



Clara Callan: A Novel

By Richard B. Wright

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In a small town in Canada, Clara Callan reluctantly takes leave of her sister, Nora, who is bound for New York. It's a time when the growing threat of fascism in Europe is a constant worry, and people escape from reality through radio and the movies. Meanwhile, the two sisters -- vastly different in personality, yet inextricably linked by a shared past -- try to find their places within the complex web of social expectations for young women in the 1930s.

While Nora embarks on a glamorous career as a radio-soap opera star, Clara, a strong and independent-minded woman, struggles to observe the traditional boundaries of a small and tight-knit community without relinquishing her dreams of love, freedom, and adventure. However, things aren't as simple as they appear -- Nora's letters eventually reveal life in the big city is less exotic than it seems, and the tranquil solitude of Clara's life is shattered by a series of unforeseeable events. These twists of fate require all of Clara's courage and strength, and finally put the seemingly unbreakable bond between the sisters to the test.

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Clara Callan: A Novel By Richard B. Wright Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1191334 in Books
- Published on: 2003-12-02
- Released on: 2003-12-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .97" w x 5.31" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 432 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A finely detailed depiction of the Depression era, Richard B. Wright's *Clara Callan* is told entirely in the letters and journal entries of two adult sisters, Clara and Nora Callan, and their older lesbian friend, Evelyn. The novel, Wright's ninth, made a surprising sweep of Canada's major awards for best novel--the Giller Prize and the Governor General's Award--in 2001. Wright has the gift of making the reader care deeply about these characters and their worlds, which include small town Ontario, where Clara is a sensitive schoolteacher, and New York City, where the younger Nora has moved to become a radio soap opera star. Since both sisters are still "on the shelf," their roller-coaster love lives--Nora's in worldly Manhattan and Clara's in the more restrictive atmosphere of small-town spinsterhood--are a primary subject of their letters and Clara's journal.

This is a quiet book, studied and well researched, but thoroughly engaging and readable. Numerous references to period music, political events, and the looming war quite successfully place the reader at both the centre and the periphery of life in the 1930s. Side trips to Italy and to view the Dionne quintuplets feel entirely authentic. With deceptive simplicity, the author creates a world of clear images: "Nora came in from her shuffleboard game with a sweater tied across her shoulders, her hair damp from the rain." Most importantly, Wright has realized characters that come alive on the page--quite a feat considering the self-imposed limitations of this novel's form. --Mark Frutkin, *Amazon.ca*

From Publishers Weekly

Canadian author Wright (*The Age of Longing*) has published eight novels, but remains unknown to most readers in the States. His most recent offering, which won Canada's 2001 Governor General's Award and the Giller Prize, could change that. The story's conceit is simple enough: Clara Callan is a single "schoolteacher who likes to write poetry," left to fend for herself in the tiny town of Whitfield, Ontario, after her father dies and her sister, Nora, takes off for New York City. The novel is made up of a series of letters and journal entries written between 1934 and 1939. During that time, Nora becomes a radio soap opera star, while Clara loses her faith in God, is raped by a vagrant, has an abortion, engages in an affair with a married man named Frank and finally gives birth to a daughter. Nora and the lesbian writer of her soap opera, Evelyn Dowling, are Clara's main correspondents, but the news she relates in her letters (such as "grippe and calloused hands"-although she also shows concern for the world's more serious injustices) contrasts with the darker events recorded in her journal entries. Wright has accomplished an amazing feat by allowing his characters to emerge, fully formed and true, without authorial intrusion into their intimate psychological world, revitalizing the epistolary form in the process. This novel will remind some readers of the American poet Elizabeth Bishop, herself an avid correspondent, and of the way in which the elegant surfaces of her letters sometimes cracked open to reveal demons lurking below.

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Review

"CLARA CALLAN is one of those rare novels that one might justifiably call a masterpiece." (-- Jay Parini, author of *THE APPRENTICE LOVER*)

"Superb... Traces with understated compassion ... the separate histories of two sisters." (Kirkus Reviews (Starred))

"A singularly poignant story about the depravity of human beings [and] their compassion and amazing

capacity to endure.” (Times Literary Supplement (London))

“A compelling story of perseverance and quiet triumph.” (Washington Post)

“Entertaining.” (Boston Globe)

“An amazing feat [that] remind some readers of the American poet Elizabeth Bishop.” (Publishers Weekly)

“A classic page-turner.” (Quill & Quire)

“A master story-teller.” (The Ottawa Citizen (Canada))

“A compelling narrative and characters that brim with humanity.” (Winnipeg Free Press)

“A near-perfect miniature: precisely written, true in voice and setting.” (Toronto Star (on THE AGE OF LONGING))

“Mr. Wright writes with the apparent ease of breathing, and he is both touching and very very funny.” (New York Times (on THE AGE OF LONGING))

“As compelling as any Margaret Atwood or as incisive as a Robertson Davies.... [An] invigoratingly original work.” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jaime Leflore:

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Sharon Clayton:

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Brenda Luna:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or maybe go to the outside with them family or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity this is look different you can read the book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent the entire day to reading a e-book. The book Clara Callan: A Novel it is rather good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book through your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book possesses high quality.

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