



In This Issue... News

- [Clamor No More](#)
- [Tillie Olsen, 1912-2007](#)
- [Appeal for Paula Gunn Allen](#)
- [Literary Grants](#)

Favorite Books of 2006

- [Ann Christophersen](#)
- [Linda Bubon](#)
- [Megan Bayles](#)
- [Chelsey Clammer](#)
- [Angelique Grandone](#)
- [Kathie Bergquist](#)
- [Mary Ellen Kavanaugh](#)
- [Sara Luce Look](#)
- [Science Fiction & Fantasy](#)
- [Mysteries](#)
- [For the Kids](#)

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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The Lesbian Edition

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 Suzanne Corson.

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The Gay Men's Edition

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

More Books for Women

- January 2007 -
Volume 3 Number 1

To start off the new year, we've asked our reviewers to list their favorite books of 2006. Some are titles they've mentioned before and others are not. Enjoy the variety they share with you!

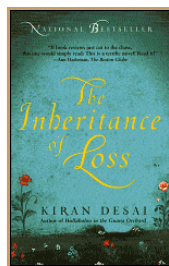
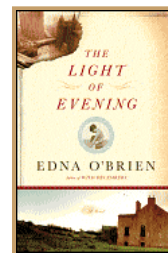
We're also happy to introduce a new reviewer to you: Jill Roberts, managing editor at Tachyon Publications. She'll be predominantly covering science fiction and fantasy titles and starts her tenure with BTWOF by sharing her favorites from 2006.

Wishing you many good reads this new year,
Suzanne Corson



Ann Christophersen

Edna O'Brien's **The Light of Evening**, about two generations of mother-daughter relationships is deeply resonant and nuanced: one feels the keenest sense of the love, dependency, pain, and irresolution that so many women feel, whichever side of the relationship they occupy. Dilly, the main character, is an elderly and very resilient woman who, at the beginning of the novel, is suffering from a potentially terminal illness. She is also suffering the painful - both physical and emotional - distance her daughter, Eleanor, has imposed on their relationship. In the course of the narrative, we hear of Dilly's early adulthood as an Irish immigrant to the United States and her return home at her mother's request after the death of Dilly's brother. Many of the features of her relationship with her mother parallel to some extent the powerful but difficult connection she has with her own daughter. The artfulness of *The Light of Evening* is simply stunning and is what gives the story its tremendous power. Houghton Mifflin, \$25, 9780618718672.



Kiran Desai's **The Inheritance of Loss**, recent winner of the Man Booker Prize, is another of my favorites this year. It is set in - and just above - a town at the foot of one of the major Himalayan peaks. There are many harsh realities in this novel (class hostilities, injustice, colonialism), the complexities of which the author handles deftly to make them intellectually and emotionally available to the reader. There are also great moments of humor, charm, and resolution that offset the pain of understanding some of the grim realities presented. And the novel's setting - a town in the Himalayan foothills - is an extraordinarily beautiful place that Desai describes in such detail of sight, sound, and smell that it is constantly present. Overall it's a wonderfully crafted novel - read my complete review in [MBW #7](#). Grove/Atlantic, \$14, 9780802142818.

A backlist title I read for the first time this year, Lorrie Moore's poetically spare, generous, insightful novel **Who Will Run the Frog Hospital** reminded me at once of Alice McDermott. 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 absolutely still and attentive in their artistic grasp are comparable. *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital* begins with the narrator vacationing in Paris with her husband and goes on to explore her memories of her 15-year-old self and that girl's



Richard Labonte.

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relationship with 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 comments on the adult marriage form the heart of the matter for me. (My full review of this backlist title can be found in [MBW #10](#).) Random House/Vintage, \$12.95, 9781400033829.

Others novels I enjoyed this year include [After This](#) by Alice McDermott (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$24, 9780374168094), Jane Hamilton's [When Madeleine Was Young](#) (Random House/Doubleday, \$22.95, 9780385516716), and [Runaway](#) by Alice Munro (Random House/Knopf, \$14.95, 9781400077915).

Ann Christophersen is a founder and co-owner of [Women & Children First Bookstore](#), a 27-year-old feminist and children's bookstore in Chicago. She is also a past-president of the American Booksellers Association and a former judge of The Story Prize. She currently works as Director of Marketing and Communications at ComputerWorks of Chicago as well as continuing her involvement with Women & Children First.



Linda Bubon

This past year I especially enjoyed three novels: Sara Gruen's [Water for Elephants](#), Jane Hamilton's [When Madeline Was Young](#), and [After This](#) by Alice McDermott. All three were pleasurable reading experiences. They were all carefully edited, no over writing. Every scene seemed important - I wouldn't have cut anything from them.

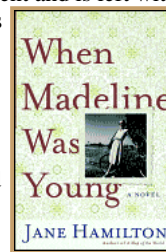


[Water for Elephants](#) is a great historical novel as well as a great love story. I learned all about circus trains during the depression; it was eye-opening to think about people jumping aboard the trains and wanting to join the circus, primarily because the circus could *feed* people. It was a tough life, and hierarchical, but everyone got fat, which was significant - they would work for the circus just to have a regular meal, in spite of the poor living conditions. It's about a community of people, and it's a book that could be recommended to anyone, from 16-year-olds to 80-year-olds. The narrator is in his 90's, though he's not sure how old he

is. Many seniors would identify with him: his current life in a nursing home and his memories of the depression. Others will enjoy the love story which was so engaging and romantic. Anyone who loves animals will like this book - it features an elephant named Rosie as one of the characters. The author lives in a planned ecological community; you can tell she really cares for animals by how she writes about them. Algonquin Books, \$23.95, 9781565124998.

Although the stories in [When Madeline was Young](#) and [After This](#) are different, there are strong similarities. One is that they're both intimate family portraits of distinctive families - more character driven than plot driven - set across the broad canvas of the last half of the 20th century. Characters in each of the books get involved in some way with the significant social movements of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Although intimate books, they're also big books, they have a scope. For both Jane Hamilton and Alice McDermott, the way they use the history of the last fifty-sixty years made these bigger books than their previous books were. *Madeline* was very funny, though it begins with a tragedy: a beautiful young newlywed has an accident and is left with the mental age of a 7-year-old. Her husband's sister's best friend is a nurse; she is brought into the family to nurse his wife back to health. In the process, the nurse falls in love with the husband, and they eventually marry. They decide to raise Madeline as their child and later have two more children, one of whom, Mac, narrates the novel. At first Madeline is his big sister, and then later becomes his perpetually younger sister. By the time Mac and his sister, Lu, become young teenagers, they understand that Madeline's an adult who is disabled, but she's included in the family. This sense of inclusivity - not casting out, not putting her in an institution, including her in the family - gives the novel such tenderness and compassion, and yet it's not soupy, saintly, or sentimental. There are very funny scenes throughout.

The family is upper middle class; dad works at the Field Museum as an ornithologist. They share an African-American maid with his sister. It's interesting how this is treated, how the maid is shown to be part of the family and then along comes the Civil Rights movement. The mother is aware of the political incorrectness



of their having a black maid, since they are white, but they wouldn't dream of firing her, since she's part of the family - she's treated with an enormous amount of respect and has an honored place in their family.

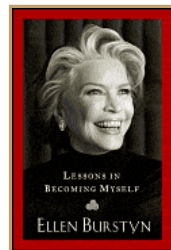
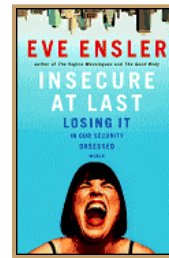
There's other political stuff, too, like the Vietnam War. The mother is rabidly against the war; her best friend (sister-in-law) married someone working in the Kennedy Administration who is behind the war, and thus there are dinner table conversations about the politics of the war. Their son, Mac's cousin, Buddy, goes to war. Mac is against the war like *his* mother. At the end of novel, Buddy's son goes off to the Iraq war. There's so much here, and the book is under 300 pages. It's a warm, funny, interesting look at one family - not an epic. Random House/Doubleday, \$22.95, 9780385516716.



Like *Madeline*, *After This* is about one family. The main character is Mary, a woman nearing 30. After WWII she falls in love with John, a vet who has a limp from a war injury; they marry and have four kids. Her best friend, Pauline, remains single and becomes aunty to her kids. When Pauline has an accident and needs to be cared for, she's brought in to their home. *After This* is set in the Long Island suburbs like McDermott's other fiction. John and Mary's kids go to Catholic School, and there is much anti-abortion and anti-birth control talk. Two of their daughters become pregnant unexpectedly and each makes a different choice.

War is also a factor, when one of the sons goes to Vietnam. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$24, 9780374168094.

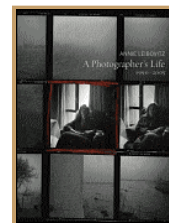
In terms of nonfiction, Eve Ensler's book, ***Insecure at Last: Losing It in Our Security-Obsessed World***, is must reading for feminists. It's a little book, size-wise, but she takes you all around the world where horrible things are happening to women: Bosnia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ciudad Juarez. As difficult as those chapters were to read, Ensler put herself in these places - the least I can do is read about it. I had to push myself to read *Insecure at Last*, but I'm so glad I did. She also includes chapters about Vagina Warriors, women who are making a difference where life is hard. It's a great book for learning about the changes that women make around the world. Random House, \$21.95, 9781400063345.



I just loved ***Lessons in Becoming Myself***, a great autobiography by Ellen Burstyn. She started work on this book fifteen years ago and had also kept journals for many years. She's had an interesting life. She has never been someone who sought a lot of publicity or was always in tabloids. Every few years she turned in a phenomenal performance that did get recognized, but she wasn't a flashy star. I knew nothing about her personal life. She had a tough childhood, one marriage to a sweet man with whom she adopted a child, but he was an alcoholic, and she decided she had to leave the marriage. Then she married a man who, it became evident, was paranoid schizophrenic. There were many episodes when he was violent with her; he also thought he was Jesus. After their divorce, he stalked her for years, showing up at rehearsals and at her home. The book also describes her seeking a greater truth. She became a Sufi, initiated into Sufism, traveled all over the world and learned from the many spiritual masters she met. Her spiritual journey is fascinating, too, especially in light of her being a creative person dealing with the challenges of her personal life. To find a spiritual truth to help her heal from tough life situations and keep her creativity growing makes for a fascinating story. Very well-written. Penguin, \$25.95, 9781594489297.

The two best-selling books in our store during the holidays were Barack Obama's ***Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*** (Random House/Crown, \$25, 9780307237699) and Amy Sedaris's book ***I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence*** (Warner, \$27.99, 9780446578844). We kept ordering them in large quantities and sold about one hundred of each since October. Also Annie Leibovitz's book, ***A Photographer's Life: 1990-2005***, did nicely.

This book is so revealing - I can't get over people criticizing Leibovitz for not saying she's a lesbian. It's so beside the point when someone publishes these incredibly revealing photos of herself, her family, her children, her partner Susan Sontag... Susan let herself be photographed as her illness progressed - in the bathtub, in a hospital bed, on her deathbed. The book is arranged chronologically, and their love relationship is there in the photographs. Many of Leibovitz's iconic celebrity photographs are in there, too. Her art is so much about self-revelation, which is fascinating, when she's best known for her celebrity photos

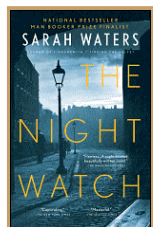


over the years. Her insights into celebrities are evident as well. Random House, \$75, 9780375505096.

Linda Bubon has been the co-owner of [Women & Children First Bookstore](#) with Ann Christophersen since it opened in 1979. She is also a professional story performer and the mother of a 20-year-old son. She loves sports and competes as a runner, volleyball player, and bowler. This summer she took up golf.

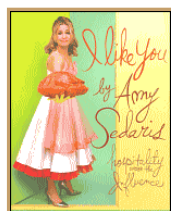
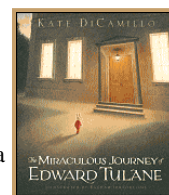


Megan Bayles



The book I couldn't put down - and was sad when it ended - was **The Night Watch** by Sarah Waters. It was accessible in a way that her Victorian novels weren't to me. The relationships were all interesting. The reverse chronological time structure had me interested in going back to the beginning to re-read it, filling in the start of the story with the new information I'd gleaned over the course of the book. Penguin, \$15, 9781594482304.

Kate DiCamillo (*Because of Winn-Dixie*) is known best as a young adult author, but I say **The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane** is going to be her breakout book for grownups. It's the sweetest book. A little china rabbit who doesn't love anyone or anything goes through various disasters and is passed among various owners. He learns to love, pushes through a heartbreak, and learns that each love has its own value, that he'll love again. I had to leave a public place because I was crying while I read it. It's even sweeter than her last book, *The Tale of Despereaux*, which was also great. I think Kate is the best new intermediate/YA writer. I have especially been recommending *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* to anyone going through a breakup, since it's a good story of love and loss and love again. Candlewick Press, \$18.99 hardcover, 9780763625894.



I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence by Amy Sedaris was my Christmas present to myself. She's the funniest person ever. Not only is *I Like You* hilarious and laugh-out-loud funny, it's also a really good book with helpful hints for entertainment. By the end of the book, you actually realize you have valuable tools for being a good hostess. It also comes with a poster. I haven't tried the recipes yet, but Amy's known for her cheeseballs. *I Like You* has many troubleshooting tips: how to figure out who to invite, what to do if someone shows up who's not invited, how to deal with hard-to-please guests. It's an attractive book which will look great on a coffee table - or a kitchen table. Warner, \$27.99, 9780446578844.

I also loved **Water for Elephants** by Sara Gruen, Alison Bechdel's **Fun Home**, and **The Girls** by Lori Lansens - the relationship between the twins and their adoptive parents was the most moving part of the book for me.

When Megan Bayles is not working at [Women & Children First](#), she's a glorified babysitter, does yoga, and reads novels in the fake sun in her kitchen.



Chelsey Clammer

Rose of No Man's Land by Michelle Tea was one of my favorites. I really like her writing: it's fun and easy to read, great before bed or on the train, and it's full of social commentary. In *Rose*, her first novel, the protagonist's big sister is trying to get on *Real World*, which was a great way to put social commentary in. All of Tea's previous books are memoirs, and you get her life story from age five to the present day. Reading *Rose*, you can tell that her life has influenced her novel, but it's not her life - it's a good, creative work of fiction. MacAdam Cage, \$22, 9781596921603.





I was surprised that I liked **The Girls** by Lori Lansens - I was afraid that the disability of the characters would be sensationalized. But Lansens gave these conjoined twins full lives - the novel was about how they lived their lives, not how they overcame anything. It was beautifully written, with flowing language. The author clearly did lots of homework on the subject and presented it with an honest perspective. Little, Brown, \$23.95, 9780316069038.

What stuck out for me about Alison Bechdel's **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic** was that the story couldn't have been in any other medium - the fact that she drew her life out and wrote the accompanying text made it more of an enriching read. The graphic memoir format was a very smart way to show what's she's trying to communicate. Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95, 9780618477944.



Chelsey Clammer recently moved to Chicago from Austin (where she used to work at BookWoman) to attend Loyola graduate school in women's studies. Chelsey also works at [Women & Children First](#), is interested in disability studies, and writes lesbian fiction.

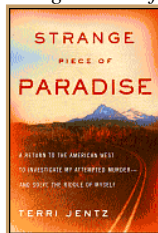


Angelique Grandone

In 1976, Yale student Terri Jentz and her best friend and classmate, Shayna, flew to Oregon with their bikes in preparation for an eighty-day cross-country trip. **Strange Piece of Paradise** is Terri Jentz's telling of their relationship, how she and Shayna were brutally attacked in Oregon, and the aftermath of that experience.

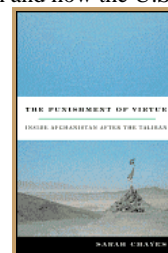
The book starts with the story of the intense friendship between these two very different girls, and it becomes apparent that Terri has a crush on Shayna. While camping in Oregon at the start of their trip, a man deliberately drives over their tent and attacks them both with an axe. It was a miracle they both lived. Shayna was primarily injured around her head and face, and as a result, doesn't recall anything about the attack and doesn't want to talk about it. Terri, on the other hand, suffered injuries on other parts of her body and remembers everything. Their friendship did not survive the experience.

Terri Jentz works now as a screenwriter, and indeed her writing is very visual. In *Strange Piece of Paradise*, she tells her story three times: once just simply relating the facts, secondly a more in-depth look, and lastly, a heart-wrenching telling of what happened to her and the best friend she was in love with. The author's examination of both the nature of violence and the rise of violent crime in this society is quite astute, as is her look at how our legal system fails us. After being haunted by what happened to her, Terri set off to find the man who attacked them. She visits the town where it happened and discovers that the people in the town were very affected by this attack, too - and she found out that many people knew who did it. She ends up meeting the guy face to face and went to one of his trials for another violent assault. He kept getting let off on technicalities, though was finally jailed for bashing a person with AIDS outside of a gay bar. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$27, 9780374134983.



The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban by Sarah Chayes is about her experiences in Afghanistan. She went there initially as a reporter with NPR and ended up staying there as a civilian to work with the Afghan people. Her passion was Middle Eastern history, and she has an intimate understanding of how that culture is so different from western culture - and how westerners don't get it. She was fearless and has the humility to admit when her assumptions were based on her western education and when she was wrong. Chayes discusses how the approach of U.S. intervention was so off the mark for Afghanistan and how the U.S. doesn't recognize and understand the centuries-old relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The author also writes about her experience as a woman in Afghanistan - and the privilege she has as a western woman - and her choice to nonchalantly dress as a man, since that helps her get her job done. She started a coop in Afghanistan in which farmers plant certain crops and the coop pays them after the harvest. Because of the relationship between warlordism and the drug trade, the Afghan people can't build an economy without drugs. So Chayes and her coop are trying to bring about a specific social reform that allows non-opiate crops to be grown for profit. She's also addressing gender and equity in Afghanistan - their coop has men and women working together.



Chayes describes how it was difficult at first, but they didn't want to exclude either gender. There's been lots of adjustment necessary to do it, but ultimately it upholds the culture (i.e. women do different work than the men by choice).

Chayes is very careful not to pass judgment but just report what she sees, explains it as best she can based on what she knows, and corrects herself when she learns differently. Her story is both valuable and hopeful. She read at our store in October, and she's one of the most heroic women I've met. It's not a surprise to me that she and Eve Ensler (whose *Insecure at Last* I also enjoyed) are friends, what with their work for women. Penguin, \$25.95, 9781594200960.



I just read Rebecca Solnit's **A Field Guide to Getting Lost**, which is new in paperback this year, and it's just great. She's often compared to Joan Didion and Susan Sontag, but I think she's better: she's more accessible, she's not a snob, and her cultural examinations start with a simpler, more relatable premise. Think of her as the punk rock little sister of Didion and Sontag. Solnit's writing is personal and specific to California, and there's a great sense of adventure that permeates her writing. She has a truly inquisitive mind, like a friend you can go anywhere with. It's hard to describe this book, but I highly recommend it. Penguin, \$15, 9780143037248.

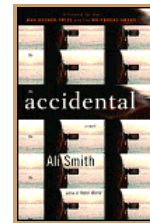
Angelique Grandone has been at Women & Children First for 6 1/2 years; when not there, she's a healthworker in training at Chicago Womens' Health Center, which has been around for 31 years.



Kathie Bergquist

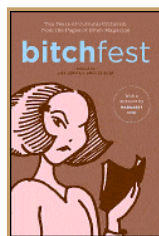
Here are my favorites for 2006, in no particular order:

Ali Smith's **The Accidental**, a brilliant and inventive novel about the havoc wreaked on a "perfect" English family by an unknown visitor who shows up at their vacation home, was hands down the best book I read all last year. Brilliantly conceived and written, it's Smith at the height of her craft. All lovers of edgy literary fiction should put this great novel at the top of their reading list. Random House/Knopf, \$22.95, 9780375422256.



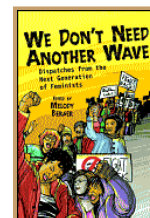
I'm sure I number among the many who put **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**, Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir at the top of her list. This genre-exploding book is funny, poignant, heartbreaking, thoughtful, and so very beautifully, breathtakingly rendered. I often describe it to people as "major literary award" good. Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95, 9780618477944.

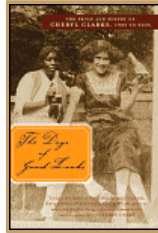
A bit of a departure from the well-plotted Victorian bodice busters Waters made her name with, **The Night Watch** is a more serious novel that takes place in reverse chronology after, during, and just before the London Blitz of WW2. Despite the era-jump, *The Night Watch* is rich in the type of compelling period details that Waters is so adept at, and the nighttime scene during a bombing raid left me breathless. Penguin, \$15, 9781594482304.



Feminism is dead? Obviously not, if *Bitch* magazine has been going strong for a solid ten years. The **Bitchfest** anthology, edited by Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler, collects the best of the feminist pop cultural criticism from the first ten years of the magazine's publication, chosen to represent the depth and diversity of issues tackled within its pages. Feminist discourse is alive and well, thank you very much! Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$16, 9780374113438.

As if to underscore my previous point, **We Don't Need Another Wave: Dispatches from the Next Generation of Feminists**, edited by Melody Berger, is a collection of writings by young feminists which builds on the continuity and evolution of women's issues, rejecting labels of difference to reinforce the fact that young or old, of the seventies or now, we are all part of one continuing movement for social justice. Seal Press, \$15.95, 9781580051828.





As more and more of the great lesbian feminist books of the eighties and nineties go out of print, what a gift Carroll and Graf gave us by issuing **Days of Good Looks: The Prose and Poetry of Cheryl Clarke, 1980-2005**, a collection by the author of the ground-breaking lesbian feminist titles *Living as a Lesbian*, *Humid Pitch*, and *Experimental Love*. I thoroughly enjoyed being reintroduced to Clarke's amazing, bluesy poetic voice and her insightful essays about politics and difference. Carroll & Graf, \$16.95, 9780786716753.

A book about pregnancy written from a teacher to a student might seem like a weird favorite choice for a woman who has no children, nor any on the foreseeable horizon, but author Beth Ann Fennelly is also a gifted poet, and much of that poetic sensibility comes through in **Great With Child: Letters to a Young Mother**. It is practical, honest, touching, and often laugh-out-loud funny. Really, I have bought this book for at least six friends who are new mothers this year. It's a beautiful look at the emotional and spiritual significance of new motherhood that is a lovely companion to more practical books such as *What to Expect When You're Expecting*. *Great With Child*: W.W. Norton, \$22.95, 9780393061826.



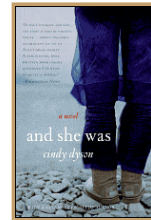
Kathie Bergquist is a staffer at Women & Children First Bookstore and co-author of A Field Guide to Gay and Lesbian Chicago (Lake Claremont Press).



Mary Ellen Kavanaugh

Zadie Smith's Orange Prize-winning **On Beauty** was one I read early-on in the year and still think about. Her spot-on portrait of academics was compelling. It is such a relief to read fiction which deals with issues that people around me deal with - race, class, sex. I may reread this soon just because I enjoyed it so much. Penguin, \$15, 9780143037743.

And She Was by Cindy Dyson is a stunning debut novel which I read twice in a row. It features a strong protagonist who travels far to come home to herself. I wrote about this in [MBW #9](#). HarperCollins, \$13.95, 9780060597719.



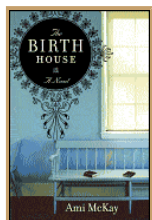
Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping by Judith Levine contains interesting sociological observations by a well-schooled yet accessible feminist journalist. My original review was in [MBW #10](#). Free Press, \$25, 9780743269353.

Mary Ellen Kavanaugh is a talented and charming (and, um, humble, really, I am) unemployed bookseller/English teacher looking for work in the Twin Cities.



Sara Luce Look

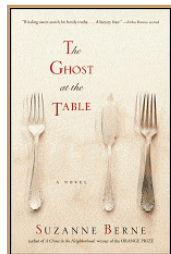
My favorite novels from 2006 all felt spiritual to me - they made me think, and all were beautifully written:



My number one pick is definitely **Birth House** by Ami McKay, which I gushed about in [MBW #11](#). This is the one where I was so impressed, I emailed the author. She and her family moved into a "birth house," a place where women went to give birth before it was common for births to happen in hospitals. From this inspiration, McKay's excellent novel was born. William Morrow, \$24.95, 9780061135859.

Eat the Document by Dana Spiotta was, deservedly, a National Book Award finalist. It takes place in the seventies and the nineties, with the story told in different voices. In the seventies, Mary Whittaker and Bobby DeSoto were involved in radical anti-war protests; one of them killed someone, and they both went underground. What's interesting about it is its portrayal of activism, both in the 70s and in the 90s

(one of them runs an anarchist bookstore in the 90s.) *Eat the Document* explores what it means to completely recreate yourself - several times - and become anyone you want to be. Scribner, \$15, 9780743273008.



And then there's ***The Ghost at the Table*** by Suzanne Berne, who also wrote *A Crime in the Neighborhood*, Orange Prize winner in 1999. *The Ghost at the Table* is about the Fiske sisters, estranged for years, who will be getting together for a Thanksgiving reunion at the family home in New England. One of them, Cynthia, writes historical novels for girls about famous sisters in history. The one she's currently writing is about Mark Twain's daughters, who have a similar story to her own; for instance, both sets of sisters lost their mother at an early age. The Fiske family house is also near Mark Twain's house. I liked how this novel looked at how memories can be different for people in the same family, how someone can have such a clear idea about something in their past, and once they start talking to others about it, they learn their version is not necessarily how it happened. Algonquin Books, \$23.95, 9781565123342.

I also loved ***We Don't Need Another Wave: Dispatches From the Next Generation of Feminists***, edited by Melody Berger, heir apparent to *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*. See my review in [MBW #13](#) for more details. Seal Press, \$15.95, 9781580051828.

Sara Luce Look is co-owner and book buyer at [Charis Books](#) in Atlanta. She is also mother to Zelda Jane and a femme dyke who loves to read.



Science Fiction and Fantasy

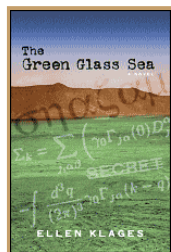
By Jill Roberts

Do you think that you've outgrown fiction about spaceships and elves? Did you stop reading science fiction and fantasy a long, long time ago? Well, I'll wager you this: I'll bet that you've read at least one novel by Isabel Allende, Alice Sebold, or Margaret Atwood. These authors write eloquently about magic, the supernatural, and the future. In other words, they are science fiction and fantasy writers.

Science fiction and fantasy is the literature of possibility. It crosses boundaries to break rules. Whether you call it literary fabulism, magical realism, or slipstream, sf/f contains some of the most exciting (and subversive) books being published.

My favorite sf/f books of 2006 are indicative of the diversity of genre fiction and include a biography, a children's book, and a novel. Here are three excellent books that will greatly appeal to any woman who reads quality fiction.

With an urgent immediacy, the biography ***James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon*** by Julie Phillips introduces a six-year-old Alice Sheldon trekking through the dangerous and uncharted Congo with her socialite parents. Sheldon becomes a debutante, a painter, a CIA operative, an experimental psychologist, and one of the most influential science fiction writers of her time. Her pseudonym, James Tiptree, Jr., gave her license to make brilliant fictional forays into gender, biology, and identity, while avoiding the labeling that stymied most first-wave feminist science fiction writers. Featured on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, this is an incredible book that has been repeatedly mentioned as one of the best biographies of 2006. St. Martin's Press, \$27.95, 9780312203856.

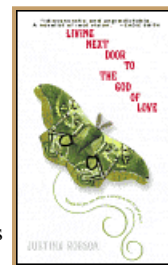


The Green Glass Sea by Ellen Klages is not exactly a children's book, though it initially appears so. Two misfit girls - a reluctant bully and a science geek - overcome their differences to form a solid friendship. It's sweet and straightforward, until you realize that the girls are sequestered in Los Alamos, as their well-intentioned parents work diligently along with Robert Oppenheimer to create the atomic bomb. Klages provides a note-perfect portrayal of the melancholy sweetness of childhood as it is slowly underlaid with an inevitable menace. A recent BookSense top pick, this is a beautifully told and haunting exploration of the

ultimate loss of innocence. Penguin/Viking Juvenile, \$16.99 cloth, 9780670061341.

Note: *The Green Glass Sea* defies categories so thoroughly that it may be shelved in the children's, genre, or fiction/literature section of your local bookstore - and quite possibly in all three sections. Definitely make sure you find it.

Living Next Door to the God of Love by Justina Robson is one of the most challenging - and riveting - books I read in 2006. Jalaeka is a dangerous accident, an unpredictable body-shifting deity splintered off from the all-powerful Unity. Unity is gradually absorbing the universe into itself, and has sent its avatar, Theo, to destroy Jalaeka. Along with his/her genetically-engineered human lover, Francine, a Unity-focused academic, a metallic guardian-angel, and an untrustworthy elf, Jalaeka is inexorably drawn toward a showdown with Unity. Robson tackles desire, consumerism, and epistemological infighting with great prose, unexpected humor, and ambitious complexity. Though it occasionally spins out of control, *Living Next Door to the God of Love* is an absorbing cyberpunk thriller unlike any I've previously encountered. Spectra, \$13, 9780553587425.



Jill Roberts is the Managing Editor at *Tachyon Publications*, an independent sf/f press and publisher of the Tiptree Award anthology series. Her literary heroines are Ursula K. Le Guin and James Tiptree, Jr. (a.k.a. Alice Sheldon). She wants to read more fiction that messes around with gender.



Nan Cinnater's Favorite Mysteries of 2006

By Nan Cinnater



The Art of Detection by Laurie R. King. Sherlock Holmes, in 1920's San Francisco, and a lesbian police detective in the 21st century both discover the importance of gay marriage rights. Random House/Bantam, \$24, 9780553804539.

Cutting Blades by Victoria Blake. In this sequel to *Bloodless Shadow*, British private eye Sam Falconer searches for a missing Oxford rower while dealing with her enigmatic fugitive father. Berkley/Prime Crime, \$14, 9780425209998.

Dope by Sara Gran. Nothing is as it seems in this nearly pitch-perfect 50's noir thriller filled with addicts, cons, prostitutes, and one unforgettable heroine. Penguin/Putnam, \$21.95, 9780399153457.

End of Watch by Baxter Clare. In the latest and possibly best in this lesbian series, LAPD Lieutenant "Frank" Franco goes home to New York City and picks up the trail of a cold case, her own father's murder. Bella Books, \$13.95, 9781594930645.

The Glass Coffin by Gail Bowen. I was late to catch up with this Canadian book by one of my favorite mystery writers, who combines the way-we-live-now intimacy of American cozies with the literary and psychological sophistication of the best British mysteries. McClelland and Stewart, \$6.99, 9780771014772.

Jane and the Barque of Frailty by Stephanie Barron. Latest in the series of Jane Austen mysteries. Barron continues to amaze me with her mastery of Austen's idiom - and occasionally even Austen's exquisite irony - here conjoined with a neat, tightly plotted mystery surrounding the murder of a Russian princess. Random House/Bantam, \$24, 9780553802269.

The Killing Room by Gerri Hill. A fun lesbian romance between a Denver cop and a psychotherapist turns into a fairly credible hunt for a serial killer when the therapist's patients are targeted. Bella Books, \$13.95, 9781594930508.

Snow Blind by P.J. Tracy. Wicked good thriller set in the Minnesota winter, combining some strong women characters with some strong ethical questions. Penguin/Putnam, \$24.95, 9780399153396.

The Summer Snow by Rebecca Pawel. In 1945, Lieutenant Tejada of Spain's Guardia Civil is transferred to Granada to solve a murder in his own family. Pawel brilliantly illuminates Spanish history by casting a fascist as her hero. Soho Press, \$23, 9781569474082.

Too Darn Hot by Sandra Scoppettone. Something clicked for me with this second installment in Scoppettone's slangy series about a 40s dame doing a man's job as a private eye in wartime New York City. Random House/Ballantine, \$24.95, 9780345478122.

Unbearable Losses by Jennifer L. Jordan. In a near-perfect mix of lesbian social comedy and character-driven mystery, Kristin Ashe works on two cases: nuisance thefts from the Crumpler sisters' lavish Christmas display, and poison pen messages at an upscale pre-school. Spinsters Ink, \$14.95, 9781883523688.

Nan Cinnater is a former bookseller who lives in Provincetown, MA. She now teaches high school English and reviews mysteries for Books to Watch Out For.



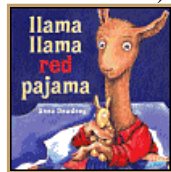
2006 Favorites for the Kids



Favorites of Linda Bubon and Women & Children First

For the recent holiday season, Women & Children First had a few shelves spotlighting our favorite children's book authors. There was a Mo Willems shelf with **Edwina, the Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She Was Extinct** (Hyperion, \$16.99 cloth, 9780786837489), **Leonardo the Terrible Monster** (Hyperion, \$16.99 cloth, 9780786852949); and **Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late** (Hyperion, \$12.99 board, 9780786837465), among others; an Ian Falconer shelf with the fabulous Olivia books (the latest is **Olivia Forms a Band**, Simon and Schuster, \$17.95, 9781416924548); and the great books from Candlewick, such as **Egyptology** (9780763626389), **Wizardology** (9780763628956), **Dragonology** (9780763623296), and **Pirateology** (9780763631437), the most recent (all are \$19.99, cloth).

Our top seller for the past two months has been **And Tango Makes Three**, by Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, and Henry Cole (Simon and Schuster, \$14.95 cloth, 9780689878459). Right behind it are my favorite book for preschoolers, **Llama Llama Red Pajama** by Anna Dewdney (Penguin/Viking, \$16.99 cloth, 9780670059836), and **On the Night You Were Born** by Nancy Tillman (Feiwel & Friends, \$16.95 cloth, 9780312346065), with beautiful illustrations by the author. This book would make a child you're reading it to feel like a miracle: the polar bears stayed up all night dancing and the ladybugs don't fly home. It's whimsical, lovely, and not sentimental.



Another favorite of our staff is **Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship**, by Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Paula Kahumbu, which is the story of a tortoise who befriends a baby hippo after the December 2004 tsunami (Scholastic, \$16.99 cloth, 9780439829731). A favorite from last



year, [Zen Shorts](#) by Jon Muth, was a big seller again this year (Scholastic, \$16.95 cloth, 9780439339117). Another one we like a lot is [Max's Words](#) by Kate Banks. Max is the youngest of three boys. One of his older brothers collects stamps, and the other collects coins; they won't share with Max, so he collects words. Soon he can make sentences, and eventually, a story, which is when his brothers become interested in Max's collection. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$16 cloth, 9780374399498.

Sara Luce Look's Favorites from 2006

My favorite kids' books of last year were [The Green Glass Sea](#) by Ellen Klages (Viking, \$16.99 hardcover, 9780670061341), about two girls whose parents are working on "the gadget" in Los Alamos, New Mexico, in the forties (reviewed in [MBW #12](#)) and, of course, [Chickarella](#), by Mary Jane Auch and Herm Auch (Holiday House, \$6.95, 9780823420155), a picture book with elaborately costumed chickens, which I wrote about in [MBW #11](#).



Clamor No More

Clamor magazine is ceasing publication after seven years and thirty-eight issues. From the letter they sent to subscribers and other fans of *Clamor*:

"After seven years of bulldozing borders, defying dogma, and inspiring instigation, the financial obstacles involved with publishing an independent magazine have become too great, and it's time to move on... Effective movement media doesn't need to last indefinitely to be successful. We're confident that many people have been inspired to do great things after reading about others doing the same in *Clamor*. We know this because we've been consistently inspired by the stories of struggle and triumph in *Clamor*. And while we'll miss that, we're also confident that there are independent media projects being born at this very moment with even greater promise."

The owners of *Clamor* are currently working to ensure the survival of several of their online allies, all of whom shared an "infoshop" with *Clamor* (*Just Seeds*, *Spread* magazine, *Alternative Press Review*, and *Vegan Freak* are some of those involved). For more information, check out www.clamormagazine.org.



Tillie Olsen, 1912-2007

Author and activist Tillie Olsen died on New Year's Day, just two weeks shy of her ninety-fifth birthday, at her home in Oakland, California. Her books, *Tell Me a Riddle*, *Yonnonidio: From the Thirties*, and *Silences*, staples in women's studies programs, gave voice to working-class women. Florence Howe, editor at the Feminist Press, said, "She told women writers that it's okay to write about how you live and what you do." In addition to writing, she was a labor, anti-war, and human rights activist. Julie Olsen Edwards, one of her four daughters, remarked of her parents, "Our home became a refuge and gathering place for people who shared their commitment to build a more just world."

A public memorial will be held sometime in February, but for January 14, 2007, which would have been her ninety-fifth birthday, her family encouraged those touched by her work to gather with friends and read Tillie Olsen's work together. For more on this tribute - and to see some wonderful photographs of the author - be sure to visit www.tillieolsen.net. Those who wish to make contributions in her name may send them to: Tillie Olsen Memorial Fund for Human Rights, Public Libraries, and Working Class Literature, c/o the San Francisco Foundation, 225 Bush St., #500, San Francisco, CA 94104.

San Francisco Chronicle obituary:

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/01/03/BAG16NBSAC1.DTL&hw=tillie&sn=003&sc=986)

[f=/c/a/2007/01/03/BAG16NBSAC1.DTL&hw=tillie&sn=003&sc=986](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/01/03/BAG16NBSAC1.DTL&hw=tillie&sn=003&sc=986)

New York Times obituary:

[www.nytimes.com/2007/01/03/books/03olsen.html?](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/03/books/03olsen.html?em&ex=1167973200&en=97643c0cb933a22b&ei=5087%0A)

[em&ex=1167973200&en=97643c0cb933a22b&ei=5087%0A](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/03/books/03olsen.html?em&ex=1167973200&en=97643c0cb933a22b&ei=5087%0A)

Appeal for Paula Gunn Allen

Paula Gunn Allen is the author of numerous influential books, such as *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, and the recent biography *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy Entrepreneur, Diplomat*. She has also done much to bring attention to American Indian literature with *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*, *Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature 1900-1970*, and *Song of the Turtle: American Indian Fiction 1974-1990*. She also taught for many years, retiring in 1999 as Professor of English/Creative Writing/American Indian Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles.

In October 2006, a fire resulted in the loss of her car, double-wide trailer, clothes, appliances, books, and papers. She also suffered smoke inhalation and consequently spent several weeks in the hospital. (2006 was a hard year for her - just before the fire, she had successfully completed radiation therapy for lung cancer.) Fortunately she is now responding well to treatment, and friends report that her spirits are better than they have been in awhile.

The Paula Gunn Allen Fund has been established to provide financial assistance to Paula and help her rebuild her life. Donations may be sent to: The Paula Gunn Allen Fund, Account No. 0129540739, Bank of America, 228 North Main St., Fort Bragg, CA 95437. (Donations are not tax deductible.)

Paula also needs copies of books containing her essays or poems because hers burned in the fire. (Fortunately, she had deposited most of her papers in the library of the University of Oregon several years before the fire.) Books can be sent to Paula Gunn Allen, c/o 560 1/2 North McPherson St., Fort Bragg, CA 95437.



Literary Grants

A Room Of Her Own Foundation (AROHO) is "dedicated to helping women artists achieve the privacy and financial support necessary to pursue their art." Their \$50,000 Gift of Freedom Award allows a woman to fulfill Virginia Woolf's vision of "money and a room of her own" to write. The 2006-07 Literary Gift of Freedom Award will be given to an American woman fiction writer. Deadline for applications is February 1, 2007. The application and more information can be found online at www.aroomofherown.org/giftfreedom.html.



We hope you've enjoyed this issue of **More Books for Women**. We'll be back next month with reviews of the books that have booksellers buzzing this winter.

We appreciate your assistance in spreading the word about *Books To Watch Out For*. It's helpful when you add us to your list of favorite links on your own website and places like MySpace and Tribe, tell your friends, colleagues, and book group(s) about us, and ask your local independent bookstore to carry our flyers. It all helps.

With thanks,

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