

Véhicule Press

Spring/Summer 2022

POETRY

Lorna Goodison

Jim Johnstone

FICTION

Dimitri Nasrallah

Baharan Banihamedi





Véhicule Press

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHERS

Like most of our colleagues, we've been scrambling. Supply chain disruptions, backed-up printers and paper shortages—COVID aftershocks, all—have created unprecedented delays getting our books into stores. And yet, we move into the new year with continued momentum from an expectation-exceeding 2021, and are grateful to the readers who have supported us. We've assembled a dynamite list for Spring/Summer 2022, which can be summed up as a season of firsts. On deck is a new novel by Dimitri Nasrallah, his first written entirely in the voice of a woman; a novel by acclaimed Iranian-Canadian actress Baharan Baniahmadi, her first in English; an anthology of Millennial short fiction, the first of its kind in Canada; and Lorna Goodison's first Canadian collection of poetry in nearly a decade. Don't forget to check out the back pages where we dig deeper into some of last season's titles and remember a legendary Montreal poet. À bientôt.

Publishers

Simon Dardick

Nancy Marrelli

Associate Publisher

Carmine Starnino

Cover art by François Vigneault

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PRINTED IN CANADA



Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts



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HOTLINE

Dimitri Nasrallah

It's 1986, and Muna Heddad is in a bind. After escaping Lebanon's civil war, she'd hoped to work as a French teacher in Montreal, but no one trusts her to teach the language. The only work Muna can get is at a weight-loss centre. All day, she takes calls from people phoning a hotline who are responding to ads seen in magazines or on TV. These strangers all have so much to say once someone shows interest—marriages gone bad, parents dying, isolation, personal inadequacies. Even as her new life faces invisible barriers at every turn, on the phone Muna is privy to the city's deepest secrets.

Following international acclaim for *Niko* (2011) and *The Bleeds* (2018), Nasrallah's intimate new novel is a vivid elegy to Montreal in the 1980s. Highlighting the era's marginalization of migrants, *Hotline's* endearing portrait of struggle and perseverance raises issues that are still alarmingly relevant today.

"Nasrallah possesses superb powers of description. With a few deft strokes, he delivers a character's essence and motivations.

— *The Globe and Mail*

"Nasrallah has created complete worlds that you carry around in your head after you put the book down, worlds to which you want to return." — *Montreal Review of Books*



Dimitri Nasrallah is the author of four novels, including *The Bleeds* (2018). He was born in Lebanon in 1977, and lived in Kuwait, Greece, and Dubai before moving to Canada. His internationally acclaimed books have garnered nominations for CBC Canada Reads, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and the Grand Prix du Livre de Montréal, and won the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction and the McAuslan First Book Prize.

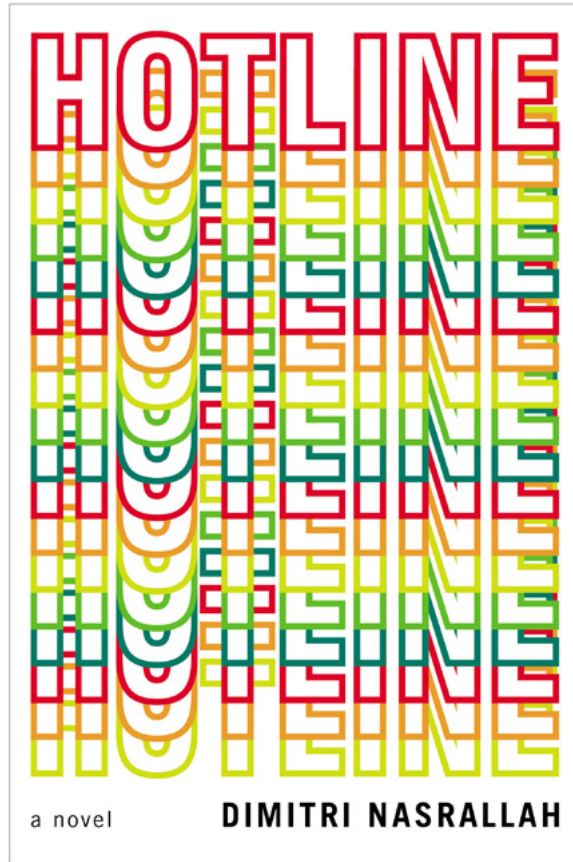
NOVEL • MARCH 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-594-0 • \$21.95 CDN

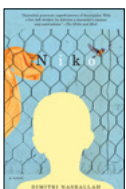
TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 280 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-600-8 • \$13.99

A vivid elegy to the 1980s—and a deeply endearing portrait of struggle, perseverance, and bonding.



Also by Dimitri Nasrallah



Niko

ISBN: 978-1-55065-311-3
 \$19.95 CDN
 5 ½ x 8 ½ • 255 PP
 EPUB AVAILABLE



The Bleeds

ISBN: 978-1-55065-480-6
 \$19.95 CDN
 5 ½ x 7 ½ • 244 PP
 EPUB AVAILABLE

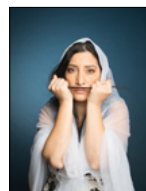
PROPHETESS

Baharan Baniahmadi

In the slums of Tehran, seven-year-old Sara witnesses the horrific murder of her sister Setayesh, an event leaves her in shock and unable to speak. As the neighbourhood frantically searches for the missing girl, Sara is locked inside herself, unable to tell her parents or police all she knows.

Over time, the mute Sara develops a strange allergic reaction, in which hair covers her face every time a man approaches her. One day in school, when an imam gets too close, she faints. After Sara reawakens, classmates show her video of her speaking freely and eloquently while unconscious... in Polish. These are only the first of many unexpected developments in Sara's life, as she grapples with how to live with her sister's memory in a world that abuses women from a very early age.

Prophetess is a fearless novel of gripping and surreal turns that push the limits of the imagination in their collision of tradition and nonconformity. Baharan Baniahmadi has crafted a wild, allegorical interrogation of trauma, women's rights, and religious tradition.



Baharan Baniahmadi

is an Iranian actress and writer based in Canada. After working with many international stage directors such as Ariane Mnouchkine, Amirreza Koohestani, and Izumi Ashizawa, Baniahmadi switched to cinema following the success of her third film, "The Canon of the Accident." In 2018, she immigrated to Canada, where she continues to play roles across stage, film, and television in English, French, Persian and Arabic. With numerous published stories and a bestselling memoir published in Iran, *Prophetess* serves as her English-language debut.

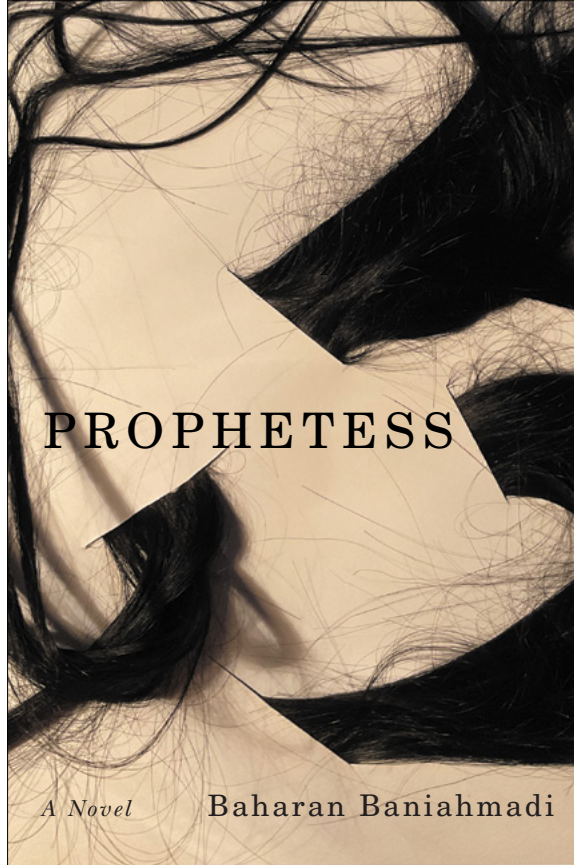
NOVEL • MAY 2022

ISBN: 978-1-550-65595-7 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 180 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-601-5 • \$13.99

An unflinching allegorical novel that explores trauma, women's rights, and religious tradition.



Recommended Fiction



Book of Wings
Tawhida Tanya Evanson

ISBN: 978-1-55065-564-3
\$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US
5 x 7 ½ • 150 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE



Swing in the House and Other Stories
Anita Anand

ISBN: 978-1-55065-398-4
\$18.00 CDN • \$18.00 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 180 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

AFTER REALISM

24 STORIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Edited by André Forget

After Realism: 24 Stories for the 21st Century is the first anthology to represent the generation of millennial writers now making their mark. Diverse, sophisticated, and ambitious in scope, the short stories in this ground breaking book are an essential starting point for anyone interested in daring alternatives to the realist tradition that dominated 20th century English-language fiction. *After Realism* offers twenty-five distinctive talents who are pushing against the boundaries of the “real” in aesthetically and politically charged ways—forging their styles from influences that range from myth to autofiction, sci-fi to fairy tale, documentary to surrealism.

The selection is accompanied by a comprehensive and provocative essay by editor André Forget that explains the themes, tendencies and concerns of this group. In bearing witness to an extraordinary flowering of contemporary fiction, *After Realism* will supply a new standard for Canadian writing.

Contributors include:

Jean-Marc Ah Sen	Sofia Mostaghimi
Carleigh Baker	Téa Mutonji
Paige Cooper	Fawn Parker
David Huebert	Casey Plett
Jessica Johns	Rudrapriya Rathore
Cody Klippenstein	Naben Ruthnum
Julie Mannell	John Elizabeth Stintzi



André Forget was born in Toronto and raised in Mount Forest, Ontario. The former editor-in-chief of *The Puritan* and a contributing editor to *Canadian Notes & Queries*, his work has appeared in a variety of magazines and newspapers in Canada and the United States.

ANTHOLOGY • APRIL 2022

ISBN: 978-1-550-65596-4 • \$22.95 CDN • \$18.95 US

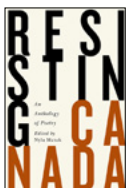
TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 300 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-602-2 • \$14.99

The first anthology to represent the generation of millennial writers now making their mark.

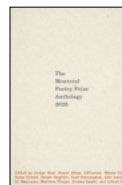


Recommended Anthologies



**Resisting Canada:
An Anthology of Poetry**
Edited by Nyla Matuk

ISBN: 978-1-55065-533-9
\$22.95 CDN • \$17.95 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 280 PP



**The Montreal Poetry Prize
Anthology 2020**
Edited by Yusef
Komunyakaa, Wendy
Cope, Jordan Abel et al

ISBN: 978-1-55065-569-8
\$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 280 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

THE STRANGEST DREAM

CANADIAN COMMUNISTS, THE SPY TRIALS, AND THE COLD WAR, *Third Edition*

Merrily Weisbord

Lauded as the most eloquent book about Canadian communists and written like drama, *The Strangest Dream* animates the history and life of militants from the 1930's to Khrushchev's 1956 denunciations about Stalin.

An antidote to recurrent anti-communist vitriol, *The Strangest Dream* evokes not only the struggle "to make a better world," but the warmth, generosity, songs, theatre, art, and exhilaration of party members for whom comradeship meant a way of life. Merrily Weisbord's research and contacts unearth historical documents and rare testimonies, including that of Canada's only communist MP, and of the accused in the Cold War spy trials.

The Strangest Dream is witness to the heyday and legacy of Canadian communists' courage and social conscience, and to the forces that destroyed their dreams. Published originally in 1983, this Third Edition contains a new preface by the author, additional photographs, and previously unpublished letters.

"A generation of radicals comes to life in their own words and feelings as passionate, complicated, frequently attractive and certainly compelling human beings." — Rick Salutin



Merrily Weisbord is a Canadian literary non-fiction writer, documentary screenwriter and broadcaster. *The Love Queen of Malabar*, a memoir of her longtime friendship with the late Indian writer Kamala Das, was a finalist for the 2010 Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction, the QWF Mavis Gallant Prize for Non-fiction, and the Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction.

LITERARY NON-FICTION • MAY 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-599-5 • \$22.95 CDN • \$18.95 US

TRADE PAPER • 5½ x 8½ • 300 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-605-3 • \$13.99

Witness to the heyday and legacy of Canadian communists' courage and social conscience.

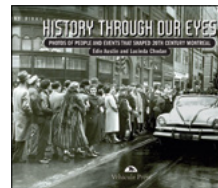


Recommended Non-Fiction



Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage
Marcel Trudel

ISBN: 978-1-55065-327-4
\$27.95 CDN • \$27.95 US
9 X 6 • 255 PP



History Through Our Eyes: Photos of People and Events That Shaped 20th Century Montreal
Edie Austin and Lucinda Chodan

ISBN: 978-1-55065-554-4
\$39.95 CDN • \$29.95 US
9 X 12 • 200 PP

MOTHER MUSE

Lorna Goodison

Lorna Goodison's first poetry collection to be published in Canada in over nine years, *Mother Muse* heralds the return of a major voice. The poems in Goodison's new book move boldly and range widely; here are praise songs alongside laments; autobiography shares pages with the collective past. In her exquisitely lyrical evocations of Jamaican lore and tradition, Goodison has always shown another side of history. While celebrating a wide cross-section of women—from Mahalia Jackson to Sandra Bland—*Mother Muse* focuses on two under-regarded “mothers” in Jamaican music: Sister Mary Ignatius, who nurtured many of Jamaica's most gifted musicians, and celebrated dancer Anita “Margarita” Mahfood. These important figures lead a collection of formidable scope and intelligence, one that seamlessly blends the personal and the political.



Lorna Goodison is the author of 18 books of poetry, fiction, and essays. Her memoir, *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People* (2009) was a finalist for the Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction and the Trillium Award, and won the B.C. Award for Canadian Non-Fiction. Born in Jamaica, Goodison has taught at the University of Toronto and the University of Michigan, and now lives in Halfmoon Bay, British Columbia. She was Jamaica's Poet Laureate from 2017 to 2020 and was the recipient of The Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2019.

“Lorna Goodison has come to be recognised as a hugely significant and influential contemporary author. Through poems rooted in her Caribbean heritage and upbringing she has created a body of enchanting, intelligent and socially aware poetry in the authentic registers of her own tongue.”

— Simon Armitage

“Lorna Goodison's language is often spare and exact... It is an English deeply inflected with the speech, life and rhythms of Jamaica.” — Kaie Kellough

POETRY • APRIL 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-598-8 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

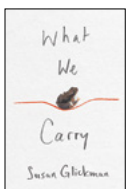
TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 96 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-604-6 • \$13,99

A poetry collection of formidable scope and intelligence,
blending the personal and the political.

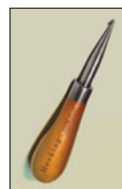


Recommended Poetry



What We Carry
Susan Glickman

ISBN: 978-1-55065-521-6
\$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US
5 x 7 ½ • 78 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE



Hooking
Mary Dalton

ISBN: 978-1-55065-351-9
\$18.00 CDN • \$18.00 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 88 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

INFINITY NETWORK

Jim Johnstone

Infinity Network completes Jim Johnstone's ambitious trilogy which began with *Dog Ear* (2014) and continued with *The Chemical Life* (2017). Central to each volume is the struggle with identity at a time of great social change. Justifiably acclaimed for his exquisite rendering of acute states of mind, Johnstone explores pressing questions about the ubiquity of surveillance and social media, and evokes, with a powerful intelligence, the neurosis of living in a consumerism-obsessed era.

Infinity Network not only attempts to capture the changing ideas of personhood, but also tries to create a new kind of verse to track it—a complex, bold, stark style able to give uncanny interiority to our digital dreads. As our lives descend further into disinformation and algorithmic control, Johnstone has emerged as the laureate of, in Keats's words, truth "proved upon our pulses."

"From selfhood to self-consumption, gunfire to the 'black gasp suck(ing) back into the gun,' the poems in *Infinity Network* loop, reverse, and reiterate, caught in the viral cycle that characterizes the violent, post-truth, solipsistic cultural moment. Poetry cannot, and should not, escape the consequences of the echo chamber we have made, and Johnstone is daring in his willingness to take it on as subject, image, and sound."

— Diane Seuss, author of *frank: sonnets*



Jim Johnstone is the author of five collections of poetry, including *The Chemical Life* (2017). He is the recipient of a CBC Literary Award, *The Fiddlehead's* Ralph Gustafson Poetry Prize, and Poetry's Editors Prize for Book Reviewing. He curates the Anstruther Books imprint at Palimpsest Press, where he published *The Next Wave: An Anthology of 21st Century Canadian Poetry* (2018). He lives in Toronto.

POETRY • APRIL 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-597-1 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 78 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-603-9 • \$11.99

Explores pressing questions about the ubiquity
of surveillance and social media.

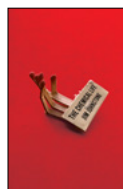


Also by Jim Johnstone



Dog Ear

ISBN: 978-1-55065-374-8
\$16.00 CDN • \$16.00 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 78 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE



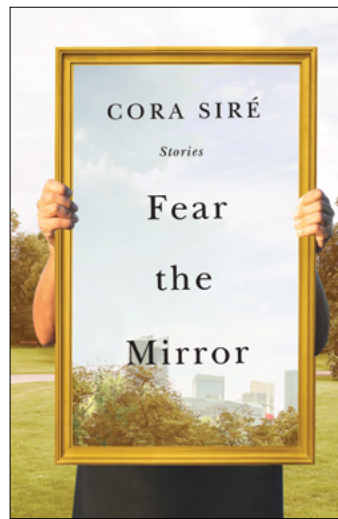
The Chemical Life

ISBN: 978-1-55065-482-0
\$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 88 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

FEAR THE MIRROR

Cora Siré

In *Fear the Mirror*, Cora Siré weaves together a web of interconnected stories to portray the people who have left significant marks on her life. A feminist mother who fled Estonia. A father who arrived in Canada with nothing but a violin. A Catalan boy whose parent is dying. A love triangle among novelists. Bodies stolen in the night and never found. Blending essay, memoir, and fiction, the Montréal author draws on her encounters in Latin America and elsewhere to compose loving and conflicted portraits — of family members, writers, filmmakers, and gravediggers — culminating in the persistent legacies and strange alchemies that haunt the person she sees in the mirror. In this masterful fifth book, Siré has written her most urgent, beguiling, and personal work to date.



Praise for *Behold Things Beautiful*:

“One of those rare novels that steeps its readers fully in a fictional reality, and at the same time spurs them to learn more about the history that helped inspire it.” —*The Ottawa Review of Books*

SHORT STORIES • ESPLANADE FICTION

ISBN: 978-1-55065-577-3 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 240 PP

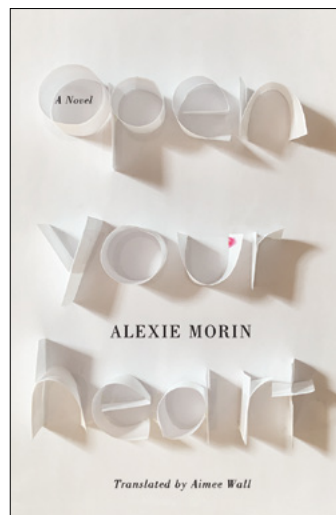
EPUB: 978-1-55065-585-8 • \$12.99

OPEN YOUR HEART

Alexie Morin

Translated from the French by Aimee Wall

In this frank and unforgettable debut novel, celebrated Québécois writer Alexie Morin becomes the subject of her own story as she places a childhood friendship under a microscope. Set in a small industrial town in Quebec during the 1990s, *Open Your Heart* recounts the story of a difficult friendship between two girls brought together by illness. One girl suffers from severe strabismus, while the other was born blue. The first, defiant, feels that something is wrong with her, while the second is an angelic child loved by all. One becomes a writer, and the other dies at eighteen, during an operation that should have saved her life.



In *Open Your Heart*, Morin stakes out an exceptional pursuit for truth in these old memories as she grapples with death, love, bonding and solitude.

“A shocking and brutal book.” —Dominic Tardif, *Les libraires*

“A powerful story that strikes you with its aggressive frankness and the depth of its introspection.” —Véronique Rossignol, *Livres Hebdo*

NOVEL • ESPLANADE FICTION

ISBN: 978-1-55065-578-0 • \$19.95 CDN

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 300 PP

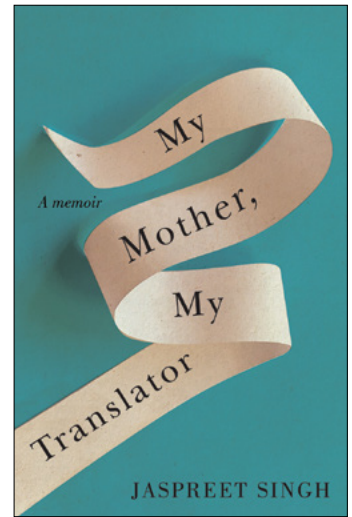
EPUB: 978-1-55065-586-5 • \$12.99

MY MOTHER, MY TRANSLATOR

Jaspreet Singh

In 2008, Jaspreet Singh made a pact with his mother. He would give her the go-ahead to publish her significantly altered translation of a story from his collection, *Seventeen Tomatoes*, if she promised to write her memoirs. After she died in 2012, he decided to take up the memoir she had started. *My Mother, My Translator* is a deeply personal exploration of a complex relationship. It is a family history, a work of mourning, a meditation on storytelling and silences, and a reckoning with trauma—the inherited trauma of the 1947 Partition of India and the direct trauma of the November 1984 anti-Sikh violence Singh experienced as a teenager.

My Mother, My Translator takes us through Singh's childhood in Kashmir and with his grandparents in Indian Punjab to his arrival in Canada in 1990 to study the sciences, up to the closing moments of 2020, as he tries to locate new forms of stories for living in a present marked by COVID-19 and climate crisis.



"A powerful and moving memoir, kinetic in its tracing of the various impacts of inherited trauma through several generations of Jaspreet Singh's family living through Partition and Sikh massacre in India to himself here in Canada. Through a series of digressions, both playful and deeply serious, *My Mother, My Translator* reshapes memoir in an unforgettable way."

— Daphne Marlatt, author of *Then Now*

"Singh is an unparalleled chronicler.... *My Mother, My Translator* is an indispensable, inimitable memoir."

— Shazia Hafiz Ramji, *Quill & Quire*

MEMOIR

ISBN: 978-1-55065-579-7 • \$22.95 CDN

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 × 7½ • 320 PP

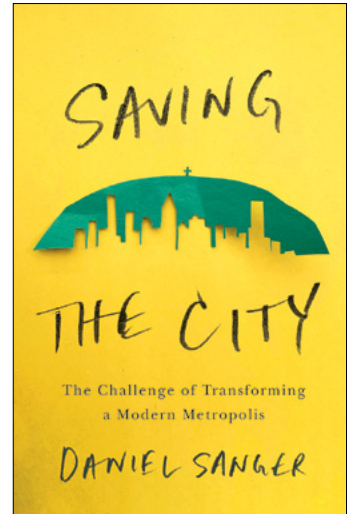
EPUB: 978-1-55065-587-2 • \$14.99

SAVING THE CITY: THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMING A MODERN METROPOLIS

Daniel Sanger

When it was dreamed up in the early 2000s by a transportation bureaucrat with a quixotic goal of bringing tramways back to Montreal, few expected *Projet Montréal* to go anywhere. But a decade and a half later, the party was a grassroots powerhouse with an ambitious agenda that had taken power at city hall—after dumping its founder, barely surviving a divisive leadership campaign and earning the ire of motorists across Quebec.

Projet Montréal aspired to transform Montreal into a green, human-scale city with few rivals in North America. Equal parts reportage, oral history and memoir, *Saving the City* is a highly readable chronicle of what the party did right, where it failed, and where it's headed. Written from the perspective of someone who worked for *Projet Montréal's* administration for almost a decade, Daniel Sanger's book draws on dozens of interviews with other actors in the party and on the municipal scene, past and present.



“One of the most fascinating Canadian political books in an age... *Saving the City* combines the clear eye of a very good reporter with the insider access of a sympathetic partisan... Sanger's frankness, and that of his sources, is a tonic.” — Paul Wells, *Maclean's*

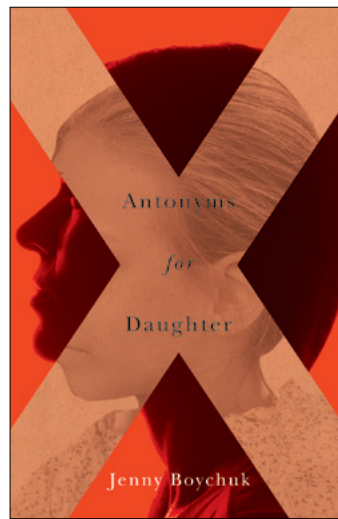
POLITICS

ISBN: 978-1-55065-580-3 • \$22.95 CDN • \$17.95 US
 TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5½ × 8½ • 300 PP
 EPUB: 978-1-55065-588-9 • \$14.99

ANTONYMS FOR DAUGHTER

Jenny Boychuk

Antonyms for Daughter, Jenny Boychuk’s poetry debut, addresses a harrowing subject: the loss of the poet’s mother to substance abuse. Deploying a range of forms and techniques astonishing in a first collection, Boychuk creates unsparing scenes of their complicated life together. Poem after poem attempts to wring clarity from memories ripe with trauma and love, as Boychuk questions whether it is possible for a child to ever extricate herself from an abusive parent—to become, as it were, a living “antonym” of a painful family legacy. A booklength loss-lyric of vivid beauty, *Antonyms for Daughter* is a singular example of grief transformed into art.



“‘Mother, when you were alive / your words undressed me.’ Scathing in their honesty, beautiful in their lyricism, the poems in *Antonyms for Daughter* undressed me and chilled my skin in the way only poetry can do. This is a book to celebrate.”

— Lorna Crozier

“*Antonyms for Daughter* offers no easy consolation, only a long hard look at two intertwined lives—daughter and mother, antonym and synonym—and, in doing so, renders absence as presence in piercing language: ‘you’re already ash, // and can’t burn further, can’t become less.’” — Michael Prior

POETRY • SIGNAL EDITIONS

ISBN: 978-1-55065-581-0 • \$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 75 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-589-6 • \$10.99

HALLELUJAH TIME

Virginia Konchan

Hallelujah Time, Virginia Konchan's third full-length poetry collection—and the first to appear in Canada—delivers up poetry unlike anything being written today. Specializing in fast-moving monologues that track the vagaries and divagations of a mind in action, Konchan cuts our most hallowed cultural institutions and constructions down to size. She bravely confronts the contemporary need to constantly adjust our masks to appease impossible standards, and our desperate fear of having our true selves be seen and understood. *Hallelujah Time* embraces a dazzling mix of idioms, registers, and tones in poems that compress everything they know into aphoristic, hard-boiled insights as arresting as they are witty, theatrical as they are sincere. “My human desire,” Konchan writes, “is simple: / to live on the perpetual cusp / of extremity.”



“The poems in *Hallelujah Time* are decadent confections, criminally fun films in which a Dorothy Parker-like wit directs performances by Wilde and Baudelaire. Virginia Konchan brandishes a glittering stiletto while on a doomed joyride through sex, death, and art.” — Nyla Matuk

“[Virginia Konchan] puts on an impressive show in her third collection of poetry.... Her work is flamboyant, but underlying the glitz is a serious engagement with how we create meaning out of a welter of experiences and influences.” — Barbara Carey, *Toronto Star*

POETRY • SIGNAL EDITIONS

ISBN: 978-1-55065-582-7 • \$ 17.95 CDN

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 110 PP

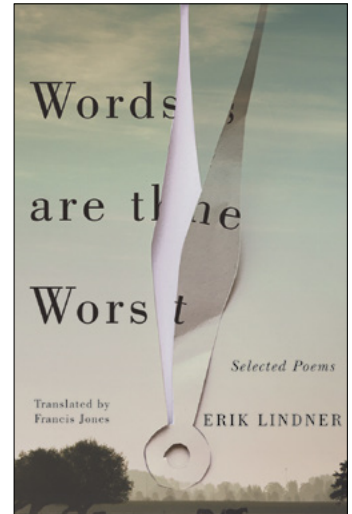
EPUB: 978-1-55065-590-2 • \$10.99

WORDS ARE THE WORST: *SELECTED POEMS*

Erik Lindner

Translated from the Dutch by Francis R. Jones

Born in 1968 in The Hague, Erik Lindner is one of the Netherlands's most acclaimed poets. Admired for a style that fuses simplicity with strangeness, Lindner builds his poems through a montage of descriptive images that, by fending off closure, generate extraordinary visionary power. Gathering together new work with a selection from his previous six collections, *Words are the Worst* offers a range of pleasures that have made him celebrated in his home country: an austere eloquence; a hard, unsparing precision; a restless and idiosyncratic eye. Best of all is how his intensely filmic observations transform haunted landscapes of windmills, birds, dogs and houseboats on canals into, as one critic put it, "Lindner-like" moments. Brilliantly translated by Francis R. Jones, with an introduction by Canadian poet David O'Meara, *Words are the Worst* introduces a leading Dutch voice to English readers.



“With a cinematic eye, Erik Lindner tracks the traces of human activity. The poems in *Words are the Worst*, awash in reflections and flotsam, illuminated by sea air, tease out meaning and motive from the everyday. Fleeting pleasures — a picnic, juicy apple, train ride, stride into the surf—dissolve in a moment. We are left with a plaintive, searching song in which the simplest actions become enigmatic.”

— Kateri Lanthier

POETRY • SIGNAL EDITIONS

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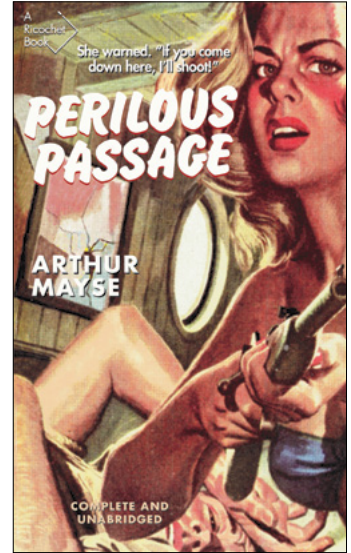
PERILOUS PASSAGE

Arthur Mayse

Introduction by Susan Mayse

A semi-conscious man looks about a boat's cabin as a woman presses a wet cloth to his forehead. She's young, her nails are short, and her small hands are calloused. When another man tries to enter, she grabs a gun: "If you come down here, Joe, I'll shoot you."

So begins the story of Clint, a reform school runaway, and Devvy, an orphaned farm girl saddled with a deceitful drunk of a stepmother. Clint and Devvy are pushed together as they struggle against the corrupt, criminal, violent adults trying to exert control over their lives, *Perilous Passage* first appeared in 1949 as a serial in *The Saturday Evening Post*. It has since been published in hardcover, paperback, and in Swedish translation. Our Ricochet Books edition marks the first new edition since 1952.



“A rousing tale about drug-running on the British Columbia coast. It is fast-moving, full of plot and surprises, including a nice assortment of incidental murders.” —*The Globe & Mail*

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PETER VAN TOORN (1944-2021)

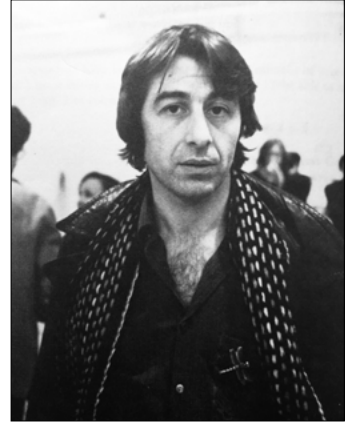
“God, how they’ll love me when I’m dead,” Orson Welles once said. To myth-seeking minds, Peter Van Toorn, who died on October 6, 2021 at the age of 77, was something like Canadian poetry’s Welles: a romantic, difficult talent, known for a single masterpiece and then a lifelong slide into obscurity.

Van Toorn was born in Holland in 1944, and came to Canada as a child. He studied at McGill University under poets F.R. Scott and Louis Dudek. He eventually taught at Concordia University and, later, John Abbott College. (Northrop Frye described Van Toorn’s work as “the product of an unusually intelligent mind.”) Van Toorn edited a couple of anthologies, and took several runs at what would turn out to be his life work; his early books—*Leeway Grass* (1970) and *In Guildenstern County* (1973)—were eventually absorbed into the monumental *Mountain Tea*, which was nominated for Canada’s Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1984.

Fizzing with ideas and formal bravura, *Mountain Tea* suggested a poet who could pull off anything: free verse, sonnets, translations. Even now, the book confounds categorization. In time, *Mountain Tea* fell out of print, and Van Toorn, into neglect. Véhicule Press reissued the book in 2003. “Canadian poetry will not come of age until it is ready to rediscover and rehabilitate the work of Peter Van Toorn,” wrote David Solway in the introduction. The reissue drew interest. Zachariah Wells, Michael Lista, and others wrote about *Mountain Tea*. A younger generation made its pilgrimages—by phone, on foot.

In Jason Guriel’s recent verse novel *Forgotten Work*, a cult following casts about for a lost band named “Mountain Tea.” Perhaps Van Toorn himself sensed he was doomed to be a cult item. In the early ’70s, he contemplated an anthology called *Mainstream*, going so far as to pull together a manuscript of neglected Canadian poetry. Publishers balked, and Van Toorn scrapped the book. Another project, an essay collection called *Handy Handles*, came to naught.

Orson Welles, too, abandoned many projects. Still, he managed to complete a number of post-*Citizen Kane* pictures, some of which were wonderful; Van Toorn never published another book after *Mountain Tea*.



Mountain Tea Peter Van Toorn

ISBN: 1-55065-169-2
8 ½ x 5 ½ • 175 PP
CDN \$16.00 • US \$11.00

Mountain Study

After rain
 dust's down, gone Dutch—
 everything's naked, wet, clear as Vermeer.

Tires
 pulling the adhesive wet off the streets
 making a “frizzing” sound.

Oilspots
 those cocky vulgar bits of peacock stain
 rolled to all the parts of town
 like leaves.

Air
 lumpy with sound
 after the last churchful of bellcopper
 clangs the damp away.

Air, sweet as baby's breath.

Here and there
 the nation's flag
 spanking in the wind,
 domestic as Odysseus.

Festive, too, the trees
 animated with brand new leaves
 moving like mobiles.

And close by,
 almost Chinese, the lucrative
 rustlines
 of old nails on foxskin fenceboards.

Look under your feet,
 so nurtured,
 segmenty: the limpstrength of worms.

All journalese
 in context of these slums.

Still, like puddles,
 or those fish spread flat on newspaper,
 something for the eye.

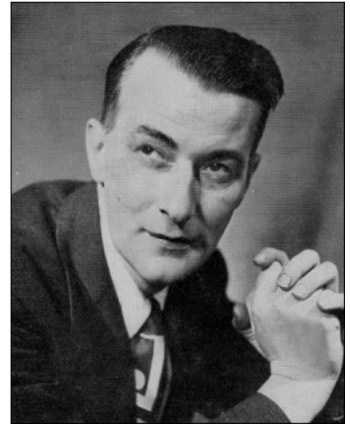
From *Mountain Tea* (Véhicule, 2003)

TELLING THE STORY: ARTHUR MAYSE AND *PERILOUS PASSAGE* BY SUSAN MAYSE

When my father wrote *Perilous Passage* as a seven-part series in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1949, he was well established as a West Coast short story writer selling to magazines in the United States. He was Canadian to the bone, but he didn't then call himself a Canadian writer. In my dad's view there was no Canadian publishing industry worth noticing. The few novels and short stories identified as Canadian fiction, he felt, were anaemic works written in subservient imitation of English writers of the time. He wanted no part of their pretensions. Instead, Bill Mayse—as friends and family called him—preferred working with Americans. They were hard-nosed, capable, and courteous; they treated him well, and most importantly, they paid decently. Several European publishers also picked up and translated *Perilous Passage*. The book brought him to the attention of reviewers and other publishers and got him an agent. My father always followed the respect and the paycheck. He never wanted to be counted among the second-raters. If a man couldn't make his living by writing, was that man really a writer?

So why is Arthur Mayse now an unknown name farther afield? One reason is that my father never sought the lime-light and didn't like it when it happened to fall on him; he didn't apply for awards, fellowships or grants, since he didn't need them. He avoided interviews. The concept of platform for a fiction writer—experience and background that lend credibility to one's writing—would have scandalized him. He had no interest in boosting his income by writing, as he saw it, overstuffed epics or magazine puffery. On his own terms he wrote honest stories. He was proud of his work, but he felt it spoke for itself. He was a working writer who paid his own way.

Another answer is simple snobbery, I believe, not only other people's but his own. Bill Mayse did what other people



Perilous Passage
Arthur Mayse
Introduction by
Susan Mayse

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couldn't do, selling scores of short stories and five books, mastering new media and crowning his lifetime writing career with success. He never diminished anyone else's efforts, but he knew his own achievement.

After the University of Victoria opened in 1965, he met members of the English and writing departments. A few sought him out and asked for his comments on their work. He gave straight answers, often suggesting they beef up plot and character to make their story serve its purpose instead of striking a pose.

Some dismissed him as a regional writer, and worse when that was still unfashionable, a genre writer. My dad was amused that men and women who'd published one or two stories in small journals would look down on his success. He could quote Chaucer and Thomas Wyatt and Chidiock Tichbourne with the best; his prose sang and struck home. For his part he regarded his critics with polite scorn. Literature was changing in ways that he didn't appreciate, including admirable and ambitious ways, and it put other writers in the limelight that he'd avoided so long. In an era of television that conferred fame and glamour, that mattered to readers. Perhaps most importantly, his career was ending just as the internet came into existence, so his work went unrecorded in ways that readers could easily access.

In *Perilous Passage*, his first book after many published short stories, his gift of observation and his ear for language were keen. It was the kind of story that he liked best, not only adventure and suspense set on the West Coast, but a hard-luck love story with young characters and a happy ending. He would repeat this theme of a poor boy and a slightly better-off girl—or occasionally a rich

girl—more than once in later short stories and novels. After all, it was his own story, and he knew it spoke to the lives and struggles of depression-era and post-war readers. His writing grew smoother and more subtle over his later books and stories, but his first book carried a sense of freshness and excitement in his world.

One summer evening when I was a kid, as the swallows looped and twittered outside, I sat side by side with my dad on the tweed chesterfield in our Arbutus Cove house to leaf through *Fifty Centuries of Art*. Dad wanted to show me something important from the section on Greek pots, but he couldn't find the right image, so instead he told me.

Inside one handle of some amphorae and water jugs, you might see a small human figure leaning, arms often crossed, to watch the world around him. A writer is that figure, my dad said, not taking much part in the activity of the day but quietly observing everything. And that is what we do.

Susan Mayse is the author of the novels *Merlin's Web* and *Awen*.

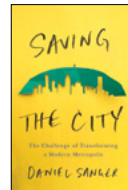
WHY I WROTE *SAVING THE CITY*

BY DANIEL SANGER

I first thought of writing a book about *Projet Montréal* around 2015 or 2016 when I felt that I was done working for the political party and for the city of Montreal and that it was perhaps time to return to my previous life: writing and journalism.

The book I had in mind originally was quite different, more about what I knew best, our experience running the borough of Plateau-Mont-Royal. In particular, how our buckle-your-seatbelts approach—deliver as best as possible the bold changes we promised in the 2009 campaign, weather the inevitable storm and let the voters decide four years later—had proven successful. It would be something of an optimist’s guide to municipal politics; how to be re-elected with ever-larger majorities without compromising or triangulating or obsessing on a daily basis about “comms” and public relations. Instead, working full out to improve a city and letting actions speak for themselves. Then, of course, in 2017 *Projet Montréal* got elected city-wide and the story got bigger and my time working with the party for the city was extended. And the book which came out of it all evolved into something of a hybrid: a chronicle of the party as well as a discussion of how we transformed the Plateau.

For those looking for better models of municipal governance, as well as different ways of doing politics, this book can be of interest. Certain things, it’s true, set Montreal apart. Few other cities in Canada have political parties at the municipal level, something which tends to lead to much more wholesale, regular renewal at City Hall. Councillors can’t rely on simple name recognition and local support to get re-elected; they also usually need to be on the right team. Also, like many other cities across Quebec and Ontario, Montreal went through a merger two decades ago to create a governance structure that better reflected the reality of its growth. But



Saving the City Daniel Sanger

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\$22.95 CDN • \$17.95 US
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the city merged in its own distinct way. To be specific, it went through a protracted merger-demerger process in which 28 municipalities became one, only to subsequently become 16 again. Come 2006, the city of Montreal was about twice the size, with 50 percent more people and, very importantly, a system of *arrondissements* or boroughs.

The borough system allowed for something which municipal activists in the city (and elsewhere) had been clamouring for since the 1960s: significant local control over the development of (and thus life in) their neighbourhoods. It is something that, in the pursuit of uniformity, rationalization and economies of scale, the mergers pushed ever more out of reach in many cities, including Toronto and Ottawa. And it was something which led to a certain amount of controversy and derision in Montreal, where initially critics only saw duplication, overlap and inconsistencies, especially when one borough saw and did things differently than its neighbours or the central city.

With the years, however, the virtues of the borough system have proven their value, allowing for finer tuning of projects and policies by people closer to the ground in Montreal's various neighbourhoods. It has also allowed boroughs to act as little laboratories for different initiatives which would have been unlikely to make it through the central city machinery but nonetheless prove successful and end up replicated across the city. It is not a system for centralizers or strong-man mayors who thrive on control but it is a system which seems to work. It is also one which allowed *Projet Montréal* to show its stuff, rather than simply backseat driving from the opposition benches.

Those who believe cities can be effective agents of social and environmental change will find important lessons in what we did, and how we did it. At its core, however, the story about *Projet Montréal* is, like all stories, a human one, one of personalities and visions, of good luck and bad decisions, and that is what I have sought to tell.

Daniel Sanger has written for the *Montreal Gazette*, *The Canadian Press*, *The Economist*, *Saturday Night*, and *The Walrus*, among other places.

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**I taste my own salt blood
and remind myself I am still alive
and there is hope while there is life.**

— Lorna Goodison, *Mother Muses*



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