



Montreal Writers: Nathalie Guilbeault
and Christian Fennell

Description

An interview with the Westmount-based authors on the launch of their new books

By Irwin Rapoport

August 4, 2022

Westmount-based authors **Nathalie Guilbeault** and **Christian Fennell** launched their new books on June 22 at the Burgundy Lion, where many of their fans gathered to meet them and secure signed copies of their latest novels. For Guilbeault, it was *Inhaled*, 2nd edition, and Fennell, *LOVE, GUNS & GOD in America*, which completes his trilogy, *The Real* and *The Imagined*. Both their books are published by Firenze Books Publishing. To read an excerpt from *Inhaled*, visit nathaliegulbeault.com and to read an excerpt from *LOVE, GUNS & GOD in America*, visit christianfennell.com

Fennell, a writer and editor from Toronto, read Guilbeault's book and wrote his first-ever non-paid review, and their friendship sparked from there. He commented on a Facebook post, and she responded on Instagram. "The Leafs will beat the Habs in six," he wrote. One year into the pandemic, Fennell headed down the 401 East to Montreal, where Guilbeault was waiting to collect her wager. The two now live together and share a passion for prose and the power of the written word.



Fennell and Guilbeault at their book launch

Their new books have garnered high praise. Concerning Guilbeault's novel, author **Kathryn Brown Ramsperger** noted: "A tone and a voice reminiscent of European writers Anais Nin and Alain Robbe-Grillet." As for Fennell's latest novel, writer **Josip Novakovich** was crystal clear when he said Fennell's a "violent fucking poet."

Inhaled is a novel based on a true story – "Silencing her own intuition, Isabelle falls into the arms of hope; a hope she keeps weaving into a new reality, putting her life and that of her daughter at risk. In this psychological thriller where sex is used both as a weapon and a cure, Guilbeault exposes with great lucidity the dangers of becoming entangled with a person whose character is poisoned by narcissistic and sociopathic traits. It is the story of a woman's desperate need to surrender and escape, whatever the price."



INHALED

A NOVEL

based on a true story

NATHALIE
GUILBEAULT

This

updated edition of the book comes out almost four years after its initial release. Guilbeault was compelled to examine what one tells oneself to survive the humiliation. Time gave perspective and made it possible for the author to better understand why she remained within the confines of a dangerous relationship. She went back to the memoir and added more insights, "I delved further and found answers as to why it happened, how." The act of rewriting did something to her; she discarded her pen name, Isabelle Duval, and emerged as herself. "Writing about abuse is challenging", said Guilbeault, "mostly because I expose myself and, also, the type of abuse I write about here is hidden. Would it be believed? There are no bruises, no scratches, no broken bones. It's invisible to friends and family, and that makes you want to become invisible, too. Words were my way out."

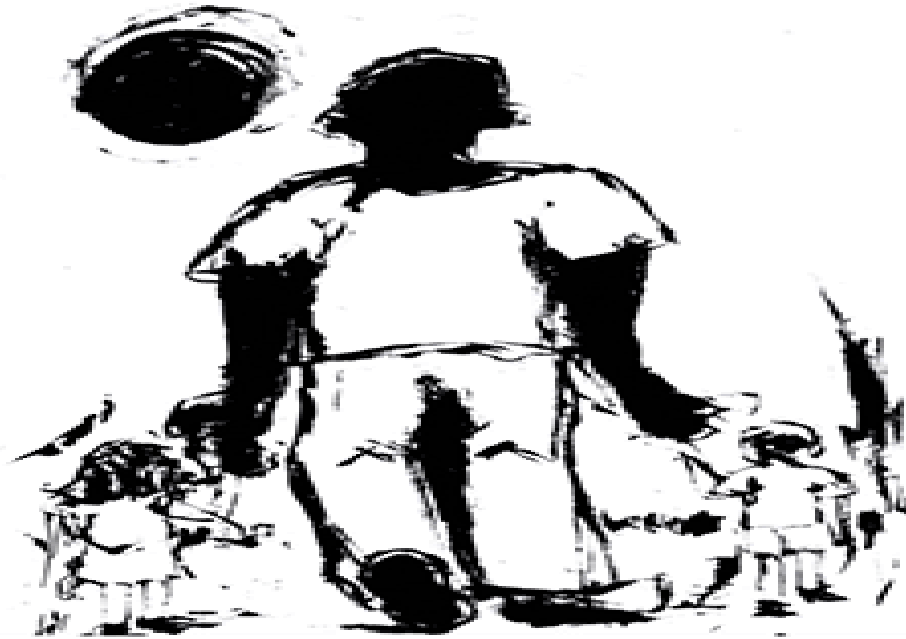
Dr. Laurie Betito, a clinical psychologist with a specialty in sexual wellness, radio host, best-selling author and TEDx speaker, who reviewed the novel, says, "This book was intense! I couldn't put it down. Knowing that this was based on a true story got to me in my deep. A whole mix of emotions with some added eroticism made this book captivating and relatable. Very well written."

Christian Fennell describes his novel as a portrayal of the violence, race issues, and ideological confrontations facing America today, as exemplified by the recent shootings in Buffalo, NY, and Uvalde, Texas. It is timely and reflects his unique writing style that is poetic and reaches to essence. When two young children, fleeing a white nationalist upbringing, chance upon a large, mythical man in the woods, he helps them on their journey to California. When captured, events take a horrific, racial turn, one that, many years later, still impacts all those involved.



LOVE, GUNS & GOD in America

WESTMOUNT MAGAZINE
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a novel
Christian Fennell

"A violent fucking poet."
- Josip Novakovich

"1

started the trilogy because I wanted to examine the lives of people when viewed through a lens of what is real and what is perceived as being real," he said. "This fascinates me – the blending of these two things. In a sense, it is how we all live our lives. And certainly, it is at the root of many of the problems currently facing America and much of the world today."

Here is an excerpt from the book: "He drove the circle and stopped in front of the entrance. He looked at the AK next to him. Freedom. It's what they all wanted, in their own way. All of them reaching to it; reaching beyond what was right in front of them; reaching to God, and blinded by their hate – and more of it coming."

Diane Donovan, Senior Editor at Midwest Book Review, was impressed and wrote in her review, "Passionate observations of life in different strata of the American psyche drive a story that is a raw inspection of the violence and confrontations of both a nation and the individual."

To learn more about this dynamic and creative couple, Westmount Magazine sent them some questions. Here are the responses that perfectly reflect the easy-going nature of the authors and how they inspire each other.

Passionate observations of life in different strata of the American psyche drive a story that is a raw inspection of the violence and confrontations of both a nation and the individual.

– Diane Donovan, Senior Editor, Midwest Book Review, on *LOVE, GUNS & GOD in America*

WM: *What are the themes of your new books, and why did you write them?*

Fennell: *LOVE, GUNS & GOD in America* is somewhat of a dystopian view of America, one that is based on the possible conclusions of current events. America's love of guns, the ideological and political confrontations that divide the nation, as well as the drive to a purity based on religious beliefs, are dangerous things when combined to the degree they are today and I wanted to examine that through a narrative that looked at the consequences of these things. I started the book in 2014 and, to be honest, it's a little scary looking at the American landscape today and seeing what is happening, especially in light of the recent Supreme Court rulings. It's worrisome to say the least, and I hope from that point of view the book is not accurate.



Nathalie Guilbeault

Guilbeault: It's a romantic thriller, one where sex is used both as a weapon and a cure, through which I expose the dangers of becoming entangled with a person possessing narcissistic and sociopathic traits. The story is about Isabelle Duval, a woman wronged by her husband, who meets a Nicaraguan man online. Silencing her own intuition, she falls into the arms of hope, weaving for herself a new reality, one that puts her life and that of her daughter at risk.

WM: *How would you describe your writing style, and how do you select your subjects?*



Fennell: I try and write to the essence of things – more so than the thing itself. Writing to essence, you can cover more ground, quicker... a good thing in today's reading world. I'm pretty sure I don't select my subjects, but rather, a seed of an idea appears and, from there, it becomes something, or it doesn't.

Guilbeault: It's a difficult question for an author isn't it? I think that I write with no filters, with just enough emotion mixed into some... poetry, although I do not consider myself a poet. I think the subject targeted me, no pun intended really, as it's based on truth to some extent. There is a sequel to *Inhaled*, *Mad Honey*. Following those two books, the choices will be mine, more mine.

'This book was intense! I couldn't put it down. Knowing that this was based on a true story got to me in my deep. A whole mix of emotions with some added eroticism made this book captivating and relatable.

– Dr. Laurie Betito, clinical psychologist, on *Inhaled*

WM: *What led you to become authors, and what compels you to write?*

Guilbeault: When I wrote my thesis, a memoir, many years ago, on strategic management, I felt that "I am in the zone" feeling. That's when I knew it would be my thing, eventually.

Fennell: At the age of 12, I fell in love with reading – and the art of story-telling... and that's the thing for me, it's not just the story but how the story is told.

WM: *Who are your favourite authors, and what are some of your favourite books?*

Guilbeault: I am not versed in classics at all and, in fact, do not relate to them so much. The ones that resonate with me are the likes of Lionel Shriver's *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *The Post-Birthday World*; Carlos Ruiz Zafon, all of his work; and Cormack McCarthy; of course, there is no choice, Christian Fennell's trilogy, his style of writing. There are more, of course, but I'll stick to those for now.

Fennell: Sheila Watson – she wrote a book called *The Double Hook* and for me, it has been very influential. There's also Joyce, McCarthy, Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Marques, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, O'Connor... etc. And, of course, Nathalie Guilbeault – her writing truly inspires me. She is so very talented.

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– Christian Fennell

WM: *Can you tell us about your previous novels?*

Fennell: My previous novel, *The Fiddler in the Night*, takes the reader on an orphaned teen's journey through the darker recesses of rural America – one which is really quite horrifying and, yet, hopefully compelling. A tragic love story unfolds against a background that is both real and imagined, and one that sees them trying to stay one step ahead of a ruthless killer.

WM: *What is it like to be two authors in a relationship and living together?*



Guilbeault: To piggyback on the previous question, I live with an extraordinary writer, a man who understands the intricacies of life. All that shows in his work, and I can say that living with him as a writer is a continuing learning experience. How better can it get?

We get this question, as you can imagine, all the time. How can I separate the man from the writer? Impossible. It's smooth living (!) knowing you are observed every day (that's what excellent writers have, an uncanny sense of observation) and knowing your downs and ups will be understood and reframed. In the end, we are two humans in sync – that's it.

Fennell: It's the best thing possible – I love it. And well, it's Nat – and so... there's that. We ebb and flow so very well, between these things – being writers and being in a relationship. We each have our own rhythm with respect to when we write – I like the early mornings and Nat, she tends to write later in the day and at night sometimes. We've developed, like a sixth sense, as to when to probe into one another with respect to our work and when to leave it alone, and I think that's important. And, like I said above, she inspires me every day – her courage, honesty, talent, and her determination.

'Writing, while you can plan and have a subject and a goal and all that, is a process that is alive, it lives. I try to dance with it without stepping on its toes...'

– Nathalie Guilbeault

WM: *Writing a short story is not as easy as it seems. What are the essentials to writing a solid short story?*

Guilbeault: Somehow, I know it is a question of time, length of text, and so the writing somehow adjusts. This said, you may intend to write a novel and end up with a short story and vice-versa. Writing, while you can plan and have a subject and a goal and all that, is a process that is alive, it lives. I try to dance with it without stepping on its toes...

Fennell: Mostly, I think it's a question of keeping the storyline focused and not overloading it with too many story variables such as plot or character items. There's freedom, however, in writing short stories, at least for me there is. I like to get away from working on a novel and get back to short stories, as you can explore with them so many different narrative possibilities, and you can get in and get out and have fun while there. With a novel, you're locked into one story and, generally, one writing style... and so, writing short stories is a reprieve from that. I view writing them much like stretching as a writer. My first book was a collection of 22 stories called [Torrents of Our Time](#).

WM: *For those who have a desire to write a novel or short story, what advice would you offer?*

Guilbeault: Start and don't overthink it. And know, once you have gotten all on the page, that's when the real writing may start.

'... what I would tell someone young and just starting out – save your money and go take off, live somewhere interesting and cheap, and just write for the same length of time you would be enrolled in an MFA program.'

– Christian Fennell

Fennell: For me, the main thing is to understand there are no rules – none, except perhaps, make it good, and then make it better. Everything else is on the table. The thing is, you need to develop confidence in yourself to be able to truly do that, and that can only come from writing. Honestly, the path today is to get an MFA in creative writing, and that's fine if you would like to work in the writing industry, as an editor, perhaps, or an



agent, publisher, etc., but really, what I would tell someone young and just starting out – save your money and go take off, live somewhere interesting and cheap, and just write for the same length of time you would be enrolled in an MFA program. The advantage to this is that you will force yourself to learn through doing it, and doing it on your own, which I think can be invaluable. Learning what works and why through your own discovery and not others telling you can be very enriching. At least, it was for me.

WM: *As you are writing your novels, do you ever show your drafts to colleagues and friends for suggestions and feedback?*

Guilbeault: When I do, I have one or two people (brutally honest people) I go to. I have learned not to send anything until it is done or almost done. Not so much for ideas, more to know if they understand and feel the coherence, the flow in the narrative. I may tend to lose sight of the story...

Fennell: No, not until I'm sure it's done and I've gone over it countless times to get in there what I think I need to. Then, I'll hand it in but only after Nat's looked at it. Really, she's the only one.

To learn more about Nathalie Guilbeault and Christian Fennell, visit their websites at:

nathalieguilbeault.com
christianfennell.com

*Images: courtesy of Nathalie Guilbeault and Christian Fennell
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Date Created

August 2022