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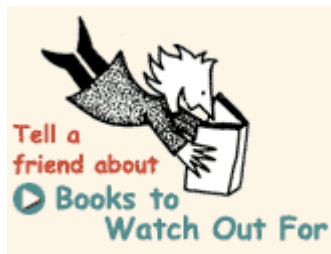
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### About BTWOF

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

## The Lesbian Edition

February 2004  
Volume 1 Number 4

Welcome to TLE #4.

This issue starts with news of lesbian publishers and feminist bookstores, then moves into the Find of the Month, Fiction, Lives, and takes a quick look at sex and romance and Gay Marriage books, before checking in to see what they're reading at the Toronto Women's Bookstore and The Crime Scene Short stories and essay collections – perfect for people who are “too busy to read” – are a sturdy sub-theme running throughout the issue. The scoop on the current batch of literary awards (Lammy nominations, the Stonewall Awards, and a couple more) – and a little commentary – follow the book columns. This issue also premieres our new feature, “What Are You Reading?” a question BTWOF is likely to ask whenever we encounter book people. Last – and perhaps least – the non-news that *The New York Times Book Review* covers almost three times more books by men than by women

On the tech side, the innovation this issue is a link to a Super Printer-Friendly/Plain Text version for people whose printers can't handle the lightly-formatted (but much more aesthetically pleasing) Printer-Friendly version. You'll find both immediately below the table of contents. If neither printer-friendly version works for you, please email [info@BooksToWatchOutFor.com](mailto:info@BooksToWatchOutFor.com), and we'll try to help you out.

This issue also features click-through pages for the Lambda Literary Awards short list and for the complete list of all the books nominated. If you're printing this issue out to read off-line, you might want to click up to the Table of Contents, then click to the Lambda Lit Shortlist and the Nominations list and print them out as well. There's a lot of wonderful reading in those lists, and we encourage you to check them out.

Yours in spreading the words,  
Carol Seajay



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### New Lesbian Presses

#### Bywater Books

Building on a friendship that evolved from years of working together, mystery writer J. M. (Jean) Redmann, novelist Marianne K. Martin, and publisher/bookseller Kelly Smith are launching a new lesbian publishing company, Bywater Books. Their Fall list will include *Under the Witness Tree*, a new novel by Martin, and a reprint of Redmann's third Micky Knight mystery, *The Intersection of Law and Desire*. I'm not at liberty to tell you what they have lined up for 2005, but it looks great!

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

- » [Click here](#) to **subscribe**.
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### The Gay Men's Edition

announces and reviews new books by and about gay men as well as other books of interest and gay publishing news. Written and compiled by Richard Labonte.

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### More Books for Women

will launch in 2004.

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



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

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

### BTWOF: The Lesbian Edition

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



### Advertising & Sponsorships

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



### Housekeeping

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

- » your subscriber profile
- » whatever has changed.

Bywater's priorities are to publish well-written commercial fiction for lesbians and other discerning readers, to nurture emerging and established writers, to build community, to operate with extreme fiscal responsibility, and to have a rollicking good time. Bywater, by the way, is a neighborhood in New Orleans, "probably the neighborhood where Micky Knight lives."

And, yes, they are looking for additional titles. Check out the web site for submission guidelines.

Consortium will distribute Bywater titles. Bywater Books, PO Box 3671, Ann Arbor MI 48106-3671; email: [Bywaterbooks@aol.com](mailto:Bywaterbooks@aol.com). Watch for their forthcoming web site at [www.Bywaterbooks.com](http://www.Bywaterbooks.com).

### Bella Books

Bella Books, the heir to the Naiad Press publishing dynasty, is back on track and on schedule with an awesome 39-book publishing schedule for 2004.

"That's two new books and a reprint every month, plus a few irresistible additions," proud Bella publisher Linda Hill points out.

Bella is also launching a new series, Bella After Dark (BAD), featuring books that are a bit edgier and offer more risqué sexual adventures than fit Naiad's strictly vanilla, implement-free tradition. The first title in the series, **Back to Basics: A Butch-Femme Anthology** edited by Therese Szymanski, will be published later this month.



The Bella team is now Linda Hill, Terese Orban, and, staffing the Havana, Florida office, Becky Arbogast and Stefy Bau. [www.BellaBooks.com](http://www.BellaBooks.com).



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### 'Live' from Amazon

Amazon – that's the *original* Amazon Bookstore, thank you very much, not the online imposter – has streaming video on their web site. I think that's a first for women's bookstores. Amazon is moving to a great new (and more affordable) space two blocks from their current location but in a very up-and-coming little shopping district with some great restaurants, a movie theater, gift shops, and lots of foot traffic. Of course moving takes cash and, if Amazon was rolling in it they wouldn't be moving, so the video is a fundraising appeal for donations to help cover the moving costs.

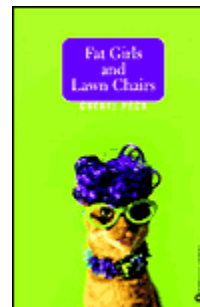
Kudos to the Amazon volunteers who made this, the oldest feminist bookstore in the US, the first in this techno-innovation. Check it out at <http://www.fourthcanyon.com/kate/bookstore/amazon4.mov>. More details on [Amazon's Web site](#).



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### Find of the Month

OK, in the spirit of full disclosure, I must admit, before I review this book, that I spent many a childhood Sunday in Three Rivers, Michigan, visiting my (great) aunt and uncle, Grandma Van Horne, and crushing out on my bad-girl, older cousin, Sherry. Having abandoned all of that for the queer left-coast decades ago, I still suspect that there is a deep current of humor running through, oh, say, the greater Mississippi River valley, that is inaccessible to those raised on either coast. I hope not. I wouldn't wish anyone to be deprived of the laugh-out-loud humor of Cheryl Peck's **Fat Girls and Lawn Chairs**. It's nothing serious – just a series of short





vignettes – addressing the everyday realities of life, growing up in a family where children are routinely sacrificed to protect flowers from escaped cows, and, of course, the dangers of lawn chairs. Warner Books is touting Peck as “the new female David Sedaris” and a “gay Erma Brombeck”, but she’s neither – she’s Cheryl Peck, slicing life down to manageable bites and giving us the drama and humor of daily life. Not that she treads lightly over things that need to be said, mind you. She has more than a few bones to pick and her aim, when she throws them, is all any athletically inclined dyke could wish for. Maybe it’s a Three Rivers thing, but she makes me laugh and nod even when I disagree with her. Or maybe it’s just that the purple-wigged cat on the cover sets you up for the ride. In any case, move over Ellen, move over Lily, move over Kate, and make room for Cheryl: We need this midwestern poignancy to round out our laughter. Originally published by Flower Press, the home of that ecological (and lesbian) classic of vermicomposting, *Worms Eat My Garbage*, Warner picked it up, cover and all, and stands ready to make a killing on one supersized dyke’s take on life in Three Rivers, Michigan. Give it to your sweetie, give it to your Mom for Mother’s Day. Save it for yourself for a rainy day. \$12.95. Warner Books

#### **Cheryl Peck on gym life:**

It happened again this morning. I was sitting there, half-naked on a bench when a fellow exerciser leaned over and said, “I just wanted to tell you – I admire you for coming here every day. You give me inspiration to keep coming myself.”

“Here” is the gym.

I have become an inspirational goddess.

In a gym.

I grinned at the very image of it: here is this woman who probably imagines herself to be overweight – or perhaps she is overweight, she is just not in my weight division – sitting on the edge of her bed in the morning, thinking to herself, ‘There is that woman at the gym who is twenty years older than I am and has three extra people tucked under her skin, and she manages to drag herself to the gym every day . . . ‘

“It is not my goal here to be unkind to myself or to others.

Perhaps I am an inspiration to her because I am easily three times her size and I take my clothes off in front of other women. Being fat and naked in front of other women is an act of courage. . . .

From “Queen of the Gym”

#### **And on professional football – for either gender:**

Girls don’t learn the difference between personal victory and team victory or personal loss and team loss. Girls learned that if you don’t do it yourself, it doesn’t get done. Girls were never asked to fight the war in Vietnam or in any other war. But if they had been, girls would have won. Girls would have felt guilty for not winning it sooner, and girls would have restored all of the roads, rebuilt all of the bombed homes, adopted all of the orphans, established daycare centers, domestic violence shelters and homeless shelters, and girls would have processed endlessly what we could have done to have prevented war and what we still can do to prevent it from happening again.

From “The Southwest Michigan Jaguars”



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### Quick Reads

For more good reads by and about fat women, check out Susan Koppelman's latest anthology, **The Strange History of Suzanne Lafleshe and other stories of women and fatness**. Koppelman is a world-renowned scholar of U.S. women's short stories, and here she uses her considerable resources (including her own archive of 3,500 short stories) to compile these gripping, poignant, sly, funny, disturbing, surprising, brave, and illuminating stories that celebrate bodies deemed transgressive or that simply acknowledge that fat women exist in life and in literature. The stories span 100 years; the authors range from Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Edna Ferber (1913 and 1910 respectively) up through the Fat Liberation classics. Contemporary writers include J. California Cooper, Roz Warren, Leslea Newman, Susan Stinson, Judy Freespirit, and Elana Dykewomon. Alix Kates Shulman introduces the collection while an afterword by Koppelman puts the stories in historical and political context. \$16.95 paper, The Feminist Press.



Koppleman's life long labor of love has been researching and preserving women's short stories and collecting them into anthologies that reclaim and validate women's lives: *Old Maids*, *Between Mothers and Daughters*, *Women's Friendships*, and *Two Friends* (which focuses on nineteenth century lesbians). To ensure that her gift endures, the Feminist Press has launched the American Women's Stories Project which will, under Koppelman's supervision, create an online catalog of stories by women writers and will also reprint some of her hard-to-find collections and publish several new anthologies as well.

Is it fact or is it fiction? – and where do lesbian writers draw the line? That was Lynda Hall's question when she edited **Telling Moments: Autobiographical Lesbian Short Stories**. The stories – from the likes of Gloria Anzaldúa, Marie-Claire Blais, Emma Donoghue, Karla Jay, Anna Livia, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Rothanne Robson, Sara Schulman, Peggy Shaw, Carmelita Tropicana, and others – range from poignant to hilarious, from grief-filled to joyful. And the brief commentaries following each story, sorting out the facts from the fiction – where that's possible, add an interesting layer to the reading experience. It's too bad that Wisconsin has priced it so far above standard trade paperback prices. \$26.95 paper. (Ouch!) Terrace Books/The University of Wisconsin Press.

I never understood the allure of those contests where the prize is a celebrity date, but I'd be all over any contest where the prize was a good conversation with one of our community's best thinkers. But ten long lunches with **Queer Ideas** might be even better. **Queer Ideas** collects the first ten annual David R. Kessler lectures – an ongoing series organized by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS), which invites some of our best and brightest to talk about their work, their concerns, and our community. Beginning in 1992 with Joan Nestle's "The Life of Mabel Hampton as Told by a White Woman" all the way through Judith Butler's 2001 lecture, "Global Violence, Sexual Violence," the lectures – many of which read like a relaxed conversation – are interesting, stimulating, entertaining, and excellent. Check out Edmund White's 1993 perspective on gay publishing during the height of the "gay publishing boom," Barbara Smith on excavating African American Lesbian and Gay history, Esther Newton on the importance and sometimes-unpopularity of butch identity, Monique Wittig reading what she couldn't write in the U.S., John D'Emilio's "A Biographer and His Subject: Wrestling with Bayard Rustin," Cherríe Moraga ("The fiction of our lives – how we conceive our histories by heart – can sometimes provide a truth far greater than any telling of a tale frozen to the facts..."), Samuel R. Delany speaking for the importance of interclass contact while mourning for the banished sexuality of Times Square, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on love. What a treat! What luxury. \$17.95 paperback, The Feminist Press.

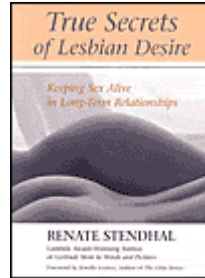
*One of the most essential books of 2004.* –Richard Labonte



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## Love, Sex, and Romance

"I'm not giving up my sex life until I die!" Renate Stendahl vowed at a recent reading. And she forswears lesbian bed death for all time in **True Secrets of Lesbian Desire: Keeping Sex Alive in Long-Term Relationships**.



Telling the truth – the hard, difficult, lovely, challenging, endearing truth – about what you want sexually and in the relationship, she advises, is the secret to ongoing passionate intimacy. It's that simple and that challenging. Stendahl, a sixty-something counselor, also writes about cycles of lesbian relationships and draws on her 18-year relationship as well as her experience in the passionate days of the early feminist movement in Paris in the late 60's and early 70s. Read it, even if you're not in a long-term relationship, for the sheer pleasure of a writer who uses the F-word while talking about a very active and passionate sexuality. Originally published in cloth as *Love's Learning Place: Truth As Aphrodisiac in Women's Long-Term Relationships* by Edgework Books, it's now in paperback from North Atlantic Books with a new foreword by Jewelle Gomez. \$14.95.

Bett Williams (*Girl Walking Backwards*) takes the opposite approach in **The Wrestling Party**, a raucous mix of essay, cultural crit, erotic tell-all, memoir, and internet journalism. Stalking The Girl through a lot of angst, riot grrrl music festivals, Trash Discos, and that new performance art, oil wrestling, while only *occasionally* telling a truth (or even remembering that she already *has* a girlfriend) would seem to be the point here. Does she ever actually get the girl? Not exactly. But then, that wasn't really the point. If you followed that – and enjoyed it – it's your book. \$12.95, Alyson.



On the other end of the age and literary spectrums, Aynda Merchant, our oldest living lesbian writer and publisher, has just published **O, Mistress Mine** under her *nom de plume*, Sarah Aldridge. I haven't seen it yet, but it promises to address the far right, organized religion, same-sex marriage, adoption, abortion and discrimination – as well as being a love story. This is Merchant's fourteenth Sarah Aldridge novel. Now 92, she and her partner of 55 years, Muriel Crawford were the quiet (though never silent) partners when Naiad Press was launched. They now publish as A&M Books. Fifty-five years! Now that's a Valentine story! \$15, A&M Books, PO Box 283, Rehoboth Beach DE, 19971.

Perhaps it was a mistake to read *True Secrets of Lesbian Desire* concurrently with Karin Kallmaker's **Maybe Next Time** – I kept wanting to yell, "Just talk to each other!" at the longing and tortured young musician and her beloved. But the gals in Kallmaker's more recent **One Degree of Separation** do a better job – eventually – of passing the Truth Telling test. **One Degree** is centered in a close-knit midwestern community; **Maybe Next Time** is set in Hawaii and in the surreal world of a constantly traveling classical musician, but bad things happen to good women in both books, and walking through it is the only way out. Both are classic Kallmaker – steamy, erotic romances. \$12.95, both from Bella Books.

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## Weddings Bell Blues & The Law

Whether you're itching to get to the alter or whether you're a smash-patriarchy-and-destroy-the-nuclear-family kind of gal – or both – lesbian and gay marriage is shaping up to be one of the key political issues of the 2004 presidential campaign. It's going to be quite a donkey-and-elephant road show, in a campaign with more than a few gay children of politicians. Here



are a few books to read along the way.

My just-married cohort, Richard Labonte, writing in *The Gay Men's Edition of BTOWF*, highly recommends David Moats' **Civil Wars: Gay Marriage in America**:



"The most gripping of the recent reads. Moats, whose editorials in support of Vermont's civil unions legislation won him and his newspaper a Pulitzer, has a good journalist's insatiable curiosity.... [T]he book – touted appropriately by the publisher as "a remarkable drama of democracy at work on a human scale" – is packed with mesmerizing detail. Moats focuses almost totally on the Vermont story, but his quietly epic examination of how civil unions came to be the law of that small state has wider implications for the freedom-to-marry forces in America, both in the wake of the pro-wedding ruling by the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts a few months ago, and also in the face of what's sure to be the virulent demagoguery around gay marriage by George W. Bush's handlers in election year 2004.

"... it was also by chance that I happened to witness the story of civil unions in Vermont. I did not come to the issue as a gay man. I came to it as a journalist discovering the most extraordinary story I had ever covered," Moats writes in his prologue. \$25, Harcourt.

**Just Married: Gay Marriage and the Expansion of Human Rights**, by Canadians Kevin Bourassa and Joe Varnell, is a first-hand account of their January, 2001 wedding in Toronto's Metropolitan Community Church and the subsequent legal process which resulted in Ontario Supreme Court approving same-sex wedding licenses in June, 2003. Published by Doubleday in Canada, and by University of Wisconsin in the U.S. \$26.95.

And watch out for these books, all to be published in April:

**Why You Should Give a Damn About Gay Marriage** by Davina Kotulski promises to be an easy-to-read guide outlining the rights, benefits, and protections that legally recognized marriage guarantees. It also outlines the impact of *not* having those rights on various gay couples. Sounds like a good book for well-meaning straight friends and family who think that domestic partner laws – or even civil unions – solve the problems. \$12.95, Advocate Books.

**Why Marriage Matters** by Evan Wolfson connects gay marriage to other equality movements. \$23, Simon and Schuster.

Journalist Jonathan Rauch confronts conservatives on their own turf in **Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America**. He argues that it's good for society to have people taking care of each other, that it benefits society as a whole, and that excluding certain groups of people from participating is corrosive to the institution itself. \$22, Times Books.

And, while we're addressing things legal, the Fourth Edition of the American Civil Liberties Union's handbook, **The Rights of Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, and Transgender People** by Nan Hunter, Courtney Joslin, and Sharon McGowan, is just out from Southern Illinois University Press. \$19.95.



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## Lives

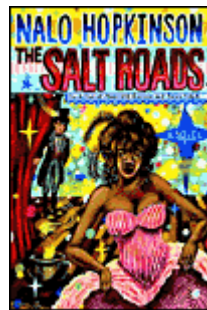
“Say what you will about Mercedes, she’s had the most important women in the twentieth century,” was how Alice B. Toklas summed up the dashing (and, at that time still married), Spanish American society girl in the years before the two became friends. But it was true: de Acosta (1893-1968) was obsessed with – and at times lovers with – Greta Garbo, as well as Marlene Dietrich, Isadora Duncan, and theatre stars Eva Le Gallienne, Ona Munson, Michael Strange, and Alla Nazimova, among others. But Robert Schanke’s **“That Furious Lesbian:” The Story of Mercedes de Acosta**” also gives us the Mercedes de Acosta who was a playwright, poet, and a novelist – a woman who got (and lost) writing jobs in the emerging movie industry as easily as she found (and lost) lovers. Her 1926 novel, *The Arrow of Longing*, if not ahead of her times, was certainly far ahead of publishers’ mores, addressing as it did lesbianism, the plight of single mothers and their bastard children (albeit those with ambition and class), and unrequited love. The legal battles following the publication of *The Well of Loneliness*, a couple years later, did nothing to encourage publishers to risk publishing Mercedes. But Mercedes’ first love was theatre, and her plays (often written for her lovers) were not an easy sell on Broadway, addressing as they did Sapphic love (successful and otherwise) and anti-Semitism, as well as loneliness, rejection, and spirituality. And, best of all, Schanke gives us a woman fiercely committed to loving women, a woman who wasn’t afraid of the L-word – or its passions – despite the way it compromised her writing career. \$45, cloth, Southern Illinois University Press. Theatre aficionados will also want to check out **Women in Turmoil: Six Plays by Mercedes De Acosta**, \$40, also edited by Schanke and published by SIU.



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## Fiction & Science Fiction

Lesbianism, as we practice it in twenty-first century America, presumes that women are allowed to live independently, and that we can support ourselves, rather than relying on fathers, husbands, family or clan. But what of women who lack these essential luxuries? How do they make their way? Nalo Hopkinson’s **The Salt Eaters** and Ruthanne Lum McCunn’s **The Moon Pearl** explore the possibilities – and the creativity required – of newly enslaved women in the seventeenth century America, of their descendents in Paris, and of young women in China’s silk districts in the nineteenth century.



Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson (*Midnight Robber*, *Skin Folk*, *Brown Girl in the Ring*) uses a twist of science fiction (the creation of Ezili, born from hope destroyed, who flits across continents and centuries, seeking a way to manifest freedom and desire) to explore and connect the lives and determination of brilliant, passionate, loving, and wonderfully sexual women who love who they will (women and men) when they can, and who love who they must when that freedom is in short supply. Jewelle Gomez calls it “A raw, passionate adventure...grounded in women’s senses: the sound of whispered desire, sweat’s salty taste, hands catching a newborn baby.” Kirkus calls it “Sexy, disturbing, touching, wildly comic. A tour de force from one of our most striking new voices in fiction.” Jewell Parker Rhodes calls it “A fabulous, wonderful, inventive novel...a fine celebration of African heritage.” – To which I would add: “And of all women’s heritage.” Thanks to Cecelia Tan of Circlet Press, for bringing this book to my attention. \$22.95, Warner.

**The Moon Pearl** considers the lives of “self-combers” – women who combed their own hair up rather than waiting for marriage, lived in communities of women, renounced sexual intimacy with men (but not women), and supported themselves in the labor-intensive silk industry, a tradition that flourished in China’s Sun Duk province for 100 years. Ruthanne Lum McCunn grew up in Hong Kong, amidst the diaspora of these independent spinsters who left China when the silk trade declined. She was inspired by their example to seek her own fortunes in a wider world. Later she began to wonder how the first of these women were able to conceive – and initiate – lives of self-rule and build an alternate, woman-oriented community structure. Eventually she went to China to interview elderly self-combers. From that research, she realized that what made life possible for the independent spinsters was their recognition that independence and community were not exclusive states. **The Moon Pearl** imagines the lives of women whose defiance of community tradition could launch women-oriented worlds in the midst of a fiercely held patriarchy. Told with the deceptive simplicity of a folktale, it remains one of my favorite explanations of how the world came to be. \$14, Beacon Press.



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### In Brief

**Stone Butch Blues**, Leslie Feinberg’s classic and compelling tale of politics, passion, butch identity, and the transgendered life, is back in print – this time from Alyson Press. What a relief! I’ve heard tales of desperate young women and trans kids paying \$30 and \$40 to get their hands on a used copy. \$14.95.



Out lesbian and Islamic scholar Irshad Manji demands cultural diversity, freedoms for women, and her right to be a lesbian and leaves the wearing of hijabs and chadors to Muhammad’s wives in her Canadian bestseller, **The Trouble With Islam: A Muslim’s Call for Reform in Her Faith**, which has just been published in the U.S. by St. Martin’s Press. When asked if she’s willing to be an international lightning rod for the cause of reform, she responds, “I don’t fear the consequences of having written this book. God gave me a thick skin, a big brain and, I’ll be the first to admit, an even bigger mouth. And that’s a pretty good combination to take on a cause as ambitious as this.” BTWOF says, “You go, girl! And maybe we’ll achieve peace in our times yet.” \$22.95

### What Are You Reading?



BTWOF asked mystery writer J. M. Redmann our favorite question:

“Helen Humphreys’ **Leaving Earth**,” she answered. “Like Sarah Waters and Emma Donoghue, she writes brilliant historical fiction. **Leaving Earth**, set in Toronto in the 1930s, features an aviatrix, her plane, Moth, and her co-pilot as the two women attempt to break the world flight endurance record. **After Image**, which is gorgeously written, is loosely based on Julia Cameron’s life. Both books have a clear lesbian sensibility.” Try libraries if your local bookstore can’t get these books –

both may be out of print. And see, “What They’re Reading,” below, for a review of Humphreys’ new novel, *The Lost Garden*.”



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### Periodically Yours

**Sinister Wisdom** is publishing again. Issue #61, *Women Loving Women in Prison*, is just out. Lesbians are, indeed, everywhere, and women are the fastest growing population in prisons – in part because women get longer sentences than men for the same actions, in part because women are often charged with “conspiracy” when a male partner or acquaintance is arrested for drug-related activities, and because so many women are imprisoned for problems that would be better served by drug or alcohol addiction treatment or job training programs. Eighty percent of the women in prison are there for non-violent crimes.

This issue, comprised of writing by current or recent prisoners, including political prisoners, looks at how constrained women’s lives are in prison, at the intense discrimination against and punishment of lesbians, and also documents moments of tenderness, passion, delight and love.

The next issue is due out in June, and the lesbian literature issue is already in the works. The last issue, “Love, Sex, and Romance” is also available, so now would be a good time to subscribe or to renew if your subscription has lapsed. \$20/year, \$34 for two years. Back issues are \$6 plus \$1.50 p&h for the first issue, \$.50 each for each additional issue. Free on request to women in prison or mental institutions. The rest of us can send checks to PO Box 3252, Berkeley CA 94703

### BITCH

BTWOF caught up with Mary Ellen Kavanaugh, who was traveling around California after having just closed My Sisters Words in Syracuse. What was she reading? **BITCH: A Feminist Response to Pop Culture**. Of course we asked what she likes about it:

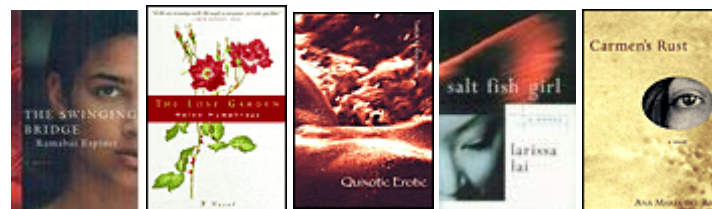
“**BITCH** is the right magazine for anyone looking for hip, right-on feminist analysis of the culture we live in. I look forward to it the way I used to look forward to *Ms*. There’s always something pithy and unexpected that I didn’t even know that I wanted to know before I picked it up. Each issue has a theme (i.e. #23, Winter 2004 is “taste & appetite”) and an array of very smart women weigh in on how that topic plays out in our lives. BITCH even has ads you’ll want to read, for very cool products that make sense in your life, whether you’re 23 or 63, straight, bi, or lesbian. If you call yourself a feminist, you need to check this out. Look for it in any good independent bookstore or online at [www.bitchmagazine.com](http://www.bitchmagazine.com) or call 877-21-BITCH. \$4.95.”

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### What They're Reading at The Toronto Women's Bookstore

*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 Anjula Gogia and the rest of the crew at the Toronto Women's Bookstore. Not surprisingly, they read a lot of Canadian books, only some of which are also published in the U.S. But never fear, if something grabs your fancy, you can order it online or by mail from TWB or many other Canadian bookstores. (Web site and mailing address below.)*



**The Swinging Bridge** by Ramabai Espinet. A moving story of race and displacement, *The Swinging Bridge* carries us effortlessly from nineteenth-

century India to the cane fields of Trinidad and then to modern-day Toronto. An exquisite novel that explores the immigrant experience with compassion and humour. A deeply feminist novel that explores history, exile, and longing for truth. C\$32.95, Harper Collins. – Anjula Gogia

**The Lost Garden** by Helen Humphreys. New in paperback from the author of *Afterimage*, this is the story of a shy, solitary young horticulturalist who flees London during the Blitz and discovers a "lost" garden on a country estate which helps her discover her capacity to reach for love, even in the face of pain. Humphreys, a local lesbian writer, writes with the subtlety and grace of a poet. C\$28, Harper Collins; \$13.95, US Norton. – Anjula Gogia

**Quixotic Erotic** by Tamai Kobayashi.\* Superbly written erotic tales that make you feel "dirty" in only the best of ways. These stories turn you on while simultaneously subverting both old myths/folktales and new realities with feminist sensibilities. This is neither the kind of erotica that puts you to sleep nor the brand of bawdy porn that makes you cringe for its lack of literary skill. Instead, it represents a new genre of incredibly sexy, race-y (pun intended), one-handed reading that places lesbians of colour front and centre as empowered sexual subjects. C\$19.95/ \$16.95US, Arsenal Pulp Press. – Jin Huh

**Salt Fish Girl** by Larissa Lai. Salt Fish Girl intertwines the stories of Nu Wa, a shape-shifter from Old China, and Miranda, a girl from Serendipity, a walled city on the west coast of North America (circa 2044), who stinks of durian fruit. This pleasurable and politically fantastical read reveals a future where corporations, biotechnology, and capitalism rule the world. Reminiscent of Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* or a tale in which Donna Haraway meets Chinese Canadian-style magical realism, **Salt Fish Girl** is about love, gender, intrigue, and resisting the dark forces of biotechnology. C\$23.95, Thomas Allen. – Jin Huh

**Small Arguments** by Souvankham Thammavongsa.\* Thammavongsa's poetry gracefully achieves the book's epigraph: the power of philosophy to "...show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things in daily life." The poems are precisely crafted with beautiful and deceptive simplicity, exposing both the fragility and the immutable strength of small things while creating a space in the world where they have an inalienable right to exist. C\$17.95. Pedlar Press. – Alex Macfadyen

**Right to be Hostile: A Boondocks Treasury** by Aaron McGruder. One of the hottest books at TWB this winter! For all fans of "Dykes To Watch Out For," this rip-roaringly funny comic strip comments on black suburban life, American politics, and BET [Black Entertainment Television] among other things. I was constantly reminded of Mo with main character Huey's endless cynicism and rants! C\$25.95, Random House; \$16.95 US, Crown. – Anjula Gogia



**Carmen's Rust** by Ana Maria del Rio. In simple, engaging prose, del Rio describes repressive life under the Chilean dictator Pinochet via allegorical metaphor. Carmen and her half brother (the novel's narrator) are sent to live with their oppressive aunt and grandmother who maintain complete control over their lives. In effect, it becomes a relentless struggle between the sexually repressed teenagers and their merciless captors. Del Rio captivates the reader with her flowing narrative and cleverly paints for us her beloved Chile under tyrannical rule in the 80's. First published in 1986, and now available in English from Overlook Press. C\$29/\$19.95 US. – Tammi Sulliman

\*Toronto-based writer

*Many thanks to Anjula for compiling these reviews, and to all the staff at TWB for their help with this column. Check out TWB's web site at <http://www.womensbookstore.com>. It's a great site with new book and staff favorites, booklists by subject, and online ordering. TWB, 73 Harbord St., Toronto ON M5S 1G4, Canada. Phone: 416-922-8744.*

There's also a current list of women's bookstores at [www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html](http://www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html).

About international online ordering: The good news is that it's easy – credit card companies take care of the currency conversion and most bookstores will send you anything they sell, which means you can get books that aren't (or aren't yet) published where you live if you're willing to pay the shipping costs. If you haven't yet established a relationship with a particular store, it's often worth emailing ahead to check shipping costs and to be sure they know how to mark the packages so you don't get stuck with import taxes. Then it's just a matter of placing the order and waiting (im)patiently for the package to arrive. -CS



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## The Crime Scene

By Nan Cinnater

The prolific mystery writer Lawrence Sanders writes a series about a part-time burglar who's also a bookseller, and his best friend, a lesbian named Caroline (**The Burglar in the Closet, The Burglar in the Library**, etc., \$6.99, Signet). At one point, Caroline expresses her firm conviction that the character Kinsey Millhone is a lesbian, but author Sue Grafton doesn't know it. In that spirit, I offer you some ostensibly heterosexual mysteries whose heroines display the toughness, independence, good sense, and feminist instincts that we often associate with lesbians.



If you haven't discovered *New York Times* best-selling author Nevada Barr's mysteries, what are you waiting for? National Park ranger Anna Pigeon is just the kind of flawed but fascinating heroine we love, and Barr is a master of both nature and action writing. Plus, she takes you to a different National Park in almost every book! The first book in the series is **Track of the Cat** (\$6.99, Berkley/Prime Crime) set in Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Hot off the press are **Flashback** (\$7.99, Berkley/Prime Crime) – Dry Tortugas National Park – and **High Country** (\$24.95, Putnam) – Yosemite. Sharp-eyed bibliophiles know that Barr's first novel was a superior lesbian Western called **Bittersweet** (\$13.95, Avon). Serious fans may want to check out Barr's recent collection of personal essays, **Seeking Enlightenment ... Hat by Hat** (\$21.95, Putnam).

Farther North, Dana Stabenow writes an atmospheric Alaskan series about tough, psychologically and physically scarred Inuit private eye Kate Shugak. A full cast of quirky supporting characters, a good grasp of state and Native politics, and lots of authentic details about life in the bush give these books convincing local color. In **A Fine and Bitter Snow** (\$6.99, St. Martin's/Minotaur), Stabenow takes on the issue of oil drilling in a wilderness preserve. Her most recent hardcover is **A Grave Denied** (\$24.95, St. Martin's/Minotaur). The first in the Kate Shugak series is the Edgar Award winner, **A Cold Day for Murder** (\$6.99, Berkley). Note that Stabenow also writes another series, about state trooper Liam Campbell, which shares the Alaskan atmosphere but not the same feminist appeal.



Linda Fairstein was a real-life sex crimes prosecutor in the Manhattan DA's office and she has brought much of her own experience to her books about assistant DA Alexandra Cooper. In **The Kills** (\$25.00, Scribner), Alex has two cases, a rape and a murder. (Is anyone surprised when the two cases turn out to be connected?) The murder victim is "Queenie" Ransome, a legendary dancer of the Harlem Renaissance, who was once King Farouk's lover. The title refers not just to the murders, but to the creeks and channels that separate lower Manhattan from several small islands. Fairstein's new paperback is **The Bone Vault**



(\$7.99, Pocket). The series began with **Final Jeopardy** (\$7.99, Pocket).

In 1995 Lynn S. Hightower introduced Lena Padget, a private eye on a personal mission to protect – or revenge – women and children who are victims of crimes. Padget debuted in the pulpy but mesmerizing thriller, **Satan's Lambs**, which won the Shamus award for best first private eye novel (out of print; we can only hope some publisher will be smart enough to re-issue it). Hightower has finally brought Padget back in **Fortunes of the Dead** (\$23.00, Atria). Now Lena has a boyfriend, a homicide detective who is working on the same case Lena is hired to investigate – the disappearance of a college intern. Enter the FBI, who believe Lena's case has something to do with the Waco debacle. Not surprisingly, Lena does not take well to interference by male authorities....



Hightower's prose is lean and mean, and she has an unflinching understanding of the violence that ordinary women face. Her other novels are also worth checking out. Her series about Cincinnati policewoman Sonora Blair consists of: **Flashpoint**, **Eyeshot** (both published in paper by Harper, available used or from the library), **No Good Deed** (\$6.50, Dell), and **The Debt Collector** (\$6.99, Dell). Her most recent paperback, **High Water** (\$6.99, Pocket), is a stand-alone novel about a suspicious suicide in a South Carolina family with two daughters and a gay son.

Poisoned Pen Press has made a brilliant move that other small presses could emulate: publishing Libby Fischer Hellmann's mysteries in hardcover simultaneously with mass market paper editions from Berkley/Prime Crime. Thus the hardcovers garner the reviews, make library sales, and become collectibles, while the paperbacks reach hard-core readers like us. In **An Image of Death** (\$24.95, Poisoned Pen, and \$6.50, Berkley/Prime Crime), video documentarian Ellie Foreman receives a mysterious package containing a surveillance video of a murder. A little digging leads to intrigue in Eastern Europe during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hellmann's books are intricately plotted, with detailed Chicago ambience and connections to Jewish history and culture. The previous books were **An Eye for Murder** and **A Picture of Guilt** (both \$6.50, Berkley/Prime Crime).

Carol O'Connell writes about one of the most enigmatic heroines in crime fiction, policewoman Kathleen Mallory, a kid who grew up on the streets (literally), who is now a brilliant but rebellious cop – also sociopathic, manipulative, and obsessive/compulsive. In **Dead Famous** (\$24.95, Putnam), Mallory's latest case combines a dead FBI agent in Chicago, murdered jurors in New York, a hunchbacked woman whose job it is to clean up crime scenes, an edgy shock-jock, and an extremely mean housecat. Mallory first appeared in the Edgar Award-winning **Mallory's Oracle** (\$7.99, Jove). O'Connell's latest paperback is **Crime School** (\$7.99, Jove).



**The 37th Hour** (\$21.95, Delacorte) by Jodi Compton is a first novel that looks like it might belong in this company. Minneapolis sheriff's detective Sara Pribeck is a missing-persons investigator whose husband is missing. The title derives from the experts' contention that the first 36 hours in a missing-persons case are the most important. *Publisher's Weekly* called this "first-class, serious crime fiction."

A word about violence: I am the most squeamish mystery reader I know. (To give you an idea of my threshold for violence, let me say I can't stand to watch "CSI," and I wouldn't go near the movie "Silence of the Lambs" even for Jodi Foster.) Although I can't predict what might push other people's buttons, I can tell you that Fairstein, Hightower, and O'Connell sometimes push the edge of my envelope. Mysteries contain murders, so there will be violence, but we can pay attention and try to respect each other's limits. – Nan



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### The Lammies, The Stonewalls, and a few inventions

It's Lambda Literary Award Season. Actually, its almost always is – the nominations start in November, the shortlists start circulating soon after the beginning of the new year, and the awards banquet is in June, followed by media flurries, small and large bits of grieving from the didn't-wins, and then the sticking of the winning books with those nifty "Lambda Literary Award Winner" stickers. It's almost a year-round phenomenon – as is critiquing them. Anyone can nominate a book and more people should – the fee is only \$20 (which goes to help defray the cost of the awards). Everyone has an opinion on what should have been nominated, shortlisted, and/or what should have won.

Armchair coaching is a national sport, and, in that spirit, BTWOF offers you both the [Shortlist for the 2004 Lambda Literary Awards](#) and the [long list of all the books nominated](#), all 300+ of them. Some nominations are well deserved, some seem to be vanity trips but, all in all, reviewing the lists provides an interesting look at what's been published over the last year. Some categories are overflowing with excellent books, many of which deserve shortlisting, and a few categories seem to exist just to nurture a specific – and hopefully growing – segment of our literature. Take a look and see what you think.

Looking at the breadth and depth of the books nominated, it's hard to give any credence to the idea that gay literature is in decline.

That's the good news. After doing a bit of categorizing and hair-splitting\* (see below for details) we came to some further conclusions: Only 30 of the 100 shortlisted books came from mainstream or corporate presses, eight or nine came from university presses, 20 from miscellaneous small and independent presses, and a whopping 40 or so from gay, feminist, and lesbian-owned presses. That speaks well of GLBT publishing, it should be totally embarrassing to mainstream publishing (especially if you take out the eight Kensington nominations), and it confirms what we have been saying for a long time – that the independent and university presses are where the bulk of exciting, challenging ideas will be published once the corporations devour one another into profit-seeking uniformity.

The news isn't so good for lesbians, though. Lesbian books garnered 35 of the spots of the 100-possible on the shortlist. Books by and about gay men, 60 spots. (That leaves 5 books that don't fit easily into either category.) That's 37% to 67% – a hell of a long way from gender-equity in this queered literary marriage. Just to mix apples and oranges, we're not doing a lot better – and certainly not enough better – than the 28:72 ratio of women's books to men's reviewed in the *NYT Review of Books* (see story below). Does this inequity reflect what is written, the quality of what is written, what gets published, who gets published, what gets publicity and visibility, who has the money and/or who decides where it will be spent (or what interests those people most), or just good old, traditional, all-American prejudice that what men do is more, better, and more valuable? There are only two things I can say for sure: It's not that lesbians make up only 37% of the population, queer or otherwise, and it's not that this wave of lesbians doesn't have a long and strong literary tradition. OK, a third thing seems obvious, too: Merging what used to be separate categories for lesbian and gay men's books has benefited the visibility of men's books at the cost of lesbian books' visibility and recognition.

How did the publishers stack up by gender?

Alyson gets the gender-equity prize with eight books on each side of the aisle, as well as the grand prize for having twice as many titles on the shortlist as any other publisher.

Pilgrim and Broadway both weigh in with two each in the trans categories.

On the women's side of the aisle, Bella and Cleis made out with three each, Red Hen with two, Southern Illinois with two (Robert Schanke writing about



Mercedes de Acosta). And seventeen publishers (Akashic, Conviction, Curbstone, Firebrand, Harrington, Manic D, Millivres, New Victoria, Soft Skull, University of Wisconsin, Harper, Houghton, Knopf, Little Brown, Norton, Simon & Schuster, and University of Pittsburgh) each had one title shortlisted on the lesbian side of the aisle.

On the guy's side, Kensington matched Alyson with 8 shortlists (but zip on the women's side), Cleis scored two (plus their three on the women's side). Harrington and imprint Southern Tier had four (plus one on the women's side). Wisconsin, Houghton, and Norton each garnered two nominations on the guy's side (plus one each on the women's side). Knopf and Simon & Schuster both had a nomination on each side of the aisle. St. Martins scored four on the men's side (but none on the women's side). Fourteen independents and four mainstream presses had one nomination on the men's side, but none on the women's side.

\*Truth in hairsplitting: Is worker-owned Norton a mainstream press or an independent press? (Mainstream, by history, we decided.) Kensington? That's harder. Without Kensington the mainstream has such a poor showing that we counted them in, just to ease the corp's loss of face. Where do you count Cleis? Transgender-oriented books? Books by men about women, books about both – or all – genders? Hey, this is a sport, not statistics! Which way the hair spit was rarely statistically significant. These are my estimates. Other people would come up with other totals. But the gist is still there. And I'd challenge anyone to also look at how well we are or aren't, as a literature, addressing and including other kinds of diversity. Equality is rarely achieved by accident – it takes effort. But it's always worth it.

#### **The Stonewall Awards**

Congratulations to Monique Truong and John D'Emilio, winners of the American Library Association's GLBT Round Table's Stonewall Awards. The awards will be presented at the ALA Conference in Orlando, June 24-30. Truong will take home the Barbara Gittings Literature Award for **The Book of Salt** and D'Emilio will receive the Israel Fishman Nonfiction Award for **The Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin**.

The Stonewall Awards also recognize four honorable mentions in each category.

#### **Honorable Mentions for Fiction**

**Cutting Room** by Louise Welsh

**Keeping You a Secret** by Julie Ann Peters

**Lives Of The Circus Animals** by Christopher Bram

**Southland** by Nina Revoyr

#### **Honorable Mentions for Nonfiction:**

**Beautiful Shadow: A Life Of Patricia Highsmith** by Andrew Wilson

**Before Stonewall: Activists For Gay And Lesbian Rights In Historical Context** edited by Vern L. Bullough

**Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict And Their Circle** by Lois W. Banner

**Ridiculous!: The Theatrical Life And Times Of Charles Ludlam** by David Kaufman

And, hey, in Britain, *The Big Book of Lesbian Horse Stories* won the Diagram Prize for the Oddest Title of the Year. Who says lesbians don't have a sense of humor? It's a collection of – yes – humorous short fiction... ("Alisa Surkis and Monica Nolan invite readers back into the curves of third-sex pulp fiction where odd-girls-out now ride free....") Published in 2002 by Kensington Books.

#### **Best Book Promo Stunt**

*Metrosexuality* (straight guys with a gay man's aesthetic for grooming and fashion) is the next big thing, well, for straight guys. DaCapo press gets this issue's promo award for distributing 200,000 coasters to bars in seven cities to promote their book, *The Metrosexual Guide to Style: A Handbook for the Modern Man*. I wonder how that would work for lesbian erotica titles in women's clubs and bars?

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### Input Wanted

Felice Newman is updating *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book* and is looking for lesbian, bi, and queer women – young, old, partnered and single, trans and traditionally gendered, sexually experienced and new to exploration – to share their experience, teach others, and generally rant and rave about their sexual experience. Email her [fnewman@cleispress.com](mailto:fnewman@cleispress.com) for her survey.

*Sinister Wisdom's* Lesbian Literature issue is accepting submissions until March 1. Email them to Fran Day, [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net).

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### What?! Sexism in *The NYT Book Review*?!

Just in case you needed documentation: *The NYT Book Review* overwhelmingly favors books and book reviews written by men. Feminist writer and psychologist Paula Caplan and psychotherapist Mary Ann Palko analyzed 53 consecutive issues published in 2002 and 2003 and found that 72% of the books reviewed were written by men and that 66% of the reviews were written by men.

*Book Review* editor Charles McGrath claims that the situation (at least in terms of reviewers, if not books reviewed) has improved during his eight-year tenure. Caplan and Palko conclude that the *Times'* over reliance on male authors and reviewers is demoralizing to women's psychological development.

And, BTWOF would add – to women's reputations, publishability, sales figures, income, and general ability to impact the world. Meanwhile McGrath is in the process of shifting to a new job as *Times* writer-at-large and the paper is searching for a new editor for the *Book Review*. Most of the people reported to be under consideration are women. Let's hope that whoever it is, she or he is also empowered to remedy such blatant imbalances.

And, in closing, congratulations to the workers at the Borders flagship store in Ann Arbor, who have not only voted union, but who have also successfully negotiated a contract. Employees at Borders' other unionized store (Minneapolis) have been working without a contract since 2002. Workers of the world unite: Vote union but shop independent.

Yours in spreading the words,

Carol Seajay  
for *Books To Watch Out For*



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