

Stalin and his monstrous inner circle aren't obvious fodder for humour, but the film *The Death of Stalin* is indeed hilarious, without sidestepping the horrors of that regime. Playing the role of Stalin's vain and irresolute deputy Malenkov is actor Jeffrey Tambor, best known for his role as transwoman Maura in Amazon's popular series, *Transparent*. Tambor was Hollywood's darling until he found himself #MeToo'd for sexual harassment by colleagues (he denies it) and fired from the series. Before the accusations surfaced — thanks to John Podhoretz for noting this in the *Weekly Standard* — posters for the Stalin film featured Tambor. After they were publicized, Tambor was “disappeared” from them. Here's rich irony. The archival or literal disappearance of political actors deemed inconvenient is a standard technique in the totalitarian playbook. Yet in democratic America, the film's marketers employed the same purgative strategy for their own socially “incorrect” actor. Tambor was Hollywood's darling until he found himself #MeToo'd (—image—)

Segue to a far creepier story, springing from a similar impulse, which recently unfolded in the Canadian literature community. I'm referring to the strangely ignored “disappearance” of writer Shannon Webb-Campbell. Webb-Campbell is young Mi'kmaq writer whose novel, *Who Took My Sister?*, was published by Book\*hug Press (formerly BookThug, changed because it apparently sounded offensive), and then suddenly depublished. The affair is so inherently satiric that someone should make a based-on-a-real-incident film about it. In fact, if I were a screenwriter, I'd pitch the following storyboard to producers. (—image—)

Mi'kmaq writer Shannon Webb-Campbell, author of *Who Took My Sister?*

Twitter

My working title would be “The Death of Artistic Freedom in Canada.” My protagonist would be named, let's say, Tannon Debb-Wampbell. She would be a magnificent icon of these politically correct times: an Indigenous woman who writes about colonialism and racism and female victims of violence with no deviation from the identity-politics party line. So pure is she in motive, so assiduous in her efforts to respect Indigenous sensibilities, she cannot conceive of what lays in store for her (we'll need an unsettling musical score here). At first, when her beautifully-written novel is published, Tannon is hailed as a social justice hero and invited to star at a prominent literary festival. But at the last minute, her publisher (BookSlug!) announces it is depublishing her. Why? Because a certain Indigenous family didn't like the fact that Debb-Wampbell had written a poem based on the (already public-domain) death of a kinswoman without first soliciting and getting their express permission to do so. Their anger is validated and stoked by activists. Tension mounts. At this point the publishers, knowing what's in store for them on social media if they don't disavow their author, scramble to arrange for the now-toxic writer to be sent to the literary equivalent of the gulag. First, they kiss some rings. They issue a craven apology on their website for not following “Indigenous protocol” before publication, vowing to do a better job in the future. Then BookSlug pulls the book from sale and scrubs the author from their website (suggest closeup on website as it disappears — dramatic). (—image—)

*Who Took My Sister?* was published by Book\*hug Press.

Since this is a “based-on” film, only so many liberties can be taken. Ideally, the story would then have Debb-Wampbell undergo an epiphany. Up to now, she's been a good ideological soldier and a reliable spokeswoman for Indigenous empowerment. But now she has been “eaten by the Revolution,” so to speak, and for plot arc reasons, her character should get “woke” to how she has been betrayed by her presumed comrades. So film-wise, the best resolution would be for Tannon to become an activist for artistic freedom, which she now realizes is far more important than any political cause. She crowdfunds to start her own publishing house, and is tearfully grateful when money pours in from the silent

majority who are totally fed up with political correctness. The film ends with the BookSlug people gnashing their teeth as Tannon wins the Man Booker prize with her reissued novel. Too bad that didn't happen in real life. Shannon Webb-Campbell has thus far not accepted the injustice of the shunning she endured. Indeed, she initially reacted like she deserved it in a long, grovelling letter to the accusing family on her Facebook page, apologizing multiple times for her book, and expressing shame for her apparent "complete act of disregard." So my script's ending is still up in the air, guys. But to be honest, I should add that I don't see any possibility of a government film grant if we stick with the "woke" and "artistic freedom" angle. Thoughts? • Email: [kaybarb@gmail.com](mailto:kaybarb@gmail.com) | Twitter: [BarbaraRKay](#) Barbara Kay: This spring, the fight to protect free speech in Canada continues Barbara Kay: If ideologues are teaching our judges, the public has a need to know Barbara Kay: Getting to the heart of what M-103 was always all about