Northwest Review

Northwest Review is a non-profit literary journal published thrice annually.

Northwest Review Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization registered in the state of Oregon.

ISBN: 978-1-7923-5246-1

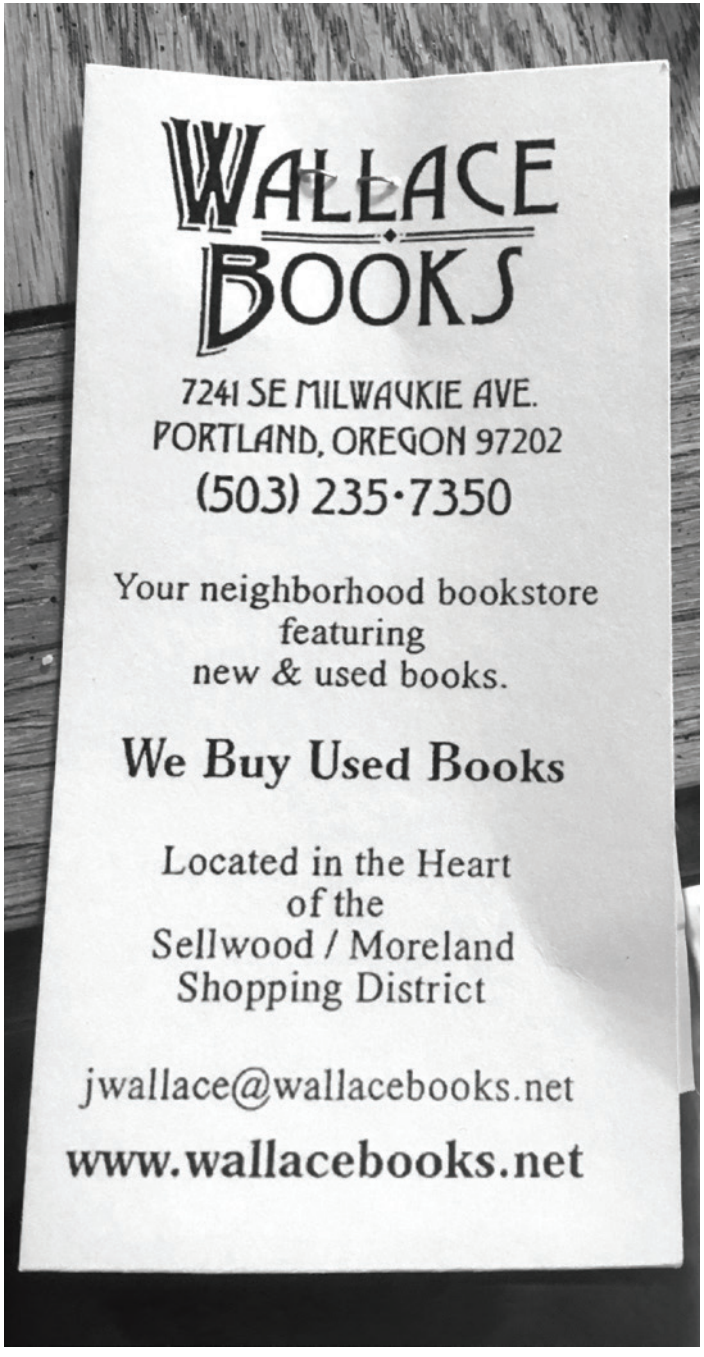
Contact: editor@nwreview.org

www.NWReview.org

Cover Layout and Interior Design by Samantha DeWys

Printed in the United States of America

Alis Volat Propriis



Northwest Review

VOLUME **50** | **03**
SPRING 2021

notice. How to never forget such noticing: sketch
by heart the lines, trace & retrace years until, in
another state, across a river, a return, those marks

in relief we think to call memory that might not be
ours. Yesterday, on the banks of the Rio Grande,
troops called up arrived, pitched camp, strung up

along hundreds of miles at the border concertina
wire, coiled & razored & meant to mean not
a chance. On the banks of the Rio Grande, this

already fierce landscape, where the fencing's crude,
cruel, & even here, all these rooms narrow, & any
welcome muffled. Let's call that tool of division

something else, or better yet, take it down & bring
out the instruments its name echoes & maybe then
we could play a song—all angular, geometric, even sky,

a carved-out shape we've made our own & some
-how shared, despite having disrupted the view
with every last thing we hang in it. On the banks

of the Rio Grande, on the shore of every single
day, the horizon a bleak near-future we'd take back
if we could. If we could look elsewhere, we'd

remember tapestry, the hand-knotted craftsmanship
that recalls how to honor what was. Who we were.
What squares itself can mark another life we might

have walked on, each step a step without fear, edge,
into what was real.

JOHN BENDITT

Memories of an Epidemic

Libra was difficult to manage. Everyone knew that. It was because he lived in two different worlds. One was the outer world of other people. Otto Rank, Freud's real son, says somewhere that reality is everything that resists a person's will. Reality, the world of other people, resisted Libra's will at every turn. The other world was the inner one. In that world nothing resisted Libra's will. Then again, nothing in it was real: He was 40 years old, he had been writing since he was 16, and nothing he wrote had ever been published. His genius was unrecognized. The contrast between these worlds made Libra hard to manage. He was obsequious in the face of the world, as helpless as if he was unreal, without power or form. At the same time he had contempt for the world and everything in it, as if it was the thing that was unreal. He was above the world, mightier than it was, stronger than Time. He never knew which

attitude to indulge at any given moment. His life flickered between them: self-abasing and self-glorying, high up and very low, full and then empty.

Libra was a science journalist, an editor at the most famous science magazine in the United States, in the entire world. He didn't want to be there. It was part of the world he had contempt for. Science was no more than another religion, a cult whose priests wore long white coats. He knew that because his father was a scientist who thought human beings were machines. Machines made of molecules. Organic machines. If anything was a religion, surely that was. Libra had contempt for science and everything in it. And yet he was a science journalist, an editor at the famous magazine with offices high over Madison Avenue in the heart of midtown, offices filled with midcentury modern furniture and people who shivered with cultic feeling. Even there he could not bear to be one of a crowd. The current that ran through him, surging back and forth between self-abasement and contempt for all that is, would not allow that. He had to be the best. And everyone else had to acknowledge it. Or else there would be trouble. Usually there was trouble.

The famous science magazine was shuddering under the pressure of change, like an iceberg about to calve. It had resisted change for decades, preserving its appointed rituals with the greatest faith. But its founders had fallen out. In the oak-panelled room at the Harvard Club where the editors had lunch once a month, the two founders presided at opposite ends of the long table, speaking in code, making hidden references to things that had happened decades before, stinging each other in the silences between the words. Mommy and Daddy are fighting. The children sat between them at the long

table eating the popovers the Harvard Club was famous for. All the children at the long table were editors, like Libra, and unfailingly loyal to one of the two parents: the founding Editor in Chief. They worshipped him. They thought the other one, the founding Publisher with his bow ties, his sharp nose, his bushy eyebrows, was a fool. He wasn't a fool, but the editors loved their leader, the Editor in Chief.

By the time Libra found a way to make everyone acknowledge his genius the founding Editor in Chief was gone. In his letters to the scientists who were the magazine's titular authors he said he was retiring and mentioned, in parentheses, that he was 65, as if that explained everything. In fact, it didn't explain anything. The founding Editor in Chief had been forced out by his old partner the Publisher. The marriage had broken. Both men had gone outside the marriage to find other partners. Outside partners who would buy the magazine they had founded together and force the other partner out. It wasn't a fair contest. The founding Publisher was the savvier man. He came from an old, rich family in St. Louis, originally German, brewers. He was the one who had raised the money to launch the magazine in the beginning. He found a German publishing company to come in and buy everyone's shares. Not long after that he forced his old partner out. After a short interlude he installed his son as the new Editor in Chief. The son was not equipped to run a famous magazine. He wore a bow tie, as his father did, but he didn't have his father's wiliness or any part of his toughness. The son was a substitute, there only because his younger half-brother, son of the Publisher's regal second wife, a smart, handsome boy and the obvious heir, had gone off the road in his car and been killed on his way back to Harvard.

Ordinarily the magazine published eight articles on eight different topics, the topics chosen and balanced according to one of the secret formulae that formed the ritual heart of the magazine's being. But every year in the fall it published an issue in which all the articles were devoted to one topic. In the days of the founding Editor in Chief, when the magazine walked in glory, choosing the topic of the special issue was a jealously guarded prerogative, held by the Editor himself, in latter years in conjunction with his chosen successor, the brilliant young newspaperman from Baltimore who had never been to college. The successor had come to the attention of the Editor in Chief by publishing a review of the famous magazine in the newspaper in Baltimore where he worked. It was a time when newspapers still mattered, in Baltimore and in other cities. The article was written as a book review. The chosen successor wrote book reviews in the time he could spare from his job as a copy editor. The review brought him to the attention of the Editor. It was a job application, the only one he needed.

After the Editor was forced out his chosen successor lasted only one issue. He didn't want to edit the famous magazine, he said, he wanted to write a novel. Libra didn't think he had a novel in him. He thought the successor didn't want to sit in the seat of his famous predecessor after the Editor in Chief was forced out and the Publisher was in charge with the new German owners to back him up. The successor didn't need to be forced out. He didn't fight. He went quietly, keeping his own counsel as usual under his prematurely gray hair. The Publisher wasted no time installing his son the Substitute in the Editor's chair. From there things went downhill quickly. Most of the older editors from the long table at the Harvard Club, the ones who had worked for the Editor for many years and idolized him, resigned or were fired.

Libra was younger. He also loved the Editor in Chief, but he wasn't as much in love with the magazine's rituals as his older colleagues were. Libra thought some icons were made to be broken. All icons, actually. Not that icons don't serve a purpose. But when they have served that purpose, they should be broken. Libra didn't agree with his colleagues that the old Editor in Chief, elegant as he was, could never be replaced. Libra thought there was an obvious replacement: Libra himself, Editor of the Future. So he stayed and established an uneasy peace with the Substitute. The Substitute didn't trust Libra, but he had other, older editors to deal with first. He thought maybe he could work with Libra until he had resolved his other problems. It was a troubled time. The Substitute had the remaining editors line up and come into his office one at a time to profess their loyalty. The ones who wouldn't swear allegiance were fired. Libra didn't have trouble finding the right words. He even believed a few of them. The Substitute was, after all, his boss. And to that extent he deserved Libra's loyalty. At least until Libra could find a way to unseat him, take his place and make the world acknowledge his own genius.

By the spring of 1988 Libra had already edited two articles by Robert Gallo. Each of the eight monthly articles in the famous magazine was a major undertaking. The articles were long—5,000 words or more at a time when magazine articles were getting shorter and shorter, even the articles in the *New Yorker*. The articles in the famous magazine were dense with experiments, with the arcana of physics, astronomy and molecular biology. A scientist wrote a first draft and imagined he had written an excellent article that would need little if any editing. Who, after all, could convey the scientist's work better than the scientist himself? Each of the eight editors then spent a month combing through the tangle of the original manu-

script until he had untangled as many knots as he could. Then he rewrote the article in his own prose, a disembodied version of the voice of the magazine, which was really the voice of the founding Editor in Chief, a man whose motto was *Science is what scientists do*. He stood by that until the very end (age 65).

When the Substitute showed signs of faltering in coming up with a good idea for the single-topic issue for 1988, Libra saw his chance. AIDS was already important. But the subject was full of fear. People didn't want to think about it if they didn't have to. It had taken years to persuade Ronald Reagan even to say the name of the disease in public. It didn't fit into his view of the world, which was formed by Hollywood. The people who were ill were mostly gay men or drug users or Haitians. People hoped it would stay that way. There were some cases of "innocent" people getting the disease. From blood transfusions, for instance. These outliers were the ones featured in efforts to get the world to pay attention. By early 1988 these efforts were starting to get some traction. But most people preferred that the disease stay south of Fourteenth Street behind closed doors.

The science, however, was making pretty good progress. Robert Gallo was one of the reasons. Libra had met Gallo in Bethesda in the hallway outside Gallo's lab at the NIH. Gallo wore white tennis shoes. The white shoes with their thick soles made no noise on the linoleum floor. Libra stood up from where he been sitting on the cover of a long radiator, waiting. Gallo walked up slowly, his body curled around its center like a boxer protecting his middle. He did not look like a man who was comfortable having anyone else interpret him or his work. But he was happy to have his article appear in the pages of the famous science magazine. In those days, even after the Substitute took over, to have an article in the famous magazine was a sign that

a scientist had arrived. A slightly nebulous sign, to be sure. Not as clear and tangible as having your NIH grant renewed. But in some ways more pleasurable. Unlike most other forms of recognition in science, it wasn't just for your peers. At a certain level of success, most scientists dreamed of being really famous.

Each of the eight members of the Board of Editors had his own method for transforming what a scientist had written into the magazine's anonymous voice. High above the roofs on Madison Avenue the editors in their eight offices were monks in the cells of an abbey: cloistered and focused, living a life spent in prayer. Each man had his own method for the delicate negotiation that followed the scheduling of the manuscript for publication. Libra's was to read and reread. He didn't always understand what he was reading, especially at the beginning of the process, especially if the subject was not in biology or social science. He had to remind himself to breathe and stay present with the feeling of discomfort at not understanding. It was a feeling Libra was familiar with. His father was a scientist. The only way Libra could talk to his father for more than a minute was to talk about science. In order to do that Libra had make himself interested in science. And he had.

Gallo's first two articles told how he and his lab had discovered the first two human retroviruses. Retroviruses are viruses that carry RNA rather than DNA as their genetic material. They also carry a curious enzyme known as *reverse transcriptase* that rewrites RNA backward into DNA so that it can be inserted among the genes of the virus's host cell. Reverse transcriptase had been discovered and characterized independently by the American scientists David Baltimore and Howard Temin. For this work Baltimore and Temin had received the Nobel Prize. Gallo was a protégé of Temin. Gallo and Temin were rivals of

Baltimore. In science rivalry often carries the edge of hatred. When Temin and Baltimore won the Nobel Prize, Gallo called Temin: *I guess now we're stuck with him forever*, he said, meaning Baltimore.

The first two human retroviruses discovered by Gallo were for the most part curiosities. They didn't seem to cause significant diseases. But they were interesting because of the fact that they carried the curious enzyme that rewrites RNA into DNA, reversing the usual flow of genetic information, which is from DNA to RNA to protein. It was very interesting that a virus could insert its genetic material into the genome of a human cell it had infected. The process surely had implications for evolution and for understanding cancer. It was already known that certain ancient viral genes in the human genome predisposed both humans and animals to cancer. The human retroviruses, which Gallo named HTLV-I and HTLV-II, were interesting.

Interesting enough that Libra proposed turning Gallo's original manuscript into two feature articles for the magazine. Gallo was interesting. He was a virus hunter. There was a ferocity about him, a ferocious desire to get the job done—regardless of who or what stood in his way. Bob Gallo wasn't neat. He wasn't delicate. His desk was piled with papers. He didn't dress with care. He didn't speak with aristocratic precision, as some of the famous scientists Libra had worked with did. He got up close and let you feel his power. His favorite book was *The Virus Hunters*, a book for adolescents, written in the 1930s, that had influenced a whole generation of scientists. Libra knew *The Virus Hunters* because his father had spoken about it. Libra's father was more elegant than Gallo. More careful. More concerned with the rules. Libra's father wasn't a wolf. Gallo was. That was interesting.

By the time Libra finished editing Gallo's two articles for the magazine, which ran in consecutive issues, human retroviruses were far more than intellectually interesting. They were matters of life and death. A strange illness, debilitating to the immune system, was killing gay men and drug addicts. It had appeared early in the decade out of nowhere. At first it was called GRID: Gay-related Immune Disorder. That was just a description. Science didn't know much about it. No one knew what caused it. There were theories. Immune systems weakened by strange sexual acts or prolonged drug use. The *slow viruses* in flesh that were thought to kill cannibals and perhaps also cause Mad Cow Disease. There were many hypotheses and many researchers working to test them. But no one knew.

One of the researchers working on the disease was Luc Montagnier of the Institut Pasteur in Paris. Montagnier was a loner. He had colleagues, of course, but in a fundamental sense Montagnier was alone most of the time. He was not a particularly distinguished scientist. No one thought much about Luc Montagnier. Certainly not at the NIH, where they did think about Bob Gallo. Gallo was large. His force radiated through the NIH campus in Bethesda outside of Washington. In the scientific community there was a certain hesitation when Montagnier reported in the British journal *Nature* that he had isolated from the lymph glands of gay men infected with the illness a new human retrovirus. Montagnier called his new virus LAV: lymphadenopathy-associated virus. The publication of Montagnier's paper didn't immediately change how scientists thought about AIDS. Gay men with compromised immune systems harbored dozens of pathogens. Some of these free riders were probably novel. Montagnier's new virus might be one of them.

Gallo wasn't dismissive. He had believed from the beginning that the plague would turn out to be caused by a human retrovirus related to the ones he had already claimed for his own. He had been trying to find it and prove it caused the disease for several years. Indeed, when Montagnier published his paper in *Nature*, Gallo believed he had already isolated a new human retrovirus from men suffering from the disease. He called it HTLV-III. But his work was not as clean and definitive as the work he had done on HTLV-I and II. The new virus seemed difficult to grow and characterize, even for Mikulas Popovic, who worked in Gallo's lab and had a wonderful touch in growing viruses. When Montagnier published his LAV paper, Gallo asked for a sample of the virus. The sample arrived and was handled by Popovic. After a time Gallo's lab began getting better and better results working with the virus they called HTLV-III. Shortly after that, Gallo published four papers in *Science*, the great American counterpart of the British journal *Nature*, showing pretty conclusively that the new human retrovirus was the cause of AIDS.

Libra was well aware of all this. Anyone interested in science knew the story. People had strong opinions about what had actually happened between the two laboratories, the one in Paris and the one in Bethesda. Some believed Gallo was guilty of a major scientific crime: Unable to make his own samples work, he had appropriated the virus Montagnier sent from Paris, claimed it as his own, and run all the tests on it that he needed to show it was the cause of AIDS. A reporter from the Chicago *Tribune*, John Crewdson, was of this mind. Crewdson was covering the AIDS epidemic for his newspaper. He was convinced Bob Gallo was a scientific criminal. Crewdson, who had won a Pulitzer Prize, was a bulldog, almost as ferocious as Gallo himself. He was assembling his information, thousands

of documents, hundreds of interviews, getting ready to publish an enormous story in the *Tribune* laying out the case for what he believed to be Gallo's theft. Other people in science weren't sure. Gallo could be abrasive. He wasn't the most generous of scientists where credit was concerned. Maybe he cut a little corner now and then. But they also knew his lab had a remarkable record of working with human retroviruses. Montagnier didn't have anything like that kind of track record. It was hard to know what was really going on.

Libra knew all this. The messiness didn't stop him. In fact, he didn't really think about it. It was time for the famous magazine to select the subject for the single-topic issue of 1988. The Substitute was hesitating. There were no deeply compelling ideas on the table. *Let's do it on AIDs*, Libra spoke up at a staff meeting. He wrote a memo to the Substitute. He was on good terms with Gallo, the leading American AIDS researcher. Gallo would steer him to the other researchers who were needed to fill out the issue. There would be articles on the biology of the virus, the physiology of the illness, the epidemiology of the plague, the steps being taken toward a cure and a vaccine. It would be a journalistic blockbuster, Libra argued. He would invite Gallo and Montagnier to write the lead article together. The bitter rivals would make peace in the pages of the famous magazine. That would be news, even outside the community of scientists. The famous magazine was taken seriously, but it didn't often make news.

The Substitute was intrigued—and wary. Not only did he mistrust Libra, but he was a man easily frightened. He had once issued a blubbering apology and reprinted a cover of the magazine after a single threatening letter from a lawyer representing an author. The Substitute hadn't understood that a

letter like that is simply the beginning of a long and generally amicable conversation. He panicked. But like many easily frightened men, the Substitute liked to think of himself as bold. He called in the Publisher. This was not his father, who had by then been sidelined by the German publishing company. It was the smooth, silver-haired advertising salesman who had been hired by the Germans. Libra was already conniving with the silver-haired Publisher to replace the Substitute with the most highly qualified candidate for Editor in Chief: Libra himself. The Substitute didn't know this yet. At least Libra didn't think he did.

There won't be any advertising, the silver-haired Publisher said. *AIDS is a dirty word. Advertisers will run from it.* The magazine had once been fat with advertising, much of it from computer makers in the days just before everyone with an office had a computer on their desk. But at a certain point the advertising dollars had begun to wither. And then a bunch of new science magazines were launched, which thinned the advertising revenue even further. One of the goals of the single-topic issue was to bring in lots of advertising dollars. AIDS wouldn't do that. But the silver-haired Publisher liked the idea anyway. Ronald Reagan wouldn't be president forever. Attitudes toward AIDS were beginning to change. The next president would have to be more forthcoming on the subject than Reagan had been. The special issue might put the magazine ahead of the curve. Being ahead of the curve was worth dollars. *Let's do it*, he said. The Substitute agreed. Someone else had taken responsibility. That made it possible.

From his office high over Madison Avenue Libra made many calls to Gallo in Bethesda. It was early summer. The single-topic issue was always published in the fall. At the famous

magazine tradition mattered: Things were done the way they had always been done, all the way back to 1948 when the two founders bought the rights to the name of a magazine, already old and famous, that had fallen on hard times. The founding Editor in Chief, impossibly elegant in his three-piece suits and English shoes, bald, hearing aids behind both ears from a childhood bout with scarlet fever, said they had bought the rights to the name of the foundering magazine because a telephone line came with its offices. In the years immediately after the war it had been hard to get a new telephone line in New York. Libra never knew how seriously to take this story. Time had burnished the founding editor's stories, giving them a high shine, a gloss that made it difficult to see the details. In that sense they were like journalism itself. Like all stories.

The table of contents for the issue was taking shape. The names of the authors of the articles for the issue came from Gallo. In his mind Libra thought of them as Gallo's All-Stars. Libra was enamored of Gallo. He could feel Gallo's power. It wasn't just his reputation. Libra had worked with scientists who were more famous than Robert Gallo, scientists who had already won the Nobel Prize and moved on to conquering the eternal mystery of how the brain produces consciousness. They were more famous, but compared to Gallo they seemed fussy, flavorless. Gallo wasn't flavorless. It was interesting to feel his hunger up close, feel that if you got in his way, maybe he would rip your throat out with his bare hands. Everyone Gallo suggested was eager to write for the magazine. They felt the same thing Libra did. The table of contents was firming up. Libra was not surprised. He was a genius, after all, wasn't he? Montagnier he didn't know. But he had to be included. His presence raised the profile of the issue. Made it bigger. The French and the Americans were fighting. This wouldn't be just

an American issue, telling only one side of the story. It would be a global issue, with a perspective from high above the planet, taking in everything.

Gallo and Montagnier had their own reasons for wanting to write an article together—or at least sign it with both their names. Everyone in science knew there was a Nobel Prize waiting in the discovery of the virus that caused the plague. Everyone also knew the people in Stockholm who give out the prize didn't like controversy. The Swedes wanted the prize to be definitive, as clarifying as an act of God. They found it distasteful when the two researchers who were leading candidates for the prize hated each other, claimed credit for themselves and denied the other guy. They perhaps especially didn't like it when there were whispers that one of the two stole the other's virus and claimed it as his own discovery. Nothing was proved. There hadn't been any official investigations. Crewdson hadn't published his magnum opus in the Chicago newspaper. None of Gallo's papers had been retracted. But the situation was messy. The people who gave out the biggest prize in science didn't care for mess.

The famous magazine was the perfect place for Gallo and Montagnier to make up in a way that was public enough to reach Stockholm. The magazine had a circulation of more than 700,000 and translated editions in Europe. It was taken seriously by scientists. Unlike the other popular science magazines, it didn't usually publish fantastic nonsense. And the articles in it didn't have to go through the cumbersome vetting process known as *peer review* that precedes publication in official science journals. All the articles for this issue had to do to be published was to go through Libra. Gallo was more than comfortable with the arrangement. He had a godfather's

sensitivity for who is loyal and who is not. He was sure Libra was loyal. Hadn't he had the idea for the issue after editing not one but two articles by Gallo? Hadn't he picked everyone Gallo suggested to write the other articles, the ones that were to fill out the issue after the big opener by the Frenchman and the American? Bob Gallo wasn't worried.

Montagnier was hesitant. Libra came to him from America. Americans were known to be dismissive of everything French, science included. Libra seemed young and perhaps susceptible to the wolf-like charm and power of Robert Gallo, whom Montagnier admired and feared. Yet the young editor had presented himself as not biased in favor of Gallo. There was something slightly charming about Libra, ingenuous. He seemed to think the thing could be done. And if it was done, there might be something very important in it for Luc Montagnier of the Institut Pasteur. In the end the Nobel prize might go to Montagnier or to Gallo or to both men together. Behind the scenes their allies were already maneuvering on their behalf. But if the two scientists were seen as raging enemies, twin halves of a long-running international scientific feud, the prize might go to no one. That had happened before.

So Montagnier signed on, even though he felt outnumbered and far from where the issue would be written and edited. Montagnier didn't care so much for travel. Being a Frenchman was already cosmopolitan. He liked his home in the suburb of Paris named Robinson after Crusoe, the comfortable house, the one-eyed black cat who liked Luc better than any other member of his household. Montagnier was comfortable in his house in Robinson. Gallo was not a homebody. He had carried on an affair for years with a brilliant young scientist in his field. She had even given him a

daughter. He would never get a divorce. But he wasn't home as much as some husbands were.

The articles were assigned. The authors in Cambridge, Bethesda, California, were writing about how the virus replicates, about retroviruses in animals, how far and how fast the epidemic was spreading, what treatments were available, whether there would ever be a vaccine. *What Science Knows About AIDS*, Libra decided to call it. It was a good name. A strong name. A departure from the names that the magazine's single-topic issues had had in the past. That was good. Things were unfolding according to plan. No advertising was coming in. But they had known it wouldn't. The plan was working. Libra was on course to evict the Substitute and become Editor in Chief of the famous magazine. It wasn't as exciting as being a writer, which was what Libra really wanted. But it was something.

The manuscripts from Gallo and Montagnier arrived. They weren't particularly well written, not good for the large audience of the famous science magazine. That was to be expected. But these manuscripts posed a problem beyond the usual ones: They told different stories. The two scientists hadn't collaborated. In fact, they hadn't spoken at all. In Paris and in Bethesda, Maryland, just outside the capital, they had sat down and written their own versions of the truth. Montagnier had told the story of how he discovered the virus on his own; everything after that was really more or less a footnote, loose ends to be cleaned up after the great single-handed act of discovery. Gallo told the story of how he had discovered the virus just as early as Montagnier, perhaps even earlier, and then had been the only one to show that it actually caused the disease.

Libra read both manuscripts and began the usual process of making notes in the margin, asking questions. Usually this process went well enough. All he had to do was to show by asking questions, over and over, what Libra did not understand in the manuscript. Sooner or later the scientist got the message: An intelligent layperson with an interest in science hadn't understood what the scientist was saying. The manuscript of which the scientist had been so proud, so sure he had hit the mark, would need to be rewritten. This technique wasn't going to solve Libra's problem with Gallo and Montagnier, though. The problem wasn't that the two manuscripts were difficult to understand. It was that they told two different stories, stories that couldn't be told in one article, no matter how long or beautifully illustrated it was. The famous magazine prided itself on its illustrations. The founding editor's theory had been that a reader should be able to understand the entire article by looking at the illustrations and reading the captions, without reading a word of the main text. It was a high bar for illustrations, but once you got the hang of it it could be done.

Libra got Gallo and Montagnier on the phone separately. He didn't usually meet his authors in person. They lived all over the world. At least all over the United States and some parts of western Europe. He would speak to them from his office with the view over the roofs of midtown for an hour or more, asking his questions in good faith but with another message behind the questions. The calls to Gallo and Montagnier weren't about intelligibility. They were about changing the story, reconciling two versions that simply didn't agree. He called them more than once. Neither man budged. Each liked his story, saw no reason to change a word. When Libra suggested that the other author had a different story, both of them laughed, Montagnier laughed softly, like a cat with a French accent. Gallo growled. Time was growing

short. Summer was coming in. The other articles had already arrived. Libra had assigned each of them to one of his colleagues, some seasoned and left over from the old regime, others newly hired by the Substitute to give himself allies and help him feel he wasn't living alone among people who hated him.

The other articles were going well enough. They had all the usual problems of intelligibility, but they would be fine in the end. Libra's article was not going anywhere. Its problems were deeper. Some new method was required, something Libra had never done before. Perhaps something that had never been done in the long history of the famous magazine. Libra decided that he would set aside the manuscripts he had been given and begin again from the origin of the story. He would go to Paris and Bethesda, sit with each man, listen to him tell his story into Libra's tape recorder, then write an article that made one story out of two. He didn't know whether it could be done. He had no choice. If he couldn't do it, the entire issue would crash down around his head in pieces. And if that happened, perhaps he was no genius after all. Perhaps he was more like the Substitute than he could ever admit, even to himself: a sad, weak man trying to live up to the image of a large and famous father. Libra's father was present in everything connected to science. Libra hadn't wanted to be a science journalist. It had happened to him step by step by the force of its own irresistible logic. He knew he had to break out of it, but he wasn't yet strong enough to do that.

To make the two stories into one and save the issue, Libra would have to come to a judgment about who deserved credit and for what. Judgement is a blunt instrument. Reality is silvery, elusive, friable, a large drop of mercury dividing into tiny fragments as soon as it is touched. Libra had to make a judgement that would stand, that both rivals could accept, and that Libra himself thought was true and fair. But how? He would never know what really happened in those laboratories at night. He would never know what happened when Mikulas Popovic, Gallo's right-hand man, famous for his ability to grow virus, handled the sample Montagnier had sent from Paris. Viruses can be tricky, hard to grow. Popovic had been struggling to cleanly grow the samples Gallo's lab had collected from the dying men. Libra would never know whether Popovic had taken Montagnier's sample and used it as his own. And if he had done that, Libra would never know whether it was done intentionally or unintentionally. And if it was done it intentionally, Libra would never know whether Gallo had ordered his colleague to do that or whether Popovic had done it on its own out of frustration at the way his own work was going.

Libra could never know these things for sure. And yet he had to render a judgment. If his brilliant crystalline structure, the famous magazine's single-topic issue for 1988, was not to come crashing down in pieces around him, if he was not to be exposed as a sad aspirant like the Substitute, who wore bow ties because his father wore them, Libra had to make a judgement—and make it strong enough that it was binding on everyone and lasting in the pages of the famous magazine. His old passport was expired. He went to a pharmacy to have a portrait photo taken for a new one, expedited so he could go to Paris and sit with Montagnier in Robinson. In the photo Libra looks as if his balls are being squeezed by a large hand that is not visible in the picture, exerting a steady increasing pressure that is just beginning to make the young editor's eyes protrude.

Libra sat with Montagnier in the French scientist's comfortable house in the Paris suburb. Everything in the house

was soft, like the black cat Montagnier held in his arms as he talked. Soft and yielding—purring, but with claws. Montagnier told his story slowly, pausing, trying to make sure that what he was saying was as accurate as he could make it. He gave credit to others, particularly to the woman who had been his primary collaborator at the Pasteur. But it was clear Montagnier had worked mostly alone, that almost no one had believed in him, that in spite of the fact that he had worked at the famous research institute, he had perhaps hardly even believed in himself. And now, stroking the black cat with one eye in the Paris suburb named for Robinson Crusoe, no one was going to take any of it away. He was finding a way through a world that was against him, moving forward on pads that compressed at each step he took.

Gallo was gruffer, less halting. In the growling voice Libra knew well, he told his story, giving his team—especially Popovic—lots of credit. Having a big lab, having their loyalty, was part of what made Gallo Gallo. Bob Gallo could be difficult and abrasive. He had strong likes and dislikes. He tended to love people or hate them. There was little ground in between. If he didn't like someone, he didn't easily share materials with them—virus, reagents. In science this was bad form. *I never had any problems with him*, Libra's father said when they talked about it. *He was always very respectful with me, very accommodating when I asked for materials.* Libra's father wanted his son to know that he had Gallo's respect. He said this in the same tone he used to tell Libra he had been asked to make a nomination every year for the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

The two men, one in Bethesda, one in Paris, one with the raspy voice of the wolf, one with the soft, French-accented voice of the cat, talked into Libra's square black tape recorder

with its three dials on the front. Libra didn't use the recorder much. He had been a newspaper reporter and after that a magazine editor, but he rarely wanted to record the people he interviewed. The recorder put them off, made them more thoughtful, less interesting. If you didn't use one they often forgot who you were, thought they were just having a conversation. Libra listened, sometimes with a notebook, sometimes without even that. He remembered what he needed to remember, occasionally writing a scrawled note that was a single word. From those scrawled words he later reconstituted sentences, smoother, more complete than the sentences people actually speak. No one had ever complained about Libra's quotes. Now he listened to the two scientists talking into the machine. As he listened he slowly came to his conclusion. When he got back to New York, he listened to the tapes, playing some parts of them again and again. The voices sounded far away within the square black recorder. But it was there, clear enough: an opening into the story.

It had been important to sit with the two men and hear their voices as they talked. As he did that, something had solidified for him. He understood something about who they were. He could imagine himself in their laboratories as they worked—Montagnier alone, Gallo surrounded by people loyal to him, willing to fight, willing to put up a united front. Gallo made you feel as if you were on the team, the winning team. Libra would never be able to get to the truth of whether Gallo had stolen the virus from Montagnier. That would be beyond him as it was beyond everyone else. Judgement remained a blunt instrument, incapable of holding the tiny silver droplets together and capturing the whole trembling mirrored spheric-le. But as he listened and felt the two men, something became clear. He was able to sit down and begin writing the article that would appear as the lead article in the single-topic issue.

In Libra's mind his conclusion was fair. Some people thought of Gallo and Montagnier as *co-discovers* of the virus. That didn't seem right. Montagnier had discovered a new virus, one that hadn't been observed before, in the lymph glands of gay men dying of the plague. He had been the first to publish. In science, that was how credit was given: *Priority*, it was called. He sent samples of his new virus to Gallo, who thought he had found a new virus himself but was struggling to cleanly isolate and grow it. Montagnier deserved to be called the discoverer. But although the Frenchman had made suggestive observations he had been unable to push the work to a conclusion and show that the new virus actually causes the disease. He lacked Gallo's big lab, his experience working with human retroviruses. It seemed to Libra that Gallo was the one who showed conclusively that the new virus was the cause of AIDS and not just another parasite infecting men whose immune systems were dying.

To Libra this seemed like a righteous conclusion. If it was self-serving, that was alright, too. If he had come to the conclusion that one of the two deserved no credit at all, how could he have written the article? There would have been no jointly signed article to write. This way what he wrote could stand in its place as the first article in the issue. He sat down to write in the voice of the two men, together and separately, specifying *what one of us (Gallo) or the other of us (Montagnier)* had done in their labs in Paris and Bethesda. This was different from the way articles in the famous magazine were usually written. In all other cases the articles spoke in the single voice of the team that did the research. Here that was not possible. But a single story did emerge, and a careful reader, Libra thought, would see how he had apportioned credit: Montagnier discovered the virus, Gallo proved it caused AIDS. There was enough credit

for both men. Both findings were necessary, neither on its own was sufficient. Together they were very powerful. They were the core of what science knew about AIDS. Everything else flowed from that.

While all this was happening the Substitute stood back, tugging at the ends of the bow tie he wore because his father wore one. If it all collapsed, he would blame Libra and the silver-haired Publisher. If it succeeded, the Substitute would get much of the credit. The rest of the articles were edited and illustrated and ready for the press. The manuscript of Gallo and Montagnier was sent to Paris and Bethesda. Libra worked the two scientists through the final version on the phone. He gave a little, took a little, stuck to his story, to the conclusion he had come to as he sat listening to the voices of the two scientists, one reticent, one aggressive, telling how the cause of the plague was found. The two scientists were, grudgingly, satisfied. Perhaps the people who give out the Nobel Prizes would also be satisfied, at least enough to give out the prize for this work, which was surely worthy of it.

The issue went to press and came back. It carried no advertising other than *PSA's:* public-service ads that brought in no revenue. The silver-haired Publisher spun that as a good thing, the magazine willing to take a loss in the name of helping people understand the most important public-health crisis of the time. The issue sold more copies than any other issue in the history of the famous science magazine, which under various owners stretched all the way back to the middle of the Nineteenth Century. That was an accomplishment. It made Libra surer than ever that he was destined to be the next Editor in Chief. The magazine needed to be *revitalized*, Libra said, remade under the sure touch of someone who understood it but

wasn't awed by its shibboleths, its fetishes, its rituals. He wrote a memo to that effect and gave it to the silver-haired Publisher, who shared it with some people.

Perhaps the Publisher shared Libra's memo with the wrong people, or with too many people. Perhaps someone had talked too much. Perhaps it was inevitable that things would come out. The silver-haired Publisher was fired, and Libra was left without his protector. Not long afterwards the Substitute called Libra into his office and fired him, too, giving an absurd reason and a year's salary as an incentive to go quietly. Which Libra did, after an angry weekend and a call to a labor lawyer, who crisply explained the facts of employment life in the state of New York. The woman Libra was living with at the time said: *Well, he had to do that.* Meaning that when Libra's machinations came to light the Substitute had no choice but to fire him. After all, can you live with someone in your own office who is plotting to overthrow you and take your job? Maybe not.

The woman Libra was living with may have been right. She was young. She didn't have a lot of experience, but there was something hard in her, a desire to look at life straight on without looking away. That came from her Irish mother. Later she hanged herself in a United Nations hostel in Islamabad. By that time Libra hadn't seen her for two years. Some time after that Libra saw the silver-haired Publisher again, at the home of his friends Barbara and Sidney in Cambridge. Barbara and Sidney invited him to brunch in their luxurious apartment in the condominiums attached to the Charles Hotel. For some reason the Publisher had changed his name from Harry to Bruno. Libra was not interested. The silver-haired magazine Publisher had nothing to offer. What Libra wanted was to be a writer.

BETH MARZONI

Quarantime, Day 139

Mostly something screaming in the trees. Cicadas I guess, & I guess singing
the more accurate term—for the frogs, too, crickets, the dog days' cacophony
I'm trying to listen through or beneath for the horn player a block east I sometimes walk
just to catch wind of, though even that's become rote as any other domestic nothing
I fold & stack into something resembling a day. His scales, my steps: all of it
measured against the body, the bodies the true undersong we're maybe both
humming. Mostly, before, I walked to think, my body the way to move my mind
out of its worried groove & turn the phrase. Mostly, tonight, the same uneven ground
& lights out but for the small pack of men huddled loosely around Anthony Rizzo's
baby face larger than life on the TV mounted in the garage. Mostly, it feels out of proportion:
the screen, the cicadas, the joy these men poorly disguise for the return of a game
of limited gestures that yield dizzying possibilities. Mostly, I'm trying to remember
when there was joy in chance. Mostly, I'm trying to do impossible math.

black vinyl floors covered with banana peels. And
that angry poem full of piss and vinegar and sea
salt and pork rinds and blue corn tortilla chips all
mashed up into this disgusting mass representing
man's inhumanity to man and all the years we wasted
watching bad action flicks on massive flat screen TVs
with cold drinks in our hands. And a poem about
those days when we were impenetrable like lead,
gathering number after number because we thought
it made us safe, because we thought it made us better.
A poem about the heavy ghosts who wandered the
cities at night telling themselves stories about all
the colors they used to see and all the movement they
could feel and all the sound they could hear in those
magnificent days and hours of history when everything
was light. And, finally, one last poem about this table,
this feast and the pastries, glazed and fruit-filled, and
the drinks we lift like spaceships to our lips in celebration
of this shattered Earth.

Contributors

William Archila is the author of The Art of Exile, winner of the 2010 International Latino Book Award, and The Gravedigger's Archaeology, winner of the 2013 Letras Latinas/Red Hen Poetry Prize. He has been published in American Poetry Review, AGNI, Conjunctions, Colorado Review, Los Angeles Review of Books, The Missouri Review, Prairie Schooner, Poetry Northwest, and Poetry, as well as in the anthologies The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNext and The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the US.

Gabrielle Bates is a Southern writer currently living in Seattle, where she works for Open Books: A Poem Emporium and co-hosts the podcast The Poet Salon. Her poems have appeared in the New Yorker, Poetry, Ploughshares, APR, Catapult, and The Offing, among other journals, and her debut collection Judas Goat was recently a finalist for the Bergman Prize. On Twitter: @GabrielleBates.

Olivia Bee is a photographer and director living and homesteading in Eastern Oregon, whilst also traveling the globe for her work. She is intrigued by the beauty of everyday life and how the beauty of memories (real or imagined) touches us.

Lory Bedikian's The Book of Lamenting was awarded the Philip Levine Prize for Poetry. Her newer work is published in Tin House, Border Lines: Poems of Migration (Knopf, 2020), and on Poets.org. Her work has been shortlisted for Ploughshares and appears in the newly released Spring 2021 issue of Boulevard.

John Benditt is a novelist and poet who lives in Brooklyn. His first novel, The Boatmaker, won the Goldberg Prize, the National Jewish Book Award for Debut Fiction.

Monica Berlin is the author of Nostalgia for a World Where We Can Live, Elsewhere, That Small, and with Beth Marzoni, co-author of No Shape Bends the River So Long. The Henke Distinguished Professor of English at Knox College, she also serves as associate director of the Program in Creative Writing.

Lauren Cerand is a jeweler, writer, and often arts and literary publicist who recently returned to New York after a year of living in Italy. Her writing while there was published in Dining in Place, the online food and culture magazine based in Melbourne, and shortlisted for the 2020 Mollie Salisbury Cup memoir writing competition, administered by the Garden Museum in London.