



More Books for Women

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- February 2006 -
Volume 2 Number 2



More Books for Women #5

Welcome to the fifth(!) issue of this grand collaboration between Women & Children First bookstore and Books To Watch Out For.

First the news, then the books.....

Carol Seajay
Publisher



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

News

Spinifex to Cease Publishing New Books

On the eve of their 15th anniversary, Australia's most successful feminist press has announced it will cease publishing new books. Publisher Susan Hawthorne writes that in the past five years she and her partner Renate Klein have watched as many feminist publishers around the world have closed their doors. "We resisted this and came up with strategies for increasing our visibility and turnover. We have survived criticism and marginalisation. What we cannot survive is lack of interest from media and all but the best bookshops."

"Our mission is to publish controversial and innovative feminist books with an optimistic edge [but] the media pigeon holes us," Hawthorne continues, "because our publishing program includes lesbian books. They forget that lesbians play an important role in fostering social justice in Australia and internationally, and they forget that as lesbians we feel the impact of social injustice acutely and that is why we have published across such a broad range of issues, much of which is ignored."

Consequently, Spinifex has decided to shift its focus to promoting and increasing the profile of the books they have already published and to publishing the remaining books under contract.

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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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 Richard Labonte.

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Perth, ON K7H 2J3
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Spinifex has 170 books in its catalogue, a long list of state, national and international awards, and a staggering number of translations and co-productions. Spinifex titles remain available through their distributors: in Australia and Asia, Macmillan; in Aotearoa/NZ, Addenda; in USA and Canada, Independent Publishers Group; and in UK, Gazelle.

The Women's Review of Books is back

Women's Review of Books' "Comeback Issue" features many reviews (of course), as well as Dorothy Allison ruminating on plot, an interview with Doha Boraki, an essay by Kate Clinton, and yours truly on the importance of lesbian pulp fiction, historically and currently. Newsstand distribution seems sparse (yet another magazine distributor, Big Top, seems to be folding) so you may well have to subscribe to read it: \$33/year from Old City Publishing, 628 North 2nd St, Philadelphia, PA 19123, or <http://www.wcwonline.org/womensreview//>

Time Warner Quits Books

"Freedom of the press belongs to those who own the presses" is an old American truism. And as book- and freedom-loving women, it behooves us to be attentive to who owns the presses that publish (or fail to publish) our literature:

Time Warner is selling its book publishing division, which includes Warner Books and Little Brown, to French media and defense conglomerate Lagardère SCA for \$540 million. The purchase makes Lagardère the third largest publisher in the world. Lagardère is said to be building a portfolio of book publishing in French, English, and Spanish; purchasing Time Warner's operations in the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand, which are included in the sale, positions the conglomerate as a leading publisher in each of these countries as well. There is also some low-key speculation that the company will also make a run for Simon & Schuster.

It's unclear what the impact will be on Bookspan, which is run as a partnership between Time Warner and Bertelsmann. Bookspan runs 30 book clubs, including the gay and lesbian-oriented InsightOut book club, Black Expressions, QPB, the Doubleday Book Club, The Literary Guild, etc.

Awards: Kids Win Big:

Congratulations to Nikki Giovanni: *Rosa*, her biography of Rosa Parks for the younger set, was named a Caldecott Honor Book.

And double congratulations to Jacqueline Woodson, who just received the Margaret Edwards Award for lifetime contribution to writing for young adults and whose extraordinary *Show Way* was named a Newbery Honor book. *Show Way* tells of seven generations of women in her family, from the one sold away from her mother right down to Woodson's own daughter, and their legacy of strength, tenacity, and courage. It's also a sweet book for daughters of single mothers, and any girl without an in-home father, as the youngest, precious daughter in the family is presented simply as her mother's daughter.

Barnes&Noble.com Charging Sales Tax

Barnes&Noble.com has quietly started charging sales tax on purchases made through its website "in states where it has significant presence" – which is just about everywhere. The American Booksellers Association and other brick-and-mortar retailers' associations have long argued – including in court – that it is unfair for online sellers to duck paying state and local sales taxes and that this practice both creates an unlevel playing field for local businesses and deprives local governments of needed revenue. B&N's decision follows a California court's ruling on the question that went against Borders' online bookselling division.

Twisted Fictions

It's an odd month in the book world. James Frey's memoir turns out to be fictionalized: in America hyperbole is more saleable than reality. I guess maybe he learned that from our other non-favorite ex-drinker, George W. Bush. And JT LeRoy turns out to be a woman writer passing as a young boy, a ruse that was intended to get her work to a wider audience. The only thing I find entertaining in that charade is the one thing that no one else seems to be mentioning: that our culture – including publishing – is much more interested in the work of teen-aged (and adult) boys than middle-aged women. And that it's the hype that sells these books, not the quality of the literature itself.....

Passings: Betty Friedan

It is with much sadness that we note the passing of Betty Friedan, whose 1963 bestselling, *The Feminine Mystique*, helped launch the women's movement. She went on to found the National Organization for Women and fought for equal pay for women, gender-free want ads, maternity leave, safe and legal abortion, then later for the rights of the aging and, eventually, coming to stand for lesbian rights. She died at 85 on her birthday.

And last but not least, while one of our intrepid WCF reviewers, Pam Harcourt, has taken a new job with Chicago-based book distributor Independent Publishers Group, we're pleased to tell you she'll continue to read and review for *More Books for Women*.



It's Women's History Month

March is Women's History Month, and at Women and Children First we often get calls from the media to see how a feminist bookstore celebrates it. Although we always say, "Every month is women's history month here," we do feature books, for both children and adults, that focus on the role women played in history on our display tables and in our windows.



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For the Kids



Recommendations from Linda Bubon

Bessie Smith and the Night Riders by Sue Stauffacher with paintings by renowned fine artist John Holyfield, captures a moment in history that is sure to inspire readers in the 5-10 age group. Told from a young girl's perspective, the story shows how Bessie Smith stood up to a posse of Klansmen (the "Night Riders" of the title) who threatened to disrupt her fine blues concert. Our young heroine, who is too poor to attend but is listening through a crack in the tent flaps, warns Bessie and the crowd of the Riders' approach, and watches while Bessie summons her power, spooks their horses, and drives off the troublemakers. She is rewarded with a front row seat and an unforgettable lesson about the force of righteous resistance. Putnam, \$16.99.

Betsy Hearne's **Seven Brave Women**, published in 1997, has finally come out in paperback! It is, perhaps, my favorite book about women in history; it features enchanting paintings by Bethanne Anderson. Told in the voice of an 8 to 10-year-old girl, the book briefly describes the lives of her seven female ancestors, from great-great-grandma who emigrated from Switzerland to Philadelphia in the 1700s down to her own mother who tells and writes stories. The details in each brief sketch are priceless: of her great-great-grandma she writes, "She made medicine from herbs and helped her neighbors have their babies. Once a sharp knife slipped and cut her finger open. She used the other hand to sew it up with a needle and thread." The stories are introduced with the young narrator explaining that most books record history by "the wars that men fought," but her mother doesn't "believe wars should be fought" and so she tells history differently. Each story begins with the war (or wars) that the ancestor lived through "but did not fight in."

The repetition makes a powerful statement. The ending, when she tells us that, like her foremothers, she can do lots of things and will be a brave woman like them, never fails to move me. I've used this book for classroom presentations, choosing seven kids to hold up a blow-up of each page, and it totally connects. And it's the perfect time to encourage them to ask their own grandparents for their own stories of bravery. HarperTrophy, \$6.99.

Two new children's books from this fall focus on the struggle for women's suffrage:

Mama Went to Jail for the Vote by Kathleen Karr, illustrated by Malene Laugesen, told through the eyes of a suffragist's daughter, provides a great introduction to the fight for suffrage. When her mother protests at the White House and is chained and arrested the importance of the struggle becomes real for her daughter. Victory is achieved at the end of this story, and the mother makes her daughter promise she will vote in every election. Hyperion, \$15.99.

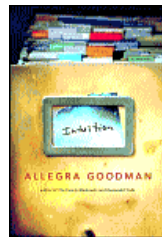
I Could Do That! Esther Morris Gets Women the Vote, by Linda Arms White with witty illustrations by Nancy Carpenter, is another book to inspire 5-10 year olds. Young Esther is portrayed as ambitious, resourceful, and resilient as she helps raise her younger siblings after her mother's death, when she opens her own millinery shop at nineteen, when she stands up to those who would close down her abolitionist meetings, when she moves to the frontier in Illinois to try to claim her dead husband's land (she is denied), and when she finally moves to Wyoming and is instrumental (along with her grown twin sons) in that state's fight for suffrage. Although she doesn't live long enough to vote in a national election herself, she became the first woman judge and the first woman to hold political office. Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, \$16.



Reading for the Rest of Us

Linda's Recommendations for Adult Reading

Sex Wars by Marge Piercy will make the suffrage struggle come alive for adult readers. Piercy's gift for historical fiction is to make the reader feel a part of the time and action. Historical figures like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are fleshed out, but readers will more closely identify with Freydeh, a young Russian Jewish immigrant who struggles to bring her family over and searches for a lost sister through the brothels and prisons of New York. Piercy shows how this early political struggle was not only about suffrage, but also about workplace rights and, especially, about the rights of women to control their own bodies and sexuality. Morrow, \$24.95.



I've enjoyed Allegra Goodman's previous novels, and now I'm deep into **Intuition**, set in the high-stakes atmosphere of a prestigious medical research institute run by a charismatic oncologist who will do anything for publicity and the scrupulous scientist who often clashes with him. Goodman's genius is in creating characters we care about and in making the setting compelling even to those of us who *never* read about science. Dial, \$25.00.

I always enjoyed a Jane Kenyon poem when I came across one in the *New Yorker*, but having a complete collection of her work is like having a big cache of jewels at my fingertips. **Jane Kenyon: Collected Poems** is a treasure. Dive in anywhere and find the perfect description of a quiet afternoon in an empty house or a full moon in winter. She is at home with the natural world as well as the difficult workings of our intimate relationships, and I love the way her poems honor the domestic world. Here is an excerpt from "Year Day": Dial, \$25.00.



We are living together on the earth.
 The clock's heart
 beats in its wooden chest.
 The cats follow the sun through the house.
 We lie down together at night.

The hermit gives up
 After thirty years of hiding in the jungle.
 The last door to the last room
 comes unlatched. Here are the gestures
 of my hands. Wear them in your hair.

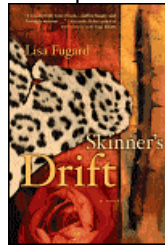
Robin Morgan's new novel, **The Burning Time**, is coming in March. She tells the story of one Alyce Kyteler, a feisty Irish noble woman persecuted during the little-known Irish Inquisition; Alyce practices the "old religion" and will be damned if the Catholic Church is going to stop her. The finished book will include a reader's guide, and Robin will be available for live speaker-phone discussions with book groups. Book groups will want to request appointments as soon as possible. It will be published by Melville House, which is distributed by Consortium. \$15, paper.

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Ann Christophersen is reading...

Lisa Fugard's first novel, **Skinner's Drift**, is excellent. Like much of the work of her famous father (the playwright Athol Fugard), it is set in South Africa during Mandela's imprisonment and the rise of the African National Congress and explores the growing tensions between white Afrikaners desperate to



hold onto their land and their privilege and black Africans rising up against apartheid and their virtual slave conditions. The novel opens as Eva van Rensburg flies back to South Africa after having been gone for ten years. Her father is dying, and she is a reluctant traveler back to a place and situation she quite purposely left behind. That she does not want to see her father is made eminently clear; why she doesn't - and the circumstances of her mother's death (that her mother was killed is another detail revealed at the beginning) - are sources of suspense and thematic significance. As the well-constructed plot moves along (I couldn't stop reading), Eva's need for some form of understanding and reconciliation with her past emerge as necessary for her own well-being, and the way that is achieved mirrors the method by which South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped narrow the staggering divide between blacks and whites after Mandela's release. Her skill with language is quite impressive too, filling the pages with gems like "the sky ahead was pale blue, a memory of blue, as if something with sharp teeth had reached up and sucked the blue right out of it." *Skinner's Drift* is also a BookSense recommendation for February, so head out to your nearest independent bookstore (if you're not going to buy it online from Women & Children First) and ask to see the BookSense display for this and other fine books recommended by independent booksellers nationwide. Scribner, \$25.00.

Mary Oliver's **New and Selected Poems: Volume Two** soars as high as any collection of poems can. I sold a copy of it today to a woman looking for a confirmation gift for a sophisticated thirteen-year-old girl who reads a lot and treasures books. She was looking for something inspirational, but not simply and sloppily so. I told her I thought this would be perfect because of the life-affirming, joyful tone and content of the poems and their ready accessibility to anyone with an eye and ear to catch the sense of wonder and wisdom Oliver conveys. One of the great things about Oliver is that while accessible enough that her work can be appreciated by an untrained reader, she is at the same time a "poet's poet": her exquisite use of form and language to communicate complex observations and ideas has earned her a National Book Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and the adulation of her many fans. She gives us something that can be very hard to find: a deep feeling for



the amazing beauty of the world and an enormous sense of gratitude for it. Beacon Press, \$24.95.

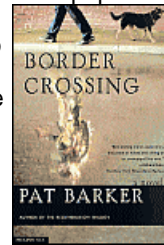
It was just December that I was lauding Margaret Atwood's contribution (*The Penelopiad*) to the new series of contemporary re-tellings of ancient myths published by Cannongate. Now I'm back to tell you that she has another new book, **The Tent**. This one is a collection of fictional essays (a form about



which I will say something a little later) and - omigod! - the pieces are fantastic! They are very short - four pages max - and range widely in subject matter. Some of them are funny, some quite dark; others are barbed and biting; all of them are witty, provocative, and ingenious. Their prose poem-like brevity makes it inviting to read them again and again. And an added pleasure of the book is that Atwood's own, quite charming illustrations accompany a number of the essays. Oh, yes, about the form: "Fictional essay" seems almost a contradiction in terms. Aren't essays usually thought of as nonfiction? What's intriguing about combining the two is that the voice in each first-person piece might be that of Margaret Atwood, which it certainly sounds like at times, given the content. That said, it can't be assumed, though, because with fiction the "I" is a persona, not the author. Then again, it could be the author if the "I" isn't being fictionalized. Pretty tantalizing, eh? Doubleday hardcover, \$18.00.

One of my favorite contemporary writers is Pat Barker, a British writer. A new novel of hers is always an occasion of great interest to me, and luckily she publishes one every few years. I'm not writing about a new one now, however, since I've been thinking about a few previous novels that pop into my mind frequently, **Border Crossing** and **Regeneration**.

Besides really appreciating her writing style, her approach to her content is one I wish more writers followed. One gleans it from reading her books, but she put it most succinctly once at a reading I attended: she said she writes about moral questions that she herself does not have the answers to. Believe me, that makes for much more provocative, satisfying writing than that of someone who has it all figured out.



Border Crossing is about a psychologist who saves a man's life only to discover that the man was someone he helped send to prison when the man was just a boy: his professional assessment of the boy was the tipping point in the court's decision. Moreover, that man wants the psychologist to help him sort out his life, which launches a painful journey into the past which also has repercussions for both in the present. Picador/St. Martin's Press, \$13.00.

Regeneration is the first novel in a trilogy about WWI. It's historical fiction, featuring such figures as Sigfrid Sasson, the WWI poet, and Charles Rivers, who was the head doctor at the first hospital created to treat shell shock. The enormous irony at the center of the book is that the purpose of the hospital is to treat men who have responded sanely to the war's madness by going mad in order to strip them of their sane response to the horror of the war so they can go back and fight. It's a great book, and as is true of all great books, has extreme relevance for the present even though set in the past. Penguin, \$14.00.

Books to Watch Out For:

Alison Bechdel of *Dykes to Watch Out For* fame, is publishing a graphic memoir in June, **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**. She's drawn and written her way to impressive new heights with this complex and nuanced work. Houghton Mifflin will publish it in a \$19.95 hardcover.



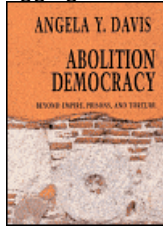
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Pam Harcourt raves (and rants)

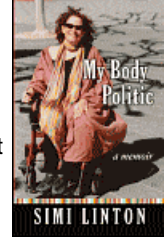
The Open Media Book series was launched to fill the space between book and pamphlet, bringing you texts from radical thinkers that you can read in a sitting or two.

Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture is a series of interviews with Angela Davis discussing Abu Ghraib, the prison-industrial complex, and the idea of abolition democracy. She's absolutely inspiring—

digging out the implications of every question she's asked and then giving answers that are actually full of possibility. By "abolition democracy," a term used by DuBois, she means a democracy that goes far beyond the theoretical right to vote. She keeps coming back to the idea that, to successfully tear down oppressive structures like prisons, there must be positive and humane alternatives around which to build a movement. The book functions as it was meant to—giving me some focused time with a great thinker who re-convincing me that we don't have to accept any oppressive social systems (like a two-party system) as given or unchangeable and priming me for her forthcoming longer work *Prisons and History*. Seven Stories Press, \$12.95.



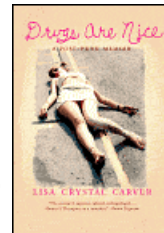
Simi Linton's memoir, *My Body Politic*, begins with her 1971 hitchhiking trip to protest the Vietnam War that ended with an accident in which she lost her husband and her best friend, and became paralyzed in her legs. I loved spending time with this smart, funny woman. She traces for us the changes in her thinking about her disability, what it meant to her identity, and the slow and fragmented ways that her consciousness was raised about the political issues of disability. I love both her honesty about her own flaws and all the credit she gives to the people who pulled her along in her political understanding. She is absolutely relatable throughout the whole book. A customer at Women and Children First recommended this book to me, saying that it's very fun to read, and when you finish you find you've received a broad overview of the major issues of the disability rights movement. She was exactly right: this is a great jumping-in point. I especially loved Simi's section on trying to talk about sexuality after her accident, and realizing it's been decided for her that she is no longer sexual, or if she is, there's nothing there that she should be talking about with anyone. The scanty research on disability and sexuality is completely boner-centric, and Simi is not having it. She talks, she listens, she distributes information, she organizes. She eventually discovers and says things about sex that have huge implications for anyone's ideas of their limits, not just disabled people. And wait till you get to her thoughts on dance! University of Michigan Press, \$25.95.



We don't know, reading Samantha Hunt's *The Seas*, if the protagonist is a mermaid living on land or just a normal land-dweller having a breakdown. Neither is an easy thing. If this book were a movie, it would be *The Whale Rider*. It's contemporary but fable-like; and the huge, grey will of the sea is a constant in the characters' lives. Hunt's writing is tremendous and sure—there's not an extra word in the book—and she handles particular words until they become so familiar that they're strange, perfectly capturing the way you spend time when stuck in an unleaveable town. I had a hard time putting this book down, wanting to follow its exquisite chilliness straight to the end. Picador/St. Martin's Press, \$13.00.



I couldn't put Lisa Carver's *Drugs Are Nice: A Post-Punk Memoir* down. Sometimes I loved it, sometimes it was really gross, and sometimes it was both. She was a pioneering 'zine writer with *Rollerderby*, and her band Suckdog was perhaps best known for being mesmerizing audience-harassers. Her memoir is full of those underground celebrities like Dame Darcy or GG Allin or Anton LaVey who are always doing some amazing craziness no one else would think to do. It's depressing when Carver seems to portray her obsessive, dysfunctional, often abusive relationships as an essential part of being an artist and not leading a boring life. But by the end, when it gets really dark, she makes some big, life-changing decisions—a relief to the reader—but it's also sort of sad how much of her freedom Carver loses. She's a fearless writer, unafraid of the dark, and in that she is ultimately inspiring. Soft Skull, \$14.00.



Tish Hayes recommends...

I read about Carol Emshwiller's collection of short stories, **I Live With You**, in *Time Out Chicago's* best of the year issue. I was so intrigued by the review that I dropped everything else, read it immediately, and I'm happy to report that I was not even a little disappointed. Emshwiller's stories are



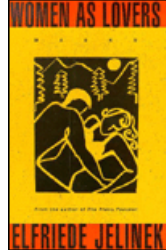
creepy and disorienting in the best ways, allowing for a thorough exploration of her themes: relationships and war. I can't tell you how often a story unsettled me, forcing me to stop and think about it before moving on to the next. After finishing "See No Evil, Feel No Joy," a short story about a woman who leaves a commune of people who try to live without engaging any of their senses, I had to put the book down for an entire day and figure out why I was so upset that the narrative didn't end the way I wanted it to. Of course I realized that although I was devastated, Emshwiller's

choices are what gave the story so much power. Throughout this collection, Emshwiller consistently pokes holes through the fabrications of our lives and reminds me of the power literature has to change the way we think. Tachyon Press, \$14.95.

Newly out in paperback, **Upstate** by Kalisha Buckhanon is a novel told through the letters between two high school sweethearts, but this is no teen romance novel. A tragedy that is revealed in full only at the end of the book has put Antonio in jail. The letters are full of the heartache and angst of young teenage love, but they are also full of the details of urban life in the projects of New York, the effects of poverty, a judicial system that rarely serves justice and the way that system affects communities. Over the course of the novel Natasha and Antonio become people you root for - their lives are full and complicated and interesting - and their predicament is not so very uncommon. *Upstate* is perfect for book groups that want fiction that examines social issues. It's also a great read for mature teens. St. Martin's Press, \$11.95.



I have to recommend the January selection from our Young Feminist Book Group: **Women as Lovers** by the Nobel Prize-winning Elfriede Jelinek. The



novel is unrelenting in its depiction of the unequal status of women as illustrated through two relationships. Paula and Brigitte both pursue young men in the hopes of making their lives better. Paula believes that love will save her, while Brigitte is much more practical and knows that a future can only work out if money and status are achieved. It doesn't end so well for either of them, but Paula is clearly the most tragic figure: love really doesn't get a woman very far.

Women as Lovers is heartbreaking and difficult, but it's an important critique of the few choices afforded to women and of the social and economic structure that keeps that oppression in place. The structure Jelinek chooses for the narrative, and her use of repetition, takes some getting used to, but it all works to make the reader feel as restricted and helpless as these women. Serpent's Tail, \$14.99.

Frantic Transmissions to and from Los Angeles is a memoir unlike any other I have read. Kate Braverman's prose makes tangible the ephemeral, creating atmosphere and mood rather than a linear perspective of her life.

Frantic Transmissions begins by locating the reader in an L.A. removed from Hollywood, an L.A. that is politicized, littered with painful memories both collective and personal, void of glamour, but an L.A. where real people exist and struggle. This locating of Los Angeles roots the rest of the book, because despite Braverman's escape, L.A. persists as formative as any relationship. Years ago I bought Braverman's first book, *Lithium for Medea*, but never got around to reading it - what a mistake. After the first chapter, I



knew that I would happily read anything she puts on paper. Every sentence is perfect and beautiful and filled with a longing I can't quite explain. It doesn't matter whether you are interested in L.A. or have ever heard of Kate Braverman—this is a book worth reading. Graywolf Press, \$15.00.

Now in Paperback

Gilead – WCF’s bestselling book in January and the long-awaited second novel by Marilynne Robinson (*Housekeeping*). Picador, \$14.
Snow Flower and the Secret Fan, by Lisa See, Random House, \$13.95.



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Young Feminist Discussion Group Picks

Tish writes often about Women & Children First's discussion group for young feminists, so we decided to include their list of recent reads. We'll post the Spring 2006 list in the next issue. The group has been meeting since 2002.

July 2005 to January 2006 Selections

[Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel](#) by Jean Kilbourne and Mary Pipher. Free Press, \$15.00.
[Regarding the Pain of Others](#) by Susan Sontag, Picador, \$11.
[Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes](#) by Don Kulick, University of Chicago Press.
[Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organizing for Reproductive Justice](#) by South End Press, \$20.
[The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women](#) by Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, The Free Press, \$15.
[Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class](#) by Michelle Tea, Seal Press, \$14.95.
[Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants](#) by Ann Brashares, Dell, \$6.99.

Earlier Selections

[Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy](#) by Barbara Ehrenreich & Arlie Hochschild.
[Manifesta Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future](#) by Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards.
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Terror by Betsy Reed & Katha Pollitt.

Cunt: A Declaration of Independence by Inga Muscio.

Gender Trouble by Judith P. Butler.



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Mysteries

By Nan Cinnater



Now that serial killers are a dime a dozen, and chick lit mysteries are more common than double lattes, mystery fans have to look farther afield for reading that's unusual, intelligent, and literate. International mysteries can be just the ticket, offering the attraction of armchair travel, immersion in another culture, and a fresh perspective on both gender and justice.

Scandinavian police procedurals are often as literary and subtle as the best British mysteries - and, if possible, even gloomier. **Don't Look Back** by Karin Fossum (\$14.00, Harvest Books), translated by Felicity David, is the fifth in a series about Norwegian Inspector Konrad Sejer, but it is the first to be published in the U.S. Sejer and his subordinate Skarre are called to a tiny village because a little girl is missing; then the search turns up the body of a drowned teenager. Perhaps because Inspector Sejer is a widower still trying to make sense of his loss, or perhaps just because of the setting, the whole book is something of a meditation on mortality, beautifully nuanced and appropriately depressing.

Detective Inspector Huss by Helene Tursten, translated by Steven T. Murray (\$13.00, Soho Press), introduces the title character, a forty-something police woman with a family and an engaging cast of colleagues in Goteborg, Sweden. A famous financier falls to his death from his apartment balcony, and the police must decide: suicide or murder. The plot involves both the upper crust and the seedy underside of Swedish society, including violent, drug-dealing motorcycle gangs. This is almost American (i.e. fast-paced, less gloomy) in style, but completely Swedish in content. With a title like **The Torso** (translated by Katarina Emilie Tucker, \$24.00, Soho, available April), the sequel is, not surprisingly, a grimmer, sometimes gory serial killer thriller, but Irene Huss remains a likeable, upbeat protagonist with great supporting characters.

Rebecca Pawel pulled off a daring trick in her Edgar Award-winning first mystery, **Death of a Nationalist** (\$12.00, Soho Press). Not only is it set in Madrid at the end of the Spanish Civil War, her hero (or anti-hero) is actually an unrepentant fascist, a member of the military police known as the Guardia Civil. Sergeant Tejada is shockingly ruthless, but also a man of honor by his own lights. This complicated tension between the good and evil in one man is magnified in the tension of a city under totalitarian rule, in a country that's still essentially two armed camps. Tejada's adventures continued in **Law of Return** and **The Watcher in the Pine** (both \$12.00, Soho Press). Now, in **The Summer Snow** (\$23, Soho), set six years later at the end of WWII, we have what at first appears to be a classic family drama, with an old lady poisoned and a missing will. But this is Tejada's old-money, right-wing family, and he has since married a socialist, so political tensions quickly surface.



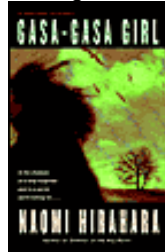
The Sultan's Seal by Jenny White (\$24.95, Norton) is a beautifully written tapestry of a novel set in Istanbul in 1886. Kamil Pasha, an Oxford-educated magistrate, heads up an investigation when the body of a European woman is found drowned in the Bosphorus. The crime resembles the unsolved murder of an English governess some years before. The plot unfolds in chapters that alternate between Kamil's perspective and two women's points of view - a young Muslim woman who knew the first victim and a young British woman, the ambassador's daughter. All the characters are well realized, and the setting is as lushly detailed as it is historically accurate.

Set in Africa in 1919, **Mark of the Lion** by Suzanne Arruda (\$23.95, NAL) is quite entertaining, but it feels about as authentic as the Hollywood version of "Out of Africa." At least in Arruda's Africa, the men don't have all the fun. Spunky American Jade del Cameron, a WWI ambulance driver, travels to East Africa after the war to fulfill a British pilot's dying wish to find his brother. The fast-moving plot involves witchcraft, murder, and a safari combined with treasure hunt; the cast is a mix of wealthy colonials, hard-working ranchers, white hunters, and Kikuyu and Somali workers. Readers who want authentic African murder mysteries in this vein may want to search for the out-of-print classics *Murder on Safari*, *The African Poison Murders*, and *Murder at Government House* by Elspeth Huxley (who also wrote *The Flame Trees of Thika*).

Miyuki Miyabe is a multiple award-winning, best-selling writer whose book, **All She Was Worth** (\$12.95, Mariner Books, translated by Alfred Birnbaum), was named not only Best Mystery but Best Novel of the Year in Japan in 1992. In spite of the critical acclaim, and intriguing issues of identity and family, *All She Was Worth* is a little too leisurely and enigmatic for me, much like Japanese film. Now we have the faster moving, equally intriguing **Shadow Family** (\$11.95, Kodansha, translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter). Here veteran Sergeant Takegama and a younger woman detective find that their murder victim, a middle-aged salaryman, had been the "Dad" in an on-line fantasy family. Newly out in the U.S. is Miyabe's **Crossfire** translated by Deborah Stuhr Iwabuchi and Anna Husson Isozaki (\$25.00, Kodansha).

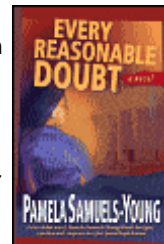


Although not international, **Summer of the Big Bachi** and **Gasa-Gasa Girl** by Naomi Hirahara (both \$12, Delta) are certainly a glimpse into another culture, the world of first and second-generation Japanese Americans. I was completely charmed by Mas Harai, the elderly California gardener and Hiroshima survivor who is the reluctant investigator in both books. In **Gasa-Gasa Girl**, Mas Harai travels to Brooklyn to visit his daughter and son-in-law, who are designing the garden for a planned Japanese American museum. Harai's culture shock in the strange new world of Brooklyn is subtly amusing and revealing.



Briefly Noted

Two new paperbacks by African American women: In **Video Cowboys** by Yolanda Joe (\$7.99, Pocket) TV anchorwoman Georgia Barnett - with the help of her wild and crazy crew - rescues a cameraman who was taken hostage in a bank robbery. In **Every Reasonable Doubt** by Pamela Samuels-Young (\$14.00, BET/Warner), attorney Vernetta Henderson teams up with the only other African-American woman in her law office to defend a wife accused of killing her husband.



We hope you enjoyed this issue of **More Books for Women**.

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We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours in spreading the words,

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