# The Bibliophile

NEWS FROM THE BIBLIOMANSE

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IMPORTED FROM SOUTH DETROIT
*1686 Ottawa St, Ste 100*
*Windsor, Ontario, Canada*

# THE 3 BIBLIOPHILE

*News from the Bibliomanse*

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## ON PUBLISHING AND FAILURE

LATER THIS MONTH WE'LL be publishing the next in our Field Notes pamphlet series, Stephen Marche's *On Writing and Failure*, a short meditation on the centrality (and consolation) of failure to the writer's life. "Failure is big right now," Marche writes,

> a subject of commencement speeches and business conferences like FailCon, at which triumphant entrepreneurs detail all their ideas that went bust. But businessmen are only amateurs at failure, just getting used to the notion. Writers are the real professionals. Three hundred thousand books every year are published in the United States alone. A few hundred, at most, could be called financial or creative successes. The majority of books by successful writers are failures. The majority of writers are failures. And then there are the would-be writers, those who have failed to be writers in the first place, a category which, if you believe what people tell you at parties, constitutes the bulk of the species.

But if writers are the real professionals when it comes to failure, publishers, especially independent literary ones, are no slouches, either. One of my working definitions of publishing has been the management of disappointment: my authors', my editors', my staff's,

my own. So much goes into the writing and the *proper* publishing of a book, most of which will never be seen by outside eyes, most of which is met by silence and indifference. Most of the efforts we make on behalf of a book fail to elicit any response at all: over the course of any given year we mail out thousands of ARCs to booksellers, editors, reviewers, and freelancers, most of which seemingly

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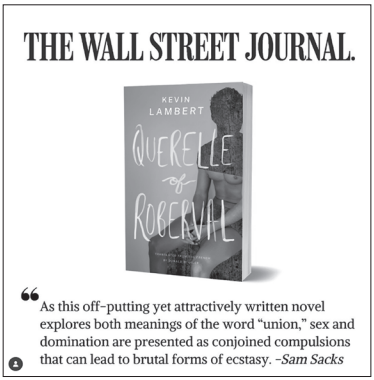
disappear into the ether, a few resurfacing on Ebay or on the deep stacks at the Strand; we follow these up with thousands of finished review copies, which suffer the same fate of their less finely-produced forebears. Our publicists send out hundreds of pitches and follow up on these as many as a dozen times over the course of a single book's life; multiply this by twenty-five to thirty a year: I counsel my publicity team regularly to persist despite the seemingly impenetrable silence. We are consistently trying to figure out how to make the lives of editors and book reviewers and freelancers easier, so that they might more easily say yes to covering our books, keeping continuous track of who moves where and why. We send out hundreds of marked catalogues to media and booksellers both, conduct hundreds of meetings via Zoom and once again in person with editors, critics, radio producers and festival organizers; send many thousands of emails to booksellers, individually and otherwise; send hundreds of media updates to our sales forces in Canada, the United States and, increasingly, the UK; attend presales and sales conferences, library fairs and trade shows. We update our metadata with the conviction and obsessive regularity of the devout. We tweet, we Instagram, we Mailchimp, we Facebook (not always effectively). We don't (yet) TikTok. We design ads, both for online and print. We spend too much money on advertising. Before the pandemic, we sent authors on the road across the country, continent and sometimes further abroad; and so we are starting to do again. We increasingly are working on forms of direct customer outreach,




*Scenes from the Bibliogram:* Querelle of Roberval *in* Wall Street Journal, A Factotum in the Book Trade *in the* New Yorker, Estates Large and Small *in the* New York Times.

which result in ideas like this, *The Bibliophile*, the third installment of which you hold in your hands. As much as this is, as much as it doesn't touch on, there is always so much more we could be doing. We are consistently aware of how much more we could be doing. We are continuously trying to rethink how to improve the public lives of the books we publish (for us, more than anything else, this defines the art of publishing), and believe that this is one of the chief challenges and pleasures of working in publishing in the first place: it makes, as the quote on my door from fellow publisher Andrew Steeves suggests, an interesting shape in a life, and we're most times grateful for it.

If we called in an efficiency expert he'd (and in this instance it seems to me entirely safe to use the masculine pronoun) probably study our Filemaker records for a few hours and then tell us to abandon most of what we do; that the expense of sending books and then following up with the NYRB and *Paris Review* and the TLS and NPR is

not worth it. And in one very limited (mercenary) sense, he'd of course be right. But this also misses the fact that there was a time when the same could have been said of the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Washington Post*, *Kirkus*, of CBC Ideas and countless others, places where our books and our authors are now regularly featured. The efficiency expert ignores the fact that the value of a book tour can't be judged in book sales or audience attendance

*Our job, as we understand it, is to hold open the doors of possibility for our writers and their books for as long as possible*

alone: a range of intangibles that have dramatic impact on a writer's development or the long-term success of a given book can accrue as a result of our efforts. Our job, as we understand it, is to hold open the doors of possibility for our writers and their books for as long as possible. Too often it isn't long enough, but, however it may seem from the outside, it is never for a lack of trying.

If failure and disappointment are regularly the publishers' lot, perhaps it's also true that this is even more the case for the Canadian small press publisher. Half a dozen years or so ago, speaking to a gathering of American, British and Canadian independent publishers, our US sales manager at the time (who has since gone on, I believe, to sell milk in the land of dairy cows) intoned that however bad publishing might seem to our American and British counterparts, it could be worse: they could all be Canadian. She then went on to suggest that Canadians were like America's spinster aunt in the attic: you invite them down for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but otherwise tend to forget they're there. We, it seems, are both nice and slightly boring, and far too agreeable. (If only they knew.) Here in Canada, somehow, it sometimes seems even worse: Canadian independent publishers produce more than 85 percent of the Canadian books published in this country and yet represent, depending on who is counting, between 3.5 and 5 percent of the overall market, what must be one of the lowest rates in the literate world. There is no doubt this is having a drastic impact on what is getting published

in this country, and whose voices are being heard, at a time when it's absolutely essential to reconsider the stories that we've historically been telling ourselves. While we squabble and peck on the sidelines, the foreign majority shareholders of our cultural life make bank. This should be considered a crisis, but at almost all levels this news (and somehow it does still seem to most people, even within the industry, to be news) is most often met by some combination

*Failure and disappointment are only a problem if we allow them to curtail our efforts, if we allow them to determine our attitudes*

of resignation and indifference. It has made me, who started his accidental career as one of the most anti-nationalist of publishers, almost evangelical on the subject: if we do not figure out a way to take back market share from the multinational industrials currently dominating the Canadian market, we'll have no one to blame but ourselves when we sink even further back into the colonial muck.

I think part of the problem in this country is that we expect too little of readers. In the past year we at Biblioasis have been told by someone we both rely upon and who should know better—never mind, for now, who that is—that Biblioasis books are too serious for the current market, that what Canadians want, after a long pandemic, in a world facing environmental and political crisis, is lighter, more comfortable fare. It was the first time I heard the now seemingly ubiquitous term "uplit." This led to more than a few days of despondency, at least within this particular office at the Bibliomanse, before I decided to call bullshit. If you're reading this, I suspect that you're the kind of reader who'll call bullshit too. And for that, I thank you.

I don't know if Stephen Marche would agree with me entirely, but failure and disappointment are only a problem if we allow them to curtail our efforts, if we allow them to determine our attitudes. The subtitle to his meditation on writing and failure is: *On the Peculiar Perseverance Required to Endure the Life of a Writer.* And this, it seems to me, gets to the heart of at least these particular matters. We must persist; we must persevere. We must pay attention.

I am biased, yes, but I think it would serve us all a little better if we paid more attention to who it is who actually is publishing our books. I've made a habit of misquoting Richard de la Mare (misremebering him as Richard Le Gallienne ) but as I've thought about what it is I wanted to say here, I went back and finally reread his pamphlet *A Publisher on Book Production.* Published in 1936, De La Mare says, in part: "I am sadly aware that the number of those book buyers and readers, who look for the publisher's name as a matter of course and remember it, is still small; but I believe that their number is growing and that there will come a day when no one will any more think of buying a book without first inquiring the *publisher*'s name, than he would now of buying a motor car without knowing the name of its maker." The number of readers who look for a publisher's name is still quite small; but if you're reading this, you're likely also one of those, for which I thank you again. But there does need to be many more of us if we hope to withstand the industrial onslaught. Anansi isn't the only independent publisher out there publishing "very good books": in Canada there's also Anvil and Aresenal Pulp and Coach House and Cormorant and Dundurn and ECW and Gaspereau and Invisible and Sutherland House and Vehicule, among many, many others; and in the US and abroad, And Other Stories, Bellevue, Charco, Coffee House, Dalkey Archive, Deep Vellum, Galley Beggar, Graywolf, New Directions, Two Dollar Radio, and Open Letter: these are just a very few of my favourite things, and I hope you'll join me in making them, alongside Biblioasis, some of yours, too. The places these publishers and their books will bring you, the voices you'll hear, are quite often very different than those you're going to get elsewhere. And each one you read, each one of you we reach, will make it a little easier for us to persevere.

Until next time. Keep reading independently.

DAN WELLS, PUBLISHER

*WINDSOR, FEBRUARY 2, 2023*

## A FAREWELL TO RICHARD SANGER

RICHARD SANGER *(1960–2022) grew up in Ottawa and lived in Toronto. He published three poetry collections and a chapbook,* Fathers at Hockey *(2020);* Dark Woods *was named one of the top ten poetry books of 2018 by the New York Times. His plays included* Not Spain, Two Words for Snow, Hannah's Turn, *and* Dive, *as well as translations of Calderon, Lorca, and Lope de Vega. He also published essays, reviews, and poetry translations. His fourth collection,* Way to Go, *will be released in April 2023.*

IT WAS WITH GREAT sadness that we learned of the passing of Richard Sanger, Biblioasis poet, friend and bon vivant. We knew that this moment was approaching: Richard had been working the last few months with his editor, Vanessa Stauffer, to prepare the manuscript of his final collection of poems, *Way to Go*, delivering it only last week. He remained himself to the very end: playful, enthusiastic, devilish. At one point, after making yet another death joke, he stopped and asked us if he was making us uncomfortable: he couldn't help it, he told us, he found his own impending demise somewhat ridiculous. He kept laughing, and making others laugh, right to the end. We will miss that spirit, and his kindness, generosity and sharp-edged intelligence. And we will miss celebrating

the launch of *Way to Go* in his person, raising a glass or three, though we take some solace in knowing that this book exists and he was able to get it where he wanted it to be, and that we will one day soon be able to share it with all of you who loved him, and hopefully a few more besides.

To honour Richard, we thought we'd share one of our favourite poems from his forthcoming collection, about the joy of movement and embellishment and friendship.

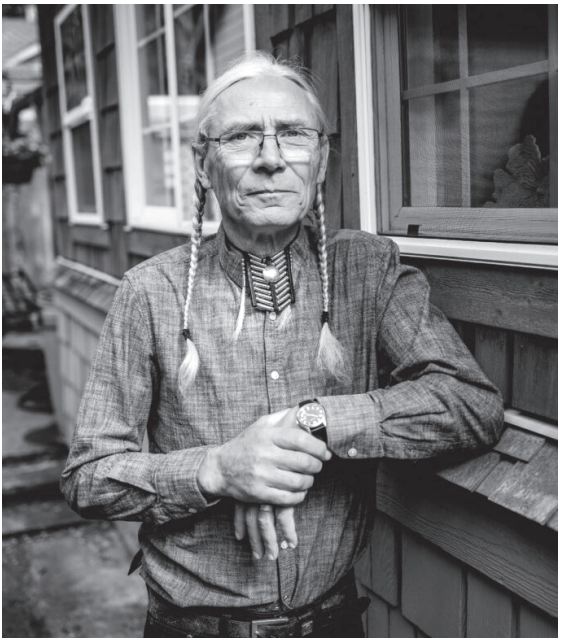
## NOVEMBER RUN
*for Harold Hoefle*

I read your letter, Harold,
as one nurse describes her new dessert
—rice krispie squares, peanut butter, chocolate—
to another who hooks me up to my IV drip
and I want nothing more than to go
for a run with you as wild
and muddy and unpredictable
as your letter, a long November run
to commemorate the races we never ran
against each other, the OFSAAS we never placed;
I want to head off hanging on your shoulder
—light-footed, loose-limbed, easy-breathing—
as you lead the way along the gravel shoulder
of the highway out of town, past the 7-Eleven,
the gas station, the monster homes,
then cut off down a path into the woods
and up whatever kind of hills you have
in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, or pastures
overgrown with sumac, I suppose,
or maybe we'd go for a run in the Gatineau,
why not, hell, up and down those ski trails,
over branches and rocks and puddles and streams
when there are still a few leaves
left on the hardwoods and also perhaps

a few precocious snowflakes in the air
appearing like over-keen students
to try their luck and melt on contact
as our cheeks and thighs redden,
and now you hang on my shoulder
as I lead the way, taking you on, pressing the pace
until we fall into a rhythm, brisk, mechanical,
each of our bodies telling the other's
I can do this all I want, I can cream you,
our bones and sinews making themselves known
shedding all superfluous weight and thought,
as we run those Gatineau trails and this steep slope
and I attack, putting my forehead into it,
pumping my arms, thinking now I can do it,
administer the coup de grâce,
and leave you in the dust . . . No such luck.
At the crest, you're still with me, surprise,
and so we head back, lungs panting, thighs aching,
letting our legs freewheel as fast as they can,
you ahead of me, or me ahead of you
breathing down my neck, laughing,
ready to pick me off and whoosh past
to the chalet where there'll be showers and beer,
some women who'll understand our jokes,
who'll ooh and ahh over our mud-spattered calves,
and tell us we're full of shit, if necessary,
and a roaring fire to get roaring drunk beside
as we proceed to purify the dialect of the tribe
and forge in the exuberance of our talk
the only lightly embellished story of our race.

## TRACEY LINDBERG ON HAROLD R. JOHNSON'S *THE POWER OF STORY*

SOMETIME IN THE LAST few years, Harold asked me if I would review one of his manuscript drafts. We were open and honest with each other—Harold, because he was with everyone. Me, because I was so with him. In my review of the draft, I found some language or logic troubling. In communicating my thoughts I drafted and re-drafted them and even considered not sending them. In the end, I communicated as we do: frankly, but in this instance worrying that I had overstepped a boundary or that he might react in a way which would change our relationship. He wrote back and was generous in his response, thanking me and acknowledging that writers' references are era specific and that someday he would be taken to task for his ideas and language aging out—but this was not that day. The pragmatism and elemental truth in that struck me and sits with me today as I read his last work.



*Harold R. Johnson, 1954–2022*

Part of me wants to cherish it and treat it as precious. Part of me wants to read it as Harold would read our work: kindly critical + critically kind. There is a line early in *The Power of Story* where he writes about working too hard and not taking enough time: "I spent too much time working and not enough time with my family. In real terms I would have been much richer if I had not pursued economic wealth over mental, emotional, and spiritual wealth." It is not remorseful, but a kind gift. I want to text him. Call him or write him and let him know that he couldn't be this writer if he had not

*Time was running as he was writing—but he is as ever patient and involved with us not just as readers, but as fellow storytellers.*

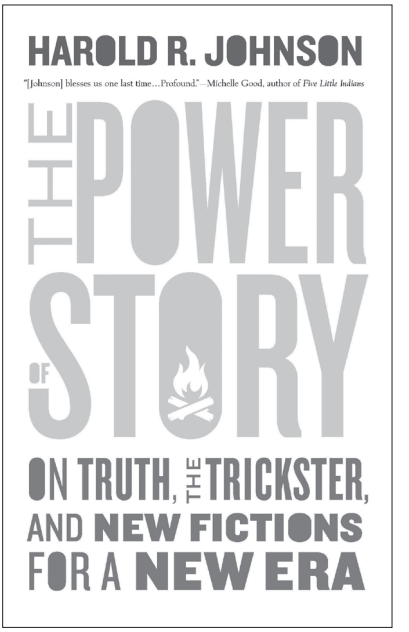
been so hard-working. But, he knew what he was saying and said what he meant. He wouldn't need me to soothe or caretake him.

He said what he meant. At the time that he wrote his work, it was Harold's truth. Having read his fiction, and seen the crossover between life and the living, in my experience as a lawyer, critic of law schools and the Canadian legal system, and creative thinker, I find myself nodding often with his work. Also, I find myself shaking my head and arguing with him—both prospects I think would make his eyes twinkle. Making us think and feel is a rich gift that I am thankful he left us, on and off the page.

When we were both youngish—I traveled to Cambridge to visit friends. They were having a writing group gathering on the night I visited them. Harold was there. We all read from our work and Harold told us what he was inspired by and reading. He was a true believer in the understanding that we could learn something from everyone. It wasn't the written word alone that he cherished; he loved people and their language, their silence, and their thoughtfulness. He could sit and enjoy your company or your silence because he was deeply engaged in experiencing, enjoying—living. In this work, Harold is fully engaged with the richness of living and life. In reading this, I am aware that time was running as he was writing—but he is as ever patient and involved with us not

just as readers, but as fellow storytellers. There is such optimism and love in his logic—it thrums with the heartbeat of a writer who cares deeply about the stories we tell. He is not so egocentric as to be enchanted by his own voice. In this work, he opens the door to young, old, women, two-spirited peoples and all animate nations (winged, gilled, spectacular, natural) as housing the means to care for the planet, each other and our selves.

Part of his gift was normalizing fantastic. Being able to imagine made it possible to do and be. At one point in our careers we both lived in Saskatoon. We were both asked to read / perform for an audience at the Broadway Theatre. Harold read from what I think was to become Billy Tinker. My memory is of a shy, quiet, confident voice coming from him. It was surprising in some measure, because he was so smartly engaged with critique and discussion of Canadian law and its potential (for harm and good) that hearing him as a fiction writer was a moment I remember. To have been able to work up north, led a camp life, toiled for the navy, gone to law school and be a creative writer seemed so nearly impossible. Nearly impossible, though, was the space from which he lovelaboured, I think. What seemed common trajectories: legal thinker writing a treatise on treaties (*Two Families: Treaties and Government*) and a creative writer publishing a work of fiction a year later (*Charlie Muskrat*) was rare enough. Later in his career, he would be called genre-bending (*Clifford*), border-crossing (*The Björkan Sagas*) and a creative philosopher (*Cry Wolf*) as his voice became strongly




*Cover design by Ingrid Paulson.*

identifiable and home to crossover between stories as fact and truth and fiction. Award nominated and winning, Harold's later publications were celebrated because of the strength of his voice and the commitment to the accessibility of story. Both *Firewater* and *Peace and Good Order: The Case for Indigenous Justice in Canada* stand out because they are passionate, intellectually accessible, and stories that need to be told.

In this work (and I am having a hard time writing "final"), Harold emphasizes and expands upon the ideas he teased out most notably in *Firewater*: we are the stories we tell and we become the stories we tell ourselves. The occasion is a multi-cultural and multi-faith gathering at his and his partner Joan's home, where the dock sits on the spot where lake meets river. In this way, we are introduced to what is a really welcoming and warm narrative about the places held and created by story and the work and possible worlds of storytelling. Within it, he sees the gathering of people from different and differing backgrounds as "a chance for humanity"—and as a reader (almost as a listener) we are introduced into the scope and possibility of story that he gifts us.

Conversationally, Harold tells us of the violent removal of his people from the Prince Albert National Park when his mom was twelve years old and he reminds us that survival and survivance are not wholly dependent upon physical labour—but also upon our capacity to remember, create, and share stories. There is less dogma and more space devoted to creation and creatively developing, reframing and altering the stories that we tell. At the start and at the end he relies upon our smartest selves to interpret the stories he has written about Trickster / Older Brother, Wisahkicahk. Grounding his time around the fire, weaving stories and braiding experience, potential truths, and possible worlds, he begins to lead listeners / readers through the beauty that stories can create and reveal and the devastation and destruction that stories can result in and perpetuate.

He leads us through areas fraught with colonial shadowy stories attached to and secured by ideologies of supremacy, superiority, and just enrichment. Through the lens of story we are able to un-

derstand how the violence of colonialism is upheld by self-serving and reifying narratives about tenure, private property, corporatization, economies, war, and sovereignty, and Harold reminds us that these are new(er) stories, the authority of which is embedded in and is used to enrich newcomers and cousins on Indigenous territories. He does not couch any of this discussion in terms of victimhood but he does address the continuing cost exacted by telling stories of rightfulness, righteousness, rights, and residency in a settler validating and valorizing voice.

*There is less dogma and more space devoted to creation and creatively developing, reframing and altering the stories that we tell.*

Perhaps it is fitting that the stories which sustain and strengthen the work are those stories he shares about relationality. Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations solidified through treaty-making and the ensuing responsibilities to each other as family members. The teaching shared with respect to this relationality (to setters as cousins, to animal, plant, and other life). The complex interrelationships to all life that surrounds us, including "the standing nation of trees, the four-legged nations, the flying nations of birds, the swimming nations of fish, and the crawling nations of insects," necessitates both care and careful storytelling.

This includes care in not generalizing, aggregating, or stereotyping and some of his work and writing made me uncomfortable enough to stop, pause, re-read and return to sections. If I read and understand the work as it is written—without cynicism or rage—I am more able to envision the story as intended. Hopeful. Careful. Powerful. Some of the language (past tense verbs as related to governance, women's roles, authority, agency) requires us as readers to contest, contradict, or question what he has written. Other portions of the work are rich and require deep thinking, discussion, and dissemination. His stories related to ceremonies, children and Elders' independence, spiritual connectedness and storytelling as an act of love, within which we shower our characters with care

and treat them respectfully, supports the fullest iteration of our lives and work as dear and loving. Story allows us our voice and perception.

For it is in his discussion of the definition and interpretation of story as applied to race, scientific discovery and advancement, and truth that Harold gifts us immeasurably in this work. Breaking down notions of absolutism and fundamentalism as tied to truth (which, he reminds us, does not exist in nature or otherwise) serves only to validate some means of creating "knowledge" without acknowledging that all things (science, theories, historical writings) are someone's version of a story—affixed to a goal of establishing belief as it validates privilege, wealth, inequality.

He steps beyond story as detailing to storytelling as a loving act. His loving act is well in evidence as he educates his audience about the storied richness of hope, love, and happiness. Discussing our possible futures, he leans into the story shared by knowledge keepers about our capacity as beings:

> Imagine love so immense that a mere human is incapable of enduring it all. Imagine happiness, likewise, so intense that at its height it is hard to endure. Then add to this the experience of being a spirit in a physical body, knowing that the only person in charge of your life is yourself. You are whole and complete. You are plugged in to the neural networks, the mycelia, the root systems of the forest. You experience and can translate energy and frequencies. You are repeatedly told by the spirits of the plants and animals and insects, "you are a beautiful human being."

Vesting in the fantastic, he reminds us that we do have agency and autonomy, but that we also have spirit helpers to work with us. Women's agency and autonomy are rich and storied; humanity's capacity for goodness rich and unfettered. He imagines and stories a world where we can be hopeful and healing; where we can connect and share stories that emancipate and govern us collectively. In circles, in our visits, and in our families—we can write and tell our story in a unified voice. As family.

Ultimately, Harold Johnson envisions and shares a possible future where we relate our story as a family with shared responsibilities and love. This loving gift—this potential for familial love bigger than self and more caring than seems possible at times—is the best story and is perhaps his biggest of all the gifts he has given us.

TRACEY LINDBERG
WSÁNEĆ TERRITORY, JULY 2022

## AN INTERVIEW WITH GRAEME MACRAE BURNET

GRAEME MACRAE BURNET *is one of the* UK*'s leading contemporary novelists. His novels, which include the Booker Prize-shortlisted* His Bloody Project, *have been translated into more than twenty languages. He lives and works in Glasgow.*

EMILY MERNIN *is a publicist at Biblioasis.*

EMILY MERNIN: *Tell me a bit about yourself and your writing*

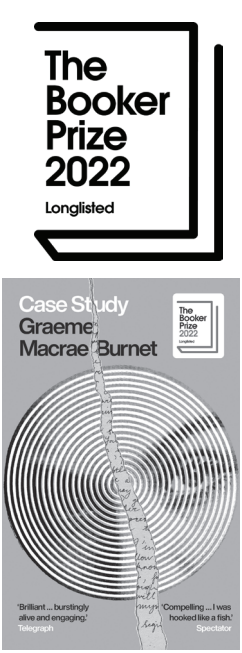
GRAEME MACRAE BURNET: I was born in a town called Kilmarnock in 1967. Kilmarnock is an industrial town near Glasgow. I studied English literature and film studies at the University of Glasgow, and then I spent four or five years teaching English as a foreign language. I was in Prague for a year and a half, spent a year in Portugal, then some time in France, and some time in london. After that I took a degree in international security studies at St. Andrews University and started working as a researcher for documentaries and television. I did that for about nine years.

I had always been writing, mostly short stories, and all I wanted to do was publish a novel. It was my only ambition in life. Then I

was forty. I lost my job in TV—which I was happy about—and it became time to really concentrate on writing a novel. I'd written various other half-novels but this effort became my first detective Gorski book, *The Disappearance of Adèle Bedeau*. Eventually it was published by Saraband. Like most first novels, it sold maybe 1,000 copies. *His Bloody Project* came out later, which took off and was shortlisted for the Booker, and translated into twenty languages. Then, yay! I could be a full time writer.

EM: Case Study *was recently shortlisted for an international prize for crime novels. Do you conceive of your work in relation to the crime genre?*

GMB: The weird thing is: I do not think of this as a crime novel. Though, I won't tell anyone how to promote or read the book. Two of my other books are much more conventional crime novels. Even then, they are not that conventional. Hardcore crime fans come to my stuff, and I don't think it really works for them. Because it creates a certain narrative expectation, and then they get disappointed.

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EM: *I see that—crime can be somewhat rigid. Though it has overlap, I read* Case Study *as, for lack of a better word, psychological literary fiction.*

GMB: The way you read it is the way I would like people to read it. And, I think that is where it belongs on the bookshelves in a bookshop, rather than in the crime section. And you know, I don't want to alienate readers by calling it literary or dismissing genre fiction. But, I don't think this one delivers a crime novel plot.

EM: Case Study *is your fourth novel. Do you think having an audience, and now a significant international audience, has influenced or changed your writing?*

GMB: A completely reasonable question but, it totally didn't. I was kind of lucky because just before the longlisting of *His Bloody Project*, I finished the first draft of *The Accident on the A35*, the sequel to my first novel. Both of those books are quiet, atmospheric novels. They are not big novels, with big ideas in them. Maybe if I hadn't already gotten that novel semi-finished, I might have felt more pressure when I found out about the Booker. But, I've always said that I just want to write the books I want to write. I'm quite an individualist and I don't care what other people write. Part of the problem of the genre conversation too is that I don't want to write the same book again.

Pressure is when no one wants to read your work. That is pressure. If you are publishing novels and they are selling 1,000 copies each, I think eventually you have to stop. Or get a job teaching creative writing. That is pressure. If you have an audience and can make a living from writing, that takes the pressure off, I think.

EM: *I'm sure you get this question a lot but I would love to hear you speak about form.* Case Study*, among your other novels, is a work of metafiction: journalistic texts are juxtaposed with found texts, in the form of a notebook. What about this form works for you—for what you try to express in a novel?*

GMB: Well, long have you got? Only kidding, but it's a hard question to answer. The reason I like found texts and having different texts within a novel, or different viewpoints within a novel, is because I think then, automatically, the reader has to make their own mind up about what is actually happening. I don't ever want to present a novel where there is a truth, and you find the answer at the end of the book, and the reader is satisfied. I want the reader to feel actively involved in the process of reading and thinking about the events that are going on in the novel. I want them to question the truth of what they are being told. I think the found document structure really enables that.

Even the crime novels I write, I present them as being a translation of another author's work which is quite unusual for a genre crime novel. The first one contains a small biography of the "original" author. When you have found documents, the metafictional elements of the novels answer the readers questions: where did these documents come from? How did the author come to have them in his possession? I am kind of interrogating these potential questions with metafiction.

Also, these techniques are how novels have been since the beginning of the novel. It is how novels are. *Don Quixote* is a found document and fake translation. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was first published as the memoir of Robinson Crusoe, without Defoe's name. If you look at other nineteenth-century British literature, it is there. In Robert Louis Stevenson, Wilkie Collins, you see it.

EM: *Yes, in so many ways,* Case Study *reminds me of a Wilkie Collins novel. Collins was in my mind throughout my reading of it.*

GMB: I take that as a great compliment. Not my favorite Wilkie Collins novel but, *The Moonstone* was a great sensation in part because of the narrative of Miss Clack. She tells part of the story which, of course, was published in serialized form. I remember reading Miss Clack's account, and then the next narrator's account, and suddenly realizing that Miss Clack had not told the truth. I remember that feeling blowing my mind.


*GMB's Fall 2022 North American tour brought him to a number of independent bookshops, among them Brooklyn's Books Are Magic (above) and Chicago's Exile in Bookville (left, with co-owner Kristin Gilbert). While in the Windy City, GMB was also longlisted for Bar Shuffleboard Rookie of the Year.*

That's where these ways of telling a story come from. I definitely want the reader, as they read Rebecca's notebooks to at times wonder: is that really the way it happened? Is her account of this event accurate? We don't know. Her seemingly true account could also be a work of fiction. After all, we know she is an aspiring writer.

EM: *For that reason, I couldn't help but read your work alongside writers like Vladimir Nabokov, Henry James, Roberto Bolano, and other masters of unreliable narrators. And then there are so many other overt (and covert) literary references in text: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Daphne du Maurier, etc. Not to mention the psychoanalytic literature and theory (namely RD Laing) that your main character, Braithwaite, is responding to . . .*

GMB: To your last point, the book is called *Case Study*. It is inspired by reading lots of case studies. The more case studies I read, the more I come to see them as examples of unreliable narration, because you only have the account of the therapist. If you read some early Freud case studies, you realize he is not only an extremely unreliable narrator, but possibly a bit mad himself. So, you start to question what you are being told. I begin to wonder what version of events would be given by the other person in the room, the patient. In a way, that is the origin of this novel, exploring the point of view of the perspective of the patient.

In terms of literary inheritance, it also comes from nonfiction. I love writing fiction in the style of nonfiction. You probably don't want to say this in an interview but, I don't really like Nabokov. I also haven't read that much of Nabokov. He is a cold writer, a cruel writer. Though I can also completely see the connection, especially with *Pale Fire*. As for Henry James, a writer I admire, I haven't read his work in thirty years.

It's funny and amazing though how when you go back to reread something, you see how much influence it has had on your work. Influence is a complicated thing. There is conscious influence, where you might have learned something then put it to use. Then, for me, there are all these nineteenth-century novels that use these

techniques we are talking about, but I've almost forgotten about them. As I go into the narrative, they fall away and I become immersed in the story. I was just rereading Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, which is also a found document novel. I'm going to read you the first line.

When I reread this, I was shocked: "The best thing would be to write down everything that happens from day to day."

Almost identical to the first line of *Case Study*. So, you get these resonances. You absorb everything and it comes out thirty years later. I am consciously influenced by Sartre, but not to the extent that I meant to write an almost identical first line.

EM: *What are you reading now?*

GMB: I am reading *This is the Castle* by Nicholas Freeling. Have you heard of George Simenon? He is my favourite writer. He has influenced me most. He's got nothing to do with metafiction, but I've learned a lot about writing novels from him. He wrote his novels in eleven days. Nicholas Freeling was an English author, a very underrated writer from the mid-twentieth century. When I am working on a book, I try as much as possible to read books that I think my characters would read. Rebecca is someone who would read novels. So, when I was writing *Case Study*, I read a lot of mid-twentieth-century fiction, mostly by women, and also popular fiction. I finally read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which is surprisingly good, and surprisingly dirty. But the Freeling is a mid-twentieth-century psychological novel. It puts me in the mood for writing my next Gorski book.

Oh, and I am reading an enormous book about Vladimir Putin.

## PORTRAIT OF A PUBLICIST

EMILY MERNIN *lives in Windsor,* ON.

VANESSA STAUFFER *is managing editor at Biblioasis, which today means tormenting Emily Mernin by asking her questions about herself.*

VANESSA STAUFFER: *Not to get too Talking Heads right off the bat, but it seems to be fairly common for people to end up working in independent publishing by happy accident rather than by, say, chasing their childhood dreams to work on this side of the book industry: how did you get here?*

EMILY MERNIN: I don't think you know this but, when I was an undergraduate, I fell into a remote gig at 1913 press, a tiny San Diego-based press and journal, after writing to the founders about how much I liked their work. That year, we published Vi Khi Nao, whose work blew me away (still does). It was short term, imperfect, but poignant: everyone, in addition to their full time jobs, made time for 1913—because they felt they had to, because of an urgency around tending to strange and experimental writing. I have carried that energy with me, stowed it like a piece of light. I felt it twitch when I spoke to you and Dan for the first time, and followed it here.

I am always becoming myself through reading. I think of literature as an environment and wonder about its future. It wasn't a childhood dream, or a really even a plan, but working in publishing provides materials and rooms for wondering.

VS: *I did not know that, though I do know you contain boundless bits of so-stored energy. And I recall that we felt the same way: light finds its likeness?*

*So, now that you've been wandering this particular biosphere for almost a year, what are some of your discoveries, whether they be specific to your Biblioasis work or not? What have you found yourself—your interests, aspirations, concerns—becoming?*

EM: I'm thinking differently about what mediates the author/reader relationship. I used to think broadly about time and objecthood,

how serendipitous and intense to discover a distant voice alive on the page. Now, watching contemporary books move into the world, I'm thinking more concretely about the systems and timelines that dictate, and gamble on, a book getting into the hands of a certain reader. I am thinking about the windows for discovery and how, over time, the discovery of any given book will always slide further from the systems that predict (and desire) its placement and become increasingly random. I am interested in what this means for the author/reader relationship. What about these processes are encoded in the book—are they sensed, or absorbed, by the reader? Beyond getting a person to pick it up and purchase it, what is the extent of the effect a book's marketing has on the voice of the author, on the story itself?

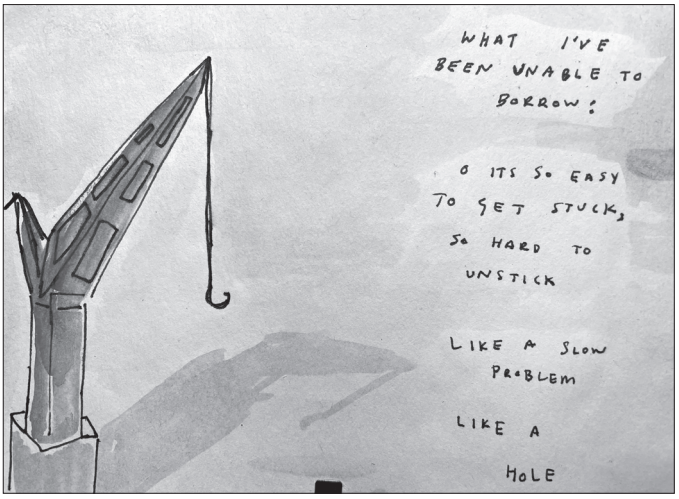
It is productive and strange being exposed to the production of literature. An almost-year of questions.

VS: *Certainly, as a publicist, you have a much keener sense of what makes books 'succeed' in the culture, of the engineering behind those systems of discoverability, than does the average reader. What, if anything, do you wish readers knew about those systems—about how book marketing and book publicity works (if, of course, it can be said to work)?*

EM: Keeping books visible in this stream of targeted advertising we are all adrift in is not easily done, and impossible without readers. The average reader is, in many ways, any book's best & most surprising publicist. I see it as a hand-off. There is groundwork laid here, and the rest is with readers. After a certain point, they alone can—and should—disrupt and change a book's trajectory.

VS: *Ignoring me & everything I said about this idea in the previous installment of the Bibliophile . . .tell us a bit about your life outside of publishing?*

EM: In first grade, we were prompted to write author bios as a way to experiment with writing in the third person. Mine is eerily enduring: "Emily lives in New Jersey with her brother, loves baseball, and is a good sleeper. She eats vegetables and cheerios:




*An EM original drawing.*

NO MEAT!" Really, only my address has changed. I grew up just outside of New York, with planes overhead and chickens in the backyard. I've since lived between Montreal, where I studied literature, New York, and, as of late, Windsor.

I run long distances outside. Here, that means taking the road out to where the river meets the lake, or kicking up dust on the bike trail, pointed towards Lake Erie. I've become more focused on running in the past few years and am starting to have bigger dreams about it. That kind of movement feels connected to the act of writing, and also reading. The voice that emerges in my head during all those actions is the same, I think. I make tiny drawings and stories, and occasionally write book reviews. Right now, I am collaborating on a small film project with my partner, for which I am providing a supplementary text. Though, the film has been changing direction in the editing process, so my 'text' is more like particulate, hanging in the air above me, unorganized & contingent on changing wind.

VS: *Desert Island Books, Biblioasis edition?*

EM: For backlist, I'll bring *A Ghost in the Throat* by Doireann Ní Ghríofa, to remind me of lifelines, and the strange shapes they can take. Then comes the recently published *The Affirmations* by

Luke Hathaway—transformative words to cling to & sing to. And, if only to remember Rome, *All Things Move* by Jeannie Marshall (forthcoming, this spring!).

VS: *Lightning round! French flaps: Y/N*

EM: Y!

VS: *Flash fiction, or prose poem?*

EM: Today? Flash fiction. Of the Walser kind.

VS: *"BookTok" or "Bookstagram"?*

EM: Neither…!

VS: *Bottomless production budget or bottomless publicity budget?*

EM: Bottomless production budget.

VS: *Three tips for a debut author?*

EM: Think about your book as both an isolated piece of art and a contribution to larger discourses. Understand and be able to articulate its significance as both of those things. Ask or (ideally) trust your publisher to do the same.

VS: *Last one: tips, any quantity, for someone who wants to get started working in publishing?*

EM: Read a lot. Learn and unlearn simultaneously. Think about the ways books come into your life. Discern, for yourself, the kind of writing that feels worth supporting.

## MEN ARE SO MEAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH LUCY ELLMANN BY LUCY ELLMANN

*The author sits down with herself to discuss the birds and the bees:*

LUCY ELLMANN: *Where do you work?*

LUCY ELLMANN: In a very cold room, almost uncannily cold. I can't figure that out. But it's near the loo. Virginia Woolf forgot to mention that the room of one's own should have a loo of its own. Bodily needs intrude unless properly accommodated. I once rented a writing studio with no access to a loo. I spent most of the day in the pub.

LE: *Where do you get your ideas?*

LE: Like Jack Lemmon in *The Odd Couple*, from the news.

LE: *What inspires you?*

LE: Daily doses of degradation, self-doubt, despair, and alliteration.

LE: *Do you write with a pen or straight on to a computer?*

LE: I use a large shiny aubergine. Let's move on.

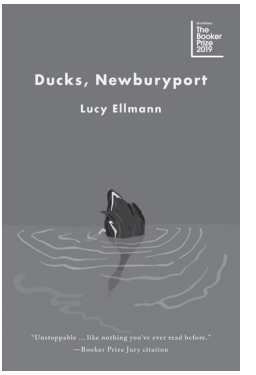
LE: *Your last book was called* Things Are Against Us. *You don't think things are* really *against us all, do you?*

LE: Don't you?

LE: *Well, which things?*

LE: Oh, everything from spitting frying pans to extraterrestrials (I'm sure they'd be against us if they ever met us). Humans are an unsustainable species. We *might* have been okay if we'd retained

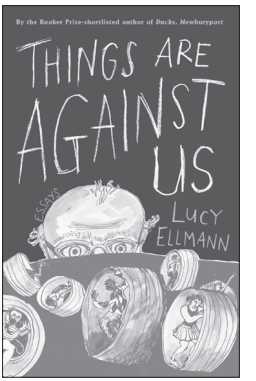
neolithic matriarchy. But men rebelled and jammed up the works with a five-thousand-year-long hissy fit.




LE: *You seem to have a particular problem with men.*

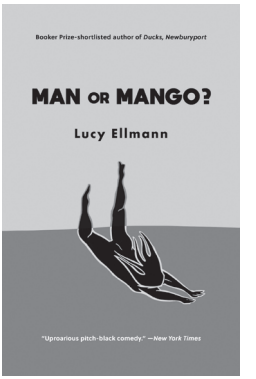
LE: I haven't known that many of them actually, and used to feel I'd sort of missed out on that front. But now that I think about it, I begin to suspect I got off pretty lightly.

LE: *What is it about them that troubles you?*




LE: Men are so mean! Looking back on my life, I realised they're really not all that nice. When I was about fourteen, this young guy said he was coming to see me on his motorbike. I waited *all* day and got more and more convinced he'd died in a motorbike accident. But when I called him up, it turned out he'd just forgotten about coming over!

Then there's the writer who wouldn't give me a lift once from a fancy literary do, because he thought I was *after* him. We happened to exit the party at the same time and, after admitting he'd brought his car, the goop nervously blurted out that he was married and *skedaddled*. Leaving me marooned in South London. See what I mean? They're not very nice. The nice ones are like gold dust.




The good news is you get better and better at detecting a louse.

Some men have neglected me unfairly, I feel. Some have rejected me. A few men have swindled me, or tried to. Millions have ignored

me (though that's probably just as well). Some have refused me employment. Many have patronised me in a sexist manner.

One guy who liked anal sex refused to meet me for a picnic: it was sex or nothing with him. One guy grabbed me roughly by the nightie once, and not in jest. Not in *lust* either. More out of pique: I had dared to undermine his power in some way. Men are so boring about power, and they retreat into violence at the drop of a hat. They lack self-control. They prefer controlling somebody else.

LE: *Sexual rejection is a problem for* both *sexes of course.*

LE: Nobody's saying men have to fancy everybody. But many, I feel, have been unnecessarily chilly towards me. At the very least, they are too gruff. It's so rude! One told me to get a hold of myself. Maybe more than one, actually. Many have frightened me, or frightened other women I know. (You hear things.) A few have mildly assaulted me—on separate occasions, not all at the same time. When I was thirteen, a madman followed me around town, grabbing at my breasts.

Some men have been splendid, I have to say. But, on reflection, not enough of them. Some sing well. But too many of them just sit around terrorizing everybody. Hitler, Trump, Attila the Hun, Jeff Bezos, Boko Haram, the NRA, the Proud Boys . . . These types keep popping up.

LE: *Not all men are genocidal maniacs!*

LE: No, as I said, some are opera stars. And a tenor aria makes up for quite a lot. But, in between all the melodic triumphs, there's the weaponry and road rage and rape culture and family annihilation, and men's deep love of plastics, sport, and pop music. Men have simply ruined life on earth! Silly of me, I know, to harp on these small defects of theirs, but I can't seem to help it.

LE: *Men find fault with women too.*

LE: Oh yeah, they're always beefing about what jerks women are, how annoying or pitiless or fat or fickle we can be. And yes, women can be jerks: there are many who collude with the enemy. But

female jerks are coming from a basic position of powerlessness, and this gives them more right to be desperate, selfish, ornery, vindictive, conniving, and furious.

*Male* jerks, on the other hand, inhabit from birth a realm of social, political, and financial advantage. Men are the *priority*, worldwide. They're top dog, with everything geared up for their entertainment and advancement. I don't mean to sound bitter or anything, but this head start men automatically receive makes their lack of gallantry, benevolence, humility and free rides out of Lambeth kind of grating.

LE: *I suppose inequality must have an effect on sex too?*

LE: Sex under the dead weight of patriarchy is a farce. The lingering ignorance about female orgasms is proof of it. And women treat themselves like scum! I can't stand the efforts they put into prettying themselves up for men, as if their bodies are pieces of errant flesh in constant need of revision, contorting themselves in order please men, with the high heels, the fashion statements, the pole-dancing classes. It's bizarre. When it's *men* who should be doing their utmost to serve and deserve *women.*

And what do you get for knocking yourself out? Not a pot of gold, not immortality, not even a lifetime's subscription to the *New Yorker*. Just a man or two. Have a dozen of them, my dear—but will it answer? Some don't even take out the trash!

There's a lot to be said for masturbation, you know. At least it rarely involves motorbikes. Also, lesbianism.

LE: *You take issue with heterosexuality?*

LE: No, not in theory. But I think men have delighted us long enough with their take on sex. Them and their porn glut and sad little bargain-basement male orgasms. It's about time we started honouring what it's like to have a *female* body.

LE: *You're being rather harsh.*

LE: Pornography's harsher.

LE: *Anything else men could do to please you?*

LE: They could go *out of their way* to please women. That's really what I think! Out of their way. *All the time.* I think they should listen to women, listen real hard. Some already do, I admit, which is admirable, but it should be universal, it should be *customary.* It would be great to have a little civility around here for a change.

And stop following us down dark alleys at night and scaring us to death, wouldja?

LE: *ME?!*

LE: If the shoe fits.

LE: *What do you wish you knew more about?*

LE: The phases of the moon and how bees live. I guess I should ask a scientist.

LE: *What pleases you?*

LE: Finding four blackbird chicks in a nest in a hedge, huge beaks and beady black eyes, all facing the same way. Birds in their little nest agree.

BOOKSELLER BUZZ

*Man or Mango: A Lament* by Lucy Ellmann

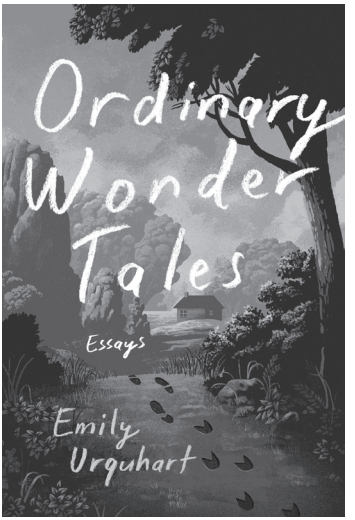
"A must-read for the reclusion romantic. Ellmann limns the paranoia of the human-allergic and the heartbreak of the society-squooshed with the same headachecrushed sugarrush of a kid punished into writing an essay on why he shouldn't've eaten ALL his Halloween candy before bed. Lesson learned: no regrets but for the all-encompassing Regret (just take the pathos less traveled). Included within: Lists! Conclusion: It's funny, it's sad, and she'll (I'll) do it all again."

*Ian McCord, Avid Bookshop, Athens, GA*

## YEARS THOUGHT DAYS

*by Emily Urquhart*

IN AUGUST, ABOUT A month after we'd discovered Mary's heart-shaped sunglasses, I was sitting in the screened-in porch at the family cottage with my two parents. My mother sat to my left and my father sat at the head of the table, where he had a view of the lake, and where he has always sat. It was dusk, there was a small pile of dishes from dinner stacked at the other end of the table, a reprieve before dessert. The children were racing along the rocky shoreline, occasionally shrieking. They were throwing stones into the lake, rippling the evening's still water. A haze had settled on the water and there was no discernable horizon, blurring the lake and sky as if they were one entity. I could hear the neighbour's dog barking, the whir of a distant lawn mower. My mother was talking, winding up to her point, which I cannot now remember, and she had stopped, mid-sentence, because my father had a question. He didn't speak his question aloud; it was that a look of bafflement had crossed his face, as if he was trying to solve an equation or a puzzle. It was the kind of look he had when examining his drawings-in-progress, which were always pinned to a corkboard opposite where he took his meals. The corkboard in the cottage porch was on the wall behind my mother, but he wasn't looking at the drawings there, which were fading now, having overwintered in the glare of the harsh, leafless light, and there had been no recent additions this summer. He looked at my mother, and then at me, and then he looked back to my mother again.




Ordinary Wonder Tales: Essays *(Biblioasis, 2022). Cover illustration by Byron Eggenschwiler.*

"What?" she'd asked him. "What is it?"

"Well," he said, looking at me again, then back to my mother. "I'm just wondering what the relationship is between the two of you."

This had happened to my mother before. My father had forgotten her, or questioned their relationship, or had asked my mother where his wife was when my mother happened to be standing in front of him, and so this was not an unusual situation for either of them.

For me, this marked the first instance where my father did not know me, or, at least, the first time he'd made this clear. I had feared this, suspected it was happening, once or twice, when I caught my

*For me, this marked the first instance where my father did not know me, or, at least, the first time he'd made this clear.*

father searching my face, not unlike he'd been doing that night. I felt that the first time my father failed to recognize me, a cavern would open in the earth beneath my feet and swallow me. I would live in the cavern, then, going forward. If my father didn't know me I would also cease to know myself, or to exist. I hoped the children would stay on the beach. I did not want an audience at that moment. I could tell by the sounds of their voices that they were drawing nearer to the cottage, circling the adults, hoping for ice cream.

My mother turned to me.

"Well?"

I took a breath and I pointed to myself and said, "Daughter." Then I pointed to my mother and said, "Mother."

I turned, then, to face my dad.

"You are the father."

I said this last part tentatively because I worried it might upset my father to learn such important information, or to learn that he had been unaware that he was seated at a dinner table with his wife and his youngest child. This was not what happened. Instead, my father's face lit up, as if this was a wonderful surprise, as if this conveyance of information was coming to him for the first time, and it was a true illumination, a pure and singular thrill. He broke into a wide smile.

"No wonder I'm having such a wonderful time," he said.

In that moment I learned an important and often overlooked feature of dementia: in forgetting there is also the opportunity for revelation.

MEMORY IS EPHEMERAL. THE fragments that make up our days are easily forgotten. While I remember the sounds of my children playing by the shore, my father's smile, how the haze hung over the lake, other moments from that evening have fallen away and are now irretrievable. Hammond writes that "when we talk about the study of memory, really, it should be the study of forgetting. Every day we experience hundreds of moments that we simply forget." Memories can be lost as soon as they are made. Eventually, we will forget everything.

I HADN'T KNOWN THE story of Urashima Taro before reading the article in the gerontology journal, but I was familiar with a similar tale from Irish mythology. The protagonist, Oisín, follows a magical horse into Tír na nóg, the land of eternal youth, where he meets Queen Niamh and falls in love with her. In some versions he meets Niamh in the human world and she guides him to her home. He spends what he believes is a year in this land but he pines for his family, his brothers in particular, and, also, his house. Niamh tries to dissuade Oisín from returning home. She worries she'll never see him again, but she lends him her horse and sends him off with a warning: Do not dismount. Whatever you do, don't let your feet touch the earth.

Oisín returns to find his home in ruins, the stones barely visible in the tangle of vegetation that has grown in his absence. He learns that his brothers are long dead and that three hundred years have passed. Among the ruins he spots the remains of the old stone washbasin where his family had cleaned themselves, and he remembers being a boy and the sensation of water on his face, and he is overcome with the urge to touch the stone basin, now cracked and fuzzed in moss. He dismounts, and when he steps to the earth he ages immediately, and, just as Urashima had, he turns to dust.

In the Folktale Motif Index, a six-volume catalogue of the granular elements of folk tales, Urashima Taro and Oisín in Tír na nóg are classified under the heading Years Thought Days. The title refers to the supernatural passage of time that happens when a mortal makes a visit to the otherworld. The Tale Type Index, a companion to the motif index, lists hundreds of magic world stories that span the globe. In one, the otherworld is a hellish farmer's field where the souls of the dead are represented by thin or fat sheep, in another it is an island where you can only laugh. It can be a place inhabited solely by women or crocodiles or elephants or fairies or gnomes. It can be underwater, or in the sky, or in a bank of clouds the sun cannot penetrate. It can be a land of people with topsy-turvy morals, and it can be a world where houses are thatched with the wings of birds. The otherworld is malleable and changeable, subject to the whims of the teller and their culture.

Despite its many iterations, there are several rules that apply to nearly all the Years Thought Days tales. The first, and foremost, is that time passes differently in the otherworld than in the human world. The second is that you cannot travel through time by natural means; some space-time compression is necessary. The third is that the enchantment is limited to a specific time span, such

*Emily and Dan in conversation at the Windsor launch of* Ordinary Wonder Tales.

as one year, seven years, or seven hundred years, and that this supernatural time span has a corresponding human time span. For example, three years in fairyland is equal to one human year, while three months in the underwater kingdom is akin to three hundred human years. A general rule of folk tales is that the storyteller must not describe the slow passage of time, what Danish folklorist Bengt Holbek described as "the slow change, the long and weary journey." This, in itself, is an act of magic, as a story that unfolds over an hour can traverse several generations.

Finally, while this is not a rule as much as it is a trend, these stories tend to have dystopic endings, which is unusual in wonder tales. Is Urashima Taro a sad story? I have discovered several versions since first encountering it in the journal article and I'm left feeling melancholic after each reading. It is a tale about the fleeting passage of time, how years can be thought days, and this is the central magic, but as with so many fairy tales it is also the central sorrow. In both the Japanese and the Irish tale, the hero dies in the end. At the heart of these enchanted stories lies the human world's ultimate truth, which is that nothing can change the fact of death.

*Excerpted from* Ordinary Wonder Tales: Essays *(Biblioasis, 2022).*

## WHERE IN CHICAGO IS JAVIER RAMIREZ? A PORTRAIT OF AN INDIE BOOKSTORE

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED by bookseller and publisher origin stories. When did they first quicken to the possibilities presented by books? Was it in the home or at school, at the hand of a parent or teacher, librarian or stranger? Was it accidental or resulting from intention? Were they seduced by the romance of books or the bookshop, the magic trick of a life surrounded by the best that's been thought and said, unaware of how much work actually goes into maintaining such an illusion? Or did it all begin with words, as a way to unspool that internalized monologue, the

scritch of a pen or the clacking of keys as those words took shape, at times almost magically, pulling others along with them?

The one thing that's almost always the case in these stories: there were books in the home. But Javier Ramirez is the exception, having grown up in a distinctly unbookish one. The seventh of as many children, the only books he remembers in the house were some Reader's Digest Condensed Books and an old set of encyclopedias, more bookish furniture than anything anyone attempted to read. Though he occasionally went to the local library, he doesn't ever recall going to a bookstore as a child: it would have been like entering "a foreign territory."

His family was a musical family, a sports family: Javier's dad was an excellent musician, a bassist, guitarist, and singer who regularly played in bars and at church functions all over town, and each of his children were coerced into playing an instrument. Javier's was the trumpet.

He describes himself as an extremely poor student who spent more time wandering the streets than going to class. As a result, he barely graduated high school. The one class he liked was English, which led him to consider, "for a hot second," journalism as a career, and so after graduation he took a few journalism classes at a local community college. Though he liked these well enough, "it just didn't stick," and he left school to float around, working a range of weird jobs, lasting two days as a cabinetmaker, working a few months assembling the *Penny Saver*, and a range of other things he has trouble now remembering.

At the time, he was dating a woman who worked in accounts payable at the Tower Records head office in Sacramento, and she got him a job in the video warehouse, from which he moved on to video sales. He stayed there for a while, until word reached him that he was going to be let go. Another friend at Tower, who had shifted from video to running the book warehouse, hired him to do basic manual labour, moving boxes, picking orders. It didn't seem like much, a way to keep employed, pay some bills, but the move would come to shape the direction of Javier's life.

Though he didn't know it at the time, Javier says this was a golden period in Tower Records' history, when they were on the cusp


*Javier with James Crossley of Madison Books (Seattle,* WA*)*

of expansion and handling a range of "extremely cool shit," small press books, SPD, RE/Search and Henry Rollins's 2.13.6 books. Javier knew he didn't know much about books, but he also knew that these weren't what most people were reading, so he asked a couple of the buyers he'd befriended, John Hennessey and Paul Harrington, why it was that they weren't carrying bigger writers like Stephen King or Dean R. Koontz.

"They literally took me by the ear and said to me, 'Listen, you idiot. We sell what we sell because it's literature and what the world needs right now.'" They went out to the warehouse and came back with a stack of books—some crazy one off small press titles, some Black Sparrow titles, including *The Road to Los Angeles* by John Fante—and "they told me to 'take these home this weekend and come back to us afterwards, and if you don't want to do this anymore, that's fine, we'll find you another job.' And so, I go home and I start reading and it's like a light just goes off in my brain, it was like the best thing that had ever happened to me." He read all of the books they gave him, then went back for more, especially Bukowski. "I don't know where I'd be without Tower Records and Tower Books," Javier says. "I wasn't heading anywhere good. They really saved my life."

There was another person at Tower who Javier singles out as having a massive influence on him. "Heidi Cotler was the only woman in a position of power at that time at Tower Records and she was great at what she did. She worked so hard to make all her employees feel special. I didn't have a great relationship with my family, and she and her husband, Dan, they sort of took me in at Tower, became my Tower family." They taught Javier how the industry worked, steered him to more and different and better books, taught him how to drink—"there were always a lot of martinis"—went to a lot of Stockton Ports baseball games. One day, Heidi came down to the warehouse because they needed to hire a new warehouse manager. "To this day," Javier recalls, "I think that I just stood still and everyone else took a step back. And the next day I was running the warehouse, and I discovered that I had a mind for it, and I just put my head down and worked hard, and I learned quickly what needed to get done."

It was around this time that Tower decided to expand overseas, opening stores in Japan, the UK, and Mexico, as well as pushing forward into the midwest. During this period they expanded from approximately sixty stores to 130, and in every one of these they wanted a book section, whether it was only one rack or a thousand square feet. They also opened a couple of superstores, including one in Tyson's Corner in Virginia and two in the suburbs of Chicago. A couple of Javier's roommates decided to move to Chicago to work at the suburban Schaumburg location, and they talked to the manager about hiring him. A week later—this is 1995—he got the call, and his new boss told him that he needed to be in Chicago in two weeks if he wanted the job. "And here I am, I've hardly ever been out of Sacramento, and I've never been out of California. But I was young and I didn't know any better and I just said, 'Sure let's do it.' I don't have any ties. Two weeks later I was on a plane to Chicago to open the Schaumburg store, which is in a suburb of Chicago. And so that's how I got here. I mean it was pretty much *bang bang*, if I thought about it now I would not have done it, you know? But I didn't know any better."

"The thing about Tower," Javier recalls, "one of the best and worst things about it is that there was no manual for anything. When

they gave you a position of responsibility, you either sank or swam, they just threw you right into the deep end. So I was born in the book fire, starting as a buyer for what was the size of a small Barnes and Noble store. And I'd never even worked retail before." He was saved a little by the fact that the majority of the big publishers were just dropshipping key titles to the stores directly, which left him free to focus on building out the other ten percent. "It was all small press shit, crazy oversized S&M books imported from Italy, Richard Kern photo books like *New York Girls*. We sold the shit

*"Here I am, I've hardly ever been out of Sacramento, and I've never been out of California. But I was young and I didn't know any better and I just said, 'Sure let's do it.'"*

out of those AK Press Loompanics on how to do everything, *How to Start Your Own Hydroponic Hot House, How to Win a Knife Fight, How to Sell Your Body to Science*. We sold a lot of books on music, a lot of really cool stuff we found." Javier really loved that kind of work, the digging and the discovery, the way that ten percent gave shape and life to the store, and as time progressed he got better and better at picking out the gems that set his store apart.

Javier worked at that location for four years, and ten years, total, for Tower, until he was let go—"That was a whole mess."—but he knew by then that books were his thing, so he began to apply to other bookshops around town. It's been said that it's easier to name the Chicago area bookstores Javier hasn't worked at than list all of those he has, but if, like me, you're not as familiar with the last quarter-century of Chicago bookselling history, a brief survey might prove useful.

Shortly after leaving Tower, Javier worked for eight months at a Crown bookstore, part of a mall chain, in what he considers the worst job he's ever had—worse, even, than stuffing *Penny Savers*—before moving on to Chicago's iconic Barbara's. He applied for a management job, but got hired as a bookseller at the Sears Tower store. After two years, he took a sabbatical from bookselling to work at a ticket agency and a health club, long enough to make

him hungry to work in books again. A friend of his told him that Barbara's was hiring for a new store in the Northwestern Memorial Hospital, off the Magnificent Mile, and so he joined Barbara's again for a couple more years, eventually managing that store and doing book buying for them. He left again, and then was contacted by Jack Cella, who was running Seminary Co-op at the time, because the MacArthur Foundation was bugging them to open a small satellite store in the Marquette Building in the Loop area, only blocks away from where Exile in Bookville is now located. Jack was convinced to hire Javier to open that store, and Javier got to work planning it out. He remembers one day going to measure the space for fixtures, and then being called back into Jack's office to learn that the project was off and that he was out of work again. But Jack moved some things around and brought Javier on, and he ended up co-managing 57th Street for three or four years alongside Laura Prail; together they brought the store into the black for the first time in nine or ten years. After three or four years, Javier left there and moved to The Book Cellar, working the floor and "doing the backlist buying, processing returns, making lattes and cheese plates and stuff like that" for another two or three years. From there it was on to The Book Stall, where he worked for a couple of years until he met Teresa Kirschbraun, who'd just opened a

*Javier with co-owner Kristin Gilbert, Exile in Bookville Chicago, Illinois*

store called City Lit. "She was about six months in," Javier recalls, "and needed a manager, and I ended up managing the store for two years." After leaving City Lit, he quit working in books for about eight months, until he ran into a couple of old friends, Jason Smith and Rachel Weaver, owners of the Book Table in Oak Park, one of the best bookstores in the Chicago area. Since they'd opened in 2003, they'd never hired a manager, but thought the time was right to do so. So Jason and Rachel hired Javier, and he worked

*It's been said that it's easier to name the Chicago area bookstores Javier hasn't worked at than list all of those he has*

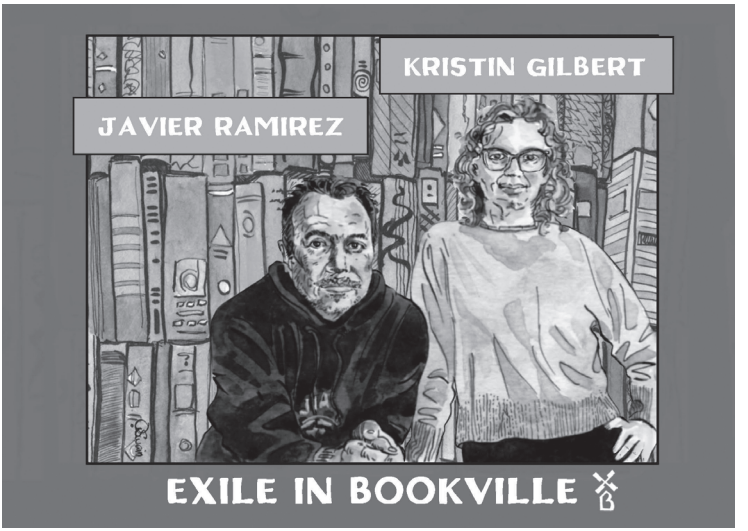
for them quite happily for another three or four years, a time he considers one of the best of his career. But Jason and Rachel did all of the buying, and Javier was getting the itch to do more than manage the day-to-day. Around this time he ran into Mary Mollman, with whom he'd worked years earlier at The Book Stall, and she mentioned that she wanted to open a new bookstore. "So I agreed to partner with her on it," Javier says, and he left The Book Table to open Madison Street Books.

The partnership lasted a little over a year, worried away by bad luck and "very different approaches to bookselling." The store opened two days before the pandemic shut everything down. Javier spent most of the months after the pandemic closed his new shop doing what booksellers across the continent and even further afield were doing: trying to shift to online and remote retail, virtual events, deliveries, and anything else he could do to keep things running. For this and other reasons, this proved a very dark time for Javier.

One of the only bright spots was the community that built up quickly around Madison Street Books. Javier was there all the time, in those early months right before the store opened and then after the pandemic closed it, twelve, fourteen or more hours a day, often into the early morning. Regulars would see him hustling at all hours and come to his aid with a coffee or in the evenings

a drink or two. "The store," he explained, "is situated in a place where people are really nice, and they would bring drinks from the bar down the street." And they supported the store in other ways, too. One of the customers who became invested in the store was Kristin Gilbert, who came every Friday and helped out in any way she could, shelving, doing odd jobs, keeping Javier company while he worked. An academic and criminologist, she wanted to see the store succeed, and at Christmas convinced her family to do all of their shopping in the shop, buying nearly $5000 worth of books. It was a necessary boost at a very tough time. Being in the bookshop gave her an idea, and as Javier's relationship with his business partner grew more strained, Kristin suggested that maybe they should open up their own bookstore together. "And the rest," Javier says, "is history."

Except if history teaches us anything, it's that it only rarely unfolds so simply. They were in the middle of the pandemic and there was little sign of when the world might return to normal. They didn't have a physical space, and didn't know when they would. Bookshop.org had just opened as competition to Amazon, and Kristin and Javier decided they could set up as an affiliate and




*Gilbert & Ramirez, North American Indies Series 2, Card #36. Art by Owen Swain.*

Exile in Bookville | 410 S Michigan Ave Suite 210
Chicago, IL
exileinbookville.com

JAVIER RAMIREZ & KRISTIN GILBERT
HOME: EXILE IN BOOKVILLE
@EXILEINBOOKVILLE @BOOKVILLEXILES
POSITION: CO-OWNERS
LISTEN TO THEIR: SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS
ASK THEM ABOUT: LIZ PHAIR'S 1993
DEBUT ALBUM *EXILE IN GUYVILLE*

#36
2023

BIBLIOASIS READ INDEPENDENTLY

*Gilbert & Ramirez, North American Indies Series 2, Card #36 (verso).*

begin to do virtual events and sales until such time as they were able to open a physical bookshop. But what should they call it?

Reader, it embarasses me to admit that I didn't know about Liz Phair's debut album *Exile in Guyville*, let alone that it had been recorded in Chicago. When Javier first told me they were calling the new bookshop Exile in Bookville, I thought it more of an existential statement: who, after a decade of struggle in the book trenches, let alone more than a quarter-century, hasn't felt themself at times an exile from the majority of humankind? Javier being Javier, I caught some of the musical reverberations, but thought more of *Exile on Main Street* or "Margaritaville," though of course that wasn't right either. "Wasting away in Martiniville"? But Javier and Kristin set me straight and expanded my musical horizons at the same time. All in a day's work for a pair of consummate booksellers.

While working hard to organize events online and build up some awareness within the community, the two tried to find them-

selves a space. But even though he'd been working in books for more than twenty-five years by this point, Javier was still beset by occasional self-doubt. So he went to a few booksellers he respected for some advice. "Do you remember Hans Weyandt?" he asked me. "I love that guy. When I first saw his bookstore, Milkweed Books, I thought, 'This is the store I want.' I'd see small presses and hard-to-find titles right next to Vintage titles. He just had the perfect mix in this small store. And it was a passionate thing, it wasn't a business thing. He told me, 'Now that you own a store, just do all of the weird shit that you've always wanted to do and every owner

*"Bookstore owners always talk about discoverability, but you limit people when you stick books in these artificial categories."*

that you worked for said no. All that shit. Don't forget about it. Reach back.' And that was the best advice I could have ever heard. Do the weird shit like separating the short stories from the rest of the fiction, or getting rid of genre categories, or selling some vinyl. Or putting mainstream shit, even on the displays, right alongside the lesser-known. Including shelf talkers from other booksellers at other bookstores from across the country. All of it." That advice, he explains, gave him the license to do his bookshop the way that he wanted. It was already there at the back of his brain, but it took Hans to help him unlock it.

After months of searching, they finally found a space a few blocks down from the Art Institute of Chicago on Michigan Avenue, in the historic and beautiful Fine Arts Building, opening it in May of 2021. It's a place with an incredible literary and cultural history, and in its early days housed both *The Dial* magazine and bookshop (in a space designed by another occupant, Frank Lloyd Wright) and Harriet Monroe's *Poetry Magazine*. The space on the second floor now occupied by Exile in Bookville had been over the past quarter-of-a-century two other, primarily used, bookstores: Selected Works and The Dial. Though they were initially worried about the lack of Main Street visibility, both fell in love with the space and its floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and large bay windows

overlooking Grant Park. It is one of the most beautiful small bookstores I've ever been in.

And also, surprising no one that has known Javier (or gotten to know Kristin) over the years, it's also one of the best stocked. Even with buying for my own bookstore, with paying more attention than most to what's new and forthcoming, I walked out of there on my October visit with more books than I have almost anywhere else. Signed copies of Nick Cave's *Faith, Hope and Carnage* and Warren Ellis's *Nina Simone's Gum*; they handsold me on Caoilinn Hughes's (brilliant) *The Wild Laughter*, and too many other books to mention. While I was there Margo Price came in to sign a stack of her memoir and visited for half an hour. It all made this provincial bookseller and publisher feel like he was in a magical place. Because I was.

The conversation drifts to the organization of the shop. One of the first things you might notice when you walk into Exile is that they don't distinguish genre in the fiction section: there are no literature, sci-fi, fantasy, mystery designations: each book, irrespective of whatever label the publisher may have affixed to it, sits next to whatever author happens to be next in the alphabet. Colleen Hoover rubs wrappers with Michel Houellebecq, Stephen King with László Krasznahorkai. I ask Javier about this, if only because on the surface it seems a touch counterintuitive.

"Bookstore owners always talk about discoverability, but you limit people when you stick books in these artificial categories. I've had people pick up my favourite sci-fi novel and bring it up to the cash, and I tell them, 'That's one of my favourite sci-fi novels' and they pause and say, 'Oh, I don't read sci-fi, but I love the jacket so I'm going to give it a shot.' And then they come back and ask if we have any more. I've had so many conversations about this over the years. We did an event with Paul Tremblay and Stephen Graham Jones and Grady Hendrix on Zoom and I told them about our approach and they just looked at me and said 'What? Thank you so much. This is how it starts. If a bookstore does that, we have a chance: we're no longer put in the corner. People can discover us as they discover anyone else.' They were so grateful for us doing that." But it's also good for readers, too. They can relax and let discovery happen more naturally, and not worry about whether

or not they're capable of reading capital-L literature. Forced to abandon certain preconceptions, anything can happen.

One of the things that Javier and Kristin are proudest of is the community that's built up quickly around Exile over the last couple of years, of writers, readers, students, other booksellers, in Chicago and from across the country, and indeed the globe. Some of this is accidental, though much is due to the hard work of making connections. Stocking local writers' books and bringing them in for signings and events. Connecting people who might not otherwise have met. Hosting rep nights for area booksellers, providing a space for booksellers to meet other booksellers from other stores, and to learn from publishers and sales reps what it is they're excited about. Helping out other booksellers, both in Chicago and elsewhere, with advice and guidance. Teaching classes on bookselling, to pass along some hard-won knowledge to make the road a little smoother for the next generation. Hosting literary events, including with writers not only outside the city but outside of the country. Judging literary prizes: in the last few years Javier has been a judge for the National Book Award, the Kirkus Prize and the newly established Republic of Consciousness Prize for Independent Publishing. The real life of a top-shelf bookseller is one of unmitigated hustle, but without it that community would be a much more sparsely populated place.

The community he's most committed to is the world of independent booksellers. He admits that this sense of camaraderie is what people outside of the industry seem most shocked by. "What? You mean you get together at trade shows and actually share ideas? It's foreign to so many people. But though it may seem like booksellers are in competition with each other, we're not, we're all the same thing, we're trying to get books into readers' hands, and we're all, to be honest with you, all the good independent bookstores are really just one big store. You know, we're like a franchise, we just have different owners who have different ideas and interests. To be honest, I think we're all basically just Tower Books and Records still. Tower had a lot of stores and every store did something different, but we all took from each other and shared with each other.

And that's what makes our group, our tribe, so special. We're not competing with each other at all. We have a common goal."

What excites him most now as a bookseller, beyond finally having the control to make a shop what he wants it to be, is that for booksellers (and the bookstores in which they work) to succeed they actually have to be booksellers. The future of bookselling, as a pandemic slogan drove home, is booksellers. "It's about paying attention," Javier says of being a good bookseller. "Doing all the small things they don't teach at ABA, but that make a real difference. I read an article in a literary journal about the future of handselling when I was working at The Book Stall, and it had this quote: "We can't just put books out and expect people to buy them." We have to be booksellers now. We have to be better than we used to be, we have to elevate our game. We need to show our customers that we know what we're doing, that we're the experts, that they can trust us, so that they forget about fucking Amazon and come back again and again and again, if only to ask what else we have." And this expertise has to be reflected in everything we do, in how we manage our displays, the books we stock and what we put them alongside, how we shape and serve our various communities.

> *"To be honest with you, all the good independent bookstores are really just one big store . . . We all took from each other and shared with each other."*

In May 2023, Exile in Bookville will celebrate its second year in business as a physical store. The days are still long, they still can't afford any employees, but Kristin and Javier are finally in the position where they can begin to take the odd day off, allow the other to work the store alone. And they're excited about where the store is, and where it's heading. "Every day someone from somewhere else in the US or elsewhere in the world," Javier tells me, "comes into the store and after browsing for a little while approaches the counter and tells Kristin and me that this is one of the best bookstores they've ever been in. I don't think anyone has ever said that unwarranted. We don't ask them what they think, they just say it.

They feel the need to say it. And it feels really good, because it feels like, after all the shit I went through, this is where I was meant to be, this is where I'm going to be. This is my last stop. This is it."

*by Dan Wells*

## BACKLIST SPOTLIGHT

*The Party Wall* by Catherine Leroux

*Winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Translation and the France-Quebec Prize | Shortlisted for the 2016 Giller Prize Selected for Indies Introduce Summer / Fall 2016*

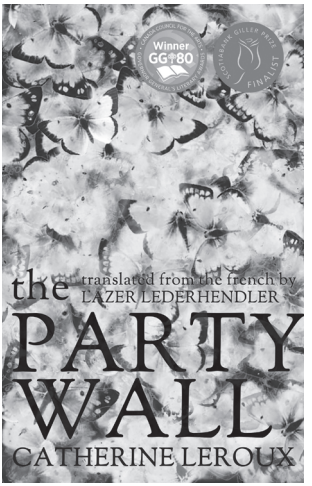
Catherine Leroux's *The Party Wall* shifts between stories about pairs joined in surprising ways. A woman learns that she may not be the biological mother of her own son despite having given birth to him; a brother and sister unite, as their mother dies, to search for their long-lost father; two young sisters take a detour home, unaware of the tragedy that awaits; and a political couple is shaken by the revelation of their own shared, if equally unknown, history. Lyrical, intelligent, and profound, *The Party Wall* is luminously human, a surreally unforgettable journey through the barriers that can both separate us and bring us together.

### CANARIES IN THE COAL MINE

*A note from Catherine Leroux*

I started writing *The Party Wall* in 2011. At the time, the book felt slightly hyperbolic, especially the chapters situated in the near future: Canada recovering from years of right-wing, divisive, autocratic government; the Prairies' soil gone sterile due to droughts; the coasts flooded by torrential rains. Political and racist violence permeating every sphere of life.

More than a decade later, it doesn't quite seem like an exaggeration anymore. Back then, the effects of climate change were akin to the first subtle, almost unreal symptoms of an illness, while today,



*(L) Cover design by Kate Hargreaves. (R) Catherine Leroux.*

they are inescapable in their devastating potency. The turbulence of the world in which Ariel and Marie evolved now seems tame compared to the schizophrenic landscape created by social and political leaders, both abroad and at home.

What are we to make of these stories, that could have been read a decade ago as anticipatory literary attempts to define still-hazy outlines on the horizon, now that these shapes have materialized into our new reality? I believe it's a matter of shifting one's perspective. Through the crises, the characters still love and fight and dream and fail. They still come to life regardless of the time in which they are read. Because of that, they remain capable of opening spaces in our minds where we can think and feel our present, where we may hold hope.

I've always liked the idea of novelists as canaries in the coal mine. I did wonder what they might do once the gas has filled the tunnel. For now, against all odds, they are still singing.

*Selected and edited by Editorial Assistant Ashley Van Elswyk, the Backlist Spotlight is a monthly feature on our blog. See biblioasis.com for additional columns.*

## SWIMMING FROM THE FLAMES

*by Pauline Holdstock*

### FINDING TIME

There were so many babies. Finding the time did become a problem. And the room. It did not help at all to know that time and space were curved. She tried not to plot her days like positions on a graph. Nothing was more linear than her own time; it was a track, and the space she wanted to reach was an empty room upon it, a cube that strangely diminished at her approach, so that she managed to slip in only briefly before emerging on the other side. Often, just as she was about to step inside, the babies themselves would be there. Ma, ma, ma. Needing. Kneading her heart into pulp until she had to tear it out, scoop it out for them, doling: Here. And here. Take. Take. Scooping and hollowing herself out, eyes on the narrow door. Let me go. Until she would step over the wiggling babies (still needing, wanting more) and close the door. Still they would be there when she came out the other side. Her babies happy now, no longer needing, forcing her with their oblivion to bend to them: I'm here, let me come back. Lacing their lives to hers with their nonchalance.

It was not that she did not enjoy her life on the track, but inside the cube space was cornered, time suspended and everything was possible, even falling off the track, which could be dreamed here in immunity, no repercussions ever.

But there was another danger. She might emerge incomplete, part of her life still inside the cube. Then her hands would muddle at the soup, the shoelaces, numb, her ears open to receive the plaints and whimpers, the needings when they began again, her eyes fixed and distant while she tried to remember what it was she had lost.

### LOSING HEART

Not her heart you understand, but heart. Sometimes she would rise to a day rare and shining and see too clearly its place upon the graph, a small square, thirty-eight large squares along, an indeterminate number, she would not guess, from the edge. Then she would want to take it and make of it something wonderful,

a keepsake in silver, exquisite, intricate and polished, but there would be a baby crying and porridge burning and all the small shoes not cleaned and the phone ringing and the cat walking by with a bird still flapping . . . dear God! The little shining day all

## BOOKSELLER BUZZ

### *Confessions with Keith* by Pauline Holdstock

"This is the funniest mid-life crisis, journal keeping book I've ever read. Actually it's the ONLY mid-life crisis, journal keeping book I've ever read. But I'm sure if I'd read more, I'd still say it was the funniest. Vita Glass is a hoot! . . . Day after day, recounting the lousy turn her life has taken, and culminates in leaving—with the kids—when her husband goes on a trip, only Vita goes in the opposite direction. What will happen in the end? Life, that's what!"

*Linda Bond, Auntie's Bookstore, Spokane,* WA

"Pauline Holdstock is the kind of writer who can immerse you completely in one character's mind, making you feel the heartbreak of their world, and she somehow manages this while being relentlessly funny."

*Meghan Desjardins, River Bookshop, Amherstburg,* ON

When her husband abruptly leaves their 20-year marriage behind for parts unknown, aspiring writer Vita is left to cope with four unruly kids, a house constantly on the verge of collapse, her career, and countless other imminent fires. Written as journal entries over the course of these crises, this very funny novel is a slow burn, building on one domestic disaster after another, leading to a very satisfying conclusion that you won't see coming."

*Seth, Carmichael's Bookstore, Louisville,* KY

"Best read at the laundromat during the spin cycle, or with a cup of tea in a messy kitchen on a cold morning."

*Eileen McCormick, Green Apple Books, San Francisco,* CA

trampled, muddied somewhere underneath the torn snow jacket and the spilled box of Cheerios out in the hall, while she and the boy shed tears for the bird they thought saved (in a box of wood shavings) suddenly dead, its heart sticking out of it like a pebble.

*Excerpted from* Swimming From the Flames *(Turnstone, 1995). Pauline Holdstock's latest book is* Confessions with Keith *(Biblioasis, 2022), an outrageously comic novel about marriage, motherhood, and mid-life crisis.*

## JEREMY GARBER ON MICHAEL HINGSTON'S *TRY NOT TO BE STRANGE*

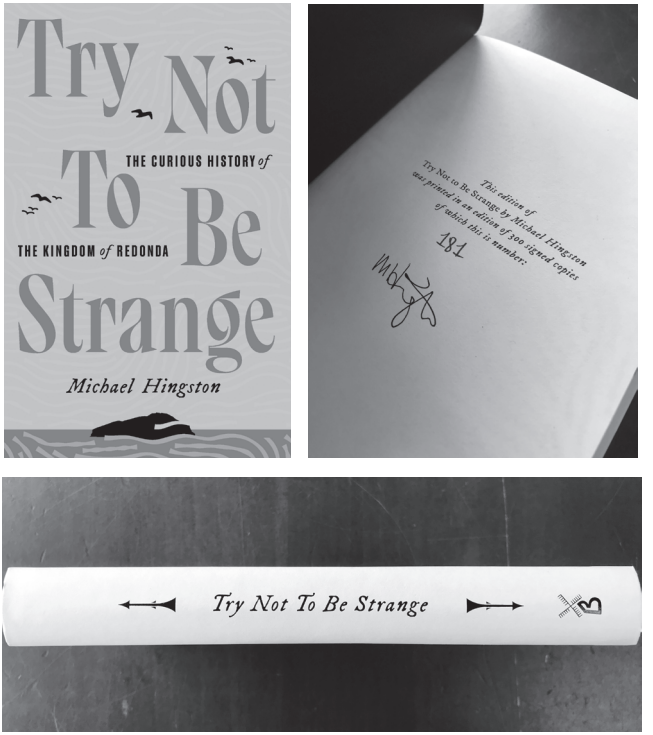
It began with a single line in Javier Marías's *All Souls*, read some nine years ago and followed that very evening by a couple of frustrated online hours trying to discover, uncover, learn, discern, find, and figure out the truth behind the island kingdom of Redonda (if, in fact, it even really existed in the first place). Whereas my own scant pursuit of the Redondan legend lasted not much longer than it took to read the novel from whence I'd first heard of it . . . Michael Hingston's own quest spanned almost a decade, thousands of dollars, and a pair of bloodied shins.

Hingston's *Try Not to Be Strange* is not just the curious history of the kingdom of Redonda, but also an unbelievable, spellbinding, and impressively researched one. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and moving across the dark back of time into present day, *Try Not to Be Strange* offers the true tale of the tiny Caribbean micronation (smaller than a single square mile) and the many (often conflicting) claims to its sovereign leadership. From the kingdom's monarchical origin as a birthday present to a teenager (who'd later find acclaim as a popular science fiction writer) to an inside joke among bookish friends to an ongoing hoax of literary proportions to disparate disputes of rightful heirs, Hingston's book is an altogether wild ride.

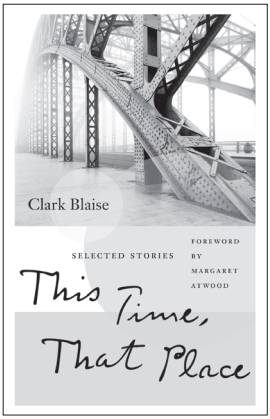
With moxie and enthusiasm aplenty, *Try Not to Be Strange* bestows upon readers the same quixotic, obsessive passion which no doubt first inspired its author. From the initial spark of curiosity

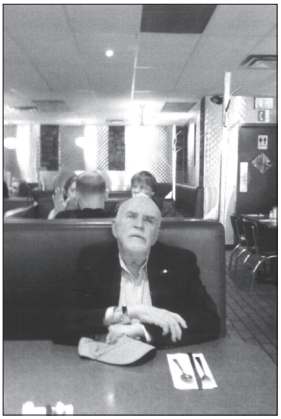
to his culminating pilgrimage, Hingston's writing resounds with an infectious, irrepressible zeal. While the story of Redonda is engrossing enough all on its own, Hingston's personal stake in the mystery adds lively dimensions of both color and character. Whether already steeped in Redondan lore or entirely new to the diminutive rocky realm, *Try Not to Be Strange* is sure to amuse, enchant, and quite possibly have you wondering why the hell you now feel compelled to get there all of a sudden too (and imagining just how mesmerizing it would be to see the endemic Redonda ground dragons up close as well!).

*Jeremy Garber is a bookseller at Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon.*

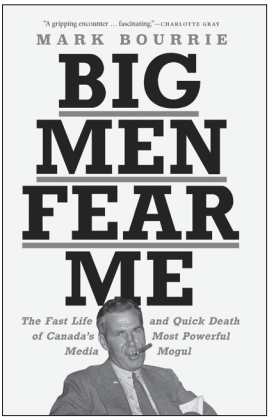



*Designed by Natalie Olsen of Kisscut Design,* Try Not to Be Strange *is available as both a trade paperback and a signed limited edition hardcover.*

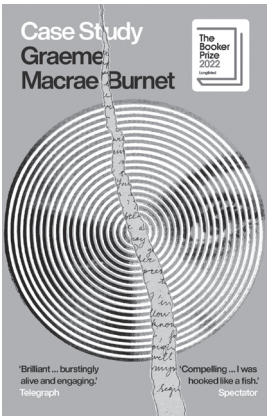


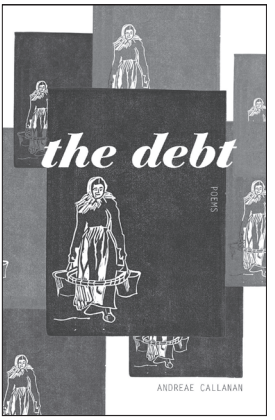
The selected stories of CLARK BLAISE, *This Time, That Place*, has been praised in the *New York Times*, *Globe and Mail*, and *Toronto Star*. Featuring a foreword by Margaret Atwood, *This Time, That Place* has been called "not only a stunning collection of fiction, [but] one of considerable importance" by the *Star*.



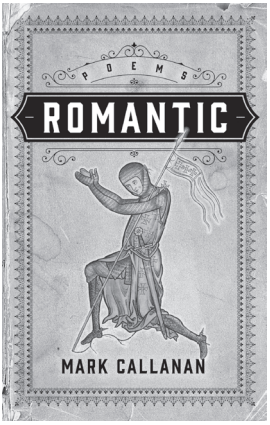

*Big Men Fear Me: The Fast Life and Quick Death of Canada's Most Powerful Media Mogul* by MARK BOURRIE has been recognized as a remarkable contribution to Canadian history and biography by the *Globe and Mail*, *Quill & Quire*, and *Literary Review of Canada*. In the *Toronto Star*, Nancy Wigston writes,"it's like little else we're likely to read this year."

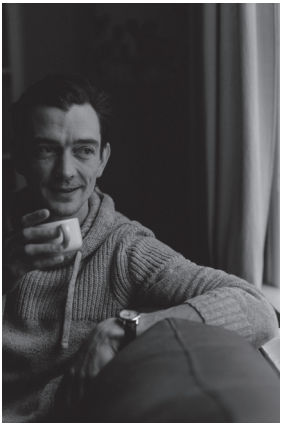



Among numerous other accolades, *Case Study* by GRAEME MACRAE BURNET was longlisted for the 2022 Booker Prize and was selected by the *New York Times* as one their "100 Notable Books of 2022." *Case Study* has been reviewed widely in outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *Star Tribune*, *Chicago Review of Books*, *Guardian*, and the *Times of London*. *Case Study* is currently longlisted for the 2023 Dublin Literary Award.

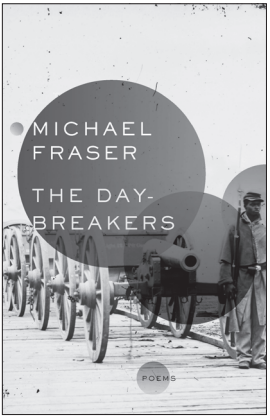



*The Debt* by ANDREAE CALLANAN was longlisted for the 2022 Fred Cogswell Award for Excellence in Poetry. Named after one of Canada's literary giants, the award is given annually to honour a work of Canadian poetic excellence.

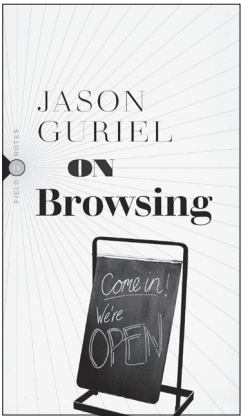




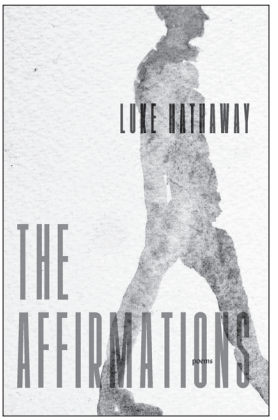
*Romantic* by MARK CALLANAN was shortlisted for the Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry. The prize is offered annually for a book of poetry by a non-US citizen published anywhere in the world.

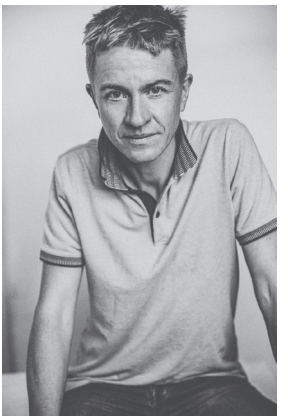


*The Day-Breakers*, a poetry collection by MICHAEL FRASER that gives voice to the untold stories of Black Canadian soldiers who fought for the Union in the American Civil War, appeared on four CBC Books lists and received rave reviews in the *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Toronto Star*.

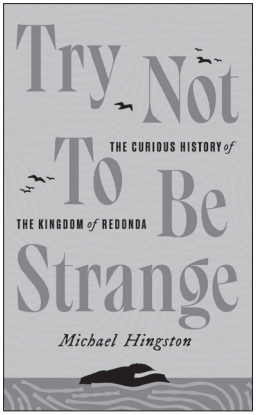


A *Nylon* Must-Read Book for November 2022 and an American Bookseller Association IndieNext pick for December, *On Browsing* by JASON GURIEL has been named a *Times Literary Supplement* Best Book of 2022 by poet A.E. Stallings.

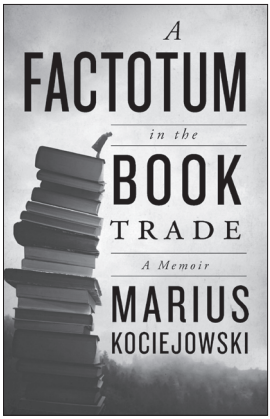




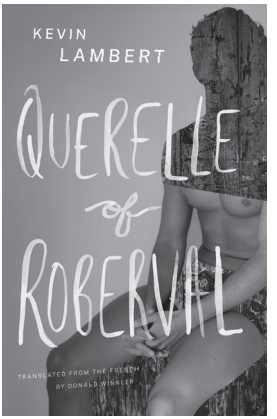
*The Affirmations*, LUKE HATHAWAY's fourth collection of poems, has been named a *Times* Best Poetry Book of 2022, one of only five books selected this year by Graeme Richardson. Winner of the 2021 Confederation of Poets prize, *The Affirmations* also received rave reviews in *Ploughshares* and *Tyee*.



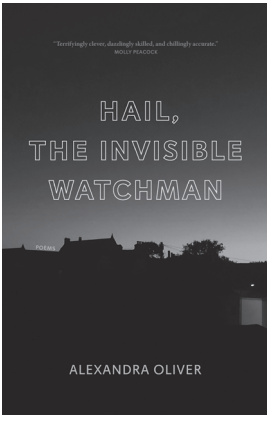
*Try Not to Be Strange: The Curious History of the Kingdom of Redonda* by MICHAEL HINGSTON has been called "a wonderfully entertaining book" by critic Michael Dirda in the *Washington Post*. It has also received glowing reviews in the *New York Times*, *Toronto Star*, and *Quill & Quire*.

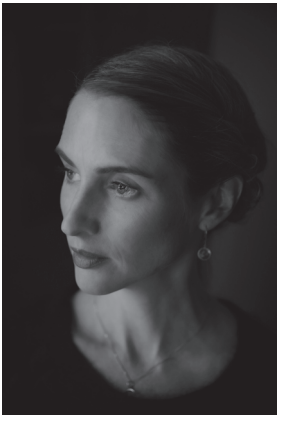


*A Factotum in the Book Trade* by MARIUS KOCIEJOWSKI has been reviewed in the *New Yorker*. Review Max Norman writes, "it is a representative slice, a core sample, of the rich and partly vanished world of bookselling." *A Factotum in the Book Trade* has also been praised in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Spectator*, *Globe and Mail*, *New Criterion*, and the *Washington Post*, where critic Michael Dirda calls the memoir "enthralling ... spiky and forthright."

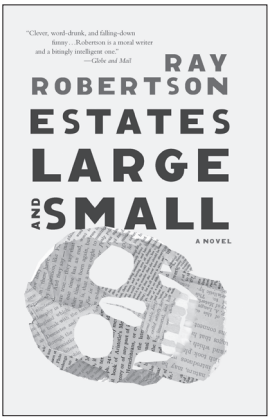


Called by Molly Young of the *New York Times* "the erotic Québécois novel about labor conflict that we've all been waiting for," KEVIN LAMBERT's sophomore novel *Querelle of Roberval* (trans. Donald Winkler) was shortlisted for the Atwood Gibson Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and received rave reviews in the *Globe and Mail*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Literary Review of Canada*, *Toronto Star*, Buzzfeed, and *Artsfuse*, among other outlets.

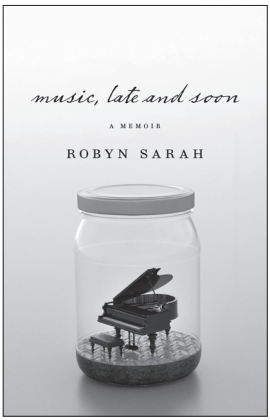




ALEXANDRA OLIVER's third poetry collection, *Hail, the Invisible Watchman*, received glowing praise in *Quill & Quire* and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.




RAY ROBERTSON's latest novel, *Estates Large and Small*, was a *New York Times* New and Noteworthy book. This bookseller favourite—a story about life, death, philosophy, and trying to sell secondhand books—was also glowingly reviewed in the *Toronto Star* and the *Literary Review of Canada.*




*Music, Late and Soon* by ROBYN SARAH was shortlisted for the J.I. Segal Award for Best Quebec Book on a Jewish Theme. Launched in 1968, the awards honour the memory of Canadian Yiddish poet Jacob Isaac Segal (1896–1954).

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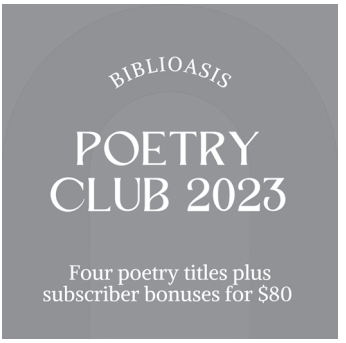


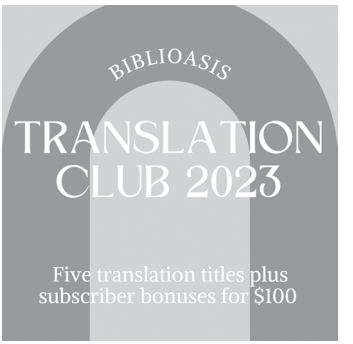



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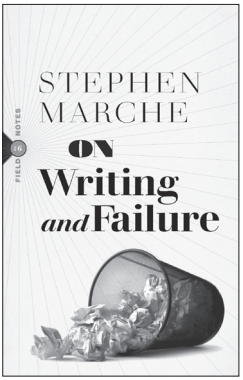
## FORTHCOMING FROM BIBLIOASIS

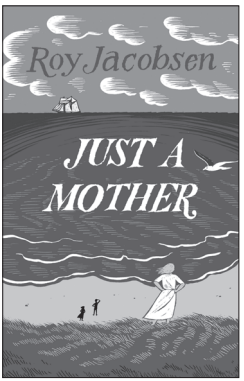



*On Writing and Failure* (Field Notes #6)
Stephen Marche

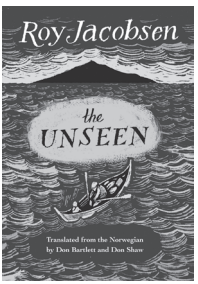
*On Writing and Failure: Or, On the Peculiar Perseverance Required to Endure the Life of a Writer* contemplates failure as the essence of the writer's life. Writing is, and always will be, an act defined by failure. The best plan is to just get used to it.

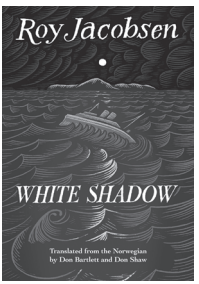
*Just a Mother*
Roy Jacobsen
Translated by Don Bartlett and Don Shaw

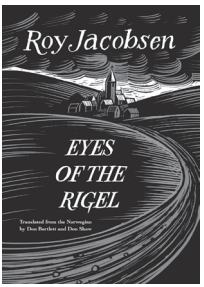
Ingrid has returned to Barrøy, but the war still casts its long shadow. As letters from friends arrive with news of a society undergoing dramatic changes, Ingrid must decide which stories to keep to herself, and which she should she bring to light.




*Other titles in The Barrøy Chronicles*

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