

through. The Berry's passage from hotel to hotel to hotel to hotel (there are four in all, three named Hotel New Hampshire) spans about a 50-year period. In that time, a circus of characters, ideologies, sexual relationships and bears float on the family's periphery, threatening and tempting its stability. The Berrys hold themselves together with the glue of dreams, humor and circumstances that could occur only in Irving's wild and entertaining imagination.

Because of Irving's relentless juxtaposition of the possible and impossible, the book gets a little out of hand, fictional liberties aside. Like "Garp," the story becomes increasingly violent and unbelievable. The central characters, all fairly well differentiated and delineated by their special obsessions and styles of speech (Irving could write great screenplays), seem to lose some substance through the direction of the plot. Our interest in them wanes as the story gets sillier and the plot goes awry.

Flaws aside, the book should be read and enjoyed indiscriminately, quickly and with

abandon. It should be read for its movement, its precise and sensitive rendering of childhood, its elegant depiction of several dreamy scenes that hint of Fitzgerald.

Certainly no current writer captures childhood and its fears, hopes and anxieties as Irving does, nor does any author guard his characters from caprice, fate and danger as tenderly. Irving makes his best fiction from characters in touch with their childhood schemes and dreams. But when the same characters start to "grow up," he ends the scene, or the novel. With this kind of storytelling device, or approach, Irving cheats the reader, especially when "Hotel" starts to sputter midway. We're too often marooned before we really know a character or a scene.

Irving does his job as teaser, magician and stellar storyteller. But after "Hotel," he may prove that he's not concerned with resolutions. He may continue to exercise the doubtful privilege that fiction can indiscriminately start, stop or go anywhere it pleases.

Angela Allen

## L.L. Bean parody wins

**"Items From Our Catalog"**  
By Alfred Gingold  
Avon Books, 1982  
84 pages, \$4.95

"Items From Our Catalog" may very well be the funniest book in years.

It is a parody of the L.L. Bean catalog. Right down to the typeface, it captures the slightly stuffy but quaint Maine friendliness of Bean's, but substitutes a wildly bizarre assortment of items for the normal fare.

At first one isn't sure what this book is. Is it real? Like a good parody should, it takes a moment for the joke to sink in.

It soon does, accompanied by great laughter.

Gingold includes items which duplicate Bean's, items similar to Bean's and items so completely off-the-wall one wishes they were in Bean's just to tease the Abercrombie and Fitch senses of its customers.

One classic Bean garment is their Norwegian Sweater. Gingold offers a bulletproof ver-

sion. Bean's own brand of insulation is 'Thinsulate.' Gingold uses 'Thinsulite' to insulate papal vestments.

The classic watchcap in "Items" is solar powered.

Then it gets really strange. Imagine a down yarmulke, dress waders, camouflage shoelaces and Swiss Army earrings. Each item, naturally, is explained in complete detail.

Then there's lip chaps, fresh air freshener — to make the outdoors smell like outdoors — and the combination compass and compact in an elegant tortoise shell case.

For Eugene folks there's mismatched socks, tofu innersoles and "Our Own Shoe and Hair Care Products."

For the really strange there's hubcap cookware, swab covers (to keep your Q-Tips clean, of course) and a "well designed, fully functional infant," 6 lbs., \$13.75.

For protecting your food there's the famous fruit sweater (zippered), a fur-lined tuna case


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