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More Books for Women

- July / August 2006 -
Volume 2 Number 7

Welcome to this issue of **More Books for Women**. Summer is a great time to get caught up with reading, so we bring you many new books for both adults and kids of all ages, fresh glimpses at some classic favorites, a few new takes on books we've covered before, and a look at a newly released mystery by both Mary Ellen Kavanaugh, a non-mystery reader, and by our Crime Scene columnist, Nan Cinnater.

So, as Mary Ellen deliciously describes [below](#), we hope you'll be inspired to find a shady tree, a tall glass of iced tea, and any of the books listed herein to create a summer reading oasis for yourself. Enjoy!

New Feminist Imprint From an Unexpected Source

Suspect Thoughts Press has announced the creation of two new imprints, one of which will publish "furiously feminist fiction - and not." Publishers Greg Wharton and Ian Phillips created the She Devil Press imprint to allow them to publish and promote books that are not "conventionally queer," in a way that will increase the imprint's titles in the literary marketplace. (Their other new imprint, Three Roads, will offer "an alternative to the conventional"; Three Roads' first release will be *Some Phantom - No Time Flat: Two Novellas* by Steven Beachy.)

Suspect Thoughts is known in the publishing world as a predominantly queer press, so any non-queer titles they publish under the Suspect Thoughts name can get lost if the buyers for bookstores assume that *all* of their titles are queer. This happened with their fourth Suspect Thoughts title, *Burn* by Jennifer Natalya Fink, which Wharton says is one of the best books he's read (\$16.95, 0971084688).

She Devil will release two books in the fall/winter season: *V*, the second novel by Jennifer Natalya Fink and *Girl on a Stick* by Kathleen Bryson, author of *Mush* (Diva Books). The "and not" in their tagline refers to the possibility that She Devil may publish genres other than fiction in the future, though the titles will all be furiously feminist.

BTWOF applauds Greg and Ian for not only making a commitment to publish literature by women but for flying the feminist flag high. In a society where even publishers that publish decidedly feminist books shy away from the "F word," these two gay men embrace the mantle for both themselves and their new imprint. Let's see the world accuse *them* of being man-hating lesbians!



Ann Christophersen is reading...

I fell in love with Lorrie Moore's [Who Will Run the Frog Hospital](#) before I read a word. I heard a review of it on an NPR book show Susan Stamberg was hosting: an independent bookseller was rhapsodic in her recommendation of it as one of her favorite books. I was so taken with her words and sentiment I hurried to my local bookstore (Women & Children First) and went home to read. A few hours later I realized my earlier feelings were but an adolescent crush compared with what I was experiencing now. This poetically spare, generous, insightful novel reminded me at once of Alice McDermott (who has a terrific new book, *After This*, coming out in September, which I'll review then). Their styles differ in some respects, but their attention to craft, precision of language, respect for their characters' complexity, and ability to hold a reader



About BTWOF

Books To Watch Out For publishes monthly e-letters celebrating books on various topics. Each issue includes new book announcements, brief reviews, commentary, news and, yes, good book gossip.

More Books for Women

covers the finest in thinking women's reading, plus mysteries, non-sexist children's books, and news from women's publishing. Written by the owners and staff at Women & Children First, and friends.

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covers both lesbian books and the whole range of books lesbians like to read. It covers news of both the women in print movement and mainstream publishing. Written and compiled by Carol Seajay.

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announces and reviews new books by and about gay men as well as other books of interest and gay publishing news. Written and compiled by Richard Labonte.

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absolutely still and attentive in their artistic grasp are comparable. *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital* opens with the main character as an adult in Paris on vacation with her husband. Their relationship, though relaxed in the ways of couples who have been together awhile, also contains an edge of discontent captured by the narrator's comment that "the affectionate farce I make of him ignores the ways I feel his lack of love for me." A certain sense of adventure and "wildness" she associates with childhood leads her to remember herself as a 15-year-old girl, and most of the rest of the narrative is about that former self and the close ties between her and her best friend, Sils. The subtle ways in which the strength of her devotion to Sils can never be replicated and how the relationship between the two friends comment on the adult marriage form the heart of the matter for me. I have only rarely enjoyed the development of an idea as much as I did in this book. I can't wait to read Lorrie Moore's other books. Vintage, \$12.95, 1400033829.



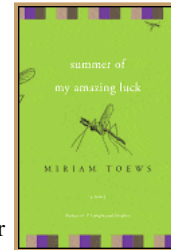
The Girl Who Played Go, by Shan Sa, is another economical novel, but more in the style of J.M Coetzee (*Disgrace*) than Lorrie Moore. There is virtually no metaphorical language, and the story is told in two voices in alternating, very short chapters. One voice is that of a high-school age Chinese girl living in Manchuria in 1935 when the Japanese are invading her country. The other is that of a soldier in the Japanese army. The girl is a great character, in many respects: she's smart, defiant of Chinese marriage conventions, and dedicated to her awakening sexual self. She is attracted to two boys who are key players in the developing

Chinese resistance but doesn't have a clue about the seriousness of their political involvement or how she will become tragically entangled in it. In contrast, the Japanese soldier is more mature and absolutely in thrall to Japanese military convention and the glory of Empire. The two narratives' lines begin to develop totally separate from each other, but as they progress they begin to have overlapping features until finally the two characters meet and are dramatically affected by each other and the war. The way the game of Go is explained and used throughout the novel is fascinating, and I found the book to be extremely interesting. I highly recommend it. Vintage, \$13.95, 1400032288.



Linda Bubon recommends...

A great choice for summer reading is a paperback original, **Summer of My Amazing Luck** by Miriam Toews, the author of *A Complicated Kindness*. By turns funny and touching, the novel is narrated by 18-year-old Lucy, a single mother "on the dole" (living in subsidized housing) in Winnipeg. Lucy is still grieving her charming, and, in her memories, loving and creative mother who was murdered on the highway several years before. Her father, sunk in his own grief, has turned Lucy out to live off the system. Lucy is determined to learn to be tough from the other single moms, an interesting, heroic, and diverse lot, but instead learns to be tender, tolerant, and resourceful. To break up the hellish monotony of the wettest and hottest summer in Winnipeg's history, Lucy and her best friend Lish, a wonderful, rebellious and self-assertive hippie mother of four daughters, take a road trip that completes Lucy's transformation from whiny brat to delightful adult. Toews has a knack for capturing the highs and lows of adolescence, with its lesson-learning repetitiveness, streaks of hilarity, moments of self-pity and absorption, and a few good parties. Oh, and it has a fabulous ending - most impressive in a young writer. Counterpoint, \$14, 1582433461.



While **Looking for Alibrandi** by Australian writer Melina Marchetta is technically a young adult novel, I want to recommend it as great summer reading for adults. Its young heroine, Josie, is in her last year of high school with all its attendant pressures and possibilities. She's been raised by a single mom who fell from grace in her strict Italian family when she had Josie. Josie loves her grandmother but can't understand why she still holds the teen pregnancy against her mother. In the course of the novel, all kinds of deep family secrets are revealed, and issues of class and nationality (Italian immigrant vs. native Aussies) are

thoroughly and realistically explored. I love the way Marchetta treats women's sexuality and vulnerability, and I think this would be a great book for older teens to use in discussing issues of class and race in a non-American culture. Random House, \$8.95, 0375836942.

Tish Hayes suggests...

Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora is an extraordinary and important collection of voices from around the world that complicate and enlarge Iranian identity. Although the work in the collection is not often overtly political, editor Persis Karim has chosen poetry, stories, and essays that challenge the image of Iran that is created from news stories and politics to create an anthology that breaks down boundaries and stereotypes. Most of the selections are by unknown writers, but the quality of writing found here is impressive and the collection is a pleasure to read. University of Arkansas Press, \$24.95 paper, 1557288208.

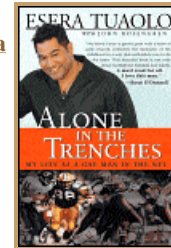


While I don't typically indulge in "beach reading," I love a fantasy novel that requires little more of me than to sit back and enjoy the story. **His Majesty's Dragon** by Naomi Novik is by far the most pleasurable reading I've done in ages. We begin this novel in the aftermath of a skirmish between an English and French ship during the Napoleonic War. The prize for the victorious English captain? A dragon egg on the verge of hatching! Not a happy situation for the English navy, but because dragons are critical to the war effort, they have no choice but to make do. From here, the novel for me soon becomes all about the love story between the Captain Will Laurence and his male dragon Temeraire. The battles and adventures they embark on keep the plot moving quickly along, but the quiet moments between Laurence and Temeraire as they read together, nap together, fly and hunt together, and disclose their mutual love and respect for each other made this a novel I couldn't put down. Of course, now I feel like living in a world without dragons might be too difficult to bear. Luckily I have two more books in the Temeraire series to keep me occupied: *Throne of Jade* and *Black Powder War*. Once I'm done with those though, I think my cats are getting little dragon costumes. Del Rey, \$7.50, 0345481283.



Angelique Grandone is enjoying...

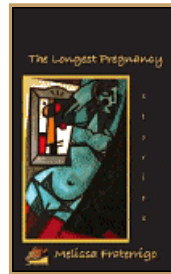
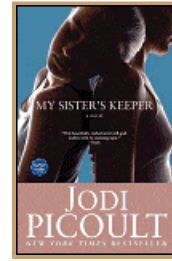
I must admit that I am the *last* person to pick up a football memoir, but Esera Tuaolo's **Alone in the Trenches: My Life as a Gay Man in the NFL** is an inspiration. A child of Samoan parents, raised on a banana plantation in Hawaii in a dirt-floored hut, with an adolescence marked by physical and sexual abuse and early excellence on the football field, Esera went on to college and then NFL fame. All this, while hiding the big secret of his homosexuality. What comes across very clearly is his integrity and strength of character in the face of such overwhelming homophobia in the NFL - and fear. While it often feels it has become much easier to be gay in our modern world, Tuaolo reminds us that there are still vast fields of bigotry left to conquer. With his humility, generosity, and what is reputed to be a pretty spectacular singing voice, Esera Tuaolo is doing just that. Co-written with John Rosengren. Sourcebooks, 24.95, 1402205058.



Intelligent, engaging, and incredibly accessible, **Black Bodies and Quantum Cats: Tales from the Annals of Physics** collects Jennifer Ouellette's "This Month in Physics History" columns in *American Physical Society News*. In thirty-eight bite-sized morsels, she takes on the history and nature of physics via pop culture and literature. What the book lacks in depth (the pieces are pretty brief considering the ginormity of the topics she's covering) it makes up for with its wry blend of humor and awe. Ouellette clearly has a reverence for physics and writing, making her the perfect candidate to explain it all to those of us who slept through physics because we'd been up all night reading Virginia Woolf. If only our professors had used Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetry* to explain string theory! Or *The X-Men* to elaborate on electromagnetism! Suddenly science is fascinating again. Penguin, \$15, 0143036033.

Catherine Jacquet raves about...

I was immediately drawn to Jodi Picoult's **My Sister's Keeper** by the storyline alone - Anna, thirteen, has spent her life as a donor for her sister who suffers from leukemia. As a perfect genetic match and her sister's only source for relief from her terminal illness, Anna is indeed her sister's keeper. Picoult's treatment of the subject does *not* disappoint. She kept me at the edge of my seat, or perhaps more appropriately I should say she kept me *in* my seat - I was so engrossed in the novel one day while riding the El that I missed my stop! From the first few chapters when Anna decides to sue her parents for medical emancipation, the reader is taken on an incredible adventure through one family's struggle with terminal illness. Picoult crafts a realistic and honest picture using multiple narrators - brilliantly evoking the whirlwind of emotions from all angles. From the mother who will do anything to save her eldest daughter's life to the destructive rebel son, Picoult's cast of characters breathe life into a story that revolves around the emotions of dealing with death. This book is a must read! Washington Square Press, \$14, 0743454537.



Melissa Fraterrigo is a champion of figurative language in her collection of short stories, **The Longest Pregnancy**. If you've ever needed an example of how writing is truly an art, this book answers the call. Fraterrigo uses language in fresh and innovative ways. As I read, I was drawn equally to the stories and the way she crafts her words - using language that is concise yet extremely vivid. Her cast of characters and storylines are compelling. While the stories themselves border a world of fantasy, they are relevant and realistic. Before reading Fraterrigo's work I was not a big fan of the short story. Thanks to this collection, I am converted. Livingston Press, \$14.95, 0930501268.

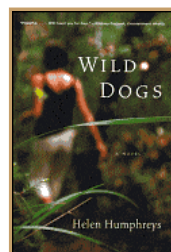


Kathie Bergquist's Lesbotronic Summer Picks

I've been in school until recently and therefore have fallen a little behind with new book releases. With my return to working in the fabulous feminist bookstore world, I was eager to catch up on what I had missed. These may not be the newest titles but just in case you may have missed them too, I offer them up here.

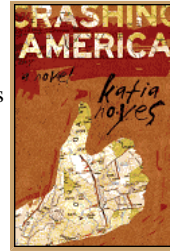
One of the books I am most enthusiastic about right now is Alison Bechdel's **Fun Home**. I love the fact that Bechdel has been getting so much mainstream media attention lately, and she certainly deserves it. Every time I page through a copy I am more blown away than before by what Bechdel has accomplished here, and how the graphics, the dialogue, and the narrative all build layer upon layer of meaning and resonance to each panel. The result is a fascinating and deeply affecting pearl of genius.

I hand sell this book like mad, though I frequently hear resistance from people who balk at the graphic novel format. To these resisters I say, "People, I am one of you!" I have never really been drawn to the graphic novel format and even find myself smugly regarding it as somehow less-than-literature (a sentiment that will not win me many friends younger than myself, I'll readily admit). *Fun Home*, as I tell all my customers, is beyond "good," it is great, in a major-literary-award type of way. I anticipate it will also spur new interest in Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* series, which is great in its own right, especially if it turns a more mainstream audience onto the day-to-day, non *L Word* realities of lesbian life (and the struggles of feminist bookstores!). *Fun Home*, Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95 cloth, 0618477942.



Another book I have been hand selling a lot lately is Helen Humphreys' book, **Wild Dogs** (which was co-winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Fiction). This novel, newly out in paperback, is about a group of people who meet at the edge of the woods every night in order to lure their once domestic dogs away from the wild-dog pack they have joined. At the root of the story is the relationship between the book's primary narrator, Alice, and Rachel, a wolf researcher, which mirrors the story's themes of wildness and domesticity in this haunting and poetic novel. W.W. Norton, \$13.95, 0393328422.

I also enjoyed reading Katia Noyes' **Crashing America**, about a young San Francisco squatter who, upon receiving the shocking news about her best gal pal and partner-in-crime's sudden death, embarks on a road trip into the heart of America. Ostensibly she is going to meet a friend with an offer of work in the cornfields of Nebraska, but really she is in search of a bit of family history and her "belonging" place. The ensuing journey involves Christian punk rockers, large farm equipment, occasional sex and drugs, grand theft auto, armed robbery, and lots of pie in this sweet-tough novel that is surprisingly philosophical about questions of identity - what makes us who we are and what determines our place in the world. Alyson, \$14.95, 1555839118.



Next up on my stacks:

The Days of Good Looks: The Prose and Poetry and Cheryl Clarke
Hello Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws, by Kate Bornstein
Olivia, the reissue of Dorothy Strachey's book by Cleis Press

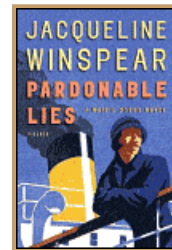


Mary Ellen Kavanaugh is reading...



When My Sisters' Words still existed, I had two customers who collected black and white postcards with images of women. For a few years running, they would bring in their collection for display at the store and talk to us about the popularity of postcards as a means of communication between women in the years when the postal service was expanding and private telephones were still somewhat rare. They got me hooked on these vintage postcards, so when **Painted Ladies**, edited by Nick Hedges, came across my desk at work, I was all over it! *Painted Ladies* (which is what these postcards are known as) is a collection of fascinating postcards images from the early twentieth century - photographed in black and white, the cards were hand colored by thousands of unknown women in their studios, making hand-tinting one of the most popular art forms of the day. The postcards come from across the globe, and the images range from the lovely (strong individual women dressed in the popular clothing of the day) to the disturbing (colonialized women). Great coffeetable book! Dewi Lewis Publishing, \$30 hardcover, 1904587186.

I didn't think much about this title when I picked up **Pardonable Lies** by Jacqueline Winspear. I just knew I was missing the detective Maisie Dobbs (*Maisie Dobbs* and *Birds of a Feather*), and was delighted to find the third book in the series available in paperback. (In September, look for the fourth, *Messenger of Truth*, in hardcover.) I am not a big mystery reader, so I cannot compare either the detective herself or the story to other mysteries, but I can tell you these are good reads, especially if you are a fan of historical fiction and strong women characters. Our heroine, Maisie, is a psychologist and detective living in London in early twentieth century. This episode takes place in both London and France in 1930. The women in this book are clearly drawn, engaging, and smart - whether they are thirteen or seventy - and you'll be intrigued by each of them. Filled with secret passages, hidden journals written in code, and a clue buried under a tree, the story raises questions about half truths and secrets and questions of what we tell people when the truth will be deeply hurtful. I read this over a swelteringly hot summer weekend, sitting under a tree, iced tea nearby, and the whole experience took me back about forty years when I'd enjoy the same with Nancy Drew. What a delight! Picador. \$14, 0312426216.

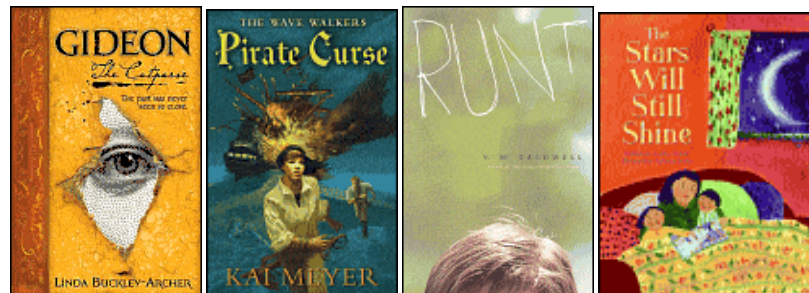


Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping by Judith Levine is just the kind of nonfiction book I like to read - interesting sociological observations by a well-schooled yet accessible feminist writer (think *Nickel & Dimed*). Here, Levine (*Harmful To Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*) recounts her year of not shopping. She and her partner Paul live half time in Vermont and half time in Park Slope (Brooklyn) and are each self-employed. While they do not have tremendous amounts of expendable income, they do find themselves to consume far more than they'd imagined. Levine extends the concept of consuming

beyond what the marketplace would say and also considers environmental consumption. The couple take advantage of knowing rural Vermonters who intrinsically live lightly on the land as well as their membership in a small group based on Volunteer Simplicity in NYC. They struggle with the dailiness of decisions about consumption, such as what to give a niece for a graduation present and are undone individually and collectively by things that surprise them. Levine talks about the impact of consumerism on our sense of self and the questions that arise when we stop consuming. "It's no wonder we're confused. All our lives, we've been operating in the market system. This year we withdrew to its margins in order to observe its workings. But we remain in the gears of the machine, and our personal transactions remain lubricated by the familiarity of its rules." Interestingly, while I was reading this, I was housesitting for folks who have considerably more income than I do. I enjoyed their air-conditioning, gourmet food, big screen TV with 200-some channels, WiFi internet service, and the Egyptian cotton sheets and bath towels. While I would not choose to purchase most of those things, I did end up coveting some of them. And I found things on the TV (I don't watch at home) that I somehow cannot stop thinking about. It was most helpful to have the author along on this little venture with me as I found myself wanting things I'd previously not even been aware of - her research, showing up in just the right places, helped me think about questions of need and desire. Needless to say, the questions raised in the book are questions of luxury. Those who struggle to keep roof overhead and food on the table are likely not struggling with what it means to forego season tickets to theatre - not a criticism of the book, just a reality check. I like a book that engages me in this way - even if, or perhaps, especially if it makes me squirm. Free Press, \$25 hardcover, 0743269357.



For the Kids

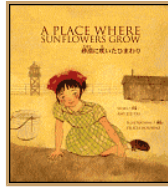


Recommendations from Linda Bubon

Two great new YA adventures should captivate the most blasé ten- to fourteen-year-olds (and totally held my attention as well). *Gideon the Cutpurse* (Simon & Schuster, \$17.95 hardcover, 1416915257) by Linda Buckley-Archer is a believable time travel novel set in the contemporary and 1763 English countryside. It stars two very likable children with distinct personalities: Peter, a rich city boy with workaholic parents, and Kate, a country girl in a large family. When they find themselves alone in 1763 and realize they must work together to find the thief who holds the key to their return to the present, they begin to adjust to each other's quirks and appreciate each other's strengths. This is a smart, compelling book that girls and boys will like equally. I guess I've caught the pirates bug currently raging with the release of the new movie, but Kai Meyer's *Pirate Curse* (McElderry Books, \$15.95 hardcover, 1416924213) is a rollicking adventure-fantasy about girl and boy "pollywogs," kids who have the ability to walk on water. Sure to appeal to boys and girls, I have to applaud this effort not to assume that adventures are "boy stories."

I must mention another YA, this one from Milkweed, a small press with an impressive collection of original and sensitive novels for middle-schoolers and young adults. I really enjoyed *Runt* by V. M. Caldwell. Runt, the main character is a loner who has come to live in a trailer with his sister and her tough boyfriend. The last thing he's looking for is a friend, especially a funny, smart-mouthed, weird-looking kid in a wheelchair. But Mitch won't stop pushing Runt to connect, and Runt comes to realize that Mitch's problems are far more serious than his own. Very touching, very real. Milkweed Editions, \$6.95, 1571316612.

(For another young adult novel, see Linda's review of *Looking for Alibrandi* [above](#).)



Speaking of touching and real, **A Place Where Sunflowers Grow** by Amy Lee-Tai is a beautiful, gentle, and heartfelt story about one little girl's adjustment in an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. While a shameful episode in American twentieth-century history, the internment of innocent Japanese Americans needs to be explained to children along with the slaughter of Native Americans, the enslavement of African Americans, and discrimination against women. We perpetuate injustice when we shield children from the ugly facts of our history. And how better to sensitize children to the pain of racial intolerance than by sharing a personal, touching story of someone their own age? When Mari attends art class at the camp, her teacher understands her initial reluctance to draw. I love that Mari's parents, artists themselves, encourage her to wait for her muse to speak. Making friends helps her initial despair and loneliness abate, and the reader shares Mari's hope that sunflowers will grow in the desert soil. Without softening the inexplicable unfairness of internment, Amy Lee-Tai has created a lovely, hopeful story. Felicia Hoshiro's watercolors capture the golden desert sun and the faces of people forced to accept the unacceptable. Children's Book Press, \$16.95, 0892392150.

It's back-to-school time in August, and some pre-schoolers have an especially hard time letting go of Mom. **Mommy in My Pocket** by Carol Hunt Senderak, with charming watercolors by Hiroe Nakata, is sure to be a help. A sweet little bunny uses her imagination to think of having mommy in her pocket with her as she goes through her day at school. Perfect for two- to three-year-olds. Hyperiaon, \$12.99 hardcover, 0786855967.



Recommendations from Angelique Grandone



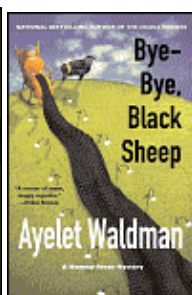
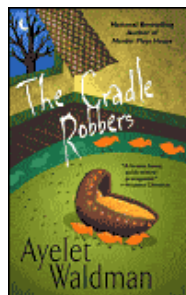
With **The Boy Who Loved Words** by Roni Schotter, the writing is so tantalizing, the words so delicious, that this book is hard to resist! With lush and whimsical illustrations by renowned illustrator Giselle Potter, this charming picture book takes us through the life of Selig, a boy in love with words. He fills his pockets with slips of paper on which he has written words that he loves: genuine, aflutter, hubbub, and chockablock (to name a few). A consummate collector, Selig's pockets soon overflow (confounding his father! worrying his mother!), and he sets off on an adventure to find a use for all of these "wonderful words!" Precocious and clever, with a romantic twist at the end, this book would be a great gift for any precocious elementary schooler (7-10) with a voracious appetite for new words and an appreciation for a well-drawn picture. Or you can just keep it for yourself! Random House, \$16.95 hardcover, 0375836012.

I have been an admirer of Cynthia Rylant for many years (*Something Permanent*, *The Relatives Came*, *Cat Heaven*) so I feel like I can speak with a certain authority when I say that her latest, **Stars Will Still Shine**, stands out as one of her best picture books. The rhythmic lull of the simple text is evocative and reassuring, making it a great book for two- to four-year-olds at storytime as well as bedtime. In addition, Tiphonie Beeke's vibrant illustrations depict multicultural families and friends enjoying life's simple pleasures: running through a tall grass field, eating ice cream at the beach, and curling up on the couch with a good story book. This book is utterly charming. HarperCollins, \$15.99 hardcover, 0060546395.



Mysteries

By Nan Cinnater



There's nothing better than a big pile of new mysteries by your bed, except possibly for a big pile of new *paperback* mysteries. Sometimes, considerations like price and trendiness aside, you just want a paperback - a book you can read in the bathtub or at the beach without worrying about it, a book that's easy to carry on the subway and read one-handed in line at the bank. So here's a whole bunch of paperbacks, most of them new, all of them worth your time and a relatively small amount of money.

Don't be fooled by the light tone and the cute/condescending subtitle of Ayelet Waldman's series, dubbed "Mommy Track Mysteries." Both writer and heroine are smart, sensitive, and compassionate, with some serious "Mommy-centered" politics. The first in the series, *Nursery Crimes* (Berkley, \$6.99, 042518000X), was a witty, well-plotted debut which introduced former public defender turned full-time mom and sometime sleuth Juliet Appelbaum. In **The Cradle Robbers** (Berkley, \$7.99, 0425206173), sixth in the series, the perennially breast-feeding heroine now has three kids and a budding business as a private investigator, in partnership with Al, a former cop. The case involves motherhood in prison, specifically what happens to the children of women prisoners who give birth while incarcerated. Juliet's search for one prisoner's baby leads her to a scary foster care agency called the Lambs of the Lord. In Waldman's new hardcover, **Bye-Bye, Black Sheep** (Berkley, \$22.95, 0425210189), Juliet's client is an African American transsexual whose sister was murdered. Literary gossip bonus: Waldman, herself a former public defender, is married to Michael Chabon (author of one of my all-time favorite novels, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, as well as a great Sherlock Holmes pastiche, *The Final Solution*). This gives an extra kick to the in-jokes about Juliet's writer husband, a grown-up slacker who collects superhero action figures.

I'm always of two minds about the Maisie Dobbs novels by Jacqueline Winspear - almost equally annoyed by the New Age-y attention to body language, centeredness, etc., and charmed and fascinated by the authentic period details. Ultimately, however, charm and fascination win out. The heroine of two previous books, *Maisie Dobbs* and *Birds of a Feather* (both Penguin, \$14, reviewed in [MBW4](#)), Maisie is a self-described "psychologist and investigator," irrevocably stamped by her experiences as a nurse in WWI. In the latest paperback, **Pardonable Lies** (Picador, \$14, 0312426216), set in 1930, Maisie has three interrelated cases. She wants to exonerate a thirteen-year-old prostitute accused of murdering her pimp, and she is asked to verify the deaths and/or find the graves of two British aviators killed in France. The latter cases bring her in contact with the spiritualist movement that flourished after the war. All three cases disturb Maisie's barely sleeping demons, including the loss of her mother at a young age, as well as the tragedies she witnessed in the war. Circumstances also drive a wedge between Maisie and her eccentric mentor, Maurice Blanche. The mysteries are ingeniously connected and neatly solved (with one exception, which was a little woo-woo for me), and I'm now looking forward to Winspear's new hardcover, **Messenger of Truth** (Henry Holt, \$24, 0805078983, due in September).

With such a skeptical attitude toward occult elements, I am obviously not the ideal reader for the Marie Laveau mystery series by African American Jewell Parker Rhodes. First in the series is **Voodoo Season** (Washington Square, \$14, 0743483286). The real 19th century New Orleans voodoo queen Marie Laveau was the subject of Rhodes' novel, *Voodoo Dreams* (Picador, \$14, 0312119313). *Voodoo Season* introduces Laveau's fictional 21st century descendant, also named Marie Laveau. This Marie is an emergency room resident in New Orleans, who delivers a dead girl's baby and is moved to find out the child's origins. Filled with visions and magical elements and a fairly respectful attitude toward voodoo, this is a rich mixture of suspense and sensuality not unlike Anne Rice. An excellent brew, if that's your cup of tea.

Everything changed in New Orleans in 2005, and it takes a certain willing suspension of that awareness for a reader to get immersed in the old atmosphere. In **Sacrament of Lies** by Elizabeth Dewberry, written before Katrina loomed on the horizon, something is rotten in the state of Louisiana. Grayson Guillory suspects that her manic-depressive mother was murdered by her father, the charismatic governor of Louisiana and presidential wannabe. The death appeared to be suicide via pills and alcohol, and Grayson even helped to cover it up. But Grayson's mother left behind a videotape claiming there was a plot to kill her. Since everyone in Grayson's life - including her husband, a speechwriter - is under the sway of her powerful father, she has no one to turn to. The result is Hamlet's dilemma played out by a contemporary female hero. Can Grayson trust her paranoid, possibly delusional mother? Can she trust herself? This is powerful stuff (hey, it worked for Will), elegantly written and mesmerizing to read. BlueHen Books/Berkley, \$13, 0425188612.

To Darkness and to Death by Julia Spencer-Fleming (0312988877) is the fourth in a series about Clare Fergusson, an Episcopal priest in a tiny town in upstate New York. A former Army pilot, Clare is tougher than you might expect - and so is the series, with strong action sequences and an unconsummated romance between Clare and the very married chief of police. Beginning with a search-and-rescue call to find a missing woman, the novel unfolds in one cold November day, cross-cutting among many characters and leading inexorably to an explosive conclusion. This is a must for fans of the series and for those who like a dark, intelligent thriller. Traditional mystery fans will prefer the first in the series, *In the Bleak Midwinter* (0312986769). Both St. Martin's/Minotaur, \$6.99.

Briefly Noted:

In **At Risk**, author Stella Rimington (who was real-life director general of MI5) introduces intelligence officer Liz Carlisle, battling people-smugglers and Islamic terrorists in Great Britain. Rimington's style is crisp and compelling and her plotting, of course, extremely plausible. Vintage/Black Lizard, \$6.99, 1400079810.

Mary Logue's **Bone Harvest** is a strongly atmospheric police procedural involving a gruesome past crime. Wisconsin Deputy Sheriff Claire Watkins thinks she's dealing with small-time vandalism when pesticides are stolen from the local farmers' co-op; but pesticides are lethal, and gradually the terror mounts. Fawcett, \$6.99, 0345462238.

Deadly Slipper by Michelle Wan (Vintage/Black Lizard, \$13.95, 1400079527) combines intriguing details about orchid hunting with rich atmosphere of the Dordogne in rural France. And, according to *The Washington Post's Book World*, it has "a humdinger of a central plot conceit: In this mystery, the only witness to a decades-old crime is a flower." Wan brings back her thoughtful heroine Mara Dunn in **The Orchid Shroud**. Doubleday, \$23.95, 0385514581.



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