

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



BOOK CLUB

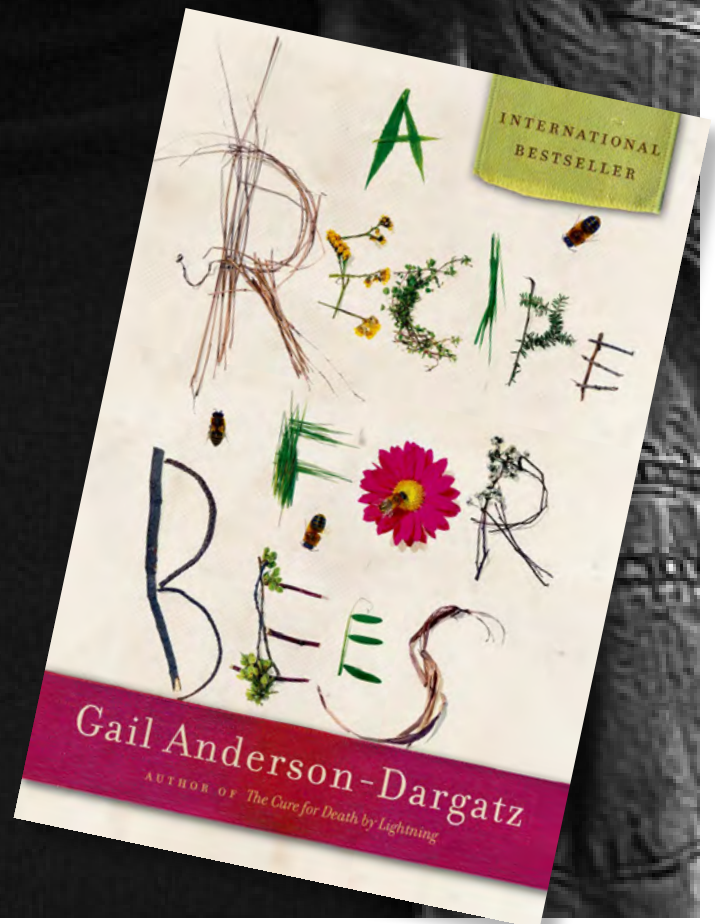
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

# A RECIPE FOR BEES

BY GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ

RECOMMENDED BY GUEST READER ALAN BRADLEY



## **HAPPY NEW YEAR!** **AND WELCOME TO ANOTHER YEAR OF** **THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB**

The Amnesty International Book Club is pleased to announce our January/February 2017 title, *A Recipe for Bees*, by Gail Anderson-Dargatz. This title has been recommended by guest reader Alan Bradley, bestselling author of the *Flavia de Luce* mystery series. In this guide, you'll find Alan's considerate reflection upon the story of Augusta Olson, as well as discussion questions, an Amnesty background section, and an action you can take.

*A Recipe for Bees* is a gently immersive novel that brings you into the past and present life of Augusta Olson as she anxiously awaits the news of her son-in-law's brain surgery. Through her reflections and daily rural life, the reader experiences touches of magic and bee lore, as well as character insights and the rekindling of romance. It is a novel that will trigger you to not only enjoy the world created by Anderson-Dargatz, but also pause between chapters and consider your own life's journey and influences.

From the author of *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, we are certain this New Year selection will please your sensibilities.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or comments you may have. Just send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

### **About Amnesty International**

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.

## About this month's author, **Gail Anderson-Dargatz**

Gail Anderson-Dargatz has been published worldwide in English and in many other languages in more than fifteen territories. Her latest book, *The Spawning Grounds*, is her first literary novel since the 2007 bestseller *Turtle Valley*.

Her first novel, *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, met with terrific acclaim and was a finalist for the prestigious Giller Prize. This international bestseller also won the UK's Betty Trask Award, the BC Book Prize for Fiction and the VanCity Book Prize, and was a finalist for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award.

Gail's second novel, *A Recipe for Bees*, was again a finalist for the Giller Prize and was nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. *A Rhinestone Button* was also a bestseller and Gail's first book, *The Miss Hereford Stories*, was a finalist for the Leacock Medal for Humour.

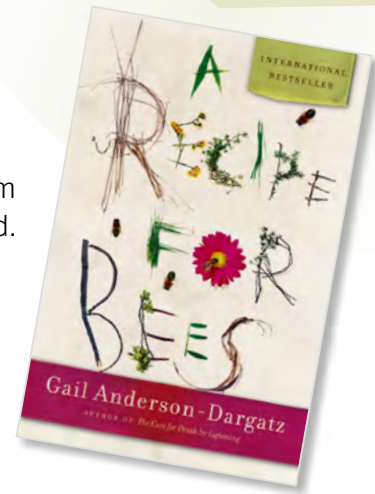
Anderson-Dargatz's fictional style has been called "Margaret Laurence meets Gabriel García Márquez" because her writing tends towards magic realism, but she says the magic in her writing arises not from literary influences, but from family stories of the Thompson Shuswap region, which she carefully transcribed. "My father passed on the rich stories about the region I grew up in, which he heard from the Shuswap men he worked with. And my mother told me tales of ghosts, eccentrics and dark deeds that haunted the area."

[www.gailanderson-dargatz.ca](http://www.gailanderson-dargatz.ca)

@AndersonDargatz

JANUARY 2017

BOOK



## About this month's reader, **Alan Bradley**



Alan Bradley was born in Toronto, Ont. and grew up in the pleasant lakeside town of Cobourg, Ont. After a long career in television broadcasting, he took early retirement from the University of Saskatchewan to write full-

time. He has published many children's stories as well as lifestyle and arts columns in Canadian newspapers. His adult stories have been broadcast on CBC radio and published in various literary journals. He has also written several screenplays and taught university-level courses in screenwriting. He was the recipient of the first Saskatchewan Writers Guild Award for Children's Literature. After writing for several years on the Maltese island of Gozo, Alan Bradley now lives in the Isle of Man.

The first book of his *Flavia de Luce* series, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* won the 2007 Debut

Dagger Award of the Crime Writers Association in the UK; the 2009 Agatha Award for Best First Novel; the 2010 Dily's, awarded by the International Mystery Booksellers Association; the 2010 Macavity Award for the Best First Mystery Novel, given by Mystery Readers International; the Spotted Owl Award, given by the Friends of Mystery, and the 2010 Arthur Ellis Award, given by the Crime Writers of Canada for Best First Novel. *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* has also been nominated for an Anthony Award, and the Barry Award. Besides appearing on the New York Times bestsellers list as a Favorite Mystery of 2009, *Sweetness* was also, among other honours, an American Library Association nominee as Best Book for Young Adults, a Barnes and Noble Bestseller, and was named to the 2009 Bloomer List.

All eight of the *Flavia de Luce* books published to date have been New York Times bestsellers, and are presently published in thirty-nine countries and thirty-six languages.

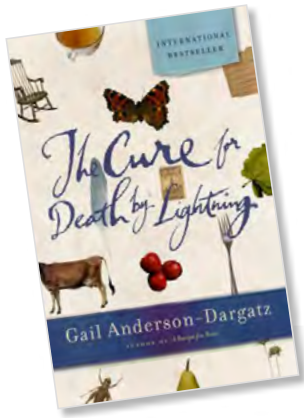
[alanbradleyauthor.com](http://alanbradleyauthor.com)

[Facebook.com/AlanBradleyAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/AlanBradleyAuthor)



## Alan Bradley on *A Recipe for Bees*

*A Recipe for Bees* grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and tossed me, as if I were a sack of grain, back to another time and another place—or two other times, to be perfectly honest.



Although I was never able to articulate it until I read this book—and its predecessor, the admirably-named *The Cure for Death by Lightning*—British Columbia's Shuswap Valley and Shuswap Lake always seemed to me to be haunted by history, both human and otherwise, river arteries flowing among the muscles of the mountains: a vast landscape in which you are now in vast,

spacious cattle country and, moments later, have the feeling you have wandered into a miniature painting on a Chinese folding screen.

It is both volcanic and glacial; a Norwegian fjord transported here for no reason other than human delight.

Gail Anderson-Dargatz makes maximum use of this ambivalence of place and spirit. Her protagonist, Augusta Olsen, dwells in a place on the borderlands of reality: a place somewhere between hither and thither; a place which exists, against all the odds, halfway between now and then; somewhere on the road that runs between Ecstasy and Despair.

If that sounds a bit like *Pilgrim's Progress*, that's because it is. *A Recipe for Bees* is at once allegory and magic realism. On a farm where crows flock to a funeral and the shades of the dead are seen traipsing into the honey house, nothing is as it seems.

*Manny had once told her that the [Indigenous People] living on the other side of the river believed a whole other world existed on the underside of the water, populated by fish and other creatures who acted like humans. Maybe this was where her father had been heading when he'd stepped into the South Thompson and been swept away. Maybe some small craziness inside him had known that the other place was there, underneath all that flowing water, and was bound to discover it. His soggy body had*

*bounced against rocks and surfaced, but maybe the part that was truly her father had come up again in that place where the fish had souls, and it was human beings who were the myths and legends, mere stories told to fish children.*



This natural world is lovingly observed, from the mountain flowers and grasses to the angle and texture of the light in the trees, it's all there: a world created and a world observed, conjured up right before your eyes. From cheating wives to a man with no thumb, Augusta's farm at the junction of the Thompson rivers, North and South, is observed and delineated in detail that would have delighted Chaucer.

Household social detail abounds in the same way it once did in Eaton's mail-order catalogue, from undies to tractor tires and from corn cribs to corn plasters: daily lives restored in lovingly rendered detail.

The bee lore is simply terrific—and by that I mean *terrific!* No other book that I know of makes such practical use of the world of the honey bee: that half-hidden life inside the hive where ultra-violet vision allows these creatures to see into spectra beyond our own.

As a person who shares that ability—at least with one eye—I can partly appreciate the wonders which lie beyond normal human perception.

Smell, too, plays a leading role in the life of the honey bee. With 170 odour receptors in their antennae, scent can serve as both personal ID and Global Positioning System.

And then there's touch. Augusta is taught early in her life the importance of calming the bees by petting the hives, brushing the back of her bare hand affectionately across the frames of the honeycomb, feeling the tickling of the thousand beating wings.

Gail Anderson-Dargatz is one of those rare writers who has the ability to create authentic myth; the ability to inject story directly into our bones. The result, of course, sometimes stings, but then, so does life.

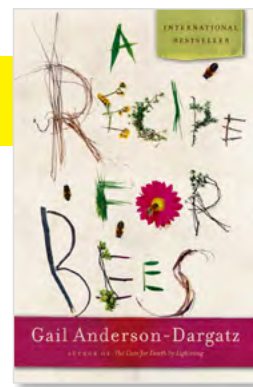
# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON *A RECIPE FOR BEES*

## Questions from Alan Bradley

1. How does Augusta's world parallel the lives of the bees in the hives? How does it differ?
2. In her own world, could Augusta be considered the Queen bee?
3. Which of her considerable characteristics allow Augusta to survive in a world dominated by her mother and father, her husband, her daughter, her father-in-law, and the public opinion of a small town?
4. Augusta's life is profoundly affected by two men who are not part of her family: Joe, and the Reverend. Do they influence her more, or less, than do her relatives? What does she learn from each of these very different men?

## Questions from the Amnesty International Book Club

1. What did you think of *A Recipe for Bees*? Which aspects did you appreciate, and which aspects were most challenging?
2. What is it about life events such as a loved one's surgery that causes us to reflect upon our own lives and legacy? How have you personally been impacted when your loved ones, or yourself, have faced crisis?
3. The touches of magic and bee lore largely come from tradition and passed forward knowledge that the author herself possessed. In considering how these stories impact Augusta's view of the world, can you extrapolate that to your own life? What traditions and lore have you grown up with that impact your world today? Are you conscious of your influences?
4. The author used images of her own parents within the novel. What does mixing fiction and fact bring to the novel that Anderson-Dargatz creates with *A Recipe for Bees*?
5. While so much of the story is set in the past, it cannot help but also leave us considering the future. Consider your legacy in this world and what stories might people tell of you when they one day look back on your life?



## BACKGROUND



The magic realism of *A Recipe for Bees* is charming and brings us a unique understanding of Augusta's world. It also clearly shows the power of 'mystic' storytelling to understand the environment, the characters and the author more deeply.

But lore is not always such a charming thing. In fact, it could also be labelled as misinformation, particularly when "magical" whispers of fortune are perpetuated within a community, which dangerously impacts the well-being and livelihood of those who are different. Such is the case with albinism in Malawi.

People with albinism experience serious discrimination and other abuses of their human rights.

In Malawi, some think that people with albinism have magic in their bones that could make others rich. Many will pay huge sums for their body

parts, allowing a gruesome trade in human bones to flourish. It is a trade driven by the growing demand for these body parts in southern and eastern Africa. The UN noted that from 2000 to 2013 it had received 200 reports of ritual attacks on people with albinism across 15 countries – all in Africa.

**The power of 'mystic' storytelling helps us understand the environment, the characters and the author more deeply. But lore is not always such a charming thing. In fact, it could also be labelled as misinformation.**

Annie Alfred lives in Malawi and loves skipping and school. She is a normal eleven year old. But she and others like her are targeted in a bizarre criminal enterprise: The trade in the use of body parts of those with albinism for use in ritual practices.

Annie starts her day like many others. She wakes up, does her chores and goes to school. "I love school. I love working hard."

Annie is the only child in her school with albinism, a rare genetically inherited condition characterized by white skin and hair.



“People with albinism are normal just like us, but they just don’t have this component of melanin and that’s why their skin colour is different from a black person.” Dr Tenganawo Mzumara, Dermatologist at the Chipatala Cha Ziwengo Hospital.

And, as is often the case with people who are different, Annie is stigmatized.

“They call me names. Some call me “albino,” “napwere,” (tomato left in garden), “mzungo,” (white person).

It’s not just Annie who is the target of abuse, it’s anyone with albinism. They are called poor white man, white man without worth, ghost and more. But there is one name that has more serious implications.

Alex Machila, Vice-President of the Association of People with Albinism in Malawi, explains. “Of recent we have also been called money, because they say a person with albinism – their body parts will always bring fortune in their business.”

It’s this reality that has forced Annie to lose her childhood innocence. “There have been killings and people have chopped off body parts and tried to sell them by saying it’s money.”

This belief has led to some of the most shocking, violent and premeditated of crimes. There were at least 45 crimes in 2015 alone, and at least 18 people killed since November 2014. One of those was Edna’s twin

son. “One of them fished out a “panga” knife and cut me on the arm so I released the child and they took him. The twin asks me, where is my ‘none’ – he just used to call him ‘none’ (brother).”

Traditional practitioners are widely used throughout Malawi.

“Almost half the country believes witchcraft exists. But I was never told by my forefathers that the bones of someone with albinism would enrich somebody. As such, you don’t need to kill people. Why are we killing these people when they could be our clients?” says Shaibu Kafoni, a traditional practitioner in Malawi.

Thanks to protest and media pressure, there is a growing awareness of the issue in Malawi. And, to its credit, the government has responded by sharply increasing the deterrent for the crimes by going on its own awareness raising programs.

But it’s not enough. “An animal like a rhino or an elephant is better protected here than a person with albinism,” says Machila.

Poor housing, lack of security in schools, and the limitations of the law in rural areas are all contributing factors.

“I only have a few words,” says Annie, “but I want people to stop killing albinos because we are staying in fear, afraid to go to school, or to play with friends.”





# FIVE FACTS ABOUT ALBINISM IN MALAWI

The killing of people with albinism in Malawi made global headlines in early 2016. Here are five facts to help you make sense of the story behind them.

## 1 Albinism is an inherited skin condition.

Albinism is an inherited genetic condition that prevents the body from making enough colour, or melanin, to protect the skin from the sun. It affects 1 in 5,000 to 15,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Health Organization. This is higher than in North America and Europe where, says the NGO Under the Same Sun, albinism affects 1 in 20,000 people. About 7,000 to 10,000 people live with albinism in Malawi.

## 2 People with albinism experience serious discrimination and other abuses of their human rights.

In Malawi, some think that people with albinism have magic in their bones that could make others rich. Many will pay huge sums for their body parts, allowing a gruesome trade in human bones to flourish. It is a trade driven by the growing demand for these body parts in southern and eastern Africa. The UN noted that from 2000 to 2013 it had received 200 reports of ritual attacks on people with albinism across 15 countries – all in Africa.

## 3 Harmful beliefs about people with albinism persist across Malawi – and are at the root of the violence directed against them.

“People tell me they will sell me. Someone said I was worth K6 million (US\$10,000). I felt pained that a price tag can be put on me.” – A man with albinism, February 2016.

## 4 Those who attack people with albinism range from criminals to family members.

In January 2016, the mutilated body of Eunice Phiri, aged 53, was found in Kasungu National Park, Zambia. Police said that she had been tricked by her own brother and two other men. They took her on a trip through the national park, where they killed and dismembered her.

## 5 Albinism-related attacks have shot up since 2014.

Attacks on people with albinism have surged in Malawi in recent years. At least 18 people have been killed and five others have gone missing since November 2014. In 2015, there were 45 reports of actual or attempted murder and abduction. Thousands of people – especially children – are living in fear, reluctant to go to school or anywhere else because they could be abducted and killed.

## YOUR REFLECTIONS, YOUR ACTIONS

While *A Recipe for Bees* clearly doesn't touch upon such issues as albinism, it does reveal how much our lives may be influenced by lore. Augusta sees the world through her bee keeper's knowledge, and acknowledges the magic around her. It is through reflection that she really shows the reader her reality.

Challenging ourselves to reflect upon our own personal perceptions can help us understand the world we have created. And at times, challenging those preconceptions is an essential element to progress and protecting human rights.



## TAKE ACTION NOW

### Call on the President of Malawi to stop the killings

Please join our call on Malawi authorities to act immediately to protect people with albinism.

**Please write to the president of Malawi:**

- Start with *Dear President*.
- Describe who you are and what concerns you about the dangers that Annie and other people with albinism face every day.
- Urge him to protect people with albinism and show that crimes against people like Annie will be met with the full weight of the law.

- Send your message to:

Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika,  
Office of the President and Cabinet,  
Private Bag 301, Capital City,  
Lilongwe 3, Malawi

Or sign the online petition at

<http://bit.ly/2hPGczm>

Call on Malawi's Government to step in now.



## TAKING ACTION THROUGH LEGACY

**Leave a gift in your will for human rights**

Be an enduring voice for freedom and justice. Become a Human Rights Guardian. Leaving a gift in your will is a simple yet meaningful way to be an enduring voice for freedom and justice. You can help Amnesty International be there wherever and whenever injustice occurs, and your commitment to protecting the

vulnerable and speaking up for the silenced will live on.

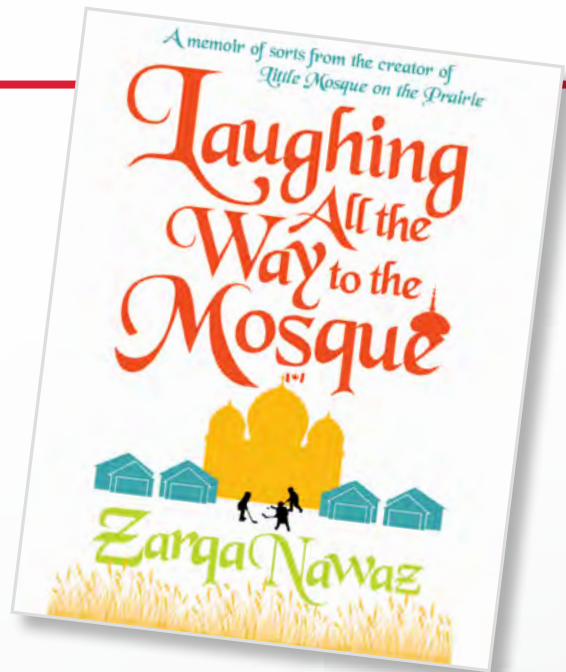
For more information or to confirm that you have left a gift in your will, please leave a message for Hala Al-Madi at 1-800-AMNESTY (1-800-266-3789) or contact her directly at (613) 744-7667, ext 223, or [halmadi@amnesty.ca](mailto:halmadi@amnesty.ca).

## FURTHER READING

Read the report *We are not Animals to be Hunted or Sold - Violence and Discrimination against People with Albinism in Malawi*, by Amnesty International <http://bit.ly/WeAreNotAnimals>

Share the Amnesty International Book Club online    

- Check us out on Facebook at **Amnesty International Book Club**, Twitter at **@AmnestyReads**, Instagram at **@AmnestyBookClub** and join our discussion group on **Goodreads.com**



## COMING UP IN MARCH 2017

### *Laughing All The Way to the Mosque* by Zarqa Nawaz

**Recommended by guest reader Janie Chang**

Zarqa Nawaz has always straddled two cultures. She's just as likely to be agonizing over which sparkly earrings will "pimp out" her hijab as to be flirting with the Walmart meat manager in a futile attempt to secure halal chicken the day before Eid. Television show *Little Mosque on the Prairie* brought Zarqa's own laugh-out-loud take on her everyday culture clash to viewers around the world. And now, in *Laughing All the Way to the Mosque*, she tells the sometimes absurd, sometimes challenging, always funny stories of being Zarqa in a western society.

**The discussion guide will be sent out March 2017.**

In the meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).