

FATHERS

A LITERARY ANTHOLOGY



Sharon Olds
Alan Bennett
Angela Carter
Michael Ondaatje
Winston Churchill
Michael Longley
Michael Ignatieff
Seamus Heaney
Ken Wiwa
Raymond Carver
Annie Dillard
Dylan Thomas
Saul Bellow
Theodore Roethke
Mordecai Richler
Leonard Cohen
Philip Roth
Robert Hayden
Rita Dove
Bliss Broyard
Bruce Chatwin
Derek Walcott
Judith Ortiz Cofer
Anne Carson
Anne Sexton
Edmund Gosse
Franz Kafka
Thomas Hardy
Miriam Toews
Sylvia Plath
Mary Gordon
John Berryman
E.B. White
Margaret Atwood
Virginia Woolf
Diana Der Hovanessian
E.F. Cummings
Alice Munro
James Baldwin

Edited by André Gérard

*For family and friends,
for Gunner, Tess, and Aron,
and for Bill Messenger.*



Patremoir (pa-tre-mwär): neologism coined to describe an essay, poem or film which is built around memories of the author's father.

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INTRODUCTION

All fathers except mine are invisible in daytime; daytime is ruled by mothers, and fathers come out at night. Darkness brings home fathers, with their real, unspeakable power. There is more to fathers than meets the eye.

— Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*

But first, a word about mothers. Nothing can be said about fathers without first saying a word about mothers. Fathers and mothers are inextricably, intimately linked. In the natural, procreative course of things there is no mother without a father and, conversely, no father without a mother. In the essays and poems that follow, the idea of mother closely shadows the idea of father and in many instances what can be said of one parent can be said of the other. However, where either parent could be invoked, the word father is used for simplicity's sake and, of course, because this is an anthology about fathers.

A further word about mothers. It could be said that until recently the subject of fathers preoccupied essayists far more than the subject of mothers. This may be because, in patriarchal societies, fathers were valued more than mothers. It may also be that children, and particularly sons, have taken their mothers for granted. More likely, though, as Atwood observes, it is because children often have a hard time seeing and understanding their fathers clearly. As such father essays are tools crafted to elucidate, to liberate. And so, on to fathers and all that they entail, including mothers.

Since the beginnings of Western Literature, children have been looking to understand their fathers, trying to gather father stories, trying to make sense of their own lives by putting together the pieces of their fathers' lives. It is often overlooked that the *Odyssey* is almost

as much the story of Telemachus trying to learn about his father as it is an account of Odysseus' personal trials. The goddess Athena in her wisdom sends Telemachus off to Pylos and Sparta to seek out news of his father. Only by coming to terms with his father can he become an adult and claim the kingdom that is rightfully his.

As Telemachus learns, "It's a wise child who knows its own father," and it's a rare child indeed who hasn't been troubled by trying to make sense of its father, in the flesh or in the spirit. We don't, it would seem, have to be Hamlets to be troubled by the ghosts of our fathers, living or dead. With the possible exception of mother, father is the most burdened word in our language, containing within it a bewildering profusion of emotions, experiences, understandings, and misunderstandings. Fathers, as Atwood's quotation suggests, are often Grendelian figures, figures of darkness and myth, figures to be fought and feared. The mother, in her ready availability, and with her nurturing warmth, is usually more accessible to us. The father, however—even today—is often more remote, more absent, and more authoritarian; and to judge by the following essays our interactions with him, whether physical or psychic, are often problematic.

Perhaps because of the often problematic nature of father-child interactions, the father essay does not appear until the end of the 19th century. Confronting fathers directly and publicly is not, and never has been, easy: the patriarch should judge and not be judged. To write about the father is to sit in judgement upon him, and for most cultures this was a taboo too strong to be overcome. The Greeks, despite their searingly perceptive stories about father-child interactions, did not attempt to do so—nor did the Romans, the Italians of the Renaissance, the Elizabethans, or even the Romantics. Paradoxically—but not surprisingly, given the rigid paternalism of the age and the attendant psychological pressures—the father essay, like radical feminism, is a product of the Victorian era.

In 1907, six years after the death of Queen Victoria, Edmund

Gosse published his memoir *Father and Son*. As he acknowledges in his concluding sentence, the book was an attempt to throw off his father's yoke and "to fashion his inner life for himself." It was an act of revolt: it was an act of courage. In Victorian England the boundary between the personal and the public world was a formidable one, and Dickens' portrayal of Wemmick in *Great Expectations* is an all too accurate caricature of how sharply those worlds were kept apart. To break down that boundary and to publicly reveal elements of your deepest private self was shocking. To speak intimately and publicly about the father was heretical. Small wonder that *Father and Son* was first published anonymously.

Though *Father and Son* almost certainly owes a debt to JS Mill's *Autobiography*, Gosse's importance in breaking down taboos cannot be overstated. In "The Art of Biography" Virginia Woolf credits him as the first writer who "dared to say that his own father was a fallible human being," thereby opening the way for Lytton Strachey, Harold Nicolson and the "new biographers." Certainly, *Eminent Victorians* and *Some People* owe a lot to Gosse. Nicolson himself stated that *Father and Son* is not "a conventional biography; still less is it an autobiography. It is something entirely original; it is a triumphant experiment in a new formula." In confronting the memory of the fanatical monomaniac who was his father and by relating the details of his suffocating childhood, Sir Edmund made it "possible to tell the truth about the dead," and to publicly and honestly attempt to explore father-child relationships.

Just over one hundred years after *Father and Son's* publication, the writings in this anthology—along with such recent powerful and moving father tributes as Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude*, Li-Young Lee's *Winged Seed*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Miriam Toews' *Swing Low*—show the great debt we owe Edmund Gosse. Although she meant to be disparaging, Virginia Woolf spoke truer than she knew when she said: "[w]here Boswell left us that profound

and moving masterpiece, *The Life of Johnson*, Gosse left us the *Father and Son*.” *Father and Son* in turn, has engendered and continues to engender a rich, varied and rewarding progeny. Mary Gordon, too, was right when she wondered if she wasn’t writing “some non-fiction genre whose proper name hasn’t yet been found?”

Edmund Gosse is the father of the “patre-moir.”

The essays and poems in this anthology are brave, personal attempts to come to terms with fathers, and the variety of responses is as overwhelming as is the intensity. Some of the portrayals are breathtakingly unfair—Sylvia Plath’s vitriolic demonization of the father she barely knew—and others are so lovingly affectionate, think Broyard’s or Day’s—as to make one wonder about the darker side of the man. Not surprisingly, given the welter of complex feelings fathers arouse, this anthology is a feast for Freudians. When writing about fathers, Pope’s aphorism “The child is father to the man” should more properly be rewritten as “The child is father to the father;” and much can be read in the details of that often painful, often messy birth.

More subtle analysts may want to puzzle out how daughters differ from sons in writing about their fathers. Certainly, sons should be expected to have a more complex relationship since they are usually fated to step into the father role themselves, and so their connection to their fathers may, in that regard, be more ambivalent and more poignant. E. B. White’s essay speaks to that. Daughters, though, may have Electra issues to deal with, since for them the father becomes the archetype of the opposite sex. Bliss Broyard’s essay, loving and delightful as it is, hints at a daughter dilemma every bit as challenging as the son’s. Incest, real or imagined, can further complicate and darken the father-daughter relationship. The essays in this anthology would suggest that daughters and sons can be equally doomed, equally blessed.

For many, the response is complicated by the fact that, for a while

RITA DOVE

Through family and family stories, almost every father roots his children to the past while growing different possible futures for them through present actions. Understanding of “Grape Sherbet” is deepened by the knowledge that Rita Dove’s father was the first black man to work as a chemist for the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio. The sherbet is a miracle of chemistry, a reality-altering, colour transformation with implications as deep as Memorial Day’s origins in the end of the Civil War. Like the children who name “each stone/ for a lost milk tooth,” who make the dead a positive part of natural growth, the father of the poem may not understand all the implications of what he does. The grandmother’s “pure refusal” almost certainly is fuelled more by racial anxiety than it is by diabetes. However, because of history, because of family, because of her father—a Dove who wears “his cap turned up/ so the bib resembles a duck”—Rita Dove can accept what the grandmother of her poem cannot. She can see why her father bothered, how he overcame pressures from both sides of the colour line, pressures both from within and from without, and because of his miracle she can face the past without ducking, without refusal. As she invents or recreates her father’s feat, using secret recipes of her own, her “Grape Sherbet” burns with a grateful, playful smile.

GRAPE SHERBET

The day? Memorial.
After the grill
Dad appears with his masterpiece—
swirled snow, gelled light.
We cheer. The recipe's
a secret and he fights
a smile, his cap turned up
so the bib resembles a duck.

That morning we galloped
through the grassed-over mounds
and named each stone
for a lost milk tooth. Each dollop
of sherbet, later,
is a miracle,
like salt on a melon that makes it sweeter.

Everyone agrees—it's wonderful!
It's just how we imagined lavender
would taste. The diabetic grandmother
stares from the porch,
a torch
of pure refusal.

CLARENCE DAY

Even allowing for its humourous exaggeration, Day's essay strongly demonstrates how fathers are very much of a place, a time and a culture. There is no mistaking the stockbroking certainties of early 20th century New York in the cut of "Father's Trousers." No other place, time or environment could have produced such a man, and the successes of Day's stories about his father (whether in vignette, book, play, movie or television form) owe as much to the way in which Day looked back to more certain times, as they do to his gentle irony, and his triumph in coming to positive terms with such a powerful yet potentially damaging father. Day's items about his father were so important to the early New Yorker that Harold Ross, legendary founder and publisher, said "If I had never done anything other than publish Clarence Day, I would be satisfied." With respectful wryness and wit, Day not only helped shape The New Yorker he helped shape how Americans perceive their fathers. Like Teddy Roosevelt, he made a positive of "bully."

FATHER'S OLD TROUSERS

Father didn't care much for jewelry. He disliked the heavy watch-chains which were worn by the men of his time, chains with charms dangling down from the middle. His had none of these things on it; it was strong and handsome but simple. His studs and cuff-links were on the same order, not ornate like those then in fashion. His ring was a solid plain band of gold, set with a rectangular sapphire. All these objects we regarded with a reverence which we felt was their due. There was a special sort of rightness about Father's things, in our eyes, and we had a special respect for them because they were Father's.

Father had had a lighter ring once, with a smaller sapphire, which he had worn as a young man. He had discarded it as less suitable for him, however, as he got on in life, and it had been put away long ago in the safe in our pantry.

Mother didn't like to have it lying idle there, year after year. After I left college, she decided that I had better wear it, so that the family would get some good out of it once more. One afternoon she and I went into the crowded pantry, with its smell of damp washcloths, and she took it out of the safe.

I did not want a ring, but Mother presented this one to me with such affection that I saw no way to get out of accepting it. She put it on my finger and kissed me. I looked at the thing. The sapphire was a beautiful little stone. I thought that after a while I might learn to like it, perhaps. At any rate, there was nothing to get out of order or break.

I soon discovered, however, that this ring was a nuisance—it was such hard work not to lose it. If I had bought and paid for it myself, I suppose I'd have cherished it, but as it had been wished on me, it was only a responsibility. It preyed on my mind. After a little while, I stopped wearing it and put it away.

When Mother noticed that it wasn't on my finger, she spoke out at once. She said there wasn't much point in my having a ring if I merely kept it in my bureau drawer. She reminded me that it was a very handsome ring and I ought to be proud to wear it.

I explained that I couldn't get used to remembering that I was wearing a ring, and had several times left it on public washstands and got it back only by sheer luck. Mother was frightened. She instantly agreed that it would be a terrible thing to lose Father's ring. It went back into the safe in the pantry.

Several years later, it was taken out again, and after another little ceremony it was entrusted to George. He had even more trouble with it than I'd had. He, too, decided that he didn't wish to wear it himself, so,

as he had married, he gave it to his wife, who adored it. Everyone was happy for a while until Mother happened to see Father's ring nestling on Wilhelmine's finger. Mother was very fond of Wilhelmine, but this strange sight disturbed her. She felt that the only right and appropriate use for that ring was for it to be worn by one of Father's sons. She asked George to take it away from Wilhelmine and return it. He silently did so, and back it went again to the pantry.

It was a curious fact that everything that Father had ever owned seemed to be permanently a part of him. No matter what happened to it, it remained impressed with his personality. This isn't unusual in the case of a ring, I suppose, but the same thing was true even of Father's old neckties, especially from his point of view. I don't think he cared what became of that ring, the way Mother did, but when he gave me an old necktie or a discarded pair of trousers, they still seemed to him to be his. Not only did he feel that way about it but he made me feel that way, too. He explained to me that he gave things which he didn't care about to the coachman or the Salvation Army, but that when he had a particularly handsome tie which had plenty of wear in it yet, or a pair of trousers which he had been fond of, he saved anything of that sort for me.

A pair of striped trousers which he had worn to church on Sundays for years went up to New Haven with me one Christmas, when I was a junior, and as I was short of clothes at the time, they came in very handy. I had to be careful not to take off my coat while I was wearing them, though. They looked oddly baggy in the seat when exposed to full view—on nights when I was playing billiards in a poolroom, for instance. They also made it harder for me to climb Osborn Hall's iron gate. This gate was ten feet high, with a row of long, sharp spikes at the top, and to get quickly over it in Father's trousers was quite a feat.

There was no point in getting over it quickly. In fact, there was no point in getting over it at all. Osborn Hall was used solely for lectures,

and we saw quite enough of it in the daytime without trying to get in there at night. Besides, we couldn't get in anyhow, even after climbing the gate because the big inside doors were locked fast. After standing in the vestibule a minute, between the doors and the gate, there was nothing to do but climb back again and go home to bed. This seemed like a useful or stimulating performance, though, when we had been drinking.

On nights like these, as I was undressing in my bedroom, I sometimes had moral qualms over the way that I was making Father's trousers lead this new kind of life. Once in a while such misgivings would even come over me elsewhere. They were not clear-cut or acute, but they floated around in the back of my mind. Usually I paid little attention to what clothes I had on, but when I did happen to notice that I was wearing those trousers into places which were not respectable, I didn't feel right about it.

Then one week I lent them to a classmate of mine, Jerry Ives, to wear in his role of a fat man in some Psi U play. Father wasn't fat, but he was much more full-bodied than Jerry, and there was plenty of room in his trousers for a pillow and Jerry besides. I thought no more of the matter until the night of the play, but when the curtain went up and I saw Father's Sunday trousers running across the stage pursued by a comic bartender who was yelling "Stop thief!" I felt distinctly uncomfortable.

After that, nothing seemed to go right with them. The fact was, they simply didn't fit into undergraduate life. The night that I most fully realized this, I remember, was when a girl whom Father would have by no means approved of sat on what was my lap but his trousers. Father was a good eighty miles away and safely in bed, but I became so preoccupied and ill at ease that I got up and left.

CODA

Though the original impetus for this book was the subject of fathers, along the way it has also become an Alan Bennett-type compendium book, a rattle bag, whose curious and eclectic items are intended to lure you, the reader, to further explorations. While not thrown together with the same serendipitous courage as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes' wonder full *The Rattle Bag*—tenuous nodes of organization are embedded here and there in the structure of *Fathers*—this anthology is meant to surprise and tempt you to further knowledge and deeper wisdom. Interestingly, Ann Thwaite also used the compendium book conceit in choosing the title and frontispiece for *Glimpses of the Wonderful*, her biography of Philip Henry Gosse, Edmund's father. Philip Henry had himself published a compendium book of that name, detailing all sorts of natural wonders.

Two final essays remain, neither one of them father essays. A further purpose of this anthology is to share some of the excitement, some of the sense of exploration and discovery that goes with such a project. Books like Patrick Lane's *There is A Season* and Alan Bennett's *Untold Stories* were unlooked for surprises, serendipitous treasures, stumbled across in pursuit of a theme. The hope is that many of the pieces and introductions in this anthology will be starting points for readers to start their own explorations. While not an *Odyssey* or an *Odyssey* translation, *Fathers: A Literary Anthology* is intended to stimulate Keatsian excitement, "to reveal new planets" and spark "wild surmise." The essays "Edmund Gosse," and "Leslie Stephen," both found in the course of doing background research, are added to advance that goal.

ANDRÉ GÉRARD

The final entry in this anthology is included, in part, as a pretext to draw back the gauze curtain of editorial impersonality. Born a twin in 1953, son of a German mother and a Belgian father, I grew up far from Wurzburg and from Liege, among the forests and lakes of the coastal pulp and paper town of Powell River, B.C. Lover of endives and sauerkraut, lebkuchen and rice pie, I have a BSc. (74) and BA.(76) from UBC, and a Master's of English Literature from the University of Washington (77), and over the years I have worked as broke hustler, green chain hand, postal employee, commercial fisherman, apartment manager, and tutor. The idea for this anthology came to me some five years ago, and although I tried to resist, the idea would not go away. I am, after all, the father of two teenage children, and some of my thoughts were forged in the fiery smithy of experience. Part of the impetus, too, came from seeing how "astronaut kids," children with fathers half a world away, responded to reading personal essays and poems about fathers. A gift for all my children, biological and emotional, this anthology was compiled as an act of affirmation. Despite being an agnostic—one who lacks the certainty to be an atheist—I believe passionately in the power of friendship, loving-kindness and literature to give meaning to our lives.

One last poem; not necessarily great, certainly personal. Beyond power, there is love. In and beyond love, there is meaning. This last poem and this anthology are expressions of love. They are assertions of meaning, and this meaning would not exist without my mother and my father. Many of the values embodied in this enterprise are their values. Poem and anthology are acts of faith. They are my myths to live by. Mind you, my Catholic father is no more Adam, or Lot, than my possibly atheistic mother was Persephone. My father's mythic power lies in daily details. His power lies in love and loyalty. It lies in the death of an older sister

when he was five years old. It lies in compulsory military service, the fall of Eben Emael, and the death of his mother at the outbreak of WWII .It lies in losing his pregnant girlfriend to the twisted lies of his gendarme father. It lies in serving on military tribunals after the war and in subsequently trying to drink himself to death. It lies in emigrating to Canada as a farm worker and, in 1951, meeting my mother in Ocean Falls. It lies in enduring life as a factory worker so as to feed a family of six. It lies in a marriage of over 50 years. It lies in several painful years of lovingly caring for my mother, as Alzheimer's disease stripped her of memory and all but a infant-like shell of identity. It lies in the chimney fires of my childhood and in my mother's epitaph. It lies in all of this, and in so much more; and, ultimately, it rises up in values transmitted.

“SAUVEZ VOUS, LES ENFANTS!”

Though the epitaph
Has not yet
Been carved into
The grey granite,
I remember
The crackling pipes of the tin chimney,
Darkly glowing red,
And the mirth of the firemen
At her panicked screams.

In the Cranberry cemetery,
Under a black umbrella
With a broken rib,
Despite the hail
My father seeps salt
And says Hail Marys
For my faithless mother;
Whilst I,
Equally bereft,
Far away in my own house
Turn to poetry.

THUMBNAIL BIOGRAPHIES

These biographies are impressionistic in nature. Written to give a sense of the writers and their accomplishments, they are also meant to seduce and assist you to read further. Often, too, they provide further information or insights about the writers' relationship to their fathers.

MARGARET ATWOOD

Margaret Atwood, grand matriarch of Canadian Literature, a Virginia Woolf figure, loved, feared and revered, was born in 1939. Poet, novelist, critic, teacher and social activist, it is part of her mythology that she was home-schooled until the age of 14, spent long periods of her childhood in the wilderness of Northern Quebec on fieldtrips with her biologist father and her dietician mother, and later studied under Northrop Frye. Among her many awards are the Governor General's Award, the Giller and the Booker Prizes, for books as various as *The Circle Game* (1964) *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), her seminal work in Canadian literary criticism, helped to establish Canadian Literature as a topic for serious study, as well as positing that the characters in Canadian novels are often survivors with victim mentalities. Perhaps in opposition to this insight, the heroine of *Surfacing* (1972), the brilliant, sinewy novel published in the same year as *Survival*, declares: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim... I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless." Given the subject of this anthology, it must also be noted that the chief plot device of *Surfacing* is the hunt for a missing father.

JAMES BALDWIN

“Each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other.” Black, homosexual, and lacking formal education beyond high school, James Baldwin (August 2, 1924– November 30, 1987) believed that as a writer “one is trying to change the consciousness of other people.” It is perhaps a measure of Baldwin’s impact on American consciousness that on May 17th, 1963 he was featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* , and that in 2005, eighteen years after his death, the United States postal service dedicated a postage stamp to him. Harlem-raised, the adoptive son of a poor, store front preacher—child-preacher himself at the age of 14—Baldwin was the eldest of nine children, and from an early age, he “took care of the kids and dealt with Daddy.” After graduating from Dewitt Clinton High School, a predominantly white secondary school for boys in the Bronx, Baldwin found his way to Greenwich Village and from there to Paris. His first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), centers on a young black boy, struggling to realize himself within the bleak boundaries of Harlem. His second novel, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), is an anguished, yet tender exploration of the distorting pressures faced by a young American living in Paris and trying to come to terms with his homosexuality. Other important novels and plays include *Another Country* (1962), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), *Blues for Mr. Charlie* (1964), and *The Amen Corner* (1954). While Baldwin also published a volume of poetry, *Jimmy’s Blues*(1983), and a collection of highly successful short stories, *Going to Meet the Man* (1965), his greatest impact was as an essayist, and collections of essays such as *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963) made him an influential voice of the American civil rights movement. According to a Random House publishing blurb, “The Fire Next Time, ” an essay first published in *The New Yorker* , “galvanized the nation and continues to reverberate as perhaps the most prophetic and defining statement ever writ-

ten of the continuing costs of Americans' refusal to face their own history." Mentor and inspiration to writers as important and varied as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Adrienne Rich and Colm Tóibín, Baldwin certainly continues to effect deep changes in individual and social consciousness.

SAUL BELLOW

Né Solomon Bellows, possibly June 10th, 1915; died Saul Bellow, April 5th, 2005. Like his novels, Saul Bellow looms larger than life. Married five times, father of five children (the last born when he was 83 years old) Bellow mythologized the world he lived in. Lachine-born to a poor family of Jewish-Russian immigrants; fluent in French, Hebrew and Yiddish; raised in Prohibition-era Chicago; educated at the University of Chicago and at Northwestern; recipient of numerous awards including three National Book Awards, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Pulitzer, and the 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature; friends with Ralph Ellison, Arthur Miller, Delmore Schwartz, Allan Bloom, Phillip Roth, Martin Amis, and John Berryman; Bellow spent his famously Chicago-centered life observing the confusing chaos of modern urban existence, sifting it for signs of soul and meaning, and re-imagining it using a highly colloquial yet erudite style filled with joyful exuberance, high humour, profound insight, and gentle compassion. His novels include masterpieces such as *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). Notable, too, is *To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account* (1976), musings on the state of Israel in the form of a travel memoir. Though Bellow has rightly been challenged and criticized for philosophical and personal inconsistencies, though he sometimes failed "to imagine life on premises different from [his] own," his greatness is undeniable. His writings repeatedly rescue us from "the humiliations of inconsequence."

ALAN BENNETT

Born in Leeds in 1934, Bennett studied medieval history at Oxford before escaping academia by achieving early fame in 1960 as a member of *Beyond the Fringe* with Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller, and Peter Cook. Since then, Bennett, while continuing to work as an actor, has written many radio, television and screen pieces, most notably *Me-I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1978), *Talking Heads* (1987), *An Englishman Abroad* (1983), and *A Private Function* (1984). His numerous stage productions include *Habeas Corpus* (1973), *Kafka's Dick* (1986), *The Madness of King George* (1991), and most recently *The History Boys* (2004), a play which won numerous best play awards in England and the United States. Critic Michael Brooke has described Bennett as “not just a great writer but the definitive chronicler of a certain kind of English ordinariness, whose outwardly placid surface conceals inner turmoil as intense as anything displayed by the more emotionally articulate.”

JOHN BERRYMAN

Berryman was born John Smith in 1914, and in 1926 his banker father, also named John Smith, died an apparent suicide. Within ten weeks his mother married John Berryman, another banker, but young John Smith did not legally become John Berryman until 1936. After studying at Columbia, where he was befriended and mentored by Mark Van Doren, Berryman attended Clare College Cambridge on a two year Kellet scholarship before teaching at Harvard, Princeton and the University of Minnesota. Berryman's life and work was tortured by a sense of loss, and his personal life was a succession of physical and mental breakdowns, financial strains, divorces, and failed battles against alcohol. Berryman owes much of his high reputation to *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (1956) and *The Dream Songs* (1969), longer poetic works which earned him numerous awards and prizes, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Bollingen Prize, and the National Book Award. While his poems have been called confes-

sional, he often distances the reader through formal structure, tortured syntax, varied masks, punning playfulness and stylized theatricality. The impact of his father's supposed suicide on his life and his work is undeniable, but Berryman also recognized that "maybe my long self-pity has been based on an error, and there has been no (hero-)villain (Father) ruling my life, but only an unspeakably powerful possessive adoring MOTHER ." Mother or father, on January 7th, 1962 Berryman killed himself by jumping from the Washington Avenue Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Of the many influences on his writing, Shakespeare, Yeats, and Crane are perhaps the most significant. Of Yeats he said, "I didn't want to be *like* Yeats; I wanted to *be* Yeats." Yeats would seem to be a dangerous poet to emulate.

BLISS BROYARD

Born September 5th, 1966, in Greenwich, Connecticut, daughter of Anatole Paul Broyard and Alexandra Nelson, Bliss Broyard was raised in Fairfield, Connecticut, spent her summers at the family's summer home on Martha's Vineyard, attended Greens Farms Academy and earned her MFA in creative writing as a Henry Hoynes Fellow at the University of Virginia. Now married and a mother, Broyard has in large part developed her writing life through writings which circle around her father, a noted critic and reviewer for the *New York Times*, and supposedly a model for Coleman Silk, the passing protagonist in Philip Roth's novel *The Human Stain*. The publication of "My Father's Daughter" in 1998 was followed by the collection of short stories, *My Father, Dancing* (1999), and most recently by the patre-moir, *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life—A Story of Race and Family Secrets* (2007). Unlike Essie Mae Washington-Williams, who grew up black only to discover that she was the unacknowledged daughter of a rich, powerful, white man, Bliss Broyard grew up white only to discover that her loving and beloved father was partly black.

ANGELA CARTER

When Angela Carter, aged 51, died of cancer in 1992, she left behind a husband eighteen years younger than herself and an eight-year-old son. She also left behind a body of work that includes several anthologies of fairy tales, nine novels including *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), *Nights at the Circus* (1984), and *Wise Children* (1991), the radical collection of short stories *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), several children's books, an opera libretto, and film scripts for the movies *The Magic Toyshop* and *Company of Wolves*. While a relatively conventional childhood, a storytelling maternal grandmother, anorexia, a stint as a reporter for the Croydon Advertiser, an early failed marriage, English literature studies at the University of Bristol, two years living in Japan, close association with the feminist Virago Press, and teaching at universities such as Brown University and the University of East Anglia might be used to construct a rationale for her life and writing, Carter is best understood as an iconoclast who waged war against the distorting limitations that culture and society try to impose on the self. Folk lore, fairy tales, puppets, masks and mirrors are repeated tropes in her works, tropes which she uses to assault conventionality and repression. If she was, as her friend Salman Rushdie called her, "a benevolent witch-queen, a burlesque artist of genius and antic grace," she was also, as Meja Makinen has said, an "avant-garde literary terrorist of feminism," who was not afraid to explore some of the darker recesses of the human mind. A writer who both invites and resists labelling, she is one of the most original, provocative and life affirming writers of the second half of the 20th century.

ANNE CARSON

While it is possible that her father once said to her, "The letters of your salad are very large," it is certain that Anne Carson was born in

Toronto, June 21st, 1950. Because Ann Carson limits the biographical blurb in her books to the short and often false sentence, “Anne Carson lives in Canada,” reviewers and critics are quick to talk about her as “notoriously reticent about her personal life.” Despite that supposed reticence, she has given interviews to the *U of T Magazine*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*, among others, and it is public knowledge that she grew up Irish Catholic in small town Ontario, daughter of a banker-father and housewife mother; that at the age of five she tried to eat an illustrated copy of *The Lives of Saints*; that she was introduced to the study of Greek by a high school teacher and went on to obtain a PhD in classics by studying at University of Toronto and St. Andrews; that she has taught at Princeton, McGill, and the University of Michigan; that she married and divorced; that her highly original and idiosyncratic books blend the essayistic with the poetical, the personal with the classical, the philosophical with the painful; and that she has won numerous prestigious awards including the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, The Griffin Poetry Prize, a MacArthur Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Her work, despite its erudition, complexity, humour and deep grounding in classical scholarship, often seems highly personal (especially in books such as *Glass, Irony, and God*(1992), *Plainwater*(2002), and *The Beauty of the Husband*(1995)) but in her most recent book, *Decreation*(2005), Carson signposts the words of Simone Weil: “We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves.” Of course, Carson is often disingenuous in her remarks. She has also said that “Loneliness is not an important form of suffering.”

RAYMOND CARVER

Biography to be written.

BRUCE CHATWIN

Born in 1940 and died in 1989, Chatwin grew up in Birmingham

and was educated at Marlborough College. At 18 he joined Sotheby's as a porter and with his brilliance, social gifts, and artistic eye he was a director by 25, before quitting at 26. The word precocious comes to mind. After studying archaeology and working as a writer and reporter for the *London Sunday Times*, in 1976 Chatwin famously resigned with the terse telegram: "Have gone to Patagonia." *In Patagonia* (1977) was the result of this trip, followed by *The Viceroy of Ouidah* (1980), *On the Black Hill* (1982), *The Songlines* (1987), and finally *Utz* (1988). Chatwin was subversively experimental, and his books—written in lyrical, gemlike prose—like Chatwin himself, refuse easy categorization, though *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines* revolutionized the genre of the literary travel book. Chatwin's passions included provocative ideas, the unusual, nomads, travel, art, outlaws, culture, mythological creatures, miracles and famous people. Deeply influenced by the adventurer, writer and mythologizer Blaise Cendrars, Chatwin often fictionalized his experience to tell—as his biographer Nicholas Shakespeare so wittily put it—"not a half truth, but a truth and a half."

JUDITH ORTIZ COFER

Biography to be written.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

"Some chicken! Some neck!" Born 1874, died 1965, Winston Churchill became the pugnacious embodiment of the thick-jowled British bulldog, and much of the humour of his remark made to the Canadian parliament in 1941, a remark intended as a riposte to comments allegedly made by French generals that "In three weeks England will have her neck wrung like a chicken," lies in trying to imagine Churchill's thick, massive neck as that of a scrawny chicken. Descended on his father's side from the 1st Duke of Marlborough and on his mother's side from Leonard Jacobsen, multi-millionaire shareholder

of *The New York Times*, Churchill's political career is too lengthy and too well-known to bear repeating. Amateur historians who want to refresh their memories and deepen their knowledge can delve into wonderful biographies by Martin Gilbert and William Manchester. More relevant to this anthology is Churchill's literary career, for which he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953. It was awarded for "his mastery of historical and biographical description, as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values."

He started his writing career as a daring war correspondent and sometimes soldier, reporting on the Spanish Cuban conflict for *The Daily Graphic*, the Pathan revolt for *The Daily Telegraph*, the Sudan conflict and the battle of Omdurman and the Boer War for *The Morning Post*. These conflicts produced four books, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (1898), *The River War* (1899), *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (1900), and *Ian Hamilton's March* (1900), to which Churchill added biographies of his father, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906), and his four volume biography of his famous ancestor, *Marlborough: His Life and Times* (1933-8). Good as these books are, his Nobel was primarily awarded for his speeches, *Into Battle (Blood, Sweat and Tears)* (1941) and *The Unrelenting Struggle* (1942) to name but two collections, and for his massive histories, *The World Crisis* (six volumes, 1923-1931) and *The Second World War* (six volumes, 1948-1953). Stating the obvious, former Prime Minister Lord Balfour described *The World Crisis* as "Winston's brilliant autobiography, disguised as world history."

LEONARD COHEN

"Like a bird on a wire/ Like a drunk in a midnight choir/ I have tried, in my way, to be free." Whether as lover, poet, novelist, singer, Zen adept, cultural icon, or maker of snow angels and plastic saints, Leonard Cohen is always a nimble-minded ironist who refuses easy categorization. Born September 21st, 1934, into a Jewish middle-

class family, he grew up in the affluent Westmount District of Montreal. When his clothier father died in 1943, the nine-year-old Leonard supposedly marked the event by sewing a poem into one of his father's formal bow ties, before burying the tie in the garden. After studying literature at McGill, Cohen flirted briefly with law school at McGill and graduate school at Columbia, before dropping out to become a writer. Montreal, Hydra, New York, and Los Angeles have been among the most influential geographical and psychic landscapes in his cosmopolitan evolution. Critically, Cohen is generally viewed as a flawed and minor early prophet in the church of Canadian Literature, and his current status as cultural icon rests principally on his reputation as songwriter and troubadour of loss and longing. Certainly his books of poetry, such as *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) and *The Spice-Box of the Earth* (1961), and his two novels, *The Favourite Game* (1963) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966), are unfairly neglected in comparison to the attention and adulation heaped upon songs such as "So Long Marianne," "Suzanne," "Bird on a Wire," "Chelsea Hotel #2," "Hallelujah," and "Democracy." Though Irving Layton once referred to Leonard Cohen "as a narcissist who hates himself," it is more profitable to think of Cohen as a performance artist, an explorer of possible selves, who, as Michael Ondaatje suggested in *Leonard Cohen* (1970), has used the mask of pop-sainthood to bridge the gap "between the serious artist and the public image."

E. E. CUMMINGS

"What are you doing at the other end of fathership?" The son of a Harvard sociologist who later became a Unitarian Minister, Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) was raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and educated at Harvard, and his work and life has often been interpreted as both a reaction against and an affirmation of this background. Cummings, though, is far more than the typographical

and syntactical iconoclast of popular myth, far more than the Bollingen Prize-winning free spirit of American poetry. Even in his first published book, *The Enormous Room* (1922)—a superb fictionalized account of his three-month imprisonment in a French prisoner of war camp, Cummings declared himself as the champion of the individual and the enemy of the stultifying forces of bureaucracy. Similarly, his poetry—whether intensely lyrical or savagely satirical, whether experimental or profoundly conventional—while attacking passivity and unthinking conventionality, celebrates love, spontaneity, and courageous individualism. His many poems include such gems as “anyone lived in a pretty how town”, “a salesman is an it that stinks Excuse”, “i sing of Olaf glad and big”, “if i have made, my lady, intricate”, “in Just-”, “in spite of everything”, pity this busy monster, manunkind”, “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”, and “the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls”. Well-connected, sociable, loyal and exceedingly witty, in the course of his life, Cummings was friends with Hart Crane, John Dos Passos, Ford Maddox Ford, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, and William Carlos Williams. Sustained by family, patrons, a frugal lifestyle and, eventually, income from his writing, Cummings spent most of his life living in Greenwich Village. Though he had numerous relationships and was married three times, Cummings is only known to have fathered one child. She was 27 before she learned that Cummings was her father, and hers is the question which opens this sketch.

CLARENCE DAY

“Clarence, of violent father reverent son,” was born November 18th, 1874 and died December 27th, 1935. The eldest of five boys (though the youngest died at only one year old), for much of his life Day served as a buffer between his blustering, domineering, yet well-intentioned father and his spirited, resourceful, willful mother. After graduating from Yale in 1896, Day became a partner

in his father's stockbroking firm and also joined the Naval Reserves. The onset of crippling arthritis in 1899 left him a life-long semi-invalid and forced him to retire from his father's firm in 1903 (son and father retired at the same time), though he did continue to be involved in business affairs throughout his life and was, for several years, owner of the *Yale Alumni Weekly*. Day's arthritis was so severe that he was eventually forced to have his knees fused, and in later years he could only write by suspending his arm over the page with a trolley and sling device. Perceptive, fair-minded and playful, Day found an outlet for his creative energies in producing essays, stories, and whimsical political cartoons for newspapers and popular magazines such as *Harper's Weekly*, *Metropolitan Magazine*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Though Day did not marry until 1928, a year after his father's death, he had strong friendships with a number of bright women and, not surprisingly, was an active supporter of suffragette and feminist causes. His first book, *This Simian World* (1920), wry, thoughtful speculations on the sociological implications of Darwinian theory, was followed by an equally well-received collection of essays entitled *The Crow's Nest* (1921). However, it wasn't until the last months of his life that Day achieved financial success as a writer. *Life With Father*, a compilation of pieces originally written for *The New Yorker*, was published in 1935 and became an immediate bestseller. Adapted as a play in 1939, *Life With Father* ran for over seven years and is still the longest-running non-musical play ever to run on Broadway. Day's daughter, Wendy Veevers-Carter, has published, in electronic book form, a two-volume biographical compilation of sketches, diaries and letters which gives intriguing glimpses of this caring, charming, quietly heroic man, this—as he once wrote of W.S. Gilbert—heartening “frontiersman of emotion.”

DIANA DER-HOVANESSIAN

Though Diana Der-Hovanessian has not revealed her date of birth to the editors of literary encyclopedias, she has said that her father was a soldier-hero who fought for the first Armenian Republic, and that her mother was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, to Armenian parents. Der-Hovanessian grew up in Massachusetts and obtained an AB from Boston University. President of the illustrious New England Poetry Club for almost thirty years, she has devoted much of her life to championing poetry and bearing proud witness to Armenian history and culture. Not only do many of her poems reference the life, history and culture of Armenia, she has translated many major Armenian poets into English. Her accomplishments as a translator have been recognized by numerous awards and by two Fulbright scholarships, scholarships which she used to teach and study in Yerevan, Turkey. Although she has published some twenty-three books of poetry, few if any of her poems have achieved the success of “Shifting the Sun.”

ANNIE DILLARD

Pittsburgh born in 1945, Annie Dillard was raised in American Standard comfort. A book rat at an early age, she gradually discovered boys, smoking, and drag racing. For her sins she was sent to Hollins College, Virginia, where she earned a BA and an MA. Tellingly, her MA thesis was entitled, “Walden Pond and Thoreau.” Three times married—the first time, in 1965, to Richard Dillard, eight years her senior and her creative writing instructor at Hollins; the second time to the father of her daughter; and the third to noted biographer and Thoreau scholar Robert Richardson—Dillard was nominally raised Presbyterian, once called herself “spiritually promiscuous,” and is now a Roman Catholic. Not surprisingly, her books are infused with a powerful, almost mystical spirituality. Her best books are essayistic in nature. Two, in particular, stand out. The 1974 Pulitzer Prize winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* rivals *On*

Walden Pond as a masterpiece of nature writing and as a “meteorological journal of the mind.” Very different, yet equally impressive is *An American Childhood* (1987). Modeled on Twain’s *Life On the Mississippi*, this lambent memoir limns a child’s awakening to consciousness within a specific historical and cultural matrix. An American original, Dillard at her best uses “an ordinary bit of what is real” to probe “the infinite fabric of time that eternity shoots through.”

RITA DOVE

Though Rita Dove was born in 1952, she shares many characteristics with Barack Obama’s so-called “Joshua Generation,” the generation of idealistic, high achieving, middle class, young, black Americans who, because of the efforts of previous generations, are not defined by skin colour alone and can choose to fight other battles. A Presidential Scholar in 1970, as one of the top 100 undergraduates in the United States, Dove received her undergraduate degree from Miami University, spent a year learning German and studying European Literature at the University of Tübingen on a Fulbright Scholarship, and obtained a MFA from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in 1977. Her first full book of poetry, *The Yellow House on the Corner*, appeared in 1980, her second, *Museum*, (which includes “Grape Sherbet”, as well as several other fine father poems), appeared in 1983, and in 1987 she won the Pulitzer Prize for *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), a work in which she conflates and fictionalizes the lives of her aunts, uncles, and grandparents to explore how history intersects with individual lives. In 1993, she became the youngest poet ever to be named Poet Laureate of the United States. Her most recent books include *On the Bus With Rosa Parks* (1999), *American Smooth* (2004), and *Sonata Mulattica* (2009), and her imagination encompasses extremes as disparate as the bloodthirsty madness of General Trujillo and the unassuming heroism of Rosa Parks. While Dove has said that her poetry tends “towards understatement and subtlety,” there is often an explosive

quality in the fierce restraint of her art. In poem after poem, she offers “a home for all who are dispossessed,” celebrating the integrity of the self as it struggles to be accepted on its own terms in the larger world.

MARY GORDON

Mary Gordon was born in Far Rockaway, New York, in 1949, and her work as novelist, biographer, essayist and short story writer is deeply marked by her fascination with her origins. Her highly successful novels include *Final Payments* (1978) *The Company of Women* (1981) and *Pearl* (2005), and she has won numerous awards (including a Pushcart prize and two O Henry first prizes) for her short stories. Gordon’s most remarkable book is *The Shadow Man: A Daughter’s Search for Her Father* (1996), a memoir in which she sketches a passionate portrait of a deeply flawed man, a shabby pornographer with literary pretensions, a convert to Christianity who was so ashamed of his immigrant and Jewish origins that he hid his past and became a nasty anti-Semite and a writer of speeches for Joe McCarthy. Given the depth of the feelings that Gordon shows towards a father who died when she was so young, it is perhaps not surprising that she twice married literary men almost 30 years older than herself. That said, although it is tempting to view Mary Gordon’s life solely through the prism of her father, she clearly owes much of her strength and clarity to her mother, a rugged survivor who despite near incapacitating polio gave birth to Mary when she was 41, and then supported her feckless husband and her baby girl by working as a legal secretary.

EDMUND GOSSE

Born 1849, raised the only child of strict Puritan Plymouth Brethren, motherless at seven, Edmund Gosse had a gift for friendship and for making favourable connections. Thomas Arnold, Robert Brown-

ing, and Lord Tennyson provided personal references for him when he applied for a position as Cambridge Clark Lecturer in 1883—a position granted to Leslie Stephen, though Gosse did achieve it the following year when Stephen stepped down—and in the course of his life he developed close, personal friendships with Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Max Beerbohm, Thomas Hardy, Rider Haggard, A.E. Housman, Henry James, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Louis Stevenson, Algernon Swinburne, and Viscount Haldane, twice Lord Chancellor, to name a few of the more famous. Despite a lack of formal education and, in the words of his close friend Henry James, “a genius for inaccuracy,” he became the pre-eminent man of letters of his generation, eventually writing hundreds of critical pieces as chief reviewer for the *Sunday Times* (1919-1927). He is credited with bringing Henrik Ibsen, André Gide and Sassoon to the attention of the British public and with championing the neglected John Donne. Although he became Librarian of the House of Lords (1904-1924) and was knighted in 1925, he had his detractors. Aldous Huxley called him “the bloodiest little old man I have ever seen,” and according to Evelyn Waugh, “His eminence sprang from his sedulous pursuit of the eminent . . . I saw Gosse as Mr Tulkinghorn, the soft-footed, inconspicuous, ill-natured habitué of the great world, and I longed for a demented lady’s maid to make an end of him.” In point of fact, Gosse died in 1928 while undergoing prostate surgery.

THOMAS HARDY

“Ere be the ’eart, but where be the rest of ’ee?” In *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man* (2007), her delightful biography of Thomas Hardy, Claire Tomalin describes how in 1866 Hardy, a 26-year-old employee of London architect Arthur Blomfield, oversaw the exhumation of hundreds of bodies from St. Pancras churchyard as part of the preparation for the building of St. Pancras Station. Apart from its Gothic aspect, this incident is of interest in showing how Hardy, a

man whose name today is synonymous with a mythical Wessex countryside, was shaped by forces which extended far beyond those of his native Dorset. Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, on June 2nd, 1840. His father was a mason and village violinist, and his mother, though relatively well-read and ambitious, a servant. At 16 Hardy started articles to become an architect, and in 1862 he moved to London where he spent five years working, studying, and writing poetry. Forced to return to Dorset because of ill health, Hardy gradually turned to novel writing. Though his first novel was never published, Hardy was encouraged and mentored by the likes of George Meredith and Leslie Stephen, and the latter, as editor of *Cornhill Magazine*, published *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) in serial form. In all, Hardy wrote some 14 novels, most notably *The Mayor of Castorbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). After the publication of *Jude*, Hardy, now financially secure, stopped writing novels and devoted the next 33 years of his writing life to poetry. "Drummer Hodge," "Heredity," "The Man He Killed," "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" "The Darkling Thrush," and "The Voice" are but a few of his more notable poems.

Hardy's writings, deeply rooted in Dorset country life, often dramatize aspirations thwarted by constraints of biology, society, history, and accident. Twice married, Hardy never had children, and despite good intentions and loving kindness both marriages were gradually warped and twisted by disillusionment and disappointment. More successful in literature than marriage, Hardy influenced writers as diverse as D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas and, of course, Seamus Heaney. W.H. Auden even went so far as to refer to Hardy as "my poetical father." When he died in 1928 most of his ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey, and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, George Bernard Shaw, A.E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling, and Sir Edmund Gosse were among the pallbearers.

ROBERT HAYDEN

“Old Four Eyes fled/ to safety in the danger zones.” These lines are a biography in miniature. In his writing and his life Hayden is a poet of struggle and transformation. His parents separated before his birth in 1913, and he was raised and supposedly adopted “Robert Hayden” by an unhappily married neighbour couple. His childhood was coloured by coke bottle glasses, books, his stepfather’s strong Baptist faith, family tensions, and by growing up poor and black in the Detroit ghetto of “Paradise Valley.” Hayden survived the Depression as a student at Detroit City College, did research on African American History for the Federal Writers’ Project, and studied under Auden while earning a Masters in English at the University of Michigan. Though raised Baptist, Hayden became a Bahá’í in 1943, a year after the birth of his daughter and only child. After twenty-three years as a teacher at Fisk University, Hayden won the Grand Prix de la Poésie at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966, an award for which Derek Walcott was runner-up. Ironically, given that some of Hayden’s greatest and most moving poems—poems such as “Middle Passage,” “Runagate, Runagate” and “The Ballad of Nat Turner”—are painful evocations of slavery and its consequences, in 1966 Hayden was also savagely attacked at the Fisk Black Writers’ Conference for being too moderate on racial issues. Despite such attacks, despite relative neglect, and despite bouts of depression, Hayden stayed true to his Bahá’í beliefs, asserting the essential equality of human beings and stubbornly resisting the pressures of prejudice until his death from cancer in 1980. Happily, “Old Four Eyes” did achieve some belated recognition. From 1969 to 1980 Hayden was Professor of English Literature at the University of Michigan; in 1975 he was elected a fellow of the Academy of American Poets; and from 1976 to 1978 he occupied the poet laureate position of Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

SEAMUS HEANEY

“History is about as instructive as an abattoir.” Born April 13th, 1939, it is part of Seamus Heaney’s history that he grew up at Mossbawn, a small 45-acre cattle farm, 30 miles east of Belfast, in County Derry Ireland. The eldest of nine children, at the age of 12 Heaney won a scholarship to attend St. Colomb’s, a Catholic boarding school in Derry, and on graduating he studied English Language and Literature at Queen’s University of Belfast before becoming a teacher. *Death of A Naturalist*, Heaney’s first book of poetry, was published by Faber and Faber in 1966, the year his first son was born. Since then Heaney has gone on to father two more children, and to write eleven more major volumes of poetry, half a dozen essay collections, two plays, and several translations, including a much-praised version of *Beowulf*. Over the course of his career as academic and poet, Heaney has taught at Queen’s University of Belfast, University of California at Berkeley, Carysfort College in County Dublin, Harvard University, and Oxford. The Cholmondeley, the E.C. Gregory, the Somerset Maugham, and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize awards earned by *Death of A Naturalist* were followed by numerous other awards, culminating in the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature. Tough-minded and tender, deeply informed by the rhythms of nature and country, Heaney’s poetry celebrates language and life. It digs deep into past and present, self and society, to create an order “true to the impact of external reality and...sensitive to the inner laws of the poet’s being.” “I rhyme,” as he says in “Personal Helicon,” “To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.” In so doing, he teaches us not to be overwhelmed by the lessons of the abattoir. “Crediting Poetry,” his 1995 Nobel lecture, should be compulsory reading for all.

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF

Michael Ignatieff, writer, historian, public intellectual, and now politician, was born May 12th, 1947 to a family of educators and

intellectuals. Ignatieff received a PhD from Harvard and held a Senior Research Fellowship at King's College, Cambridge from 1978 to 1984, as well as being Professor and Director at the Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy, Harvard from 2000 to 2005. An amazingly versatile writer with a wide-ranging intellect, his family memoir, *The Russian Album* (1987), won a Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction; *Isaiah Berlin: A life* (1998) was short listed for a James Tait Black Memorial Prize; *Blood and Belonging* (1994), a book on the dangers of ethnic nationalism, received the Lionel Gelber Award; *Scar Tissue* (1993), a deeply moving novel with strong biographical elements, was short listed for both the Booker prize and the Whitbread Novel Award, and *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (2000) won the Orwell prize for political non-fiction. At the time of this writing, Michael Ignatieff, M.P. for the Toronto riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, is leader of the opposition Liberal Party in Canada.

FRANZ KAFKA

It is titillating, though perhaps not particularly useful, to learn that Kafka was both a reluctant partner in an asbestos factory and—if business guru Peter Drucker is to be believed—the inventor of the civilian safety helmet. Perhaps more useful, though certainly less titillating, is the fact that Kafka was born July 3rd, 1883, the eldest of six children of a German speaking, middle class, Jewish family living in the anti-Semitic, largely Catholic, Austro-Hungarian city of Prague. Kafka's two brothers died in infancy before he was seven, and perhaps partly because of their deaths he grew up to be a hyper-sensitive, neurasthenic, vegetarian practitioner of Fletcherism who, despite several inconclusive love affairs, never completely broke free of his family or of Prague, and whose major works, *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926) and *Amerika* (1927), were only published after his death, and then only against his last wishes. To summarize Kafka's

life in this way is, of course, to caricaturize him and to ignore his charm, his sense of humour, his mastery of German, Czech, French, Yiddish and Hebrew, his Doctor of Law degree from Charles Ferdinand University in Prague, his work as a highly competent and well respected officer for the Bohemian Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, and the esteem he was held in by various Prague intellectuals for such small masterpieces as *Metamorphosis* (1915) and *In The Penal Colony* (1914); and yet it is certainly true that Kafka spent much of his life using, as Frederick Karl has said, "weakness as a means of asserting strength." Ultimately the Kafkaesque hero demonstrates his heroism and guilty innocence by struggling resolutely, though ineffectually and with ever-diminishing strength, against the inscrutable, indifferent malignity of the world. On June 3rd, 1924, after more than seven years in and out of sanatoria, Kafka died of tuberculosis.

PATRICK LANE

Born in Nelson, British Columbia in 1933, Patrick Lane is very much a frontier poet, the product of small town British Columbia, a sensitive man raised in a culture of cowboys, miners and loggers, a man who despite the odds has fought his way to literary success. Among his awards are the Governor General's Award, the Canadian Authors Association Award, and two National Magazine Awards. As poets go, he will probably never be measured among the giants, but with his twenty or so books of poetry, he has definitely earned his place among the ranks of decent, honest toilers who have something worthwhile to say, and who say it well. He is the father of five children by virtue of two failed marriages, and he has taught at several Canadian universities. Married to the poet Lorna Crozier, he now gardens on Vancouver Island.

DORIS LESSING

Perhaps to suggest a link between her birthplace and her writing career, many biographers and reviewers of Doris Lessing like to point out that she was born in Kermansha, Persia, in 1919. Certainly Lessing has had a very exotic, very unusual writing career. Her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950), and the fearlessness of her subsequent social realist fiction led to her banishment as a prohibited alien from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia in 1956. Her complex, though relatively conventional, explorations of the development of self in the *Children of Violence* series (1952-69) were followed by the highly experimental *The Golden Notebook* (1962), which highlighted the problems women face in trying to establish an autonomous identity. This novel became a feminist classic, though Lessing always resisted attempts to see herself as a high priestess of feminism. Her turning to science fiction in the subsequent Sufi-based *Canopus* novels (1979-1983) was perhaps partly a way to escape categorization as she continued her dissection of the clash between personal ideologies and the social frameworks which call them forth. 2007 Nobel laureate, recipient of a Companion of Honour and of numerous honorary degrees, self-educated, twice-divorced, single mother, communist, mystic, materialist, Cassandra, lover of cats . . . however she is defined, there is no denying Lessing's determination to break the chains of preconceived cultural notions such as racism, colonialism, sexism and materialism to achieve spiritual wholeness. Born in Persia, raised in South Africa, based in England, resident of the world, hers is the exoticism of intellectual courage—a courage and exoticism that shines through in the passion of her brilliant autobiography, *Under My Skin* (1994).

MICHAEL LONGLEY

Biography to be written.

ALICE MUNRO

Biography to be written.

SHARON OLDS

Born in 1942 in San Francisco and educated at Stanford and Columbia, teacher of creative writing at New York University, Sharon Olds is not a poet for the squeamish. Her excremental vision rivals and possibly exceeds Jonathan Swift's. However, where his poetry contains elements of disgust and self-loathing, her poetry seems more transgressive in its motivations. Perhaps in reaction to a "hell-fire Calvinist" childhood, she often seems to write to shock and offend, as if to try and see "if there is anything that shouldn't or can't be written about in a poem." Olds' first book of poetry, *Satan Says* (1980), won the San Francisco Poetry Centre Award, and subsequent books, such as *The Dead and the Living* (1984), *The Gold Cell* (1987), and *The Unswept Room* (2002), have also won numerous awards. Many of her poems painfully probe family life, and her 1993 book, *The Father*, uses the occasion of her father's dying to dissect some of the complexities of the father daughter relationship. Because Olds explores the visceral and the animal in us, because, too, her poems are often raw and unpolished, her graphic self-exposures, however modulated or controlled, often provoke strong reactions in some readers. Martha Nussbaum, author of *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (2004), has said that disgust "involves a shrinking from contamination that is associated with a human desire to be non-animal." In her poetry, Sharon Olds tries to help readers overcome such disgust, tries to expand our notions of what it means to be human by acknowledging our animal natures. The best of her poetry is, indeed, "poached game."

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

Michael Ondaatje is a subject worthy of one of, many of, his own

novels. A cultural hybrid of Dutch-Tamil-Sinhalese-Portuguese ancestry, he was born in Colombo, Ceylon, in 1943. The first nine years of his life were spent in Ceylon, the next ten in England, and since 1962 Ondaatje has lived, studied and written in Canada. While he is now best known for the international success of novels such as *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), *The English Patient* (1992), *Anil's Ghost* (2000), and *Divisadero* (2007), Ondaatje first achieved recognition with his poetry. Two of his many books of poetry, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1970) and *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963-1978* (1979), both won a Governor General's award. Ondaatje is a stylistically innovative writer who uses the exotic richness of his language in an attempt to heal wounds of violence and to create wholeness out of fragments. If coming to terms with the past is central to his writing, mythic truths, not facts, are what matter. We must, as he says in "In Another Fashion," "build new myths/ to wind up the world." Notorious for jealously guarding his privacy (in his introduction to *Leonard Cohen* (1970) he even warns that "nothing is more irritating than to have your work translated by your life"), Ondaatje constantly incites his readers to reconstitute fragments of his past. Part of what makes him great is that he is his own Billy the Kid, his own Buddy Bolden, his own Alice Gull, his own English patient and, most importantly, his own Michael Ondaatje.

SYLVIA PLATH

Born 1932, dead by suicide 1963, Sylvia Plath is arguably one of the best American poets of the 20th century, though much of her accomplishment is often clouded by her connection to her husband, the British poet Ted Hughes, and by her suicide at age 30. Part of the problem, of course, is that she mythologized herself, rooting her powerful, carefully crafted poems so deeply in the raw, emotional substrata of her relatively banal, mid-American upbringing that it is

hard to resist a biographical approach to her work. Also the personal elements of *The Bell Jar* (1963), her harrowing, classic novel of a bright young woman's struggle with society and mental illness, have fed the tendency to focus excessively on the biographical elements of her writing. Small wonder some feminists have tried to appropriate her as an icon of feminist martyrdom. Fortunately, her poetry—which manipulates “experiences with an informed and intelligent mind”—transcends her myths and shows how successfully she achieved her youthful ambition of becoming “drunker than Dylan, harder than Hopkins, and younger than Yeats in my saying.”

ADRIENNE RICH

“Philoctetes in woman’s form,” Baltimore born in 1929, Radcliffe educated, praised by Auden at 21, mother of three sons at 29, widowed by suicide at 41, honoured by numerous awards (including a Bollingen, a MacArthur Fellowship, a National Book Award, and the famously declined National Medal for the Arts), partner of writer Michelle Cliff for almost 35 years, and sufferer of rheumatoid arthritis since her early twenties, Adrienne Rich is a poet, essayist, critic and revolutionary whose accomplishments are still seriously undervalued. Partly this is because she started as a poet who worked within “the boundaries of perfection” and who, when those boundaries exploded, has sometimes been shrill and polemical in her pursuit of “the truths of outrage and the truths of possibility.” It must be remembered, however, that Rich is “a woman with a mission not to win prizes / but to change the laws of history.” If some of her later poems lack the polished control of “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers,” the metaphysical depths of “Diving,” or the biographical symbolism of “Power,” many show her to be—as she has said of Karl Marx—“a great geographer of the human condition” and her numerous provocative and insightful essays—essays such as “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision,” “If Not With Others, How?,”

“Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” and the “Arts of the Possible”—resurvey, remap, and even open up new territory. Equally powerful and transformational are reviews and critical essays such as “Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman,” “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson,” and “Three Classics for New Readers: Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Che Guevara.” More Hephaestus than Philoctetes, through her writings she has forged tools and instruments with which to probe and “break open lost chambers of possibility.”

MORDECAI RICHLER

“World-famous all over Canada” and in Italy, too, Mordecai Richler was born in Montreal, January 27th, 1931, and he died in Montreal, July 3rd, 2001. Grandson of a rabbinical scholar on the maternal side and of a scrap metal dealer on the paternal, Richler grew up poor and Orthodox. His parents’ marriage was an unhappy one, and when it ended in 1943 young Mordecai was quick to abandon the Orthodox faith and to rebel against his authoritarian paternal grandfather. An indifferent student, Richler attended Baron Byng High School before dropping out of Sir George William College to go to Paris to become a novelist. His first novel, *The Acrobats*, was published in 1954, but it wasn’t until 1959, after two more novels and six years in London, that Richler achieved recognition with *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Further major novels, written after his return to Montreal, include *St Urbain’s Horseman* (1971), *Joshua Then and Now* (1980), *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989), and *Barney’s Version* (1997). Notable, too, are his children’s book, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* (1975) and his political travel memoir, *This Year In Jerusalem* (1994). “A rumpiled Zorro,” blunt, fearless, combative, difficult, hard drinking, a devoted, happily married family man, and winner of two Governor General’s Awards and a Giller Prize, Mordecai Richler did more than just use satire, parody, and humour

to attack the flaws and follies of the world. Not afraid of the coarse, the common or the vulgar, his rich, riotous novels celebrate his conviction that “In a time when there really is no agreement on values . . . you are obliged to work out your own code of honour and system of beliefs and to lead as honourable a life as possible.”

THEODORE ROETHKE

“What need for heaven, then,/ With that man, and those roses?”

Born in 1908 and raised in Saginaw, Michigan, Roethke was living and teaching in Washington when he died of a heart attack in 1963. A brilliant yet troubled man, he struggled with alcohol and manic depression for most of his life. He studied at the University of Michigan and Harvard Graduate School, before the Depression forced him to support himself by teaching English and coaching tennis. His first book of poetry, *Open House*, was published in 1941, and it and his subsequent books earned him a wide readership and many awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Bollingeh Prize and the Pulitzer. Superficially confessional, there is a wounded wistfulness and puzzled wonder to much of Roethke’s artful poetry, as he, to use Delmore Schwartz’s phrase, “uses a variety of devices with the utmost cunning and craft to bring the unconsciousness to the surface of articulate expression.”

PHILIP ROTH

“Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness are my closest friends.”

Newark born (1933) and Newark raised, Philip Roth was bar mitzvahed in 1946 and graduated from Weequahic High School in 1950. In 1959, after prelaw studies at Newark College of Rutgers and an MA in English from the University of Chicago, Roth achieved early recognition and notoriety with the publication of “Defender of the Faith” in *The New Yorker*. Despite two strenuous marriages (the British actress Claire Bloom gives a bitter version of one of them in

her 1996 memoir, *Leaving A Doll's House*), numerous relationships, a Halcion-induced nervous breakdown, and a quintuple bypass, Roth has gone on to write over 28 novels. Out of “a continuing preoccupation with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world,” Roth constantly rereads, reinterprets, reinvents and rewrites the ever altering self as son, friend, lover, writer, Newarker, American and Jew. Much of his writing deliberately confuses and confounds the uncertain boundaries between story and reality so as to achieve an “expansion of moral consciousness.” Though Roth has not yet won a Nobel prize, he is, on the strength of *Patrimony* (1991) alone—not to mention a body of work which includes books as varied and ambitious as *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (1959), *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), *The Ghost Writer* (1979), *The Counterlife* (1987), *Operation Shylock* (1993), *Sabbath's Theatre* (1995), and *The Plot Against America* (2005)—eminently Nobel worthy. Among his acknowledged patron saints are Sigmund Freud, Henry James, Saul Bellow, and Franz Kafka.

ANNE SEXTON

Anne Sexton is to confessional poetry as Al Capone is to sainthood. Born Anne Gray Harvey in 1928, Sexton's life is hard to disentangle from her death by suicide in 1974. Daughter of a Massachusetts wool merchant, at 18 she eloped and married “Kayo” Sexton, a young man who eventually found work in her father's business. Troubled by bipolar disorder and manic breakdowns, Sexton first started writing poetry seriously in 1955, as part of psychotherapy. Her first book of poems, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, was published in 1960; *All My Pretty Ones* in 1962; and in 1967, *Live or Die* (1966) won the Pulitzer Prize. Of her writing, Sylvia Plath—friend, fellow poet, and rival in death as well as in life—said: “her poems are wonderfully craftsman-like poems and yet they have a kind of emotional and psychological depth which I think is something perhaps quite

new, quite exciting.” Intellectual toughness, emotional honesty, control and craftsmanship are the hallmarks of the best of Sexton’s poetry, even if many readers and critics misread her as primarily confessional. Ironically, one of Sexton’s best known lines, written for a rather autobiographical piece in *Ms. Magazine*, is usually read metaphysically, instead of literally as intended: “It doesn’t matter who my father was, it matters who I remember he was.”

DYLAN THOMAS

Dylan Thomas died November 9th, 1953, less than eleven months after the death of his father, and some two years after he wrote “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night.” Born in 1914 to Welsh parents who raised their children to be English-speaking, Thomas dropped out of school at the age of 16 to become a reporter. He published his first book of poems, *18 Poems*, in 1934 and his second one, *Twenty-five Poems*, in 1936. The success of those books launched his career as poet, broadcaster, and international celebrity. His private life is legendary for excessive drinking, madcap irresponsible behaviour, and a turbulent marriage that produced three children. His premature, alcohol-induced death, while on his third reading tour of America, also contributes to his romantic image as a *poete maudit*. Dylan’s poetry is intensely lyrical. Under the pyrotechnic, often surreal, surface of the poems lie carefully crafted and surprisingly varied explorations of life: of art, nature, death, childhood, grief and joy. Among his most famous works are the radio play *Under Milk Wood* (1954), the short story collection *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940), and poems such as “In My Craft or Sullen Art,” “And Death Shall Have No Dominion,” “The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower,” “Fern Hill,” and “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night.”

MIRIAM TOEWS

Born in 1964, Miriam Toews grew up in the small prairie town of Steinbach, Manitoba, a largely Mennonite community. Toews escaped Steinbach a day after graduating from high school, and after experiences which included “several continents, little money, strange jobs, sporadic university attendance, and two children, each by a different man,” she returned to Winnipeg to write and raise a family. If much of her writing is informed by the experience of growing up Mennonite and yearning for a larger world, much too is informed by growing up with a father who suffered from severe depression. Toews’ effervescent and often humorous books are animated by the tension between self and community, and by an appreciation of the “complicated kindness” which makes that tension almost bearable. While her novels have won numerous awards, including the 2004 Governor General’s Award for *A Complicated Kindness* (2004) and the 2008 Writers’ Trust Award for *The Flying Troutmans* (2008), Toews’ most successful and most original book is her finely modulated, deeply moving patremoir, *Swing Low: A Life* (2000).

DEREK WALCOTT

Winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature, Derek Walcott was born and raised in the British Colony of St. Lucia, a small Windward Island located some 25 miles from the French colony of Martinique and some 350 miles from Venezuela. In 1930, the year of Walcott’s birth, St. Lucia numbered some 80,000 people, mostly black, Creole-speaking Catholics. As befits an island poet, Walcott is a protean figure who assumes many guises and embodies many contradictions in his struggle with class, creed, colour and colonialism. Biographical scraps include black and white ancestors; a twin brother; a mother who supported three children by taking in sewing and by teaching at the Methodist infant school in Castries; liberal arts studies at the fledgling University College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica;

the founding of seminal theatre companies in St. Lucia, Trinidad and Boston; troubled relationships with women, alcohol, and money; a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship; a teaching position at Boston University; three marriages, and at least three children. Walcott has published many plays, notably *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* (1958), *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) and *Odyssey: A Stage Version* (1993), and about twenty volumes of poems, chief among them *In a Green Night* (1962), *Another Life* (1973), *Omeros* (1990), and *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000). Though his writing can, on occasion, be pretentious, sententious and sprinkled with unearned puns, Walcott's plays and poetry resonate with dualities of place, race, culture, faith, and identity. Some idea of the richness, power and complexity of his epic vision is given by the following quotation, a quotation taken from his essay "The Muse of History":

I accept this Archipelago of the Americas. I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper history, for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history . . .

E.B. WHITE

*"I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it"*E. B. White, Pulitzer Prize winner and son of a piano manufacturer, was born in 1899 and died in 1985. Though perhaps most famous as the author of *Stuart Little* (1945) and *Charlotte's Web* (1952) White was a long time writer for *The New Yorker* and the most famous American essayist of his time. He was a gentle, though tough-minded, humanist writer, whose essays sparkle with quiet wit and humour, as befits a man who counted Dorothy Parker, James Thurber and Stephen Leacock among his friends. White also revised William Strunk's *The Elements of Style*, and to this day "Strunk and White," as the classic style

manual is affectionately known, offers invaluable advice to college students and writers.

KEN WIWA

Born 1968 in Lagos, Nigeria and educated in England, Ken Wiwa is the son of the writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. Inevitably, for a man who vowed “to make something of my life by trying to save his,” Ken Wiwa is still better known as the son of his father than as a person in his own right. As the title of his patremoir *In The Shadow of a Saint* (2000) suggests, this subordinate position is largely of his own choosing. Certainly, he is not lacking in accomplishments. His work as broadcaster for the BBC, the CBC and National Public Radio, and his reporting for The Guardian and The Globe and Mail, has made him an important commentator on issues relating to globalization. Founder and board member of the Ken Sara-Wiwa Foundation, an organization established to honour the memory of Ken Sara-Wiwa and to continue his mission “to protect the natural environment, to promote the human rights of its defenders and to support grassroots organizations and individuals in furthering the cause of peace, freedom and justice,” Ken Wiwa’s pre-eminent position as social entrepreneur and cultural activist was confirmed by his selection as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2005. Subsequently, Wiwa worked as special assistant to two Nigerian presidents. While history and his own efforts may push him even farther onto the Nigerian and global political stage, the deeply perceptive, personal-public postscript to *In the Shadow of A Saint* proves that Ken Wiwa has already moved far beyond his father’s shadow.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Born January 25th, 1882, died by suicide March 28th, 1941. Novelist, critic, essayist, diarist, feminist, pacifist, daughter of the eminent

Victorian philosopher and writer Sir Leslie Stephen, wife of the political theorist and writer Leonard Woolf, co-founder with Woolf of the Hogarth Press, and a central member of the Bloomsbury Group which included such artists and intellectuals as Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, E.M. Forster, David Garnett, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, John Maynard Keynes, Vita Sackville-West, and Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf is one of the major figures of 20th century literature. Her deep interest in the nature of consciousness, the way in which the mind responds and organizes the varied physical, social, and intellectual stimuli to which it is exposed, helped produce highly lyrical, stylistically bold novels such as *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *The Waves* (1931). Her father died when she was twenty-two, and in her diary she later wrote, "If he had lived longer his life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; inconceivable."

