

BOOKS

"I Have Always Imagined That Paradise Will Be a Kind of Library" — Jorge Luis Borges

A woman of substance

FLINT AND FEATHER
The Life and Times of
E. Pauline Johnson
By Charlotte Gray

Johnson comes to life in this book

Biography vibrant and informative



I don't know when I've enjoyed a biography more. Charlotte Gray has to be one of the best non-fiction writers today. Her writing style is so eloquent and entertaining I almost felt I was reading fiction.



Leona King

Herald Book Club

But it was instead a fascinating account of a vibrant and exciting woman mixed with an interesting account of Canadian history.

I have always been a fan of E. Pauline Johnson's poetry and the author has brought even more meaning to the verses for me. Gray frequently intersperses the poetry as it relates to each of Pauline's life events and loves.

Most inspiring was Pauline's tenacity. Here was a woman determined to make a living with her poetry and her acting. With little more than a basic education, she observed and learned. Her family's social standing combined with her outgoing personality helped her to network and make connections with many public and influential people. Through these she was able to gain financial support and secure venues for her recitals.

Pauline toured across Canada on numerous occasions travelling often by ferry, train or horse and buggy in the worst of weather and living conditions. She entertained in all the small towns in every corner of the country as well as the drawing rooms of the aristocrats in the east. Pauline made several trips to London to entertain and to secure a publisher to print her poems and stories.

Throughout the majority of her life she lived hand to mouth and was often in debt. She braved illness and a grinding tour schedule but was always willing to perform for the benefit of a charity.

E. Pauline Johnson was described as a "beloved vagabond." She loved her country and was proud of her Mohawk heritage, often advocating for native rights. And for me she is truly in inspiration.

Charlotte Gray has done a great service to Canadians by bringing to light not only a great writer but also a wealth of information about Canada in its infancy and toddler years.

Through letters and newspaper articles of the time we see the society that formed the basis for many of the conventions enjoyed and problems struggled with today.

A book on poetry or history often puts people to sleep before they get it off the shelf. Flint and Feathers has both but is as full of plot twists and unsolved mysteries as any thriller.

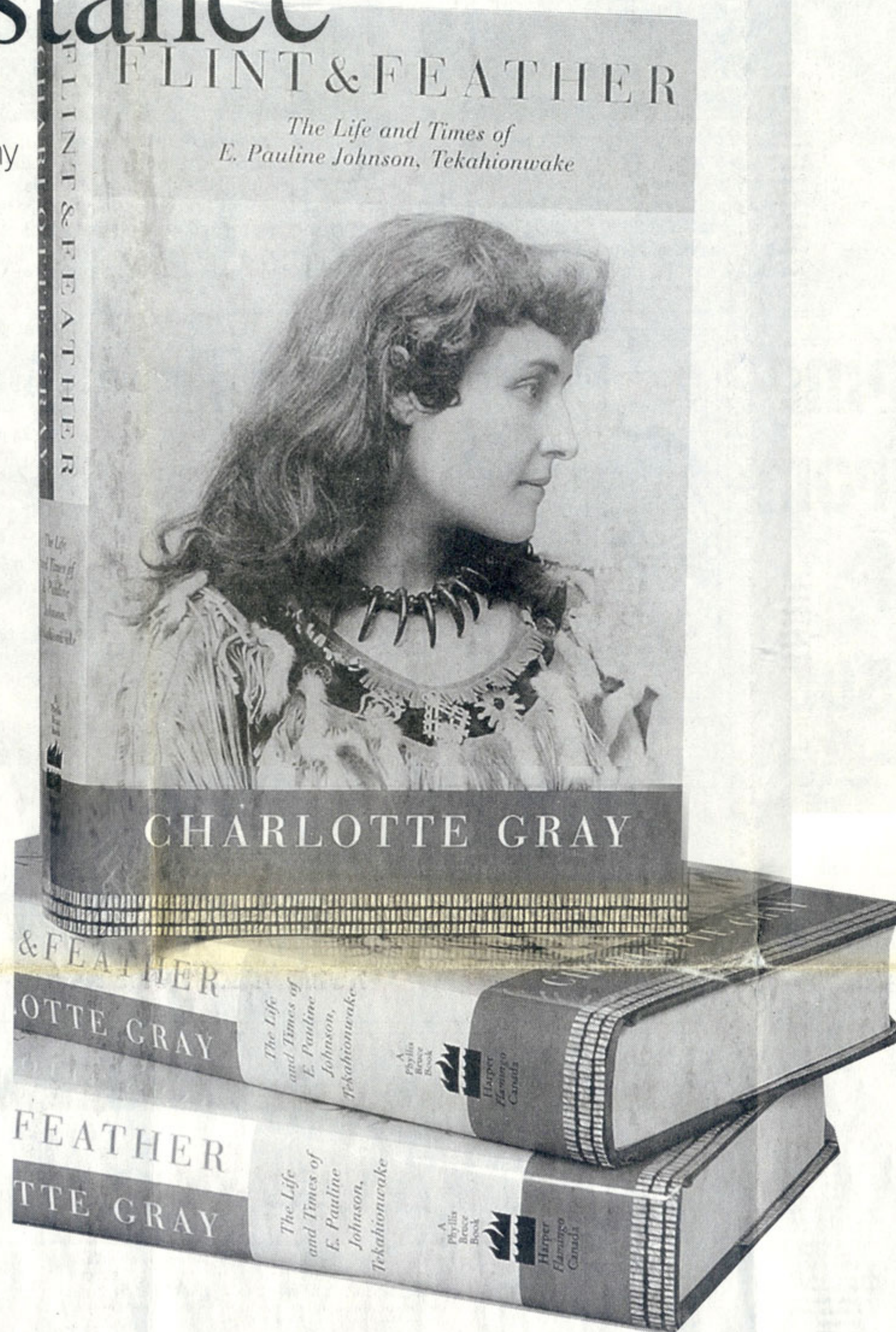
Do you want romance? Enjoy the genteel romance of unrequited — or was it? — love. Do you want adventure travel? E. Pauline Johnson lived in a time when travel anywhere was an adventure and just getting there was close to being a miracle.

As with any biography it helps to have a subject who is a little eccentric, very well know, beautiful and has a controversial cause. Johnson was all those things and much, much, more.



Elwood Main

Herald Book Club



native rights when they were almost unheard of and recorded legends and stories before they died away.

When she became ill, other writers and friends flocked to help her, and she finally got the recognition she strove for all her life.

I really enjoyed Flint and Feather. It was a well-written story about a compelling character in Canadian history. The author brought to life the vibrancy and spirit of E. Pauline Johnson and the nation that shaped her. I was wrong. Canadian history can be worth reading about.

Pioneer poet's life retold in fascinating new biography



When I first moved to Canada, I decided that I should learn something about my new country. I went to the library and checked out two or three books on Canadian history. After forcing myself through them, I decided that nothing worth reading about had happened in Canadian history.

How I wish that only one of those books had been half as interesting as this biography.

Emily Pauline Johnson was born in 1861 on the Six Nations reserve along

the Grand River in Ontario. Her mother was from a strict middle-class British family, with all the Victorian mores which that entailed. Her father was the son of a Mohawk chief with an illustrious lineage. From this less than typical beginning, Pauline became a poetess and writer of some renown.

She lived through Canada's frontier beginnings, the height of Victorian industrialism, the turn of the century, and the beginnings of the modern age. Johnson died of breast cancer in 1913. She is a fascinating figure in Canadian history.

Author Charlotte Gray does an outstanding job blending the history of the age with Johnson's personal history. This is how all history should be written.

The book is well researched and includes excerpts of some of Pauline's more famous poems. I got a real feel for the amazing, determined woman she was, and the beautiful country she loved.

Johnson published her own poetry when most men believed women didn't have a brain capable of rigorous thought. She travelled alone across Canada and to England when women rarely travelled, and while she was accompanied by her single business partners, she never lost her reputation.

In an age when Europeans believed native Americans were a less intelligent race, Johnson proved she was smart, literate, and "civilized" by all Victorian behaviour. Although she was light enough of skin that she could "pass," Johnson instead learned to embrace her native heritage. She was well loved as the Indian Poetess who performed and recited her own poetry. She used her friendships with government leaders to push for



April Garner

Herald Book Club