

# FACULTY MATTERS

Views and News of Douglas College Faculty Association Members  
Number 16, Spring 2021

## Tackling Racism

### Andrea Terpenkas & Dominique Falls on Living Anti-racism

Diversity and inclusion are buzzwords we hear thrown around with almost casual abandon these days, to the point where they have become disconnected from their activist history of class and racial struggle. They have become what Sara Ahmed calls, “non-performatives,” that is, symbolic commitments that do not result in meaningful action. Such “face-saving” words allow institutions to do the bare minimum, to focus on advertising and PR, while remaining disengaged from the deep and difficult work needed to dismantle systemic racism and oppression. As Kim Tran says, they allow institutions to focus on reorganizing people, rather than reallocating power. This needs to change.

#### **Beginning the Journey**

How? Well, we can start with some personal honesty. The work of anti-racism is complex and difficult because it starts with the recognition that the personal is political, requiring each of us to first acknowledge that oppression, racism, and white supremacy are real, and that they are deeply embedded in history, in social structures, and in our own identities. Pointing fingers at empty institutional practices or policies is a start, but it is not enough. Each of us also has a job to do, and that can start with something as simple as the words we use. Frances Lee Ansley long ago argued that we need to stop associating white supremacy with extreme hate groups. It’s not just that it’s inaccurate, worse, it lets most of us off the hook. Instead, we need to call it like it is: “a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.”

What I realised in my personal journey toward anti-racist action was that white supremacy is unconsciously embedded in my thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. It underpins the ease with which I can slip back into what has been referred to as the “ignorance, naivety, and innocence” of colour-blindness. Ignoring race and racism – and by proxy, blaming people of colour for their lot in life – is easy for me, a white person, because I live in a society built specifically to guarantee my success. I am so rarely challenged in this practice, despite the fact that ignoring race and racism causes real harm to Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour (BIPOC). Accepting the gaps in my knowledge, then challenging my unconscious biases, was the first step in my ongoing process of becoming an anti-racist.

Just as I am continually challenged in this work, I can guarantee each of us will be challenged along the way. We will be met with passive and active resistance to our efforts, gaslighting, personal and shared traumas, potential violence, and worse: denial of our humanity and human rights and/or that of our community. In these moments, when giving up and maintaining the status quo creeps back into my consciousness, when I feel myself being derailed, I turn to the mantra of one of my personal heroes, Bryant Terry, Chef in Residence for the Museum of African Diaspora, a cookbook author, food activist, and overall an inspir-

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## FACULTY MATTERS

Number 16, Spring 2021

**FACULTY MATTERS** is a publication of the Douglas College Faculty Association.

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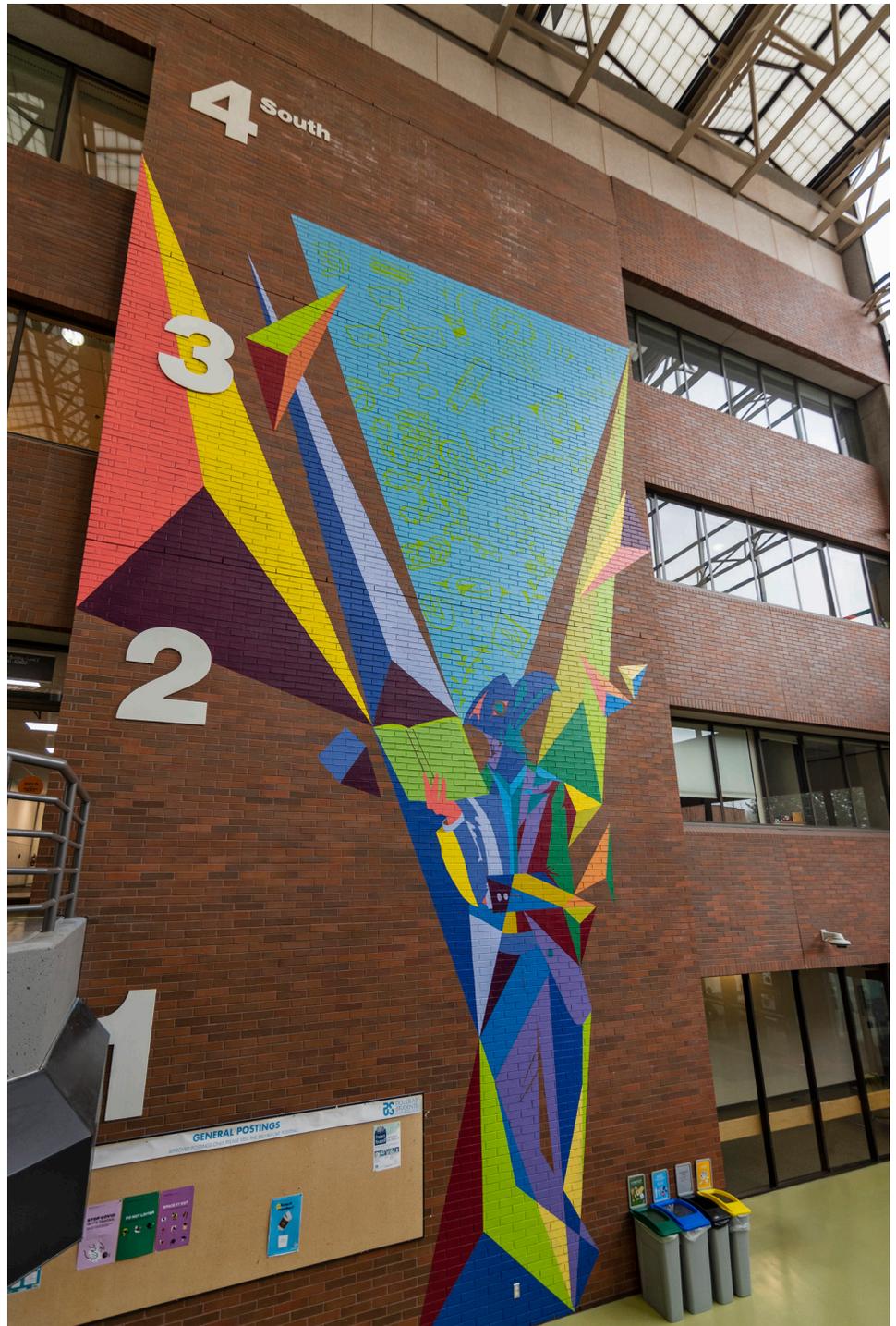
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The views expressed are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Association. Contributions are welcomed and can take almost any form: letters, articles, reports, reviews, announcements. All copy received will be edited for length, clarity, and/or stylistic conventions. Submissions should be accompanied by a digital (text only) file, preferably in a recent version of MS Word or Pages.

**FACULTY MATTERS** is published at least twice a year.

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*Photos for this issue were taken in January 2021, while the college was still in lockdown.*

**Racism ...** *continued from p1*  
ing human. Terry asks us to “start with the visceral to ignite the cerebral and end at the political.”

**Start with the Visceral** Emotional reactions to the injustice of systemic racism, acts of violence, and everyday microaggressions can be overwhelming and triggering, causing us to want to give up. When this happens, we need to use our emotions as a tool to ignite a passion for resistance and action. I have found it particularly useful in these moments (and there are a lot of them!) to reflect on my emotions and recognize how unconscious bias shapes my thoughts about myself and others. If you are a white person and have just begun this work, you may find yourself sitting with uncomfortable emotions. Sit with the discomfort, use it as a tool for reflection, and then act.

**Ignite the Cerebral** One of the most amazing things about human beings is we have the power to choose which feelings and thoughts to act on; we are not simply our feelings or our thoughts. We also have the ability to change our brains and our thought patterns through a process called neuroplasticity. What does this mean? If we recognize how systemic racism has created unconscious bias in our thoughts and emotions, we can change that. We have the ability to measure our reactions and change them, to educate and inform ourselves. In my journey, this has meant reading about the experiences of BIPOC individuals, and listening to their stories. It has meant reflecting on my reactions and my feelings and countering them and complementing them with knowledge. We need to keep learning actively. If you are a white person, know also that it is your responsibility to inform yourself; don't rely on members of BIPOC communities to do this for you. They are already exhausted and overburdened as “representatives” for their community in white-dominated landscapes.

**End at the Political** We can use our feelings and thoughts as fuel for igniting action, using our knowledge of systemic racism to support that action. What to

do? Lift up and support BIPOC voices; support BIPOC businesses; vote for political candidates who support BIPOC; support anti-racist organizations; and so on. We should focus on our communities, both inside and outside the College, and think about where we have the most power to influence change. If you are a white person, use your privilege to help do the work.

### **Cycles of Change**

Before moving forward, it's important to recognize that the journey is not linear, but rather cyclical. It requires constant reflecting and revisiting. For example, if you are a white person, and your white feelings incur guilt or resistance to the label of privilege, supremacy, or preference, take a moment to go back and reflect on your emotions (Step 1), and then on your knowledge-gathering (Step 2). Emotional reactions are a result of unconscious bias, often embedded since birth, reinforced over a lifetime, and therefore stubbornly persistent. We need to remind ourselves that having privilege is a reality created by systemic racism; so use whatever tools are available to do the ongoing work.

Where does this leave us, as educators at Douglas College? As individuals, we can use our influence to take action in our classrooms, within our departments and faculties, and throughout the college. This might include: lifting up and supporting BIPOC voices within our classrooms, decolonizing our curriculum, supporting BIPOC authors/figures/voices in academia, and supporting BIPOC individuals to run for positions within the the Faculty Association and reach for other leadership opportunities within the institution.

We can also work collectively toward structural change. To this end, the purpose of the Association's Anti-Racism Action Committee is to support BIPOC persons here at the college; to gather and communicate information on racist and racialized experiences at Douglas College; to engage with the college community and broader Canadian community on issues around racism; and to advocate for the institutionalization of anti-racist practices at the college. We also hope to share more information with our colleagues on how we can collectively implement anti-racist actions and policies at the Institution.

### **Supporting**

Our first objective as a committee is to express our solidarity with Black Lives Matter and worldwide anti-racist movements. Many highly respected post-secondary institutions across Canada and the United States have issued statements of support for Black Lives Matter and have committed to anti-racist action since the death of George Floyd in May of 2020. To date, Douglas College has put forward no formal institutional response. We therefore call on the college community to follow those many other institutions. We have a petition circulating to that effect, and we invite you all to join us in solidarity. As part of this petition, we have drafted a statement of support as follows:

*We, the DCEA Anti-Racism Action Committee, would like to extend our solidarity with the global Black Lives Matter Movement, and to support the general BIPOC communities.*

*We understand and recognize that this past summer, a spark was ignited which catapulted into the largest recorded Civil Rights movement in world history. Years of abuse, oppression, genocide, and mistreatment of Black and Indigenous peoples in the US, Canada, and around the world had taken its gruesome toll, and the murder of George Floyd was the final straw. We realize that this is **NOT** just an American problem, but it is most definitely a Canadian problem, as well as a global problem – let us not forget Regis Korchinski-Paquet, D'Andre Campbell, Sean Thompson, Abdirahman Abdi, and many more Black and Indigenous Canadian victims of police violence.*

*Since this movement began, many educational institutions, businesses, and organizations have come forward with their statements of solidarity, showing support*

for the Black Lives Matter Movement. We, the DCEA Anti-Racism Action Committee, acknowledge that we have a responsibility as members of the Douglas College community, to voice our own support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and as a newly formed committee, think it is important that this be our first action.

*In times of great inequality and oppression, silence is complicity.*

*This is especially the case when coming from a position of great privilege. As an Educational Institution, entrusted with the education of our communities, Douglas College must be a leader in social movements. We call on the Douglas College community to publicly stand against police brutality and discrimination towards the Black and Indigenous communities. To stand against the current hate crimes that are happening towards the East Asian Community, as well as all forms of discrimination and bigotry towards the South Asian, Muslim, and Latinx communities, and any forms of racism that may exist in any way, shape, or form.*

*In addition, the DCEA Anti-Racism Action Committee calls upon the Douglas College administration to publicly announce their support for the Black Lives Matter movement, to pledge to be allies to everyone who is a part of the BIPOC community, and to promise to proactively support the change of policies and practices that perpetuate racism within Douglas College and the broader community.*

*We, the DCEA Anti-Racism Action Committee, look forward to working with the Douglas College administration to make legitimate changes within our College to make it safe for all. We will keep you, the Douglas College community, updated on our progress.*

*In Solidarity.*

Please join our voices and action by signing the petition, joining our Committee, and/or doing whatever you are able to do to support anti-racist work at the College. If you haven't already, please choose to start your path toward anti-racist justice. We are here to support you and work with you. 

## Freedom? What Freedom?

### Kim Trainor Wants to Secure Academic Freedom

As many of you are no doubt aware, at the beginning of 2021 the Faculty Association was on its way to court to challenge the college Registrar's authority to impose term limits on faculty members serving on Education Council. Our position was that this was a violation of the language of the 1996 provincial *College and Institute Act*. In mid-February we learned that the College agreed to change its elections policy and remove term limits; moreover, "legal counsel to the DCEA ... confirmed that the Registrar's change in position was clearly a result of our litigation proceedings." Following this favourable resolution, I decided to take a look at the history of the bicameral system of governance of colleges in British Columbia, and the relationship of that history to academic freedom.

Of course, like most of us, I'm busy teaching, writing, Zooming, taking my kids snowshoeing (and tending chickens Dandelion, Ethel, Mocha, and Luna – long story). So I'm guessing many of us have little time to do a deep dive on issues that are far more familiar to administrators, who do this stuff every day. But I'm coming to realize how crucial it is for faculty – the academic heart of the college – to be aware of the governance

structure and our position within it, because this is inextricably linked to our access to academic freedom. We all assume that we have this vital freedom – but do we?

#### Diving In

In setting out on this dive, I'm relying heavily on a 2013 analysis by Hogan and Trotter ("Academic Freedom in Canadian Higher Education"), who begin by noting that most Canadian universities are governed under a bicameral system, with a board of governors that concerns itself with financial accountability and the business side of running an institution, and a senate which governs academic programs and guarantees intellectual integrity. Canadian colleges, which have a shorter history – often going no further back than the 1960s – operate under a patchwork of provincial legislation and oversight, which is essentially a relic of the initial focus of colleges on vocational training. For British Columbia, it was not until 1996, with the creation of the *College and Institute Act*, that a bicameral system was implemented in our colleges, similar to the universities – but not identical. Douglas College has a Board of Governors and an Education Council (EdCo), which is our equivalent of a university senate. EdCo has 20 voting members, 10 faculty members (elected by faculty), four students (elected by students), four administrators (appointed by the President), and two support staff (elected by staff).

Regarding the Faculty Association's court challenge to the Registrar's attempt to impose term limits on EdCo members, it's noteworthy that the *Act* says (4.16.1) that "Faculty members.... serve a two-year term and may be elected to further terms under that section." As administrative appointments have no term limits, it allows these appointees to become very familiar with the complex structure of EdCo and the college overall. If faculty positions (which are elected by faculty) were to be restrained by term limits, this would leave them at a distinct disadvantage, as faculty have less chance of obtaining the requisite knowledge needed due to the brevity of their term. It takes time to learn the complex structure of EdCo in relation to the functioning of the college as a whole.

In their survey of 104 community colleges throughout North America, Hogan and Lane note that "only BC actually [has] the legal framework for shared gover-

nance in its colleges and institutes.” And while Education Councils do not have the full authority granted to university senates, still, “the creation of education councils moved BC colleges toward a co-governance model and provided faculty at the colleges and institutes with greater say over the academic core of programs and curriculum.” This was an important move that placed college instructors at the heart of participating in the academic programming and intellectual integrity of the college – a rare distinction that we as faculty must safeguard.

### **Uniquely BC**

The rarity of faculty input to academic programming in colleges North America wide suggests to me that allowing EdCo to vote on reduced term limits for faculty members, or any change to the EdCo bylaws without full faculty input and consent, could result in a serious loss of our influence over academic issues within the college. And let’s not forget that this is the heart of what we do – we create programs, we respond in a resilient and flexible manner to society’s requirements for education and training, and we teach.

This is why I watched with dismay when the recent vote at EdCo over the revised by-laws – bylaws which will have a long-standing influence on the functioning of EdCo – was held in camera. No accountability was required of our elected faculty representatives. This was on top of a very short turn-around time for faculty responses to the bylaw revisions: a turn-around time that stretched over end-of-term Fall marking, the winter holidays, and the second wave of the pandemic. As a result I drafted a letter specifying some of the main concerns for faculty that the revised bylaws contained, and then circulated this to my Languages, Literature and Performing Arts colleagues to sign; I then submitted this signed letter directly to the members of Education Council. I also encouraged my colleagues to attend the EdCo meeting during which these bylaw revisions were discussed and voted on – and in the end, the revisions were approved via the in-camera session. Note that as faculty we can attend all EdCo meetings, but we cannot have any direct voice or vote; only our elected members may carry our concerns directly to EdCo. Our strength and integrity on the council is determined by the integrity and advocacy of our elected faculty representatives. For that reason, I encourage you all to pay attention to EdCo meetings, to issues related to academic concerns, and to voice your concerns to your EdCo faculty representatives so that our voices can be heard. This is very much connected to our access – and lack thereof – to academic freedom.

### **Securing Academic Freedom**

Hogan and Trotter define academic

freedom in terms of “five key elements.”

*(a) the freedom to pursue truth wherever that may lead, (b) tenure so that the truth-seeker is not subject to loss of job when the research is controversial, (c) the ability of the scholar to be critical of the university, (d) the ability of the scholar to participate in public life, and (e) co-governance within the university.*

Colleges, which have historically been vocational institutions, have not had such access to academic freedom. However, Hogan and Trotter note that the rapidly transitioning nature of colleges – which more frequently now offer degrees and include faculty who engage in research – will have to negotiate such rights. With co-governance comes academic freedom, but as Hogan and Trotter acknowledge, the 1996 *College and Institute Act* takes us only so far in terms with regards to the first four elements, in that such freedoms must be negotiated through a Collective Agreement.

As for the universities, Hogan and Trotter note that (perhaps following neo-liberal economic policies), they have moved away from the more “traditional collegial culture of governance” towards one that is more overtly “managerial.” This has become so obvious that the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) recommends that university faculty now also use collective bargaining to secure academic freedom:

*CAUT has claimed that control of the universities remains with administrative groups, who operate universities without any accountability. Furthermore, CAUT has claimed that in an attempt to increase efficiency, administrators have marginalized the roles of university senates in governance. In response, the CAUT recommended a shift in strategy and made collective bargaining its primary tool to protect and extend collegial governance models, as well as support the bicameral shared governance systems.*



I think it's crucial that as faculty dedicated to our teaching and our students, we must be equally vigilant in using our collective bargaining to maintain and press for academic freedom language in our own Collective Agreement.

Hogan and Trotter observe that college faculty have generally secured academic freedom with regard to **freedom to research** (a) and **tenure** (b) through bargaining. Typically, they have "broad discretion in how they teach as long as the objectives stated in the course outline are followed," and job security in the form of seniority and language regarding arbitrary dismissals. They also feel that most college faculty gain some protection to be **critical of their institutions** (c), and the ability to **participate in public life** (d), when these are secured through a Collective Agreement. In British Columbia, **co-governance** (e) is solely dependent on the *College and Institute Act*, which was designed by the government of the day as "a strategic move ... to provide ... faculty a greater voice over the academic affairs of the college."

### **What Kind of Freedom?**

So what kind of academic freedom do we actually have as faculty members at Douglas College, with regards to Hogan and Trotter's five elements? So far as tenure is concerned, we have language protecting seniority, hiring protocols, and dismissals, and element, co-governance, is secured by the *Act* so long as we safeguard our position on EdCo. However, for the pursuit of truth, criticizing the institution, and participating in public life, there is no language in the Collective Agreement that secures these freedoms. Currently, there is no protection for faculty who express their opinions on matters beyond their own teaching and curricular responsibilities. While academic freedom was an issue in our last round of bargaining, no progress was made.

To be sure there is a college Policy on Academic Freedom, but it offers a very circumscribed definition:

*The freedom to engage in teaching, learning, research or other creative work in order to expand knowledge and to do*

*so in an atmosphere of free inquiry and exposition. It includes the right to examine, question, teach and learn in an environment that supports the need to investigate, speculate and comment without penalty or sanction.*

No mention here of the freedom to participate in governance, to criticize – the college, or to participate in public life. The definition restricts our freedoms to the classroom.

We must use our collective voice to participate in the governance of Douglas College through EdCo and to maintain the diverse and rigorous academic programmes that serve our students and the wider communities in which we teach. And we must bargain for robust language in this current bargaining round to support academic freedom.

Now I am going to go feed my chickens. Dandelion, by the way, lays beautiful moss green eggs, and Ethel's are a gorgeous speckled brown. Mocha and Luna are still pullets, so we must wait and see. jm

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## The Voice

### Ryan Miller on Podcasting and "Presence" During a Pandemic

**W**hat defines our work during a pandemic? What constitutes faculty "presence" if instructors are not in a physical classroom? Is it a YouTube channel? A slideshow? Is it students' ability to see their instructor on Zoom?

If the latter, do students find comfort in that bobbing head, besieged as it is by rectangles of darkness or other bobbing heads? Must we be Alice in some Lynchian Brady Bunch?

Or can "presence" be a voice?

I'll begin by sharing that, in the Summer 2020 semester, I taught my courses from beginning to end without ever seeing my students. Nor they me. No photos, no avatars, not a single Zoom call.

And it worked.

I had done it before. In the late nineties and early aughts – the nascent days of online course management software and dial-up Internet – I was a tutor-marker for Distance Education at a local university. Back then, with a roster of nearly 80, the university would mail students a box of materials for our English literature course. The package included copies of the novels, a spiral-bound study guide, assignment instructions, my phone number, and an email address. That's all.

Ironically, most registered students were not "distant" at all

but resided in the Lower Mainland. Yet, I never physically saw them, nor they me, until months later at the final exam. There, as each student approached my table, there'd come a moment we'd assess each other, trying to square the person before us with the image we had cultivated in our mind's eye. It was a futile game.

Yet, despite being a less-personal method of content delivery, outcomes, on the whole, appeared little different compared to face-to-face learning. Some students excelled, others did not; most performed adequately and, one presumes, were generally satisfied. What was important, though, was that, even though the students and I hadn't seen each other in person, their education was unimpeded. They had been given the materials they required, and they had me, a voice on the other end of the phone, for fourteen weeks. They knew I was available; that I was "present."

It was that experience I drew upon when the pandemic struck, for reasons I will explain.

### **Stranger Than Fiction**

In hindsight, the lead-up was almost comical. Six months prior to the emergence of SARS-COV-2 (colloquially known

as COVID-19), I had taught Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, a novel about a (in that case lab-engineered) virus that eradicates most of the human population. How prescient! Consider, for instance, the account of that pandemic's early days, as recounted by the novel's third-person narrator:

*There was no disguising the fear of the [news] commentators. Who's next, Brad? When are they going to have a vaccine? Well, Simon, they're working round the clock from what I hear, but nobody's claiming to have a handle on this thing yet ....*

*Documentaries were hastily thrown together, with images of the virus .... [I]t looked like the usual melting gumdrop with spines .... They'd given the virus a name, to make it seem more manageable ....*

*Conspiracy theories proliferated: it was a religious thing ... it was a plot to gain world control .... [D]on't travel advisories were issued in the first week, handshaking was discouraged. In the same week there was a run on latex gloves and nose-cone filters.*

*Oryx and Crake* was published in 2003 during the SARS-COV-1 crisis, although even then the novel was reportedly completed before that virus had been identified. Here, as in other arenas, Atwood proved adept at anticipating the broad uncertainties that are all too familiar now.

Could she, though, have ever imagined the hoarding of toilet paper, *Tiger King*, or Trudeau's beard? The idea that colleges and universities could go fully online within weeks must also have been fanciful.

### **Improvising the Apocalypse**

Indeed, the final stretch of the Winter 2020 semester was, for lack of a better word, surreal. It required a level of improvisation to which most of us were unaccustomed but, as has been recognized elsewhere, handled admirably. For many, the solutions came quickly. I still marvel at how eagerly faculty embraced the wealth of technology and professional supports available to us. As instructors reconfigured their courses to fit the situation, I heard accounts of home broadcasting studios and headsets; of disembodied hands weaving, magician-like, beneath livestreamed document cameras; of instructors-turned-YouTube personalities, gesticulating wildly – all of it the ephemera of necessity.

Though I am no Luddite, I was not among the brave. For my own classes, I decided against Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate and the like early on. Here, I confess a significant avoidance of video or images of myself – the product of a longstanding body-image disorder the Zoom era has only exacerbated. Simply put, I cannot do video. The mere thought – the anxiety it sparks – is near debilitating. In my private life, I don't take selfies. I don't FaceTime. Close friends know not to post photographs or videos online that include me. In March of 2020, the possibility of having to appear on a screen

for hours a day – and with it, the heightened awareness of being thumbnailed, seen, scrutinized – seemed injurious. Had there been no other choice, I don't know what I would have done. COVID has taken what was invisible, manageable, and brought it to the fore.

Winter/Summer instructors had an additional challenge: the scramble to reimagine a semester's worth of content for online delivery in astonishingly little time. Unless one was in that position, the stakes cannot fully be appreciated. There was no luxury of months to contemplate a new syllabus, no meditative wag over how best to impart early, core skills remotely. Granted, the experience of last March and April did permit instructors to envision how it might all work; the circumstances were not a complete surprise. However, if you had been preoccupied with assignments and exams until the morning of the Winter grade deadline, you had six days.

Faced with those circumstances, I opted to attempt a semester of audio only. To facilitate my plan, I ordered a professional podcast microphone, a cheap pop filter, and – with my rudimentary knowledge of GarageBand on the Mac – went to work. Yet, as the Summer began, one thing soon became clear: It would not be a time for whimsical music transitions and well-polished yarns. CBC's *As It Happens*, it was not. Content had to be produced – near-daily, and quickly.

Keeping students' interest, I knew, would be key. In lieu of a single, one-take 40- or 60-minute lecture file each week, I decided to deliver course content in the form of what I term "mini-podcasts." In a literature course, this strategy typically involved producing three to five audio posts per week, per course, with each file ranging anywhere from eight to 20 minutes in length. For convenience, I organized the clips into distinct topics. There could be, for instance, a nine-minute clip about a particular character, or a 13-minute post about a theme. Brevity was my friend, my asset. Mercifully, the "Narration" preset in GarageBand also honeyed my voice into something tolerable.

In Blackboard, I created weekly folders to house the audio files. I augmented the latter with annotated PDF handouts, exercises (with annotated answer keys), and an online message thread forum where I could moderate a broader discussion of our literary works once students had listened to the recordings.

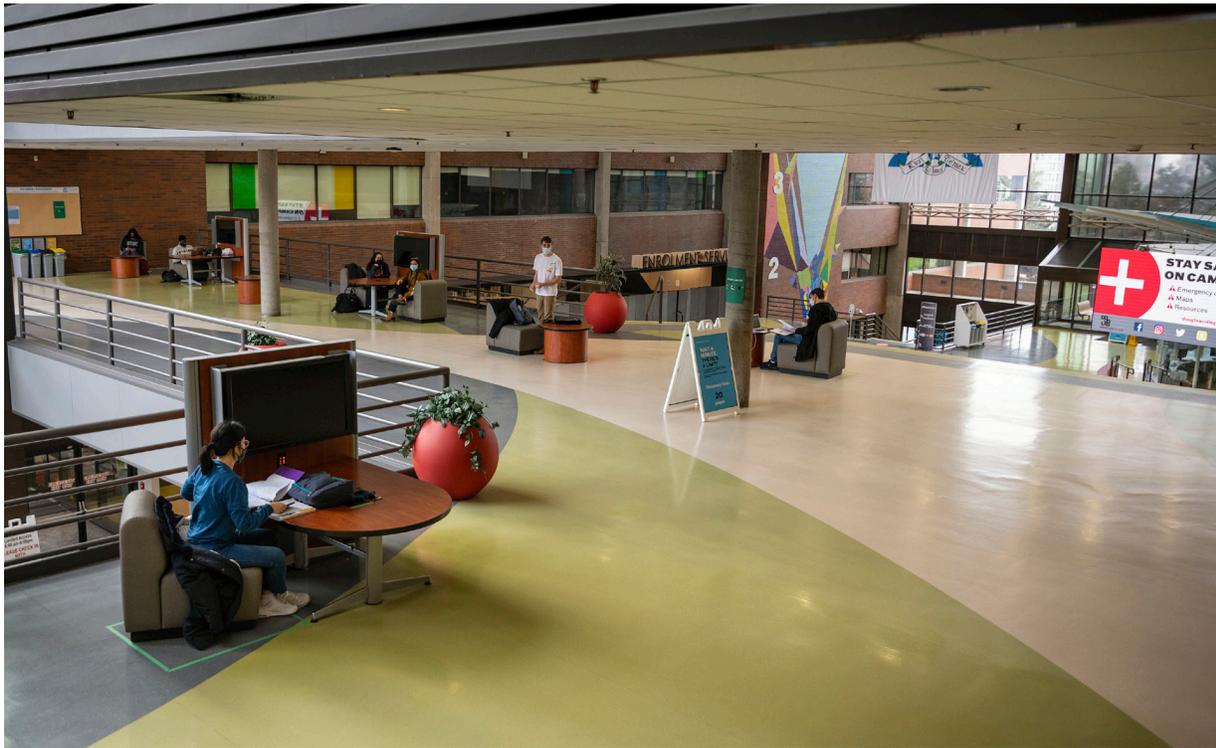
That was the delivery method I settled on and use still.

### **Advantages ...**

The advantages? "Mini-podcasts" are certainly asynchronous. Uploaded as MP3 files, students are free to download the clips for their walks or else listen to them in a space and time of their choosing.

I had cause to lean in this direction: having just emerged from the Winter 2020 semester, I was acutely aware of how





the pandemic had disrupted students' work schedules. Had students lost employment, or had their shifts become precarious (a situation I later found out was true for many), the ability to study asynchronously could mean the difference between paying rent or not. Other students, conversely, had the opposite problem. Some told me of their sheer exhaustion, typically from stocking shelves at Costco or grocery stores – hours they were asked to give above their usual schedule. They too stood to profit from that flexibility if taking Summer classes.

As an instructor, there are more practical benefits. Once audio has been produced in one semester, one has a more comfortable starting point in subsequent semesters. It becomes possible to draw upon that bank of material, provided one eschewed referring to specific dates. If one is ill, for instance – waylaid by a common cold for a week – the show can go on. Certainly, there are always contingencies that require new material. One also wrestles with the impulse to build upon what is already complete. Yet this mode of delivery has meant that I am no longer overwhelmed in quite the same way; I am now able to give attention to grading or to providing more substantive responses in the discussion forum. In short, other aspects of the course have gotten better as a result.

### **... and Not**

There have been disadvantages, of course – that initial workload being chief among them. Lest you think this delivery method made for an easier go, I assure you, it did not. Despite 12- and 13-hour days in my desk chair last Summer, I was only ever a day or two ahead of my students, prep-wise. It remained that way for the full length of the semester. Even with a functional knowledge of *GarageBand*, a 12-minute clip could require four or five hours to (loosely) script, record and edit into usable content before I'd have to move on to my other course. The process of recording was also fraught. Often, I managed to capture only one or two minutes of content at a time before a motorcycle would roar by, or the neighbour's grandson would shriek. More often, though, I would simply flub my delivery. Take after take after take.

It bears noting that students have not been uniformly satisfied with my approach either. Although to date I've received no formal complaints, one or two students have politely likened my approach to a "radio show," a one-way flow of opinions that, at times, can leave the listener in want of responding in the moment. I an-

tipiculated that possibility and have since tried to mitigate it by monitoring the discussion forum hourly during the workday. I do take that criticism, though.

### **Is It Working?**

Indeed, there are moments I still have misgivings about my delivery method. Despite the afternoon I might spend writing and producing content for a single class, the finished product can look embarrassingly slim. On the student's end, they only see a 10- or 15-minute clip. They are unaware of the hours it took to distil the concepts into both a script and a recording – time above what a livestreamed class might entail. When one is on Zoom, students see you putting in that time. When you're alone at your desk, surrounded by wrappers, they do not.

For much of last Summer I also struggled with feeling as if I had somehow been cheating students, experience-wise. Was an audio-based course giving them sufficient value for their money? Was I leaning in to the objectives outlined in the college's Strategic Plan and what it envisions of the student experience? Was it unfair and, frankly, weird for me to not put my face out there, when so many of my peers elsewhere in the College were happily (or perhaps

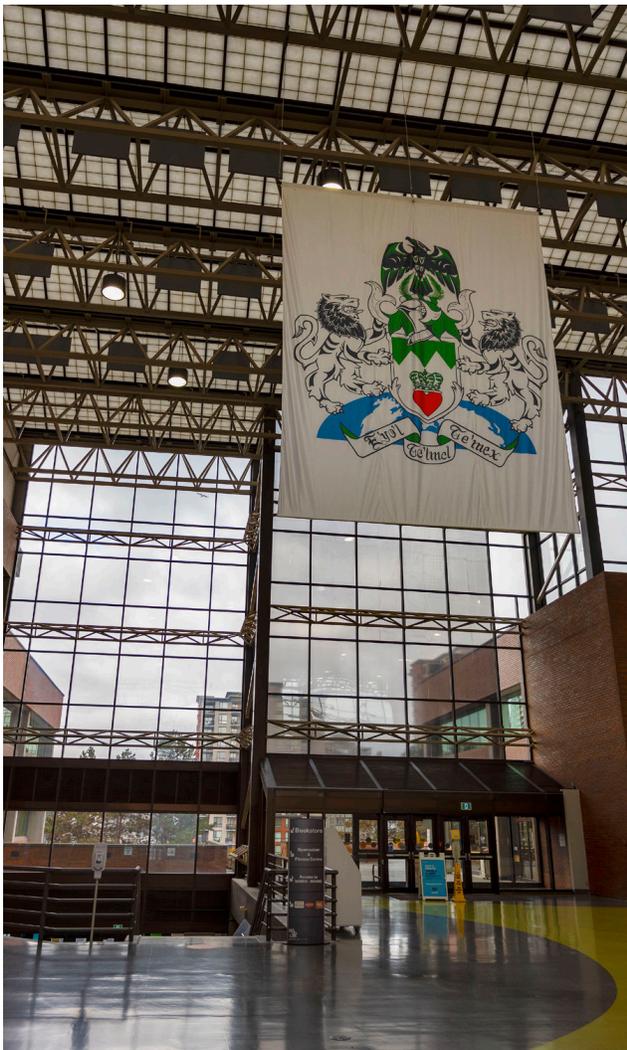
unhappily) professing away on video?

But then, something unexpected happened. As the Summer wore on, I began to receive unsolicited emails. One student expressed his appreciation for “not another Zoom class.” Others appreciated the clips’ conciseness – the “get to the point” nature of the recordings. Some, as I had hoped, welcomed the course’s flexibility for their work schedules. Two students, for whom English is an additional language, reported their fondness for being able to easily relisten to content – a benefit that hadn’t even occurred to me. It is because of those moments that I have grown more confident in my approach. Whether I have made the right choice or wrong choice for content delivery, – whether I’m doing all I should – I only know that it can work. I remind myself too that all of this is temporary.

There is one email in particular that has stayed with me, and it is here that I return to the question of instructor “presence.” That message arrived early one afternoon in July from a student student who, apropos of nothing, confessed to struggling in the course because of long hours at his job, worsened by the unspecified anxiety of the pandemic. He had an urge to connect. “Your narrations keep me company,” he wrote, “especially during the times that I need.”

Maybe that’s enough.

fm



# Ask A Steward

## Melanie Young Talks Copyright & Commercialization of Intellectual Property: Implications for Education Leaves

**W**hen faculty members go on Education Leave to develop or create some piece of work (writing a book, developing a process, creating software), it is important that they are aware that there may be a disagreement with the employer as to who owns the copyright and has rights to revenues from any potential commercialization.

### **The Collective Agreement**

In the Collective Agreement (in Article 5.1 of the part which used to be the Common Agreement) it states that (my underlines and ellipses):

*The copyright or patent for any work product, including creative work, instructional strategies or curriculum/instructional material, software or any other material or technology that may be copyrighted or patented:*

5.1.1 belongs to the employee(s) where the work product has been prepared or created as part of assigned duties, ...; and

5.1.2 belongs to the institution where one or more employees:

...

(b) are given release time from usual duties to create and produce copyrightable work product...

### **Education Leave**

In recent discussions with the employer in regards to the Douglas College Commercialization of Intellectual Property Policy, it came to light that the employer considers that Education Leave “time release from usual duties to create and produce copyrightable work product” (5.1.2b, above) and therefore they may own the copyright for work produced. This would give the employer rights to revenue should faculty members commercialize their intellectual property.

However, a recent discovery in the Faculty Association files shows that the employer and the Association reached an agreement in 2000, stating that faculty members would own the copyright to work created while on Education Leave.

We are now in discussions with the employer to clarify that faculty own the copyright to work produced while on Education Leave, as well as any revenues from commercialization

We’ll keep you updated as we learn more

If you have any questions about this, please contact your area steward or me (Melanie), the DCFA VP Stewardship.

fm

# On Militant Antifascism

## Devin Zane Shaw Details Seven Steps in Fighting Fascists

Given that militant antifascist groups today tend to organize around a united front policy, the differences between socialists, anarchists or Marxists is not nearly as profound as the split between militant antifascism and liberal antifascism.

Militant antifascism upholds the diversity of tactics to combat far-right and fascist organizing, organizes as a form of community self-defense which (at least ideally) builds reciprocal relationships with marginalized and oppressed communities, while recognizing the “revolutionary horizon” of antifascist struggle: fascism cannot be permanently defeated until the conditions which give rise to fascism are overthrown. (Depending on the context, as we will see below, other conditions might be present, such as settler colonialism).

Liberal antifascism, in Mark Bray’s definition, entails “a faith in the inherent power of the public sphere to filter out fascist ideas, and in the institutions of government to forestall the advancement of fascist politics.” Liberal antifascists appeal to the democratic norms of these institutions, but also assume that law enforcement will apply force to repress the fascism when it constitutes a legitimate threat. They also often appeal to the converse of this position: if law enforcement doesn’t intervene, then no legitimate threat is present.

### **The Current Situation**

While militant antifascism is best known for the embrace of the diversity of tactics, over the past several years many antifascists have worked to create a broader social atmosphere of everyday antifascism. This makes it possible to organize a broader movement which would challenge far-right groups when they mobilize in various cities across North America. Everyday antifascism could, under the right conditions, bring larger crowds to counter-protests, but

*This article is a lightly edited excerpt from a longer essay prefacing T. Derbent’s **The German Communist Resistance 1933–1945**. It also presents and develops claims raised in my latest book, **Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy**. Footnotes and citations have been omitted.*

as well it provides political education on how the seemingly small things – like seating far-right groups at restaurants or providing lodging – enabled the far-right threat to communities. With Trump in office there was no chance that antifascism could be funneled back toward an affirmation of American civic participation. A Biden administration poses different problems. In August 2017, only a few weeks after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Biden published an editorial in *The Atlantic* denouncing Trump’s equivocations about the far right; he also referenced Charlottesville repeatedly during his campaign. In and of themselves, these denunciations didn’t drive his electoral messaging. But in light of the far-right raid on the Capitol on 6 January 2021, and the popular outrage which accompanied this action, Biden is positioned to siphon parts of the broader atmosphere of everyday antifascism – which previously made it possible to organize militant antifascist actions relatively openly – to fortify Democratic voting coalitions. This co-optation of a weak sense of even liberal antifascist sentiment will drive the narrative that fascism, encapsulated and isolated as so-called “Trumpism,” was defeated with the victory and inauguration of the Biden administration, when in fact the far-right was diverted from system-loyal tendencies aligning with Trump and the Republican Party, back toward system-oppositional forms of organization.

If this occurs, the Biden administration can work to legitimate liberal currents of antifascism while delegitimizing – while still applying the force of the repressive state apparatus toward – militant currents. If liberal antifascism succeeds in pulling everyday antifascism back toward forms of bourgeois forms of institutional cultural power, it will effectively empty everyday antifascism of any concrete political and organizational content, while setting the stage for state repression of militant antifascists. Any extension of law enforcement powers that follow in the wake of far-right actions related to the Capitol riot will redound against left-wing militants. What liberals will portray as the intransigence of militant antifascists will appear to them as an ideological victory, but it will be won with repressive state violence, dismantling militant antifascist organizations and undermining community self-defense.

The foregoing scenario is far from a *fait accompli*. It can be forestalled by renewed efforts at militant political education and organizing around a united front policy. The defeat of the Trump administration has untethered far-right organizing from its system-loyal pretensions, though without necessarily undermining alliances forged by the mutual opposition of some far-right groups and police departments to the antipolice uprising of 2020.

I propose here a series of theses concerning a united front policy for militant antifascists in North America (though I believe some points would also hold in other situations). We will begin with defining two terms: fascism and the far right.

### **Fascism**

This definition of fascism is a marked departure from the most common Marxist definition (Dimitrov’s), which holds that fascism is “the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.” Whereas Dimitrov’s formulation treats fascists in the streets as instru-

**1. Facism is a social movement involving a relatively autonomous and insurgent (potentially) mass base, driven by an authoritarian vision of collective rebirth, that challenges bourgeois institutional and cultural power, while re-entrenching economic and social hierarchies.**

ments of the most reactionary faction of capital, the definition above asserts that fascist social movements are relatively autonomous formations which challenge bourgeois institutional and cultural power. This autonomy does not preclude hegemonic formations between fascists and the bourgeoisie. As Hamerquist argues, the Nazis' seizure of power united factions of the ruling-class interested in imposing fascism "from above," with non-socialist factions (I'm using the term "socialist" quite loosely here) of the fascist movement and "nazi political structure had a clear and substantial autonomy from the capitalist class and the strength to impose certain positions on that class."

As to the class composition of fascism, Derbent has said that "workers were the only social group whose percentage of Nazi party members was lower than its percentage in the total population." At the time of writing, an examination of 49 of 107 persons arrested for participation in the Capitol riot indicates the generally petty bourgeois character of participants. Both observations affirm that the class composition of the far right and fascism is more complex than the most reactionary faction(s) of the bourgeoisie. In North America, the far right draws from elements of the white petty bourgeoisie who are seeking to protect their social status – purchased, as W. E. B. Du Bois argues, through the wages of whiteness – and/or their class position. Fascism is therefore relatively autonomous because while it is anti-bourgeois, it is anti-capitalist only to the degree that it seeks to reorganize capital accumulation on terms conducive to its base.

## Ideology

Lyons defines the far-right as inclusive of "political forces that (a) regard human inequality as natural, inevitable, or desirable and (b) reject the legitimacy of the established political system." Lyons' definition focuses our attention on two key

### 2. Fascist ideology and organizing develops within a broader far-right ecological niche.

features of the far-right milieu, within which fascists organize.

First, while far-right groups seek to re-entrench social and economic inequalities, the social hierarchies they advocate aren't necessarily drawn along racial lines. Lyons gives the example of the Christian far right, which advocates for a theocratic state centered on heterosexual male dominance, noting that although this movement has embraced Islamophobia and "promoted policies that implicitly bolster racial oppression," still, some groups have conducted outreach to conservative Christians of color, where others have formed alliances with white supremacist groups. Fascist movements emerge within a broader milieu of right-wing social movements and these various groups sometimes establish alliances and sometimes conflict. In fact, one purpose of antifascist counter-protesting when these groups rally is to put pressure on their organizing. When their rallies are disrupted or dispersed through antifascist action, far-right alliances often rapidly splinter as prominent figures and groups within the far right trade accusations and recriminations.

Second, far-right groups reject the legitimacy of, as I would phrase it, bourgeois-democratic institutions of political and

cultural power. Though mainstream conservatism has been pulled toward the far-right in ideological terms, organizational differences between "oppositional and system-loyal rightists is more significant than ideological differences about race, religion, economics, or other factors."

## Three-Way Fight

Put more precisely – each "corner" of the three-way fight struggles against the other two at the same time as this struggle offers lines of adjacency against a common enemy. The first and most fundamental lesson of the three-way fight is that while both revolutionary movements and far-right movements are insurgent forms of opposition against bourgeois democracy, "my enemy's enemy is not my friend." Given that far-right groups also aim to recruit or ally with some revolutionary leftist groups, it is all the more important to root out all forms of chauvinism within our practices and organizations. Second, we must recognize the line of adjacency between militant antifascism and the egalitarian aspirations of bourgeois democracy, for it is this shared appeal to egalitarianism which makes fostering a broader sense of everyday antifascism possible. But it also means, as I will argue in thesis six, that militants must uphold a revolutionary horizon to keep the limitations of liberal antifascism in clear focus.

We will deal with the line of adjacency between the far right and bourgeois democracy (or liberalism) in the next two theses. Before moving on, however, we must examine the relationship between far-right groups and law enforcement. The slogan – "Cops and Klan go hand-in-hand" expresses two fundamental aspects of this relationship. First, it acknowledges the systemic role of law enforcement, which often operates to protect systemic white supremacy of North American settler-colonial states. Second, it emphasizes not only common membership between the two groups (when police, for example, are also members of the KKK), but as well the ideological bases through which police and system-loyal vigilante groups find common cause in opposition to leftist movements. It would be incorrect to assume that there are no antagonisms between law enforcement and far-right groups, but in my view it is more accurate to differentiate between what I would call system-loyal vigilantism and system-oppositional armed organization. In Lyons' terms, all far-right groups are ideologically system-oppositional, but not all of them are organized in system-oppositional forms. Over the last few years, many framed their actions as system-loyal vigilantism, which I would define as the use of violent tactics to harass, intimidate, or physically harm individuals or groups participating in transformative egalitarian movements. While some levels of law enforcement tend to be permissive or deferential toward system-loyal right-wing vigilantism, at least at the federal level, law enforcement has moved to repress system-oppositional groups organized around armed insurgency. In 2020 alone, police moved to incapacitate numerous far-right armed accelerationist groups, including

### 3. Militant antifascism is involved in a three-way fight against insurgent far-right movements and bourgeois democracy (or, in ideological terms, liberalism).

members of The Base, Atomwaffen, and the more loosely-affiliated boogaloo movement. Even so, we should not mistake law enforcement repression as signaling an unequivocal antagonism between police and the far right, or any degree of common cause between these targeted far-right groups and militant and revolutionary leftist movements.

### Concrete Social Relations

**4. The particularity of the three-way fight is dependent on concrete social relations. Far-right and fascist groups draw on and respond differently to different social contexts. For example, during the interwar period, fascist movements drew from the imperialist aspirations of European nationalisms. North American far-right movements emerge in relation to broader ideological and material forms of settler-colonialism (which includes—meaning that capital accumulation is imbricated in—elements of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism, and Indigenous dispossession).**

development of liberal political and cultural institutions has been inseparable from the development of settler-colonialism. Nonetheless it would be undialectical to treat them uncritically as the same thing. It would be more precise to contend that settler-state hegemony is formed through the mediation of bourgeois liberalism and white supremacist settlerism. I would define white supremacist settlerism as an ideological framework which privileges both white entitlement to land (possession or dominion) over the colonized's right to sovereignty, autonomy and entitlements encapsulated in what W. E. B. Du Bois called the "public and psychological wage of whiteness." Examining the end of the Reconstruction period in the southern United States after the Civil War, Du Bois argued that the potential for the formation of abolition democracy, built on the solidarity between the black and white proletariat, was defeated by the reorganization of settler-state hegemony, which enforced forms of deference and the institutionalization of racial control, as well as opening institutional access to education and social mobility to poor whites, drawing them, even if only aspirationally, into the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy.

Du Bois' analysis remains the prototype for conceptualizing settler-state hegemony and the role that whiteness plays within it. The presidential campaigns of 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and then the widespread anti-police uprising, offered two competing visions of reorganizing American settler-state hegemony; one which attempted to pull some system-oppositional far-right movements into system-loyalty and the other which took on a form of superficial antifascism. At the same time it demonstrated that a common interest in maintaining settler-state hegemony against challenges from the revolutionary left and the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples, forms the basis of the line of adjacency between bourgeois liberalism and white supremacist settlerism.

### Loyalty or Insurgency?

In the first thesis, I said that fascist groups appeal to an authoritarian vision of collective rebirth. In North American settler colonial societies, far-right and fascist groups demand the re-entrenchment of the social and economic hierarchies which enabled white social and economic mobility. They perceive that their social standing is in jeopardy, and demand that settler-state hegemony be tilted "back" toward their advantage. In sum, far right movements assert supposed "rights" of white settlerism which supersede the formal guarantees and protections granted through the liberal institutions of settler-state hegemony.

I would suggest that liberalism and white settlerism were historically able to coexist because the latter's interests did not interfere with the former's. Fascism failed to emerge as a profound challenge to American political hegemony in the 1930s and 1940s because, as Sakai notes, "white settler colonialism and fascism occupy the same ecological niche. Having one, capitalist society didn't yet need the other." In the 1950s to the 1970s, a variety of civil rights and

liberation movements posed a profound challenge to settler-state hegemony. Liberalism accommodated challenges from social justice movements by extending formal legal protections to marginalized groups and introducing new patterns of economic redistribution (social welfare). This did not overturn the expectations and entitlements of the wages of whiteness. As Cheryl Harris says, "after legalized segregation was overturned, whiteness as property evolved into a more modern form through the law's ratification of the settled expectations of relative white privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline." In other words, white entitlements would be codified into law as long as they could be framed in supposedly colour-blind terms – but these colour-blind terms would also contribute to the (false) perception that systematic white supremacy has been pushed to the margins of American society.

As recent events reveal, settler-state hegemony is not immune to crisis. As Marx and Engels argue in *The Communist Manifesto*, the social position of the petty bourgeoisie is always tenuous because "their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on." While the white petty bourgeoisie has repeatedly

been "bought off" – even during the period of neo-liberal policy – by social mobility or access to land (available due to Indigenous dispossession), that does not mean that settler-state hegemony will continue to reorganize future hegemonic blocs successfully. The threat remains that an insurgent fascist movement, organized around the rebirth of the settler-colonial project, will fill that hegemonic vacuum.

### Defeating White Supremacy

Militant antifascism is organized in order to meet the imminent threat of fascist organizing; it is an instantiation of community

**5. Far-right movements are system-loyal when they perceive that the entitlements of white supremacy can be advanced within bourgeois or democratic institutions and they become insurgent when they perceive that these entitlements cannot.**

**6. A revolutionary horizon is a necessary component to antifascist organizing; that is, there is no meaningful way in which fascism can be permanently defeated without overthrowing the conditions which give rise to it: capitalism and white supremacy, and in North America, settler-colonialism.**

self-defense. A united front is necessary in situations where the revolutionary left is present but lacks a mass base, but it is always caught in a contradiction: the major leftist ideological currents converge in a united front but diverge around the particulars of the revolutionary horizon. While combatting fascism is the immediate task of militant antifascism, antifascists must maintain a revolutionary horizon, even if only in broad outline, in order to avoid being absorbed within the ideological parameters of liberal antifascism. At the same time, militants must also recognize that antifascist work cannot merely be absorbed into revolutionary work because antifascism is community self-defense.

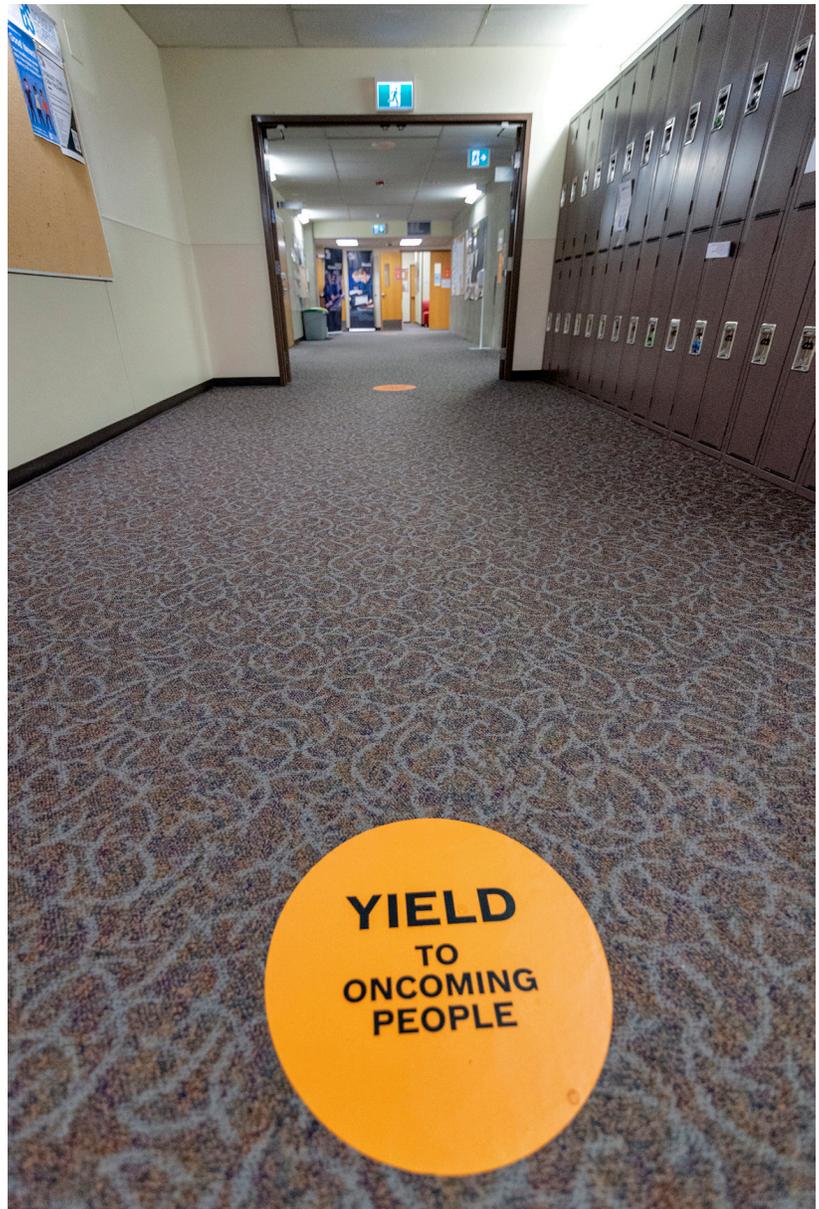
### Tactics

#### 7. Militant antifascism must uphold the diversity of tactics.

From a practical perspective, militant antifascism is distinguished from liberal antifascism by a willingness to use a diversity of tactics, up to and including physical confrontation, to disrupt far-right organizing. Effective militant organizing, though, must not transform the diversity of tactics into merely physical confrontation. Anti-fascism seeks to raise the cost of fascist organizing and that is the most obvious reason that the diversity of tactics plays an important role in organizing. As Robert F. Williams observed (in 1962), racists “are most vicious and violent when they can practice violence with impunity.” Physical confrontation raises the stakes of fascist attempts to harass and intimidate communities as they organize. But it is important to emphasize that physical confrontation still tends to come late in practice. Antifascists conduct research and publicize the fascist threat, we dox fascists, we put pressure on supposedly community-accountable institutions to deplatform or no-platform far-right groups, and when fascists rally we meet them in the streets to disrupt their actions. Militants uphold the importance of the diversity of tactics, but that doesn’t mean (in spite of popular conceptions) that violence is necessary. The critical question is always: *which tactic can cause the greatest disruption to far-right movements at each stage of organizing?*

Events of the last year especially have revealed the weaknesses of liberal mechanisms to stem far-right organizing. For years, liberal antifascists interpreted the lack of law enforcement pressure against the far-right as a lack of urgent threat. When the potential scope far-right violence erupted into popular consciousness on 6 January 2021, it was years too late. The failure of far-right and fascist groups to undermine

the transition of government power was due not to police repression (in fact, there was a distinct absence of police repression on that particular day), but primarily to internal organizational weaknesses, which I would attribute in part to pressure brought to bear on these groups over the last five years of antifascist organizing.



When confronted with emerging far-right movements, militant antifascists – unlike liberal antifascists – act sooner so that we don’t have to take greater risks later. Antifascists must maintain a revolutionary horizon, but at the same time remain focused on the immediate threat of fascist organizing. A world where fascists can openly organize is worse than one where they cannot. Though German fascism and Italian fascism were historically defeated in 1945, it will take a greater effort to defeat fascism once and for all. Part of that work must be done now by a united front of militant antifascists.

fm

# Earth To Douglas ...

## What Has the Climate Emergency Action Committee Been Up To? Kim Trainor Reveals All

In spite of the pandemic, the Climate Emergency Action Committee has been quite busy over the last semester. Herewith a few highlights. Our inaugural Speaker Series webinar featured Seth Klein, who offered some hopeful models for tackling the climate crisis drawn from the way in which the Canadian economy was speedily retooled during the Second World War. The webinar had over 100 attendees and a lively question and answer session following the talk. A recording of the talk has been circulated to all attendees, and for those of you who were not able to attend, the recording can be accessed via this link: [Tiny.cc/dfasethklein](https://tiny.cc/dfasethklein).

### Emergency Declaration

At the last Faculty Association meeting, a vote was held to declare a climate emergency and to sign the Sustainable Development Goals Accord as a supporting organization. The Climate Committee thanks everyone for their supporting the vote; the Douglas Student Union has likewise signed the Accord. The Climate Committee is now considering whether to begin a petition to ask the College to declare a climate emergency and expand the current sustainability committee to comprise climate action. The college has no reason not to do so, considering it would be in line with the new 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

### Correspondence

The Climate Committee is also asking faculty to consider signing the Global Climate Letter. Ten Douglas faculty members have signed it, so let's add our names to the growing list and encourage Douglas College to be an institutional signatory and global leader on this existential threat. So far in British Columbia, only four institutions have signed (Kwantlen, UBC, Selkirk College, and Thompson Rivers). The Kwantlen Fac-

ulty Association has also signed this letter, and the Climate Committee will be putting forward a motion at the Annual General Meeting in April, asking Faculty Association members to approve signing this letter. In the meantime, please consider signing the letter as an individual, at the following link.

Here's more information about the letter:

EDMONTON, MARCH 10, 2021 – Frustrated by the gulf between expert research on climate change and milquetoast institutional responses to the crisis, Canadian university faculty, staff, and students have raised their voices. Over 3500 individuals from 74 post-secondary institutions have added their names to a petition calling on Canadian University leaders to sign the Global Universities and Colleges Climate Letter, a document sponsored by the United Nations Environment Program and organizations supporting sustainability in higher education.

Signatories of the petition include members of academic staff, non-academic staff, undergraduate students, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, research associates, alumni, and emeriti professors.

To date, 302 post-secondary institutions around the world have signed the Global Climate Letter, which declares a "Climate Emergency in recognition of the need for a drastic societal shift to combat the growing threat of climate change." Institutional signatories to this letter also commit to fulfilling three goals, all of which are consistent with the mandate of institutions of higher learning to contribute to the public good:

1. Mobilize more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation;
2. Commit to going carbon neutral by 2030 or 2050 at the very latest;
3. Increase the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curriculum, campus, and community outreach programmes.

The petition, circulated by the Climate Action Coalition at the University of Alberta (CAUA) and supported by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, has garnered over 3500 signatures to date, including over 1800 continuing faculty members.

The thousands of Canadian university faculty, staff and students supporting this petition are sending a clear message to university and college leaders: if our institutions of higher learning are not willing to squarely address the most pressing challenge of our century, they risk losing their legitimacy as leaders of institutions mandated to serve knowledge and the public good. The time to commit to a sustainable future is now.

*Media Release from climate action @u of alberta*

New climate committee members are always welcome! Please contact Kim Trainor ([trainork@douglascollege.ca](mailto:trainork@douglascollege.ca)) to find out more. We meet via TEAMS on a monthly basis, first Thursday afternoon of every month. Our committee consists of faculty, staff, and students. We'd love to hear from you: Bring your energy, your passion, and your climate ideas!

jm



# Fair's Fair?

## David Moulton Scrutinizes Faculty Elections

Over the past month I've written two notes to the Registrar of the College regarding my concerns about the manner in which elections are held for faculty positions for the College Board and for Education Council. These elections are run and monitored by the Registrar's Office. To date, I've not received a reply to either note.

My first note (dated 10 March 2021) says –

*The issue for many instructors at this College is that there is not an unbiased process for electing faculty members to either Edco or the College Board. I will provide two specific examples:*

- ❑ *It was your office that determined that faculty members of Edco should have term limits yet other stakeholders like administration personnel were not encumbered by such limits. This issue was finally resolved to the satisfaction of the DCFA and many faculty members when the matter was settled out of court. The settlement removed the term limitation ruling. However the original actions taken by your office have tainted the neutrality that an electoral office is supposed to maintain.*
- ❑ *It was your office that decided to announce the opening of the last faculty election for the College Board on DC Connect rather than the traditional method of emailing the notice to faculty. This change in communication meant that only one candidate entered their name and they were acclaimed without opposition. Several faculty members were interested in running for the Board, including myself, and your actions denied us our democratic right to stand for office.*

*In both these cases the electoral process has been compromised by your office. I could also include the latest instance of irregularity that was raised by my colleague where a candidate may not have violated the letter of the rule but they certainly violated the spirit of the rule.*

*In summary I trust you can now understand why many of us in the faculty do not trust the electoral process at the College.*

My second note (dated 30 March 2021) says –

*Further to my last note, there is an additional question I would like to ask about how your office manages elections for the faculty. What measures are in place to ensure that proper scrutiny is provided for each of the candidates in the voting process?*

*This is a very important question because we need to have the assurance that everyone who was eligible to vote was able to*

*exercise their franchise and that the tabulation of the vote was accurate.*

*In normal circumstances, scrutineers are appointed by each candidate when the polls are closed. These people are there to verify that all the proper procedures have been followed and that the candidates, win or lose, know that the process was fair to everyone.*

*When I reviewed the College Election rules, there was no mention of any type of scrutiny to ensure fairness. All other democratic systems, at all levels of government, have these types of safeguards in place.*

*Your answer to my question should also outline what precautions have been taken to make sure that the software program used by the College has not been hacked or tampered with in any way. The precautions should include not only what the vendor has put in place but also what your office has done to make sure nothing untoward has occurred.*

*Thank you.*

It would be my contention that the Registrar's Office should be not only unbiased when it comes to this role but must also seem to be neutral by College stakeholders. As you can see, I have serious doubts that this is the case. In my experience, no electoral officer would make the types of decisions the Registrar's Office has made during our elections.

If you agree with the concerns I have raised, please send a note to the Registrar's Office. You can reach them at this email: [rng11@douglascollege.ca](mailto:rng11@douglascollege.ca); ask for answers. /fm

### REVIEW

## Who Needs 'Em? (The Sequel)

### J.P. Henry Peruses Some Particularly Pointless Prose

I worry that I might have left a false impression with an article I wrote for the last issue of *Faculty Matters*, said impression being that it was solely writers of non-fiction who were responsible for the production of needless books. But of course it's much more likely that needless books of fiction will be produced, purely on the pragmatic grounds that very few novels ever make their money back, thus, the publishers' search for that elusive best-seller – or better yet, best-selling series – is correspondingly more desperate. It's also why, when a series does become successful, the writer is encouraged to turn out at least one book, and possibly two, every twelvemonth for as long as the market will bear it: Tom Clancy, John Sandford, Michael Connolly, Lee Child – even Jodi Picoult – have been doing exactly that for years. (Though in Picoult's case, she is a far better writer than the males in this group, and, to her credit, has taken some years off.) Moreover, even though Tom Clancy and Robert B. Parker have both died, “Tom Clancy” and “Robert B. Parker” are still

pumping out books; indeed, in Clancy's case, he has improved vastly as a writer since his untimely passing.

Then too, the stakes for fiction are different than they are for non-fiction, in that while the latter sort of books really ought not to be published unless they have something fresh to say, the former can easily justify their existence simply by telling a good story. Humans are pretty much hard-wired for narratives, and they consume enormous amounts of them, thus, the rule that we should be cautious of disparaging the entertainments of others, decrying what brings enjoyment to them, I think applies with special force here, on the old principle that what pleases me is not a matter of dispute; after all, it is my emotions, my feelings, that are doing the enjoying. Tell me that what I like is trash and I won't deny it, but only because I will allow you your definition of trash. My definition (obviously; by definition) is just – different.

### **Salander Rides Again!**

As with my non-fiction choice, part of the reason I chose *The Girl Who Got Caught in the Spider's Web* as a wholly unnecessary book is because I felt I had been suckered into buying it, that I had been fooled. I picked it up partly out of curiosity, but also because I liked the three novels in Steig Larsson's *Milenium* series – the Lisbeth Salander novels – which came before this one, number four. It's not that I thought Larsson was any kind of brilliant writer; I didn't. But he had his hands wrapped around a damn fine story, and even though his style was not great, his prose being at best, workmanlike, he didn't let that story down. With *Spider's Web*, on the other hand, as I turned the last page and tossed it aside on the sofa, I got the distinctly stinky feeling that it hadn't arrived in my hands as a result of a writer's genuine desire, but because of the publisher's (and Steig Larsson's family's) desire to cash in on their late brother's unexpected success.

The author of *Spider's Web*, David Lagercrantz, like Steig Larsson before him, began his career as a journalist and then branched out into writing crime novels. He created a detective – Daniel

Hill – who, like many a fictional detective, is an amateur who is both brilliant and independently wealthy (the money coming from Hill's having been a brilliant stock-market trader). Prior to being tapped by the Larsson clan to continue the Lisbeth Salander saga, however, Lagercrantz's biggest selling book was an as-told-to biography of Swedish soccer star Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and he's also written a couple of other biographies and a true crime book. In short, Lagercrantz is a professional writer, willing to turn his hand to almost any job. Because *Spider's Web* is a translation from the Swedish, it's hard to be sure, but Lagercrantz also seems very much like Larsson stylistically, in that his background as a journalist means that he's more comfortable starting from a factual basis rather than purely inventing things. In the current instance, he seems to be taking the original *Milenium* trilogy as his "fact" base, then working from that. (One question I suppose we can't really answer is whether Lagercrantz is a poor writer by nature, or whether he is doing his best to imitate Larsson's "style," but the former strikes me as more likely than the latter.)

Indeed, a relative weakness of invention was one of the problems with Larsson's original trilogy. Finding it difficult to purely invent, for almost every scene, he *must* lay out the details that will give him (he thinks) a factual leg to stand on, and for individual scenes, he *must* spend some time describing the physical locale, sometimes in considerable detail, before he can place his characters, and get them talking to one another. One wants to reach out and shake him and say, "Yes Stieg, yes, there are only a few IKEA items in this room, including cups and glasses, I understand, now please – please – get on with the story!"

### **Skill-Sets**

Story was precisely Larsson's strong suit. Some writers are fabulous with sentences and paragraphs, and other writers can tell great stories, but there are very few writers who are good at both. American novelist Cormac McCarthy, for example, is great with words and sentences, even whole lyrical paragraphs, but his plots mostly don't work,

first because he's not really interested in plot, and second because he constantly intrudes into both events and characters by spinning out gestures – by this I mean moves the writer makes which say "Lookit what I can do!" – that are obviously meant to be "symbolic," though usually in McCarthy's case not of anything specific.

This means that the tendency of much of McCarthy's work is towards allegory, which is probably the dullest of all genres when it is poorly or indifferently done, and with McCarthy, it's usually done indifferently because where true allegory demands clarity – think *Animal Farm* – McCarthy delights in opacity, often seemingly for its own sake ("*Punctuation? We don't need no stinkin' punctuation!*") or for the sake of the lyricism. His love of the symbolizing gesture may also be why McCarthy seems to have a yen for Nietzschean villains like the Judge in *Blood Meridian*, men – it's always men – who are supposedly beyond good and evil, and who therefore commit appalling crimes and who then mock those who would judge them as small-minded and foolish; bohemianism with a pistol, so to say. Such villains are the equivalent in the literary novel of the highly-skilled professional hit-man (or rarely, hit-woman) we encounter in popular fiction, both types embodying the supposed glamour of evil, and both of them mainly mythical, that is, not grounded in anything much resembling an actual world.

On the other side of the skills divide, there are writers unsurpassed at telling stories, but whose command of basic narrative resources is weak, for example, J.R.R. Tolkien. At the start of the second book of his trilogy, *The Two Towers*, the Fellowship has been split into three: Merry and Pippin have been kidnapped by Orcs; Legolas, Gimli and Aragorn are in pursuit; and Frodo and Samwise have crossed the river to take the Ring to Mount Doom. The smoothest way to deal with such a situation would be to move back and forth between the three strands, so that the reader's sense of a single narrative time is preserved, along with overall narrative momentum. Shakespeare does this in Act V of *Macbeth*, where the scenes switch rapidly



A spread from the DC Comics adaptation of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*. A French-language market comic has apparently also been licensed, with stories based on the characters, not on the original novels or Lagercrantz's continuations. Note the panel at lower left, which seems all too evidently based on a reference photo, rather than a straight drawing.

back and forth between attackers and defenders of Dunsinane castle, until Macduff and Macbeth meet and fight.

In *The Two Towers*, however, once bumptious Boromir has been dispatched, Tolkien proceeds to tell us all that happens in strand number one; and then winds back the narrative clock to the splitting point, and proceeds to detail everything in strand number two. It's clumsy, and the result is that much of the interest and excitement is simply drained away. Strands one and two are rejoined at Isengard, but by the time we get there, its tower has already been destroyed by the Ents, so that that epic clash is presented as indirect speech rather than as a scene in its own right. And even at Isengard we still have another 40 pages to slog through before Tolkien once again winds back the narrative clock to zero, and we pick up strand three, wherein Frodo and Sam are walking – and walking – and walking – to the gates of Minas Morgol.

The problem Tolkien thus creates for himself (and his readers) is that nearly half of the second volume repetitively details hobbits stumbling over rocks and through swamps, talking with one another over campfires and getting more and more tired and dispirited. Even the injection of Gollum into the proceedings fails to brighten things very much, as he becomes simply another voice around the campfire, kvetching about

the weather or the food or the terrain. It's just not exciting stuff, and when potentially exciting stuff does occur (running into Faramir and his raiders) its impact is blunted. Or in the first volume of the trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the hobbits are placed in jeopardy in a dark forest purely so Tolkien can have them rescued by one of the characters from his vast mythology – Tom Bombadil – who turns out to have almost nothing to do with the story (though nice for us it is he speaks in lines that almost rhyme). Worse, these two episodes essentially reproduce very similar incidents from the earlier book, *The Hobbit* (Beorn's house; the journey through Mirkwood) with almost no change except for occurring in reverse order.

Which brings us back to Steig Larsson, whom we can denominate as the Tolkien of crime novelists; Lisbeth Salander's story is hugely compelling, but the teller is simply not a very good writer of fiction. His is a sort of engineer's prose, accurately describing things, but almost completely devoid of character beyond a primitive labelling system that informs the reader which ones are good and which evil (he has a third category, the weak, but in functional terms they almost always turn out to be allies of evil). Blomquist, the Doctor Watson character to Salander's Sherlock Holmes, is somewhat more

fleshed out, but that is because he is obviously based on Larsson himself. Blomquist is the star reporter and founder of *Millenium* magazine, which specializes in exposing fascists and white supremacist thugs and killers; Larsson helped found, and edited and wrote for *Expo* magazine, which covers pretty much the same beat. And incidentally, you can see here how Blomquist is not just based on Larsson, but most likely a projection of an idealized and sexier version of him, in other words, a Marty Stu character.

### **Cashing In Redux**

So why did Lagercrantz write this book? The first three books of the *Millenium* saga make a self-contained unit, with volume one as the prologue, and the second and third volumes giving us detailed origin stories for both Lisbeth Salander, and for the partnership she and Blomquist develop. Larsson, we are told, had planned to write 10 books altogether, and had completed something like two-thirds of a fourth book when he died suddenly of a heart attack. Richard Schickel (in an article in the *LA Times*) takes up the story:

*Larsson died without a will, meaning his fortune in royalties went to his family, a father and a brother with whom he was not close, instead of to his helpmeet of 30-odd years, whom he never married but who everyone (except the lawyers) thinks deserves more than a grass widow's mite of his earnings.*

Larsson's widow – in almost any other jurisdiction she would have been counted a common-law wife – got nothing from the estate, but she had possession of the manuscript of the fourth volume, such as it was, meaning that if subsequent volumes were to be produced, as rights-holders the “family” would need to go shopping, not only for a novelist, but also for ideas about how to continue the saga. This of course raises the question whether Lagercrantz developed his book fully independently, or whether he wrote in chains, so to speak, with father and brother Larsson leaning over his shoulder and making suggestions.

“What about the twin, what's her name, Carvella? Carmina? We don't want to tell you how to do your job, but why don't we put her in? That'd be cool, don't you think? And we've got to have the old gang back, Modig, Bublanski, Ekstrom, and those guys. Milton Security too. People will be expecting it.”

At any rate, Lagercrantz's volume four conspicuously repeats beats from the original trilogy. Conspiracy featuring involvement of dark government forces? Check. Display of Salander's almost magical powers to command computers?

Check. Stupidity and cowardice of institutional forces? Check. And so on.

In other words, one gets the sense that the book came into existence not because of any writerly desire on Lagercrantz's part but purely because the “family” was aware that they had inherited a hot property, and wanted to exploit it while it remained hot by having a hireling scibbler turn out several “sequels” that would hopefully keep the euros rolling in. So far, that seems to be working, although if *Wikipedia* is to be believed, while Larsson's original books have sold 80 million copies world-wide, Lagercrantz's three sequels have only raised the total to 100 million, that is, about 7-8 million copies for each of his continuations. Of course, there's also the comic book version of the original trilogy, which presumably brings in a bit of money, and the film and television adaptations also have to be licensed from the rights-holders, so if the aim was indeed to keep money rolling into bank accounts every month, they have certainly succeeded.

So is the book any good?

### **The Art of Unthrilling**

In a word, no, not much. Rather than a mystery novel, it's designed as a thriller, with the plot basically a chase; the bad guys are after an autistic boy whom Lisbeth Salander is protecting. Lagercrantz has got a firm grip on one aspect of the modern thriller, and that is the lengthy



*Claire Foy (a.k.a., Queen Elizabeth in *The Crown*) as Lisbeth Salander in the movie adaptation of Lagercrantz's *The Girl in the Spider's Web*. It has explosions, car chases, and a gloomy castle where the wicked villain lurks.*

and detailed set-up where the reader is introduced to a number of characters in different locales around the world, the idea being that at some point all the strands will come together in a thrilling finale (read: shootout; car chase; explosion); and of course, on the way to the finale, some of the separate strands will come together in thrilling (read: shootout, car chase, etc., etc.) standoffs and/or fights. The trouble is that Langercrantz's grip on those action bits where the strands are supposed to come together is spectacularly weak and often poorly thought out.

One example will suffice.

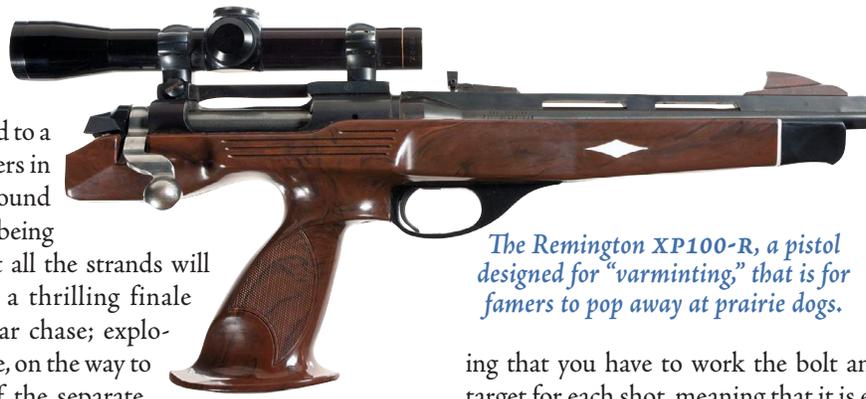
About halfway through the book, the bad guys have set up a hit on the autistic boy. The shooter fires from across the street towards the door out of which the boy and an adult are coming. Approaching from the side, Lisbeth dives on top of the boy, but gets shot in the process. She then hijacks a car to escape, and attends to her wound. The hijacked driver tells us that "the girl had been hit somewhere below the shoulder, not far above the heart," and a little later, Lisbeth herself finds "both the entry and exit holes. The bullet must have gone straight through the front of her shoulder, which was bleeding profusely."

Reader, stay a moment and try to find a location like the one just described; I will wait while you do so.

What did you find?

What you are most likely to have found is a lot of ribs, and, just above, a collar-bone and shoulder blade. In other words, a through-and-through shot is highly unlikely at that location, unless, by great good fortune, no bones were hit. But even so, that location, minus any inconvenient bones, contains the apex of a lung, so that the shot as described would very quickly collapse the lung, making movement difficult if not impossible. Salander, however, nothing daunted ("It's just a scratch" as another bold knight might have said), forces the owner of the car out and then manages to drive it herself to a hiding place. The point is that the research Lagercrantz needed to do, and didn't do, was as close as his fingertips. It's also worth thinking about how, if Salander was hit in the front of her shoulder, that fits with the description that she "threw herself over the boy," and the amended description, a little later, that "she launched herself on top of the boy."

I admit to picking a few nits here, but this is, after all, a thriller, and writers of such are expected to get these sorts of details as correct as they can. Lagercrantz gets the pistol (partly) right, telling us it is a Remington. He says the assassin "raised his pistol and [aimed] at the boy through the telescopic sight," meaning that the pistol is a model XP-100R, the only Remington that can take such a sight, and which can indeed shoot the sort of rounds that will produce a through-and-through. But Lagercrantz also gets it seriously wrong. He tells us that the assassin "fired and hit on his target. He



*The Remington XP100-R, a pistol designed for "varminting" that is for famers to pop away at prairie dogs.*

hit something, and shot again and again," that is, he fired more or less continuously, and certainly quickly. The problem here is that the XP-100R is a bolt action, mean-

ing that you have to work the bolt and then reacquire the target for each shot, meaning that it is exactly the wrong sort of pistol to be using in an assassination attempt on a busy street. The weapon would be even more clumsy and difficult to use if our assassin were, like most people, right-handed, because the bolt is on the right-hand side. To use it as quickly as the assassin does, he would have to be holding it with his left hand and working the bolt with his right hand. Lagercrantz doesn't even allude to the handedness of his assassin, I would guess because he hasn't bothered to think through how to use the weapon. It looks cool, but that's about it.

It's worth pointing out too, that whatever Steig Larsson's limitations as a writer, he at least didn't try to do stuff he knew he wouldn't be good at, so there's none of this sort of quasi-thriller dreck in the original trilogy, no mysterious highly qualified hit-persons, and the dark forces conspiring against Salander turn out to be, in the end, a relatively small local operation running drugs and sex-trafficking with impunity because of an odd, though simple twist of fate. There's no world-girdling conspiracy of evil, just ordinary sexist jerks taken one step farther than the idiot at your workplace who makes smirking jokes about his female co-workers. The family Larsson, however, if they did influence the novel at a distance, seems to have been reading more Tom Clancy than their own brother, and if I were to speculate, I would guess that the notably un-thrilling *Spider's Web* might have its origins in that sort of reading.

### **Once More to the Gold-mine**

My impression of Lagercrantz is that he isn't even really trying, that he would rather be writing a different sort of book, one where quirky characters and their motivations are the focus. But this actually becomes another irritation for the reader, because Lagercrantz is constantly delaying or interrupting the narrative to give us a look inside the heads and lives of even the most minor characters. The young man driving the car which Salander hijacks, for example, is Jacob Charro. He's 22, and he's just bought his new Volvo XC60 "on credit with his father as guarantor." He's on his way to lunch with relatives to celebrate getting a place "on Syrian FC's first team." We are even told what song is playing on the car radio when all this happens. (Incidentally, the name of the football club is *Syrianska*, but when you run that word through Google Translate, it identifies it as Swedish and gives you – "Syrian," which tells us, perhaps, that Lagercrantz's English translator is not a soccer fan; after all, you wouldn't translate *Munchen-Gladbach* as "Munich contented brook.")

The deeper problem is that Salander, the little we see of

her in the novel, is also given these internal ruminations, and they do not add up to the Lisbeth Salander we are familiar with from the original trilogy. The main difference is that the new Salander seems to be moved by a single emotion, anger, rather than a variety of emotions, and this turns her pretty much into a vigilante. The movie based on this book, which is not bad if you treat it as a “check-your-brain-at-door” flick, makes this explicit, portraying Salander as a gun-toting avenger whizzing hither and thither on her Ducati motorcycle. Even Mikael Blomqvist doesn't seem like himself in Lagercrantz's novel, spending the first third of it wondering whether he should maybe give up journalism, and try something else. But that's ridiculous. The entire series is named for Blomqvist's muck-raking magazine, *Millemium*, and one of the givens of the first three books – and presumably, the seven subsequent ones Larsson intended to write – was that Blomqvist's investigative work, aided by Salander, was undertaken to generate blockbuster stories for the magazine.

Because it's a thriller, a lot of these ruminations from various characters are, ultimately, pointless and unsatisfying. They are intended to add a dimensionality to the characters, but for the most part they are too banal and too poorly written to fulfill that function convincingly. This is a pity, because the book contains almost no dialogue. It's true that characters sit down and talk at one another, but almost all of these instances are scarcely disguised bits of exposition, that is, explanations of plot moves. Many times, I didn't feel I was reading a story so much as reading a summary of what the story might have been, in the hands of a writer who cared about a few of the characters, and who had tried to inhabit their lives. What Lagercrantz does is give the characters ersatz lives, and in great and excruciating detail. He's also hamstrung by following Larsson's somewhat simplistic sense of characters as coming in only two varieties (good and evil), such that anyone in this novel who occupies an official position of some sort – doctor, bureaucrat, or whatever – is presented as vain, small-minded, and stupid.

So it's not a very good book; it may even be the epitome of the wholly unnecessary book, but only because I haven't read the subsequent two volumes Lagercrantz has cranked out to bring the series up to six volumes. Reviews of Lagercrantz's work have been mixed, and sales, compared to Larsson's books, modest, with many reviewers feeling that what made the originals hum – the Blomqvist/Salander relationship, with one or the other of them on almost every page – is largely absent from the continuations, that the two of them are the absent signifiers for mysteries which aren't really that engaging, that they are crowded aside by characters we don't really care about.

### **Whose Success?**

One doesn't want to be too hard on Lagercrantz, who had an unenviable task on his hands, and who was also saddled with the weaknesses of Larsson's basic concept. Salander never was a fully developed character but more a set of reader wish fulfillments. Indeed, at the close of the second of Larsson's books, as she goes to meet her father (who will shoot her and bury her alive) she suddenly has an insight which allows her to solve Fermat's Last Theorem – and not in the same way as the modern proof by Andrew Wiles, but by way of a proof which Fermat himself might have been able to achieve. Struck by the brilliance of the solution, she allows herself

*Even Mikael Blomqvist doesn't seem like himself in Lagercrantz's novel, spending the first third of it wondering whether he should maybe give up journalism*

a giggle, and then continues on to meet her fate. To an extent, Larsson provides some foundation for this scene by telling us earlier that mathematics is a new zone of endeavour for the brilliant Salander, and that she has been puzzling over Fermat's theorem; but still. One's only response to the scene has to be: *Really?* It's just too perfect. As Richard Schickel puts it, Salander is not so much a character as “a tiny bundle of post-modernist tropes, beginning with her computer skills” and continuing on through her being a self-taught mathematician of genius.

For the publishers, Lagercrantz's novel was a success. As noted, it seems to have sold, worldwide, some several millions of copies. For the brothers Larsson likewise, the novel could probably be counted a success in that (one assumes) it fattened their bank accounts, first for the book, and later for the movie. And for Lagercrantz too it was a success, in that the brothers hired him to write another two novels to add to the series, which in turn allowed him (says *Wikipedia*) to donate

*€100,000 of his profits to Läsrörelsen, an organization working for children's and youth's readership. He also donated approximately €50,000 to Grävfonden, a foundation for training investigative journalists in Sweden.*

The only folks for whom this is not a success are the poor readers, those who thought they might find a worthy successor, or continuation of an excellent story, and who were disappointed.

And the trees of course, let's by all means not forget the heroic trees who sacrificed their lives for this addle-pated venture, which should never have been started. 