

HAMISH HAMILTON PRESENTS



Five Dials

No. 49

Unsettled Lands



Palouche



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Contributors

Christi Belcourt is a Michif (Métis) visual artist with a deep respect for Mother Earth and the traditions and the knowledge of her people. In addition to her paintings, she is known as a community-based artist, environmentalist and advocate for the lands and waters, and for Indigenous Peoples. She is currently a lead organizer for the Onaman Collective, which focuses on the resurgence of language and land-based practices. She is the lead coordinator for *Walking With Our Sisters*, a community-driven project that honours murdered or missing Indigenous women. Her work *Giniigaaniimenaaning* (Looking Ahead) commemorates residential school survivors, their families and communities. It was created to mark the Prime Minister of Canada's apology for residential schools in 2008. Commissioned by the Government of Canada, the work is installed at Centre Block on Parliament Hill. She is the author of *Medicines To Help Us* (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007) and *Beadwork* (Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2010) and her work is found within the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Indian and Inuit Art Collection and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, First People's Hall.

Luz Calvo received their PhD in the History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz and also holds an MA in Political Science (UCLA) and AB in Politics (Princeton University). Dr. Calvo teaches courses in Latino/a Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Food Justice, and Ethnic Studies. Their current research focuses on decolonization. Dr. Calvo, along with their partner, Dr. Catriona Rueda Esquibel, is the author of *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant Based Recipes for Health and Healing*, published by Arsenal Pulp Press.

Hannah Chukwu is the Editorial Assistant at Hamish Hamilton. She graduated from Oxford with an English degree last year, and continues to write across a range of forms. She is particularly interested in using these platforms to collaborate with international social justice campaigns, working with organizations such as NCS, Bolivian Express, The Brilliant Club and the theatre production company she co-founded, Chucked Up Theatre.

Catriona Rueda Esquibel joined the Race and Resistance Studies program at San Francisco State University as a specialist in gender, Women of Colour feminist theory, and queer POC literature. Her book *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* maps out the field of queer Chicana writing and examines how Chicana lesbians are represented and constructed through 'a community of writers.' With her partner and co-author Luz Calvo, she published *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing*, a project to reclaim Mexican heritage foods to fight contemporary diseases of development like cancer, diabetes and heart disease. The book is published by Arsenal Pulp Press.

Tana French is the award-winning and *New York Times* bestselling author of *In the Woods*, *The Likeness*, *Faithful Place*, *Broken Harbour*, *The Secret Place* and *The Trespasser*. Her latest novel, *The Wych Elm*, was recently published by Viking. She has won many awards for her fiction, including the Edgar, Anthony, Barry, Macavity and IVCA Clarion awards, the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize* for Best Mystery/Thriller and the Irish Book Award for Best Crime Fiction. She grew up in Ireland, Italy, the US and Malawi, and trained as an actress

at Trinity College Dublin before becoming a writer. She lives in Dublin with her family.

Gord Hill is the author of *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book*, and *The Antifa Comic Book*. He is a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation whose territory is located on northern Vancouver Island and adjacent mainland in the province of 'British Columbia.' He has been involved in Indigenous People's and anti-globalization movements since 1990. He lives in northern British Columbia.

Marlon James was born in Jamaica in 1970. His novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* won the 2015 Man Booker Prize. His latest novel, *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, was recently published by Hamish Hamilton. James is also the author of *The Book of Night Women*, which won the 2010 Dayton Literary Peace Prize and the Minnesota Book Award. His first novel, *John Crow's Devil*, was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize* for first fiction and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and was a *New York Times* Editors' Choice. James divides his time between Minnesota and New York.

Jimmy Jeong is a photographer who lives in the city of Vancouver, on the unceded homelands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. His website can be found at jimmyshoots.com

Yiyun Li is the author of two novels, *The Vagrants* and *Kinder Than Solitude*, and two short story collections, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*, as well as the memoir, *Dear Friend, From My Life I Write to You in Your Life*. Her latest novel, *Where Reasons End*, explores the

subjects of grief and motherhood. She has won literary awards including the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and the *Guardian* First Book Award, and was listed among *Granta's* 21 Best of Young American Novelists 2007.

Johny Pitts is a writer, photographer, and broadcast journalist. He has received various awards for his work exploring Afro-European identity, and his upcoming book *Afropean* is published by Allen Lane. Johny has had work published by Penguin, Editions Les Arénès, Franklin Watts, Harvard University's *Transition* magazine and *Ariel: A Review of English Literature*. As a TV presenter, he has appeared on MTV, BBC, and ITV1; as a photographer, he has been published by Cafe Royal Books, the BBC and Arts Council England, *The New York Times* and Reporters Without Borders. Johny founded the award-winning online journal *Afropean*, which can be found at afropean.com.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer, scholar and artist living in Canada. She is the author of *Dancing on our Turtle's Back*, *The Gift Is in the Making*, *Islands of Decolonial Love*, *This Accident of Being Lost* and *As We Have Always Done*.

Dizz Tate has been previously published in *The Wrong Quarterly*, *3:am* magazine, *Prism*, *No Tokens Journal*, *The Tangerine*, and *Dazed*. Her pamphlet of short stories, *Nowhere To Go But Back Again*, was published by Goldsmiths Press. She won the Bristol Short Story Prize in 2018. She is working on her first novel.

Alan Trotter is a writer based in Edinburgh. *Muscle*, his debut novel, was awarded the inaugural Sceptre Prize for a novel-in-progress. His short

fiction has appeared in *Somesuch Stories*, *Under the Influence*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* and elsewhere. In 2016 he collaborated with Editions at Play on the experimental digital story *All This Rotting* ('mesmerising' – *Big Issue*, 'nauseating' – *Irish Times*). He has a PhD in English Literature from the University of Glasgow. His dissertation concerned writers making unusual use of the form of the book. His website can be found at: alantrotter.com

Lara Williams is a writer based in Manchester. Her debut short story collection *Treats* was published by Freight Books in 2016 and in the US by Flatiron in 2017 under the title *A Selfie As Big As The Ritz*. The collection was shortlisted for the Republic of Consciousness Prize and longlisted for the Edge Hill Prize. Her novel *Supper Club* is forthcoming in Spring 2019 from Hamish Hamilton (UK) and Putnam & Sons (US). She has published short fiction in *Lenny Letter*, *Electric Literature*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Litro*, *Little Fiction* and *Metazen*.

Gregory Younging, a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation in northern Manitoba, is the publisher of Theytus Books, the first Indigenous-owned publishing house in Canada. His book *Elements of Indigenous Style* began as the house style he developed at Theytus. He teaches in the Indigenous Studies Program of the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, and he served as assistant director of research to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Unable To Contribute

Ikram Rahimov, chief editor of the news website *Realliq*, was detained by police on 26 October, 2018, according to his brother, Emin Rahimov. The following day, a Baku district court judge charged Ikram Rahimov with extortion and ruled that he should remain in detention for two months pending investigation, said the journalist's lawyer.

Azerbaijan's security service published a statement on its website on 27 October, 2018 that said Rahimov's arrest was based on 'numerous complaints' from citizens. The statement alleged that Rahimov and his 'subordinates' created *Realliq* and other 'extortionist' websites to collect compromising information about individuals and threaten them with publishing 'slandorous' articles.

The journalist's brother told the Committee to Protect Journalists he believed the charges were in retaliation for an editorial that Rahimov published on his website a few hours before the arrest. In the editorial written as a letter to Ali Hasanov, a presidential adviser who oversees media, *Realliq*'s editor addressed several issues, including alleged corruption in the country's Press Council, a government body.

Azerbaijani authorities have previously targeted Rahimov for his journalism, according to CPJ's research. He served a one-year prison sentence starting 25 November, 2016 on defamation charges.

Emin Rahimov told CPJ that when he spoke with his detained brother on 1 November, 2018, the journalist said he was innocent and being prosecuted for journalism. Emin Rahimov said his brother did not raise any issues about his health or prison conditions during the call.

On 1 November, 2018, a Baku court of appeals denied Rahimov's appeal to be released on bail, the regional online news site *Kavkazsky Uzel* reported.



On Art, Walking With Our Sisters and the Problem with Reconciliation

By Christi Belcourt

Welcome to *Five Dials 49*. My name is Christi Belcourt. I'm honoured to be a part of the issue. I am Michif (Métis) artist. My ancestry originates from the Métis community of Manitou Sakhigan (Lac Ste. Anne) in Alberta, Canada. I was raised in Ontario, and am currently based in Anishinaabeg territory on the North Shore of Lake Huron.

My people, the Michif people of Manitou Sakhigan, are Buffalo, Moose and Fish people, meaning we owe our existence to the earth and to these animals. We share with other Indigenous Nations an inheritance of a worldview connecting us to all things on the earth and in a lived state of gratitude towards all who sustain life. Before colonialism shattered our communities and dispossessed us from our lands, we relied on the buffalo for almost everything. We recognize the buffalo as a nation. They were ninety million strong before their own genocide occurred. They were annihilated because of the European's hatred of us.

We have songs for the buffalo, as well as buffalo ceremonies. They hold the doorway in our sacred lodges. We tell creation stories of them. Our lives were lived on the land with buffalo and entirely attuned to the rhythms of that shared earth. We travelled freely, as they did. My ancestors survived, and I am alive today, because of them.

Turtle Island is the name of the lands that have become known as North America. For Indigenous Nations, they are filled with spiritual places and the blood and bones of our ancestors. The land is alive. It contains knowledge. The lands in Turtle Island were stolen from Indigenous Peoples. Full stop.

Canadians have convinced themselves that this is not so. For 150 years they have engaged in the active and systematic removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands by force, coercion and death, while at the same time celebrating the myth of *Terra Nullius*, these vast empty territories that their ancestors 'stumbled upon and heroically tamed.'

Right now, there are approximately 1.8 million Indigenous people in what is called Canada. They belong to 600 communities and speak 60 different languages. We represent about 1.4% of the total population.

From 1831 to 1996, over 150,000 Indigenous children were stolen from their parents and communities and placed within Indian Residential Schools. In total, Canada paid for and endorsed the operation of 150 residential schools run by the Catholic Church, the Church of England, the United Church and the Presbyterian Church.

Children as young as three or four were taken. Some remained in the schools until they were sixteen and suffered years of violent sexual, physical and emotional abuse and torture by those put in charge of the schools. Many families endured multiple generations of residential schooling. Each generation returned to their community traumatized, often unable to speak their own languages, and left to suffer the long-term torments of trauma. Many children never made it home. Parents were not informed of deaths. I can't get into all of what happened at these schools, but there are many documented cases of actual torture and experimentation on Indigenous children, as well as cases where babies born to children who had been raped were murdered by the priests or nuns in charge of the schools.

It was pure horror.

No Indigenous community was left untouched. Every Indigenous Nation, and every village, no matter how remote, was targeted by the Canadian government, which used force to remove the children.

The goal of the British, and later the Canadians, has always been to eliminate and remove Indigenous Peoples from their lands to make way for resource extraction. This remains the goal today. Indigenous Nations went from having 100% of the land to only being in control of 0.02% of the land

under Canadian law. Indigenous People did not voluntarily sign away 99.8% of their land.

In 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an apology on behalf of Canadians to Indigenous Peoples for Canada's role in residential schools, and established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was tasked to gather testimonies of Residential School Survivors and to share that truth and recommendations with Canada and Canadians.

Since 2008, the word 'reconciliation' has been used often in Canada, and some rare but sincere groups have come together to support the work of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, primarily within educational institutions and government-funded events or the public sector. But for many Indigenous people, including myself, the word reconciliation rings hollow because these events – however well intentioned – have not been able to create the power shift necessary to address land dispossession and the systemic racism that remains at the core of the justice and child welfare systems.

I believe true reconciliation can neither be comfortable nor convenient. I believe reconciliation is not even possible without land returned and a complete and full correction of all that has resulted from our dispossession, including the restoration of our own Indigenous laws and full control over our lands.

We Indigenous people have endured 400 years of genocide, murder, dispossession, the theft of our lands, oppression, colonialism, and racism. Our communities suffer debilitating poverty. We also must endure the constant sneering expressions of superiority of a dominant society who has convinced itself, at every turn, of its own benevolence. All that was thrown at us was designed to dismantle our recognizable, sovereign, distinct nations. To weaken us. To divide us. Why? For our lands.

It's astounding to me that we are still willing to even sit down and talk about reconciliation. What peaceful, dignified and beautiful people Indigenous people are. We have taken all of this and are still willing to share.

Sharing and generosity are at the core of our values and at the core of my art. Sharing, giving and generosity is a central tenet of my life. It's tied to love, respect and compassion. It's tied to justice.

My work is not separate from the work of the hundreds and thousands of Indigenous Peoples and Nations endeavouring to bring health, healing and light to their communities. They often go unheralded. In Indigenous ways of thinking and knowing and being, the concept of walking softly on the earth is not a quaint thought. It is a way to live your life by refraining from harming the earth and instead speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

The work you will see in this issue is varied. Some of my art is an attempt to transfer 'beadwork' to canvas, and in doing so add commentary and expression beyond the purely aesthetic.

Our ancestors left us with the artistic legacy of beadwork, quillwork and embroidery. I'm following a long line of artists by taking an art form that traditionally adorned useful or wearable items and adapting it by painting on canvas.

In my early work I began by placing a few 'dots' within my paintings to suggest beadwork. The process has now developed to where entire floral patterns are created in 'dots' by dipping the end of a paintbrush or knitting needle into the paint and pressing it onto canvas. The effect is thousands of raised dots per canvas that simulate beadwork.



In this issue I've also been asked to describe *Walking With Our Sisters*, a project that honours and



commemorates the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The installation features over 2000 pairs of handcrafted moccasin tops. It has toured to thirty communities in the last seven years.

According to the most conservative statistics, over 1,200 Indigenous women and girls in Canada have been reported missing or have been murdered in the last thirty years. Most experts believe the number is much higher. On average, an Indigenous girl or woman goes missing or is murdered every twelve days in Canada.

For those far away, let me describe the experience of the installation.

When you enter, a friendly face greets you and offers a smudge, a ceremonial way to cleanse yourself with smoke. You're invited to take a pinch of tobacco and carry it through, infusing your prayers into the tobacco while you walk in the installation. At the end, the tobacco is put in a box that will later be placed onto a sacred fire.

The room's floor is entirely covered with red cloth. There is nothing on the walls. Traditional drum songs play softly. 2000 pairs of moccasin tops line the floor around the periphery of the room. Others are placed in the centre. Each pair is unique, intricately made with beads, embroidery or other materials. Their designs and colours vary. Each pair is unfinished. They are tops. They have not been sewn into moccasins. They represent the unfinished lives of the women being commemorated.

We hold ceremony together, as ceremony is what's required to properly acknowledge and honour the women who have gone missing from our communities. We can't do it by gawking. We can't do it by seeing pictures, by staring from an outsiders' perspective. We must do it by bringing their lives and the acknowledgement of the value of their lives within us. So we walk softly on the red carpet, in our stocking feet, heads bowed, as we admire and observe the workmanship and com-

passion placed within every stitch. Each pair represents one person, one human being, whose life was cut short by violence. Each pair represents a woman who is missed by family and loved ones. The injustice is evident. You might ask yourself: Why is this happening to Indigenous people?

As you leave, a friendly face will greet you again, asking if you would like to smudge once more to spiritually cleanse your mind and thoughts. It is through this act of kindness and gentleness you are instilled with a new understanding and, perhaps, a commitment to help stop the injustices and atrocities so that things will change for the coming generation. Perhaps it will help you understand that true reconciliation means confronting head on the issues that remain unsettled between us. It's a chance to give back and restore what was stolen, even if it means unsettling an entire country to do so.

With love and light,
In unity with freedom fighters everywhere,
Christi





Selections from *Elements of Indigenous Style*

By Gregory Younging

The following are a series of excerpts from Gregory Younging's Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples. For a deeper exploration of the 22 key principles of Indigenous style, refer to the book.

1.

The place of non-Indigenous style guides (Chapter 1, pg 6)

This style guide does not replace standard references on editing and publishing, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* or the *MLA Handbook*. Neither does it replace the house styles of individual publishers.

You should still follow these styles, in general, when you are writing, editing, or publishing Indigenous authors and Indigenous content. In some cases, however, Indigenous style and conventional style or house style will not agree. When that happens, Indigenous style should override conventional style and house style. If you are not familiar with Indigenous style, this may not feel right to you at first. Indigenous style uses more capitalization than conventional style, for example, and it incorporates Indigenous Protocols, which require time and attention to observe correctly.

It is helpful to keep in mind that Indigenous style is part of a conversation that aims to build a new relationship between Indigenous people and settler society. Indigenous style is conversing with you, perhaps for the first time, in an ongoing decolonizing discourse.

2.

The continuum of present, past, and future (Chapter 3, pgs 18–20)

A common mainstream perspective puts Indigenous cultures at odds with the modern world. Much writing about Indigenous Peoples by non-Indigenous authors reflects the idea that Indigenous culture is static and must exist in some past state to be authentic.

In some cases, non-Indigenous writing has implied that Indigenous cultures no longer exist at all—that mainstream settler culture has swept them away. Indigenous Peoples themselves, of course—living testaments to their presence in the present—find this perplexing.

Indigenous Peoples wish their cultures to be perceived as dynamic, in interaction with the modern world, and existing in a continuum

between past and future generations of Indigenous Peoples. They are not encapsulated in the past—static and resistant to change, or absent.

Indigenous Peoples have always been adept at fitting new technologies to their cultures. Northern Cree hunters, for example, have found that pursuing moose by snowmobile can add significantly to the success of hunting outings. At the same time, they still practise ancient ceremonies, such as honouring an animal's spirit in the bush upon killing, praying to and thanking the Creator, hanging the animal's bones over the doorway, and bringing the animal through the doorway backwards so the animal's spirit can leave frontwards.

Cree hunting by snowmobile is an example of what Lewis Mumford observed in the relationship between culture and technology. Mumford was a British sociologist, historian, and philosopher who thought and wrote about this relationship. He asserted that technology does not drive cultural change but, instead, responds to cultural contexts. Culture, in other words, shapes tools. With the snowmobile, the Cree continue to practise ancient ceremonies while hunting for sustenance: the snowmobile is a modern technology that serves to enhance the cultural practice of hunting, making it more productive and efficient within Cree cultural precepts.

I have my own example of interaction with the modern world and technology from my experience as an Indigenous publisher. I sometimes think websites might be the best medium for publishing some aspects of Oral Traditions. Some Traditional Stories are told only during certain seasons: some are told only in summer, some only in winter. They are not to be told outside that season. A website could present season-sensitive stories because it could be managed to respect the Protocol—so Winter Stories would only appear in winter, and so on. This solution would use a modern 'untraditional' technology to respectfully extend Oral Traditions in the present and connect them to the future. It would be 'untraditional' in the world of book publishing, too.

3.

Names of particular Indigenous Peoples (Chapter 6, pgs 69–72)

Before the arrival of Europeans in North America, all Indigenous Peoples had names to identify themselves that, in most cases, were a variation of the words the people in their own language. During

the colonial period in North America, English terms for Indigenous Peoples—coined in a variety of ways—emerged. Indigenous Peoples themselves maintained their own terminology, but the coined English terms became widespread in colonial society because Indigenous people often did not speak English and did not have access to colonial society.

Explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists coined most of these terms. The most common derivations included the following:

- a name associated with the first European to encounter an Indigenous group (e.g., Thompson Indians, Mackenzie Eskimos)
- an arbitrary English name based on some observation about an Indigenous group (e.g., Blackfoot, Flathead)
- an anglicized name based on a word heard in the language of an Indigenous group (e.g., Kwagiulth, Navajo, Salish, Nootka)
- an anglicized name based on a word for the group they heard in the language of another Indigenous People (e.g., Chipewyan, based on what they were called in Cree)
- a name based on a reasonable approximation of the word an Indigenous group used to identify themselves in their own language (e.g., Haida, Dene, Okanagan)

This last method, although the most appropriate, was also the most rare.

In the later colonial period in Canada, as generations of Indigenous children were introduced to English and systematically denied access to their languages through the residential school system, most Indigenous Peoples acquiesced to the terminology that had become established in English. This general trend, however, began to reverse in the early 1980s, when many Indigenous Peoples began to reestablish their original names.

This process has often involved awkward anglicizations, and the names of Indigenous Peoples in English often have several spellings.

For example:

- The name *Ojibway* originates in the colonial period based on an anglicization of a word the Cree used to describe this Indige-

nous People. Although a single Indigenous People, groupings of this nation have separate names, such as ‘Chippewa’ or ‘Assiniboine.’ In the 1980s, this Indigenous People began to assert their original name, which means the people in their language. Common spellings for the original name varied—for example, Nishnabwe, Anishnabay, Anishnabek, and Nishnawbay. In the 1990s, this Indigenous People generally agreed that the spelling Anishinaabe was a closer approximation of a phonetic English spelling. A variety of spellings remain in circulation, however, including Anishnaabe, Anishnawbe, Anishnabe, and Anishinaabeg.

- The Kwagiulth were termed *Kwakiutl* in the early 1800s by the anthropologist Franz Boas, who produced a vast body of literature about them. In the 1980s, this Indigenous People generally agreed that the spelling Kwagiulth is a closer approximation of a phonetic English spelling. More recently, Kwakwaka’wakw is gaining currency as the name for this Indigenous People, but the previous spellings also have currency. For example, the Kwakiutl District Council in Campbell River, BC, has nine member Nations.

The work of reestablishing and establishing the traditional names of Indigenous Nations (and appropriate spellings) is ongoing and being done by several institutions, including Indigenous institutions and Indigenous Nations. Here is a sampling of some other appropriate names:

Carrier becomes:	Dakelh
Gitksanin becomes:	Gitxsan
Iroquois becomes:	Haudenosaunee
Blood becomes:	Kainai
Mohawk becomes:	Kanien’keha:ka
Kootney becomes:	Ktunaxa
Micmac becomes:	Mi’kmaq
Assiniboine becomes:	Nakoda, or Nakota
Blackfoot becomes:	Niisitapi
Nishga or Nisga becomes:	Nisga’a
Thompson becomes:	Nlaka’pamux
Nootka becomes:	Nuu’chah’nult, or Nuu’chah’nulth
Bella Coola becomes:	Nuxalk
Peigan becomes:	Piikuni

Shuswap becomes:	Secwepemc
Lillooet becomes:	Stl'atl'imx
Okanagan becomes:	Syilx
Sarcee becomes:	Tsuut'ina, or Tsuu T'ina

There is no complete standard reference on correct names and spellings for all the Indigenous Peoples in Canada. As an editor or publisher trying to do the right thing in terms of accuracy, consistency, and showing respect on the page, you have two options.

First, you can ask the Indigenous Peoples at the centre of a work for the spelling of their names. This is the most respectful procedure, and is practical most of the time.

Second, you can choose to follow names and spellings compiled by others in consultation with Indigenous Peoples.

The method you choose to follow for Indigenous names in a work needs acknowledgement and explanation in the work.

4.

Indigenous goals **(Chapter 7, pg 74)**

Subtle bias shows up in word choices to describe the political goals of Indigenous Peoples. Consider the difference between *demanding* something and *asserting* something. You might use *demand* to describe a complaint or a whine: a child, for example, might demand dessert. You would use *assert* to describe a justified action: you *assert* authority, you *assert* rights.

In the context of Indigenous Title, *assert* is the appropriate word. The Nisga'a did not spend a century *demanding* Indigenous Title to their Traditional Territory (because this is an Indigenous Right they always had and still possess): they spent a century *asserting* Indigenous Title to their Traditional Territory.

5.

Indigenous resilience **(Chapter 7, pg 77)**

Pessimistic language is another form of subtle bias. For example, compare these statements: first, 'Indigenous Peoples struggle with the legacy of the residential school system'; second, 'Indigenous

Peoples acknowledge the legacy of the residential school system, and the importance of appropriate compensation and apology from Canada's government in moving forward.'The first statement makes Indigenous Peoples victims and casts doubt on their power to overcome trauma. The second statement recognizes their resilience, agency, and future.

6.

Indigenous words in the English language (Chapter 7, pgs 85–87)

Conventional style guides recommend italicizing words and phrases in languages other than English, except in cases where the word or phrase is commonly understood. One rule of thumb is that if the word or phrase appears in the English dictionary you are using, then it should be set in roman. For example, the term *café au lait* (from French, with the accent) and *barista* (from Italian) appear in several English dictionaries, so you would not italicize them: 'The barista takes the customer's order for café au lait.'

Many words of Indigenous origin appear in several English dictionaries. Here, for example, are words listed in the free online dictionaries of Collins, Merriam-Webster, and Oxford:

canoe

hammock

igloo

kayak

maize

moccasin

moose

muskeg

pemmican

potato

raccoon

saskatoon: Collins and Merriam-Webster list this term, which refers to the plant and berry. Oxford lists only the city (Saskatoon) in its free online resource, although the term for the plant and berry appears in the longer, etymological *Oxford English Dictionary*.

skunk

sockeye (salmon)

squash (the vegetable)**tamarack**

tipi: Collins and Merriam-Webster list *tepee* as an alternate spelling; Oxford lists *tepee* as the preferred spelling, and *tipi* and *teepee* as alternate spellings.

toboggan**tomato****wapiti**

So, none of these words would appear in italics by conventional style.

I regret that English has swallowed these words. These words bear witness to the history of Indigenous Peoples in contact with Europeans. They often represent technologies and foods that Indigenous Peoples introduced to Europeans. Their presentation as ‘English’ terms fails to acknowledge the contributions Indigenous Peoples have made to mainstream culture and the English language, and fails to educate readers who may not be aware of these contributions.

A key goal of Indigenous style is to show respect on the page. Indigenous style could recommend italicizing these words to emphasize their foreign origin in Indigenous languages. I think, though, that this would be a clunky solution. For one thing, these are Indigenous words rendered for the English ear. If you italicize *saskatoon*, what would you do with *misâskwatômin*, which is the actual Cree word of origin? It seems to me that italics is best reserved for *misâskwatômin*.

Another solution is to include notes about words of Indigenous origin in an etymological glossary in the back matter of a work. The etymology of Indigenous-origin words can be complicated. Of the online dictionaries, for example, Collins and Oxford (not Merriam-Webster) supply notes on Indigenous etymology, but sometimes disagree on the source language. For *muskeg*, Collins lists the derivation as Algonquian or Cree; Oxford lists it as Cree only. Spellings from the source language also differ: Collins and Oxford agree that *raccoon* comes from Algonquian, but Collins renders the source word as *ärâhkun* and Oxford renders it *aroughcun*. So, include a discussion about how you arrived at the etymological information in the glossary. Consider consulting several etymological sources, and summarizing points of agreement and disagreement. Consider consulting people fluent in the Indigenous language at issue for their insights, especially for words derived from the language of the Indigenous Peoples at the centre of the work.

Consider, also, using the word the Indigenous People use for their own language. Generally, this is not the word with currency in English. For example, the language of the Syilx is Nsyilxcn.

7.

Possessives that offend (Chapter 7, pg 91)

It is a common error to use possessives to describe Indigenous Peoples, as in ‘Canada’s Indigenous Peoples,’ or ‘our Aboriginal Peoples,’ or ‘the First Peoples of Canada.’ These possessives imply that Indigenous Peoples are ‘owned’ by Euro-colonial states.

Indigenous Peoples assert sovereignty and many do not identify as Canadian.

To describe Indigenous Peoples as located in Canada, appropriate wordings include ‘Indigenous Peoples in Canada’ or ‘Indigenous Peoples in what is now Canada.’

8.

Verb tense (Chapter 7, pgs 97-98)

Avoid the common error of describing Indigenous Peoples in the past tense, as in ‘they held Potlatches’ or ‘they told Sacred Stories passed down through Oral Traditions’ or ‘they had Traditional Territories where they hunted and fished.’

They *hold* Potlatches, they *tell* Sacred Stories, they *have* Traditional Territories.

Referring to Indigenous Peoples in the past tense engages the following inappropriate, often offensive assumptions:

- that Indigenous Peoples no longer exist as distinct cultures
- that they no longer practise their cultural traditions
- that contemporary Indigenous Peoples have been assimilated into mainstream Canadian society to the point that they no longer identify with their ancestors, or that Indigenous cultures have been fundamentally altered or undermined through colonization

Indigenous Peoples have *not* been assimilated into mainstream Canadian society, despite over a century of legislation and official policy to force assimilation. Indigenous national and cultural paradigms have *not* been fundamentally altered or undermined through colonization. Indigenous Peoples are distinct and diverse, and going through processes of healing and reclamation. They are living cultures that adopt new technologies and adapt to new circumstances in a process of complex navigation, but not of acquiescence.

Excerpted from *Elements of Indigenous Style* by Gregory Younging, published by Brush Education. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.



Belcourt.

‘Gayness, queerness, non-binaryness, gender plurality, plural pronouns – Africa got there two millennia ago.’

Marlon James on the vast world of *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*

Marlon James won the Man Booker Prize in 2015 with a sprawling, intricately plotted, multi-layered novel and decided, naturally, to follow his triumph with an even more ambitious work. Black Leopard, Red Wolf is set in a land of his own creation and peopled by menacing figures including a necromancer, a shape-shifter, a witch, an antiwitch, a very smart buffalo, a band of mercenaries and Asanbosam, a monstrous eater of flesh. At the centre of the tale is our troubled hero, Tracker, who has been chosen for a mission because of his unerring sense of smell.

As James explained to Five Dials, his fictional kingdoms were grounded in the African cities of the past.

Five Dials When you are building a world, do the characters come first or does the landscape?

Marlon James When I’m writing a novel, the characters come up first even if I have a vague idea where they’re going to be. I trust a lot to research. I will build a world based on the research I find. Even though it’s fantasy, I didn’t want something that veered too much from what was actually going around.

Greek mythology doesn’t veer very far from Greek geography despite there being Sirens and gods and goddesses.

I did the research on everything from soil patterns to wind patterns, to average heat and temperature, to records of storms, and so on. But also, a lot of history of Mali and Songhai and the Great African empires, Ethiopia and Kenya and so on – what exactly sub-Saharan Africa was like. I wasn’t very interested in anything above the Sahara Desert. Usually whenever people think of African civilization, we always trot out Egypt, as if Egypt is it.

There are lots of civilizations that were below the Sahara. The British Empire just happened to burn them all to the ground – and they took the treasures to the British Museum.

For me, it was a personal journey of discovery. Not even rediscovery, because some of those things I didn’t know. People would be surprised by what aspects of the book are factual and what are made up.

5D Which books were you looking at?

MJ Most of my resources were African resources. Because the tricky thing about reading African history is first you have to read who wrote it. And depending on who told the story, know whether to listen to it or not. It’s actually kind of hilarious reading African history, even written up to the ‘60s, where there are still these ridiculous European biases in them.

A novel like this is fantasy, and I have a lot of leeway to make stuff up, but I also run into lots of risk, including underselling Africa, or misrepresenting Africa, even though I’m writing an imagined story.

5D So if they actually saw the research, would readers be surprised by how much of it was coming from these sources rather than just from your head?

MJ Yeah. One of my cities has streetlights. Benin City had streetlights long before anybody in Europe even had gas lights. Mali at one point was the richest empire in the world. One of the Malian emperors, Mansa Musa, made a trip to Mecca, made the Hajj, and gave away so much gold that the value of gold dropped for nearly ten years. When I got deep into the research, the novel almost started writing itself.

I have very clear ideas about what I want in a book, but I would be an idiot if I stopped at them. All my novels have happened despite my very best intentions.

I learned this writing my second novel: I can’t

impose my will on the story. You don't create stories, you find them. And if you're in the process of discovering, and you discover a story that will blow your mind or open your world right open, you have a choice. You can either go down that road and see where it takes you, or you can say, 'No, this is not my idea. This is the idea I have for a novel or a story or a poem and nothing is going to change it.'

Sometimes what you have is just a trigger. It's just the thing to lead you to the real idea.

5D Some authors turn to historical research but don't find so much richness.

MJ It depends on how you research though.

Too often we start with a conclusion and look for things to back it up. And if that's the way you're going to research, then of course you'll always find answers. But you'll never know. You'll never fully explore the possibility of creativity. You have to go in open-ended and be open to any kind of answer instead of the answer you're looking for.

5D What else did you find?

MJ Mythical cities like Go. Cities of gold or cities that float mid-air, although I don't think I used that in this book. I might have it in the next book.

I absorbed those stories so fully. I think I took aspects from all of them. Some of the African epics are historical and factual, some are a sort of magical realism, a good thousand years before their time.

I absorbed so much. I'd have to go back and re-read them and go, 'Oh, that's where I got that from.'

5D You mentioned how much you love *Epic Traditions of Africa* by Stephen Belcher.

MJ I did draw on a lot of the stories in there. Some of the stories were only recently translated, and hopefully we're getting more and more translations as time goes on.

I was reading epics from everywhere. It wasn't just African epics. I re-read *Beowulf*, The Icelandic Sagas, and the *Mabinogion* – pretty much any country that had any ancient narratives.

One of the things I learned from going back to those originals is all of those narratives are written to be read aloud, so this book had to have an auditory quality. The book had to be driven by a voice. The book had to sound like somebody was talking to you.

5D With that in mind, did you think about the propulsion of the dialogue?

MJ Dialogue is very important to me. Every good dialogue has rhythm. Watch an episode of *Sopranos*. It has fantastic rhythm.

I definitely wanted a kind of musicality to it. Because in Africa, in storytelling, most of the ancient stories are told to music. If you're a griot, you have your kora guitar and so on.

I'm also very conscious of disabled readers, of blind readers, of readers who may come to, say, the audiobook. One of the things I learned from rewriting my last book is that there's more to the world, there's more to the senses, than just sight.

5D This novel is also about smell. Did you always know the lead character, Tracker, would have an amazing nose rather than, say, great hearing?

MJ I think the nose came about because of an older version of the novel where Tracker wasn't even the main character. He was somebody being treated like a hound.

That always happens for me. I'll start writing a

story and the person who ends up being the major character isn't even major. Something about them sparks something in me and I pretty much abandon whoever I was going to use and go with them.

5D I remember you saying the same about *Seven Killings*.

MJ At some point I realized I didn't want to tell a typical fantasy story set in a royal house about royal people. I wanted to tell a fantasy story about ordinary people or ordinary looking people. He immediately jumped to the forefront for me.

5D When do you know to make that decision?

MJ There are certain parts of writing process I just can't explain.

Sometimes through trial and error and sometimes it's when no other version works. I tried maybe four or five versions of the novel before I ended up on this one, and this is the one where pages just kept coming.

There are aspects to writing and to creativity and art that are a mystery. Some of this I actually can't explain. Sometimes I don't know how story happens. I'm just glad it does happen.

And because I don't know how story happens, most of the time when I'm beginning a book I'm in sheer terror. This is not going to happen. I don't know how this is going to work. I wish I had a formula. I wish I knew what the story is, and how it's going to take shape, and who's going to tell it. But when I'm starting out, I actually don't know.

5D Why doesn't that sheer terror translate to less ambitious books?

MJ Maybe I'm also kind of foolish. I don't know. I approach every page with absolute terror. I

approach every novel with nerve-wracking fear. Every story I think, 'This is the one that's going to destroy me. This is the one where I won't get it done. This is where the jig is finally up.'

I start every book that way. Some of it is absolute panic. But then I respond to panic. I respond to fear by trying to break it down. Okay. What do I have? Maybe I have a character. What does a character want? I don't know but maybe we should think about it. Or maybe we should try writing in all different ways and all different styles.

In most of the novels I write there are three or four trials that lead to error. Whether it's first person, second person, or third person: that's a whole other mess for me because if I can't figure out point of view, I can't tell the story. And I usually don't know what a point of view is until I try and fail, and try and fail, and try and fail.

My sense of crushing fear and my sense of creativity – they have never interfered with each other. Part of it is me thinking, 'You know what? I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm going to do it until somebody smarter than me tells me I can't.' I remember some passages. 'You know what? I'm just going to leave it in until my editor says, "Take it out."'

5D And then they don't.

MJ So I go: 'Okay, maybe it was all right then.'

Just because you're scared of doing something doesn't mean you shouldn't do it.

The fact that I'm locked in a room and nobody can see what I'm doing yet is what emboldens me even when I'm afraid.

5D How are your own noticing skills? Do you consider yourself someone who picks up on the stuff of the world?

MJ My friends are constantly annoyed by it. I'm

the type of person who, if I meet someone, I'll forget their name within 10 seconds.

But I'm the same person who will remind his boss that he said something different from what he's saying now, and he said it seven years ago in his office, and he was smelling of his garlic pills. Which actually did happen.

I think it serves me well as a writer. It's very weird how memory works and it's very weird how my memory works. I'm going to forget that we had dinner plans, but I'll remember that five years ago you had a tie pin on.

That attention to details is something I bring to fiction. That's why smell is more than just a sense. Smell sometimes conjures a memory. Smell sometimes is what makes a memory three-dimensional. Smell is the first evidence of something is tactile, I think.

I remember when I was teaching a class on 9/11 novels. The first question I asked the students was, 'What do you think 9/11 smelled like?' And it's something that always throws them off. That's another thing that never occurred to them.

Smell evokes nostalgia but smell also evokes haunting.

I have friends who are haunted by the smell of a tragic event. They could never get past it. It's the smell that was the hardest thing to get rid of even though they were nowhere near the scene of the tragedy anymore.

We all smell a certain way. And Tracker is just a heightened version of what everybody in a way has and does.

5D Do you write quickly?

MJ I write pretty fast, but I still have to slow down. You have to inhabit a scene and let it play out, because you're writing real people. As far as I'm concerned, they're real people. I have to pull back

and let the story emerge, whether it's a romance or so on.

I also just love fight scenes. I grew up with sci-fi and fantasy and tons and tons and tons of comics. And I'm still influenced by comics and action films. I wish I was a more highbrow consumer of cinema. All my friends want to watch the latest art house thing. I'm like, 'Can we watch the new Spiderman? Come on.'

I'm not kidding when I tell people *Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse* is the best film of 2018. I'm not even kidding when I say it.

5D Don't spoil it. I haven't seen it yet.

MJ It's amazing. And not just because I'm in it. There's this imagined novel written by me that Spiderman is reading.

So I consider that to be immortality. I can just go, 'I was in Spider-man.'

5D You're done now.

MJ I've reached the pinnacle.

When you're somebody like me, so influenced by fantastical versions, you run the risk of writing a comic book scene. You run the risk of writing a superhero scene where there's lots of collateral damage and no cost.

Violence doesn't work that way. Cruelty doesn't work that way. People suffer. People recover.

One of the things I had to remember writing this book is my characters can't just bounce back into the next scene after a fight. They have injuries. They have debilitations. They lose limbs or they lose body parts.

After that comes things like recovery and coping and some people don't recover very well. I had to remember that. We're not just talking violence, we're talking trauma, and trauma takes time to get over.

That was something that was not in the first draft of this book because I was just like: let's get to the next scene. Let's do this, do this, do this. And I realized, no, people don't just bounce back from things. Humans take a while.

5D And trauma seems to inform the other areas of Tracker's life. It seems he has trouble with his intimacy because it needs to be portrayed in a violent way.

MJ There are legacies of bloodshed. Some of that was taken again, from real life sources. A lot of the villages in the book, the Ku, Gangatom, and so on, are based on villages in the Omo Valley including one called the Nyangatom. So of course I wasn't straying too far from the tree.

One of the things that the Omo village tribes are plagued by is blood feuds. When you go off to university and you get a call, 'You need to come back to the village to avenge the death of so on.' 'No, I want to get my sociology degree. I do not want to be a part of a feud that kills our entire family.' A lot of that was still going on.

Again, not to sensationalize violence, but to also have people realize that the kind of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, kumbaya idea of African villages, is just as ridiculous and harmful as thinking that they're bloodthirsty savages. It's complicated. If we did a story about Vikings locked in a blood feud, nobody would think, 'How backward. How savage.' You would just think, 'Oh, they're just Vikings.'

But with this, we can attach whatever stigma we want. I had to be very careful in writing about things like that because I wanted to show how self-destructive that sort of culture is. Tracker thought he wanted it, and he realized that's not what he wanted.

War is complicated. Revenge is complicated. These things carry costs. It was very important

for me, even though I was writing a fantasy novel with blood and guts, and swords and sorcery, and witches and mermaids, to make it a very grown up book.

No matter how fantastical a world I want it to be in, I can't escape being a novelist, and I can't escape writing what is essentially still, for want of a better term, a grown-up novel.

5D With a grown-up outlook on evil, too. How do you create evil in a character? You've mentioned before the brilliance of Bill Sikes, your admiration of a character who embodies evil incarnate. How do you produce a character that menacing?

MJ One of the things I learned from horror films is that a great horror film is a seduction. That's what people don't realize. That's what the people who do gore don't understand.

You have to lure me to the house first. If I'm going to get into the house on the hill, I got there because you lured me. I've got to be seduced by a horror film.

The great villains are also great seducers. But there are two kinds. A Bill Sikes is just pure evil. Sometimes we worry that these characters are stereotypes. They're not stereotypes. They may be types, but they're not stereotypes.

People should have a complicated relationship to everybody, not just the heroes. Why only have complicated relationships to your heroes? You should have a complicated relationship to a villain too.

I want my readers to feel feelings they weren't counting on. Nobody wants to have a complicated relationship with a monster. But we should.

5D That's been a theme throughout your novels: adding complication. I'm thinking about the character Weeper in *Seven Killings*. The perception of what it is to be gay became complicated. Are you

doing the same thing with the gay relationships in this book?

MJ Funny thing about the gay relationships and the queer things – and this was so refreshing – is the research.

Because of the research I realized these are the old elements, the retro touches, in the book. Gayness, queerness, non-binaryness, gender plurality, plural pronouns – Africa got there two millennia ago. And they knew it until a bunch of American TV preachers told them that they didn't.

Again, this is not stuff I'm making up for the book. The stuff I have on shoga I took explicitly from research.

So there was a band of gay men who had a specific role in weddings. One, they were the only men trusted to be around the bride because everybody knew they were not after the bride. The groom, maybe. Also, both bride and groom trusted these people to teach them about marriage intimacy, about sex. This is what was expected of you. Hell, sometimes they'd give them actual sex tips.

Not only were there varieties of sexual experience, but a lot of ancient African societies found ways to absorb, use, and compliment these things. So when I got to writing Tracker as queer, it didn't even feel like I was making a statement. It felt like I was slipping back into an old way of things. And that was shocking for me. But again, that's why I love research.

I mean, I'm a queer author. I wasn't necessarily sitting down like, 'I'm going to write a queer love story because let me score some points.' Maybe it does score some points...

Especially given the reputation the African continent is developing about homophobia. A lot of people don't realize this homophobia is an invented thing. This homophobia is something that has happened post-TV preachers, some of whom

are still considered quite legit in America. Coming out of the evangelical church in Jamaica, I know the tactic. These preachers come to Jamaica. First they ask, 'All right. Are we being filmed?' And once you convince them that they're not being taped, you think you're at a Nuremberg Rally. The things that come out of the mouths of these guys. So this whole demonizing of queerness and otherness is recent. There are some African tribes where there were like fifteen genders.

So that was the mind-blowing moment for me, and that's when I knew Tracker would be who he was. If anything the statement here is go back to your real roots and oppose the embrace of the new.

5D Fantasy seems to be a durable receptacle for all of this. It offers space to all of these subjects, some new, some ancient.

MJ It always has been, which is one of the great things about fantasy. Which is why I never understood snobbery against genre. Fantasy's been doing this work for years. I'm not touching anything Samuel Delaney didn't already do in 1960.

The problem with Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is that it's no longer science fiction, it's now absolute science fact. *Handmaid's Tale*, despite all the warnings, is still happening. In America, women are losing control over their own bodies daily. This stuff is happening. Sci-fi fantasy sometimes can serve as a warning. But maybe we're too snobbish to read fantasy so we didn't get it.

5D You noted that if someone says there are no politics in their writing, that's a statement.

MJ I'm amazed when people say there is no politics in their work. I'm like, 'You need to teach me how to do that.' Because it's not like I try to have politics in my work. I don't. But I can't escape it.

Politics informs every aspect of my life right now, including literally the air we're breathing.

I'm not a statement author and I'm trying not to make any, but I also think my characters are in the world, and my characters observe the world just as much as I am observing mine. How can you have a character not talk about politics? Or not be involved in it in any way? You are.

We talk about politics all the time. Good luck remembering the last day in your life you did not think of politics once before you went to bed. But characters never talk about it? Of course they talk about it. They talk about how horrible their king is. They'll talk about how it filters down. Without being too heavy-handed about something, you can sensitize the reader to what's going on.



Belleart

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

viscosity

calling out
calling in
you're not fooling me

tethered to the kinship
of disassociated
zeros and ones

shining your crown
of neoliberal
likes

yelling the loudest
in the
empty room

gathering
followers
like berries

feeding
fish
to insecurity

sliding
into
reckless moment
after reckless moment

we witness:

too many holes in your hide
the broken skin of a canoe
the tightening of a mind
tracks, leading nowhere.

at the
beach
we build a fire

sit in our
own
silence

peel off
blue
light

lie back
on
frozen
waves

breathe
in
sharp air

warm
into
each other

careful moment
after careful moment.

head of the lake

in a basement full of plastic flowers
perogies and
cabbage rolls

at the head of the lake
thinking under accusation

at the mouth of the catastrophic river
disappearing our kids

at the foot of the nest
beside trailer hitches, coffee, spoons

we made a circle
and it helped

the smoke did the things
we couldn't

singing
broke open hearts

i hold your hand
without touching it.

we're in the thinking part of the lake
faith under accusation

at the mouth of the river
and the spectre of free

at the foot of Animikig
beside bones of stone and red silver

in a basement full of increasing entropy
moose ribs, wild rice.

in realization
we don't exist without each other

she says: there's nothing about you
i'm not willing to know.



Belmont

500 Years of Resistance

Gord Hill draws an antidote to the conventional history of the Americas

PART 3: ASSIMILATION

A COMMON STRATEGY OF COLONIAL REGIMES IS TO ASSIMILATE SURVIVING NATIVE PEOPLES INTO THE COLONIAL SOCIETY ITSELF...



THIS MAKES THE NATIVE EASIER TO CONTROL, AS WELL AS AN OBEDIENT WORKER AND CONSUMER IN THE COLONIAL SYSTEM...

IN THE AMERICAS, THIS WAS DONE BY FORCING NATIVE CHILDREN TO ATTEND SCHOOLS RUN BY CHURCHES + PRIESTS.



THEY WERE KNOWN AS MISSIONS, INDUSTRIAL, OR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS...



CHILDREN WERE FORBIDDEN TO SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE OR PRACTISE THEIR CULTURE. MANY WERE ABUSED BY PRIESTS + STAFF.

RELIGION AND SCHOOLS ARE THE MAIN FORMS OF ASSIMILATING NATIVE PEOPLES.



THRU THESE, THE NATIVE'S CULTURE AND HISTORY ARE ERASED, REPLACED BY THOSE OF THE OCCUPYING NATION...

IN N. AMERICA, RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS EXISTED FROM THE MID-1800S UNTIL THE 1980 S.



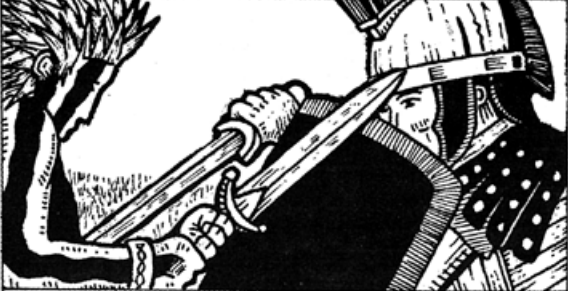
ENTIRE GENERATIONS WERE FORCED TO ADAPT EUROPEAN CULTURE + VALUES. TODAY'S GENERATIONS ARE THE MOST ASSIMILATED AND COLONIZED...

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF ASSIMILATION IS THE ROMAN COLONIZATION OF WESTERN EUROPE. SOME REGIONS WERE OCCUPIED FOR AS LONG AS 500 YEARS...



ALTHO' THE EUROPEAN TRIBES RESISTED, OVER TIME MOST HAD BECOME 'LATINIZED', WITH MANY LATER SERVING IN THE ROMAN ARMY OR GOVERNMENT...

TODAY, ENGLISH, FRENCH, SPANISH, GERMAN + ITALIAN HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN LATIN, THE RESULT OF ROMAN INVASION + CONQUEST...



WESTERN CIVILIZATION IS ITSELF THE RESULT OF ASSIMILATING EUROPEAN TRIBAL NATIONS INTO THE ROMAN EMPIRE...

IN N. AMERICA, RESERVATIONS WERE IMPORTANT TO REMOVE THE PEOPLE FROM THEIR LAND AND IMPOSE EUROPEAN CULTURE



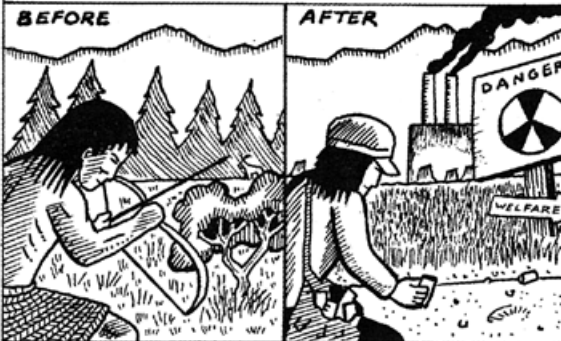
SHELTER IS ONE EXAMPLE; INSTEAD OF MANY SHARING ONE SHELTER, NATIVES WERE FORCED TO LIVE IN EUROPEAN-STYLE HOUSES.

THRU LAWS SUCH AS THE INDIAN ACT, TRADITIONAL FORMS OF GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZATION WERE BANNED...



IN PLACE OF THESE, BAND COUNCILS WERE IMPOSED, BASED ON EUROPEAN MODELS OF GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CONTROL...

THRU LOSS OF CULTURE + DESTRUCTION OF TERRITORY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE BECOME DEPENDENT ON STATE FUNDING...



THIS MAKES THEM MORE EASILY CONTROLLED AND VULNERABLE TO BOTH GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE PRESSURE FOR RESOURCES.

TO THIS END, STATES CONTINUE POLICIES OF LEGAL, POLITICAL + ECONOMIC ASSIMILATION OF NATIVE PEOPLES + RESERVE LAND...



THEIR GOAL IS TO DESTROY ALL INDIGENOUS CULTURE + IDENTITY THAT INSPIRES OUR SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE, AND WHICH LIMITS THEIR PLANS OF EXPLOITATION...



Birkov

‘My search for black Europe was about community, but it was also about Europe...’

Hannah Chukwu asks Johny Pitts to define *Afropean*

Johny Pitts has worked across many media forms throughout his career, from writing and creating music, to television presenting and photography. He founded the online collective, afropean.com, which provides a community for those whose cultural background encompasses both Africa and Europe. The website features photographic essays, narrative blog posts and links to events that allow the collective to create, share and form a community together.

He is the author of an upcoming book of the same name, Afropean, an on-the-ground documentary which charts his journey across Europe meeting Europeans of African descent who are forging new identities and navigating life in all its multiplicity.

Johny sat down with Five Dials to discuss his alternative map of the continent, as well as the origins of the term.

Johny Pitts It came from quite a mysterious place – from my own experiences growing up, and a period of feeling quite lost at the end of college and taking a couple of years out. Those couple of years, while I was going through them, felt like lost years. I draw a lot from those two years.

I was just reading something by Mark Fisher – who’s had a profound effect on my writing – where he talks about the autodidact, about someone who has to learn about the world outside of an official academy which isn’t providing them with the things they need to learn about. I really resonated with that, especially in terms of my own identity.

I suppose I was just looking for something beyond the local, where I grew up. I started to see that for a lot of my friends, their blackness – their Sheffield blackness in particular – could only sustain them as an identity for a certain amount of time. And when we got to around sixteen years old a lot of them fell by the wayside. I didn’t feel connected to the idea of the British nation either. My

dad’s from Brooklyn, and yet the African American suit didn’t really fit. So I suppose it started in a very personal place; that stereotypical search for identity. But what happened as I began to write the book is that I realized that it was about much more than me. My search for black Europe was about community, but it was also about Europe, and trying to make Europe come to terms with its black community. So it came from a very personal situation, I started at the personal to arrive at the universal. It ended with what I hope is a very human narrative.

Hannah Chukwu Your vision for collating experiences from the Afropean community also extends beyond the book, to your website, afropean.com. How do the book and website interconnect? Did one inspire the other?

JP I wanted to search Europe and find a sense of my own position, as someone who has brown skin in Europe, and see what the experiences of other people were. I started a Facebook page, before Facebook became this dark spectre. I started it in 2009, with the hope I could get information from other black communities about where I should go and who I could see and what issues I should grapple with. And I think what happened is I realized – which I think is so important in this era of identity politics – that this story was about more than me.

I realized I had to set up a journal online to share stories so that it wasn’t always coming through my own story and other people could get involved and share their stories. So I’ve always seen that the book and website really go hand-in-hand. It’s like the book gave birth to the website, and the website reimaged the book and then hopefully the book will encourage more people to go to the website. It’s an equal system.

HC Were you writing as you travelled?

JP I gave myself a goal whilst I was staying in all of these cheap hostels – oh God, some of the smells in those hostels. Anyway, I had to write 500 words a day, which is actually not that much. But to keep doing it takes discipline.

HC And that was for five months?

JP I came back with about 200,000 words. I also took three photographs per day. That was my goal. But what I found was that I put myself in a position of allowing the landscape to talk to me; I didn't set out much of an itinerary, and as I travelled and spoke to people they'd reference things I didn't know about. When I came back the research began.

Initially, there was this physical experience, and then afterwards was this experience of travelling through history and trying to unpick what I was seeing. I did it in a back-to-front way. A lot of people will research and then go and travel, but I think one of the virtues of travelling before you know what you're talking about is that you don't try and impose any kind of rigid structures or ideas upon the subject. So I allowed black Europe to tell its story.

HC Was there a reason for the selection of cities which you decided to travel to?

JP The cities were the one thing I did plan. I mean, the book is not a balanced portrait. I fell in love with Marseilles; I spent a long time there, whereas sometimes I'd just breeze through a place. But in general it became evident which cities I should go and visit after talking to people on my travels.

Sometimes blackness gets shoe-horned in with urban and the city, and one of the regrets of the book is that I didn't get to travel the rurality. I didn't get to see communities living in unexpected places, even in the UK. There's nothing in the book

about Bristol or Liverpool, and we have a long history of blackness. Because I was running out of time and money, and I didn't have a publishing deal when I was travelling around, I decided to stick to places that had the largest black community. Or, for instance, Moscow, which had this history during the Cold War with the international movement and with Africa. I felt I needed to explore where the rise in racism came from. It felt really important to go to Russia.

HC Your experiences in Russia resonated with me. I'd spent a few years travelling around Europe before going to Russia, and I knew I was making a big decision travelling there as a person of colour. I went in blind, feeling like the less I knew about the country's racism, the better; it was just after the Reggie Yates documentary *Extreme, Russia*. Did you feel safe? Why was it so important to recount that journey?

JP I was drawn to Russia. As I heard more about the story of African students there, I was led into the dark web, and to videos that were really frightening. But knowing about this history, and knowing that it hadn't always been like that, and knowing about all of these cold war ties Russia had with Africa, and this idea of solidarity with the workers of the world... I wanted to try and unpick it. I wanted to know why there was this big change in the mood towards black communities.

Russia was such a mystery to me and I felt like I had to dive into that mystery. It felt like a really important place to go, especially because Russia's on the periphery of the European idea. I wanted to see what was happening just outside of the usual spots we think of as Europe.

I noticed the notes I took there are quite jolly and optimistic. I think it's because anything that wasn't me getting beheaded by neo-Nazis was a

success. I was so grateful for any bits of goodwill that I found there. As I was leaving Russia, I felt like this massive weight had been lifted off my chest. I couldn't wait to leave.

Something I wanted in the book was a series of images of Russians staring at me. I started to take photographs of Russians staring at me. I got this big montage of faces just looking. So through the photographs, the lookers become the looked at. That was one of the virtues of being somebody who was documenting the experience: I got a bit of control over how I was presenting myself.

I was constantly on edge in Russia. There were a couple scary moments. I put one in the book. A fake taxi just stopped, opened the door and waited for me to get in. As if I was going to get in. Who knows what that was?

By the end of the chapter, Russia's still a bit of a mystery to me. But I do know that it wasn't a great place. Some of the members of the black community in Russia I spoke to really weren't having a good time.

HC Did you ever have an encounter where you thought, 'I don't know if the book that I want to write is the book that I'll end up writing'?

JP There were loads of times. I think I began the book with bravado, thinking I was an expert, and I ended the book realizing that I don't know anything. Not just about the history of black Europe, but, what is Europe? And what is blackness? And what ties everything together?

The realization that you can never fit everything into a category became the mood of the book. I had to allow the diversity of the book to really come through, like a bricolage – a series of experiences that never fully fit together. But there is a pattern there that we can probably all connect to and learn from.

Russia was one of the moments where my blackness didn't chime with the African students. I was trying to connect and I realized, I don't know what they're going through, and our blackness isn't enough here, in this situation, for us to connect. It was the same on the outskirts of Paris where there were moments I assumed I would be an insider but I was more of an outsider.

That can be a beneficial position, because it gives you more clarity than being totally immersed or totally observing, being on the inside and the outside.

HC When you came back to the UK, did your foreign experiences change your view of the communities here? I really loved your line criticizing 'The reduction of the black-British experience into a single London-oriented narrative.' Obviously as someone from Manchester, I really resonated with that.

JP I remember watching the documentary series *Black is the New Black*, where they talk to black people about their experience. It was all Londoners and maybe a few Brummies in there as well. Of course that's where the largest black communities are, but I feel like it's the same stories recycled over and over again.

Also, what I worry about the most after writing the book is seeing how over-reliant Britain in general is to America, but especially in the black communities. I'm always surprised that black communities here don't look across to Europe more often. I did a little radio show on One Extra and my whole idea was that I wanted to play music from the Afro-European diaspora. I wanted the French hip-hop, and people just weren't interested.

It's not always a language thing either. This Swedish singer-songwriter Steven Simmonds sings in English and writes beautiful soul music. But on

the show, if it wasn't very localized black British music they wanted, then it was music from America. We're missing a trick there, especially with the legacy of colonialism. There's a lot of knowledge there that black communities can share amongst each other.

HC I completely agree. While reading the book, I realized how much my own perception of blackness was based on American blackness. All the books I read growing up by black writers were written by Americans.

JP It was exactly the same for me. Even someone like Caryl Phillips, who's become such an important figure in my writing life. I didn't read him when I was young. I read Toni Morrison and Richard Wright and Langston Hughes and all those canonized African-American writers way before any British writers. Even someone like Ben Okri, who was winning prizes in the 90s, was just not on the curriculum. Benjamin Zephaniah and John Agard were the only two I was taught in school.

HC Do you remember the poem that goes something along the lines of: *'When I sleep at night, I close half-a-eye, consequently when I dream, I dream half-a-dream...'*

JP Yes! 'Half-Caste'. That was it. They were the heights.

HC As you were writing the book, did you have a specific group of readers in mind?

JP Initially, a community of people of colour who live in Europe. First and foremost, the book has to work for that community. Beyond that I have these strange ambitions. My mate Thomas is a 6'3" rugby-playing white lad who doesn't read much.

The book deals with politics and race and culture, but I hope it comes across as being about experiencing humanity. There are so many giants I'm standing on the shoulders of, people like Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall and even people like Frantz Fanon, who laid this theoretical foundation. But I feel like often those books preach to the converted. I wanted to write a book that took some of those ideas and allowed them to enter places they wouldn't traditionally enter.

HC You create content across so many different forms, including photography. Did you ever consider that this would be a photographic book instead?

JP This idea of *Afropean* really was a mood. It was this strange feeling. There was something that this word contained that was really important.

As I set off, I knew it had to have photographs. Initially I thought it would be mostly photographs with some text. Then I realized the problem with photography is that it can be quite voyeuristic. Also, as soon as you aim a camera at somebody it automatically becomes performative. I've tried to capture banal moments in my photographs, like commutes, for instance, as I didn't want to constantly look for the sensational.

The great thing about writing is that there were private conversations I could transcribe, where people would tell me things that they ordinarily wouldn't tell me. That's why I sometimes used pseudonyms for people who weren't coming across very well. They're saying stuff that is really problematic but needs to be addressed. I felt that it was unfair to name them because I wanted to respect the nature of the private conversations. But with writing I felt like my pen could enter spaces that my camera couldn't. To counteract, though, I felt that my camera could describe things that

my pen couldn't. There was a balance. But it did become more of a written account in the end.

HC In the introduction, you talk about why the word Afropean felt so important – partly because there wasn't a hyphen. It wasn't a case of identifying someone as 'mixed-this' or 'half-that'. Did you ever feel like the book was giving new terminology to people who've been described as 'mixed-race'?

JP No, actually. I remember in the noughties, especially under New Labour, there was a real industry geared around experiences of mixed-race people. Everybody wanted to know what is it like to be mixed-race? I took part in that, but I feel it became a bit fetishized. There was a bit of shadism there. I felt like it was the polite or attractive iteration of blackness that white communities could identify with. Actually, at some point I decided I would stop writing about being mixed-race.

Now, it might be time to back into writing about being mixed-race from a different perspective, because there is a perspective that is important. But what I realised, with *Afropean* was that it's not about being mixed-race at all, but about being mixed-cultured. And I noticed that a lot of writing and things that I saw in the news didn't take into account the experiences of me and my friends.

On one end, I've got my friend Ayo, who's a blue blood from Nigerian royalty, who identifies with *Afropean* because he's somebody who was educated in England. He was forced into calling himself Andy by his parents and he's now working out how to claim his name back and where he sits as someone who is African and European. So it's for people like that.

On the other hand, and to a lesser extent, it's for my friend Leon, who's white and grew up in a really Caribbean part of Sheffield where he spoke

better patois than me. He was totally immersed in the black community and actually took part in that performative blackness, probably in a way that even I didn't. Afropean was to include this vagueness and this liminality, and anyone who finds ethnic absolutisms problematic.

I wanted to challenge that. I don't think it's just about being mixed race at all.



Reading William Trevor

By Yiyun Li

In retrospect little makes sense—perhaps all stories, rather than *once-upon-a-time*, should start this way. Shortly after my first book was published, I asked an Irish friend to send a copy with a thank-you note to William Trevor. I considered the note necessary—without his stories mine would not have been written. I wanted to be well mannered, too, so the note was brief and courteous. A few months later, a reply came, graciously written. I framed the letter and hung it in my study. It was uncharacteristic of me—to assign meaning to an object presumes an attachment. It was there as inspiration, I told myself, from someone I aspired to be.

is an emergency exit, which I agreed to give up when I left the hospital. To think people used to be able to disappear easily: borders crossed, names changed, evidence destroyed, connections severed. No one seems to mind the absence of Miss Havisham or Mrs. Rochester. A father in a Jean Stafford novel walks out of a cobbler's workshop and is never seen again. Maidens from *Dream of the Red Chamber* or *The Tale of Genji*, when heart-broken or abandoned, humiliated or disillusioned, become Buddhist nuns, their stories ending long before their lives do. An uncle, my mother's eldest brother, vanished on the eve of the Communist victory over the Nationalist army, and an orphan

I wrote to Trevor about the possibility of visiting him. It is inconceivable now to think I behaved in such a way, as Trevor is among the most private writers, which was not difficult for me to deduce.

The story might have ended here. I would have continued reading Trevor as I did Turgenev or Hardy: from a distance, which is a prerequisite for unabashed connection. But Turgenev and Hardy could not have written and raised the possibility of meeting in person one day.

The next November, traveling to London for an event, I wrote to Trevor about the possibility of visiting him. It is inconceivable now to think I behaved in such a way, as Trevor is among the most private writers, which was not difficult for me to deduce. I myself would have been taken aback by the inappropriateness of such a request.

The effort to avoid isolation sometimes agitates me. The thought of disappearing from the world

girl, half maid and half daughter in the family and raised as his future bride, had to be married off to another man. The aunt in Nanxun, we called her; no other relative was known by the place where he or she lived. In an album there were family pictures she sent each year to my grandfather, all her children having inherited her remarkable beauty, growing up effortlessly in front of my eyes each time I flipped the pages. The aunt in Nanxun was mentioned often because of the unmentionable, an uncle presumably alive in Taiwan on optimistic days, presumably killed in action when optimism could not be sustained. (I learned of his existence and the conjecture of his fate by eavesdropping on my mother and my aunt once. Foolishly I told a friend at school, who then wrote a note to inform

the teacher about this uncle of mine in Taiwan. The note was passed on to my mother. The teacher was her colleague, thoughtful enough to intercept a secret that could bring harm, though I could not find gratitude for the teacher nor forgiveness for my friend. It was because of their meddling that I received a beating.)

Forty years later the uncle appeared as unexpectedly as he had disappeared, in a long letter that had taken more than a year, through many hands, to reach his father. My grandfather, with a few months to live, hoped for a reunion with his lost son, but the travel ban across the Taiwan Strait would not be lifted for another two years.

We now live in an ever-connected world, allocated only the wishful thinking of privacy and solitude. Once, when my green card application was denied and it was reported in the news, a man calling himself Doctor S— kept phoning my workplace with a marriage offer, saying it would secure a green card for me. Once a woman said to me at a cocktail party the moment I entered the well-groomed garden: I want you to know, had my mother had your success she would not have killed herself. At a festival in East Sussex I watched a man come up to Trevor afterward and ask if he could stop by for tea, describing Trevor's house correctly and in detail.

In notes sent to my publisher and to the hotel, Trevor asked me to phone once I arrived in London. A meeting was proposed, not in Devon, where he lives, but in Bath, more easily accessed by train for both parties. It was considerate of him, I knew, but it also occurred to me that Bath would be safer for him to meet a stranger. I could be a character in a Trevor story, quiet and nondescript yet possessing inexplicable malevolence. Can a mistrustful person, who is capable of dissecting herself with ruthless imagination, be trustworthy at all?

It turned out that I could not travel to Bath. There was publicity lined up for the day. I was disappointed but relieved. External interference pardons one from ambivalence. My wish to meet Trevor was as strong as the fear that it might happen—there was no way to rid the doubt that had begun to plague me: Who are you? What makes you think of yourself as innocuous?

I phoned back, with the hope that Trevor would be relieved, too. We chatted about the weather—rain in London and rain in Devon—for a minute. He told me there would be other opportunities. Next year he and his wife were planning to visit America. By ship, he said; I can guarantee you it's a more pleasant way to travel.

July 2015. We visited China for the first time since my husband and I became American citizens. While in Baishan, my husband's hometown, my mother called and said her brother had died that morning.

Years ago, I had written a novel set in Baishan without having seen it. Baishan, *White Mountain*, used to be Muddy River, named after the river running through town. In the 1990s the city government had deemed the name a hindrance to its prosperity and rechristened the city. With a novelist's opportunism I had claimed the unwanted Muddy River. My husband had drawn a map of the city circa the 1970s, and I had followed people's footsteps in it.

When we entered the city I noticed the bridge where two of my characters met for the first time, the foot of the mountain where a trusting dog was poisoned, the cooling tower of the electricity plant where a murderous janitor worked, and the river itself, befittingly muddy, fast flowing after days of rain. I had wondered if I would notice things about the place and its people that I had not imagined while working on the novel. I did not, which was

a disappointment. I do not mind that my imagination is limited; I do mind when the world is not bigger than what one can imagine.

Until the phone call about my uncle's death, I had been dispirited. Please, I ordered my eyes, find one thing that is not anticipated, but everything in China seemed only to confirm. The cabdrivers told political jokes that I had heard twenty years earlier. The pushing crowd made me impatient, and I elbowed queue cutters with an aggressiveness that came back as easily as the rude slang I hurled at them. My children, Western tourists, were continually amused by the inept English translations of public announcements and signs, but to me they were stale jokes. Only once did I stop to appreciate

I checked out *The Hill Bachelors*, Trevor's newest collection, after reading the story, and trudged through the snow from the university library to the student union, where I sat on a green sofa next to a movie theater where films in foreign languages drew a limited crowd every night. Details preserved by memory can be dull, significant only to the one remembering, but it is the mundane that remains mysterious.

It would be presumptuous to claim that a connection was made during that first encounter; it would not be as presumptuous to say a space that had not been known to me was made possible through reading Trevor. From *The Hill Bachelors* I moved on to his other books. A few weeks later I

I could be a character in a Trevor story, quiet and nondescript yet possessing inexplicable malevolence.

a message. At the Beijing international airport, a woman on a bulletin board encourages her audience to enjoy life. 'Take a look at this wonderful life unfolding in front of you,' she exhorts in Chinese, but sounds skeptical (or subversive) in the English translation: *This wonderful life lies as you see it.*

The first story I ever read by William Trevor was 'Traditions,' set in an Irish boarding school. It was published in *The New Yorker* with a photo of young scholars in dark suits as illustration. Its reality was far from mine. I was in a science program then, uncertain if I should continue. My doubt was that I could easily see my life unfurl in front of me: a degree in a year, a few years of post-doctorate training, a secure job in academia or the biomedical industry, a house and children, a dog because a dog rollicking in a neatly maintained yard had always appeared to me to be the pinnacle of an American life.

discussed with my advisor the possibility of leaving science. Stay, he said; you have a bright future in this country. Yes, I said, but I can already see myself at the end of that future; I know I will regret it if I don't try this.

This, as I explained to him, was to become a writer. To write is to find a new way to see the world, and I did not doubt, as I was reading Trevor, that I wanted to see as he does.

Letters were exchanged a few months ahead of Trevor's visit to America to set the date of the meeting. In October 2007, I took a red-eye flight from California to Boston to meet him for lunch. I had three hours, as I was to catch the evening flight back.

Many things were talked about during the lunch: a trip the previous year Trevor and his wife,

Jane, had taken to meet the letterer who would carve their gravestones; a conversation decades ago with his father about becoming a letterer himself; a funeral during which religious music had been played against the will of the dead and the alive; a conversation with Graham Greene, another with V. S. Pritchett; descriptions of Molly Keane's work and the graveyard she was buried in, which I would visit the next year. Halfway through the lunch, a woman in an orange blouse walking past the restaurant patio caught Trevor's attention. There was something incomprehensible about her in that moment, he explained. Such moments may pass, he said, though I sensed that often they did not.

After lunch Trevor showed me the work of Henry Moore near his hotel. I followed him, or my eyes followed where I thought he was looking, feeling apprehensive. I could describe the sunny New England afternoon in October and the bronze sculptures surrounded by the trees that were changing colors, but they would be clichés. The truth is, I did not know what I was supposed to see.

This apprehension repeats itself, in museums and galleries and movie theaters. Once a friend pointed out that a sentence I had written describing a chrysanthemum felt wrong. It's not bad, I said, defending it, not doubting at all that I had made every word right. It was not that the sentence was poorly written, she said, but that it was written not from perception but its absence.

This art of seeing—a painting, a sculpture, a film—is an elusive one to me. In Trevor's novella *Nights at the Alexandra*, a cinema in a provincial Irish town offers the setting of a tale of love and loyalty. In Trevor's memoir, days are whiled away in cinemas, the boredom of youth compensated by the wonders on screen.

I have never felt the attraction to films. The movie theatres in Beijing—Workers' Clubs they

were called in the 1970s and early 1980s, which held over a thousand people—offered little wonder. The newsreels about King Sihanouk and his comrade General Pol Pot were repetitive, and the movies, which we were often required to see as part of school, did not interest me as much as the people sitting nearby, a woman cracking sunflower seeds or a man gurgling while drinking tea from a mug. Often someone would be summoned during a movie. A handwritten note, saying Comrade So-and-So was requested due to an emergency, would be projected onto the dark column next to the screen. These interruptions felt like riddles to which the answers were withheld forever. Obligingly I offered scenarios to satisfy myself. I wished that my name would appear.

One of my most dreaded activities in the army was the weekly movie, an enrichment activity to raise morale. I established a competition with the girl who sat next to me to see who could sleep through these movies longer—I was the more frequent winner. But my feats were not as admirable as those of the girl in another squad, who could stand in the most perfect military posture but doze off confidently.

The girls who slept during the daytime were your allies. After lights-out and before reveille they occupied storage rooms and toilet stalls and memorized English vocabulary. There were other night wanderers, too. Once a girl was found weeping in the darkness; she was later sent home. Once my bunkmate, reputed to be one of the top young mathematicians in China, was stopped by a girl when she went to use the bathroom. The girl had spent hours after lights-out trying to solve a well-known mathematical problem and asked for her help. Crazy, someone commented, but obsessions demanded respect, too. A petite girl in my squad regaled us with stories from her village, where women took their own lives with weed killer and

pesticides as readily as—in her exact words—apples dropped from apple trees. The same girl read and marked a few notices in a magazine where young women advertised their wishes to seek soul mates in the army. Lecherous, she called the women; all they want is to marry a soldier for practical gain. I was doubtful but persuaded—don't question me, she said; these are people I've grown to know—to draft replies. I made up male names and ranks and combined them with solid knowledge about military life, and mailed the letters in army-issued envelopes to ensure that a reply would come to our fictional selves. For days and weeks we waited. No love letter ever found its way into our hands.

looked happy, she said; why would he do it? I had no answer, so my mother asked me if she had told me about the death of our former neighbor Mrs. Xiao. Yes, I said, but that did not stop her from telling it again: the woman had jumped from her eighth-floor apartment the year before. Courteous, aloof, elegantly dressed at a time when most women wore gray and blue Mao jackets, she was one of the most graceful people I had known as a child. She had refused to join the neighborhood gossip (and so became a subject); she had never meddled with my or any child's business.

When I was growing up, my family never once traveled together. The summer I was seven, my

A petite girl in my squad regaled us with stories from her village, where women took their own lives with weed killer and pesticides as readily as—in her exact words—apples dropped from apple trees.

On the phone, reporting my uncle's death, my mother informed me that toward the end of his life he had become violent, beating his children and grandchildren. Your cousins said it was dementia, she said; but do you think what he really had were mental problems?

My mother has a way of talking about mental illness and suicide that makes me uneasy. The day I arrived in Beijing she reported that the father of an elementary-school classmate had died. When his wife was out grocery shopping, he made a detailed list of bank accounts and passwords, bills to be paid and already taken care of, and then hanged himself. Do you remember him? my mother asked. Yes, I said. He was active in the retirees' choir, my mother said; a good tenor. He

uncle, who lived four hours by train from Beijing, brought my sister and me to his home, the first time I had been on a train or set foot in another city. Perhaps it is his death that makes me modify the memory, but it seems those two weeks at my uncle's belonged to the happiest time of my childhood. Though I know, in retrospect, that the summer must have been difficult for his family. Our eldest cousin had taken the college entrance exam and scored third in his province, but he had a noticeable limp from polio, so no college would admit him. He was quiet. Still, he showed us around town like a dutiful host, carrying four children on a bike with twenty-eight-inch wheels and reinforced for agricultural use. As he rode across town, my sister and I and our two cousins waved

at people as though we were a troupe of acrobats.

My uncle played for hours on a pump organ every evening. I did not understand his music, but I was mesmerized by the pedals going up and down.

When I was in high school, my uncle wrote a long letter to his three nieces narrating his grievances. He was six when the Japanese invaded his hometown, and when his parents evacuated, he was left behind. (Wrong, my mother and my aunt said. The right version, they explained, was that he had been playing with a servant's son, refused to leave, and said he would go to their grandfather's house for a few days; but their grandfather was soon killed by the Japanese, and a few days became a few months.) His parents, he wrote in the letter, never cared for him, and as a teenager he had been forced to seek a future in the army. (Wrong, my mother and my aunt said. Their big brother, an officer in the Nationalist army, had helped him enroll as a cadet.) Both brothers fought against Mao's army in the civil war. When they lost, one of them crossed the Taiwan Strait, while the uncle who missed the boat was sent to a factory to be reformed. Eventually he became a music teacher in an elementary school. By the time he wrote the letter there were more reasons to wail against life's injustice: his elder brother's prosperity in Taiwan (he himself could've had the same good life had he left China), his son's disability, which made it hard for him to find a wife, his only daughter's stillborn baby. Disappointment after disappointment: Did anyone ever try to understand him? The question upset my aunt and my mother. They decided that he must have gone mad like many before him. Why else would he write such untruths? Doesn't he already have three children to inherit his woes?

In interviews Trevor says that he writes 'out of curiosity and bewilderment.' What does not make sense is what matters. What motivated my

uncle to write the letter? Is it fascination or devotion that makes my mother start her conversations with the news of someone's suicide? Is it selfish of me to react coolly, as though it were irrelevant? Why did Trevor agree to meet me? Why was the lunch with Trevor not a merely courteous meeting where gratitude was properly expressed and accepted? Come and visit before too long, he said, and spoke of the garden he wanted me to see. At the metro station, the man behind me on the escalator turned around to look at Jane, who had joined us, and Trevor. They waved until I was out of sight. A goodbye, isn't it? the man said, and I said a goodbye indeed. More leave-taking would follow in the coming years, at the Exeter train station; at London Victoria; at the sunny garden of a restaurant in Devon. At each farewell the question not asked is always there: Will I see you again?

Only by fully preparing oneself for people's absence can one be at ease with their presence. A recluse, I have begun to understand, is not a person for whom a connection with another person is unattainable or meaningless, but one who feels she must abstain from people because a connection is an affliction, or worse, an addiction. It had not occurred to me, until I met Trevor, to ask: *Will I see you again?* What had precluded me from asking is this: *Perhaps I won't see you again, and if so, goodbye for now and goodbye forever.*

Do you think of your characters after you finish the books? I asked Trevor the next time I visited him, when he was driving me from the train station to his house.

I do, he said. I don't reread them but I remember the characters. I still feel sad for them sometimes. Do you?

I remember your characters and feel sad for them, too, I said.

He looked at me. No, what I mean is, do you

think about your characters? Do you feel sad for them?

I knew that was what he had asked, but to admit that characters, having left, still kept me a hostage seemed silly.

It was nearly spring—February, though warm and sunny—and flowers in the garden were already blossoming. At lunch, Trevor placed me on the side of the table facing the window so I could see outside. He sat down, and rose again, pulling the curtain ever so slightly. This way, he explained to me, I could enjoy the garden without the sun shining into my eyes.

Sometimes people ask me what they should read if they want to start reading William Trevor. To say anything about Trevor's work is also to speak about memories—they are in English, and I know where they start. There is 'The Piano Tuner's Wives': the pain of seeing the characters struggle with cruelty they do not know they are capable of is not alleviated by familiarity. There is 'Reading Turgenev': once in Pennsylvania I was driven by a poet in the moonlit countryside, and she told me that she had been working on a poem called 'Reading Turgenev' as a homage. There is *Nights at the Alexandra*, which traveled often with me. Once on a trip to New York, I watched a middle-aged woman and a child on the subway, the girl no more than thirteen, her head on the older woman's shoulder, the latter caressing the child's inner thigh. I could not tell if they were mother and daughter or a pair of lovers. Not knowing disturbed me as much as either possibility. Later in the hotel I started the first paragraphs of a novella. The narrator, a middle-aged woman living by herself in Beijing, tells her story with the same opening lines used by the narrator in Trevor's novella, an older bachelor in a provincial Irish town. A person living in isolation does not speak from solitude, but loneliness; that Trevor's narrator decided to speak to the

world makes it possible for the woman to do so.

Trevor's books—*Other People's Worlds*, *Fools of Fortune*, *Elizabeth Alone*, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, and many more—offer me a haven. But even to explain that is to intrude: there is the privacy of Trevor, who has built that space; there is my privacy, too—in writing and in life one is often sustained by memories unshared.

After Trevor gave his last public reading—I had flown to England for it—he told Jane and me about an old man at the end of the book-signing queue. The man had come not for Trevor's signature, but to thank him. His wife had loved Trevor's stories, and when she had become too sick, he read to her. It was a Trevor story he had been reading to her as she died.

In time I would learn what it meant to understand one's own writing through the eyes of a dying reader. A woman from Canada wrote to me, noting the chapter and page number where she had read a sentence that she said she would never want to lose. Her brain had been damaged from radiation, she wrote; she had not been able to concentrate because she fell asleep so often. She felt isolated but did not wish to seek out others. 'This is something I have long considered and now I think I have my answer,' she said of the sentence. 'Perhaps I will never sleep again.'

I remembered writing the sentence. Defending my mind at that moment, which was considering death as the way out, I had trespassed the boundary and written about myself: *Love measured by effort was the only love within his capacity. Failure too, measured by effort, would be the failure he would have to make peace with one day.*

The other day I read through the letters from Trevor. I wish there were a way to write them into this book. But I also wish there were a way to

leave him unnamed as two other friends are among these pages.

How old is your baby? a young woman asked me when, years ago, I checked into my side of the hospital room we were to share. Three days, I said; he was running a fever when we got home so he was readmitted. How old is your baby? I asked. He turned a month yesterday, she said; we're waiting for him to reach five pounds. She was a high school student, and when she was not called away to nurse her baby she studied in bed. After school, a boy her age came to visit, and they huddled in her narrow bed, whispering and giggling. Two days later,

and what I was writing in it. I showed her what I had underlined in an Elizabeth Bowen story, when one character asked another: 'Has there been anything you have never told me?' *Frightening*, I had written in the margin, and the woman insisted that I write down it's not so *frightening* for Alex, which was her name.

A cabdriver on my latest visit to Devon asked me which was my local prison, Sing Sing or Alcatraz. Alcatraz, I said, and he expressed regret, as I would not have heard of his relative imprisoned in Sing Sing in the 1930s, who had a record of hosting house parties from which people kept disappearing.

The other day I read through the letters from Trevor. I wish there were a way to write them into this book.

the Twin Towers fell, and I spent the day between watching the news and visiting the quarantined baby. In the evening, when I returned to the room, they had changed the channel to the Cartoon Network, watching *Tom and Jerry* with the volume turned low.

The first time I went to Devon a young woman next to me on the train described the boardinghouse she would inherit one day from her grandparents. Her boyfriend was hoping to be hired by the old couple. I imagined them whispering and giggling behind her grandparents' backs, like the new parents from years ago. One's hope for strangers comes more naturally. Perhaps the child in Iowa, a teenager now, still has parents in love with each other. Perhaps the young woman and her boyfriend have settled down in the boardinghouse.

A few years ago, on a flight to London, a woman next to me asked to see the book I was reading

It's my Irish guilt that drove me to the West Coast, a cabdriver in California said to me; have you heard of James Michael Curley, my granduncle, the only mayor of Boston who was elected from prison? Take my card, the driver prompted me, and before I exited the car he reminded me to look up his family story, which I dutifully did.

One morning in Washington, D.C., I stood for half an hour with another woman, waiting for the airport counter to open at five o'clock. She was a single mother, and she and her three daughters were on the way to Disneyland. They had packed all their party clothes and gone over a list to unplug everything in the house. They had saved for years to make this trip, the woman said. It's wonderful chatting with you, she said when the counter opened; we should exchange emails.

People like to be asked about their lives. Sometimes they only need someone to listen. There is

not a safer way to be out in the world, until listening pulls one into an unsolicited story. 'I do not know how much time I have. I am wondering if you are willing to meet and to see if you are interested in my story,' a woman with cancer wrote to me. I had thought it was impossible to deny a dying person's wish until the woman wrote again, predicting I would cancel the appointment because she was 'inspired by serial killer Dr. Hannibal Lecter character to become a psychiatrist. Had suicidal and homicidal ideation. Struggled with being kind and evil constantly. Pursued happiness all these years and never found it. Quite often I wish I had a button to push to kill the entire human race.'

You must protect yourself, a friend warned me. But to write one has to give up protection fundamentally.

I have not forgotten a person who has come into my life, and perhaps it is for that reason I have no choice but to live as a recluse. The people I carry with me have lived out not only their own rations but mine too. To remember is the due a recluse owes the world.

My father and I used to plant string beans in our yard, their tendrils reaching higher each day on the bamboo fence. When summer ended an old woman in the neighbourhood would snap the beans a few days before we were ready to harvest. The first time I caught her stealing I was furious, but my parents said that I shouldn't be because she had sewn a cotton jacket for me when I was a baby. Year after year the old woman harvested our beans, and every time my parents reminded me to be grateful for the jacket. Then she stopped coming: she had died, and I had no more reason to feel anything.

Once my grandfather, taking a walk along Garden Road, felt unwell and was helped by a young soldier. He became part of the family, an adopted

grandson who visited on weekends. After my grandfather's death, he traveled to Beijing with his new bride and stayed with us. My sister and I adored his bride, who was pretty and mild-mannered. The day before their departure, he had to stay overnight in a queue for train tickets, and I caught her crying in the morning when he had not returned. He was only delayed, and they went home happily married. After they left I found a writing pad, the top page ripped away, though I could see the trace of what had been written: an anxious monologue of the bride's, asking herself what his absence meant, why she was left in this vacancy, and how the marriage had come into being in the first place. Years later I underlined in a Bowen novel a passage about a character's 'emphatic' pencil, which had left a trace for her daughter to decipher.

What's this about? my older son asked me when I was watching on the Internet a military parade in Beijing. A celebration of the end of World War II seventy years ago, I said. My great-grandfather died in that war, I said, and immediately regretted sounding like the cabdrivers easily offering inherited family dramas. Which year was that? my son asked. Nineteen thirty-eight, I said. That was the end of the discussion. I did not want to describe the man's death as it had been described to me. He, a fabric merchant in a small town, was forced into hard labor for the Japanese army; he had a limp that made him unable to keep up with the other laborers, and was killed summarily, his torso cut open by a sword. (Having not met the man and not witnessed his death, I had spent much time thinking about him when I was young. His limp reminded me of my limping cousin.)

I don't understand why Trevor still writes about the Troubles, someone in Ireland once said to me. They are old stories, and Ireland has moved on. I can tell you your books have hurt my feel-

ings, a reader, who turned out to have grown up in the same apartment compound I did, announced at a bookstore reading; why do you have to write about China's history; why can't you make me feel proud of being Chinese? But cruelty and kindness are not old stories, and never will be.

In elementary school, a girl's father died suddenly. The next morning, on cleaning duty, I swept my side of the schoolyard and watched her sweep the other side. (It did not occur to me to question why cleaning duty was more important than a father's death or why I did not offer to help her.) She was weeping, her tears falling into a pile of leaves. I wanted to say something to her but did not know what, all the time plagued by a glum concern. She was the other plump girl in my grade; even the meanest boys would leave her alone now, and I would be the only plump girl to be made fun of. I did not recognize the frivolousness of my worry. Though I remember my subsequent thought while watching her: at least she had a reason to cry, and people would understand.

Did I tell you Teacher Sun died? my mother asked me recently. Nobody is going to miss him, she said; bedbound for ten years and nobody felt bad for him then, either. There was no malice in her words. The dead man, my fifth-grade math teacher, had once been known to beat boys in class and put his hands the wrong way on girls' bodies. No parents or teachers or school officials ever intervened. He was a violent man, capable of doing anything to anyone who offended him. One less evil person in the world, my mother said. Her words reminded me of something I had nearly succeeded in forgetting. This teacher used to write problems on the board at the beginning of class and ask me to solve them while he walked between aisles, taking his time to pick out ears to wring. When I finished the problems, having already inflicted pain on a boy or two he would return to the board. Beautiful, he

would remark. Despite his cigarette-stained fingers and the sour breath of a smoker behind his sadistic smile, I did not feel repulsed by his approval. Then he would turn and launch a piece of chalk at someone—we all knew it would happen. You, the teacher would say, yes, I'm talking to you, he would stare at the boy marked by the chalk; you'll never understand the beauty of a mind. With those words I was dismissed and sent back to my seat.

Cruelty and kindness, revisited, are not what they appear to be.

When I visited my parents this past summer, in the same apartment I grew up in, I saw a photo of me, taken on my fifth birthday, next to a photo of my mother, taken when she was sixteen. There were other photos of the family, though those two, older than the rest by decades, their subjects captured at a much younger moment, were prominently displayed. I flinched at this shrine of innocence, when neither girl in the pictures had yet caused much damage. My mother had a dreamy laugh, beautiful in a romantic and glamorous way; I was smiling as ordered by the photographer, not precociously but dutifully. What if I had not known either of them? I would have looked at them more closely, my curiosity not different from my curiosity about any stranger. No better and no worse than others, these two are fools of fortune, too.

'You may be less confused than you imagined,' in a letter Trevor wrote. 'Stories are a hope, and often they obligingly answer questions.'

Who are you? Trevor asked when I saw him this past spring. It's okay, I said; I'm only coming to see you. Ah, we met in Boston, he said a minute later. Yes, we met in Boston, I said, but I could have also said: we are solitary travelers, having crossed paths in the land of stories.



The Unist'ot'en Blockade

Photographs by Jimmy Jeong

Since 2009, the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en people and its supporters have occupied a camp that blocks proposed oil and gas pipelines in northern British Columbia, Canada.

According to their website, 'the Unis'tot'en are known as the toughest of the Wet'suwet'en as their territories were not only abundant, but the terrain was known to be very treacherous.'

In January, 2019, an armed Royal Canadian Mounted Police force entered Wet'suwet'en territory without their consent and arrested 14 people. The RCMP were enforcing an interim injunction obtained by Coastal GasLink Pipeline Ltd. (a subsidiary of TransCanada Pipelines) to prevent interference with work regarding its planned natural gas pipeline crossing Wet'suwet'en territory.

Supporters traveled to the camp.



Tange Joseph, Fort Babine, British Columbia

'I'm here to support the Unist'ot'en camp and protect the waters. Our waters were contaminated with mercury. When I grew up we used to drink that contaminated water. Our fish were contaminated.'



First Nations leaders meet with Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers at the Unist'ot'en camp near Houston, B.C., 9 January, 2019.



**Brian Michell and Gary Michell,
Wet'suwet'en fishery technicians, from Tse-Kya**

'We are here for protection of rivers and creeks that our salmon use for habitats. This is our father clan territory. And in honour of our father we are here. One Strong Nation.'



Adam Gagnon, hereditary Wing Chief of the Fireheat Clan
'I'm here to support the Unist'ot'en in defending the land against the big greedy corporations.'



The Unist'ot'en camp near Houston, B.C., 9 January, 2019.



Sabina Dennis from the Dakelh Cariboo Clan
'I'm here in support of the Wet'suwet'en people in protecting the sovereignty and sacred inherent right to protect their land.'



Lara Williams on eggs

‘We might think of disgust as entirely innate but it appears it may also be culturally conditioned.’

Alan Trotter on what makes a book

‘When an author subverts the conventions of the book and reminds the reader of the book’s physical presence, it is felt as a rudeness and a breach of good hygiene.’

Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel
on how to decolonize your diet

‘For us, helping to build an awareness of the relationship between food and community offers one way to reclaim Indigenous knowledge.’

New fiction by Dizz Tate

**‘You lose all your money.
You go to live with Aunt Beryl.’**

&

Tana French on writing mystery

‘I was thinking about the relationship between luck and empathy, and how too much luck can stunt empathy.’

How to Decolonize Your Diet

Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel on cultural reclamation, food politics, and a very good recipe for *tamalitos*.

Authors Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel are life partners. When Luz was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006, they both radically changed their diets and began seeking out recipes featuring healthy, vegetarian Mexican foods. They also began researching the health benefits of certain ancestral Mexican and Central American foods.

‘We started to evaluate Mesoamerican cuisine and quickly found that foods from the pre-Hispanic era (i.e., before colonization) were among the healthiest foods on the planet,’ Luz writes in their forward to their book, *Decolonize Your Diet*, ‘and that many of the less healthy aspects of Mesoamerican cuisine came about as a direct result of colonization – with the introduction of wheat, beef, cheese, cooking oils, and sugar. Before colonization, Mesoamerican food was steamed, grilled or cooked on a clay skillet known as a *comal*. Meat was eaten only in small quantities. Our ancestors gathered and ate wild herbs and greens. They cultivated hundreds of different varieties of beans, squash, and corn, not just the few varieties now available at most grocery stores. In terms of corn, in particular, our ancestors created a rich and sustaining cuisine that included yellow, white, red, blue, and black corn, made tamales, tacos, atoles, tlacoyos, and more.’

Thus began Calvo and Esquibel’s quest to decolonize their diet.

Luz explains further: ‘First, we started eating simple foods: a fresh pot of beans! And then I learned how to make fresh corn tortillas from scratch. Ah! My spirit awoke. I recalled warm memories of these tastes and smells from childhood. We decided to raise our own chickens. I started a garden and found seeds for wild greens like *quelites* (lamb’s quarters) and *verdolagas* (purslane). With the help of friends, we liberated paved spaces so that we could plant fruit trees. In the center of the garden, I constructed an herb spiral where I grow many

herbs, including Mesoamerican species, like Mexican oregano, *pipicha* (*Porophyllum linaria*) *pápalo* (*Porophyllum ruderale*) and lemon verbena.

‘For us, helping to build an awareness of the relationship between food and community offers one way to reclaim Indigenous knowledge. We are writing a cookbook, but not just for individual cooks to read, or even cook from, while isolated in their kitchens. The project of decolonizing our diets cannot be accomplished through individual acts of food preparation. Instead, we hope that our project will inspire our readers to think critically about the effects of colonization on the food we eat and motivate them to get involved in their communities.

‘Politically, as Chicanas/os, we believe it is important to stand in solidarity with our native brothers, sisters, and trans siblings across our continent. As citizens of the US and Canada, we understand that we have a responsibility to contest the immense power of US and Canadian governments and multinational corporations, who are wreaking havoc on native communities: displacing people, polluting lands and waterways, and threatening ancestral seeds.’

Butternut Squash & Roasted Green Chile Tamalitos

Makes about 30 small tamales

Tamales (tamalli in Nahuatl) are a favorite food for holidays: we like to enlist friends and family to help assemble them, and the work goes quickly as the conversation flows. Luz's grandmother often made green chile and cheese tamales: in our vegan version, we use butternut squash instead of cheese. We make our tamales on the small side, hence the name tamalitos (little tamales).

Filling

- 1 butternut squash, about 1 lb (500 g)
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 white onion, quartered
- 1 tsp cumin seeds, toasted and ground
- 8 allspice berries, toasted and ground
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 6 fresh poblano chiles, roasted and peeled

Masa

- 1 cup (250 mL) non-hydrogenated shortening
- 1 tbsp sea salt
- 1 tbsp aluminum-free baking powder
- 3 lb (1 1/2 kg) masa for tamales
(without added salt or shortening)
- 3 dozen corn husks, rinsed, soaked in hot water, and patted dry

1. Prepare Filling

Cut squash into quarters and scoop out seeds. Using a potato peeler, remove skin. Cut each quarter in half. In a large saucepan on medium heat, combine squash, garlic, onions, cumin, allspice, thyme, and salt. Cover with water and cook for 20–25 minutes or until squash is fork-tender. Strain squash and reserve 1 cup (125 mL) stock. Reserve 1 piece of squash to blend. Dice remainder of squash, place in bowl, and set aside.

In a blender, purée piece of squash, reserved stock, onions, and garlic until smooth. Set aside.

Tear chiles into thin strips, about 1/4–1/2 in (6 mm–1 cm) wide (about 12 strips per chile), place in a bowl, and set aside.

2. Prepare Masa

Using a hand or stand mixer, whip shortening for 5 minutes, or until doubled in size. Add salt and baking powder and whip into shortening. Add masa

and blended stock mixture, a bit at a time. When mixture becomes too thick to beat with hand mixer (if using), hand knead for about 20 minutes. At first, masa may be sticky; as it is worked, the liquid will be absorbed and it will become less sticky. Place a pea-size piece into a glass of cool water to see if it floats. If it doesn't float, continue to knead or add more shortening or more liquid, as needed.

3. Assemble Tamalitos

Set out ingredients (squash, chile strips, masa), each in a separate bowl. Take a corn husk: notice that it is vaguely triangular and that one side is smoother than the other (which has more pronounced ridges). Lay husk out before you, smooth side up, and base of triangle at top. Place a scant 1/4 cup (60 mL) masa on corn husk. With a spoon or fingers, spread masa to create a rectangle about 3 x 5 in (8 x 12 cm) and about 1/8-in (3-mm) thick. Leave a 1/2-in (1-cm) border at top, 1/4 in (6 mm) on each side, and about 1 in (2.5 cm) at bottom. Leave narrow point of triangle entirely free of masa. Place 2–3 strips chile and 5–6 pieces squash in centre of rectangle. Bring 2 sides together, folding 1 side over the other. Fold bottom point up. Tamales are now open at top and enclosed on the other 3 sides. Place in a baking dish, open end on top. Repeat until you have used up either masa, corn husks, or filling.

4. Cook Tamalitos

In a tamale pot or large pot with a steamer, add 3–4 in (about 9–10 cm) water. Stack tamales in steamer, open end up. Place a wet dish towel over tamales to keep steam in, and cover with pot lid. Bring to a boil, lower heat to medium-low, and steam for 45–60 minutes. Remove tamales from heat and check one. If it releases easily from side of corn husk, tamales are done. If they appear a bit mushy, cover and let sit for 30 minutes. Overcooked tamales become rubbery, so don't overcook.

This recipe is taken from Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing published by Arsenal Pulp Press.

Plainly Repulsive

The more I think about eggs and their textures,
the more horrified I am by them.

By Lara Williams

I used to work with a girl who told me there was a finite amount of time that could elapse between her starting to eat something and becoming attuned to the texture of the food, at which point she would have to abandon whatever it was she was eating, so horrified she was at its squelch or grit or stringiness. I only ever saw her eating a roast dinner, because we worked in a bar, and we got a free roast on Sundays. She was slender, and whenever she ate her roast, sat up on one of the tall stools at the bar, she would invariably receive a series of unprompted observations, none more inventive than a variation of ‘where do you put it’. Food can be a complicated business. Particularly for women, I think.

It makes sense to me that the most delicious foods are all a bit disgusting: blue cheese, ladies fingers, kombucha. But on the intersection of disgust and pleasure that can be found in food, I can’t think of many foods that cross this line more so than eggs. About a year ago I reneged on a decade-long stretch of veganism. Allowing eggs back into my diet after a long period of abstinence, I went through a phase of putting them on everything. Almost anything can be improved with the addition of an egg. Some examples from recent memory: mashed potatoes with an extravagant amount of fresh dill (fried egg); a very spicy chana masala (soft boiled egg); rice noodles with spinach and spring greens (scrambled egg). And yet they are plainly repulsive: muculent and sulfurous and strangely metallic tasting. It’s a bracing way to begin the day.

A lot of people are disgusted by eggs. I have a friend who claims she can still smell raw egg from the bowls and utensils they have come into contact with even after she has washed them several times. My boyfriend often points out how many bad smells are described as being ‘eggy’, and why would you want to eat something that is shorthand for a bad smell? And they can be potent, if not pungent, objects. You can be respiratorily allergic to eggs; bakery and confectionery workers can become occupationally asthmatic from inhaling airborne egg proteins. For some reason this is called ‘egg-egg syndrome’.

The more I think about eggs and their textures, the more horrified I am by them. Of course, there are better reasons to be appalled: chickens in cages so small they are unable to fully extend their wings, forced to lay more than twice as many eggs as they naturally would. I buy free range but they come with their own horrors: beak trimming and still unnaturally cramped conditions. I tried the vegan eggs once. A velvety yellow powder you mix with water and then fry to a wet sneeze.

Like most food, eggs bring out our idiosyncrasies. My grandma only makes omelettes served with fried onions and sprinkled liberally with sugar. I always presumed this was a Polish recipe but apparently it is her own concoction. Polish food offers a lot of delicious / disgusting options. Blood-red broth. Knuckles of meat the size of your fist. Unsurprisingly, then, my most visceral encounters with eggs have been through my Polish heritage. Sucking them raw from their shell to paint at Easter, at the Polish Roman Catholic Club in Mansfield. Getting salmonella on a coach trip to Kraków, from scrambled eggs served straight from the pan. My sister and I wildly unpopular with the other coach trippers, vomiting across several countries on the

We might think of disgust as entirely innate but it appears it may also be culturally conditioned

long drive back to the UK. Zurek, a wincingly sour soup, served with an egg poached straight into it. You really appreciate that egg. A mild and salty reprieve.

We might think of disgust as entirely innate but it appears it may also be culturally conditioned: something commonly held as disgusting in one culture might be neutral in another. Paul Rozin, one of the leading thinkers on the psychology of disgust, believes most disgust triggers are animal in origin – rotting flesh and faeces etc: a reminder that we are animal, and that we will die. He developed the Disgust Scale, a survey which determines your predisposition to feelings of disgust. It includes questions like, would you eat soup stirred with a thoroughly washed fly swatter, or, how disgusted would you be to learn your friend only washes their underwear once a week, or, how do you feel about ice cream garnished with ketchup. The scale differentiates between three types of disgust: core, animal and contamination.

Core disgust is about defending the mouth from contamination by unpleasant things such as bodily excretions or cockroaches. As its name suggests, it is the most base and essential embodiment of the disgust response. Animal disgust is triggered by things that remind us we are mortal flesh, such as corpses or bodily violations. Contamination disgust is the urge to defend the whole body, not just the mouth,

from dirty or 'sleazy' people. Conservatives generally have a higher level of disgust than liberals. I was disheartened to find I had quite a high proclivity for disgust, particularly for core disgust: the disgust most closely associated with food.

However, Rozin believes you can educate yourself to like foods you previously found distasteful, as he has done with beer, which he used to find unpalatably bitter. He claims there are almost no foods he doesn't like or hasn't managed to coach himself into liking. But he still can't stomach eggs.

The Body-Text Speaks

What happens when an author subverts the conventions of the book?

By Alan Trotter

There's a passage in Don DeLillo's *Underworld* in which Father Paulus, a priest at a Jesuit reform school, challenges Nick Shay, one of his pupils, to name the parts of the shoe. Laces, Shay manages. Sole and heel. Then he drifts to a halt. 'There's not much to name, is there?' he says. 'A front and a top.' Father Paulus draws from him that the name for the flap beneath the lace is the tongue. And that the holes that the lace pierces are eyelets. He tells him that the name for the strip of material around the top of the shoe is the cuff. The stiff section above the heel: the counter. The strip above the sole: the welt. Between the welt and the cuff is the quarter. The hard tips that reinforce the ends of the laces are aglets; the reinforcements that ring the eyelets (through which the aglets pass) are grommets.

Father Paulus says, 'You don't know how to see the thing because you don't know how to look. And you don't know how to look because you don't know the names.' He says, 'How everyday things lie hidden. Because we don't know what they're called.'



What are the parts of a book?

There is a front and a back, there are the pages: not much to name. Let's make the attempt though. As well as pages and a cover (front and back), there is a fore-edge, a spine and tail. There may, if the book is a hardback, be a jacket with front and back flaps. If it's a paperback it may (more unusually) have French flaps. It may have endpapers. It will in all likelihood consist of a number of signatures – sets of pages, each of which was originally a single large sheet of paper that was folded and folded and cut and bound with others just like it in sequence. Within the book each two-page spread has a verso page on the left and a recto on the

right, and beginning at page 1 (actually page i – prelims being conventionally numbered with lowercase roman numerals) we will probably come to at least a half-title page, a title page and an imprint page before we reach the text proper (we may also pass through a dedication, a contents page, a preface, an introduction, a bibliography of other books by the same author, translator's or editor's notes – anyway, some quantity or arrangement of these or other, similar devices). And once we finally reach the text, there will be a typesetting framework of (it is likely) running heads and page numbers that frames and supports the text block.

And it's this text block that is the author's residence, a home placed and built for them, constructed to a height of thirty-something lines and a width of about fifty to seventy characters. An author's control is as limited or expansive as this: they can fill the rows of the text block with whatever words they choose.

This is where the polite author is expected to make their home, and not to venture out.

As readers we often conceive of the book as a thing of just two parts, the split between them large and obvious. There is the text, and then there is everything else. (Such neat Cartesian dualism!) The pure, disembodied text is the thing – it is significant, meaningful. Everything else (all that packages and accompanies the text) we think of as contingent, maybe even irrelevant.

If there is a great lexicographer of the book, it is Gérard Genette, the literary theorist who died last May, and he divides the book in this sort of fashion: into the text and the paratext, as he calls it. Though in the paratext Genette includes not just all the conventions and devices that constitute the book itself (this being the *peritext*), but also material further removed, outwith the container of the work, from author's interviews to early versions of a work, to an author's letters or the known content of their private conversations (this sort of thing being *epitext*).

The paratext, Genette tells us, exists at the threshold of the text, liminal to it, and presents the text to the reader ('in the usual sense of the word but also in the strongest sense: *to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world*').



The typical goal of the well-designed peritext is to disappear as it presents, to avoid drawing attention to itself, in the manner of a discreet butler.

So, for example, when a book is well typeset, we don't consider the typesetting unless we have a professional interest. We just find, without noticing, that our thumbs sit in generous margins, that we don't have to crack the spine to hunt for words that hide in the gutter, and that our eyes track easily across the lines.

Even the elements of the peritext that are meant to draw our attention do so cautiously. Unlike the rest of a book, the cover art and the blurb have as their intended audience not the reader but the maybe-reader. They hope to grab and then seduce this prospect, this browser, this mark, and to do so they hope to stand out. But at the same time they need to be familiar – and therefore unremarkable – enough to situate their book comfortably among others of the kind it aspires to be.

But although the peritext is discreet it applies pressure. We have our reading shaped for us by it, whether we choose to or not, whether we are aware of it or not. We always judge a book by the scaffolding of it as well as by the text, as unforgivingly as we hold each person we meet accountable for their own face. Choices of paratext, even seemingly small choices, can have a large impact on our reading.

Authors understand this; at least, plenty do.

Milan Kundera writes about a different post-humous betrayal of Kafka than the one we're all familiar with (that he wanted his work to burn and

it did not): he writes that Kafka insisted his books be printed with large type, only to have publishers – once they could enjoy the convenience of a dead author – ignore his wish.

This matters because, while an author who writes 'lavishly articulated' pages of small paragraphs does not require large type, Kafka's prose flows out in long paragraphs, pages or even chapters in length. Text in long, continuous paragraphs is less easily legible: large type saves the eye from growing tired, and allows the reader to take pleasure in the prose, rather than struggle with it. So it is 'justified, logical, serious, related to his aesthetic', writes Kundera, for Kafka to want his prose set in large type.

Of course, there are authors who make more substantial aesthetic demands for the book than asking to have a slightly larger-than-usual typeface.



It's possible to drag any part of the paratext into the text. The editorial apparatus perhaps most obviously. It is composed of words, so authors feel comfortable handling the material; as a result, fictive forewords and editors abound, contesting and manipulating our understanding of the text – from *Don Quixote* and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* to *The Book of Disquiet* and *Lolita*.

A writer might also dislocate the linear order of the text. Julio Cortázar includes a table of instructions at the beginning of *Hopscotch*; 'this book consists of many books, but two books above all', it says, and suggests to the reader two ways of reading the novel. They can either follow a given list of chapter numbers which will jump them unpredictably back and forth as they move through the book, or else they can begin at the beginning and proceed normally as far as chapter 56 – and stop

entirely, about a third from the end of the text ('the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience'). Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* has two parts, and which the reader encounters first depends on the copy of the book they happen to pick up (the order being reversed in half of the print run): this means it is also two books above all, and no reader can read both (the experience of either one precluding the other). B. S. Johnson published *The Unfortunates* in loose shuffle-able sections, with

a space for reading. (There are a lot of possibilities.)

To go back to labelling our shoe momentarily – there are many names for work in which the author makes unusual use of the technology of the book, all defining themselves in different ways: 'multimodal', 'transliterate', 'metatextual', there are those who discuss how 'visible' a text is or how 'opaque'...

Authors of this kind of work are making an admission about their art that other writers – and

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a start, an end and twenty-five sections between which are to be read in any order. He made the form of his book mimic the randomness of memory and the fragility of the body.

Johnson also cut holes in two leaves of *Albert Angelo* to reveal part of a future paragraph out of turn. And Jonathan Safran Foer cut holes to make *Tree of Codes*, excavating his text from someone else's (Bruno Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles*). Graham Rawle assembled thousands of lines of text cut from women's magazines of the sixties to assemble them into his novel *Woman's World* – the resulting collage gives his narrator a particular unhinged edge, a ransom note aesthetic.

For every aspect of the book we could find examples of authors meaningfully subverting the page. And not just the page. I have been talking about printed work, but there is a line that joins works like these to electronic literature, which takes advantage of the possibilities of the screen as

readers who wish to consider only the pure text – implicitly deny: that the book possesses a body. So my preference is to consider them body-texts.

A body-text author working now has all the advantages of new printing and typesetting technologies available to them, as well as all the abundant possibilities of electronic literature (interactive fictions, fictions that incorporate sounds or video, that track the movement of readers or the flow of blood through their veins, fictions that appear in infinite variations, each copy of a book different from the last, books that evolve or collapse over time...). Though to take advantage they might have to teach themselves code, or typesetting, or bookbinding, or, or, or.

But there is a new countervailing pressure against them: a commercially produced book is expected to have simultaneous existences, both in print and as an e-book (and an e-book also capable of multiple lives, that can be read on phones, e-readers, laptops,

wherever), and perhaps in audio too. To creatively attend to any one of these forms might undermine the existence of the others.

And then the author of a body text makes demands. They risk trying their publisher, on whose pocket and patience they depend to exist at all. If they are indulged, they still invite mishap. The original publication of *Albert Angelo* was delayed by the difficulty of cutting the holes. There were copies sent back by booksellers who believed them to be defective, and others apparently seized by customs agents who believed obscene material had been excised. (In 2004 the novel was included in an omnibus of Johnson's work: the holes were misplaced by a line, entirely undermining their purpose.)

The author of the body-text also risks trying the reader, if the reader is of the sort inclined towards convention and liable to find it tiresome when convention is upset. And many readers do resent this sort of play, preferring to allow the stuff of the book to exist invisibly, as unconsidered as a shoe's welt. Outrage and scorn can greet the author of the body-text – their efforts can be dismissed as gimmickry.

Why? Because around the body of the book, as around our own bodies, exist social rituals and decorums. When an author subverts the conventions of the book and reminds the reader of the book's physical presence, it is felt as a rudeness and a breach of good hygiene.

(Is it because they are required to make themselves obnoxious that authors of body-texts tend to be men, taught to be comfortable with their own rudeness?)



Why then intervene in the anatomy of the book at all?

The answer is probably the same as the answer

to the question 'why write?': you wouldn't if you weren't drawn to. But the body-text includes possibilities that we miss if we don't care to learn the parts of the shoe. And as William Gass writes, 'in the serious business of art, opportunities are enemies unless seized'. That you might unsettle the reader would be a poor reason not to seize them. Unsettling the reader is, after all, part of the author's role.

The body of the book speaks. If it speaks, shouldn't an author be interested in what it has to say?

Father! Daughter! Dance!

By Dizz Tate

1

Your dad decides age sixty-three that the best thing for the family is for you all to move to Florida. You say, Sure. He says, Sure? Give me some more enthusiasm, champ! You say, Sure! Your mother says nothing. You are nine. You say it again for her. Sure!

Your aunt, your father's sister, is called Beryl. You are both disgusted and fascinated by her name, and by extension her, with her mirrored sarongs that reveal the dark hair on her legs and her habit of smoking a cigar with her coffee in the morning. You see her twice a year, at Christmas and for a strange week in June that your father takes off work so they can drink the days away together. She lives in Florida the rest of the year, but you have never been before you move.

Beryl runs a store that sells British snacks and souvenirs in Orlando. It is successful. She opens up another store, in a small coastal town where rent is running cheap. She gives it to your father to run. Your father is eager to leave. He has two ex-wives in your sleepy English town, and they both tell their kids not to talk to you at school.

You speed away in a minicab driven by your dad's ex-wife's new husband. He says nothing. He opens the boot and your dad puts the bags in. Your mother says nothing. You and your father say everything to keep the ride bearable. You say goodbye to fields and cows and houses joined together, to cold and wet and England. You are ecstatic. You are leaving. WE ARE OUTTA HERE, your father yells. He whoops out of the window.

At the airport, your father's ex-wife's new husband, says, Good riddance. Your mother laughs her head off at this. Your father takes her hand and grins at her. You undo their hands with your own, but yours are sweaty and milky from your cereal, and they do not hold on. You try not to mind. You say, See ya later, asshole! in an accent you have seen

taxi drivers do on television. No one laughs at your hilarious joke. SEE YA LATER, ASSHOLE, you scream. Your mother grips your shoulder the way you sometimes see her gripping her phone or a sofa cushion or a saucepan or the edge of the breakfast bar, all the things that belong to her and not to your father, her knuckles white and sharp. It hurts. You slink underneath her touch, like she is pushing you into the ground.

2

The first few months, you stay in a budget motel and your dad wears a comedy cork hat with a plastic alligator sewn on to its front. It's summer and hot as hell. Your father flies back and forth to England, hiding illegal meat-based products in his hand luggage. Your mother takes up smoking and this occupies almost all of her time.

You keep yourself busy, no sweat. You juggle with the long-life milk pots. You read naughty passages from the Bible in the drawer. Your responsibility is to keep the ice bucket full for your mother, who likes you to drop the cubes down her neck while she smokes on the balcony. You trail down to the machine once an hour. You listen under the cracks in the doors, hoping for something sexy, but the couples you see by the pool are on their way back from honeymoons at Disney, and it turns out these couples aren't types for public or private displays of affection. You start to make stuff up instead. You bring boys to the hotel in your mind, boys with names like Chase and Jamie, with frosted tips and skateboards but posh British accents. You make them pop stars. You cross paths late at night by the shimmering, smoking pool, rid of the suicidal roaches and rats that you prod at in the mornings. Your boys tell you about how hard it is being a famous person, how they are misunderstood. You take a deep breath. You say,

with immense earnestness, I Understand You, and they say, quickly, and just as earnestly, But You, You Are A Mystery. You hear songs on the radio using words you have told your boys to say. You think you are magic, psychic, or that in some parallel universe your dreams are becoming reality.

3

The store opens. Your father finds the three of you an apartment the colour of a deep suntan. Your father loves how everyone in Florida, from the realtor to your school principal, reacts to his accent. You go to the Queen's house? They ask. Your father nods, solemnly. Your new town is small, locked between lakes, far away from the theme parks. Everyone is curious about you. They make jokes about the redcoats riding into town. Your father suddenly takes a great interest in your appearance. In England, you wore laddered tights and bleach-pocked jumpers, but here, you wear a uniform to fourth grade that no other child wears. You slink through the hallways in your khaki skort and clean-pressed white polo shirt, the school mascot, a puffer fish, printed above your heart. You burn dully next to the shiny girls, whose spaghetti straps fall listlessly off shoulders burned smooth from lifetimes in the sun.

Your father loves your double act. When you drop your T's at dinner or start to drawl, your dad has you repeat each phrase, rounding your vowels. You start to repeat yourself continuously. What your father doesn't know is that you practise your American words at night, lying on the scratchy beige carpet on your stomach, staring intently at yourself in the mirror, and saying, Hey Brittany, can I have a sip of your water? the way you see those shiny girls do during gym. You understand quickly that Florida sun is cruel like everyone and everything else. You watch it pick its favourites, land like a white brick

over the beautiful, while you stew in the shadow that seems to follow you around.

4

The novelty of British groceries and knick-knacks wears off quickly. No tourists come to your town except on layovers. Your father spends the rest of his savings launching a TV advertising campaign for the store to drum up business. He dresses in his wedding tuxedo. He tries to get your mother to film it but she won't, so he sets up the shots for you and you press the recording button. He purchases a thirty-second slot in every commercial break on the local news station between three and four p.m. It is just in time for your arrival home from school. You watch your father on television, his tux a little tight, his top hat tipped on his head. He holds jars of Bovril, unwinds an unappealing chord of fat sausages, rips the corner off a giant bar of Dairy Milk with relish. He is jaunty as he slaps the counter with the till on it and the Queen's framed picture jumps. The commercial doesn't work. Your father sits alone in his dark, empty little store, surrounded by reminders of another life.

Your mother takes to wearing all beige. She looks smooth and beautiful when she walks around the supermarket, surrounded by the bright packages and the Florida women in their neon polo shirts. She smokes Camels. She wears turquoise eyeshadow. You hate this eyeshadow. In her otherwise unmade face, you take it as a firm marker of a secret life. Your mother's thoughts occur elsewhere. You find this unbearable. You are loud. You scream and turn things over. She politely slides closed the glass balcony doors and turns her back to you.

She is on the brown leather sofa, smoking a cigarette. You sit at her feet and wrap your arms around her legs and put your head into the cove between her knees. She rests an ashtray on your

head to protect your hair. She says, I'm leaving.

In the background, on the television, your father loops up on the television every fifteen minutes, like a joke repeated so many times that it becomes more like a plea.

I didn't come to America to end up in Florida, your mother says.

She says, You'll Understand One Day.

You think of your hotel boyfriends. Your mother removes the ashtray and breaks her posture for a second to leave a kiss on your roots. She smooths your hair apart, the closest she ever comes to brushing it. She does this nice thing for you, and then she leaves.

Your father comes home. He sits on the sofa and opens two beers, and you take your first ever sip and cough. You finally pull yourself together and say what he already knows.

Mom's gone! you shout.

You hope you saying 'mom' rather than 'mum' will distract him. Your double act under threat! He takes you by the shoulders as if he is about to shake you, and perhaps he does shake you, a little.

All right, champ, he says, in his beautiful voice, and you curl up under its sound and feel safe in the lie of it.

5

Your mother leaves, and you and your father eat out every night. You are ten. You go to Oyster World, where they only take cash and let tabs run sky high. You sit at the bar with the basin hidden behind it, order two dozen oysters. Your father has them raw, you have them steamed, but you take your sauce the same way. Squeeze of lemon, Tabasco, bits of pickled red onion. You love this sauce, the way it dries your tongue to bark. You eat half a sleeve of soggy saltines before the oysters, grey and plump, arrive in front of you. You eat half. Your father hits

you on the back until you eat a few more and he deems you close enough to vomiting to stop. He slurps his with great affectation. You can read his thoughts so much more easily than your mother's. You find his less interesting as a result, but you still appreciate being able to see through a person. As he sucks down the salty slime, you can see him imagining himself in Chelsea with a glass of champagne, the oysters on a mountain of shaved ice. As he gets drunker his dream blurs into your real life. He starts to call Big Al, the shucker, Albert, and comments on the vintage of the Bud Light. Big Al giggles at him, popping off bottle tops on to the sawdust floor. You imagine a city of trash beneath the dust, run by roaches. You have your own mini glass of beer. Big Al chuckles at you.

When you get to choose on a Sunday night, you pick Hooters. You pretend you like the milkshakes more than at Applebee's or Chili's. The waitresses make a fuss of you, putting their arms around you, bringing you crayons and admiring the drawings you do even though you are too old for crayons. Often, they bring you cake with a candle in it, and when you protest, say it isn't your birthday, they put a finger to their lips and hush you, winking. You whisper your thank you, blush with longing. They all smell the same, like suntan lotion and the kind of perfume that stings your eyes.

6

You lose all your money. You go to live with Aunt Beryl. Beryl believes in angels and her apartment is covered in them, posters, statues, lamps and cookie jars. Your father sleeps on the couch. You sleep in Beryl's bed. Beryl smells like cigar smoke but even more so like the bleach she uses to try and cover up the smell. You lie beside each other, the space between you buzzing as you flinch further towards the edge of the bed. She is nothing like

your mother, or the waitresses who brought you your milkshakes.

You start sixth grade in a new school and quickly fall in love. He is called Matthew. He wears a chain on his jeans. You sit next to him in your first class of the day. Often, you have to hold your own hands to stop yourself reaching out from under your desk to unclip his chain and attach it to your own belt loop. You are desperate to bind yourself to him. Your lonely days run by quick as a dream with your imaginings. Late at night, you imagine the sound the chain would make as you unclip it, running through your fingers smooth as water. The angels on Beryl's walls stare at you, hands clasped in judgement while she snores beside you.

You make your father tea every morning. You brew it for ten minutes until it is gasoline black, then top it up with more hot water and a glug of milk. You add two sugars. You eat cereal over Beryl's sink while the tea brews and watch your father pretend to sleep. At the ten-minute mark, you yell, FIRE! or TORNADO WARNING! or MAN DOWN IN AISLE TWO! Your father leaps up in a semblance of horror that you find hilariously funny for a whole year of mornings.

7

Summer draws in tight and your father gets a job guarding the building site of a new luxury gated community. You move into the one finished show home. Behind the site there is nothing but other housing developments for miles and miles and miles. For a while, you are the last one in the row, the only one still unbuilt, and beyond you is pure wasteland and swamp. The sky is flat and blue and so low it seems to grow out of your own head. It is a beautiful time at the beginning, being right at the end.

Your father protects the site from kids and thieves who steal materials during the storms, then

sell them cheap to the next developer along. It's a long and messy-skied summer. You speak to no one but your father for four months. There are no neighbourhood kids, and the builders ignore you, speaking in Spanish above your head while you blush at them determinedly in your bikini tops. You give up and spend days writing poems about Matthew, but you are horrified to realize you can barely remember his face by July, and by August you have forgotten the last name you once so carefully rolled around your tongue next to your own.

Your show home has four bedrooms, all fashioned out of bleached-blond wood with blonde carpets and blonde walls and blonde people in the photo frames. Sometimes when you watch television your father points to the photos and points back to you and then pretends to fall off the sofa in shock.

Who are you? he screams. What have you done with my daughter?

You leap up as well. Who am I? you say. What have YOU done with my father? Then you both sit down silently again as though nothing has happened.

Your father skinny-dips every night in the show-home pool and often you worry he is drowning. You stay in your room reading until he resurfaces and is dressed again in his favourite orange sarong. Together you stand on your fake patio and look out on to all the marked squares and tarpaulins where houses grow more and more solid each day. You think of it like a forest growing in quadruple time, a frightening fairy-tale wood, and you often have dreams it is about to smother you in your lone house. Every night you go to bed and pray to Beryl's angels, your only known source of magic, that summer will never end and you and your father will stay alone and safe in your halfway world for ever.

8

By the time the development is grown up, so are you. You are fourteen, and you stop worrying about your father drowning. You stop waking him up with natural disasters. He takes on the role himself. He appears at your bedroom door shouting, ALERT! ALERT! But he is not as creative as you are with the scenarios, and eventually you have to tell him you have done Tornado Warning too many times. He shakes his head sadly at you, and that is it.

The Ivy Lakes housing committee appreciate your father's charms and the gin and tonics he makes at board meetings, and so, when the show home is sold, they give your father a job as the gate guard. You live in a tiny house just outside the gates, and your father spends all day in a little office, smaller than the water feature beside it, buzzing in visitors. Your father spends most of his pay cheque getting his security guard outfit an express dry-clean twice a week. Sometimes you wear his spare hat while you watch television, find yourself chewing on its visor like you once used to suck your thumb.

He takes a break between three and four when you get off the bus from school. He feeds you tuna and saltines or pasta with cut-up hot dogs. He tells you his thoughts of the day that he cooked up alone in the guardhouse, and tells you who is having affairs with which neighbour. Sometimes he is quiet and he doesn't eat with you but will try to make you some complicated baked good that will never make it into the oven. While you hunch over your homework, he asks you questions, like do you believe in God, and what do you want to be when you grow up, and what do you make of this dingbat President, and what do you think about death?

You lie and say you don't get the big deal about death, because it's not like you would know what was happening, it would just be one moment to

the next. And you ask, Are you scared about dying?

He says, I'm not scared of anything, champ.

You are terrified, but you cannot resist.

You're a liar, you say.

Your father's face freezes in a little grimace. He slams his hand hard on the kitchen counter so his glass tips over on its side and breaks in one clean crack. The liquid spills and slowly browns your essay on the Legislative Branch. When he picks up the glass it slices his index finger clean open but he sticks it in his mouth and walks out of the door. You sit very still watching the liquid pool on your paper and the cake mix gritty in its bowl and it takes a long time for your heart to unclench and for you to move and clean things up.

9 Only rich people live in Ivy Lakes and you feel a kinship with them, having lived in that show home for a while and pretended to have their life. You act like a rich kid. When people ask where you live, you say, Ivy Lakes, and everyone nods. You are believed, even though you wear your father's loose floral shirts as dresses, tied with a piece of rope as a belt. You say you are expressing your individuality. You wear plastic flip-flops with a comedy clown flower stuck to the V that you got at the dollar store. If you stamp your foot hard enough a stream of water will curve its way into the air and ruin the jean hem of whatever boy you are trying to appear charming to.

You make your first friend, pretending to be rich. She is called Kitty, a new recruit to Ivy Lakes due to her parent's divorce. Her father is a plastic surgeon who left her mother for a woman who he did full facial reconstruction surgery on after she was in a terrible car accident. He did Kitty's mother's face as well, and she is very beautiful as a result. She tells you the difference between her and her ex-husband's new wife is that she chose how she wanted her face to look, but the new woman had been unconscious and so left it all up to her

ex-husband. You see, a man wants all the credit, she says.

You tell your father not to let on that he knows you if he sees you around Ivy Lakes. You tell Kitty you have strict evangelist parents who won't let you have friends over, but that they are extremely rich and that your great-grandfather built a railroad and owns lots of property in New York. She does not ask as many questions as you would like to answer.

When you are tanning by the Ivy Lakes pool, drinking margaritas in red plastic cups that Kitty's mother made you, your father saunters past.

What have you got there, girls? he calls. You glare at him.

7-Up, duh, says Kitty, shaking her cup. You wanna sniff?

He stares at you, looking mournful. You fold your arms.

No, no, you just be careful, he says, his voice cracking. You turn back to the white-brick sun that you have finally managed, after all these years, to coax into landing on you.

His accent's cute, says Kitty, but he only ever looks at you.

You close your eyes and pretend not to hear her.

10

You start wearing perfume that you steal from the pharmacy. You think of your mother, the Hooters waitresses, sashaying through the cinema of your mind. You still don't smell the way you think you should, no matter how many times you spin through the promising mist. You steal the strongest scents, Vanilla Cupcake and Cinnamon Sugar, ever determined, but still you think people can smell that motherless rot in you.

Your father notices this. It is hard not to. You can clear a room with your sweet stink. On your

sixteenth birthday, he drives you back to your old town as a surprise treat so you can go to Oyster World. Big Al even gets you a cupcake from the gas station next door, which he insists on holding while you take a bite out of it and your father snaps a photo. He looks uncomfortable after, looking at it. You are skinny as hell, greasy-haired, but there is no denying you have grown up into an angry-looking teenager who shouldn't be eating out of Big Al's hairy hand.

On your way home, two pitchers of beer down, your father swings across four lanes of highway amid a chorus of honks into the Walgreens parking lot. He tells you to wait. When he comes back, he has two carrier bags full of products, lotions and face wash and every flavour of body mist they stock. He piles them in your lap, claps your shoulder and tears out of the lot.

Find us a driving song, champ, he says, and you flick through until you find one that's perfect, all drum, and he makes wolf sounds and cups his hand out of the window. The spotlights from the theme parks weave across the sky, blocking out the stars. The lights are switched off at the water parks but still the slides glitter as you fly past. The highway hums with speed and the wind batter-rams you through the window. You don't get pulled over. Your father wears his security guard outfit crumpled for two weeks as a result of the spree and you are touched.

11

A while later, you are at Kitty's house. You have taken to skipping school. Your father drops you off at the beginning of the car loop and you run to the end where Kitty picks you up again. Kitty's father has given her a boob job as an early graduation present. You watch reality shows, splayed on her couch. Kitty holds two bags of frozen peas over her

new boobs. It is around eight in the morning, just as the first period bell would be ringing, when your father comes out of Kitty's mom's room, buck-naked but still wearing his security cap, which he quickly removes to cover his junk. Her mom follows him out in a nightgown and quickly pulls him back into the room.

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, sings Kitty, with total glee. You mechanically keep eating chilli popcorn by the fistful.

Your father comes out again, dressed, his eyes wet. You cringe. Why aren't you girls in school? he says.

You roll your eyes. Hi, Dad, you say. Kitty stops laughing and stares at you.

What the fuck? she asks, reasonably.

You and Kitty don't speak for two weeks but in the end your big secret gives you a bit of an edge that she appreciates. You drive around at night drinking rum and looking for loud noises. You run around yelling in people's faces at parties. You are the first to jump in the pool in your underwear, too early, when everyone else is still sober.

We've got mommy *and* daddy issues! you chorus, delighted at your ability, if not to be loved, then to completely terrify.

12

You go for an awful dinner, you and Kitty and your respective parents, at a basketball-themed restaurant. Your dad pronounces schnitzel as sneezechel.

Kitty says, Bless you. You both laugh maniacally.

Your parents smile at you.

You girls could be sisters, says Kitty's mother.

No way, says Kitty. We don't look anything alike, thank God.

She looks at you, innocently sipping her orange milkshake.

No offence, she adds. She is your friend, after all.

None taken, you say, and knock over the water

jug helpfully to change the subject.

One afternoon when you are bored, you find your father's old commercial for the British store on YouTube. It doesn't take long to find at all, and there are even a few comments, saying, WHAT A HERO and WHAT A FREAK, in respectively different ways. You and Kitty watch it fifty times over, until you have the whole act down perfectly, the cock of the head, the adoring glance at the Bovril, the innuendo unwinding of the sausage coil. The jaunty tip of the hat at the end. You laugh and laugh.

Well, at least I can show her this and she'll see sense, finally, says Kitty.

No offence, she adds, and you stop laughing but she doesn't ask you why.

13

You are about to graduate, and you are failing miserably, but your teachers put your grades up enough for you to get into community college. Still, when you go to register, it turns out your father's visa does not cover you, and you are technically still an international student. You try to call your mother, but she has changed her number. You find her on Facebook and it turns out she has a new husband named Shane and you write her a series of drunken ranting messages. You demand that she buys you a hairbrush, that she cooks you mashed potato and pie, that she teaches you how to blend eyeshadow into your lids. You send her a broken heart. You send her a downward-facing thumb. She never opens them, the little ticks remaining firmly, obliviously grey beside your words. You copy the details from your father's credit card, find your expired passport, and start looking up flights to anywhere.

You distract yourself by falling in love for the second time with the same person. You are at a party when you see Matthew, your old crush from Beryl's. After you drink six beers you tell him how

much you admired his jeans chain. He puts his tongue in your mouth and swings it like it's a hammock and you are two trees, but you don't mind. You realize love never disappears, just simmers at the back of your mind. You think of your love like that shimmering, smoking pool in your old hotel, the setting you created when you were at your loneliest. You think how your love with Matthew is blessed by Beryl's angels. You are drunk. You think of your father too, his sad look above his security cap. You cry on Matthew's shoulder and say, Aren't you sad it's all over? That it can never be the same? He laughs at you. You're A Real Mystery, he says.

He drops you home. Your dad is on the couch watching a rerun of the Ellen Degeneres show, his tumbler cupped in his palm.

You stand in front of the television and shout, I'm really in love, finally!

Your dad gives you a thumbs up.

It reminds you of the first time you got your period, how you told him with such pride and then he drove you to Walgreens and you spent ages deciphering the different-coloured flows. You think of how he always rides on shopping carts and never just pushes them.

Your father drops his thumb, and his eyes glisten.

She broke up with me, he says. The Woman with the Perfect Face.

He sobs.

Dad, Dad, none of it was real, you say, sitting beside him and taking a glug of whisky for yourself.

What do you mean? he asks.

You pat his shoulder. You think, suddenly, and with startling clarity, of the two families he had before you that he never talks about. You notice his hair has turned grey, his bones close to the surface like his skull is breaking free.

Dad, will you leave me? you ask. Like you left the others?

He is pretending to be asleep, so you get up

and stand in your bedroom doorway. As soon as a minute passes, he opens his eyes and continues to watch Ellen dancing. Your reflection is perfectly visible in the glare of the television in the dark room. You stand in the doorway and you do the meanest impression you can of his commercial, mutely, going through the whole thirty-second routine. His eyes flicker across you but you don't know if he sees you before you are no longer there.

‘How could this possibly be mysterious? Where could this take us?’

A conversation with Tana French

Tana French’s novels are prized by connoisseurs of crime fiction. Readers who like their murders embedded in an evocative setting know she’ll give them the best and worst of Dublin. The books never skate lightly over their setting, like a cursor atop a pleasant screensaver. For French, place offers physical description, and also dictates the type of murder on offer.

In order to explore the city, French created the fictional Dublin Murder Squad, and like an actor keen to play each role, she has moved from one narrator to the next, one detective to the next, over the course of six novels: In the Woods, The Likeness, Faithful Place, Broken Harbour, The Secret Place, The Trespasser. The latest, The Wych Elm, is a departure of sorts. The narrator is not a detective, but rather an entitled young white man named Toby who sustains neurological damage after an assault by two burglars. Things get worse, as they usually do.

Over the course of our conversation, in a busy café in Dublin, French wanted to talk about the challenge of this new POV. We also drifted back to the past, to the books she inhaled as a younger reader, including another work that defies genre boundaries: The Secret History.

Crime has been good to French. Her books have sold millions of copies and some of the earlier novels are being made into a television series for the BBC. But French has been good to crime, too. Like Tartt, she wants more than mere murder. She examines what can unsettle any particular land, her own included.

Five Dials When you’re talking about your books, and someone says, ‘Oh, they’re murder mysteries,’ do you ever have to say: ‘Well, I’m doing a bit more here’?

Tana French I’m aiming to do a bit more, definitely. I’m not a big believer in genre boundaries. Crime? ‘Oh,’ they say, ‘it’s got a gripping plot, but probably two-dimensional cliché characters, not

great writing, no thematic depth.’ Literature? ‘It’s got all the themes, it’s got the great writing, but probably the plot is pretty boring and involves a lot of people staring out their windows in some deeply symbolic urban landscape.’

I don’t see why you couldn’t aim for all of it. If somebody’s reading this as crime, great. They can get enjoyment out of it. If they’re reading it as literature, great. And if they want to just take it on its own terms where there might be elements of both, that can work too.

One of the defining reading experiences for me was in college when I read Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History*. She absolutely refuses as a writer to take any shit about genre boundaries. There are no genre boundaries. This is one of the great mysteries of all time, but it’s also a great work of literature. She seemed to say, ‘Take this on its own terms. It’s got elements of both.’

I thought, OK. So you can do that? Wow, I didn’t know you could do that. There were a lot of writers who were going, ‘Okay, so there are options I didn’t even realize I had. I want to do that too.’

5D Where were you when you read it?

TF I was over visiting family in the US. I started it on the plane back. I got off the plane, went through passport control with my face in the book, got home, read straight through till I finished it, and I swear, you know the big reveal scene? I think the house could have burned down around me, and I wouldn’t have noticed.

It was about that intense defining moment in college where you’re moving away from your birth family, you haven’t developed a family of your own yet, and your friends are your surrogate family. I hadn’t seen that given weight before. I hadn’t seen anyone acknowledge that college friendships are

that powerful and that intense, and high stakes enough that they can end up in murder.

I did a full-time acting course at Trinity. It was two years. It was very intensive and it was long, hard hours, and very physical. There was a sense of being part of some little esoteric group, people learning some arcana that others weren't part of. That's a lovely feeling, at that age. It's powerful stuff.

5D When you survey the world, you must see possibilities. Donna Tartt saw possibility for murder in a classics department. Do you see similar possibilities elsewhere?

TF It's not murder, though. It's mystery. I like looking for the potential mystery in everything.

I remember being around six and reading a school book that included little comprehension pieces. One of them was on the *Mary Celeste* – the ghost ship that showed up drifting with nobody on board. 'Breakfast was still cooking in the galley, and nothing was disturbed. Only the lifeboat was gone.' I was enthralled. I remember lying there thinking, 'Right, when I die, I'm asking God what happened.'

So I'm looking for the potential mystery in just about everything, and it doesn't have to be a murder mystery. How could this possibly be mysterious? Where could this take us? It's a deep human instinct to be fascinated, and not just by mystery itself, not just by the answer – because if that was it, we would read the first chapter of a mystery novel and skip to the last. We're fascinated by the process, by where that process takes us, and what we discover along the way. There's an assumption that the process of investigating, even if you don't solve it, has an inherent power and an inherent value. I'm looking for potential mysteries and what the process of solving them might entail.

5D How far do you have to stray from your own life to find these mysteries?

TF A lot of the ideas from my books have come from really banal stuff. Like *Faithful Place*. I was walking home and some old Georgian house was being cleared out to be renovated. There was a skip outside, and this old blue suitcase was among the crap on the skip. What if somebody left it there thinking they'd come back for it? Where could that take somebody, if they started pulling on that thread? Where might it lead them?

Broken Harbour was because we had mice.

5D And also because of Ireland's ghost estates?

TF Those are inherently creepy. You don't have to go looking for a mystery in them. They're deeply frightening: what they say about us as people, what they say about our society, what we as a society are willing to buy into, what illusions we're willing to believe out of desperation.

Those houses were charged up with some of the most frightening things underlying our society. I didn't have to go looking there.

5D How would you explain the ghost estates of *Broken Harbour* to someone who doesn't know about Ireland at that time?

TF They were born out of optimism. The housing bubble, I think, was very carefully manufactured, because in Ireland, politicians, bankers and property developers are very closely linked, to an extent that's unhealthy and often illegal.

People were being told constantly, 'Our house prices are only going to go up. You know what you need to do? You've got to get on the ladder now. What you should do is go out to some estate that hasn't been built, where the ground hasn't even

been broken, and pay hundreds of thousands of euros for a house that's nothing but a drawing on a page, because in five years, sure, you can sell it for a higher price to some other sucker.' It was a massive Ponzi scheme.

Property is so deeply ingrained in the Irish psyche. We've got 700 years of English colonization. One of the ways that it was enforced was that the Irish couldn't own property. So you were constantly at the landlord's mercy, and you could be thrown out on the street for any reason. So it's ingrained in us that you are never safe, ever, unless you own your home. People fell for this. 'Oh yeah, we've got to go buy something in a field in the middle of nowhere. Otherwise we won't be safe, because prices are going up.' And of course this Ponzi scheme collapsed, because they do.

People were left on half-built estates in the middle of nowhere. No street lighting, no public transport, no shops, no schools, no nothing. Just a handful of houses, many of which had huge construction problems. So your house is falling apart. It's got cracks in the wall. You can't sell it, because you're hundreds of thousands into negative equity. There's nothing you can do except stay there and wait, and hope that the bank doesn't take even that away from you.

To me, that was terrifying. The devastation wasn't just financial, it was psychological. I don't know how you recover from something like that, when everything you've built your life on suddenly turns out to be not just non-existent, but actively destructive.

5D And – sadly – it was good for the novel. This phenomenon had a physical manifestation. These were estates that not only existed, but they could be used as a setting.

TF It's a solid bricks and mortar socio-political

commentary every time you go past one of those ghost estates.

I'm a big believer in the power of place, and I do wonder if that's because of all my moving around, where each very different place that I lived became charged. I'm a big believer in places having that charge.

5D Does Dublin yield enough mystery for your novels?

TF Dublin was very fixed, population-wise, up until the mid-nineties. Ireland didn't have much immigration, because who would move to Ireland, which was basically in a permanent recession? So everybody who lived here, their parents and their grandparents and their great-grandparents had lived here as well. It was a society that was very deeply rooted. And that's absolutely enthralling to me, this idea of a neighbourhood – which I used in *Faithful Place* – a neighbourhood where families have been intertwining for hundreds of years. The relationships aren't just coming out of nowhere. People are related in ways that go back generations and that may be positive or negative, but they're solid and inescapable. Dublin and Ireland are full of neighbourhoods that have deep roots. That makes for rich settings for writing.

5D And dictates the kind of crime, too. If you're murdering somebody in that environment, it's different than in a transient city.

TF That's why murder mysteries have a tendency to illuminate something about the society where they're set, whether you mean them to or not. It seeps in, I guess. Murder happens everywhere, but the reasons it happens are completely informed by the time and place, by that society's priorities and its tensions and its fears and its dark places. If you

have somebody who shoots his wife for cheating on him, then you know instantly that you're in a society where sexual fidelity is a thing. Even what we consider to be the simplest domestic murder is telling you something about that society.

5D Do the foreboding areas of Dublin change? Do certain places take on a new danger as the city changes?

TF I don't think there's anywhere that doesn't have a potential layer of darkness in it. Everywhere has tensions.

Sometimes it's more overt. That's one kind of danger, but there are also the dangers in the calm, residential, peaceful, leafy suburbs where people have their own tensions and their own fears, and they're fighting their own battles. They're always going to have dark places and they're always going to have things that are hard to cope with, and grief and anger and fear. Those exist in everyone, everywhere. No one's exempt.

5D In your previous novels, you view a crime through the POV of the police officers. In the new book, *The Wych Elm*, you flip the perspective.

TF I've looked at criminal investigations through a detective's eyes six times. But there are a lot of other people involved. There are witnesses, there are victims, there are suspects, there are perpetrators, and this whole process has to look completely different from their point of view.

When you're looking at the investigation as a detective, all the procedural stuff is a source of power and control. It's your way of re-imposing order on chaos. Whereas, from all those other perspectives, it has to be the exact opposite. The investigation is this thing that comes barrelling into your life, turns it upside down. You have no idea

where it's going to go. You have no control over it. You don't know what the detectives are doing or why. Are you a witness? Are you a suspect? Who are you within this pattern?

I thought I should give a voice to those other perspectives, where you're borne along by this process and you have to struggle and fight to find any kind of agency.

At various points in the book, Toby, the lead character, is all of those. He's victim, he's witness, he's suspect, he's perpetrator, and he shifts from all those perspectives. I definitely wanted to see it from the opposite angle.

5D The allure for the reader is that the detective is in charge. The detective detects. He or she has power. But when you flip the perspective, you feel closer to someone like Toby, because it's happening to him as it could happen to you, if things ever went bad.

TF And he struggles with it. I didn't want him to be just a passive character within this story. It weakens the book if your narrator is somebody to whom things just keep happening, and he just keeps receiving, rather than being a force within the story itself.

5D It's also an interesting book to be reading right now. Here's a middle-class white guy, with a definite sense of entitlement. It's pointed out many times in the book that Toby is not like others. Was that conscious?

TF That's what started the book. I was thinking about the relationship between luck and empathy, and how too much luck can stunt empathy. If you've been too lucky in one area, it's easy to not be aware that other people might be experiencing a very different reality.

What about somebody who's been lucky in every way? He's got the right side of the coin flip all the way along. He's white, he's male, he's straight. He's from an affluent family. He's mentally and physically healthy.

5D You get the feeling he can get away with things.

TF He's good-looking. He's charming. He's had a stable childhood, a family who loves him. The world is basically set up to be Toby-friendly. It was very important to me to make him a good guy. He's not nasty. There's no malice in him. He's the guy who's just pulled every single ace along the way.

5D And you didn't want a woman to play that role, say a white woman who's everything but male?

TF If you're not playing the game on the easiest difficulty setting in every way, then you're going to be more aware that other people might have other difficulty settings.

Perhaps you're a woman who has, pretty much on a daily basis, had your ideas dismissed in meetings or laughed at. If you get passionate about something you're called hysterical or aggressive. You've been catcalled. You've been grabbed on buses, just all the daily stuff. You're aware that the good, sound guys who would never do this kind of thing are completely oblivious to the fact that this is part of your daily experience. If you're like that, you might think: 'Hang on a second. I'm probably oblivious in the same way to the experience of others. Hang on a second, I can kiss my boyfriend in public, but my gay guy friends can't do the same thing.' Or, 'Hang on a second, maybe I have a different experience of the police or trying to rent a flat than a black friend does.'

If you are daily being made aware of the fact

that there are different difficulty settings, you're more likely to be aware of that as it applies to other people. So he had to be male. And he had to be white and he had to be straight and he had to be middle class. If he wasn't playing the game on the easiest setting in every way, it would make him much more likely to be aware of other people's realities.

5D When you choose to move from the perspective of a detective to the perspective of a character like Toby, are there new limits and new freedoms?

TF It was a little bit scary, because in some ways it was much more like writing *In The Woods*. In all of the ones in between, I had already established the world of the Murder Squad. Although the other books are pretty much stand-alones, they have a certain amount of continuity. You know who the pathologist is, what size the squad is, how it works, the hierarchy. I couldn't break that in the other books, which is good. It means I've got certain shortcuts established already. But it also means I can't suddenly transform the entire Murder Squad into something different. Whereas in this novel, there are none of those parameters.

It's easy to fall into the trap of writing the same book over. I don't want to fall into that trap ever.

5D A lot of people do. I guess they have their reasons.

TF I'll *read* those. I love reading those, the same book over and over, but I don't actually want to write them.

5D One of the police officers in the new novel says that a lot of times he can tell what kind of mind he's up against when investigating a murder. He can feel them out there. How do you go about

matching those two sides: killer and detective? Is that something that you consciously think about when you're approaching a new project?

TF Sort of, because they do have to be a good match. It's one reason why I don't do a series with the same narrator detective. I like writing about the big turning points for the narrator.

5D That makes me think of the *Die Hard* films. 'Seriously? Again? How many Christmases in a row is this guy faced with an international terrorist situation?'

TF Somebody kidnapped another of Liam Neeson's relatives? I don't want to do that. The poor guy is going to be dumped into this massive life-changing situation every two years when my deadline comes along? No. He'd end up in a straitjacket by book three, end of story.

The only other way to stick with the same narrator is to back off with the life-changing situations and do what P. D. James does with Adam Dalgliesh. His sanity and future aren't put in jeopardy every time. You're watching him through the smaller ups and downs, as he goes through relationships and professional changes. I like those too, but they're not what I want to write.

So I have to start from: this is going to be a case that is going to mess up the detective's head. And the detective, or the narrator in this case, is the one person I usually have clear in my head before I start. The killer grows out of that. They're going to be the person who will catalyze the detective's process of change. So it is a match, but it's a match starting from the narrator.

5D You're calling forth this character on the other side?

TF Who's going to prod the narrator forward, who's going to have elements that will disturb whatever balance the narrator's established. There are going to be elements of the killer, or elements of the killing, that amplify any cracks the narrator's got, and bring their defences tumbling down.

5D A character emerges as an outline.

TF It's like a Polaroid.

5D And because you choose to construct a new narrator each time, what is the enjoyment of passing the POV within a fixed group of people like the Murder Squad?

TF There are two main things, really. One is, I used to be an actor. I come from an acting background. I like playing different characters. I don't want to keep playing the same character for years and years and years. But also, I'm fascinated by the way we can all see the same setting or the same series of events in very different ways: how different it looks from different perspectives, how different people are experiencing the same event. Where does the reality lie, in between all these people? Passing the torch of narration around gives me room to do that.

5DI thought of Mike Leigh when I read the other books. Mike Leigh has a corps of actors and he seems to say: 'It's your turn in this story to be the lead.'

TF They can step up to centre stage. I really like that. You may be sometimes a secondary character and sometimes the lead. We're all the lead in our own story.

5D In a lot of the previous books, you use the jargon

of policing. How do you collect this language? Do you pluck terms as they go by? Or did you at some point think, ‘I’ve got to know how people speak?’

TF I’m lucky to know a retired detective. He’s a talker as well, right? His brother was in drama school with my husband – it’s Dublin, basically everybody knows everybody somehow – and he’s great. And he’s so generous with his time. He tells me stories. And while I do have specific questions, there’s also stuff that I don’t even know I need to know. I pick up atmosphere and jargon and dynamics and hierarchies from those stories. I’m scrounging phrases and techniques and little subtleties.

5D Does he know how interesting his own life is? Some detectives seem to know that what they’re doing is the stuff of fiction.

TF I get the sense that he realizes how fascinating it is on a procedural level, how fascinating the process of investigating a mystery is, the magic of being part of some group that has its own arcana that nobody else fully understands. ‘What would you do in these circumstances? What lines of inquiry would you have? How would the forensic pathologist respond to this? What samples do you take?’ I think he realizes that this is fascinating. But I don’t think he really gets that, in this profound mythic way, the detective is this archetype of the searcher going after truth and order in a world of chaos. I don’t think he really thinks of it as that. For him, it’s a practical thing. ‘Somebody contaminated my blood sample.’

5D I wonder how effective you’d be as a detective if you were thinking on a mythical level.

TF He’s retired. He can afford to feel mythic about it if he wants to now.

5D That would probably be the worst partner to have: someone who’s feeling things mythically.

TF ‘Pull it together. We need a hair sample.’ ‘Yes, but it symbolizes man’s quest for truth.’ ‘No, it doesn’t. It symbolizes that we’re all going to get fired if you don’t get it in that test tube.’

Sometimes I don’t stick to the reality. But I need to know what it is, so that if I move off from it, it’s not just because I shoved my foot in my mouth. There isn’t a Murder Squad in Ireland. But I wanted that elite, tight-knit hothouse feel where you’re all that little bit too close and it’s all a little bit too intense and what you’re doing is so important that it can become too highly charged. So I made a Murder Squad. It’s not that I thought there was one and screwed up. It’s that I decided that I needed one for narrative purposes.

5D Have they ever approached you and said, ‘That’s a great idea for Dublin?’

TF ‘Dublin should totally have a murder squad?’ Not so far.

5D You’ve mentioned your love for books that have broken the form. Have other books acted as a template?

TF *The Talented Mr Ripley*. You only realize partway through, Oh my God, I’m rooting for the murderer, and not even a ‘good murderer’, whatever that is. Not somebody who killed a person who was threatening his family – no, he killed somebody because he fancied his life. But you root for him. Patricia Highsmith was all kinds of genre buster.

There are writers, including many of the greats, who approach the genre as an end point, as a finished thing. Let’s polish this sculpture to its absolute highest shine. Let’s perfect this. People like Agatha

Christie. But then you also have the opportunity to use genre as a starting point rather than an end point. So it's not like, 'Let me get these conventions as brilliant as they can be.' It's, 'What could I do with these if I tie them in a knot and build them into something else?'

I like conventions as a starting point. 'What else could I do with it?' Part of it may be timing. I felt that I came to the genre at a point where it had been polished to the highest shine.

Look at Kate Atkinson and Gillian Flynn – Gillian Flynn and I started very much around the same time. We're going, 'All right. So what next? What else can we do? What else is there room for?' There will always be room.

5D Where do you think the form will go from here?

TF I heard somewhere that more and more crime books are being set retro, set a few decades in the past, because of those damn mobile phones. So much of the investigation process is technological. But the human interaction that makes us fascinated with crime books is being eroded away. You can track somebody. You don't have to interview five people to find out where so-and-so was on the night of the 15th. You just track his phone.

A decade or two ago, if you want to know where Joe was on the night of the 15th, and you talk to his ex-girlfriend, and she says he wasn't with her, is she lying because she wants to get him into trouble? Joe says he went past her house and she definitely saw him. Who's lying? Whereas now: well, Joe's phone says he wasn't there.

It erodes the sense of mystery in everything, not just in the specific mystery. There isn't that sense of reality being slightly flexible, having its own little nooks that you might never be able to clarify. It's eroding our relationship with mystery.

I worry about whether our relationship with mystery is going to be truncated. We're going to get more and more impatient with the idea that something might not have an immediate solution. I notice people are more dismissive of things that don't have an easy answer. There seems to be a general movement towards being less and less willing to put time and thought into something that may not be capable of solution.

I wonder if there's going to be a polarization: people who really have no patience for anything that isn't on Google, versus people who crave that mystery.

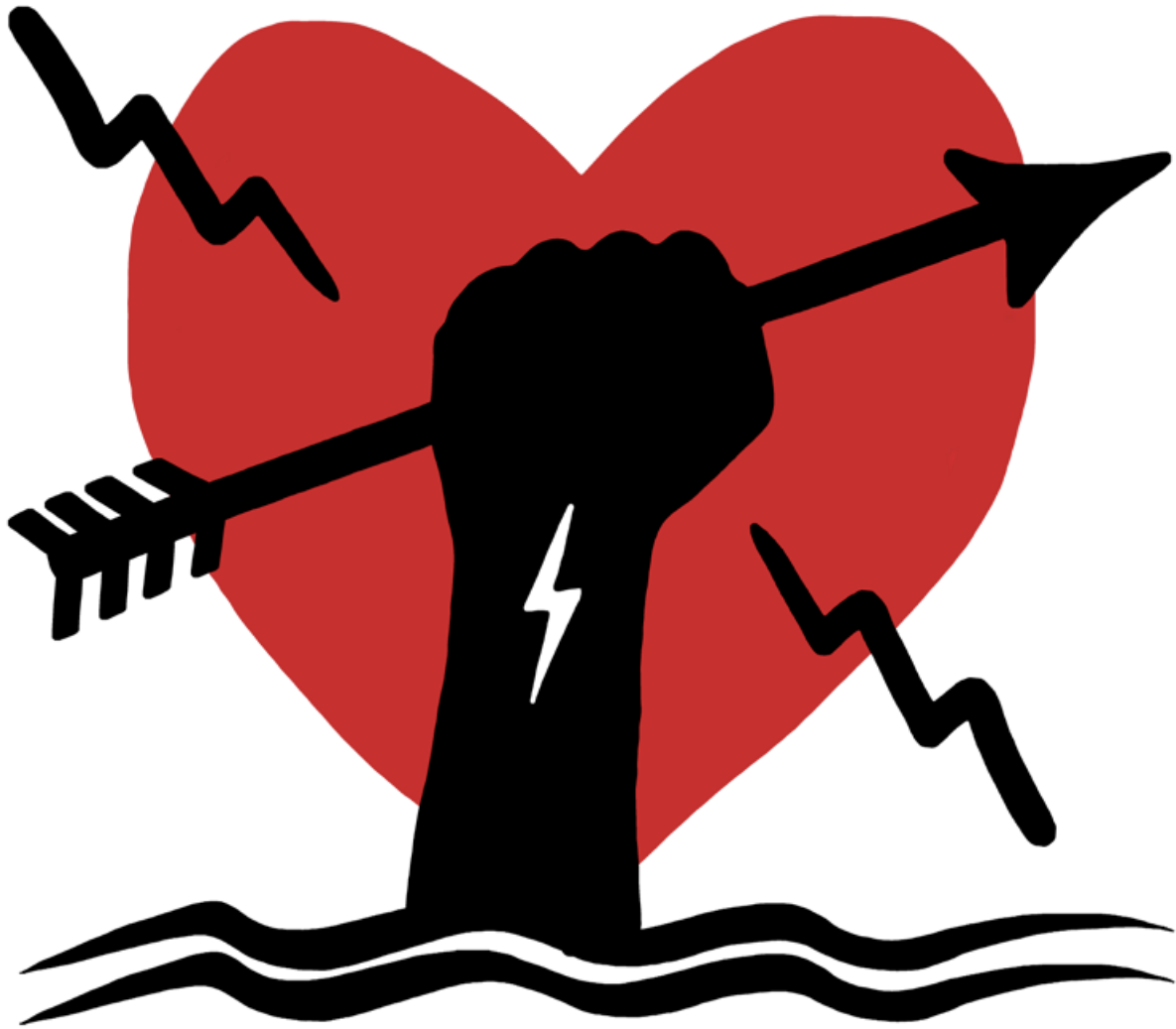
5D Which side will you be on?

TF I like mystery.

FEATURED ARTIST

Christi Belcourt

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IS LIFE

