

# BOOKS FOR YOUNG LAWYERS

## The Honourable Robert J. Sharpe, Court of Appeal

---

### **THE MAN WHO MADE US and NATION MAKER** by Richard Gwynn

I think a sense of history is essential for lawyers. I suggest Richard Gwynn's two volume bio of Sir John A Macdonald - "The Man Who Made Us" and "Nation Maker" very readable and give one a terrific sense of how this country came together and how fragile the union has always been.

### **JOHN MARSHALL: DEFINER OF A NATION** by Jean Smith

My favourite judicial biography is Jean Smith's *John Marshall: Definer of a Nation* - one gets a great account of the making of the US constitution and the foundations of judicial review. I also suggest reading some Canadian judicial biography - Philip Girard's bio *Bora Laskin: Bringing the Law to Life*; Ellen Anderson *Judging Bertha Wilson: Law as Large as Life*.

### **ISAIAH BERLIN: A LIFE** by Michael Ignatieff

Another terrific biography (non-judicial) is Michael Ignatieff's *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* a very readable and fascinating account of a great modern thinker who somehow managed to be involved in many of the great events of the 20th century.

### **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD** by Harper Lee

I would encourage young lawyers to read lots of fiction - enjoyable and instructive on where the world has been and where it is going. Booker and Giller short-lists are a good places to start. There are some very good books on legal themes that I have enjoyed Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a classic. I loved Julian Barnes' *Arthur and George* a fictionalized account of a turn of the century case of wrongful conviction that involved Arthur Conan Doyle of Sherlock Holmes fame.

### **THE BEST WE CAN DO** by Sybil Bedford

Another great book on the trial process is Sybil Bedford, *The Best We Can Do*, an account - probably more non-fiction - of the trial of an English doctor - was it murder or mercy killing and if the latter is he still guilty? On the lighter side, I enjoyed Grisham's *The King of Torts* - some real insights into the excesses of the class action bar and *The Appeal* which looks at the evils of electing judges and gives some excellent insights into attack ads.

### **DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF TIME** by Anthony Powell

On the personal and quirky front, for some reason - probably because I am an incurable Anglophile - I am addicted to Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*. It is a 12 volume series that looks at life in English artistic, intellectual and bohemian circles from before WW1 to the 1970s. It takes a while to acquire a taste for the writing, but once you do you are hooked. I am not sure how it would hit a younger reader now but I got into it in my 30's and I keep going back. The volumes stand alone as well and one of the best is *Books Do Furnish a Room*. If anyone likes this sort of thing, there is also a very good and sadly neglected equivalent serial in Canada - Hugh Hood, *The New Age*.

## Sandra Forbes, Litigation Lawyer at Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg LLP

---

### **THE PHOTOGRAPH** by Penelope Lively

I am not crazy about the book she won the Booker for, or the two novels she has written since this book but *The Photograph* is probably my most favourite book. It is about a man who learns something about

his wife after she dies (through a photograph) and Lively explores the pain he goes through and the ultimate understanding he reaches with beautiful writing, humour and sensitivity, without being manipulative (which these types of books can sometime be).

**TOO MUCH HAPPINESS by Alice Munro**

Its by Alice Munro, need I say more? You cannot go through life without experiencing the magic of Munro and I think she is at her best in these stories. Only she can write about the ordinary life of ordinary people and draw you into a story that is both brilliant and simple.

**THE SUBMISSION by Amy Waldman**

This is a brilliant book, a story about the committee that is put together to decide on the memorial for 9/11 and the architect who wins the contest. The committee chair is the widow of a man killed in the attack on the twin towers. All is thrown into disarray when the committee learns that the winner of the (blind) contest is a architect who happens to be Muslim (and who grew up in the US). It is a brilliant expose of the destruction caused by prejudice and the power of emotion (however irrational), which Waldman presents without judgment or criticism. She leaves it up to the reader to decide how they feel. I was incredibly moved by this book and can't wait for her next one.

**MISSING WITNESS by Gordon Campbell**

Since we are talking about books for young lawyers, I have to include my favourite legal thriller. Campbell is a trial lawyer and this book is an excellent story about trial tactics, with a very interesting twist. Unputdownable and very realistic in terms of the description of a trial and the challenges one encounters in preparing and advocating a case.

**BIRDS OF AMERICA by Lorrie Moore**

The very, very, very best collection of short stories in my view, my favourite being "People Life That Are the Only People Here" – I can't do it justice in a sentence, but lets say that I challenge you to get through it without breaking down. It is story about a sick child that Moore tells masterfully and honestly from a mother's perspective.

**THE IMPERFECTIONISTS by Tom Rachman**

Great collection of related stories about a newspaper in Rome that is being closed down, told from the very different perspectives of the people involved in the paper. Rachman is an excellent writer and the stories unfold with creativity, humour and insight – makes you feel you are a writer in Rome.

**HISTORY OF LOVE by Nicole Krauss**

Just trust me and read it. Krauss is "wow". I don't want to give anything away. Read it very carefully as all pieces come together in the end, just like a stellar legal argument. She is, I think, the best writer of her generation. Her next book, Great House, was also excellent but I am not sure I got it and I think History of Love is superior.

**Jack Batten, Writer and Former Lawyer:**

---

**AGAINST THE AMERICAN GRAIN by Dwight Macdonald**

Dwight Macdonald was the all-time best North American magazine journalist. To write clearly is the highest objective of any journalist, and Macdonald succeeded in every sentence he wrote. When I was still a lawyer who wanted desperately to be a writer, Macdonald was the guy I read over and over just to understand how he did it, how he mixed clarity and humour. Against the American Grain is a collection of his magazine pieces, mostly from The New Yorker. The book was first published in 1962 and reissued

a couple of years ago. It offers Macdonald writing authoritatively-- and clearly—about such diverse subjects as the revised King James version of the Bible, Mark Twain, James Joyce, and the decline and fall of proper English.

**OUT OF SIGHT by Elmore Leonard**

Leonard is one of the masters of dialogue. Many critics say he writes exactly the way people really talk. But that's missing the point. Leonard's characters talk exactly the way Leonard characters are supposed to talk. They're a distinctive breed, and it's fascinating to figure out how Leonard arrives at such a personal way for characters to express themselves. Out of Sight also presents a variation on the cool guy, a character type who appears in many of Leonard's books. The difference in this cool guy, Jack Foley, is that he happens to be a bandit rather than an enforcer of the law. Foley is cool but bad, and Leonard keeps the reader guessing about where Jack's going to find himself at the end the book.

**NOBODY'S FOOL by Richard Russo**

Russo is a wonderful American novelist who is usually overlooked when prizes are handed out. The geographical part of the U.S. where his books are set is the northeast, not in Boston or the other big cities, but in smaller New England towns. Nobody's Fool takes place in an upper New York State community where a guy named Sullivan can't get his life straight. He's divorced, boards in a large and decaying house owned by a sharp-tongued old lady, and works at odd jobs. Sully may not have any money in his pocket, but he's still got his principles straight. It's just a question whether he has the courage to act on his principles. The book was made into a terrific movie—same title—with Paul Newman playing Sully to perfection.

**ONE STEP BEHIND by Henning Mankell**

In the opinion of many crime fiction readers, this book, published in 1997, ranks among the ten best crime novels ever. It comes from the Swedish writer, Henning Mankell, and it features a beleaguered police inspector in a town in the south of Sweden. The inspector's name is Kurt Wallander, the central character in nine other Mankell novels, a man whom readers can't help embracing. In One Step Behind, Wallander is called on to solve the murder of three young people whose bodies are found, dressed in eighteenth-century Swedish costumes, in a remote meadow. On every page, the book raises the same question in the readers' mind: what happens next? That's an ultimate achievement in crime fiction.

**GET REAL by Donald E. Westlake**

It's harder to write comedy than it is to write drama. This is an axiom that applies to crime fiction as accurately it does to other forms of literature, and Donald E. Westlake was one of the few writers who successfully mixed laughs with his crimes. That was especially evident in his series featuring the New York City burglar John Dortmunder and his merry crew of thieves. Dortmunder was a master at orchestrating heists; it was just that random events invariably got in the way of ultimate success. Get Real is a late Dortmunder novel, published in 2009 shortly after the prolific Westlake died suddenly. The book finds Dortmunder using a reality TV show as the cover for his burglary job, one that goes as hysterically wrong as all the others did.

**Nicholas Kluge, Litigation Lawyer at Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP**

---

**THE ODYSSEY OF HOMER, Mandelbaum Translation**

One of the few true “desert island” books. If you were asked to pick a single book to read and re-read for the rest of your life, this choice would be hard to argue with. A foundational (if not the foundational) work of western literature, it contains just about all existing literary genres: adventure, romance, horror, comedy, spirituality, mystery, and at one point or another addresses just about every possible kind of

human (and inhuman) experience. Mandelbaum's verse translation returns the work to the kind of beautiful, simple poetry that the ancient authors likely intended it to possess.

**AUSTERLITZ by W.G. Sebald**

The last work by one of the great writers of our time, Sebald died tragically young. As evidenced by this work, his writing blends fact and fiction and has the ability to transport the reader far away from their own time, place and consciousness to feel as if they had gained access to another existence. Although ostensibly the story of one man's journey to uncover some difficult truths about his own past, it is equal parts a mystery and a meditation on the nature and significance of memory, both personal and historical. Some will find it a hard slog at times (one sentence runs over seven pages) but a comparatively small effort rewards the reader with a profoundly moving experience.

**JOHN BROWN, ABOLITIONIST by David S. Reynolds**

The book is subtitled "The man who killed slavery, sparked the Civil War, and seeded civil rights". Cogent arguments can be made that he accomplished all of those things, but this book also makes clear that John Brown was a religious zealot with messianic leanings as well as a terrorist and murderer. He was and remains a polarizing figure, interesting not only for the significance of his failed 1859 insurrection to abolish slavery, but because of the ways his legacy has been and continues to be interpreted and re-interpreted by different groups over time. His story brings up some fundamental questions about the nature of individual conscience and the rule of law. When the law under which a citizen lives is immoral and evil, what are the obligations of a moral person? Can terrorism ever be justified and if so, when? John Brown was as certain of the righteousness of his path as those of his modern successors who battle to overthrow systems with which they fundamentally disagree. The difference is that Brown, through his acts of terror, helped to change the world for the permanent good of all.

**THE PERIODIC TABLE by Primo Levi**

A memoir in the form of a collection of short stories, each in some way related to the elements on the periodic table. Levi was an Italian Jewish chemist who, after surviving the horrors of Auschwitz, went on to become a world-renowned writer of fiction, memoir and poetry. Although some of his other works – *The Drowned and the Saved* and *Survival in Auschwitz*, for example, deal explicitly with his experiences during the Holocaust, *The Periodic Table* is a much more broad-ranging survey of his life and, by extension, the breadth of human experience in general. It contains honest and very often beautiful descriptions of the most mundane to most fantastic aspects of his existence, and the reader is left with admiration for Levi, who manifested the power to survive, flourish, and create new beauty after narrowly escaping death at the hands of the most inhuman manifestation of evil in human history.

**A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE by George R.R. Martin**

Currently at five (large) volumes and counting, this epic high fantasy series is pure escapism at its most involving and accomplished. Martin creates a believable alternate universe, and populates it not just with dragons and magic, but with characters the reader comes to understand and care about, which is aided by the unusual narrative device of changing perspective in each chapter. The hit HBO television series pales in comparison to the experience of reading the books, as a sprawling canvas can be compared to a Polaroid snapshot. Don't be daunted by the thousands of pages (so far) in the series – you'll be thrilled at the task ahead of you once you allow yourself to be drawn inexorably in by the first few hundred pages...

## **Julian Porter, Q.C.**

---

### **RATKING by Michael Dibdin**

Michael Dibdin has written a series about an Italian detective, Aurelio Zen, who investigates crimes in various Italian cities, each with a different culture. It's a wonderful way to experience the subtleties of Italy. I suggest you start with *Ratking*. After that there are many more.

### **PHINEAS FINN by Anthony Trollope**

A prolific writer who makes reading easy with his 19<sup>th</sup> century view of politics, church and society. Start with *Phineas Finn* and you begin a whole series of political novels.

### **THE MATTHEW SHARDLAKE SERIES by C. J. Sansom**

C. J. Sansom has a series of four fictional tales of a hunchbacked barrister named Shardlake in the time of Henry VIII where the law was quixotic and justice very rough.

### **MORNING IN THE BURNED HOUSE by Margaret Atwood**

Poetry.

### **THE ROBBER BRIDE by Margaret Atwood**

A racy, exciting read.

### **AND NO BIRDS SANG by Farley Mowat**

A heart-stopping portrayal of war.

### **YELLOW-DOG CONTRACT by Ross Thomas**

An American master of witty thrillers. You can re-read them for the joy of the dialogue alone. Try *Yellow-Dog Contract*. Read any one of his books and you will be amused and the better for it.

### **NO GREAT MISCHIEF by Alistair MacLeod**

A story of clan in Cape Breton carefully crafted with images which burn in your memory.

### **RUNNING IN THE FAMILY by Michael Ondaatje**

A rollicking tale of growing up with an eccentric family in Sri Lanka.

### **MONTAIGNE'S ESSAYS by Michael de Montaigne**

Pithy discussions of everything, presented in a direct, unvarnished style. Engrossing.

## **For Your iPad or iPhone**

### ***Arts and Letters Daily***

A free site which tracks interesting articles from around the world.

***Wasteland*** by T. S. Eliot. A poem performed by Fiona Shaw. It begins, "April is the cruellest month ..." and then be prepared to be enchanted.

*Shakespeare's Sonnets* – buy them, all 154, advertised under the name of Patrick Stewart. A variety of actors read the sonnets with footnotes and commentary. Pick your favourite. My father wrote a book on just one sonnet.