COMBINING THROUGH BLACK BEAUTY CULTURE

THE WITCHY POLITICS OF TAROT
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When my daughter was born severely underweight at almost 37 weeks’ gestation, health care professionals and technicians asked me no fewer than four times whether I smoked. When I said no, one person pressed further with, “Are you sure?”

Struggling to walk in my hospital robe, post-Caesarian section, wearing neither makeup nor a Catherine Middleton blow-out, I was a new Indigenous mother still bewildered by the condition with which my daughter was born—Intrauterine Growth Restriction. The condition, I was told, can be caused by smoking, drug use, malnutrition or an unusual uterine shape. The umbilical cord and placenta were sent to pathology to look for structural clues. The cord that connected us yielded no further information upon its dissection, and so, it stood to reason, it must have been my own behaviour or lack of self-care that determined my child’s tiny size.

As I spent the first few weeks of my daughter’s life in the NICU, supported by my partner and our family members and friends, I thought a lot about what would have happened if I had, indeed, needed addiction support. A hospital social worker circulated in the unit, and another employee encouraged me to register my daughter in a developmental monitoring program. During the intake meeting for the program, I was again asked about alcohol and drug use. To my knowledge, there was no formal monitoring of my situation from a family services perspective, but I was keenly aware of historical and present-day colonial patterns of targeting Indigenous mothers.

These patterns were also highlighted in the June 2019 report of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It condemned the practice of birth alerts targeting “Indigenous mothers, including mothers who are in care themselves,” because that “can be the sole basis for the apprehension of their newborn children.” The report further stated that “Birth alerts are racist and discriminatory and are a gross violation of the rights of the child, the mother and the community.”

Health care professionals and technicians asked me no fewer than four times whether I smoked.

In their accompanying Calls for Justice, the Inquiry demanded “an immediate end to the practice of targeting and apprehending infants (hospital alerts or birth alerts) from Indigenous mothers right after they give birth.” The practice of birth alerts, whereby healthcare professionals are alerted by social workers about mothers they deem to be high risk, is controversial. It can lead to apprehensions, leaving families to struggle to reunite, and it can discourage women from seeking support for healthy pregnancies and enhancing parenting skills for fear of judgement, scrutiny and the very real threat of losing their children. It also causes intense stress for women during what should be an empowering, transformative and special time for themselves and their families.

British Columbia ended birth alerts in September 2019, citing the fact that they target marginalized women and, “disproportionately, Indigenous women.” Katrine Conroy, B.C.’s minister of children and family development, stated: “We acknowledge the trauma women experience when they become aware that a birth alert has been issued. We also heard calls to end this practice from Indigenous communities, organizations and the report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.” Manitoba Families Minister Heather Stefanson announced the end of birth alerts in Manitoba as of April 1, 2020, citing Indigenous calls to end the practice as well as a review finding “no evidence this increases the safety of children in any way.” Manitoba has the highest rate of Indigenous children in care. Ninety percent of children in care are Indigenous. Until Manitoba revoked its policy, an average of one newborn per day was taken into care in the province.

Distressing patterns can be found across the country, as the 2016 census reported that while more than 50 percent of the children in state care are Indigenous, Indigenous children constitute only 7.7 percent of the total population. Indigenous peoples are the youngest and fastest-growing sector of the population in Canada, yet we continue to lack humane and responsible systems to support Indigenous mothers, our families and our communities. As more provinces question the efficacy of birth alerts, and some bring them to an end, it is equally important that social welfare agencies provide greater support for Indigenous birthing strategies that prioritize wellness and community resilience.
How Kenyan Girls Changed Their World

by AMANDA LE ROUGETEL

A year after 160 girls from Meru, Kenya took their government to court for failing to act on their numerous reports of sexual violence, the country’s court ruled in their favour. As a result, the girls launched a powerful movement against sexual assault and in support of girls’ empowerment that continues to this day.

The landmark court challenge was back in 2013—four years before North American women broadly embraced the hashtag #MeToo—and the victory of the Kenyan girls is all the more remarkable because of their young age.

They did what, until that point, had been rarely done anywhere in the world—they went public, named those who assaulted them and persisted through the shaming and the threats that they and their families endured over the course of the court case.

These global leaders in the fight for justice for victims of rape are the subject of The Girls of Meru, a film by Halifax-based filmmaker and animator Andrea Dorfman. The film tells the story of the 160 Girls Project and how their “justice dream team”—a group of legal experts from Canada, Kenya, Ghana and Malawi—pulled the court case together and developed a legal strategy.

Toronto-based feminist lawyer Fiona Sampson, founder and CEO of the equality effect, and Mercy Chidi Baidoo, head of the Kenyan NGO Ripples International and founder of the Tumaini Girls’ Rescue Centre, a shelter for girl victims of sexual violence, were the driving force behind getting the project off the ground.

In Kenya, one in three girls experiences sexual violence before adulthood. While their country’s constitution,
Needs of Young Women With Disabilities Overlooked

by SANDHYA SINGH

A new report is calling on Canadian policymakers and researchers to integrate the needs of girls and young women with disabilities into their work. Sonia Alimi, co-author of the report and research coordinator at the DisAbled Women’s Network Canada (DAWN), says, “Even within disability activism, children tend to be ignored and girls with disabilities are particularly devalued.”

The report drew on Canadian, U.S. and international sources to paint a picture of the challenges facing girls and young women with disabilities up to the age of 25. It examined education, sexuality and reproductive rights, violence, criminalization and mental health.

According to the most recently available data, 2.7 percent of girls under the age of 15 in Canada have a disability. For young women aged 15 to 24, the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability found a 15.6 percent rate of disability. Girls and women with disabilities face discrimination when it comes to education. Inaccessible infrastructure, limited accommodations, bullying and attitudinal barriers on the part of teachers and administrators are cited as reasons for limited educational success. Some 27.9 percent of girls and young women with disabilities are bullied at school due to their disabilities and 10.9 percent have given up their education or training because of disability-related barriers. Statistics Canada reveals that 18.3 percent of women with disabilities have no post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree, compared to 8.3 percent of women without disabilities.

revised in 2010, is strong in terms of children’s rights—“We’d be lucky to have the same in ours,” says one Canadian member of the legal team in The Girls of Meru—what brings justice to individuals is actually having the law enforced. Before the court case, Kenyan police were notorious for not pursuing an investigation into a complaint of rape or not following due process, and some asked for money in order to investigate. When the court ruled in favour of the 160 girls, it made legal history in Kenya and spoke to girls and women around the world. The ruling was not the end of the road for Sampson and the equality effect, however. They had to create legislation and practices, knowing that justice doesn’t just “magically leap into a girl’s lap,” says Sampson. The group’s long-term commitment is to public education and social change via the “160 Girls” Kenya National Implementation Project. The project works with the courts, police and local communities to deliver public education on rights and justice for girls, and includes training for Kenyan police officers, using a curriculum specifically designed to address the

The Girls of Meru by Halifax filmmaker Andrea Dorfman tells how 160 girls and a group of legal experts took Kenya’s police to court over their negligence involving sexual assault.

gaps identified through the 160 girls of Meru cases.

“Without justice, the man will do it again and again,” says Mercy Chidi Baidoo. “The solution is to hold the state to account to make sure the existing laws are being enforced.” Thanks to the persistence of the 160 girls of Meru, the 10 million girls of Kenya are more likely to get justice in the face of sexual violence.

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The Girls of Meru can be streamed at www.nfb.ca/film/girls-of-meru.

ARGENTINA SET TO LEGALIZE ABORTION

Argentinian President Alberto Fernández pledged in March to introduce a bill to legalize abortion in the largely Catholic country.

That means the country of 45 million is on track to become the first major Latin American country to legalize the procedure. “The state must protect its citizens in general and women in particular,” Fernández said in his first annual address to congress. “Society in the 21st century needs to respect the individual choice of its members to freely decide about their bodies.”

Abortion remains illegal across most of Latin America’s 21 countries. It is legal in Cuba, Uruguay and in Anglican Guyana. Mayra Mendoza (pictured), a member of the lower house of the Argentine National Congress, is one of the driving forces of the proposal to legalize abortion.

A bill to legalize abortion in Argentina was defeated in August 2018 after the failure of then-president Mauricio Macri to support it.

Last year she was found guilty of cyber harassment against Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni after she wrote and posted a poem online about Museveni’s birth and his mother’s vagina. Her release came after High Court Judge Henry Peter Adonyo overturned her conviction.

Nyanzi is an avid critic of the Ugandan government. “I am proud of what I told a dirty, delinquent dictator,” she is quoted as saying in The Guardian after being sentenced. “I want to embolden the young people … I want them to use their voices and speak whatever words they want to speak.”

The Guardian also reports Rosebell Kagumire, a feminist activist, as saying, “Her struggle is for equality and [the] end of dictatorship in Uganda.”
Argentina’s women’s rights activists, who have long campaigned for legal abortion, welcomed Fernández’s announcement.

Campaigner Ana Correa said, “The decriminalization and legalization of abortion is finally within reach. Let’s hope that congress is up to the role assigned to it.”

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACK WOMEN DOCUMENTED

A new report on Black women published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reveals insights into how racism and sexism intersect in the lives of the 620,000 Black women and girls who live in Canada.

Written by Jen Katschunga and Notisha Massaquoi from the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit of the City of Toronto and by Justine Wallace of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the report notes that for Black students, educational institutions are often places where they encounter “degradation, harm and psychological violence.”

In response, the report recommends that educators be made “aware of how structures of inequities like racism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia and Islamophobia operate in educational institutions.”

In spite of these challenges, the gap between Black women’s participation in secondary education and that of non-Black women is slowly closing. “In 2016, 32.5 percent of Black women aged 25 to 34 years held a university degree compared to 36.5 percent of women who did not report being part of a visible minority,” the report notes.

Black women are disproportionately affected by chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, lupus and hypertension. Diabetes rates have doubled among Black women.

Violence is a pressing problem. Numerous international studies report that disabled girls and young women are at greater risk of violence because of their disability, their gender and their young age. This includes not only sexual violence, but forced or coerced sterilization, being refused personal care by caregivers or having their assistive or mobility devices withheld.

“That vulnerability to violence is highest for those aged 20 to 24,” Alimi says. “There is little doubt that girls and young women in Canada are at particularly high risk.”

According to a 2017 Canadian study, Indigenous children with disabilities are particularly marginalized. Using an intersectional approach, the report examined how ableism, racism, sexism and neocolonialism affect the lived experiences of girls, including those who are trans, gender non-conforming and non-binary.

Girls with disabilities need better access to sexual and reproductive rights. Alimi notes that ableist views regard disabled girls and young women as asexual and therefore not in need of sex education. One Australian study found that sex education for teens with disabilities was ableist and heteronormative. As a result, many girls with disabilities do not have the opportunity to develop their sexuality in a safe way.

All of this has negative consequences on mental health.

Young women with disabilities experience health and educational barriers. (Photo: iStock)
Indigenous Film Captures Resistance to Racism

by DOREEN NICOLL

nipawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up made history at the 2019 Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival as the first-ever opening night film by an Indigenous filmmaker. It also received the award for Best Canadian Feature Documentary.

Award-winning Cree filmmaker Tasha Hubbard depicts the aftermath of the death of Colten Boushie, who spent the afternoon of August 9, 2016 swimming with friends. On the drive home, the 22-year-old Cree man from the Red Pheasant First Nation in Saskatchewan fell asleep in the back of the SUV. He woke to chaos and violence, which culminated in Gerald Stanley shooting Colten Boushie in the back of his head after the driver of the SUV, one of Boushie’s friends, entered Stanley’s property.

Hubbard honours Boushie’s memory and his family’s struggle for justice in her film nipawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up. The filmmaker skillfully weaves together the Indigenous history of the prairies, including her own adoption into a settler family, with Boushie’s killing and the systemic racism that permeates Canada’s judicial system.

The film focuses on Boushie’s family and the inhumane treatment they were subjected to at the hands of the RCMP, as well as the racist social media posts and death threats they were subjected to before and after Stanley’s acquittal by an all-white jury.

Their quest for justice takes them to Parliament Hill where they meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Conservative representatives and others to gain support for a royal commission on racism in the judicial system. The family then addresses the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, requesting they investigate the structural racism permeating Canada’s legal system.

Emerging from the tragedy are the powerful and resilient voices of Boushie’s sister, Jade Tootoosis, and his mother, Debbie Baptise. They are joined by family and community in their efforts to create a better future for the next generations, so Indigenous children can live safely.

Colten Boushie’s sister Jade Tootoosis, and his mother, Debbie Baptiste, address the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

from 6 percent to 12 percent between 2001 and 2012. Black women’s rate of high blood pressure also increased from 20 percent to 27 percent over this time period. The report calls for more research and improved treatment of these conditions.

In the labour market, Black women are underpaid compared to their non-Black counterparts. Black women are disproportionately represented in low-paying jobs and are subjected to hiring and advancement discrimination in the Canadian labour force. As a result, Black women earn just 59 cents for every dollar earned by men, whereas women as a whole in Canada are paid 79 cents compared to men in Canada. Even among university professors, racialized women professors earn 68 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized male academics.

The report recommends Canada create a national gender equality policy to address structural factors such as anti-Black racism leading to Black gendered inequality.

AFGHAN PREZ: GENDER TOP CONCERN

President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan said in January that gender would remain his top question in the peace talks between the Taliban and the U.S.

“No Afghan woman, as long as I am alive and in a position of responsibility, is going to be subjected to gender apartheid,” the president said.

After the Taliban took hold of the country in 1996, Afghan women were prohibited from working, attending school or appearing in public without a male relative. Afghan women continue to express deep concern about Taliban violence in their country after the U.S. withdraws all its troops.

A peace agreement signed by the U.S. and the Taliban in February, however, does not include guarantees that human rights, minority rights or women’s rights will be guaranteed, leaving women’s advocates worried that peace will come on the backs of women.

Ghani cautioned that if the Taliban see the peace process “as a Trojan horse to overthrow the government, then the society and government will mobilize.”
Tasha Hubbard, a filmmaker and associate professor at the University of Alberta, was motivated to make the film for very personal reasons. Hubbard is from the Peepeekisis First Nation in Treaty Four Territory in Saskatchewan and has ties to Thunderchild First Nation in Treaty Six Territory. She is also the mother of a son and a daughter.

Hubbard’s first experience solo writing/directing was for Two Worlds Colliding (2004), a project for the National Film Board (NFB) that focused on Saskatoon’s infamous “starlight tours,” the term for a police practice in which First Nations men were driven to the outskirts of Saskatoon on the coldest nights of winter, stripped of their coats and shoes and left to make their way back. Many froze to death.

Hubbard followed with the 2017 documentary Birth of a Family, chronicling a Sixties Scoop reunion of a birth family during a holiday in Banff.

The making of nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up became a personal project for the filmmaker. Hubbard first heard about the killing of Colten Boushie while driving on rural Edmonton roads with her then-nine-year-old son and her nephew. The film recalls how this event escalated quickly into an unending stream of racist comments on social media blaming Boushie. This reaction online led Hubbard to the awareness that these events would directly affect her son, his cousin and all young First Nations men.

It isn’t until Hubbard visits with her biological father in the film that we realize that her biological father’s wife is also Boushie’s aunt. It was she who encouraged Hubbard to make a film detailing the full story from a Cree perspective and providing the history of the land where the film’s events took place.

Hubbard was adopted by a farming settler family, a fact that brings a certain humanity. “The situation we’re in is due to past decisions, and people still benefit from those decisions,” Hubbard says. “Canadians need to come to terms with their past and help make the changes necessary for the future.”

Canadian history over the past 150 years includes laws that prevented Indigenous peoples from leaving reservations, disallowed them from organizing resistance, barred them from accessing lawyers and from obtaining an education and made it illegal for them to sell their produce without permission from an Indian agent.

This 98-minute film, coproduced with Downstream Documentary Productions and the National Film Board, is a must-see for every person in Canada.

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The winter of 2020 began with nation-wide protests in support of the Wet’suwet’en uprising. “The Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs are the title holders and maintain the authority and jurisdiction to make decisions on unceded lands.” So affirmed a media statement from the hereditary chiefs that asserted their authority to oppose the Coastal GasLink pipeline from being routed through 22,000 square kilometres of Wet’suwet’en territory in B.C.

The extraordinary clarity of the Wet’suwet’en call for support, and the astonishing network that formed across the country has brought about one of the most powerful movements seen in Canada in recent years. Within a week in February, almost all rail traffic was halted across the country. Demonstrations, blockades and occupations happened in every province and even in some U.S. cities. They were all led by Indigenous people and attended by diverse groups of young people. Injunctions were served and burned.

A statement from the Unist’oten resistance camp outlined the protesters’ resolve. “We have the power of people shutting down railways, highways, ports and government offices all around this country. Thank you to people all around this planet making our struggle your struggle. The flames of resistance and the resurgence of Indigenous land reclamation give us strength…These arrests don't intimidate us. Police enforcement doesn't intimidate us. Colonial court orders don't intimidate us. Men in suits and their money don't intimidate us. We are still here. We will always be there. This is not over.”

While the media focussed most on the economic impact of the protesters, the issue that brought so many into the freezing night to blockade railways was a desire to demonstrate support for the historic right and title of Wet’suwet’en people, who have never given up their land and never ceded title. It has been more than 20 years since the Delgamuukw vs British Columbia Supreme Court of Canada ruling recognized the protection of Aboriginal title in section 35 of the constitution. Yet no government, neither the NDP or Liberals in B.C., nor the Liberals or Conservatives in Ottawa, have negotiated agreements on how this title will be exercised. The only other avenue offered to First Nations is to give up their title under the modern Treaty process, which they do not want to do.

And despite the governments of B.C. and Canada claiming that they agree with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), they have not recognized the principle of free, prior and informed consent, which is the bedrock of UNDRIP—a document which stipulates how laws affecting Indigenous lands should be approached. Instead, B.C. and Canada have imposed Canadian law, forcing expensive case upon case on Indigenous nations. No wonder the Wet’suwet’en use the term “wreckconciliation” to describe the Liberal pretense of reconciliation.

After the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Idle No More and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Girls and Women, many non-Indigenous Canadians have become more aware of Indigenous issues. An entire generation has grown up understanding, at least in part, that Indigenous people fighting to protect their unceded territories from greedy gas and oil companies are fighting for all of us by protecting the environment.

Add to that a growing consciousness, in Canada and around the world, that we need massive transformations within our economic system to achieve greater democracy and to mitigate global warming. It’s not just that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has lost his progressive cred, but that more and more people are realizing that a reform here or there is not going to bring about social justice.

Canada has long been in denial about its colonial past and its colonial present. It’s time for the government of Canada to put a higher priority on the rights and title of Indigenous peoples than on the profits of oil and gas companies. And a generation of Indigenous people, including youth, is rising up to make sure they do.
Combing Through Black Beauty Culture

by CICELY-BELLE BLAIN

It’s Sunday evening and I’m sitting on the couch. On the table in front of me lie three combs, two brushes, four Olive Oil products, a tub of cocoa butter, a hairdryer, a curling iron and about one thousand bobby pins (give or take). Every Black femme knows this scene oh-so-well. It’s wash day; my arms ache, my rug is 50 percent wool, 50 percent curly hair and I’m halfway through a new Netflix series.

This hair day is different from most because on the arm of my couch sits a bright pink and purple book, Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada’s Black Beauty Culture by Cheryl Thompson. But as I apply heat and chemicals to my head, I’m not thinking about history or politics or feminism. I’m thinking about hair—just hair—for the next five or six hours.

Or am I?

I have an important business event this week and I know the drill. Hair—straightened (or slicked back into oblivion); accent—British and proper; earrings—small and classy; lipstick—bold but not garish; clothes—smart but shapeless enough to hide my curves. This is my ritual for survival. I intentionally try not to think about it, because every time I do, it makes me angry. I just do it over and over again. I’m not even sure I know the person this process creates, but I know that I need them. And I know that my experience is the opposite of unique. I’m part of a long line of Black women and femmes who burn and twist and pack and cover their hair in order to be successful, or even just accepted.

I open up Thompson’s book, which maps out Canada’s Black beauty industry from past to present, infusing critical race theory and Black feminism into a historical investigation on Black hair. And therein lies my trepidation. See, every Black person knows our hair is political. Whether we intentionally wear it as a political statement or the politicization of it is non-consensually placed upon us, Black hair is never just hair.

An afro is a symbol of revolution, dreadlocks are a religious commitment, or at least a nod to Rastafari, Bantu knots spark reminders of colonization and Apartheid in South Africa. Even wearing a durag is not without meaning. Originally worn by slaves and labourers, durags became a fashion statement after the Black Power movement in the United States in the 1960s.

Furthermore, not one of these hairstyles has gone without criticism or even criminalization. For example, a 16-year-old New Jersey wrestler was told by a referee to cut off his dreadlocks or else forfeit his win; a six-year-old Florida boy was forced to disenroll from a private school, and two students in Massachusetts were disallowed from attending prom—all because of their natural hair. California recently passed a law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of hair texture. This is a big win for Black folks, but it
also marks a trajectory towards more radical attempts at inclusion for others.

In Canada, no such law exists, and public discourse on Black hair is in its infancy in comparison to our southern neighbours. Living in Vancouver—Black population one percent—this lack of discourse serves to double down on the erasure of Black identity in the Canadian imaginary. Black often becomes synonymous with African American, a community that has contributed many central tenets of Black culture but doesn’t necessarily share the same experiences of Black Canadians or Black Brits like me or those back in the homelands.

In fact, our understanding of Black history is so American that Black Canadian icon Viola Desmond is often is dubbed “Canada’s Rosa Parks.” It’s ironic given that Desmond refused to move from the “whites only” section of a movie theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia on November 8, 1946—nine years before Parks refused to budge from the “whites only” section of an Alabama bus in 1955. Parks’ action sparked the Montgomery bus boycott, while Desmond’s arrest and conviction galvanized support for the outlawing of segregation in Canada.

Viola Desmond’s legacy is not just about segregation—it’s also about hair.

Thompson’s second chapter details how Desmond started her own salon, created and developed her own line of beauty products and trained other Black women as beauticians and stylists. A pretty normal career until you consider the barriers faced by women who just wanted to use products appropriate for their hair. Desmond was refused admission to a beauty school in Halifax, driving her to the U.S. for training. Her achievements in her short life (Desmond died at 50) are notable for the advancement of civil rights in Canada, but Desmond’s role as a Black Canadian entrepreneur in the beauty industry is also a significant part of her legacy.

In Thompson’s book are photos of Desmond posed in her salon, some from newspaper clippings. The most striking thing about Viola Desmond so often noted by historians, including Thompson, is her sleek, smooth, put-together appearance. I know that look—it’s a look of someone who can’t let their hair down (literally) for a moment because of the searing scrutiny placed on Black women and femmes. Even one with the privilege of lighter skin and softer hair.

“I don’t know any Black women who didn’t go through high school being bullied for their hair,” Thompson said to me over the phone. “It’s even worse when you think you’re lookin’ the bomb!” After reading Beauty in a Box, most of my burning questions for Thompson were about her own life, the inspiration for her work and, most importantly, her own hair journey.

Thompson remembers begging her mother for a long time to let her relax her hair, and finally being allowed to at 14 (same!) and re-relaxing it regularly until she turned 30. It’s a typical tale—begging your mother, who likely has her own hair trauma, to let you look more like the white girls in your class, and for it to take years of scalp burning to finally love your natural crown. This is under-discussed in Canadian beauty culture as many of us—especially outside of the GTA, Montreal or Halifax—feel tremendous pressure to assimilate and whitewash ourselves to be accepted in predominantly white towns and cities.

The hair and beauty products on the coffee table in front of me are a collection of treasures sourced from dark corners of the internet and hidden shelves in a London Drugs two towns away or smuggled into my bulging suitcase after trips back to London, England. It’s very difficult to find Black hair care products in B.C. And yes, the Black population here is small so it makes sense to some extent. But as Thompson outlines in Beauty in a Box, availability of ethno-specific products and larger structures of racism are intrinsically connected.

The Black population of Vancouver is not only small, but it has been made small on purpose. In the 1970s, the City of Vancouver completed the construction of the Georgia Viaduct,
a bridge that connects East Vancouver to Downtown. The bridge’s construction caused the demolition of Vancouver’s only Black neighbourhood, the vibrant Hogan’s Alley. An overwhelmingly poor and disenfranchised population, Hogan’s Alley residents were easily displaced. Many moved to the suburbs, out east or down south. And while the Black community of B.C. is steadily resurging, this active form of erasure has contributed to a pejorative narrative that Black people do not belong in the province.

So while it may seem dramatic to equate the lack of available appropriate hair products to systemic racism, the forms of beauty that are catered to and not catered to in a community are a reflection of who is valued within that community.

Historically, Black hair and beauty has been rooted in community.

“I never touched my own hair until I was 30,” Thompson says. It’s often a custom to have mothers, grandmothers, aunts, friends (shoutout to my best-friend-turned-stylist who always keeps my braids fresh) do your hair for you, especially in places where salons are few and far between.

Thompson also believes that this prevented her from truly falling in love with her own hair.

“It’s kind of scary—every woman should know all of her own body,” Thompson now proudly sports locs, an ode to her Jamaican roots. “I’m not against weaves or wigs,” she explains. “I’m pro-knowledge. Now we know the consequences wearing certain hairstyles for a long time can have on our hair and scalp, and I think we should stay informed.”

My own earliest hair memories consist of hours in the bathtub as my mother pulled a metal comb through every strand. To illustrate certain styles throughout Black Canadian history, Thompson includes stunning photos of her glamorous female relatives with captions like “Old family photo” or “Great aunts.” This struck me as poignant as it highlights how personal Thompson’s work was for her. “They capture a certain generation of working-class women looking beautiful,” she says. “They dressed up for themselves.”

There is no doubt that Black hair—whether we love it or not—is unique and deeply rooted in culture and tradition. This is why my blood begins to boil when I see non-Black people trying on cornrows, Bantu knots or locs for fashion or costume. Cultural appropriation is a hot topic and I was curious how Thompson felt about it, considering she has spent the past few years chronicling Black hair and beauty culture.

“Power is increasingly invisible,” Thompson says, referring to how anti-Blackness continues to be pervasive yet manifests in more subtle ways. Black aesthetic has always been exotified, copied and stolen. One of the most poignant examples is that of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman stolen from her tribe in South Africa and paraded around Europe for spectators to laugh and goggle at. Her large behind became an inspiration for the late 1800s bustle dress, worn by white women who couldn’t think of anything worse than being Black but were happy to appropriate certain elements of Blackness for a fleeting fashion trend.

The phenomenon continues today with Kylie Jenner in cornrows, Katy Perry gelling her edges or Kim Kardashian “breaking the internet” by posing as a Black woman. “There hasn’t been a moment when white culture hasn’t looked to Black culture for entertainment,” Thompson says. “People just see our hair as a performance.”

This appropriation of Black hairstyles is harmful because society simultaneously vilifies Black people—especially Black women and femmes—for wearing the same hairstyles that are praised and applauded on white celebrities.

My experience as an anti-racism educator has taught me that the average Canadian knows very little about Black history, especially Black Canadian history, and this contributes to the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism in this country. We receive a lot of our information from American media, and that comes with stereotypes and tropes about Black people, especially the consumable elements of Black culture like fashion, hairstyles, dance moves, music genres and so on. This leads to two main problems in the Canadian imaginary. One is a lack of understanding of Black Canadian identity, history and culture, and second is an exaggerated caricature of Blackness that is undiluted by meaningful relationships with real Black people. For example, I can tell that a lot of Vancouverites don’t have any Black friends based on the number of times I’ve been asked to twerk.

*Beauty in a Box* teaches us to re-examine our own biases about Black culture in Canada and paints a unique and beautiful portrait of an underrepresented history about the political roots of Black hair.

Some days I am tempted to chop it all off, or burn away the kinks and curls, but Thompson reminds me of the importance and significance of my natural hair.

Black people have been crafting revolutions and disrupting narratives with the stuff that grows out of our heads for centuries. From my time spent with Cheryl Thompson and her work, I learned that some self-love, accurate historical knowledge and a little bit of Shea butter allows a radical body politic to keep growing.
Witches of the World Unite

Taking Down Patriarchy with Tarot, Astrology and Magic

by ANDI SCHWARTZ
I scroll through my Instagram feed and notice my thumb flicking past numerous images of tarot cards, crystals, plants and candles. As a researcher of femme internet culture, the witchy aesthetic sweeping through feminist and queer circles has been hard to ignore.

The link between young women and all things witchy has almost become a meme: a screenshot of a tweet that reads, “Can someone with bangs tell me which planet is making me sad?” shows up in my newsfeed. The wry tweet conjures the stereotype of a young feminist sporting short, DIY bangs and explaining away human experience using astrology.

Humorous tweets aside, the recent resurgence of witchcraft, magic and tarot is worth a serious look. What is it about tarot that is so appealing to feminists and queers? Is it, as the Twitter commentator suggests, just the hip, queer, feminist aesthetic? Or is there something about this political moment that makes magical practices feel necessary?

“In apocalyptic times, there’s always a resurgence of mysticism,” says Sophie Macklin, one third of the Working Witches of the World (WWW) collective. “Magic leaves room for things that seem impossible.”

She’s talking about surviving the impending climate crisis and the ever-expanding enclosures of capitalism. Toronto-based astrologer and playwright Shaunga Tagore shares similar concerns.

“As an astrologer, I look at some of the rapid planetary movements of the next decade in conjunction with what I’m seeing in the news about the climate crisis, and I personally find the rate at which things are escalating really scary,” she says. In order to navigate these massive global changes, Tagore believes, we need a framework of support that is “otherworldly.”

According to some, this wouldn’t be the first time the other realm has supported humanity through a major political turning point, nor would it be the first time in the history of Western culture that women, queers or feminists have found their way to tarot, magic and alternative spiritualities.

While the word “witch” has roots in Old English and was used to refer to sorcerers of any gender, the practices associated with witchcraft have historically been associated with women. It wasn’t until the rise of Christianity in the first millennium that goddess worship and folk healers were demonized. In her book *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive*, Kristen J. Sollée says the demonizing rhetoric of witchcraft was used by church and state alike to gain control of unruly women. The result was the witch trials and executions that swept Europe between the 15th and 18th centuries. Some estimates put the number of executions in the millions, while other estimates are as low as 100,000. The body count may not be certain, but that the vast majority killed were women is. And given most organized religions’ treatment of women throughout the ages, it is perhaps no wonder so many women have sought alternative spiritual practices.

According to scholar Karlyn Crowley, the New Age movement ran parallel to the rise of the feminist movement from the 1960s to the 1990s. Various New Age practices, like mediumship, have enabled women to gain a sense of spiritual authority and reclaim feminized traits like intuition.

“Feminists and queers have always been denied access to traditional systems of knowledge and history making,” says Shawna Dempsey, co-creator of the Winnipeg Tarot Co. tarot deck. “Women and queers have been accused of gossip, but that’s how we tell our stories. In the binary system of intellect versus intuition, intuition has been the purview of women and feminine men. Historically, we’ve worked with what we have.”
It is not coincidental that the rise of Christianity throughout Europe paralleled the expansion of European imperialism and the early stages of capitalism. And as Chani Nicholas recently said in *Bitch* magazine, queer and trans folks have been demonized in Christian traditions, particularly by efforts to uphold a gender binary. This, she says, helps explain why many queer people have taken to astrology.

Many feminist and anti-racist white witches are committed to rediscovering magic practiced by their European ancestors—practices which were largely suppressed or erased through the witch trials, the spread of Christianity and through colonization.

In her book *Modern Tarot*, Michelle Tea describes tarot as “an ancient story system, a pack of cards that tell a multitude of tales depending on the ways in which they’re placed alongside one another.” While we might use them for fortune-telling and healing, the origin of tarot cards we know is that they emerged as a card game in 15th century Milan—Tea says you can still give a decent tarot reading with an ordinary pack of cards.

Today, the visual narrative of tarot cards fits well with highly visual platforms like Instagram. The point of both tarot and social media is connection, which can explain why social media is one of the vehicles driving the contemporary resurgence of tarot and witchcraft. WWW collective member Tess Giberson of Vancouver suggests that the alienation and loneliness driving the current desire to connect with others is generational—a millennial problem. Dempsey and her artistic collaborator, Lorri Millan, attribute it to local culture.

Dempsey and Millan’s first experience with tarot came shortly after the performance artist duo moved from Toronto to Winnipeg in the late 1980s, where they saw people reading tarot cards in nearly every café and diner they encountered.

“We had come from the centre of business and commerce, and it was just
another indicator that Winnipeg was a little different,” says Millan. “There was the recognition of different kinds of power in Winnipeg, maybe a thinner veil between this realm and the next.”

Dempsey and Millan created their tarot deck, lusciously illustrated by visual artist Bonnie Marin, in 2010. It features Winnipeg-centred imagery—much of it queer. The Winnipeg Tarot Co. project was created to elicit stories about Winnipeg from its citizens, and Dempsey, Millan and other artists conducted tarot readings in public places. It is this ordinariness that makes it easy to connect over tarot, which invites a shared interpretation of symbols, rather than calling on mastery of religious doctrine.

Other newer decks, including The Collective Tarot and New World Tarot are redrawn without the symbolic reliance on the gender binary, whiteness and cis-normativity found in traditional decks. But it is more than representation that makes tarot feminist.

A lot of feminist tarot content emphasizes the importance of unlocking your inner magic, connecting with your higher self and prioritizing self-care and healing. While tarot and witchcraft’s healing potential is personally validating, it has led to critiques that it is too individualistic. New Age culture in general has been critiqued by the political left for being too apolitical. But magic practitioners see their work, healing and otherwise, as deeply political.

“My feminism can’t exist without spiritual and personal healing,” says Shaunga Tagore. “I started my relationship to justice with my own personal healing in terms of the racism, sexism and homophobia that I experienced as a child.”

For Tagore, healing personal injury that stems from ancestral trauma—such as ongoing legacies of racism—also means interrogating how we participate in those very systems of oppression. There’s nothing individualistic or apolitical about it.

“My spiritual practice is inherently political,” says Tagore. “It’s looking at ‘what are my patterns?’ I can’t heal the things that have hurt me without healing the things that cause me to hurt and violate and participate in oppression.”

The history of the feminist movement is populated by witchy women. Kristen J. Sollée writes that 19th-century American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a practitioner of Spiritualism—a practice centred on communing with the dead via mediums—and wrote her famed manifesto on women’s rights, the Declaration of Sentiments, at a table used for séances.

However, WWW member Sophie Macklin says when she first bought a tarot deck in the mid-2000s, it was definitely “not cool to be witchy in political circles” which are very masculine. Casey Wait, the third WWW collective member, attributes the skepticism of the immaterial that runs in socialist and leftist circles to a sort of respectability politics.

“Witches have always been part of revolutionary struggle,” Wait insists. “There are very real roots here.”

The Wild Unknown Archetypes tarot deck by Kim Krahns is published by HarperCollins.
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An example is the Haymarket Affair. On May 1, 1886, more than 300,000 workers at 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs on the first May Day celebration in history. In Chicago, workers protested in support of the eight-hour workday for three days and it ended after police opened fire on workers on the evening of May 4, following a bomb blast. Eight people were convicted for conspiracy. The Haymarket Affair anniversary is also known as International Workers Day or May Day. May 1 is significant because it is the day of Beltane, an ancient pagan festival that marks a cross-quarter day, the mid-point between equinox and solstice. On cross-quarter days, the veil between worlds—ours and the spirit world—is said to be its thinnest. Ancestors are believed to be present with the living at this time of rebirth and spontaneity.

According to the WWW, “revolutionary ancestors were very present on that day and collaborated with the living to catalyze this moment that spurred working class rebellions.”

“I think that something people forget is… they weren’t only fighting for eight hours of work, they were fighting for eight hours of rest and eight hours of pleasure,” says Wait.

The collective members believe pleasure has too often been ignored in traditional, masculinist activism in favour of productivity, and many witches want to change that.

“Rather than pleasure being a vehicle for personal empowerment, pleasure or frivolity is a way to become ungovernable,” says Giberson.

For the WWW collective, witchcraft is about countering traditionally masculine cultural norms that mandate waged labour, productivity and individual success over rest, pleasure and generating collective power. The collective members see pleasure, frivolity, the feminine and magic as intertwined.

For this reason, they are skeptical of the “boss witch” figure who haunts Instagram, offering spells for abundance, courses on “money magic” and other ways to harness the earth for personal gain. “It’s been really valorized and celebrated to get rich and be a boss witch. It feels very lean in-feminism to me,” says Macklin. “Actually, we have to dismantle that power and go for collective power.”

Feminist witches remind us that the locus of power does not lie in buying plants, crystals or tarot decks. Magic’s radical potential is that it’s by the people and for the people.

The resurgence of magical folk practices, like reading tarot cards, is evidence of a growing frustration with the masculinist status quo, and a desire to imagine and build a different world. Magic asks us to think collectively, to value the feminine inherent in people of all genders and to honour ancestral practices. Feminist witches believe these practices can be used to strategically interfere with the patriarchal and capitalist exploitation of our bodies and the planet.

If anyone on Twitter is still wondering, it may not be a planet making you sad—but it just might be the forces of unbridled capitalism.

“Frivolity is a way to become ungovernable.” —TESS GIBERSON

Shawna Dempsey (left) and Lorni Millan’s Winnipeg Tarot Co. deck is proudly situated in the witchy world of Winnipeg, Manitoba. (Photo: Ruth Bonneville, Winnipeg Free Press)
Celebrating the Frenetic Feminism of Julie Doucet

by NYALA V. ALI

A visibly menstruating woman sweats and twitches as she frantically searches her apartment for a tampon. Growling, she kicks open the front door, shifting and growing larger by the second. Once outside, she goes on a rampage, flooding the streets with blood—the very sight of her a threat to the neighbourhood. The woman overturns cars and smashes through a drugstore ceiling with a singular goal in mind. Shrinking back down to size only upon acquiring a box of Tampax, she sits demurely, wrapped in a blanket and surrounded by police, a sheepish grin on her face.

This is "Heavy Flow," released over 30 years ago by influential Canadian comics creator Julie Doucet. First appearing in Dirty Plotte #6, Doucet’s self-published minicomic series at the time, “Heavy Flow” cements the artist’s innovative approach to the medium’s content and form—to establish self-contained woman-centric narratives that resist containment and instead highlight a constant, transgressive spilling out, with Doucet herself at the forefront.

In 1988, Doucet produced and self-published her first series, Plotte (Québécois slang for vagina), after dropping out of art school at 22. She later distributed her mimeographed, hand-stapled minicomics through a fanzine called Factsheet Five. The entire run of strips (created in under two years’ time) was picked up in 1990 as the debut single-author title for up-and-coming Montreal publishing house Drawn & Quarterly (D&Q). D&Q published Doucet’s existing 12 issues of Plotte within the next eight years, along with new material.
Now reprinted in a two-book retrospective released by D&Q, *Dirty Plotte: The Complete Julie Doucet* celebrates the artist’s chops as a visual storyteller and her vast significance as a woman creator of Canadian indie comics. This anthology boasts all 12 issues of *Plotte*, as well as Doucet’s critically acclaimed graphic memoir *My New York Diary*, a handful of dream comics that appeared in *My Most Secret Desire* and countless other rare strips, interviews and previously unpublished materials. This collected re-release highlights the intricacies, frustrations and fun of Doucet’s frenetic womanhood.

Without taking early strips like “Heavy Flow” and most of the original *Dirty Plotte* series into account, it would be easy to characterize Doucet solely as a graphic memoirist, as her best-known stand-alone works are seemingly rooted in autobiography. *My Most Secret Desire* is, as its core, a graphic dream journal, and the title of *My New York Diary* suggests a coming-of-age travelogue of a young woman living abroad. However, Doucet’s collection of *Dirty Plotte* strips depict a more freeform, loosely plotted work that retroactively challenges the veracity of her later, more straightforward narratives about bad dreams and bad boyfriends.

In *Plotte*, Doucet experiments with the chimeric version of “Julie” she presents to the audience within the equally malleable story worlds she creates. She establishes divisions not only between Julie the artist and “Julie” the character, but between dream and waking life, and the surreal and the everyday. She then artfully breaks these down, keeping the reader off-balance, but engaged, as she challenges our expectations in exciting ways. Notably, issues 10 to 12 of *Plotte* contain the original *My New York Diary*, which is a fitting end to the miniseries: Julie moves to a new city for a man, only to end up claiming her agency and independence as a woman in art.

By this point in her short but prolific comics career, Doucet had honed her skills as a storyteller interested in elevating the mundane through the absurd, in large part through the impressive amount of detail present in each panel. Remarking that it often took two days to compose a single page, Doucet’s claustrophobic yet explosive backgrounds infuse her work with kinetic energy, while also grounding daily goings-on in a very real and personal sense of place.

Also serving as slight-of-hand, the sheer amount of chaos taking place in a Doucet strip allowed the bobble-headed, simply sketched Julie to hide in plain sight, making appalling mischief while camouflaged among all manner of art supplies, debris and household appliances. But nothing is ever still in these frames, with objects maliciously springing to life to oppose ideas of domestic bliss.

“Ha! Good ol’ reassuring reality!” Julie quips during one such strip, believing that murderous objects thought to have been contained to a nightmare are still lurking behind her. In “My Alcoholic Romance,” Julie lures an anthropomorphic beer bottle back to her place, under the guise of wanting to paint him, since she’s an artist, after all. Besides pointed commentary through the presence of everyday items made flesh, *Plotte* also contains an ongoing strip called “Monkey and the Living Dead.”

Chronicling the lives of two anthropomorphic, wayward cats, “Monkey” is modelled after underground comix pioneer Robert Crumb’s raunchy, sexually explicit *Fritz the Cat* series from the 1960s.

It would also be easy to characterize Doucet as a woman counterpart to Crumb, especially since, as she asserts, her work was crafted “in the same spirit as men’s hardcore comics.” But it is Crumb’s maleness that makes his oeuvre something wholly different (and retroactively even less shocking) than Doucet’s. Though Doucet adopts many of the hyper-masculine conventions of sexuality (as well as the barrage of male genitalia) found in comix like Crumb’s, she also re-genders male sexual energy and agency through the acute awareness of her body and subject position as a woman. Incidentally, Doucet’s work gained further recognition after appearing in *Weirdo*—a comix anthology that Crumb himself created—but it was actually Crumb’s wife and fellow cartoonist Aline Kominsky-Crumb who included Doucet’s work, choosing none other than “Heavy Flow” for *Weirdo* issue 26 (published in 1989), a subversive*

* "Comix" refers to the first wave of independent small press or self-published comic books that emerged in America in the late 60s and early 70s. These strips were often socially charged and sexually explicit, and therefore banned from mainstream comics publishers.

Julie Doucet (seen here in a self-portrait) has, at times, re-gendered sexual energy in her work.
Weirdo’s largely male fan base, after Doucet’s other work had started to garner attention. Besides *Plotte*, D&Q also picked up several titles from Doucet’s male contemporaries, most famously Chester Brown’s *Yummy Fur*, Seth’s formative comics digest *Palookaville*, and U.S. expat Joe Matt’s *Peepshow*. Unsurprisingly, Doucet was not granted the same level of notoriety as her tight-knit male counterparts, even though she and Brown were friends. Nor was she afforded her own group of women peers to pal around with—although at the time, Montreal artist Sylvie Rancourt was also working in isolation and in a vastly different cartooning style on her own comic series about her life as a nude dancer.

While *Plotte* undeniably demonstrates a woman’s perspective, male fans and contemporaries who admire Doucet’s work have tended to focus on those elements that adopted the hetero-masculine conventions of sexuality and desire established through the first wave of underground comix. As the artist remarks in an interview with comics scholar Christian Gasser, “The guys were impressed by the subjects I was talking about because it was all very sexual and… so crazy,” perhaps not realizing that she had, in part, disguised her stories as male-coded. She goes on to say that “strangely enough—or strangely to me, in any case—the menstruation stories made people uncomfortable.” The discomfort elicited by these stories, especially among men, reflects Doucet’s refusal to pander to the male gaze and men’s sexual desires, while riffing on a genre initially founded on both.

Instead, she trades desire for disgust, adopting the grotesque visuals that defined so many male-centric underground comix, and re-frames them from a woman’s gaze. In “Heavy Flow,” and in other strips throughout *Plotte*, the artist ends her outburst by apologizing with a polite, almost infantile smile, framing the whole thing as innocent and unintentional. In especially shocking strips, Doucet actively weaponizes both her naivety and her subconscious to temper her raunchy, violent and taboo imagery. “Oh La La, What a Strange Dream” finds Doucet in outer space, first seeking Tampax, and then masturbating blissfully with cookies she receives from her mother. She then awakens and shrugs. “Heh,” she says, simply, as though she could not possibly be held accountable for what her sleeping subconscious has dreamed up.

Doucet’s shock value is rooted in the body’s ability to transgress, not just sexually, but in sexually unexpected ways. In a handful of interspersed strips called “If I Was a Man,” “Julie” pictures herself as “Jules,” an aggressively sex-fueled hero just like the ones found in many a ’60s underground comic. But even when writing “Julie” as a man, Doucet still foregrounds a woman’s perspective by using “Jules” to lampoon male power fantasies; he talks at length about himself and his phallus (and its length), and contemplates “the great mysteries of nature” after inclusion given Weirdo’s largely male fan base, after Doucet’s other work had started to garner attention.
having seemingly not-quite-consensual sex with his girlfriend. Yet another strip shows Jules literally exploring his penis, discovering that it comes apart and can function, much like a woman’s purse, to store everyday sundries. In a subsequent panel, a bouquet of flowers springs forth from the phallus, which Jules then presents to a woman. “What if this thing could be gentle, or even useful?” Doucet seems to say, implying, of course, that when it comes to the displays of male sexuality she is often privy to, neither is the case.

Perhaps the most interesting instance of Jules, though, is the strip “The Double,” in which a dreaming Julie looks in a mirror and sees herself once again as a man, only to have Jules step through the mirror to bed her. Besides satirizing the narcissistic nature of many underground comix artists, the strip is also telling with regard to Doucet’s subject position as a comics creator. In using her most secret desires (by way of an often destructive, male-coded, carnal id) to illustrate pervasive misogyny and everyday woman-centric issues, Doucet also ended up somewhat alienated as an artist.

After her run of Plote ended, drawing comics became a tiring grind for Doucet, instead of, as many Plote strips would depict, a joyous one. While she still felt excluded by the established boys’ club, she did not necessarily desire to break into feminist circles either. When asked about her feminism in Plote, Doucet replied “Of course I’m a feminist, even though that can mean so many things. I would say ‘yes’ because of what I do. And my own position is not to let anybody forbid me to do what I want.”

Doucet also mentions that independent/feminist bookstores wouldn’t sell Plote, contesting its often uncomfortable, violent content. (Most characters dismembered in Doucet strips are male.) But, as scholar Martine Delvaux notes, “Doucet speaks of a feminism that doesn’t need to be named as such.” This makes her early work doubly innovative considering the soon-to-follow Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s, also rife with DIY zines with a feminist bent. And for someone who often proclaimed herself “totally unfit as a woman”—Volume 1 of Plote depicts these anxieties on its cover—Doucet’s influence still permeates the work of current Canadian women cartoonists, from the irreverent, canon-smashing mischief of Kate Beaton, to Jillian Tamaki’s wry coming-of-age candor and fondness for minutiae, to the bobble-headed indignance in the work of the late Geneviève Castrée.

Julie Doucet has long-gained cult status. But an awareness of her legacy has also recently increased in wider comics circles, and especially with scholars of the medium. Dovetailing nicely with Dirty Plote’s re-release in late 2018, Anne Elizabeth Moore’s Sweet Little C*nt: The Graphic Work of Julie Doucet was awarded Best Academic/Scholarly Work About Comics at the 2019 Eisner Awards.

And though Doucet might not wholeheartedly embrace the term, this raging, rampaging collection is indeed a feminist retrospective that affirms her work as retrospectively feminist. The impact of Dirty Plote is undeniably still present, kicking open doors and confronting the masses with Doucet’s messy, often inconvenient womanhood. A demure smile or an apologetic shrug might follow, but only because the artist knew that asking for permission in the first place was never an option.
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A Feminist History Society Book

Second Story Press
When it comes to media coverage of the #MeToo movement, I have many pet peeves. Calling rape a “sex scandal” is one. Lamenting a perpetrator’s halted career but not a victim’s traumatization is another. But the growing trend of referring to someone accused of sexual harassment or rape as having been “MeToo’d” is one of my biggest gripes.

This term is used in videos by dating coaches on YouTube, which often teach men “How to avoid getting MeToo’d.” Kanye West raps in his 2018 song “Yikes”: “Russell Simmons wanna pray for me too/ I’ma pray for him ‘cause he got MeToo’d… What if that happened to me, too?” More recently, at a Republican party rally, Donald Trump Jr. joked, upon kissing his girlfriend (ostensibly consensually), “I will not be getting MeToo’d this evening, alright? [She] may MeToo me later, but that’s a different story.”

It’s interesting that this turn of phrase has picked up so much steam, especially when journalism style guides counsel writers to stick to the active voice. Sure, one could say that over 80 women have “MeToo’d” Harvey Weinstein, for example, but the passive phrasing—e.g. “Weinstein got MeToo’d”—seems to be far more common. I think this construction is popular for social reasons rather than grammatical ones: our culture remains determined to blame victims—even through sentence structure.

This may seem like a tiny quibble, but language has a mimetic quality which shapes not only how we describe events, but also how we understand them. What was called “the Lewinsky scandal” actually hinged on Bill Clinton’s infidelity and misuse of power, for example. And every time the press calls Ivy League rapist Brock Turner a “Stanford swimmer” instead of a sexual predator, readers view him more as the former and less as the latter. The aim of the #MeToo movement has always been to foster solidarity between victims of sexual misconduct while calling for perpetrators to be held accountable, but the astonishingly brave act of naming one’s abuser has been linguistically reshaped into something a victim does to a sexual predator.

Making #MeToo into a verb strengthens the widespread idea that anyone can get “MeToo’d” and have their life smashed to shambles by a single accusation. Articles proliferate online advising “how to keep from getting MeToo’d” as if the answer were any more complex than “don’t sexually harass, bully or rape people.” Survivors are also discredited by the implied equivalence between being raped and publicly calling out a rapist. When journalists and other commentators vilify victims, even subtextually, for “MeToo’ing” a famous sexual aggressor, they contribute to the narrative that perpetrators are the true victims—as though their career being temporarily derailed by rape accusations is anywhere near as traumatic as the havoc they wreaked on their accusers.

People who’ve been falsely accused of sexual misconduct are said to have been “MeToo’d” as well. The phrase seems to imply that all such accusations are—or could be—false. Yet police reports in North America confirm that only about 5 percent of rape allegations are without basis. Far more rapes aren’t reported at all. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), just 23 percent of rape victims file a police report, and only 0.5 percent of rapes lead to a conviction. Making such allegations on social media may be easier for some victims than undergoing the intense, often re-traumatizing legal scrutiny of filing a police report or going to court. However, these online disclosures also run the risk of attracting legions of abusive online trolls. Why, then, has the press, including Canadian outlets like the National Post, continued to insinuate that survivors are at fault when they use social media to say what happened to them?

Being conscientious about language, especially around sensitive issues, is a mantle worth taking up. Survivors courageous enough to report their ordeals should be praised, not blamed. Words have power. Let’s make sure we wield them carefully, kindly and accurately.
CAVEBOY

Night in the Park, Kiss in the Dark
Independent

REVIEW BY ALISON LANG
As I watched the video for "Landslide," the first single from buzzy Montreal trio Caveboy’s debut album, the first thing I noticed was the group’s charisma. Flanked by people doing yoga in a studio moving from soft lighting to nightclub-neon, three musicians—Michelle Bensimon, Isabelle Banos and Lana Cooney—stare imploringly into the camera with a fearless desire and intensity. There is something beautifully queer and powerfully political about witnessing three women interacting with bodies and laying claim to the viewer’s attention in this way. This energy is so strong that Caveboy’s music itself, lovely as it is, almost seems to fade into the background. And the same thing happens as you listen through their album. Night in the Park, Kiss in the Dark is elegantly produced ethereal pop but it sometimes struggles to leave a lasting impact.
This said, there is lots to like here. All three women are supremely talented, and Bensimon’s voice, in particular, is almost preternaturally gorgeous and note-perfect. And the production values are incredible. For an independently produced album, Night in the Park sounds lushly expensive. There are, however, occasional lyrical moments that left me wanting. “Hide Your Love” examines romance in a cold technological age with some flatly literal lines like “a swipe right in the night doesn’t fill you up.” For a band that embraces such a sparkingly intimate sound, I’d love to see lyrics with a deeper hint of mystery. Yet there are also moments that soar. “NYP” begins with a slow Chromatics vibe and swirls into hypnotic repeated chants. Songs like this overflow with potential and feeling and make me eager to see Caveboy live—and excited to see what comes from them in the future.

TEGAN AND SARA

Hey, I’m Just Like You
Sire Records

REVIEW BY KATE SLOAN
Sara and Tegan Quin were 17 when they won a Calgary rock band competition called Garage Warz. The two nervous teens who played acoustic punk songs they’d written in their bedrooms would, over the next two decades, rocket to stardom and win scads of music awards. At 39, Tegan and Sara are synonymous with Canadian indie rock. And they’re still pushing boundaries and surprising audiences.

Though Tegan and Sara bared their angsty teenage souls at Garage Warz, they hadn’t yet revealed a core aspect of their identities: both are gay. The tension of being closeted is front and centre in both the band’s new coming-of-age memoir, High School, and in the album they released alongside it, Hey, I’m Just Like You. The record is a collection of 12 songs the two women wrote as teenagers, unearthed from old demo tapes, rewrote and reworked here and there and re-recorded in a decidedly modern indie-pop style.

Reading the book while listening to the album is surreal and sometimes sad. In the book, Tegan and Sara grapple with the feelings they had for girls in high school. The love songs on the record speak to a vague “you,” however, in reading the memoir, you can piece together the identities of Tegan and
Sara’s high school girlfriends and crushes like a delicate jigsaw puzzle.

The songs, like the former teenagers, overflow with outsized emotions. The track list reads like a poem scribbled in a long-forgotten journal. “Hold My Breath Until I Die” is about a cataclysmic heartbreak. “We Don’t Have Fun When We’re Together Anymore” is a refreshingly plain-spoken admission that a relationship has gone sour. The titular “Hey, I’m Just Like You” explores teenage kinship and connection, a particularly important touchstone for queer youth, who, studies show, are likelier than their straight peers to feel socially isolated and even commit suicide. Tegan and Sara have tackled the complications of queerness in more finessed songs since these were written—for example, rejecting the mantle of gay fame in 2013’s “I’m Not Your Hero,” and begging a closeted partner to come out in 2016’s “Boyfriend”—but the emotional immediacy of these youth-addled songs makes them some of the most striking the duo has ever released.

It’s comforting to realize that the insecure and scared girls who wrote these songs became self-assured, powerful women. Hey, I’m Just Like You suggests that even for young people who languish in the proverbial closet for years, there is a brighter future in store, and one worth sticking around for.

With her album I Disagree, Poppy has created a new persona—an empowering metal-pop goddess of chaos.

POPPLY
I Disagree
Sumerian Records

REVIEW BY ALISON LANG
Poppy is the brainchild and persona of musician/artist Moriah Pereira, and first appeared as a YouTube enigma a few years ago—a petite, doll-like white woman with curtains of ash blonde hair, delivering gently robotic monologues about aliens, gravity, her beloved basil plant and Instagram likes. The videos racked up views in the millions, with fans speculating she was a simulation, or maybe an alien. Then the alien started posting songs—and they were really good songs.

Poppy released her first album, Poppy.Computer, on Diplo’s Mad Decent label in 2017. The album was packed with unnaturally hummable anthems and glitch-glossy synth production falling somewhere between the airiness of Grimes and the vulnerable danceability of Robyn. She followed it up with Am I a Girl?, on which equally perfect pop songs were threaded with darker themes—depression, body dysmorphia, heartbreak and, in the song’s title track, a dalliance with gender dysphoria.

Cut to 2020 and the release of her third album, I Disagree, where the darkness has almost taken over completely, as has the influence of heavy metal, if you couldn’t already tell from the cover, which features Poppy’s face photoshopped over with black-metal corpse paint. Album-opener “Concrete” sets the tone with an air raid siren followed by Poppy’s whispered plea to “bury me six feet deep” and then an explosive burst of riffs and operatic guitar trills, leading to a shiny, sing-songy chorus: “Yummy yummy yummy.” It shouldn’t work, but it does; due to Poppy’s songwriting savvy and the clever production, every song explodes thrillingly, like biting down on a sour jawbreaker candy. Lyrically, there’s a lot of depth here too. The lone slow song, “Nothing I Need,” features Poppy singing wistfully about the importance of inner strength in solitude: “When I said I’m ok/ All the power you had, it slipped away,” she says. All in all, with I Disagree, Poppy has created a new persona all her own—an empowering metal-pop goddess of chaos—and it will surely draw the ire of headbanger bros the world over, which is all the more reason that Poppy utterly rules.
Our protagonist, Sarah Levine, is the youngest of three sisters and is haunted by nightmares rooted in stories she overheard as a child about her dead relatives. At 25, she lives in a rooming house and works in a dead-end gardening job. She makes minor and major decisions by twisting a penny in her pocket—heads for Yes and tails for No. Clearly dysfunctional but compelling nevertheless, Sarah leaves her lover’s home in the middle of the night only to continue her nightmares.

Her story is set in Toronto and Paris in 1982. Tregebov herself lived in Paris at the time of a terrorist bombing of a popular Jewish delicatessen on the Rue des Rosiers. The perpetrators were never brought to justice.

Sarah is apolitical, learning finally to enjoy the aesthetic hedonism of life in Paris. When descending the Metro station in her Paris neighbourhood, however, she sees graffiti that reads: “Mort aux Juifs” (Death to the Jews).

"And at the same time, the very same time, in the same place inside her where she was sure termination was right, she was also sure it was wrong. She was doing harm, preventing a life. It was wrong and it was also right." 

In Rue des Rosiers, Tregebov tells a story composed of richly layered sub-plots—such as teenage abortion, miscarriage, relationships between sisters—with a touch that is personal and not rhetorical. I particularly appreciated Tregebov’s ability to convey complexity. For example, of the protagonist’s decision to have an abortion as a teenager, Tregebov bravely writes, “And at the same time, the very same time, in the same place inside her where she was sure termination was right, she was also sure it was wrong. She was doing harm, preventing a life. It was wrong and it was also right.”

The women are the story’s strong, compelling characters, while the men are either paranoid loner conspiracy theorists or ineffective stoners. The plot is almost skeletal, and the ways in which context, characters and story are sketched and suggested, rather than filled out, are the elements that make The Hard Tomorrow successful as a graphic novel.

Davis’s artistic style is elongated and languid, reminiscent of Modigliani or Chagall, and the figures have a fluid, sensual sensibility. Although the illustration does not blend or seep through multiple panels, it often seems to—an impressive feat which creates a strong sense of movement.

Hannah’s core instincts are traditional; she rejects romantic interest from the female best friend she reveres and imitates, and she still shops at multinational-owned stores without hesitation. First and foremost, she wants to be a mother. Although I question its conclusion that babies are the answer to our personal and political problems, The Hard Tomorrow is a beautiful, imaginative work of art which delves thoughtfully into the joys and despairs of humanity.
artwork The Dinner Party. Now, in Paper Houses, Dominique Fortier presents a lyrical meditation on 19th-century poet Emily Dickinson.

Structurally, the novel reflects Dickinson’s style: wide margins and succinct text. Fortier invites readers to inhabit the expanse and readers interested in Dickinson’s biography, the historical period, or the writing life will settle in comfortably. The narrative itself is deliberate and distancing, the prose, in Rhonda Mullins’ translation, concise and clean.

Much is made of the poet’s solitude, but while the fear of exposure is real, there is a solution: layer up. “Every book contains one hundred books. They are doors that open and never close. Emily lives in the midst of one hundred thousand drafts. She is always in need of a sweater.”

Also layered throughout are the poet’s recurring themes. Portraits of a young Emily reveal early preoccupations—snow, birds, fire and impermanence.

Scenic writing and ruminative passages illuminate character and motivation. “She writes to bear witness: here lived a flower, for three days in July… Each poem is a tiny tomb erected to the memory of the invisible.”

Emily Dickinson’s apartness is inescapable. Even flitting through those open doors—paper spaces—she is a woman daring in ways few women dared. At Mount Holyoke, she studied subjects reserved for boys: “One might almost forget they are mere girls.” She fancies herself like the daisies she admires, which, “wild like mustard, […] spring unchecked like weeds.”

Early on, Dickinson appears empowered by her worldview, but as the pages turn, her loneliness increases as friends are “snatched by marriage or malady.”

Periodically a present-day woman writer emerges in the narrative—neither a dinner nor overnight guest, but another resident in another paper room, another paper house—and brings yet another layer to the narrative, connecting contemporary writers with those women who wrote before.

Paper Houses is an homage, a delicate and deliberate encapsulation.

FEEL FREE
ZADIE SMITH
Penguin Random House

REVIEW BY SYLVIA SANTIAGO
Feel Free is British writer Zadie Smith’s most recent collection of essays published from 2010 to 2017. She writes about topics as wide ranging as the importance of libraries, the creative duo behind the comedy series Key & Peele and the connection between writing and dancing.

As a reader who is also a writer, the essays that interested me most were Smith’s reflections on writing. For example, in “The I Who Is Not Me,” Smith’s Philip Roth Lecture delivered at the Newark Public Library in 2016, she explores her aversion to using first-person narration in her novels. Given the ease with which Smith uses the first-person point of view in her journalistic prose, this aversion is surprising. Evidently, she feels it’s too open to interpretation and speculation when employed in novels: “I want to try to find a place to reconcile the "I-who-is-not-me" of the writer with the "I-whom-I-presume-is-you" that the reader feels they can see. Writers always claim it’s all fiction and readers always suspect that it isn’t. Who’s right?”

Moving from matters of fiction to family, another standout essay is “Love in the Gardens.” In it, Smith compares a trip that she and her father made to the Boboli Gardens with her visit to the Villa Borghese gardens after his death. Florence’s Boboli Gardens intimidate her. “Through formal gardens we passed, each one more manicured and overdesigned than the next, our cameras hanging dumbly from our necks…”

Years later and shortly after her father’s death, Smith returns to Italy. This time, she visits the Villa Borghese gardens in Rome. Reminiscent of London’s Hampstead Heath, these gardens, their openness and liveliness, appeal to her. In these public gardens, she feels free “to think about her father and how he would have loved these oily arancini that she bought near the Pantheon (which he would also have loved).”

Feel Free is a substantial book with over 30 commentaries and criticisms on offer. Smith’s essays are by turns amusing, entertaining and thought provoking. There’s sure to be something within these pages to please any reader.

THE WILD UNKNOWN ARCHETYPES
KIM KRANS
HarperCollins

REVIEW BY MARY ANN MOORE
Kim Krans illuminates the revelatory power of archetypes in her latest deck of divination cards, which incorporate line drawings, watercolour paintings and collage. The round cards are divided into four suits: The Selves, The Places, The Tools and The Initiations. A round box holds the cards, which, along with Krans’ guidebook, come in an attractive square box with a magnetic closure.

In the guidebook, Krans explains that the archetypes “prefer potentials over answers, collaboration over convention, dynamism over singularity, and inclusion over rejection. In this way they challenge us to expand our sense of self to include what we had previously rejected.”

Among The Selves are Maiden, Mother and Crone as well as Hunter, Lover, Shapeshifter and Destroyer. The Hunter “is skillful, quick, decisive and results-oriented. Like the great hunting goddess Artemis, who carries her quiver upon her back, the Hunter typically has a weapon
WE HAD NO RULES
CORINNE MANNING
A rebellious, beautifully realized story collection about the messy complications of contemporary queer life. “As necessary as it is delightful, We Had No Rules is not to be missed.” —Literary Hub

I HOPE WE CHOOSE LOVE
KAI CHENG THOM
American Library Association Stonewall Honor Book winner: Kai Cheng Thom’s incendiary essay collection proposes heartfelt solutions on the topics of violence, complicity, family, vengeance, and forgiveness.

MY ART IS KILLING ME
AMBER DAWN
Lambda Literary and Vancouver Book Award winner Amber Dawn’s latest poetry collection probes that sacrifices that artists make for their art. “Amber Dawn’s poems are rituals of beauty, courage and fierce rage.” —Vancouver Sun

THE GOSPEL OF BREAKING
JILLIAN CHRISTMAS
Jillian Christmas extracts from family history, queer lineage, and the political landscape of a racialized life to create a rich, softly defiant collection of poems. “Fiercely defiant and courageously tender.” —David Chariandy

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of choice.” Many of the cards have references to goddess archetypes which offer a myriad of possibilities for honouring women as opposed to deference to a single male deity.

Krans makes note of poems and other readings to explore in order to “go deeper” into each card’s definition. Among The Places is The Temple, which includes reference to the poem “Now Is the Time” by Sufi mystic Hafiz. Along with The Vision card from The Tools, I can see the beginnings of a feminist manifesto.

One of The Initiations cards that came up for me is Anima Mundi: “Diversity is celebrated, multiplicity is honoured and nothing is denied embrace.” To “go deeper” Krans suggests having a look at the life and paintings of Hilma af Klint, a Swedish abstract artist and mystic who belonged to a group of women called The Five.

Krans suggests adding other card decks when doing card spreads. I got out the Motherpeace Tarot (US Games Systems Inc, 1983). The prelogue to its guidebook begins: “Patriarchy has brought us no peace.” While The Wild Unknown Archetypes makes no such declaration, it does offer further insight for acknowledging female strength with a fresh appreciation for our multi-faceted, fascinating and dynamic selves.

**MY YEAR OF LIVING SPIRITUALLY**

**ANNE BOKMA**

*Douglas & McIntyre*

**REVIEW BY DOREEN NICOLL**

I’ll admit, it’s been a very long time since I have been able to sit down and read a book from beginning to end. That is, until I started devouring Anne Bokma’s *My Year of Living Spiritually*.

We meet the Hamilton-based award-winning freelance journalist in mid-life. Bokma is not in crisis, but she is looking for something more. This search lays the groundwork for her year of living spiritually, as she chronicles each month’s journey to find greater depth of meaning, connection, simplicity and ultimately inner peace.

This book is for those who want to have a spiritual life without the baggage associated with organized religion. Bokma, who left the Dutch Calvinist Reform Church at 20, joined the growing group of individuals who may or may not believe in God, but who share a deep connection to nature and the Earth. Known collectively as spiritual but not religious (SBNR), Bokma tells us it’s the fastest-growing faith group in the Western world.

Making use of her eagerness to find answers to life’s questions yet relying on her reporter’s skepticism to maintain objectivity, Bokma invites readers to vicariously experience her 12-month sampling of spirituality.

January, the month of hope and fresh starts. A chance to try out new morning routines and to once and for all put an end to her obsession with busyness. By the end of the year, only the most essential practices remain. February finds Bokma creating sacred space on a budget while trying to avoid spiritual appropriation. And so it goes.

Ultimately, Bokma morphs her altar into a collection of meaningful keepsakes and personal items that show she is charting her own spiritual path.

This journey takes her on a pilgrimage to Concord, Massachusetts where Henry David Thoreau spent two years living, walking, playing his flute and writing about the local plants and animals. Thoreau was also a founding member of transcendentalism, the belief that people and nature are inherently good. Transcendentalism also helped to establish a distinction between religion and spirituality.

Interspersed throughout Bokma’s spiritual journey are compelling, heart-wrenching stories from her life. I can hardly wait for the next chapter.

**UNPACKED**

*A Memoir of Checked Baggage*

**ALY COY**

*Barefoot Daughter*

**REVIEW BY WENDY JUDITH CUTLER**

Aly Coy’s debut memoir, *Unpacked: A Memoir of Checked Baggage*, is about her nomadic backpacking travels through Western Europe during her twenties. With fast-paced, sensory-detailed and luscious prose, it is a bold, often disturbing and utterly captivating read. The book captures two timelines during a five-year period, beginning with Coy deciding between two paths: continue living in an off-grid village in the Spanish Pyrenees or book a plane ticket back to Canada.

The memoir never flinches from authenticity and brutal honesty. Coy consumes a lot of drugs, has numerous sexual liaisons and wonders what it all means. She shows us the thrills and challenges brought on by spontaneous choices, searches for intimacy and gradually faces the reality of dating a controlling and eruptive partner.

During her travels, Coy opens herself to what is at hand, working a series of jobs so that she can afford to stay abroad. She helps a goat give birth in the Pyrenees, attends raves in Amsterdam and Seville and dumpster dives. She also learns radical herbalism at a squatted farm in the Netherlands and comes to see the people she encounters as a kind of family.

We are engaged witnesses as she allows her heart to guide her and as she eventually opens up enough to begin a close, intimate relationship. As readers, we are never blind to her vulnerability and wonder throughout the book whether she will stay or leave. Her story is a testament to her resilience and determination to not only survive but thrive—an inspiration to readers.

Today, Aly Coy is an herbalist, author and the owner of Barefoot Daughter, a botanical body care business. She also lives off-grid in a cabin on Salt Spring Island, B.C. For every book sold, one tree will be planted in partnership with the Seven Ravens Eco-Forest.
A SONG FOR YOU
My Life with Whitney Houston
ROBYN CRAWFORD
Dutton

REVIEW BY EVELYN C. WHITE
A television movie, two feature-length documentaries and a handful of books have been released since singer Whitney Houston was found dead in a bathtub at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in 2012.

Now comes A Song For You, a memoir in which Houston’s beloved friend and colleague shatters the silence about (among other topics) their much-talked-about lesbian relationship. “That first kiss was long and warm like honey,” writes Robyn Crawford, who reveals that she and Houston became lovers after they met as teenagers while working at a summer camp in 1980. “I owe it to my friend to share our story. And I hope that in doing so, I can set us both free.”

When Houston began her spectacular ascent, Crawford was a star college basketball player. Crawford writes that she forsook her athletic aspirations and that their romance ended after the singer handed her a bible and said that homosexuality would not only deliver them “to hell,” but also destroy her music career.

“I wasn’t totally blindsided,” writes Crawford, later the creative director on the singer’s paid staff. “The love I felt for Houston was real and effortless, filled with so much feeling that ending the physical part of our relationship … didn’t feel as if I was losing much.”

In addition to comic Eddie Murphy, Crawford writes that actor Robert De Niro became smitten with Houston. As for the singer's drug-fueled marriage to performer Bobby Brown, Crawford notes: “There were so many forewarnings in her and Bobby’s relationship, but she chose to forgive them all.” Frustrated by her inability to help Houston, Crawford eventually severed ties with the singer. Today, she is married to a woman and is the co-parent of twins.

The book also includes Crawford’s poignant reflections on her own brother and mother, both felled by AIDS. Finally, there are reflections on Houston’s daughter, Bobbi Kristina Brown, who died tragically in 2015 at age 22, in a bathtub. “I did hear Krissi’s cries,” Crawford writes of Houston’s daughter, who did not have a close relationship with her mother. “[But] she was surrounded by people who were unlikely to welcome my influence.”

A courageously crafted narrative rendered with unflinching honesty.

THE SELFIE GENERATION
How Our Self-Images Are Changing Our Notions of Privacy, Sex, Consent, and Culture
ALICIA ELER
Skyhorse Publishing

REVIEW BY CHERYL THOMPSON
Selfies. We all take them—even my grandma! Yet, we might not know or even think about the consequences of this ubiquitous action in contemporary culture.

In her book’s introduction, Alicia Eler asserts, to the ways in which selfi es offer a feeling of instant connection with a person. But The Selfie Generation asks us to ponder whether that connection is authentic. Towards the book’s end, Eler tackles the portrayal of selfi es on television, the role of selfi es in mass shootings (i.e. the selfie-shooter using the selfi e to control their perceived image) and finally, the popularity of selfi e journalism and the looping need to produce everchanging selfi es.

While you might be selfi e’d out by the end of this read, The Selfie Generation maintains an engaging conversational tone that will keep you captivated. Eler’s use of case studies provides great context and evidence to support her personal stories and anecdotes. The Selfie Generation is an eye-opening glimpse into a world we all inhabit but are so misinformed about.

MONSTER, SHE WROTE
The Women Who Pioneered Horror and Speculative Fiction
LISA KRÖGER AND MELANIE R. ANDERSON
Quirk Books

REVIEW BY AMBER TROSKA
If you google “greatest horror writers,” nearly every list you will come across in the first page of search results will be overwhelmingly male. But if you dig a little deeper, you will find that the horror genre owes some of its greatest contributions to women. In fact, if you accept that the
gothic novels of the 18th and 19th centuries were the precursors to modern horror, you could even go so far as to say that women were the true progenitors of the genre.

In Monster, She Wrote: The Women Who Pioneered Horror and Speculative Fiction, Lisa Kröger and Melanie R. Anderson present a fairly comprehensive collection of women writers who made significant contributions to genre fiction, specifically stories of horror and suspense. Part reader’s guide and part literary history, Monster, She Wrote surveys the lives and works of dozens of writers ranging from the world-famous like Mary Shelley and Shirley Jackson, to nearly forgotten authors whose true identities aren’t even fully known. Overall, Kröger and Anderson take a straightforward approach to the project of covering hundreds of years of genre fiction by moving mostly chronologically through six sections that cover different eras in horror fiction.

Genre fiction has always been important as a gateway for writers shut out by the larger literary establishment. This is especially relevant for women writers, who were not only often excluded from “serious” writing, but who were also denied employment opportunities in general for a very long time. For some women, writing macabre and sensational stories was the only way for a respectable woman to make money. For others, horror and speculative fiction offered a new way to explore the real world through a uniquely adaptable and imaginative lens. Whether genre fiction paid the bills or simply offered creative license, every one of the writers in Monster, She Wrote has shaped literature as we know it.

FOUR UNRULY WOMEN
Stories of Incarceration and Resistance from Canada’s Most Notorious Prison
TED McCoy
UBC Press

REVIEW BY ANN HANSEN
Four Unruly Women tells the story of four women who were imprisoned in Kingston Penitentiary at different times between 1835 and 1935, a period that preceded the notorious Kingston Prison for Women. As the story unfolds, we discover that each of the women was included because they resisted the authorities and were subjected to the many forms of extreme punishment used by the penal system of the day.

By the book’s end, its critique of retributive justice is clear. And even though indiscriminate corporal punishment has now been officially abandoned, isolation and restraint continue to be used despite various government inquiries and changing social attitudes towards punishment.

At first, I thought this book would lack credibility because its author, Ted McCoy, is a man with no lived experience in prison. But I was pleasantly surprised; he attributes the influence of three female researchers and his partner for contributing to his feminist approach in recognizing that gender and patriarchy are central features of the past and present penitentiary system in Canada.

Four Unruly Women will be of particular interest to those concerned about justice for prisoners and the abolition of prisons because it supports the view that conditions for women in 20th century prisons were not radically changed since those of the 19th century. There is evidence, for example, that academics conducted experiments using LSD and shock treatment on prisoners in the Prison for Women during the first half of the 20th century.

I have personally witnessed women spend years in segregation, including Kinew James who spent almost 15 years being segregated before dying of a heart attack in 2013 at the age of 35 in a forensic treatment centre in Saskatchewan. Opposition to such punishing treatments galvanized when Ashley Smith suffocated to death in a segregation cell in Grand Valley Institution for Women in 2007 while being videotaped by guards who were supposed to be protecting her.

This book honours Bridget Donnelly, Charlotte Reveille, Kate Slattery and Emily Boyle by bringing their disturbing stories to light.

THICKET
MELANIE JANISSE-BARLOW
Palimpsest Press

REVIEW BY KIM FAHNER
When you pick up Melanie Janisse-Barlow’s Thicket, you’ll enjoy the sensory delight of the book itself. Its cover calls you into the collection via its round, cut-out image of what might be a beam of light viewed through the middle of a tangled thicket. The book’s physical design, by Kate Hargreaves, mirrors its internal movement and structure. The five sections are all complete pieces on their own, but a clear sense of personal journey threads itself throughout the entire book.

Janisse-Barlow is someone who knows how to craft her images in a sophisticated manner. Thicket is her second book of poems, and it’s clear that she’s taken her time in writing and structuring the work. She writes of dropping “rocks and shells into the pot” and then slides into the notion of turning “bones into gardens.” She writes lines like “I am on the frontline of your skin,” “I just keep remembering the hollowed honeycomb of me in my own rented room at night,” “each chakra lighting up like a light bulb on the/ upswing in it a battle between earth and water,” and “Pass me the museum of myself.” They are lines that cut into you as you read, lines that resonate and linger even after you put Thicket down.

In “Notes for Charliegirl: A long poem,” the style shifts and rushes across the page in a poetic frenzy, pulling you along as you read. You’d be hard pressed to turn away from these poems, not wanting to risk missing their energy.

What Thicket does is remind the reader of how we are interconnected with others in complex webs of relationship. This tangle, this thicket of connection, is both uncomfortable and tender—just as life can be, even on the best of days.
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—MICHELE LANDSBERG, AUTHOR AND OFFICER OF THE ORDER OF CANADA

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WHAT SHE SAID: THE ART OF PAULINE KAEL
Director Rob Garver

Pauline Kael was a single mother, a nanny on Park Avenue and a failed playwright. But according to What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael by Rob Garver, Kael’s aspirations drove her to become one of the most influential film critics of the 20th century, writing for the New Yorker from 1968 to 1991 and publishing 14 books before her death in 2001.

The editor of the City Lights bookstore’s journal gave Kael her first writing assignment after overhearing her pontificate to a group at a café. Thus, Kael began her life as a contrarian, launching her career by panning the revered Charlie Chaplin film Limelight (1952).

Kael cultivated a colloquial, autobiographical and highly opinionated style that was unusual at that time for both critics and the New Yorker. Kael says, “I worked to loosen my style. I wanted sentences to have the sound of a human voice.” She also reacted to films without pandering to social, intellectual or studio pressures. She could penetrate the political manipulations and false profundity of movies, as well as the limitations of audiences, who often misinterpreted the pompous as cerebral rather than self-indulgent, as in the case of Hiroshima mon amour.

Kael’s writerly persona overshadowed many of the films she reviewed. She was responsible in some cases for making a mark for a film, as in the case of Bonnie and Clyde. Kael’s knife cut both ways, and her provocation engendered equal hate and admiration.

Garver’s excellent documentary would likely impress Kael, as he delivers the compelling subject of his film with no embellishment or artifice, interviewing many filmmakers who were positively or negatively impacted by Kael’s writing, as well as academics, friends and family members. What She Said also includes interview footage of Kael. Kael’s voice is provided by Sarah Jessica Parker.
RETROSPEKT
Director Esther Rots

This dazzling and terrifying second feature by Dutch filmmaker Esther Rots examines the growing friendship between two young women. Using tropes from the horror and thriller genres, the film portrays risks that are inherent even when one acts with good intentions.

Opening in a rehab institution for people who are neurologically and physically impaired, the film backtracks through a friendship between a social worker and her client, a survivor of domestic violence. Grappling with the ennui created by her husband’s frequent business trips and her own maternity leave, the social worker invites her client to stay in her home with her and her young children. The film asks what kind of monster is capable of putting a vital young woman into such neurological distress that she can no longer walk, speak or care for her children.

Rots braids a tense narrative. The social worker (Circé Lethem), played with a highly nuanced naive and fierce determination, is unable to grasp the risk involved in harbouring her client (Lien Wildemeersch), who combines equal parts charm and emotional lability. Rots builds terror skillfully through the interplay between the two actors, flashing from the present to the past while the viewer waits on the edge of their seat for the monster to appear—all punctuated by a disturbing neo-operatic score by composer Dan Geesin.

The film depicts how a person’s misguided motivation to help someone they view as vulnerable can, paradoxically, turn and destroy them.

WE ARE NOT PRINCESSES
Directors Bridgette Auger and Itab Azzam

In 2014, the group Open Art organized a theatre workshop to help Syrian refugees process their trauma using techniques from the theatre of the oppressed. The eight-week workshop was held in Lebanon and included 35 Syrian women from the Sabra, Shatila and Bourj el-Barajneh refugee camps. Antigone of Syria culminated in three performances in Beirut in December 2014.

The brilliant documentary We Are Not Princesses by Bridgette Auger and Itab Azzam grew from this experience. Using live action as well as animation (to give voice to the women whose families didn’t want them onscreen), the documentary follows a few of these women as they work together to create a theatrical production based on Antigone, a tragedy written in 441 BCE by Sophocles. In Sophocles’ play, Antigone is sentenced to death for challenging the king’s edict not to bury Antigone’s brother, whom the king considers a traitor. For the women participating in the Open Art workshop, Antigone becomes a flashpoint—a prism of many Antigones who grieve brothers, husbands and sons, family members who went unburied during the Syrian conflicts.

The play constructs a framework for each woman to contextualize her grief and sorrow. These intelligent, funny, high-spirited women take different roles in the preparation of Sophocles’ play, as the heartbeat of their lives is explored through the ancient story.

These three films were viewed at the Vancouver International Film Festival.
It’s quiet outside—have you noticed? Except, that is, for the sound of people singing from balconies in Montreal and from front porches here in Winnipeg. This strange COVID-19 spring has unearthed an abundance of caution along with an abundance of outdoor singing—to say nothing of the growing chorus of people asking big questions.

In the time it takes to put together an issue of Herizons—about three months—the COVID-19 virus crossed the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans after devastating parts of China and Europe and has brought Canada to a halt.

As we go to press at the end of March, states of emergency have grounded most air travel and millions of cars and trucks are off the roads—hence, the quiet. One result of this pandemic is that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the transportation sector are predicted to temporarily drop by around 25 percent as a by-product of distancing measures.

Over the last month, we’ve seen many things we would never have thought possible. One of the most astonishing elements of Canada’s response to the pandemic has been the speed with which the federal government announced massive, unprecedented economic aid to keep people on payrolls, subsidize wages and route money to self-employed people and small and medium-sized businesses. As we’ve been told from day one, Canada’s economic recovery is as vital as reducing the virus’s transmissions.

But as the crisis continues to unfold, many people are questioning whether the status quo economy is the one we want to go back to.

Increasingly, the answer is no. Because while we still have much to learn from this pandemic, we already know a lot. Scientists pre-COVID were already warning us that if GHG emissions weren’t drastically and immediately cut the world would face multiple and ongoing crises, including the spread of diseases. Is COVID-19 a sign of things to come if we don’t rapidly green our economy? Since the answer is probably at best, maybe, simply returning to the status quo economy is not an option. In other words, when the financial economy is reseeded with billions in public aid, it needs be done with the environmental economy, the health economy and the caring economy top of mind.

What kind of world do we want to live in? For starters, one that commits to improve the living conditions of the elderly in nursing homes. One that pays the predominantly female workers at nursing homes better wages, so they don’t have to work at multiple facilities or go to work sick. One that ensures that all health care workers—again, the majority of whom are female—are safe at work so that clusters of deadly viruses are kept in check. Flight attendants, grocery store workers, the prison population—all of us are vulnerable to catastrophic events.

As we go to press, there’s talk of the federal government bailing out Alberta’s oilsands and Conservative leader Andrew Scheer wants Ottawa to abandon the carbon tax increase. But with record low oil prices calling the viability of the oilsands into question, a carbon-neutral economy can’t come fast enough. In Canada, 60 percent of industrial GHG emissions come from the oil and gas sector—which makes up a modest seven percent of the GDP. We’ve just seen the break-neck speed with which governments can act in a crisis. This quick and unprecedented response tells us that it’s possible to green our energy and transportation sectors rapidly, and to align our economic recovery along the principles of a Green New Deal.

Establishing a carbon-neutral economy sooner rather than later will help us adapt to future crises. We should have started decades ago, in 1987, when Gro Harlem Brundtland, former prime minister of Norway and former head of the World Health Organization first coined the term sustainable development. The Brundtland Commission on the environment defined it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Call it sustainable development or a green new deal but an economic policy that puts human health and the preservation of the natural world at its epicentre can’t come a moment too soon.

We should all be singing its praises.
Domestic violence is a workplace issue

DV negatively impacts work performance

DV interferes with a worker's ability to get to work

DV can happen at or near the workplace

DV impacts co-workers and their safety

Work can also be a source of safety, support, and economic security when experiencing DV

Domestic violence is a union issue

Learn more on our website at http://bit.ly/nupgedomesticviolence

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