

WELCOME ISSUE 9 JULY 2021

Extra! Extra! This just in! FOTD is a Canadian site and as Canadians we are bonded in our sorrow by the sickening discovery of over 900 graves of Indigenous/First Nation children in the cold grounds of Indian Residential Schools in the western provinces. Children taken away from their families at too tender an age, given a number (!) and an English name and forced to worship a 'loving' god whose heart is as hollow as a broken calabash. We mourn the loss of these young people, systematically deprived of their language, their culture, their self worth and their future. Who knows how many artists, poets, musicians, thinkers and warriors for peace we lost? Who knows how many ordinary kids who would grow up to be just who they are we lost? It's a dark day for Canada and it's a dark day of shame. We mourn each child and we mourn them deeply. Janet (Drama editor) and Joey (Fiction editor) are both American but they, too, share our pain. Rest in peace.

This issue is dedicated to the radical activist freedom loving spirits who have been so unjustly silenced by the monstrous machinery of petty, malevolent governments. We honour and support **Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow, Charles Lim, Ivan Lam (HongKong), Loujain Alhathloul, Raif bin Muhammad Badawi and Jamal Kashoggi (Saudi Arabia), Alexei Navalny (Russia) and Roman Protasevich (Belarus).**

Vox tacet refrenata. Ueritas libera voce.

Freedom is a dangerous drug. One dose and you're hooked. Deal, why doncha?

"My quarrel isn't with Christ, it's with Christianity." *The Outspoken Atheist*

"I just think that fiction that isn't exploring what it means to be human today isn't art." *David Foster Wallace*

"I try really hard, even if there's a minor character, to hear their memorable lines. They really do float over your head when you're writing them, like ghosts or living people. I don't describe them very much, just broad strokes. You don't know

necessarily how tall they are, because I don't want to force the reader into seeing what I see. It's like listening to the radio as a kid. I had to help, as a listener, put in all of the details. It said "blue," and I had to figure out what shade. Or if they said it was one way, I had to see it. It's a participatory thing." *Toni Morrison*

"There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit at a typewriter and bleed." *Ernest Hemingway*

'Young people have to start thinking about the kind of world they are leaving me and Keith Richards.' *Willie Nelson at 87*

"Gibberish is woefully underrated..." *Hezekiah Scretch/Poetry Editor*

Welcome to Fleas on the Dog (aka FOTD)! We're a no frills brown bag online lit rag with only one focus: GOOD WRITING. Our style is 'HOTS!'—hands off the submissions! We publish every submission exactly as received, so there might be arbitrary spacing, pagination and files containing more than one font. What you won't find are pretty pictures and fancy layouts. We like this 'broadsheet' deconstructionist approach—the printed page as its own aesthetic—inspired by the 'Beat' presses and journals because it visually footprints the individual in a way a uniform format does not. We hope you like it too. (In some cases with poetry, Hezekiah's intro will be found at the bottom, not the top of the page.)

Editors' note: *The following op-ed was written before the discovery of the residential school gravesites. Please note that our comments are addressed specifically to artistic expression and personal appearance and in no way are meant to be interrupted as a slur against the vital political activism needed to resuscitate global conscience. That said, we stand by our opinions as expressed.*
Tom Ball and Charles Pinch.

We hear a lot these days about 'cultural appropriation' (and its tap root 'political incorrectness') and since this is a *tse-tse* fly in our bonnet we decided that as soon as the drugs wore off we'd throw an 'ice bucket' on this hotly topical topic, collected essays of which might be titled 'Welcome to Insanity.' Two examples out of 37 billion will suffice.

When The Bieb posted on Insta a couple months ago showing his newly acquired 'dreads' social media went ballistic. A global conflagration ensued and the tight asses of the world did their Jan 6th best to pillory the inked phenom with comments so carbolicly (sic) corrosive they could eat through Wonder bread. Gulp! We almost ended up feeling sorry for the poor (yeah, right) little no-talent wannabe.

Closer to home, the Art Gallery of Ontario late last year exhibited a painting, hauled up from storage, by renowned artist Emily Carr, with the title she had given it in 1929: 'The Indian Church.' No sooner was it on the wall when the fire branding guerrillas descended. WTF was the gallery thinking!! 'Indian' FFS is a colonial pejorative of the meanest kind and an insult to Canada's (and by extension all) indigenous people! The BOD, in their swan like ignorance and cowering capitulation meekly agreed to change it to 'Church at Yuquot Village.' The fallout from this not inconsequential decision was twofold. Emily Carr rolled over in her grave and artistic integrity took a Conor McGregor kick to the groin.

The painter and the performer had caused 'grievous offense' to an indeterminate percentage of the population (though it's reasonable to assume that in neither case it was intentional) and for this they were heinously and publicly shamed. But ask yourself, what exactly is going on here? Didn't 'appropriation' used to be called 'borrowing'? Didn't 'political incorrectness' used to be known as 'awareness of differences in an historical context'? This is not intended as a whitewash of the past: of course mistakes were made, of course atrocities took place. But when it comes to art and personal appearance choices, it's not a question of thin or thick skin; it's not even a question of right and wrong; it's a question of rational perspective.

Artists borrow from different cultures all the time. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* wouldn't be possible without Picasso's interest in what then was called 'Negro art.' (And by transforming it did he at the same time denigrate/disrespect it as some have charged?) Ezra Pound 'borrowed' the haiku form when he wrote *In a station in the Metro*—a revered Japanese literary device with a long national history, alien to his American heritage and culture. Alas, in both cases we are richer for the 'indiscretion.' In every generation revolutionary artists change the rules and in doing so shake up the anal retentive status quo. And they should. The integrity of a work of art is inviolate. Making arbitrary changes to it based on questionable or unsound ideology amounts to propaganda which soon enough will open the door to censorship. You can title your painting THIS not THAT! You can wear your hair like THIS not THAT!

If we are unable, or worse, *choose* to ignore the inherent creative opportunities in any one impossibly complex socio-cultural model, we are in danger of what philosopher Peter Wehner called ‘a transvaluation of values.’ An insidious body politic has wormed its way into our collective psyche and feeds upon our intellectual insecurities and moral trepidations. Unchecked, it builds upon the critical mass of history until it implodes and becomes revisionist history. And pronouns, we don’t wanna go there.

We are richer by far for borrowing and so transforming the fruits of diverse cultures—no matter what our ethnicity and no matter who it offends-- and we should not be intimidated (especially in the artistic community) from doing so when the endgame is truthful expression and creative authenticity. A title like ‘The Indian Church’ must be seen in its historical context as Carr intended and so left unchanged. A white rapper should be free to wear dreads without reprisal. Artists are creatures of conscience and art is the ultimate expression of conscience: anything less is artifice, to wit: artificial art.

An Asian friend of ours colours his hair blonde. One of us has a sacred Maori tattoo without ever having visited New Zealand or knowing a word of *te reo*. Shameful! Soon enough we’ll be accosted in ‘Casa Luigi’ for eating *tagliatelle alla bolognese* because none of us was born in Emilia-Romagna. *Basta!* Enough already! Or as our Charles (who just handily happens to speak Italian) would say: *Ehi,esci dalla mia faccia, tu! Vaffanculo!* (Hint: it’s a useful exclamatory expression that starts with ‘f’.)

Any person who writes WHY WE LIKE IT’s better than we do, we want on board. So we’d like to introduce to the Universe at large our newly whelped **Fiction Editor, JOEY CRUSE** (as you can see from the name no relation to Ted. Whew!) When it comes to putting fingers to keyboard, the dude is amazing. He uses words like ‘the’ and ‘but’ and blew us away with his totally off the wall inspiration to end all declarative sentences with a PERIOD (.) !!! Talk about talent! He also of late informed us that he is soon to be a Dad-dude. So congrats, *fiol* (Venetian colloquy for ‘cool guy’) to you and your sweetheart! You sure had a lot more fun in lockdown than we did!

Electric Kool Aid Acid titles by electric Kool Aid artist Wade Springer. Man, you string us out like we’ve never been strung! Why...it’s a *whole new* Fleas!!!

We'd like to take a moment to congratulate FOTD alumnus contributor **Robert D. Kirvel** on winning *The Steel Toe Books Prize in Prose 2020*. WELL DONE, dude! This should come as no surprise for those who have read Robert's work, where the combination of piercing intelligence and radiant prose stimulates our imaginations beyond expectation. You can read three of his well-honed essays in the archives: see Table of Contents for Issue 2, Issue 5 and Issue 7. You do us (and yourself) proud, bro!

Much to our hilarity, in author Nick North's story *9 ordinary words and 36 of their combinations* published in Issue 8 (Fiction) nobody, and we mean NOBODY (including the author) noticed that there are not nine words in the sentence—*A red sun rose over a red sea.*—but EIGHT! So Charles, who finally uncovered the oversight (mindfulness meditation pays off!), phoned the Nickster who said:

NN: WTF?!

CP: You have 2 choices to get the egg (or whatever it is) off your face. Tell everybody it was deliberate and you were curious to see how long it would take readers to catch it....

NN: Or?

CP: You can dumb up and call it your Andy Warhol moment. Then to sound coolly convincing you can go around saying (just like Andy)... 'um...sure...I mean...um... okay...yeah...um ...sure. So what'll it be, Nick?

NN: ...um...sure...yeah...um... go for it....you know...sure...

And that's why a story entitled *9 ordinary words*... is really about 8 ordinary words.

We're just six rad bruhs and one moxy fox who love the language and fall on our knees at the sound of beautiful words in all their glorious reach and transformative power. At FOTD we share that with each submission we publish, each different from the other, some miles and styles apart, but always burning. *Nisi optimum et clarissimum.*

And now we give you **Issue 9**. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. Our authors are rainbows, see how they glide. And until we meet again in Issue 10, always remember to spread the LOVE and STAY SAFE, or, as we say here in rockin' Canada, the true north strong and Flea, "Stay safe, *eh!*"

Tom, Charles, Joey, Hezekiah, Janet, Richard and Rob