

Insider's view a definitive, vivid account

# Late-night protagonists as good to read as watch

**The Late Shift**  
By Bill Carter  
Hyperion, 299 pages

Reviewed by Rick Kogan  
Chicago Tribune

FROM DIFFERENT places and possessed of vastly different if equally strange personalities, Jay Leno and David Letterman first crossed paths in 1975. Letterman, an ex-TV weatherman and would-be comic from Indiana, had journeyed to California where he found Leno, from the Boston area by way of New York City, comfortably enthroned as the king of the young standup comics.

"Jay filled in a huge blank for me," Letterman says of his first brush with Leno. "What I learned from Jay was you can do almost anything if you have a consistent attitude."

Thanks to Carson, the job of Tonight show host had become one of the most coveted and lucrative in television history. And the quest to take Johnny's place is chronicled in fascinating depth and detail by New York Times TV writer Bill Carter in *The Late Shift*, subtitled *Letterman, Leno, & The Network Battle for the Night*.

The book is full of juicy tidbits, none juicier than the tale of Leno's sneaking into an office at NBC in Burbank, Calif., in January 1993 to eavesdrop and take detailed notes on a telephone conference in which East Coast and West Coast NBC executives discussed whether Leno should be dumped as Tonight show host and Letterman asked to take his place.



Letterman: filled in a huge blank

There was perhaps no TV event in history that received more press attention than the fight for late night. A certified insider — his Rolodex would be the envy of any TV beat reporter — Carter has interviewed every significant player. His story is both authoritative and definitive, a vivid, behind-the-scenes, blow-by-blow account.

We learn that unbeknownst to either Carson or Letterman, a week before Carson

made his surprise retirement announcement in May 1991, NBC signed a deal with Leno to be Carson's successor.

We sit in at a corporate meeting last September, when General Electric board chairman Jack Welch (GE controls NBC) admitted that giving the Tonight show to Leno, rather than Letterman, had been a mistake. And we listen to Welch share the responsibility for making it.

We are in Letterman's office in September 1991 and eavesdrop on a phone call from an ABC executive whom Carter does not name, telling the star that ABC wants Letterman and that the executive's bosses are willing to scrap Ted Koppel and *Nightline* in order to get him.

This is a story of corporate greed, misplaced loyalties, bad decisions, infighting, lies and massive egos. It exposes TV executives to be what one always imagines them to be: aggressively petty and not very bright.

Leno and Letterman dominate the book — two men wracked by insecurities.

For all their weaknesses, Leno and Letterman are the rarest of entertainment birds. In the history of TV only a handful of performers have been able to thrive in the late-night environment. But the elements that allow them to do so remain mysterious to Carter and his readers.

Some may think this sort of made-on-TV story isn't worth the scrutiny Carter brings to it. But with tens of millions of dollars at stake and millions of people watching, the fight for late night makes for captivating reading — and watching.

# Philosopher's reasoning clarified

**George Grant: A Biography**  
By William Christian  
University of Toronto Press, 372 pages

Reviewed by Michael Finlayson  
A-Winnipeg freelance writer

IN RETROSPECT, it is easy to see why philosopher/theologian George Grant and his popular writings, especially *Lament for a Nation*, had the impact they did.

Grant knew that ideas mattered, and he wrote lucidly and passionately about them. His life revolved around his effort (with the assistance of his brilliant wife, Sheila) to answer big questions: What objects are worthy of pursuit? What is the relationship among God, nature and man? What roles ought science, the university and nationalism to play in modern society, particularly Canada's?

This excellent biography is necessarily replete with a description of Grant's mental life and the effect upon it of his encounters with the works of Plato, Aristotle and Strauss, among many others.

Grant was born in 1918 and grew up in

small-town Toronto, the son and the grandson of school headmasters. He was extremely well-connected. (Vincent Massey was his uncle).

The established and his family were displeased by his pacifism during the Second World War, despite his heroic efforts in London as a civilian during the Blitz.

Indeed, it cost him a job at the University of Toronto after the war. His connections assisted him in obtaining an appointment in the philosophy department at Dalhousie University.

### Unqualified

By measure of formal training, he was unqualified for this position. He had studied history at Queen's and law at Oxford, but his temperament was well suited to philosophy and he became a fine teacher.

His views were always outside the mainstream of contemporary philosophy, dominated as it has been by the so-called analytical school and its offspring.

These people admired science virtually without qualification. Grant thought science and technology very much a mixed blessing, which inevitably would lead to the end of

this civilization.

It was Lester B. Pearson's introduction of nuclear weaponry to Canada which provoked him to write *Lament*. In it he says Canadian nationalism is dead, that annexation by or incorporation within the United States is ineluctable and contemporary notions of progress are misguided.

Nietzsche was mistaken, he wrote. God lives, so everything is not permitted. Relativism is wrong: there are universal standards of morality and these are not equivalent to or founded upon scientific knowledge.

*Lament* and much of Grant's other work were eloquent cries from the heart. This book sympathetically clarifies and amplifies Grant's reasoning and its origins.

Grant was often accused of being a pessimist. He replied: "I'm not being pessimistic at all. I think God will eventually destroy this technological civilization. I'm very optimistic about that."

Grant departed for the "solemn shades, the silent continents of eternity," in 1988. Events since then have not shown his optimism to be unjustified.

## Briefly noted

**21st Century Capitalism**  
By Robert Heilbroner  
W.W. Norton, 163 pages

CAPITALISM IS ordained by neither God nor nature, as so many of its prosperous missionaries would have us believe.

Instead, economist Robert Heilbroner argues persuasively in his readable 19th book, capitalism is the logical outgrowth of the conditions that ended the Dark Ages and brought on the Enlightenment.

Despite his title, he speculates little beyond the horizon. Instead, he attempts to look with the clarity and wisdom of tomorrow's hindsight at today's political economy.

*Knight-Ridder Newspapers*

**Road Mangler Deluxe**  
By Phil Kaufman  
White-Bouke Publishing

He's funny. He's quick. He can — and does — party with the best of them.

But there's one reason above all that Phil Kaufman has thrived behind the scenes in rock 'n' roll: He doesn't take any guff.

That's clear from his hilarious new sex-drugs-rock book, a peek into a fascinating life as road manager with Mick Jagger, Gram Parsons and others.

And it's clear from his latest battle — over Charles Manson's music.

Kaufman produced Manson's music in the late '60s, owns the rights and plans to get the tens of thousands of dollars he says he's owed in the recent controversy when Guns N' Roses put a Manson song on its latest album.

Kaufman lost money on the deal until now, having only near-brushes with death at the hands of Manson devotees to show for it — "three attempts on my life — actually, four, but who's counting?"

*Orange County Register*

**Lost Star: The Search For Amelia Earhart**  
By Randal Brink  
W.W. Norton, 206 pages

The latest book about the disappearance of aviator Amelia Earhart in 1937 over the South Pacific cogently sets forth the premise that Earhart was, in fact, spying for the U.S. government when she took off for her round-the-world flight on June 1, 1937. Brink, a former airline captain as well as the author of the novels *Pan Pacific* and *The Fleeting Season*, builds his case in solid, Perry-Mason-solves-the-mystery fashion.

*Orlando Sentinel*

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