



The Lesbian Edition

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Volume 2 Number 3

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Congratulations to BTWOF part-time staffer Suzanne Corson on her new position as Managing Editor of *On Our Backs*. We miss her daily and wish her the best!

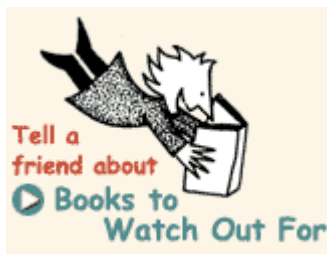
And our apologies to all our readers for the long delay between the last issue and this one - and thanks to everyone who wrote, emailed or called to make sure we're still here.

We are! Just a bit too caught up in travels (to the Saints & Sinners GLBTQ Literary Festival, Book Expo America, The Lambda Literary Awards, and National Women's Studies Association conference) where we collected the stories below and a few more to come, plus a few "distractions" like moving our credit card processing to another vendor (that promises stellar security in this era when many banks seem increasingly careless with customer data), double- and triple-testing everything after our ISP moved everything to a new server, plus a few tasks I've put out of my mind. Please keep the faith, send us a kind thought, and look for another new issue soon.

Yours in spreading the words,

Carol Seajay
for *Books To Watch Out For*

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Women's Review of Books is Back

The good news is that *Women's Review of Books* is being relaunched in January as a joint project of The Wellesley Centers for Women and [Old City Publishing](#). Old City is an academic publisher, founded in 1995, that publishes a dozen scientific and academic journals (think: *The Journal of Experimental Therapeutics and Oncology*, *Inorganic Reaction Mechanisms*, and the *International Journal of Unconventional Computing*) and *Earth Focus* magazine.

About BTWOF

Books To Watch Out For publishes monthly e-letters celebrating books on various

The Wellesley Centers will be responsible for editorial content; Old City will manage production, printing, distribution, and advertising. Amy Hoffman will

topics. Each issue includes new book announcements, brief reviews, commentary, news and, yes, good book gossip.

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 Carol Seajay.

- » [Click here](#) to **subscribe**.
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- » [Click here](#) to **tell a friend** about the Lesbian Edition.

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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More Books for Women

will launch in 2005.

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Q. How does BTWOF define "a lesbian book?"

A. We think that any book that belongs to a lesbian is a lesbian book, just as any bike that belongs to a girl is "a girl's bike."

BTWOF: The Lesbian Edition

covers a wide range of books likely to be of interest to our readers as well as books with lesbian content and books by lesbian writers.



Advertising & Sponsorships

BTWOF is financed by subscriptions, rather than advertising or book sales. Publishers and individuals who wish to help launch BTWOF are invited to sponsor any of the first 12 issues. Write to [Mozelle Mathews](#) for sponsorship information.



Housekeeping

If you want to change your BTWOF email address or other contact information, [click here](#) to

continue on as editor. WRB will continue on in its familiar tabloid format and will publish bimonthly. Non-expired subscriptions will be reactivated upon renewal.

"I am thrilled that we are relaunching the *Women's Review of Books*," Amy told BTWOF. "Our readers have always known that they could turn to us for insight into feminist issues, and we are ready to once again provide them with serious and informed discussion of new writing by and about women. They've missed us — and I've missed doing this exciting work."

BTWOF caught up with Old City's Publishing Director Ian Mellanby in the exhibit hall of the National Women's Studies Association conference in Orlando in June. "Old City Publishing is delighted to be working with the Wellesley Centers for Women on the relaunch of *The Women's Review of Books*. We're confident that the journal is going from strength to strength," he told BTWOF, and added, "I'm overwhelmed by the number of publishers and subscribers who've come up to the booth to tell me that the news of the relaunch has made their day."

Old City became interested in working with *WRB* when advertising contacts at Rutgers spoke last fall of their disappointment that *WRB* was ceasing publication and of the loss of such an important vehicle for advertising and promoting their strong women's list.

To (re)subscribe, send \$33 (US & Canada); €42 Euro or ¥5,700 Yen to Old City Publishing, 628 North 2nd St., Philadelphia, PA 19123. For advertising info call 215-925-4390. Send editorial queries and books for review to WRB, WCW, 106 Central St., Wellesley, MA 02481.



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Lambda Book Report Suspends Publication

The Lambda Book Report (LBR), published by the Lambda Literary Foundation (LLF), unexpectedly suspended publication in June, just a few days after the Lambda Literary Award festivities, pending a review of the magazine's financial situation. LLF Executive Director Jim Marks tendered his resignation shortly after the LLF's June 3 Board meeting and the rest of the staff, including *LBR* Editor Lisa C. Moore, Jonathan Harper, and Brian Baker, are being phased out in June and July. The LLF/*LBR* offices will close by July 15, when the new owners of the building where LLF has had free office space for the past several years, take possession. The office space had been donated by then building-owner and LLF Board of Trustees member Nick Apostol.

The LLF Board members Jim Duggins, Katherine V. Forrest, Karla Jay, and Don Wiese have stressed their commitment to maintaining the Lambda Literary Awards and the LLA nominees readings. The awards, in a newly designed form, will be under the creative direction of Executive Producer Ben Hodges who produced the NYC LLA festivities.

The LLF Board also plans to publish the June/July double issue, with its features on Filipino/a gay and lesbian writing, either online or in print. The *Lambda Book Report* had been operating at a loss for some time.

Publication of *The James White Review*, which is also published by LLF, has also been temporarily suspended, although it looks likely that it will resume publication in the near future under different auspices.

LLF and BTWOF have entered into a tentative agreement for BTWOF to fulfill outstanding *LBR* subscriptions. We look forward to *LBR*'s eventual return to publication or reincarnation in a new format. To paraphrase Richard Labonte, BTWOF's *Gay Men's Edition* editor, "[BTWOF] is one voice, [LBR] is many." To which I would only add: "and we need a broadly diverse community of writers and reviewers for our literature to thrive." In the meantime BTWOF will be working with the LLF Board to envision a new

update:

- » your subscriber profile
- » whatever has changed.

Finding BTWOF

BTWOF is published by Carol Seajay and Books To Watch Out For.

www.BooksToWatchOutFor.com

Email: Editor@BTWOF.com

PO Box 882554

San Francisco, CA 94131.

Send books for review consideration for the **Lesbian Edition** to the San Francisco address above.

Send books for review consideration for the **Gay Men's Edition** directly to Richard Labonte at
7-A Drummond St W
Perth, ON K7H 2J3
Canada.



model for a publication to showcase GLBTQ writing that can feature up to the minute information, that utilizes contemporary technology, that is more quickly distributed and more financially viable than the current structure.

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Change, Change, Change: Publisher Changes

Turn your back on feminist & lesbian & gay publishing for a minute and everything changes:

Florence Howe is back in the Publisher's seat at [The Feminist Press](#) while they're looking for a new publisher. BTWOF will miss Jean Casella in that position. It seemed to us that she had done a great job of updating the press' publishing program and moving it in interesting new directions.

Jean Redmann is (has?) signing off from her co-publisher position at [Bywater Books](#). It seems that running an AIDS education/prevention program that's doubling in size every year, writing some of the best mysteries in the industry, *and* running a publishing company is too much for any one woman. (Whew! We were starting to feel downright unambitious by comparison.) I'm sure it was a hard choice, but we're relieved that she didn't give up writing — it's already been too long since we've seen a new JM Redmann mystery. (What *is* that Micky Knight up to these days, anyway?) Jean leaves Bywater in the capable hands of Kelly Smith and Marianne Martin.

New Directions for Alyson

But the big news is that LPI Media has replaced long-term publisher Greg Constantine (SP?) with Dale Cunningham as Publisher for Alyson Books. Cunningham, who was signed on the day before Book Expo opened in New York, comes from John Wiley, Inc.'s Howell Book House, where she was Executive Editor for a specialty market imprint. Her publishing background includes management positions in editorial, sales, and marketing with Wiley, Random House, and Rizzoli.

Alyson Press was reinvented ten years ago when LPI purchased it from founder Sasha Alyson, and LPI seems to be ready to reinvent the press again with new goals:

"Dale's experience and enthusiasm are just what we need to position Alyson Books as the leader in gay and lesbian content in the larger world of book publishing," said Judy Wieder, Corporate Editorial Director and Executive VP for LPI Media, in announcing the new appointment. "Her appointment comes at a very exciting time as we transition our teams to New York City, the publishing capital of the world, and start a new era at Alyson," she added.

"What is particularly exciting about the current business climate is the synergistic partnership opportunities for Alyson with the LPI Media family of magazines, web sites, and cable TV. As an established specialty publisher, Alyson is well-poised to develop and position new titles for multiple channels, including mainstream crossover," Cunningham said, after stressing Alyson's 25-year track record of publishing quality books from the LGBT community.

In interviews on the BEA floor, she and Wieder stressed a new environment of "integrated" books coming out of an era when gays and lesbians are more fully integrated into society and as mainstream readers integrate gay and lesbian content into their reading, as well as plans to increase authors' exposure via LIP Media's growing network of outlets and venues.

Other staff positions were not announced, but look for major changes as the press relocates from Los Angeles to NYC.

LPI Media, which publishes *The Advocate*, *Out* and *The Out Traveler* as well as Alyson and Advocate Books, recently announced a partnership with LOGO, MTV's new 24/7 LGBT channel.



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Find of the Month

It's easy to sit in San Francisco and claim that **Babyji** is the tale of a young butch coming of age in New Delhi. But Anamika, for all that she's the head prefect in her school, for all her passion for her studies, and for all her careful reading of both George Eliot and the *Kama Sutra*, wouldn't use — or have — the b-word.

Our Anamika is an idealist — Brahmin by birth, she's fighting the good fight for equality and social justice both at home and at school, even if she does get tripped up with clinging to the benefits of her own class- and caste-based privileges at times, encouraging the family servant to stand as an equal in one moment, then treating her rudely, as a lover, just because it's expedient and she knows she can get away with it, a few hours later.



Budding intellectual that she is, Anamika is developing an impressive, albeit slightly twisted, facility for using the intellectual constructs she studies in school (quantum physics, differential calculus, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and Planck's constant, to name a few) to justify both her sexual adventures and her frequent misbehavior — not exactly what her teachers have in mind — but where is a teenaged girl *supposed* to turn for guidance in matters of womanly attraction? Still, navigating between her divorcee neighbor, her family's lower-caste servant, and the popular girl at school, no matter how well justified, presents more than a few challenges for a girl who still lives under the familial roof.

But love and the pursuit of lovers is perhaps the least of it. Anamika's headstrong beliefs get her in (and out) of numerous scrapes. By the novel's end she's bet her future — or at least her prefectship — on the class troublemaker (and her chief competition for Sheela's heart), daring him, in her own way, to pull through and finish the term, despite having every reason to want to see him expelled. It's Anamika's gutsy integrity and headstrong vision that will keep readers cheering for her long after the novel closes.

It's a good, dense read, rich in language, social insight, and moral conflict. Dawesar does a deft job of portraying the passions, mood swings, and shifting confidence levels that mark the bumpy transition from child to adult and gives us a sharp, thoughtful, and frequently hilarious coming of age tale that claims new horizons for lesbian readers — and anyone else who wants to believe that girls can be smart, curious, and sexual without falling over the edge.

Babyji and Dawesar's earlier novel, **Miniplanner**, were both published as paperback originals. **Babyji** by Anchor/Random House, 356 pages, \$13; **Miniplanner** by Cleis Press, \$12.95. **Babyji** will be published in India this spring, and in Spanish and Italian translations this summer.

Click here (or scroll to the end) to read [BTWOF's interview with Abha Dawesar](#).

And here to find the short stories on her website:

www.abhadawesar.com



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Lives

Susan Krieger wrote the first essays in **Things No Longer There: A Memoir of Losing Sight and Finding Vision** before she consciously understood that her vision was failing. Originally interested in the differences between

internal vision and “reality” (the cherished memories of a girls' camp that, when sought years later, has been bulldozed into suburban homes; the vivid memory of a post-forest-fire landscape contrasted with the same land a year and two years later, as new growth softens, then obliterates, the charred past), Krieger's ability to hold inner vision serves her well as her visual acuity diminishes, due to a rare condition known as birdshot retinopathy. But much more important — and essential to us all — is her ability to cultivate new vision — whether that's learning to read the different kinds of space beside and between buildings while learning to see her way with a cane, finding other lesbians in different locales, or looking back at the past with new eyes in the book's concluding novella about a difficult therapeutic/friendship relationship.



Krieger (*The Family Silver: Essays on Relationships Among Women, Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form, and Mirror Dance: Identity in a Women's Community*) is one of our most insightful chroniclers of lesbian experience in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. She's never an easy read, always insisting that we acknowledge complexities where simpler visions might be easier to savor. “Lesbianism,” she insists, “is a very different dream from heterosexuality.” “The invisible landscape of lesbianism is also a landscape of invisible fears,” she adds later. And, “[W]e are all, to some extent blind, to some extent sighted, and each of us moves in a world of unique inner vision, an interior landscape that is composed of meanings, of sights and sounds, and feelings deeply held.” \$19.95 paper, Terrace Books/University of Wisconsin Press. Digital and Audio versions also available on request for blind readers. For e-book, contact Margaret Walsh, 608-263-1131, e-mail mawalsh1@wisc.edu; for audio book contact the author, skrieger@stanford.edu.

Out in paper: **Songs of the Gorilla Nation**, Dawn Prince-Hughes's story of growing up with and then coming to terms with her autism (Asperger's Syndrome), learning to be human from a gorilla tribe whose behaviors made much more sense to her, at least initially, than human people's behaviors, and then becoming an anthropologist with a focus on primate behavior. The fact that she's a lesbian in a long-term relationship is almost incidental. Originally reviewed in BTWOF: [The Lesbian Edition #5](#). \$12.95, Three Rivers Press.

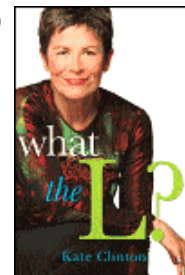
Not lesbian, as far as I've read (someone email me and tell me I'm wrong!), but as fiercely feminist as you can get: **Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog From Iran**, The Feminist Press' 300-page reprint of a young Iraqi woman's blog postings during the early days of the US invasion of Iraq. Identified only by her screen name, “Riverbend” is a self-proclaimed geek who had been employed in the computer industry before the invasion. She chronicles the senseless attacks from the inside, the day-in and day-out ramifications of the war, women's loss of freedoms, and it offers something much too rare: woman's voice and perspective. Fascinating, essential and, of course, very difficult to read. \$14.95, 285 pgs., The Feminist Press.



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Politics

The most difficult part of reading *Baghdad Burning* (above) is how it brings home the insanity of what's happening in this country, under our watch, and that we haven't managed to take it back yet. How do we keep going when the madness immobilizes us? Here's the BTWOF prescription: Read two chapters of **What the L**, Kate Clinton's new book, read the best lines out loud to your partner, your roommate, your cat, or yourself, get a good night's sleep, and you'll be ready to go again in the morning. It's cheap and medically safe, if possibly



somewhat addictive. Kate weighs in on Bush's "re-election", on "all the president's women" (Mary Cheney included), Fox TV and other weapons of mass distraction, the so-called Healthy Marriage Initiative, gay marriage, the "ex-gay" movement, Botox, *The L-Word*, and more. There is, as always, no stopping her. Perfect for Lesbians, perfect for Leftists. What the 'L'? Just enjoy it. \$14.95, Carroll & Graf.

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Pulp & Literature: Reclaiming Lesbian History

Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World of Lesbian

Paperback Novels 1950-1965 takes us back to those thrilling days of yesteryear when a simple stroll through a drugstore or newsstand could yield thrilling, terrifying, sometimes condemning paperback lesbian novels with titles like *Return to Lesbos*, *Another Kind of Love*, or *The Third Sex*. Most were camouflaged by sleazy covers and hyperbolic, condemning jacket copy, but all confirmed that lesbians existed and gave clues about how to find the lesbian underground. Many of the books sold hundreds of thousands of copies, a few over a million copies. Here Katherine V. Forrest has selected and introduced excerpts from 20 of the best and most important of the genre and discovered that, shockingly enough, there was some excellent writing buried in the format. Look for work by Vin Packer, Valerie Taylor, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ann Bannon, and many more. It's a great mix of classics and less well known gems. Forrest's introduction alone would be worth the price of admission even if the collection didn't include original covers and sensationalist cover blurbs.



One quick kvetch: While it's true that some lesbian feminists "got down" on the pulps and/or what they saw as confining role limitations (and hey, kids, oftentimes they were...), many lesbians who became feminists in the 70s spent years reading (and loving) the pulps and continued to celebrate and defend them until they became popular again, yours truly included. I, for one, am really tired of reading that lesbian feminists unilaterally trashed the pulps. Was there controversy? Of course. Lesbian feminists debated everything. (That was the point, wasn't it?) But it was hardly a one-sided fight.

That said, I'd also like to see two additional anthologies: One that would collect the popular nonfiction of the time, the pseudo-sociological books by "Ann Aldrich" and Jess Stern, for example, that so many of us used to make life-altering decisions (such as whether to move to New York, Chicago, or San Francisco) and another that would collect the more literary (and much less well-known) side of lesbian writing history: from Djuna Barnes, Gale Wilhelm, and Dorothy Baker to Patricia Highsmith and early Jane Rule (*This Is Not for You*), May Sarton, Janet Flanner....

But in the meantime, settle in with **Lesbian Pulp Fiction**. \$18.95 paper, 415 pgs., Cleis.

Meanwhile, The Feminist Press, as part of its *Femmes Fatales: Women Write Pulp* series just released Tereska Torres' **Women's Barracks**.

Subtitled "A Frank Autobiography of a French Girl Soldier," it was first



published in the U.S. in 1950 and sold two million copies by 1955, setting off the avalanche of lesbian pulp novels that followed. Read an excerpt in *Lesbian Pulp Fiction*, but then turn to this edition for an interview with the 85-year-old Torres and an afterword by Judith Mayne. But was it a pulp or a serious literary novel? I'd argue that it's a bit of both. Written as a novel, it was tweaked a bit in translation to make it seem to be an autobiographical tell all, then (re)packaged as one of the first novels in that exciting new mass-market paperback format.... \$13.95, 234 pages, The Feminist Press.

But here's what I want to know: If readers snatched up two million copies of *Women's Barracks*, and a million or more of many of the lesbian-themed books that followed — some of which ranked in the top three bestsellers of their respective years, and if the era lasted until 1965 (the year I came out), why did publishers stop publishing them? Ten years later, in the mid-seventies, it was almost impossible to find lesbian-themed work, and lesbian feminists had to set up printing presses, publishing companies, and women's

bookstores to make lesbian books available again. Is there something we need to understand here about how a literature can disappear so quickly?

And, in Canada, Arsenal Pulp Press and Little Sister's, the Canadian bookstore that fought Canada Customs to the Supreme Court and won, have joined forces to publish *Little Sister's Classics* to revive lost and out-of-print lesbian and gay literary classics.

The first two books in the series are Jane Rule's **The Young in One Another's Arms** and Richard Amory's **Song of the Loon**. Look for the next two books in the series, Isabel Miller's **Patience & Sarah** (How could its publishers have ever let that slip out of print?!) and John Preston's wonderful **Franny, the Queen of Provincetown**, in October. All of the books in the series include reviews, promotion materials, interviews and the like from the period in which the books were originally published.



The Young in One Another's Arms, a complex tale of a community of women and men living in a Vancouver boarding house at the end of the Vietnam War, won the Canadian Authors Association's Best Novel of the Year Award in 1978. Rule, who never takes a simplistic approach to anything, believes that no one — and no one character — is, or should be, the center of the world. Instead she has given us a series of novels where community is the central character, and individuals make their own way — whether lesbian, straight, undecided, or simply in love with her mother-in-law. Deep thanks and kudos to Arsenal Pulp and Little Sisters for this series. \$16.95.



And Dorothy Baker's **Cassandra at the Wedding**, was republished last Fall as part of the New York Review of Books' Classics series. First published in 1962, but set in 1912, it's the tale of a brilliant, witty (and tormented, of course, but ultimately sympathetic) young woman doing her best to derail her beloved twin sister's upcoming marriage. The 1982 Virago classic edition called it "the best of [Baker's] four novels, a bitter, entrancing study of a passionate, jealous, and hopeless love between sisters." I also hold a mordant tenderness for Baker's 1943 novel, *Trio*, a "frank" (and tormented) novel about a young

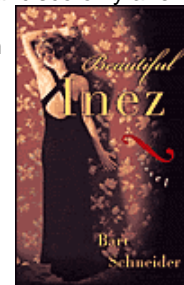
woman's loss of innocence at the hands of an evil, older (and tormented) woman professor that was considered scandalous at the time despite all the white gloves and teas. *Trio* won a Gold Medal Award from the Commonwealth Club of California. Baker and her husband adapted *Trio* as a play which ran, briefly, on Broadway in 1944 but was quickly shut down because of protests. (Another version of the story is that the protesters were hired by the theatre management who wanted to close the play and run something more profitable.) It certainly would be lovely to have a reprint of both the novel and the play in one volume, with a little history and context about the protests and the author.... Baker's husband maintained that **Cassandra** was based on both the writer's own experiences and those of her daughters. Baker won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1942. Her writing had, in the words of William Soskin, "plenty of iron and a strong, dependable bony structure." She died of cancer in 1968. File her work under Lost Lesbian Literary Novels. \$12.95, New York Review Books.



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Contemporary Fiction

Bart Schneider's **Beautiful Inez**, published earlier this year, is a beautifully written and evocative tale set in the early 60s, in a San Francisco only a few blocks, yet worlds away, from the lesbian worlds outlined in the pulps above. Schneider's Inez, the lead violinist with the SF Symphony, lives in a pre-*Feminine Mystique* world where sexual abuse, postpartum depression, one's husband's affairs, and the way child rearing compromises a woman's musical career are, if acknowledged at all, things a woman is supposed to just get over. Sylvia, a bit younger and more resilient, does whatever shape shifting is necessary to pursue the violinist. Schneider does a brilliant job of creating these characters, of portraying the



music that echoes throughout the book like a third central character, and of portraying both the limitations and the passions of their times. I'd be tempted to do the unthinkable and nominate it for a Lammy if only the ending were as deeply written and as convincing as all the rest of the book. By the end I just wanted Inez to know that Women's Liberation and consciousness-raising groups were coming — even as I wanted a good book discussion group for myself. It's a wonderful look a very difficult era for women in general and lesbians in particular. Schneider was the founding editor of the *Hungry Mind Review* and he now edits *Speakeasy* magazine. \$24, Shaye Areheart/Crown/Random House.

More womanist than lesbian, there's tenderness, passion, much longing, and a few stolen moments of sensuality between the sworn sisters in Lisa See's **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan**. But it does offer a thoughtful look into



women's lives and friendships in nineteenth-century China, in remote Hunan villages in an era when wives and daughters lived in almost total seclusion, when foot-binding was the price of marriage, and where women had devised both a secret written language — *nu shu*, possibly the world's only language used exclusively by women to communicate with women relatives and friends — and also a network of "sworn sisters," friendships, and support groups that mitigated, to some extent, the isolation of both girls and married women. But, limited as their options

were, women of the time — or at least of this book — are hardly passive victims of fate; instead they do everything in their power to improve their lives and build some semblance of security. *Nu shu* messages were embroidered into handkerchiefs, written into special books and the folds of fans, then passed secretly from woman to woman. It's a fascinating, sometimes tender, tale of women's lives, survival, and resilience. \$21.95. Random House.

Anchee Min offers a very feminist retelling, in **Empress Orchid**, of the life of China's last empress, a flawed but compelling woman who struggles both for her own survival and to see her son live to come into power. Zip lesbian content — but a fascinating reclaiming of women's history. \$14.00, Mariner/Houghton Mifflin.

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Want Something Edgier?

Consider Ali Liebegott's **the beautifully worthless**, a novel told in verse and letters to the girlfriend left behind, about a dyke on the road with her Dalmation, between New York and a dreamed of town in Idaho. It's a postmodern odyssey through Amerika, filled with heartbreak, longing, cute boys, un-cute cops, warm beer, cheap eats, longing (did I say that already?), and all the stresses of a solo wild-ride road trip. Oh, and a few familial visits, a bit of a breakdown, and some lock-down time in various institutions.



Many readers will know Liebegott's poetry from her days with the notorious Sister Spit's Ramblin' Road Show. \$12.95, Suspect Thoughts Press.

Or, for something more linear, albeit with fewer women characters, consider Tennessee Jones' **Deliver Me from Nowhere**, a collection of short stories invented out of the songs on Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* album. Michelle Tea says, "Tennessee Jones' interpretive fictions are as big, bleak and beautiful as the American landscape, all full of lonely smells, whiskey, class desperation, and the dusty, archetypal dirt road to nowhere." I'd add that Jones, an Appalachian-born transman currently living in New York City, and his work often remind me of early Dorothy Allison stories. Allison has more women in her stories, but Jones' women seem equally true to me. Jones is also the editor of the punk lit zine *Teenage Death Songs*. \$12, Soft Skull Press.



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Supporting Characters & Bit Parts

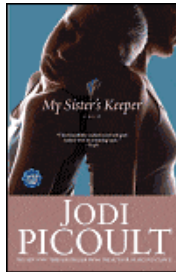
I just read J. M. Coetzee's **Disgrace**, thanks to a friend's recommendation. It's a fascinating novel of morals and mores reflecting on entitlement, power, and the abuse thereof set in post-reconciliation South Africa. Normally I'd have limited tolerance for living in the head of a university professor who is clueless about why he ought not hit on his young students, but Coetzee gives us such a wonderfully rich and layered look at the ways entitlement begets crime (including rape and oppression) across sex, race, and class lines (and back again), and at the systems that do (or don't) compensate abuse with justice (and at their limited success in educating the perpetrators), that it felt like time well spent.



I read a number of reviews of **Disgrace** both when it was published and when it won Coetzee an unprecedented second Booker prize, but none of them mentioned that the daughter the professor turns to, after he loses his job, is a back-to-the-land lesbian. Coetzee uses Lucy's outsider statuses well, to offer yet another perspective on justice even as he uses her farm as a jumping off place to look both legal and community justice systems and who each system benefits and fails. The one place where Coetzee fears to tread is in providing Lucy with any lesbian community whatsoever — the lover with whom she started the farm has gone back to the city, and she hasn't a lesbian friend (or ex) anywhere in sight. That criticism aside, it's a page turner of a novel that demands that its readers be more insightful than the characters. I recommend it to anyone interested in the evolution of social justice. \$14. Penguin.

I found **My Sister's Keeper** on the shelves of my local queer bookstore.

Neither of the booksellers present (both male) could tell me if it had any lesbian characters, only that they rarely stock books that don't have some queer interest, but I'd been interested in Jodi Picoult's novels for a while, so I bit. Turns out there is a lesbian character — a supporting character's supporting character — her twin sister is a lesbian and had just been left by her lover who, after seven years in a committed relationship, was no longer sure if she was a lesbian. (Ah, the old lesbian-who-is-never-seen-with-a-woman thing?) Whatever. Well, at least it gives her a platform to be disparaging about relationships that need some critical commentary.



But that's hardly the point. The point is an excellent read exploring and portraying the complexities of the realities behind designer-baby, stem-cell research, etc., debates. In this case, our 13-year-old protagonist, Anna, who was conceived via preimplantation genetic selection so that the stem cells in her umbilical cord could be utilized to fight her older sister's leukemia, sets out to gain medical emancipation so she can make her own decisions about what medical risks to take and what else of her body she wants to donate to her sister's health. It's a marvelous tale of the best of intentions gone awry, of the hidden impact of successful medical research, of the catastrophic consequences of catastrophic illness on the healthy children in a family, and is a brilliant and very feminist exploration of complex issues. Nothing in the novel — as in real life situations — is as simple as it first appears. There's also an interesting interview with Picoult about writing on these topics in the back of the book. I'd have to say it was my favorite read of the month, and it's moved her more recent novel **Vanishing Acts** (\$25, Atria/Simon & Schuster, paperback due in December) to the top of my to-read list.. \$14, Washington Square Press/Simon & Schuster.



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Friday Night Reads

This section is dedicated to Sue Butterworth who believed that lesbians everywhere deserve a good Friday night read.

Ah! Two thoughtful Friday Night Reads for the 50-something crowd: I found Pat Rosier's **Poppy's Progress** on a Charis Books' Bookseller's Favorite Books list, and then picked up the recently-released-in-the-USA sequel, **Poppy's Return**, at the Spinifex Press booth at the National Women's Studies Association conference last month. Rosier was the editor of New Zealand's feminist magazine *Broadsheet*, and she turned novelist on the magazine's demise. Here she spins a sweet mediation of a tale about a woman approaching that big 5-0, reflecting on the contradiction that, while Poppy is mostly content with her life, it seems a far cry from her feminist ideals and that it hasn't, when she stops to look at it, turned out quite as she'd hoped or expected.... Well, maybe content isn't quite the right word, after all. **Poppy's Progress** is a sweet mix of memory, reflecting on the political passions of her youth, grieving the dead, going on, getting caught up, a bit, in the struggle to maintain some space for lesbians amid a growing queer politic, the place of family, and a road trip that left me itching to explore the New Zealand coast. And who wouldn't love a character who takes both Ferron and Suede for company during the drive? I'm looking forward to the sequel. \$17.95 each, Spinifex Press. Rosier is also co-author of *Get Used To It! Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents*.



Graceful Waters, on the other end of the age spectrum, was an unexpected treat. Judging from the cover I half-expected a nature/camping novel. Instead writing team BL Miller and VH Foster present a troubled teen sentenced to a boot-camp type reformatory. I kept expecting the set-up to slide into some kind of semi-military sexual fantasy but found, instead, a novel where the point is character growth and development, where boundaries aren't violated, where staff has time to care about the kids in their care, and the conflicts between stubborn and angry young Grace and senior instructor Carey are dedicated to building character rather than steam. OK, maybe the ending is too simplistic — that's what makes it a good Friday night read, after all — but it did make me rethink some of my assumptions about “boot camp” type reform schools for at least some kids. \$18.50, Intaglio Publications.



Not primarily a romance, not quite a mystery, Blayne Cooper's **Unbreakable** falls more in the women's-friendship-circles-gone-awry category. In this case, five women who were tight friends from grade school through the first few months of college reconnect after twenty years of estrangement at the behest of the one who's being blackmailed over the secret all five swore never to reveal. Each woman has her own fears and her own agendas, all have grown and matured...but is honesty possible even this much later? Can friendships be rebuilt? Give this book five points for restraint (phrases like: “cursing Jacie with virulent word combinations that paid homage to her working class upbringing” rather than a simple display of every known cuss word), add a couple points for presenting changing attitudes toward lesbianism over time, but subtract two for assuming that every firstborn and his father can't subtract nine months from a birthdate. But then, some don't. \$17.99, 280 pgs., BookEndsPress.



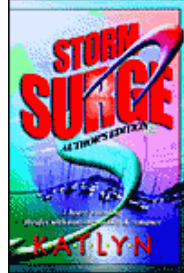
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Saturday Afternoon Adventures

Saints and Sinners, the New Orleans GLBTQ Literary Festival, continues to be the friendliest writers conference of all. For me, one of the most useful

workshops was one allegedly on “The Lesbian Romantic Hero” which was primarily about lesbian action-adventure novels and finally explained to me the genre that is based on the superhero model. There isn’t *supposed* to be much in the way of character development. Everyone (except possibly me) knows that superheroes spring full-blown from someone’s brow. They’re *supposed* to be bigger-than-life, perform feats that would be impossible for regular mortals (vanquish enemies with karate kicks the morning after downing a couple of bottles of wine and making love all night, all while smoking a cigarette), and they excel, in almost every way, at difficult careers. The contemporary (lesbian) superhero should be a CIA agent, crackerjack cop, forensic specialist or other medical specialist, or a brilliant lawyer. If she’s tall enough, beautiful enough, and strong enough, chiseled cheek bones are optional, but the chip on the shoulder is not. And, since we’re talking fantasy worlds here, neither the good guys nor the bad guys ever discriminate against lesbians (“Sure, Susie, take the prisoner in the other room and have your way with her.”) We’re not in identity-politics land anymore and if I could just get over wanting the appropriate, responsible actions from the superheroes and their pals, I’d be all set. But what top cop ever lets new lovers, however fond of each of them he may be, go out on missions together and endanger a whole team with their distraction? OK, so said distractions do create a few crises that move the plot along and there you have it — flawed characters who give their all for their novels. Ah well, I always was the one who screamed, “*Don’t go in the basement!*” while watching horror movies. (I’ve also been known to yell, “*Just talk to each other!*” during tormented lesbian romances when the author fails to give compelling reasons for poor communication.) But for many readers — and writers — adventure-hero novels with a dash of lesbian romance is the ultimate Saturday afternoon adventure. So now that I know what I’m looking for, here are a few:

KatLyn’s **Storm Surge** promises — and delivers — “a heart-pounding thriller with nonstop action and romance” and features FBI Special Agent Alex



Montgomery and tough, streetwise detective Conner Harris, both of whom have lost friends or lovers in the line of duty, both of whom will stop at nothing to put the perpetrators behind bars. Evil drug traffickers, rogue cops, passionate sex, compelling nonstop action, and good friends of both sexes — what more could an action/adventure kinda gal want? \$18.50, BookEnds Press, distributed by StarCrossed Productions. Watch for the sequel, **Rip Tide**, and check Crime Scene (below) for a review of KatLyn’s more recent **Code Blue**.

I loved the premise of **The War Between the Hearts**, Nann Dunne’s Civil War tale of a determined Southern girl who passes as a man to spy for the Union and appreciated the tale of a woman coming into herself in the midst of (or despite) the war. But too much of both the internal and external dialogues seemed way too contemporary for the setting for my reading pleasure. High points were our hero(ine)’s growing disgust at war and her own growth as she banged her head against the walls as she pursued the love of her life. The sweetly supportive, but often unrealistic vignettes with family and friends suggest fantasy more than history. Kinder readers will enjoy it more than I. \$17.59 Intaglio.

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Science Fiction



British writer Jane Fletcher was in the U.S. for Saints and Sinners. Her adventure/science fiction tale **The Walls of Westernfort** contrasts an ought-to-be idyllic goddess-based culture that has slipped into a militaristic rigidity with the ought-to-be evil heretics on a world where all surviving sentient beings are female. Young Natasha Ionadis bravely volunteers for a mission to contain a band of heretics and renegade imprinters, only to find all of her assumptions — about both her culture, about honor and faith, and about her birth mothers — challenged beyond tolerance. A good, satisfying read. This is the first book of

a trilogy; watch for the sequels, *Rangers at Roadsend* and *The Temple at Landfall*, late this Fall. \$15.95, Bold Stroke Press.

Fletcher's earlier novel, *Lorimal's Chalice*, was shortlisted for the 2003 Gaylactic Spectrum Award. It will be reissued as *Book One: The Exile and the Sorcerer* and *Book Two: The Traitor and The Chalice* along with the conclusion, *Book Three: The Empress and the Acolyte*.

Daughters of an Emerald Dusk concludes Katherine V. Forrest's much-loved trilogy, launched in 1984 with *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*, the tale of 4,000 women who escaped the tyranny of a male-dominated Earth to colonize the planet Materas. *Daughters of an Amber Noon*, published in 2000, followed the lives of the women who chose to stay behind. The conclusion, **Daughters of an Emerald Dusk**, reunites the two groups, but little is as expected: Space-time shifts mean that the women who left are decades older than their peers on earth, new generations have been born on Materas, but these children have bonded and follow a path that is beyond their mothers' comprehension. The conclusion, which is probably not what early readers of *A Coral Dawn* are expecting, is as solid and inevitable as the Unity's original drive to resist the out-of-control patriarchy. It's classic Katherine V. Forrest all the way. \$13.95 Alyson.



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Back in Print



Life on the Edge: Cartoons by Judy Horacek. Australia has, one might think, a better sense of humor than the USofA. Humor there is, well, *expected*. And wide-ranging. So it's not surprising that Judy Horacek (who provided BTWOF's graphics) is much more widely published there than women cartoonists here despite – or because of – her quirky, feminist, lesbian-positive, anti-war, anti-pollution, patriarchy-thing politics. When life in this woman-hating, war-mongering world is getting you down, take two Judy Horacek cartoons and laugh with a friend to remind yourself of your sanity. My only regret is that her more recent work isn't available here. \$13.95 Spinifex.



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Magazines

Two new issues since last BTWOF:TLE last went to print: "The Lesbians and Music, Drama, and Art" edition of *Sinister Wisdom* (\$6, or \$20/yr from SW, PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. www.sinisterwisdom.org.)

Bloom Vol. 2, No 1. Either it's the most beautiful issue yet of this new queer literary magazine or it's just that I got to spend a leisurely day with it in New Orleans, the day after Saints and Sinners. Features work by Marilyn Hacker, Honor Moore, Carol Guess, Joan Larkin, and much more. And unlike many "queer" magazines, lesbian work and lesbian content is an integral — rather than a token part — of the content. (\$10 each issue or \$16 for a year. PO Box 1231, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10011. www.bloommagazine.org)

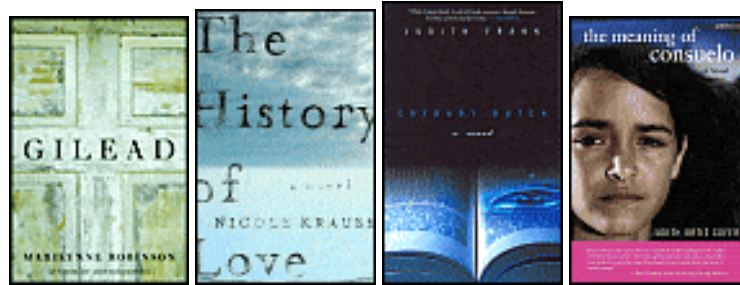


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What They're Reading at Women & Children First

Each issue BTWOF asks the staff at a different women's bookstore what they're reading and what they're loving. This issue we asked Ann Christophersen what she and her colleagues at Women and Children First are reading these days. W&CF is a gorgeous, vibrant bookstore, a wonderful resource for the women (and men) of Chicago. I usually get there at least once a year and always find books I hadn't seen anywhere else. Here's what they said:

* Books with lesbian content.



Linda Bubon

Marilynne Robinson's **Gilead** still tops my list as best novel of the year (and it's definitely on my all-time favorites list), and I was thrilled that it won the Pulitzer and the Book Critics' Circle Award. Robinson asks all the hard questions: what is love? How can we live to best serve others? Why is there war? Will there ever be peace? Can we ever heal this country from slavery, and its descendant, racial injustice? In a long epistle to his young son, an elderly minister tries to give his family's history and discern what matters in life. Reading this book took me to a higher, meditative place, but it was also funny and surprising. \$23, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The History of Love is a stunning, achingly tender novel written in two voices: an old man who is a Holocaust survivor and a 14-year-old Jewish girl. The voices are so real, so distinctive, that the characters walked off the page and into my mind and heart. There's an engaging plot, too, concerning a lost book that creates a life of literary fame for one man, hope for its young reader, and resolution, finally, for its true author. By Nicole Krauss, \$23.95, W. W. Norton.

* **Crybaby Butch** is a terrific lesbian novel by Judith Frank about a young, butch-identified, middle-class literacy teacher and her older, old-school, working-class butch student. Set in Chicago, with some great erotic scenes, this book gave me real insight into and empathy for the life struggle of illiterate adults. There are many kinds of closets. Poignant, thoughtful, and well-written. \$14.95, Firebrand.

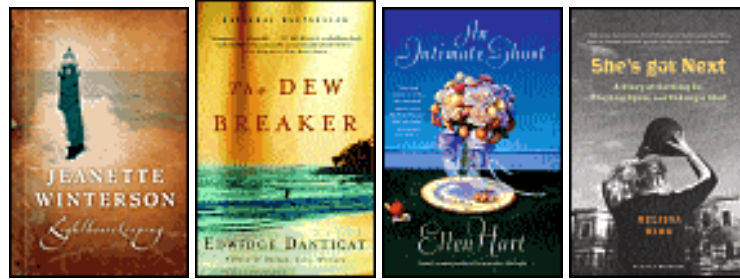
A Complicated Kindness by Miriam Toews is a darkly comic novel about a teen girl living in a small Canadian town in a strict Mennonite community. Her grief over her mother's and sister's leaving (they are shunned by the Elder) is palpable, her rage and acting-out understandable, and her loyalty to her passive, schoolteacher father endearing. Hers is a voice at once tough and tender, witty and heartbreaking. \$23, Counterpoint Press. Available in Canada in paperback, July 1.

Judith Ortiz Cofer's **The Meaning of Consuelo** is a lovely, thoughtful novel for both teens and adults, set in Puerto Rico in the present. Issues of class, gender, and sexuality are skillfully woven into the narrative. Consuelo, after a tough year of losing her best friend — a gay boy whose father feels forced to move to the States, struggling with her family over her younger sister's emerging mental illness, and having her first sexual experience result in her acquiring "slut" status in her high school, emerges stronger, wiser, and able to stand up for herself. \$13, Beacon Press.

I've just finished Jane Fonda's long and thoroughly engaging autobiography,

My Life So Far, and I'm very impressed. She tells the truth about all the people, events, and causes in her life with candor, wit, and forgiveness. She has an amazing story to tell: her parents' and grandparents' history; her life with French director Vadim and the European intellectuals and artists in his circle; her years of activism against the Vietnam War; her work on over forty movies and the reasons for doing them; her life with Tom Hayden and Ted Turner; her struggle to be a good mother and daughter; her understanding of her emergence as a feminist activist working to empower adolescent girls. I loved reading it. \$26.95, Random House.

Naomi Wolf's new book, **The Treehouse**, is a magical, marvelous book. Naomi's father's lessons on listening to the artist within, living with passion, noticing the details, and honoring one's work are totally inspiring. This is a great book for anyone who wants to think about whether they've found their true art in life and what it means to live creatively and encourage others (our children, our students) to do the same. \$24, Simon & Schuster.



Ann Christophersen

* **Lighthousekeeping**, Jeanette Winterson's new novel, is mesmerizing. It actually is partly about keeping a lighthouse — after her mother's death, the orphaned narrator finds her first true home in this unlikely place — but the symbolism of shining light into dark and wild places filters through the novel. Immersing oneself in Winterson's spare, powerful language is reason enough to read this book; the love story is another good one. \$23, Harcourt.

The Dew Breaker by Edwidge Danticat (just out in paperback) is an amazing "novel" of interconnecting stories. Humanizing a Haitian torturer (a "dew breaker") while setting before the reader an unflinching picture of the full range of damage done by his actions is no small task. Danticat accomplishes it brilliantly. \$12.95, Vintage/Random House.

Lost in the Forest, Sue Miller's newest novel, is disturbing in the way sexual awakening takes place for one of the main characters, a girl in her late adolescence who is seduced by a family friend. But it is meant to be, and Miller is, as usual, deeply insightful in her presentation of complex family situations. In this one, the aftermath of a divorce, the maturing of a young woman into a self-confident, self-knowledgeable, independent person, and the strength of a developing father-daughter relationship are at the center. It's a very good novel. \$24.95, Knopf/Random House.

Embroideries, the new graphic memoir by Iranian writer/artist Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*) is terrific. Her grandmother is the central character, but she is surrounded by aunts, women friends, and Marjane herself as they gossip and tell stories about sexual escapades and other juicy subjects over tea. (Marjane's grandmother is an opium addict and pretty crabby before her tea but absolutely charming after it.) Satrapi once again portrays an element of Iranian life and culture with a little text and a lot of very expressive drawings. She's also terrific in person, so watch for her reading in your town. \$16.95, Pantheon/Random House.

* Ellen Hart was at Women & Children First recently, and I read her most recent Jane Lawless mystery in paperback, **An Intimate Ghost**. It was thoroughly entertaining, as is Ellen herself. The plot is complex and the writing unerringly skillful—and I liked the literary references she incorporates into the story. *An Intimate Ghost* is a very fun, satisfying read. \$13.95, Griffin/St. Martin's.

I just finished listening to the audio of Carson McCuller's classic, **The Heart is a Lonely Hunter**. For reasons I can't explain, I had never read this fine,

fiery, haunting novel in all my years of books. Set in the bad old days of the South before Blacks had any semblance of equal rights or opportunities, when women's dreams died a very early death, and before labor unions were effectively operating against total exploitation, it builds a rich, textured story about a cast of characters — and a political situation — one cares very deeply about. \$12 paper, Mariner Books; \$39.95 CD, Harper Audio.

I'm just now reading a new book called **She's Got Next: A Story of Getting In, Staying Open, and Taking a Shot**, a memoir by Melissa King. A former basketball player myself, I'm loving the excitement of the pick-up games she played in Chicago and all the description of what the sport has meant in her life, how she has loved it and used it. Playing basketball is also the source of many of her metaphors, and she uses them very effectively. She has a fresh, clear voice, too, one I'm very much enjoying listening to. \$13, Mariner Books.

Tish Hayes

The first chapter of **Paradise**, by A.L. Kennedy begins with Hannah, our narrator, in a hotel with no knowledge of why she's there, where she's going or where she's been. Pretty quickly you realize that she's an alcoholic, and we are brought up to date by memories and flashbacks to discover that in the timeline of the novel that first chapter falls at the midpoint. I was a little discombobulated at first by the structure, but as I got to know Hannah it fit perfectly. Memories are discovered and confessed by the most unlikely connections, so what seems like a really funny story may become the most horrifying or heartbreaking thing you've ever heard. If Hannah is off balance, then so are you, and what makes Kennedy's writing great is her ability to take this woman, who you would never want to know at all, let alone be friends with, and make her so real that she feels a little like you. I've been thinking about this novel for the past week since I finished reading it, and Kennedy's images are so perfect and clear that the book just runs like a movie in my head. It still breaks my heart, and makes me laugh, and fills me with a longing that I think is Hannah's. \$25, Knopf.



Many thanks to Ann for collecting this list, and to all her colleagues at [Women & Children First](#). If you can't get to W&CF in person, remember that you can always order books from them online or by phone -- which is a great way to thank them for taking the time to write this column and for all the work they do to support women's literature. There's also a list of women's bookstores at www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html.



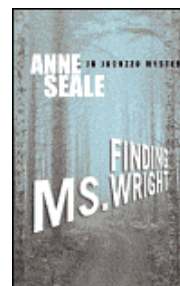
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The Crime Scene

By Nan Cinnater

For whatever reason, it seems that lesbian publishing moves in seasons, and this is lesbian mystery season — or, more accurately, lesbian romantic suspense season. From the pile of books next to my computer, you would think that all lesbians are either cops or doctors, with perhaps a few lawyers to advise them of their rights. ("You have the right to hot, steamy sex...")

Of all the books in this pile, my favorite is the most straightforward mystery, **Finding Ms. Wright** by Anne Seale. This is the second in her series of RV mysteries featuring Buffalo lesbian Jo Jacuzzi, sequel to **Packing Mrs. Phipps** (both \$13.95, Alyson). Jo is not a cop, and not even a private eye, "just a regular person with a bunch of time on my hands," as she says. Here she travels to Oklahoma during tornado season to find her friend Weezie's missing ex, Honey Lou Wright. Seale writes fast, funny mysteries with twisty plots and real suspense. There's even a touch of romance, although hardly any hot, steamy sex.



In **Down the Rabbit Hole** by Lynn Jamneck (\$12.95, Bella) our heroine is an FBI agent who, just like the author, has "a penchant for cigarettes, strong coffee, women and guns." Agent Samantha Skellar is coping with a serial killer and a cyber-stalker — as well as a sexy computer security expert with hacker attitude. The mystery is fast-paced and well-plotted, but not particularly authoritative or convincing in its investigative details. Also, a special caution for the squeamish: there are graphic crime scenes and autopsy descriptions. Blame it on Patricia Cornwell.

In **Imperfect Past** by Jessica Casavant (\$16.95, Yellow Rose Books) Boston homicide detective Jamie Saunders is investigating a murder that also



resonates with her incest issues. Jamie obstructs justice and breaks laws left and right, but that didn't keep me from enjoying this guilty pleasure, really more romance than mystery. At the heart of the book is the group of friends that every lesbian dreams of:

They had cried and fought and barged into each other's lives in the only way they knew how — insisting on being heard; determined not to be ignored; and always, always loving each other despite it all. And somehow when the chips were down, when life got too messy, they rallied around and pushed and pulled and dragged each other back into living it.

Like Nancy Drew's chums grown up, Jamie's friends always have her back. Even a curmudgeonly reader like myself, who likes her crime unsullied by soap opera, was won over.

If you fancy wilderness action/adventure with lesbian heroines, you should take a look at **Hunter's Pursuit** by Kim Baldwin (\$15.95, Bold Strokes Books) and **Have Gun We'll Travel** by Lori L. Lake (\$18.95, Quest Books). In **Hunter's Pursuit**, Kat is a contract killer known as Hunter who has retired to a remote snowbound retreat. Against her better judgement, she rescues an injured woman who claims to have no memory of who she is or how she got to Kat's door. In **Have Gun We'll Travel**, St. Paul police officers (and lesbian couple) Dez and Jaylynn are on a camping trip with friends when they run afoul of escaped convicts (not to mention Russian mobsters), and Jaylynn is taken hostage. The woods of northern Minnesota have never looked meaner.



Distant Shores, Silent Thunder, the new novel by the astoundingly prolific and popular author Radclyffe, contains a murder but is not primarily a mystery (\$15.95, Bold Strokes Books). Rather, it is the multi-strand story of a group of lesbian friends in the gay tourist mecca of Provincetown. Similarly, even though **Code Blue** by KatLyn (\$18.50, Intaglio) has a rather complicated serial-killer plot, the book's raison d'etre is the attraction between (yet another) lesbian cop and dyke doctor. And if a gal is looking for true love instead of justice on the mean streets, I don't really care.

This Just In:

Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders by Alicia Gaspar De Alba (\$23.95, Arte Publico Press) is an amazing and important book meant to draw attention to a real-life wave of terrible crimes against women. For over a decade, a mounting toll of hundreds of bodies — now 350 mostly poor Mexican women — have been found in the desert outside Juarez, the Mexican city across the border from El Paso, Texas. (Why is this not the biggest news story in the world right now?) In this fictional account, LA professor and Chicana lesbian Ivon Villa travels to Juarez/El Paso to adopt a child. There she finds out about the murders and, when her own little sister disappears, she is compelled to investigate.

There is almost too much going on in **Desert Blood**. The fictional Ivon's story is a gripping adventure, with family drama, romantic complications, false trails, brutality and heroism. It stands on its own, with a satisfying resolution. On the other hand, there is no solution as yet to the real murders, and the detailed descriptions of autopsies and mutilated bodies seem all the more horrifying for being real. This is not a conventional mystery, and not just because it mixes fact and fiction. As Gaspar de Alba



writes,

"This wasn't a case of 'whodunnit,' but rather of who was allowing these crimes to happen? Whose interests were being served? Who was covering it up? Who was profiting from the deaths of all these women?"

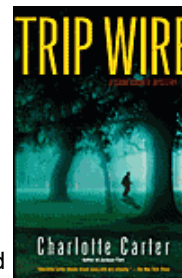
In a conspiracy this large there can be no single villain.

Mysteries to Watch Out For:

The wonderful out lesbian author Val McDermid has just published a new book in her series about Scottish lesbian reporter Lindsay Gordon, **Hostage to Murder** (\$12.95, Bywater)! Lindsay is back in Scotland and at loose ends, until a local car dealer's stepson is kidnapped. The trail leads to St. Petersburg and a dangerous snatch-back operation. McDermid has won major mystery awards on both sides of the Atlantic; her Lindsay Gordon books are witty, smart and feminist. This is a must-read. In addition, McDermid writes a superb non-lesbian series about Scotland Yard detectives Carol Jordan and Tony Hill, who are usually on the track of particularly grisly serial killers. New in this series are: **The Torment of Others** (\$24.95, Minotaur) and **The Last Temptation** (\$3.99, Minotaur).

Here is a round-up of mysteries about African American women, none of them lesbian as far as I know:

Jackson Park was the first Cook County mystery by African American writer Charlotte Carter, and she has just published the second, **Trip Wire** (both \$12.95, One World/Ballantine). In the Nineties, Carter wrote an unconventional series set in New York and Paris, about saxophonist Nanette Hayes, that was sheer jazz poetry (**Rhode Island Red**, **Cog au Vin**, **Drumsticks** and **Walking Bones**, all \$14.00, Serpent's Tail). So I can't wait to see what she does with these intergenerational mysteries, featuring African American Cassandra Lisle and her great-aunt and uncle, Ivy and Woody, set in Chicago in the turbulent Sixties. In **Jackson Park**, Cassandra is a senior in college in 1968 when Martin Luther King is assassinated. **Trip Wire** is set during the Democratic convention, when Cassandra moves into a radical commune.



For hard-core action/adventure fans, there's **The Assassin** by Rachel Butler (\$6.99, Dell), featuring Jamaican Selena McCaffrey, owner of a Key West art gallery, who is forced into the role of assassin by a drug dealer from her shady past.

On the chick lit side there's the comic caper **Video Cowboys** by Yolanda Joe (\$22.00, Simon & Schuster), featuring Chicago TV reporter Georgia Barnett. Here Georgia gets in the middle of a bank robbery gone wrong and her cameraman is taken hostage. In **Sex, Murder and a Double Latte** by Kyra Davis (\$17.95, Red Dress Ink) a Black Jewish mystery writer discovers that a killer is imitating the murders in her books. **The Company You Keep** by Angela Henry (\$14.00, BET Books) is the first mystery featuring Ohio GED instructor Kendra Clayton, who helps her best friend solve the murder of her ex, the boyfriend many women love to hate. Angela Henry also maintains the MystNoir web site, <http://mystnoir0.tripod.com/MystNoirDir/>, dedicated to mysteries "written by or featuring African Americans."



New in Paper:

I Dreamed I Married Perry Mason by Susan Kendal (\$6.99, Avon). A fun romp through Fifties Hollywood, via a contemporary writer investigating an old case of Earle Stanley Gardner's. (Minor lesbian sub-plot.)

The Game by Laurie R. King (\$6.99, Bantam/Dell). The world's greatest detective undertakes a spy mission in India, with some help from her husband, Sherlock Holmes. Due in June: another Russell/Holmes adventure, **Locked Rooms** (\$24.00, Bantam), in which the pair travel to San Francisco and we learn more about Russell's American family.



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Fundraising & Raffles

Soapstone, a writer's retreat and workspace for women writers, is fundraising via raffle. Prizes include a week for four at Soapstone and many other wonderful treats. Check it out at <http://www.soapstone.org/raffle.html>. Entries must be received by July 31.

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Awards and Prizes

The Tiptrees

This year's Tiptree Awards for science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender went to Joe Haldeman for **Camouflage** and to Johanna Sinisalo for **Troll: A Love Story** (published outside the USA as *Not Before Sundown*).

Shortlist

The Tiptree shortlist isn't the list from which the judges picked the winners — it's a list of books that the judges found interesting, relevant to the award, and worthy of note.

A. S. Byatt, **Little Black Book of Stories**

L Timmel Duchamp, **Love's Body, Dancing in Time**

Carol Emshwiller, "All of Us Can Almost..." (on SciFi.com)

Nancy Farmer, **Sea of Trolls**

Eileen Gunn, **Stable Strategies and Others**

Gwyneth Jones, **Life**

Jaye Lawrence, "Kissing Frogs" (in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, May 2004)

For more info go to <http://www.tiptree.org/>.

And for more great reading, check out **The James Tiptree Award Anthology**, a collection of stories, excerpts, and great commentary on the development of the award. My favorite piece is Joanna Russ' elegant claiming of Alice B. Sheldon (who wrote under the pseudonym [James Tiptree, Jr](#)) as a lesbian. \$15.95, [Tachyon Publications](#).

The Publishing Triangle Awards

Publishing Triangle Leadership Award went to The Lesbian Herstory Archives, the **Bill Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement** went to Edward Field, and **The Robert Chesley Foundation's Lifetime Achievement in Playwriting Awards** went to Michael Kearns (Lifetime Achievement Award) and Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas (Emerging Artist).

The Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Nonfiction

Alison Smith, *Name All the Animals* (Scribner)

The Randy Shilts Award for Gay Nonfiction

David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (University of Chicago Press)

The Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction: Women

Stacey D'Erasmus, *A Seahorse Year* (Houghton Mifflin)

The Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction: Men

Adam Berlin, *Belmondo Style* (St. Martin's Press)

The Audre Lorde Award for Lesbian Poetry

Maureen Seaton, *Venus Examines Her Breast* (Carnegie Mellon University Press)

The Publishing Triangle Award for Gay Male Poetry

Carl Phillips, *The Rest of Love* (Farrar Straus Giroux)

The Philip K. Dick Awards

The awards are given to a science fiction paperback original published for the first time during 2004 in the U.S.

Life, by Gwyneth Jones (Aqueduct Press)

Special citation was given to **Apocalypse Array** by Lyda Morehouse (Roc).

Other shortlisted titles included:

Stable Strategies For Middle Management by Eileen Gunn (Tachyon Publications)

City Of Pearl by Karen Traviss (Eos)

Banner Of Souls by Liz Williams (Bantam Spectra)



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Writing Wanted

Rise and Resist: Young Queer Women Do Activism

Maura Ryan is looking for: personal essays written by lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women (in their late teens to early thirties) on their participation in queer activism(s) to create a snapshot of what young queer women are doing to resist the current oppressive political climate that engulfs our lives.

Deadline: July 15, 2005. For more info email: mryan@ufl.edu

The Other Mother: Tales from the Lesbian Home-Front or Nonbiological Mothers Tell All

an anthology by and for non-biological lesbian moms, seeks "personal essays — humorous, sad, sweet, snide, whatever voice it takes, about the phenomenon of raising children birthed by your partner. The premise is that two-mom households represent a family architecture unique not only because of having same-sex parents, but also because of the intentional non-bio/bio dynamic (not quite traditional step-parenting). As of now, it seems the only literature available has to do with tragic custody tales." For more info go to <http://www.harlynaizley.com/omproposal.html> or email Harlyn Aizley at harloo@aol.com.

One In Ten Screenplay Contest

Dedicated to the positive portrayal of GLBTQs in film, deadline is Sept. 1.

For more info go to www.screenplaycontests.com or email

Cherubfilm@aol.com.

The Future Is Queer

BTWOF: The Gay Men's Edition editor Richard Labonte and Lawrence Schimmel are collecting science fiction tales for an anthology to be published by Arsenal Pulp Press, Fall '06. "We're looking for visionary short stories extrapolating actual GLBT concerns into the future, whether it be the next decade or a far-off millennium." Send stories (or request details): Richard Labonte at thefutureisqueer@hotmail.com.



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New Stores

We hear way too many reports of feminist and LGBT bookstores closing, but this issue we get to announce two that have opened:

Broad Vocabulary is a new feminist bookstore in Milwaukee. It specializes in feminist literature, subculture studies, progressive politics, cultural movements, and non-sexist young adult/children's books (both new and used), as well as T-shirts, bumper stickers, magnets, buttons, soy candles, homemade books and journals, pepper-spray, cards, pride-gear, local art, stationery, zines.... (gee, sounds just like a feminist bookstore!) Co-owners Molly Tennesen and Amy Daroszeski also host readings, writing groups, and (gasp!) consciousness-raising groups. These are young women, folks,

not holdovers from the 70s. May they thrive! 2241 S. Kinnickinnic, Milwaukee, WI 53207; www.broadvocabulary.com; 414.744.8384.

The Reading Grounds is a new LGBT bookstore and coffee house in Omaha. “We’re creating a place where you can go to relax, alone or with friends—a place that embraces diversity and stimulates independent thinking—a place where you’ll always find ‘Brewing Attitudes’,” says Cindy Collins, president of The Reading Grounds. Fifty percent of the bookstore’s inventory will cater to the LGBT community. The Reading Grounds will also offer gourmet coffee, lattes, smoothies, sandwiches, salads, and desserts. The Reading Grounds, 3928 Farnam St, Omaha, NE 68131; 402-502-2008. www.readinggrounds.com

Meanwhile, Tampa’s 18-year-old gay bookstore, gift shop and coffee house, Tomes & Treasures, and Sacramento’s gay bookstore, The Open Book, have closed. Seattle’s Beyond the Closet bookstore is slated to close at the end of July.



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BTWOF Talks with Abha Dawesar about *Babyji*

BTWOF: *Babyji* is an exciting novel that covers a lot of — sometimes unexpected — ground. Where did the idea for it start?

AD: The first fifteen or twenty pages which were intended as a short story is where *Babyji* began. I had the main character Anamika in mind already and I wanted another character called India so that I could blur the boundaries between the person and the country.

Is that similar or different from your experience with *Miniplanner*?

They are similar in that they both started as short stories and turned into novels. *Miniplanner*, however, was written at great speed over the course of five weekends or so, while *Babyji* gestated for years after I’d written the first forty or fifty pages because I started a new high stress job that kept me very busy.

I’m sure everyone asks you this: Does *Babyji* draw on your own experiences growing up?

No. When I was a teenager growing up I was actually writing and reading fiction!! *Babyji* has a very adventurous life. I wrote a novella in the summer vacations that took place in an imaginary international school in Delhi. I also wasn’t as much of a nerd as *Babyji* is in the book (I hated Physics in high school!). I spent almost all my time thinking about big grand ideas like death — [I was] just a little morbid and a lot less optimistic than *Babyji*.

The five-year-old son of one of Anamika’s lovers calls her “the Bhaiyya who was a Didi.” There are a lot of words out there these days to describe women who are attracted to other women — would you use any of them to describe Anamika? Or the woman she’ll grow into being?

In general [in India] a lot of children will call other kids who are older than they are Bhaiyya or Didi. In this case the young boy is not sure whether the person visiting his mother is a boy or a girl.

I’d be loathe to describe Anamika in any words other than those used in the book. We see her in a period of time where she is learning at a very rapid pace about herself and inventing herself as she makes the passage to adulthood. The snapshot of her we have is limited to a brief period of time in a culture (India) and at a time (1990) and age (16) where she would be less interested in words to describe herself and more interested in experience. To be true to the book, it’s necessary not to dress her in terms that are relevant to the United States in 2005. India was at the cusp of an incredible change at the time when the book is set which is why this time interests me. Cable television had just come to India and we went from having one government-run TV station to suddenly seeing *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* which, by the public standards of the time, were brash and edgy (and an instant addiction!). Things that had never been spoken about or publicly discussed were slowly inching out toward the spotlight. I mean

things like marital problems and adultery. And when change came it came quickly. Within a few years the landscape had metamorphosed and those who came of age in the late nineties are unlikely to have lived the life of those who were in high school five years before.

You've said that when you're writing your characters (and their dramas) become a big part of your life. Do you miss hanging out with Anamika? Is she still a recurring presence? Where do you think her life would go after the conclusion of the novel?

For me writing *Babyji* was certainly about hanging out with Anamika but it was as much about hanging out with India or Deepak or Vidur or Rani. That is to say it took me back to India and Delhi when I was working on it (whether the first draft or a revision). And that was both difficult and fantastic when I was away from India. On the other hand, publishing is a very slow process and books tend to come out long after you finished working on them. What I am missing now is actually the next book which I have just finished, and its main character, a difficult but extraordinary old man called Prem who is 75.

The science and math in Anamika's daily studies do a lot to shape her worldview — did you have to go back and review it all or was it all still on reserve in the back of your mind?

The science had never been in my mind, back or front! It was all fresh work. I'd read Richard Feynman at some point while I was working on *Babyji* and got inspired. I found some science books and read them and finally understood, years after having left high school, the enormous paradigm shift from Newtonian mechanics to quantum mechanics. I owe *Babyji* that!

Your Harvard degree is in political philosophy, and you worked in global financial services for eight years in NYC. Are you writing full time now? Is writing the next logical career step from financial services?

I moved to NY in order to write. I had to have a job in order to pay the bills but I always knew that it was a means to an end: writing. The big step was to give up the financial security of a regular job to turn to writing full-time. One learns to live with very little money and do things differently. In terms of how much it gives me at other levels I haven't yet regretted that trade-in.

What are you working on now?

My new novel is about writers. It takes place in New York and Paris and is narrated in a close third person voice. I think a lot of writers go through a time when they write about writers and some get stuck permanently. I was therefore resistant to the idea of this novel. It's easy to fall into the trap of an autofictive loop that reverts to yourself all the time. My main character is therefore 75. In the process of writing this novel, I've learned from him.

What are you reading now?

I'm reading a book that should be coming out in the Fall by NK Shapero called *What Love Means to You People*. It seems very promising at the moment. It's the love story of an older man and a younger man.



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