



Events that I really missed attending in 2021

Description

Quebec Writers Federation and Meta awards, and the Atwater Library Benefit Cocktail

By **Byron Toben**

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Looking back at 2021, with its on-again, off-again COVID restrictions, there were a few annual live events that I truly missed being able to attend.

Quebec Writers Federation Awards Night

The **Quebec Writers Federation (QDF)** was founded in 1998 by a merger of **QSPELL** and **FEWQ** and continued the celebration of annual awards for authors of published books, which has grown greatly. Most ceremonies were held in the atmospheric **Cabaret Lion D'Or** and, for a few years, at the cavernous **Corona Theatre**.

For 2021, it reverted to a streamed session back at the Lion D'Or called **Maskerade** on November 24, hosted by **Sean Michaels**, with prizes of \$3000 each given in six categories. **Playwrighting**, introduced in 2018 by my quiet praying and **Gabriel Safdie's** active promotion, was not a category in 2021. In addition to the monetary awards, there were two recognition prizes. A quick summary of the winners follows below:

Mavis Gallant Non-Fiction and **Concordia University First Book** prizes were awarded to double winner **Samir Shaheen-Hussain** for ***Fighting For A Land To Hold: Confronting Medical Colonialism Against Indigenous Children In Canada***, published by McGill-Queens University Press.



The **Paragraph Bookstore Fiction award** went to **Michael Iossel** for *Love Like Water, Love Like Fire*, published by Belle-Vue Literary Press.

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The **Cole Foundation Translation award** went to **Sarah Henzi** for her translation into English from French of **Artane Kapesch's** *I Am a Damn Savage: What Have You Done For My Country?*, published by Wilfred Laurier University Press

The **A.M. Klein Poetry award** went to **Sarah Venart** for her *I Am The Big Heart*, published by Brick Books.

The **Memory of Janet Savage Blanford Children And Young Adults Literature award** went to **Monique Polak** for her *Room For One More*, published by Kal-Ben Publishing.

Non-monetary recognition awards were:

Judy Mappin Community Awards to both **H. Nigel Thomas** (encouraging students, etc.) and **Richard King** (50 years of book promotion, etc.)

The winner of the **QWF College Writers Award**, drawn from the five English CEGEPS, was **Julian Burton-Nadon** for his *A Fisher's Parade*.

Finally, a Carte Blanche \$100 Award for submissions to the QWF newsletter went to **Noa Padawer-Blatt** for his *Tricks*.



The 2017 META Award for Outstanding PACT Production went to Angélique – Image: Andrée Lanthier



Montreal English Theatre Awards Night

The **Montreal English Theatre Awards (META)** co-incidentally now has the same acronym as the new holding company as Facebook (in its case, short for Metaverse.) Whether this figured into our META transferring its 9th annual Awards night on November 21 into a meta combination of game show and augmented intelligence, I know not.

‘... in the end, no 2021 selections were made, just an announcement that they were cancelled, understandably, due to the constraints of attending live theatre during the pandemic.’

I am sure that the event committee of this peer group juried organization devoted a lot of hard work and imagination into trying to defeat the constrictions of Mr. COVID, but the result of this **Not-A-Ceremony** for non-techie me, was fumbling with my desktop PC to little avail, and cursing the need to become an avatar to see who the winners were.

I am not an avatar and even if I could become one, in the end, no 2021 selections were made, just an announcement that they were cancelled, understandably, due to the constraints of attending live theatre during the pandemic.

So I left to bemoan the fate of this glamorous event, which I covered at the spectacular Rialto theatre for most of its years and then at the historic Monument National for a recent two. I was the only reviewer, to my knowledge, reporting it as an event unto itself rather than just listing the results. Ah, well, them days is gone along with the crowd mingling energy generated.



L to R – Atwater Library Executive Director Lynn Verge, Mary Ann Lacey and Byron Toben in conversation at the 2017 Atwater Library Benefit Cocktail – Image: courtesy of the Atwater Library

Atwater Library Benefit Cocktail

Westmount is blessed with two libraries – the Westmount Library, deep in the heart of the city and the **Atwater Library and Computer Centre** at the city's eastern border with Montreal.

A successor to the 1828 Mechanics Institute and now located in its 1920 building (a designated historic site), its limited government funding is largely supplemented by private donations. A key event to encourage that has been the annual benefit cocktail evening, which I have delighted in attending until suspended in 2020 and 2021 due to, yep, that old devil COVID-19. Besides silent auctions of various items of restaurant meals, travel, artworks, shawls, and hockey tickets, were original cartoon drawings by **Terry Mosher** aka **Aislin**. I was often outbid for those but lucked out in obtaining one of Hillary Clinton in 2016.

A complimentary buffet of Dunn's smoked meat gave quasi veggie me a chance to gorge on that treat once a year. Frequent guests included former Westmount Mayor **Peter Trent**, Suburban journalist **Pierre Albert Sevigny** and hockey legend **Bob Gainey**.

'The Atwater Library's executive director Lynn Verge managed to pull these benefits off with her few salaried and many dedicated volunteers, with great aplomb.'



Media notables like **Denis Trudeau** and **Mutsumi Takahashi** moderated and introduced the honouree of the evening while Concordia's **Dave Turner**'s cool jazz trio provided background music like *Autumn Leaves*.

The Atwater Library's executive director **Lynn Verge** managed to pull these benefits off with her few salaried and many dedicated volunteers, with great aplomb.

Begone variant viruses and let these pleasant respites return!

Feature image: guests at the Atwater Library Benefit Cocktail perusing the Silent Auction in 2017, by Matthew Perrin

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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