower relaxants, regular days when PSWS would stay with me while Judy did whatever she wanted, a trip to New York City, a wide array of CDs, food and wine, and multitudes of fresh flowers.

The first time I went to Judy's apartment, there were flowers. She always had flowers. When we moved in together, more flowers. For our first New Year's Eve in our apartment, we filled the place with approximately

a dozen bouquets. I was amazed by how many vases she owned. Our annual celebration of ringing in the new year with rooms in bloom continued for more than thirty years.

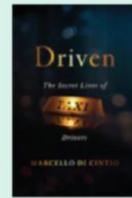
At some point between our twentieth and twenty-fifth wedding anniversaries, I decided I should buy Judy flowers once a week, maybe more. Every week, I would go to the florist and select a single rose, either yellow, red, pink, or white. We had gone through so much together; I wanted to regularly celebrate that devotion—and our marriage—with a symbol



The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

Driven: The Secret Lives of Taxi Drivers
by Marcello Di Cintio



Travel writer Marcello Di Cintio spent a year among cabbies, wanting to learn about “their backstories, not their backseats.” His book explores the lives, hardships, and transitions of taxi drivers in different Canadian cities at a time when the industry is contending with Uber, Lyft, and COVID-19.

Most have come from away and many have come from childhoods spent among “smoke, gunfire, and blood.” Michael in Halifax had his leg shot up in Sierra Leone. Andy in Toronto is a Holocaust survivor. Kareem in Yellowknife escaped war-torn Somalia. On and on—Beirut, Baghdad, Afghanistan. Over the book’s fourteen chapters, I was astonished by what these men and women endured and humbled by their discipline and optimism. A blend of reportage, social history, and personal profile, *Driven* is a triumph of curiosity and compassion.

ALEX PUGSLEY is the author of the novel *Aubrey McKee*. His first story collection, *Shimmer*, will be published in May 2022.

not just of beauty but also of fragility, of not taking life, or each other, for granted.

THE MORNING AFTER receiving Judy's Alzheimer's diagnosis, we lay in bed in silence and dismay. There was no reason to get up. We listened to classical music, and at one point, Judy quietly, softly stated, *Well, that's life. Things come and things go.* My only response was to hug her, not knowing what else to do or say.

I thought a lot about the marital bed that day and how it is such a complex setting. As long-time happy couples discover, it's a refuge on which to romp, play, relax, sleep, recharge, and heal. For Judy and me, the bed was all these things, but perhaps more than for most twosomes, it was a place of comfort and comforting. After sitting in a wheelchair all day, for example, it's a huge relief to stretch out and sink into soft layers of foam—so much the better if a good bottle of wine and two glasses, one with a straw, are within reach.

Throughout our years together, there have been moments when I felt

overwhelmed by disability and a world that is frequently unwelcoming to me. Judy would usually suggest we lie in bed, where she would hold me tightly, rhythmically stroking my cheek with a curled index finger while wiping away my tears. (I am the weeper in the family.) At some point, I would ask something like, *Aren't I just too much for you?*

Her responses were firm yet soothing, variations of: *No, you aren't. A fool or someone with anger issues is too much. I love you.*

A few days after her diagnosis, Judy told me, *I am so sorry. This is going to be very hard for you.*

Hanging in our bedroom is a framed poster for the opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, a wrenching life-and-death-and-life story, based on a Greek myth, in which two lovers are reunited in Elysium, the underworld paradise where everyone is in a state of bliss. Judy gave it to me after the emergencies of *Spinal Cord II* had passed. It's a lovely piece of graphic design, and on the back, she wrote out a verse from the opera—when Orfeo

first comes for Euridice and the chorus calls out:

Return, fair one, to your husband,
from whom merciful heaven
wishes you never more to be parted.
Do not lament your lot,
for a husband so true
can be called another Elysium.

The story of *Orfeo ed Euridice* was much on Judy's mind throughout *Spinal Cord II*, particularly in the early weeks, as she would venture daily into the underworld of downtown Toronto's St. Michael's Hospital, where, in the basement, the MRI area is just a short stroll away from the morgue. She was on a mission: to help rescue me in any way she possibly could.

My mission has become quite different. There is no rescue from Alzheimer's, of which Judy, having watched her father's slow demise from the disease, was particularly aware. But what still astounds me is the calmness she brought to accepting her fate, even through torrents of tears at times, and how steadfast she was in continuing on as best she could.

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One evening, as we lay in bed, Judy started to cry. She whispered, *I'm afraid of forgetting everything.*

I know you are, I responded, *but try not to worry. I will be your memory.*

Judy relaxed, smiled, squeezed my hand, and quietly said, *Good.*

FOR THE FIRST several years of living with Alzheimer's in the house, my emotions were often in upheaval. One example: I cursed my disability—frequently. Though I have learned many positive life-altering lessons over the decades, such as that out of loss and weakness can come new strengths and insights, I couldn't envision any possible good coming out of watching my Judy slowly slip away. That I would never be able to reciprocate all that physical help Judy had bestowed on me seemed particularly cruel. Could I ever come to terms with that?

Inside the minds of most people in the early stages of Alzheimer's is a swirl of anxieties that can be frightening and debilitating, especially as the light of day ebbs away. Music can help to soothe, so

Judy and I spent countless hours together, particularly in the evenings, lying in bed, face to face, enjoying a stream of oldies. As I listened to the chartbusters of our youth, it slowly dawned on me how many "boy meets girl, boy loses girl" hits have a new resonance for those of us in long-term relationships as disease or death take our loved ones from us.

It was in bed with Judy that the idea for the evolving love letter came to me. Initially, Judy worried about suddenly wandering away from our house and getting lost—or worse. In response, one evening, I reminded her of the children's book *The Runaway Bunny*, which she loved reading to Hannah. *If you wander away,* I said, echoing Mother Rabbit to her adventure-seeking offspring, *Hannah and I will always find you and bring you home.*

I would frequently repeat this line, and each time I could see Judy relax, if only for a little while. She never did wander away, and through this example and numerous others, we learned how much Judy valued and needed to hear our voices. I have never been shy about telling Judy how much I love her. Each time,

it would make her beam, and I started to realize that those three words would be even more powerful to her as the fog of Alzheimer's steadily, stealthily rolled in, confusing and scaring her, making her feel alone and unprotected.

I launched my oral love letter a few nights after the National Magazine Awards. "Judy and Steve met by chance, on Cumberland Street in Toronto, on the most gorgeous day of the summer," I told her. "I was immediately smitten, remain smitten, and will always be smitten no matter what twists and turns of life await us." I then added a slightly edited passage from the speech. "You are the love of my life, who literally and figuratively, physically and emotionally keeps me going. You are a tremendously talented artist, specializing in dolls and collages, with a rare gift of making unexpected pairings that are particularly magical, just like our marriage."

I followed that with brief descriptions of treasured memories: the afternoon we met, the morning Hannah was born, the purchase of a cherished opal ring, watching a particularly spectacular Atlantic

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sunset, and other joyful moments of two lives tightly intertwined.

When I finished, Judy quietly sighed, kissed me, and made a request. *Would you say that all over again?*

ON A SUNNY August afternoon, about five months into the pandemic, Judy, Hannah, and I were sitting comfortably in the back courtyard of my wife's long-term-care facility. We were surrounded by blooming hostas, black-eyed Susans, geraniums, and other flowers in addition to a variety of carefully positioned trees and bushes—all of which offer residents, staff, and visitors shade, privacy, and an aesthetic relief from the more institutional feel inside. It's an area designed for quiet contemplation, tender conversation, and lots of physical movement along a smooth pathway in the shape of a large infinity loop.

Judy has resided here since June 2017. Hannah and I had been determined that she stay at home with us for as long as we could manage, aided by PSWS and a few remarkably thoughtful relatives and

friends, knowing full well we would likely need to place Judy in a nursing home eventually. That is the trajectory of Alzheimer's, and we were able to hold off that wrenching transition for more than five years.

We were visiting on an auspicious day in our lives: the forty-first anniversary of when Judy and I first met, on that most gorgeous day of the summer. She and I were in our respective wheelchairs, Judy's newer and sleeker—and hers tilted back, which is safer and accommodates her frequent naps. We listened to Hannah as she read aloud from *Within a Budding Grove*, the second volume of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. Judy hadn't discovered Proust until her mid-forties, when he quickly became her favourite author. She treasured his vivid, detailed descriptions; his wry, sometimes snarky social and personal commentaries; and his musings and observations on love. Hannah had started reciting selections from Proust to Judy a few weeks after the diagnosis.

As Hannah read, I was reminded of a conversation I'd had with Judy shortly after settling in back home following *Spinal Cord II*, twenty-two years earlier.

Our daughter was twelve at the time, and I had asked my wife, *Do you think we should get Hannah more involved in assisting me to help take some of the workload off you?*

Judy thought about my question for a few moments, then replied, *No. I don't want to force her to help. I want her, as she gets older, to observe how we handle difficult situations and learn from our example and the way we embrace life despite bigger problems than many. It would be much better if she decides she wants to help.*

After about twenty minutes of Proust readings, Hannah, now in her mid-thirties, departed for her COVID-19 test, which she did weekly as an essential caregiver to her mother. Suddenly, Judy and I were alone for the first time in weeks. Even before pandemic quarantining began, we had been apart for almost two months. I'd had a particularly difficult winter. It had started with a deep cold—first with Hannah, then with me. But mine had quickly degenerated into quadruple pneumonia, and I'd spent much of that December and January in hospital, mostly in ICU, hovering near death three times and hooked up to a ventilator for several weeks, constantly

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worrying about Judy and feeling incredibly guilty that I could not be with her.

Before the deep colds and the arrival of the pandemic, Hannah and I would visit Judy three or four times throughout each week. On some visits, she'd be somewhat alert; other times, not so much. No matter what her state, I was happy to be there, feeling an inner peace and contentment I had not expected. This calmness only intensified when Hannah would give us time to be alone together and I could recite my love letter, which I have done well over 5,000 times since 2012, often up to ten times a day.

"Judy and Steve met..." I would begin, and in almost every instance, Judy would react by reaching out and clasping my waiting hand. In time, as Judy moved shockingly quickly from early Alzheimer's to middle and then to late stages, she still frequently attempted to grasp my hand as I began to recite. She often missed, but it was gratifying to realize that the letter and I were still connecting with her. But could that connection stay intact through the onslaught of quadruple pneumonia and a global pandemic?

As Hannah headed inside, I looked at Judy. Her eyes were half closed and her head was slumped slightly forward, though not enough to dislodge her black wide-brimmed sun hat. I am often asked if Judy still knows who I am. My answer: I don't know, but I think, when she is aware of my presence, she does recognize me as someone familiar.

It's hard to accept the possibility that Judy may have completely forgotten about me, but a lifetime of living with disability has shown me how delicate human bodies and minds can be, how little it can take to dramatically, traumatically alter—or end—lives. Two rogue bones in my neck. Plaque on my beloved's brain. Great love stories begin with such heady promise and end with such sadness and grief—but, at least in my case, also with memories of immense joy throughout a muscular marriage of two strong, supportive partners with challenges aplenty.

I started to recite. When I came to the third *smitten*, I noticed Judy's arm moving slightly toward me. Am I still getting through? Does my love letter continue to resonate? Or is she just a bit

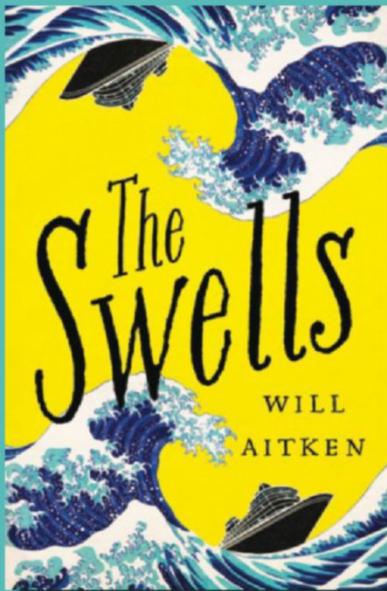
uncomfortable and simply repositioning her arm?

I'll never know for sure. I searched her face for a clue, but there was no indication. I continued reciting all the components of my letter, speaking a little louder than usual to offset the muffling effects of my face mask. When Hannah returned, she picked up where she had left off in her Proust reading until a nursing-home worker told us that our time was up so another family could have a visit.

We said our goodbyes, told Judy we would see her soon, and strolled along the infinity loop to a waiting accessible cab, which took us back to an emptier, quieter home where, in the living room, a vase of fresh flowers can usually be found. *

Author's note: several of the ideas, passages, and descriptions in this article first appeared, in sometimes slightly different form and context, in "Lost & Found," my quarterly column for Abilities magazine.

STEPHEN TRUMPER is a writer, editor, and instructor at Ryerson University's school of journalism.



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HISTORY

MY UNCLE THE WITCH HUNTER

Was nineteenth-century settler John Troyer a target of supernatural evil—or just paranoid?

BY ROSEMARY COUNTER

IN THE summer of 1829, in a sleepy Ontario sheep-farming settlement called Baldoon, the McDonald family found themselves tormented by their two-storey home. Without warning, beams would drop from the ceiling, and at night, the kitchen filled with the noise of marching feet. Over the years, the disturbances grew more terrifying. Fires spontaneously ignited. Rocks and bullets rained down on the house. Once, a twenty-five-centimetre hunting knife tore through the air.



News of the paranormal attacks spread, with dozens of people narrating first-hand accounts of what the *Detroit Gazette* called “the pranks of some invisible and mischievous visitor.” The pranks converted the staunchest of nonbelievers. Even a reporter for Toronto’s *Globe*, bragging of his “well-rounded distrust of ghost stories,” ultimately changed his mind to become “skeptic of skeptics.” By 1831, a desperate McDonald family realized they needed professional help, so the patriarch, John, travelled 200 kilometres—three days on horseback, riding dawn to dusk—to consult with a highly recommended healer. According to an



1871 account by John's son, the diagnosis required gazing into a moonstone, which revealed "a long low log house" where lived a witch and the source of the McDonalds' suffering. The witch took the form of a black-headed stray goose, and it was decided that, if they shot the goose's wing with a sterling silver bullet, they'd at once stop her—which they did. The ghost never struck again.

Two centuries later, the Baldoon mystery reigns as one of Canada's greatest ghost stories—you can find tellings and retellings in just about every collection of Canadian folklore. Less well known, perhaps, is the person who ultimately

solved it: John Troyer, a man legendary at the time for his unconventional talents in herbal remedies, fortune telling, white magic, bloodletting, water dowsing, exorcisms, and of course, witch hunting. He was also my distant uncle.

I STUMBLED ON Troyer a few years ago while researching the Amish arm of my family tree. I was determined to trace my matriarchal history back to Magdalena Mast, a woman who fled persecution in Switzerland before landing in North America, where, according to genealogy websites, between the ages of seventeen and forty-five, she bore

ABOVE *Witch Trap*, an exhibition by Leisure at Toronto's Erin Stump Projects in 2012, was inspired by the anxieties that John Troyer of Long Point, Ontario, projected on the women and landscape around him in the early nineteenth century.

fifteen children. Most of Mast's brood married equally young and had almost as many kids of their own. All except one: John Michael Troyer, her oldest, born in 1753. Among the dense, interwoven Amish lineages in a family tree where eldest sons usually feature prominently, Troyer's line is a branch that's been unceremoniously pruned away. Soon

after the American Revolution ended, in 1783, Troyer made tracks for the dense bush of what would become Upper Canada and, by all accounts, never returned.

Troyer's refusal to swear allegiance to an independent America might have been his official reason for fleeing, but as I'd often learn, nothing with him was ever straightforward. By then, Troyer didn't even identify as Amish, instead adopting the more mystical beliefs of an Anabaptist offshoot sect later called the Tunkers. Perhaps, before the Amish could shun him, he left of his own accord. Whatever his reasons, he packed everything he could into a Conestoga wagon pulled by four horses and headed north. With his wife, Sophronia, and their two children, nine-year-old Michael and five-year-old Barbara, Troyer covered 800 kilometres of gruelling terrain filled with bears and rattlesnakes. Luckily, they kept diligent records of the journey, which, according to a genealogy book written in the 1980s by a descendant, included a trek "up the Susquehanna River, across the Finger Lake region in New York to below present Buffalo and into Canada."

Home was fifteen secluded acres on the shores of Lake Erie, still known today as Troyer's Flats. He built a log cabin and planted a lush orchard of apples, peaches, and pears. He later added a grist mill and a blacksmith forge. By the time he officially petitioned for the land, in 1797, Troyer had established himself as "Doctor Troyer," known for the potions he concocted from herbs, roots, and berries, which were said to cure local maladies.

For the record, Troyer was absolutely not a medical doctor. He had no formal training, and the hocus pocus he employed would have warranted his excommunication from the Amish, who theoretically rejected such superstition. In practice, however, folk magic was rife among the Pennsylvania Dutch, who borrowed the Algonquian word *powwow* for the mystical beliefs they'd brought to North America. Powowers provided cures, removed curses, located lost objects, and foretold the future. Many of their folk formulas—and the spells Troyer likely used—would have been

included in *The Long-Lost Friend: A 19th Century American Grimoire*, which was published in 1820 and was, for nearly a century, the most influential manual of magic in America. (To cure baldness? "Pound up peach kernels, mix them with vinegar, and put them on the bald place.")

Troyer had an "inexplicable sixth sense," as local historian George Laidler later described it, to find water via hazel twigs and detect precious buried metals. The most precious, at least on the shores of Long Point, Ontario, around 1800, was said to be an iron chest filled with furs and gold buried by David Ramsay,

ACCORDING TO LORE, WITCHES CAN'T PASS COLD IRON, SO TROYER NAILED HORSESHOES ATOP EVERY DOOR.

a Scottish fur trader and alcohol smuggler. Convinced he could retrieve the gold with his divining rod, Troyer and his son, Michael, went on a treasure hunt. "On the stroke of midnight, Michael's spade clanged dully against a metal object," goes a 1977 retelling by Harry B. Barrett. "Working feverishly, he sprung the rusty hasp and began to pry up the lid." Unbeknownst to Troyer, alongside the loot, Ramsay had buried a dog's corpse as a guardian. "Suddenly before his horrified gaze a large black dog began to materialize from the chest." Laidler has the dog "growing bigger and bigger" as father and son "fled in terror to their boat."

Their reaction wasn't altogether unreasonable: a black dog is a terrible omen in many folklores but especially in the Germanic legends Troyer would have grown up with. "They're a manifestation of dark or evil spirits," explains David Williams, podcast host of *Fireside Canada* and a fierce devotee of Troyer's, whom

he calls Canada's Van Helsing. "Even if he just saw a black dog, Troyer could well have thought he unleashed a curse."

Afterward, Troyer indeed seemed to suffer years of bad fortune: Michael fell into a trance, was thought dead for three days and three nights, and was nearly buried alive. Barbara either died young or married and moved away: by 1827, she had disappeared entirely from family records. In 1821, after forty-three years as Troyer's wife, Sophronia died, leaving Troyer all alone with an increasingly erratic fear of witches that slowly took over his life. He blamed them for all "his troubles of mind and body," wrote historian E.A. Owen in 1898. A former resident described Troyer as possessing "a thorough knowledge" of "their ways and doings" and as having a knack for "expelling them."

According to Owen, Troyer believed that his "insanely superstitious" tendencies—which, according to one source, extended to a fear of dark-eyed women—were warranted. "The old doctor," he writes, "was terribly persecuted by these witches." Ghost stories, of course, tend to encode a certain misogyny, and evil is often given the face and body of a sorceress—be it crone or beauty. I'm not sure which of these tropes was Jennie Elizabeth McMichael, one of the so-called witches, who lived right next door. The widow had been left to raise ten children. As she no doubt had to be, she was "of strong mind and great courage," wrote Owen, and "to be considered a witch by the superstitious old doctor was highly amusing to her." McMichael took to hiding in Troyer's bushes, popping up to tease and taunt him, and cackling madly at the fright she caused.

In retaliation, Troyer safeguarded his house. According to lore, witches can't pass cold iron, so he nailed horse-shoes atop every door. He kept the metre-and-a-half-long flintlock rifle that he had brought up from Pennsylvania close. When the witches still haunted his dreams, he built a "witch trap"—a modified bear trap that he bolted to the floor and slept beside, set, every night. While they get the details wrong, most every historical account of Troyer mentions the

grim device. (Both Troyer's rifle and bear trap can be found at the Eva Brook Donly Museum, in Simcoe, Ontario.) "The jaws were about three feet long," wrote Owen. (They're about half that.) R.S. Lambert, in 1955's *Exploring the Supernatural*, exaggerates further, depicting the jaws as "three feet long and two and a half feet high." In a 1987 short story, Douglas Glover imagines himself as Troyer: "I set a trap at the door of my bed, a contraption of beams and pulleys bolted to the floor. It has nearly been the death of me, twice."

The witches came for Troyer just the same. Some say it was a vivid nightmare, others say the old doctor mixed a bad potion, but whatever the explanation, Owen's telling of the story begins: "One night the witches took him out of a peaceful slumber, transformed him into a horse and rode him across the lake." There, writes Barrett, "the poor doctor stood, tied to a post with nothing but rye straw for sustenance after his exhausting trip, watching through the window the wild ceremonies that lasted long into the night." Barrett describes a "clandestine dance," Lambert a "Sabbath orgy."

This story, to me, is a window into the warped psyche of the pious Troyer, and I'm not the only one with raised eyebrows. "A psychiatrist would have a field day with Troyer's sexually-inspired fears," wrote journalist Frank Jones in the *Toronto Star* in 1984. Could all of Troyer's eccentricities have been caused by guilt and sexual oppression rooted in a devout Christian upbringing he couldn't escape? "Wrong, impure sexual thoughts could be caused by demons, bad spirits, and witches," explains Williams. They could also be visions from what we'd call sleep paralysis but what, in Troyer's era, was often experienced as a visit from the malevolent "Old Hag" or literal "Night Mare." After researching the phenomenon across countless cultures and folklores—in Germany, an "alp"; in Japan, "kanashibari"—Williams is mostly convinced that Troyer suffered from a particularly awful case of the affliction.

Most, including Williams, treat Troyer sympathetically as a righteous hero ridding the world of supernatural evils

with his own brand of wholesome superstition. This is certainly true of my family, who mostly revel in the myth. Whether history remembers someone as a hero or a villain, it seems, is relative. But, when it comes to *actual* relatives, whose stories land somewhere between fact and fiction, not to mention between right and wrong, then what? Do you embrace the friendly lore or dig deeper?

Today, devotees of the Baldoon mystery can visit a recreated room from the McDonalds' haunted cabin (which burned down in 1930) at Ontario's Wallaceburg Museum before grabbing a beer at The Black Goose pub. But I'm sorry to report that the mystery of John Troyer may never be solved. Maybe he was, as

my family insists and the commemorative plaque on his homestead reads, "a sane and respected healer." Maybe he was just a storyteller, like me.

Troyer died at the ripe old age of eighty-nine. His cabin and mill have long crumbled, but Troyer's Flats looks largely the same as it always did. I'd like to pay my respects, but his burial site has been lost, the stone stolen. Local gossip says it was scooped, smashed into bricks, and laid into a local fireplace, though whoever has it isn't telling. 

ROSEMARY COUNTER is a Toronto-based writer whose work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Maclean's*, and *Vanity Fair*.

Something Else

BY GARY BARWIN

it's been raining all night
and I can't sleep
half-remembering a poem

Dave McFadden, you said
we should write every day
and today was your funeral

your urn was
exactly as you'd wanted:
a Dilbert cookie-jar

you wrote
that perfect poem I can't quite remember:
"why do we worry?"

I don't remember the rest, something like
we're something
and then something else after that



Whitney Houston
in Toronto in the
mid-1980s

PHOTO ESSAY

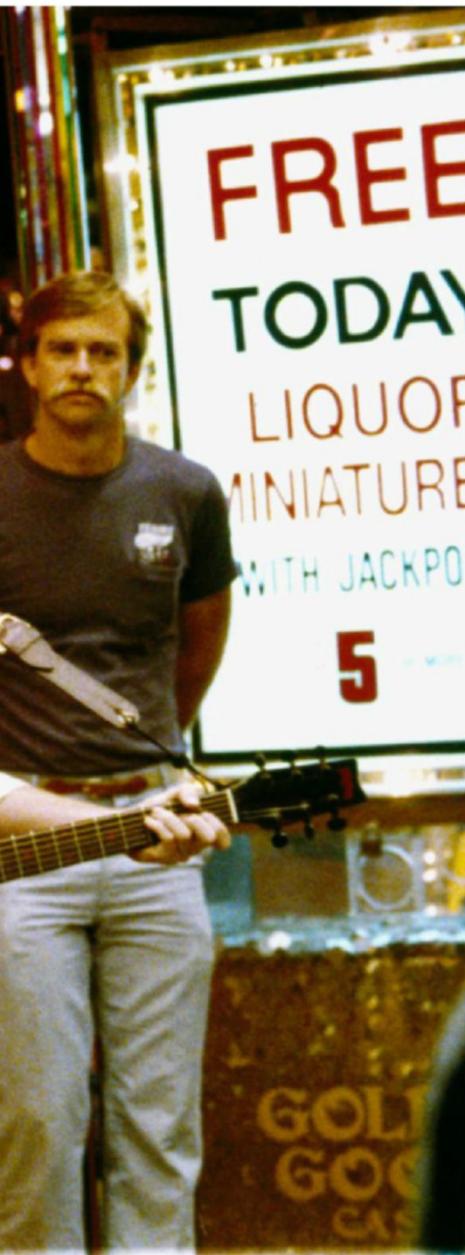
Shooting Stars

Before social media, the backstage snapshot was the only way for most fans to meet Madonna, Whitney Houston, or Paul McCartney

**BY LOU D,
AS TOLD TO CONNOR GAREL**

I SHOT QUEEN at Maple Leaf Gardens, in downtown Toronto, in 1982, when I was fourteen. I had brought my uncle's camera with me only because my cousin said it would be a good idea. It was. The concert hall was packed with fans, and even though I was quite tall for my age—and just five to seven rows back from the stage—I had to stand on my seat to snap the pictures I wanted.





ABOVE u2 on Fremont Street in Las Vegas, 1987
BELOW, LEFT
TO RIGHT Tina Turner at the Montreal Forum, 1985; Prince at Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, 1984; Mick Jagger at the Miami Orange Bowl, 1989



I took those images to get processed at the Japan Camera shop that used to be on Yonge Street, and I waited in one of those shops that sells posters to rock-and-roll heads. The guy working the counter had been at the Queen concert too, and when I told him I'd taken pictures, he offered to buy a roll for \$150. It was a lot of money for a kid.

And, for the many years after that, shooting live music is what I did.

I went from photographing concerts to being a trusted insider, someone artist managers and labels would call and ask to photograph their touring acts, which involved taking backstage images of stars. I photographed everyone at their best. To me, the 1980s was a time when

musicians were at their peak. Prince had *Purple Rain*; Madonna had *Like a Virgin*; U2 had *The Joshua Tree*; and David Bowie was everywhere. I photographed Whitney Houston when she was still young, before people all over the world were paying attention to her. She laughed through the whole shoot. I got these great little private moments with Paul and Linda McCartney, backstage at the SkyDome (now the Rogers Centre) before a concert, where they were just goofing off for the camera, having a good time. There was this moment in Las Vegas when I was shooting U2: we were all hanging out backstage, and Bono came in to say they were going down to Fremont Street to shoot the video for "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." They filled a shopping cart with all the audio equipment, and then it was just the videographer, the band, and me, walking down this street in Vegas, and I got a great sequence of images.

For the last twenty-five years, all these old film images have sat in Kodak vaults. I wanted to keep them protected from the environment. But, decades later, there's been a renewed interest in work like mine. I think a big part of it is nostalgia for a bygone era.

Social media imploded the whole business model. Twitter arrived in the middle of my time working with Paris Hilton, in the mid-2000s, when she was still taking pictures of herself on a digital camera. At the time, I was doing double-page spreads in the *Toronto Star's* Sunday entertainment pages, and I thought, *I should watch out for this social media thing*. And it turned out that Instagram was on the horizon. Celebrities were becoming their own news sources. In some ways, it eventually took away the real-life quality of celebrity images because it gave them, and their PR teams, more control over their messaging—announcing breakups or new albums on their own terms. Empowering, perhaps, but less authentic. I don't sell pictures to newspapers anymore; I put them on Instagram. And my archive has found new life being exhibited outside the gallery system, in coffee shops, restaurants, hotels, and private residences. The music industry isn't what it used to be. But, back then, I was right on the pulse of popular culture. I always just happened to be there—the guy with the camera. ☺

LOU D is a creative consultant and rock-and-roll photographer. For over thirty years, he has recorded pop culture history in publications worldwide.

As told to Connor Garel. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



ABOVE Madonna at the New York City prerelease event for her book *Sex*, 1992

BELOW Jay-Z on Bloor Street in Toronto in the 2000s

OPPOSITE Axl Rose leaving the Four Seasons Hotel in Toronto

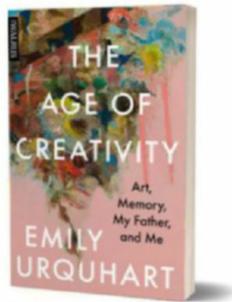


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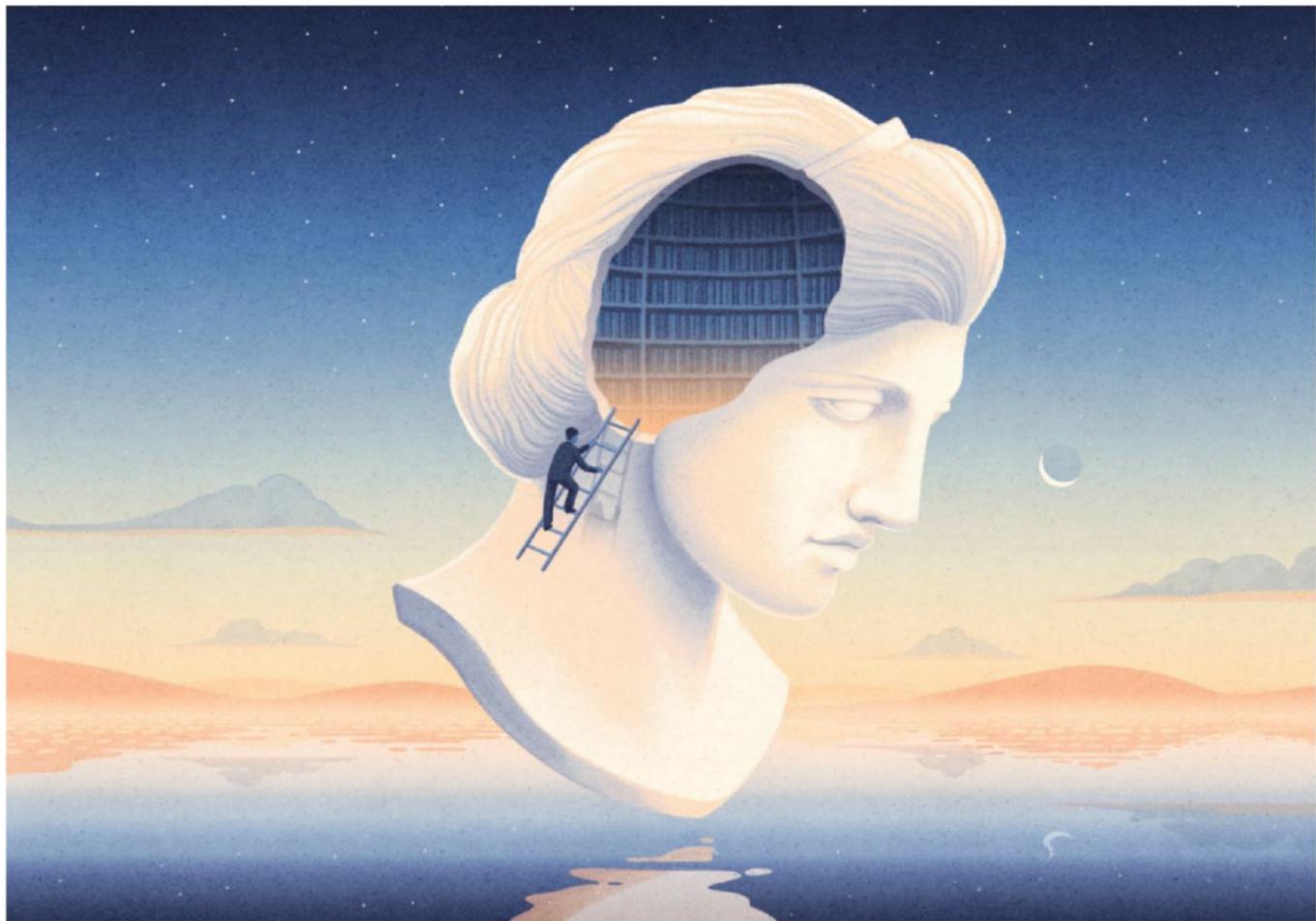
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 CANADA'S CONVERSATION

**LITERATURE**

Textual Healing

Why some therapists are offering a novel course of treatment: bibliotherapy

BY KATRYA BOLGER

ILLUSTRATION BY MYRIAM WARES

WHEN THE PANDEMIC struck, in March 2020, Anne Boulton was already feeling overwhelmed. She was pursuing a PhD at Laurentian University, which meant teaching in the English department and spending her days at home reviewing readings on literature and psychoanalysis for her thesis. But personal issues were bubbling just below the surface. “When COVID happened,”

she says, “suddenly you were faced with your own isolation.” She wanted to better address the strain she was dealing with.

Boulton contacted Hoi Cheu, her supervisor at Laurentian. Besides teaching literary theory, Cheu is a trained marriage and family therapist: he has drawn on his experience in both areas to offer therapeutic support, on and off, for about thirty years. He also trained in bibliotherapy, using his dual background

in psychology and literary studies to recommend specific texts for people coping with life challenges from loneliness to mental illness.

Bibliotherapy is premised on the idea that books can be healing tools. It can occur in individual or group settings, though the main distinction is between clinical bibliotherapy, where texts, including fiction and nonfiction, are recommended by a clinical therapist, and nonclinical bibliotherapy, as practised by a facilitator such as a librarian. Though not a stand-alone clinical practice in Canada, clinical bibliotherapy is a method used by professionals who already have certification in counselling, therapy, and clinical therapy and want to help patients seeking an additional outlet. Nonclinical bibliotherapy can’t replace professional help for patients with mental illnesses; instead, it is often used in conjunction with other forms of clinical therapy.

Cheu, based in Sudbury, Ontario, first learned of bibliotherapy during his

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undergraduate degree, when he came across English professor Joseph Gold's *Read For Your Life*, which outlines the benefits of bibliotherapy. In fact, the British-born Gold is widely credited with bringing bibliotherapy to Canada. Cheu began working under Gold during his master's at the University of Waterloo and later wrote his PhD thesis on James Joyce and the art of Zen, applying principles of Buddhism to his analysis of the Irish writer's works. He eventually became Gold's assistant, joining him in sessions with clients in his private practice. Books, Cheu says, provide a safely cocooned space inside which people can unearth painful and sometimes repressed feelings.

When Cheu and Boulton logged on to their first virtual session, Cheu started taking notes on Boulton's needs. "What literary character do you most identify with?" he asked her. She responded with Anna Karenina. She related to the Leo Tolstoy heroine's strength of spirit. Like the Russian socialite, Boulton was comfortable asking for what she wanted even when she had repeatedly been discouraged by those around her. From this first session, Cheu started to build out her reading list. There was Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster*, a novel about a young heroine's tumultuous childhood in the American South. And there was Nikolai Leskov's "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk," a short story about a young woman seeking to escape a stifling marriage to an older man. Being a good student of English literature, Boulton dove into the texts with vigour.

THOUGH THE FIRST known use of the term *bibliotherapy* appeared in a satirical essay published in a 1916 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the idea of offering reading material to those in mental distress dates back to eighteenth-century asylums. By the early twentieth century, librarians in US hospitals were even considered therapists. American military libraries also prescribed books to soldiers suffering from trauma after the First World War. These programs were eventually expanded to other hospitals and libraries.

The growing interest in the field of psychotherapy in the 1930s led to research on bibliotherapy. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, several books were published on the subject. And, as mental health treatment expanded, bibliotherapy gained broader appeal, according to *Bibliotherapy: A Critical History*.

Proponents of bibliotherapy firmly believe in the potential of literature to provide people the language to help them make sense of their experiences. Fiction does this especially well by nudging readers to substitute their sense of self for that of a character. Enveloped in the perspective of another person, the reader can ponder their choices with a greater degree of objectivity.

The case for bibliotherapy is further bolstered by developments in cognitive science, which indicate a range of benefits. Research suggests that regular readers are likely less stressed and more empathetic. One study by Yale University even suggested that reading books could help people live longer. Critics of bibliotherapy, on the other hand, say that fiction falls short as a method for dealing with real-life challenges and that the practice assumes its patients have access to education and an understanding of the way metaphor and literary motifs work. Some also consider it an overly utilitarian view of literature as a means of self-improvement instead of an outlet for pure enjoyment.

In practice, bibliotherapy varies greatly in form. The clinical approach involves a therapist working with patients to build a tailored reading list, which can be accompanied by writing prompts. In recent years, The School of Life, a UK-based company focused on personal development, has popularized

the reading-list approach in its non-clinical sessions. Nonclinical formats have been used in diverse contexts, from prison programs to hospitals. In these,



The Walrus Reads

Authors pick their favourite books of 2021

Pure Flame: A Memoir

by Michelle Orange



The premise of *Pure Flame* seems straightforward: in the 1980s, a woman leaves her family to move to Toronto and pursue a successful business career.

What Michelle Orange does with that tale—a true one, about her own mother—is anything but straightforward. "In my own work," she writes, "an instinct toward story has always competed with an impulse to question and dismantle." Orange portrays her mother as a complex and occasionally enigmatic individual with a "lifelong flair for paradox": she rises from entry-level positions to executive ones while struggling against ubiquitous misogyny; she resists Orange's attempts to label her a feminist; and she spends years hiding her chronic, eventually fatal, lung disease from the family. Throughout the book, her mother's voice emerges with striking clarity, proud and generous, ardently meritocratic, puzzled by her daughter, and sometimes hurt by the distance that has grown between them. It is Orange's precisely rendered recollections that move and startle the most, such as when she recounts a childhood memory of interrupting her mother studying at night: "a private light seems to emanate from her, fearful and alluring. It hovers between us, shedding no warmth. A warning, a raised finger; a thin white flame."

MICHAEL PRIOR's most recent book of poems, *Burning Province*, won the Canada-Japan Literary Award and the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize.

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THE WALRUS | CANADA'S CONVERSATION

The Climbing Vine

BY KAREN SOLIE

From rocky soil it came
from next to nothing
stretched on the rack of its genome

the pain of its talent running through it
embracing the legs of the decking for comfort

unidentified no immediate family
exiled from the chatter of annual plantings
not much in common with the cavalier flowering perennials

even the sun said Whoever you are
I am not made of money

everything it owned strapped to its body
arm over arm in its wet clothes
it hauled itself to the second-floor balcony

and where it spread out redistributed its weight
like a traveller on a platform

the structure's joints creaked
and the muscles stood out in the nails

had they let it it would have scaled the house
to stand on the roof where God might notice
what had been accomplished in his absence

would have torn the house down and stood on the ruin
tossing its hook at the downspout of heaven

they pruned it its strength of conviction redoubled
cut it back to the trunk
a litter of tendrils wobbled out

razed it to the ground a shoot appeared
like a prisoner through a manhole
they had to eradicate it at the level of the idea

but here



a facilitator poses questions about the readings, and participants are encouraged to reflect on the stories as they relate to their own lives.

Bibliotherapy has also been put forward as a potential way to help manage social ills from stress to isolation—states that have been particularly pervasive during COVID-19. At the start of the pandemic, online book groups—such as the popular Tolstoy Together, initiated by novelist Yiyun Li—sprang up to help participants collectively sort through feelings that they would otherwise have had to address alone. Despite the demonstrated benefits of reading—many backed

is how you allow the discussion to move away from a very personal direct confrontation to an imaginary alternative,” he says, “which allows them to imagine a different life for themselves.” Literature essentially helps clients be seen without being exposed.

While bibliotherapy has yet to be broadly embraced here, its popularity is on the rise. Cheu says he is not aware of any formal licensing organization for bibliotherapy, since it’s not taught as a stand-alone practice, but that programs for clinicians do exist outside of Canada. In other words, those seeking to become bibliotherapists in clinical settings have

University of Toronto cognitive psychologist Keith Oatley and York University psychologist Raymond Mar have explored the role fiction can play for people seeking to enhance their social skills or mental well-being. In 2011, Mar found an overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and those used to infer the mental states of other people. His findings suggest that literature—fiction in particular—can ignite the parts of the brain that process how others think and feel. The hope, then, is that, if bibliotherapy can trigger those reactions, it can help us better understand others and improve our lives.

In regular therapy, you’re looking at yourself. It can be really hard. It’s too vulnerable.”

by scientific evidence—bibliotherapy remains relatively niche in Canada.

Cheu’s clients are often friends who approach him in distress. His consultation process, he says, is never as simple as asking clients to identify their problem and handing them a stack of books. “Rather,” he explains, “it’s a complex process to integrate stories into people’s everyday lives.” Each introductory session starts with Cheu asking a client to tell him their story and, sometimes, what type of books they are drawn to. From there, Cheu identifies literature that may resonate with the individual.

The books Cheu prescribes are as diverse as his clientele. For young people experiencing grief, he suggests *Bridge to Terabithia*, a novel about two children who create a magical land that allows them to escape a personal tragedy. For people dealing with indecision, he recommends “Eveline,” a short story by James Joyce about a young woman who plans to leave Dublin with her lover and is forced to decide whether to abandon her family. Cheu prompts clients by asking them, “If you were Eveline, what would you do?” Turning the question on the reader, he says, uses the story to ease them into sharing more about themselves. “That

to go abroad to earn their certification. Some organizations, such as the International Federation for Biblio/Poetry Therapy, offer certificates and formal guidelines for the practice. The IFBPT requires that participants learn the theory and techniques behind bibliotherapy and that they complete courses in psychology and literature.

While a handful of certified clinical bibliotherapists are currently operating in Canada, the practice is far more widespread in places like the UK, where a national charity, The Reader, is overseeing a nationwide program to promote non-clinical bibliotherapy through “shared reading.” But it’s not for everyone—including those who have limited appetites for reading at all, whether for enjoyment or learning. A 2020 BookNet Canada survey of 748 Canadians indicated a slight uptick in those who were interested in doing more reading during the pandemic. That is a positive sign, but enjoying books, according to Cheu, is not a prerequisite for success in bibliotherapy. A successful session depends on the individual’s simple willingness to engage and self-reflect.

Despite bibliotherapy’s lower profile in Canada, a growing body of research points fairly clearly to its potential.

BOULTON ENDED her treatment after five sessions with Cheu, but she credits those sessions with validating her relationship to reading. She sees certain books as “old friends” she can return to and finds comfort in rereading them.

Boulton says bibliotherapy came naturally to her as it melded the languages of literary analysis and psychoanalysis. “Because I understand motif and symbolism,” she says, “I was able to access some of the ideas and awareness [around bibliotherapy] quickly.” Her sessions led her to share observations about stories that felt adjacent to her—only to realize how entangled they were with her own reality. As she started reading and talking to Cheu, she also found that the stories illuminated clear parallels in her life. However, the reading was only part of the process—she describes it as “starting points for conversations,” prompts that led her to ponder new perspectives.

She has recommended bibliotherapy to several people since her sessions with Cheu. “I liked it better than traditional therapy,” she says. Ultimately, it provided a path to confront her issues. “In regular therapy, you’re looking at yourself. It can be really hard. It’s too vulnerable. It’s too naked. Whereas, when relying on literature, it’s a gentler way of processing the more painful things.” ■

KATRYA BOLGER is a journalist whose work has appeared in *Future of Good*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Montreal Gazette*.



BUSINESS

Ask a Supply Chain Expert

Are product shortages our new normal?

BY HARISH KRISHNAN, AS TOLD TO LAURA HENSLEY

SINCE THE START of the pandemic, the system by which goods are manufactured, distributed, and sold around the world has faced disruption after disruption, from shipping delays to material shortages to factory closures. Now, during the busiest retail season of the year, the problems have only worsened. We asked Harish Krishnan, a professor of operations and logistics at the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business, about the turmoil.

For starters, what is a supply chain and why have we been hearing so much about them? There's a huge global network of interconnected resources that exists to support the production and distribution of everyday items. A commonly used example is a pencil. It may seem like a simple object, but in order to make it, someone has to cut down trees, which must then be processed into wood; somebody has to mine graphite, which also has to be processed; then there's the glue, the paint—the list goes on. In addition to the materials, there's assembly, distribution, and warehousing. When it comes to more complex products, like iPhones or cars, it's easy to see how much collaboration is needed to manufacture and distribute the goods we rely on.

What does covid-19 have to do with all of this? A disruption usually occurs on either the supply or demand side of things. Over the past decade, most of the issues have been supply related—due, in part, to environmental factors. The 2011 Fukushima earthquake, for example, created production problems for the automotive industry because many of the manufacturing giants are based in Japan. The same year, floods in Thailand,

1 During March 2020, toilet paper sales rose by 845 percent, according to an estimate by *Business Insider*.

2 The Bank of Canada has estimated that inflation will near 5 percent by the end of 2021. In 2019, the increase was 1.9 percent.

3 The cost of shipping a twelve-metre container from Shanghai to Los Angeles increased by 238 percent over the past year, according to Drewry, a maritime-research consultancy.

where a lot of hard drives are produced, affected the computer industry.

COVID-19 is unique because the initial disruption came from increased demand as consumption patterns changed overnight. Just look at toilet paper: suddenly, home-use toilet paper demand went up¹ and office-use demand went down. Machines and production lines weren't optimized for this. Now, nearly two years into the pandemic, we're still experiencing widespread shortages of imported goods.

What are the broader economic implications of a supply chain disruption?

The supply chain crisis has been linked to inflation,² and there have been concerns about whether that's going to continue. The issue is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: if everybody expects prices to go up, prices are more likely to go up.

The other issue is the labour shortage. A lot of jobs linked to the supply chain have become less desirable due to low wages and poor working conditions. Take long-haul trucking: truck drivers tend to be older than the average worker, a lot of them are retiring, and there aren't a lot of young people going into that industry. On a policy level, governments need to ensure that the supply chain is well cared for by providing better benefits and protections for workers.

What does all of this mean for this year's Christmas shopping? Since most goods are in higher demand due to lack of availability, there's also been strain on the distribution side of things: shipping containers, trucks, and slots at ports are all in short supply, and the cost of shipping and distribution has gone up.³

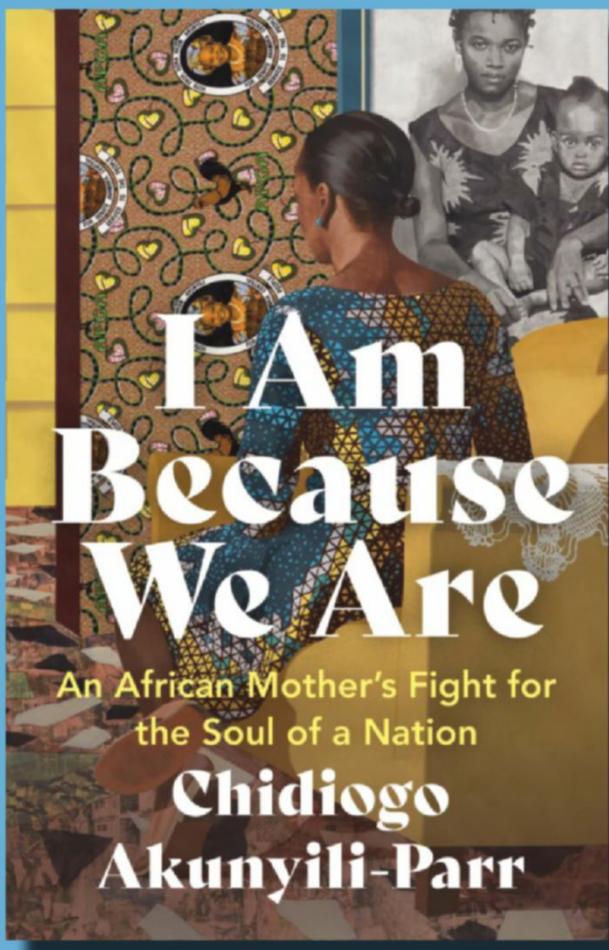
Many electronics are manufactured overseas, so they're most likely to be affected. Meanwhile, as CNN has reported, toy companies have prioritized manufacturing products that have higher value densities—like smaller, squishy toys—to make better use of limited cargo space.

This year, expect that you might not find everything on your wish list. ■

HARISH KRISHNAN's research focuses on supply chain management, including incentives, contracting, risk management, and visibility in supply chains.

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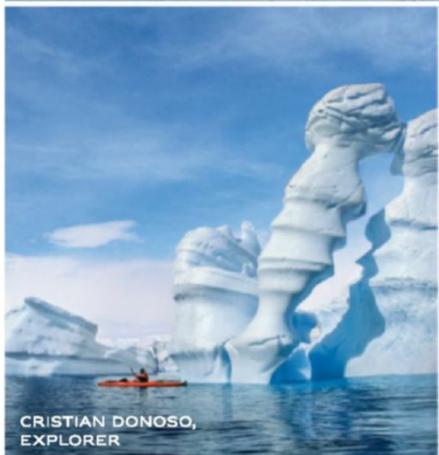
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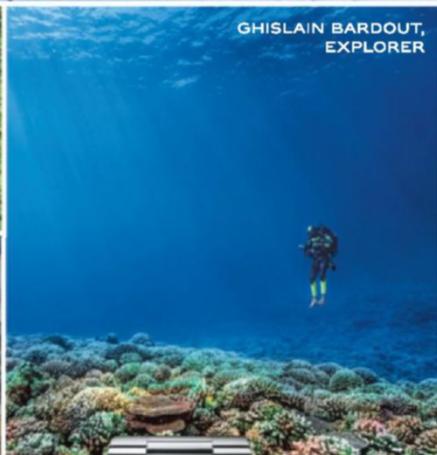
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