



## Books

### The Lesbian Edition

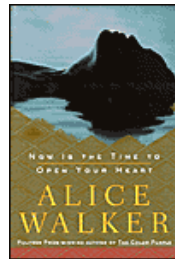
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July 2004  
Volume 1 Number 7

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#### Prose & Poetry & Pulitzers

Two of our Pulitzer Prize winning authors, Alice Walker and Mary Oliver, have new books:

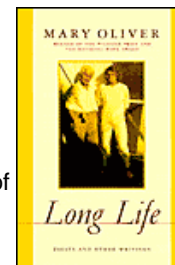


A few years ago Alice Walker swore off writing – at least for publication. But with two books of poetry and a novel in 18 months, all I can say for sure is that it seems to have given her a clear space from which to begin again: **Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth: New Poems** is recently out in paperback. (\$13.95, Random House) and **A Poem Traveled Down My Arm: Poems and Drawings** came out last October (\$12.95, Random House). It's easy to think that Walker's new novel, **Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart**, is autobiographical, featuring, as it does, a

well-published, multiple-relationship author on a quest to learn to heal the earth and her many inhabitants. **Now Is the Time** follows the adventures of one Kate Nelson Talkingtree as she navigates the Colorado River with women friends, seeks the wisdom of the grandmothers in the Amazon, and finds her way in a relationship. A lesser thread follows Kate's current partner (this time a man), Yolo, as he navigates her absence, relationships past, and the sometimes tenuous connection between them. Some readers might prefer a more strictly autobiographical account, but fictionalizing clearly gives Walker a necessary freedom. \$24.95, Random House.

If, somehow, you missed Walker's 1999 novel, **By the Light of My Father's Smile**, check it out. An excellent, if sometimes challenging novel, it offers paths of resolution (even with the dead), explores passion as a necessary part of healing, and demands that Magdalena's father learn, albeit after his death, to bless her relationship with the woman she loves to compensate for the rigidities he imposed on her as a child. It is, I think, a good example of what Walker means when she speaks of the necessity of healing the ancestors, so they can bless us as we move forward. Only Alice Walker would dream so courageously. \$13.95, Ballantine.

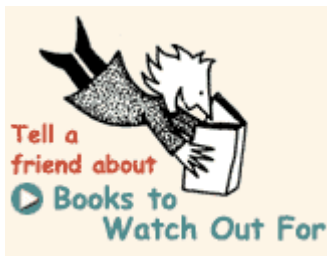
Mary Oliver is, many would argue, our finest writer on the natural world and our place in it. And her writing offers solace and a resting place in these troubled times. **Long Life: Essays and Other Writings** – an excellent place to begin if you're new to her work – uses both essays and poetry to offer an intimate look at the world and world-view that shape Oliver's life and writing. The front-cover photo, of Oliver with Molly Malone Cook – the "M" of the essays – would be worth the price of admission. \$22, Da Capo/Perseus.



"M. and I have plagued each other with our differences for more than forty years. But it is also a tonic. M. will hardly look at a bush. She wants a speedboat. I want to sit down on the sand and get all dreamy; I want to see what spirits are

## Print It Out

- [Books reviewed in this issue](#) (printable list)
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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.

### 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.

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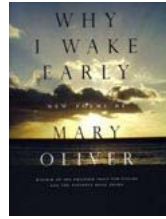
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peeking out of the faces of the roses. Years ago M. took flying lessons...."

### 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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Oliver's **Why I Wake Early** includes 47 new poems, all written in the last two years. Oliver, of course, writes with exquisite grace, whether about the local dump or crickets, trout lilies, or the necessity of everyday happiness. These poems offer that necessary moment of renewal at the end of a long day of fighting the good fight. An excellent bedside or dinnertime companion. \$22, Beacon Press. Her **New and Selected Poems: Vol. 2** has been rescheduled for Fall 2005; *Why I Wake Early* was published in its stead.



### More Books for Women

will launch in 2004.

- » [Click here](#) to be notified when it launches.

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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

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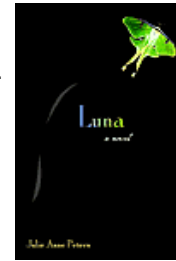
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### More Fiction

Three out of four booksellers I talked to in June recommended **Luna**, Julie Anne Peters' not-just-for-young-adults novel that starts, "Yeah, I loved her. I couldn't help it. She was my brother." It's not easy having a transgender brother even when you love her fiercely: buying underwear and make-up, covering for her when the parents appear, helping her dress for a mall stroll. Regan does it all, and gladly, but sometimes, just sometimes, she'd rather focus on her own life.... Peters uses the "as seen through the eyes of" motif brilliantly to convey Luna/Liam's struggle for self-identity and acceptance while also maintaining Regan's needs and conflicts. Also worth checking out: Peters' well received lesbian YA novel **Keeping You a Secret**. Both books: \$16.95, cloth, Little Brown.



Beverly Hickok's tale of coming out in the 40's, **Against the Current**, reads a lot more like autobiography than fiction and Hickok (b. 1919) acknowledges that it's based on her own efforts to acknowledge and accept her lesbianism, and to find friends, lovers, and a place in the world – and a suitable career in a world with few options for independent women. It was a pre-Stonewall, pre-Daughters of Bilitis community – but there was a network of bars (Mona's!) and books passed hand to hand (*The Well of Loneliness*, read standing up in a bookstore when it first came out, and later *Diana: A Strange Autobiography*, and Gale Wilhelms' novels, *We Too Are Drifting* and *Torchlight to Valhalla*) and much more. Essential reading for any woman who cherishes lesbian history. That Hickok had to turn to Xlibris to get it out is more of a commentary on the state of lesbian publishing (both mainstream and indie) than on the quality of the book. \$21.99, Xlibris.



Jean Hegland's **Into the Forest**, which was originally published by Calyx Books and then sold to Bantam as part of a \$500,000 multi-book deal, was one of the literary sensations of 1996. The two young women in this post-apocalyptic dystopia haunt the edges of my memory as if, perhaps through friends of friends, I might yet get word of how they're faring.... That won't happen but the long wait for Hegland's second novel is over: **Windfalls** is a worthy, if unexpected, successor, looking at the dystopian reality of contemporary motherhood with such grace and perception that even those least interested in "mothering" will enjoy it. In **Windfalls**, Hegland asks if women are defined by our choices, by our circumstances, or by our hearts – and then gives us two women, both young and single and facing unexpected pregnancies in vastly different circumstances. And what a journey it is. I have to wonder if the literati who so cherish road-tour books as "universal experience" will be able to get over themselves to see these mothers' journeys of mothering as equally universal. Look for **Windfalls** on next year's Orange Prize shortlist. *Windfalls*, \$25, Atria/Simon & Schuster. *Into the Forest*, \$15, Bantam.

But if girls on the road are closer to your core interests, there's a girl on the road to Runne (North Dakota) in Susan M. Brooks' **She's the Girl**, the tale of

a 30-something woman looking for love in all the wrong places who thinks maybe it's in Runne, in the body of a recently remembered high school sweetie. But life is the journey, right?... not the destination, and the journey will mess with your mind, your sense of self, and certainly your sense of humor.... \$14.95, [Small Dogs Press](#).

Read a rave review from a Book Garden staffer at <http://www.smalldogspress.com/press/Reviews.html> or the first chapter at <http://www.smalldogspress.com/excerptspopup.html>



But if it's the road to self-discovery you want, consider **Desilicious: Sexy. Subversive. South Asian** which explores the relationship between sensuality and culture via a medley of arousing and innovative short fiction and poetry designed to explode existing notions of cultural "norms." And it works. It's not so much the inclusion of the wealth of lesbian- and gay-positive stories that is so unexpected in this collection, it's the sex- and self-positive images of both older and young women that shatter stereotypes and break new ground – such as Reena Sharma's "Mrs. Gupta Visits the Gynecologist" and Roohi Choudhry's study in contrasts, "Truth in Real-Time." – Not, mind you, that I would have skipped the wonderfully lesbian stories, the subversions of arranged marriages, or even the tender musings of the gay boys whose desireds (if not their intendeds), lack the necessary courage.... "Desi" is a Punjabi word meaning, "of one's own people," and in this case, well over half of the people are women. Edited by The Masala Trois Collective – Deborah Barretto (whom many readers will know from her years at The Women's Press/Canada), Gubir Singh Jolly, and Zenia Wadhvani. \$16.95, C\$21.95, Arsenal Pulp Press.

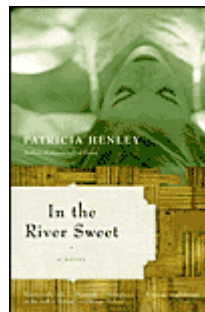


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### Bit Parts

A good friend reminds me that a decade (or two) ago, I postulated that when lesbian characters started showing up as bit parts in straight people's books, we would stop needing feminist bookstores and the women in print movement. It seemed so unlikely then, but it seems nearly normal now that almost everybody (or at least every writer) knows that they know some lesbians and gay men.... But, being a little older and a little wiser, I'll renege on the it-would-be-OK-to-dismantle women's bookstores and publishers part. Let's wait until the number of lesbian bit parts – and main characters – parallels our representation in the general population and then reconsider.

Meanwhile, this section celebrates some wonderful books that are aimed at a mainstream reading public, rather than specifically to lesbians, which integrate lesbian characters. Drop me a line if you have other favorite novels with lesbian bit-parts.



Patricia Henley's excellent **In the River Sweet** integrates a lesbian daughter into a midlife crisis (getting that dreaded/hoped-for email from the child given up for adoption a lifetime ago) in an otherwise lucky existence. Catholic by upbringing and choice, neither her daughter's deviations nor her own sit well with Ruth Anne Bond, but life is rarely limited to what sits well, and Henley does a wonderful job of weaving together a difficult childhood, recollections of Viet Nam, mother-daughter (and father-daughter) friendships – and difficulties – and the difficult job of forging a life of one's own. A great book to pass on to your mom or dad. I hope

P-FLAG has a book of the year and that this is it.

A *Chicago Tribune* Best Book of the Year and a National Book Award Finalist. \$14, Anchor/Random House.

After you've read it, check out Henley's autobiographical essay: <http://www.powells.com/fromtheauthor/henley.html>

There's a lot less action – and drama – in Karen Joy Fowler's *NYT* bestseller, **The Jane Austen Book Club**. Fowler is reported to have seen a

notice in a bookstore for a Jane Austen Book Club and was so disappointed that it wasn't a novel that she sat down and wrote one. Fowler's book group features a circle of mid- and later-life friends, the lesbian daughter of one of the mainstays (mother and daughter are both recovering from bad endings to their respective relationships), and one young man. It's wonderfully full of ruminations on life (and, of course, relationships), on the connections between women, between women and books, the complications of friendships, and the way books (or their readers) change with each reading. And, of course, reflections and discussions on Jane Austen's novels. (Never read them? No problem. It's still a great read and there's a cheat sheet in the back should you want to check a detail.) \$23.95, Putnam.



"My husbands weren't any of them bad men. I was the problem. Marriage seemed like such a small space whenever I was in it. I liked the getting married. Courtship has a plotline. But there's no plot to being married...."  
-70-something Bernadette.

While "Allegra liked to describe herself as a garden-variety lesbian, she knew that the truth was more complicated. Sexuality is rarely as simple as it is natural. Allegra was not entirely indifferent to men, just to men's bodies. She was often attracted to the men in books; they seemed, as a rule, more passionate than the women in books, though actual women seemed more passionate than actual men. As a rule."

Marge Piercy offers a cautionary tale in **The Third Child**. Piercy seems to have had a hard time warming to her conflicted, confused lead character, the youngest daughter in a politically ambitious family. However Piercy's political vision is wonderfully intact: women's lives, even (or especially) in wealthy Republican families are impossibly demanding and conflicted, the sins of the fathers return to haunt their families and, there among the cautionary themes: cover your back – if they'll do it to the family queer (in this case a lesbian aunt), they'll do it to anyone. \$24.95, Morrow, look for the paperback in late fall.

Elizabeth Berg writes "heart-warming" books about lucky, basically happy white suburban women in good marriages who encounter bad things that happen to other people. And she often writes of women's friendships. I find myself wanting her characters to go further, deeper – but they do what they can do without rocking their own boats more than they can stand. Berg's recent **Art of Mending** hasn't a lesbian in sight, but it's a good tale of a woman coming to terms with learning that her kind-of-difficult sister was physically abused in the "happy" family they grew up in – and learning to support that sister, albeit not as fully as that character might wish. Still, an interesting tale featuring the non-targeted siblings in scapegoat-based families. \$24.95, Random House.

But Berg's 1997 **Talk Before Sleep** – again presented from the view of the mostly happily married Ann (loves her husband and daughter but often hates the whole confining institution of marriage) – portrays a circle of women, one of them lesbian, who form a support circle around Ann's best friend, a recently separated artist, after she is diagnosed with terminal cancer. And of course it's the lesbian who always thinks outside the box, pushes boundaries, and refuses to give in to what the others see as inevitable. I don't recall if she was clearly identified as a lesbian or if it's all in the subtext – but she's clearly there, and is clearly a friend that every woman needs.... But I have to admit that Berg adds to my theory that a single lesbian (in fiction or in fact) makes for an interesting anomaly, whereas a lesbian with a community changes the entire landscape. \$13.95, Dell.

Some of my favorite lesbian bit parts show up in Spokane writer Sherman Alexie's stories (and films). They're quirky, unexpected, never tokens, and always an essential part of moving the story forward. Years ago, Paula Gunn Allen famously wrote, "Dykes Are Like Indians." Maybe Indians are like dykes, too. In any case, Alexie always gets it right. I use his stories, like sorbet, between longer works 'to cleanse the palate.' For deeply satisfying stories, when you don't have time for a novel, try **Ten Little Indians** (\$13, Grove) or **The Toughest Indian in the World** (\$12, Grove). If you need a

good video, look for *The Business of Fancydancing*, (written and directed by Alexie), about a gay man who is called back to the reservation for a funeral. His earlier film, *Smoke Signals*, was based on short stories in **The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven** \$13, Harper/Perennial.

And David Leavitt (*Lost Language of Cranes, While England Sleeps*) explains how it happens that a woman, stuck perhaps in a fifties sensibility and identity, is the gay character of his new novel, **The Body of Jonah Boyd**: <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/ARTICLE>.



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## Sex & Passion

### In **Box Lunch: A Layperson's Guide to Cunnilingus**

Diana Cage tells a girl (or a guy) everything s/he might want to know about 'going down' on women in this celebration of giving (and getting) oral sex. Good and useful information – whether or not you believe in tops, bottoms, or that painting your toe nails “a bright slutty red” is a turn-on – for even skilled practitioners of the art. \$13.95, Alyson.



And Cage's **On Our Backs: The Best Erotic Fiction, Vol. 2**, which promises to be “a new crop of lesbian porn stories culled from America's #1 lesbian sex magazine...

that celebrate dyke sex in all its forms – vanilla, sex between longtime lovers, hot spanking tales, group sex, kink, and more” should be hitting the bookshelves as you read this. Contributors include Cara Bruce, Nicole Foster, Lucy Jane Bledsoe, Thea Hillman, Lee Lynch, Hanne Blank, Red Jordan Arbateau, and Sacchi Green. \$14.95, Alyson.

### **Once Upon a Dyke: New Exploits of Fairy Tale Lesbians** is the latest offering in the Bella After Dark series. Racier than your average Naiad, but



still a bit pleasantly shy of *On Our Backs* extremes, it asks “What's so charming about Prince Charming, anyway?” and proceeds with four re-visionings of standard fairy tales from (horny) dyke perspectives. I preferred the stories with less focus on the erotic – less being more, most of the time – and more focus on character growth: Julia Watt's (*Finding H.F.*) “The Belle Rose” and Karin Kallmaker's “A Fish Out of Water.” But others will prefer Therese Szymanski's “A Butch in Fairy Tale Land” and Barbara Johnson's “Charlotte of Hessen.” Definitely not Disney-approved. \$14.95, Bella.



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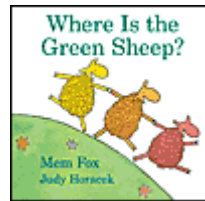
## Lives To Watch Out For

Alexis de Veaux's **Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde** just arrived at BTWOF and I can't wait. Lorde, even a decade after her death, is still the consummate hero/poet/inspiration and push to think more widely and act with more courage. And she's such a volatile mix of seeming contradictions and multiple truths that I suspect it will take many biographies to capture it all. But this is the first and we've been waiting such a long time.... \$29.95, Norton.



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## Reading to the Kids



I'm a serious Judy Horacek fan – if one can be remotely serious about her hilarious visual takes on the world. From the graphics that grace *Books To Watch Out For* to her new read-to-the-kids book **Where Is the Green Sheep?** Horacek offers a sweet relief to the trials of daily life. I'd have bought Mem Fox's primer for adults, **Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever**, just for Horacek's illustrations if I hadn't gotten totally caught up in the message: reading to kids will change their lives. Any kids – from newborns to adolescent boys – and yours, too. This is a book that should be sent home from the hospital, along with a small stack of books, with every newborn. But it isn't, so it's a superb gift for anyone who has (or is going to have) a kid. (\$12, Harvest/Harcourt.) And it showed me why **Where Is the Green Sheep?** (written by Mem Fox) is a perfect read-to-the-kids book. Though I have to admit that my favorite was the "bed sheep" who, of course, is reading in that bed, not sleeping. \$15, Harcourt in the US, Penguin in Australia.

Horacek's more-for-adults collection, **Life on the Edge**, will be released in the U.S. in the Fall. \$13.95, Spinifex. Find more fun on her web site <http://www.horacek.com.au/>. She offers a mood-lifter any day of the week. Sign up for her e-reminder to check her site when she posts new cartoons.



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## Lesbian Families

Never known for waiting for permission – and certainly not legal approval – lesbians have been busily making babies for decades:

In **Baby Steps: How Lesbian Alternative Insemination Is Changing the World** Amy Agigian offers a scholarly look at the lesbian baby boom, considers the ways both reproductive medicine and family law discriminate against lesbians, how lesbian AI challenges our culture's most basic assumptions about families, the effects of class, race, sexuality and economics on lesbian reproduction, and suggests new legal (and philosophical) approaches designed to improve the lives of lesbian family members. \$29.95, Wesleyan University Press.



Coming in September: **The Family of Women**, based on extensive interviews with and observation of the dynamics in thirty-four lesbian co-parent families where the children were conceived via donor insemination, looks at the workings of this emerging family form, and provides a theoretical understanding of how lesbian families are quietly shattering the existing gender order. Author Maureen Sullivan is a visiting Assistant Professor of Social Studies at Harvard. \$21.95 paper, University of California Press.



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## Resources



Donna Rafanello interviewed 60 lesbians living with sexual abuse experiences for **Can't Touch My Soul: A Guide for Lesbian Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse** and integrates their stories and experiences with information about every aspect of healing from childhood sexual abuse. Rafanello offers a wealth of information about childhood sexual abuse, about its long-term effects – both

emotional and physiological – and a variety of strategies for recovery as well as lesbian-specific and lesbian-affirming information. Its 400+ pages may feel a bit overwhelming at first, but most lesbian survivors will find their experience represented. Next edition I'd like to see more specific experiences of lesbians of color – and an index. \$16.95, Alyson Publications.

My one complaint about **The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism** is that it didn't seem quite angry enough to live up to the title. Inspired by frustration with the feminism they encountered, Third Wave feminists like the book's editors, Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin, and Rebecca Walker (who wrote the foreword), set out to create their own institutions that would do a better, more inclusive job of broadcasting a feminism that addresses all power imbalances, whether based on race, gender, economic disparity, or globalization. The essays in **The Fire This Time** teach recent feminist history and tackle issues as diverse as misogynist rappers, funding a movement, the growing incarceration of women, changes in women's work under globalization and new technologies, and building effective news networks. **The Fire This Time** insists that the new feminism must be multi-issue, multicultural, and multi-visioned. It's enough to give hope to even the most jaded old – or young – feminists. \$14.95, Anchor.



Need even more ammunition to dispute Bush's "compassionate" conservatism? Pick up Laura Flanders' **The W Effect: Bush's War on Women** for the update on Bush's intentional, cold-blooded and punitive virtual war on women. Amber Hollibaugh, Cynthia Enloe, Jill Nelson, Barbara Ehrenreich, Katha Pollitt, Gloria Steinem, Gail Sheehy, Vandana Shiva, Farai Chideya and other furious women cover the range of the Bush administration's attacks on women including preaching abstinence while withholding birth-control funds, "women's rights" bills that cut women's wages and freedoms, the increase in violence against women in U.S.-occupied countries, and much more. \$15.95, The Feminist Press.

It's never too late to have a good time at the prom – at least vicariously. David Boyer uses a school-yearbook motif to document who took who to the prom over the last 75 years in **Kings and Queens: Queers at the Prom**. Photos include lesbian prom queens, a transgender king, and gay high school sweethearts – as well as a lot of straight-looking young people – but additional photos tell the real stories of who they really are – and who they grew up to be. \$24.95, Soft Skull Press.



Jamison Green offers a readable mix of personal experience, social and political analysis, and basic education for anyone seeking further insight into the FTM experience in **Becoming a Visible Man**, a not-fiction-at-all account of Jamison's journey through a childhood in a girl/woman's body, twenty-some years as a lesbian feminist, grappling with the concepts of gender vs. sex, a growing understanding of herself as (bisexual) male, surgical transition, a hormone-induced second adolescence, coming into a male adulthood, and an adult life as a transman activist. Insightful, moving, and occasionally irritating – as when Green refers to "the lesbian-feminist doctrine of male evil," a cheap shot in a book that otherwise strives to validate a wide range of sexual, gender, and political identities and experiences. \$24.95 paper, Vanderbilt University Press.

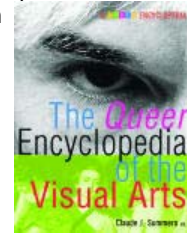


Cleis Press is publishing a series of three queer encyclopedias, all extracted from the wealth of info at [www.glbtq.com](http://www.glbtq.com), the online encyclopedia of GLBTQ culture. **The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts** is just out, *The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance, and Musical Theater* will be published this Fall 2004, and *The Queer Encyclopedia of Film, Theatre, and Popular Culture* in Spring 2005; all three are edited by Claude J. Summers.

**The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts** seeks to place portrayals of

same-sex desire in historical context, to provide accurate biographical info about artists who have contributed to queer artistic traditions, and to explore important questions about the presence of homoeroticism in the world's artistic legacy. It's a great beginning and there's a wealth of information here – it would be easy to spend hours wandering among the entries. And, print fiend that I am, I'm always glad to see online resources documented in that presumably longer lasting and more stable format, ink on paper.

Still, (and I think the editors would agree), the information here barely scratches the surface, especially with regards to women, people of color, and non-Euro/American art. Centuries of discrimination against all of these groups, of course, impacts when and where we appear in the traditional canon... but in a discussion of queer art, I want much more access to womanist and even (gasp!) feminist ideas and images which, I would posit, affect lesbian representation in art and its making, as profoundly as homoeroticism affects male imagery, and that simply plugging women into the concepts that define male experience (and art) does us all a disservice. The whole project is very much a work in progress and I expect it to grow in all of these directions.



Summers is also the editor of *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* which was named one of the best reference books of 2003 by the New York Public Library. \$29.95 paper, 375 pages, 120 b&w illustrations, Cleis Press.

Where do lesbians and gay men have a good time? Turn to **The Gay & Lesbian Atlas** to find out. Gary Gates and Jason Ost mine the 2000 Census data for the characteristics of the 594,391 reported same-sex "unmarried partner" couples to find out where we live, with whom (turns out we're more likely than heterosexuals to live in racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods), where lesbian & gay parents live, and where to find concentrations of African-American and Hispanic couples. State and city maps also break some of the information by male and female couples, ethnicity, and the presence of children. Could be a real asset in choosing where to buy or rent when moving to a new town. \$49.50 paperback, The Urban Institute.

Atlas freaks might also want Joni Seager's **The (Penguin) Atlas of Women**. \$20, Penguin. [This is not a title-match/recommendation you'd find on Amazon.com. A.com's suggested reading for *The Atlas of Women* is a not-so-near miss, "Meet (single) Women in Michigan." Hmmm. Meet women at Michigan, perhaps....but I don't think they have quite the right demographics in mind....]



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### **More on Marriage**

**We Do: A Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Marriage**, a photo essay celebrating and documenting the joy in San Francisco's 4000+ lesbian and gay marriages earlier this year. It also includes photos from Portland, New Mexico, and New Paltz. Written and edited by SF newly-weds Amy Rennert and Louise Kollenbaum, it starts with Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's marriage (just another adventure in their 51-year partnership and quest for rights for lesbians and all women) and goes from there. A pleasure for the already convinced, an excellent coffee-table book for supporters, and an excellent gift and conversation-starter for opposed-but-still-deeply-human relatives and acquaintances as Bush does his best to whip up a frenzy of anti-gay sentiment as a way to distract voters from his real agenda. Actually, I wonder if even the most hardened homophobes could page through this book without being deeply moved. Kudos to Chronicle Books for getting behind this title and going from concept to finished books in less than four months. \$19.95, Chronicle Books.

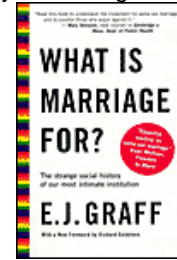


I stopped by the *We Do* group autographing session at Books By the Bay to visit with the gals on page 64, Pat Holt (long term book critic, champion of independent bookselling, publishing and thinking, and brain behind [Holt Uncensored](#)) and Terry Ryan (*The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio: How My Mother Raised 10 Kids on 25 Words or Less.*) Filming has just started on the movie version of *The Prize Winner*. It stars Julianne Moore, Woody



Harellson, Laura Dern, and 30 child-actors, portraying the family at three different ages. Look for it in 2005.

Beacon has republished E. J. Graff's **What Is Marriage For** with a new foreword. It's the perfect book to throw at anyone who starts up with the "sanctity of marriage" routine outlining, as it does, the history of marriage in the west, how marriage law has *always* been a battleground, and how marriage law is rewritten to fit each era and economy – and how the prophets of gloom and doom have predicted that every push for equality (women's suffrage, reproductive rights, interracial marriage, etc.) heralds the end of civilization. What did those erstwhile protectors of the sacred institution of marriage have to say about nineteenth century laws that gave women control over our own property and wages?



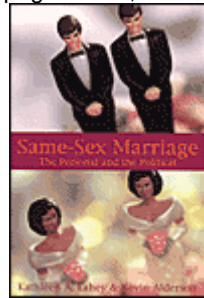
*If any single thing should remain untouched by the hand of the reformer, it [is] the sacred institution of marriage... –a New York legislator in the face of defeat.*

*Contrary not only to the law of England, but to the law of God, –British Parliamentarian.*

*That they would lead 'to infidelity in the marriage bed, a high rate of divorce, and increased female criminality' while turning marriage from 'its high and holy purposes' (from a 1844 New York legislative committee report).*

Gee, that all sounds strangely familiar.... And it's a good read, too. \$16, Beacon.

**Same-Sex Marriage: The Personal and the Political**, by Kathleen A. Lahey and Kevin Alderson, is two books in one: Lahey's section, the first hundred pages or so, looks at the political and legal struggle for marriage around the



world. She pays particular attention to the seemingly sudden legalization of gay marriage in Canada which, she stresses, is built on 30 years of civil, legal, and human rights work which culminated, for gays, in being defined as "persons" under the law. Anderson's longer section offers interviews with 16 couples revealing the interesting and complex people behind the legal challenges including a San Franciscan who feels more accepted in the Netherlands than where she was born, Americans who left the U.S. to resist the American war in Viet Nam and stayed, Americans who turn to Canada for civil rights not yet available here, a Chinese couple eager to take their Canadian marriage home to Hong Kong, and several of the Canadian couples whose efforts opened up the marriage laws in Canada.

Lahey (*Are We 'Persons' Yet? Law and Sexuality in Canada*, University of Toronto) was the lawyer for three of the couples who won the right to marry from the B.C. Court of Appeal on July 8, 2003. Alderson (*Beyond Coming Out and Breaking Out: The Complete Guide to Building and Enhancing a Positive Gay Identity for Men and Women*, both from Insomniac Press) is a counselling psychologist in Calgary. \$16.95, \$21.95 in Canada, Insomniac Press.

OK, rights are one thing, but some want the whole traditional wedding, too. If that's you – or if you want some advice on the same-sex deviations in wedding planning check out **Gay and Lesbian Weddings**, which advises coming out before you send the invitations, checking what the limo driver will wear, and much more. by David Toussant with Heather Leo. \$16.95, Ballantine/Random House.



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**(More) Marriage Books To Watch Out For**

**I Do/I Don't**, an anthology from Suspect Thoughts Press, will (finally!) address the ambivalence many of us feel about this most conservative of social institutions. Edited by Greg Wharton and Ian Philips. \$16.95, September.

Looking for something different? **The M Word: Writers on Same-Sex Marriage**, edited by Kathy Pories, will include essays by both gay (Dan Savage, Stacey D'Erasmus, David Leavitt, Alexander Chee, and Jim Grimsley) and straight writers (Francine Prose, George Saunders, and Wendy Brenner) – just as if this was an important issue for, well, everyone. Hmmm. Look for it in October from Algonquin Books.

**Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality**, by historian George Chauncey, will be out in August from Basic Books.

Spring's line-up includes **The Survival Guide to Gay Weddings** by the gay brother/lesbian sister team K.C. David and Dawn Kohn from St. Martin's Press and Green Party Mayor Jason West's political memoir **Another World Is Possible** about, among other things, performing same-sex marriages in New Paltz. Miramax.



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### Now in Paperback

Monica Truong's excellent **The Book of Salt**, a wonderful look at expatriate France from the perspective of the (gay) Vietnamese cook for Gertrude Stein & Alice B. Toklas. If you're looking for a brilliantly written, insightful yet entertaining summer read, this would be it. What did we say about it in [BTWOF: Lesbian #2](#)? "An exquisitely written novel that begs to be read aloud: the sentences are as savory as the food Binh prepares." \$13.95, Mariner/Houghton Mifflin.



Robert A. Schanke's wonderful (see [BTWOF: Lesbian #4](#)) **That Furious Lesbian: The Story of Mercedes de Acosta** is out in a \$25 paperback. Southern Illinois University Press.

**Beautiful Shadow**, Andrew Wilson's look at the difficult and troubled life of Patricia Highsmith. Most of Highsmith's work (with the exception of her very early – and sweet – non-mystery, *The Price of Salt*) – as well as her biography – are much too *noir* for my reading pleasure, but others will be interested in the rest of the life of the woman Marijane Meaker profiled in *Highsmith* (\$14.95, Cleis Press), her memoir of their mid-fifties affair and/or in the woman who wrote *Strangers on a Train* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. \$18.95, Bloomsbury.

Word is that Highsmith's just-published final novel, **Small g: A Summer Idyll**, might have benefited from one more revision.... still, it's Highsmith incorporating gay (male) characters, gay bashers, and (women) homophobes.... \$24.95, Norton.



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### What They're Reading at In Other Words

*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 Sue Burns, the manager at In Other Words in Portland, Oregon, what she'd been reading:*

\* Books with lesbian content.



**Without a Net** edited by Michelle Tea

Heartfelt experiences of working-class women growing up. Riveting and insightful. \$14.95, Seal Press.\*

**Gay and Lesbian Weddings** by David Toussaint

Over three thousand same-sex couples were given marriage licenses in Portland this past spring. Waiting for the state to legitimize these unions doesn't stop us from having the party. This is the perfect guide book. \$16.95, Ballantine Books.\*

**Warrior Poet: a Biography of Audre Lorde** by Alexis De Veaux

I'm not sure anyone could tell Lorde's life any better than she already has, but I'm devouring this book anyway. \$29.95, W. W. Norton.\*

**The Fat Girl's Guide to Life** by Wendy Shanker

Portland is home to *FatGirlSpeaks - A Celebration of Size, Self, and Sexuality* and so, thanks to Stacy Bias, we have almost eradicated fatphobia from the Pacific Northwest. It is good to know the rest of you have a comparable guide book. \$23.95, Bloomsbury Press.

**A Girl, In Parts** by Jasmine Paul

When this book was still a galley, we passed it to almost all of the 30 women who volunteer at In Other Words. We all loved the eloquent, painful return to our adolescence. \$14.95, Counterpoint.

**Windfalls** by Jean Hegland

I used to say *Into the Forest* was my favorite novel. Now I can say Jean Hegland is my favorite author. She writes so beautifully, and yet realistically, about timely and important issues. \$25.00, Atria Books.

**Girls Rock: Fifty Years of Women Making Music** by Mina Carson, Tisa Lewis, and Susan M. Shaw

These three women, rock fans and academics, wrote this comprehensive analysis of women in rock by writing some, emailing it to the next one and so on. That's feminist process! \$29.99, University of Kentucky Press.\*

**Whatever, Mom! Hip Mama's Guide to Raising a Teenager** by Ariel Gore with Maia Swift

The only thing better than Ariel's revolutionary take on raising a kid is her teenage daughter's commentary. Love this book. \$14.95, Seal Press.\*

*Many thanks to Sue and to all the women at In Other Words for their help and for all the work they do to support our community. You can find In Other Words online at <http://www.inotherwords.org>, and a current list of women's bookstores at [www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html](http://www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html).*

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**What They Are Reading at Women & Children First**

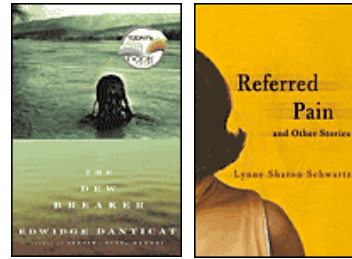
*I was in Women & Children First Bookstore in June, and was struck by these two staff reviews:*

Linda Bubon on Lynne Sharon Schwartz's **Referred Pain**:

"A wonderful collection – stories that disturb and provoke and, most of all, make you think. I've read all of Schwartz's fiction (most of it unavailable,

unfortunately), and have never forgotten any of it." \$24, Counterpoint.

Ann Christophersen on Edwidge Danticat's **The Dew Breaker**:  
 "I don't think I've ever used 'amazing' to describe a novel – but I find **The Dew Breaker** amazing. It's a hard story about a Haitian torturer and the lives he has affected, but it's told with such subtlety and skill and yes, even humor on occasion, that it is not only powerful but a wonder of literary experience." \$22, Knopf/Random House



And congratulations Sydney's Feminist Bookshop, a book store run by three lesbian sisters. They're celebrating thirty years of lesbian, feminist, and gay bookselling in Australia. Read all about it at <http://www.ssonet.com.au/display.asp?ArticleID=3380>.



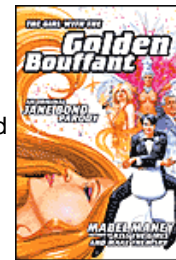
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## The Crime Scene

By Nan Cinnater

I'm traditional and conservative only when it comes to reading for pleasure. I like the genres to observe their conventions, and I agree with the Detection Club's rules for mystery writers, as set out by Dorothy L. Sayers. Thus it's surprising that I was completely engrossed in a "whydunit," **Commitment to Die**, by Jennifer L. Jordan (\$11.95, Bean Pole Books). Denver lesbian Lauren Fairchild commits suicide, and part-time P.I. Kristin Ashe is hired by Lauren's sister to find out why. Kristin uncovers a tangle of family dysfunction and disability that resonates uncomfortably with her own issues. Her epileptic brother is in a coma, while at the same time Kristin is dealing with her fear of commitment to her lover of three years. ("Couldn't we keep dating?") Comic relief is provided by her best friend Fran, a queer ex-nun with a can-do attitude. First-time author Jordan is brilliant at capturing the dynamics of a family with an elephant in the living room. Big issues about society's response to disability are folded seamlessly into a surprisingly suspenseful, eminently readable story. I'm so glad I didn't let the Detection Club keep me from it.

The name is Bond ... *Jane Bond*, in Mabel Maney's silly sixties spoof, **The Girl with the Golden Bouffant** (\$14.95, HarperEntertainment). Best known among lesbians for her Nancy Clue parodies, **The Case of the Not-So-Nice Nurse**, **The Case of the Good for Nothing Girlfriend**, and **A Ghost in the Closet** (all \$14.95, Cleis Press), Maney turned to the ultimate sixties icon with **Kiss the Girls and Make Them Spy** (\$14, HarperEntertainment) in which James Bond's lesbian twin sister was drafted to impersonate 007 in the service of the Queen. Now Jane



has become a double agent for Girls in Europe Organized to Right Grievances and Insure Equality, a G.E.O.R.G.I.E. girl. Her mission: to infiltrate an international spy convention in Las Vegas and steal a weapon so super-secret no one knows what it is. Like some of the best SNL sketches, the premise is inspired but the execution goes on too long.



Set in the literally cut-throat world of cancer research, **Cold Steal** by Carole Spearin McCauley (\$16.95, Hilliard and Harris) introduces bisexual medical writer Pauli Golden. Staff reporter at a genetics research institute in Connecticut, Pauli is having a passionate affair with her married and monumentally insensitive boss, Dr. Stevens St. Steven. When he is murdered at a party celebrating a million-dollar research grant, Pauli is in an ideal position to investigate. Medical writer McCauley does a great job

detailing the politics of the "war" on cancer, including alternative therapies, but she can also write sharply and movingly about people and relationships.

**Last Call** by Baxter Clare (\$12.95, Bella Books) brings back her lesbian heroine, Lieutenant L.A. "Frank" Franco of the LAPD homicide squad. This is the fourth in a series consisting of **Bleeding Out** (Firebrand Press -- out of print; check your library or used bookstores), **Street Rules**, and **Cry Havoc** (both \$12.95, Bella Books). When her fellow cop and former partner Noah Jantzen is killed in a car accident, Frank compensates by fixating on an unsolved child-murder case Noah left behind. With her emotions shut down and her drinking out of control, Frank seems bent on self-destruction. Written in terse, present-tense prose, **Last Call** is gritty, streetwise, and so tough it's practically bullet-proof.



If you're more of a body-in-the-library cozy mystery fan, you won't want to miss these two academic mysteries, with strong, feminist, but heterosexual heroines. **Orange Crushed** by Pamela Thomas-Graham features African American Nikki Chase, an economics professor at Harvard. Nikki travels to Princeton to see her mentor Earl Stokes, chair of the Afro Am Studies Department. Before he can announce his impending (and controversial) move to Harvard, Earl is murdered. This is the third in a series of Ivy League mysteries, which began with **A Darker Shade of Crimson** (\$6.99, Pocket) and **Blue Blood** (\$6.99, Pocket). A graduate of Harvard Business School and Harvard Law School, Thomas-Graham knows whereof she writes, and it's wonderful to get her outsider/insider take on these institutions of the elite.



Joanne Dobson writes about another outsider academic in **The Maltese Manuscript** (\$6.99, iBooks), self-made, working-class literature professor Karen Pelletier. At a conference on the mystery genre at her liberal arts college, Karen is stuck with entertaining the guest speaker, a bestselling author closely resembling Patricia Cornwell. Expect wicked send-ups of post-deconstructionist lit crit and, well, Patricia Cornwell. This is the fifth and, according to Dobson, last in a series that began with **Quieter Than Sleep** (\$6.99, Bantam).

One of the best thrillers of 2003 was **Monkeewrench** by mother-daughter team P.J. Tracy, now in paper (\$6.99, Signet; see [BTWOF Lesbian Edition #1](#)). The sequel, **Live Bait** (\$23.95, Putnam) brings back Minneapolis detective Leo Magozzi and enigmatic computer maven Grace McBride, but it's missing some of the feminist elements (a lesbian cop in a minor role, an emphasis on a couple of beautiful, sexy plus-size women characters) that made **Monkeewrench** so refreshing. In **Live Bait**, someone is killing old people in one Minneapolis neighborhood. The victims have nothing else in common, except history. A strong plot and entertaining dialogue make it worthwhile.



#### Now in Paper

**A Fountain Filled with Blood** by Julia Spencer-Fleming (\$6.99, St. Martin's/Minotaur -- See [BTWOF Lesbian Edition #1](#)). For more in this series featuring former Army pilot turned Episcopal priest Clare Ferguson, there's **Out of the Deep I Cry** (\$23.95, St. Martin's/Minotaur).

**The Book of Light** by Michele Blake (\$6.99, Berkley Prime Crime -- See [BTWOF Lesbian Edition #1](#)). Another woman Episcopal priest in a taut adventure reminiscent of *The Da Vinci Code*, only with more accurate scholarship.

#### Award Winners

**Maisie Dobbs** by Jacqueline Winspear (\$14, Penguin) won the Edgar Award for Best Mystery Novel of 2003. (See [BTWOF Lesbian Edition #5](#) for a full review.) Maisie is back in **Birds of a Feather** (\$25.00, Soho) which was well reviewed by Marilyn Stasio in *The New York Times Book Review*. Apparently, Maisie retains her unusual psychological approach to private

investigation, and her cases continue to deal with the traumatic aftermath of WWI.

**Death of a Nationalist** by Rebecca Pawel (\$12.00, Soho) won the Edgar Award for Best First Mystery. See [BTWOF Lesbian Edition #5](#).



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### Forthcoming Books To Watch Out For

Emma Donoghue's new novel, **Life Mask**, will be out in September. It promises to be "The luscious story of a famous eighteenth-century love triangle" featuring the unhappily married Lord Derby ("the richest man in the House of Lords"), the object of his affections, England's reigning queen of comedy, Eliza Farren, and his competitor for her affections, Anne Damer, sculptor and rumored Sapphist. It promises to be a hefty read (650 pages). It's been too long since *Slammerkin*. \$26, Harcourt.

In 1981 Marilynne Robinson published *Housekeeping*, a wonderfully quirky coming-of-age novel featuring Ruth, her sister Lucille, their sometimes-caretaking Aunt Sylvie and the odd train.... It quickly became a favorite in feminist bookstores everywhere. Even the movie version was wonderful. The long wait for another novel from Robinson's world view ends in November, but with fewer eccentric women: **Gilead**, an exploration of the bonds between fathers and sons, offers an account of one Reverend John Ames' life, as he prepares an account of himself and his forebears for his son. He considers his grandfather's fight for abolition, his father's pacifism, and his own life... \$23, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

### List-Mania

The Publishing Triangle, which published a "[100 Best Lesbian and Gay Novels](#)" list a few years ago has just released "[The 100 Best Lesbian and Gay Nonfiction Books](#)." The list was chosen from 722 titles by a team of thirteen judges. Fully a third of the "100 Best" are by women – which just about replicates the percentage of women on the panel.

### Awards

Ann-Marie MacDonald's **The Way the Crow Flies** won the Canadian Booksellers Association's Fiction Book of the Year Award.

Booksellers in the U.S. gave their Book Sense Book of the Year Fiction Award to *The Da Vinci Code*, but gave the Adult Nonfiction Award to Azar Nafisi's **Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books** and the Paperback Award to Sue Monk Kidd's **The Secret Life of Bees**.

Yours in spreading the words,  
Carol Seajay



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