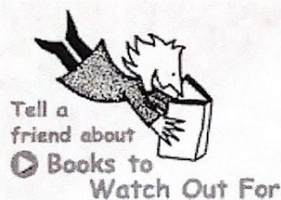


Print It Out

## The Lesbian Edition

- [PDF of this issue](#)

Volume 2 Number 4



Read the Last Issue of *Lambda Book Report Online*

The Lambda Literary Foundation (LLF) has just released the last issue in this incarnation of the *Lambda Book Report*. It's yours for the reading at:

<http://www.btwof.com/LBR/issue.html>

Readers are welcome to print out copies of the issue to read off line at their leisure.

**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 double issue was in production last June when publication of both the *Lambda Book Report* and the *James White Review* was suspended. With the support of both the LLF staff and Board of Directors, BTWOF publisher Carol Seajay (that would be yours truly) was able to snatch the issue from the jaws of oblivion, facilitate the completion of the issue, and bring it to online publication.

**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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"It's a great issue," Seajay said. "As a publisher I have quite a vivid understanding of how much work and how many dreams go into each issue of a book review, and I hated the idea of all this work ending up in a dumpster somewhere. So when I heard that the issue was 'nearly ready to go' I thought, 'We can save it.' Everyone pitched in and did all the work they normally would, then did a bit extra to accommodate the specifics of online publishing, and we did it. Now all of the articles, reviews, essays, and even the ads, are available online for everyone to enjoy."

While an online issue of an 80-page magazine is a bit different than BTWOF's usual publishing style, we hope that our readers will find plenty to enjoy in this unique, one-time offering and will agree with us that it was worth a deviation from our regular publishing schedule.

**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 LLF News:** The Foundation has announced the development of a new web site that will offer expanded services for the LGBTQ literary communities. The new site will be at [www.lambdaliterary.org](http://www.lambdaliterary.org). The Board also reports that the Lambda Literary Awards are on track for next spring and that long-time editor Patrick Merla will assume independent control and publication of the *James White Review*.

I hope you enjoy this unique issue.

**More Books for Women** will launch in 2005.  
» [Click here](#) to be notified when it launches.

Yours in spreading the words,  
Carol Seajay  
for *Books To Watch Out For*

\*\*\*\*\*



\*\*\*\*\*

#### 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.



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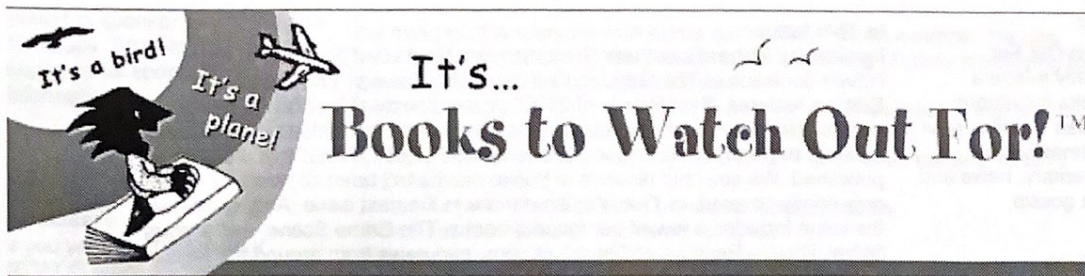
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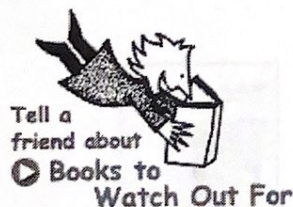
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#### A&M Books

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Celebrating Hotchclaw

From Ann Allen Shockley,  
author of the lesbian classic *Loving Her*,  
comes a tale of an Historically Black College on the brink of its One  
Hundredth anniversary – while internal academic conflicts and a  
shocking discovery about an admired faculty member create a  
fascinating maze of gender and racial identity issues.

Volume 2 Number 4

### The Lesbian Edition Returns!

**The Lesbian Edition** has been silent for too many months while I've been doing the background work of launching Books To Watch Out For's third publication, **More Books for Women** - resolving many of the ongoing technical challenges of inventing this kind of book review and literature support scheme, changing credit card service providers to one with an excellent security record (our old provider wasn't in the top rankings any longer and we aren't content with anything less than stellar ratings on credit card security), and sorting out the odd health challenges.

As much as I hated to take time from **The Lesbian Issue** to do any of these things, they were all essential to **TLE** and **BTWOF's** continued long-term survival. I knew when I launched **TLE** and **The Gay Men's Edition** that it would take all three publications to build a financial base solid enough to give them the support they need to flourish and I'm thrilled to have all three publications up and running. It took a little longer than I'd expected, but still, launching three publications in two and a half years is a huge success. Financial stability is a rare and lovely thing for lesbian publications and I'm trusting that this structure will create it.

The next step, of course, is to make sure that all the readers who love lesbian, feminist and gay books know about **Books To Watch Out For**. For that we rely on our readers as well as continually doing outreach in new directions. To help with that, I've hired Leigh Davidson, long time managing editor with Down There Press and before that with Volcano Press, as Assistant Publisher. Her hats include chief publicist, issue production, operations and admin management. It was a long hard summer after Suzanne left for a full-time job - remind me not to try to manage this publication without staff support, should I ever be foolish enough to try that again! Once Leigh's up and running, I look forward to actually having time to read (and review!) books again.

In the meantime, please accept my apology for the long delay between issues, and for the books not covered in 2005. We should be publishing regularly (10 issues/year) in 2006, and plan a few bonus issues toward making up for the lost time.



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The Lesbian Edition

Covers both lesbian books and the whole range of books lesbians like to read. It covers news of both the women in print movement and mainstream publishing. Written and compiled by Carol Seajay.

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More Books for Women

Covers the finest in thinking women's reading, plus mysteries, non-sexist children's books, and news from women's publishing. Written by the owners and staff at Women & Children First, and friends.

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\*\*\*\*\*

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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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In This Issue

Inspired by Richard's popular "Favorites and Bests for 05" article in the November issue of The Gay Men's Edition, this issue of **The Lesbian Edition** features "Best Reads of 2005" from a variety of lesbian editors and writers. We'll have more next issue, too. The issue also includes four reviews that had been written for issues of *The Lambda Book Report* that were never published. We selected reviews of books that hadn't been covered, or were only briefly covered, in **TLE**. We'll run more in the next issue. And, of course, the issue includes a few of our favorite books, *The Crime Scene*, and a great "What They're Reading at Charis" column, and news from around the lesbian publishing scene.

Our New Year's Resolution is to publish **The Lesbian Edition** early and often. And we wish you the best in the new year, and peace to us all, all around the world.

Yours in spreading the words,

Carol

PS: A quick reminder that nominations for the Lambda Literary Awards are open until December 31. For details: <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/awards.html>

Favorites and Bests for '05

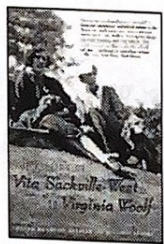
What Lesbian Writers and Editors are Reading

BTWOF wrote to 70 lesbian writers and editors and asked what their favorite reads of 2005 were. "Preferably but not necessarily books published in 2005, - preferably but not necessarily lesbian books, and a few words about why you like them," I wrote, and added that I was more interested in their favorites than a "best book of the year" conclusion.... Here are the first responses. We'll feature the rest next issue. -CS

Lucy Jane Bledsoe

Just a quick response because I'm off for Antarctica tomorrow - got a gig on an Australian "voyage" as a "lecturer" but I have a definite choice: **The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf** edited by Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell Leaska. Cleis reissued it a few years ago. It's such an amazing read because the letters are so passionate and funny and human. Who would have thought that brilliant and poetic Virginia Woolf could be whiny or jealous and even silly? Their freely expressed passion for each other is a joy to read. And Vita's endless dalliances are intriguing, as are Virginia's responses to them.

(Lucy Jane writes for both adults and middle schoolers. Her adult novels include *This Wild Silence* and *Working Parts*. Her kids' books include *The Antarctic Scoop* and *Hoop Girtz*. Forthcoming: *The Ice Cave: A Woman's Adventures from the Mohave to the Antarctic and, for the kids, How to Survive in Antarctica*.)



Nan Cinnater

My favorite book of 2005 was **Petty Treason** by Madeleine E. Robins, a wonderful historical mystery that's so entertaining it almost qualifies as a guilty pleasure. I reviewed it in TLE# 12. (Nan writes the mysteries columns for **The Lesbian Edition** and for **More Books for Women**. She co-ran Provincetown's wonderful mystery and gay bookstore, Now Voyager, for many years.)

Frédérique Delacoste

I spent a lot of the summer sipping Terry Castle's phenomenally delicious **Literature of Lesbianism**. Every queer person interested in history and literature should own a copy. Go and buy it now!

I was rattled by Orhan Pamuk's **Snow**, a difficult book but well worth the effort. Orhan Pamuk said in February in an interview with a Swiss newspaper that certain topics in Turkey were off limits for writers. He cited the genocide of





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the millions of Armenians and Kurds during WW1 as an example. He now faces prison for defaming the Turkish state. His timing (Turkey is lobbying to join the European Union) is impeccable.

I just re-read J.M. Coetzee **The Life and Times of Michael K** and am, once again, blown away by the power of Coetzee's writing.

**The Master** was extraordinarily absorbing - I have been reading Toibin's other books this fall.

I had fun with **The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson**.

Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus series is fab.

**Happy Baby** by Stephen Elliott knocked my socks off.

I am just reading **Stet** by Diana Athill (famed editor of Andre Deutsch) and loving it!

I look forward to Alison Bechdel's forthcoming novel and the republication of **The Illusionist** by Francoise Mallet-Joris. (Sorry this one is a plug for a Cleis forthcoming book but it really is excellent.)

I'm on my way to Paris this Christmas where, inspired by the wonderful biography by Judith Thurman (**Secrets of the Flesh**), I will be reading Colette.

(*Frédérique is a visionary, a publisher, and the co-founder of Cleis Press.*)

#### Emma Donoghue

Helen Humphreys' **Wild Dogs** - about a group of people whose dogs have run off to the woods - is a ravishingly written novel about the contrary pulls of danger and home, by a Canadian lesbian novelist who deserves to be an international name.

(*Emma is an Irish writer living in Canada; her books include Life Mask, The Woman Who Gave Birth To Rabbits, Slammerkin, Kissing The Witch, Hood, and Stirfry. Touchy Subjects, stories about contemporary controversies and embarrassing topics, comes out from Harcourt in June.*)



#### Jewelle Gomez

My favorite book this year is from another year: **Tipping the Velvet**, by Sarah Waters. I was on the Olivia Writers Salon Cruise with her in the spring, so decided to re-read her novel. I was as moved and impressed as I was the first time around, the year it won the Lammy. -It made me want to rent the DVD. After that I was still craving her words so I read her second novel, **Affinity**. Wow, she can write!!!

(*Jewelle's books include Don't Explain and the very, very, very wonderful Gilda Stories.*)

#### Seraphina Granelli

**Lesbian Book - Sleep With Me** by Joanna Briscoe - It's a dark and chilling tale of love, lust, madness, delusion and deception. The novel is told alternately through the eyes of Richard, a literary supplement editor, and his fiancée Leila, an academic. The book opens with the giddy conception of their first child and a post-coital scramble to a friend's party. At that party is Sylvie, a somewhat mousey woman who seems to fade into the background so much that Richard and Leila barely notice her. Over time Sylvie seems to crop up everywhere and strikes up separate friendships with both Richard and Leila and her influence reverberates loudly.

Briscoe weaves the different strands expertly into a genuine page-turner and the mounting tension is superbly executed. It's a difficult book to pin down and indeed this is part of its strength - it's a thriller, it's a love story, it's a darkly erotic book and it's got a strain of gothic horror. The writing is by turns beautifully delicate and then shockingly brutal, and Briscoe skillfully conjures many memorable scenes. Sublime.



**Non-Lesbian Book - The Time Traveler's Wife** by Audrey Niffenegger - I think most people probably know what its about by now but for the uninitiated: Henry suffers from Chrono-Displacement Disorder which means that periodically his genetic clock resets and he finds himself pulled suddenly into his past or future. He meets his future wife Claire when she is 6 and he is 36; they get married when she is 22 and he is 30. Henry's time travelling is spontaneous and sometimes he has great fun adventures, but other times his experiences can be painful and harrowing. The novel follows Henry back and forth to chart his relationship with Claire and the events are related



alternately by both of them.

Hugely original and unbearably moving, this book doesn't feel like a debut novel at all. Niffenegger writes with immense confidence and her prose is both lyrical and raw. Not many books have made me cry but this one did several times and it wasn't necessarily because something was sad, it was also because of its beauty.

*(Seraphina manages Libertas - the British lesbian bookstore that morphed into an online-sales site, [www.libertas.co.uk](http://www.libertas.co.uk), and edits its magazine Dykelife. Both the website - which features a marvelous selection of interviews with lesbian writers - and the magazine are great resources that aren't well enough known on this side of the big puddle.)*

#### Susan Hawthorne

I was lucky enough to be invited to be part of the York Lesbian Festival held in York, England in late October.

There I met Diana Souhami. I had long admired her biography of **Gluck**, but here she was with another biography, **Wild Girls**, this one about Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks. Diana Souhami is such a pleasure to read. She combines lesbian wit with fine scholarship, great readability and a wonderfully dry sense of humor. So taken was I, that I have also since read **Gertrude and Alice** with its appreciation of the combined strengths of these two famous lesbians. And after that, **The Trials of Radclyffe Hall**. I walked away from this with more admiration for Radclyffe Hall's courage and stamina than I'd had before, but less taken with the character of Lady Una Troubridge. I recommend all of her books to readers of biography.

On my list of summer reading (I'm in Australia): Jeanette Winterson's **Weight**.

And a couple from our own press (which will celebrate 15 years of independent feminist and lesbian publishing with a big bash in February). Jenny Kelly's fabulous book on lesbians and menopause, **Zest for Life** provides a great model for how menopause could be regarded in the mainstream. Lesbians have developed strategies for dealing with this life shift. Diane Bell's novel, **Evil**, is a great read for lesbians and feminists who want a book that might reflect their own experiences of the last decade. *(Susan is the Publisher at Australia's Spinifex Press and is also a poet, novelist, and theorist. Her books include The Butterfly Effect - to be released in North America in April, The Falling Woman, and Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation and Bio/diversity.)*



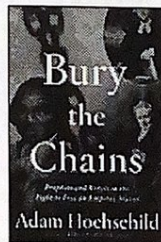
#### Amy Hoffman

Paul Simon once sang, "When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school / It's a wonder I can think at all."

Having gone to high school in a backwater New Jersey suburb in the cold-war 1960s, I know exactly what he means, and relearning history, in particular, has become one of the projects of my adult life. **Bury The Chains** by Adam Hochschild, about the British antislavery movement, is terrific "people's history" - a story of courageous organizing on all levels, from working "within the system," to boycotts, slave rebellions - and media campaigns, 19th century style. The famous diagram of the interior of a slave ship is so recognizable now because it was a widely distributed abolitionist poster. The book is eye-opening, inspiring, and thrilling - I couldn't put it down.

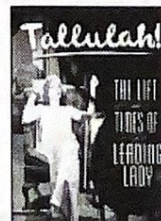
I also recommend Hochschild's **King Leopold's Ghost** about the looting of the Congo and the killing and enslavement of its people by Belgium's King Leopold II in the late 19th century.

*Amy is Editor in Chief of the newly revived Women's Review of Books and the author of Hospital Time. Her prequel memoir-in-progress, An Army of Ex-Lovers, is about being an editor at the Boston weekly Gay Community News in the late 1970s.)*



#### Fay Jacobs

My favorite book of 2005 was the wonderful biography of Tallulah Bankhead, **Tallulah! The Life and Times of a Leading Lady**, by Joel Lobenthal. As a film and theatre lover as well as someone curious about lesbian life back when, the book was a treat. While it sometimes provided more detail about the films and scripts than I could absorb, it was grand to hear that there was a whole lot of serious Sapphic canoodling going on backstage and behind the



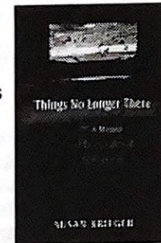


cameras - and lots of famous folks involved. The book names names and gives a fantastic peek at lesbian life as far back as 1920. And Tallulah herself was scandalously outrageous!  
(*Fay is author of As I Lay Frying: A Rehoboth Beach Memoir.*)

**Karla Jay**

**Things No Longer There: A Memoir of Losing Sight and Finding Vision** by Susan Krieger is a series of poetic meditations/essays and a novella on the changing nature of the outer world - landscapes, relationships, and perhaps most importantly, the author's shifting, diminishing sight due to a rare condition known as birdshot retinopathy. Only our inner experiences - memories and emotions, for instance, have a crystalline stability. As someone who has also lost my own sight recently, I was inspired by Krieger's ability to enjoy her present, to re-evaluate her past, and to connect both to her lesbianism. The book is also available in HTML format and in audio format for the print-impaired. Though the recording is a bit amateurish, I was grateful that it exists at all for there are few recordings made of lesbian material.

(*Karla is the Vice President of the Lambda Literary Foundation and has written, edited, and translated ten books, the most recent of which is Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation.*)



**Karin Kallmaker**

With limited time for reading pleasure, the fact that I got to read aloud, savor, study and outright wallow in **Pride & Prejudice** as legitimate work research made my summer.  
(*Karin is the author of the recently released Just Like That, a.k.a. Pride & Prejudice: The Lesbian Edition.*)

**Stacey Lewis**

Here are some of my faves, and thanks for asking me!

1. **Everyone Into the Pool: True Tales** by Beth Lisick - She's the best kind of storyteller - utterly original, naturally hilarious, wisely observant, and completely down-to-earth. Those who like David Sedaris, Sarah Vowell, Marjane Satrapi or Julie Doucet will absolutely love this book.
2. **Colors Insulting to Nature** by Cintra Wilson - My co-worker turned me on to the sassy Cintra Wilson and now I'm hooked. This perfectly hilarious novel tells of Liza Normal's coming-of-age among queers, punks, hippies, drama queens, and coke-heads in 70s-80s Northern California.
3. **Entering Fire** by Rikki Ducornet (City Lights) - "Rikki don't lose that number . . ." Yep, she's that Rikki and her novel, *Entering Fire*, is absolutely lush and sensual.
4. **The Freedom: Shadows and Hallucinations in Occupied Iraq** by Christian Parenti - Daily casualty reports in Iraq do not shed light on what's really happening there - this book does. Christian Parenti bravely travels with American soldiers on tours of duty, interviews Iraqi resistance fighters who do not accept U.S. intervention, and talks to Iraqi civilians whose distrust grows as relatives and friends are killed, and food, water and electricity - basic infrastructure - erodes.
5. **Atomik Aztex** by Sesshu Foster (City Lights) - Don't bother heading to the movies this holiday season. The one created in your head by this book is so action-packed and mind-blowing, you'll need some spiked cider before and after the read to make sense of it all. Enjoy!
6. I'm lucky enough to have gotten my hands on an advance copy of Michelle Tea's forthcoming novel **Rose of No Man's Land** (February). It will surely land on my list of favorites for next year as well as this.  
(*Stacey is Publicity and Marketing Director at City Lights Publishers.*)

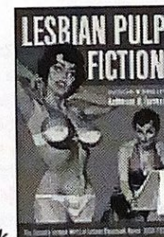
**Joy Parks**

That's easy.

My favorite of 2005 was **A Seahorse Year**, by Stacey D'Erasmus, (even though it came out in very late 2004) simply because it's so beautifully written. Well crafted prose, believable characters I'd actually want to know, a moving plot (so rare!) and probably the best description of a dress I've ever read.

I was pretty fond of Katherine V. Forrest's **Lesbian Pulp Fiction**, too.

(*Joy reviews for Publisher's Weekly and the weekend book*)





sections of several dailies throughout North America. In 2006, her short fiction will appear in collections from *Bella*, *Alyson* and *Arsenal Pulp*.)

#### Rachel Pepper

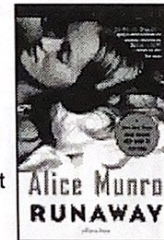
If you missed *A Seahorse Year* in its hardcover release last year, as I did, you'll be delighted to know that the paperback is freshly out. So you now have no excuse for not picking up this Lambda Literary Award winning novel by Stacey D'Erasmus, who's also the author of the novel *Tea*. *A Seahorse Year* is that rare book - a beautifully written and sophisticated novel by a lesbian author which includes gay characters, but transcends the boundaries of what we sometimes consider lesbian fiction. It's the story of a family living in San Francisco - gay father Hal, biological mother Nan, her partner of seven years Marina, and the 16-year-old boy at the book's heart, their son Christopher. As Christopher descends into schizophrenia, those around him, including his parents and girlfriend Tamara, must come to terms with his condition, with their relationship to him, and to each other. I was particularly impressed with the author's handling of the delicate trio that the biological parents form with the mother's live-in partner, a portrayal that is quite a rarity in our community's literature. The City by the Bay also takes its rightful place in the story, and D'Erasmus gets her details just right - the weather, the native plants, the East Bay's artists' lofts, the Mission district's lively coffeehouses, even the house purchased cheaply by Hal from a gang of Hell's Angels now worth a fortune, all are sketched by someone who clearly did her research and cared enough to get it right. Most impressively, D'Erasmus gets easily inside all her character's heads, even capturing what it's like as Christopher battles the demons that threaten to bring heartbreak to his whole family. If you've been looking for a wonderful lesbian-themed novel to read, make it your New Year's resolution to start off 2006 by reading *A Seahorse Year*.



(Rachel's tell-all and guidebook, *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians*, was just released in a new edition. She's been a bookseller at *Women & Children First* and *A Different Light* and owned the late, lamented *Bernal Books*.)

#### Kris Radish

Alice Munro has always captured life in a way that is breathtakingly simple yet elegant. In her latest book, *Runaway*, Munro waltzes into worlds of conflict, turmoil, seduction, temptation, loss - worlds of emotion with words strung together that make readers dizzy with pleasure. I read this book as if I were sipping expensive wine, holding it in my mouth for a very long time, and then swallowing it slowly. The short story collection is not lesbian focused but her stories land solidly on the heart of every woman. I usually read fast. I often swallow books whole and digest them quickly. The writing in *Runaway* is so beautiful and rich I read each story slowly and then literally slept with the book under my pillow. I now keep it next to my computer and look at it, sometimes just touch the cover, when I write every single day. It's one of the best books ever written. Read it. You will sleep with it too, and your girlfriend won't even be jealous.



(Kris is the Bantam Dell bestselling author of *The Elegant Gathering of White Snows* and *Dancing Naked at the Edge of Dawn*. Her third novel, *Annie Freeman's Fabulous Traveling Funeral* will be released in January; *The Sunday List of Dreams* is scheduled for 2007. Tour details at: [www.krisradish.com](http://www.krisradish.com).)

#### Sarah Schulman

My favorite reads this year were: *Madame Bovary*, *Rent Girl* by Michelle Tea, *Veronica* by Mary Gaitskill, *Sarah Bernhardt: The Art Of High Drama*. All of these books are eccentric and about eccentric powerful personalities persevering against absurdities invisible to the more homogenous. Mary Gaitskill, in particular, has always been one of my favorite writers. She's a deeply singular stylist, which I admire.



(Sarah's forthcoming publications include a new novel, *The Child*, a new play, *Carson McCullers*, and a reprint of *Empathy*; in print titles include *Girls*, *Visions*, and *Everything*, *My American History* and *Stagestruck*.)



Susan Stinson

I loved **The Beautifully Worthless** by Ali Liebegott, a book length poem that (to hijack one of her images) races down the road toward the last light in a late sky with an urgency that made me think it really might be quick enough to let the driver, the reader, and a Dalmatian named Rorschach squeeze through on our stomachs, out of this world and into the next. How could I not love a book that cares this much, looks this hard, and counts its pennies like a runaway waitress counting spilled salt stars?



I also loved the 1994 title, **Our Own Snug Fireside:**

**Images of the New England Home: 1760- 1860** by Jane C. Nylander. Although it is a work of nonfiction using women's diaries and letters to provide information about domestic life in this place and time, the fact that the book dwells with tender exactitude on things like the white sand that New England women used to sweep in herringbone patterns across their wooden floors gives it unexpected common ground with *The Beautifully Worthless*, although the history is about being grounded in daily life and the poem is about flight.

(Susan's novels include the beloved *Fat Girl Dances with Rocks and Venus of Chalk*. She is at work on *Spider in a Tree*, a novel based on the family life of the eighteenth century theologian Jonathan Edwards.)

June Thomas

June Thomas weighs in, on Slate.com, with **I Didn't Do It for You: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation**, Michela Wrong's history of Eritrea, and Alison Bechdel's **Invasion of the Dykes To Watch Out For**, which inspired her to go back and read the ten previous books as well.

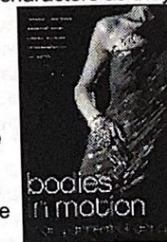
(June is currently Foreign Editor at Slate.com. She has a long history of work with various feminist presses and periodicals in both the U.K. and the U.S.)

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this feast. We'll be back in the next issue with more Favorite Reads in 2005. -CS

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#### Find(s) of the Issue

There's a lot to be said for Mary Anne Mohanraj's **Bodies in Motion** – vivid writing, good story telling, the pleasant intrigue of tracking characters as they move across continents and oceans, marry (or not), and age.... But what lingers is her exquisite success at writing gay family members back into the immigrant story as well as Ceylonese history. She gives us a new lens with which to see a late-night (life-changing) meeting between an "ugly sister" ("too short, too-plump Mangai with her coarse hair and flat chest") and her brother's new bride, a new way to think about "all those women's card games," and a glimpse into the cracks between tradition and reality where women make their own way. Mohanraj's interlocking stories affirm what we have always known – that women-loving women have always been everywhere, no matter how oblivious others may be. The women (and men) in her stories make difficult choices as they wrestle through life's opportunities, limitations, and conflicts, be they the modern generation in America or an aging woman in a fishing village continuing on after her "servant" (ahem: look again) dies.... But all decisions have ramifications and Mohanraj is even better at portraying those than she is at portraying her characters' passions – which is saying a lot. \$22.95, HarperCollins.



Ana Castillo (*Peel My Love Like an Onion, So Far from God, The Mixquiahuala Letters, Loverboys, My Father Was a Toltec*) offers us another immigration epic – this one a novel written in verse – in **Watercolor Women/Opaque Men**. Richer in image and context than plot, perhaps, it begins on the shifting sands of California's migrant communities as a young girl tries to make sense of her parents love for each other, meanders through the winter "vacation" trips "back home" where only the members of her extended family have to share a single outhouse, then swerves north to



Chicago (with her rebellious Aunt Renata) on what seems to be a wonderful adventure until her aunt abandons her there. Castillo isn't a writer to let anyone (or any institution) off easy, nor are there any easy answers here: education, marriage, lovers (both male and female) fail to provide salvation – or even much security. Ultimately a woman, or at least the *she/ella* of this tale, must find wholeness, integration, and peace within herself. Best read slowly, letting each chapter sink in before moving to the next. I found myself impatient at times, wanting the conventions of plot while I was reading it. But months later, many of Castillo's images, characters, and situations still resonate in the clear contexts she conveys, and I wouldn't want to be without them. \$15, Curbstone Press.



I was so eager to read Diana Souhami's **Wild Girls: Paris, Sappho & Art – The Lives and Loves of Natalie Barney & Romaine Brooks** that I almost ordered the British edition last year. The cloth edition has just been released in the U.S., while the Brits and Canadians are already reading paperback editions. Erg! Where is globalization when you need it?

In the version of the story that I first heard, Romaine Brooks left Natalie Barney, after 50-some years of non-monogamy, when Barney brought home a woman she'd met on a park bench. Diana Souhami offers an even richer version of their lives in **Wild Girls**. Natalie Clifford Barney, with her Paris salons, her passion for life, women, love (and many many lovers), and her attempts to (re)create a Sapphic idyll in her own time, has long been the stuff of lesbian and feminist legends. It's an irresistible piece of lesbian history. \$29.95, St. Martin's Press



The big *manga* (Japanese comics) craze has nothing on the lesbian community: we've had Alison Bechdel penning the hysterically funny, frighteningly profound *Dykes to Watch Out For* for 25(!) years. Bechdel is one of our country's most insightful commentators, though most of the media is too lesbophobic to see it and publish *Dykes* as widely as they should..

She's in top form with her most recent collection, **Invasion of the Dykes to Watch Out For**. Our intrepid, incorrigible, indefatigable, and, yes Mr. Bush,



Mr. Limbaugh, and Mr. O'Reilly, *inevitable* heroines tackle our country's absurd politics, fight for gay marriage rights (if they believe in marriage or not), fall in (and out of) love, maintain their relationships, raise the kids, strive to make a living in this economy, fight to save a deteriorating democracy, and provide us all with desperately

needed laughs and perspective on it all. No sanity-based lesbian (or gay or queer or straight) household should be without one. \$14.95, Alyson Books.

Not convinced? Read some scripts online at:

<http://www.dykestowatchoutfor.com/>

Read the blog:

<http://alisonbechdel.blogspot.com/>

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### Celebrating Shockley - and Hotchclaw

Ann Allen Shockley burst into the lesbian publishing world in 1974 with **Loving Her** (published by Bobbs-Merrill, published mass market by Avon in 1978, currently in print from Northeastern University Press) with our first novel about an interracial lesbian relationship written by a black woman. It was gutsy, it was good, and it was erotic and I used to sell it in stacks to women who bought copies of the mass market edition to give to all their friends. She followed it with a collection of short stories, **The Black and White of It** (published by Naiad in 1980) and then, in 1982 with the outrageous (and sadly out of print) **Say Jesus and Come to Me**, which featured charismatic revival preacher Myrtle Black, her passion for social justice (which leads her to organize a march to protest the murder of two prostitutes), and her growing attraction for singer Travis Lee, who looks to religion – and Myrtle – for solace after that last wretched night with her boyfriend.



It's been a long wait, but Shockley is back with **Celebrating Hotchclaw**,



published by A & M Books. And she's once again exploring the boundaries of attraction and sexuality, addressing the banality of racism, and now exploring gender identity – all while giving a painless crash course on the history and financing of Historically Black Colleges. Hotchclaw, a fictionalized HBC, is preparing to celebrate its 100th anniversary. The place is as teeming with personalities, conflicts (professional and otherwise), and financial problems as you might expect. I hate to give anything away, so I'll only say that lesbian readers will, ultimately, find the book satisfying, but that contemporary gender-queers might have to consider that the book is set in the '80s and that it has, indeed, taken another twenty years for one of the premises to manifest in our culture. \$17, A&M Books.

Welcome back to publishing, Ann Allen Shockley. We have missed you and hope you have a few more books up your sleeve, ready to be published.

A&M, which publishes the Sarah Aldridge novels, as well as Fay Jacob's *As I Lay Frying*, doesn't have wide distribution. Look for all their books at your neighborhood women's or gay bookstore (or call or order online if your "local" store is more than driving distance away) or order directly from the publisher via:

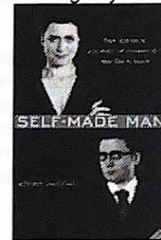
[www.sarahaldrige.com](http://www.sarahaldrige.com)

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### Dyke Eye on the Straight Guys

Nora Vincent offers a "Dyke Eye on the Straight Guys" in **Self-Made Man: A Woman's Journey into Manhood and Back Again**.

Researcher/writer/journalist Nora Vincent is a lesbian and isn't at all afraid to say so. Indeed, that's part of what makes her book so interesting: Dykes rarely get such a clearly dyke-identified perspective on the male 50% of the population. – And it's clearly her detached, "outsider" perspective on straight men that informs her sharp perspective while it also offers a certain comforting detachment for straight women reading the book. Ironically, I suspect it's her lack of sexual interest in the guys she's studying that, ultimately, makes the book safe and accessible for straight men.



Struck by how totally differently the men on her block related to her one night when she was dressed to accompany a friend to a Drag King show, Vincent found herself wondering what men's lives were really like and set out to find out. A tall woman who is occasionally "sir-ed" in public, she worked out to build upper body mass, learned to paste on a five o'clock shadow, bought the clothes, got some voice coaching, practiced walking the walk and talking the talk, then set out on an 18-month exploration of men and men's worlds. Passing as "Ned" she joined a bowling team, worked a number of jobs, dated women, and checked out the company of men in strip clubs, on a retreat in a monastery, and in a men's therapy group modeled on Robert Bly's "Iron John" groups.

In **Self-Made Man**, she writes about her experiences, insights, the friendships she develops, the reactions she gets when she "comes clean" to guys who know her to be a man, and about the impact the experiences had on her. Ultimately it's her willingness to put all the contradictions on the page, and her deep sympathies for men, women, lesbians, and herself in these situations that make the book both fascinating and engaging.

And, for once, the media and I agree. Look for Vincent on *20/20* (Jan. 23) and on *Good Morning America*, (*Oprah* are you listening? *Ellen*?), for an excerpt in *People* (January), and an interview in *Time*. This might be one of the rare occasions when national media actually credits a dyke perspective. Stay tuned to find out. Viking claims an 80,000-copy first printing. \$24.95, Viking.

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### A Girl on the Road

Katia Noyes turns the girl-on-the-road narrative inside out with **Crashing America**. Instead of running away to the big city, seventeen-year-old Girl (whose Dad is too busy with a new family to raise her, whose Grandad is too busy staying sober to cope with her shenanigans, and whose mom has long since lost her life to the tarnished tinsel of Girl's San Francisco hometown), loses it entirely the night her girlfriend dies an electrical death while crashing



in a BART tunnel and runs away to America's heartland where she hopes to find some kind of salvation amid the wide blue skies and the greens of growing corn.

Salvation is easier dreamed of than found, but a Christian dancer-girl, a stint of corn detasseling, lovers and friends she makes (and loses) along the way, and her own wits hold her together while she finishes the job of raising herself. It's an insightful and compelling coming-of-age novel set in difficult times, a very good read, and a sometimes scary glimpse into the worlds of lesbian youth. \$14.95 Alyson.



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### Science Fiction

Not a lesbian in sight, but Kit Reed's **Thinner than Thou** will take you on a riotous tour of a dystopian near-future where work-out palaces are the new churches, AfterFat has replaced Heaven as the ultimate goal, and people will modify their bodies right into oblivion (literally) to maintain the illusion of youth.



It all starts innocently enough: Betz' sister, Annie is "in trouble" (in this world, that's bulimic, not pregnant) and when her parents send her off to a clinic for troubled teens, Betz and Annie's boyfriend smell a rat and set off to find her. Their journey takes them into the heart of a not-so-far-fetched world of evangelical corporate capitalism run amok.

Two of Reed's earlier books, *Little Sisters of the Apocalypse* and *Weird Women, Wired Women*, were Tiptree Award finalists, and her YA novel, *The Ballad of T. Rantula*, made ALA's Best Books for Young Adults list. *Publisher's Weekly* calls her "One of our brightest cultural commentators." \$13.95, Tor.

If you like Reed's pessimistic humor, check out her new collection of short stories *Dogs of Truth*, \$14.95, Tor.

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### Bit Parts

In her novel **The Last Days of Dogtown**, Anita Diamant (*The Red Tent*) takes us to a backwater community that's already being abandoned in the early 1800s. Who's left? Widows, orphans, spinsters, free Africans, a few prostitutes, and others too poor to escape to a more prosperous community or who would be unwelcome in the new environs for other reasons. Diamant is a consummate story teller and here she includes among the Dogtownians two lesbians (who live by that one profession that's always available to women), an African woman who dresses as a man to ply her stonemason's trade, and a white woman who – sometimes – dares a relationship with an African man, amid several other memorable women. \$25, Scribner.

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### Back in Print

Three cheers for Insomniac Press for bringing Jane Rule's **Contract with the World** and her classic of classics, **This Is Not for You**, back into print.

In **Contract**, set in Vancouver in the mid-'70s, Rule writes of the intersections between artistic motivation, personal fulfillment, and sexual politics as experienced by a painter, a sculptor, a sound musician (a '70s version of performance artist), and a would-be writer as each does her or his best to find a home in the world.

But it's Rule's **This Is Not for You** that always steals my heart – even more than her better-known classic, *Desert of the Heart*. In part, undoubtedly, because I read it during my very impressionable youth when I, too, was in love with a girl who wanted to be a nun. Readers now, (myself included) will want to throw the book across the room and yell, "Just do it, already, and save the poor girl from having to leave the convent later!" Published as literary fiction in 1970, but finished in 1965, and set in the early



fifties, it's a difficult tale of a young woman, very much in love with her more naive best friend, but trapped in a double standard that forgives her own lesbianism but that doesn't allow her to "inflict" her desire on Esther. It is, perhaps, the lesbian version of *Brokeback Mountain's* line, "If you can't fix it, Jack, you gotta stand it." Rule did a brilliant job of presenting the restraints of the era, and I heartily recommend it to anyone who's willing to look at a version of the fifties and sixties that is a bit more somber than the lesbian pulps of the era portray. And it's a rather remarkable measure of the distance we've traveled, as a community and a society, in the last fifty years. \$16.95 paper (\$21.95 in Canada), Insomniac Press.

**Patience & Sarah**, that first sweet, self-published lesbian historical romance, is (finally!) back in print. Many thanks to Arsenal Pulp and the Little Sister's Classics series for putting it back into our hands. Alma Routsong (aka Isabel Miller) self-published it as *A Place for Us* in 1969 in a 1000-copy edition and sold it out of a shopping bag at Daughters of Bilitis meetings. McGraw Hill picked it up, then Book-of-the-Month Club, and the rest is history for one of the best selling books in the dykedom. This edition includes a wealth of supplemental material - Emma Donoghue on *P&S's* place in literary history, an afterward by Elizabeth Deran, Alma's lover while she was writing the book, program notes from the opera version, a wonderful obituary/biography and more - that put the novel in context and offer some fascinating glimpses into the writing of the book and the woman who wrote it. If you've ever had a warm spot in your heart for *P&S*, find a copy of this new edition to read all the additional materials. If you've never read it - indulge yourself. Set in the 1800s and inspired by a painting in a folk museum, it traces the growing love between the spinster daughter of a prosperous farmer and a cross-dressing daughter of a poor farmer and their flight "west" to escape convention and build a life together. \$16.95, paper, Arsenal Pulp Press.

**An Emergence of Green**, Katherine V. Forrest's 1986 classic tale of coming-out in the 'burbs, of men threatened by all that feminism offers women, of domestic violence, and of women finding their way into an increasingly feminist - and lesbian - future. This edition features a new introduction by Katherine Forrest and an afterward by Victoria Brownworth. \$16.95, Alice Street Editions/Harrington Park/Haworth Press.

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#### Just Out in Paperback

**The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall**, edited by Terry Castle. - An 1100-page compilation of everything written about or by lesbians from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, with introductions and commentary. It's a feast. No lesbian home should be without it. \$29.95 paper, Columbia University Press.

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#### Some Books to Watch Out For

2006 is shaping up to be a promising year for lesbian literature. Here are a few Books To Watch Out For:

A new Sara Waters novel: **Night Watch**, an engrossing tale of relationships set in war-torn London, (March) \$24.95, Riverhead.

A coming-of-age novel from Michelle Tea, **Rose in No Man's Land** (February 14), \$22, MacAdam/Cage.

**Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**, Alison Bechdel's long-awaited tale of growing up with a closeted, distant father in the family funeral parlor.... (June) \$19.95, Houghton Mifflin.

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## A Few Reviews

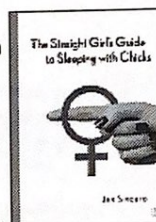
When the Lambda Book Report suspended publishing last summer, a number of reviews had been commissioned – and written – were left without a publishing venue. We've picked up some of the reviews of books that haven't already been covered in The Lesbian Edition. Some are below; others will be published in future issues.

### The Straight Girl's Guide to Sleeping with Chicks

by Jen Sincero

reviewed by Marissa Pareles

Lesbian sex is very popular. Even straight girls fool around with each other and with us - in high school and college, on the sly from boyfriends and in bed with boyfriends, and even at their own bridal showers, according to anecdotal evidence. Jen Sincero's **The Straight Girl's Guide to Sleeping with Chicks** confirms what many dykes have always suspected: Yes, Virginia, it does turn them on to sleep with us.



Some straight girls, suggests further anecdotal evidence, have surprising natural talent in this arena.

Some don't. "They don't need a guidebook to screw us over," says a lesbian friend of mine about Jen Sincero's *The Straight Girl's Guide to Sleeping with Chicks*. But her straight ex-squeeze certainly needed a guide to the screwing part.

Sincero's straightforward, energetic manual delivers, slogging only briefly through identity politics (suffice it to say that her use of "straight" is overwhelmingly broad) before sliding into detailed basics at a (somehow non-annoying) PR pitch. A self-proclaimed Kinsey 1.5 who's also a booster for dyke sex, Sincero instructs other straight girls in a girls-only technique she says "sends me through the roof" and "is so hot I can't even tell you how hot it is." That's just the introduction.

Sincero preps her readers well for dyke sex, telling bi-curious readers to locate their desires, ignore any omniscient moms or deities, purge homophobia, fantasize, cut their nails, and masturbate - all great advice, and accompanied by detailed, accessible anatomical diagrams and information that any non-gynecologist should review. It's here that Sincero's talent for explicit instruction shines: subsections devoted to finger, water play, humping, sex toys, and no-contact masturbation feature lists of positions and variations, along with cute, inspiring stories. It's not one of those *Cosmo* first-orgasm tipsheets that send dykes into tailspins of pity and depression.

Sincero gently takes her readers through meeting girls, evoking some porno fantasies - "have a slumber party/kegger at your sorority house, complete with...group sleeping area" - and plugging butch seduction power: "You may feel more turned on by the fact that [boots] make you feel masculine in a way that attracts chicks...It's very subtle, but it's totally hot." Safer sex instruction precedes foreplay, a surprising sensible move.

Sex instruction is the meat of the guide, laid out just like the masturbation section with a huge focus on creative techniques and positions. The gem of a cunnilingus section matter-of-factly quells first-time squeamishness, then hands out uniquely sophisticated menstrual sex (or not) tips. Each implement in a girl's "god-given toolbox" - tongue, lips, fingers, teeth, and face - gets its own list of techniques. The positions get really adventurous and obscure, some of the more difficult ones illustrated by photos of a tattooed Barbie doll going down on her brunette counterpart.

If dykes need a guide to straight-girl sexual psychology, this is it. Apparently, they're a lot like us. What makes this book really stand out for dyke and bi-dyke readers, though, is that while other guides seem ponderous, unsexy, or vague at times, Sincero makes lesbian sex ed simultaneously erotic ("Rub baby oil all over the tits of the other girl....Get on all fours and eat one person out while the other does you from behind"), instructional, and encouraging with one master stroke. She oughtta brush up on her cultural research, though; I can take blithe talk about "experimentation," but not Sincero's inclusion of out lesbians Cynthia Nixon and Sinéad O'Connor in a box called "Famous Straight Women Who've Dabbled"! \$12, Fireside.

<http://www.marissapareles.com/>



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## Brass

by *Helen Walsh*

reviewed by *Chelsea Jennings*

Helen Walsh will not waste your time with exposition. By page three of **Brass**, the novel's main character is coked up and having sex with a prostitute in a graveyard. This is where the book begins, and it's a good indication of where it's going. Walsh has created a relentlessly grimy, sprawling novel that has sex and substances in dizzying quantities, a book that goes ninety miles an hour from start to finish and leaves a good amount of carnage along the roadside.



In many respects, Walsh has taken cues from Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and given readers a contemporary version, centered around Millie, the book's feisty protagonist. The narration in *Brass* alternates between Millie's own voice and that of her friend Jamie, but Jamie's portion of the story revolves almost entirely around his relationship with Millie. On one hand, this leaves Jamie's character less developed than it could be, but it succeeds in painting Millie as both charismatic and self-involved, and provides a more rational lens for viewing her various exploits.

The unraveling of Jamie and Millie's friendship is one of the book's primary conflicts, but Millie also struggles to manage her relationship with her father and to deal with the absence of her mother while halfheartedly finishing her university education. She also runs into a lot of trouble finding female prostitutes who will accept female clients.

Outside of Jamie, Millie has very few meaningful relationships, and her whirlwind through Liverpool often finds her alone on a quest for drugs, sex and self-discovery. Because so much of *Brass* is about Millie's psychology, much like *Tropic of Cancer*, one of the main "characters" in the novel is the city itself. Millie's enthusiasm for the roughest and dirtiest parts of Liverpool is unwavering, and she often launches into descriptions of the city that correspond with her mood, such as the following:

*"Along Princess Avenue the barrio falls silent as we pass through rows and rows of derelict houses with haggard roof tops...but as we cross the junction that throws us into Catherine Street and away from the Toxteth cavity, it suddenly comes alive with brass, their johns, drunks and looting teenagers running from unknown locations in to the lawless, demented night. I love this city. I do. I fucking love it."*

Walsh often writes in rambling, stream-of-consciousness run-ons or sentence fragments and this, combined with her heavy use of slang, gives the whole book a very "spoken" feel. Millie and Jamie describe their observations and emotions in the present tense, as they occur, and because of this immediacy, their thoughts and feelings are often contradictory and startlingly human.

Part of what makes Millie so compelling is that she's smart - even when her choices are anything but sensible she's able to reflect on them and the people around her with great insight. She is constantly looking below the surface, to get "a glimpse of the girl behind the whore," for example, and to see the complexities of Liverpool's underworld. She's also an excellent liar and shamelessly manipulates even the people closest to her, and it's both fun and heartbreaking to watch her charm her way out of tight situations.

However, as the novel progresses, Millie's free-fall into drug abuse and hedonistic sex is so constant and direct that it can become tedious. There are only so many ways a cocaine binge or a liaison with a prostitute can play out - although to her credit, Walsh seems to have thought of them all. Perhaps the book's greatest flaw is that it is written more like a short story, barreling towards its conclusion without much of the relief or variety that well-integrated side-plots provide.

But the end of the novel makes the 200-page barrage of drug-induced sex scenes worthwhile. After braiding Millie and Jamie's voices together, Walsh resists the temptation to tie them neatly off at the end, and instead gives a series of plot twists that are both surprising and believable, and an ending that is satisfying without being simplistic.

Millie is a wild and charming protagonist who consistently does the inexcusable, then finds a way for the other characters - and the reader - to forgive her. But to get caught up in judging Millie, in either condemning or glamorizing her exploits, is to miss the point. *Brass*, in the end, is about redemption, and about the lengths we go to get there. \$14 300 pgs.,



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*Chelsea Jennings is a writer and teacher living in Washington DC.*

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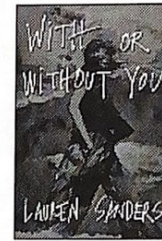
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## With or Without You

by *Lauren Sanders*

reviewed by Elisabeth Flynn

Lambda Award-winner Lauren Sanders' second novel, **With or Without You** (following *Kamikaze Lust*) gives us an anti-heroine of the first order. Lilian (Lily) G. Speck is a confessed murderer biding her time in a New York state women's lock-up, enduring psychiatric evaluations, scanning the headlines in the prison library, keeping tabs on her own press. The bulk of the narrative unfolds as Lily's diary, written as part memoir, part pained love letter to the young actress she shot to death.



The setting is the Reagan 80s: Iran-Contra and Bernie Goetz are making headlines, alongside MTV, parachute pants and 'Say No to Drugs.' It's the decade of runaway greed and throwaway culture; of cheap celebrity, drugs, money, status; a world where the greatest achievement of all is "to end up on television" - regardless of how you get there.

In Lily's case, how she got there is a bit of a mystery. Her dad's a successful advertising executive, and mom's a real estate whiz. Successful, attractive, and perennially inaccessible figures, Jack and Nancy (as Lily refers to them) are too enamored of their good fortune to pay much attention to Lily. Instead they smoke, drink, and stay out late, farming their daughter out to her grandparents and occasionally the next door neighbor, Blair - a boozy, melancholic stewardess on whom Lily develops a doomed early crush.

Young Lily doesn't relate to the other kids in her Long Island suburb. By high school she has few friends and no apparent interests outside of her sketch pad and her favorite television soap opera, "World Without End." Lily's real obsession turns out to be the show's hot young star, Brooke Harrison. Through most of her adolescence, Lily's own life co-exists with a fantasy world in which Brooke is the center, and the two of them share an unshakeable bond as best friends, confidants, and perhaps lovers, although it's never made clear.

In an ambitious but somewhat uneven approach, Sanders jumps between Lily's present-day prison narrative, the painful childhood that led her here; and third person observations of her victim's mother as she watches her talented but inscrutable daughter's ascent to stardom with an anxiety that proves well-founded. These alternating voices juxtapose the rise of the self-possessed, apparently golden girl, Brooke, with Lily's own distinctly troubled adolescence. Their one brief, actual meeting will have tragic consequences for all.

Lily's sharp and cynical take on the world around her makes for some trenchant dark comedy, but it feels nearly too broad a target at times - the social climbing, pill popping, suburban melodrama - to address without invoking cliché. ("The cruelest joke is you can have everything you want and still be miserable. Money cannot buy happiness," Nancy tells Lily at one point, as if this weren't abundantly clear).

At times it's hard to know just who *is* the real Lilian - the seen-it-all, wisecracking convict or the lonely, vulnerable girl desperate for some sign of affection. The truth seems to be a little of both.

Most things in Lily's 'real' life seem to her to be phony - her father's ads; her mother's high-flying lifestyle; even their eventual attempts at reconciliation. During one of her prison visits Nancy appears overcome and starts to reach for a tissue, but Lily remains unconvinced. "Make no mistake, she's not crying but the gesture seems to comfort her. A million miles away on Planet Recovery, Nancy can't see that I'm still lying on the ground after falling off a roof. Still waiting for a mother who won't touch me or talk to me. A mother who can't see me without seeing herself."

The intensity of Lily's loneliness and isolation are palpable here and the moment, in a novel of missed connections, encapsulates a great deal. When her mother finally rises to leave, Lily feels a moment of fleeting sympathy and almost-remorse: "A jolt of longing for the life I'll never have shoots through me. Then I remember my mother's face and understand what few



people ever acknowledge: it's not so great out there, either."

Early in the book there's a reference to John Lennon's murder, and later to John Hinckley Jr.'s shooting of President Reagan (for 'that actress,' as Lily notes). With Lily's act of desperate, misdirected violence, Sanders seems to be drawing some kind of parallel. She's a talented writer with something to say about teen angst and the dark side of our celebrity-obsessed culture, but with so few light moments to offset the darkness that seems to pervade Lily's narrative, it's hard not to find this warped fairy tale of Long Island fairly grim. *Elisabeth Flynn is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia. Her work has appeared in the San Francisco Bay Guardian, Bay Area Reporter and American Art Review.*

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## The Bermudez Triangle

by *Maureen Johnson*

reviewed by *Nancy Garden*

It's not what you think.

No one really disappears in **The Bermudez Triangle** the way people and ships do in its near namesake, and the triangle in question doesn't involve two people in love with the same person, or one person in love with two people.

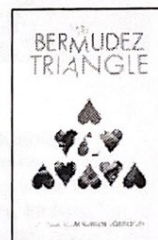
This triangle is made up of three best friends, Nina Bermudez, Avery Dekker, and Melanie (Mel) Forrest, seniors in high school. For years the girls have "triangled off" periodically, forming a triangle pattern and chanting a verse ending with a cry of "Triangle power!" - hence the book's title. They don't do that much any more, but their friendship is still as strong as ever. When the book opens, the three are about to be separated for the first time. Avery and Melanie are going to be waitresses at a local restaurant and bar, but Nina is going away to take part in a summer "precollege" program.

While Nina is away, she meets and falls in love with fellow precollege student Steve. Back at home one morning after a drunken party, Mel wakes up with Avery after a sleepover and kisses her. As it turns out, Avery has been thinking about kissing Mel, too, but much as she loves Mel, she isn't sure she loves her as she would if she were gay. Mel, however, has "known for a long time that this was going to happen someday;" she's pretty sure *she* is probably gay.

So begins this engaging young adult novel, part romp, and part serious exploration of the developing sexualities and changing emotions of three feisty, witty teenage girls. It's funny and charming, suspenseful and sad, and seems very much on target in the fluidity and changeability of the teens' complicated relationships with one another and with others, including a few boys. The three best friends care deeply for one another and are intensely loyal, but even so, as one might expect, conflicts and misunderstandings do arise. Johnson shows their triangle breaking apart and joining together as the girls' relationships with one another and with outsiders ebb and flow. She has managed to tell each girl's story separately while at the same time weaving it skillfully into the stories of the other two. I ached for each girl's pain, rejoiced in the depth of their caring, and laughed out loud at their clever repartee.

At 370 pages, this is long for a young adult novel; Nina comes back from her summer program on page 77, and the story continues well into the school year. Although it is entertaining and absorbing for the most part, and although Johnson is a good writer, I think the story could have profited from some tightening, for at times, the pace seemed to lag. There are no scenes that are "bad" or that seem in themselves expendable, and yet I'm not sure that all are necessary or really add to the story. Perhaps culling a few and making numerous small cuts of words, phrases, and sentences throughout would have tightened the book and speeded up its pace.

Also, although the teen characters are very real, and although their banter is clever and fun, I couldn't help but wish that Johnson had given them more distinctly individual voices. Yes, we're told they look different and have different talents and interests; yes, it's clear that Nina's straight, Mel's gay, and Avery is probably bi - but when they talk, they pretty much sound the same. In fact, all the teenage characters tend to sound the same, all equally clever. Although the dialogue is fun to read and sounds authentic, and although real-life teens do tend to express themselves similarly, the absence of any variations, even slight ones, in these characters' voices tends to





diminish their individuality, even to the point of sometimes making it difficult to distinguish among them, and especially to distinguish between Mel and Avery.

Still, *The Bermudez Triangle* is a good read, both fun and poignant, and the sweet ending is a just about perfect resolution to the drama of the lives of these three likeable girls. \$16.99 cloth, 370 pages, Razorbill/Penguin  
*Nancy Garden was one of the first to successfully publish lesbian and gay YA books, including the beloved Annie on My Mind and Good Moon Rising, The Case of the Stolen Scarab (for middle-schoolers), Molly's Family (for the pre-school set) and Nora and Liz, for the adult set. Look for her new YA novel, Endgame, an exploration of bullying, its devastating effects, and blame, in April.*

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### Tango Has Two Daddies

*And another review, from one of BTWOF's favorite librarians, of a truly delightful book for the inner kid in us all. -CS*

### And Tango Makes Three

*by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, illus. by Henry Cole*

reviewed by Kathleen T. Horning

A groundbreaking picture book, based on the true story of a penguin chick being raised by two male penguins in the Central Park Zoo. Back in 1998, workers at the zoo noticed that two male penguins, Roy and Silo, had become a couple. They did all of the things that pairs of male and female penguins typically do – building a nest together, sleeping together, and spending all of their time with each other. When zookeeper Rob Gramzay observed that the two were sitting on an egg-shaped rock, he got an idea: he took an abandoned fertilized egg and placed it in Roy and Silo's nest. The two took turns sitting on the egg until it hatched, and then they shared responsibility for taking care of the chick, named Tango by Gramzay. The straightforward narrative lends an understated eloquence to the story, which wisely refrains from humanizing the penguins. Henry Cole's subtle use of ice blue contrasts nicely with the requisite predominance of black and white, and his shifting perspectives underscore the drama inherent in the story. The book concludes with an authors' note that provides some additional information about the key players, although it was published before the highly publicized break up of Roy and Silo. Quite simply, this is the best picture book that's been published to date dealing with same-sex parents, and every gay/lesbian family - and every other family who celebrates diversity - will want to own a copy. For ages 3-7. \$14.95, cloth, Simon & Schuster.

*KT is the director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center at UW-Madison.*

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## What They're Reading at Charis

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 the women at Charis Books and More, Atlanta's awesome and wonderful treasure of a bookstore, what they're reading. Here's what they said:



### Sara Luce Look

**Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak** edited by Saleemah Abdul-Ghafur - The women in this collection, who have always been Muslim and also American, were chosen because they were willing to tell the truth about their lives. Saleemah traveled the country, looking for women who had claimed Islam for themselves. She deliberately sought out women who would represent the diversity of experience within Islam - including a lesbian who is under death threat for being who she is and claiming Islam for herself. This is a rich, respectful, enlightening book for all of us. \$15, Beacon.

**New and Selected Poems, Volume Two** by Mary Oliver - Mary Oliver is one of only a very few poets whose new books we always know we will be able to sell at Charis. This volume, like all of her books, is dedicated to her partner, Molly Malone Cook. It features 42 new poems, along with selections from several previously published volumes. Oliver's poems are full of nature, simple and beautiful, yet unsentimental: seeing the hawk and its prey as clearly as the tiger lily on the shore. The joy of reading Mary Oliver is the way she opens the reader's eyes to see the world and its wonder in such an everyday sort of way. \$24.95, Beacon.

In her new memoir, **Leaving the Saints**, Martha Beck continues the compelling, powerful story she began in *Expecting Adam* (\$13.95, Berkley). When Adam was a baby, Martha and family relocated from the intellectualism of Harvard back to their roots in Mormon Utah. Martha was prepared to enter into Mormon life wholeheartedly, with faith, and hope, and a kind of relief as they welcomed her and completely accepted Adam, who had Downs Syndrome. Intertwined with this very personal story, Martha learns and teaches the history of the Latter Day Saints. Though she leaves the Saints, as the title indicates, she does so with sorrow and love and offers the reader insight into a growing religion with gifts as well as enormous unsolved problems. \$14.95, Three Rivers Press.

**A Seahorse Year** by Stacey D'Erasmus - Now in paper, I loved this work of literary lesbian fiction about a "modern" family (lesbian mom, partner, and gay dad) and the mental breakdown of their son. \$13.00, Houghton Mifflin.



**Invasion of the Dykes To Watch Out For** by Alison Bechdel - Who can resist this latest collection? I never get to read them in the paper these days, so it's fun to devour the whole book in one sitting (and be left wanting more!) \$14.95, Alyson.

I've also been reading lots of galleys lately - Sarah Water's **Night Watch** (March), Michelle Tea's novel, **Rose of No Man's Land** (Feb. 14), and a novel called **Labyrinth**, by Kate Mosse (March), that I loved. - None of them



are out yet, but they're all coming soon.....

**Debby Gluckman:**

**Gourd Girls** by Priscilla Wilson - A wonderful memoir of two women who come out in rural North Georgia and their journey as they start an unusual business and find themselves creating community along the way. \$11.95, Mt. Yonah Press.

**Urgent Message From Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World** by Jean Shinoda Bolen - This is a call to action for all women to help save our planet and ourselves. With endorsements from the likes of Gloria Steinem and Alice Walker, this little book is a quick and thought-provoking read. \$16.95, Conari Press.

**Angela Gabriel:**

**Bliss** by Fiona Zedde - A Jamaican American woman travels back to Jamaica and reconnects with her family, as well as falls in love with a beautiful woman. This is a highly erotically charged first novel, with a fast-moving plot that keeps you hooked. \$14, Kensington.

**With a Rough Tongue: Femmes Write Porn** edited by Amber Dawn and Trish Kelly - Some "good, clean lesbian smut" that's smart and sexy! \$16.95, Arsenal Pulp.

Many thanks to Sara Luce Look for collecting this list, and to the women at Charis Books and The Charis Circle for all they do to support women's literature.

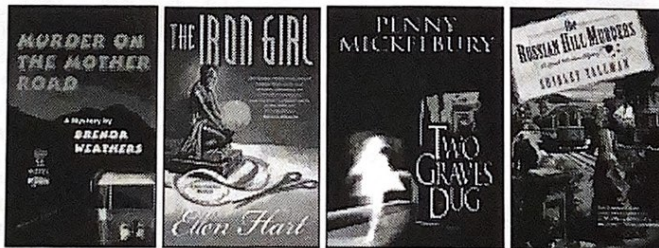
Charis celebrated 31 years of bookselling to women all over the South this fall. If you're in Atlanta, stop and see them. If you can't get there in person, you can always order online or by phone - which is a great way to thank them for their work.

Think Globally, Read Frequently, and Shop Politically - Spend your money where it will build community, not destroy it.

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## The Crime Scene

By Nan Cinnater



You know that lesbian RV-ing is a true cultural phenomenon when it has spawned its own small sub-genre of lesbian RV mysteries. First there were two by Ann Seale, **Packing Mrs. Phipps** (See TLE #6) and **Finding Ms. Wright** (both \$13.95, Alyson; see TLE #15). Now there's **Murder on the Mother Road** by Brenda Weathers (\$12.95, New Victoria), an atmospheric mystery set at a Bates-like motel on old Route 66 in the California desert. Libby Merchant is a fifty-something travel writer with good sense and a good rig; in fact, she's good company altogether. At the Knight's Rest Motel she runs into an old sorority sister, who is unable to speak and whose brother lies dead in their decrepit mobile home. From this promising beginning Weathers spins an enjoyably gloomy tale that veers between zaniness and dysfunction - much like old Route 66 itself.

Halfway through **Relationships Can Be Murder** by Jane DiLucchio (\$12.95, New Victoria) amateur sleuth Dee DeValle remarks to her sidekick, "Miss

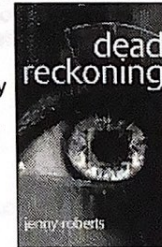


Marple would have this figured out by now." Dee may not be a lesbian Miss Marple, but DiLucchio is clearly aiming to be a lesbian Agatha Christie, with a light touch and a non-violent plot full of red herrings, numerous suspects, and multiple motives. Dee is a grade school teacher who recently had a fling with the murder victim, a television anchorwoman in LA, and that makes Dee one of the chief suspects. Dee's multicultural crew of lesbian friends rally round to help solve the murder and keep Dee out of jail. The friends are amusing (especially femme fatale Tully, short for Tallulah) and the plot sufficiently twisty to keep the reader guessing.

Ellen Hart created the template for a Christie-style lesbian mystery back in 1989 with **Hallowed Murder** (\$13.95, St. Martin's), and she is still the master. **The Iron Girl** is the thirteenth entry in Hart's series featuring Jane Lawless and Cordelia Thorn, one of the great sleuth/sidekick teams of all time (\$24.95, St. Martin's). In **The Iron Girl**, Jane is finally cleaning out her late girlfriend's things, and she is shocked to find a gun - linking her ex to past secrets and long unsolved murders.

African American writer Penny Mickelbury is a gem - a polished, sophisticated writer with great crossover potential. I'm happy to see that she has a new book out, **Two Graves Dug** (\$25.95, Five Star), introducing New York PI Phil Rodriguez and his partner, computer whiz Yolanda Aguilera. I was even happier, however, to see that Kings Crossing Press has made available all of Mickelbury's lesbian mysteries featuring Mimi Patterson and Gianna Maglione: **Keeping Secrets**, **Night Songs**, **Love Notes** and **Darkness Descending** (all \$14.95). Mickelbury's fictional police detective Gianna Maglione heads up the Hate Crimes Unit in Washington, DC, so all these books deal to some extent with the politics of hate. In the latest, **Darkness Descending** (published in December 2004), the hate crimes are directed against AGs and Doms (short for aggressive and dominant), a Black/Latina lesbian subculture that I knew nothing about. Mickelbury manages to educate about difficult issues and to create characters we care about while still maintaining taut suspense. Mickelbury has also written a non-lesbian series about attorney Carol Anne Gibson, consisting of **One Must Wait** (\$6.50 St. Martin's), **Where to Choose** (\$22, Simon & Schuster), **The Step Between** (\$17.95, Simon & Schuster), and **Paradise Interrupted** (published in hardcover by Simon & Schuster, now out of print). It's worth checking libraries and used bookstores for these hard-to-find titles.

Sometimes a girl just wants to walk the mean streets with a tough, plain-spoken private eye for company - even if the mean streets are in Manchester and the private eye is a British dyke with menstrual cramps. **Dead Reckoning** by Jenny Roberts (\$14.95) is the third mystery featuring PI Cameron McGill, following **Needlepoint** and **Breaking Point** (\$13.95, all published by Diva). In typical PI tradition, Cameron is balancing two cases here, one professional and one personal. In spite of her aversion to domestic cases, Cameron is following a presumably cheating husband, who turns out not to be dating another woman but transforming himself into one, on a transvestite's night out. Meanwhile, her best friend is in prison, having been set up on a charge of deadly assault. In her own way, Roberts does as neat a job as Mickelbury in educating about queer issues while keeping us turning the pages of this literate thriller.



Sandra Scoppetone has long been a favorite with lesbian mystery fans, notably for her witty series about New York lesbian private eye Lauren Laurano. (For details, see TLE #11.) Now she goes back to the source - the noir private eye literature of the Forties - for a non-lesbian novel featuring spunky secretary Faye Quick on the homefront in New York City, circa 1943. In **This Dame for Hire** (\$21.95, Ballantine) Faye is working as a private investigator, filling her boss's shoes while he is at war. You can almost hear the gum snap in Faye's pitch-perfect first-person narration, but occasionally you can also hear the scenery creak when Scoppetone's Forties ambience fails to convince.

Why is it that historical mysteries seem to offer more play than contemporary novels for authors' feminist impulses (witness Anne Perry, Elizabeth Peters, and Miriam Grace Monfriedo, among others)? Perhaps it's just the contrast between what we think of as "woman's place" in history and the strong



feminist characters these authors create. In any case, Shirley Tallman joins the ranks with **The Nob Hill Murders**, about nineteenth century San Francisco attorney Sarah Woolson, followed by **The Russian Hill Murders** (both \$23.95, St. Martin's/Minotaur). In **The Russian Hill Murders**, Sarah becomes involved in Chinatown intrigue when the Chinese cook at a charity dinner is accused of poisoning a society matron. The plot also involves such progressive issues as sweatshop conditions and health care for unwed mothers, but the historical atmosphere is a little thin compared to the richly detailed work of the authors cited above.



## News

### Lambda Literary Foundation: Reorganized and Raring to Go

#### Nominating Books for The Lammies

Nomination forms for the 2006 Lambda Literary Awards were due December 31.

This year the Awards will be organized a bit differently: A new category, **Belles Lettres**, can include memoir, autobiography, collections of essays, literary criticism, letters, travel writing, graphic novels, and anything related. The LGBT Studies category has been renamed LGBT Nonfiction and will include history, politics, and cultural studies. The fiction and nonfiction anthology awards have been combined into one Anthology award. Visual Arts/Photography and Drama are no longer categories.

LLF's new address is: Old Chelsea Station, P.O. Box 1957, New York, NY 10113; 646-239-9790; asklambda@earthlink.net.

#### Reorganized

After much soul-searching, some chaos, and a summer and fall of reorganization, The Lambda Literary Foundation hired poet, writer, editor, and literary organizer Charles Flowers as its new Executive Director, launched a new web site, and is fundraising to re-launch *The Lambda Book Report* as a quarterly publication in 2006.

Charles Flowers has served as chair of the Publishing Triangle, founded and edits *Bloom*, ("The most exciting new queer literary publication to emerge in years," -Edmund White), and has been Associate Director of the Academy of American Poets since 2001.

Details, a link to make donations, and a survey are all on the new web site at:

[www.lambdaliterary.org](http://www.lambdaliterary.org)

### Alyson Escapes to New York PlanetOut Buys LPI Media

Alyson Books, after hiring new publisher (Ms.) Dale Cunningham last summer, has moved operations to New York's Chelsea district. The publisher's all-new staff include Executive Editor Joseph Pittman, Editor Shannon Berning, Marketing & Publicity Manager Jeff Theis, Managing Editor Richard Fumosa, and Publishing Assistant Anthony LaSasso. Look for them at 245 W. 17th St., Suite 1200, NY, NY 10011. 212-242-8100. Alyson Press is owned by LPI Media. Shared corporate services remain in Los Angeles.

LPI Media, in turn, was recently purchased by PlanetOut.com. The \$31.1 million agreement joins the country's two largest gay media forces. The acquisition seems to have been driven by PlanetOut's desire to become more attractive to advertisers by extending its reach.

PlanetOut.com claims 5.4 million unique visitors per month. It went public last year, and is using the cushion that created to purchase LPI.

LPI Media publishes *The Advocate*, *Out*, *Out Traveler*, *HIV+* magazines, owns Alyson Press and Advocate Books, and had recently announced a partnership with LOGO, MTV's new gay channel. *The Advocate* claims a monthly circulation of about 130,000. LPI Media publishes 8.2 million magazine copies per year.

PlanetOut and LPI Media first discussed merging in 1999, but the merger was called off when the Internet industry - and online advertising - started to



tank.

The acquisition is expected to nearly double PlanetOut's revenues, which were a reported \$7.6 million last quarter.

### Feminist Bookstores: Use It or Lose It

Ah, it breaks my heart to say, but Sweet Violets, the feminist bookstore in Michigan's Upper Peninsula is closing in February. The fact that it flourished there, in what seems to me one of the unlikeliest places to find a feminist bookstore (ranking right up there with Fargo North Dakota and Gulfport Mississippi), for well over a decade, celebrates the fact that we are everywhere - and that we read. During the course of the year we've also lost A Woman's Prerogative (Detroit), and Denver's Book Garden, which changed its name to Sisters Books and became an online-only store.

Meanwhile Charis just celebrated 31 years with a move to 1189 Euclid Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307, but the store is under siege by the contradiction between what people say ("We need Charis!") and where they spend their money. If you cherish Charis and other women's bookstores, spend your money there. It's just as easy to order online from a feminist bookstore as from a megalomaniac store.

The Feminist Bookshop, Australia's sole remaining feminist bookstore, just celebrated 30 years. It's owned and run by three lesbian sisters, staff, and friends. When it was founded, male homosexuality was still illegal in Australia, discrimination against lesbians and gay men was not, and a newly elected MP tried to close the shop down claiming that lesbian and feminist literature was pornographic.

### Publishing People

**David Rosen**, the guiding force behind the successful gay and lesbian InsightOut Book Club has left Bookspan to become VP, Editorial Director at Abrams and to head up a new imprint, Abrams Image. He was at Bookspan for 16 years and launched InsightOut, and helped to launch and shape One Spirit, Black Expressions, HomeStyle and QPB....

**John Scognamiglio**, who edited Kensington's popular gay and lesbian books, has been promoted to the company's Editor-in-Chief.

### Awards

**Alexis de Veaux** won the non-fiction Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*. The prize carries a \$10,000 purse.

### BTWOF in the News

For the Women's eNews article on the loss of intellectual community centers as feminist bookstores close:

<http://www.alternet.org/story/24067>

*Publishers Weekly* ran a great story on us in their online daily.

As did *Bookselling This Week*.

And so did *Curve* in their December 2005 issue.

Finally, but not least, *The Women's Media Center* helped spread the word.

Our thanks to them all!

### Women's Journals Online

**Metaformia**: Judy Grahn, whom I often call "Another Mother of Us All" for her image shattering poetry in the seventies, (*Edward the Dyke*, *The Common Woman Poems*), for co-founding The Women's Press Collective so women could publish our own books and say whatever the hell we wanted in them, and then for claiming all manner of gay, lesbian, and women's history in *Another Mother Tongue* and *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, has launched *Metaformia: A Journal of Menstruation and Culture*. Read it at [www.metaformia.com](http://www.metaformia.com).

Grahn's evolving Metaformic Theory returns women to a crucial place in cultural origin stories, histories, rituals and religions. "We think the world needs fresh new approaches to questions on the origins of culture, why



humans differ from animals, why we are the marvelous, amazing, terrible, peculiar, cruel, kind, dangerous, and occasionally constructive beings that we are," says Grahn. *Metaformia* will include articles on race, class and caste, on violence and peace, cosmic energies and money, gender and evolution, roles of women and men in creating culture, aspects of religion and anthropology, and more.

**TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism** is an online relaunch of *TRIVIA: A Journal of Ideas*, an international feminist literary magazine that was published out of Montague, Massachusetts from 1982 to 1993. *TRIVIA* publishes literary essays, experimental prose, poetry, translations, and reviews and encourages women writers to take risks with language and form so as to give their ideas the most original and vital expression possible.

Forthcoming issues include: **The Love and Lust Issue** (Deadline: January 6) and **The Resurrection Issue** which will be dedicated to the lives and work of feminist writers, artists and activists who are no longer with us (Deadline: May 5).

Read the current issue, which features work by Harriet Ellenberger, Lise Weil, Lee Maracle, Louky Bersianik, Deena Metzger, Kay Hagan, and Juliana Borrero, at:  
<http://www.triviavoices.net>

#### Out on the 'Net

Jhoanna Lynn B. Cruz asks where Filipina lesbians can find their literary foremothers:

<http://www.bulatlat.com/news/5-43/5-43-lesbian.htm>

A new website for Susan Krieger's **Things No Longer There: A Memoir of Losing Sight and Finding Vision** (which will be available from The National Library Service, Talking Books Division, on 4-track tape in Spring 2006) includes information about the book's various accessible formats as well as a fascinating glimpse at the technology one woman uses to keep the written word accessible:

<http://susankrieger.stanford.edu/>

For an article on making the book accessible:

<http://susankrieger.stanford.edu/ebooktech.html>

Novelist, playwright, poet, and Science Fiction Reviewer for *Feminist Bookstore News* for many years, Susanna J. Sturgis is shopping her new novel. Details at:

<http://susannajsturgis.com>

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We'll be back soon with the next **Lesbian Edition**.

Yours in spreading the words,  
 Carol Seajay



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