

Award Winning Books: Plot Descriptions
(Courtesy of Chapters website)
Current as of July 2018

Man Booker Award Winners

Sanders, George. *Lincoln in Bardo.*

February 1862. The Civil War is less than one year old. The fighting has begun in earnest, and the nation has begun to realize it is in for a long, bloody struggle. Meanwhile, President Lincoln's beloved eleven-year-old son, Willie, after a grave illness, dies and is laid to rest in a Georgetown cemetery. Newspapers report that a grief-stricken Lincoln returns, alone, to the crypt several times to hold his boy's body. From that seed of historical truth, George Saunders spins an unforgettable story of familial love and loss that breaks free of its realistic, historical framework into a supernatural realm both hilarious and terrifying. Willie Lincoln finds himself in a strange purgatory where ghosts mingle, gripe, commiserate, quarrel, and enact bizarre acts of penance. Within this transitional state—called, in the Tibetan tradition, the bardo—a monumental struggle erupts over young Willie's soul.

Beatty, Paul. *The Sellout.*

A biting satire about a young man's isolated upbringing and the racial trial that sends him to the Supreme Court. Born in the "agrarian ghetto" of Dickens-on the southern outskirts of Los Angeles—the narrator was raised by a single father, who leads him to believe that his pioneering work will result in a memoir that will solve his family's financial woes. But when his father is killed in a police shootout, he realizes there never was a memoir. All that's left is the bill for a drive-thru funeral. Fueled by this deceit and the general disrepair of his hometown, the narrator sets out to right another wrong: Dickens has literally been removed from the map to save California from further embarrassment. Enlisting the help of the town's most famous resident—the last surviving Little Rascal, Hominy Jenkins—he initiates the most outrageous action conceivable: reinstating slavery and segregating the local high school, which lands him in the Supreme Court.

Catton, Eleanor. *The Luminaries*.

In January 1866, young Walter Moody lands in a gold-mining frontier town on the west coast of New Zealand to make his fortune and forever leave behind a family scandal. On arrival, he stumbles across a tense gathering of twelve local men who have met in secret to investigate what links three crimes that occurred on a single day: the town's wealthiest man has vanished. An enormous fortune has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk. A prostitute has supposedly tried to end her life. But nothing is quite as it seems. As the men share their stories, what emerges is an intricate network of alliances and betrayals, secrets and lies, that is as exquisitely patterned as the night sky.

Barnes, Julian. *The Sense of An Ending*.

The story of a man coming to terms with the mutable past, Julian Barnes's new novel is laced with his trademark precision, dexterity and insight. It is the work of one of the world's most distinguished writers. Webster and his clique first met Adrian Finn at school. Sex-hungry and book-hungry, they navigated the girl drought of gawky adolescence together, trading in affectations, in-jokes, rumour and wit. Maybe Adrian was a little more serious than the others, certainly more intelligent, but they swore to stay friends forever. Until Adrian's life took a turn into tragedy, and all of them, especially Tony, moved on and did their best to forget. Now Tony is in middle age. He's had a career and a marriage, a calm divorce. He gets along nicely, he thinks, with his one child, a daughter, and even with his ex-wife. He's certainly never tried to hurt anybody. Memory, though, is imperfect. It can always throw up surprises, as a lawyer's letter is about to prove. The unexpected bequest conveyed by that letter leads Tony on a dogged search through a past suddenly turned murky. And how do you carry on, contentedly, when events conspire to upset all your vaunted truths?

Jacobson, Howard. *The Finkler Question.*

Julian Treslove, a professionally unspectacular former BBC radio producer, and Sam Finkler, a popular Jewish philosopher, writer, and television personality, are old school friends. Despite a prickly relationship and very different lives, they've never lost touch with each other, or with their former teacher, Libor Sevcik. Dining together one night at Sevcik's apartment--the two Jewish widowers and the unmarried Gentile, Treslove--the men share a sweetly painful evening, reminiscing on a time before they had loved and lost, before they had prized anything greatly enough to fear the loss of it. But as Treslove makes his way home, he is attacked and mugged outside a violin dealer's window. Treslove is convinced the crime was a misdirected act of anti-Semitism, and in its aftermath, his whole sense of self will ineluctably change.

Mantel, Hilary. *Wolf Hall.*

England, the 1520s. Henry VIII is on the throne, but has no heir. Cardinal Wolsey is his chief advisor, charged with securing the divorce the pope refuses to grant. Into this atmosphere of distrust and need comes Thomas Cromwell, first as Wolsey's clerk, and later his successor. Cromwell is a wholly original man: the son of a brutal blacksmith, a political genius, a briber, a charmer, a bully, a man with a delicate and deadly expertise in manipulating people and events. Ruthless in pursuit of his own interests, he is as ambitious in his wider politics as he is for himself. His reforming agenda is carried out in the grip of a self-interested parliament and a king who fluctuates between romantic passions and murderous rages. *Wolf Hall* is that very rare thing: a truly great English novel, one that explores the intersection of individual psychology and wider politics. With a vast array of characters, and richly overflowing with incident, it peels back history to show us Tudor England as a half-made society, moulding itself with great passion and suffering and courage.

Adiga, Arvind. *White Tiger*.

Balram Halwai. Servant. Philosopher. Entrepreneur. Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, we learn the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life -- having nothing but his own wits to help him along. Born in the dark heart of India, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver for his village's wealthiest man. From behind the wheel of their Honda City car, Balram's new world is a revelation. While his peers flip through the pages of *Murder Weekly*, barter for girls, drink liquor and perpetuate the Great Rooster Coop of Indian society, Balram watches his employers bribe foreign ministers for tax breaks, barter for girls, drink liquor (single-malt whiskey), and play their own role in the Rooster Coop. Balram learns how to siphon gas, deal with corrupt mechanics, and refill and resell Johnnie Walker Black Label bottles (all but one). He also finds a way out of the Coop that no one else inside it can perceive. Balram's eyes penetrate India as few outsiders can: the cockroaches and the call centers; the prostitutes and the worshippers; the ancient and Internet cultures; the water buffalo and, trapped in so many kinds of cages that escape is (almost) impossible, the white tiger. Balram teaches us that religion doesn't create virtue, and money doesn't solve every problem -- but decency can still be found in a corrupt world, and you can get what you want out of life if you eavesdrop on the right conversations.

Enright, Anne. *The Gathering*.

The Gathering is a portrait of a large Irish family haunted by the past. The nine surviving children of the Hegarty clan are gathering in Dublin for the wake of their wayward brother, Liam, drowned in the sea. His sister, Veronica, collects the body and keeps the dead man company, guarding the secret she shares with him--something that happened in their grandmother's house in the winter of 1968. As Enright traces the line of betrayal and redemption through three generations, she shows how memories warp and secrets fester. *The Gathering* is a family epic, about love and disappointment, about how fate is written in the body, not in the stars.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss.*

In the northeastern Himalayas, at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga, in a crumbling isolated house, there lives a cantankerous old judge who wants nothing more than to retire in peace. But with the arrival of his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, and the son of his chatty cook trying to stay a step ahead of U.S. immigration, this is far from easy. When a Nepalese insurgency threatens the blossoming romance between Sai and her handsome tutor, they are forced to consider their colliding interests. And the judge must revisit his own journey and his role in a world of conflicting desires-every moment holding out the possibility of hope or betrayal.

Hollinghurst, Alan. *The Line of Beauty.*

In the summer of 1983, twenty-year-old Nick Guest moves into an attic room in the Notting Hill home of the Feddens: conservative Member of Parliament Gerald, his wealthy wife Rachel, and their two children, Toby-whom Nick had idolized at Oxford-and Catherine, highly critical of her family's assumptions and ambitions. As the boom years of the eighties unfold, Nick, an innocent in the world of politics and money, finds his life altered by the rising fortunes of this glamorous family. His two vividly contrasting love affairs, one with a young black clerk and one with a Lebanese millionaire, dramatize the dangers and rewards of his own private pursuit of beauty, a pursuit as compelling to Nick as the desire for power and riches among his friends.

Martel, Yan. *The Life of Pi.*

The son of a zookeeper, Pi Patel has an encyclopedic knowledge of animal behaviour and a fervent love of stories. At sixteen, his family emigrates from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship, along with their zoo animals bound for new homes. The ship sinks. Pi finds himself alone in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and Richard Parker, a 450-pound Bengal tiger. Soon the lion has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with the animal for 227 days while lost at sea. When they finally reach the coast of Mexico, Richard Parker flees to the jungle, never to be seen again. The Japanese authorities who interrogate Pi refuse to believe his story and

press him to tell them "the truth." After hours of coercion, Pi tells a second story, a story much less fantastical, much more conventional--but is it more true?

Pierre, Dbc. *Vernon God Little.*

Named as one of the 100 Best Things in the World by GQ magazine, the riotous adventures of Vernon Gregory Little in small-town Texas and beachfront Mexico mark one of the most spectacular, irreverent and bizarre debuts of the 21st century so far. Its depiction of innocence and simple humanity (all seasoned with a dash of dysfunctional profanity) in an evil world is never less than astonishing. The only novel to be set in the barbecue sauce capital of Central Texas, *Vernon God Little* suggests that desperate times throw up the most unlikely of heroes.

Carey, Peter. *The True History of the Kelly Gang.*

In *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, the legendary Ned Kelly speaks for himself, scribbling his narrative on errant scraps of paper in semiliterate but magically descriptive prose as he flees from the police. To his pursuers, Kelly is nothing but a monstrous criminal, a thief and a murderer. To his own people, the lowly class of ordinary Australians, the bushranger is a hero, defying the authority of the English to direct their lives. Indentured by his bootlegger mother to a famous horse thief (who was also her lover), Ned saw his first prison cell at 15 and by 26 had become the most wanted man in the wild colony of Victoria, taking over towns and defying the law until he was finally captured and hanged.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Blind Assassin.*

The novel opens with these simple, resonant words: "Ten days after the war ended, my sister drove a car off the bridge." They are spoken by Iris, whose terse account of her sister Laura's death in 1945 is followed by an inquest report proclaiming the death accidental. But just as the reader expects to settle into Laura's story, Atwood introduces a novel-within-a-novel. Entitled *The Blind Assassin*, it is a science fiction story told by two unnamed lovers who meet in dingy backstreet rooms. When we return to Iris, it is through a 1947 newspaper article announcing the discovery of a sailboat carrying the dead body of her husband, a distinguished industrialist.

Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace.*

After years of teaching Romantic poetry at the Technical University of Cape Town, David Lurie, middle-aged and twice divorced, has an impulsive affair with a student. The affair sours; he is denounced and summoned before a committee of inquiry. Willing to admit his guilt, but refusing to yield to pressure to repent publicly, he resigns and retreats to his daughter Lucy's isolated farm. For a time, his daughter's influence and the natural rhythms of the farm promise to harmonize his discordant life. But the balance of power in the country is shifting. He and Lucy become victims of a savage and disturbing attack which brings into relief all the faults in their relationship.

McEwan, Ian. *Amsterdam.*

On a chilly February day, two old friends meet in the throng outside a crematorium to pay their last respects to Molly Lane. Both Clive Linley and Vernon Halliday had been Molly's lovers in the days before they reached their current eminence. Clive is Britain's most successful modern composer; Vernon is editor of the quality broadsheet *The Judge*. Gorgeous, feisty Molly had had other lovers, too, notably Julian Garmony, foreign secretary, a notorious right-winger tipped to be the next prime minister. In the days that follow Molly's funeral, Clive and Vernon will make a pact with consequences neither has foreseen. Each will make a disastrous moral decision, their friendship will be tested to its limits, and Julian Garmony will be fighting for his political life.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things.*

Set mainly in Kerala, India, in 1969, *The God of Small Things* is the story of Rahel and her twin brother Estha, who learn that their whole world can change in a single day, that love and life can be lost in a moment. Armed only with the invincible innocence of children, they seek to craft a childhood for themselves amid the wreckage that constitutes their family.

Doyle, Roddy. *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha.*

Patrick Clarke is a ten-year-old boy trying to make sense of his world. He is confused. His Ma and Da fight too much. School seems like a joke. And love, though it has a good reputation, seems pretty cruel. Paddy sees everything, but has trouble understanding it all. His story is an exuberant romp through the triumphs, indignities, and troublemaking detours of an Irish childhood.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient.*

This novel traces the intersection of four damaged lives in an abandoned Italian villa at the end of World War II. The nurse Hana, exhausted by death, obsessively tends to her last surviving patient. Caravaggio, the thief, tries to re-imagine who he is, now that his hands are hopelessly maimed. The Indian sapper Kip searches for hidden bombs in a landscape where nothing is safe but himself. And at the centre of his labyrinth lies the English patient, nameless and hideously burned, a man who is both a riddle and a provocation to his companions--and whose memories of suffering, rescue, and betrayal illuminate this book like flashes of heat lightning.

Byatt, A.S. *Possession.*

Possession traces a pair of young academics--Roland Michell and Maud Bailey--as they uncover a clandestine love affair between two long-dead Victorian poets. Interwoven in a mesmerizing pastiche are love letters and fairytales, extracts from biographies and scholarly accounts, creating a sensuous and utterly delightful novel of ideas and passions.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day.*

It is the summer of 1956, and Stevens, an aging English butler, embarks on a holiday that will take him deep into the countryside and into his past. For the first time in three decades, Stevens looks back on his long life of service and finds himself confronting the dark undercurrent in the life of his previous employer, Lord Darlington, and his own conflicted relationship with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton. *The Remains of the Day* is Kazuo Ishiguro's beautiful and haunting meditation on life between the wars, love denied, and the high cost of duty.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight`s Children.*

Saleem Sinai was born at midnight, the midnight of India's independence, and finds himself mysteriously 'handcuffed to history' by the coincidence. He is one of 1,001 children born at the midnight hour, each of them endowed with an extraordinary talent -- and whose privilege and curse it is to be both master and victims of their times. Through Saleem's gifts -- inner voices and a wildly sensitive sense of smell -- we are drawn into a fascinating family saga set against the vast, colourful background of the India of this century.

Giller Prize Winning Books

Redhill, Michael. *Bellevue Square*.

Jean Mason has a doppelganger. She's never seen her, but others swear they have. Apparently, her identical twin hangs out in Kensington Market. Jean's a grown woman with a husband and two kids, as well as a thriving bookstore in downtown Toronto, and she doesn't rattle easily—not like she used to. But after two customers insist they've seen her double, Jean decides to investigate. She begins at the crossroads of Kensington Market: a city park called Bellevue Square. Although she sees no one who looks like her, it only takes a few visits to the park for her to become obsessed with the possibility of encountering her twin in the flesh. With the aid of a small army of eccentric locals who hang around in the park, she expands her surveillance, making it known she'll pay for information or sightings. But when some of them start disappearing, she fears her alleged double has a sinister agenda. Unless Jean stops her, she and everyone she cares about will face a fate much stranger than death.

Alexis, Andre. *Fifteen Dogs*.

I wonder, said Hermes, what it would be like if animals had human intelligence. - I'll wager a year's servitude, answered Apollo, that animals - any animal you like - would be even more unhappy than humans are, if they were given human intelligence. And so it begins: a bet between the gods Hermes and Apollo leads them to grant human consciousness and language to a group of dogs overnighing at a Toronto veterinary clinic. Suddenly capable of more complex thought, the pack is torn between those who resist the new ways of thinking, preferring the old 'dog' ways, and those who embrace the change. The gods watch from above as the dogs venture into their newly unfamiliar world, as they become divided among themselves, as each struggles with new thoughts and feelings.

Michaels, Sean. *Us Conductors*.

Us Conductors takes us from the glamour of Jazz Age New York to the gulags and science prisons of the Soviet Union. On a ship steaming its way from Manhattan back to Leningrad, Lev Termen writes a letter to his "one true love", Clara Rockmore, telling her the story of his life. Imprisoned in his cabin, he recalls his early years as a scientist, inventing the theremin and other electric marvels, and the Kremlin's dream that these inventions could be used to infiltrate capitalism itself. Instead, New York infiltrated Termen - he fell in love with the city's dance clubs and speakeasies, with the students learning his strange instrument, and with Clara, a beautiful young violinist. Amid ghostly sonatas, kung-fu tussles, brushes with Chaplin and Rockefeller, a

mission to Alcatraz, the novel builds to a crescendo: Termen's spy games fall apart and he is forced to return home, where he's soon consigned to a Siberian gulag. Only his wits can save him, but they will also plunge him even deeper toward the dark heart of Stalin's Russia.

Ferguson, Will. 419.

A car tumbles through darkness down a snowy ravine. A woman without a name walks out of a dust storm in sub-Saharan Africa. And in the seething heat of Lagos City, a criminal cartel scours the Internet, looking for victims. Lives intersect. Worlds collide. And it all begins with a single email: "Dear Sir, I am the daughter of a Nigerian diplomat, and I need your help." Will Ferguson takes readers deep into the labyrinth of lies that is "419," the world's most insidious Internet scam. When Laura Curtis, a lonely editor in a cold northern city, discovers that her father has died because of one such swindle, she sets out to track down—and corner—her father's killer. It is a dangerous game she's playing, however, and the stakes are higher than she can ever imagine. Woven into Laura's journey is a mysterious woman from the African Sahel with scars etched into her skin and a young man who finds himself caught up in a web of violence and deceit. And running through it, a dying father's final words: "You, I love."

Edugyan, Esi. *Half Blood Blues*.

Paris, 1940. A brilliant jazz musician, Hiero, is arrested by the Nazis and never heard from again. He is twenty years old. He is a German citizen. And he is black. Fifty years later, his friend and fellow musician, Sid, must relive that unforgettable time, revealing the friendships, love affairs and treacheries that sealed Hiero's fate. From the smoky bars of pre-war Berlin to the salons of Paris -- where the legendary Louis Armstrong makes an appearance -- Sid, with his distinctive and rhythmic German-American slang, leads the reader through a fascinating world alive with passion, music and the spirit of the resistance. *Half-Blood Blues*, the second novel by an exceptionally talented young writer, is an entrancing, electric story about jazz, race, love and loyalty, and the sacrifices we ask of ourselves, and demand of others, in the name of art.

Skibsrud, Johanna. *The Sentimentalists.*

Haunted by the vivid horrors of the Vietnam War, exhausted from years spent battling his memories, Napoleon Haskell leaves his North Dakota trailer and moves to Canada. He retreats to a small Ontario town where Henry, the father of his fallen Vietnam comrade, has a home on the shore of a man-made lake. Under the water is the wreckage of what was once the town -- and the home where Henry was raised.

When Napoleon's daughter arrives, fleeing troubles of her own, she finds her father in the dark twilight of his life, and rapidly slipping into senility. With love and insatiable curiosity, she devotes herself to learning the truth about his life; and through the fog, Napoleon's past begins to emerge.

MacIntyre, Linden. *The Bishop's Man.*

The year is 1993 and Father Duncan MacAskill stands at a small Cape Breton fishing harbour a few miles from where he grew up. He does not yet know that his already strained faith is about to be tested by his interactions with a troubled boy, 18-year-old Danny MacKay. Known to fellow priests as the "Exorcist" because of his special role as clean-up man for the Bishop of Antigonish, Duncan has a talent for coolly reassigning deviant priests while ensuring minimal fuss from victims and their families. It has been a lonely vocation, but Duncan is generally satisfied that his work is a necessary defence of the church. All this changes when lawyers and a policeman snoop too close for the bishop's comfort. Duncan is assigned a parish in the remote Cape Breton community of Creignish and told to wait it out. This is not the first time Duncan has been sent away for knowing too much: decades ago, the displeased bishop sent a more idealistic Duncan to Honduras for voicing suspicions about a revered priest. It was there that Duncan first tasted forbidden love, with the beautiful Jacinta. It was also there that he met the courageous Father Alfonso, who taught him more about spiritual devotion than he had ever known back home. But when an act of violence in Honduras shook Duncan to his core, he returned home a changed man, willing to quietly execute the bishop's commands. Now, decades later in Cape Breton, Duncan claims to his concerned sister Effie that isolation is his

preference. But when several women seek to befriend him, along with some long-estranged friends, Duncan is alternately tempted and unnerved by their attentions. Drink becomes his only solace. Attempting to distract himself with parish work, Duncan takes an interest in troubled young Danny, whose good-hearted father sells Duncan a boat he names "The Jacinta." To Duncan's alarm, he discovers that the boy once spent time with an errant priest who had been dispatched by Duncan himself to Port Hood. Duncan begins to ask questions, dreading the answers. When tragedy strikes, he knows that he must act. But will his actions be those of a good priest, or an all too flawed man?

Boyden, Joseph. *Through Black Spruce.*

Through Black Spruce is a novel of contemporary Aboriginal life, full of the dangers and harsh beauty of both forest and city. When beautiful Suzanne Bird disappears after moving to the city, her sister Annie, a loner and hunter, is compelled to go in search of her. To follow her sister's trail, Annie must leave behind their uncle, Will, a man haunted by loss. While Annie travels from Toronto to New York, from modelling studios to A-list parties, Will encounters dire troubles. Both eventually come to painful discoveries about the inescapable ties of family.

Hay, Elizabeth. *Late Nights on Air.*

Harry Boyd, a hard-bitten refugee from failure in Toronto television, has returned to a small radio station in the Canadian North. There, in Yellowknife, in the summer of 1975, he falls in love with a voice on air, though the real woman, Dido Paris, is both a surprise and even more than he imagined. Dido and Harry are part of the cast of eccentric, utterly loveable characters, all transplants from elsewhere, who form an unlikely group at the station. Their loves and longings, their rivalries and entanglements, the stories of their pasts and what brought each of them to the North, form the centre. One summer, on a canoe trip four of them make into the Arctic wilderness (following in the steps of the legendary Englishman John Hornby, who, along with his small party, starved to death in the barrens in 1927), they find the balance of love shifting, much as the balance of power in the North is being changed by the proposed

Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline, which threatens to displace Native people from their land.

Lam, Vincent. *Blood Letting and Miraculous Cures.*

Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures welcomes readers into a world where the most mundane events can quickly become life or death. By following four young medical students and physicians - Ming, Fitz, Sri and Chen - this is a riveting, eye-opening account of what it means to be a doctor. Deftly navigating his way through 12 interwoven short stories, the author explores the characters' relationships with each other, their patients, and their careers. Lam draws on his own experience as an emergency room physician and shares an insider's perspective on the fears, frustrations, and responsibilities linked with one of society's most highly regarded occupations.

Munro, Alice. *Runaway.*

The stories in this collection are about women of all ages and circumstances. The runaway of the title story is a young woman who is incapable of leaving her husband. In another, a country girl emerging into the larger world via a job in a resort hotel discovers in a single moment of insight the limits and lies of passion. Three stories concern the same woman--in the first, she escapes from teaching at a girls' school into a wild love affair; in the second, she returns with her child to the home of her parents, whose marriage she finally begins to examine; and in the last, her vanished child turns up caught in the grip of a religious cult. In these and other stories Alice Munro's understanding of the people about whom she writes makes their lives as real as our own.

Vassanji, M.G. *The Inbetween World of Wikram Lall.*

The novel begins in 1953, with eight-year-old Vikram Lall a witness to the celebrations around the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, just as the Mau Mau guerilla war for independence from Britain begins to gain strength. In a land torn apart by idealism, doubt, political upheaval and terrible acts of

violence, Vic and his sister Deepa must find their place among a new generation. Neither colonists nor African, neither white nor black, the Indian brother and sister find themselves somewhere in between in their band of playmates: Bill and Annie, British children, and Njoroge, an African boy. These are the relationships that will shape the rest of their lives. We follow Vikram through the changes in East African society, the immense promise of the fifties and sixties. But when that hope is betrayed by the corruption and violence of the following decades, Vic is drawn into the Kenyatta government's orbit of graft and power-broking. Njoroge, his childhood friend, can abandon neither the idealism of his youth nor his love for Vic's sister Deepa. But neither the idealism of the one nor the passive cynicism of the other can avert the tragedies that await them.

Clarke, Austin. *The Polished Hoe.*

When an elderly Bimshire village woman calls the police to confess to a murder, the result is a shattering all-night vigil that brings together elements of the African diaspora in one epic sweep. Set on the post-colonial West Indian island of Bimshire in 1952, "The Polished Hoe" unravels over the course of 24 hours but spans the lifetime of one woman and the collective experience of a society informed by slavery. As the novel opens, Mary Mathilda is giving confession to Sergeant, a police officer she has known all her life. The man she claims to have murdered is Mr. Belfeels, the village plantation owner for whom she has worked for more than thirty years. Mary has also been Mr. Belfeels' mistress for most of that time and is the mother of his only son, Wilberforce, a successful doctor. What transpires through Mary's words and recollections is a deep meditation about the power of memory and the indomitable strength of the human spirit.

Wright, Richard. *Clara Callan.*

Clara Callan is set in the middle of the Great Depression, and chronicles the lives of two sisters. Clara is a spinsterish school teacher whose quiet life in a small Ontario town masks a passion for love and adventure. Nora, her flighty and very pretty sister, travels to New York where she lands a starring

role in a radio soap opera. Written in diary and letter form, the novel brilliantly reveals the sisters' stories, as their lives become increasingly complex. With Wright's extraordinary eye for small but telling details, the world of the thirties comes vividly to life, an era when show business was in its infancy, and the Dionnes grabbed the headlines, when Automats were a futuristic way of buying fast food and the Women's Auxiliary still ruled the social roost in small towns everywhere. Above all, Wright's portrait draws a world of young women -- pre-divorce, pre-Pill, pre-liberation, where judgment weighed heavily upon anyone who defied convention.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Anil's Ghost*.

The setting is Sri Lanka. Steeped in centuries of cultural achievement and tradition, the country has been ravaged in the late twentieth century by bloody civil war. This novel follows a woman's attempt to piece together the lost life of a victim of war. Anil Tissera, born in Sri Lanka but educated in England and the U.S., is sent by an international human rights group to participate in an investigation into suspected mass political murders in her homeland. Working with an archaeologist, she discovers a skeleton whose identity takes Anil on a fascinating journey that involves a riveting mystery. What follows, in a novel rich with character, emotion, and incident, is a story about love and loss, about family, identity and the unknown enemy. It is also a quest to unlock the hidden past.

Richards, David Adams. *Mercy Among the Children*.

As a boy, Sydney Henderson thinks he has killed Connie Devlin when he pushes him from a roof for stealing his sandwich. He vows to God he will never again harm another if Connie survives. Connie walks away, laughing, and Sydney embarks upon a life of self-immolating goodness. In spite of having educated himself with such classics as Tolstoy and Marcus Aurelius, he is not taken seriously enough to enter university because of his background of dire poverty and abuse, which leads everyone to expect the worst of him. His saintly generosity of spirit is treated with suspicion and contempt, especially when he manages

to win the love of beautiful Elly. Unwilling to harm another in thought or deed, or to defend himself against false accusations, he is exploited and tormented by others in this rural community, and finally implicated in the death of a 19-year-old boy. Lyle Henderson knows his father is innocent, but is angry that the family has been ridiculed for years, and that his mother and sister suffer for it. He feels betrayed by his father's passivity in the face of one blow after another, and unable to accept his belief in long-term salvation. Unlike his father, he cannot believe that evil will be punished in the end. While his father turns the other cheek, Lyle decides the right way is in fighting, and embarks on a morally empty life of stealing, drinking and violence.

Burnard, Bonnie. *A Good House*.

A Good House begins in 1949 in Stonebrook, Ontario, home to the Chambers family. The postwar boom and hope for the future colour every facet of life: the possibilities seem limitless for Bill, his wife Sylvia, and their three children. In the fifty years that follow, the possibilities narrow. Sylvia's untimely death marks her family indelibly but in ways only time will reveal. Paul's perfect marriage yields an imperfect child. Daphne unabashedly follows an unconventional path, while Patrick discovers that his happiness requires a series of compromises. Bill confronts the onset of old age less gracefully than anticipated, and throughout, his second wife, Margaret, remains, surprisingly, the family anchor.

Munro, Alice. *The Love of a Good Woman*.

Eight stories about what people will do for love, and the unexpected routes their passion will force them to take. A prim, old landlady in Vancouver with a crime of passion lurking in her past. A young mother with a secret life who abandons her children to be with her lover. A country doctor in the 1960s discovered by his daughter to be helping desperate women, his "special patients." These and other fascinating characters weave their way through stories that track the changes that time brings to families, lovers and even to friends who share old, intimate secrets about the "prostration of love." The rich layering that gives Alice Munro's work such a strong sense of life is particularly apparent in the title story, in which the

death of a local optometrist brings an entire community into focus - from the preadolescent boys who find his body to the man who probably killed him, to the woman who must decide what to do about what she might know.

Richler, Mordecai. *Barney's Version*.

Ebullient and perverse, thrice married, Barney Panofsky has always clung to two cherished beliefs: life is absurd and nobody truly ever understands anybody else. But when his sworn enemy publicly states that Barney is a wife abuser, an intellectual fraud and probably a murderer, he is driven to write his own memoirs. Charged with comic energy and a wicked disregard for any pieties whatsoever, *Barney's Version* is a brilliant portrait of a man whom Mordecai Richler has made uniquely memorable for all time. It is also an unforgettable love story, a story about family and the riches of friendship.

Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace*.

In *Alias Grace*, Atwood takes us back in time and into the life of one of the most enigmatic and notorious women of the nineteenth century. Grace Marks has been convicted for her involvement in the vicious murders of her employer, Thomas Kinnear, and Nancy Montgomery, his housekeeper and mistress. Some believe Grace is innocent; others think her evil or insane. Now serving a life sentence, Grace claims to have no memory of the murders. Dr. Simon Jordan, an up-and-coming expert in the burgeoning field of mental illness, is engaged by a group of reformers and spiritualists who seek a pardon for Grace. He listens to her story while bringing her closer and closer to the day she cannot remember. What will he find in attempting to unlock her memories? Is Grace a female fiend? A bloodthirsty femme fatale? Or is she the victim of circumstances?

Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance*.

A Fine Balance is set in mid-1970s India. It tells the story of four unlikely people whose lives come together during a time of political turmoil soon after the government declares a "State of Internal Emergency." Through days of bleakness and hope, their circumstances - and their fates - become inextricably linked in

ways no one could have foreseen. Mistry's prose is alive with enduring images and a cast of unforgettable characters.

Vassanji, M.J. *The Book of Secrets.*

The Book of Secrets is a novel of generations and the sweep of history which begins in 1988 in Dar es Salaam when the 1913 diary of a British colonial officer is found in a shopkeeper's back room. The diary enflames the curiosity of a retired schoolteacher, Pius Fernandes, whose obsession with the stories it contains gradually connects the past with the present. Inhabiting the story is a memorable cast of characters, part of an Asian community in East Africa, whose lives and fates we follow over the course of seven decades. Rich in detail and description, Vassanji's novel magnificently conjures setting and the realm of eras past as it explores the state of living in exile from one's home and from oneself.

Governor General's Literary Award Winning Books

Hynes, Joel Thomas. *We'll All be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night.*

Scrappy tough guy and three-time loser Johnny Keough is going a little stir-crazy awaiting trial for an alleged assault charge involving his girlfriend, Madonna. Facing three to five years in a maximum-security prison, Johnny knows this might just be the end of the road. But when Madonna doesn't show up for court due to a fatal accident, shell-shocked Johnny seizes his unexpected "clean slate" as a sign from above and embarks on an epic hitchhiking journey across Canada to deliver her ashes to a fabled beach on the outskirts of Vancouver.

Johnny's wanderings see him propelled in and out of the driver's seat of stolen cars, knocking heads with cagey cops, nearly decapitated by a moose, coming face-to-face with his incarcerated biological father in a Kingston jail, and finding surprising connections with strangers on the lonely road west. But most of all, he revisits the choices and mistakes of his past—his relationships with his adoptive father and a cousin who meant the world to him, and his first real chance at love with the woman who is now lost to him.

King, Thomas. *The Back of the Turtle.*

In *The Back of the Turtle*, Gabriel returns to Smoke River, the reserve where his mother grew up and to which she returned with Gabriel's sister. The reserve is deserted after an environmental disaster killed the population, including Gabriel's family, and the wildlife. Gabriel, a brilliant scientist working for Domidion, created GreenSweep, and indirectly led to the crisis. Now he has come to see the damage and to kill himself in the sea. But as he prepares to let the water take him, he sees a young girl in the waves. Plunging in, he saves her, and soon is saving others. Who are these people with their long black hair and almond eyes who have fallen from the sky?

Catton, Eleanor. *The Luminaries.*

In January 1866, young Walter Moody lands in a gold-mining frontier town on the west coast of New Zealand to make his fortune and forever leave behind a family scandal. On arrival, he stumbles across a tense gathering of twelve local men who have met in secret to investigate what links three crimes that occurred on a single day: the town's wealthiest man has vanished. An enormous fortune has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk. A prostitute has supposedly tried to end her life. But nothing is quite as it seems. As the men share their stories, what emerges is an intricate network of alliances and betrayals, secrets and lies, that is as exquisitely patterned as the night sky.

Spalding, Linda. *The Purchase.*

In 1798, Daniel Dickinson, a young Quaker father and widower, leaves his home in Pennsylvania to establish a new life. He sets out with two horses, a wagonful of belongings, his five children, a 15-year-old orphan wife, and a few land warrants for his future homestead. When Daniel suddenly trades a horse for a young slave, Onesimus, it sets in motion a struggle in his conscience that will taint his life forever, and sets in motion a chain of events that lead to two murders and the family's strange relationship with a runaway slave named Bett.

de Witt, Patrick. *The Sisters Brothers.*

Hermann Kermit Warm is going to die. The enigmatic and powerful man known only as the Commodore has ordered it, and his henchmen, Eli and Charlie Sisters, will make sure of it. Though Eli doesn't share his brother's appetite for whiskey and killing, he's never known anything else. But their prey isn't an easy mark, and on the road from Oregon City to Warm's gold-mining claim outside Sacramento, Eli begins to question what he does for a living - and whom he does it for. With *The Sisters Brothers*, Patrick deWitt pays homage to the classic Western, transforming it into an unforgettable comic tour de force. Filled with a remarkable cast of characters - losers, cheaters, and ne'er-do-wells from all stripes of life - and told by a complex and compelling narrator, it is a violent, lustful odyssey through the underworld of the 1850s frontier that

beautifully captures the humour, melancholy, and grit of the Old West and two brothers bound by blood, violence, and love.

Pullinger, Kate. *The Mistress of Nothing.*

Lady Duff Gordon is the toast of Victorian London society. But when her debilitating tuberculosis means exile, she and her devoted lady's maid, Sally, set sail for Egypt. It is Sally who describes, with a mixture of wonder and trepidation, the odd menage (marshalled by the resourceful Omar) that travels down the Nile to a new life in Luxor. When Lady Duff Gordon undoes her stays and takes to native dress, throwing herself into weekly salons, language lessons and excursions to the tombs, Sally too adapts to a new world, which affords her heady and heartfelt freedoms never known before. But freedom is a luxury that a maid can ill-afford, and when Sally grasps more than her status entitles her to, she is brutally reminded that she is mistress of nothing.

Ricci, Nino. *The Origin of Species.*

The setting is Montreal during the turbulent mid-1980's. Hiding out in a seedy apartment near the Concordia campus is Alex Fratarcangeli ("Don't worry I can't even pronounce it myself"), a somewhat oafish 30-something grad student. Though tender and generous at heart, Alex leads a life devoid of healthy relationships, ashamed in particular of the damage he has done to the women with whom he has been romantically entangled. Plagued by the sensation that his entire life is a fraud, Alex attends daily sessions with a lack-luster psychoanalyst in an attempt to shake off the demon of depression. Scarred by a distant father and a dangerous relationship with his ex Liz, and consumed by a floundering dissertation linking Darwin's theory of evolution with the history of human narrative, Alex has come to view love and other human emotions as "evolutionary surplus, haphazard neural responses that nature had latched onto for its own insidious purposes." Then a convergence of brave souls enter Alex's life, forcing him to recognize the possibility of meaningful connections. There is his neighbour Esther, whose multiple sclerosis is progressing rapidly, yet who gamely attacks every day she has left. There is the elegant Felix, an older gay man whose own health status is in question yet who remains resolutely generous, and Maria, returning to fight for

human rights in her native El Salvador, knowing she will face certain peril. Along the way Alex meets others whose struggles with their own demons are not so successful, and sometimes tragic. When he receives a letter from Ingrid, the beautiful woman he knew years ago in Sweden, notifying him of the existence of his five year old son. Alex is gripped by a paralytic terror. Whenever Alex's thoughts grow darkest, he is compelled to recall Desmond, the British professor with dubious credentials whom he met years ago in the Galapagos. Treacherous and despicable, wearing his ignominy like his rumpled jacket, Desmond nonetheless caught Alex in his thrall and led him to some life-altering truths during their weeks exploring Darwin's islands together. It is only now that Alex can begin to comprehend these unlikely life lessons, and see a glimmer of hope shining through what he had thought was meaningless.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Divisadero*.

In the 1970s in Northern California, near Gold Rush country, a father and his teenage daughters, Anna and Claire, work their farm with the help of Coop, an enigmatic young man who makes his home with them. Theirs is a makeshift family, until it is riven by an incident of violence-of both hand and heart-that sets fire to the rest of their lives. *Divisadero* takes us from the city of San Francisco to the raucous backrooms of Nevada's casinos and eventually to the landscape of south-central France. It is here, outside a small rural village, that Anna becomes immersed in the life and the world of a writer from an earlier time-Lucien Segura. His compelling story, which has its beginnings at the turn of the century, circles around "the raw truth" of Anna's own life, the one she's left behind but can never truly leave. And as the narrative moves back and forth in time and place, we discover each of the characters managing to find some foothold in a present rough-hewn from the past.

Behrens, Peter. *The Law of Dreams*.

The Law of Dreams is haunting in its depiction of a young man's perilous journey from innocence to experience. Follow Fergus O'Brien from Ireland to Liverpool and Wales during the Great Potato Famine of 1847, and then beyond -- to a harrowing Atlantic crossing to Montreal. On the way, Fergus loses his

family, discovers a teeming world beyond the hill farm where he was born, and experiences three great loves. Behrens's incandescent language illuminates a lost world and a searing experience that continues to haunt the ancestral memory of millions.

Toews, Miriam. *A Complicated Kindness.*

Sixteen-year-old Nomi Nickel is trapped in East Village, Manitoba, a small town whose population is Mennonite: "the most embarrassing sub-sect of people to belong to if you're a teenager." Ministered with an iron fist by Nomi's uncle Hans, East Village is a town that's tall on rules and short on fun. Nomi struggles to cope with the back-to-back departures three years earlier of Tash, her beautiful and mouthy sister, and Trudie, her warm and spirited mother. She lives with her father, Ray, a sweet yet hapless school teacher whose love is unconditional but whose parenting skills amount to benign neglect. Father and daughter deal with their losses in very different ways. Ray, a committed elder of the church, seeks to create an artificial sense of order by reorganizing the city dump late at night. Nomi, on the other hand, favours chaos as she tries to blunt her pain through "drugs and imagination." Together they live in a limbo of unanswered questions. Nomi's first person narrative shifts effortlessly between the present and the past. Within the present, Nomi goes through the motions of finishing high school while flagrantly rebelling against Mennonite tradition. She hangs out on Suicide Hill, hooks up with a boy named Travis, goes on the Pill, wanders around town, skips class and cranks Led Zeppelin. But the past is never far from her mind as she remembers happy times with her mother and sister - as well as the painful events that led them to flee town. In a voice both defiant and vulnerable, Nomi offers hilarious and heartbreaking reflections on life, death, family, faith and love.

Wright, Richard. *Clara Callan.*

Set in the middle of the Great Depression, Clara Callan chronicles the lives of two sisters. Clara is a spinsterish school teacher whose quiet life in a small Ontario town masks a passion for love and adventure. Nora, her flighty and very pretty sister, travels to New York where she lands a starring

role in a radio soap opera. Written in diary and letter form, the novel reveals the sisters' stories, as their lives become increasingly complex. The world of the thirties comes vividly to life, an era when show business was in its infancy, and the Dionnes grabbed the headlines, when Automats were a futuristic way of buying fast food and the Women's Auxiliary still ruled the social roost in small towns everywhere. Above all, Wright's portrait draws a world of young women -- pre-divorce, pre-Pill, pre-liberation, where judgment weighed heavily upon anyone who defied convention.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Anil's Ghost*.

The setting is Sri Lanka. Steeped in centuries of cultural achievement and tradition, the country has been ravaged in the late twentieth century by bloody civil war. As in *The English Patient*, Ondaatje's latest novel follows a woman's attempt to piece together the lost life of a victim of war. Anil Tissera, born in Sri Lanka but educated in England and the U.S., is sent by an international human rights group to participate in an investigation into suspected mass political murders in her homeland. Working with an archaeologist, she discovers a skeleton whose identity takes Anil on a fascinating journey that involves a riveting mystery. What follows, in a novel rich with character, emotion, and incident, is a story about love and loss, about family, identity and the unknown enemy. And it is a quest to unlock the hidden past - like a handful of soil analyzed by an archaeologist, the story becomes more diffuse the farther we reach into history.

Cohen, Matt. *Elizabeth and After*.

Elizabeth and After is the touching and resonant story of Carl McKelvey, who returns to the small town of West Gull, Ontario, to mend his family's legacy of alcohol and violence, to reconnect with his young daughter, and to reconcile with the spirit of his beautiful mother, killed several years earlier in a tragic accident. *Elizabeth and After* skillfully wraps us up in the lives of Carl and his family, and the other 683 odd residents of this snowy Canadian hamlet.

Urquhart, Jane. *The Underpainter*.

The Underpainter is a novel of interwoven lives in which the world of art collides with the realm of human emotion. It is the story of Austin Fraser, an American painter now in his later years, who is haunted by memories of those whose lives most deeply touched his own, including a young Canadian soldier and china painter and the beautiful model who becomes Austin's mistress. Spanning decades, the setting moves from upstate New York to the northern shores of two Great Lakes; from France in World War One to New York City in the '20s and '30s. The book brilliantly depicts the landscape and the geography of the imagination.

Vanderhaeghe, Guy. *The Englishman's Boy*.

The Englishman's Boy links together Hollywood in the 1920s with one of the bloodiest, most brutal events of the nineteenth-century Canadian West - the Cypress Hills Massacre. Vanderhaeghe's rendering of the stark, dramatic beauty of the western landscape and of Hollywood in its most extravagant era - with its visionaries, celebrities, and dreamers - provides vivid background for scenes of action, adventure, and intrigue. Richly textured, evocative of time and place, this is an unforgettable novel about power, greed, and the pull of dreams that has at its centre the haunting story of a young drifter - "the Englishman's boy" - whose fate, ultimately, is a tragic one.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient*.

With unsettling beauty and intelligence, Ondaatje's novel traces the intersection of four damaged lives in an abandoned Italian villa at the end of World War II. The nurse Hana, exhausted by death, obsessively tends to her last surviving patient. Caravaggio, the thief, tries to re-imagine who he is, now that his hands are hopelessly maimed. The Indian sapper Kip searches for hidden bombs in a landscape where nothing is safe but himself. And at the centre of his labyrinth lies the English

patient, nameless and hideously burned, a man who is both a riddle and a provocation to his companions—and whose memories of suffering, rescue, and betrayal illuminate this book like flashes of heat lightning.

Weibe, Rudy. *A Discovery of Strangers.*

A Discovery of Strangers tells of the meeting of two civilizations - the first encounter of the nomadic Dene people with Europeans - in an imaginative reconstruction of John Franklin's first map-making expedition in 1819-21 in what is now the Northwest Territories. At the heart of the novel is a love story between twenty-two-year-old midshipman Robert Hood, the Franklin expedition's artist, and a fifteen-year-old Yellowknife girl known to the British as Greenstockings.

Mistry, Rohinton. *Such a Long Journey.*

It is Bombay in 1971, the year India went to war over what was to become Bangladesh. A hard-working bank clerk, Gustad Noble is a devoted family man who gradually sees his modest life unravelling. His young daughter falls ill; his promising son defies his father's ambitions for him. He is the one reasonable voice amidst the ongoing dramas of his neighbours. One day, he receives a letter from an old friend, asking him to help in what at first seems like an heroic mission. But he soon finds himself unwittingly drawn into a dangerous network of deception. *Such A Long Journey* charts the journey of a moral heart in a turbulent world of change.

Riccki, Nino. *Lives of the Saints.*

When young Vittorio Innocente's mother, Cristina, is bitten by a snake during an encounter with a blue-eyed stranger in the family barn, the superstitions and prejudices rampant in their small Italian town immediately roil to the surface. But the worst is yet to come for the independent-minded Cristina. Eight months pregnant and unable to abide her treatment in the village any longer, Cristina books a passage to Canada for herself and Vittorio, although it will not be to join her irascible husband Mario, who sailed there when Vittorio was an infant.

Richards, David Adams. *Nights Below Station Street.*

Nights Below Station Street is a powerful tale of resignation and struggle, fierce loyalties and compassion. Set in a small mill town in northern New Brunswick, it draws one into the lives of a community of people who live there, including: Joe Walsh, isolated and strong in the face of a drinking problem; his wife, Rita, willing to believe the best about people; and their teenage daughter Adele, whose nature is rebellious and wise, and whose love for her father wars with her desire for independence. Richards' unforgettable characters are linked together in conflict, and in articulate love and understanding. Their plight as human beings is one we share.

Munro, Alice. The Progress of Love.

A divorced woman returns to her childhood home where she confronts the memory of her parents' confounding yet deep bond. The accidental near-drowning of a child exposes the fragility of the trust between children and parents. A young man, remembering a terrifying childhood incident, wrestles with the responsibility he has always felt for his younger brother. Drawing us into the most intimate corners of ordinary lives, Munro reveals much about ourselves, our choices, and our experiences of love.

Atwood, Margaret. The Handmaid's Tale.

In the world of the near future, who will control women's bodies? Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. She may leave the home of the Commander and his wife once a day to walk to food markets whose signs are now pictures instead of words because women are no longer allowed to read. She must lie on her back once a month and pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, because in an age of declining births, Offred and the other Handmaids are only valued if their ovaries are viable. Offred can remember the days before, when she lived and made love with her husband Luke; when she played with and protected her daughter; when she had a job, money of her own, and access to knowledge. But all of that is gone now....

Vanderhaeghe, Guy. Man Descending.

These stories reveal an astonishing range, with settings that vary from a farm on the Canadian prairies to Bloomsbury in London, from a high-rise apartment to a mine-shaft. Vanderhaeghe shows us the world through the eyes of an eleven-year-old boy as convincingly as he reveals it through the eyes of an old man approaching senility. Moving from the hilarious farce of teenage romance all the way to the numbing tragedy of life in a ward for incurables, these twelve stories inspire belief, admiration, and enjoyment, and come together to form a vibrant chronicle of human experience from a gifted observer of life's joys and tribulations.

Findley, Timothy. *The Wars*.

The year is 1915. Robert Ross, a young Canadian, enlists as an officer. He is not yet twenty as he leaves his cloistered home in Toronto to cross the Atlantic to Ypres and the horrors of the battlefield. He finds himself in a nightmare world of trench warfare, of mud and smoke, of chlorine gas and rotting corpses. In this world gone mad, Robert Ross performs a last desperate act to declare his commitment to life in the midst of death. *The Wars* is about the war that would end all wars; it is, therefore, the story of all wars. And at its centre is the compassionate portrait of a young man whose smouldering inner conflict bursts into flame as he is swept into the most traumatic war in history.

Engel, Marian. *Bear*.

After five years buried like a mole amid the decaying maps and manuscripts of an historical institute, Lou is given a welcome field assignment: to catalogue a nineteenth-century library, improbably located in an octagonal house on a remote island in northern Ontario. Eager to reconstruct the estate's curious history, she is unprepared for her discovery that the island has one other inhabitant: a bear. Lou's imagination is soon overtaken by the estate's historical occupants, whose fascination with bear lore becomes her own. Lou is led along a path of emotional and sexual self-discovery, as she explores the limits of her own animal nature through her bizarre and healing relationship with the bear.

Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners.*

The Diviners is the story of Morag Gunn, an independent woman who refuses to abandon her search for love. Follow Morag from her lonely childhood in a small prairie town, through her demeaning marriage and escape from it into writing, fiction, and finally back to rural Canada, where she faces a different challenge - the necessity to understand, and let go of, the daughter she loves. Throughout, Morag is forced to test her strength against the world - and at last achieves the life she had determined would be hers. Laurence has created a figure whose experience emerges as that of all dispossessed people in search of their birthright, an inspirational symbol of courage and endurance.

Wiebe, Rudy. *The Temptations of Big Bear.*

"What can that mean, I and my family will have a 'reserve of one square mile'?" So asks Big Bear of Governor Morris, come to impose a square treaty on the round, buffalo-covered world of the Plains Cree. As the buffalo vanish and the tension builds to the second Riel Rebellion, Big Bear alone of the prairie chiefs keeps up pressure for a better treaty by refusing to choose a reserve. He argues, "If any man has the right to put a rope around another man's neck, someday someone will get choked." It is Big Bear's story - and the story of Wandering Spirit, of Kitty McLean and John McDougall-that is told in this novel with rare and penetrating power. Exploring Big Bear's isolated struggle, Wiebe has encompassed in one creative sweep not only his hero's struggle for integrity, but the whole range and richness of the Plains culture. Here is the giant circle of the prairie horizon, and the joy, the sorrow, the pain and the triumph and the violence of unconquerable human beings faced with destruction.

Davies, Robertson. *The Manticore.*

Ramsay is a man twice born, a man who has returned from the hell of the battle-grave at Passchendaele in World War I decorated with the Victoria Cross and destined to be caught in a no man's land where memory, history, and myth collide. In *Fifth Business*, the reader learns of his apparently innocent involvement in such innocuous events as the throwing of a snowball or the teaching

of card tricks to a small boy in the end prove neither innocent nor innocuous.

Richler, Mordecai. *St. Urbain's Horseman.*

St. Urbain's Horseman is a complex, moving, and wonderfully comic evocation of a generation consumed with guilt - guilt at not joining every battle, at not healing every wound. Jake Hersh is a film director of modest success, a faithful husband, and a man in disgrace. His alter ego is his cousin Joey, a legend in their childhood neighbourhood in Montreal. Nazi-hunter, adventurer, and hero of the Spanish Civil War, Joey is the avenging horseman of Jake's impotent dreams. When Jake becomes embroiled in a scandalous trial in London, England, he puts his own unadventurous life on trial as well, finding it desperately wanting as he steadfastly longs for the Horseman's glorious return. Irreverent, deeply felt, as scathing in its critique of social mores as it is uproariously funny.

Laurence, Margaret. *A Jest of God.*

Main character Rachel Cameron is a woman struggling to come to terms with love, with death, with herself and her world. Trapped in a milieu of deceit and pettiness - her own and that of others - Rachel longs for love, and contact with another human being who shares her rebellious spirit. Through her summer affair with Nick Kazlik, a schoolmate from earlier years, she learns at last to reach out to another person and to make herself vulnerable.

Moore, Brian. *The Luck of Ginger Coffey.*

No, for wasn't this the chance he had always wanted? Wasn't he at long last an adventurer, a man who had gambled all on one horse, a horse coloured Canada, which now by hook or by crook would carry him to fame and fortune?" Meet Ginger Coffey, the title character of a novel that is the robust, funny, sometimes tragic tale of one unforgettable Irish immigrant to Montreal. Buoyed by unflinching optimism, Ginger confronts the ugly realities of life in the New World. Jobs are scarce, people often inhuman. And dreams of glory do not offer any lasting escape from the hard pinch of poverty. In spite of the battering he receives in his struggle for survival, Ginger

Coffey emerges a true hero - the "little" man who can be defeated by anything, except life itself.

MacLennan, Hugh. *The Watch that Ends the Night.*

George and Catherine Stewart share the worry of Catherine's illness, which could cause her death at any time, and the memory of Jerome Martell, Catherine's first husband and George's closest friend. Martel, a brilliant doctor passionately concerned with social justice, is presumed to have died in a Nazi prison camp. His sudden return to Montreal precipitates the central crisis of this novel. Hugh MacLennan takes the reader into the lives of his three characters and back into the world of Montreal in the thirties, when politics could send an idealist across the world to Spain, France, Auschwitz, Russia, China, and back, finally, to his old home.

Roy, Gabrielle. *The Tin Flute.*

The Tin Flute, Gabrielle Roy's first novel, is a classic of Canadian fiction. Imbued with Roy's unique brand of compassion and compelling understanding, this moving story focuses on a family in the Saint-Henri slums of Montreal, its struggles to overcome poverty and ignorance, and its search for love. The novel is an affecting story of familial tenderness, sacrifice, and survival during the Second World War.

Ringuet (psedo.). *Thirty Acres.*

One of the most important books to come out of Quebec, Thirty Acres traces the course of one man's life as he enters into the age-old rhythms of the land and of the seasons. At the same time, it is a novel on a grand social scale, spanning and documenting the tumultuous half-century in which a new, industrial urban society crowded out Quebec's traditional rural one.

Pulitzer Prize Winning Books

Greer, Andrew Sean. *Less*.

A struggling novelist travels the world to avoid an awkward wedding in this hilarious Pulitzer Prize-winning novel full of "arresting lyricism and beauty" (New York Times Book Review).

Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*.

Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhood—where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. Matters do not go as planned—Cora kills a young white boy who tries to capture her. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted. In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor—engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora and Caesar's first stop is South Carolina, in a city that initially seems like a haven. But the city's placid surface masks an insidious scheme designed for its black denizens. And even worse: Ridgeway, the relentless slave catcher, is close on their heels. Forced to flee again, Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom. Like the protagonist of Gulliver's Travels, Cora encounters different worlds at each stage of her journey—hers is an odyssey through time as well as space.

Doerr, Anthony. *All the Light We Cannot See*.

Marie-Laure lives with her father in Paris near the Museum of Natural History, where he works as the master of its thousands of locks. When she is six, Marie-Laure goes blind and her father builds a perfect miniature of their neighborhood so she can memorize it by touch and navigate her way home. When she is twelve, the Nazis occupy Paris and father and daughter flee to the walled citadel of Saint-Malo, where Marie-Laure's reclusive great-uncle lives in a tall house by the sea. With them they carry what might be the museum's most valuable and dangerous jewel.

In a mining town in Germany, the orphan Werner grows up with his younger sister, enchanted by a crude radio they find. Werner becomes an expert at building and fixing these crucial new instruments, a talent that wins him a place at a brutal academy for Hitler Youth, then a special assignment to track the resistance. More and more aware of the human cost of his intelligence, Werner travels through the heart of the war and, finally, into Saint-Malo, where his story and Marie-Laure's converge.

Tartt, Donna. *The Goldfinch.*

The Goldfinch is the story of Theo, a boy who survives a terrible tragedy - a terrorist bombing that takes the life of his mother - he emerges from the rubble with a priceless painting, a mesmerizing image that will obsess, haunt, and inspire him. And that's just the beginning. This is a story wrapped in big ideas, about fate, friendship, and hope, but Theo's journey in all its twists and turns is always intimate, a small life on a big stage.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad.*

Bennie is an aging former punk rocker and record executive. Sasha is the passionate, troubled young woman he employs. Here Jennifer Egan brilliantly reveals their pasts, along with the inner lives of a host of other characters whose paths intersect with theirs. With music pulsing on every page, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a startling, exhilarating novel of self-destruction and redemption.

Harding, Paul. *Tinkers.*

An old man lies dying. As time collapses into memory, he travels deep into his past where he is reunited with his father and relives the wonder and pain of his impoverished New England youth. At once heartbreaking and life affirming, *Tinkers* is an elegiac meditation on love, loss, and the fierce beauty of nature.

Strout, Elizabeth. *Olive Kitteridge.*

At times stern, at other times patient, at times perceptive, at other times in sad denial, Olive Kitteridge, a retired schoolteacher, deplores the changes in her little town of Crosby, Maine, and in the world at large, but she doesn't always recognize the changes in those around her: a lounge musician haunted by a past romance; a former student who has lost the will to live; Olive's own adult child, who feels tyrannized by her irrational sensitivities; and her husband, Henry, who finds his loyalty to his marriage both a blessing and a curse. As the townspeople grapple with their problems, mild and dire, Olive is brought to a deeper understanding of herself and her life-sometimes painfully, but always with ruthless honesty.

Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.*

Oscar is a sweet but disastrously overweight ghetto nerd who from the New Jersey home he shares with his old world mother and rebellious sister, dreams of becoming the Dominican J.R.R. Tolkien and, most of all, finding love. But Oscar may never get what he wants. Blame the curse that has haunted Oscar's family for generations, following them on their epic journey from Santo Domingo to the USA. Encapsulating Dominican-American history.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road.*

A father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. It is cold enough to crack stones, and when the snow falls it is grey. The sky is dark. Their destination is the coast, although they don't know what, if anything, awaits them there. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food-- and each other. *The Road* boldly imagines a future in which no hope remains, but in which the father and his son, "each the other's world entire," are sustained by love. The novel is an unflinching meditation on the worst and the best that we are capable of: ultimate destructiveness, desperate tenacity, and the tenderness that keeps two people alive in the face of total devastation.

Brooks, Geraldine. *March.*

As the North reels under a series of unexpected defeats during the dark first year of the war, one man leaves behind his family to aid the Union cause. His experiences will utterly change his marriage and challenge his most ardently held beliefs. Riveting and elegant as it is meticulously researched, *March* is an extraordinary novel woven out of the lore of American history. From Louisa May Alcott's beloved classic *Little Women*, Geraldine Brooks has taken the character of the absent father, *March*, who has gone off to war, leaving his wife and daughters to make do in mean times. To evoke him, Brooks turned to the journals and letters of Bronson Alcott, Louisa May's father--a

friend and confidant of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In her telling, "March emerges as an idealistic chaplain in the little known backwaters of a war that will test his faith in himself and in the Union cause as he learns that his side, too, is capable of acts of barbarism and racism. As he recovers from a near mortal illness, he must reassemble his shattered mind and body and find a way to reconnect with a wife and daughters who have no idea of the ordeals he has been through.

Jones, Edward P. *The Known World*.

Henry Townsend, a black farmer, boot-maker, and former slave, has a fondness for *Paradise Lost* and an unusual mentor -- William Robbins, perhaps the most powerful man in antebellum Virginia's Manchester County. Under Robbins's tutelage, Henry becomes proprietor of his own plantation -- as well as of his own slaves. When he dies, his widow, Caldonia, succumbs to profound grief, and things begin to fall apart at their plantation: slaves take to escaping under the cover of night, and families who had once found love beneath the weight of slavery begin to betray one another. Beyond the Townsend estate, the known world also unravels: low-paid white patrollers stand watch as slave "speculators" sell free black people into slavery, and rumours of slave rebellions set white families against slaves who have served them for years.

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *Middlesex*.

Middlesex is the story of Cal Stephanides, an epic of a family's American life and the history of a gene travelling down through time. In 1922, Desdemona and "Lefty" Stephanides, brother and sister, leave their war ravaged village. With their parents dead and their village almost empty, the siblings have gradually been drawn closer together and fall in love. As the Turks invade their country, Lefty and Desdemona, Callie's grandparents-escape to reinvent themselves as a married couple in America. Their son Milton grows up and serves in the Navy in World War II and returns to marry his cousin Tessie, Sourmelina's daughter, and the errant gene comes closer to expression. Milton takes over the family business and they have two children, one a girl who they name Calliope. As their

fortunes rise, the family moves into a new home called Middlesex in a tony suburb, and Calliope, who had been a beautiful little girl is sent to private school where she grows tall and gawky and fails to develop into womanhood. She has a curiously intense friendship with a girl at her school, the beautiful and confident Obscure Object of Desire. It is only when Calliope has an accident and is examined at the hospital that her genetic secret is discovered. After extensive testing she is pronounced genetically male: 5 alpha-reductase syndrome caused her true genital characters to remain hidden until puberty: Callie is a hermaphrodite. Cosmetic surgery and hormone injections are recommended to make her seem more female but Callie refuses to be something she is not, runs away, cuts her hair short and hitch-hikes across the country, calling herself Cal. After some difficulties and performances in a strip club Cal learns to relish being both male and female. One more unexpected family tragedy and some old revelations, await in Detroit.

Russo, Richard. *Empire Falls*.

The town of Empire Falls has seen better days. One by one, its logging and textile enterprises have gone belly-up, and the once vast holdings of the Whiting clan (presided over by the last scion's widow) now mostly amount to decrepit real estate. The working classes, meanwhile, continue to eke out whatever meagre promise isn't already boarded up. Miles Roby gazes over this ruined kingdom from the Empire Grill, an opportunity of his youth that has become the albatross of his daily and future life. Called back from college and set to work by family obligations-his mother ailing, his father a loose cannon-Miles never left home again. Even so, his own obligations are manifold: a pending divorce; a troubled younger brother; and, not least, a peculiar partnership in the failing grill with none other than Mrs. Whiting. All of these, though, are offset by his daughter, Tick, whom he guides gently and proudly through the tribulations of adolescence. A decent man encircled by history and dreams, by echoing churches and abandoned mills, by the comforts and feuds provided by lifelong friends and neighbours, Miles is also a patient, knowing guide to the rich, hardscrabble nature of Empire Falls: fathers and sons and daughters, living and dead, rich and poor alike. In the end, Empire Falls reveals our worst and best instincts, both our most appalling nightmares

and our simplest hopes, with all the vision, grace and humanity of truly epic storytelling.

Chabon, Michael. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay.*

It is New York City in 1939. Joe Kavalier, a young artist who has also been trained in the art of Houdini-esque escape, has just pulled off his greatest feat to date: smuggling himself out of Nazi-occupied Prague. He is looking to make big money, fast, so that he can bring his family to freedom. His cousin, Brooklyn's own Sammy Clay, is looking for a collaborator to create the heroes, stories, and art for the latest novelty to hit the American dreamscape: the comic book. Out of their fantasies, fears, and dreams, Joe and Sammy weave the legend of that unforgettable champion the Escapist. And inspired by the beautiful and elusive Rosa Saks, a woman who will be linked to both men by powerful ties of desire, love, and shame, they create the otherworldly mistress of the night, Luna Moth. As the shadow of Hitler falls across Europe and the world, the Golden Age of comic books has begun.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies.*

Navigating between the Indian traditions they've inherited and the baffling new world, the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's elegant, touching stories seek love beyond the barriers of culture and generations. In "A Temporary Matter," published in *The New Yorker*, a young Indian-American couple faces the heartbreak of a stillborn birth while their Boston neighbourhood copes with a nightly blackout. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession.

Cunningham, Michael. *The Hours.*

In *The Hours*, Michael Cunningham draws inventively on the life and work of Virginia Woolf to tell the story of a group of contemporary characters struggling with the conflicting claims of love and inheritance, hope and despair. The narrative of Woolf's last days before her suicide early in World War II counterpoints the fictional stories of Samuel, a famous poet whose life has been shadowed by his talented and troubled mother, and his lifelong friend Clarrisa, who strives to forge a

balanced and rewarding life in spite of the demands of friends, lovers, and family.

Milhauser, Steven. *Martin Dressler: The Tale of An American Dreamer.*

Young Martin Dressler begins his career as an industrious helper in his father's cigar store. In the course of his restless young manhood, he makes a swift and eventful rise to the top, accompanied by two sisters--one a dreamlike shadow, the other a worldly business partner. As the eponymous Martin's vision becomes bolder and bolder he walks a haunted line between fantasy and reality, madness and ambition, art and industry, a sense of doom builds piece-by-hypnotic piece until this mesmerizing journey into the heart of an American dreamer reaches its bitter-sweet conclusion.

Shields, Carol. *The Stone Diaries.*

Born in 1905, Daisy Goodwill drifts through the chapters of childhood, marriage, widowhood, remarriage, motherhood and old age. Bewildered by her inability to understand her own role, Daisy attempts to find a way to tell her own story within a novel that is itself about the limitations of autobiography.

Proulx, Annie. *The Shipping News.*

When Quoyale's two-timing wife meets her just desserts, he retreats with his two daughters to his ancestral home on the starkly beautiful Newfoundland coast, where a rich cast of local characters and family members all play a part in Quoyale's struggle to reclaim his life. As Quoyale confronts his private demons -- and the unpredictable forces of nature and society -- he begins to see the possibility of love without pain or misery.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.*

Sethe was born a slave and escaped to Ohio, but eighteen years later she is still not free. She has borne the unthinkable and not gone mad, yet she is still held captive by memories of Sweet Home, the beautiful farm where so many hideous things happened. Meanwhile Sethe's house has long been troubled by the angry,

destructive ghost of her baby, who died nameless and whose tombstone is engraved with a single word: Beloved. Sethe works at beating back the past, but it makes itself heard and felt incessantly in her memory and in the lives of those around her. When a mysterious teenage girl arrives, calling herself Beloved, Sethe's terrible secret explodes into the present.

McMurtry, Larry. *Lonesome Dove*.

A love story, an adventure, and an epic of the frontier
McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* is the third book in the *Lonesome Dove* tetralogy, about the last defiant wilderness of America. Journey to the dusty little Texas town of Lonesome Dove and meet an unforgettable assortment of heroes and outlaws, whores and ladies, Indians and settlers. Richly authentic, beautifully written, always dramatic, *Lonesome Dove* is a book to make us laugh, weep, dream, and remember.

Walker, Alice. *The Colour Purple*.

Celie is a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of twenty years of her life, beginning at age fourteen when she is being abused and raped by her father and attempting to protect her sister from the same fate, and continuing over the course of her marriage to "Mister," a brutal man who terrorizes her. Celie eventually learns that her abusive husband has been keeping her sister's letters from her and the rage she feels, combined with an example of love and independence provided by her close friend Shug, pushes her finally toward an awakening of her creative and loving self.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

'Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.'
A lawyer's advice to his children as he defends the real mockingbird of Harper Lee's classic novel—a black man charged with the rape of a white girl. Through the young eyes of Scout and Jem Finch, Harper Lee explores with rich humour and unswerving honesty the irrationality of adult attitudes toward race and class in the Deep South of the 1930s. The conscience of a town steeped in prejudice, violence, and hypocrisy is pricked

by the stamina and quiet heroism of one man's struggle for justice-but the weight of history will only tolerate so much.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Told in language of great simplicity and power, it is the story of an old Cuban fisherman, down on his luck, and his supreme ordeal a relentless, agonizing battle with a giant marlin far out in the Gulf Stream. Here Hemingway recasts, in strikingly contemporary style, the classic theme of courage in the face of defeat, of personal triumph won from loss.

Commonwealth Writer's Prize Best Book Winners

Forna, Aminata. *The Memory of Love.*

The Memory of Love transports us to an African city, where a dying man Elias Cole, reflects on a past obsession: Saffia, the woman he loved, and Julius, her charismatic, unpredictable husband. Arriving in the wake of war Adrian Lockheart is a psychologist new to this foreign land, struggling with its secrets and the intensity of the heat, dust and dirt, until he finds friendship in Kai Mansaray, a young colleague at the hospital. All three lives will collide in a story about friendship, love, war, about understanding the indelible effects of the past and the nature of obsessive love.

Dasgupta, Rama. *Solo.*

Solo is an epic tale of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries told from the perspective of a one hundred-year old Bulgarian man. Having achieved little in his twentieth-century life, he settles into a long and prophetic daydream of the twenty-first century, where all the ideological experiments of the old century are over, and a collection of startling characters-demons and angels-live a life beyond utopia.

Tsiolkas, Christos. *The Slap.*

Told through the eyes of eight different characters, the slap and the ensuing emotional maelstrom become catalysts for an unflinching and all-seeing journey into the modern family and domestic life. Children come of age, marriages teeter on the brink and midlife crises erupt against a backdrop of lust, jealousy, deception and inadequacy. In its penetrating and incisive examination of the ever growing middle class and its fears and aspirations, *The Slap* is a fiercely intelligent and provocative story about the nature of loyalty and happiness, compromise and truth.

Hall, Lawrence. *The Book of Negroes.*

Abducted as an 11-year-old child from her village in West Africa Aminata Diallo is sent to live as a slave in South Carolina. But years later, she forges her way to freedom, serving the British in the Revolutionary War and registering her name in the historic Book of Negroes. This book, an actual document, provides a short but immensely revealing record of freed Loyalist slaves who requested permission to leave the US for resettlement in Nova Scotia, only to find that the haven they sought was steeped in an oppression all of its own. Aminata's eventual return to Sierra Leon, passing ships carrying thousands of slaves bound for America is an engrossing account of an obscure but important chapter in history that saw 1,200 former slaves embark on a harrowing back-to-Africa odyssey. Lawrence Hill is a master at transforming the neglected corners of history into brilliant imaginings, as engaging and revealing as only the best historical fiction can be. A sweeping story that transports the reader from a tribal African village to a plantation in the southern United States, from the teeming Halifax docks to the manor houses of London, *The Book of Negroes* introduces one of the strongest female characters in recent Canadian fiction, one who cuts a swath through a world hostile to her colour and her sex.

Jones, Lloyd. *Mister Pip.*

After the trouble starts and the soldiers arrive on Matilda's island, only one white person stays behind. Mr. Watts, whom the kids call Pop Eye, wears a red nose and pulls his wife around on a trolley, and he steps in to teach the children when there is no one else. His only lessons consist of reading from his battered copy of *Great Expectations*, a book by his friend Mr. Dickens. For Matilda, Dickens's hero Pip becomes as real to her as her own mother, and the greatest friendship of her life has begun. Soon Mr. Watts's book begins to inflame the children's imaginations with dreams about Dickens's London and the larger world. But how will they answer when the soldiers demand to know: where is this man named Pip? Set against the stunning beauty of Bougainville in the South Pacific during the civil war in the early 1990s, Lloyd Jones's breathtaking novel shows what magic a child's imagination makes possible even in the face of

terrible violence and what power stories have to fuel the imagination.

Grenville, Kate. *The Secret River*.

A life of petty crime and poverty on the streets of 19th century London sentences William Thornhill, along with his wife and children, to exile in the colonial outpost of Australia. But among the convicts of New South Wales there is a whisper of the possibility of freedom, away from Sydney and up the Hawkesbury River for those who dare to stake a claim. Grenville tells the heart-wrenching story of a family in exile. Sweeping across the 19th century, from the teeming banks of the Thames in London to the hardscrabble frontier settlement of Sydney, Australia, *The Secret River* sets us down in an unforgiving land and masterfully confronts us with brutal price of colonization.

Levy, Andrea. *Small Island*.

Hortense Joseph arrives in London from Jamaica in 1948 with her life in her suitcase, her heart broken, her resolve intact. Her husband, Gilbert Joseph, returns from the war expecting to be received as a hero, but finds his status as a black man in Britain to be second class. His white landlady, Queenie, raised as a farmer's daughter, befriends Gilbert, and later Hortense, with innocence and courage, until the unexpected arrival of her husband, Bernard, who returns from combat with issues of his own to resolve. Told in these four voices, *Small Island* is a courageous novel of that most American of experiences: the immigrant's life.

Clarke, Austin. *The Polished Hoe*.

When an elderly Bimshire village woman calls the police to confess to a murder, the result is a shattering all-night vigil that brings together elements of the African diaspora in one epic sweep. Set on the post-colonial West Indian island of Bimshire in 1952, *The Polished Hoe* unravels over the course of 24 hours but spans the lifetime of one woman and the collective experience of a society informed by slavery. As the novel opens, Mary Mathilda is giving confession to Sergeant, a police officer she has known all her life. The man she claims to have murdered is Mr. Belfeels, the village plantation owner for whom she has

worked for more than thirty years. Mary has also been Mr. Belfeels'' mistress for most of that time and is the mother of his only son, Wilberforce, a successful doctor. What transpires through Mary's words and recollections is a deep meditation about the power of memory and the indomitable strength of the human spirit.

Carey, Peter. *The True History of the Kelly Gang.*

In The True History of the Kelly Gang, the legendary Ned Kelly speaks for himself, scribbling his narrative on errant scraps of paper in semiliterate but magically descriptive prose as he flees from the police. To his pursuers, Kelly is nothing but a monstrous criminal, a thief and a murderer. To his own people, the lowly class of ordinary Australians, the bushranger is a hero, defying the authority of the English to direct their lives. Indentured by his bootlegger mother to a famous horse thief (who was also her lover), Ned saw his first prison cell at 15 and by 26 had become the most wanted man in the wild colony of Victoria, taking over towns and defying the law until he was finally captured and hanged.

Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace.*

After years of teaching Romantic poetry at the Technical University of Cape Town, David Lurie, middle-aged and twice divorced, has an impulsive affair with a student. The affair sours; he is denounced and summoned before a committee of inquiry. Willing to admit his guilt, but refusing to yield to pressure to repent publicly, he resigns and retreats to his daughter Lucy's isolated farm. For a time, his daughter's influence and the natural rhythms of the farm promise to harmonize his discordant life. But the balance of power in the country is shifting. He and Lucy become victims of a savage and disturbing attack which brings into relief all the faults in their relationship.

Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance.*

A Fine Balance is set in mid-1970s India. It tells the story of four unlikely people whose lives come together during a time of political turmoil soon after the government declares a "State of

Internal Emergency." Through days of bleakness and hope, their circumstances - and their fates - become inextricably linked in ways no one could have foreseen. Mistry's prose is alive with enduring images and a cast of unforgettable characters.

De Bernieres, Louis. *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

Extravagant, inventive, emotionally sweeping, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* is the story of a timeless place that one day wakes up to find itself in the jaws of history. The place is the Greek island of Cephallonia, where gods once dabbled in the affairs of men and the local saint periodically rises from his sarcophagus to cure the mad. Then the tide of World War II rolls onto the island's shores in the form of the conquering Italian army. Caught in the occupation are Pelagia, a willful, beautiful young woman, and the two suitors vying for her love: Mandras, a gentle fisherman turned ruthless guerilla, and the charming, mandolin-playing Captain Corelli, a reluctant officer of the Italian garrison on the island. Rich with loyalties and betrayals, and set against a landscape where the factual blends seamlessly with the fantastic.

Mistry, Rohinton. *Such a Long Journey*.

It is Bombay in 1971, the year India went to war over what was to become Bangladesh. A hard-working bank clerk, Gustad Noble is a devoted family man who gradually sees his modest life unravelling. His young daughter falls ill; his promising son defies his father's ambitions for him. He is the one reasonable voice amidst the ongoing dramas of his neighbours. One day, he receives a letter from an old friend, asking him to help in what at first seems like an heroic mission. But he soon finds himself unwittingly drawn into a dangerous network of deception. Compassionate, and rich in details of character and place, this unforgettable novel charts the journey of a moral heart in a turbulent world of change.

Commonwealth Writer's Prize Best First Book Winners

Hanif, Mohammad. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes.*

Why did a Hercules C130, the world's sturdiest plane, carrying Pakistan's military dictator General Zia ul Haq, go down on 17 August, 1988? Was it because of: Mechanical failure, human error, the CIA's impatience, a blind woman's curse, Generals not happy with their pension plans, the mango season? Or could it be your narrator, Ali Shigri? As young Shigri moves from a mosque hall to his military barracks before ending up in a Mughal dungeon, there are questions that haunt him: What does it mean to betray someone and still love them? How many names does Allah really have? Who killed his father, Colonel Shigri? Who will kill his killers? And where has Obaid disappeared to?

Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time.*

Narrated by a fifteen-year-old autistic savant obsessed with Sherlock Holmes, this novel weaves together an old-fashioned mystery, a contemporary coming-of-age story, and a fascinating excursion into a mind incapable of processing emotions. Although gifted with a superbly logical brain, Christopher is autistic. Everyday interactions and admonishments have little meaning for him. At fifteen, Christopher's carefully constructed world falls apart when he finds his neighbour's dog Wellington impaled on a garden fork, and he is initially blamed for the killing. Christopher decides that he will track down the real killer, and turns to his favourite fictional character, the impeccably logical Sherlock Holmes, for inspiration. But the investigation leads him down some unexpected paths and ultimately brings him face to face with the dissolution of his parents' marriage. As Christopher tries to deal with the crisis within his own family, the narrative draws readers into the working of his mind. The most wrenching of emotional moments are chronicled by a boy who cannot fathom emotions.

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*.

At the centre of this novel are two unlikely friends, Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal. Hapless veterans of World War II, Archie and Samad and their families become agents of England's irrevocable transformation. A second marriage to Clara Bowden,, a Jamaican woman half his age, quite literally gives Archie a second lease on life, and produces Irie, a knowing child whose personality doesn't quite match her name (Jamaican for "no problem"). Samad's late-in-life arranged marriage (he had to wait for his bride to be born), produces twin sons whose separate paths confound Iqbal's every effort to direct them, and a renewed, if selective, submission to his Islamic faith. Set against London's racial and cultural tapestry, *White Teeth* revels in the ecstatic hodgepodge of modern life, flirting with disaster, confounding expectations, and embracing the comedy of daily existence.

MacDonald, Anne Marie. *Fall On Your Knees*.

Set largely in a Cape Breton coal mining community, ranging through four generations, MacDonald's novel focuses on the Piper sisters and their troubled relationship with their father, James who elopes with a thirteen year old. From early on, major themes are established: racial tension, isolation, passion and forbidden love, which will gradually lead to incest, death in childbirth, and even murder. At the centre of this story is the nature of family love, beginning with the Piper sisters who depend on one another for survival. Their development as characters - beautiful Kathleen, the promising diva; saintly Mercedes; Frances, the mischievous bad girl, who tries to bear the family's burden; and disabled Lily, everyone's favourite - forms the heart of the novel. And then there is James, their flawed father. As the details of the labyrinthine plot are pulled together, the question of whether it is possible to escape one's family history gradually raises itself.

Canada Reads Award Winners

Alexis, Andre. *Fifteen Dogs*.

I wonder, said Hermes, what it would be like if animals had human intelligence. - I'll wager a year's servitude, answered Apollo, that animals - any animal you like - would be even more unhappy than humans are, if they were given human intelligence. And so it begins: a bet between the gods Hermes and Apollo leads them to grant human consciousness and language to a group of dogs overnighing at a Toronto veterinary clinic. Suddenly capable of more complex thought, the pack is torn between those who resist the new ways of thinking, preferring the old 'dog' ways, and those who embrace the change. The gods watch from above as the dogs venture into their newly unfamiliar world, as they become divided among themselves, as each struggles with new thoughts and feelings.

Hill, Lawrence. *The Illegal*.

In the dark fictional world of Zantoroland, bestselling, award-winning author Lawrence Hill casts a satirical eye on some of the most pressing issues of our time: race, immigration, undocumented refugees, discrimination and how the unseen and forgotten must struggle to survive. In one of the poorest nations in the world, running means respect and riches. But when Keita Ali is targeted for his father's outspoken political views, he escapes into Freedom State—a wealthy island nation. This is the new underground: a place where tens of thousands of people deemed to be "illegal" live below the radar of the police and government officials. Keita must keep moving in order to avoid deportation. As he trains in secret, eluding capture, the stakes keep getting higher. Soon, he is running not only for his life, but for his sister's life, too.

Thuy, Kim. *Ru*.

Ru. In Vietnamese it means lullaby; in French it is a small stream, but also signifies a flow--of tears, blood, money. Kim Thúy's *Ru* is literature at its most crystalline: the flow of a life on the tides of unrest and on to more peaceful waters. In vignettes of exquisite clarity, sharp observation and sly wit, we are carried along on an unforgettable journey from a palatial residence in Saigon to a crowded and muddy Malaysian refugee camp, and onward to a new life in Quebec. There, the young girl feels the embrace of a new community,

and revels in the chance to be part of the American Dream. As an adult, the waters become rough again: now a mother of two sons, she must learn to shape her love around the younger boy's autism. Moving seamlessly from past to present, from history to memory and back again, *Ru* is a book that celebrates life in all its wonder: its moments of beauty and sensuality, brutality and sorrow, comfort and comedy.

Boyden, Joe. *The Orenda*.

The Orenda opens with a brutal massacre and the kidnapping of the young Iroquois Snow Falls, a spirited girl with a special gift. Her captor, Bird, is an elder and one of the Huron Nation's great warriors and statesmen. It has been years since the murder of his family and yet they are never far from his mind. In Snow Falls, Bird recognizes the ghost of his lost daughter and sees the girl possesses powerful magic that will be useful to him on the troubled road ahead. Bird's people have battled the Iroquois for as long as he can remember, but both tribes now face a new, more dangerous threat from afar. Christophe, a charismatic Jesuit missionary, has found his calling amongst the Huron and devotes himself to learning and understanding their customs and language in order to lead them to Christ. An emissary from distant lands, he brings much more than his faith to the new world. As these three souls dance each other through intricately woven acts of duplicity, small battles erupt into bigger wars and a nation emerges from worlds in flux.

Moore, Lisa. *February*.

In 1982, the oil rig *Ocean Ranger* sank off the coast of Newfoundland during a Valentine's Day storm. All eighty-four men aboard died. *February* is the story of Helen O'Mara, one of those left behind when her husband, Cal, drowns on the rig. It begins in the present-day, more than twenty-five years later, but spirals back again and again to the "February" that persists in Helen's mind and heart. Writing at the peak of her form, her steadfast refusal to sentimentalize coupled with an almost shocking ability to render the precise details of her characters' physical and emotional worlds.

Aguirre, Carmen. *Something Fierce*.

Six-year-old Carmen Aguirre fled to Canada with her family following General Augusto Pinochet's violent 1973 coup in Chile. Five years later, when her mother and stepfather returned to South America as Chilean resistance members, Carmen and her sister went with them,

quickly assuming double lives of their own. At 18, Carmen became a militant herself, plunging further into a world of terror, paranoia and euphoria. *Something Fierce* takes the reader inside war-ridden Peru, dictator-ruled Bolivia, post-Malvinas Argentina and Pinochet's Chile in the eventful decade between 1979 and 1989. Dramatic, suspenseful and darkly comic, it is a rare first-hand account of revolutionary life and a passionate argument against forgetting.

Fallis, Terry. *The Best Laid Plans.*

A burnt-out political aide quits just before an election - but is forced to run a hopeless campaign on the way out. He makes a deal with a crusty old Scot, Angus McLintock - an engineering professor who will do anything, *anything*, to avoid teaching English to engineers - to let his name stand in the election. No need to campaign, certain to lose, and so on. Then a great scandal blows away his opponent, and to their horror, Angus is elected. He decides to see what good an honest M.P. who doesn't care about being re-elected can do in Parliament. The results are hilarious.

Hall, Lawrence. *The Book of Negroes.*

Abducted as an 11-year-old child from her village in West Africa Aminata Diallo is sent to live as a slave in South Carolina. But years later, she forges her way to freedom, serving the British in the Revolutionary War and registering her name in the historic Book of Negroes. This book, an actual document, provides a short but immensely revealing record of freed Loyalist slaves who requested permission to leave the US for resettlement in Nova Scotia, only to find that the haven they sought was steeped in an oppression all of its own. Aminata's eventual return to Sierra Leon, passing ships carrying thousands of slaves bound for America is an engrossing account of an obscure but important chapter in history that saw 1,200 former slaves embark on a harrowing back-to-Africa odyssey. Lawrence Hill is a master at transforming the neglected corners of history into brilliant imaginings, as engaging and revealing as only the best historical fiction can be. A sweeping story that transports the reader from a tribal African village to a plantation in the southern United States, from the teeming Halifax docks to the manor houses of London, *The Book of Negroes* introduces one of the strongest female characters in recent Canadian fiction, one who cuts a swath through a world hostile to her colour and her sex.

Quarrington, Paul. *King Leary.*

Percival Leary was once the King of the Ice, one of hockey's greatest heroes. Now, in the South Grouse Nursing Home, where he shares a room with Edmund "Blue" Hermann, the antagonistic and alcoholic reporter who once chronicled his career, Leary looks back on his tumultuous life and times: his days at the boys' reformatory when he burned down a house; the four mad monks who first taught him to play hockey; and the time he executed the perfect "St. Louis Whirlygig" to score the winning goal in the 1919 Stanley Cup final. Now all but forgotten, Leary is only a legend in his own mind until a high-powered advertising agency decides to feature him in a series of ginger ale commercials. With his male nurse, his son, and the irrepressible Blue, Leary sets off for Toronto on one last adventure as he revisits the scenes of his glorious life as King of the Ice.

O'Neill, Heather. *Lullabies for Little Criminals.*

At thirteen, Baby vacillates between childhood comforts and adult temptation: still young enough to drag her dolls around in a vinyl suitcase yet old enough to know more than she should about urban cruelties. Motherless, she lives with her father, Jules, who takes better care of his heroin habit than he does of his daughter. Baby's gift is a genius for spinning stories and for cherishing the small crumbs of happiness that fall into her lap. But her blossoming beauty has captured the attention of a charismatic and dangerous local pimp who runs an army of sad, slavishly devoted girls—a volatile situation even the normally oblivious Jules cannot ignore. And when an escape disguised as betrayal threatens to crush Baby's spirit, she will ultimately realize that the power of salvation rests in her hands alone.

Toews, Miriam. *A Complicated Kindness.*

Sixteen-year-old Nomi Nickel is trapped in East Village, Manitoba, a small town whose population is Mennonite: "the most embarrassing sub-sect of people to belong to if you're a teenager." Ministered with an iron fist by Nomi's uncle Hans, East Village is a town that's tall on rules and short on fun. Nomi struggles to cope with the back-to-back departures three years earlier of Tash, her beautiful and mouthy sister, and Trudie, her warm and spirited mother. She lives with her father, Ray, a sweet yet hapless schoolteacher whose love is unconditional but whose parenting skills amount to benign

neglect. Father and daughter deal with their losses in very different ways. Ray, a committed elder of the church, seeks to create an artificial sense of order by reorganizing the city dump late at night. Nomi, on the other hand, favours chaos as she tries to blunt her pain through "drugs and imagination." Together they live in a limbo of unanswered questions. Nomi's first person narrative shifts effortlessly between the present and the past. Within the present, Nomi goes through the motions of finishing high school while flagrantly rebelling against Mennonite tradition. She hangs out on Suicide Hill, hooks up with a boy named Travis, goes on the Pill, wanders around town, skips class and cranks Led Zeppelin. But the past is never far from her mind as she remembers happy times with her mother and sister - as well as the painful events that led them to flee town. In a voice both defiant and vulnerable, Nomi offers hilarious and heartbreaking reflections on life, death, family, faith and love.

Parker Day, Frank. *Rockbound*.

To the harsh domain of Rockbound -- governed by the sternly righteous and rapacious Uriah Jung -- comes the youthful David Jung to claim his small share of the island. Filled with dreamy optimism and a love for the unspoken promises of the night sky, David tries to find his way in a narrow, unforgiving, and controlled world. His conflicts are both internal and external, locking him in an unceasing struggle for survival; sometimes the sea is his enemy, sometimes his own rude behavior, sometimes his best friend Gershom Born, sometimes his secret love for the island teacher Mary Dauphiny; but always, inevitably, his Jung relatives and their manifold ambitions for money and power.

Vanderhaeghe, Guy. *The Last Crossing*.

Set in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the American and Canadian West and in Victorian England, *The Last Crossing* is a sweeping tale of interwoven lives and stories. Charles and Addington Gaunt must find their brother Simon, who has gone missing in the wilds of the American West. Charles, a disillusioned artist, and Addington, a disgraced military captain, enlist the services of a guide to lead them on their journey across a difficult and unknown landscape. This is the enigmatic Jerry Potts, half Blackfoot, half Scottish, who suffers his own painful past. The party grows to include Caleb Ayto, a sycophantic American journalist, and Lucy Stoveall, a wise and beautiful woman who travels in the hope of avenging her sister's vicious murder. Later, the group is joined by

Custis Straw, a Civil War veteran searching for salvation, and Custis's friend and protector Aloysius Dooley, a saloon-keeper. This unlikely posse becomes entangled in an unfolding drama that forces each person to come to terms with his own demons.

Aquin, Hubert. *Next Episode.*

First published in 1965, Hubert Aquin's *Next Episode* is a disturbing and yet deeply moving novel of dissent and distress. As he awaits trial, a young separatist writes an espionage story in the psychiatric ward of the Montreal prison where he has been detained. Sheila Fischman's bold new translation captures the pulsating life of Aquin's complex exploration of the political realities of contemporary Quebec.

Ondaatje, Michael. *In the Skin of a Lion.*

In the Skin of a Lion is a love story and an irresistible mystery set in the turbulent, muscular new world of Toronto in the 20s and 30s. Michael Ondaatje entwines adventure, romance and history, real and invented, enmeshing us in the lives of the immigrants who built the city and those who dreamed it into being: the politically powerful, the anarchists, bridge builders and tunnellers, a vanished millionaire and his mistress, a rescued nun and a thief who leads a charmed life. This is a haunting tale of passion, privilege and biting physical labour, of men and women moved by compassion and driven by the power of dreams -- sometimes even to murder.

National Book Awards (American)

Ward, Jesmyn. *Sing, Unburied Sing.*

A journey through Mississippi's past and present, examining the ugly truths at the heart of the American story and the power—and limitations—of family bonds. Jojo is thirteen years old and trying to understand what it means to be a man. He doesn't lack in fathers to study, chief among them his Black grandfather, Pop. But there are other men who complicate his understanding: his absent White father, Michael, who is being released from prison; his absent White grandfather, Big Joseph, who won't acknowledge his existence; and the memories of his dead uncle, Given, who died as a teenager. His mother, Leonie is an imperfect mother in constant conflict with herself and those around her. She is Black and her children's father is White. She wants to be a better mother but can't put her children above her own needs, especially her drug use. When the children's father is released from prison, Leonie packs her kids and a friend into her car and drives north to the heart of Mississippi and Parchman Farm, the State Penitentiary. At Parchman, there is another thirteen-year-old boy, the ghost of a dead inmate who carries all of the ugly history of the South with him in his wandering. He too has something to teach Jojo about fathers and sons, about legacies, about violence, about love.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad.*

Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhood—where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. Matters do not go as planned—Cora kills a young white boy who tries to capture her. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted. In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor—engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora and Caesar's first stop is South Carolina, in a city that initially seems like a haven. But the city's placid surface masks an insidious scheme designed for its black denizens. And even worse: Ridgeway, the relentless slave catcher, is close on their heels. Forced to flee again, Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom. Like the protagonist of *Gulliver's Travels*, Cora encounters different worlds at each stage of her journey—hers is an odyssey through time as well as space.

McBride, James. *The Good Lord Bird.*

Henry Shackleford is a young slave living in the Kansas Territory in 1857, when the region is a battleground between anti- and pro-slavery forces. When John Brown, the legendary abolitionist, arrives in the area, an argument between Brown and Henry's master quickly turns violent. Henry is forced to leave town with Brown, who believes he's a girl. Over the ensuing months, Henry, nicknamed Little Onion, conceals his true identity as he struggles to stay alive. Eventually Little Onion finds himself with Brown at the historic raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859, one of the great catalysts for the Civil War.

Endrich, Louise. *The Round House.*

One Sunday in the spring of 1988, a woman living on a reservation in North Dakota is attacked. The details of the crime are slow to surface as Geraldine Coutts is traumatized and reluctant to relive or reveal what happened, either to the police or to her husband, Bazil, and thirteen-year-old son, Joe. In one day, Joe's life is irrevocably transformed. He tries to heal his mother, but she will not leave her bed and slips into an abyss of solitude. Increasingly alone, Joe finds himself thrust prematurely into an adult world for which he is ill prepared. While his father, who is a tribal judge, endeavors to wrest justice from a situation that defies his efforts, Joe becomes frustrated with the official investigation and sets out with his trusted friends, Cappy, Zack, and Angus, to get some answers of his own. Their quest takes them first to the Round House, a sacred space and place of worship for the Ojibwe. And this is only the beginning.

Ward, Jesmyn. *Salvage the Bones.*

A hurricane is building over the Gulf of Mexico, threatening the coastal town of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, and Esch's father is growing concerned. A hard drinker, largely absent, he doesn't show concern for much else. Esch and her three brothers are stocking food, but there isn't much to save. Lately, Esch can't keep down what food she gets; she's fourteen and pregnant. Her

brother Skeetah is sneaking scraps for his prized pitbull's new litter, dying one by one in the dirt. Meanwhile, brothers Randall and Junior try to stake their claim in a family long on child's play and short on parenting.

As the twelve days that make up the novel's framework yield to their dramatic conclusion, this unforgettable family-motherless children sacrificing for one another as they can, protecting and nurturing where love is scarce-pulls itself up to face another day.

Gordon, Jaimy. *Lord of Misrule.*

Tommy Hansel has a plan: run four horses, all better than they look on paper, at long odds at Indian Mound Downs, then grab the purse -- or cash a bet -- and run before anyone's the wiser. At his side is Maggie Koderer, who finds herself powerfully drawn to the gorgeous, used up animals of the cheap track. She also lands in the cross-hairs of leading trainer Joe Dale Bigg. But as news of Tommy's plan spreads, from veteran groom Medicine Ed, to loan shark Two-Tie, to Kidstuff the blacksmith, it's Maggie, not Tommy or the handlers of legendary stakes horse Lord of Misrule, who will find what's valuable in a world where everything has a price.

McCann, Colum. *Let the Great World Spin.*

In this book, centered upon Philippe Petit's 1974 highwire walk between the now missing World Trade Twin Towers, McCann weaves several distinct stories into a single taut and beautiful tale of love and loss. There is Corrigan, an Irish monk transplanted to New York, who expends his full energy and then some making life a little easier for a group of low end prostitutes. Against all he believes he falls desperately in love with a Guatemalan nurse who hopes he will choose her over the Church. There is Claire, a native of the Upper East side who finds herself drawn to a group of women whose only bond is that each has lost a son in Vietnam. Within the confines of the group Claire builds an

unlikely relationship with Gloria, a woman from the projects whose depth and warmth helps transform them both. And there is Solomon - a judge whose experiences in court has caused him to lose all the idealism that once characterized his commitment to the law. On the day of Petit's performance, their lives interconnect and the deep richness of the story unfolds.

Tuck, Lily. *The News from Paraguay.*

The year is 1854. In Paris, Francisco Solano -- the future dictator of Paraguay -- begins his courtship of the young, beautiful Irish courtesan Ella Lynch with a poncho, a Paraguayan band, and a horse named Mathilde. Ella follows Franco to Asunción and reigns there as his mistress. Isolated and estranged in this new world, she embraces her lover's ill-fated imperial dream -- one fueled by a heedless arrogance that will devastate all of Paraguay.

Hazzard, Shirley. *The Great Fire.*

The Great Fire is an extraordinary love story set in the immediate aftermath of the great conflagration of the Second World War. In war-torn Asia and stricken Europe, men and women, still young but veterans of harsh experience, must reinvent their lives and expectations, and learn, from their past, to dream again. Some will fulfill their destinies, others will falter. At the center of the story, a brave and brilliant soldier finds that survival and worldly achievement are not enough. His counterpart, a young girl living in occupied Japan and tending her dying brother, falls in love, and in the process discovers herself.

Glass, Julia. *Three Junes.*

In June of 1989 Paul McLeod, a newspaper publisher and recent widower, travels to Greece, where he falls for a young American

artist and reflects on the complicated truth about his marriage. . . . Six years later, again in June, Paul's death draws his three grown sons and their families back to their ancestral home. Fenno, the eldest, a wry, introspective gay man, narrates the events of this unforeseen reunion. Far from his straitlaced expatriate life as a bookseller in Greenwich Village, Fenno is stunned by a series of revelations that threaten his carefully crafted defenses. . . . Four years farther on, in yet another June, a chance meeting on the Long Island shore brings Fenno together with Fern Olitsky, the artist who once captivated his father. Now pregnant, Fern must weigh her guilt about the past against her wishes for the future and decide what family means to her.

Franzen, Jonathan. *The Corrections*.

After almost fifty years as a wife and mother, Enid Lambert is ready to have some fun. Unfortunately, her husband, Alfred, is losing his sanity to Parkinson's disease, and their children have long since flown the family nest. The oldest, Gary, a once-stable portfolio manager and family man, is trying to convince his wife and himself, that he is not clinically depressed. The middle child, Chip, has lost his seemingly secure academic job and is failing spectacularly at his new line of work. And Denise, the youngest, has escaped a disastrous marriage only to pour her youth and beauty down the drain of an affair with a married man—or so her mother fears. Desperate for some pleasure to look forward to, Enid has set her heart on an elusive goal: bringing her family together for one last Christmas at home.