

Welcome to Thistledown's Spring 2025 season!

Tunnel Island is a new collection of stories from iconic BC writer Bill Gaston. In these eleven loosely connected tales, an array of delightful misfits mess up their lives and somehow manage to find some form of redemption through human connection and community.

Walking Upstream is a first poetry collection by Saskatchewan writer Lloyd Ratzlaff, who undertakes a journey to cast off the chains of an evangelical upbringing and find peace, self-acceptance, and delight in the natural world as he walks the pathways of a prairie city.

Elizabeth J. Haynes is a lifelong intrepid traveller who has collected some of her best adventures and insights in the collection titled *Food for the Journey:* A *Life in Travel.* The author's openhearted and wise encounters with a wide range of people and cultures always entertains and enlightens.

Each of our spring 2025 titles offers food for thought, as well as nourishment for the spirit.

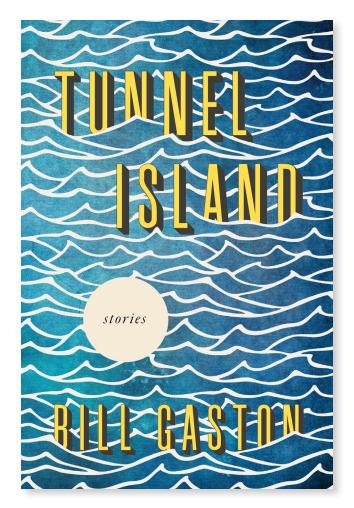
Enjoy!

JoAnn McCaig Publisher Thistledown Press









Publication: April 29, 2025

\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 228 pages

ISBN: 9781771872683

FICTION / Short Stories / Small Town & Rural /

Humorous / General

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Bill Gaston is the author of seven novels and eight collections of short fiction, including Sex is Red and Mount Appetite, as well as a book of poems and two memoirs, most recently Just Let Me Look at You. His work has been shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Fiction, the Giller Prize, among many other awards, and has won the Victoria/Butler Book Prize, the Writers' Trust Timothy Findley Award (for a body of work, mid-career), the Ethel Wilson Prize for Fiction, and the National Post Book of the Year. He lives on Gabriola island Island with his wife, the author Dede Crane.

Tunnel Island: Stories by Bill Gaston



Set on an island in BC's Salish Sea, a richly imagined and often hilarious collection of linked stories by Bill Gaston, a master of the art of short fiction.

Eleven stories unfold over a period of ten years, featuring a cast of characters striving to understand and overcome pasts that often include a catastrophic error: on Tunnel Island, moral misjudgements, semi-legal schemes, and antisocial gaffes abound.

Jack ekes out a living doing odd jobs and minding the beautiful houses of absentee landlords, until he takes a lover's bad advice and rents them out on Airbnb. A dying woman retains her wry sense of Wiccan humour while lovingly ministered to by her partner—in between his trips to hand out Halloween candy to the goblins at their door. A gruff-bordering-on-abusive uncle persuades his nephew to help him catch the otter hunting his koi. The almost mystical disappearance of a toddler is revisited years later when her parents remarry in a surreal outdoor ceremony.

These salty islanders are loners—not always by choice—though sometimes their disconnectedness is alleviated by a wedding or a Christmas dinner or a night at the pub. Highly original and empathetic, *Tunnel Island* is electrified by dark undercurrents that jolt and illuminate by turns. Bill Gaston's big-hearted vision of life on a heavily forested island off the BC coast immerses readers in a world rendered tender and tolerable by human folly and our stumbling attempts at redemption.

Praise for Tunnel Island:

"The immense pleasure that *Tunnel Island* gave me came from every possible source: from the lovingly described settings, the unexpected narrative turns, the supple sentences, the close observations . . . What a talent Bill Gaston is! What a master of the craft!"

-Barbara Gowdy, author of Little Sister and The White Bone

"Bill Gaston's stories are as multifaceted and generous as the complicated, all-too-real characters at their heart. This is a wonderful book. Spend some time on Tunnel Island, and you'll never want to leave."

-Steven Price, author of Lampedusa and By Gaslight

Praise for Past Work:

"Here is a writer of great empathy, capable, it seems, of getting beneath the skin of anybody."

-2002 Giller Prize Jury

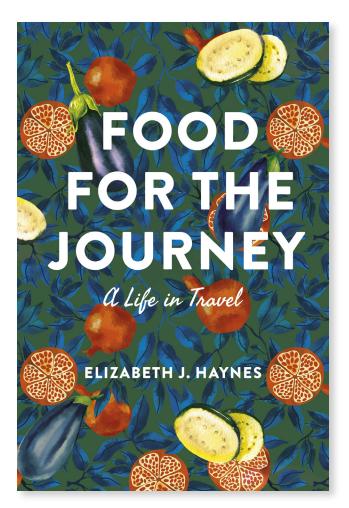
"Gaston has a wonderful talent for the incongruous and the absurd."

-Thomas Wharton, Southam News

"Gaston is that rare writer who can peel back the deepest fears of Nature (abandonment, pain, futility) and find a vision of vehement, imperfect beauty."

-Publishers Weekly





Publication: May 27, 2025

\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 204 pages

ISBN: 9781771872690

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Personal

Memoirs / Women

TRAVEL / Special Interest / Adventure

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Elizabeth J. Haynes juggled a career in Speech-Language Pathology with a passion for writing and a lifelong case of wanderlust. Now retired, she writes memoir, fiction, and poetry, and continues to explore the globe. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, most recently *You Look Good for your Age* (University of Alberta Press). Her short fiction collection, *Speak Mandarin not Dialect* (Thistledown Press), was an Alberta Book Award finalist. She has won the Jon Whyte Memorial Essay, a Western Magazine Award and the American Heart Association Award for fiction. Her first novel, *The Errant Husband*, was published in 2021 (Radiant Press). She served as writer in residence for the Calgary Public Library in 2023. She lives in Calgary, Alberta.

Food for the Journey: A Life in Travel by Elizabeth J. Haynes



In this inspiring memoir rich with the flavours of other cultures, the author journeys by bike, on foot, by bus, plane, and train in her quest to understand the lives of the people she meets.

You know you're not on a typical turista tour when you read, "We stopped for a mid-day lunch of piranha and hiked to a lagoon." This writer's explorations are unpredictable, sometimes perilous, often amusing, and always fascinating. While Elizabeth J. Haynes is an outsider—in the Philippines as a volunteer working with disabled children, at a pig killing in a remote Indonesian village, or even at a family wedding in rural North Carolina—she offers a compassionate view of those around her.

Insights and revelations emerge from stories Haynes tells about the vagaries of the human heart. Cycling with her sister in Cuba, she hopes her sister will find the strength to leave a difficult relationship. On a working trip in Armenia, she recalls a lost love; in Cambodia, in an encounter with a little girl, she faces the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge regime. Like many first-world travellers, she is pained by the want and suffering she witnesses and is moved by the generosity she receives.

As Elizabeth J. Haynes writes, "No one travels alone. No one journeys without help." And sometimes help comes in the form of food—Southern grits with pancakes, Armenian eggplant stuffed with walnuts and pomegranate, grilled guinea pig in Peru—nourishment for the soul of the traveller. This travel memoir is a sumptuous meal with many courses, savoury and sweet.

Praise for Food for the Journey:

"Food for the Journey by Elizabeth J. Haynes takes the reader on inner and outer explorations of exotic locales, sudden friendships, contemporary politics, historical horrors, and acts of kindness. Diverse and often unexpected, Haynes's trips throughout the world offer insights into both the wonders of the natural world and the complexities of human relationships, while exploring the joys and perils of travel off the beaten path."

-Joan Crate, author of the novels Black Apple and Breathing Water

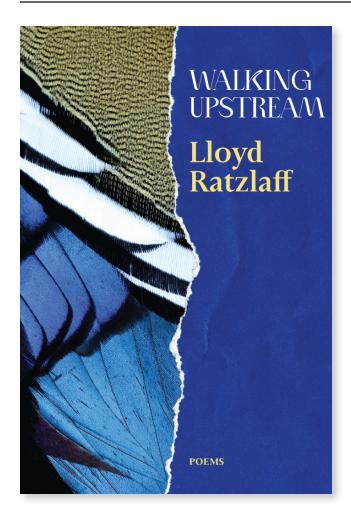
Praise for Past Work:

"The Errant Husband is a worthy first novel, notable for a fresh authorial voice that engages readers with the protagonist but still maintains a distance that encourages us to analyze and critique protagonist Thelma."

—The British Columbia Review

"Haynes' characters are fully rounded, complex and believable, and the wry humour, rich sensory detail and well-executed suspense make this novel a delight to read." —Lori Hahnel





Publication: April 8, 2025 \$19.95 paperback | 6 x 8 | 78 pages

ISBN: 9781771872706

POETRY / Religious / Animals & Nature / Canadian

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Lloyd Ratzlaff is a former minister, counsellor, and university lecturer who has authored three books of literary nonfiction and edited an anthology of seniors' writings and a children's book. He was a finalist for three Saskatchewan Book Awards, won two Saskatchewan Writers' Guild literary nonfiction awards, and served on the boards of several writing organizations. He was a columnist for *Prairie Messenger Catholic Journal* through its last nineteen years of publication, and taught writing classes for READ Saskatoon, the Western Development Museum, and the University of Saskatchewan's Certificate of Art and Design program. *Walking Upstream* is his first poetry collection. He lives in Saskatoon.

Walking Upstream by Lloyd Ratzlaff



A debut poetry collection, both lyrical and surprisingly playful, about overcoming a harsh evangelical upbringing and seeking consolation from the beauty of the natural world.

This collection by the author of three books of nonfiction takes readers into one man's struggle to escape the corrosive effects of a punishing religion. We meet the small, frightened boy afraid of hell-fire and eternal guilt, and decades later, the man kicking free of the habit of self-excoriation.

There is humour in the observation of the antics of birds, especially magpies and other corvids, and profound humility in the struggle to resist a confining culture.

Excerpt from Walking Upstream:

Magpie, I love you more for your flight and strut than for your squawk, but can't vilify a creature ten times tougher than I am and a hell of a lot more handsome.

We walk with the poet-as-flaneur through neighbourhoods and along the river in a small prairie city, observing the incongruities, absurdities, and startling images and sounds of city life. And with the mystic who believes in something far beyond himself, so the beetle he sees on a path is "a little Buddha," and the wind and the flowing river are "irresistible forces," while a pine teaches him "how you move / without going / anywhere."

Praise for Walking Upstream:

"In this bright and supple collection of lyric reckonings, Lloyd Ratzlaff's humble speakers attend to multitudes. Everything from God to gosling, clover to cuckoo, dogma to dogshit, and Buddha to bee serve as companions on a path of call and response to our world. In the best way, we are re-minded. This book will refresh all who read it."

—Gerald Hill, author of Crooked at the Far End and Hillsdale Book

Praise for Past Work:

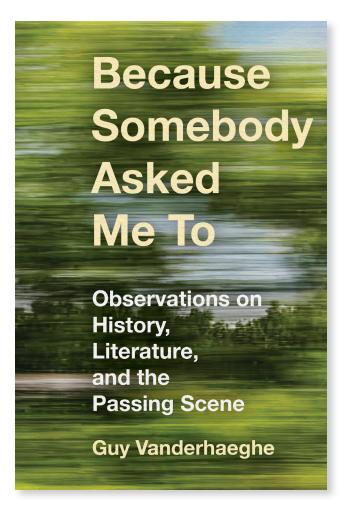
Bindy's Moon

"A keenly detailed, often lyrical exploration of love, loss, and courage." —Saskatchewan Writers' Guild John V. Hicks Long Manuscript Awards

"Bindy's Moon is exquisitely rendered. Ratzlaff's personal reflections deploy the delicate tuning of an inquisitive mind, the sober bell of experience, and the deft use of language to grapple with life's complexities and transcendent potentials."

-Saskatchewan Book Awards citation





Publication: September 17, 2024 \$25.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 320 pages ISBN 9781771872584 LITERARY COLLECTIONS / Essays Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Guy Vanderhaeghe is a three-time winner of the Governor General's Award for English language fiction for his collections of short stories, Man Descending and Daddy Lenin, and for his novel, The Englishman's Boy, which was also shortlisted for the Giller Prize and The International Dublin Literary Award. His novel, The Last Crossing, was a winner of the CBC's Canada Reads Competition. August into Winter, his most recent novel, won the Saskatchewan Book Award for Fiction and the Glengarry Book Award and was shortlisted for the Writers' Trust Atwood Gibson Fiction Prize. He has also received the Timothy Findley Prize, the Harbourfront Literary Prize, and the Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Prize, all given for a body of work.

Because Somebody Asked Me To: Observations on History, Literature, and the Passing Scene by Guy Vanderhaeghe

Canadian literary great Guy Vanderhaeghe's eclectic and wryly insightful collection of nonfiction pieces spans his forty-year writing career.

Many editors and publishers over the years have asked Guy Vanderhaeghe for his thoughts on books and writers, on history, literature, and his own specialty, the historical novel. *Because Somebody Asked Me To* has all the hallmarks of the author's fiction: it is intelligent, wise, wry, and a pleasure to read. These essays, reviews, and occasional pieces are about the difficult craft of fiction, about growing up on the prairies, and about the struggle to find his own voice as a writer, as well as about novels by writers he deeply admires. And, throughout, he casts a bemused eye on the entire human comedy.

In 1982, when Guy Vanderhaeghe's first book appeared, Canadian literature was beginning to be recognized at home and abroad as culturally engaging and significant. *Because Somebody Asked Me To* gives readers a glimpse into those beginnings and how they shaped the author and his generation of fiction writers. The book also examines how the Canadian literary scene has shifted during the course of his career—the economic, societal, and cultural changes that have made the old world of writing and publishing scarcely recognizable. *Because Somebody Asked Me To* invites readers to ponder the transformations Canadian writing has undergone, where it is now, and where it might go from here.

Praise for Because Somebody Asked Me To:

"This marvelous stash of nonfiction reveals Guy Vanderhaeghe's full palette. All his strengths are visible whether in a review, a speech or an essay. Reading this volume, I felt all my circuitry light up like a flash of fireflies, as Nadine Gordimer would say. I'm just so glad somebody asked him to."

-Shelagh Rogers, former CBC host of The Next Chapter

Praise for August Into Winter:

"Guy Vanderhaeghe is simply a wonderful writer."

-Richard Ford

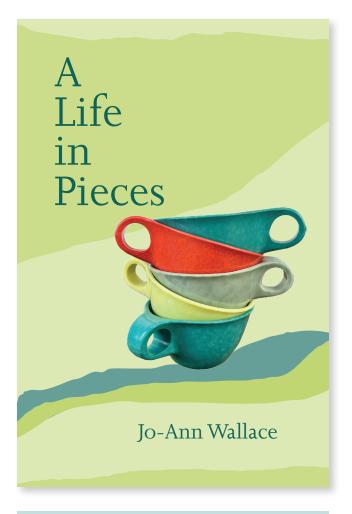
"August into Winter... is by turns beautiful and stunningly violent... It's a breathtaking achievement."

–Quill & Quire

"August Into Winter is an epic in miniature that reminds us why we go on living and loving in a world veering from one crisis to the next."

-Prairie Fire Magazine





Publication: August 27, 2024 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 224 pages ISBN 9781771872560

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Memoir

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Jo-Ann Wallace was an Emeritus Professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. In her younger years, her poetry appeared in several now defunct periodicals, including *The Canadian Forum*. Her scholarly work focused on little-known progressive movements and women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently, her literary nonfiction appeared in venues like the *London Review of Books*, the *Literary Review of Canada*, and *Prairie Schooner*. At the time of her death in June 2024, she was living in Victoria with her husband Stephen Slemon and their rambunctious dog Bodhi.

A Life in Pieces by Jo-Ann Wallace



With fresh, understated wisdom, A Life in Pieces explores a woman's entire life, without ever forgetting the shadow of mortality trailing every one of us.

This often lyrical and always thought-provoking memoir asks questions that confront many of us: what do we know, for sure, about our childhoods? Does a lively imagination enrich a life or blind us to opportunities? What choices shaped the path our lives have followed? In thirty short chapters, Jo-Ann Wallace take us on a journey from girlhood to elderhood, from one conundrum to another, with the crackle of synaptic energy flashing in the gaps—in what isn't revealed, isn't told.

The book parachutes us into working-class English Montreal in the 1950s and 1960s, into young womanhood in Toronto in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then into professional life in Edmonton from the 1980s through the 2000s. "White Swan, Black Swan" delves into childhood games, and how the subconscious power dynamic between a younger and an older sister lets their imaginations fly free of their small shared bedroom. "Melmac" starts with that quintessentially mid-century dinnerware rattling around in an old motorhome as the author ponders the obsessive collecting of objects as a quirky coping strategy, an outlet for the stresses of contemporary working life. "Whimsy" takes us from the classic Jimmy Stewart movie "Harvey," with its 6 foot 3 ½ inch rabbit to her own imaginary childhood friend, a Scottie dog, and to a present friend who will not watch any movie based in "whimsy." What dangers arise, the author wonders, when imaginations go unexamined, and unexercised.

The many disparate pieces of the author's life are like an intricately worked mosaic, while the title, A *Life in Pieces*, foreshadows the final chapters that unfold with tenderness and awe in the wake of a cancer diagnosis.

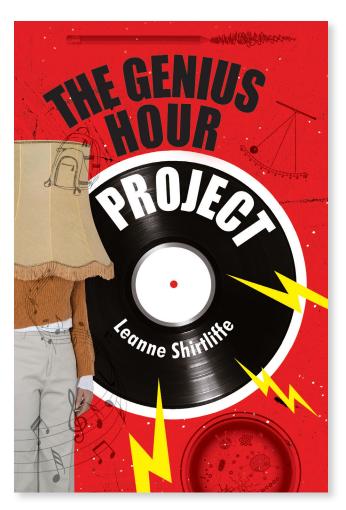
Praise for A Life in Pieces:

"Completely absorbing and affecting, A *Life in Pieces* follows the arc of a lifespan to an unwaveringly clear-eyed completion. Understated yet luminous, conversational but penetrating, these essays bring back a generation's hunger for self-definition, and attest to Wallace's own realization of a life in letters."

-Judith Kalman, author of Called to Testify: The Big Story in My Small Life

"These short essays are whimsical in the best sense of the word. They chart a life filled with a wry acceptance of things, from the possibility that our dogs may all be there to greet us after death, to the fact that her mother never really liked her. This memoir . . . will make you want to buy Melmac, watch *Elvira Madigan*, and go to Mars."

-Ted Bishop, author of The Social Life of Ink



Publication: August 6, 2024

16.95 paperback | 5.5×8.5 | 250 pages

ISBN 9781771872577

JUVENILE FICTION / School & Education

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Leanne Shirtliffe is a writer and teacher who has lived in Canada, Thailand, and Bahrain. The author of five picture books for children and two nonfiction books for adults, *The Genius Hour Project* is her debut middle-grade novel. When she is not writing, she can be found teaching teenagers, going to garage sales, and listening to an eclectic collection of music. Leanne now lives with her family in Calgary, Alberta.

The Genius Hour Project by Leanne Shirtliffe



Eleven-year-old Frazzy is mostly coping with being bullied and not always fitting in at school, until every aspect of her life goes haywire.

Frazzy likes to chat her way through classes, distracting her best friend Mel, while inwardly speculating about whether Ebrahim, the boy she has a crush on, really does like her—all without attracting any more attention from the bully Jake who humiliates her whenever possible. Then the teacher springs a yearlong assignment on her class called The Genius Hour Project, while at the same time Frazzy discovers that Mel's parents might be divorcing and Mel might be going to a different school. And just when she needs him most, Frazzy's stay-at-home-dad disappears into a major depression.

The idea behind the Genius Hour Project is for kids to "let their inner genius shine," but the thing is, Frazzy doesn't want her schoolmates to know that what she really cares about is vintage music and finding deals on old records at garage sales with her dad—too totally uncool. So she chooses a really dull, normal Genius Hour Project, something that she thinks will please her teacher: women politicians. She'll start close to home, with her mom, the long-suffering mayor of Riverview.

The problem is that nobody, not her teacher or the principal or her friends, gets behind Frazzy's project. So, if trying to be more normal is not the solution, what is? Over the months that follow, though she is worried about her dad, and even more distracted than usual at school, Frazzy slowly finds a way to be her best and brightest self.

Praise for The Genius Hour Project:

"Frazzy has a chatty and distinctive voice, and doesn't mind laughing at herself. Her class at Riverview Elementary and Middle School is made up of goofs and weirdos. Her homelife is a stew of music, laughter, and popcorn. What's not to like?"

-Richard Scrimger, author of Weerdest Day Ever! and Downside Up

"Zany, heartfelt and bubbling with creativity, *The Genius Hour Project* delivers its charming story right to the heart."

-Arthur Slade, author of The Hunchback Assignments and Dust.



What Fills Your House Like Smoke by E. McGregor

Publication: April 9, 2024 \$19.95 paperback | 6 x 8 | 90 pages ISBN 9781771872522 POETRY / Family / Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island

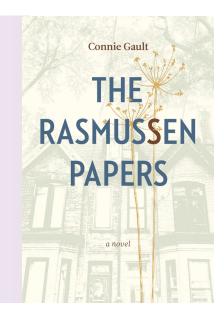
In this debut poetry collection, E. McGregor combines the lore of family history with personal memory, vividly parsing patterns of inheritance, particularly through the maternal line.

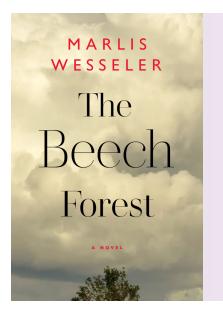
What Fills Your House Like Smoke begins and ends at the deathbed of the writer's Métis grandmother. In between, McGregor composes an incomplete and wildly imaginative biography of her grandmother, interrogated by family photographs, stories, and the scant paper trail she left behind.

The Rasmussen Papers by Connie Gault

Publication: May 14, 2024 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 192 pages ISBN 9781771872539 FICTION / Literary / Psychological

The Rasmussen Papers is a brilliant reply to Henry James' The Aspern Papers. Connie Gault flips James' story on its head and slides it into contemporary Toronto's Cabbagetown, among the marginalized and dispossessed, people the narrator studies as intently as she studies everyone she meets—until a confrontation on a streetcar makes her reconsider the limits of what you can know of another's story, and how hidden we all are, especially from ourselves.



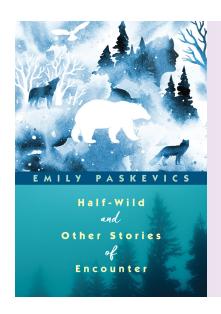


The Beech Forest by Marlis Wesseler

Publication: June 4, 2024 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 222 pages ISBN 9781771872546 FICTION / Literary / Small Town & Rural

This wry, perceptive novel is about secrets and silences; about estrangements between family members, and gaps in understanding between well-intentioned people who struggle to bridge the distances between one another. *The Beech Forest* looks into the dark corners of the human heart, and brings us back out into the light of day with humour and compassion.





Half-Wild and Other Stories of Encounter by Emily Paskevics

Publication: September 5, 2023 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 156 pages ISBN 9781771872485 FICTION/Nature & the Environment/Short Stories

In HalfWild and Other Stories of Encounter, a startling debut short story collection by a new Ontario writer, intergenerational relationships unfold in a context of environmental change and degradation.

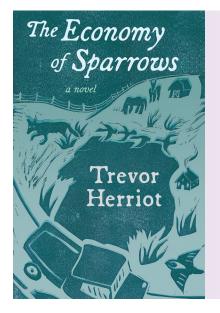
Emily Paskevics takes her characters—mothers, daughters, fathers, sisters—into the wilderness to lose themselves in their primal nature . . . or to find what they've always been missing as they struggle in a borderland between irrevocable environmental change and hope for ecological connection and

The Heathens and the Dragon: A 13th-Century Adventure by Kate A. Boorman

Publication: September 5, 2023 \$16.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 300 pages ISBN 9781771872478 YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Historical / Medieval / Action & Adventure / Social Situations / Values Ages 9-13+

From award-winning author Kate A. Boorman comes her first middle grade historical novel, set in France in the Middle Ages at a time of great religious upheaval. The Heathens and the Dragon: A 13th-Century Adventure stars twelve-year-old Elodie, a resourceful guardian to her little brother Bertran and his often willful pet chicken Codet. Together with Joie, a young troubadour, they perform for their very survival.





The Economy of Sparrows by Trevor Herriot

Publication: September 12, 2023 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 264 pages ISBN 9781771872461 FICTION / Literary / Nature & the Environment

This debut novel by Trevor Herriot, one of Canada's foremost writernaturalists, is the richly observed story of Nell Rowan, who has inherited her family's prairie farmstead and returned there to live after many decades away. Nell is increasingly obsessed by a 19th-century bird collector while haunted by memories of her mother's disappearance.





a beautiful rebellion

poems

rita bouvier



a beautiful rebellion by Rita Bouvier

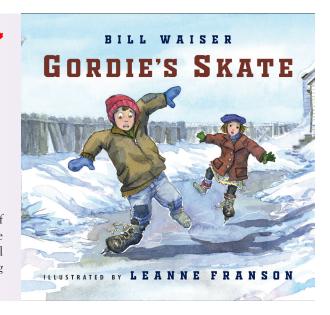
Publication: April 10, 2023 \$19.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 72 pages ISBN 9781771872348 POETRY / Canadian / Indigenous

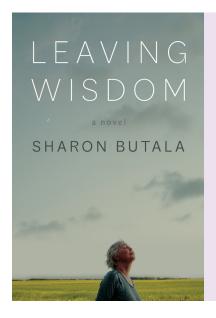
This evocative new poetry collection speaks with a fierce tenderness of many aspects of the poet's life: a childhood spent on the banks of the Churchill River, the death of a beloved one, the struggle to try to find forgiveness for wrongs done and the weariness of trying to redress those wrongs. And, most poignantly, *a beautiful rebellion* reaches one hand back to Louis Riel and one hand forward to future Métis generations.

Gordie's Skate by Bill Waiser; illustrated by Leanne Franson

Publication: April 15, 2023 \$14.95 paperback | 10.25 x 8.5 | 24 pages ISBN 9781771872355 \$21.95 hardcover | 10.25 x 8.5 | 24 pages ISBN 9781771872393 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Biography & Autobiography / Sports & Recreation

Set in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression, this is the story of hockey legend Gordie Howe and his first experience with skating. The book is charmingly illustrated in full colour by Leanne Franson. Bill Waiser is a popular historian and Governor-General's-Award-winning author.





Leaving Wisdom by Sharon Butala

Publication: May 30, 2023 \$24.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 282 pages ISBN 9781771872362 FICTION / Literary

Sharon Butala's new novel begins with the wrong kind of bang when retiring social worker Judith falls on the ice on the way to her retirement party. The debilitating concussion that follows seems to shake loose a confusing whirl of memories.

*Winner of the 2023 Glengarry Book Award Prize





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Spring 2025 UTP Specials

UTP Frontlist Special: 50+ frontlist titles

Discount: 45% Code: 4FRN

Conditions: One order per code. Ends March 31st, 2025. Combinable across all Ampersand's participating UTP publishers.

UTP Backlist Special: 50+ backlist titles

Discount: 47% Code: BAC7

Conditions: One order per code. Ends December 31st, 2024. Combinable across all Ampersand's participating UTP publishers.

2024 Backlist Special: 50+ backlist titles

Discount: 47% Code: BAC8

Conditions: One order per code. Starts January 1st, 2025. Ends December 31st, 2025. Combinable across all Ampersand's

participating UTP publishers.

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Alberta / Saskatchewan / Manitoba / NWT

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