



More Books for Women

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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.

- June 2006 -

Volume 2 Number 6

Welcome to **More Books for Women #9**. In this issue we welcome a number of new contributors: Women & Children First staff members Angelique Grandone, Anna Eley, Catherine Jacquet, and Megan Bayles, as well as Suzanne Corson of the San Francisco Bay Area's late lamented Boadecia's Books. We also miss Pam Harcourt's reviews. She's moved on to her new job but will still be contributing an occasional review.

Orange Prize Winners

British writer Zadie Smith won the eleventh **Orange Prize for Fiction** for her third novel, **On Beauty**, after an "animated discussion which broke all Orange Prize records for length" according to cofounder and Honorary Director Kate Mosse. In the end the judges were forced to take a majority vote, with one judge passionately opposed to the final decision.

Controversy and difficult decision making were predicted: Four writers on the shortlist - Zadie Smith, Hilary Mantel, Ali Smith, and Sarah Waters are all recognized as being leading writers in English literature, despite having published relatively few novels and/or being relatively young writers. Many critics felt that any of the four could have won in a year with even a little less competition. Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* is still eligible for both the Man Booker and the Whitbread. Australian Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* was the only first-novel on the shortlist.

Zadie Smith leapt into the public eye when Penguin paid £250,000 for her first novel which immediately became a bestseller. Both of Smith's previous novels, *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man*, made Orange Prize shortlists when they were published. *The Autograph Man* was also shortlisted for the Man Booker.

The **Orange Award for New Writers** went to Naomi Alderman for *Disobedience*, a tale set in north London's Orthodox Jewish community.

The Orange Prize for Fiction includes a £30,000 purse and a "Bessie," a limited edition bronze figurine. The Orange New Writers Award carries a £10,000 prize. Both are anonymously endowed.

The NYT and the Best Work of American Fiction

For this year's fiction issue, *NYT Book Review* editor Sam Tanenhaus did an informal survey and asked a couple hundred writers, critics, and editors what they thought was the single best work of American Fiction since 1980.

That the consensus was Toni Morrison's **Beloved** was no surprise.

But much else about the survey was troubling: That only two of the 22 books that made the shortlist are by women is troubling. (The other being Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*.) Books by people - including men - of color - are also strikingly absent. Of course that may be explained, in part at least, by the fact that less than a third of the "judges" (anyone who responded to Tanenhaus' letters or emails) were women.

How does this happen, given that more women write, read, and buy books than men? Not that you'd know that reading the *NYTBR*. I'm told that Tanenhaus sent invitations to an equal number of women and men (which, given the *NYTBR*'s publishing record, has to be the first and only time women have achieved equality in its pages. Oops - that list never actually achieved print, so I guess we still have that *NYTBR* equality moment to look forward to.) But still, it's interesting math: Let's see, if invitations were sent to 200 people, and 125 or so of the respondents are male.... Hmm, that doesn't

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quite work, does it? Let me try that again: Perhaps the invitations *really* went to 250 people, and 100% of the men responded but only a third of the women responded.... Now why would that be?

I'm also appalled by the overt bragging, on the part of several of the (male) judges, that they deliberately voted for something other than *Beloved* because they "knew" it would win. Not because they disagreed with its excellence but, well, mostly they don't say why they took that action - perhaps you'd have to be a guy to understand? Or a white guy? Or maybe it's just a male jealousy thing? And I find it equally appalling that these responses are considered publishable and that such "bragging rights" are still printable in what is supposed to be the national newspaper of record. Hmm. And perhaps that explains why at least some of the women who were invited chose not to participate.

Well, one thing is sure: given the hostile climate, it's more than clear that *Beloved's* election as "The Best Work of American Fiction in the Last 25 Years" is even more of a triumph than first meets the eye. And that, unlike some of our recent presidential elections, given a full and fair election, it would undoubtedly win again.

Reality Check

For bookish conversation where women matter, check out the **Center for New Word's** recently re-launched website:

www.centerfornewwords.org.

Check out the conversations with **Alison Bechdel** (*Fun Home*) and **Katha Pollitt** (*Virginity or Death!*) at:

www.centerfornewwords.org/blog/2006/06/alison_online.php

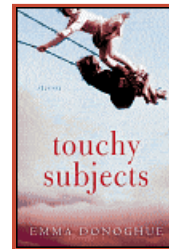
www.centerfornewwords.org/blog/2006/06/chatting_katha_1.php.

Or click over to the Watch/Listen page to catch video streams of many of the writers and speakers from the New Words Live! series (published online via arrangement with WGBH). They make great company, if you have a dull task ahead of you and have a corner of your computer screen to spare. Do that task while your favorite woman writer reads to you or talks about her work. What a luxury to have these mini-broadcasts in our own homes and workplaces, and at our convenience!

www.centerfornewwords.org/watch/.

Ann Christophersen is reading...

The story that begins Emma Donoghue's new book, ***Touchy Subjects***, is simply hilarious. A woman is trying to conceive a child but lacks an available partner and doesn't want an anonymous donor. Her best friend quite helpfully talks her husband into being a sport and providing what is needed, and the story opens with Sarah - exhausted from a transatlantic flight but at her most fertile - impatiently awaiting the hapless Pedraic, who is none too keen about the whole business. The story is not only laugh-out-loud funny, however; it also has some very poignant moments. The characters are well-meaning, generous and dear, and Sarah's plight, despite its comedic presentation, is a serious one for many women. The rest of the stories in the collection all deal with other sorts of touchy subjects and are organized into five categories, including "Babies," "Domesticity," "Strangers," "Desire," and "Death." If you aren't familiar with this very fine and popular Irish lesbian writer, this volume is a good place to start. And then go on to some of her other splendid books, among the most recent *Life Mask* and *Slammerkin*. As a final note, Emma includes a very diverse cast of characters in her books, so one bumps into lesbians, straight people, people from various classes, and people living at different historical times; she is definitely a crossover writer. Harcourt, \$24 hardcover, 0151013861.



I, like many people in their fifties, have become interested in the literature on aging, particularly in those books that deal with aging parents. I also have a professional interest in the subject - as a buyer for my bookstore I am constantly on the lookout for good new books that will be helpful to my customers. So I was excited to discover a book that dealt with the subject from a different perspective than usual: that of the care receiver rather than



the caregiver. The book is **[Navigating the Journey of Aging Parents: What Care Receivers Want](#)**. The author, Cheryl Kuba, who holds an M.A. in Gerontology and has professional experience in several different capacities in the field, has talked with many elderly people whose lives have changed dramatically and find themselves struggling with the facts and feelings of having become dependent. For caregivers to engage in the process of finding out what their elders actually want in terms of their care seems like an obvious place to start, but for a variety of reasons often isn't. This book will help guide a reader through that process and, I believe, make for much happier caregiver/care receiver relationships. Routledge, \$19.95 paper, 0415952883.



Linda Bubon recommends...

The best novel I've read in a long time, hands down, is **[Water for Elephants](#)** by Sara Gruen. Once I started it, I simply didn't want to do *anything* but continue reading it, and I was sad when it ended. Jacob, a retired veterinarian, now in his nineties, tells us the story of a Depression-era traveling circus. It is also the story of his first job, his first love, and of a time and a milieu both extraordinary and universal. The narrative is so engaging, the characters are so endearing, and the writing is so well done that I want to recommend this book to everyone. And if you have any feeling for animals, you will love the animals in this book and the sympathetic characters who work with them. Gruen made me feel as if I were there, jumping on the train with Jacob in the middle of the night, watching the hoochie-koochie dancer twirl her breasts in my face, getting tossed into the back of the horses' stalls, getting drunk on moonshine - such vivid descriptions! Such well-chosen scenes! I treasure the experience of reading this book. Algonquin, \$23.95 hardcover, 1565124995.



I really appreciate a good satire, and Elizabeth Brink's **[Save Your Own](#)**, fulfilled its promise. Narrated by Gillian, an exceptionally smart, quirky Harvard Divinity School PhD candidate, the novel is memorable, original, and laugh-out-loud funny. Gillian is a 26-year-old virgin in search of transformation: Her dissertation topic has been rejected as too "New Age-y"; she's always been a social misfit; and she'd like to find a lover - of either gender. She takes a job at Responsibility House, a half-way house for women recovering from addiction, and to her the women seem like exotic creatures who are likely to gobble her up (she's 4'9"). However, as the novel unfolds, the women become real, the job becomes meaningful, and Gillian comes into her own. This is a good feminist novel unafraid of making fun of feminist stereotypes, recovery models, and academia. Houghton Mifflin, \$23 hardcover, 0618651144.



Tish Hayes can't resist...

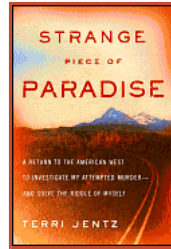
A few months ago I reviewed two novels by Joanna Russ that had recently been reissued by Wesleyan University Press: **[The Two of Them](#)** and **[We Who Are About To...](#)** Those books were the perfect introduction to Russ's work, and I was thrilled at the prospect of reading her influential and renowned novel **[The Female Man](#)** for W&CF's Intergenerational Feminist Book Group. The book is as astonishing as I had anticipated. I don't want to scare away any prospective readers, but the narrative is challenging and both needs and deserves generous time and careful



attention. Through this narrative that shifts between four alternate versions of one woman, Russ explores gender dynamics, the construction of identity, and the possibilities and pitfalls of utopia. Even though *The Female Man* clearly comes out of the political climate of the 70s, both the writing and the feminist perspective remain modern and relevant. I'm looking forward to reading it again. Beacon, \$15, 0807062995.



Angelique Grandone loves...



Don't let the true crime premise of Terri Jentz's **Strange Piece of Paradise** deter you from this intelligent and engaging memoir. In the summer of 1977 Jentz and her best friend set out on a cross country bike trip. Early in the trip, after they'd gone to sleep in a campground, they were brutally attacked - first driven over by a pickup driving madman, and then attacked with an axe. Initially surviving by sheer will and naïveté, Jentz chose to treat the incident more as a comic interlude than as the life-altering event that it was. Fifteen years later, when her life demanded a closer

examination of her fears and compulsions, she returned to Oregon for a deeper understanding of the attack and its impact. The resulting memoir is part investigative journalism, part cultural history, and part intimate exploration of the nature of recovery. With her, we revisit the small town in Oregon that was also affected by the tragedy - and that has harbored its suspected perpetrator who was never prosecuted for the crime - and come to understand the pervasive effects of that midsummer night. Jentz is a screenwriter and it shows in her writing; her eye for detail and for framing a scene are an asset to her narrative and her sense of irony peppers the book with moments of wry humor. Most engaging, however, is the way she includes the reader in her search. We are often left with more questions than answers at the end of each chapter, and these questions serve as a motivating force to continue on with her, to root for her, and to feel with her as she encounters the motley cast of characters bound by her tragedy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$27 hardcover, 0374134987.

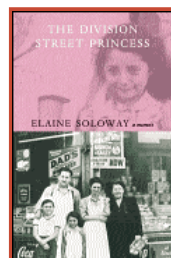


Anna Eley recommends...

Half/Life: Jew-ish Tales from Interfaith Homes, edited by Laurel Snyder, is a collection of essays from people with one Jewish parent. Each essay illustrates a very different perspective on dealing with faith and identity. Some made me laugh out loud, while others made me re-examine my own cultural and spiritual self. I was initially interested in *Half/Life* because I am a half Jew, but after reading it I found that this is an excellent book for anyone interested in identity, family and the marriage of different cultures. Soft Skull Press, \$14.95, 1933368241.



Catherine Jacquet suggests...



The Division Street Princess, a memoir by first-time Chicago author Elaine Soloway, is set in the 1940s and follows Soloway as she grows up, documenting both the trials and the joys of her childhood. When her optimistic, American-dream searching father, Irving Eugene Shapiro, decides to buy a small grocery store beneath their apartment, life is forever changed. Alternately hilarious and heartbreaking, this story of a tightly knit immigrant community centered on the Soloway family grocery store is

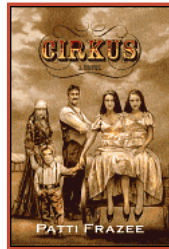
a perfect read for anyone interested in Chicago history or yearning for a dose of nostalgia. Syren Book Company, \$15.95, 0929636635.

Hit by a Farm is a memoir by children's author Catherine Friend, documenting her adjustment from life as a city girl to life as a farmer on a small sheep farm in Minnesota. When her partner, Melissa, decides to pursue her lifelong dream of owning a farm, Catherine somewhat reluctantly tags along for the adventure - and an adventure it certainly is! From birthing sheep to sexing chickens, this story covers everything you ever needed to know about life on the farm in an outsider's voice that is engaging, honest, and hilarious. As someone who has romanticized the ideas of having a farm and "living off the land," this book is a great reality check. Marlowe & Company, \$14.95, 1569242984.



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Megan Bayles raves about...

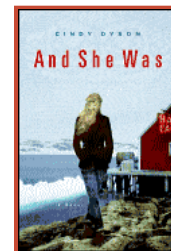


I just ate up **Cirkus** by Patti Frazee, a story of Czech circus "anomalies" touring the Midwestern U.S. in 1900. Flame-throwing dwarf Shanghai has no shortage of lady suitors. Mariana, the gypsy wife of circus director Jakub, reads his diary to be as close to him as she can be without stepping into his mind. After Mariana takes away the memories of Milada, the flying trapeze artist who broke Shanghai's heart by marrying and staying in Prague, Shanghai then falls for Atasha, one of the conjoined twins who join the circus in Nebraska. In the midst of all this scandal and romance, the most compelling is the relationship between Atasha and her sister Anna, as they negotiate the separateness they encounter for the first times in their life as a result of Atasha and Shanghai's affair. Anna's feelings of abandonment and insufficiency are poignant, and the physical manifestation of these feelings is remarkably moving. Alyson Books, \$24.95 hardcover, 1555839355.

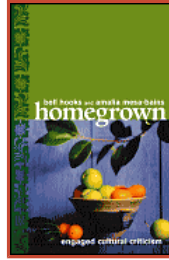
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In the Twin Cities, Mary Ellen Kavanaugh is reading...

Nearly a week after finishing Cindy Dyson's **And She Was**, I am still living inside the story. It is just that powerful. This debut novel has already received accolades from many corners of the book world - *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Library Journal*, among others - and everyone of them is spot on in their praise. But none of them mentions the first thing that came to my mind - the f word - you know, feminist? Yes, I do believe I'd call this a feminist novel. Brandy, the 31-year-old narrator, who has followed yet another guy to yet another town, finds herself on Unalaska Island in the Aleutians. The year is 1986, and Brandy, who has dropped out of college, is smart enough to own the ways in which patriarchy has left her a "male-identified woman," a term she'd learned in a women's studies class. She knows this has made a friendless, unhappy drifter of her. What she doesn't know is how to shift her consciousness so that she is at the center of her own life. While she waits for her boyfriend to come back from sea, she lands herself a job as a cocktail waitress in the town bar, giving us a view of all that bar life in the 80s was - drinking and drugging and an acceptance of excess that, twenty years later, is no longer tolerated in quite the same way. In a story that shares the gritty elegance of Dorothy Allison's *Cavedweller*, as well as the allegorical telling of Alice Walker's *Temple of My Familiar*, *And She Was* is a compelling and deeply satisfying tale of this lost woman who learns from the Aleutian women she lives among about coming into her own. From these women, she learns compassion, strength, duty, and responsibility to self and the greater community. The contemporary story is



gracefully interwoven with the historical story of the Aleuts, a Native American tribe conquered by not one conquerer, but two (Russia and the U.S.). In that conquering, the native women passed down messages of resistance through their daughters. As Brandy gains their friendship and learns their story, she learns to rescue herself and that to "live with intention, in the full force of our own will, is the most essential and the most dangerous thing we will ever do. It is the act which makes us fully human." William Morrow, \$24.95 hardcover, 0060597704.



Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism by bell hooks and Amalia Mesa-Bains is an elegant conversation between an African American and a Chicana woman. Mesa-Bains is a California-based artist, curator, educator, and writer, and hooks writes extensively on the impacts of racism and sexism in the media and the arts. The book is structured as a series of conversations - and it works well. It allows them to meander into places that a straightforward essay might prohibit. The two met about ten years ago when, as they see it, there was tremendous growth of the work of people

of color in literature and the arts. They contrast this with the current return to conservatism in which people of color are being both silenced and pitted against one another. Their intention was to present a work for the "organic intellectuals" (hooks) - those of us outside academic institutions who think critically wherever we are. Works for me!

Another goal of their collaboration was to find the commonalities of their lived experiences - and to that end, they tell many personal stories as they discuss family, resistance, beauty, multiculturalism, memory, public culture, immigration, and more. I read this alone and quickly, and I would relish rereading it again in a reading group - it is a book that invites conversation - and I imagine this is just what the authors hoped for. South End Press, \$15, 089608759X.



Suzanne Corson serves up mystery treats...

Suzanne was one of the founders and owners of Boadecia's Books (1992-2004), a feminist bookstore near Berkeley, California. Since its closing, she has reviewed books for Girlfriends and On Our Backs magazines, as well as for the Lesbian Edition of BTWOF. -CS

I have long been a fan of Margaret Maron's mysteries, especially those featuring her Deborah Knott character. Deborah is a judge in North Carolina and the youngest - and only female - of eleven children. Her father is a retired bootlegger, as explored in the series' debut, *The Bootlegger's Daughter* (Warner, \$6.99, 0446403237). My favorite title is the excellent, but disturbing *Home Fires* (Warner, \$6.50, 0446608106), which features one of Deborah's many nephews. The books in this series are filled with extended family members (family trees begin several of the books), Southern flavor, and eccentric supporting characters and plots. For this Yankee from a small family, diving into the covers of a Deborah Knott mystery is like taking a refreshing swim in very friendly, though unfamiliar, waters.

Occasionally Deborah needs to cover for a vacationing judge's courtroom in a different part of the state. **High Country Fall**, the most recent paperback, finds her in a small town in the Blue Ridge mountains. One of her first cases is a preliminary hearing for a young man accused of killing his girlfriend's father, a local doctor and influential man-about-town. As is often the case for Deborah, with her huge family, she discovers that there is a connection for her with the defendant: his girlfriend is the best friend of nineteen-year-old twin girls who happen to be Deborah's cousins. Since Deborah is staying with the girls while in town, they implore her to do some sleuthing, since they are sure that the boy is innocent.

And away we go. Interesting subplots include Deborah's recent engagement to an old friend and the impact on residents and local businesses when real estate developers and influential others try to create a "boutique" town.

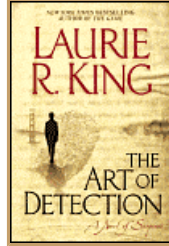
The next book in the series, *Rituals of the Season*, will be out in paperback this August (Warner, \$6.99, 0446617652), and then *Winter's*



Child will come out in hardcover (Warner, \$24.99, 0892968109). Margaret Maron also writes a good police procedural series featuring NYPD detective Sigrid Harald (most recent is *Fugitive Colors*, Warner, \$5.99, 0446403938), but my heart is with the cozier (but not *too* cozy!), incidental detective Deborah Knott and her clan. For some warm Southern hospitality mixed with your mystery, check out this great series. *High Country Fall*, Warner, \$6.99, 0446615900.

Learn more about Margaret Maron, her books, and both series' characters at www.margaretmaron.com.

Kate Martinelli fans finally have a new tale: the advanced publicity for Laurie R. King's latest, *The Art of Detection*, suggests that this is the book which



links her two very different series - her San Francisco-based, lesbian police detective Martinelli and the British, early-twentieth century exploits of Mary Russell and her husband, Sherlock Holmes. While it is true that the mystery Kate's working involves the world of Sherlock Holmes, you won't find Mary Russell in these pages.

In *The Art of Detection*, Philip Gilbert is a founding member of the Strand Diners, a group of Sherlock Holmes / Sir Arthur Conan Doyle aficionados. Gilbert, arguably the most enthusiastic of the bunch, has turned part of his San Francisco home into a virtual replica of 221B Baker Street. Gas lamps replace light bulbs, period appliances do duty instead of more modern conveniences, and the books are all leather-bound. SFPD Detectives Kate Martinelli and Al Hawkin are called in when Gilbert is murdered.

During the investigation, Kate discovers that Gilbert had come across an unpublished story which is not only written in the style of Doyle (and in the voice of Holmes), Gilbert's death mirrors the murder in the manuscript.

Fans of the cadence, period, and language of the Mary Russell books (and Doyle's) will enjoy the fact that since Kate had to read the manuscript as part of her investigation of Gilbert's murder, author King included the manuscript in *The Art of Deception*. We readers are treated to two mystery tales in one.

In addition to the police procedural tale of Philip Gilbert's murder and the period, we get additional glimpses into Kate's home life with her psychotherapist partner, Lee, and their four-year-old daughter, Nora. Friends from past books, notably Roz and Maj from *Night Work*, also return.

Though Laurie R. King's publishing career began with a Kate Martinelli book (1993's *A Grave Talent*), until *The Art of Detection* there were only four other titles which focus on Kate. The author's excellent sales for her Mary Russell/Sherlock Holmes books (starting with 1994's *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*) inspired her publisher to ask King to focus on those characters. Later she was asked to write stand-alone books like *A Darker Place* and *Folly* when the trend in publishing was to shy away from series characters (and the attendant expectation that all the books in a series be kept in print). Those of us who enjoy either Kate's character, police procedurals, and more contemporary tales can be very pleased with the return of Kate in *The Art of Detection* and hope that it won't be another six years before we revisit Kate, Lee, Nora, and Al. Bantam, \$24 hardcover, 0553804537.

Check out www.laurierking.com for more about this prolific author and her wonderful books.

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New in paperback:

Bodies in Motion: Stories by Mary Anne Mohanraj (Harper, \$13.95, 006078119X). Read [BTWOF's review](#).

Oh Pure and Radiant Heart by Lydia Millet (Harcourt, \$15, 0156031035). Read [BTWOF's review](#).

All This Heavenly Glory by Elizabeth Crane (Little, Brown, \$13.95, 0316014214)

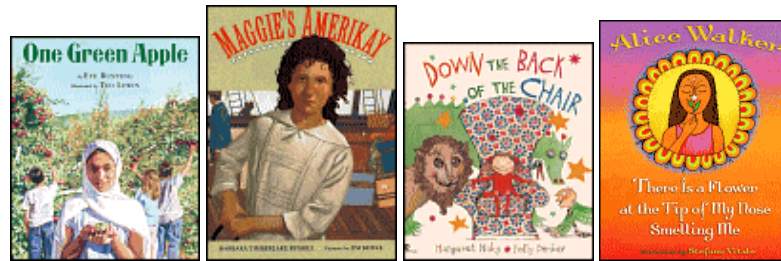
Zorro by Isabel Allende (Harper, \$14.95, 0060779004).

The Coast of Akron by Adrienne Miller (St. Martin's, \$14, 0312425139).

Embroideries by Marjane Satrapi (Pantheon, \$10.95, 0375714677). Read [BTWOF's review](#).

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For the Kids



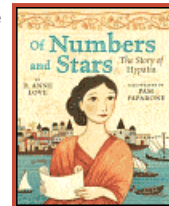
Recommendations from Linda Bubon

There are two new picture books to help 5- to 9-year-olds understand the challenges faced by immigrants to this country that I hope find their way into first to third grade classrooms as well as home libraries:

One Green Apple by Eve Bunting, with beautiful, light-dappled paintings by Ted Lewin, is the story of Farah, a young Muslim immigrant who is new to the country, new to her school, and is experiencing her first school field trip - to an apple orchard - where she does begin to feel at home. Clarion Books, \$16 hardcover, 0618434771.

Maggie's Amerikay by Barbara Timberlake Russell, with evocative paintings by Jim Burke, takes the reader back to 1898 New Orleans where an Irish immigrant girl and a young black boy become friends, against both their parents' wishes. The parents are realistically harsh about their children's ambitions, and see the children only as "Irish" and "boy," but there's a heartwarming ending in which both children prove themselves useful and do their families proud. Children reading this story will recognize the wrongness of the narrow-minded adults and identify with the humanity of the children. FSG, \$16 hardcover, 0374347220.

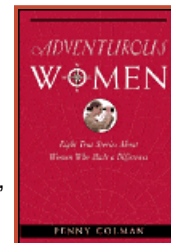
Of Numbers and Stars: The Story of Hypatia, by D. Anne Love, illustrated by Pam Paparone is a welcome addition to the literature about famous women, written with a text simple enough for 4- to 7-year olds. Holiday House, \$16.95 hardcover, 0823416216.



More entertaining and philosophical in a different way is **The Secret-Keeper** by Katie Coombs, with magical watercolors by Heather M. Solomon. In the village of Maldinga, everyone tells their darkest secrets to Kalli, a lovely young woman who lives alone in the forest. This leaves them lighter of heart, but eventually the weight of everyone's secrets makes Kalli ill.

The villagers are concerned and come together to try to help her. They discover that not all secrets are sad, and perhaps the sad ones need to be shared with others besides the Secret-Keeper. A very original and satisfying story. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 hardcover, 0689839634.

Penny Colman has steeped herself in women's history and written a number of great books for middle-schoolers about famous women. Her newest offering, **Adventurous Women: Eight True Stories About Women Who Made a Difference**, will uncover new ground for adults as well as children, ages 8 and up. She breathtakingly reports on "Arctic Explorer" Louise Boyd, "Supersleuth" Alice Hamilton, "Daring Superintendent" Katharine Wormeley, and "Resolute Reporter" Peggy Hull. There are photos, a bibliography, and a Webliography. Yes, it's a library book, but the chapters are written with such verve, I would have loved this book as a young girl looking for role models. Move over, Britney. Henry Holt, \$18.95 hardcover, 0805077448.



Recommendations from Angelique Grandone

Down the Back of the Chair by Margaret Mahy is a rollicking, rhyming, read-aloud storybook that turns a morning-of-lost-car-keys on its ear. "But Mary, who is barely two, says, 'Dad should do what I would do! I lose a lot but find a few- down the back of the chair!'" And oh, the things they find! Perfect for the 4-6 set, children will be reciting this books precocious lyrical text for years to come, and parents will wish all lost keys mornings ended so well. Houghton Mifflin, \$16 hardcover, 0618693955.



The beauty of the novella **Girls in Peril** by Karen Lee Boren is in its taut prose and finely tuned observations of crossing the line from the communion of girlhood to the solitude of adolescence. Told in a collective voice, the reader is propelled through the minutiae of an endless summer belonging to five girls: neighborhood spyings, Avon-lady hijackings, midnight outings, and the mysterious world of older boys. We know from the beginning that "something" is going to happen and as the story progresses, Boren's masterful writing creates a world in which that something is always just around the corner. We come to understand that the moment of change could be ignited by anything, and that the transformation will be swift and irrevocable. Tin House, \$10.95, 0977312720.

In the afterward to **There is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me**, Alice Walker confesses that the text for this vibrant, gorgeously illustrated (by Stefano Vitale) children's book came to her on a walk through the forest. The book is meant as a reflection of interconnectedness in the world, and its gentle, lulling text works equally well read as a meditation at bedtime or with gusto during story time. In addition to the 2- to 7-year-old crowd, I could see this book doing well as a gift for adults. HarperChildrens, \$16.99 hardcover, 0060570806.



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Yours in spreading the words,

Carol Seajay
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