

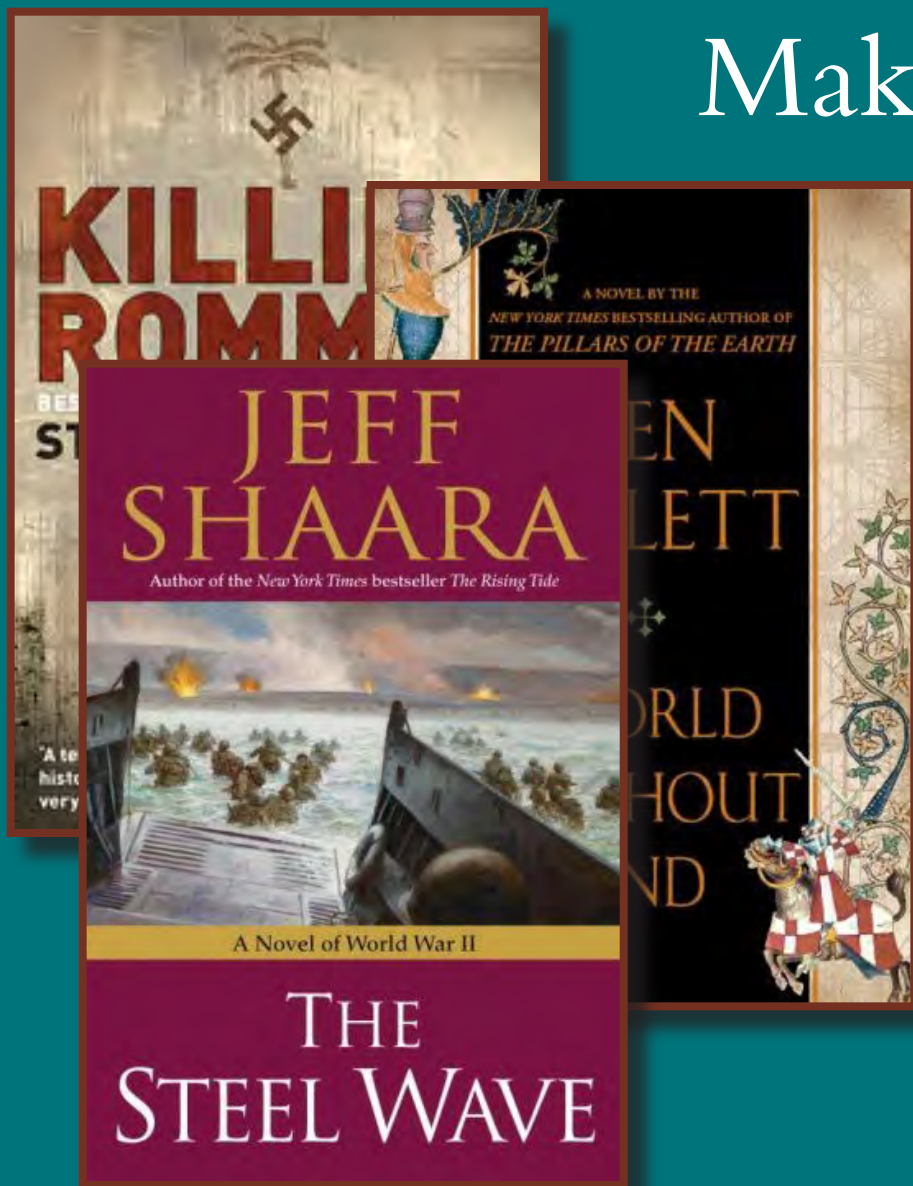
Historical Novels Review

A publication of the Historical Novel Society

Make WAR

Not Love

Ken Kreckel consults **Jeff Shaara**, **Steven Pressfield**, and more about the trends in historical fiction for men



Plus...

Susan Higginbotham interviews **Catherine Delors** about *Mistress of the Revolution*, **Rose Melikan** discusses *The Blackstone Key*, **Andrew Thompson** looks at time & place in **Arthurian fiction**, publisher **Mills & Boon** celebrates its centenary, and coverage of the 2008 UK **HNS Conference**

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The Historical Novels Review

Issue 45, August 2008, ISSN 1471-7492

Where the Boys Are



As we bade a fond farewell to Mary Sharratt and Sally Zigmond in the previous issue, so we bid a warm welcome to their replacement

editors, Edward James and Alan Fisk, in this issue. For more information on Edward and Alan, see Sarah's column, and meanwhile, welcome aboard, gentlemen!

And speaking of gentlemen, we have a very interesting cover piece for you this issue. We've seen a great deal lately in the way of articles that focus on historical fiction written with women as the target audience. So we thought that it might be interesting to get a male perspective on the state of things in historical fiction. Ken Kreckel has stepped up to the challenge by consulting authors Jeff Shaara, Steven Pressfield, and more on the subject of historical fiction for men.

Also in this issue, you'll find interviews with Catherine Delors, author of *Mistress of the Revolution*, and Rose Melikan, author of *The Blackstone Key*. Andrew Thompson (with a little help from Myfanwy Cook) takes a look at historical settings and Arthurian fiction, and Jay Dixon profiles publisher Mills & Boon on its centenary. Susan Higginbotham provides a helpful quiz to help you determine exactly what type of a researcher you are (don't worry, results remain confidential) and last, but certainly not least, Sarah Cuthbertson fills us in on the goings on at the 2008 UK HNS Conference, which was held in April at the National Railway Museum in York. Enjoy!

Bethany Latham

Historical Fiction Market News



Please continue to send information on publishing deals and other news to me at sljohnson2@eiu.edu.

HNS Announcements

As Bethany mentioned in May's *HNR*, this will be reviews editor **Mary Sharratt's** last issue. We wish her the best of luck in her writing endeavors and look forward to reading her next historical novel, about the Pendle witches.

Taking over for Mary is **Edward James**, a native of Kent now living in Cheltenham. Among other accomplishments, he is a former university lecturer and consultant with several books on social policy and local history to his credit, though his current ambition is to publish a work of fiction. Edward's interests include the 16th century and WWII; he has reviewed for the HNS for three years.

Alan Fisk, another longtime reviewer and HNS member, will take over for Sally Zigmond effective next issue. Alan, a technical writer who lives and works in London, has had five historical novels published, of which two are still in print: *Forty Testoons* (set in 1504 Newfoundland), and *Cupid and the Silent Goddess* (16th-century Florence). Contact details for Alan and Edward are on the page opposite. We'd like to welcome them both to the editorial team.

Contest News

With the support of Penguin UK, the HNS is running two **book giveaway contests** open to UK members. See p. 61 for how to enter.

To celebrate the centenary of his birth, the Royal Institution of Cornwall (RIC) announces the **Winston Graham Historical Prize for Literature**. A £5000 prize will be awarded in its inaugural year, for an unpublished work of historical fiction, preferably with a clear connection to Cornwall. Pan Macmillan, who have re-issued Graham's twelve Poldark novels, will consider the winning entry for publication. For details, visit <http://www.royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk> and click on "Prizes." Deadline is 31 March 2009.

Historical Fiction Seminar

The 27th annual **Key West Literary Seminar**, two separate 4-day events to be convened in January 2009, will be devoted to "historical fiction and the search for truth." Speakers will include **Andrea Barrett, Russell Banks, Madison Smartt Bell, Geraldine Brooks, Francisco Goldman, Thomas Mallon, Barry Unsworth, and Gore Vidal**, among others. For details and to register: <http://www.kwls.org/lit>.

New Publishing Deals

Sources include Publishers Marketplace, *Publishers Weekly*, *The Bookseller*, and more.

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Sarah Hoyt's untitled novel about Katherine Howard, fifth wife of Henry VIII, who plied love as a weapon better than most, but not well enough to survive court machinations, sold to Ginjer Buchanan at Berkley, by Lucienne Diver of The Knight Agency.

Sweeping Up Glass, **Carolyn D. Wall's** debut novel about mothers and daughters, poverty and prejudice in the 1930s American South, sold to Bantam US at auction, for a six-figure sum, and to Laura Palmer at Quercus (UK and Commonwealth).

Helen Humphreys's *The Frozen Thames*, chronicling the forty times that this fabled river completely froze from the years 1142 to 1895, sold to Caitlin Alexander at Bantam Dell at auction, by Bill Hanna of Acacia House.

Commonwealth Prize for overall Best Book winner **Lawrence Hill's** *The Book of Negroes* (an Editor's Choice selection last November, under the US title *Someone Knows My Name*), a fictional slave narrative, sold to Marianne Velmans at Doubleday UK by Claire Roberts at Trident Media Group, on behalf of Ellen Levine.

Erica Eisdorfer's *The Wet Nurse's Tale*, following a smart and resourceful country girl who makes her living by nursing the children of wealthy families, who, she discovers, are often not as they seem, sold to Rachel Kahan at Putnam, by Alexandra Machinist.

Sheramy Bundrick's *The Sunflowers*, which imagines Vincent Van Gogh's relationship with the Arles prostitute to whom he gave his severed ear, sold to Lucia Macro at Avon, for publication in Fall 2009.

Glynnis Campbell's two untitled historical romances, set along the border of Scotland in the time of Mary Queen of Scots, sold to Frances Jalet-Miller and Amy Pierpont at Grand Central, by Helen Breitwieser at Cornerstone Literary.

The House at Riverton and *The Forgotten Garden* author **Kate Morton's** *The Distant Hours*, a historical mystery of wartime romance, broken promises and almost-forgotten secrets, sold to Maria Rejt at Pan Macmillan, in a two-book deal, by Julia Lee at Allen & Unwin.

Susan Vreeland's *Clara and Mr. Tiffany*, about the achievements and struggles of the most gifted designer in Tiffany's workshops, and a second novel, sold to Jane von Mehren at Random House, by Barbara Braun at Barbara Braun Associates.

Roy MacSkimming's *Laurier in Love*, a historical novel about the most romantic national leader in Canada's history, sold to Patrick Crean at Thomas Allen, by Dean Cooke of The Cooke Agency.

Outlaw by **Angus Donald**, the first of a new series with Robin Hood as the Godfather of Sherwood, including a gang of outlaws more like the mafia than the Hollywood legend, sold to David Shelley at Sphere in a two-book deal, for publication in July 2009, by Ian Drury at Sheil Land.

Anchee Min's next novel, *Pearl of China*, about the life of Pearl Buck told through the eyes of her fictional friend Willow, a Chinese girl, for publication in Spring 2010, sold to Anton Mueller at Bloomsbury by Sandra Dijkstra at the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency.

Ariana Franklin's *Mistress of the Art of Death* sold to the BBC, by Meg Davis of MBA Literary Agency on behalf of

Helen Heller.

Kenneth Wishnia's *The Fifth Servant*, set in 16th century Prague during the Inquisition, sold to Jennifer Brehl at William Morrow, by Leigh Feldman at Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman.

Lady Macbeth author **Susan Fraser King's** *Saint Margaret of Scotland*, exploring the life of pious Queen Margaret, the wife of Malcolm III, sold to Heather Proulx at Crown by agent Karen Solem.

James Becker's *The Last Apostle*, positing an earth-shattering what-if about the birth of Christianity, first in a new series, sold to Brent Howard at NAL by George Lucas at Inkwell Management on behalf of Luigi Bonomi at LBA (US).

Lorenzo Borghese's *The Princess of Nowhere*, centering on the romance and relationship of Camillo Borghese and Pauline Bonaparte in early 19th century Rome, sold to Lucia Macro at Avon, by Ian Kleinert at Objective Entertainment.

Jane Rusbridge's debut *The Devil's Music*, a story of family secrets and betrayal that includes Harry Houdini, sold to Helen Garnons-Williams at Bloomsbury UK, for publication in summer 2009, in a two-book deal, by Hannah Westland at Rogers, Coleridge & White (UK/Commonwealth).

In Stores Soon

Caroline Rance's *Kill-Grief*, her debut novel, set in an 18th-century hospital and about a young woman whose determination to escape her past leads her into life as a nurse in a world of disease, surgery and rotgut gin, will appear from Picnic Publishing in January.

C. C. Humphreys' Vlad: The Last Confession, about the historical Dracula, will appear in September from McArthur & Co (Canada) and next March from Orion (UK).

Biya Bandle's *The King's Rifle*, described as the first novel to depict the experiences of black African soldiers in the Second World War, will appear from Amistad/HarperCollins US next April.

The Miracles of Prato, a novel by **Laurie Albanese and Laura Morowitz** about the passionate romance between Renaissance painter-monk Fra Filippo Lippi and a young nun, is slated to appear from HarperCollins US in January.

The Princes in the Tower are the subject of **Emma Darwin's A Secret Alchemy**, out from Headline Review (UK) in November.

A Mercy, **Toni Morrison's** next novel, about a slave girl owned by an Anglo-Dutch trader in colonial America, will appear from Knopf (US and Canada) in November.

Delacorte (Random House US) will publish **Elissa Elliot's Eve: A Novel of the First Woman**, inspired by the Genesis account as well as Mesopotamian history, next February.

Margaret Lawrence's Roanoke, a literary thriller about the famed Lost Colony, will also appear from Delacorte (US) in February.

For additional forthcoming titles, visit: <http://www.historicalnovelsociety.org/forthcoming.htm>

Errata

In the review of **Evelyn Coleman's Freedom Train** (May HNR, p. 57), it was the Marine Guards who guarded the Freedom Train, not the Army Guards.

HISTORY & FILM

By Any Other Name

by Hannah Sternberg

When I watched *The Name of the Rose* (1986) for the first time, I did not feel transported. Maybe the conditions weren't right. I was in the library; it was the afternoon. There might have been a glare on the screen, or someone coughed behind me. Everything seemed to be there in the film: the mist was nebulous, and the knights were clanky. The monastery was weathered and Styrofoam-free. So what was missing? What about the experience of reading Umberto Eco's 1980 novel of the same name had been lost here? And why was that loss significant?

Eco's book is bursting with cinematic potential, from its rich visual imagery to the grotesquery of characters and incidents. Set in a 14th-century monastery beset by a string of gruesome murders, Eco's story uses a historical setting not as a comfortable retreat from modern reality, but as an alien landscape for the exploration of fear and faith, making the recognizable elements of human behavior all the more unsettling or moving. And Eco also adroitly manipulates the genre expectations of his modern readers, slipping in references and allusions that play on the stereotypes of modern mysteries and thrillers; the book even contains a catchy tagline for itself, when Adso, the novice to sleuthing Brother William, proclaims, "It's a story of theft and vengeance among monks of scant virtue!"

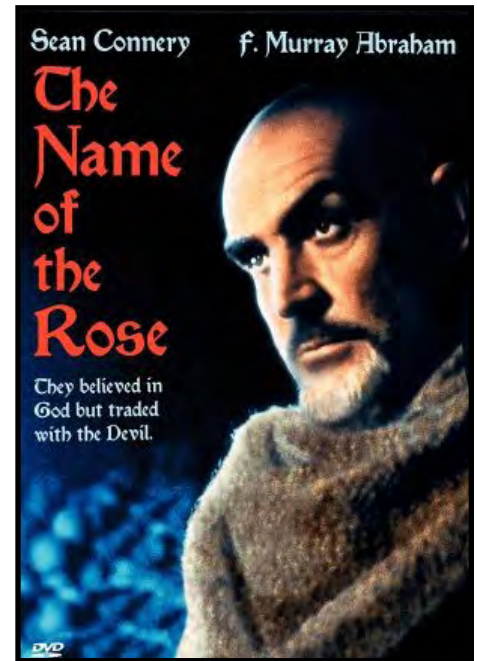
In the opening credits of the film version, a title tells us this is "A Palimpsest of Umberto Eco's Novel." Classically, a palimpsest was a reused piece of parchment, or a book taken apart for its

pages to be scraped and rewritten. This 1986 film seems to do all the scraping, but none of the rewriting. The four screenwriters have carefully removed layers of emotional and intellectual meaning to make the story easier to digest, but in so doing they erased from it the book's hypnotic magic; what director Jean-Jacques Annaud presents instead is an unsatisfying facsimile for fans of the book, and a dull, flat allegory for viewers who had not previously read it.

The most beautiful sequence of the film is the opening, when, against a dark screen, the voice of adult Adso begins to tell the story that will soon be enacted. A dark screen here is not a blank screen; though nothing is depicted, the viewer is drawn to look into the darkness, waiting. This could have been the opening of a meaningful interpretation of Eco's work. But after that quiet opening, and the haunting landscape shots that follow it, the film sets about filling in all the blanks *too* assiduously, producing a compact story with no room for imagination or philosophy.

In a 1986 review of the film in *The New York Times*, Vincent Canby spots the film's shortcoming in its shedding of Eco's meandering digressions; by reducing the story to, well, just a story, this film has neglected all the academic goodies that, in Canby's mind, made Eco's book so fascinating and fun. Canby describes Eco's original *The Name of the Rose* as "a professor's joke," and the same could be said of Eco's later novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*, sometimes referred to as the thinking man's *Da Vinci Code*. However, in both these books, the academic digressions promise more than just "fun facts." I didn't put down either novel by Eco asking myself, "Why didn't he write nonfiction on this research instead?" – a question I've asked of several recent historical or history-related novels, such as *The Interpretation of Murder* and *Ghostwalk*.

Eco's "historical goodies" are digressions, but they aren't tacked on; behind this astounding accumulation of facts, this lingual muscle-flexing, and the sometimes aggravating esoteria, Eco asks the reader (or perhaps just himself),



"Why?" Even in the book's final twist – whether the reader has predicted it or not – the question of the nature of knowledge is not a simple matter of the enlightened good guys fighting the forces of intellectual darkness; Eco raises interesting questions about the lust for knowledge, the compatibility of knowledge and faith, even our ability to bestow logical connections on the random events of the world. This skillful, vital mixing of fact and fiction is also seen in current novelist Louis Bayard, whose *Mr. Timothy* and *The Pale Blue Eye* are remarkable not just for their thorough scholarship or clever referentiality, but for the stunning emotional strength derived from those elements.

Despite Canby's skepticism, Annaud's 1986 film does in fact contain plenty of the historical goodies expected in a lavishly decorated and atmospheric period piece. The scriptorium scenes are a museum of book-making, and the Latin is still there in prayer and reading; especially captivating is crazed Salvator's spoken amalgamation of all languages, in a kinetic performance by Ron Perlman. You even get to see how a monk's habit is put together, in one painfully explicit sex scene (go ahead and fast-forward through the rest). If this is what constituted the book's appeal, it may be condensed but it's not entirely missing. What *is* missing, however, is the personal dialogue of

philosophy and faith that these elements inspire.

In an original advertising poster, Sean Connery (as William of Baskerville, the Franciscan Sherlock Holmes) stands with arms crossed and chin tilted inquisitively at the viewer, surrounded by miniatures of the other characters from the film. On the left, at the top of the column, papal inquisitor Bernardo Gui (F. Murray Abraham) jabs a finger at the viewer: "I want YOU to experience medieval history." Where is Adso (a teenaged Christian Slater), Eco's innocent narrator, his contemplative everyman, this naïve adolescent teetering on the verge of a mystical, monastic life? He's in the lower right corner, making out with the village girl (Valentina Vargas).

There's nothing in this poster, however, that screams this is a bad movie in its own right. It looks like it could be a fun, character-filled historical thriller, with the same combination of pseudo-historical tidbits and banter-strewn action that makes Indiana Jones such a guilty pleasure. The potential for a solid, commercial, entertaining mystery flick is there, despite the chagrin of countless book fans who would probably wish for a more enlightened treatment. If you're doubtful of the film's commercial intent, just look at the fact that this Italian-German-French co-financed adaptation of an originally Italian novel was scripted in English.

But the film's writers and director fail at producing a commercial adventure/thriller just as they fail at creating a more thoughtful film. They may have successfully condensed Eco's lengthy novel into pure plot, and they may have spotted what would make that thin plot unique – historical detail – but tension and pacing are the cracks where the meaning falls through. This isn't because of any intrinsic inability of film to capture the subtlety of literature – it's simply because the director and cinematographer mishandle the film, using a complete coverage technique that isn't incorrect in itself, but acts like a wet blanket on the mystical atmosphere this story requires. The few action sequences are

confusing and disorienting, unraveling the excitement that should have resulted. Quieter scenes, however, are shot at a cool distance, with emphasis on dialogue that explains rather than close-ups that illustrate emotion, carefully avoiding any angles that would jar the static coverage set-up.

There are moments when more stirring photography seeps in, such as the shot of ancient Ubertino (William Hickey) sprawled on the stones of the church before the statue of the Virgin, which captures the immense size of the place as well as the eeriness of his devotion; but technique like that soon dissipates into more banal set-ups as soon as the dialogue begins. It seems that, in this literary adaptation, faithfulness to the original has been mistaken for faithfulness to words, which actually clutter the film's ability to visualize the emotions and tensions described.

But the elements most evidently missing when they're badly needed are darkness, silence and emptiness. That may sound contradictory, considering the ponderous word count of Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, but in 600 plus pages of prose densely packed, Eco actually sets the reader free. Through the medium of Adso's hallucinatory depictions, the reader seeps between the lines, and becomes the air of the church pierced with light, the flicker of the oil lamp oozing over obscure pages, the darkness under the cowls of the monks. Eco's descriptions, in their best moments, are a gossamer armature upon which the reader hangs his or her own imagination.

Tapping into an audience's imagination is more than a matter of illustration; films must also construct a convincing enough "reality" to allow the viewer to close his or her eyes and see the characters, after the final scene has been wrapped up, continuing to dwell in the world created by the film. In the 2005 HBO series, "Rome," the remote world of ancient Rome was brought to life, and not just through clever references to the audience's modern lives. "Rome" succeeded at making home life, family life, mealtimes, sleeping arrangements, travel

arrangements, and even advertisements vivid and believable. Part of this is through the wonderful ease of the actors' performances; part of it is the meticulous but artful set decoration and costume design; and part is the use of light that makes it all feel natural, the sense of darkness alive in the night (so different from night in a modern city) or in the sewers of Rome, the slant of sunlight through the curtains of a humble home, the cool dimness of the Senate floor.

Not only does *The Name of the Rose* feel over-rehearsed in contrast; but the design and lighting, as scrupulous as they may be, only add to this petrification. Instead of a portrait of living monks, we see a bunch of European actors playing dress-up. Instead of a slice of life, we have an awkwardly stiff mystery play. And to me this seems to be summed up in the scene when William and Adso shuffle through the library at night, followed jerkily by the spotlight meant to represent the glow of the lamp Adso carries. *The Name of the Rose* shines most in its darkest scenes – scenes that don't obscure for the sake of confusing the viewer, but use contrast to heighten mystery and tension, to isolate or entrap characters, to highlight motion over detail – but these moments are fleeting.

The 1986 film *The Name of the Rose* has the feeling of many literary adaptations, that of a well-lit proscenium theater into which the audience peers; rather than the invasive atmosphere of a book that reaches into its audience's imagination and blossoms there. The problem isn't that its subject is literature, or history; the problem is the fear of offending either that keeps the film from bringing them to life.

The Name of the Rose, 1986

directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud; executive producer, Jake Eberts; based on the novel of the same name by Umberto Eco; starring Sean Connery, Christian Slater.

Hannah Sternberg studies film and creative writing at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Make WAR Not Love

Trends in Men's Historical Fiction

by Ken Kreckel

It's time to take a look at the subject of men's historical fiction. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

In fact, it's quite a slippery subject. Just what is men's historical fiction? We all know what women's fiction is—romance, right? Per Romance Writers of America, romance accounts for more than 50% of all books sold; 22% of the readership is male, up from 7% just a few years ago.¹ Still, the genre is dominated by the fairer sex.

So men's historical fiction must be the opposite. Books with no bodice ripping? No romance? Or perhaps no women. Indeed, google "men's fiction" and you're going to come up with a lot of references to "gay men's fiction." That's not what we're looking for—not that there's anything wrong with that. Dig a little deeper and you encounter articles, usually written by women, that not only question what men read, but if they read at all. The latter, of course, is utter nonsense. One has to read if one finds oneself without ESPN or Sky and needs to check last night's scores.

The answer can be found at the Comic Book Bin, surely a man's site if there ever was one. Leroy Douresseaux's review of the movie *300* definitively states that it is "historical fiction for males." Within the piece is a litany of the characteristics of men's fiction: "lots of thrilling, action scenes full of ghastly, but cool imagery; glorious ... battles, as gruesome and horrific as they are epic; every moment ... punctuated by bombast; pomposity and high falutin' speeches and proclamations about duty, honor, sacrifice, etc."² Now that's what I'm talkin' about.

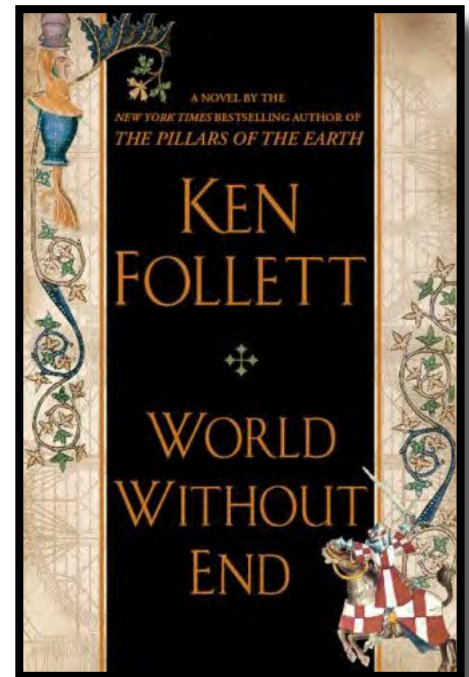
Action is the key word. No less a personage than Ken Follett has stated: "You can't write novels about people who are timid, risk-averse and passive. Or you can, but

they're called literary novels."³

Where do we find the best prospects for risky action? War, of course. It has all the elements that men seem to like, and even wish to *be like*. Mike Gayle, author of *My Legendary Girlfriend*, explains: "men prefer Boys' Own stories about the SAS and true-life gangsters because it's men living life the way you suspect men are supposed to live their lives but are a little too scared to do so."⁴ This would explain the statistics that show that although women read far more fiction than men, men read more non-fiction. It's the relation to the "real," I suspect, or at least its appearance, that catches men's interest.

Reality is a key factor. I asked Steven Pressfield about the composition of his readership. "Elite military people - Marine Corps, Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Army rangers - seem to respond to my stuff," he says. "I think they are drawn to the issues of courage, honor, the warrior ethos, certain ethical issues of how one conducts oneself in extreme conditions, male camaraderie, etc." He goes on: "Modern Marines, for example, see themselves as not alone, not the first fighters to face what they're facing; they get a longer view, that many other professional warriors have dealt with the same problems and felt the same feelings. It's been going on for thousands of years."

Books about war do seem to dominate. Two prominent male authors featured at the last North American HNS conference, Bernard Cornwell and C.C. Humphreys, set their books during times of war. Browse through the book lists of the leading male historical novelists, and you'll inevitably find war is the subject of either all, or at least most of their works. Steven Pressfield focuses on ancient conflicts. Jack



Ludlow and Simon Scarrow concentrate on Roman wars. Jeff Shaara's books have worked through American wars, from the Revolution to World War II. Ken Follett first rose to prominence with his best-selling *Eye of the Needle*, and has returned again and again to the Second World War.

Of the aforementioned authors, several are currently either releasing or working on novels dealing with World War II in particular. Pressfield's latest novel is *Killing Rommel* (Doubleday, 2008). Shaara has just released *The Steel Wave* (Ballantine, 2008), the middle book of a trilogy. Simon Scarrow's brother Alex has published a WWII-based novel. Follett wrote on the subject most recently in *Hornet Flight* (2002) and will likely return to it in the future. David Donachie (Jack Ludlow) is also working on a story set during the Second World War. Nearly 1,200 WWII-related books were published in 2006, according to Bowker's database, far more than deal with the Civil War. While this includes a large number of non-fiction books, I believe it is representative of historical novels as well.

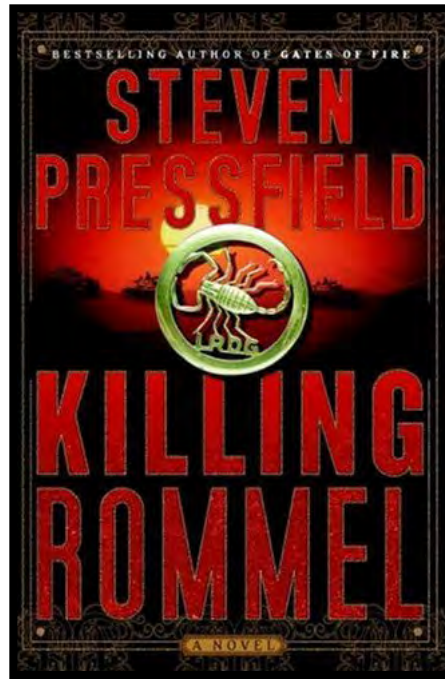
Follett explained the war's appeal: "It is the greatest drama in human history, the biggest war ever and a true battle of good and evil."⁵ Pressfield agrees: "It was a helluva war, wasn't it? From the

European theater to the Pacific, it encompassed an incredible range of conflicts, environments, tactics, enemies – not to mention fantastic stories. Heroism, drama, sacrifice, twists of fate, good versus evil ... next to the Bible, it has more pure eye-popping, mind-bending sagas than any period ever." In an interview with *HNR*, Shaara echoes these thoughts: "It's a war we feel good about, and the outcome was extremely positive for our country. That hasn't happened since." Initially skeptical about writing a WWII-era novel, he had to be convinced by his publisher that his readers wanted his take on the subject. Finally he agreed: "Drama emerges from crisis, and what greater crisis is there than war?"

Although the subject of World War II seems to be increasing in popularity, there may be some clouds on the horizon. Late last year, Cindy Adams's *New York Post* column reported: "The History Channel has nixed future WWII programming. They claim: Doesn't fit our demographics. The History Channel!"⁶ If true, this is indeed amazing, as the subject has been a staple of their programming, but on further reflection perhaps it's not so surprising. The participants, the greatest generation, are dying off. Even their children, who kept the flame alive with such projects as *Flags of Our Fathers*, are getting on. Steven Spielberg, who helped stoke interest with *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*, is moving to other projects. More ominously, the readers of these books are not being replaced. Television, computers, the Internet, and video games have taken their toll on the next generation, particularly the male portion.

This situation has had a particular effect on men's fiction. Literary agent Andrew Zack has attested: "I lost my job at The Berkley Publishing Group specifically because of the drop-off in sales of what we called 'men's fiction action/adventure' (or so my boss told me!). Men's fiction was always a smaller piece of the action than women's. Simple fact. And now that the entire pie is smaller, that piece is smaller than ever. So what

does get published better have an overwhelming potential to sell. And finding that potential seems easier with women's fiction or non-fiction. Your target market is, well, a bigger target."⁷ Shaara also cautions: "I'm firmly convinced that there are just as many boring war books as there are boring books of other genres, and just having 'war' as a subject is no guarantee that readers will find



the book interesting."

However, those who write in the genre are not worried. None of the authors in this piece sees any drop-off of interest among his readership. Pressfield points out that many of his readers are "military, retired military, police, or pure history buffs," and their interest is consistent. Commenting on World War II as a setting, Ken Follett imagines "that writers will continue to get stories from it, and readers will continue to love them, for many more years."⁸ Authors like Follett, whose historical fiction often fits the thriller category, enjoy enormous success. Admittedly, thrillers are more of a gender-neutral product, and have a much broader appeal, than say, a more narrowly-focused military book such as *Killing Rommel*.

Again, is "action" the trump card?

Douresseaux, the reviewer of *300*, stated the film "is like Oliver Stone's *JFK* – less about history and

more about mythmaking." He went on to point out that even the film's creators readily admit this. Citing another historical movie, *Gladiator*, Simon Scarrow was not bothered: "Loved it! While it is littered with historical inaccuracies, that doesn't really detract from the fact that it is great cinema."⁹ Of course, motion pictures are not books. Still, the same comments were often made about the thriller *The Da Vinci Code*.

Scarrow explained it in this way: "I'm a great reader of history books, and am frustrated by the way good historians can create an exciting tale, but have to be faithful to historical method. Historical fiction, by comparison, is allowed to creatively fill in the gaps left by the historical facts, and that's what makes the world of historical fiction so very tangible."¹⁰ Donachie agreed: "A novelist can tell an interior story, I think a historian is stuck on the outside of the people he is writing about."¹¹

What does this say about the need for accuracy? Pressfield states that his readers are "sticklers for accuracy," categorizing works such as the aforementioned *300* as "more in the realm of action fantasy." Shaara acknowledges that while Hollywood often changes historical facts, he chooses not to do that. Follett simply notes that an author must be "a perfectionist."¹²

However, war is not the only topic addressed by the writers of men's historical fiction. Interestingly, Ken Follett's most popular work, *The Pillars of the Earth*, chronicles the construction of a cathedral during the Middle Ages. The author admits that its success surprised even him; it even provoked a sequel, *World Without End* (Macmillan UK/Dutton, 2007).

Nor does men's historical fiction need to be confined only to male readers. C.W. Gortner, the author of *The Last Queen* (Ballantine/Headline, 2008), believes that historical fiction books written by men can appeal to readers of both sexes. Russell Whitfield has even crossed over, penning *Gladiatrix*, characterized by Gortner as "a girl-kicks-some-serious-butt debut novel set in the time of the Roman Empire."¹³ Whitfield confesses

to being a fan of many historical writers, including in his list such authors as Susan Curran and Donna Gillespie among the Pressfields and Scarrows. But is this a trend, or merely men getting in touch with their more sensitive side?

Of course, many male authors have always had a significant female following. Tim Lott, author of *The Love Secrets of Don Juan*, admitted that he gets a lot of fan mail from women, and that more women than men attend his readings." In addition, he is reportedly "anxious not to be seen as a 'male writer.'"¹⁴ Jeff Shaara shares this anxiety, reporting that at least half the audience at his events is female, and he does not want his work to be labeled as "testosterone oriented." Since more women than men read fiction, this makes good marketing sense at the very least, but I believe it is more than that.

Over the years there have been many historical novels that appeal to both sexes. Herman Wouk's masterpiece, the two-book *Winds of War and War and Remembrance*, was described by him as an "historical romance."¹⁵ Nevertheless, men did not shy away from it. During his run for the vice-presidency, Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen acknowledged Wouk's books to be the most significant he had read. Follett's books have long featured female protagonists. The hero of *Eye of the Needle* was a woman. The list goes on and on.

I have no doubt that labels and categories are more a construct than reality. As is the nature of the world, men's fiction represents more a continuum than a rigid division. It can range from military-oriented books with an almost exclusively male readership to books that share the same subjects but have a much broader appeal.

Where does that leave historical fiction for men? Recent trends in popular culture seem to suggest that historically-based stories are increasing in appeal. Hugely popular efforts on cable TV such as *Rome* and *The Tudors* indicate a resurging interest in historical fiction. Notwithstanding some historical inaccuracies, the shows were well done, attracting large

audiences, including a significant number of men. Still, one has to ask: does the prospect of seeing a naked Anne Boleyn really (forgive the choice of words) stimulate an interest in historical fiction among males?

As Scarrow has pointed out: "There is definitely a prurient fascination in the self-indulgence of the Romans and the sheer diversity of the deadly and sexy entertainments that they wallowed in ... They make for great copy, great novels, great TV series and great movies."¹⁶ In Follett's stories, "having sex is usually a moral decision with consequences for people and families. For example, in *The Eye of the Needle*, Lucy Rose is a passionate woman in a cold marriage, and she decides, rashly, to have a love affair with a stranger. The ethics of this decision, and its effects on her family, are part of the ongoing drama."¹⁷ The same might be said about Henry VIII.

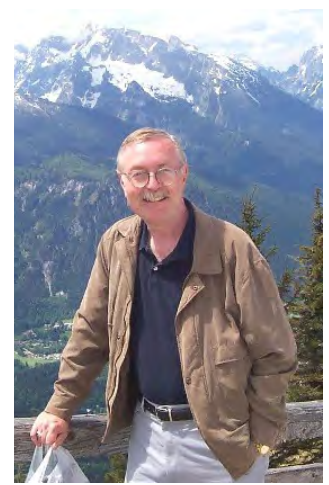
While many of the authors quoted above acknowledge that reading as a whole might be decreasing, they have detected no hint of it in the response to their own works. Indeed, the genre appears to be very robust. However, if men's fiction is all about war, there may be trouble ahead. Pressfield notes: "World War II was easy; you knew who was bad and who was good. Asymmetrical warfare and counterinsurgency, warfare with non-state actors and combatants mixed in with non-combatants ... that gets a lot trickier, witness the United States' response to terrorism - Abu Ghraib, waterboarding, warrantless wiretapping, Guantanamo."

But where trouble lies, so does opportunity. Pressfield goes on: "I think we'll see more stuff that asks, 'What is right?' and 'What would YOU do in such-and-such a situation?'"

He foresees a bright future. "I think it's going to get 'realer.' So many men have now served in Iraq and Afghanistan and many, many of them will write about it and are writing about it (or other stuff) already. There will be great authors coming out of these ordeals. I can't wait to read 'em!"

Neither can I.

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LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ:

WRITING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Susan Higginbotham interviews author Catherine Delors

Mistress of the Revolution, Catherine Delors' first novel, was selected as an Editors' Choice in the February 2008 issue of *HNR*. Set during the French Revolution, it is told in the form of a memoir by Gabrielle de Monserrat, an exile living in England.

A native of France, Delors graduated from the University of Paris–Sorbonne School of Law and now practices law in California.

SH: *English is your second language. Did that affect the writing of your novel at all? Do you find yourself thinking in French and writing in English, or vice versa?*

CD: Whenever I write in English, I think in English. But the fact that it is my second language does affect the way I write. I learned basic English at school, but I really “met” the language later, thanks to an encounter with the works of Jane Austen. I read and reread her novels to the point where I know them by heart now. That was a tremendous help to write *Mistress of the Revolution*, since my heroine, Gabrielle, lived in England in the early 1800s. She could have met Jane! Maybe she will in a sequel . . .

SH: *As a lawyer myself, I've found that my*

legal training helps me a lot in creating my characters, because I've become accustomed to thinking about all sides of an issue. Do you find that this is true in your own writing? Has your legal training helped you as a writer in other ways?

CD: How true! As lawyers we must adopt a multi-faceted approach to people and issues. My legal training has helped me in another way. As a litigator, I have learned to use simple words, simple sentences, in my briefs and in oral arguments. No jargon, no fireworks. That's the way to be an effective advocate, and I believe that it is also the most elegant and beautiful literary style. Flourishes make me cringe.

SH: *Are you writing full-time now, or are you still practicing law also?*

CD: For me, writing full-time remains an ambition, but I am not there (yet). I am still an active member of the State Bar of California.

SH: *What interested you in writing about the French Revolution?*

CD: In the beginning, nothing. I had studied it in high school and found it an incomprehensible muddle of events and characters. Then one day, I had a talk with my father, who was a history professor, about Coffinhal Street in Vic, the little mountain town where I used to spend all of my summers. He asked whether I

knew who Coffinhal was. I

owned to my ignorance. My father and I began talking about the man, his career, the Revolution in general. He also spoke of the Chevalier des Huttes and Carrier, both of whom were from the

same area. In a single conversation, I had been handed no less than three historical characters for my

novel! All in a setting that had been familiar since my childhood. How could I resist that? I began digging into the Revolution, and was soon astonished by the modernity of the issues raised at the time. My father died before the book was completed, but we often talked about its progress. I know he would have loved to see it published.

SH: *In the United States, there seems to be a preference for historical fiction set in Europe. Do you find that readers in France prefer fiction set in their own country, or fiction set elsewhere?*

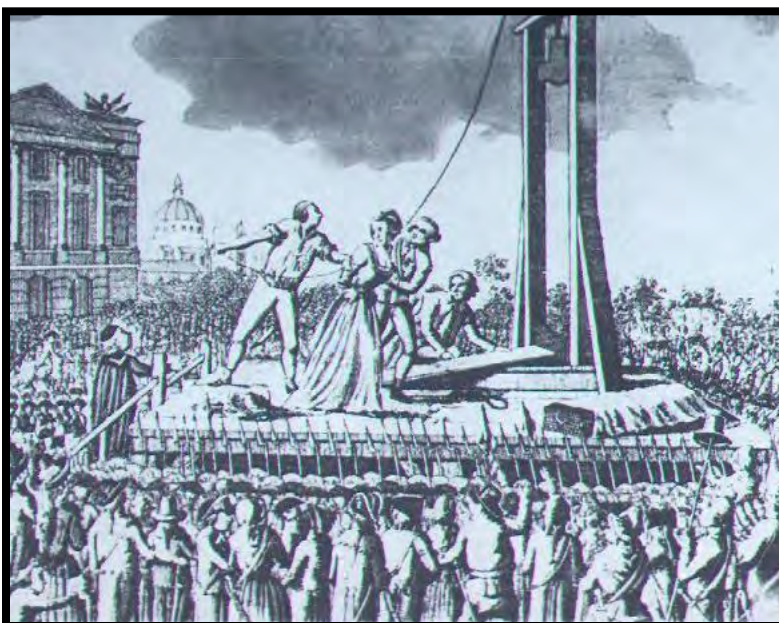
CD: Historical fiction is extremely popular with French readers, and much of it is set in France. The Revolution, the Napoleonic era, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the reigns of Louis XIV, Louis XV, the 19th century, the two World Wars, you name it . . . French readers may not be so captivated by the Tudors as their English or American counterparts, but otherwise all kinds of eras and settings, European or otherwise, are popular. The greatest French authors have written historical fiction. It does not carry the same stigma as in the English-speaking world. Maybe that happened because the first novel in the French language, *La Princesse de Clèves*, was a (beautiful) work of historical fiction.

SH: *In Mistress of the Revolution, your fictional heroine interacts with historical figures. Did you find that this posed any particular challenges?*

CD: Oh yes. Whenever a novelist deals with real characters, or real events, she has a responsibility to be historically accurate. You can't have one of your characters say or do something that would be, well, out of character for that particular historical figure.

SH: *Your novel is written in the first person. Is there any reason you chose that over the third person? What challenges, if any, did it pose?*

CD: It felt natural to have Gabrielle speak through my own voice. She was so close to me and yet so different in her circumstances. The drawback was that I had trouble getting her off my mind once



Marie Antoinette keeps her appointment with Madam Guillotine

the novel was completed. The cure was easy, though. I plunged into my second novel, written in the third person, with a male protagonist. Now that I have tried both first-person and third person narratives, I would say first-person is easier on the novelist. But it doesn't work for all genres. My second and third novels are thrillers, which require multiple points of view, and that's more convenient with a third-person narrative.

SH: Had you been writing fiction before *Mistress of the Revolution*?

CD: No, not even a short story for a high school magazine. *Mistress of the Revolution* is my very first work of fiction.

SH: Do you have a historical figure from this era who interests you in particular? One who'd you like to see a novel written about?

CD: I wish there were more fiction written about the Haitian Revolution, twin to the French Revolution. For instance, I discovered a character while researching a blog post: Jean-Baptiste Belley, the first Black man to hold elective office in France. He was born in Africa, abducted and sold into slavery while still a child. He went on to become one of the leaders of the revolt in Haiti. Then he was elected as a Representative to the National Convention, before being jailed by Bonaparte. Can you imagine such a life? It begins like *Roots*, but the slave becomes a politician. I certainly would like to read a great historical about former slaves like Belley, or Toussaint-L'Ouverture, or General Dumas, father of the great Alexandre Dumas and the first Black General in the French Army. But I believe that would have to be done by a Caribbean author, because slavery is the kind of topic that cannot be written from the outside.

The French Revolution was also a time of momentous progress for women's rights. What about a novel on one of early feminists, like Olympe de Gouges?

SH: On your website, you note that Coffinhal has been treated unfavorably by other writers. Has your more sympathetic portrait of him met with any controversy?

CD: No such luck. But it's not too late to pounce on him, or me . . . Certainly Coffinhal has been treated unfavorably by historians, in particular Michelet. To

my knowledge, *Mistress of the Revolution* marks the first time he appears in a novel.

SH: What's your opinion of Marie Antoinette?

CD: She is such a complex figure that it is a difficult question to answer in a few sentences. In *Mistress of the Revolution*, she is seen entirely from the outside. She appears as a public figure and my heroine has no personal relationship to her.

Physically I picture Marie-Antoinette as imposing, very majestic. She was also energetic, willful, obstinate, and, even decades before the Revolution, terribly unpopular. She had a sort of reverse gift for public relations. Well into the Revolution, she still acted on occasion, including some very important occasions, like a spoiled child. But when she was jailed for over a year, and stripped of everything, her royal title, the material possessions that had been so important to her, even her children, she showed a great deal of dignity and courage.

SH: As a French woman writing about the French Revolution, do you find that writers of other nationalities tend to see events or people differently than French writers?

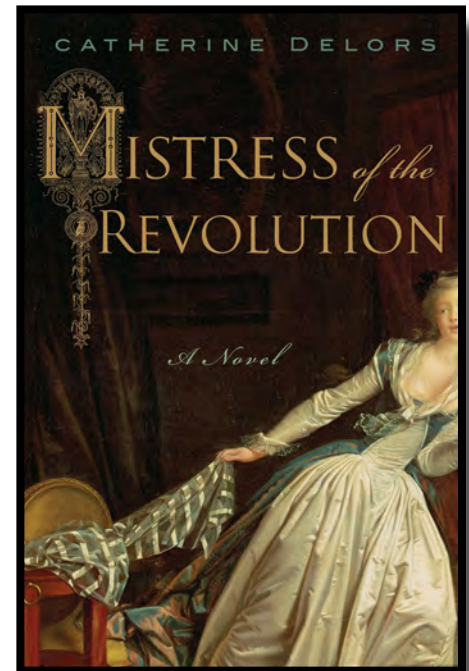
CD: Very much so. French people in general consider themselves the heirs to their Revolution. Of course they are not blinded to the atrocities committed during that era, but there is more to the story. I believe that it was a seminal event for Western thought in terms of civil rights, and the French tend to be more aware of it more than people of other nationalities.

SH: What types of materials did you find most valuable for researching your novel?

CD: I like to work with the materials that are closest to my novel. Since *Mistress of the Revolution* is a fictional memoir, I relied on a number of real memoirs, which I list on my website.

SH: You have an active blog. What has blogging been like for you? Do you find that it's benefited your writing?

CD: At first I had no idea of what I would talk about. Now I believe I have found my voice. And many friends within the literary blogging community. Sometimes people whom I would never have thought of approaching. If I have any regret, it is not to have begun this much earlier. Has it



benefited my writing? Yes, because it has allowed me to interact with my readers.

SH: What authors do you admire most and/or who have influenced your own work?

CD: I spoke of Jane Austen. Galsworthy (I know, totally unfashionable, but I love the way he conveys emotion), Dostoevsky, Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Emily Brontë, Cervantes, Pasternak.

SH: What are your future writing plans?

CD: I am working on the final edits to my second novel, to be published by Dutton in 2009. It is a historical thriller about a "terrorist" attack in 1800 Paris.

And I have begun work on my third novel, also a historical thriller. It is the (true) story of a serial killer in the mountains of France twenty years before the Revolution. I find the research angles fascinating: 18th century military history, witchcraft and the psychology of sociopaths. The great thing about historical fiction is that you learn even more as a writer than as a reader.

Find out more about Catherine Delors, her writing, and the history behind it at: <http://catherinedelors.com>
<http://blog.catherinedelors.com>

Susan Higginbotham's first novel, The Traitor's Wife: A Novel of the Reign of Edward II, is being reissued by Sourcebooks in 2009. She is at work on a novel set during the Wars of the Roses.



The Blackstone Key

Doug Kemp talks with author Rose Melikan about her debut novel

Rose Melikan holds degrees in literature, law and history from the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago. She moved to England in 1989 to complete her Ph.D. at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge.

Since 1993, Rose has been a Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and she lectures on British Constitutional History. *The Blackstone Key* (Sphere, 2008) was an Editors' Choice in the May 2008 issue of *HNR*.

DK: *The Blackstone Key is your first published novel. Previously, your works have been in the academic field. What are the main differences between writing non-fiction history and historical fiction? Which do you prefer?*

RM: I really enjoy both. Research is the common core for me, and where academic and creative writing differ, each has its advantages and disadvantages. With respect to academic writing, you are the prisoner of your sources. You can have a great idea for an essay or book, but if the sources do not exist or are incomplete, you're stuck. With fiction, of course, you can fill in the gaps to suit your story and your characters. Source material can also be a wonderful source of security to the historian, however. If I have done my research properly I am less likely to 'get stuck' when working on an academic piece, because the material provides so much of the structure and substance of my argument. A work of fiction has to be created to a far greater extent, and sometimes that means I am not sure where I'm going. That can mean that there is a greater satisfaction when the creative problem is solved, but bringing to light a genuine historical issue can also be extremely satisfying.

DK: *Are any of the characters based*

on real people from your past or present? Mary Finch, the heroine, is a vividly portrayed, likeable and authentic character.

RM: In one sense I've invented all the characters, but in another they have been influenced by people that I have met or situations that I have encountered, because these have helped to inform my imagination. I am not conscious of drawing upon a particular person for any character – except in one case – but I am sure that very often characters make sense to me because I have seen or experienced someone like them at some point. I'm glad that you believed in Mary as a character; I don't think the story would succeed if that weren't the case! I would like to claim to be her inspiration, but I'm afraid she is far braver than I am and much less cautious.

DK: *Which came first, the characters, the plot or a desire to write historical fiction set in late 18th-century England?*

RM: Before *The Blackstone Key*, I wrote another story set in the late 18th century also featuring Mary Finch, so I suppose that setting and one particular character came before plot. However, I don't think that I ever made a conscious decision about those two elements: Mary was still in my head, and the Georgian era was a natural setting for me, because of my academic interests. I think I would have had to make a conscious decision *not* to write about that period. The plot was a conscious decision – I wanted to begin with the idea that this is Mary's story; she is the protagonist whose actions and attitudes drive the narrative. Gradually, however, we see that the story actually began long before Mary appeared, and her involvement was really quite fortuitous.

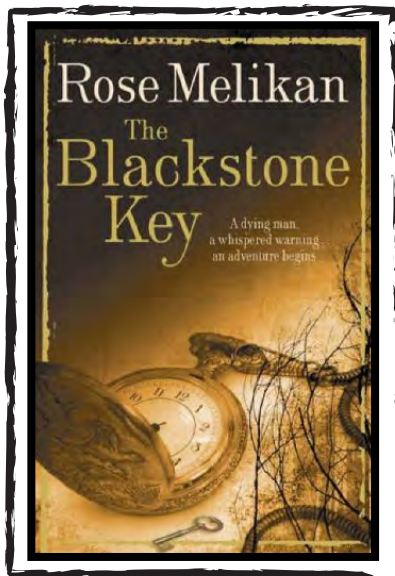
DK: *How long does it take for the inspiration of the characters to formulate and develop, and do you have to change them as the story progresses?*

RM: In the early stages I find that the plot and the characters develop together, rather than there being a plot to which the characters must conform or vice versa.

As the project progresses, however, I sometimes find that an idea I had won't work, because the role I had assigned to a particular character is not suitable for him or her. Often it is because I haven't quite thought through the scene, and I can adjust it to achieve what is necessary for the overall plot. I don't think I have ever changed a character to suit the plot, but I have changed many scenes, often only slightly, to suit the characters. I adhere to the notion that, at some point, characters assume a degree of reality – of integrity – such that the author cannot simply 'make' them do things. Characters can be altered, certainly; Captain Holland has changed quite a bit over the course of various re-writes, but more because I was not satisfied with him than because I had a fully developed plot into which he had to fit.

DK: *One of the traditional features of mediocre historical fiction is the temptation the author may have to dump large packages of well-intentioned research into their novels. Although *The Blackstone Key* contains many fascinating details of life in late 18th century England, I never felt that these were intrusive or unnecessary. How did you manage to do this?*

RM: Yes, that can be tricky; particularly if you have spent a considerable time familiarising yourself with a topic or have uncovered an interesting tidbit, you can experience an almost irresistible temptation to include it – whether it actually enhances the story or not. I do quite a lot of research, but often I find that it is most useful in giving me the confidence to describe a scene *without* a lot of technical detail – particularly without details that the characters themselves would not have found interesting or noteworthy. Clearly, there are some details that people in the 18th century would take for granted but which a modern reader needs (or likes) to know, but that shouldn't be at the expense of the story and the integrity of the characters. If the narrator becomes a lecturer, or a character 'explains' something that would have been obvious to him and his listener, I think the reader stops believing in the story



– I know that I do!

DK: For me one of the most impressive aspects of *The Blackstone Key* was the dialogue between the characters. You seem to have tuned the conversations of the main characters so that the dialogue is neither stilted nor full of modern slang.

RM: Thank you! My academic work has involved quite a lot of work with letters, diaries, and printed accounts of the period, so I hope that I have something of a feel for what sounds right. Of course, there is often a difference between the way people express themselves on paper and the way that they speak, but private correspondence and newspaper accounts can also have an immediacy that I find helpful. (I did, at one stage, experiment with a more formal style of dialogue, but I found that it read too much like pastiche.) The main characters in *The Blackstone Key* do not represent a very wide stratum of Georgian society, but I have tried to make distinctions between them to help illustrate their different ages and experiences. Mary Finch, for example, speaks more properly than Captain Holland does (even when he is not cursing), and neither of them displays quite the linguistic sophistication of Paul Déprez. Mrs Tipton and Mr Somerville represent a slightly older, more blowsy style of speech, and Hicks' educated diction is overlaid with expressions and patterns more common to a servant or labourer.

DK: The story is mostly set in Suffolk and Norfolk in eastern England. Is this a favourite part of the country for you?

RM: I have lived in East Anglia since coming to the UK in 1988, so I suppose I have some affinity with this area, but I actually chose Suffolk for strategic reasons, such as the location on the east coast and the distance from London. Then, as I began my research, I also found some valuable information about region during the 18th century, which confirmed my choice. Research trips have also been extremely helpful. Although much has changed since 1795, I took a great deal of inspiration from locations into which I felt I could place my characters. I find it extremely helpful to feel that Mary, or Holland, or Déprez 'would have walked down this street' or 'must have had this view.'

DK: Who or what has been your greatest influence in your writing career and why?

RM: It is hard to single out one person or incident. I have been fortunate always to have had extremely helpful readers. My parents were very supportive of childish efforts (and remain so today), and I had a number of teachers and lecturers who did not fail to praise what was good while criticising the slipshod. Constructive criticism of my academic work has continued among colleagues, and my husband not only reads every draft of what I write, he also listens patiently when I am working through a difficult passage or idea. I think that having a thoughtful, critical, sympathetic audience is crucial for any writer. Without it you can become too insular in your thinking – something makes sense to you and you do not appreciate that an outsider might be confused or bored by your subtle argument – and too morose if you are convinced that your readership will be confined to yourself!

DK: Which authors do you think have influenced your style the most? Do you have any favourite authors of historical fiction?

RM: The first part of your question is difficult, because I am not conscious of having a particular style. The way I write feels natural to me; I am not sure I can define it according to any other parameters. I imagine, however, that I have been influenced by the authors whose work I have enjoyed, because when I like a book

I tend to read it more than once, and if I find one book by an author and enjoy it, I will try to read his or her other works. Some of the authors in that category are quite well known, so I'll mention a few that are not so popular nowadays: James Hilton, Anthony Hope, A.E.W. Mason, H.S. Merriman, and Nevil Shute. My favourite authors of historical fiction are Patrick O'Brian and Stanley J. Weyman, followed by Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Conan Doyle. Weyman is not so well known as the others, but I find his appreciation of atmosphere, his light touch with dialogue, and his knowledge of period – particularly of 16th and 17th century France – outstanding, and his stories are thrilling.

DK: Will you remain a historical fiction author, or do you have plans for, shall I say, mainstream fiction writing?

RM: If a good idea occurred to me, I wouldn't shy away from a contemporary story, but I don't have any plans in that direction. Also, I so enjoy the past – both the remoteness and the sense of discovery – that it would be difficult for me to leave the genre of historical fiction completely.

DK: Are you able to tell us anything about the further adventures of the redoubtable Mary Finch? – The Counterfeit Guest is due for publication in March 2009.

RM: Well, I don't want to give anything away, but perhaps I could say that, even for Mary, adventures do not happen continuously, so you can expect some little time to have elapsed before we catch up with her again. Rather than diminishing either her grit or her curiosity, however, this interval will give her the sophistication and sense of responsibility to accept (and one hopes, overcome) a dangerous challenge quite unlike any she has encountered. And as for the third book, which is what I am working on now, I won't say any more than that the title is *The Mistaken Wife*.

Doug Kemp is a regular reviewer and a UK Reviews Editor for the Historical Novels Review.



Glastonbury (© WesternWeb Ltd.)

By Andrew Thompson, with research
by Myfanwy Cook

*In divers places of England many
remembrances be yet of him*¹

References and allusions in Arthurian literature to landscapes and places, real and imagined, date back to some of the earliest sources. The way in which the authors treat place reflects both their perception of Arthur and the stylistic tradition within which they were writing. The early medieval *Annales Cambriae*, whose main purpose was to record time and events, baldly state that in 518 Arthur fought at Badon, where the British were victorious, and that in 539 he and Medraut died in conflict at Camlann.² In the 12th century, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* introduced many new places and events, including the famous story of Arthur's conception. To seduce Igraine, Uther is given her husband's appearance by Merlin's magic so he can enter Tintagel which 'is situated upon the sea, and on every side surrounded by it; and there is but one entrance into it, and that through a straight rock, which three men shall be able to defend against the whole power of the kingdom.'³

Geoffrey was a source for many of the later medieval Arthurian romances, which culminated in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, published in 1485. In his preface the printer William Caxton listed evidence from literature and 'divers places,' such as Winchester's round table and Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury Abbey, before confidently asserting: 'all these things considered, there can be no man reasonably gainsay but there was a king of this land

named Arthur.'⁴ This article is not a foray into the often vehemently contested terrain of Arthur's historicity or, assuming such distinctions are even applicable in these post-modern times, at what point one moves from 'fact' into 'fiction.' Nevertheless, questions of historicity do intrude partly because Arthurian fiction has often drawn on scholarly activity, but also due to a long tradition of quarrying literary texts in the

"In Divers Places..."

Time, place & Arthurian fiction

search for evidence which locates Arthur in both place and time.

Arthur has been claimed by a variety of individuals and groups for particular places. But place and landscape are not just settings where dramas unfold; they are imaginative creations, which over time acquire histories and meanings. As Simon Schama observes, 'nature and human perception...are... indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory, as from layers of rock.'⁵ Similarly, some archaeologists refer to landscapes as having biographies.⁶ From this perspective, writers become part of the story and play a vital role in defining places, shaping their identities and 'putting them on the map.'

At Tintagel this process has been literal as well as metaphorical. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's time the castle had not yet been built. The place name Tintagel,

which derives from the Cornish *Din Tagell* meaning the fortress of the narrow entrance, may have helped to preserve folk memories of a post Roman stronghold whose existence was not confirmed until the 20th century. A medieval castle was built in the early 13th century and mass interest in Tintagel's medieval heritage was stimulated in the Victorian era, when the name applied only to the castle, by Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. In 1900, the enterprising inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Travena sought to exploit the economic potential of Arthurian tourism by engaging in what today would be called a rebranding exercise.⁷

Since the mid-20th century much Arthurian fiction has been set in the post-Roman 5th and 6th centuries. This period's popularity was inspired initially by major developments in scholarship.⁸ These included Collingwood and Myres' pre-war classic *Roman Britain and the English* (1936) which asserted that Arthur had been a Romano-British military commander; renewed post-war interest in early Welsh literature; and excavations in the 1960s demonstrating post-Roman occupation at Glastonbury Tor and nearby South Cadbury hillfort (traditionally identified as Camelot). South Cadbury, where media excitement culminated in the publication of the hugely influential *The Quest for Arthur's Britain* (1968) edited by Geoffrey Ashe, revealed substantial 5th century fortifications and what was interpreted as a large feasting hall, although not the eagerly anticipated proof of Arthur's existence.

Fiction influenced by these developments includes Rosemary Sutcliff's pioneering *Sword at Sunset*, works by Mary Stewart, and Bernard Cornwell's *Warlord Trilogy*. All contain historical notes stating that Arthur probably existed, while emphasising that due to the paucity of evidence, most of the story, including the central character, is fiction. They are characterised by thoughtful attention to detail, and Arthur is portrayed as a Romanised Christian British king or warlord fighting against both pagan Saxon invaders and native rebels. Cornwell, for example, makes places like Isca Dumnoniorum (Exeter) the backdrop for action: 'Culhwch...led his spears in a swift campaign across the great moor, then south into the wild land on the coast. He ravaged Cadwy's heartland, then stormed the rebellious Prince in the old Roman stronghold of Isca.'⁹

For Mary Stewart 'research is most useful when dealing with place rather than action.'¹⁰ The topographical detail that distinguishes her writing is based on close study of maps and extensive field work

employing acute observation. She describes Tintagel castle as 'built on a promontory of rock...which is joined to the cliffs of the mainland only by a narrow causeway. To either side of this causeway the cliffs drop away sheer to small bays of rock and shingle tucked in under the cliff. From one of these a path...leads up the face of the cliff to a small gate let into the roots of the castle walls. This is the postern, the secret entrance to the castle. Inside is a narrow stairway of stone leading up to the private door of the royal apartments.'¹¹

Treize suggests that the 'best place-conscious fictional texts are too subtle and detailed to take the form of a travel brochure' and 'have a special role linking imagination and landscape, deriving energy from both sources.'¹² In *The Crystal Cave* Uther's men enter Tintagel through the postern having climbed the path while the waves 'came roaring up...and there ahead of us, recessed deep in the rock below the castle wall, and hidden from the rampart above by the sharp overhang, was Tintagel's emergency door.'¹³ Stewart sweeps the reader along so effectively that it is easy to overlook the fact that the postern she describes does not exist. The postern is a dramatic device which bridges the gap between her plot (based on Geoffrey of Monmouth), Tintagel's visible medieval fortifications, and the state of knowledge when *The Crystal Cave* was published in 1970. Since the 1930s archaeologists had believed that Tintagel's post-Roman remains were evidence of a Celtic monastery. It was only in the 1980s and 1990s, after a fire revealed an extensive settlement, that further investigation resulted in Tintagel being reinterpreted as a 5th and 6th century secular stronghold.¹⁴

A very different type of fiction has been inspired by Glastonbury, often identified as the Isle of Avalon ('the island of apples').¹⁵ Glastonbury is, in fact, on a peninsula rising above the reclaimed wetlands of the Somerset Levels. Local archaeology includes Romano-British pagan shrines, possible early Christian chapels and the abbey. The medieval abbots energetically promoted Glastonbury's claims to links with both King Arthur and Joseph of Arimathea. Since the late 19th century the area has stimulated various counter cultures which have produced their own alternative histories. In the late 20th century, radical feminists embraced earlier theories that Glastonbury had been a centre of pagan worship, suggesting that the Isle of Avalon's geography was shaped like the Great Goddess whose religion had been central to a matriarchal prehistoric society.

Such ideas inspired Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, which

reinvents Morgan le Fay as the heroine Morgaine, a priestess of the Mother Goddess struggling against patriarchal Christianity. The setting is the Summer Country, a land steeped in mysticism which 'lay mostly under water, bog and salt marsh' although the sea was retreating so that 'one day this would all be rich farmland...but not in Avalon [which] now lay eternally surrounded in the mists, hidden from all but the faithful.'¹⁶ Rosalind Miles' Guenevere trilogy presents the queen as the defender of the Summer Country's ancient religion against the machinations of the Christian church. She uses flora and fauna to establish a sense of place: 'In the water-meadows, king-cups and lady's smocks dotted the long grass...Along the bank, clusters of willows hung weeping over the water, their long green fingers rippling the slow-moving stream.'¹⁷ Returning to Avalon 'black waters pulsed steadily, bearing them along...the pink-and-white scent of apple blossom reached her from far away...Avalon, Avalon, mystic island, home.'¹⁸

Sarah Zettel's novels rework tales of Sir Gawain and his three brothers in a post-Roman context. *Camelot's Sword* is Gareth's story set in Cornwall during a period of political instability. The picture of an impotent King Mark ruling from Tintagel and owing allegiance to the High King based at Camelot is reminiscent of the fragmented kingdoms analysed by recent historians such as Christopher Snyder.¹⁹ Zettel's story is rooted in evocative images of the Cornish landscape. At fictional Cambryn 'paths between the stone and thatch houses with their little courtyards spread out like old roots. They delved into earth and stone to reach the cellars and storage chambers that were hiding places in times of war or great storm.'²⁰ The non-fictional Bodmin Moor confronts Gareth's

party with 'mile after mile of rolling, open country with ragged, lonely heights and deep bowl-like valleys' where 'in foul weather...A traveller could wander lost in the openness until they died of cold and exhaustion, or the hidden bogs dragged them down.'²¹

Since the 1970s, academics have generally denied Arthur's existence. Now the conventional view that the 5th and 6th centuries were a period of Saxon invasion, chaos and war is being challenged by claims that archaeology, DNA analysis, landscape studies and literary texts point instead to peaceful assimilation and gradual cultural change.²² There has been a growing divide between the academy and the wider population who continue to visit sites (like Tintagel and Glastonbury) which are, often because of the influence of historical fiction, perceived as Arthurian. Academics are, however, increasingly interested in how perceptions of Arthur and the characters associated with him have evolved and what this reveals about changing cultural, political and social attitudes. From this perspective, irrespective of whether it is ultimately derived from any historical truth, Arthurian fiction and those of us who read it contribute to the next chapter in the story of the people and the places it represents.

Andrew Thompson has lectured in history at universities and for adult education, including Elderhostel. He runs Landscapes Travel (www.landscapetravel.co.uk) which provides history and cultural holidays, breaks, and courses in South West England. Together Landscapes Travel and Aspiring Writers organise historical writing courses, including King Arthur's Cornwall.

Myfanwy Cook is currently the Historical Novel Review's features editor.

Please see p. 61 for references.



Happy 100th!

The Historical Novels of Mills & Boon

A publisher profile by Jay Dixon

Mills & Boon celebrates its centenary this year, having been set up in 1908 by Gerald Mills and Charles Boon (although their first book, a novel by Sophie Cole, wasn't published until 1909). These days the firm is associated in most people's minds with contemporary romance fiction, and few realise it started as a general publisher, with a mixed list which encompassed the educational (including *An English History Date Book* by George Dacre Fox published in 1923), travel guides, theatrical reminiscences, craft books, and children's books, amongst other non-fiction, as well as a fiction list which included novels by P G Wodehouse, Hugh Walpole, E F Benson, and Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera*. Despite what many think, they did not publish Barbara Cartland, whose writing style did not suit their list.

One of the first historical novels they published was Allan Fea's *My Lady Wentworth* in 1909. This is not, perhaps, a novel one would associate with Mills & Boon's current historical romance list. Set during the Monmouth Rebellion it concerns Lady Wentworth's love for Monmouth and is peopled with historical characters – Monmouth himself, of course, and also Charles II, James II, and other notables involved in the rebellion. This was Fea's first novel, and with its emphasis on a political danger to the state, it was in line with other historical fiction of the period, which at this time was mainly written by men. It was published in Mills & Boon's 'thrilling adventure' series, which was the only sub-genre within its fiction list. This makes it very difficult to discover what other historical fiction they published, as neither Mill & Boon's catalogues of this period, nor the British Library catalogue, differentiates fiction by genre.

However, it is evident that in 1910 they published at least three historical novels: May Wynne's *A Blot on the Scutcheon*, set during the French Revolution, Louis Evan Shipman's *D'Arcy of the Guards*, set

always to have been popular with readers, and in 1923 Mills & Boon published Georgette Heyer's third novel (written under the pseudonym Stella Martin), *The Transformation of Philip Jettan*, later re-issued by Heinemann as *Powder and Patch*. This was Heyer's first comedy of manners, set in 1753, and concerns the transformation of the hero from an English country bumpkin into an elegant gentleman. Published during the flapper era, the original version of the novel ends with the hero and heroine, dressed all in white, taking their place in Parisian society. But by 1930, when it was reissued, times had changed and, without its final chapter, the implication is that 'they will retire to Sussex and become a country gentleman and his wife' as Hodge (1984) puts it (p.25), which was more in keeping with the ideal of companionate marriage of the period.

In 1928 Mills & Boon published *This Side Idolatry* by 'Ephesian' (C.E. Bechhofer Roberts) a fictionalised biography of Charles Dickens, which ends: 'Kate [Dickens' wife] still kept her silence,' showing a regard for that misused wife not always found in biographies of the man.

Until about 1926, the date Georgette Heyer published *These Old Shades* with Heinemann, the readership of historical novels had been a mixed one, but Heyer's bestseller, with its focus on personal relationships as opposed to adventure, changed this to a predominantly female audience (Hughes 1993, p.39). Despite this, however, by the 1930s it appears that historical fiction had, at least for Mills & Boon, run its course, and from then until the 1950s, they concentrated on contemporary romance fiction, selling their hardbacks to commercial libraries as well as individual readers. As commercial libraries began to decline in the 1950s, Mills & Boon started using local newsagents as their outlets, and in 1957

in 1777 during the American War of Independence, and Henry B M Watson's *The King's Highway*, which is a fictional account of episodes from a highwayman's life. The Georgian period seems

they started selling to the Canadian firm Harlequin, which enabled the company to go into the paperback market in 1960. They were still a small firm then, publishing some eight contemporary romances a month. In 1972 they merged with Harlequin, and three years later a controlling interest was sold to the Canadian Torstar Corporation. By 1978 they were publishing 12 paperbacks a month, with a massive worldwide readership.

Georgette Heyer died in 1974, leaving a gap in the popular historical fiction market, which many publishers tried to fill (Wallace 2005, p.152). In 1977, with its ready-made female readership, Mills & Boon followed suit, launching what was then called the Masquerade line in September of that year, with a party at the Foley Street offices, to which members of staff came dressed in the clothes of their favourite historical period.

The first novels were Julia Herbert's *The Runaways*, Jane Wilby's *Eleanor and the Marquis* (a Regency greatly influenced by Heyer's *Arabella*), Marguerite Bell's, *A Rose for Danger* (also influenced by Heyer's novels) and *The Secret of Val Verde* by Judith Polley, who, under the pseudonym Valentina Luellen, became one of Mills & Boon's most popular authors, often using foreign settings for her novels. *Val Verde*, as the title suggests, is no exception, as it is set in Mexico in 1864, during the war between Emperor Maximilian and Benito Juarez, with a French heroine and a Mexican hero. Apart from this novel, which had originally been published by J M Dent & Sons in 1974, all these books were Mills & Boon originals.

They were followed in October with another book by Julia Herbert, *The Fortune Hunter*, set just after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, Elizabeth de Guise's *Puritan Wife* and Meriol Trevor's *The Marked Man*, set in Luxembourg in 1798. They also published Judith Polley's *The King's Shadow*, again bought from Dent, set just after the defeat of Charles II at Worcester. In this novel Kate, the daughter of a major in Cromwell's army, falls in love with Sir Justin Douglas, 'the king's shadow', who is helping Charles II escape from England. It ends with the two of them taking ship to France: 'She knew it was possible she might never see England again, but she had no regrets. With a smile she put her hand in Justin's...'

Of course, the contemporary reader knows that Charles was restored to his throne nine years later, so this ending is not as pessimistic as it first sounds. Mills & Boon, in their historicals as their contemporaries, have always insisted on the happy ending. In 1979 they published Dinah Dean's *Flight from the Eagle* (originally published in 1974 by William Heinemann), which was the first of her linked books set in Russia during the Napoleonic wars. Despite her popularity with readers, Mills & Boon turned down *The Green Gallant*, because of its unhappy ending. Using the pseudonym Jane Hunt, she published it with Souvenir Press in 1980.

Although the Regency period continued to be popular, in 1979 Mills & Boon published novels set in 1860s Russia (Sylvia Sark, *Sophie and the Prince*), Elizabethan England (Margaret Hope, *The Queen's Captain*), and Belinda Grey's *Passionate Puritan*, set just after the Restoration in 1660. And in 1979 another novel by Julia Herbert, *The Bond-Woman*, opens in seventeenth-century London, but quickly moves to America.

From the beginning, Mills & Boon has had an association with the United States – a few of their early authors of contemporary fiction were American, and as already noted, some of their historicals were set in America, albeit with an English bias! They still publish American authors and, in 1994, a historical by Nora Roberts – *Lawless*, set in Arizona in 1875. At this point Mills & Boon were calling their historical line Legacy of Love, but by 1997 it was changed to Historical Romance, partly because many readers confused the series title with the title of the book!

It is not only English and American authors that Mills & Boon publish. In 1985 they published Angela Morel's only novel, *Camellias for Caroline*, set in 1860s India, the land of the author's birth and where she then lived, and in 1992 they took the first of many books by the Australian author Stephanie Laurens. Sophia James, whose novels are set in periods from 14th-century Scotland to Victorian England, is also Australian. As long as it is written in English and there are romantic elements present, Mills & Boon are, according to Linda Fildew, the Senior Editor of the historical line, 'happy to acquire strong historical manuscripts from both agented and unagented authors

and read all submissions. If an author has true potential we are happy to work with them to bring them to publication standard.' However, they do insist on historical accuracy, although as Sarah Mallory (who also writes as Melinda Hammond for Hale) points out: 'I think historical accuracy is important, but so is a good story. The really talented writers combine both!'

Another important element of a Mills & Boon historical is a strong heroine. As Mary Sharratt said in her article on 'Rewriting Women's History' in May's *Solander*: 'At the end of the day, it's a question of knowing your market. Although it's hard to pinpoint precise figures, the majority of buyers and readers of historical fiction appear to be women, and they seem to crave books that present compelling portraits of strong female protagonists.' This is certainly true of Mills & Boon's readership, and their authors and editors are aware of this. As Elizabeth Bailey, author of *Sweet Sacrifice* (1991), who now writes mainstream novels, says: 'The editorial policy always changed to keep pace with modern trends.' So these days, although the hero may still be as arrogant as he was in the 1970s, he is also vulnerable, and the relationship he forms with his heroine is more one of equals than one of male dominance. Equally, these days, the heroine is more likely to be independent-minded, as the heroine of Sarah Mallory's *More than a Governess* is, or even 'off centre', as Louise Allen puts it, whose *No Place for a Lady* (2007) has a heroine who runs a coaching company.

As already intimated, Mills & Boon publish novels set in all eras, and authors do not have to stick with one period. Nicola Cornick has recently published *The Last Rake in London*, about the Edwardian descendant of the Kestrel brothers (the heroes of her Regency-set *Bluestocking Brides* series). Mills & Boon editors are always open to new ideas, within the parameters of a historical romance, and as Nicola says, her editor 'is always happy to talk ideas through with me and I can't remember the last time she vetoed any of my suggestions.' Louise Allen, who has been writing Regencies for Mills & Boon since the 1990s, first with a partner as Francesca Shaw and then, since the publication of *One Night with a Rake* in 2003 (reissued 2008) on her own, published *Virgin Slave*,

Barbarian King (2008) set in Italy in AD 410. It was well-received by readers, proving that although it appears Mills & Boon sell by the publisher's name, the readers know the authors, and are willing to follow them into another era.

However, it is the Regencies that have remained perennially popular, to such an extent that in 1998 they put a blue rectangular flash on the cover with 'Regency' on it, though they have recently changed the background to a gold circle, so that readers can immediately identify the two Regencies from the four historicals they publish each month. They also reissue many Regency period novels in the Lords and Ladies collection, a set of two books bound in one volume, enabling readers to catch up with previous books by authors they may have only recently discovered.

From its shaky beginnings as a small English publisher in the early years of the 20th century, with a start-up capital of just £1,000, Mills & Boon have now become a world-wide publisher, selling tens of millions of books per year. Gradually shedding its non-fiction list, it has become a by-word for women's category fiction, offering its readers many lines and types of romance novels to choose from, including contemporary, medical and, of course, historical romances. These romances, like all historical novels, give readers a sense of a different time and place where all problems are long past and thus already solved, allowing them a respite from today's troubled world.

Jay Dixon was head of copyediting at Mills & Boon in the 1980s and is the author of The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon 1909-1990s (UCL Press, 1999). She has been a member of the HNS since its inception, and is an occasional reviewer for HNR.

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Sarah Cuthbertson reports on the 2008 HNS UK Conference

The Historical Novel Society UK Conference took place on 12 April 2008 at the National Railway Museum in York. Appropriately enough, one of the speakers was Andrew Martin, a native of York who writes historical mysteries set on the Edwardian railways starring Jim Stringer, the Steam Detective: *The Necropolis Railway*, *The Blackpool Highflyer*, *Murder at Deviation Junction*, *The Lost Luggage Porter* and the latest, *Death on a Branch Line*. Andrew's father was a railwayman and Andrew grew up at the end of the age of steam, recalling with pleasure the free rides to London he took as a boy, for the pure pleasure of going on a long railway journey. He is also fascinated by the details of life in Edwardian times, from the tweed suits that even workmen wore to the elegant language so rarely found in speech today.

Suzanna Dunn spoke of her novels about various Tudor women, including Anne Boleyn (*The Queen of Subtleties*) and Catherine Parr (*The Sixth Wife*). Her forthcoming novel is *The Queen's Sorrow*, about Mary Tudor. She was billed as "not a historical novelist" but it turned out that what she meant was that she didn't do the stilted dialogue and heaving bosoms style of historical fiction. Her characters speak in modern language, and this serves to reflect how modern people like Anne Boleyn were.

Also at the conference were the movers and shakers at Crème de la Crime, a newish publisher of crime fiction. Its founder, Lynne Patrick, told us all about setting up a small independent publisher with only a few permanent staff, including herself, the rest of the work being undertaken by

freelancers. Crème de la Crime recently introduced a historical crime strand and two of its historical authors were at the conference: Gordon Ferris, whose latest novel, set in ration-book London and defeated Berlin, was launched during the conference lunch; and Roz Southey, author of *Broken Harmony*, set in 18th-century Newcastle with a musician for a protagonist. Roz was on an after-lunch panel discussing what the future holds for historical fiction, along with Sarah Bower, author of *The*

concluded that this was happening already, and not before time either.

Jude Morgan spoke next. He used to write historical mysteries set in the 18th century under the name of Hannah March. His detective was a man and Jude told an amusing story about a reviewer who said he couldn't get on with the novels because Hannah March couldn't write men convincingly. Jude Morgan now writes fictional biographies. His first was *The King's Touch*, about Charles II, which was followed by *Indiscretion* (a stylish Regency tale of love and the impoverished Miss Fortune), *Passion* (Byron, Shelley, Keats and the women who loved them), *Symphony* (Berlioz and his muse) and his latest, *An Accomplished Woman* (a witty homage to Regency romances and Jane Austen). His next novel is about the Brontë sisters and is due out early next year.

The last speakers were Elizabeth Chadwick, author of early medieval historicals, and Alison King, who's an akashic consultant.

After explaining what an akashic consultant is (someone who can tune into an ethereal level where he/she can communicate with the dead), she and Elizabeth did a session, demonstrating how Elizabeth has used tuning into the akashic records in researching the real-life characters in her recent novels about William Marshal (*The Greatest Knight*, *The Scarlet Lion*) and his father (*A Place Beyond Courage*).

In short, at the HNS 2008 UK Conference, a good time was had by all!

Sarah Cuthbertson is a former editor and regular reviewer for the Historical Novels Review.



HNS UK Conference

2008



Nat'l Railway Museum



York



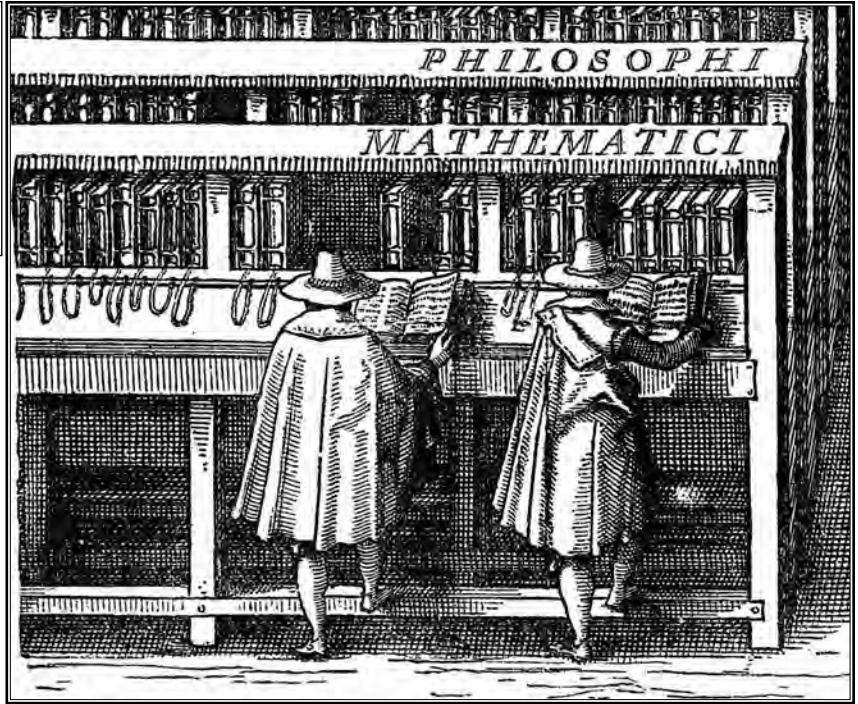
Pictured clockwise from left: Melinda Hammond, Sandra Garside-Neville, Mary Sharratt, Terry Hooper, Iris Lloyd; Andrew Martin; Jude Morgan; Alison King and Elizabeth Chadwick.

Needle in the Blood and Russell Whitfield, whose first novel, *Gladiatorix*, was published in March. The conclusion: more Ebooks, more from small independent publishers like Snowbooks, Myrmidon, and Crème de la Crime who are giving the big boys a run for their money.

At the same time as this, another panel featuring Melinda Hammond (author of romantic historical novels such as *A Rational Romance* and *The Belles Dames Club*), Jude Morgan (see below) and Mary Sharratt, author of *The Vanishing Point* and *A Light Far Shining*, a forthcoming novel about the Witches of Pendle, talked about writing women back into history and

Quiz Time! 10 Questions to Determine Your Research Style

by Susan Higginbotham



Warm fuzzies or an attack of hives? Take the quiz and find out!

- 1.** Heck, if *Cosmo* can use a quiz to predict the course of your love life with unfailing accuracy, why can't we do the same for your research style?
- Just as your novel is nearing completion, you find that a major character in it died years before the action takes place. You:
- Rewrite the whole thing.
 - Leave it as it is, but add a paragraph in the Author's Note explaining your goof.
 - Leave it as it is, but look sheepish if anyone ever mentions it to you.
 - Leave it as it is, and say, "History is written by the victors," if anyone ever mentions it. That always shuts 'em up.
- 2.** Your favorite research site is:
- A university library on another continent.
 - A good university library in your area.
 - Wikipedia.
 - The bedroom. Hey, some things never change.
- 3.** You've found a source that looks as if it might clear up a historical question that's been nagging at you, but it's all in medieval Latin.
- So what's the problem?
 - You spend months trying to make sense of it, and two days after you give up and pay someone to translate it for you, you find an English version online.
 - You decide to pretend you never saw it.
 - You ask your neighbor from Latin America to translate it for you.
- 4.** Your heroine's name is:
- Brunechildis.
 - Brunhilda.
 - Britney.
 - Blaze.
- 5.** Your elderly great-aunt dies peacefully in her sleep, leaving you a modest sum of money on the condition that you give yourself a treat with it. What will you do with it?
- Take that big research trip you've always been dreaming of, leaving the family at home.
 - Take a trip that's half research, half family fun.
 - Buy a couple of reference books, and blow the rest on clothes.
 - One word: liposuction.
- 6.** While you're visiting your relatives for the holidays, *Braveheart* comes on the television. You:
- Rail against its historical inaccuracies until someone turns it off or throws you out of the house.
 - Keep the set on, but glare at it throughout the broadcast, being sure to heave frequent sighs of martyrdom.
 - Enjoy it, because that Mel Gibson is such a hunk.
 - What inaccuracies?
- 7.** When you see a website that contains inaccurate

- information about the period you write about, you:
- Bombard the author with e-mail until he or she corrects the site out of sheer exhaustion.
 - Point it out to all your like-minded friends so that you can have a good giggle.
 - Worry that the author knows something that you don't.
 - Add it to your list of favorites.
- 8.** Your local university library is:
- Your home.
 - Your oasis.
 - Full of oddballs.
 - Where?
- 9.** The nonfiction books in your library are:
- Plastered in sticky notes and/or full of jottings in the margin where you take issue with the author's points.
 - Dog-eared and well-thumbed.
 - Pristine.
 - Both on your coffee table.
- 10.** You most often Google:
- Google Scholar.
 - Google Books.
 - Google Shopping.
 - Your name.

If most of your answers were (a), you secretly long to have "Ph.D." after your name. So get that doctorate in history and stop slumming here, will you?

If most of your answers were (b), you're a good, solid researcher, but your children probably don't want to be seen within thirty feet of you, and "life of the party" may not be the first words that come to mind when people think of you.

If most of your answers were (c), you may be cheerfully oblivious for now, but a twist of fate could catapult you into categories (b) or even (a). Watch yourself.

If most of your answers were (d), you're probably filthy rich from your huge advances and high sales. Got some spare change?

Susan Higginbotham once had some trick-or-treaters come to the door and say, "This looks like a library!" She likes to think that this was a compliment, but it probably wasn't.



Reviews

CLASSICAL

THE SUN'S BRIDE

Gillian Bradshaw, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$28.95, hb, 232pp, 9780727866417

The Eastern Mediterranean, 246 BC. The Rhodian warship *Atalanta* and her naked crew (that got your attention) come across and destroy a pirate ship. The *Atalanta's* helmsman, Isokrates, is in temporary command, and is pleased not only with this victory but also with the discovery that the prisoners that he has rescued from the pirates include the beautiful, wealthy, and cultured Dionysia. Dionysia is carrying a secret that, when revealed, will plunge Isokrates and the republic of Rhodes into great danger.

War and politics interact with other pressures upon Isokrates: his ambition to make his way in the world as a sea officer, and his estrangement from his elderly father arising from a family tragedy years before.

At the risk of an angry letter from the author, I always think of Gillian Bradshaw's novels as ripping yarns with class. *The Sun's Bride* moves at a fast, almost breathless pace, and I mean that as praise, and the cultural and political background are worked in expertly as well. Isokrates does occasionally come out with opinions more likely to be heard from an early-21st-century Western liberal, but most of the time he is credibly tough and driven.

At the end, all the threads of the story have been resolved, if not entirely in the way that the characters would have wanted.

Gillian Bradshaw has done her research, which she outlines in an Author's Note, and here's an author who does know that ancient galleys were *not* rowed by slaves, for example. It is surprising, then, that on page 66, there is a mention of tacking (sailing against the wind), which wasn't practical until the invention of the lateen sail at a later period.

This novel is highly recommended, and if you haven't read Gillian Bradshaw, try her *Island of Ghosts* as well.

Alan Fisk

TROY: Fall of Kings

David and Stella Gemmell, Corgi, 2008, £6.99, pb, 660pp, 9780552151139 / Ballantine, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 464pp, 9780345477033

A merciless war of attrition has reduced golden Troy to a city of starvation and scavengers. While Hektor, greatest of heroes, and Helikaon the Golden One remain alive the Trojans will not surrender. The besieging Mykene and their allies cling to their tattered honour, eyeing one

another in mistrust and growing detestation, forced to admit that only trickery will give them victory. On Thera, Island of Women, Kassandra waits, tormented by foresight. Andromache, Hektor's wife, makes her choice; she will remain with him and her son Astanyax while Helikaon, love of her life and most cunning of sea captains, creates havoc amongst the enemy in his beloved ship Xanthos. Odysseus of Ithaca, clever and persuasive reluctant ally of the Mykene, has obtained safe conduct for non-combatant Trojans to depart by sea to the only place of true safety: the little colony already established at the place called The Seven Hills.

The authors have had the confidence to abandon one of the *Iliad's* most famous and moving scenes—the fight to the death between Hektor and Achilles—instead replacing the combat and its aftermath with their own startlingly original version. Warriors with their beautiful and deadly weapons of bronze create the bloodiest set piece battle scenes I can recall, impacting on all the senses. The inglorious part played by the Trojan Horse provides almost a light relief to the dreadful tragedy.

Fall of Kings is an audacious and brilliant re-creation of one of the world's greatest stories with climax and finale of apocalyptic magnitude.

Nancy Henshaw

SHADOW OF COLOSSUS

T.L. Higley, B&H, 2008, \$14.99, pb, 396pp, 9780805417309

As the hetaera, or bound courtesan, of one of the most powerful men in Rhodes, Tessa has more respect and greater status than many Greek women in 227 BC. But she is still a slave, and her life is numb and hopeless. When her owner dies suddenly, Tessa sees a chance to escape, but first she must keep his death a secret. Among those who help her are Nikos, a handsome dockworker with a mysterious past, and Simeon, whose Jewish family shows Tessa a kindness and love she has never known. Soon they all become caught in a much larger clash of forces, from scheming politicians to spiritual awakening and a cataclysm that could destroy Rhodes itself.

The author makes ancient Greece feel gritty and real, and the plot is engaging and well researched. Indeed, I was sometimes more interested in the subplots than the main characters, who could have used more fleshing out. Readers of Christian fiction will appreciate Biblical values applied to a pagan society, but the spiritual message is not so overbearing as to prevent others from enjoying the story. This is the first in a series based around the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Heather Domin

ALEXANDER AND ALESTRIA

Shan Sa (trans. Adriana Hunter), HarperCollins, 2008, \$23.95/C\$25.95/£14.99, hb, 256pp, 9780061543548

Alexander the Great was crowned King of Macedonia in 336 BC and soon after began asserting his authority through his formidable army, squashing resistance from current subjects, and conquering new lands. He was merciless, yet unfulfilled, until he met Alestria. Alestria led the girls of Siberia, a tribe of young warrior women who wandered the steppes. These girls who loved horses came from various backgrounds, mostly abandoned and abused, and were all adopted, never birthed, by Amazons. Alestria, daughter of the Great Queen of the Amazons, was groomed to be the next queen upon her mother's death. Prophecy said that the Amazons would disappear when the Great Queen fell in love with a man.

Alexander and Alestria, now queen, meet in battle, and mutual admiration mingles with desire to form a relationship that transcends Alexander's trysts with his slave and best friend, both male. When they marry, Alexander renames her Roxana.

Told mostly from the first-person perspectives of Alexander, Alestria, and Ania, Alestria's confidante and serving girl, these parallel storylines read like confessionals. Alexander conveys how his father's brutal treatment of him contributed to his lust for power and blood. Ania introduces Alestria and serves as the spokeswoman for the Amazon tribe, providing the narrative necessary to understand the implications of Alestria's infatuation with Alexander. Alestria relays how formative events molded her into a woman who could betray her tribe for a man and describes the anguish that love brings.

Shan Sa's rendition sticks closely to accepted historical speculation of Roxana's background and gives humanistic insight into one of history's most vicious conquerors. Readers captivated by this time period and Amazon lore will enjoy this novel.

Suzanne J. Sprague

THE TRIUMPH OF CAESAR

Steven Saylor, Minotaur, 2008, \$24.95/C\$28.95, hb, 320pp, 9780312359836 / Constable, 2008, £12.99, hb, 320pp, 9781845295677

The Roman Civil War has ended with Julius Caesar returning to Rome a hero, around 46 BC. Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, asks Gordianus the Finder to protect her husband's life by finding and uncovering a suspected plot to kill him before the Triumphs are staged to honor Caesar's military victories in Asia, Egypt, Gaul and at home. Gordianus' investigation will lead him to meet Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt; Cicero, a formidable Senate leader; Marc Antony; Marcus Brutus; and Vercingetorix, the captured leader of the Gauls, scheduled for execution during the celebration. Gordianus suspects no one and everyone.

This novel is 13th in the Roma Sub Rosa series of books featuring Gordianus the Finder, the noted Roman sleuth, famous in Rome for his ability to uncover crimes against famous

members of society. Steven Saylor is also noted for his *New York Times* bestseller *Roma*, an epic novel of Rome. Even though I was able to determine the likely assassin in the story, the author spun a fine tale about the Roman world. Saylor knows Roman history, its class differences, and people's way of life in this great ancient city. As a reader, I felt transported back in time. If you enjoy a good mystery or a tale of ancient Rome, I recommend this book for your reading pleasure.

Jeff Westerhoff

1st CENTURY

THE BLOOD OF CAESAR: A Second Case from the Notebooks of Pliny the Younger

Albert A. Bell, Jr., Ingalls, 2008, \$15.95, pb, 257pp, 9781932158823

I'm a fan of historical mysteries but hadn't read Albert A. Bell's work before, and was thrilled to discover this series set in ancient Rome. This novel is extremely hard to put down. An obscure workman is found dead in the building housing the imperial archives. This event should be beneath Emperor Domitian's notice, but he assigns Pliny the Younger to investigate. As Pliny unravels the mystery, he uncovers the possibility that a blood heir of Augustus Caesar may still be alive. This knowledge is dangerous to the well-being of the emperor and the stability of Rome, and the closer Pliny comes to the truth, the more perilous his own situation becomes. Will he be murdered for knowing too much?

The historical setting is vividly rendered. One senses the author's deep knowledge of the period. Historical figures, including some very interesting women, come alive. Pliny emerges as a believable character, a man at home in his own time. The mystery plot is expertly crafted, and the truly frightening climax left me eager to read more books in this series.

Phyllis T. Smith

CLAUDIA: Daughter of Rome (UK) / PILATE'S WIFE: A Novel of the Roman Empire (US)

Antoinette May, Orion, 2007, £6.99, pb, 482pp, 9780752893181 / Harper, 2007, \$13.95, pb, 400pp, 9780061128660

Claudia: Daughter of Rome is set in the early years of the Roman Empire, when the empire is consolidating its political and military hold over its recent conquests. It is the time of the transition from Augustus's sham republic to a hereditary empire. Set in the Eastern Mediterranean, it explores the world from the perspective of a wife of an equestrian governor, Pontius Pilate.

Claudia is the educated daughter of a Roman general, a close ally of Germanicus. She uses magic to ensure her marriage to an up-and-coming equestrian, Pontius Pilate. The first narrative theme of the book is the disintegration of Claudia's family in the power struggles that surround the succession to Tiberius. May does

not depart from the story as told by Robert Graves, but inserts a fictional account of the rise and fall of Pontius Pilate.

The second narrative theme is the experimentation with eastern religions by the Roman aristocracy. Claudia becomes an initiate in the cult of Isis; at first she treats the religion as a Roman would and buys favours from the goddess; the emptiness of this relationship leads her into a more personal mystery.

Love, sex and betrayal in ancient Rome are the subtitles. The book does not live up to such brash branding. It is a thoughtful attempt to explore the dilemmas faced by a Roman woman who has married into the equestrian class, which was the backbone of the Roman administrative machine. The themes of sexuality in marriage and the search for mystical enlightenment are beautifully exposed. Unfortunately, one is distracted from these more interesting aspects by the fashionable retelling of the Mary Magdala myth, Pontius Pilate and the vilification of the Empress Livia.

Bill Dodds

CENTURION

Simon Scarrow, Headline, 2007, £12.99, hb, 336pp, 9780755327768

The story opens on the banks of the River Euphrates, where a Roman cohort is building a fort to protect the eastern outpost of the Empire from Parthia in the 1st century AD. When the Romans are massacred by a Parthian force, it can only mean war. The situation is made worse by near-open revolt in nearby Palmyra, a nominally independent City State but one which both Rome and Parthia wish to annex and control. The king's youngest son, Artaxes, has declared himself the next King of Palmyra and with his followers has managed to besiege King Vabathus in the citadel. Help must be sent to the King immediately and before the Parthians can come to the aid of the rebel Prince, but the Roman army is scattered, and it will take time to re-assemble it. But there is one cohort that is ready to march – the Second Illyrian. Together with a cohort from the Tenth Legion the relief force sets out for Palmyra under the command of Macro and Cato. It is no easy task they have been set, and Simon Scarrow tells a powerful story of the march and its outcome. It is full of detail and a real page-turner.

I could not put this book down and fully sympathise with Bernard Cornwell in his comment 'I really don't need this kind of competition'. This is the first book I have read by this author but it certainly won't be the last. Highly recommended.

Marilyn Sherlock

NOX DORMIENDA: A Long Night for Sleeping

Kelli Stanley, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 323pp, 9781594146664

Londinium, 84AD. The dregs of Saturnalia are slumped over in the clinic, begging for relief as

Arcturus, 33-year-old physician to the Governor of Britannia, dispenses cures to local citizens as well. He's about ready for a cup of *falernian* when a beautiful woman delivers a message and then vanishes: a Syrian spy, Vibius Maecenus, is traveling to Londinium carrying orders from the Emperor that will harm his Governor. She knows; she's the Syrian's unwilling betrothed. Still reeling from her beauty and the shock of her message, Arcturus is summoned urgently to examine a dead body in the Roman *mithraeum*. It's the Syrian, ritually murdered, with the document stolen.

Realizing that civil accord is at stake, Arcturus is pressured to solve the case *now*. His hybrid heritage gives him access to all strands of society, even back to the "old beliefs" of his youth, where the clues may lie. He's heartbroken that the beautiful Gwynn cannot be ruled out.

Arcturus is a unique protagonist: a private eye in a toga, wisecracking monologues to boot. This era with its smells, sounds and the language comes alive in the noir world of *Nox Dormienda*. I look forward to the next in the series. Highly recommended.

Tess Allegra

JOHN

Niall Williams, Bloomsbury USA, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 288pp, 9781596914674 / Bloomsbury, 2008, £10.99, hb, 288pp, 9780747595816

Blind and exiled, the disciple John is passing his existence on the isle of Patmos with a small band of devoted followers. Well, at least they started that way, but now with the monotony of waiting, prickles of doubt surge. John spends his time remembering the days he walked with the Master and the Revelation he received. What are the others doing? They came because they heard of his previous preaching, how he cured thousands and could not be killed. Williams occasionally adds a poetic touch to the narrative account: "Ten thousand miles were in his feet, dust of all creation."

But the darkness of temptation and uncertainty arises to haunt those who have tired of waiting for the Messiah to return. For Papias, can he heal and save a woman and her husband? After all, if we all carry the Divine as John teaches, can one not convey the same power as the Master? Matthias is a strong speaker who is tired of enduring John's exile, and with time passing comes to believe that Jesus was no more than a powerful prophet. Will John speak to this disunity and to the strongly looming sense of despair rising on the barren isle? What will they do when the Emperor dies and they are free to return to Ephesus? Will there be a triumphant entry or a parting of the ways for all?

John is a sometimes tension-packed, sometimes bleak retelling of this pivotal period preceding the vision that led the "favorite disciple" to create the gospel still being read and followed today. But how could it have been anything else during that time between the death of the Master and the rise of what came to be

known as the Christian church?

Viviane Crystal

4th CENTURY

MURDER'S IMMORTAL MASK

Paul Doherty, Headline, 2008, £19.99, hb, 308pp, 9780755338429

Rome, 314 AD. Constantine is now the emperor, having defeated Maxentius at the battle of Milvian Bridge in the year 312 and brought to an end the persecution of the Christians. But Rome is no peaceful city. Two years earlier a spate of vicious serial killings of prostitutes in the Caelian Quarter had taken place and the killer had never been caught. Now, suddenly they began again. Attius Enobarbus, a veteran and centurion of the Imperial army and appointed by Maxentius to search the city for Christian shrines and relics, and in particular the tomb of Peter the Galilean, had been suspected of being the killer, the Nefandus. However, he is found dead, stabbed in the back in his own room with the door locked on the inside, the only key still in the lock and a particular casket missing. Then his concubine, Drusilla, is murdered. Helena, Constantine's mother, calls in Claudia, one of her most trusted *Agentes in rebus* who with her unpretentious appearance had proved herself to be a perfect secret agent, and charges her to discover who killed Enobarbus and the whereabouts of the casket thought to contain the location of the burial place of St. Peter. Then there is Valentinian, leader of the Christian community on the Vatican hill, who disappeared without trace when the community was wiped out.

The story twists and turns, weaving its way through events with a dexterity that one has come to expect from Paul Doherty. History told as it was, but wrapped up in a rattling good tale. A real page turner.

Marilyn Sherlock

6th CENTURY

SEVEN FOR A SECRET

Mary Reed & Eric Mayer, Poisoned Pen Press, \$24.95, hb, 296pp, 978159058489

In 6th-century Byzantium, John Lord Chamberlain to Emperor Justinian discovers that name-dropping can be fatal. John confides his evening thoughts to a young mosaic "girl" whom he calls "Zoe," but naturally she cannot respond. One day in the Copper Market, a young girl seizes him, begging for an appointment the next day. Seeing his confusion, she pulls aside her veil aside to whisper, "...I am Zoe!"

John's bewilderment spurs his curiosity, but arriving at the assignation, he discovers that Zoe has been viciously murdered. Determined to find the killer and the motive for the murder becomes a personal obsession John pursues despite harm to himself and danger to his family – not to mention risking the ire of the

evil Empress Theodora when he uncovers an unsavory palace secret.

The redoubtable John and his irrepressible companions then lead the reader through a riveting chase among the denizens of the city with peculiarities that are not without humor. Although seventh in the series, this novel sustains on its own and is highly recommended for newcomers to the era or old friends who cannot get enough of engrossing historical intrigue.

Tess Allegra

SWORD AT SUNSET

Rosemary Sutcliff, Chicago Review Press, 2008, \$14.95/C\$16.95, pb, 495pp, 9781556527593

Although fans of Arthurian history and fiction have long been familiar with the depiction of Arthur as the last of the Romano-British warriors, recent movies based on the same premise (*King Arthur* and *The Last Legion?*) have brought the idea to a wider audience. Thus Rosemary Sutcliff's 1963 novel rings with a modernity that will no doubt find her new readers as well as old friends raised on her many children's novels.

The question that Sutcliff sets herself is how the historical Arthur could have become such an enduring legend, and the prose she weaves effects just such a transformation. In this rendering of the Matter of Britain there is no Round Table but men bound to one another in life and death by a warrior culture, no magic but the 'thin places' of Celtic spirituality, and no chivalric deeds but the struggle to hold back the darkness of the inevitable Saxon invasion in the hopes that a little of what is Britain may live on. Artos the Bear tells us his story in retrospect from his deathbed, and a tone like the lament of a harp plays through the entire novel as he moves towards the fate set in motion by the dark sin of his youth.

Yet as I read, it struck me that the reissue of *Sword at Sunset* is timely in more important ways. In a period when immigration and the cultural destiny of Britain have been a cause for much anxiety and speculation, not to mention violent words and deeds, this story of the struggles of a country of many peoples and faiths offers an almost prophetic, and ultimately hopeful, allegory: a reminder that values can remain even as the face of a nation changes.

Susan Cook

11th CENTURY

ALAMUT

Vladimir Bartol (trans. Michael Biggins), North Atlantic, 2007, \$16.95, pb, 389pp, 9781556436819

Bartol's novel is set in 11th century Persia. The title is the name of the castle over which the self-proclaimed prophet Hasan ibn Sabbah rules. He is scheming to achieve his vision to establish control over his country and free his people from the occupying Turks. At Alamut, the castle, he creates an army of devoted followers including an elite group, the fedayeen. They are fanatics who blindly follow his commands without question even to the point of suicide; some become "living daggers" to kill his enemies. To create this extreme devotion, he twists the interpretation of religious doctrine. He also uses hashish, lush gardens, and beautiful slave girls to create an illusion of paradise that he manipulates to bind the loyalty of the fedayeen to his cause. The novel has a wide array of interesting characters, but focuses on two in particular: Halima, a young and beautiful slave girl, and ibn Tahir, a devotee who becomes a fierce soldier.

The novel can be read on multiple levels. One is as a simple adventure story. On another,

A PLACE BEYOND COURAGE

Elizabeth Chadwick, Sphere, 2007, £18.99, hb, 302pp, 9781847740518



John FitzGilbert is King's Marshal to Henry I. His duties are many, including responsibility for the good administration of the court, organising journeys when the court is on the move, ensuring the well-being of everyone and everything around, from the smallest hunting hawk to the most important guest, and keeping records of money owed by and due to the king. All is well until Henry dies without naming his heir; the crown is taken by his nephew Stephen of Mortain, but hotly contested by his daughter Matilda, dowager empress of the Holy Roman Empire. So begins one of the most turbulent eras in history. To stay on top, John must have his wits about him and tread a very fine line.

So runs Elizabeth Chadwick's tale. As always, her facts are well researched, and her use of genuine people of the day intermingled with fictitious characters makes for a spellbinding story. I have enjoyed her books ever since I read *Lords of the White Castle*, and this one does not disappoint.

She tells history as it was, but in an eminently readable form which can do nothing other than enthuse even the most jaded reader with the past.

Most highly recommended.

Marilyn Sherlock

it is a fairly accurate retelling of actual historical events. On yet another level, it can be seen as an allegory on fascism, a growing menace in Europe at the time of the book's first publication in 1938. It is also an ominous forecast of the current nightmare in the Middle East.

Having been translated already into 19 languages, the novel's English translation by Michael Biggins brings this 20th-century masterpiece to a new audience for the first time.

Gerald T. Burke

12th CENTURY

MAGIC IN HIS KISS

Shari Anton, Forever, 2008, \$6.99/C\$8.50, pb, 320pp, 9780446617567

This is the final in a romance trilogy featuring the de Leon sisters, 12th-century descendants of King Arthur, and all possessing supernatural gifts. Nicole, the youngest of the sisters, is the king's ward, secluded in an English nunnery. As the political scene shifts, she becomes a valuable pawn to both England and Wales. Her uncle, a Welsh chieftain, sends his warrior bard Rhodri ap Daffyd to persuade her to defy the king and return to Wales with him. Can they forgo duty and their hearts' desires to bridge the social chasm between them? Can Rhodri help Nicole bear the burden of her psychic gift? Well, this is a romance...

I have not read either of the other novels, but this seemed designed to stand alone. It is pretty light on everything except passion; if you are looking for a few hours of pure escapism, then this should fit the bill.

Susan Cook

THE PATHS OF THE AIR

Alys Clare, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$28.95, hb, 250pp, 9780727866363

Sir Josse d'Acquin is sitting by his fireside wondering where his life is going when a mysterious stranger comes to the door asking for a place to stay. The man looks like a Saracen, perhaps a servant of a returning knight, and he agrees, but then the man vanishes – where has he gone, and why? When a mutilated body is found in the forest by a passing merchant, Josse wonders whether it is the missing John Damianos. Then he finds himself in the middle of a race to not only find out whodunit, but prevent several other deaths.

I do enjoy a good mediaeval mystery, but am less keen on the paranormal element that has crept into Ms Clare's books of late. Perhaps burst in and taken over the whole series might be a better way of putting it, but if you are like this reviewer and liked her earlier works before the New Age brigade arrived then this book might appeal. I can guarantee it virtually woo-woo free, and instead it bursts with a good plot filled with mysterious Hospitaliers, Saracens, treasure, fleeing fugitives and merciless assassins. It reminded me why I used to enjoy

her books so much, so maybe we might hope that she will write more in this vein.

Rachel A Hyde

13th CENTURY

PILGRIM: The Greatest Crusade

James Jackson, John Murray, 2008, £12.99, hb, 372pp, 9780719521133 / £11.99, pb, 372pp, 978071956924

In 1212, crusaders march to the Holy Land in order to wrest it back from the Saracens, who are now in control of all but a few coastal cities. But these crusaders are children and adolescents from the villages of the Rhineland. They include siblings Kurt and Isolda, and their enemy Gunther. Sixteen-year-old Otto is journeying to find his father. Brother Luke, a Franciscan friar, has his own reasons for travelling with the pilgrim children. In the Holy Land itself, warring factions of all denominations plot and spar for power.

Pilgrim is a lightweight if violent and gory adventure. There are numerous historical errors, from the portrayal of Cathar Perfecti as bloodthirsty murderers (when the Perfecti were total pacifists) to an aristocratic woman venturing unescorted and unremarked into a seedy tavern. I was shocked to come across a greedy hook-nosed Jewish money lender and felt that this was stereotyping at its offensive worst. Many of the scenes demand a strong suspension of disbelief. Readers wanting historical veracity and believable three-dimensional characters might prefer to look elsewhere. However, readers in search of a swift, uncomplicated read and a busy plot might find this one entertaining.

Susan Hicks

14th CENTURY

A KNIGHT'S TALE (US)/CONDOTTIERE: A Knight's Tale (UK)

Edward John Crockett, Pegasus, 2007, \$14.95, pb, 262pp, 9781933648491 / Polygon, 2006, £9.99, pb, 256pp, 9781904598718

There is an enormous equestrian painting of a 14th century knight, John Hawkwood, in Florence's Duomo. One wonders why an English soldier should deserve such an honor. The author of *A Knight's Tale*, Edward John Crockett, turned this wondering into an excellent tale woven out of solid historical research. Originally entitled *Condottiere*, *A Knight's Tale* is the story of John Hawkwood, one of Florence's most distinguished mercenary generals.

The story opens in 1356 with the battle of Poitiers, where events lead to Hawkwood's fall from royal favor. On return to England, Hawkwood is approached with an offer from Pisa to raise an army for her defense. Stung by the Black Prince's retaliation over an imagined slight at Poitiers and disenchanted with his

marriage, he finds Pisa's call irresistible. Hawkwood leaves England to begin a brilliant career as leader of the White Army, his white-cloaked company of condottieri. His service to Pisa opens the way to contracts with other Italian city-states, some Pisa's allies, some her enemies. During the last seventeen years of his life Hawkwood serves Florence and becomes one of its leading citizens. The story closes with his death in Florence on March 18, 1394.

A Knight's Tale is captivating reading. It is rich with political intrigue, battlefield excitement, and a love story created from Hawkwood's actual marriage to Donina Visconti, a woman of the minor nobility. The only disappointing elements in the story were Hawkwood's death, which seemed contrived, and his participation in Siena's famed horse race, the Palio – which was out of character. But these are easily overlooked in the fast-paced sweep of the story. The book can be confidently recommended as an engaging and informative journey into the world of medieval Italy.

Lucille Cormier

CATHEDRAL OF THE SEA

Idefonso Falcones (transl. Nick Caistor), Doubleday, 2007, hb £14.99, 626pp, 9780385611855 / Dutton, 2008, \$25.95/C\$28.50, 592pp, hb, 9780525950486

Set in 14th-century Catalonia, this novel has become a huge bestseller in Spain with translations sold in 32 countries to date. The story of Arnau, the son of an escaped serf, and therefore born into serfdom himself, the novel paints a vivid picture of Spain in the period. Arnau's father, Bernat, finds refuge in the free city of Barcelona, and it is there that Arnau grows to manhood. It is a long book, however, and I felt that he takes rather too long to grow up. Therefore, the novel loses pace a little in the middle section. But this is a minor quibble. It soon gathers pace again once he is fully grown. Through a combination of hard work and good fortune, he acquires wealth and eventually, as a reward for a daring exploit when Barcelona is under attack from the sea, he is made into a nobleman. But the King forces him into a loveless marriage. And when he frees the serfs on his estates, his fellow nobles are enraged. The climax in which Arnau finds himself arraigned before the Inquisition is superb.

Other themes dealt with are the arrogance and brutality of the nobility, popular prejudices against the Jews, and the relentless persecution of them by the medieval church. Throughout the story is counterpointed by the building of Santa Maria de la Mar (the Cathedral of the title) by the common people of Barcelona.

The story is well told, and the themes nicely handled. It is not difficult to see why the book became a bestseller in Spain. For non-Spanish readers and English speakers in particular, an additional bonus is the light it throws on the situation in Spain at this period, of which I confess I knew little. This is certainly a first rate

historical novel.

Neville Firman

THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLES

Susannah Gregory, Sphere, 2008, £18.99, hb, 496pp, 9781847440815

It is ten years since the Black Death reaped its harvest at Cambridge. Now, in the stifling summer of 1357, an even more sinister visitor is at large. So begins the latest tale in the Matthew Bartholomew series. Told within the setting of Cambridge University and in particular, Michaelhouse College, Father Thomas, who survived the plague, preaches fervently about the evils of sin and assures his flock that if they don't mend their ways the plague will return. But then into the arena appears the Sorcerer, who seems

to be able to appear and disappear at will and keeps his identity well hidden. When Thomas is hit on the head and falls to the ground, he is taken into Michaelhouse by Dr. Bartholomew, who begs him to rest, although it is a relatively minor injury, and gives him something to drink for the pain. To everyone's consternation Thomas is found dead the following morning. When Margery Sewale's body is found removed from her grave, things begin to get serious. Brother Michael, the University's Senior Proctor, and responsible for maintaining law and order, sets out to discover who has done this with the assistance of Matthew Bartholomew. Are these and subsequent events the work of an evil man or the machinations of the Devil?

As always, Susannah Gregory has a good

understanding of what it was like in 14th-century Cambridge. Life was hard and far from comfortable except for the very rich. I thought this story moved a little too slowly at times with some unnecessary, repetitive explanation, but the dramatic ending is no more than would have been expected.

Marilyn Sherlock

15th CENTURY

EMERALD SILK

Janet Lane, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 325pp, 9781594146824

The second book in Lane's Coin Forest medieval romance series set in 15th century England features Kadriya, a half-English, half-Gypsy orphan who has spent her short life trying to reconcile her conflicting backgrounds. The Gypsy in Kadriya wants to live a nomadic life, and her betrothal to Teraf, a Gypsy tribal king, seems to ensure that her dream will be achieved. When Teraf is suspected of stealing an emerald-encrusted chalice from a monastery, Kadriya sets out to prove his innocence, putting her in the path of Sir John Wynter, a knight who dislikes foreigners—especially Gypsies. Sir John and Kadriya embark on a quest to locate the chalice, and Kadriya finds herself strangely attracted to the brusque knight. Can she find a way to make John see past his xenophobia and give in to love?

Emerald Silk goes beyond simple romantic suspense by including serious issues such as racism, homophobia, and clerical greed. However, the love story and the quest for the stolen chalice take center stage throughout. The pacing is brisk, and Lane isn't afraid to give her characters some flaws to overcome. Readers of medieval romances will enjoy Lane's well-crafted novel.

Nanette Donohue

THE MERCHANT'S MARK

Pat McIntosh, Robinson, 2008, £6.99, pb, 320pp, 9781845296643 / Carroll & Graf, 2006, \$24.95, hb, 302pp, 0786717416

Augie Morrison had ordered a quantity of books from the Low Countries, planning on keeping some for himself, giving some to his friend, Gil Cunningham, and selling the rest on to the local bookseller, Thomas Webster. When the barrel thought to contain them is opened, it is not books they find. The barrel is full of brine with a bag of treasure at the bottom and a man's head floating at the top. Who is he, where is the rest of him, to whom does the treasure belong and where are the books? All questions for which Gil has to find the answers. Things get worse when the Provost arrests the widowed Augie Morrison for the murder of the unknown man, and he has to leave his two small daughters in the care of Alys and her sister.

This is the third book in the Gil Cunningham mysteries set in and around Glasgow University at the end of the 15th century. The trail twists and turns and blows hot and cold before all is

The Book of Love by Sarah Bower

Snowbooks, 2008, £7.99, pb, 598pp, 9781905005826

Although expelled from Spain by royal edict in 1492, young Jewess Esther's fate is more fortunate than others of her race. She journeys eastwards, her mother tragically dying on the way, to Rome and her father who lends money to the Borgias and where, after arranging her expedient conversion to Christianity, he secures her a post in Lucrezia Borgia's household. From that moment on, her fortunes are not only tied to those of her mistress, but to Lucrezia's brother Cesare with whom, from the moment she sees him, Esther falls deeply and irrevocably in love. But is this love or a naïve infatuation? And can it ever hope to be fulfilled?

Although dubbed 'La Violante' (oath-breaker or treacherous one) by Cesare, Esther ultimately realizes that she is only one pawn, not only in the power games played between the Borgias, their enemies and allies alike, but more dangerously, in that more darkly intimate one between brother and sister.

Sarah, a former *HNR* co-ordinating editor, had this to say about her new novel: "*The Book of Love* really has been a labour of love (pun at will!) for me, as I've been shamelessly besotted by Cesare Borgia since I first read Jean Plaidy's *Madonna of the Seven Hills* and *Light on Lucrezia* in my teens. The challenge was to find some way of writing about the Borgias which hadn't already

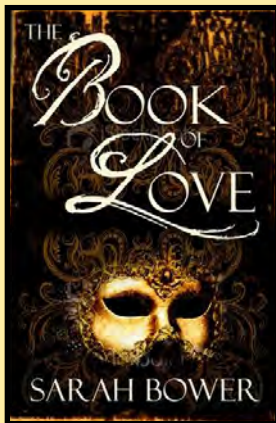
been done. For the Borgias, and most people connected with them, really, the trouble began in 1492, when Rodrigo became Pope. A great year, when the Jews were expelled from Spain and Columbus arrived in America. So I stuck those three events together to see what I would come up with. *The Book of Love* was the result."

Though happy with the reception of her previous novel, *The Needle in the Blood*, Sarah expressed some apprehension about her latest work: "*The Book of Love* is very different. Despite its title, it's not a romance. Although sexual love and obsession play their part in the novel, it is really far more about relationships between parents and children. The 'book of love' itself is a recipe book handed from mother to daughter. So I'm hoping *Needle in the Blood* fans won't be disappointed. I'm glad to say critical feedback so far has all been positive and I'm keeping my fingers crossed it will stay that way!"

Sally Zigmond, with comments by Sarah Bower



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revealed and the missing books are recovered.

Marilyn Sherlock

THE ROUGH COLLIER

Pat McIntosh, Constable, 2008, £18.99, hb, 288pp, 9781845294724 / Soho Constable, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 302pp, 9781569475072

When the peat cutters up on the moor find a buried body another mystery begins for Gil Cunningham. The locals are firmly of the opinion that it is one Thomas Murray missing from the local coal mine and that he was killed by witchcraft, the main suspect being the local wise woman, Beattie Lithgo. Needless to say things are not that simple and much is to happen with several surprises in store before all is made clear.

Gil and Alys are married at last and visiting Gil's mother, Egidia Muirhead, the Lady Cunningham, at her home at Belstane, some distance from Glasgow, when the body is discovered on neighbouring Douglas land. With Sir James away at Stirling, his deputy in Edinburgh and his son, Michael, at the University of Glasgow, there is no one immediately in authority to deal with the situation. Gil, as the Archbishop's Quaestor, is asked to look into it.

This is the fifth book in the Gil Cunningham series, and it certainly lives up to expectations.

Marilyn Sherlock

THE ENCHANTRESS OF FLORENCE

Salman Rushdie, Random House, 2008, \$26.00, hb, 368pp, 978-0375504334 / Jonathan Cape, 2008, £18.99, hb, 368pp, 9780224061636

Wearing a multicolored leather coat, a Florentine traveler arrives at the emperor of India's court armed with magic tricks, a secret, and a tale to tell. Set in Italy and India in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *The Enchantress of Florence* explores the many levels of becoming, fantasy and reality, and how to bring dreams to life. Emperor Akbar the Great's imaginary queen, who is his idea of perfection, becomes a point-of-view character by a pure act of will. Others disappear into paintings, while in Renaissance Florence, statues come alive and party in the streets.

As Rushdie plays with space and time, nothing is impossible. Stories are started, interrupted, retold, and folded inside out. His emperor is not content with *being*, but wants to *become*. Simonetta Vespucci, Botticelli's inspiration for *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*, is the Florentine enchantress whose magical prowess is mirrored by Qara Kóz, a princess before whom the beguiled universe falls to its feet.

We're told Rushdie wrote *Enchantress* after many years of research, and he includes a comprehensive bibliography. Why then, does he cavalierly write that in Italy in 1478, during an attempt to overthrow the Florentine Republic, Lorenzo de' Medici hanged his enemies from the windows of City Hall? In fact, government officials tossed the men to their deaths. Such broad strokes do not inspire rock-solid confidence in the author in those places where it's obvious

he doesn't mean to play with history, but to get it right. This made me question the historical underpinnings of the entire novel.

Although provocative and clever and often laugh-out-loud funny, too frequently the humor descends into the sexual fantasies of a schoolboy. Worse, for a novel that is in large part about telling tall tales, yarns, and stories, this particular story is deeply disappointing, since ultimately it boils down to little more than thin air.

Alana White

16th CENTURY

THE LEGACY

T. J. Bennett, Medallion, 2008, \$7.95, pb, 460pp, 9781933836362

Sabina von Ziegler lost her father at an early age, and her stepfather, Baron Marcus von Ziegler, treats her as little more than a commodity that he can trade as necessary. The Baron has a secret, as does Wolf Behaim, a widowed printer with a young daughter. In exchange for Wolf's silence, the Baron offers him Sabina's hand in marriage—along with the impressive legacy that her late mother left for Sabina when she was a child. Sabina plans to use the money to build a home for escaped nuns, but Wolf has other plans. They both expected a marriage of convenience, but are shocked when their physical attraction quickly becomes a deep, meaningful romance.

Bennett's 16th-century German setting is unusual for a romance novel, and all the drama

of the Protestant Reformation, as well as the peasant riots of the era, provide a fascinating backdrop for this torrid love story. Sabina is a typically headstrong heroine who answers to no man, and Wolf is a wounded alpha male-type who never expected to fall in love again after his first wife died in childbirth. Pleasing secondary characters, including Wolf's brother Peter and his daughter Gisel, round out the story. This is a solid historical romance from a promising debut author.

Nanette Donohue

THE QUEEN'S SORROW

Susannah Dunn, HarperPress, 2008, £12.99, pb, 304pp, 9780007258277 / Harper, Dec 2008, \$13.95, pb, 9780061704277

This novel tells the story of Rafael Prado, who is brought to England by Prince Philip of Spain to create a sundial for Whitehall Palace gardens as a gift to his wife, Queen Mary.

Rafael and his mason, Antonio, lodge away from the court with the Kitsons, a merchant family. Alone and alienated, they feel completely out of their depth despite reporting to the Spanish office regularly for briefings. Antonio begins to mingle with the locals immediately, but the shyer, more restrained Rafael observes all in his isolation and homesickness. Through his eyes we see what life in Tudor London was like, within the household and on the streets.

Whilst waiting for his son to be born, Philip vacillates over his wife and the finances to finish the sundial. Rafael waits, writing letter home that receive no reply. In his introspective loneliness he faces some unpalatable truths about

REVELATION

C.J. Sansom, Macmillan 2008, £17.99, hb, 550pp, 9781405092722



EDITORS' CHOICE

Palm Sunday, 1543: Henry VIII, having only recently beheaded his fifth wife, is wooing a very reluctant Catherine Parr. Sergeant Matthew Shardlake, now a senior barrister in Lincoln's Inn, has been given a case he does not want; to defend young Adam Kite, son of a master stonemason who has been put into the Bedlam for religious madness. Meanwhile, Archbishop Cranmer is troubled with a succession of killings in London which may involve the King's new lady.

Revelation is the fourth of C.J. Sansom's excellent Shardlake series. It is perhaps overlong, but the author has a style that is elegantly enjoyable and makes the novel often impossible to put down. The descriptions of mid-16th century London and of Westminster just after the dissolution of the Abbey are atmospheric, capturing the disorderliness, ordure, smells and ripeness that must have been present then.

Skilfully constructed, the book describes in specific detail the changes in Christian worship when people were questioning their beliefs. England was turning from Roman papism towards Luther and Calvin. The Bible, which had been printed for the first time in English, was banned to women and the working classes. Into this melting pot of religious fervour, a killer stalks the streets. Using the seven dark prophecies from the Book of Revelation as his chosen method of slaughter, he marks a trail that can only lead to Armageddon. Matthew Shardlake is once again drawn into solving the mystery.

This is the best kind of historical novel: a story that never falters, with interesting and compelling characters, and written with a masterful command of the period.

Gwen Sly

his marriage. He befriends the kindly, secretive housekeeper, Cecily and her selectively mute son, Nicholas.

An impromptu meeting with the Queen finds Rafael confiding details about his son's birth to the friendly but self-doubtful mother-to-be, which ends with him giving her assurances about her pregnancy. The public announcement of the Queen's pregnancy is celebrated in the streets, but the pregnancy proves false and her Roman Catholic religious fervour intensifies. Within days, London is shaken by rumours concerning the queen's cruel dictates. Rafael cannot believe that the queen he encountered and whose life story has so many parallels with his own could endanger innocent lives and authorise the burning of heretics and married priests. Compelled to act, he finds that his actions have horrific consequences for those he sought to protect.

There are a few modern references, but these do not detract from this skilfully written, intricate and compelling story. The period details contrasting the life of the poor against that of the not-so poor, whilst coping with the political and religious uncertainties, adds depth, vibrancy and veracity to the narrative. The ending stayed with me long after I had finished reading it. Highly recommended.

Janet Williamson

THE OTHER QUEEN

Philippa Gregory, Touchstone, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 448pp, 9781416549123 / HarperCollins, 2008, 18.99, hb, 448pp, 9780007190348

The "other queen" in Gregory's new Tudor novel is Mary of Scotland, the bane of Elizabeth's existence and the thorn in William Cecil's side. This is the story of Mary's captivity, one which is fairly well known, but the impact of that captivity on her hosts and jailers, newlyweds George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, and his indomitable wife, Bess of Hardwick, is not.

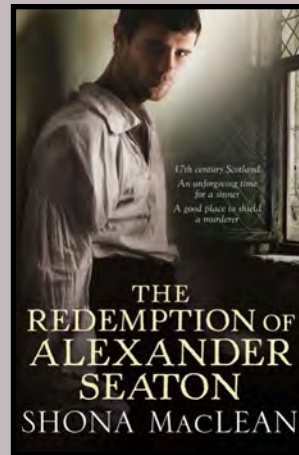
Bess, a wealthy widow who had moved up the social ladder by her amazing business acumen, has made her most successful marriage to a trusted confidant of Queen Elizabeth's. She is now well-positioned to ensure her own future and that of her children. She knows every penny she earns and every penny she spends.

When Elizabeth puts Mary under house arrest, she chooses her trusted servant, George Talbot, as Mary's jailer. Neither George nor Bess realize what they're getting into. As the years of Mary's captivity stretch on and George and Bess must fund Mary's "court," they find themselves verging on bankruptcy, caught in the web of intrigue promoted by Mary and her supporters and increasingly the target of Elizabeth's and Cecil's suspicions. Worse for Bess is the fact that it is obvious that George is infatuated with Mary.

Using the narrative technique she employed in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Gregory alternates chapters from narrator to narrator, with Mary, Bess and George each telling their story. For some reason, though, I found that I was not

THE REDEMPTION OF ALEXANDER SEATON

Shona MacLean, Quercus, 2008, £14.99, hb, 356pp, 9781847245052



This engrossing, atmospheric novel is not only a satisfying, skilfully constructed mystery with richly developed characters. It's also the vivid evocation of a particular time and place by an author whose uncle was Alistair MacLean and who is herself a historian specialising in 16th and 17th century Scotland. She has used her gifts to the full to create a truly memorable and exciting read.

Sarah Cuthbertson

engaged in this story as I have been in Gregory's previous Tudor novels. And I had no patience for either Bess, who was harsh and money-hungry, for George who was – for lack of a better term – wimpy and pitiful, or for Mary, who was downright manipulative and conniving. I didn't particularly like any of these people and didn't feel particularly forgiving of their foibles and shortcomings.

Ilysa Magnus

SPELLBOUND: The Legend of the Ice People

Margit Sandemo (trans. Gregory Herring, Angela Cook), Tagman Press, 2008, £7.00, pb, 260pp, 9781903571750. First pub. in Oslo, 1982.

In the winter of 1581 16-year-old Silje is the lone survivor of her family, wiped out by plague. Alone and starving she befriends two orphans left to die in the cold. In her desperate search for food and shelter she is confronted by a mysterious man clothed in wolf skins. He turns out to be Silje's saviour and arranges for her and the children to be cared for by kindly farming folk. As the story develops changing circumstances force Silje to leave what has become a comfortable home, and the wolf man takes her away from all she has ever known to the mountains and the forbidding land of the Ice People. Although Silje knows little about them she has always lived in fear of their shadow.

Margit Sandemo has written over 170 novels including *Spellbound*, which is the first in a series that spans four centuries. A mixture of myth and legend interwoven with historical events, this is an imaginative creation that involves the reader from the first page to the last.

Ann Oughton

EDITORS' CHOICE

On a stormy night in 1626 in the Scottish town of Banff, the local apothecary's assistant collapses in the street. Next morning he is found dead in Alexander Seaton's house. Murder is suspected and when one of Alexander's few friends in the town is arrested, Alexander sets out to clear him. But Alexander has a past. Having studied to be a minister of the Kirk, he had been denounced at his ordination for dishonouring the girl he would have married. Disgraced, he lost his faith and ended up a reluctant, embittered schoolmaster. Now, in the course of his investigations, Alexander must deal with characters good and bad: selfless, wise, devious and unscrupulous. He must contend with inflamed prejudices that lead to a witch hunt and accusations of treacherous Catholic plotting. And he must confront his own demons.

RESTORATION LADY

Sue Allan, Domtom Publishing Ltd, 2008, £6.99, pb, 254pp, 9781906070076

If, like me, you have read and enjoyed *Mayflower Maid* and *Jamestown Woman* you will be eager to read the concluding part of this excellent trilogy. This is the story of Bessie's further adventures (and misadventures) as she copes with the rest of the Civil War and Cromwell's reign and sees the return of the monarchy only to get hit again by the double whammy of plague and fire.

I often complain that the 17th century does not get written about often enough, but at least with this series I have if not exactly quantity, but certainly quality. Ms Allan manages to pack a lot in to her fairly slender volumes, which makes a pleasant change from the usual weighty tomes. She gets under the skin of what it must have been like to have lived through such momentous times, and her characters have the ring of authenticity about them with the concerns and ideals of the era. This is also a book that manages not to veer to extremes of black and white, but shows the realism in between both in events and people; some larger-than-life situations, but nothing that cannot be found in the history books.

Here is a rare thing, a highly readable novel of modest length filled with engaging characters and thought-provoking situations. I do hope we haven't read the last of Sue Allan. Highly recommended, and one series that has to be read in order.

Rachel A Hyde

A DEATH IN GASCONY

Sarah D'Almeida, Berkley Prime Crime, 2008, \$7.99, pb, 313pp, 9780425221013

Sarah D'Almeida's fourth installment in her mystery series with Alexander Dumas' famous 17th century Musketeers as sleuths gets off with a gallop: Henri D'Artagnan, barely six months

EDITORS' CHOICE

THE KING'S FAVORITE: A Novel of Nell Gwyn and King Charles II

Susan Holloway Scott, New American Library, 2008, \$14/C\$15.50, pb, 448pp, 9780451224064



The story of the Oxford-born barmaid turned prostitute turned orange seller turned renowned actress – and, ultimately, the mistress and closest companion to Charles II – is one of legend. Scott takes this well-worn story and breathes life and spirit into it.

From a very early age, Nelly Gwyn has her heart and mind set on Charles. The fact that he is England's monarch appears not to intimidate her, but then again, Nell is quite a rambunctious, clever and enticing creature, capturing the fancies of some in the king's inner circle. Her earthy wisdom, saucy personality and hilarious wit – and outright determination and perseverance – attract everyone who comes in contact with her.

Nell's story is an amazing one, and it is a fascinating evolutionary tale in Scott's talented hands. What could have been a pedestrian retelling of the same old story is transformed into a first person, eyewitness account of life in 17th-century England and an insider's look at the intrigues, passions and deceptions at Whitehall Palace.

What is communicated most effectively is the deep, abiding connection between Nell and Charles. Clearly, Charles relies on Nell as his best friend to counsel him in all things, both personal and political, and he respects her opinion and sage advice – certainly not what you'd expect between England's king and a "common street whore."

But then again, Scott does such a marvelous job of imbuing Nell with innate intelligence and a love of life that the reader just can't help falling in love with her too.

A joyous and highly recommended novel.

Ilysa Magnus

into his new life in Paris, is called home to Gascony after the death of his father. Which is suspicious. And his son's life is also in grave danger.

Young Henri tries to face his troubles alone, but is joined (in the nick of time, of course!) by the all-for-one fellows: the noble Athos, cunning Aramis, and loyal red-headed giant Porthos. Bodies and suspects mount, and the family tree proves not as once thought by its young heir.

The views of investigation through the minds of each the musketeers prove both rich and entertaining. Rational Aramis searches through the roots of the country's religious wars. Emotion-based Athos thinks the source is money. Porthos enjoys playing the amiable dunce like a musketeer Columbo as he trails a herd of horses. D'Artagnan interviews family members and grows suspicious of most of them, even his beautiful mother. And of course, the dastardly Cardinal Richelieu is involved to his teeth. The answers, of course, lie at the end of all these roads. A great, swashbuckling treat!

Eileen Charbonneau

THE SUN KING RISES

Yves Jégo and Denis Lépée (trans. Sue Dyson), Gallic, 2008, £7.99, pb, 474pp, 9781906040024

Orphaned Gabriel de Pontbriand has fled the stifling conformity of the country life his uncle has planned for him for the flesh pots of Paris. Ambitious to become an actor, he has gained a post as Molière's secretary. But he lives in turbulent times, and one night a batch of mysterious coded documents bearing his father's

signature come into his possession. These are at the heart of a dangerous game of intrigue being played out in the aftermath of the death of Louis XIV's chief minister, Cardinal Mazarin. Gabriel determines to unravel the mystery...

Unfortunately, Gabriel's character is never really fleshed out beyond that of naïve country boy, and most of the other characters are mere types, although that may be the fault of the translation. Possibly as a result of this, it took me a while to get into, especially as the protagonist does not appear until page fifty. When I did, it was hard to keep track of everyone – lots of grey men plotting against each other. On the other hand, this is good as it keeps the reader guessing for some time, especially as to what is really going on, to the extent that when we do find out it's a bit of a disappointment.

I like the structure of the novel – each chapter is a scene at a particular location, date and time, but there is rather a large gap towards the end section of the story which makes it feel a bit rushed. It's all just a little bit too incredible for me, but conspiracy theorists will love it.

Cas Stavert

THE HERETIC'S DAUGHTER

Kathleen Kent, Little, Brown, 2008, \$24.99/C\$27.99, hb, 333pp, 0316024481 / Macmillan, 2008, £14.99, hb, 400pp, 9780230704435

With *The Heretic's Daughter*, debut author Kathleen Kent has taken the tragic story of Martha Carrier, a victim of the witch trials of Salem Village in 1692, and breathed life into the events surrounding this era of hysteria. The

fact that Carrier is actually Kent's ancestress adds drama to an already frightening and unbelievable tale.

Told through the eyes of Martha's young daughter, Sarah, the book begins with several chapters of background-building that gives insight into the times and the family's reputation in the area. Martha is a strong-willed woman who has managed to offend several members of the community, and Sarah watches in disbelief as, once accused, Martha refuses to do anything to save herself, believing that right will win out in the end. As the horror continues, even Sarah and her brothers are accused of witchcraft and are thrown into jail. Sarah discovers that she will have to make hard decisions that will either keep her alive or send her to the gallows. Kent builds the story and leads us to the sad, bitter ending, showing how mass hysteria feeds itself.

Once the story gets past the initial background-setting pages, *The Heretic's Daughter* gains momentum, but I found the first part a tad tedious. As told through the experiences of young Sarah, this book seemed more young adult in tone and would likely appeal to teens interested in the period. I am also hoping that the final published copy will include an author's note that gives more information about how Kent researched and developed the story. Overall *The Heretic's Daughter* is indeed a good read, and highlights a truly dreadful time in history.

Tamela McCann

BUCCANEER

Tim Severin, Macmillan, 2008, £12.99, hb, 338pp, 9781405088909

Tim Severin is the author of those splendid non-fiction accounts of classical voyages which have entertained us over the years. His first steps into fiction writing gave us the equally enthralling *Viking* trilogy. *Buccaneer* is his second Hector Lynch novel and here he gives us a story of reckless adventures, beautiful heiresses and corrupt officials set in the colonial times of the Caribees.

The Spanish Main was a lawless place in the late 17th century. England and France claimed possession of the West Indies whilst Spain dominated the Great South Sea. Smuggling and piracy were rife. Any unsuspecting merchantman was fair game to the democratic regime of soldiers and sailors of fortune who gathered there seeking unlawful financial gain.

In late December 1679, twenty-year-old Hector Lynch is sailing his recently acquired ship, *L'Arc-de-Ciel*, from the West African coast to Jamaica. A small slaver without cargo, she has only a five-man crew. Falling into the hands of the notorious buccaneer, Captain John Coxon, Hector has no option but to join the buccaneer raid through the jungle to Panama. Navigational maps were the key to journeys in the Pacific and a great prize if accurate. The capture of a well-placed Spanish lady leads Hector into discovering a collection of sea charts giving precise details of the South American coast. Later, his skills as a negotiator stand him in

good stead as he stands accused of murder and piracy.

An enjoyable romp, even if the description of the journey around the Horn is hurried. Hector Lynch is however an engaging and likeable character and I look forward to his new adventure.

Gwen Sly

18th CENTURY

TOUCHING DISTANCE

Rebecca Abrams, Macmillan, 2008, £12.99, hb, 307pp, 9780230015555

Based on a true story, this is an account of how Dr Alec Gordon struggles to understand how a mysterious disease, puerperal fever, becomes an epidemic in 1790 Aberdeen.

Meticulously researched, both in the locations and the medical knowledge of the time, the novel shows how Gordon struggles against the scepticism of the more complacent doctors in the town, the antagonism of the midwives and his own family problems. His wife, Elizabeth is increasingly consumed by memories of her childhood in Antigua and her secrets, but he has little time or energy to spare for her.

Well known as a journalist and writer of non-fiction, Rebecca Abrams brings all her skills into this first novel. It is beautifully written with details that take the reader straight into Aberdeen and the country around at all times and all seasons, or, painfully, to the bedsides of women giving birth or dying horribly when the illness strikes.

Gordon was a man ahead of his time, but his pioneering work was forgotten for decades. This novel will help to re-establish him as a clever, caring man who observed facts and drew correct conclusions from them.

Marina Oliver

THE LIGHTSTEP

John Dickinson, David Fickling, 2008, £14.99, hb, 624pp, 9780385611732



every character with just a few deft strokes. His historical details always have the ring of authenticity but never overload or weigh down the story.

This is a gem of a novel, and I shall certainly be looking out for more works by the author.

Sara Wilson

EDITORS' CHOICE

Once upon a time Michel Wery had been a firm supporter of the French Revolution, but the Terror, the atrocities and the new leadership have soured the dream. By 1797 this staunch republican has become a spy for the other side, awaiting his chance to strike back. Then he is approached by a great friend's sister, Mria von Adelsheim, who wants him to investigate her brother's death. A pact is made, and both tumble headfirst into a dangerous mission that will leave neither of them unscathed. Ultimately, Michel has to decide how much he is willing to sacrifice for the greater good – whatever that might be.

The Lightstep is a great work of theatre and a true historical epic. Scheming politicians, lavish balls, obscure cults, love, lust and bloodshed pepper its pages in thrilling detail. John Dickinson writes with a light touch and an eye for detail. He has the ability to paint every scene and draw

A LADY'S SECRET

Jo Beverley, Signet, 2008, \$7.99, pb, 409pp, 9780451224194

Fans of Jo Beverley will be glad to learn that there is a new romance on the market involving the intriguing Malloren family. This one begins in 1764 at an inn near Abbeville, France. Robin Fitzvitry, the Earl of Huntersdown, traveling incognito with his absurd papillon, Coquette, is returning to England from the court at Versailles, when his trip is interrupted by an encounter with a cursing nun. Of course the nun isn't really a nun, nor is he truly the wastrel he would appear to be.

When "Robin Bonchurch" offers to give Petra D'Averio passage to the coast in his carriage,

she has no real choice but to accept. She is in imminent danger, making a quick change of conveyance the one chance she has of reaching her destination, though clearly her rescuer has more than pleasant conversation on his mind.

This novel has full measures of passion, and intrigue. The main characters are likeable, if unlikely, and their banter is entertaining. Period details pepper the plot, but aren't its focus.

Alice Logsdon

MIDWIFE OF THE BLUE RIDGE

Christine Blevins, Berkley, 2008, \$14.00/C\$15.50, pb, 432pp, 9780425221686

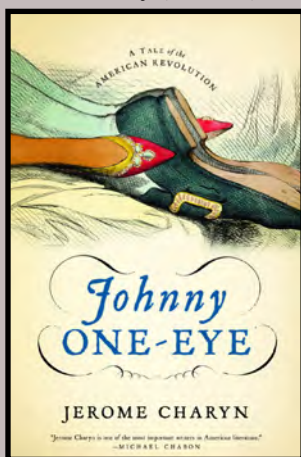
This novel begins just after the battle at Culloden Moor in 1746, when young Maggie Duncan joins the Cameron household, having just lost her entire family. Raised by Hannah, a skilled herbalist and midwife, Maggie grows up in the village of the Black Corries, learning the trade of her foster mother. When Hannah dies sixteen years later, Maggie leaves the village, having never earned the full trust of many of her neighbors.

After two years of barely scraping by in Glasgow, Maggie decides to take a chance on her future by sailing to Virginia as an indentured servant. Aboard *The Good Intent*, Maggie makes many friends, and one dangerous enemy. Once her contract is purchased, Maggie's adventure begins. She is good-humored and isn't afraid of hard work. She faces uncertainty and danger with a cool head. These qualities and more attract the attention of Tom Roberts, a hunter and fur trader, whose years of living in the frontier of Kenta-ke seem doomed.

I enjoyed the pace of the narrative and the interactions between the varied characters. This novel is full of action, passion and period detail. I especially enjoyed the use of Scottish and backwoods vocabulary. I would say that Blevins has done a good deal of research into daily life

JOHNNY ONE-EYE: A Tale of the American Revolution

Jerome Charyn, Norton, 2008, \$25.95/C\$25.95/£14.99, hb, 479pp, 9780393064971



illegitimate birth.

Jerome Charyn is an immensely talented writer, and his abilities with language and setting combine to produce a superb historical novel.

John R. Vallyley

EDITORS' CHOICE

Johnny One-Eye is a cleverly written and well-crafted glimpse of some of the leading British and American characters of the American Revolution through the eyes—excuse me, eye—of young John Stocking. Stocking earns his nickname as a result of a bayonet wound while with Benedict Arnold's American forces in Québec in 1775. Our young hero returns to the "Holy Ground" area of New York City where he pursues Clara, one of the prostitutes working under the chief madam, Gertrude. Clara and Gertrude bring Johnny in contact with Sir William Howe and George Washington, two men who are not strangers to the temptations offered by the "Holy Ground." Johnny has enormous difficulty in his relations with both Clara and Gertrude, and his problems are not aided by General Arnold, Alexander Hamilton, or his own emotions set in permanent turmoil in questions surrounding his

in frontier America, particularly as pertains to those who lived in and around forts.

Alice Logsdon

RULES OF WAR

Iain Gale, Harper Collins, 2008, £12.99, hb, 332pp, 9780007253555

This is the second in the series of adventures of Captain Jack Steel, first introduced to us in *Man of Honour*. In the early 18th century, the British army led by John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, was the leaders of a wide-ranging and successful alliance against the French king Louis XIV. Jack Steel is a man with a strong sense of honour off the battlefield while a superb soldier on it, leading his Grenadiers to where the battle is hottest. While *Man of Honour* covered the famous battle of Blenheim, *Rules of War* begins with the battle of Ramillies in 1706. The battle is bloody and expertly described by Gale. In the aftermath of the battle, an unforeseen threat to the Duke of Marlborough sends Steel on a new and dangerous mission. He is soon forced to battle treacherous elements within his own army as well as a hostile Belgian populace. Even worse, his fate and that of Marlborough becomes entwined with the siege of Ostend and the ferocious French privateer, Rene Duglay-Trouin.

While there are some obvious similarities to Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe and Allan Mallinson's Matthew Hervey series, the Jack Steel character is convincing in his own right and overall this was an enjoyable read. The battle scenes in particular are superbly detailed and the first half of the book moves along with pace and vigour. Gale's touch is less sure in the second half, however, and the characterization becomes more laboured particularly with the introduction of Duglay-Trouin. Matters improve considerably when the siege enters its final stages and Gale is on surer ground. The pace increases and Steel does what he's best at: killing the enemy.

Gordon O'Sullivan

TO TASTE TEMPTATION

Elizabeth Hoyt, Forever/Grand Central, 2008, \$6.99/C\$8.50, pb, 362pp, 9780446406918

The unknown situation surrounding her brother's death during the Battle of Spinner's Falls in the American colonies haunts Lady Emeline Gordon, a refined English widow and chaperone to young ladies entering Society. Wealthy colonial merchant Samuel Hartley, visiting London, asks Emeline to take his sister as a protégée. She agrees, not only because of the challenges involved, but also because of her fascination with Samuel.

Hartley's trip to London is not simply for the benefit of his sister, but to seek answers about Spinner's Falls—a battle where he believes there was a traitor in the ranks. He must keep Emeline at arms' length while he investigates, though that becomes impossible. Love blossoms despite past tragedies and self-doubt on the part of the characters.

The first book of this Georgian-set series is part love story, part history, and part fairy tale. The politics and happenings of the day make it a fascinating story. I recommend it!

Monica Spence

DEVIL'S PRIZE

Jane Jackson, Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 224pp, 9780709084808

The Devil's Prize takes the reader into the realms of Cornish wrecking and smuggling towards the end of the 18th century. Times are hard and the people of Porthinnis earn their living by whatever means they can, be that salting down a shoal of pilchards in the pilchard cellars, retrieving anything they find on the beach either simply washed up or recovered from a ship wrecked in a storm, or by smuggling brandy, lace and tobacco from France, in this case Roscoff. Woven into the story are the loves and lives of Jenefer Trevanion and her crippled sister, Betsy, Tamara Gillis and, of course, Devlin Varcoe, the hero and 'devil' of the tale.

The story moves at a good pace, the characters are believable, and life in and around the village quite colourfully told. Love, jealousy, treachery, and betrayal are all there. The theme is hardly original, but it is a good yarn, and I found it an enjoyable read.

Marilyn Sherlock

DUCHESS BY NIGHT

Eloisa James, Avon, 2008, \$7.99/C\$8.99, pb, 368pp, 9780061245572

In 1783, Harriet, the young widowed duchess of Berrow, longs to escape the structure of Georgian society. She jumps at the chance for adventure when her friend Isidore decides to create a great scandal to lure her long-absent

husband back from his Far East explorations. The two ladies, with their friend the Duke of Villers as escort, decide to visit the scandalous Lord Strange, whose home is regularly filled with actors and actresses.

Unlike Isidore, Harriet does not wish her name to be caught up in a scandal, so she daringly dresses in breeches and poses as Harry Cope, a young relative of the duke's. Exploits abound as Harry rides without a sidesaddle for the first time, learns to fence with the fearsome Lord Strange, and tends to the amorous advances of a scantily clad actress. Harriet revels in her newfound freedom, but finds her heart captured by Lord Strange, who finds himself unsettlingly drawn to the beautiful young "man."

With her third installment of the Desperate Duchesses series, James again delights with seduction, surprise and wit. The story has lively dialogue, engaging characters who find themselves in entertaining predicaments, and as always, ends with quite a satisfying conclusion.

Rebecca Roberts

THE IRON TONGUE OF MIDNIGHT

Beverle Graves Myers, Poisoned Pen Press, 2008, \$24.95/C\$24.95, hb, 303pp, 9781590582329

This fourth volume in the series featuring castrato opera singer Tito Amato is the author's tribute to the country house mystery.

In September 1740, Tito and his brother-in-law, English painter Gussie Rumbolt, arrive at a villa on the Venetian mainland. Tito has been invited to sing the lead role in an opera by a German composer with whom the mistress of the villa, an ambitious woman with musical pretensions, is having an affair. Tito is astonished to discover that one of his fellow

THE HAWK

Peter Smalley, Century, 2008, £18.99, hb, 354pp, 978184602446



Smalley has been hailed as the heir to those great writers of naval historical fiction, Patrick O'Brian and C.S. Forester. I agree. *The Hawk* is the second of his books I've read, fourth in the series, and another rip-roaring adventure.

In 1790 Lieutenant James Hayter, despite the failure of the Rabhet expedition (as told in book three) is given his first command, the 10-gun cutter, *The Hawk*. His task is to prevent smugglers and spies from crossing the Channel. The only thing spoiling his enjoyment is the 'beaching' of his friend and old captain, William Rennie, or so Hayter thinks. Rennie is held responsible for the failure of the Rabhet expedition. Once spymaster Sir Robert Greer appears, readers know the problems are about to start. And they do. The seemingly simple task of capturing a renegade captain and his cutter turns into life-and-death drama, poor Rennie suffering most dishonourably.

Smalley has a good ear for dialogue, a thorough understanding of the class system, and a delightful way of adding historical colour without hitting readers on the head with an information dump. He has created an 18th-century world in a way that rings true for this reader. Smalley writes so well that each book stands alone and can be read without reading the others. I wouldn't, though. Highly recommended, even for those who are not fans of naval fiction, just for the pleasure of reading a well-written historical novel.

Patrika Salmon

singers is his own long-lost sister Grisella, last seen sailing to Constantinople. Soon the body of a stranger turns up, killed by the pendulum of an enormous clock just as it was about to strike midnight. With the local constable off hunting, Tito decides to do his own investigations.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Myers gives us wonderful insights into the world of 18th-century opera, with its jealousies and intrigues between the members of the opera company. The book can be read on its own, but, since part of the enjoyment of the series comes from following Tito's career and family relationships, it is best to begin with the first volume, *Interrupted Aria*.

Vicki Kondelik

MITTEE

Daphne Rooke, Toby, 2008, \$14.95/£9.99/ C\$14.95, pb, 256pp, 9781592642069

Mittee was first published in 1951. The story is set in the Transvaal in the late 18th century. The new edition includes an afterword by John Maxwell Coetzee. Selena, a young woman of "mixed blood," narrates. She is a servant and companion to Mittee, who is of Afrikaans descent. Selena is not Mittee's slave, but she must accept Mittee's hitting, pinching, and hair pulling without retaliation, though mutual verbal abuse seems to be allowed. It is somewhat of a Cinderella situation, albeit Cinderella with a beautiful, spirited, and, for the most part, likeable stepsister.

The story opens as Mittee prepares to marry Paul, eldest son of the foremost family in the region. Selena will tell the story of her own affair with the adulterous Paul, her brutal rape by Jansie, and her eventual marriage to Fanie—a good man. But the book's title is *Mittee*, and Mittee is the true focus of Selena's tale. We read more about what Mittee does, feels, and thinks—from Selena's point of view, of course—than about Selena's own self.

J. M. Coetzee characterizes the story as a sexual rivalry between the girls and asks whether Rooke is not merely a romance writer rather than a serious chronicler of social and political conditions. He dismisses her as the former. I disagree with his analysis and suggest that the author is neither. I would say rather that she is an astute observer of human nature in that she has given us an incisive look at two women engulfed in self-pity. Both Selena and Mittee's sister-in-law, Letty, act out their venomous obsession with Mittee, who struggles and finally attains her heart's desire.

But there is not space here to develop this analysis. Suffice to say, *Mittee* is an excellent story—intellectually stimulating and beautifully narrated. Most highly recommended!

Lucille Cormier

THE FIELDS OF FORTUNE

Jessica Stirling, Hodder & Stoughton, 2008, £6.99, pb, 452pp, 9780340834930

On the brink of being coerced into an unwanted marriage to an old, albeit rich, neighbour, young Nicola Templeton flees to

Georgian Edinburgh to stay with her older sister Charlotte, who married Grant Peters, a lawyer, without her father's consent the previous year.

At Charlotte's small but comfortable house, Nicola meets her brother-in-law's younger brother Gillon, who retired early from the army. Gillon has his mind set on the second Templeton heiress, and actively pursues Nicola, who, despite flirting with him, is only too aware of his inadequacies, particularly with regards to money. On one luncheon with Gillon, she meets his older brother, Roderick, and is smitten. But will a hardworking farmer as a husband ever be good enough for her father?

John James Templeton, the girls' father, has his own plans for the family fortune – he plans to remarry and sire a son to whom he can leave his extensive estate. He is therefore a little surprised when he receives an invitation for an evening of whist at Lady Oliphant's residence where he meets – and becomes enchanted with – Madelaine, a young 'widow' from London. But he has a serious rival in Gillon. Who is Madelaine and who will gain her affections?

The Fields of Fortune has several plots running parallel where, at times, there were so many characters at play that I lost track of their purpose. But the main aspect was the complex relationship between members of each of the two families, the Templetons and the Peters. The ending implied that happiness does not depend on financial gain but on high values and hard work. An interesting read with a moral.

Stephanie Hochadel

19th CENTURY

PEARL'S REDEMPTION

C. H. Admirand, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 273pp, 9781594147005

The widow of an abusive man, Pearl Lloyd's life should have been on the upswing, but things had never been easy. Still recovering from injuries received defending her property and the young women that rely on her, she is shocked to learn from Davidson Smythe, the handsome stranger on her doorstep, that he has just become the owner of *her* ranch. Few could blame Pearl for taking potshots at him. Later, when Smythe finds himself in custody for being shot at, he wonders how he will extricate himself from this dispute without losing his inheritance or allowing someone to commit a serious swindle against the intoxicating Pearl...

Set in the 1870s in Emerson, Colorado, *Pearl's Redemption* is third in Admirand's western romance series. *Pearl's Redemption* is a thoroughly engaging novel with fine contrasting characters: Pearl is no more the helpless heroine than Smythe is a typical western hero – he isn't even a cowboy. Neither seems able to escape their past. A novel well worth a read!

Janette King

FROM A DISTANCE

Tamera Alexander, Bethany House, 2008,

\$13.99, pb, 269pp, 9780764203893

It is 1875 and Elizabeth Westbrook, daughter of a former colonel in the Federal army, is determined to win a coveted staff position on the *Washington Daily Chronicle* by photographing the beauty of the newly discovered Mesa Verde cliff dwellings. Elizabeth needs a guide to take her through the Rocky Mountains of the Colorado Territory, but the only man available is Daniel Ranslett, a former Confederate sharpshooter who can bring down an elk—or an enemy officer—from the distance of a mile.

Eleven years before the opening chapter, Daniel and Elizabeth lost loved ones on opposite sides in the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, a battle in which Colonel Westbrook was the tactical commander. Subplots involving Elizabeth's Negro assistant, Josiah, and Daniel's widowed friend, Rachel, add substance (and, presumably, set the stage for sequels).

Alexander, a bestselling novelist, writes with an ease that belies the complexity of this love story. Daniel and Elizabeth are multifaceted characters who must overcome their own shortcomings before they can trust each other. Altogether, this is a compelling and thought-provoking novel. I give extra marks for the beautiful cover, which captures so perfectly the heroine in her favorite gown.

Nancy J. Attwell

THE CLERKENWELL CONSPIRACY

Ann Barker, Robert Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 224pp, 9780709085287

The Clerkenwell Conspiracy is a romantic adventure set in London during the Napoleonic Era. Here the reader finds the potent mix of political adventure by Baroness Orczy alongside the mannered romances of Jane Austen, making for a greatly entertaining story.

The heroine, Eve, is a poor widowed relative reluctantly taken in by Cousin Julia, her protector. Eve is more than a little relieved when opportunity arises with the bequest of a bookshop in Clerkenwell and she is able to escape Cousin Julia's bullying. However, the bequest comes with an odd collection of dependents and a mystery to be revealed. The stage is set for the development of tight plotting in the form of more than a dash of political intrigue, spies, romance and a pepper pot full of misunderstandings. We don't lose Cousin Julia and her cronies either.

The novel draws the reader into the Regency world with post haste speed and soon a network of characters enters the pages. As their various motivations are revealed, the reader has a sense that the era is written with confidence and authenticity. Eve is an independent heroine who quickly becomes amiss of the sensibilities expected of any respectable young woman. She is beset with challenges: a business to run, an intrigue involving spies and the attentions of both hero and cad. All these ingredients make for a story with twists and turns as dark as the back lanes of Clerkenwell itself.

Carol McGrath

THE DISORDER OF LONGING

Natasha Bauman, Putnam, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 432pp, 9780399154959

Ada has everything—a fine Boston family, a handsome, wealthy husband, a beautiful home, and servants. Nevertheless, she's a rarity in the 1890s: an intelligent, college-educated woman, who has been sufficiently bold to do some sexual exploration before her arranged marriage. Living in a stultifying gilded cage, shopping, entertaining, and giving birth are not what she craves. Ada understands she is expected to be subordinate in every way, an animate doll, content within severely prescribed limits. When her husband, enamored of intellectual pursuits, takes up continent intercourse as a "moral" way to keep the marriage childless until the rebellious Ada is "ready," the last pleasure she has disappears. Her husband is also obsessed with orchids—the latest status craze—and the sensorially deprived Ada is too, although she has to study this "masculine" subject on the sly.

Somewhere around the middle, the story changes gears. Ada begins escaping, dressed as a man, and finally makes her way to Brazil with native orchid hunters to search for the rare, prized (and utterly significant) *cattleya labiata vera*. Victorian repression of ordinary human behavior is clearly a subject, but this is an uneasy book. It seems part feminist tract, part *Wide Sargasso Sea*, part romantic adventure and part quest. I turned the pages with interest and, occasionally, excitement, but I didn't always believe in the characters or dialogue within the historical context. I wish the lives of all Victorian Adas had ended with such heady liberation—but, sadly, I doubt it.

Juliet Waldron

FORBIDDEN FRONTIER

Zana Bell, Mira Australia, AU\$32.95/NZ\$37.00, pb, 319pp, 9781741166347

Charlotte Badger is a heroine of a type I've not encountered before. A strapping, self-reliant, and clever woman, Charlotte's not above a little thievery or whoring if it'll get her a few more drams of rum. She narrates her story beginning with her transportation from London to Port Jackson in faraway New South Wales in the year 1800. Sharing the harrowing voyage with Charlotte and her fellow convicts are Nathan Wesley, an idealistic missionary, and his distant wife, Elizabeth, whose viewpoints appear in alternating sections. Their paths come together when Charlotte convinces Nathan to make her their house servant.

To their dismay, the Wesleys discover their new home consists of little more than ramshackle huts with earthen floors, muddy roads, and a lumpy, deserted landscape. The social strata amongst the settlers mimic that of their English homeland, with rich landowners at the top of the scale and convict labor and the despised Irish at the very bottom. Charlotte finds a sort of freedom in her life outside prison, while Nathan follows his adventurous spirit to extremes, and Elizabeth hides her feelings under a mask of

decorum in order to preserve her marriage. It's only later, as each forms new relationships and undergoes difficult trials, that they make peace with their true selves.

The historical record provides the bare bones of Charlotte's tale: the first white woman in New Zealand, she arrived there in 1806 after staging a mutiny. This leaves plenty of room for speculation on her background and motivations. Bell ably captures the difficulties of eking out an existence on a new frontier, Sydney's gradual development into a full-fledged town, and the way disillusionment can transform into opportunity, and vice versa, at a moment's notice. Charlotte's irreverent, good-humored voice and her ability to seize the best out of every meager prospect kept me reading. I enjoyed this novel immensely.

Sarah Johnson

A ROGUE'S GAME

Renee Bernard, Pocket, 2008, \$6.99/C\$7.99, pb, 352pp, 9781416524229

The title rogue is Victorian-era playboy Julian Clay, Earl of Westerleigh, who is attracted to a young woman he meets at a gambling salon. Eve Reynolds, an expert card player, is being used by her unscrupulous uncle to fleece money from the members of the ton unwary enough to play with her. A mutual attraction soon flares into a passionate affair. Will the scheming Lady Shelbrook, who wants Julian for her own, come between them? Can Julian rescue Eve from her money-hungry uncle?

Sensual romance fans will appreciate the frequent, ultra-steamy bedroom scenes. Since historical accuracy isn't the first priority of the genre, I won't nitpick over some plot absurdities, other than to say that one of Bernard's sexual

euphemisms conjures up an odd mental image, resulting in unintended humor. Some of the characters also appear in prior volumes of the author's Mistress trilogy, but it's not necessary to have read those first. Ultimately, readers' enjoyment will depend on whether they prefer a book's emphasis to be on "tale" or "tail."

B.J. Sedlock

MRS. DARCY'S DILEMMA

Diana Birchall, Sourcebooks Landmark, 2008, \$12.95/C\$15.50, pb, 224pp, 9781402213335

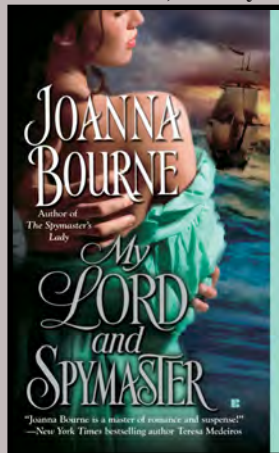
As Queen Victoria assumes the throne, the former Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* and her husband Mr. Darcy discover that their two grown sons are romantically entangled with the daughters of Elizabeth's scapegrace sister Lydia. Bettina, the older of the daughters, does the unthinkable; she actually becomes an actress. The reader can understand Elizabeth's fear that Bettina will lead her son to ruin, but, as more conventional young ladies assure themselves they are modern women, the author seems to be winking at us. Bettina, selfish, reckless, but admirably independent, is by far the most interesting character in the book. Her sister Cloe stays within the bounds of propriety, renounces her apparently hopeless love for the younger Darcy son, and takes a thankless job as a governess in the pompous Mr. Collins's household. Will virtue be rewarded, vice punished, and true love win out?

If you haven't visited Austen country recently, you might wish several characters were not referred to by surnames on one page and first names the next, but this enjoyable romance is worth a brief struggle to remember who is who.

Phyllis T. Smith

MY LORD AND SPYMASTER

Joanna Bourne, Berkley Sensation, 2008, \$7.99/C\$8.99, 336pp, pb, 97804425222461



to whom Jess is irrevocably tied, the clergyman who ministers to the downtrodden—are exceptionally well drawn. The characters live and breathe on the page, fluently speaking the vernacular of their time and place. A vibrant mix of betrayals, passions, and mysteries, this tale is not to be missed. Even readers who prefer the more typical ballrooms and fashionable frocks of the traditional courtship novel should be impressed by Bourne's achievement.

Margaret Barr

EDITORS' CHOICE

KILLSTRAIGHT

Johnny D. Boggs, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 226 pp, 9781594146220

Renamed Daniel Killstraight at the Carlisle Industrial School in the late 1800s, a young Comanche man returns to his tribe, who live on an Arizona reservation. He stops at a small town close to his home and, while there, witnesses the hanging of a childhood friend. Looking for work, he joins a Metal Shirt group, law enforcement officers ordered to arrest Comanches who break the law. While working with the Metal Shirts, he tries to determine the innocence of his friend, hanged for killing a white man and his wife. Because he is an Indian, he isn't allowed to arrest a white man for any crimes, which makes his job more difficult when he learns that certain powerful white men may be behind the killings.

Killstraight is both a fine western novel and a gripping who-done-it. Johnny Boggs is a well-known writer who has won the coveted Spur Award several times. His research into early western history, along with the fact he has lived in the West for many years, contributes to his storytelling. I highly recommend this novel to western enthusiasts and readers who enjoy a good mystery.

Jeff Westerhoff

YOUR SCANDALOUS WAYS

Loretta Chase, Avon, 2008, \$6.99/\$7.99, pb, 384pp, 9780061231247

After her bitter and high-profile society divorce, Francesca Bonnard took revenge on her husband by making herself the most notorious and sought-after courtesan in all Europe, industriously collecting high profile lovers and costly jewelry. In Venice she encounters half-Italian James Cordier, notorious in his own right. Sparks of attraction fly and interest ignites—complications swiftly arise. James is a spy, traveling incognito and pursued by a wrathful and murderous female whose emerald necklace he took from her. Moreover, she is allied with Francesca's evil ex-husband. Can the besotted European prince courting Francesca's favors protect her from increasingly ruthless assassins as masterfully as the irresistible James?

Succumbing to mutual passion, the courtesan and her inscrutable lover must battle their pasts as well as present threats, never entirely certain whether they fight on the same—or opposing—sides.

Chase has a gift for witty and naughty exchanges between her complicated protagonists, tossing in classical references. She exhibits a rich talent for depicting the Byronic debauchery and sensuality prevalent in 19th-century Venice. This latest offering ranks among her very best works, and seems likely to become a favorite with historical romance enthusiasts.

Margaret Barr

CHERRYBROOK ROSE

Tania Crosse, Severn House, £18.99/\$27.95, hb,

231pp, 9780727866288

Rose Maddiford, the daughter of the manager of the gunpowder mills at Cherrybrook, has no time for a husband; she devotes all her love to her father. Despite her determined efforts, when tragedy strikes, she realizes she cannot manage alone. Rose is forced to make a difficult decision and thus traps herself in an impossible situation.

Dartmoor and the gunpowder mills are well described, as is the harshness of prison life at that time. Rose is a wild and determined character, and her exploits, especially on horseback, are entertaining. The male, Charles, is drawn as unpleasant and insensitive, which is a mistake in a romance of this sort. The reader needs to warm to both the hero and heroine.

Adjectives are overused, and this detracts from the flow of the story; more rigorous editing would have helped here. Unfortunately the denouement of this book is contrived; Rose in the last three pages undergoes a complete *volte face* that contradicts all that has gone before, in order to give the reader a happy ending.

No doubt the numerous fans of this author will still read *Cherrybrook Rose* with enthusiasm.

Fenella Miller

THE COURTESAN'S SECRET

Claudia Dain, Berkley Sensation, 2008, \$14.00, pb, 312pp, 9780452221365

The "secret" of Claudia Dain's latest Regency is that it is laugh-out-loud funny.

Lady Louisa Kirkland's bid to retrieve her pearl necklace from the handsome Marquis of Dutton is propelled by her unspoken desire to marry Dutton. What she does not know is that her long-time friend and secret admirer, Lord Henry Blakesley, has wagered with Dutton, using the pearls and Louisa as the prizes. When Louisa seeks the help of former courtesan Sophia, Countess of Dalby, to recover the pearls, she does not realize she is setting the stage for a series of misadventures, as well as for a rollicking good time for the reader.

On a few occasions, the author's head-hopping pulled me out of the story, but it did not spoil the read. Though this novel stands alone, it is the second part of a three-book series featuring Lady Sophia. The references to the plot and characters of Dain's previous novel, *The Courtesan's Daughter*, makes me anxious to read it in order to get more of the character's back story.

I recommend *The Courtesan's Secret* to lovers of the Regency era, and for someone looking for a great, funny read.

Monica Spence

THE DUKE OF SHADOWS

Meredith Duran, Pocket Star, 2008, \$6.99/C\$7.99, pb, 371pp, 9781416567035

In 1857 Delhi, survival from a shipwreck does not make a young, innocent English girl a heroine among her own people. Rather, it makes her scandalous. Thus, Emmaline Martin must

endure the censure of the British community in this Indian city. Julian Sinclair, the Duke of Auburn, must endure censure as well. He is the son of an English Duke and a woman of mixed English and Indian descent. British society tries to shun Julian, but his status as Duke keeps him from being a complete outcast. As trouble comes to Delhi, these two outcasts must join forces to survive.

The Duke of Shadows is Meredith Duran's debut novel, the winner of the Gather.com First Chapters Romance Writing Competition. The book is rich in historical details of both the British and Indian societies in India during the mid 1800s. The characters are compelling individuals, with compassion and depth. Ms. Duran knows how to spin a rewarding historical novel. Hopefully this will be the first of many.

Nan Currutt

THE WILD CARD

Beth Elliott, Robert Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 224pp, 9780709085249

London 1810. Kitty Towers has been sent to London to stay with an elderly aunt with the aim of mixing with the capital's society. An independent-minded young woman, she considers society life frivolous, and determines not to be drawn into the empty social whirl where the main objective is to find a suitable husband. Despite her best intentions, she finds herself drawn to Theo Weston, an ex-soldier and well-known rake, while her aunt would like her to be more encouraging to Etienne de Saint Aubin, an aristocratic refugee from France. However, Kitty soon comes to realise that the seemingly frivolous society that she has become part of has dark undercurrents, and she finds herself unwittingly involved in a plot to remove Wellington from his command in Spain.

An enjoyable read. The characters are well defined, and Kitty Towers is a strong, believable heroine while the plot provides a plausible vehicle which takes the romantic core of the novel forward to its satisfactory end. This is Beth Elliott's first published novel, and I look forward to reading her next one.

Mike Ashworth

LETHAL LEGEND

Kathy Lynn Emerson, Pemberley, 2008, \$17.95/C\$19.95, pb, 240pp, 9780977191352

Fourth and quite sadly last in the Diana Spaulding series, this adventure finds Diana and her fiancé, Dr. Ben Northcote, preparing for their wedding, soothing their contentious families, and solving a mysterious case of poisoning on Keep Island, home of Ben's childhood friend, Graham Somener. Graham has allowed a female archaeologist (a rarity in 1880s Maine) to dig for a fabled missing treasure on the island, and when three of her assistants are poisoned, Graham turns to Ben to determine the cause. Naturally, Diana, with her reporter's instinct as well as her concern for her fiancé's whereabouts, is not far behind.

I've been a fan of this series but found

myself disappointed in this final outing. In prior books, characters and their relationships were more fully fleshed out, but here the friendship between Ben and Graham doesn't ring true. Compounding this is the initial presentation of Serena Dunbar, the archaeologist, as unlikeable, so I failed to become invested in her redemption and relationship with Graham. The skirmishes between the strong-willed mothers of the bride and groom were highly entertaining, though, and Emerson does make a case for Serena's behavior as the result of prejudice and suspicion against a female scholar. Both Ben and Diana fall into the trap of underestimating her because of her sex. Emerson also plants the seeds in this book for her next series, and I'm not so disappointed in this book that I won't follow her there.

Ellen Keith

HER EVERY PLEASURE

Gaelen Foley, Piatkus, 2008, £6.99, pb, 408pp, 9780749938499 / Ballantine, 2008, \$6.99, pb, 416pp, 9780345496698

Princess Sophia and Major Gabriel Knight are the main characters in the third part of Gaelen Foley's *Spice* trilogy. Sophia has been brought up in England since Napoleon conquered Karvos. She is the only remaining member of her family, and on reaching twenty-one in 1818, is determined to reclaim Karvos, despite the threat posed to life by Sheik Suleiman and his Janissary warriors. She is protected by Leon and her Greek guards and accompanied by her gullible companion Alexa until she is ambushed. Fleeing from the attack she finds protection in the arms of Gabriel, but love and diplomacy are highly volatile bedfellows. Gabriel's experience as a soldier in India has taught him all about guerrilla warfare, but not the kind that involves the young women he has sworn to protect.

Written in an easy to read style, this novel moves along at a fast pace. The character of Gabriel, despite his murderous past, is likeable. Although part of a trilogy, the story can be read without prior knowledge of the characters' backgrounds. This is a 'theme park' historical novel, with a roller coaster of events from ambushes to 'fund-raising' balls. The historical facts have been sprinkled like a relish to add colour and taste to the story. For those readers who like factual historical detail, this novel might give you nightmares, but for those who love light romantic novels this one is definitely for you.

Myfanwy Cook

THE RESURRECTION MEN

Sara Fraser, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$28.95, hb, 236pp, 9780727866424

Thomas Potts is the reluctant, despised, badly paid Parish Constable in 1826 Redditch, centre of needle manufacturing in the Midlands. He has a termagant for a mother and the flirtatious barmaid Amy for a sweetheart (he hopes). When fresh graves are robbed, finished needles are stolen from the warehouses and the rambunctious Needle Pointers threaten to strike, Thomas's problems seem overwhelming. But although

Tom may be gormless, he is intelligent and he has a theory. Employing coal dust or chalk, he can distinguish individual finger marks found at crime scenes. It is a ridiculous idea, scorned by all, but Tom believes these marks will help him solve the needle burglaries at least. Local gossip has it that a ruthless gang called the Rippling Boys is behind all these crimes. Can Tom identify the crooks and even better, catch them?

Tom is an unusually appealing hero. Timid, too tall, weak, put upon by most of Redditch, he doggedly carries out his duties despite being scared half to death most of the time. The novel has an excellent period feel. The Needle District, its workers and their hard life are brought to colourful life.

Redditch and the surrounding landscape are described so well that we can practically follow Tom from factory to tavern to the grim lock-up where he and his ghastly mother live.

Sara Fraser (*nom de plume* for an ex marine-commando, no less) has cleverly left a villain on the loose and a romance dangling, so with luck we shall see another very enjoyable Tom Potts novel soon.

Lynn Guest

THE SALISBURY MANUSCRIPT

Philip Gooden, Soho Constable, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 229pp, 9781569475126 / Constable & Robinson, 2008, 18.99, hb, 288pp, 9781845296407

In a Victorian world of stormy nights, the Slater family of Salisbury learns of a document written by a dissipated forebear that could damage their family's reputation. Lawyer Tom Ansell is sent from London to retrieve this manuscript from Canon Felix Slater, whose obsession with artifacts and heritage restrains him from destroying a piece of history, however damaging. Felix's estranged and profligate brother, Percy, decides to impart family secrets of his own to his young son, Walter, whom he considers a traitor for going into the church and living his life in Felix's shadow. The revelations have devastating consequences. When one of the brothers is found murdered, Tom Ansell must remain in Salisbury to clear his name and find a killer who could silence him for his knowledge of the Salisbury Manuscript. Tom's fiancée, Helen, joins him, and they race alongside danger trying to trap the villain. With Tom's legal mind and Helen's sensible methods, they work well as a complementary sleuthing duo in this promising new Victorian series.

Tess Allegra

TEXAS LOVING

Leigh Greenwood, Leisure, 2008, \$7.99, pb, 320pp, 100843956860

Eden Maxwell, the youngest of twelve siblings, lives on her parents' ranch near San Antonio. In 1887, when she is twenty-one, Eden learns that her mother is the illegitimate daughter of the Earl of Southampton. Eden travels to England to meet her newfound family, which includes her grandfather's handsome heir,

her distant cousin, Edward Davenport. Not long after Eden returns home, she is surprised to find that Edward has come to Texas and hired himself out as a ranch hand to her brother. Although her cousin insists that he intends to settle in Texas, he is such a misfit that Eden cannot believe that he will stay. Their growing love for each other does not prevent Eden and Edward from competing for a ten-thousand-dollar purse in the San Antonio horse race. But someone else wants to win that prize, and Eden's life is soon in danger.

Although the plotting required to bring Eden into the sphere of a British peer feels rather contrived, most of the novel takes place on Texan soil, where the author excels. This story about the youngest Maxwell is a heart-warming addition to Greenwood's *Cowboy* series.

Nancy J. Attwell

ARIZONA WAR: A Colton Brothers Saga

Melody Groves, La Frontera, 2008, \$19.95, pb, 287pp, 9780978563431

The three Colton Brothers get caught up in the American Civil War in 1861 while local Apache uprisings continue to create problems for Texas settlers. Both James and Trace Colton live with the nightmare of having been captives of the Apache under Cochise. Both men, but particularly James, were tortured both mentally and physically by the Indians during their imprisonment. They both survived, but must cope with memories that still haunt their lives.

James has become unstable, and his friends fear him because of his behavior. Trace has managed to control his demons, and he, along with their brother, Andy, try to protect James from harming others. As the story unfolds, James learns he may have to face Cochise and the Apache again.

This novel is the third book in the series Melody Groves has written about the Southwestern frontier. She develops her characters well, especially the inner conflict that takes over the thoughts and actions of James Colton. Even if you don't normally read westerns, I recommend this book to those who enjoy reading about characters with emotional problems and how they are able to cope with them.

Jeff Westerhoff

FOREVERMORE

Cathy Marie Hake, Bethany House, 2008, \$13.99, pb, 350pp, 9780764203183

Hope Ladley makes her living in 1890s Texas driving from farm to ranch, looking for families who need temporary domestic help, moving on once the need is over. Widower Jakob Stauffer certainly could use some extra hands around the house. His sister Annie lives with him, both to care for his daughter Emmy-Lou and to escape from an abusive husband. Since Annie is very pregnant and harvest time is approaching, indefatigable Hope rolls up her sleeves and pitches in, making everyone laugh with her mangled proverbs. Jakob's pain over the loss of

his wife begins to give way to interest in Hope, but is she willing to stop wandering? And clouds begin to loom when Annie's husband Konrad sets plans in motion to get his wife back.

While Jakob is multidimensional, Hope is so good (she has almost no faults) and Konrad so bad (he "slinks" and "skulks" around) that the story was a bit too black-and-white for me. Hope's comically twisted sayings ("put your best food forward") add a dose of humor, and the reader will get a vivid sense of the daily burden farm women faced on the 19th century prairies. Inspirational fiction audiences will enjoy it.

B.J. Sedlock

THE PARADISE WILL

Elizabeth Hanbury, Robert Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 224pp, 9780709085492

In February 1818 Alyssa Paradise receives a shock. As her uncle's will is read out, she discovers that he left his Dorset estate to her and not – as expected – to her spendthrift cousin Piers Kilworth.

However, the will has one clause she is required to fulfil for the estate to pass fully into her hands – she has to dine with her uncle's neighbour, Sir Giles Maxton, once every week for six months! For Giles, the right of access to a water supply is at stake. Enraged, they form an instant dislike towards each other.

Alyssa travels to Dorset with her fiancé, Charles, and her ward, Letty. Charles is incensed and wants her to sell the property. Once there, Alyssa is relieved when he leaves. Giles is cynical about the clause, but Caroline Nash, certain in her expectation to become Lady Maxton, is beyond herself with anger. When she meets Alyssa, she immediately regards her as a threat. Piers, meanwhile, follows Alyssa to Dorset and begins to stir up trouble, intent on getting his hands on the estate one way or another. But he has not counted on the considerable charms of Letty, who sets herself the task of bringing him onto the rightful path. Despite their early misgivings, Alyssa and Giles begin to enjoy each other's company. But with her betrothal to Charles, and his unspoken understanding with Caroline, can there be a future for them?

The Paradise Will is a historical novel in the vein of the great Georgette Heyer. The plot is intriguing and the action unrelenting. I did not want to put this book down at all, regardless of the early hour. A highly entertaining read!

Stephanie Hochadel

MISSY

Chris Hannan, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, \$24/C\$25.50, hb, 304pp, 9780374199838 / Chatto and Windus, 2008, £12.99, hb, 204pp, 9780701180430

In *Missy*, a tale of the adventures of an opium-addicted "flash-girl," Chris Hannan brings to life the madness of a Nevada boomtown in the mid-19th century.

Missy is Dol McQueen, a 19-year-old mulatto prostitute who strikes out for the Sierra Nevada with a handful of other professionals

in order to raise a little hell—and make twelve dollars a night—in the silver towns. Missy has another reason for going: her alcoholic mother, who in the past has ignored, mentally abused, and abandoned her, has already gone to the hills. Burdened with the unloved child's psychological need to watch over her own abuser, Missy follows her mother in the vain hope of saving her from further degradation. En route, this laudanum-sipping flash-girl is forced, through odd circumstance, to hide a stolen crate of the purest opium. This opium—and its market value—give Missy hope of riches beyond imagining, and tempt her with its mind-blowing potency. Soon, however, all the forces searching for the stolen crate converge on the ungovernable mining town. Missy hauls her mother and a few friends into the brutal desert in a race to keep the drug for herself—and for the ironic chance it offers for a future.

Missy is raw, heartfelt, and thoroughly steeped in the era. Chris Hannan's portrayal of a mid-century addict is powerful, due in part to the brilliant use of slang as well as his tasteful but gritty descriptions of a flash girl's life. Missy is a hard soul, a self-deluded soul, and a lost soul, but her last act—though unintentional—gives the reader hope that she just might make it through the desert.

Lisa Ann Verge

Dol McQueen is an irrepressible and frustratingly unreliable 19 year-old prostitute with a damaging addiction to opium—the eponymous missy according to the contemporary slang. Set in the virtually lawless Wild West of 1862, Dol and her small group of girls move east from San Francisco and take up work in a brothel in Virginia City. There Dol meets the local police chief, Captain Duffield, whom she hopes will take her away from the lowlife. He lets her down, but before going assists with a madcap scheme involving a hugely valuable case of pure high-grade opium. Not surprisingly, there are some very unpleasant characters also after this cache. Allied to this picaresque chase after the drugs, are Dol's efforts to establish relations with her selfish, alcoholic mother, who is also happy to do tricks in the brothel for a drink.

This a rambunctious, explicit and rip-roaring novel narrated in the language of the times. It is also a time when life was cheap and casual brutality and violence the norm. Dol, though a charming narrator, is a deeply flawed and ultimately rather pathetic character. An entertaining novel, but somewhat shallow.

Doug Kemp

THE SÉANCE

John Harwood, Jonathan Cape, 2008, £12.99, hb, 294pp, 9780224081863

This is an excellent Gothic tale set in the second half of 19th-century England. Narrated by a number of different characters, in language and style the novel is essentially Victorian, with a definite touch of M. R. James helping to

generate a decidedly creepy atmosphere.

The story concerns the crumbling ruin of Wraxford Hall, near the Suffolk coast, and the supposed supernatural disappearance of previous owners and inhabitants of the house. There are two leading female characters – and here we are also in the familiar Victorian territory of inheritance, tenuous family links, with a strong seasoning of clairvoyance and spiritualism. Constance Langton, an orphan who seems to have some mediumistic powers, inherits Wraxford Hall and becomes involved in solving the odd circumstances of the disappearance of Eleanor, the estranged wife of the previous owner, Magnus Wraxford.

The plotting is superb and demands attention from an attentive reader to spot the nuances and hints dropped by the author. It is expertly paced and written to a high standard, with a series of mysteries propelling the reader along the road to a final understanding of events. The historical context is sound and authentic. A thoroughly enjoyable book.

Doug Kemp

SECRETS OF SURRENDER

Madeline Hunter, Dell, 2008, \$6.99/C\$8.99, pb, 400pp, 9780440243953

Having just surrendered her virginity to Lord Norbury whom she thought intended marriage, Lady Roselyn Longworth was devastated to learn he thought of her as a whore. If that wasn't bad enough, imagine her shock when in trying to end the relationship, he puts her up for auction at a dinner party. Norbury's architect, Kyle Bradwell, a man of common birth from the mining areas in northern England, obtains Roselyn with an astounding bid. Between her larcenous brother's escape to the Continent to avoid hanging and being sold at a house party that rivaled the Hellfire Club in debauchery, Roselyn couldn't escape scandal no matter how innocent her involvement. The only solution her wealthy and titled relatives could see was marriage to the commoner who had bought her. Of course, Roselyn had other plans altogether.

Madeline Hunter excels in historical romances with unexpected plot twists, strong heroines, wonderful heroes, and *Secrets of Surrender* has all of that. However, the energy of this post-Napoleonic narrative lags a bit.

Audrey Braver

HARDCASTLE'S BURGLAR

Graham Ison, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$27.95, hb, 212pp, 9780727866318

This is a most enjoyable police procedural, fast paced and easy to follow, an expert piece with a clever subtlety reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes.

Hardcastle's Burglar is set during WW1 in London and Surrey about the time of the great Somme battle. Intelligent and thorough, with accurate and detailed research from personal experience, Ison makes it a quick and satisfying read.

The seventh of the DDI Hardcastle series

carries the reader through the detection of a baronet's enigmatic murder. A set of believable coppers, characterised in detail, and the ever irascible Hardcastle with his side-kick DS Marriot, oscillate between Canon Row nick and a mansion on Kingston Hill. There, retired Colonel Sir Adrian Rivers is found shot. Add to this puzzle Sir Adrian's second, new and pretty wife with a bookie father, and one has an intriguing detective novel.

Guess what? There is a new will leaving all Sir Adrian's money to the new Lady Rivers, now a pert young widow. This cuts out his army officer sons, one a General, soon to return to the bood bath in France.

Well constructed syntax carries the story, but I found too many dialogue attributions and double abbreviations like 'I'd've' and 'he'd've' irritating. There is good use of police and cockney rhyming slang explained in a glossary but the occasional long and obscure word like 'yarmulke' creeps in.

This is one of the very few books I have rattled through in recent years. I shall be looking for more in the Hardcastle series. Ison obviously enjoys his writing.

Geoffrey Harfield

THE MONTMARTRE INVESTIGATION

Claude Izner (trans. Lorenza Garcia and Isabel Reid), Gallic, 2008, £7.99, pb, 304pp, 9781906040055

This is the third in the series of crime novels featuring Parisian bookseller and amateur sleuth, Victor Legris. This time a series of nasty murders seem to revolve around the nightclubs of Montmartre, the performers and the clients. Slowly but surely, Victor pieces together the facts with the help of his apple-crunching, muttering, cynical and secret crime-writing assistant, Jojo.

I must admit there were aspects of *Murder on the Eiffel Tower*, the first book in the series, that didn't impress me but I enjoyed this one hugely, mainly because of its dry humour which was either lacking in the first novel or I somehow failed to pick it up. More is learned about Victor and his immediate circle and I am beginning to think of them as old friends. The author (Claude Izner is the *nom de plume* of two sisters) conveys the fin-de-siècle atmosphere extremely well and Paris, with its leafy boulevards, its slums, cafés, railway stations and its night-life is richly conveyed. The crimes may be more ingenious than realistic but this is all to the good because ingenuity rather than realism is perfect for the period.

Where I still have reservations, it is in the translation of the dialogue, especially the rendition of slang, which is stilted and feels 'wrong.' I think this is because the translators are keeping too close to the original and are sacrificing fluency for accuracy. That aside, I look forward to more in this entertaining series.

Sally Zigmond

THE MESMERIST'S APPRENTICE

L. M. Jackson, William Heinemann, 2008, £14.99, hb, 361pp, 9780434015535

Sarah Tanner is the mysterious owner of the Dining and Coffee Rooms on the corner of Liquorpond Street and Leather Lane. Who she is and where she has come from no-one knows, but most are happy to speculate. Sarah keeps her own counsel, but finds her quiet life is threatened when a local butcher is falsely accused of trading in horse-meat and Sarah decides to investigate.

Then an old friend comes to call and asks Sarah to look into the affairs of Dr Stead, a leading mesmerist and possible consummate charlatan. The two cases cannot be more different and yet the more she probes the more links she finds. Her discoveries soon lead her into danger and disillusionment.

This is the second novel to feature Sarah Tanner, and Lee Jackson seems to have really found his voice. As the author of the Inspector Webb novels he always provided good, solid entertainment, but with this latest series he has raised his game and produced some first-rate writing. Victorian London swirls into vivid life, complete with the low-life, the high-life and all the degrees in between. Violence and passion simmer just below the surface, and a real sense of fear dogs the reader through the ever-twisting plot.

Sara Wilson

HANGMAN'S CORNER

Peter King, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 275pp, 9781594146459

This debut of an historical mystery series features full-time Cockney hansom cab driver and part-time sleuth Ned Parker, plying his trade and finding danger at every turn in 1870 London. The mayhem gets off to a rollicking start as a recent fare disappears then turns up murdered. Soon both some nefarious London underworld connections and Detective Rollo Jackson, who is "not bad, for a copper," are plaguing our hero. Only when a fellow cabbie is taken into custody under suspicion of the murder does Ned decide to investigate. Along the way towards uncovering the treasure of a long-lost shipwreck, charming Ned enlists the eyes and ears of his colorful cabbie associates, his girlfriend, family and even his horse while cheerfully eating Mrs. Lovett's meat pies and consulting with Karl Marx on forming a cabbies' union. How could one not love a man thrilled by the silence of the reading room at the British Museum and who confides in his horse? A great new series that is sure to please.

Eileen Charbonneau

LADY OF MILKWEED MANOR

Julie Klassen, Bethany House, 2007, \$13.99, pb, 411pp, 9780764204791

In Regency England, Charlotte Lamb, a proper vicar's daughter, has committed the ultimate social disgrace by becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Turned out of her home and shunned by her family, Charlotte goes to a lying-in hospital to avoid the shame of anyone

else finding out her secret. But once there, she is at first stunned, and then reassured, to discover that her one-time suitor, Daniel Taylor, is now a physician at the facility. Can the romance between the two be rekindled, despite Charlotte's fall and Daniel's manic wife?

Ms. Klassen has penned an exquisite first novel that echoes the era of Jane Austen in both setting and style. Charlotte is humbled by her disgrace, yet manages to persevere through several difficult choices. I particularly enjoyed the milkweed theme, which was woven throughout the book, and the statements taken from actual texts of the day that begin each chapter. This novel engaged me from the first page, and I can highly recommend *Lady of Milkweed Manor* to anyone who delights in Regency romance.

Tamela McCann

A LINE IN THE SAND

Al & JoAnna Lacy, Multnomah, 2007, \$12.99/ C\$16.99, pb, 306pp, 9781590529249

WEB OF DESTINY

Al & JoAnna Lacy, Multnomah, 2008, \$12.99/ C\$15.99, pb, 304pp, 9781590529256

These first two volumes in the Kane Legacy series follow youngest son Alan Kane as he emigrates from 1834 Boston to Texas, with the ambition of someday owning his own ranch. At a stopover in New Orleans, he meets the beautiful Julia Miller, daughter of a plantation owner, but feels his ranch hand status is too lowly to aspire to her hand. His brother Adam, following him later, has no such qualms, and becomes engaged to Julia. Despite a change in his social status when he unexpectedly inherits a ranch, Alan vows never to let either know he loves Julia.

The rest of the Kane family join the brothers on the ranch, just as the call goes out from the Texas government for men to fight Santa Anna and the invading Mexican army. Both Alan and Adam join the others gathering at the Alamo. The story then follows the consequences of the battle on both the Kane family and on Texas, as the United States is caught in a "web of destiny," leading inexorably to a full-blown war with Mexico.

I was glad to learn more about the Alamo and the road to the Mexican War, but am afraid that was the only thing I liked. The portrayal of minority characters seems to be drawn from old Hollywood movies. The slaves on the New Orleans plantation are happy to serve their masters: "Ah loves the Millahs, an Ah loves bein' Hosanna Millah." The Millers believe that "real Christian" owners are kind to their charges, and build them nice cabins to live in. A Mexican ranch hand's dialogue sounds rather old-Hollywood, too: "Eef Juarez does hees part to defeat zee Mehicano soldiers, will he be a real Texan?" Santa Anna is described as wicked, vicious, and chuckling fiendishly.

The religious content is heavy, and from a fervently 21st century evangelical point of view. There is some less-than-scintillating dialogue: "I wish we could go home to our families, but

it can't happen right now." "Right," said Alex. "Not at this point." Abel nodded, "That's right." In a fight scene, "Alan dodged two hissing fists." If the authors were trying for metaphor, it falls on the ludicrous side. Fists that hiss? One of many information dumps begins with a blatant, "Let me tell you about that." In short, only the most uncritical readers will enjoy the series.

B.J. Sedlock

THE JAMES BOYS

Richard Liebmann-Smith, Random House, \$25.00/C\$28.00, hb, 262pp, 9780345470782

The premise is that outlaws Jesse and Frank James were actually Rob and Wilky, black sheep younger brothers of intellectuals William and Henry James. Henry, returning from a trip West via train in 1876, meets Elena Hite, a proto-feminist and believer in free love, who is reading his latest novel. But it happens to be the train the James gang selects to hold up. Henry recognizes Rob/Jesse, whereupon the gang forces him to accompany them to their hideout. Elena tags along, pretending to be Henry's wife, but she soon becomes sexually involved with Jesse on the sly.

Henry is then compelled to participate in the gang's ill-fated raid of Northfield, Minnesota. Elena, kicked out of the hideout when the men leave for the raid, returns East. Her railroad magnate father sends her to consult William James for psychological help, who recommends a tour of Europe, sending Elena off with his sister Alice as chaperone. In Paris they encounter Henry, who has escaped the gang and fled the country, tailed by noted detective William Pinkerton. Events take a dramatic turn when, back in Boston, Elena's father is about to hand over a large amount of gold to Harvard University to start a laboratory for William. Pinkerton uses the occasion to plan a trap for the Jameses.

Western fans expecting straightforward action won't find it here, as Liebmann-Smith includes many a digression, such as the history of Northfield, long backstories of the characters, and minutiae such as detailed lists of food on a buffet table. Readers may want to have a dictionary at hand, as they will encounter the likes of "estival" and "odobenidan." There were some humorous passages, but overall, Liebmann-Smith didn't sell me on his premise, and I didn't care about the characters.

B.J. Sedlock

THE DEVIL WHO TAMED HER

Johanna Lindsey, Corgi, 2008, £6.99, pb, 438pp, 97805521536318 / Pocket, 2007, \$24.95, hb, 354pp, 9781416537304

Ophelia Reid was the most beautiful and desirable debutante of her generation and she was also the most hated woman in England. Having cancelled her wedding to the Marquis of Birmingdale's heir, she sets her sights on Raphael Locke, only son of the Duke of Norford. Rafe is debonair, handsome and equally desirable but unattainable. He, however, takes a wager from

the discarded fiancée to improve Lady Ophelia's shrewish nature. Whisking her off to his most secluded estate, Lord Locke discovers himself to be more attracted to her as each day passes and is forced to admit to himself that he is falling in love with her.

The assumption is that Johanna Lindsey's latest novel is historical, but only the book cover and a Regency-ish dialogue give evidence of this; facts to establish the period of time in which it is set are sadly lacking.

For those who enjoy stories of aristocratic ladies and gentlemen, beautiful and caddish by turn, living in magnificent mansions surrounded by all the luxuries vast amounts of wealth can bring and served by wily and loyal retainers, then this is for you. Readers who prefer a factual historical novel should choose elsewhere.

Gwen Sly

BURN ENGLISH

William A. Luckey, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 209pp, 9781594145032

Burn English is well known in the West for his knowledge of breeding and training horses. Injured as a young man when he became entangled in barbed wire, he fell in love with the woman who nursed him back to health. She married another, though, and eventually Burn, feeling like an old man at forty-three, decides to abandon his small ranch, where he lived close to the married woman of his dreams, and heads north.

He settles and sets up a small camp near a pond, where he befriends a young girl who invites him home to meet her family. Burn begins to work at the small homestead for the woman and her three children, two teenage boys and the young girl. He then becomes involved in helping the family fight a local rancher who wants their land.

Born in the eastern United States, William Luckey spent a number of years in the West working with horses and participating in trail rides. His knowledge and love of horses is apparent in his story; he provides readers with an excellent character study of Burn English, along with the other minor characters presented in his book. If you like Western novels where accuracy of locale and Western lore is important, you will enjoy this novel as much as I did.

Jeff Westerhoff

THE OPEN DOOR

Elizabeth Maguire, Other Press, 2008, \$23.95, hb, 248pp, 9781590512838

Constance Fenimore Woolson, the grandniece of James Fenimore Cooper, was a popular novelist and travel writer in the latter half of the 19th century. The core of this historically accurate novel concerns her relationship with Henry James, the master whom she travels to Europe to meet. At first James avoids his lady admirer, but he eventually yields to her flattering attentions. They become intellectual companions, even though he is dismissive of her writings and envious of her earnings.

When he reviews her work in *Harper's*, he calls her an "excellent example of the way the door stands open between the personal life of American women and the immeasurable world of print," and fails to acknowledge her talent or that of any woman writing. Doctors treating her middle-aged maladies show her no more respect. Woolson remains resolutely independent, but she is ahead of her time in openly enjoying her sexuality, although not with James—for reasons that become obvious.

While dying of ovarian cancer, Maguire, a well-known publisher, wrote and revised this book, which shows how decisions as to what constitutes serious literature are made by men with little regard to the taste and achievements of women. From its opening, with images of Mackinac Island's magical waters, to its tragic end in the canals of Venice, this book a worthy tribute to an unfairly dismissed writer.

James Hawking

RAPSCALLION

James McGee, HarperCollins, 2008, £12.99, hb, 412pp, 9780007212729.

The further adventures of Matthew Hawkwood, soldier, spy, Bow Street Runner. At the height of the wars with Napoleon thousands of French prisoners are condemned to the hulks: converted, half-rotten men-o'-war anchored in the Thames. Many die from starvation, disease and the brutality of the guards and their fellows. A very few escape into the Kent marshes, where the Admiralty suspects local Free Traders are smuggling prisoners back to France in exchange for brandy. The first naval officer to investigate is murdered and the second disappears. The Bow Street Runners are called in. Hawkwood is ordered in as an undercover agent in the guise of an American fighting for the French. He is sent to the *Rapacious* where he finds conditions far worse than his familiar London rookeries. With a fellow prisoner, a French privateer, Lasseur, Hawkwood escapes from the hulk but that is the easy part. To locate and break up the smuggling ring proves his most dangerous assignment yet.

McGee has set himself two interesting problems. First, as Hawkwood is masquerading as a French ally, the cruelty of the guards and the appalling conditions he and the prisoners suffer make the British the baddies – an eye opener for Hawkwood and for the reader. Second, in *Resurrectionist*, he was an interesting "hero": tough, cynical and ruthless yet with a moral depth that was admirable as well. Here, in Lasseur, McGee has created such an appealing character that in the first half of the novel, Hawkwood fades and does not reassert himself until the last 150 pages. Perhaps this is why, although always entertaining, the first sections seem overly long. When the action picks up, it really picks up and in the second half, the novel is unputdownable. The period detail is strong although the dialogue owes more to the 21st century than 1813. Normally, this irritates me but in this case it works. This is an interesting, gripping series of novels with an intriguing hero.

I look forward to the next instalment.

Lynn Guest

THE LONG JOURNEY HOME

Laurel Means, Academy Chicago, 2008, \$16.95, pb, 320pp, 9780897335690

After a lengthy tour of duty in the Civil War, Henry Morton returns to his home in Minnesota hoping to resume his life as a farmer. When he reaches his home, he finds that his wife is dead, his daughter has left, and his sons aren't interested in the struggles involved with farming the prairie. Morton's life changes when a letter arrives from the U.S. government, notifying him that he is eligible for a land grant if he is willing to settle further north. With nothing to lose, Morton abandons his home and travels to the northern frontier of Minnesota, hoping to build a new life.

His new homestead, near the town of Green Prairie, is a wooded wilderness that could take years to clear, so he settles in town at the local saloon in the interim. While there, Morton gets swept up in the chaos of frontier life—he drinks too much, gambles with money he doesn't have, and impregnates a French Canadian barmaid named Agnes, who he is then forced to marry. When Morton leaves Agnes to register his claim in St. Cloud, Agnes assumes that he has abandoned her and their daughter, and her grief sets in motion a chain of events that will affect many in Green Prairie.

The characters are not always likable—Morton is harsh and rather unpleasant at times—but they are certainly realistic. The situations that Morton and his family face are often dramatic, but the events do not seem heavy-handed or exaggerated. Settling the American west was treacherous, and *The Long Journey Home* captures the danger and risk at the heart of the settlers' experience.

Nanette Donohue

A DEBT OF HONOUR

Fenella-Jane Miller, Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 222pp, 9780709084976

When Edmund Fox gambles away his entire inheritance he starts a chain of events which his sister is relied upon to sort out. He is given just three months in which to arrange his affairs and repay the debt or lose his fortune, his home and render his grandmother, mother and sisters destitute.

This is another book in the Regency genre, although the only hint as to the era in which it is set is a reference to Constable staying in the area and the fact that the estate in question, Grove House, is in Dedham in Suffolk. It is clearly a romance overlaid with a large slice of melodrama, and the final pages lack all credibility for the age in which the tale is set.

A romantic novel it may be, but an historical one it most definitely is not.

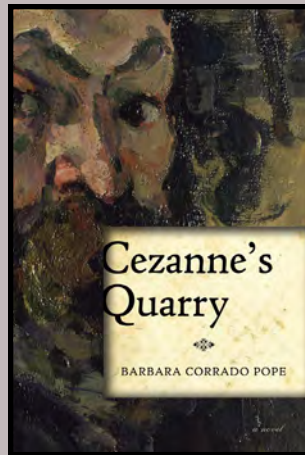
Marilyn Sherlock

AWAKEN MY HEART

DiAnn Mills, Avon Inspire, 2008, \$9.95/

CEZANNE'S QUARRY

Barbara Corrado Pope, Pegasus, 2008, \$25.00, hb, 384pp, 9781933648835



The city of Aix-en-Provence in southern France recently celebrated the centennial of the death of Paul Cézanne, an artist often called the father of modern art. In honor of this anniversary, Pope has written a literary murder mystery set in 1885, during the midyears of Cézanne's career.

The body of the beautiful and mysterious Solange Vernet has been found in the Bibemus quarry outside of Aix, a location where Cézanne frequently paints. The chief of police, Albert Franc, is convinced that the murderer is the victim's lover, Darwinian scholar Charles Westbury. But the investigating magistrate, Bernard Martin, considers Cézanne a prime suspect. Martin's suspicions deepen after he discovers a series of Cézanne's early works, which depict the stabbing and strangulation of women who look eerily like the victim.

An enjoyable read from start to finish, *Cézanne's Quarry* is a masterpiece itself, deftly intermingling diverse subjects such as art, politics (of the Third Republic), love, the meaning of friendship, and the relationship between science and religion. Before her death, Vernet, along with Westbury, had sponsored a weekly salon where a select circle gathered to discuss the issues of the day. Westbury explains to Martin: "...you feel it necessary to reject not only the Church but any semblance of religious feeling... Solange and I were striving for middle ground where science and religion, and men and women, could truly meet." As Martin continues his investigation, he becomes aware that he, himself, is an outsider, and he is filled with longing to find a place where he can belong. Unfortunately, the more he delves for answers—and the more secrets he uncovers—the more he doubts himself. This is a novel that I highly recommend.

Nancy J. Attwell

CS\$10.95, pb, 262pp, 9780061376016

The colony of Texas of 1803 is the setting for the star-crossed love story between a gently-bred Virginia planter's daughter and the *mestizo* rebel whose band kidnaps her. Desperate to help his people hold onto their homeland of La Flor, Armando Garcia at first agrees to the kidnapping. He soon regrets his complicity, especially when his young captive Marianne Phillips proves not only fluent in his language, but an advocate for his people's cause. He also learns Marianne's personal kind of Christianity and turns his heart back to a God he once abandoned.

Armando and Marianne admit their love, but the social and political environment and Marianne's obedience to her parents cause her to agree to become engaged to Don Lorenzo. But when her father plans to sabotage La Flor and sacrifice its inhabitants, she rushes to warn the people she has come to love. She comes home in time to say goodbye to her father, whose cruel and unhappy heart has given out on him.

In a novel full of adventure, humanity, and her protagonist's humility, DiAnn Mills treads around the didacticism that sometimes infects this genre. The reader is left with good questions to ponder after an entertaining prance through an exciting part of Texas history before statehood. Well done.

Eileen Charbonneau

THE SOUTHERNER

Walter Hines Page, University of South Carolina, 2008 (first pub. 1909), \$16.95, pb, 424pp, 9781570037290

An insightful new introduction by Scott Romine places this Southern classic in its cultural context and examines the literary reception it has received since its 1909 serialization in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Education reformer Nicholas Worth was only a boy during the Civil War, but he's haunted by its repercussions his whole life. Harvard-educated, Worth champions public education reform in his native South Carolina. The proponents of the romantic Lost Cause are in his way at every turn, with veterans who "frightened us into actions that we did not approve, for we feared to offend them... they were our fathers and they were brave; but we did not become ourselves till they were buried, if indeed we are become ourselves yet."

In *The Southerner's* sights are not only the educational system, but also party politics, the press, the church, and all institutions invested in lionizing the Confederacy. Progressive ideas about social and economic and racial reconciliation are thwarted at every turn as election returns are "delayed" and each state is viewed as its inhabitant's mother, not to be changed or criticized.

The first-person narration enhances this view of the post-Civil War South from its protagonist's frustrations. Presaging William Faulkner's Quentin Compson, Nicholas Worth loses in love and social standing in order to fight the battle of his generation, one that is still being fought one hundred years later. Though the writing sometimes sacrifices storytelling narrative to essay, the ideas expressed are so compelling and still relevant that it is a

welcome republication. Scott Romine's analysis illuminates the text, its time, and the reactions of contemporary critics, some of whom claimed that it was "made to fit the New England theory of the South."

Eileen Charbonneau

SISTER'S CHOICE

Judith Pella, Bethany House, 2008, \$13.99 pb, 350pp, 9780764201349

It's 1882, and Maggie Newcomb, just turned eighteen, is determined to win handsome Colby Stoddard for her husband—if, that is, she can keep him from being snared by beautiful Tamara Brennan, who's visiting Maggie's small Oregon town following a broken engagement. When Evan Parker, newly graduated from Harvard Law School, returns to his family in Maintown, Maggie sees the perfect opportunity. Not only can the awkward young lawyer defend Maggie's friend Tommy against murder charges, he can join forces with Maggie to keep Colby and Tamara apart.

The second book in Pella's Patchwork Circle series, which revolves around the members of a quilting circle and their daughters, *Sister's Choice* is a charming and often gently humorous novel, with engaging characters, especially its heroine, who's refreshingly blundering and down-to-earth. It also features that rarity in romantic novels—a bespectacled hero. I look forward to spending more time with these characters.

Susan Higginbotham

BUCKINGHAM PALACE GARDENS

Anne Perry, Ballantine, 2008, \$26.00, hb, 312pp, 9780345469311 / Headline, 2008, £19.99, hb, 320pp, 9780755320608

The Prince of Wales has invited some experts to Buckingham Palace to consider a project to build a Cape-to-Cairo railroad through the heart of Africa in the late 1800s. Drinking and entertainment by prostitutes brought into the palace is followed by a ghastly killing. Sadie, one of the prostitutes, is found ghoulishly murdered, her throat and abdomen slashed. Special Service's Thomas Pitt and Victor Narroay of the Special Branch are called in quickly to investigate the crime and quietly put away the party responsible.

The majority of this mystery concerns the snobbish resistance of the upper classes to the inquiry ordered by the Prince, the skewed and complex interrelationships of all the parties involved, and the passions hidden behind past and present attitudes toward the British expansion in Africa. Thomas Pitt himself is forced to face some unpleasant attitudes and actions in himself that must yield to a higher purpose and destiny in order to guarantee success in this important phase of his detective career.

Anne Perry does a superb job of weaving together this tapestry of far-reaching political plans, decadence within the royal family, and large entrepreneurial vision gone awry because of small human nature.

Viviane Crystal

RATOONS

Daphne Rooke, Toby, 2007, \$14.95/£9.99/ C\$14.95, pb, 273pp, 97815926420451495

Ratoons, (n), shoots growing from the root of a plant (esp. sugar cane) that has been cut down.... or burnt.

This novel, originally published in 1953, is set in the British colony of Natal, beginning around the time of the Anglo-Boer Wars. Seen through the eyes of Helen Angus, *Ratoons* follows the fates of members of two families, the Anguses and a family of Indian workers employed on John Angus's sugar-farm. Racial tensions are high with Zulus resenting the influx of Indians to their land, and—even worse—the Indians' increasingly successful attempts to become financially independent.

Helen is at the heart of story. Somehow she manages to avoid absorbing most of the prejudices of her time, though intolerance all but permeates the soil and air. But Helen cannot avoid her desire for Chris Van der Westhuizen. In vain, her Indian friend Leela tries to prevent the affair. Before Helen can tell Chris she's pregnant, he leaves to fight in the Boer War. The tragic yet timely deaths of Helen's mother and infant brother shield Nicky's parentage from all but the midwife, so Chris's eventual return can't result in a wedding: in order to raise her own son, Helen cannot marry.

Ratoons isn't just a book, it's a vivid portrayal of lives set against the experience of Natal's inner turmoil. Daphne Rooke's characters are drawn so convincingly they can almost walk from the page. Yet, in spite of tragedies, the novel also has a light side. Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Lambert could almost be exports from a Jane Austen novel. Reaching the end of the book brings a sense of loss, the same feeling evoked by the loss of many of Rooke's good people along the way. My method of getting over this was to start the book again. Somehow in this new beginning, the novel's inhabitants sparkle all the more.

Janette King

WIZARD'S COUNTRY

Daphne Rooke, Toby, 2007, \$14.95/£9.99/ C\$14.95, tpb, 306pp, 9781592642052

Zululand, in the 1870s, is about to change forever. This tale is told by Bengé, a Tshanini tribesman whose clan farms, raises cattle, and sends young men to be warriors for the Zulu king, and whose home is on the southern edge of Zulu territory, bordering the British colony of Natal. Bengé is a hunchback, an anomaly among his people, as deformed children are usually abandoned at birth. His deformity was accidental, however, and he was allowed to live, being treated variously as a child, a man, and at times as a magic dwarf. In Bengé's search to belong, we learn the life-cycle of the Zulu, and some of the secrets of this culture, rich in superstition and ritual. Bengé's stalking and hunting skills earn him the respect of his beloved brother, Thunzi, and assist in retrieving the beautiful Cece, an exile who has crossed the

Tugela river into Natal with one of the king's top warriors. His experiences in Wizard's Country—an area avoided by his clan because of the powerful witch who lives there—enhance his abilities, and create an inner conflict between good and evil. When the Zulu king goes to war against the English, Bengé's personal turmoil is reflected in the battles of a culture struggling to survive. Rooke's spare prose effectively sets the scene in this arid land and reinforces the concept of the reader (and Bengé, and white men) as outsider.

First published in 1957, *Wizard's Country* provided a rare non-white perspective on the demise of the Zulu nation, and brought kudos to its white author. Daphne Rooke was one of a triumvirate of mid-20th century South African women writers, the other two being Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing; in reissuing Rooke's works, Toby Press is bestowing some much-deserved attention on this recently neglected author.

Helene Williams

MY HEART REMEMBERS

Kim Vogel Sawyer, Bethany House, 2008, \$13.99, pb, 348pp, 9780764202629

An orphan train carries three Irish children from their tenement life in New York City to Missouri in 1886. Before they are parted toward separate households, the eldest, Maelle, bestows on her brother and sister their heritage: a family bible for baby sister Molly, a family photograph to brother Mattie, and a packet of her parents love letters for herself. These become the talismans of the children's lives, as Maelle searches to reunite her family for the next seventeen years.

Unbeknownst to each other, all have followed their father's advice to "take care o' the wee ones." Mattie, a cowboy and shepherd, protects the downtrodden, with his fists when need be. Molly uses inheritance money to found a school for orphans. Maelle becomes a photographer in the Jacob Riis tradition. Petey, an abandoned newsboy, brings the three siblings together as he winds each around his heart.

Kim Vogel Sawyer displays a good command of the conventions of the Christian historical novel, with a fast-moving plot and enjoyable characters deserving of their road back to family.

Eileen Charbonneau

TWO MEN

Elizabeth Stoddard, edited and with intro. by Jennifer Putzi, Univ of Nebraska Press, 2008, \$19.95/C\$21.95/£10.99, pb, 271pp, 9780803293472

Originally published in 1865, *Two Men* begins when Jason Auster, a carpenter, leaves home to start a new life. His stagecoach makes a stop in Crest, a seashore village in New England where he decides to settle. Finding work at a local church, he meets dark-eyed Sarah Parke, a woman of wealth and social standing. He learns she is the granddaughter of the well-known Squire Parke. Despite their class differences,

Jason soon becomes a frequent visitor at the Squire's home, playing whist with Sarah's grandfather and backgammon with her. They marry and have a son, who they name Parke.

A stroke takes the Squire's life, and fate puts Jason in control of his estate. Some years later, Osmund Luce, Sarah's co-heir, shows up with his daughter, Philippa, who he intends to leave with Sarah. Upon learning of his grandfather's death, Osmund gives Philippa his inheritance. The novel continues as a complex story of love and romance, relationships left unsatisfied, and surprising, difficult choices.

Two Men takes place during the antebellum period, when men, not women, were allowed to express passion, and marrying beneath your class, interracial relationships, and choosing to be a single woman were all considered taboo.

This is not a Civil War novel. It is a period piece that gives a sense of what it was like to live in mid-19th century American society. The language is indicative of the period, and today's audience won't find it shocking. Yet, reading the book I kept wondering what the Victorian attitudes of Stoddard's readership would think. No doubt there were many whispers and raised eyebrows. Stoddard was an author ahead of her time; her portrayal of strong women seems almost anachronistic, her descriptive writing flows, and she conveys much of her characters' thoughts through dialog. *Two Men* is a remarkable tale; highly recommended.

Donna Bassett

DELICIOUS

Sherry Thomas, Bantam, 2008, \$6.99, pb, 432 pages, 9780440244325

A late 19th-century tale involving identity and the expectations of social class, *Delicious* is the story of Verity Durant, possibly an aristocrat, who through misfortune must earn her living. Verity becomes an executive chef, and the notorious, and many assume French mistress of her employer, Bertram Somerset. When Bertie dies, his illegitimate brother Stuart inherits his estranged brother's estate, including his ungovernable chef, toward whom the politically ambitious Stuart feels an unwonted attraction. Madame Durant's food and her person recall for Stuart a passionate episode with a stranger that has haunted him for years.

A secondary romance is as charmingly rendered as that of the main characters, and the author thoroughly understands the universal appeal of both descriptions of fine cuisine and romantic scenes. Well executed and entertaining, if long for the story it has to tell, *Delicious* is only slightly marred by an overuse of metaphor.

Eva Ulett

WORKHOUSE LASS

Una Thorne, Severn House, £18.99/\$28.95, hb, 232pp, 9780727866516

Lottie arrived in the workhouse when she was three years old and, at thirteen, found a place with a miner's family to look after three young boys and their invalid mother. Maltreated there,

she runs away and finds a Methodist preacher who is prepared to teach her to read and write. Lottie is a bright girl and this chance sets her life on a different course.

The description of the workhouse, and the appalling life that Lottie endures working for Mr Green, the miner, is detailed and credible. The hardships faced by the mining community are explained well, giving the reader an accurate picture. Anyone interested in mining, in late Victorian times, will learn a lot from this saga.

However, the author appears to be writing 'about' her characters, not speaking through them; because of this distance they are rather one-dimensional, sounding similar. In *Workhouse Lass* she hasn't given them each their own individual voice.

Unfortunately this book does not carry the reader along; it's just not a page turner. Una Thorne's many fans will, no doubt, still enjoy this book.

Fenella Miller

THE GOLDEN VOLCANO: The First English Translation of Verne's Original Manuscript

Jules Verne (trans. and ed. Edward Baxter), Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2008, \$15.95/C\$17.50, 362pp, pb, 9780803296350

In 1899, the Gold Rush is on—in Africa, in California, and in northwestern Canada. Montreal residents Ben Raddle and his cousin Summy Skim inherit a gold mining claim in the Klondike, thousands of miles away. The rational option would be to sell the claim, sight unseen, to one of the large mining companies, but where's the adventure in that? So, off go Ben and Summy, first to Vancouver by train, then by way of cart, sled, and boat, to Dawson City, capital of the Klondike, to view the claim in person. Then they decide to work the claim to earn back their expenses for the trip. By then, Ben has been infected with gold fever, and there's no going back to Montreal anytime soon for Summy; in spite of bad luck, horrendous weather, and unsavory Americans, Ben drags Summy further into unexplored and dangerous territory in pursuit of his dream, ultimately arriving at Golden Mount, north of the Arctic circle. Verne provides a fast-moving adventure, and his intended audience probably wouldn't have cared about the prevalence of factual errors. Instead, turn-of-the-last-century readers would be enthralled with the sights and sounds of the northern frontier.

The saga of this publication is nearly as long as the narrative of *The Golden Volcano*: never published during the author's lifetime, the story was not-so-subtly altered by Verne's son, who added scenes and characters. One hundred years later, translator Edward Baxter was able to use Verne's original manuscript, and he provides us with a text that much more closely reflects the author's intentions, with only a few changes for spelling, consistency, and geographical accuracy. Textual changes and contextual information are

documented in the *Notes* section at the end of the book. This translation also includes the preface to the French edition, by Olivier Dumas.

Helene Williams

THE GUNS OF EL KEBIR

John Wilcox, Trafalgar Square, 2008, \$24.95 and Headline, 2007, £19.99; both hb, 341pp, 9780755327201

The Victorian Empire lends itself quite easily to historical novelists willing to perform the necessary spadework in research tools to provide the setting in which their characters live. John Wilcox has certainly done so as his Simon Fonthill series enters a fifth volume with this latest offering.

Fonthill is an ex-British Army officer who tired of the restrictions of regimental duties in favor of clandestine intelligence service in several regions of the Empire. He and his hard-fighting and hard-drinking sidekick, "352" Jenkins, are tasked by Sir Garnet Wolseley with discovering the strengths and weaknesses of Colonel Arabi's forces in an Egyptian military revolt in 1882. Fonthill's mission is complicated by the presence of newspaper correspondent Alice Griffith. Alice, married to an injured British officer enemy of Fonthill's, is the love of Simon's life, but his moral code prevents him from declaring so. Frustrated love plays out against a background of the Royal Navy's bombardment of Alexandria, several desert escapades by the two protagonists and their Egyptian helper, a deadly double agent, and the ever-resourceful Wolseley's brilliant victory over rebel forces at Tel-el-Kebir.

John R. Vallely

20th CENTURY

TO THIS DAY

S.Y. Agnon (trans. and intro. by Hillel Halkin), Toby, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 177pp, 9781592642144

In this, Agnon's final novel, the eminent Hebrew author overlays the comical story of a young Galician writer who has been living in Palestine with the horrors and deprivations of World War I Germany.

Our narrator has emigrated to Germany from Palestine. Since Germany is at war, he is required to report to the draft board and to remain in Germany. Most of the first half of this slim volume is dedicated to Shmuel Yosef's travels outside of Berlin and his meetings with various other characters, including a young woman who has opened a nursing home for wounded soldiers and his cousin, Malka. The balance of the book follows Shmuel from room to room, none of which are livable for more than a brief period of time, in a Berlin increasingly wracked by shortages of every conceivable type and which is rapidly losing its young men.

The larger story, of course, is about Germany's attitude toward Jews and Zionism, and the narrator's own sense of disconnect from what he has witnessed and his own orthodox roots.

As the translator, Hillel Halkin, comments in his significant introduction, it cannot be overlooked that Agnon was writing this novel in 1951 and there was little possibility he could have insulated his narrative from the impact of such a cataclysmic event as the Holocaust.

This is a difficult and often confusing book, and we don't always understand why Agnon is introducing offshoot stories or side plots. If one spends the time to read and absorb, though, Agnon does have an abiding effect on the reader's thought processes. Inevitably, there is a bit of the satirical Voltaire in Agnon, and our narrator is something of a Dr. Pangloss who appears to see no means as antithetical to a desired end.

Ilysa Magnus

FROM PENVARRIS WITH LOVE

Rosemary Aitken, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$27.95, hb, 219pp, 9780727866271

Spanning the First World War this romantic novel opens in Penzance in Cornwall in 1914. Maud and Belinda both work at Madame Raymond's. Belinda is a more experienced seamstress, and Maud an apprentice. They spend their days making alterations to gowns that they are never likely to be able to own, and live simple and sparse lives. Maud, although younger of the two, has achieved what Belinda longs for: an admirer who would like to marry her. Stanley Hoskins, Maud's childhood sweetheart, comes from a farming family, but believing that the war will be over soon enlists. The lives of Maud and Belinda are dramatically and irrevocably changed as the war progresses, and the long-term effects of this are unveiled in the novel's epilogue.

This novel captures the impact of the First World War on an ordinary rural community, and also the unquestioning patriotic fervour of the early war years. It also enables the reader to catch a glimpse of the hardworking lives of seamstresses, where every stitch was scrutinised and the whim of every bad tempered customer pandered to. The contrasting characterisation of Stanley, Jonah and Peter are believable and Stanley's story is particularly moving. Maud and Belinda are both realistic and engaging heroines. Rosemary Aitken has managed to create an evocative picture of the era, which is sensitive, informative and engrossing.

Myfanwy Cook

THE AFFAIR OF THE BLOODSTAINED EGG COSY

James Anderson, Allison & Busby, 2008 (c1975) £7.99, 366pp, pb, 9780749080495

This is the first in a trilogy of Golden Age murder mysteries set in the elegant surroundings of Alderley House, home to the 12th Earl of Burford. The second in the series was reviewed in HNR 44, having been reissued by the publisher ahead of this. But no matter, for both books can be read as standalone tales. The Earl and Countess of Burford are hosting a Long Weekend party with a cast of quintessential 1920s-1930s characters. It is a fiendishly, perhaps bordering on ludicrously, plotted tale of murder, theft and false identity, and solved by the appropriately eccentric Inspector Wilkins. Good fun!

Doug Kemp

PELICAN ROAD

Howard Bahr, MacAdam/Cage, 2008, \$25.00, hb, 325pp, 9781596922891

Howard Bahr has made a name for himself in American literary circles with his three novels about the American Civil War. In *Pelican Road* he takes a change of direction, looking at the American railway and two particular trains travelling on Christmas Eve, 1940. It is, according to the publisher's press release, a book examining 'the greatest themes in literature: the tragic nobility of those attempting to overcome difficult situations through love, honour and sacrifice.'

It's a beautifully written book, perhaps a little self-consciously literary in places, but forgivable in a writer who has such a feeling for the flow of words. We are allowed glimpses of many diverse characters and of what the journey means to them. These vignettes are held together by the stories of Artemus Kane, Frank Smith, and the group of railway men manning each train. Some of the stories are brutal, raw, and typically violent, but as for the characters' 'tragic nobility overcoming difficult situations through love, honour and sacrifice'? Well, I have to disagree there. These characters are merely human; not fatally flawed in a tragic situation, but not particularly good or bad either. They do their best. In fact, I felt this novel was traditionally American, almost with the sense of a Western in its 'a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do' theme. Bahr's characters get on with life as best they may in a world gone mad.

If you like trains and railways, you'll enjoy the book. If you like American literary writing,

you'll enjoy it as well. If you're in search of an unusual historical novel to read, I highly recommend it. Don't look for happy endings, though.

Patrika Salmon

THE RESERVE

Russell Banks, Bloomsbury, 2008, £14.99, hb, 287pp, 9780747593676 / HarperCollins, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 287pp, 9780061430251

Set in America in 1936 against the background of the Depression and the growth of Fascism in Europe, in Spain and Germany, this is the story of several damaged people. Artist Jordan Groves, a serial adulterer (despite his marriage and two young sons) and fervent anti-Fascist, is invited to look at paintings by a rival at the secluded holiday home of Dr Cole in the Reserve, a privately owned area of the Adirondacks. He arrives unconventionally and controversially by landing his seaplane on the lake.

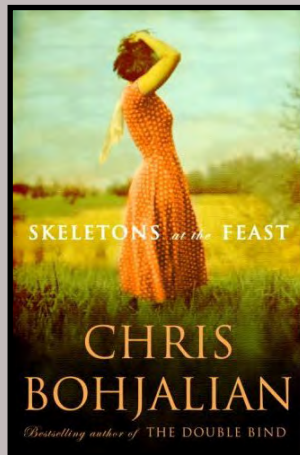
He meets Dr Cole's daughter, the beautiful, twice-married and twice-divorced socialite Vanessa, who tries to seduce many of the men she meets and is not averse to tempting Jordan.

Their strange relationship develops against the lovingly described scenery of the mountains. Jordan is anxious to fight in Spain with his friends, Hemingway and Dos Passos. Vanessa discovers a family secret that is destroying her fragile sanity. Other people, including Jordan's wife, suffer.

I found the opening chapters slow to grip me, but it was worth persevering as the characters are revealed and their actions lead to unexpected

🦴 SKELETONS AT THE FEAST

Chris Bohjalian, Shaye Areheart, 2008, \$25.00, hb, 363pp, 9780307934958 / Simon & Schuster, 2008, £12.99, hb, 384pp, 9781847373144



Once in a while a novel comes along that crawls into your soul from the first page and won't let go, even long after you've read the final word. Your perspective is changed; you've been transported to another place and time. *Skeletons at the Feast* is such a novel.

It begins in Germany during the final months of World War II. The Third Reich is falling apart; the vengeful Russians are invading. The Emmerich family of good and loyal Germans has been living quietly on their estate, raising horses and believing in Hitler's vision, unaware of his true purpose. They have even been allowed to "keep" a Scottish prisoner of war, Callum, to help around the farm; he and eighteen-year-old Anna, the daughter of the house, have begun a clandestine affair. When the war begins to turn and the family realizes that they must flee or face the terrible retribution of the advancing Russians, Anna, her mother, younger brother, and Callum are forced to leave everything behind. As they forge ahead on foot through bitter cold, they know nothing of the fate of Anna's father and two older brothers, who are fighting the Allies far away. Along the way, they encounter Uri, an escaped Jew who has been masquerading as a German soldier. With Uri's protection, they continue their journey; yet as they travel, they begin to realize the atrocities that the Germans have been committing and their own unwitting roles in this holocaust.

The difficulties and even the small triumphs of this group as they trek onward to safety are described in breathtaking detail. With his gift for storytelling, Bohjalian has brought to light the plight of innocent Germans who paid the price for Hitler's egomaniacal plans. Definitely a keeper, this book is very highly recommended.

Tamela McCann

and sometimes horrifying events. Running alongside the main story, interspersed in italics between the main chapters, is an account of what happens in the following year, 1937. This was probably the only way to complete the story without having a long explanatory epilogue, which would have been a letdown after the dramatic ending, but I did not like the device. It seemed false, and such foreshadowing destroys the tension inherent in the main story.

Marina Oliver

FOR A SACK OF BONES

Lluís-Anton Baulenas (trans. Cheryl Morgan), Harcourt, 2008, \$25.00, hb, 368pp, 9780151012558

Awarded the highest prize in Catalan letters, the Ramon Llull Prize, this somber novel, first published in Spain, tells a tale in the terrible years after the Spanish Civil War. Genís Aleu, the protagonist, is a soldier of the Legion with a past. Enraged and resentful after the deaths of his best friend and of his father, Genís returns to the peninsula after years in North Africa, planning revenge and determined to carry out the promise he made to his dying father. Genís must find the unmarked grave of Bartomeu Camús, murdered in a prison camp after the war was over. "Don't ever tell anyone, not even your mother," his father warns him, "don't trust these people. They've no sense of compassion or pity. Don't believe them... Play along, fool them into thinking you're one of them. There'll be a treasure for you at the end."

The novel's chapters alternate between 1949, with Genís's steps toward the fulfillment of his father's wishes, and the kinder years before the war, his childhood and early adolescence. The portrait of a divided nation is brutal and one-sided. In this Spain, indoctrination, hunger, and hypocrisy rule the day. The winners are uniformly ostentatious and cruel, the losers angry. The translation falters once in a while ("court martial" is inaccurately translated as "council of war"), but the narrative is strong. Still, the reader gets to the last bitter page, pondering how deep the well of resentment can be. After closing this novel, you'll need a walk in the woods, or at the very least a chamomile infusion.

Adelaida Lower

BLOOD ALONE

James R. Benn, Soho, 2008, \$24.00/£14.99, hb, 320pp, 9781569475164

Billy Boyle, the one-time Boston police officer busily helping his Uncle Ike in intelligence work, is at it again in the author's third novel on World War II. Boyle had been asked by his uncle, none other than General Dwight D. Eisenhower, to look into employing the Mafia to assist Allied forces in the 1943 invasion of Sicily. Boyle wakes up in an Army hospital on the island suffering from amnesia, with a silk handkerchief in his pocket. This handkerchief will prove to be an aid in his recovering his memory but, in the meantime, he goes into battle with hard-bitten American paratroopers and meets up with a shady sergeant in supply services. Adventures abound as the ever-resourceful Boyle's memory returns and he realizes the handkerchief is his letter of introduction to the head of the Sicilian

Mafia. Joining with an Italian army doctor and members of an Allied intelligence team, Boyle moves through enemy lines to join in on the delicate negotiations with the Sicilian gangsters.

James Benn is never dull, and Billy Boyle is always fun. Some may say that World War II deals between "Lucky" Luciano and the US government are too inconceivable even for fiction, but they did in fact occur. Join up with Billy Boyle and fight Mafia greed and German and Italian soldiers while helping his soft-spoken uncle.

John R. Valley

A ROYAL PAIN

Rhys Bowen, Berkley Prime Crime, 2008, \$23.95/C\$25.50, hb, 320pp, 9780425221631

Second in Bowen's latest series featuring Lady Georgiana Rannoch, thirty-fourth in line to the English throne in 1932, this outing finds Georgiana juggling her work as a maid (with references provided by herself) with playing hostess to Princess Hannelore of Bavaria. The princess has been invited at Queen Mary's behest in the hopes that she'll tempt the Prince of Wales away from that dreadful Simpson woman.

Bowen deftly turns the life of the aristocracy on its end—Georgie is dead broke, hence the sideline as a maid, but must maintain an image of affluence. When she cannot refuse the queen's insistence that she host the princess, her Cockney granddad (father of her actress mother) acts as her butler while his neighbor poses as the cook. Georgie has her hands full with the princess, who has learned English from American gangster movies and has a habit of walking out of high-class stores with unpaid merchandise. When Hanni insists on visiting a young Communist at the bookstore where he works, she gets into further trouble by tripping over his corpse. Georgie is an engaging, sympathetic heroine (her relationship with her would-be beau Darcy O'Mara could stand to move a little faster), and Bowen excels at the depictions of the moneyed classes, royalty, and public versus private faces.

Ellen Keith

WINDSTORM

Frances Burke, Robert Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 223pp, 9780709085218

It is wartime Cairo in 1916. Lea Attwood, an intrepid war correspondent, is in Egypt seeking news of her husband, Michael Attwood, who is a British agent working undercover in Turkish territory. Lea is unaware that she has been targeted as bait to lure him to his death. They are both unaware that Lea is being followed by their equally intrepid 16-year-old daughter, Cally, who has her own adventures before finding her mother. After a terrifying ordeal when lost in the desert Lea is reunited with her husband. However, his enemies are closing in.

This is a satisfying adventure story with characters already met in Frances Burke's first novel *Dragon Wind Rising*. This in no way hurts the first time reader. It is simply that their exploits are more familiar. Lea reminded me of an Amelia Peabody type from Elizabeth Peters' books – not just because it is set in

Egypt but more because she too is a resourceful character, dressing 'sensibly' in desert territory. The terrible conditions of the Allied War effort in Egypt are kept alive by diary entries which intersperse the narrative, from Lieutenant Rick Holman who befriends Cally and then becomes infatuated with her mother. A refreshing tale of derring-do, with vivid scenery.

Karen Wintle

RELIEF

L.E. Butler, Regal Crest, 2008, \$14.95, pb, 196pp, 9781932300987

Katie is a young widow in Boston, 1912, struggling with lingering trauma from her husband's death. She is also a painter who always dreamed of living as an artist in Venice. After a year of floundering, she takes the plunge and moves to Venice to pursue her dream. She begins by painting portraits of Rusala, an exotic and beautiful ballet dancer. Katie's paintings are good enough to get attention from fellow artists and gallery owners, but through Rusala she is introduced to a more bohemian world of dancers and performers. Soon Rusala's allure as a muse becomes a deeper attraction, and the two begin a passionate affair. Katie's desire for Rusala and her need to establish a career compete for her focus, and secrets from her past continue to haunt her. If she is to find success she must deal with her demons and recover her inner strength – but not before Rusala reveals a secret of her own.

The character of Katie is at times confusing and self-contradictory. The truth behind her husband's death is never explored once revealed, missing an opportunity to understand her more fully. The prose wavers in places, weighed down by similes, odd adjective choices, and random expletives. But the chemistry between Katie and Rusala is undeniable, and their passion is both highly erotic and tastefully written. Venice in 1912 is described in detail; the author's love for that city and the various forms of art it inspired are obvious. *Relief* is not quite a character study and not quite a love story, but something in between. Overall, however, it is a promising debut.

Heather Domin

THE CREATOR'S MAP

Emilio Calderón (trans. Katherine Silver), John Murray, 2008, £12.99, hb, 259pp, 9780719520907 / Penguin Press, 2008, \$24.95/C\$27.50, hb, 259pp, 9781594201813.

The violent death of an aristocratic former Fascist and Nazi sympathiser in 1952 is the catalyst for this mystery story set among Spanish refugees living in Rome during the Civil War and World War II. The author has taken an actual archaeological find, a mysterious stone tablet unearthed in Bashkortostan, and woven an ingenious fiction around it. His novel is part romance, part espionage thriller and part esoteric mystery, which I am certain will make it a considerable commercial success.

I did not, however, find it a particularly enjoyable read. While the plot is nicely developed, the quality of the writing and characterisation leaves something to be desired. The style is an uneasy mix of travel guide, popular history and a kind of fastidious

romantic mystery reminiscent (but not as good as) the stories of M. R. James. The characters, including the narrator, are ciphers – the solitary intellectual, the beautiful, feisty heroine, the benignly eccentric antiquarian bookseller, the Machiavellian bureaucrat, the fatally glamorous aristocrat etc. etc. They stage contrived conversations designed to leave the reader in no doubt that the author has done his research, on walks through Rome, for example, giving one another potted histories of its great landmarks which makes them sound more like tour guides than people living in the city and preoccupied with the many dangers and inconveniences of their refugee status and divided political loyalties.

An undemanding read for those planning a city break in Rome and probably the foundation of a Hollywood blockbuster. Not my cappuccino.

Sarah Bower

VALFIERNO

Martín Caparrós (trans. Jasper Reid), Atria, 2008, \$24/£28, hb, 340pp, 9780743297936

In 1911, the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre in Paris. Two years later, an Italian carpenter tried to sell it in Florence, claiming he'd stolen da Vinci's masterpiece in order to return it to its rightful home. In *Valfierno*, Martín Caparrós' literary re-imagining of these events, the "true" story is recounted by a mysterious Argentinean con man who claims to be the mastermind behind the crime.

The Marqués Eduardo de Valfierno wants the world to know that he—a man raised in fatherless poverty in the slums of a small Argentinean town—pulled off the crime of the century. In his younger years, Valfierno took many names, and shed them just as easily, each time coming closer to the man he wished to be: cultivated, wealthy, and a connoisseur of art. Only by becoming this man could he con six rich patrons into paying a fortune for the chance of owning the Mona Lisa itself—when, in truth, they'd be receiving six copies, forged perfectly by a brilliant cohort. During the confession, Valfierno argues issues of truth and identity: is a flawless copy any less valuable than the original? More importantly, which was the greater artistic endeavor—the theft of the Mona Lisa, the brilliance of the man who made the forgeries, or the long and hard-won creation of the Marqués de Valfierno himself?

Because the thematic issues of truth and identity are so deeply embedded in the text, *Valfierno* can be a challenge to follow, particularly in the first half of the book. It's worth the effort: Martín Caparrós' novel is a fresh look into a crime fading from memory, and a compelling portrait of a man's search for meaning and identity.

Lisa Ann Verge

THE CAIRO DIARY

Maxim Chattam (trans. Susan Dyson), Pan, 2008, £6.99, pb, 340pp, 9780330451918 / Minotaur, 2007, \$24.95, hb, 340pp, 0312360991

The Cairo Diary is two mysteries for the price of one, a historical detective story embedded in a contemporary psychological thriller.

When Marion accidentally uncovers a scandal that rocks the whole of Paris, she is whisked away

to the monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel for her own protection. There she stumbles across the diary of Jeremy Matheson, an English detective investigating a series of brutal child murders in Cairo in 1928. But, as Marion is sucked deeper into the past it seems someone on the peninsula is determined to retrieve the diary.

I found this novel atmospheric, conjuring up the windswept Mount, the opulence of the European ex-pat community in 1920s Egypt and the teeming, foetid alleys in which the murder victims live.

However, I was a little disappointed that, instead of writing Matheson's diary in the first person, Chattam chose to use the same, slightly detached third person narrative as in the contemporary sections of the book. Much is made of the fact that Marion is hypnotised, almost seduced by Matheson's use of language and it would have been fascinating if the reader had been allowed to experience it too, particularly given the twist towards the end. A missed opportunity to create something outstanding.

Jasmina Svenne

BLOOD ALLEY

Tom Coffey, Toby, 2008, \$24.95/£19.99/£24.95, hb, 276pp, 9781592642236

Patrick Grimes is a veteran intent upon making a mark as a newspaperman in New York City in 1946. His work for the *New York Examiner* as a rewrite man on the graveyard shift leaves him with limited opportunity to practice his craft. His life takes a radical turn when he covers the murder of a young woman whose body is found in a slum area near the East River. An African-American worker in a nearby building is charged with the murder after first being beaten into submission by corrupt police officers. Grimes cannot leave the case alone as he wonders how and why the daughter of a wealthy New Yorker could have ended up in a slum alley. His investigation takes him into a New York of wealth, power, and corruption and his quest for both truth and justice in a world which seems to have little use for either forces him to make decisions that will transform his life.

Patrick Grimes' traumatic experiences take us back to a time of institutionalized racism in American police departments as well as a world in which the efforts of one honest, dogged journalist could seek to balance the interests of the poor with the greed of the rich. This postwar New York City is not pretty, but it is compelling.

John R. Valley

SILESIA STATION

David Downing, Soho, 2008, \$24.00, pb, 336pp, 9781569474945 / Old Street, 2008, £10.99, hb, 320pp, 9781905847358

American journalist John Russell arrives home in Berlin after a trip to the States in the summer of 1939. After dropping his son off with his divorced German wife, Russell finds his actress girlfriend Effi has been arrested by the Gestapo. In order to secure her release, he agrees to spy for them. Already having been co-opted into espionage work for the Americans, Russell promptly volunteers to do the same for

the Russians as well. Throw in a search for a missing Jewish girl, a healthy dose anti-Nazi resistance workers, and the need to cover a torrent of news stories dealing with the run up to war, you have a life turned as upside down as the world in those last few weeks of peace before the Second World War.

Although the story is a labyrinth of plot and counter plot, and there are more characters than a Russian novel, somehow it all works. While the reader may feel the urge to take notes, and a flow chart or two would be most helpful, the author does a masterful job of tying it all together into a cohesive whole by the end. But all this is really just the framework for the real value of the work, a rare glimpse into life during a pivotal time in world history. He paints his scenes with a wealth of detail. In doing so, he provides his readers with more than one insight into just what caused the war to erupt in Poland at a time when the other nations just might have been able to deter the Nazis' avarice.

Since *Silesian Station* is the second in a series, we can look forward to learning more of the complex life of John Russell, and get a few additional insights into how the world was reshaped by that worst of all wars in the bargain.

Ken Kreckel

SO BRAVE, YOUNG, AND HANDSOME

Leif Enger, Atlantic Monthly, 2008, \$24.00, hc, 287pp, 9780871139856 / Quercus, 2008, £12.99, hb, 384pp, 9781847245311

Monte Becket has lost his sense of purpose. It is 1915, and he has become a bestselling author with his first published book. Living a simple life in Minnesota with his wife and young son, he experiences writers' block while trying to pen his next novel. He befriends an older neighbor, Glendon Hale, whom he learns builds small boats. With his wife's permission and understanding, Monte joins Hale on a quest to locate Hale's wife, Blue, whom he deserted years ago.

Monte soon learns that Hale is a wanted man with a relentless lawman on his heels. Monte is then faced with either following his newfound friend on his quest or returning home to the safety of his own family.

Leif Enger has followed his *New York Times* bestseller *Peace Like a River* with an excellent character study of three individuals: the protagonist, Monte Becket; the outlaw Glendon Hale; and the relentless ex-Pinkerton detective, Charlie Siringo. I found myself immersed in the chase, finding it fascinating to see how Siringo continued to remain on their trail. Can Hale remain free from the clutches of the wily detective? Will Becket ever see his family again, or will he face imprisonment for aiding Hale in his run from the law? Will Hale find his ex-wife, and what will happen when he does? The author pulls the story together in a manner that leaves the reader anxiously turning the pages to discover how it will all come out. Well-written with engaging dialog, this novel is highly recommended.

Jeff Westerhoff

THE UNQUIET HEART

Gordon Ferris, Crème De La Crime, £7

THE PAINTER FROM SHANGHAI

Jennifer Cody Epstein, Norton, 2008, \$24.95/C\$27.50, hb, 416pp, 9780393065282



At fourteen, the future Pan Yuliang is sold into prostitution by her opium-addicted uncle. Yuliang determines to run away, but disobedient “flowers” are beaten or murdered. Steeled to her fate as chattel to be bargained by men in early 1900s China, she rises to become the Top Girl. When a young customs inspector arrives to clean up corruption, Yuliang is offered to him as a bribe for a night. He refuses to bed her, but takes pity and buys her out of her debt. Pan Zanhua makes her his concubine, falls in love, and encourages her growing interest in art. Yuliang is offered a scholarship to attend art school and realizes her immense talent. Accepting a scholarship to Paris, she becomes involved with a young Chinese revolutionary. When her scholarship money is withdrawn because of governmental shifts, she struggles and starves for her art. On her return to China, Yuliang disdains Chinese traditional painting and follows the French post-impressionists. Her nude self-portraits fascinated Paris but scandalize the Chinese, who are undergoing dramatic changes as their imperial nation falls to the warlords, the Japanese, and eventually the Communists. Yuliang teaches art at the university, but her reputation as a former prostitute threatens her career and, to her despair, Zanhua’s position with the government.

This fictionalized account of Pan Yuliang’s life is told in sensuous prose that illustrates the determined spirit of a painter who refused to be subjugated by her gender or era. The history of China’s revolution, the world wars, along with the travesty of foot-binding—all seen through this brave young woman—make this a page-turner. A stunning debut novel.

Diane Scott Lewis

99/\$17.95, pb, 269pp, 9780955707803

Danny MacRae, a private detective barely making ends meet in post-war London, meets Eve Copeland, a crime reporter, looking for new ways to improve her career. Danny falls for Eve and is determined to find her when she disappears. The search to his lover leads him first into a web of black marketeers, double agents and assassins then to Berlin where terrorism and espionage are rife. He begins to lose sight of the line between good and evil.

This is a superb book, intelligent and gripping. Think Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe in 1946 London. You walk with Danny in the bleakness and fog, taste the warm beer and smell the tobacco. Gordon Ferris draws you in from the first page with his mix of humour, brilliant narrative and breathtaking action.

This is his second Danny MacRae book; no doubt there will be more. I certainly hope so; I can’t wait for the next story. A tense and believable thriller that’s not to be missed.

Fenella Miller

THE BROKEN WORD

Adam Foulds, Cape Poetry, 2008, £9.00, pb, 80pp, 9780224084444

This short but startlingly effective verse narrative is set in the 1950s in the British expatriate community in Kenya at the time of the Mau Mau uprising. Tom has just finishing his schooling in England and before starting university education, he is “blooded” in the brutal response to the insurrection by the self-policing white community, followed by a short stint with the military. The cruel violence he witnesses and participates in against the native population damages Tom, and we see the psychological effect it has on him when he

EDITORS’ CHOICE

9781932961478

When the dot-com bubble bursts at the end of the 20th century, George Bailey reassesses his life. He worries that his family is going to have to adjust to a diminished lifestyle and that his son, a troubled teenager, will have to go back to public school. Looking for answers and ways out of his predicament, George travels to Abbeville, the small town in central Illinois where his grandfather lived most of his life. His grandfather, Karl Schumpeter, started out as a farmhand, became a lumberjack, and then a banker and a successful businessman. But he was wiped out during the Depression and ended up in prison. Still, George remembers him as a happy man, a janitor and a postman, who was beloved by his family and respected by the community. What happened to him, George wonders. How did his grandfather manage the comeback? Is there a lesson in the tale for him?

Pulitzer Prize-winning Jack Fuller’s seventh novel tells a simple story about the true meaning of success and failure and about the generosity, decency, and grit of ordinary people. Fuller writes with elegance and a beautiful, calm voice: “It was the way of the world to put obstacles in the path between a man and the things he wanted or was obliged to do. Otherwise... a soul would never be measured.” Fuller tests his characters, and in the process, he shows how to overcome life’s quandaries. When George draws his lesson, this is no longer the tale of an extraordinary man and of a small town going through hard times; rather, *Abbeville* and the message become universal. A heart-warming, lovely read.

Adelaida Lower

THE SPIES OF WARSAW

Alan Furst, Random House, 2008, \$25.00/C\$28.00, hb, 266pp, 9781400066025 / Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008, £16.99, hb,

starts his university studies and attempts to join the “civilised” world. The writing is deft and elegant, and the observation and description piercingly meticulous.

Doug Kemp

ABBEVILLE

Jack Fuller, Unbridled, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 272pp,

EDITORS’ CHOICE

THE RED SCARF (US) / UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY (UK)

Kate Furnivall, Berkley, 2008, \$15, pb, 496pp, 9780425221648 / Sphere, 2008, £6.99, 512pp, pb, 9780751540444



The Red Scarf is an epic tale of survival and hope in Stalinist Russia. It is 1933, and Sofia and Anna have already been incarcerated in Davinsky Labor Camp in Siberia for several years. They have forged a strong friendship that helps them survive the grueling work, starvation, and suffering, but Anna grows more sick and frail every day. Sofia decides to risk her own life to save Anna’s. She makes a daring escape and crosses thousands of miles of Siberian wilderness in the hopes of finding Anna’s former love, Vasily, the only hope of saving her friend.

In a remote village, where a gypsy family nurses her to health, she finds a man who she believes to be Anna’s love. He’s also everything she ever wanted. How strong is Sofia’s commitment to rescuing her friend when she is so tantalizingly close to freedom, family, and passion?

Kate Furnivall has a gift for enveloping the reader in the bleak, paranoia-ridden world of Stalinist Russia while still leaving room for love and trust to blossom. *The Red Scarf* is a riveting narrative that is heavy on the heart. The plot, which smoothly flows between pre-revolutionary and Communist Russia, keeps readers entranced. In this poignant story rife with fear, yet imbued with hope, the major characters risk all for the slightest chance of freedom and happiness. Highly recommended.

Andrea Connell

288pp, 9780297855415

In the autumn of 1937, Warsaw was still a city at peace, although wary eyes looked to the West with anxiety. Germany was firmly under the control of the Nazis, and rumors of war flew by like so many bullets and shells, which would follow them in two short years. The peacetime spy game being played out in all cities in Europe still maintained the façade of civility, many of the spies belonging to the various diplomatic corps. Information was gleaned at endless soirees and in many cases. Smack in the middle of it all was Colonel Jean-François Mercier de Boutillon, military attaché to the French embassy in Warsaw. Between the fall of 1937 and the early summer of 1938, the Colonel would come to realize that not only was war with Germany inevitable for the Poles, it would involve France as well. And he knew France was not prepared.

Once again, Furst brings us into the exciting and terrifying world of espionage in pre-World War II Europe. He is a master at setting scenes and developing characters who are believable and real to the extent that it's possible simultaneously to like them, hate them, and not care one way or the other. His scenes are filled with smoke that burns your eyes, raucous laughter that rings in your ears, and cold, dead silence that chills you to the bone. His now-famous Brasserie Heininger, with its trademark bullet hole in the mirror behind table fourteen, is as real to me as any place I've ever been. I remember being there with the characters in his last book, *The Foreign Correspondent*. I hope to visit there again soon.

Mark F. Johnson

HOW FAR THE ROAD HOME

Alan Gifford, Margol Publishing, 2008, \$28.50, hb, 340pp, 9780978835675

During World War II, a half-million German, Italian, and Japanese prisoners of war were held in camps on American soil. Until the war's end, they worked in factories and on farms and roads. Set in Colorado in the early 1940s, *How Far the Road Home* utilizes multiple points of view to tell the story of American farm girl Celena Walker and her romantic attachment to German POW, Ernst Halder, who is working on her parents' wheat farm.

The plot is multifaceted; appealing characters abound. Will Celena marry the American soldier to whom she is engaged, or will she find happiness with her new love, Ernst? Will Captain Jackie Forrest, an undercover Army Intelligence Officer, stop the Nazi assassin incarcerated at the camp from escaping and turning the war into a Nazi victory? Gifford ably weaves these threads of the story with the intriguing facts surrounding the clandestine activities within the camps. Although the behavior of the *lagergestapo*, the soldiers loyal to Hitler within Gifford's fictional camp, is chilling, clearly the German Democrats held there want only to take Germany back from the Nazis and reclaim their homeland.

These days it seems novels require a descriptive hook to attract readers; unfortunately, the one given this book is particularly unnecessary and misleading (*Eye of the Needle* meets *Cold Mountain*; it doesn't). The comparison is a disservice to an entertaining and often tender novel capable of standing on its

own feet. Gifford's war research (in a neat turn, this includes the Civil War as well as WWII) seems meticulous, and his excellent historical note is compelling as he describes how, for example, some Americans befriended POWs who worked for them and officially sponsored the several thousand German soldiers who filed for and received U. S. citizenship after the war.

Alana White

CLASS 1902

Ernst Glaeser (trans. Horst Kruse), Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2008, \$21.95, pb, 326pp, 9781570037122

The effects of war on ordinary citizens are illustrated with brutal and beautiful clarity in *Class 1902*, a biographical novel that found instant popularity when first published in Germany in 1928. The author turns his own memories of adolescence into the story of his protagonist, E., the son of a dutiful but emotionally absent government worker and a doting, courageous mother. E. spurns adulthood and everything to do with it, with one exception: he is obsessed with what he calls "the mystery," the secret connection between men and women with which he is wholly unfamiliar. E. feels that if he could only learn the truth behind "the mystery," he would understand the world and the strange behavior of adults. Over the course of four years, the agonies of E.'s puberty run parallel to the social upheaval unfolding around him, with idealization and jubilation followed by disillusionment and despair. These upheavals are mirrored in E.'s disparate group of friends: Ferd, the handsome and heroic son of an aristocrat who opposes the Kaiser's policies; Leo, the frail and insightful young Jew who benefits from Ferd and E.'s protection; and August, the fiery working-class Socialist who sees war as a chance for equality. At first they all leave the outside world to the adults, but as the realities of war become inescapable, each young man is marked by them forever, and E. struggles to understand what is happening to them and the world.

The 2008 English edition includes an introduction by Horst Kruse, whose translation preserves the sparse, sharp beauty of Ernst Glaeser's memories. The struggles of growing up are magnified by the horrors of war, illustrating how war affects the innocents of every country. The prose is graceful and controlled, but it pulls no punches and offers no happy endings. *Class 1902* is not an easy book to read, but its tragic beauty is not easily forgotten. Highly recommended.

Heather Domin

PAST CARING

Robert Goddard, Delta, 2008, \$12, pb, 501pp, 9780385341172

Martin Radford is a floundering, unemployed historian with a dim future who jumps at the chance to research the memoirs of Edwin Strafford, a young Edwardian cabinet minister and contemporary of Churchill and Lloyd George with a promising career that went mysteriously astray. Radford's own blunders will unfold on this journey as he investigates Strafford's past in this blended mix of politics, romance and historical thriller.

This reprint of Goddard's debut novel unfolds in the early part of the twentieth century and late seventies and has maintained a graceful sense of both eras. The plot's incorporation of a little-known pre-World War I constitutional crisis, the Suffragette movement (which neatly fits in with the women's movement of the seventies), and well-paced twists makes *Past Caring* an entertaining page-turner.

Strafford himself, his family and his life's many secrets and discoveries are by far more noteworthy and remarkable than the markedly tarnished Radford, whose flaws Goddard uses to make him credible if not altogether likable.

I adore a main character I'm not supposed to, and devour a plot that has great tempo and keeps me speculating. *Past Caring* has all this, plus a lovely sense of history.

Wendy Zollo

MAD ABOUT THE BOY?

Dolores Gordon-Smith, Soho Constable, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 288pp, 9781569475119 / Constable, 2008, £18.99, hb, 288pp, 9781845296094

Jack Haldean, mystery novelist and Great War veteran, is enjoying his aunt and uncle's silver wedding anniversary. The party is in full swing at the country estate of Hesperus when one of the guests commits suicide. Or did he? Soon afterward his employer is brutally stabbed to death. Blame falls on Jack's friend, the shell-shocked Arthur, but there is more going on than meets the eye and Jack must solve the mystery before Arthur hangs for a murder he may or may not have committed.

This Jazz Age tale has everything one would expect from such a murder mystery—a country estate, jaunts to London in a convertible, Communist conspiracies complete with Slavic thugs, a love triangle, and more. Haldean is an engaging protagonist, and there are also strong supporting characters. The attempt to replicate 1920s dialogue comes off as a bit bothersome, but otherwise this is an entertaining, if a bit predictable, read.

Bethany Latham

DEATH BEFORE WICKET

Kerry Greenwood, Poisoned Pen Press, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 9781590581704

In 1928, on holiday in Sydney, Phryne Fisher has her vacation all planned out: cricket matches, dinner with the in-crowd, and lots of dancing. Solving yet another mystery is not on the agenda. But when she arrives and her maid Dot finds that her respectfully married sister, Joan, has vanished and left her children in the care of a loutish husband, Phryne steps in to solve the mystery. And when a university student is accused of breaking into the dean's safe, Phryne is also more than ready to investigate the theft—especially when expressly asked to by two students who believe their friend has been wrongly accused.

With her typical aplomb, Phryne juggles both puzzles, while cruising some dubious nightclubs in search of clues. She also finds time to converse among the scholars, acquire a delightful new lover and enjoy cricket matches, as she searches for Dot's sister and tries to figure out which of the seemingly harmless objects in the safe the thief was really after. As with her

other Phryne stories, Greenwood artfully blends action, humor and deduction in this delightful Australian mystery.

Rebecca Roberts

EAST OF THE SUN

Julia Gregson, Orion, 2008, £7.99, pb, 464pp, 9781409102519

Rushed into paperback after having been chosen as one of Richard and Judy's Summer Reads*, this novel tells the story of three girls on their way to India in 1928. Viva is hired to chaperone Rose and Victoria but has personal reasons for wanting to return to the country of her birth which she only vaguely remembers. Rose, a pretty but naïve girl, is about to be married to a young soldier she barely knows. Her best friend and bridesmaid, Victoria (known as Tor) is desperate to escape the crushing influence of her mother and live an independent life. Another of Viva's charges is Guy, a troubled young man.

We follow them on their sea-voyage and the people they meet and their subsequent experiences. Suffice to say life in India is not what any of them expected, and all emerge from the experience better and wiser people.

There is nothing wrong with this novel. It's a pleasing page-turner. Then again, I don't feel it says anything startlingly new about the British presence in India or the 'passage' to India. The main characters act exactly as you'd expect. I've read it all before and better elsewhere. Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* comes to mind but there are many more. Minor characters were total stereotypes and many of the plot-lines went nowhere, such as Guy's breakdown and Viva's abduction and rescue. (Did the publishers ask the author to 'beef' up the narrative?) To me, it carries on long after the original concept has run out of steam.

This is a novel you will either love or, whilst not hate, will wonder what places it above others of its ilk.

Sally Zigmund

*For those who live outside the UK: *Richard and Judy* are Britain's TV equivalent to *Oprah Winfrey*.

ABIGAIL'S SECRET

Roberta Grieve, Robert Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 224pp, 9780709085522

Abigail Cookson lives with her alcoholic father in Chichester. He physically abuses her and spends what little money he earns on beer. Abigail thinks her life has improved when she gets a job at a department store and then meets and falls in love with Joe, a sailor. However, Joe is sent off to sea, and Abby's employer is not as respectable as he outwardly seems. He rapes her. Pregnant and fearful of Joe's reaction to her pregnancy, she leaves the town until the baby is born and arranges for the baby to be adopted. Determined to turn her life around Abigail joins the Women's Land Army and is sent to work on a farm close to Chichester.

The story did not work for me. I found the central character, Abigail, weak and unpersuasive, while the supporting characters were unconvincing. The only dramatic tension was whether or not she would wait for Joe, who may or may not be dead, or move on with

Charlie, a young man who was clearly infatuated with her. What would happen if either found out her secret? The plot line was old-fashioned, and I do not think it will appeal to modern readers. Disappointing.

Mike Ashworth

THE WINTER OF HER DISCONTENT

Kathryn Miller Haines, Harper, 2008, \$13.95/ C\$14.95, pb, 336pp, 9780061139802

Actress Rosie Winter returns in Haines's second in the series set in World War II- era New York City. With the war, times are tight and Rosie is more "struggling" than "actress." When her friend Al, a gangster who had come to her rescue in the first book, admits to murdering his actress girlfriend, Rosie is convinced of his innocence. She and her roommate Jayne get parts in the dead woman's show and befriend her costars, a group of patriotic women doing their best to entertain the troops. Wracked with anxiety over her soldier boyfriend, who's missing in action, Rosie seeks to distract herself by clearing Al's name and attending the Stage Door Canteen dances with her new friends.

As in the first book, the mystery itself takes a backseat to the atmosphere and characters that Haines brings to life. Rosie is a stand-up gal who holds her own against acting rivals and gangsters alike, and both her friendship with Jayne and rivalry with Ruby Priest are highlights of the book. The banter and camaraderie of the actresses' boarding house life is contrasted with the deprivations of the wartime era, and Rosie's efforts to get any news of her boyfriend Jack lend the story a particular poignancy. May this series have a long and healthy life!

Ellen Keith

SHE WAS

Janis Hallowell, William Morrow, 2008, \$24.95/ C\$26.95, hb, 336pp, 9780061243257

As a member of the Vietnam-era anti-war group Fishbone, a young woman named Lucy Johansson set a bomb in a building at Columbia University. Fishbone's intention was to make a statement against the presence of military recruitment and ROTC programs on college campuses, not to kill the night janitor, who is cleaning the building on his usual night off. Appalled by what she has done and terrified of the potential consequences, Lucy goes underground with the assistance of her brother Adam, reinventing herself as Doreen Woods.

Thirty-four years later, Doreen has a successful dental practice and a loving family, and her only tie to her past is Adam, whose body has been ravaged by a long battle with MS. When Janey, a fellow Fishbone member, locates Doreen, she feels her past catching up with her, and knows that it's time to reveal the truth to her family.

She Was takes place over the span of one week, with copious flashbacks to Doreen and Adam's coming-of-age in 1960s Kansas and the events that transformed them into the adults they became. Hallowell reveals the truth of both lives slowly, giving readers powerful glimpses of Doreen's youthful activism and Adam's tour of duty in Vietnam.

She Was is an extraordinary novel, not only for the parallels it draws between the Iraq War

and Vietnam, but for the descriptions of the human toll that war—and radical activism—can take. By compacting the present-day narrative into a brief span of time, Hallowell lets her characters' pasts speak for them, describing how young adults' need to prove themselves—whether to a homophobic father or a charismatic love interest—can steer their future. This is an essential read for all who appreciate intelligently-written, powerful, and thought-provoking historical fiction.

Nanette Donohue

LOVE AND WAR

Anne Herries, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$27.95, hb, 219pp, 9780727866578

This is the second novel of an upstairs-downstairs saga featuring the families at Trenwith. Anyone who has not read the first, *Love is Not Enough*, may find the absent characters discussed and the events referred to in the beginning chapters a little bewildering.

This novel deals mainly with the downstairs family as the Great War offers the younger generation an escape from domestic service. Jack Barlow, a groom at Trenwith, joins up hoping to serve as a mechanic but is sent to the trenches. When he is wounded, he is rescued by Louise, a French farmer's wife. His memory lost, he falls in love and plans to stay with her on the farm although he knows he should return to the British lines.

His sister Rose leaves her place as a parlour maid to join the VADs, hoping one day to train as a nurse. A great beauty, she is admired by Luke Trenwith, heir to the estate, although he accepts there can never be marriage between a Trenwith and a Barlow. Luke volunteers for the Royal Flying Officers Corps. In France, he and Jack meet again, no longer as master and servant.

The French scenes are the best. The horrors of the trenches, the terrible death rate and the burden of the German occupation on the French peasants are well drawn. Jack, Sarah and Louise are likeable and often convincing characters set in their period. But because of the loose ends dangling at both the beginning and the end of the novel, I would recommend reading the first in the series before tackling this one.

Lynn Guest

BONES IN THE BELFRY

Suzette A. Hill, Soho Constable, 2008, hb, 288pp, 9781569475102 / Constable & Robinson, 2008, £18.99, hb, 288pp, 9781845295820

Irony and wit abound in Molehill, Surrey, where Francis Oughterdard serves as vicar to a parish full of oddball characters and as owner-by-default of a snooty cat and rambunctious dog. The pets' commentaries, interspersed with the vicar's own narration, are one of the delights in this, the second "Bones" novel by Suzette Hill. Chief among the ironies is Hill's hilarious and vivid character Mrs. Tubbly Pole, who, though a successful detective novelist, insists that characters are unimportant since all readers care about is action. Those looking for a complicated, twisting plot may be disappointed, for here character trumps action on every page. The fretting aspirin-and-whiskey-chugging vicar's attempts to hide stolen paintings he has been

blackmailed into accepting, and the resulting antics of the town's pets (who communicate with each other far better than many of the people do, and are equally prone to quirks and petty animosities) constitute the plot. This is 1950s English country life done up Seinfeld style, complete with a gin-drinking bulldog. It should appeal to fans of Martha Grimes, Saki, and Wodehouse.

Laurel Corona

THE ODIN MISSION

James Holland, Bantam, 2008, £12.99, hb, 352pp, 9780593058343

In a brutal attack during April of 1940 Germany invaded neutral Norway. Desperate to escape the advancing Nazi troops are three soldiers from the King's Guard who have been entrusted with helping the scientist, Professor Hening Sandvold, reach the Allied forces.

Enter Sergeant Jack Tanner of the British 148th Brigade. He and his patrol are struggling to rejoin their unit. After first encountering the Professor and then meeting up with a group of French soldiers, this unexpected band joins forces to try and outwit the enemy in the treacherous Norwegian mountains: a task which Jack discovers could change the outcome of the war because Sandvold holds a vital secret that the enemy must never uncover.

James Holland is obviously a World War II enthusiast, and his expertise shines through in his writing. It is a skill to bring history vividly to life, and he obviously has that particular skill in abundance. This is the first novel featuring Jack Tanner and it seems certain that more will soon follow.

The Odin Mission is an excellent, fast-paced thriller, and Jack Tanner looks set to become the Sharpe of the Second World War.

Sara Wilson

BITTER HARVEST

Jeannie Johnson, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$28.95, hb, 265pp, 9780727866431

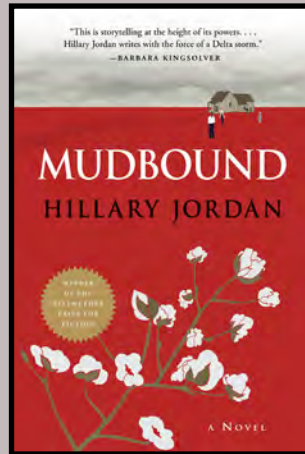
When Catherine's mother, Leonora, discovers that her lover, Walter Shellard, has married another woman she commits suicide and her daughter Catherine's idyllic childhood at the magnificent Castile Villanova in Portugal comes to a sudden and unexpected end.

Walter Shellard then brings his bride, Ellen, from Bristol to live at Castile Villanova and banishes his illegitimate daughter to live with her Aunt Lopa in a small country farmhouse in the fertile Duoro valley. Catherine believes that she has fallen in love, first with Francisco and then with a young priest called Umberto, but in both instances there are setbacks for Francisco's mother opposes the match and priests are forbidden to marry. When her Aunt Lopa is savaged and killed by wolves, Catherine's father, Walter, decides to bring her back to England and marry her to Robert Arthur Freeman, as part of a deal to amalgamate the Freeman vineyards into the Shellard family business.

Catherine quickly discovers that her husband is a deranged, unpleasant womaniser who is totally unable to run his business affairs. But Catherine has a natural aptitude for business and is as quick-witted as her father and sets out to get her revenge for the way her father and

MUDBOUND

Hillary Jordan, Algonquin, 2008, \$22.95, hb, 324pp, 9781565125698 / HarperCollins Canada, 2008, \$18.95, pb, 336pp, 9781554681921 / Heinemann, 2008, £12.99, hb, 336pp, 9780434018871



In 1946, Henry McAllen moves his city-bred wife Laura, their two girls and his crotchety father Pappy to the farm he purchased on the Mississippi Delta. Laura is shocked to find she must learn to live in a shack with only an outhouse and no running water. Henry names his farm Fair Fields, but the name Laura jokingly calls it, Mudbound, is the name that sticks. While Henry loves the land and making things grow, Laura tries her best not to hate it. When Henry's troubled younger brother, Jamie, comes back from the war, Pappy sees him as another victim to torment, but Laura sees him as someone who understands her and considers her feelings.

Hap and Florence Jackson are sharecroppers on Henry's farm. Their son, Ronsel, returns from the war a decorated hero, but with troubles of his own. Jamie and Ronsel form a tenuous friendship which is regarded with hatred and suspicion by Pappy and some unruly members of this Jim Crow community.

Hillary Jordan's beautifully rendered debut novel received the Bellwether Prize for Fiction. This poignant tale of love and hate, violence and forgiveness in the Mississippi Delta country highlights the chaos and confusion of the times. Ms. Jordan narrates her story through the voices of her characters. Each character paints a portion of the picture, but it takes their blended voices to tell the whole. This outstanding, deeply moving story comes highly recommended.

Nan Curnutt

Robert Arthur Freeman have treated her. Before long her husband is beaten to death when caught in the act of rape of a young girl. Catherine then discovers that inside a wooden chest willed to her by her dead aunt are share certificates worth thousands of pounds which enable her to take a controlling interest in the business of the vineyard.

Jane E Hill

HIGH MARKS FOR MURDER

Rebecca Kent, Berkley Prime Crime, 2008, \$6.99, pb, 208pp, 9780425222041

It's 1905, and Meredith Llewellyn is the headmistress at Bellehaven, a finishing school for young ladies in the English Cotswolds. Meredith came to the post after her husband was killed in the Boer War. Many of the students as well as some of the staff are suffragettes. Meredith herself is sympathetic to the suffragette cause and strives to balance this with her position to prepare young ladies to be proper wives and mothers. One Sunday morning, Kathleen Duncan, the home management teacher and a close friend of Meredith's, is found dead in the garden, apparently killed by a falling tree branch. The local doctor determines that it was in fact, murder, not an accident. Meredith is determined to find out who killed her friend. While attempting to solve the mystery, Kathleen's ghost repeatedly visits her; Meredith believes Kathleen is urging her to find the killer. I enjoyed this cozy mystery until the murder was solved. Disappointingly, there was a glaring problem with the solution, and I was left wondering about the loose end, something I really hate. I won't be reading any more of this new series.

Jane Kessler

WHEN THE HEATHER BLOOMS

Gwen Kirkwood, Severn House, 2008, £18.99/\$28.95, hb, 246pp, 9780727866448

This novel continues the Pringle family saga set within the farming community near Lockerbie in the Scottish Highlands. Every member of the clan has his or her part to play in this gentle romantic story. Although the novel starts with Victoria and Andrew Pringle taking centre stage, then Victoria discovers that she has a nephew Peter, the son of her brother Mark, who died during the war. From that point onwards it is Peter who takes gradually becomes the main character along with Mimi, who suffered from polio as a child, and has been left with a physical disability and additional burden of an overprotective parent.

The charm of this novel lies in the detail lovingly included about life in a Scottish farming community in the 1950s, and early '60s, from the work in the creamery's checking and testing the milk to Mimi's first experience of a 'dance'. The detailed descriptions of the flowers and countryside with the changing seasons conjure up a real sense of place. This novel is easy to read, and the struggles of Peter and Mimi to create their own lives through hard work and determination capture one's interest as a reader.

Reading Gwen Kirkwood's novel, rather like drinking a mug of hot chocolate on a rainy, cold night, is both comforting and satisfying. It is also full to the brim with accurate detail, which gives you the impression of looking at a world that, although close in time, is now part of history.

Myfanwy Cook

CHILDREN OF FREEDOM

Marc Levy, Harper, 2008, £7.99, pb, 312pp, 9780007274956

This novel, based on true stories of the French Resistance, is an excellent read and will appeal to those like myself who have previously enjoyed the novels of Sebastian Faulks and Louis de Bernières.

Jeanot and his brother are Jewish boys. In the France of 1940 they can see what is happening to others of their kind and determine to fight the Nazis. But as Jeanot says at the beginning, the hardest thing was finding the Resistance. We don't tend to think of the Resistance as being run by teenagers, but that is what the group Jeanot and his brother joined were. They were also largely refugees from other European countries who had fled to France, from Spain, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The novel follows Jeanot and his compatriots through the last years of the war as they struggle against the local Nazis.

This is a well written and enjoyable novel, but those who like a bit of suspense in their reading may be irritated by the way that each character is introduced with a short summary of what eventually happens to them. This effectively means that the reader knows what is going to happen to everyone right from the start. It then becomes a story about how the characters get to their end. Despite this structure, there were one or two surprises at the end, and it was, overall, a satisfying read.

Cas Stavert

THE PRIVATE PAPERS OF EASTERN JEWEL

Maureen Lindley, Bloomsbury, 2008, £10.99, pb, 284pp, 9780747591160

Rather than being demure and submissive, Chinese princess Eastern Jewel is sexually provocative, inquisitive and precocious. In 1914 her father tires of her behaviour and sends her to live with his Japanese blood brother, Kawashima. Seduction, marriage, theft, escape and numerous casual sexual dalliances highlight her life.

Her outrageous behaviour, marked by greed and generosity in equal measure, eventually leads her into the life of high-class prostitution and from there to spying. As in all aspects of her life, Eastern Jewel is the mistress of her own success and downfall and yet, for all her boldness and liberation she is essentially vulnerable and, at times, breathtakingly naïve.

Based on the true story of Yoshiko Kawashima, *The Private Papers of Eastern Jewel* is a ruthlessly honest account of a very flawed woman who was painted as a demon by the people who used her and eventually destroyed her. War, intrigue and sexual manipulation make for an explosive mix and this novel is definitely hot stuff.

Although she was hated in her day, Maureen Lindley's Eastern Jewel is not a monster and deserves all the pity the reader undoubtedly feels for her. The exotic setting, glamorous characters and dangerous intrigue combine to create a riveting, haunting read.

Sara Wilson

ANCIENT HIGHWAY

Bret Lott, Random House, 2008, \$25.00, hb, 256pp, 9781400063741

"Hurrah!" Earl Holmes jubilantly whispers this word to his dying brother in 1925,

symbolizing their shared belief in victory in all circumstances, even death. The very next morning, knowing a better opportunity will never come, Earl leaves his small-town Texan home, hitching his way on railroad box cars all the way to Hollywood to become a movie star, just like in the magazines he pores over. What he sees on this journey transports him to a harsh reality that is so vividly described it makes the reader breathless. The scene suddenly changes to 1947 when Earl and his wife, Joan, a great lover of music, and their daughter are standing outside a movie theater, Earl avidly looking and waiting for someone famous to pass by and afford him the first chance toward success. It's an extraordinary scene that symbolizes the theme of dreaming big in the face of obvious ill luck. And it's just that feverish drive that propels this novel into the daughter's rejection, and a returning Vietnam vet grandson's search in the 1980s for the truth of this strange family's real life story.

Betrayal and sacrifice fill the silence for this extraordinary family. The Holmes drama is even more intriguing as we learn what it was like to work with the likes of Moe, one of the Three Stooges, and other actors and actresses. What's the secret behind a small record that holds a devastating, huge story to do with Earl's wife?

Ancient Highway is an important look at the film industry in its early stages, and it's frequently amazing and sometimes devious in its development. The Holmes family's story parallels this revelation in potent, heart-rending ways.

Viviane Crystal

THE LADY OF THE MANOR

Chris Marr, Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 222pp, 9780709084815

Chris Marr is described as a voracious reader of the Edwardian period with a passion for crime fiction, and his first book is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a crime novel set in 1903.

George Erskine, invalided out of the army after being wounded in the Boer War, has recently married a beautiful debutante, Emily Delsey, and the pair have settled down on her Hampshire estate. But all is not entirely well between them, as Emily, for reasons she does not reveal, will not allow her husband even to enter her bedroom, and the marriage remains unconsummated. Then Emily is found dead in bed, and George is on trial for her murder.

It is a convention of the murder mystery that the obvious suspect cannot possibly have done it, but Mr Marr allows some seeds of doubt to be sown as the trial proceeds, and new evidence arrives in the nick of time in the best Perry Mason tradition. However, perhaps the author has been too influenced by reading *American* crime fiction. In Edwardian England, no one would 'take the stand', they went into the witness box, and while it may be that in America questions of the admissibility of evidence are dealt with in open court and the content is revealed to the jury before it is admitted, in England such matters are dealt with by the judge in chambers, with only the lawyers present.

Ann Lyon

SAND AGAINST THE WIND

Catriona McCuaig, Hale, 2008, £18.99, hb, 224pp, 9780709085294

This novel is the story of the Morgan family in Wales during the Second World War. Colliery owner Harry Morgan has plenty to worry about. His daughter, Meredith Fletcher, is a war widow with a child to bring up. Her half sister, Mariah, experiences her own tragedy when her husband, a pilot in the RAF, is shot down and declared missing. When a young woman turns up and declares she was married to Meredith's husband the family is thrown into turmoil. Then a local miner courts Mariah's mother, Ellen Richards, and Harry realises that he is about to lose her. A novel of the vagaries of family life during the Second World War and worth reading if you like family sagas, this is the sequel to *Windsong*. I had not read the first book and found there was little exploration of characters in this one, so it took me a while to get into the book and establish all the relationships. Once I did, I thought it was enjoyable and cared enough to want to read on to see how it would turn out in the end.

Karen Wintle

THE LONGEST ROAD

Pamela Oldfield, Severn House 2008, £18.99, hb, 217pp, 9780727866455

This is a well-constructed novel with plenty going on as the excellently drawn characters interact in a Kent village and in London.

The title alludes to the heroine's hesitant road to romance, having lost her fiancé in WW1. It is now May 1920. Clare Wishart (a good name for a romantic heroine) is back in her big house, after its army requisition as a hospital during the war. The mansion needs renovation but Clare is broke and hampered by a lazy cousin in residence. She must sell her home. In the meantime her working horse is put down, her gardener (who has a soft spot for her) dies and her kitchen maid is seduced by her ne'er-do-well cousin. A shotgun wedding follows, and the cousin changes into a useful husband and a promising father, at last doing a day's work. All good stuff.

Clare is a writer of short stories for *The Ladies Own Journal*. Her editor suggests she write a novel and puts her in touch with an eligible fiction editor. After a few doubts, a gentle, courtship ensues leading to the prospect of marriage and her hope for children.

The Longest Road has excellent introspection and lots of cups of tea in country kitchens. When Clare finds a buyer, strangely, ghosts are portrayed as emanating from death and being evil. My experience is otherwise.

Introducing new characters late in the book, without initially setting them in a scene, is disconcerting. Naming servants and giving details of meal preparations that are remote to the main thrust of the story divert the reader's attention. Nevertheless, *The Longest Road* is one of the 'nicest' easy page turners I have reviewed for the HNS.

Geoffrey Harfield

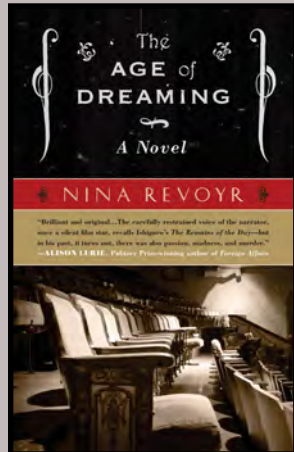
THE GLORY BOYS

Douglas Reeman, Century, 2008, £18.99, hb, 312pp, 9780434013524

The Mediterranean, 1943. The tide of war

THE AGE OF DREAMING

Nina Revoyr, Akashic, 2008, \$15.95/C\$19.50, pb, 327pp, 9781933354460



Told entirely—and convincingly—in the polite, somewhat detached voice of the elderly Nakayama, Revoyr's novel takes us back and forth between the late teens and early twenties when Hollywood was roaring and rather liberal, to Nakayama's present day. It soon becomes clear that he is trying to hide something terrible about his past from this prying journalist, who turns out to have written a movie script that he wants Nakayama to star in. The something terrible centers around a beautiful ingénue and her overbearing stage mother, with tactfully revealed truths about those who found a livelihood in the movies.

The drama is unpredictable and superbly paced, with an ending that satisfies without sentiment. Revoyr reveals the world of Hollywood in both eras—the golden age of silent movies and the ultra-commercialized sixties—in a new light through the eyes of a survivor with heart and honor. Highly recommended.

Susanne Dunlap

EDITORS' CHOICE

Set in Hollywood of the 1960s, this novel is a surprisingly rich tale that tells the story of an aging star of the silent era, Jun Nakayama. He lives quietly in his home at the foot of the Hollywood Hills, his only friend a neighbor who lunches with him occasionally and has no idea of his romantic past as a heartthrob of the silent screen.

But his tranquility is disrupted by the arrival of a young enthusiast, Nick Bellinger, who wants to write a piece about Nakayama to coincide with the opening of a silent movie theater, the beginning of renewed interest in the genre.

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Susanne Dunlap

is beginning to turn. Lieutenant-Commander Robert Kearton has just taken charge of a newly-formed flotilla of motor torpedo boats. His task is to protect the convoys coming in from the Atlantic with vital oil supplies for beleaguered Malta. If Malta falls, the Mediterranean will effectively be in Nazi hands. Kearton's second task is to do what he can to hamper enemy supply lines to Rommel's army in North Africa.

Reeman, himself a WW2 navy veteran, writes with conviction. The language, emotions (stiff-upper-lip), and virtues (endurance, courage, decency) of the period all add to the authenticity.

On the minus side, I found the characterization a touch predictable. On board ship, there is the jokey one, the cold bastard, the one nobody likes and so on. Kearton himself is (naturally) heroic, confident, and meticulous and cares about his men. *'They broke the mould when they made him,'* says one of the crew. I also found the relationship between Kearton and Glynis unlikely. Kearton scarcely knows her and suddenly, out of nowhere, he's in love. Glynis's emotional range goes from A to B and is mainly characterized by gasping 'Bob, I've been so worried,' down various crackling phone lines.

My general feeling is that this is, above all, an action book, and here Reeman excels. My grasp of naval jargon is fairly basic and frequently I wasn't too clear exactly what was going on, but the pace was so fast and the torpedo boats' dodges, feints and sudden blazing action scenes so gripping that I was swept along by the power of the writing. Reeman is excellent at getting across male camaraderie in war, together with the living-life-on-the-knife-edge feel. If you like historical accuracy and a rip-roaring read full of deeds of derring-do – this is the book for you.

Elizabeth Hawksley

GHOSTS OF EL GRULLO

Patricia Santana, Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2008, \$24.95, pb, 296pp, 9780826344090

Yolanda Sahagun in 1973 is about to enter college at the University of San Diego, in California, but that's not the most unusual change she's about to experience in this coming of age novel celebrating the integration of her Mexican heritage and American life. Beginning with a party where she is about to be honored by a Daughters of the American Revolution scholarship award, she hears her usually quiet, unassuming mother narrate a vivid story of what the last Mexican Revolution of 1917 was really like. The American DAR members are riveted, but later on her mother tells Yolanda that she, Yolanda, is a true revolutionary figure. It takes the entire novel for Yolanda to discover just what that means, starting from the visits back to her family's village, El Grullo, in Jalisco, Mexico, where ancestral ghosts still prowl the hallways, longing to bring closure to some unfinished family history.

Within that conflict are the endless tussles Yolanda has with her strict and frequently violent father, a man who can only be calmed by his wife, a man whom his wife finally forces to choose between silence and exile from the family. Then there's the psychologically wounded brother rendered disabled from his Vietnam War experiences. The climax of the novel occurs around her parents, involving changes that so deeply shatter Yolanda's equilibrium that the reader wonders how she will survive. However, the essence of this novel is not about surviving grief and devastation.

Patricia Santana writes in one of the most beautiful narrative voices this reviewer has encountered. The reader not only gets to know

each of the characters intimately but wants more and more to literally share it as well. Read this book – for its passion, colorful setting and dialogue, and overall its sheer beauty and richness. What a phenomenal read!

Viviane Crystal

THE STEEL WAVE

Jeff Shaara, Ballantine, 2008, \$28.00/C\$33.00, hb, 493pp, 9780345461421

This second novel in Shaara's World War II trilogy starts in January 1944 (after a fast-paced introduction covering the war to that date), with a recon team collecting rock samples from the beaches of Normandy. Constructing the defenses of those beaches is the best of the German generals, Erwin Rommel. Rommel is once again frustrated with the lack of support and the apparent indifference of the German High Command to his repeated warnings about the vulnerability to invasion he perceives. Meanwhile, Eisenhower and the Allied command are busy planning every detail of the forthcoming invasion and, as the planned date approaches, trying to deal with the worst early summer weather in memory. The invasion succeeds on June 6th, although not without some horrifying losses. In addition to an inside view of the planning and machinations in both sets of headquarters, the story follows an airborne infantry unit that has parachuted into the infamous hedgerow country behind the beaches in order to secure bridges and crossroads. It wraps up in July 1944 as the Allied forces break out of the hedgerows and head for Berlin.

Once again, Shaara is at his best when writing from the point of view of the fly on the wall. The reader never feels that anything is contrived or less than authentic. It's history from a front row seat. Very compelling.

Mark F. Johnson

THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY

Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, Dial, 2008, \$22.00/C\$25.00, 261pp, hb, 9780385340991 / Bloomsbury, 2008, £12.99, hb, 256pp, 9780747589198

It's a good bet that many people don't know (or remember) that Britain's Channel Islands—Jersey and Guernsey, just off the coast of France—were occupied by the Germans during the second World War, and this breezy epistolary novel is just the thing to fill in the gap in our collective historical knowledge. In 1946, London and its environs are casting off the pall of war, and writer Juliet Ashton is on the lookout for a subject for her next book; she is contacted by a farmer on the island of Guernsey about a book by Charles Lamb that she had once owned which he has just purchased. This correspondence marks a new beginning for nearly everyone involved: Juliet, her publisher Sidney Stark, the Guernsey farmer Dawsey Adams, and the rest of his fellow-islanders who belong to the oddly-named (but completely rational once it's explained) book group.

The letters bring out the characters—and they are indeed characters—of the many who suffered greatly under Nazi rule for five long years. The multiple points of view also allow Shaffer and Barrows to include details about

the varied, and very real, historical events on Guernsey. Besides Dawsey Adams, we meet Amelia Maugery, hostess for the literary society; Isola Pribby, potion-maker and parrot-owner; and Eben Ramsey, fisherman and wood-carver, to name just a few. All tell Juliet of their wartime experiences, and they all talk about one islander in particular, Elizabeth McKenna, whose bravery and loyalty, along with her young daughter, Kit, keep the rest of the group going during tough times. This is a heartwarming, and at times heart-wrenching, book in which history and personalities form an incredibly well wrought narrative, and which left me wanting to know what happens next in the lives of these lovely people.

Helene Williams

FLIGHT OF SOULS

David E. Stuart, Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 276pp, 9780826342621

Having been raised and abused in foster homes and reform schools, John Alexander, a student of anthropology and folklore, leaves the U. S. and travels to Mexico in search of freedom. He is a troubled young man with a penchant for escapism. "My essence must have either died or gone away... and I knew it, because I could no longer feel ordinary emotions." After a wild night of drinking and sex at the beach, a diplomat's wife is murdered, and John gets blamed. First he is beaten up by the Mexican police, then by roguish elements of the U. S. embassy. With a depraved American general in hot pursuit, and thrashed occasionally by the embassy's Marine security detachment, John travels through Mexico, seeking enlightenment.

In this novel set in Mexico in the early 1960s, John narrates his story with an edgy, sometimes crude style that clashes with sensitive descriptions of the Mexican countryside. The text is pockmarked with strings of ellipses. It shifts confusingly from a cynical to a lyrical voice. The plot also totters between an action thriller with ludicrous twists and an interesting journey toward healing with magical-realism touches. All in all, *Flight of Souls* is a very bumpy ride.

Adelaida Lower

BONE CHINA

Roma Tearne, Harper Collins, 2008, £16.99, hb, 400pp, 9780007240739

This novel, which starts during the Second World War, is one of love, violence and change for the ex-tea-planting de Silvia family. It is set in Sri Lanka and London. Grace de Silva has five children, and a husband Aloysius who gambles and drinks too much. The world she was brought up in vanishes, and the civil unrest in Sri Lanka forces her children into moving to London where they have to try to adapt to the cultural diversity that confronts them. The exception is Frieda, who stays to look after her parents in their home perfumed by the scent of jasmine and loss.

The de Silvia creative talent combined with their historical legacy enable Grace's granddaughter Anna-Meeka to achieve what her own parents would not have imagined possible. It is difficult to summarise this novel, because of the intricacy of both the story and the

characterisation.

The descriptions of Colombo are exquisite, and Roma Tearne has conjured up in words all the nuances of a past time and place. She has also created a set of engrossing characters from the minah bird Jasper to Meeka who is both intelligent and selfish. However, the characters that dominate the novel are Grace and Savitha her daughter-in-law. Grace is externally as fragile, delicate and beautiful as the bone china, which she tries to preserve as a family heirloom, but she also has strength and resilience, and like bone china even when cracked by life can still be both useful and beautiful.

This novel is charming, thought provoking and historically interesting, casting a light on the civil unrest in Sri Lanka. It is easy to read yet brim-full of details and characters that stay clearly in your mind, and like bone china its hallmark is quality!

Myfanwy Cook

CAPTAIN CONAN

Roger Verceel, Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2008, \$19.95, pb, 296pp, 9781570037139

The Great War is over and young French Captain Conan, a fearless killer loyal only to his own men, is redeployed to Bucharest on the Bulgarian front to protect the area against a possible attack from Russian forces. Andre Norbert, a young French conscript who is "grossed out" by the behavior of Conan and his men, is appointed the army's judge-advocate to oversee cases of men who break military law. He befriends Conan, but it is a difficult and unusual relationship because Conan believes there are no rules in combat or between soldiers. They are eventually placed into a position whereby only one of them can win.

Originally published in 1934, French writer Roger Verceel's novel is part of the Joseph M. Brucoli series of fiction and nonfiction stories of World War I. Except for a battle at the end of the story, the book is focused primarily on Norbert and Conan, the continuing conflict between them, and life behind the lines at the end of the war. The writing in this enjoyable book did not seem at all dated. Verceel did a commendable job in drawing out the characters. I highly recommend this book for those who are interested in reading about war and how it affects men who led normal lives beforehand, but who had to adjust to the daily killing to survive.

Jeff Westerhoff

FANON

John Edgar Wideman, Houghton Mifflin, 2008, \$24/CS\$26.95, hb, 240pp, 9780618942633

Franz Fanon, who died in 1961, is most famous for his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, which excoriated racism and colonialism. A psychiatrist of African descent, he developed his theories while treating individuals on both sides of Algeria's war for independence, including victims of torture and their torturers. Many saw his work as justifying the use of violence in overcoming oppression. I expected Wideman's novel to be a fictionalized retelling of Fanon's life story, but it is for the most part about an African-American novelist, a stand in for the author, who is struggling to write about Fanon. There are some imagined scenes from Fanon's

life, but generally Wideman's counterpart takes center stage. He visits his imprisoned brother, Rob, and contemplates the life of his elderly, crippled mother who lives in a Pittsburgh slum. At one point in the narrative, he receives a human head in the mail for reasons never made clear.

There is some beautiful writing in this novel, some well crafted scenes, and, at the heart of it, a moving plea for human brotherhood. Readers will look in vain, however, for a storyline, and those not familiar with Fanon's work will get little sense of it. The author implies that Rob's long imprisonment is unjust, the product of racism, but never tells the reader if he actually was guilty of a crime and, if so, what crime it was. How do Fanon's views on violence relate to Rob's situation? Is the severed head to be taken purely as a symbol, and of what precisely? Much is left to the reader's conjecture, too much in my opinion. But fans of postmodernist fiction may admire and take pleasure in this novel.

Phyllis T. Smith

THE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T

Gene Wilder, St. Martin's Press, 2008, \$19.95, hb, 167pp, 9780312375782

Jeremy Spencer Webb, a concert violinist who takes leave of his senses during a performance, finds himself at a spa somewhere in Bavaria where he has gone for a rest cure following his hospitalization in the U.S. While there, he meets a mysteriously beautiful girl (the one who wouldn't), who is suffering from terminal cancer.

The violinist, who doesn't really understand what made him behave so peculiarly as to pour water into the bell of the tuba while the tuba player was performing, somewhat absurdly meets Anton Chekhov at the watering hole, as well as an avuncular doctor who has both Webb and the cancer victim in his care.

One thing leads to another, and Webb seduces the young woman, who is apparently immune to the moral code of the day, and whose shocking behavior is uncharacteristically condoned by her doctor. He eventually reaches an understanding of his temporary insanity, and falls madly in love with the woman. The results should be surprising, but instead they are completely unbelievable.

In this his second novel, Wilder evokes Chekhov frequently, both in the sparseness of his style and in the length of the book—an extremely short 167 pages. Unfortunately, Wilder's ability as a writer does not approach Chekhov. In his hands, sparseness turns to childishness. I thought for a while this was a children's fable until the clumsily described sex scenes. Wilder's ability as a writer of historical fiction is all but nonexistent. The dialog reads more like a Gene Wilder film than anything plausibly set at the turn of the 20th century, and jarring anachronisms abound. Altogether, the novella left me wondering if it would ever have had a chance of being published if its author were not a famous actor. Viewed as a curiosity—and given it takes little time to read and very little space on a bookshelf—there may be some who would want to read this book.

Susanne Dunlap

FALLEN ANGELS

Valerie Wood, Corgi, 2008, £5.99, pb, 527pp, 9780552156592

Lilly is a good mother, strong and loyal, but the day she married Billy Fowler to provide a home for her and her two children was the day she made the worst decision of her life. Left as a widow, her soldier husband presumed dead in action, she had little choice. When the mean-hearted Fowler takes her and her daughter, Daisy, to Hull, she has no idea what he has planned for his pregnant wife.

Desolate, she is left in dire circumstances, deserted in a strange place with no means of survival. Her ability to use her wits, coupled with a determined, selfless spirit, gives her the ability to turn desperation into opportunity despite being indebted to another rogue, Jamie.

Whilst her own family is separated from her, through circumstances beyond her influence, Lilly discovers a new family of hapless souls. How, though, can she help them escape from their desperate state, protect herself and hope to provide a respectable home for herself and her daughter? This is her challenge throughout the novel.

From the minute I started reading this book I was drawn in to Lilly's world – a world where homeless, helpless women are victims of greedy, selfish men. For lack of work and compassion from a harsh governing system they either starve or resort to a desperate existence. The period detail along with the many moving dilemmas each believable character faces, kept me reading until all was finally resolved in a very satisfying and surprising way. It is an excellent novel and well worth its cover price.

Valerie Loh

21st CENTURY

THE RING: The Last Knight Templar's Inheritance

Jorge Molist (trans. Mara Faye Lethem), Atria, 2008, \$14.00/C\$16.00, pb, 400pp, 9780743297516

For her twenty-seventh birthday, New York lawyer Cristina Wilson receives a surprise gift from her late godfather, a ruby ring that sparks disturbing dreams. Eager to learn its history she returns to Barcelona, where she grew up, to attend the reading of her godfather's second will. That document sets her and her childhood friends, Orion and Luis on a search for the Templar treasure. Others are as eager to find it as they are, and soon the trio find themselves immersed in a life and death struggle for a cache that has lain hidden for hundreds of years. Also twined through the main plot is the mystery behind Cristina's godfather's suicide along with her mother's reluctance for her to return to her childhood home.

This novel is a difficult one to review. While the story premise is interesting, the rather stiff translation combined with a somewhat unsympathetic protagonist and meandering plotline make it a rather uneven read. Several large historical info dumps also serve to slow the pace. Though it's narrated in first person, I found myself distanced from Cristina. It's hard to tell if this was because of the translation masking her voice or because she was unappealing,

abandoning her fiancé for her first love even as she flirted with their enemy.

On the more positive side, the setting is convincing, with Barcelona and its environs easy to see in the mind's eye as the characters conduct their search. The city's winding streets and energy drew me in and kept me reading when other story elements tempted me to put the book down.

Fans of *The Da Vinci Code* and other similar stories may want to read this book for comparison's sake.

Teresa Basinski Eckford

MULTI-PERIOD

SARAH'S KEY

Tatiana de Rosnay, John Murray, 2008, £6.99, pb, 290pp, 9780719524523 / St. Martin's, 2007, \$24.95, hb, 294pp, 9780312370831

Paris, 1942: ten-year-old Sarah Starzynski locks her four-year-old brother in a secret cupboard to keep him safe when the French police come to arrest her family. Sarah swears to her brother that she will come back for him, but little does she know what the police have in store. Sarah and her parents, along with thousands of other Jewish families, are rounded up and held in the Velodrome d'Hiver, an indoor stadium, before they are sent on to the holding camp of Drancy, where Sarah's parents are wrenched away from her and transported to Auschwitz. Somehow Sarah contrives to escape Drancy and, perhaps too easily, meets a kindly family who help her travel back to Paris in search of her brother. However, a brutal revelation awaits when they finally unlock that cupboard door.

Paris, 2002: Julia Jarmond, an expat American journalist researching the Vel' d'Hiv round up, uncovers Sarah Starzynski's story and soon learns that this girl's fate intertwines with that of Julia's French in-laws, who opportunistically moved into Sarah's family's apartment after the police dragged them off.

Sarah's tale is powerful but truncated and never fully realised: the narrative feels too distanced, describing her as 'the girl.' Julia's story, however, is told in first person, in somewhat overblown detail about the woes of being an American wed to a vain and philandering Frenchman (neither the historical nor the contemporary French come off very well in this novel) and forced to endure the summer without air-conditioning. Sarah's tragedy is reduced to a subplot in an otherwise banal tale of a navel-gazing expat struggling to come to terms with her unhappy marriage.

Mary Sharratt

STEALING ATHENA

Karen Essex, Doubleday, 2008, \$22.95, 464pp, 9780385519717

In her highly anticipated follow up to *Leonardo's Swans*, Karen Essex delves into the controversial heart of the origins of the Elgin Marbles, those priceless artifacts of Athena's temple on the Acropolis which Lord Elgin dismantled and carted off to England in the early 19th century. To this day, Greece and Britain are locked in argument over which country has the right to house these treasures.

With her trademark elegance and rare insight into the passions and vicissitudes of the past, Essex weaves this complex issue into a tale personified by two characters in different eras—Mary Nisbet, Countess of Elgin, who assisted her husband in his frenetic quest to capture the marbles and save them from destruction at the hands of the occupying Turks; and Aspasia, philosopher and courtesan of Perikles of Athens, who commissioned the temple itself. Through their alternating eyes, we enter a world of 19th-century greed, adventurism, and arrogant disregard for the concept of cultural heritage, as well as experience the astonishing talents, dignity, and pervasive misogyny of ancient Greece.

Though separated by millennia, both women share a common link to the marbles and the societal restrictions placed on their gender. While high-spirited Mary finds herself forced to reckon with her disillusionment in order to honor her own desires above those of her domineering husband, Aspasia faces accusations of corruption and must defend her independence. Shadowing each of them in their struggles are the marbles themselves—impervious, coveted, irreplaceable. Essex paints a fascinating portrait not only of two distinct eras tainted by disregard for the rights of women, but also of the illusory value we place on objects and the spiritual sacrifices we often make to obtain them.

C.W. Gortner

THE BOOK OF AIR AND SHADOWS

Michael Gruber, Harper, 2008, \$14.95/C\$15.95, pb, 496pp, 9780061456572 / Harper, 2007, £6.99, pb, 576pp, 9780007251902

Gruber takes readers on a wild ride in this satisfying tale of double-crossings, murders, and intrigue. The lives of two very different men are thrust together when their paths cross unexpectedly. Jake Mishkin, an intellectual property lawyer, and Albert Crosetti, an aspiring filmmaker and antiquarian bookseller, find their worlds turned upside down when a rare bookstore is consumed by flames and the letters of Richard Bracegirdle, an English spy and soldier from the 16th century, are discovered.

Bracegirdle's ciphered letters found in a rare book reveal that there exists an undiscovered manuscript by William Shakespeare. These letters prompt Mishkin and Crosetti to travel to England in search of the lost manuscript, an item sure to set the literary world on its toes. In their quest to retrieve the lost work of Shakespeare, the men must deal with persons and events from the underbelly of society—Russian gangsters, kidnappings, murders, and more.

With a complex, smart, and engaging plot, Gruber keeps readers guessing and on the edge of their seats. Rare manuscripts and cryptography make this novel a dream come true for bibliophiles. Written in the distinct voices of the three men and alternating between the past and present, Gruber treats readers to snippets of the personal lives of Mishkin, Crosetti, and Bracegirdle, making these flawed characters all the more believable. *The Book of Air and Shadows* is a superb blend of history and the present day, complete with a blood-pounding climax that is hard to beat.

Troy Reed

THE AVIARY GATE

Katie Hickman, Bloomsbury, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 352 pp, 9781596914759 / Bloomsbury, 2008, £12.99, hb, 352pp, 9780747580386

Oxford researcher Elizabeth Staveley is intrigued to discover an ancient fragment stuck in a book. The fragment tells of a young Englishwoman in the 16th century who was kidnapped and enslaved in a harem after her father's ship is wrecked. Elizabeth delves into the history of the then Ottoman Empire, even flying to Istanbul to uncover Celia Lamprey's story. In a parallel tale set in 1599, intrigue rocks the sultan's harem when the chief eunuch is found poisoned. A spun sugar comfit, shaped like an English ship, is found by his side. Suspicion is cast on the new English concubine, Celia. The sultan's mother, the Valide Sultan, struggles to control her world and wants no woman more powerful than she. She uses the pale, golden-haired western girl to entice her son away from his favorite. Docile Celia aches to be free and reunite with her fiancé, merchant Paul Pindar. Pindar is in Constantinople to oversee a gift given to the sultan by Queen Elizabeth I. He learns that Celia may be alive and imprisoned in the harem. But the sultan is all powerful and his women sacred—no one will help Paul find her. Celia tries to elicit aid from another concubine, who gives her a special key to the Aviary Gate. With the Valide spying on her every move, Celia is desperate to arrange her escape.

With exotic settings and erotic rituals, this novel puts you into the hidden world of the harem. Descriptions of 16th-century Constantinople and modern Istanbul were vivid. I enjoyed the story, but the modern heroine remained underdeveloped, and I wished the author had told Celia's tale alone.

Diane Scott Lewis

AGAMEMNON'S DAUGHTER

Ismail Kadare (trans. from the French of Tedi Papavrami and Jusuf Vrioni by David Bellos), Arcade, 2008, \$13.99, tpb, 226pp, 9781559707886 / Canongate, 2007, £12.99, hb, 226pp, 9781847672230

Tyranny is the theme of this absorbing novella and two short stories. Written by Albania's best known novelist, who experienced totalitarianism firsthand, all three are extremely spare in terms of plot, yet riveting. The novella is set in an unnamed country ruled by a dictatorship. A young man is in love with the daughter of the dictator's chosen successor. He learns that she must end their romance for political reasons. He watches a May Day parade and ruminates about how through the ages tyranny has demanded the sacrifice of love and sexuality, and deformed ordinary life. The atmosphere of life under totalitarianism is chillingly conveyed as marchers go by carrying banners exalting the leader. Meanwhile, the narrator's thoughts range over history and mythology. He mourns his own lost love and considers the fate of Iphigenia, sacrificed by her father before the Trojan War, and of Stalin's son, abandoned by his father to die as a German POW.

In one of the two stories, a parable about terror in the Ottoman Empire, not only are people hunted down and blinded for possessing the "evil eye," they are expected to understand

that this is for their own good. This stomach-churning little horror story, with its catalogue of ways to render people blind, is impossible to put down. The second story is a meditation on the meaning of the Great Wall of China, replete with irony. Did the Mongol invaders need the wall as much as the Chinese did? Did their way of life depend on its existence?

A translation from the Albanian might sound like daunting reading, but Kadare's writing is straightforward and full of black humor. I highly recommend these deceptively simple tales freighted with historical truth.

Phyllis T. Smith

THE CRYSTAL SKULL

Manda Scott, Delacorte, 2008, \$25.00, hb, 384pp, 9780385340106 / Bantam, 2008, £6.99, pb, 554pp, 9780553817669

A formulaic thriller made palatable by good writing, *The Crystal Skull* follows newlywed Cambridge scholar Stella Cody as she struggles to unravel the secret of the flawless sapphire skull she and her husband, Kit, have located in a Yorkshire cave. Set in present day and 16th-century England and Spain, the story is based on a Mayan prophecy concerning thirteen skulls of crystal and other precious stones, which must be found and brought together to prevent the end of the world on December 21st, 2012.

While purportedly trying to keep her discovery of the blue skull a secret, Stella tells anyone who will listen all about it, so it comes as no surprise that soon she finds herself in danger from one who desires it for his/her own nefarious purposes. Or not. Actually, the villain, when revealed, covets the blue heart-stone not only for its power, but also because it is "the biggest gemstone in the world."

Scott, who is known for her historical fiction about the life of Boudica, draws her characters well, including the colorful Spanish ship's captain, Fernandez de Aguilar, who begins on a minor note but grows into an engaging and pivotal main character by the book's end. Readers who enjoy historical thrillers with a dollop of magic and mysticism along with tantalizing, open-ended conclusions likely will enjoy this author's latest endeavor. Scott's author's note details the legend surrounding the skulls (her interest in the subject was sparked by the life-sized crystal skull on display in the British Museum), and her bibliography includes titles of books and websites she used in her research.

Alana White

**TIMESLIP****AMENABLE WOMEN**

Mavis Cheek, Faber & Faber, 2008, £15.99, 343pp, 9780571238941

When Flora Chapman's husband dies in a bizarre ballooning accident she suddenly realises her new freedom. Edward Chapman dominated Flora's life, but now she can return to researching in earnest the history of their village, Hurcott Ducis, only one of her ideas that Edward hijacked for his own.

A reference to Anna of Cleves, Henry VIII's fourth wife, leads Flora to Paris and the Louvre. Hans Holbein's portrait of Anna captures Flora's

imagination and, fascinated, she does not stop until she has unearthed the true story behind the woman who was rejected by Henry and blighted by the title of the 'Flanders Mare'.

In her own words Anna tells her story: how she was brought up as a devout Catholic, a virgin when she married Henry whose obese, disease-ridden body disgusted her. After their brief marriage Anna was retired with comfortable accommodation and a generous pension often acting as surrogate aunt to the princesses, Mary and Elizabeth. But, fearful of Henry's reputation, she could never be certain of her safety. The possibility that she might end up on the executioner's block was never far from her thoughts, but Anna keeps her counsel and her head.

Flora finds a soul mate in Anna, both amenable women. When her history of the village is applauded, as usual, Edward steals her thunder and is awarded the posthumous glory.

In a delightful interweaving of two histories, Mavis Cheek produces an in depth study of love, life and self-preservation with understanding and humour.

Ann Oughton

TRAIN TO YESTERDAY

Nell DuVall, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 290pp, 1594146632

Penny Barton's life is on track; she's a vice-president of her company and her disastrous romantic past is finally behind her. Unfortunately, things derail quickly for her when she's seemingly hurtled back in time to the 1850s with no known way of returning to her time period. Taken in by Emily Dawe and her handsome nephew Fletcher, Penny fights her attraction to the aloof store proprietor while entangling herself in a plot to stop the railroad coming to town.

While this book is labeled a historical romance, I found the story picked up steam when it focused on Penny's adjustment to the 1850s and the worries of the railroad's impact on the life of Coshocton, Ohio. The pages fairly flew for the middle portion of the book; it's only when the focus shifted to the romance between Penny and Fletcher that the plot sagged. I never felt a true connection with them; perhaps more development of their emotional relationship would have pulled me further into their romance. The ending leaves holes large enough to drive through, but perhaps a sequel will tie up the loose threads. Overall *Train to Yesterday* is a good read that those who love time-slip novels will likely enjoy.

Tamela McCann

THE WARRIOR'S PRINCESS

Barbara Erskine, HarperCollins, 2008, £18.99, hb, 560pp, 9780007174287

At an end-of-term party, Jess, a teacher in London, is drugged and raped by someone she knows well. She suspects several men although she has no recollection of the event. Traumatized, she resigns her post and seeks refuge at her sister's Welsh cottage. Her sister is on holiday in Rome and alone in the house Jess soon feels threatened. She is sure someone is stalking her. And to add to her fears, she keeps

hearing the plaintive sobs of a young ghost.

As her fears increase she slowly finds out that she has 'tuned' into the life of another woman who was brutally raped at the time of the Roman invasion of Britain and subsequently taken to Rome. And so Jess's life becomes slowly and inexorably entangled with that of Eigon, daughter of King Caractacus (Caradoc). Soon the past invades the present as Jess's attacker is subsumed by Eigon's and begins to obey his evil commands. How can the impending horror be averted and both Jess and Eigon saved?

If you are a fan of timeslip novels then this rich and dramatic novel will not disappoint. Erskine is brilliant at conveying dramatic scenes, especially the ones here set in the Rome of Nero and the emerging Christians. The way both stories inter-relate is very cleverly done as is the climactic conclusion as both stories become one.

Having said that, I wonder whether there's just that bit too much going on here and far too many people. I got the impression that the author wasn't fully in control of her narrative so needed to resort to convenient plot devices. I couldn't fully accept all the convenient coincidences nor the way that in the present-day sections, nobody remembered to charge their mobile phones or conveniently forgot to keep other people informed of what they'd learned, their plans and their whereabouts, thus creating situations that could have been so easily avoided in real life. I know fiction isn't reality but I found it tiresome. So not for me, I'm afraid, but I can foresee without tarot cards or dreams, that this one is destined to be a best-seller.

Sally Zigmond

SWORD OF THE HIGHLANDS

Veronica Wolff, Berkley Sensation, 2008, \$6.99, pb, 320pp, 9780425222485.

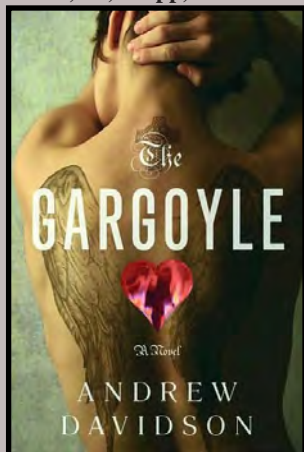
Readers are whisked back in time in this sexy tale set in the Scottish Highlands. Magdalen Deacon, a curator at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, leads a lonely, isolated life consisting of nothing but work ever since her brother tragically died. One evening while cleaning a painting for a show of Scottish pastoral works, she comes across a stunningly beautiful portrait of James Graham, First Marquis of Montrose. Reaching up to caress the portrait's face, Magda is pulled back in time to the 17th century and finds herself waking up in Graham's bed.

Magda soon learns that James is a Scottish nobleman who initially sided with the Covenanters but is now a Royalist supporting King Charles I leading up to the English Civil War. What ensues is a novel containing Scottish battles, acts of heroism, and intense passion that develops between Magda and James. As her feelings for Graham grow, Magda questions whether she should give up her comfortable safe life in 21st century Manhattan or give in to her heart's desire and stay in 17th century Scotland, a time and place of uncertainty, with the man she loves. A pleasing time travel romance that is sure to delight.

Troy Reed

THE GARGOYLE

Andrew Davidson, Doubleday, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 480 pp, 9780385524940 / Canongate, 2008, £16.99, hb, 502pp, 9781847671684



If the first scene of this debut novel doesn't grab you by the throat, then no opening scene ever will. In *The Gargoyle*, Andrew Davidson has penned a riveting, haunting, beautifully crafted, and starkly original novel.

The Gargoyle's nameless protagonist, a handsome drug-addicted pornographer, is burned in a car accident to the point of freakish disfigurement. Confined to a hospital, abandoned by his so-called friends, he suffers a long year of brutal—and baldly depicted—surgeries, treatments, and physical therapy. One day, a lovely visitor wanders out of the psych ward. Marianne is unafraid of his appearance, and claims to have known him in the 14th century. When not hospitalized, she supports herself well by carving gargoyles—although she describes the process as 'releasing a gargoyle from the stone,' and giving it one of her hearts. She carries these hearts in her chest, she tells him, and she

has only so many left: The last heart is for him. As the hero struggles with his growing enchantment with an apparent madwoman, Marianne plies him with gourmet meals. She regales him with old, exotic, romantic tales, and unfolds the story of how they both met in medieval Germany. Her unflinching affection lures the suicidal protagonist away from dark thoughts, as she coaxes his tormented spirit down a long, difficult road—literally, through hell—into resounding redemption.

Andrew Davidson has written a book that is brutally realistic, yet otherworldly; impossibly romantic, yet without syrup, sentimentality, or sex. The past and the present are as tightly woven as the real and the imaginary, and striking images resonate throughout the story. *The Gargoyle* is simply the loveliest, most fully realized novel this reviewer has experienced in years.

Lisa Ann Verge

ALTERNATE HISTORY

ELEANOR VS. IKE

Robin Gerber, Avon A, 2008, \$13.95/C\$16.50, pb, 352pp, 9780061373213

In this fascinating alternate history, popular former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt is called upon to replace Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson in the 1952 election. Eleanor, it seems, is the only Democrat popular and recognizable enough to take on well-known World War II general Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower in the general election. Gerber follows Roosevelt's uphill presidential campaign from the Democratic Convention, where Stevenson's fatal heart attack leads to fervent meetings in smoke-filled rooms, to Election Day, where her brief campaign reaches its end.

This is Gerber's first novel, but it isn't her first work about Eleanor Roosevelt. She knows her main character's real life well enough to accurately predict her actions. Roosevelt is, of course, steely and determined, and undaunted by the challenges that face her in the election. Eisenhower is portrayed as genial but a little bit out of his league; his Vice Presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, is as slick and tricky as you might expect.

These were exciting times for American presidential politics—postwar prosperity had gripped the nation, and television was coming into its own as a way to convey political

messages. *Eleanor vs. Ike* has all the drama of a presidential campaign, including speeches, debates, and tours—including one where Roosevelt meets a precocious child named Hillary Rodham. In light of current U.S. political events, this is an especially timely novel, and it shows how little the scenario has changed for a female candidate for the U.S. presidency.

Nanette Donohue

HISTORICAL FANTASY

SEEKERS OF THE CHALICE

Brian Cullen, Tor, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 368pp, 9780765314734

In ancient Ireland, in a time when gods and men walked the earth along with demons, the Chalice of Fire, the symbol of peace for Ulster, is stolen from the Red Branch. A small band of Seekers set out to recover and return the Chalice to the Red Branch to bring peace once again to the Ulster Kingdom.

Loosely based on the Táin Bó Cúailnge, or the Cattle Raid of Cooley, the concept is interesting – take the forms and structures of traditional high fantasy and apply them to Celtic mythology. Unfortunately, the execution does not meet those expectations. The characters are flat, stock characters without any depth. The action is meandering, a series of nearly identical disconnected fight scenes with a different enemy (vampires! Werewolves! Hags!) The Dreamworld/Otherworld/Earthworld concept was interesting, but never felt fleshed out.

The most frustrating and distracting issue with


THE LITTLE BOOK

Selden Edwards, Dutton, 2008, \$25.95/C\$28.50, hb, 401pp, 9780525950615

Ideally, you'd approach this novel as I did: with intense curiosity about its contents but little knowledge of the plot or characters. But since that makes for an unconvincing review, I'll begin again, but very carefully. It's best you discover its wonders and surprises for yourself.

The Little Book opens as Wheeler Burden, a 47-year-old resident of San Francisco, inexplicably finds himself walking along the Ringstrasse, the street encircling the dazzling city of Vienna, in 1897. How he arrived there from the year 1988, he has no idea. Fortunately, he finds the setting very familiar, thanks to the enthusiastic teachings of his beloved mentor – who saw late imperial Vienna as the cradle of modern intellectual thought. As you read the novel, you'll understand why.

Wheeler's story loops back and forth in time as his mother, Flora, relates his uncanny adventures, based on the journal he kept while there. His story encompasses Freudian analysis, the philosophy of baseball, the history of rock and roll, modern feminism, the growing waves of anti-Semitic sentiment in 19th-century Europe, the truth behind many Burden family legends, and much more. But this isn't just a novel of ideas; it's really more about people and the bonds that connect them. The distinct and wonderfully eccentric characters that Wheeler meets gradually unlock the reasons for his presence there and then.

Selden Edwards is an imaginative and generous writer, and his debut is an impressive literary achievement, a poignant and unusual love story, and a delightful tribute to the vanished world of fin-de-siècle Vienna. There are few books that are both very cleverly put together and populated with characters you come to care about, but this is one of them. A feel-good novel in the best possible sense, it's the type of book you want to beg all your friends to read.

Sarah Johnson

EDITORS' CHOICE

the book was the indifferent editing, including serious continuity errors toward the end of the story that made me shake my head and put the book down. It is an easy read overall, but for me, not a satisfying one.

The concept was interesting and I really wanted to like this book more than I did. I hope the planned second and third books in this trilogy continue the story and concept with more heart, more depth, and more polish.

Julie K. Rose

PRIESTESS OF THE FOREST: A Druid Journey

Ellen Evert Hopman, Llewellyn, 2008, \$18.95/C\$21.95, pb, 360pp, 9780738712628

Priestess of the Forest is set in a fictional 3rd-century Ireland when Christianity is sweeping across the Celtic Isles. It is a tragic romance, a historical fantasy, and a bardic teaching tale: an introduction for those intrigued with Celtic and Druidic lore and traditions.

The story follows a love triad connecting a Druid priestess, a Fennidi warrior, and the High King. Ethne, a Druid healer and priestess, lives a secluded and tranquil existence in the wilds of pre-Christian Celtic Ireland. Her peaceful existence is interrupted when a small band of Fennidi warriors delivers a wounded man named Ruadh to her quiet hamlet. As she heals him, they find in each other a shared spiritual soul. However, a larger crisis envelops the land as their love blooms: Christianity sweeps the Island, dividing tribal loyalties and threatening the power of Crimthann, the High King, whose fealty to the old ways wavers. Summoned by the

Druid leaders, Ethne is asked to wed Crimthann in order to save her people. Ethne must choose between the oaths she has sworn for her people and the calling of her heart.

This narrative is a beautiful glance back at pagan culture, Druidic practices and rituals, and daily Celtic life. It makes one yearn for the connection with the earth that we, in our modern day and age, seem to have lost. It reads easily and weaves Druidic teachings with a touching love story. If you are intrigued by ancient Celtic culture or possess a desire to learn about Druidic customs, pick up this book. It also includes a glossary of Celtic/Druidic terms and suggested sources for further study.

Andrea Connell

A SONG FOR ARBONNE

Guy Gavriel Kay, Roc, 2008 (c1992), \$16.00, pb, 512pp, 9780451458971

In this novel celebrating the troubadour era of medieval Europe, Arbonne is a land dedicated to the female goddess Rian and a Court of Love. Romantic, chivalric lyrics are the tools which transform the relationships of knights and fair maidens, royal or otherwise. But the peace in such an idyllic paradise is marred by the King of Gorhaut, the cruel yet intelligent lord of a land where the male god Corannos dominates all women. Blaise, a bitter mercenary, arrives in Arbonne only to be tempted beyond his determination to single-minded military service. It takes some time for all the characters to awaken to the intricate complexities of rivalry between Bertran de Talair and Urte de Miraval; the magical skills of Arbonne's queen, her

daughter, and the High Priestess of Rian; and revelations shaping a shattering betrayal that will affect both kingdoms. Although *A Song for Arbonne* is a fantasy novel, it clearly portrays a well researched historical era that is sure to fascinate readers. Guy Gavriel Kay remains a master craftsman of historical fiction.

Viviane Crystal

THE SARSEN WITCH

Eileen Kernaghan, Juno, 2008, \$12.95, pb, 240pp, 9780809575174

After having witnessed her entire family slaughtered by the invading horse-lords, young Naeri survives on her own for several years before being captured by the invaders as she attempts to steal a pig. She escapes cruel punishment at the hands of the chief when Gwi the metalsmith steps in. One of these impossibly nice guys history, at least historical fiction, seems to be full of, he teaches our heroine his craft. She soon learns she has a gift for more things of the earth: Her vanished people knew how to find the power lines of the earth and the ways of the great stones, the sarsens, that form a circle in the plain where they lived. Naeri marries the chief in order to assist in restoring the ancient monument, and, with it, the land's balance.

The Sarsen Witch is the third in the Grey Isles historical fantasy series. Perhaps if I had read the previous titles, I would not feel there was so much missing from this one. Occasional passages of poetical beauty do not cover for an over-all feeling of sparseness, the sense that we have not had the groundwork for events laid for us. It feels pat and simplistic, as if we have heard it all before.

With archaeologists even now undertaking new work at Stonehenge, it is an interesting time to wonder once again how the circle came to be there. Kernaghan's bibliography at the end is a useful touch.

Ann Chamberlin

PAX DAKOTA

Ken Rand, Five Star, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 265 pp, 9781594146725

This is a fantasy novel involving an Indian spirit named Old Enemy, released accidentally from his medicine bundle prison while on its journey back to the spirit world from which it was cast out centuries ago. The only spirit that can stop him is Watcher, the spirit of the First People, housed in the body of a Dakota boy named Joseph Thorn. With the future of mankind at stake, Thorn must stop Old Enemy from causing a war between the white man and Dakota that could return the West to a continuation of the plains wars that ended a few years earlier in the 1890s.

In his tale of good versus evil, Ken Rand has written a fantasy/alternative history novel showing the struggle between spirits that could create havoc in our world. I thought the story was well written, for the most part, even providing a runaway prostitute as an unusual sidekick for the protagonist. My major problem occurred in the second half of the book, when Old Enemy continued to bring dead animals back to life to help him track down Joseph Thorn. I am not a big fan of fantasy novels, and may not

understand how these stories are constructed, but I thought the continued “raising” of the dead animals seemed a bit far-fetched compared with the rest of the story. If you enjoy this genre of historical fiction, you may want to check it out for yourself.

Jeff Westerhoff

BEWITCHED

Sandra Schwab, *Love Spell*, 2008, \$6.99/\$8.99, pb, 321 pp, 9780505527233

In 1820, a magical mishap that turns her uncle’s house blue sends Amelia Bourne to the marriage mart in London, stripped of all her powers. At a ball one evening, Amelia suddenly (and mysteriously) becomes enchanted by the rakish Sebastian “Fox” Stapleton, a man she had previously abhorred. After sipping some punch, the two are swept away by their unexpected passion. Fox and Amelia soon remove to the Stapleton country estate to celebrate their engagement.

While at Rawdon Park, a few inexplicable events cause Amelia to wonder about this sudden love affair. Sensing dark magic, Amelia must figure out who is causing trouble, and why. And of course, she must discover if the heat she feels for Fox is truly love, or just a spell.

With such a promising storyline, it was disappointing when the plot fell short. Amelia is supposed to be a witch, but Schwab strips all powers from her in the prologue, leaving just a story about a girl in love. Amelia starts out as a strong character, but after the spell, she becomes a silly wishy-washy girl. As a Regency romance, this was an adequate read, but it did not bewitch this reader in any way.

Rebecca Roberts

CHILDREN & YOUNG ADULT

DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT THE WAR

David A. Adler, Viking, 2008, \$15.99, hb, 216pp, 9780670063079

It is 1940. Thirteen-year-old Tommy would like to enjoy just being a kid. He is more interested in listening to Brooklyn Dodgers games on the radio than war news. But the world is changing, and so is he. He can't ignore the worries of a Jewish friend who has family members in Europe. His mother becomes ill, and he watches as she first searches for a medical diagnosis and then comes to terms with multiple sclerosis. His feelings toward Beth, a schoolmate at his Bronx junior high, change, and soon he is in the throes of first love. He grows in character and maturity by dealing with life's challenges.

The sense of place and time in this book can't be faulted. There are fascinating historical details. It's easy to like young Tommy, the narrator, and his voice is absolutely convincing. A good part of the time, however, he is more of a spectator than a participant in the events unfolding around him, and some young readers may wish for a stronger storyline. Those who enjoy vicariously traveling back to a different time in American history for a slice of life won't be disappointed. Ages 11 and up.

Phyllis T. Smith

SHE TOUCHED THE WORLD: Laura Bridgman, Deaf-Blind Pioneer

Sally Hobart Alexander and Robert Alexander, Clarion, 2008, \$18/C\$19.95, hb, 96pp, 9780618852994

Left deaf and blind by scarlet fever in 1832 at the age of two, Laura Bridgman became an inspiration to others similarly afflicted. This delightful non-fiction book for children reveals how, with the help of Dr. Samuel Howe, she overcame her disabilities and grew up to be an advocate for the Perkins School for the Blind, where she lived most of her life.

Starting with Laura's childhood, young readers learn about early 19th-century life and the ways in which Laura experienced it after her world went dark and silent. But it is when she moves to Boston and the Perkins School that the story becomes truly fascinating. Within a few years Laura could read, write, knit and do arithmetic. The narrative bustles with energy as Laura soaks up knowledge, always eager for more. Interesting and helpful sketches and photographs which illustrate the various ways Dr. Howe developed to teach his students fill the book's pages, adding to its charm.

The authors successfully bring to life this remarkable woman, choosing just the right details while giving a real sense of the period itself. Highly recommended. Ages 4-8.

Teresa Basinski Eckford

THE MEDICI SEAL

Theresa Breslin, Corgi, 2007, £6.99, pb, 485pp, 9780552554473

Italy 1502. A young gypsy boy, fleeing from a brigand, is rescued by Leonardo da Vinci, and becomes part of his household. He calls himself 'Matteo' and gives a heavily-censored account of his life. The truth, however, is more sinister. The brigand, Sandino, knows that Matteo carries something which both the Medicis and Borgias would kill to have, and he will stop at nothing to get it.

The story is set against the turbulent background of warring city states. The infamous Pope Alexander VI, together with his bastard children, the murderous Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia, is determined to extend the power of both his family and the Papacy. One by one, the cities of northern Italy fall into Borgia hands.

Cesare is Leonardo's patron; he employs him as an artist, draughtsman and engineer, and his protection enables Leonardo to pursue his interest in human dissection. Matteo comes to love his new master and is increasingly torn by wanting to be open and knowing he must keep his secret. Then new challenges arise. The dell'Orte family once sheltered him, and now Sandino is on their track – because of him. They are in terrible danger and he's got to help them. But how can his obligations towards the dell'Ortes be squared with his duty to Leonardo who has saved his life?

I enjoyed this. I certainly couldn't put it down. The history is put across in an accessible way without either dumbing down or obscuring the human stories, particularly Matteo's, which should be central to any novel. It is also about one boy's quest for the truth about himself and to learn how to balance conflicting claims of duty, love and honour. Recommended for 12 plus.

Elizabeth Hawksley

Often I find books for junior readers slightly patronising, but I needn't have worried, as *The Medici Seal* is beautifully written. The exciting plot means that it is a guaranteed page-turner, though the story line does meander slightly towards the middle, telling us more of Leonardo's life and work, but at the expense of the otherwise action packed plot. Despite this, the book is an extremely competent mix of fact and fiction. From the word go, the reader is plunged into a whirlwind adventure story, full of deceit, secrecy and murder, whilst being able to really get a grasp of the thoroughly interesting and diverse work that Leonardo da Vinci did.

Rachel Chetwynd-Stapylton, aged 15

MARCH TOWARD THE THUNDER

Joseph Bruchac, Dial, 2008, \$16.99, 304pp, hb, 9780803731882

Prolific author Joseph Bruchac tells the story of a 15-year-old Canadian Abenaki Indian boy who enlists in the Union Army in 1864 to obtain the bonus paid to enlistees and to prove his worth as a human being. Fatherless, young Louis Nolette and his mother, Marie, an Abenaki healer, support themselves as basket weavers, and Louis wants the bonus so his mother can buy land for them.

By 1864, Civil War recruiters were hard-pressed to maintain the supply of soldiers, and this gave Louis the opportunity to enlist with the "Fighting 69th" Irish Brigade of New York. In the Brigade's march to Virginia and subsequent battles there, Louis was accepted by and soon found much in common with his Irish fellow soldiers, both cultures having experienced loss of homeland and both struggling to make their place in the world. Though fighting bravely, Louis avoids harm in most of the often-mismanaged battles that summer, although the brigade suffers horrendous losses.

The book is somber but avoids being too dark because of the thoughtful musings and unique perspective of Louis and the occasional flashes of humor from the soldiers. Its surprising conclusion also saves the book from being just a "war is hell" tome. The book is carefully researched, and the author skillfully introduces many historical facts (women soldiers, black brigades) and figures, such as Lincoln and Clara Barton, in his narrative. I recommend it.

Pamela Ortega

JOURNEY TO GONZALES

Melodie A. Cuate, Texas Tech Univ. Press, 2008, \$17.95, hb, 174pp, 9780896726246

This is book three of the author's Mr. Barrington's Mysterious Trunk series. This time a ghost comes to lead friends Hannah, Jackie and Nick back to 1835 and in the middle of events leading up to the Battle of Gonzales.

Nick reunites with historical characters Johnny, Will, and Galba, who will become Alamo defenders. Hannah and Jackie, in their quest to bring back Nick safely to the present, wind up in the custody of kindly Lieutenant Ramirez, and on the Mexican side of the line being drawn between American settlers and the army that led to the Battle of Gonzales.

The children learn both how out of place they are, and that some things like loyalty, foolishness, and family, don't change with the

generations. If only every social studies class could be infused with this kind of living history touched with magic! For middle readers.

Eileen Charbonneau

BUFFALO MUSIC

Tracey E. Fern, Clarion, 2008, \$16/C\$18.50, hb, 32pp, 9780618723416

When the pioneer woman Molly first settled in Palo Duro Canyon in the late 1800s, life was hard and lonely. While doing her chores, Molly loved to listen to the music provided by nature. She particularly enjoyed the sounds of the buffalo herds. It wasn't long before the buffalo hunters came to Texas to make their fortunes, and within six seasons, the music of the buffalo was silenced. Still, not all the buffalo were gone. Cowboys discovered orphaned calves and brought them to Molly. Eventually she raised a herd of one hundred buffalo. When she learned Yellowstone National Park was trying to build a herd, she contributed four of her own. This is a nicely illustrated picture book with an environmental message. It provides an introduction to the tragic devastation of the buffalo population while avoiding the complexities which would be too confusing for the targeted age group. It would be a good read-aloud book for younger elementary schoolers. Ages 4-8.

Sue Asher

RAVEN QUEEN

Pauline Francis, Usborne, 2007, £5.99, pb, 243pp, 9780746078808

Lady Jane Grey lived a tragic life of manipulation and cruelty, and is marked down in history as the young woman who was queen for nine days during the turbulent Tudor period. Jane is briefly remembered as the sovereign whose short reign fitted into our history between the ailing King Edward VI and the formidable figure of Mary I who wanted to lead England back to the old faith, with her life ending cruelly in execution.

Pauline Francis has introduced a fictitious character, Ned, a Catholic, who Jane rescues from the noose and befriends, as her destiny is determined by her power-hungry father and the ruthlessly ambitious John Dudley who becomes her father-in-law.

Jane's story is told in dual narrative with Ned's. This skilfully weaves the two opposing religious views into the one story, showing just how intolerant and hated one was to the other. It also brings out a very sensitive nature of a spirited and intelligent girl whose life was abused by her closest relatives in the name of power. Jane is a victim: she is trapped, freedom cannot be hers on earth, and her plight is pitiful and predictable, but the book is not.

We know how Jane's life must end, but the novel gives a graphic illustration of life in Tudor times which will be valuable to those children who may study this at school. It is easy to read, yet the style builds reader empathy for Jane's plight in keeping with the era whilst showing the blood and gore of the period, religious intolerance and the danger in the unstable politics of the time.

If Lady Jane Grey has been diminished to a line in our history books, I think this book will give her life poignancy in the minds of

the reader. It is a story not easy to forget: informative, rewarding and sensitively handled, and a memorable read.

Val Loh

A ROSE FOR THE ANZAC BOYS

Jackie French, HarperCollins Australia, 2008, AU\$15.99, pb, 260pp, 9780732285401

It is the year 1915. Margery (Midge) Macpherson is a 17-year-old New Zealand girl attending boarding school in England while her two brothers serve with the Australian New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) in Turkey and Europe. Midge leaves school to set up a railway canteen in France. She serves refreshments to the endless flow of soldiers returning from the front, relieves the local ambulance driver, and assists at a field hospital. Jackie French does not spare the reader. People die and are injured. But somehow she strikes a balance between the horrors and humanity of war that is appropriate to upper primary lower and secondary readers.

Each chapter is headed by a series of letters. I found myself poring over them, as if they had recently arrived in the post. The letters are written by Midge, civilian relatives, and others serving in military and medical capacities. Through them, we hear the voice of the era with all of its class consciousness, parochialism, hope and despair.

The narrative is framed by two contemporary events: ANZAC Day, 1975, as Lachie prepares to push his Pa's wheelchair in the Biscuit Creek remembrance parade; and ANZAC Day, 2007, where Lachie is marching as a soldier newly returned from fighting in Afghanistan. These chapters attempt to bridge the past and the present. It was not until halfway through the narrative, however, that I connected Biscuit Creek with Harry, a young Australian soldier Midge was befriending. Or until the final chapter, that I understood Lachie to be a descendant of Harry and Midge. I was disappointed to find the adult Lachie in military uniform. To remember the 'war to end wars,' was no such thing. But that is Jackie French's triumph, the final thrust of her novel. She delivers it powerfully.

Liz Corbett

BLACK HEART OF JAMAICA

Julia Golding, Egmont, 2008, £8.99, hb, 377pp, 9781405237574

1792. In Cat Royal's fifth adventure, our heroine finds herself and her African virtuoso violinist friend, Pedro, sailing to Jamaica with the Peabody Theatrical Ensemble. Pedro's old master, the Jamaican slave owner, Kingston Hawkins, is determined to make Cat pay for her part in forcing him to free Pedro, and her old enemy, the London gang-member, Billy Shepherd, is now a plantation owner himself. As if that weren't enough, Pedro disappears, possibly to support Toussaint l'Ouverture's slave rebellion on San Domingo.

Before long, Cat finds herself in deep trouble when Hawkins tricks her into becoming his 'indentured servant' and she is forced to learn the hard way about the horrors of slavery. Will she ever escape?

Enjoyed this. Julia Golding is good at getting across the complexities of how the slave system worked, including the psychological effect of

slavery on both masters and slaves themselves. When Billy makes Cat a present of his slave Jenny, Cat learns how easy it is to accept Jenny's ministrations as her due. And Jenny has her own struggles to learn to throw off the shackles of the mind. The issue of slavery is economically and emotionally complex, and Golding does not duck the problems.

The press release points out the novel's parallels with modern forms of slavery based on the Make Trade Fair campaign and Oxfam reports. The book would make an excellent contribution to a study of slavery and its effects both historically and in the modern world.

My one caveat is a technical one. The first 30 pages or so are mainly back-story, where we meet a number of characters from earlier books who then disappear completely. The result is that it takes some time to get into the book which could put off some readers.

For 10 plus.

Elizabeth Hawksley

It took quite a long time to get interested in *Black Heart of Jamaica*, because the plot moves slowly at first. Then I got interested. I enjoyed the plot of Julia Golding's first book *The Diamond of Drury Lane* more than this one because I was more interested in the setting of theatre and London than slavery, slave rebellion, piracy and Jamaica. However, I found that the story gave an interesting interpretation of the slave rebellion and insight into the experience of being a slave. As I have been learning about the history of slavery at school, it was good to read a story in this historical context.

I felt the ending of the book was neat, it wrapped up the plot in a little parcel. I would want to read more of the series.

Ella McNulty, age 13

BY ROYAL COMMAND

Mary Hooper, Bloomsbury, 2008, £6.99, pb, 239pp, 9780747588856

Elizabethan England. In this sequel to *At the House of the Magician*, Lucy, maid to the queen's magician Dr Dee, is now a royal spy. She has been asked to keep her eyes and ears open for treason, for there are those who would prefer Mary, Queen of Scots, to be queen of England. Her friend, Tomas, the queen's jester, tells her that one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting is under suspicion.

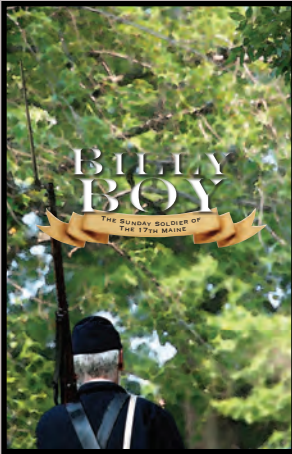
But there are worrying events closer to home. Lucy hears strange sighings in Dr Dee's house. Where do they come from? She can find nothing. Then there is Dr Dee's scryer, Kelly, who can apparently communicate with angels – which Lucy doubts. When she overhears a conversation between the credulous Dr Dee and Kelly, involving an unscrupulous money-making plot, Lucy is horrified. To interfere would be dangerous, but does she have an option?

And what about the new tutor to the Dee daughters, a man who declares he hates the court? Could he be a traitor? Throw in a Frost Fair on the Thames, a visit to Richmond Palace – by royal decree – on Christmas Eve, and Lucy has more than enough on her plate.

Mary Hooper offers a fascinating glimpse into Elizabethan life, for example, Dr Dee's over-worked cook's frantic attempts to create

✿ BILLY BOY

Jean Mary Flahive, Islandport Press, 2007, \$15.95, pb, 293pp, 9781934031131



This is a fictionalized account inspired by the life of the true Billy Laird, the only American Civil War soldier from the state of Maine to be tried for desertion. Billy's mind "just don't work the way most folks' do"; he never learned to read or write and can't figure change. When his friend Harry, the only one in town who's ever stood up for him, enlists to go fight the Confederacy, however, Billy goes against his father's advice and joins as well. Billy manages all right with Harry's help until his fear of gunfire is shifted to an artillery brigade to help care for the horses. Men in the new brigade are merciless to him for his simplicity, so he decides to follow the star his father pointed out to him to return north. He is not far from his posting when he comes across Elijah, a fleeing slave who is almost dead from his exertions. Together, they follow the underground north, one covering for the handicaps of the other.

This first novel is a glorious tour de force. Never have I read a more compelling and sympathetic portrayal from within the mind of the mentally challenged. The dialogue in particular is good, with just a few glitches to throw the reader out. Otherwise, I did not come up for breath as the story rolled along, every beat strong and right. Do not limit this moving tale to young adult readers, as the cover suggests.

Ann Chamberlin

a feast for his important guests – including a sneaky way of presenting carefully spiced and coloured mutton as venison. The Thames Frost Fair is wonderfully evoked, too, as is a court masque with its elaborate costumes and stage effects. Add this to Lucy's nail-biting adventures involving hair's-breadth escapes, midnight excursions and a man who is not who he appears to be, and you have a very readable book as well as a supporting text for Elizabethan studies.

Aimed at girls, 11-14 years.

Elizabeth Hawksley

This book is full of mystery and adventure, with just a hint of romance. The plot is interesting because you honestly do not know what is going to happen. The whole twist with Miss Madeleine Pryor was exciting to read and very unpredictable.

There wasn't much description of the characters because most of them were in the previous book, *At the House of the Magician*, but you find out a lot more about what Dr. Dee and Mr. Kelly are like because of the whole Miss Charity storyline.

The descriptions of the places, especially of the queen's palace and court were very good and it was easy to capture a picture in the mind's eye of what they were like.

Rachel Beggs, age 13

ON ROUGH SEAS

Nancy L. Hull, Clarion, 2008, \$16/C\$18.50, hb, 272pp, hb, 9780618897438

It's 1940, and Alex Curtis is fourteen. He works at his parents' hotel in Dover, England, but his heart already belongs to the sea, in spite of a watery tragedy that befell his family. Against his father's wishes, he still hangs around the docks when he has time, however, and one day Captain Cairns, of the small-but-seaworthy *Britannia*, offers him a part-time job as a galley

boy. Promising his parents he can do both his hotel chores and the galley work, Alex has an increasingly difficult time balancing his desire for adventure with the steadfastness needed by a real seaman; add in the appearance of Eva, a Jewish refugee his own age, the mysterious rumors about military involvement at a nearby castle, and the retreat of British soldiers from France, and suddenly Alex has all the adventure he can handle. This coming-of-age story covers

EDITORS' CHOICE

real history—the remembered horrors of the Great War, the deprivations caused by the current war, the bloodbath at Dunkirk—which may appeal to young adult readers who long for a change from the usual offerings involving wizardry or interplanetary travel. Ages 9-12.

Helene Williams

STELLA STANDS ALONE

A. LaFaye, Simon & Schuster, 2008, \$16.99/C\$19.99, hb, 245pp, 9781416911647

This is an alternate history only in the sense that it posits a plantation run on utopian principles. Once the reader accepts this, the rest—the violence, the utter lawlessness of the neighboring planters—is simply a given. Stella's mother is dead, and her father has been murdered by a covetous neighbor as the story begins. Stella can't find the deed to Oak Grove, and the local bank is foreclosing, claiming that a mortgage has not been paid. Courts, law enforcement, all turn a blind eye toward the plight of this daughter of a non-conformist. Stella begins the fight for her home alone, but she soon receives some unexpected assistance from her aged Cousin Mertle and a Yankee newcomer who thinks he can run a plantation.

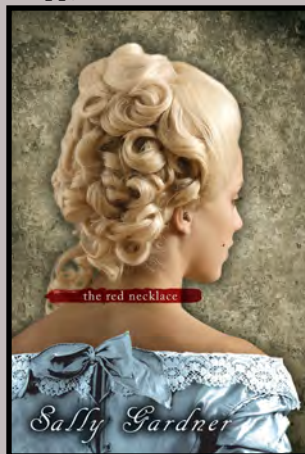
This is an exciting story, with plenty of suspense and danger until the mystery of the missing deed is finally solved. It's also an ugly picture of life after the Civil War in the Deep South, as the evils of inequality continue to be enforced by vigilantes. The dialect and Stella's unlikely upbringing were a problem for me at first, but the story is compelling, and Stella is a convincing, gutsy character. Ages 10-14.

Juliet Waldron

TRIMALCHIO'S FEAST and other mini-mysteries

✿ THE RED NECKLACE

Sally Gardner, Dial, 2008, \$16.99, hb, 384pp, 9780803731004 / Orion, 2008, £6.99, pb, 384pp, 9781842556344



This book is a winner. Set during the French Revolution, the plot centers on a young Gypsy boy, Yann, who uses his mind-reading abilities and ventroquillism as a magician's assistant. Their performance at the chateau of a decadent Marquis brings Yann into contact with the Marquis' crippled and neglected daughter, Sidonie, and the Marquis' mysterious, sinister friend, Count Kalliovski. Yann's growing love for Sidonie and his efforts to help her fuel this intricate fantasy, taking the reader into the extreme excesses of French nobility and the resultant bloody excesses of the Revolution. The reader vividly experiences the extreme entitlement of the wealthy and the hopeless poverty of the peasantry, and, in the end, the fetid, squalid prisons of the time.

Gardner has woven a tense and believable fantasy into a setting of great danger and social turmoil. Kalliovski is surely one of the more evil characters to be found in young adult literature, and his mysterious relationship to both Yann and Sidonie and his menace to them are ever present and always threatening. His lecherous plans for Sidonie remain implicit until she is betrayed and imprisoned as the daughter of a nobleman, but even then the story doesn't sink into sordidness. Suspenseful throughout, *The Red Necklace* builds to a thrilling climax. Young readers of historical fiction and fantasy should clamor for more. Highly recommended, ages 12 and up.

Pamela Ortega

Caroline Lawrence, Orion, 2007, £6.99, pb, 130pp, 9781842555934

Caroline Lawrence uses some of her readers' questions, together with intriguing bits of her own research, as a basis for six stories about the four friends, Flavia, Jonathan, Nubia and Lupus, in her popular Roman Mysteries series.

On a school visit, Caroline Lawrence showed the children a Roman lamp and asked them what they thought it was. A child's comment that you could hide a coin in it, gave her the idea for 'The Case of the Missing Coin', where a stolen gold coin is found inside a Roman pottery oil lamp.

'Trimalchio's Feast' fills in something of Lupus's back story and explains why he doesn't have a proper birthday and what his friends decide to do about it. The resulting party has unexpected consequences!

In 'Jonathan v. Ira', she offers some fascinating details about gladiatorial training and tells us more of Jonathan's experiences in the arena. My problem here is that Jonathan, an asthmatic, apparently *doesn't* wheeze when he's angry, but a steamy atmosphere triggers an attack. As any asthmatic knows, the opposite is true!

'The Case of the Citrus Wood Table' was inspired by her discovery that her replica Roman oil lamp, when lit, allowed oil to 'sweat' through the porous clay. This gave her the final clue which solved the mystery of the missing table.

In 'Death by Vespasian', a pompous *aedile* writes to the emperor Titus about the four children and their ability to solve a murder in a fuller's shop where a man is discovered head down in a jar of urine. This was used to clean clothes, and she explains the whole smelly process.

This book, with its mixture of fascinating details about Roman life, together with more about the four friends' back stories, is sure to appeal to Caroline Lawrence fans. For 10+.

Elizabeth Hawksley

SNATCHED

Graham Marks, Usborne, 2006, £5.99, pb, 297pp, 0746068409

A baby is left in a lion cage at a circus, deserted at one day old; he was rescued and brought up by the circus owner, Mr Hubble, who names him Daniel. From this horrendous start to life the boy becomes an accomplished performer who has no knowledge of the woman who abandoned him or the reason why.

He loves his circus family and the freedom of the lifestyle but is troubled when he experiences a vision of what he presumes to be the future. A strange woman arrives and trouble soon follows her. The resulting kidnapping means Daniel finds himself lost in the streets and dark alleys of Victorian London, where he will be forced to stare the truth in the face.

This suspense-filled book keeps the reader turning pages to unravel the mystery of Daniel's life and dreams. When a lady arrives mysteriously at the circus she affirms his vision, but she shares a secret with Mr Hubble. Tension builds as the story moves on, raising more unanswered questions as we are shown an insight of a life of a circus performer and the close-knit nomadic lifestyle he leads with the unorthodox and fascinating people who make up his extended family.

Superbly written, with memorable and likeable characters, it is set against contrasting backgrounds – the colour and freedom of the circus and the grime of Victorian London – and culminates in a surprising and satisfying ending,

which I think will encourage readers to search out more of the author's work. Excellent!

Val Loh

IN MOZART'S SHADOW

Carolyn Meyer, Harcourt Children's, 2008, \$17.00, pb, 368pp, 9780152055943

You'll see them in early depictions of "The Mozart Family." There they are, sister and brother, hands crossed as they perform some difficult piece on the harpsichord, accompanied by proud Papa Leopold with his violin. Yes, Wolfgang Mozart had a musically talented older sister! We don't know if she would have composed in the same grand manner, but we can certainly wonder. Nannerl, as she was called at home, is a perfect case of what happens when women are not allowed the same opportunities as men. In the late 18th century, a musician's career was, in a limited sense, possible for a woman, but it was not probable without a male relative willing to act as sponsor. In a letter, Wolfgang wrote, "After God, comes Papa," and here, truly, was the insurmountable obstacle. *In Mozart's Shadow* is the story of dashed hopes and talents wasted, of the endless sacrifices required by an implacably controlling father. Having lost his hold on Wolfgang, Leopold never lets go of Nannerl. This is a sad story, but it is one today's children, receiving conflicting messages about women's rights, can learn from.

Juliet Waldron

MAGIC TREE HOUSE: Valley of the Dinosaurs (UK) / Dinosaurs in the Dark (US)

Mary Pope Osborne, Red Fox, 2008, £3.99, pb, 70pp, 9781862302236 / Random House, 1992, \$3.99, pb, 80pp, 0679824111

This read alone book, aimed at 5-7 year olds, with its cheerful black and white drawings and easy-to-read typeface, is the first in a series of historical adventures. In it, two children, Jack and Annie, time travel with the aid of a magic tree house.

In the wood near their house, Jack and Annie find an oak tree with a stepladder which leads to a mysterious tree house filled with old books. They can't resist exploring it. Inside, they find a book called *In the Time of the Dinosaurs*. Jack, who is of a scientific turn of mind, exclaims, 'I wish I could see a pteranodon for real!' Instantly, they are transported back in time and the adventure begins. Jack's problem is that Annie *will* be friendly with the dinosaurs, and he's not at all sure which ones are safe!

In this simple adventure story, the author gives just the right amount of information to enable children to recognize the four different dinosaurs they meet and learn a bit about them. The dinosaurs are carefully chosen for variety. The pteranodon is a small winged reptile, which is vegetarian. The fearsome-looking three-horned triceratops, which is built like a tank, is also vegetarian. The baby anatosauroses in their nursery look harmless, but they are guarded by a large female, who is determined to protect them. Jack and Annie have to pretend to be slow-grazing animals and crawl quietly out of her way. But they discover that all the female wants to eat are magnolia flowers. Lastly, they meet the ferocious tyrannosaurus rex with its long, sharp teeth. It definitely has Jack and Annie on the menu.

Aimed at schools, the website offers teachers' information and various extra activities, including quizzes and games to encourage young readers.

Elizabeth Hawksley

This book has lots of adventure in it. I liked seeing the dinosaur on the hill in the story – it made me happy because I like triceratops. It was a bit scary in some places, like when the T-Rex came because all the other dinosaurs were friendly, but the T-Rex wasn't. I liked the baby dinosaurs in the nests, they were so cute.

The pictures were good, especially the pictures of the dinosaurs. I liked the idea of the magic tree house, and that there was a lot of mystery for example, who was there before the children, and who left the gold medallion. The part where they met the trumpeting dinosaur called the anatosaurus was funny, and I thought it was clever when the boy flew through the air on the back of the pteranodon.

The dinosaur book in the tree house was a good idea because Jack read lots of interesting facts from it. I thought Annie should have been the eldest because she was the one who wasn't scared of everything.

Minna McNulty, age 8 and Louis McNulty, age 5

MAGIC TREE HOUSE: Castle of Mystery (UK) / The Knight at Dawn (US)

Mary Pope Osborne, Red Fox, 2008, £3.99, pb, 77pp, 97818623025243 / Random House, 1993, \$3.99, pb, 67pp, 0679824111

This is the second of Mary Pope Osborne's historical adventure stories for 5-7 year olds. As before, it is a read alone book with black and white drawings and easy-to-read typeface, where Jack and Annie time travel with the aid of a magic tree house.

This time, Annie makes a wish to see a real live knight in armour on a horse. Instantly, they are whisked back to a castle. They cross the apparently unguarded drawbridge, go past a 'hawk house' and peep into the great hall where a feast is going on, complete with roast peacock. Then they find the armoury, where Jack gets stuck inside a helmet, and are discovered. They are thrown into a dungeon, escape, and find a secret stairway which leads from the storeroom up onto the ramparts. But even here they aren't safe. They discover a hole to a chute leading straight to the moat. Both children fall down landing with a splash. They swim to the outer bank, pursued possibly by a crocodile, where a friendly knight on horseback saves them and takes them back to the Magic Tree House.

Sadly, the castle owes more to Disneyland than any real mediaeval castle. Many of the 'facts' Jack notes in his notebook are questionable. I checked with mediaeval historian, Dr Henry Summerson: there are no records of crocodiles in moats (apart from anything else, they'd die of cold); a 'hawk house' was called a mews; and he couldn't identify the 'opening in the stone floor' of the ramparts which led to a chute. (It couldn't be the garderobe which would be in a small room with an identifiable lavatory seat.) And a fall from the ramparts could well be fatal.

The writing's lively enough but I can't really recommend it – certainly not from an historical point of view.

Elizabeth Hawksley

KEEPING SCORE

Linda Sue Park, Clarion, 2008, \$16/C\$18.50, hb, 202pp, 9780618927999

Linda Sue Park has captured 1951 Brooklyn and hit a home run with her latest release *Keeping Score*. Many writers are told to write what they know. Newbery medalist Park did just that. An avid baseball fan, she has written a story of a young girl, Maggie, who loves the sport as much as she does. Maggie, called Maggie-O,

after her father's favorite baseball player, Joe DiMaggio, doesn't play the game herself, but rather keeps the score for each of her beloved Dodgers' games. Even with her enthusiasm and prayers the Dodgers can't seem to win the World Series. Her disappointment multiplies after her letters to Jim, her baseball mentor and friend, go unanswered while he is serving in the army in Korea. Maggie is heartbroken when she finds out that Jim is suffering silently in the United States. What ensues is a moving story of friendship and team loyalty. Like so many touched by the Korean War, I admire her approach and the information added in the Author's Note. *Keeping Score* is a perfect book for baseball fans and even those who never picked up a bat and ball themselves. Ages 9-12.

Nancy Castaldo

ROGUES' GOLD

John Pilkington, Usborne, 2007, £5.99, pb, 215pp, 9780746078792

1590s. Twelve-year-old Ben Button, an apprentice actor, is with the acting company Lord Bonner's Men on their summer tour. Their first stop is Bowford Manor, home of the wealthy Sir James Howard. They are warmly welcomed by their host and the performance goes well, but then disaster strikes. A jewel-encrusted gold plate goes missing and one of the actors, Solomon Tree, is accused of theft.

Sir James's daughter Sarah offers to help. She suspects her unpleasant step-mother and step-uncle, Sir Ralph Gosson, may be behind it. Her tutor, Henry Godfrey, tells them that the plate once belonged to the recently executed Mary, Queen of Scots. It is rumoured to have the names of her supporters engraved on it, and he thinks Sir Ralph may be one of them. Ben and Sarah must work fast if they are to recover the plate, unmask the traitors, and rescue Solomon.

This is an action-packed adventure story, and the author cleverly keeps raising the stakes to keep his readers guessing. There are some nice glimpses into life in a great Elizabethan country house as well as into the world of an Elizabethan acting troupe.

Unfortunately, the misuse of some of the titles rather destroyed my suspension of disbelief. Sir James's wife and daughter would be Lady Howard and Mistress Sarah, not Lady Anne and Lady Sarah (which would mean that they were daughters of a duke, marquess or earl). The scholarly tutor would be Master Godfrey, not Henry Godfrey and he would certainly *never* be referred to as 'Henry' as Sarah casually does. (The young Princess Elizabeth's tutor, Roger Ascham, was called Master Ascham.) It's not difficult to get right: *Debrett's Correct Form* will tell you.

For boys of 10 and up, though girls will enjoy it, too.

Elizabeth Hawksley

John Pilkington is an exciting and adventurous writer. He has a good use of similes such as 'he squirmed like a rabbit'. I find that he uses too few adjectives, but creates a vivid image of the story in your head. I like the idea that Solomon, a friend of the main character, Ben Button, is accused of theft because usually stories always make the baddies get sent to prison.

Rogue's Gold is a fantastically exciting book featuring many fist-clenching moments, such as when Ben's friend gets sent to prison. Even though I thoroughly enjoyed the book, I thought it could be a bit longer and more complicated because it was very straightforward, it didn't

contain many things happening at the same time. The author is clearly an excellent writer but needs to make his sentences a bit more easily understandable. Sometimes I just skipped a few sentences because it was too hard to understand what he was trying to say.

Hal McNulty, age 10

FEASTING THE WOLF

Susan Price, Usborne, 2007, £5.99, pb, 224pp, 9780746077009

"Feasting the wolf" means leaving dead on the battlefield – and there is plenty to feast on in this dark tale of Viking adventure.

Two 15-year-old Shetland boys, Ottar and Ketil, leave home to join a Viking warship headed for the north-east coast of England. Ottar, a landless youngest son, dreams of gaining money and status; Ketil, from a close-knit farming family, is happy at home and reluctant to leave, but pushed into it by his friendship with Ottar. When the boys join the crew of *Wave Strider* they take an oath to obey the master, Eyulf – but Eyulf is a weak leader who allows his men to torment Ketil. The boys' friendship is tested when Ketil rebels and goes to join another ship led by Thorkel, a hard man but a better master.

The story itself is quite slight and the interest is all in the tensions between the characters. We see how the Vikings dig in and build a fort from which they can attack Saxon settlements, and how they survive the long, cold winter. In the spring Thorkel's and Eyulf's bands are sent to attack and pillage a monastery, and it is here that the final drama is played out. The raiders are hard, pitiless men, but they have their own code of honour. Thorkel deals fairly with his men, protects them and commands their respect, yet he is ruthless in his treatment of Saxon captives, who are either sold as slaves or killed. A sense of horror builds through the final part of the book, and the writing conveys this: a nun expecting to have her throat cut "shrilled like a rabbit in a snare, in a terror that turned Ketil cold."

This is powerful writing that tells it as it must have been. It's a bitter story, but compelling and utterly convincing.

Ann Turnbull

LILIES FOR LOVE

Felicity Pulman, Random House Australia, 2008, AU\$17.95, pb, 364pp, 9781741662900

During the civil war between King Stephen and Queen Matilda in the 1140s, a young girl named Janna arrives at Wiltune Abbey. She is seeking refuge from the man who murdered her mother as well as the identity of her father. Although the abbess had once known Janna's mother, she doesn't help her. Among Janna's few possessions is a letter he wrote to her mother. A nun teaches her to read, but it only suggests another place to look. After a puzzling encounter with Queen Matilda, a visitor to the Abbey who gives the reader, at least, a clue to the identity of Janna's father, she leaves to continue her quest.

This is Book Three in the Janna Mysteries intended for the young adult reader. Pulman is an award-winning author, and her research provides a lot of color and interesting facts about early medieval life. The heroine is sophisticated and experienced as she solves mysteries and makes a love match between her friend and the abbey's bailiff, despite the fact that she is an adolescent.

Audrey Braver

WILLOWS FOR WEeping

Felicity Pulman, Random House Australia, 2008, AU\$17.95, pb, 313pp, 9781741662504

There is always a problem being an adult reviewer of a children's novel; one is pickier than the young readers the novel is written for. As a writer I felt this mediaeval mystery, fourth in the Janna Mysteries, suffered because it was part of a series. The basic storyline for the whole series is simple. Janna's mother dies, and Janna discovers a letter with information about her father. She sets off to find him and gets involved in a series of mysteries on the way. Each mystery is a separate book. Janna is with a group of pilgrims in this book, gets involved with spies and a murder, but still hasn't found her father at the end, although she now has a name for him. Frankly the storyline struck me as good for one novel, not a series. We lose sight of Janna and why she wants to see her father in the murder mystery part of the novel, and the novel loses strength because of this. After all, Janna is the main character.

There is much that is good: teens will enjoy the mediaeval details and the political machinations of Empress Matilda and King Stephen, as well as discovering who the murderer is. Sometimes, though, I felt the pace dragged as the story bogged down in unnecessary historical asides. Despite the dull bits, I think teen readers who like history would enjoy the series. Janna is very much a teenager.

Patrika Salmon

JULIET'S MOON

Ann Rinaldi, Harcourt Children's, \$17.00, hb, 256pp, 9780152061708

In the latter years of the Civil War, all the niceties and structure of 12-year-old Juliet Bradshaw's life are turned upside down. Her home is destroyed and her father killed by the Yankees while her brother Seth rides with Quantrill's Raiders, a radical group of Confederate soldiers. Arrested along with other young females and accused of spying, Juliet is held in a ramshackle building and is one of the few survivors when it shockingly collapses.

Juliet's maturity awakens as she faces her new reality as history unfolds with the flowing ease and polished storytelling that is unique to Rinaldi. A new relationship is forged between Seth and Juliet, one that balances the lines between siblings and parenting. Drama persistently soars into Juliet's life, though real hardship seems to be fleeting; *Juliet's Moon* lacks the emotion usually found in Rinaldi's writing.

Rinaldi introduces the reader to a whole host of characters besides William Quantrill: there is a passing introduction to Jesse James and a very toned-down version of 'Bloody' Bill Anderson.

A recommended read, interesting and historical, but not up to Rinaldi's usual standard.

Wendy A. Zollo

THE ROAD TO VENGEANCE (The Strongbow Saga, Book Three)

Judson Roberts, HarperCollins, 2008, \$16.95/C\$19.99, hb, 352pp, 9780060813048

This is the third book in Roberts' Viking adventure series and begins where the last book finished. Recommended as reading for the over-fourteens, especially for boys, it's a straightforward historical adventure story, a tale simply told.

In Frankia (France) after a successful raiding voyage, the hero, Halfdan Hroriksson, youngest member of the *Gull's* crew, is now a scout, with information needed by Viking leader, Ragna. Halfdan is still waiting to take revenge, but life is complicated. He has a hostage to ransom, and

the Vikings are divided on their future. Should they go on to Paris or should they take their loot and go home? Halfdan doesn't care. He wants those villainous Vikings who murdered his half-brother.

The Vikings advance on Paris, and Halfdan's woodcraft skills win him further honours. In the great battle against the Franks he saves the Vikings from defeat and so has enough support to challenge and kill one of those he'd vowed vengeance against.

It's a painless way for teenagers to learn some history, a roaring adventure story for boys, and good solid history about a little-known Viking story, but as an adult I would have liked a little subtlety in the telling. Males who are reluctant readers should enjoy this, as would any young history enthusiast.

Patrika Salmon

LA PETITE FOUR

Regina Scott, Razorbill, 2008, \$8.99/C \$10.00, pb, 272pp, 9781595142085

Lady Emily Southwell, Miss Priscilla Tate and the Misses Ariadne and Daphne Cordebas have been inseparable friends at the Barnsley School for Young Ladies. They call themselves La Petite Four, and they expect to take London by storm during their debut into society at Emily's come-out ball. The only problem is they must first save Emily from an arranged marriage. In order to do so, they must solve a few mysteries. Before long it is obvious that La Petite Four is a force to be reckoned with!

Regina Scott, author of numerous adult romance novels, has written this early 19th-century romance novel for young adults. Although her teen characters are fun, quirky and entertaining, they are not well developed. Ms. Scott has an excellent plot and four potentially interesting, mischievous characters. Unfortunately, the story moves along too quickly, and the audience does not get to know the characters well enough to be engaged. The novel is lightly entertaining, but lacks the depth of Ms. Scott's adult romance novels.

Nan Curnutt

DOGFIGHT

Craig Simpson, Corgi, 2008, £5.99, pb, 390pp, 9780552556745

Trondheim, 1940. Norway is under German occupation. They want its iron ore, and its deep fjords to hide their battleships and U-boats from the British Navy. Ordinary civilians are suffering restrictions, shortages and harassment. Sixteen-year-old Finn and his friend, Loki, are determined to join the Resistance movement, but who can be trusted? There are collaborators in their midst, and the consequences of betrayal can be death.

Then Uncle Heimar asks them to help him set the flares to guide the parachute drop of an English spy, an expert cartographer whose job is to map German war installations, including warships and radio stations. But things go wrong and soon Finn and Loki are in deep trouble.

As the Nazi grip tightens on Trondheim, it becomes increasingly difficult to get the vital map back to Britain...

'High octane excitement', says the blurb and that about sums it up. The pace is fast and furious and Simpson doesn't pull his punches about the consequences of being found out. There are deaths as well as thrilling escapes.

With its illustrations and statistics of the war planes involved, together with a 1940s map of Trondheim, this book is presumably aimed at

boys of 11 plus, though girls who like adventure should enjoy it as well. The unobtrusive historical research gives an excellent picture of life under Nazi occupation, from the secret printing presses to the headquarters of the SS at the Kristiansen fortress where summary executions of 'traitors' were carried out. Everything is in short supply from clothes to food and petrol and Simpson makes us feel the privations as well as the dangers.

Norway's story of the war years is often forgotten, and this book is a timely reminder of Norwegian bravery and suffering.

Elizabeth Hawksley

MARY ANN AND MISS MOZART

Ann Turnbull, Usborne, 2007, £5.99, pb, 167pp, 9780746073117

London, 1764. Twelve-year-old Mary Ann is thrilled to be going to Miss Neave's Boarding School for Young Ladies at 6 Chelsea Walk. She longs to be an opera singer, and here she will have singing and harpsichord lessons, as well as deportment and all the other accomplishments 18th century young ladies needed to make a good marriage.

The school visits the nearby Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens to hear the musical prodigies of the age, the Mozart children, play and sing, and Mary Ann is more than ever determined to sing professionally. Then disaster strikes. Her father's latest business venture fails and economies are needed. Mary Ann must leave school – before the school concert, where she's due to sing several solos.

In desperation, she comes up with a plan, involving a late night excursion to Ranelagh, to make enough money for the school fees. But things go disastrously wrong, and soon Mary Ann is in serious trouble...

I've long admired Ann Turnbull's subtlety. On the surface, the story is simple, but underneath there are important issues. For example, the family business involves slave-trading. When Mary Ann exclaims '*How cruel – to seize people!*', her brother reassures her, '*They're not seized; not by Englishmen. Other Africans sell them to the traders.*' She is troubled about it for a while but then forgets it. A lesser writer would have had Mary Ann immediately becoming anti-slavery. Ann Turnbull allows her to react as an 18th century 12-year-old probably would have done, and it's far more telling.

The downturn in the family fortunes also points up how vulnerable females were. Mary Ann's schooling must be sacrificed, but not her brother's. Her sister's dowry disappears – and with it her fiancé. A number of points about class, gender and race are quietly embedded in the plot like small moral time-bombs which resonate long after the book is finished.

For girls aged 10+.

Elizabeth Hawksley

Mary Ann and Miss Mozart is a story about a girl in the 18th century who goes to a finishing school to learn music. The plot is quite thin, and with few twists and turns. However, it is an enjoyable story and you can get caught up in the characters and the events. The descriptions of clothes, people and places within the story are informative and evoke clear pictures in your mind. It gives an accurate picture of 18th-century life for Mary Ann who is the main character. Mary Ann is likeable, and her emotions and the way she's feeling are described well and we follow her goal of becoming a singer in the story. I found the end slightly disappointing as it

didn't tell me much about what really happened, and I found Mary Ann's story's cut short when the reader is still interested in what's happening to her. Mainly this is a very readable book that you will like, but not get a huge amount out of.

Ella McNulty, age 12

CLIMBING THE STAIRS

Padma Venkatraman, Putnam, 2008, \$16.99/C\$18.95, hb, 9780399247460

Fifteen-year-old Vidya lives in Bombay in British-occupied India. It is 1941, and while many other Brahmin girls are living cloistered, marriage-focused lives, Vidya has more freedom, and cherishes it. She climbs trees, is best friends with a Jewish girl, enjoys sports at school, and would like to go to college. She dreads the thought that she might be married young, as her cousin will soon be. Vidya and her brother Kitta, along with their parents, spend summers in Madras with their father's relatives. This extended household is extremely traditional, with men living upstairs and women downstairs, meeting only when women serve men their meals. Vidya's world changes overnight when catastrophe strikes and they have to move into this household. She is worked hard, loses all her freedoms, and her new school and teacher in no way compare with those she left behind. She can't even enjoy the companionship of her brother. Eventually, she finds the library on the men's floor of the house, and begins sneaking in to take solace in the books. When she meets an appealing young man also living in the house, she starts to question her lack of interest in the opposite gender. However, the focus isn't always so narrow. The British occupation, pacifism, and the encroaching war all play critical roles in this first novel.

While the dialogue seemed stilted at times, the novel slowly drew me in to a very unfamiliar world. The cultural, religious, and period details, along with a most engaging protagonist, led to a satisfying read.

Trudi E. Jacobson

THE EMPTY KINGDOM: The Mark of Solomon, Book Two

Elizabeth E. Wein, Viking, 2008, \$16.99, hb, 208pp, 9780670062737

In the conclusion to Wein's impressive Mark of Solomon duology (and fifth in her Arthurian/Aksumite series for younger readers, set in the 6th century), young Telemakos, the half-Ethiopian grandson of Artos, King of Britain, survives the perils of the court at Himyar (Southern Arabia) and is reunited with his family in Aksum (Ethiopia).

As in *The Lion Hunter* (2007), Telemakos continues to struggle with the paradoxical situation in which he finds himself. On the one hand, he experiences personal kindness and generosity from the Himyarite ruler and his family; on the other, he is suspected of spying and under the threat of death, constantly watched and guarded wherever he goes and prevented from seeing his beloved younger sister Athena. Moreover, despite his princely birth, he is haunted by nightmares resulting from captivity and abuse in the past and must struggle with ordinary tasks because he has lost an arm. Although he gives way to his fears at times, he masters them with courage, resourcefulness, and determination: despite the loss of an arm, he manages to kill a lion; despite being closely watched, he warns the Aksumites of a plot to seize islands in their possession; at the end he even succeeds in escaping by drugging all aboard a Himyarite ship and swimming to safety.

Yet despite the trials and hardships he endures, he rejects vengefulness in favour of forgiveness and compassion.

This is a thoughtful, well-crafted story, involving and suspenseful, and it captures the predicament of children: beloved, yet under an adult authority that can seem harsh and arbitrary; struggling for understanding, yet lacking the necessary knowledge; fluctuating between despair over embarrassing failure and satisfaction over hard-won success.

Ray Thompson

BEFORE GREEN GABLES

Budge Wilson, Puffin, 2008, £9.99, hb, 480pp, 9780141384122 / Putnam, 2008, \$22.95, hb, 416pp, 9780399154683

Having never liked *Anne of Green Gables*, I didn't expect to enjoy this book. How wrong I was!

For this prequel to the classic story, Budge Wilson, who lives in Nova Scotia, has carefully followed up every clue in L. M. Montgomery's books and undertaken extensive research about life in Nova Scotia in the 19th century. Her aim was to imagine how Anne, coming from such a deprived background, could have become the articulate and fascinating child who eventually arrives at Green Gables.

The story begins before Anne's birth and takes us up to her arrival at Prince Edward Island. Orphaned, then twice adopted to work as a little slave by hard-pressed poor families with too many children, Anne makes friends and finds hope and encouragement in everything that happens to her. She struggles for the right to go to school and develops a thirst for books and knowledge. Her outer life is endless drudgery but her inner world is full of joy and richly imaginative. She becomes deeply attached to certain people in her life and several times is distraught when she is removed from them with only an hour or so's notice and taken to a completely new environment. The book is saved from being sentimental by its true-to-life depiction of the harsh lives of poor Nova Scotians. The lot of women—the hard, exhausting work and the endless cycle of child-bearing—is graphically portrayed, as is the countryside of Nova Scotia—briefly warm and beautiful in summer and autumn, but deep in snow for much of the year.

What make this book so good are the characters. Every major character (and there are many) is fully developed and understood—and this helps to make this long, often quite repetitive story so gripping. Anne herself is an endearing creation with her vitality, chattiness and capacity for love. A long, absorbing read.

Ann Turnbull

NONFICTION

OTHER PEOPLE'S DAUGHTERS: The Life and Times of the Governess

Ruth Brandon, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008, £20.00, hb, 303pp, 9780297851134

The governess has played a more important role in literature than she was ever afforded in real life. Most did not have the passion of Jane Eyre or the wit and determination of Becky Sharp. They were the 'shabby gentile': not rich enough to live independent lives, denied a profession but considered too high-class for any other work, they remained poor, lonely and unfilled lives somewhere between the 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' of the newly-

emerging rich middle-classes, looked down on by their employers but snubbed by the servants, away from friends and family. Not being fully educated themselves, they passed on their limited knowledge on to the next generation of women, thus continuing and compounding the inadequate education of their gender. Mary Wollstonecraft's conclusion to this sorry state was that until women had access to education, they could never achieve full equality with men. It took a very long time. Too long.

History has not been kind to governesses. Records of their lives are sparse and tantalisingly brief. However, Brandon has woven the personal accounts of a handful of very different women into a compelling insightful narrative. Highly readable, it is essential reading for those researching the nineteenth century and even more so to remind people why education for everyone, whatever their situation, is essential, not only for personal fulfilment, but for society as a whole.

Sally Zigmond

ROYAL AFFAIRS

Leslie Carroll, NAL, 2008, \$14.00, pb, 384pp, 9780451223982

In the foreword to *Royal Affairs*, Leslie Carroll (who writes biographical historical fiction under the pen name Amanda Elyot) describes our ongoing fascination with the sex scandals of the wealthy and powerful—an attribute that connects today's gossip-hungry information society to the past. Many of the better-known stories in *Royal Affairs* will be familiar to readers of historical fiction set in Britain, and there are no groundbreaking revelations in the book, but Carroll's light, casual writing style makes this an entertaining read nonetheless. Each individual affair gets its own section, effectively breaking the book into bite-sized chunks. She quotes directly from primary sources when available, and she blends fact and speculation carefully. Because this is a survey of royal peccadilloes, and because there's a lot of historical territory to cover, there isn't a lot of depth or detail. However, Carroll gives enough of the story to intrigue readers and perhaps inspire further research.

Nanette Donohue

THE TEXAS RANGERS: Wearing the Cinco Peso, 1821-1900

Mike Cox, Forge, 2008, \$25.95, hb, 492 pp, 9780312873868

This is the first in a planned two-volume series about the famous fighting men who came to be known as the Texas Rangers. The first volume focuses on the rangers' formation in 1821, a hybrid growing out of the traditions of game wardens of 14th-century England and hard fighting warriors of the French and Indian War, and the mounted tradition of law enforcement that existed in the widespread Spanish Empire.

The first Texas Rangers were a handful of men formed from settlers of the vast Texas territory who fought the Karankawa Indians to near extinction. The next generation became a larger, better trained force to meet the needs of a growing Anglo population. As the century wore on, the enemies of the rangers grew and changed from outlaws to Comanche, to Mexican soldados and banditos, to Union soldiers. The nature of Texas topography, expansion, and sparse population ensured that its famous fighting force would always have unique responsibilities and challenges.

Written in a clear, engaging style, Mike Cox's

scrutiny does not spare the rangers their fierce and often controversial history that includes accusations of vigilante-style racism and murder as well as personal heroism. Over its first eighty years, he illuminates how this band of men became a defining force in the creation of a state. In so doing, the men who wore the *cinco peso* rode off into both history and legend.

Eileen Charbonneau

THE QUEEN'S KNIGHT: The Extraordinary Life of Queen Victoria's Most Trusted Confidant

Martyn Downer, Corgi, 2008, 576pp, pb, £9.99, 9780552155083

The eponymous knight is Major-General Sir Howard Elphinstone, who served Queen Victoria for 30 years. A decorated war hero from the Crimean campaign, Elphinstone was recruited by the Prince Consort to be Governor to the young Prince Arthur, Victoria and Albert's seventh child. Elphinstone then stayed with the Queen, eventually becoming her aide-de-camp and eminence grise. This is not just a highly capable biography, but provides a fascinating insight into the intrigues and minutiae of the Victorian court and how Elphinstone, who was not a natural diplomat or temperamentally suited to the demands of court life, had to adapt to the strange world of the monarchy, especially when Victoria withdrew from public life following the death of Albert. Victoria's stubborn pro-German sympathies and then her infatuation with the Rasputin-like John Brown and his Highlander coterie are examined with revealing analysis. Victoria's other children also valued Elphinstone as a friend and advisor, and Downer narrates in depth the sad circumstances of Victoria's eldest child, Vicky, married to the enlightened Fritz, son of the Kaiser, whose untimely death ushered in the accession of the awful Wilhelm II.

Doug Kemp

FABERGE'S EGGS

Toby Faber, Macmillan, 2008, £17.99, hb, 323pp, 9781405053884

Between 1885 and 1916, Carl Faberge made fifty jewelled eggs. These were given as Easter presents from Russia's last two tsars to their wives. Mementoes of the opulent lifestyle of the ill-fated Romanov dynasty the eggs have fascinated collectors since the revolution. In all, fifty eggs were fashioned in the workshop of Carl Faberge and 46 are known to have survived.

The Faberges were a family of jobbing jewellers in St Petersburg of French Huguenot descent. When Carl Faberge fashioned the first jewelled egg for the Tsarina of Tsar Alexander III as an Easter surprise it was the beginning of a family tradition. To many, the eggs are the epitome of kitsch, priced far beyond their intrinsic worth but they continue to fascinate as reminders of the tragedy of the Romanovs.

Toby Faber gives a fascinating account of the two families, Faberge and Romanov, and how their histories are both inextricably intertwined.

Ann Oughton

THE KIT-CAT CLUB: Friends Who Imagined a Nation

Ophelia Field, HarperPress, 2008, £25, hb, 544pp, 9780007178926

In the late 1690s, a bookseller named Jacob Tonson began a scheme of paying young writers by feeding them in return for the first publishing option on their works. Field claims that Tonson defined the shape of modern publishing. His

partner was Christopher (Kit) Cat, a pie-maker. The book begins with the funeral (reburial) of Dryden in 1700, sketching details of the various Kit Cat members, such as Congreve, Addison and Vanbrugh. There is a wealth of detail (occasionally too much?) and given how few papers have survived from the club itself, this is a real achievement. The book also gives a fascinating slant to the Whig political agenda and the central role played by the Kit Cats but, as the author says, it is also a book about "being a writer." As well, it is a history of *The Spectator* and its influence on the political scene. While it is a book about men, the author does include the wives and families of the Kit Cats in an exploration of the members' private lives. An excellent book for contemporary detail and personalities.

Geraldine Perriam

THE FIRST BLITZ

Neil Hanson, Doubleday, 2008, £17.99, hb, 436pp, 9780385611701

This is an accessible and highly readable account of the German bombing of London and other strategic targets in England during WW1. Germany's intention was to force Britain to accept peace terms, having suffered the destructive force of these new and terrifying terror weapons, which delivered death from the skies directly to the (then) world's largest city with the newly developed longer range bombing aircraft.

It is a fascinating account of typical initial British bad planning and ad hoc make-do, with growing domestic panic and collapsing morale in the London population, allied to a German iron will to achieve their aims. Fortunately for both Britain and France, Germany lacked the strategic vision to make best and most lethal use of these new weapons.

It is interesting to note that while we are still debating the ethics underlying the bombing of German cities in WW2, Germany was the first country to adopt such methods and their explicit intention was to cause as many civilian casualties as possible, to destroy English morale in the capital, as well as attacking *inter alia* munitions factories, communication hubs and Government buildings. Germany also developed and intended to use highly effective incendiary bombs to ruin both Paris and London, and would indeed have done so had it not been for the end of the War in 1918 – very like the bomb that the Allies were to use to inflict such destruction on Hamburg, Dresden and other German cities in WW2.

Doug Kemp

PAINTER IN A SAVAGE LAND

Miles Harvey, Random House, 2008, \$27.00/ C\$32.00, hb, 369pp, 978375501517

This book is subtitled *The Strange Saga of the First European Artist in North America*. Jacques LeMoyné de Morgues sailed for the New World in 1564 with a French expedition. The purpose was to establish a French colony in "La Florida" in competition with the Spanish. While LeMoyné was the mapmaker, he also documented in paintings and sketches the flora and fauna of the area as well as daily life among the Timucuan Indians who occupied that part of the Florida coast. Upon his return, LeMoyné, a Protestant, found France inhospitable and moved to London where he spent the rest of his life. Before Sir Walter Raleigh's expeditions to found the colony of Virginia, he is known to have conferred with LeMoyné.

Mr. Harvey has done a nice job of combining

interesting detail with scholarly research that makes what, in other hands, might have been a dry academic treatise into a lively read. He incorporates firsthand accounts from others who were on the same voyage of discovery with LeMoyné and uses woodcuts made from LeMoyné's paintings to illustrate certain passages.

Audrey Braver

BEST OF COVERED WAGON WOMEN

Ed. Kenneth L. Holmes; New Introduction by Michael L. Tate, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2008, \$19.95, pb, 304 pages, 9780806139142

Collected in *Best of Covered Wagon Women* are eight mid-19th century accounts of the Western overland journey. These journals and several letters describe the experiences of nine women relocating from America's East and Midwest – what these women refer to as "the states" – to the Oregon and California territories. This astounding migration, represented by these accounts over its more than twenty-year span from 1841 to 1869, is estimated to have included half a million people. So many that "the Indians conjectured that since so many white people had crossed this large region, the lands east of the Mississippi river must be all but abandoned" (p. 10, Introduction).

The common concerns expressed by the lady diarists were water, wood or other fuel, and grass for their livestock. They feelingly describe the heartache of parting from relatives in the East, the loss of family during the journey, and the general uncertainty of their undertaking. Though the women had a far different expectation of comfort than we do today – several were pregnant during the journey and never remarked upon it – yet they admired the spectacular landscape through which they traveled and we feel akin to them in their pleasure; "husband brought me a large bunch of flowers, which he said was growing close to the snow" (p. 211, Amelia Knight).

Eva Ulett

FATAL AVENUE: A Traveller's Guide to the Battlefields of Northern France and Flanders 1346-1945

Richard Holmes, Vintage, 2008, £9.99, pb, 582pp, 9781844139385

This is the latest paperback edition of a book originally published in 1992, and which neatly combines both guidebook and military history. Professor Holmes writes with his usual lucidity and grasp of complex issues, together with an eye for the small details that bring history alive. So at Loos in September 1915 Sir Douglas Haig concluded that the wind was suitable for the first British use of poison gas on the battlefield by watching the smoke from an ADC's cigarette drifting to the north-west.

Highly recommended, especially for anyone travelling in the area covered by the book.

Ann Lyon

MARLBOROUGH: England's Fragile Genius

Richard Holmes, Harper, 2008, £25, hb, 564pp, 9780007225717

John Churchill, later Duke of Marlborough is a difficult subject for a biographer. In his early years he is a cavalier courtier, and later both high politician in England, political head of the coalition against Louis XIV after the death of William III, and commander in chief. Soldier politicians are common, but high politics is frequently the epilogue, not a concurrent

activity.

Richard Holmes's strength is that he looks through Marlborough's eyes at events. The abolition of the pike, yes the pike trailed as late as 1700; the thin red line to deliver devastating fire power; the concern over the well being and morale of his troops. Marlborough's achievement was to change his army into the force that Napoleon would recognise a century later. Holmes's analysis of the campaigns is excellent with its emphasis on the strategic manoeuvre, and Marlborough's tactical control of the battlefield. Unfortunately the maps are rather uninspired and sometimes located in pages distant from the narrative.

Holmes understands that Marlborough's psychological trauma from the Civil War and his father's financial distress dominated Marlborough's motives: his acceptance of payment from his lover Lady Castlemaine, "He does it for his bread," said Charles II; his betrayal of James II; his contact with the exiled Jacobites throughout his life; and his attitude to wealth and titles.

Holmes treats politics in less detail, over emphasises the role of Marlborough's wife and underestimates the Queen's political influence. By assuming that personal relationships and interest are the main political drivers, he neglects important policy differences over the union, church, succession and the war. One would not look to this biography for an understanding of Marlborough as high politician. However, if a biography's main aim is that of portraying a person's character, Holmes succeeds.

Bill Dodds

THE FEARS OF HENRY IV

Ian Mortimer, Vintage, 2008, £8.99, pb, 387pp, 9781844135295

England 1399: Henry of Lancaster has lost all that he was born to, exiled for life by the increasingly tyrannical and capricious King Richard. Henry, renowned throughout Christendom as champion jousting and crusader against the pagan, a deeply spiritual man who walked in the footsteps of Christ at Jerusalem, now chooses a dangerous path. He returns to England, enforces Richard's abdication and death. Crowned as King Henry IV, this man of wit, a lover of books and music, has made himself England's shield at a time of repeated crop failure, chronic money shortage, disaffection of the arrogant nobility and the spectre of civil war. Henry's suffering in his fatal disease would make the most censorious angels weep but he outlasts the charismatic heroes of the age – Glendower, Hotspur – and his two marriages were exceptionally happy.

Ian Mortimer produces lovely turns of phrase: 'shades of friendship,' 'the dark of enmity,' and provides eye-opening pictures of furious noblemen hurling their hoods to the ground when challenging one another, or the King. This bold and justifiably confident writer can make tax assessments and declining wood revenue into compelling reading.

A fresh and finely detailed account of late mediaeval England.

Nancy Henshaw

ISABELLA DE' MEDICI: The Glorious Life and Tragic End of a Renaissance Princess (UK) / MURDER OF A MEDICI PRINCESS (US)

Caroline P. Murphy, Faber & Faber, 2008, £20, hb, 360pp, 9780571230303 / Oxford, 2008, \$24.95, hb, 416pp, 9780195314397

Charming, amusing, intelligent and immensely wealthy, the beautiful Isabella de' Medici strutted her stuff centre stage as an indulged star of the most powerful house of Medici. Her father, Duke Cosimo de' Medici, allowed her a freedom unknown to any other woman in Renaissance Florence. A born hedonist, Isabella lived for pleasure holding sway over a court of nobles, musicians and artists. It could not last, for when her father died he was succeeded by Isabella's brother, Francesco, and her life changed dramatically for the worse.

Caroline Murphy relies on newly discovered documents in Italian archives for this latest history of one of the most powerful families in Renaissance Italy, bringing the true story of Isabella in all its colour and her tragic end to the page.

Ann Oughton

EARLS OF PARADISE

Adam Nicolson, Harper Press, 2008, £25.99, hb, 298pp, 9780007240524

This book explores the vision of Arcadia told through the life of a place and its inhabitants. The place is Wilton, in Wiltshire, the estate of the Earls of Pembroke. The history covers the period between 1520 to the 1640s, with a small, final chapter for the period 1640-1830. The work includes the histories of tenants and labourers as well as that of the Pembrokes (Herberts). Nicolson weaves a complex and clever narrative in a history of the landscape and its occupation. The political, economic, social and cultural forces that shaped the landscape are examined and discussed in extensive and well-researched detail. It is a rich and beautifully written narrative. The Pembroke lands are "drenched in continuities" that are brought to life. Philip Sidney and his sister, Countess of Pembroke also feature, with an account of Sidney's *Arcadia* woven into the background of house, estate, political landscape and cultural vision. There are two good maps and a genealogical table. A splendid book that is highly recommended.

Geraldine Perriam

THE WOLVES AT THE DOOR

Judith L. Pearson, Lyons, 2008, \$15.95, pb, 260pp, 9781599210728

Virginia Hall wanted nothing more than to work as an officer in the U.S. Foreign Service, and she was on a path to achieve her goal when a freak accident caused her to lose her leg. Despite her robust health and athleticism, her disability kept her from her chosen career. However, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) noticed her talents with languages and her desire to help combat Hitler's plans to conquer Europe, and they trained her as a spy and deployed her to France. While in France, Hall worked closely with the French Resistance in a number of roles, all of them dangerous. Her bravery is often astonishing, and her heroic actions contributed to the eventual liberation of France from the Nazis.

Virginia Hall was extremely modest, and unlike many of her colleagues, she left no memoir or narrative of her experiences during World War II. Her life is one of great, yet quiet, heroism, one that easily could have been lost to history. By capturing her actions and adventures in this biography, Pearson has preserved the legacy of Virginia Hall for future generations.

Nanette Donohue

FRANKLIN AND LUCY

Joseph E. Persico, Random House, 2008, \$28/

£33.00, hb, 418pp, 9781400064427

In *Franklin and Lucy*, historian Joseph Persico follows up his revealing work, *Roosevelt's Secret War*, with a more personal look at the great president, especially the roles of the many great women in his life. We read of his redoubtable mother, Sara, the paradoxical relationship with his wife Eleanor, his many very personal assistants, and finally the enduring love of his life, Lucy Mercer Rutherford. All of these women, remarkable in themselves, had a profound influence on FDR, not only supplying the necessary support to overcome his enormous physical infirmity, but the sustenance to lead the entire world out of the sickness of depression and war.

By examining these and other relationships with the women closest to him, we come to know better a man who often chose to remain hidden behind a bodyguard of deception. Although this book may seem to plow the same ground as another recent work, Doris Kearns Goodwin's *No Ordinary Time*, it stands as a complementary rather than competing piece. The author makes use of new material, most of all some recently discovered letters between Lucy and Franklin, as well as a large body of personal reflections and diaries. With these, Mr. Persico manages to slip us under the curtain of FDR's often veiled life, providing valuable insight into a complex, and historically significant, mind.

Ken Kreckel

THE DRAGON'S TRAIL: The Biography of Raphael's Masterpiece

Joanna Pitman, Simon & Schuster, 2008, \$15.00/£17.50, pb, 292pp, 9780743265140

St. George and the Dragon was painted by the young, talented Raphael for the Duke of Urbino in 1504; the commission catapulted Raphael into the competitive art world alongside Michelangelo and Da Vinci, and cemented relations between the Italian Duke and Henry VII of England, who was to be the recipient of this small but powerful and enduring painting. Pitman follows *St. George* as it passes from kings—Henry VIII and Charles I, among others—to British nobles, only to be sold to a French collector, then sold again to Catherine the Great of Russia, and, in a case of 20th-century international art intrigue, smuggled out of Russia to Germany, on its way to its current home in the United States, in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. With the enthusiasm of an amateur sleuth, Pitman tracks the 500-year (thus far) history of the painting, backed up with occasional assistance from scholars in the art world. At each of the painting's stops, Pitman recreates the people and atmosphere of the time and place, providing a mini-course in art history as well as some fast-paced adventure that makes for an entertaining read.

Helene Williams

THE FIRST QUEEN OF ENGLAND: The Myth of "Bloody Mary" (US) / MARY TUDOR: The First Queen (UK)

Linda Porter, St. Martin's, 2008, \$27.95, hb, 464pp, 9780312368371 / Portrait, 2007, £20.00, hb, 400pp, 9780749951443

If any historical figure is due for a reassessment, it's surely Mary Tudor, characterized alternatively as a bloodthirsty fanatic and as a pathetic hag. In this lucid and intelligently written biography, Porter does an admirable job of showing us the woman behind the myth.

Porter gives us a full picture of Mary, reminding us that the queen who is often regarded as dour and sickly enjoyed fine clothes, gambling, and hunting. Her religious persecutions are not glossed over, but are placed in the context of their time and in that of Mary's more positive actions regarding religion. Especially interesting is Porter's examination of Mary's fraught and highly ambivalent relationship with her younger sister.

It is not the "Bloody" Mary of popular history, or the lonely wife familiar from historical fiction, who emerges here, but the courageous woman who fought through many obstacles to get to the throne, then to stay there. Porter is to be commended for bringing this complex and much-maligned woman to life.

Susan Higginbotham

CLEOPATRA AND ANTONY

Diana Preston, Doubleday, 2008, £18.99, hb, 398pp, 9780385612456

Diana Preston's book examines the dying gasps of the Roman Republic through the lives of four protagonists: Cleopatra, Antony, Julius Caesar and the future emperor, Octavian. She illuminates 1st century BC political complexities, from the dangerous power vacuum created by Caesar's assassination; to the dynastic struggles of the Ptolemies (Cleopatra's father murdered his daughter Berenike; Cleopatra poisoned her brother), and the incursions of war-like Parthians which threatened both Egypt and Rome.

I learnt much from this book. For example, I hadn't known that Cleopatra was in Rome, as Caesar's guest, at the time of his murder – and had been there for some time, together with their son, Caesarion.

The writing is informal and frequently borrows from fictional techniques: chapters ending on mini cliff-hangers, e.g. *It was an ominous clearing of the decks*; invention: e.g. *a barber who was no doubt coaxing Caesar's remaining strands of hair into the most becoming position*; and distinctly slangy words like *glitz*.

Some may feel that this approach lacks academic rigour but it certainly makes for lively, accessible reading. I enjoyed it.

Elizabeth Hawksley

LANCASTER AGAINST YORK: The Wars of the Roses and the Foundation of Modern Britain

Trevor Royle, Palgrave, 2008, \$29.95/£32.95, hb, 368pp, 9781403966728

Lancaster Against York has a somewhat misleading subtitle: this is a study of the Wars of the Roses, certainly, but not an assessment of their influence on modern Britain. Subtitle aside, this is a well written and engrossing history of this turbulent time by an author without an axe to grind on behalf of either side.

There are a few irritating errors here—Richard III did not imprison the young Earl of Warwick in the Tower, for instance. Occasionally, too, Royle seems unaware of recent research, such as the discovery of a dispensation for the marriage of the Duke of Gloucester and Anne Neville. There are no annotations, which I found frustrating when I wanted to check a source, but there's a useful bibliography and a helpful section listing the key players of the time.

On the positive side, Royle packs a great deal of information from a wide range of sources into a relatively short space, and his assessments are fair and balanced. For those wanting an introduction to the Wars of the Roses, as well as for those wanting to refresh their general

knowledge, this will be a useful book.

Susan Higginbotham

FAUST IN COPENHAGEN

Gino Segré, Pimlico, 2008, £12.99, pb, 310pp, 9781845951313

1932 is known by physicists as the “miracle year”, when scientists were undertaking groundbreaking work in quantum theory. The Copenhagen Institute hosted a conference attended by about 40 leading physicists – including Niels Bohr, Paul Dirac, Werner Heisenberg and Wolfgang Pauli.

The conference ended with a humorous skit based on Goethe’s *Faust* that parodied the struggle between the old and new physics. A struggle that was eerily to be echoed a short time later with the rise of Hitler and the struggle between the use of science for peace and for destruction.

Gino Segré, himself a physicist, documents this historic meeting with warmth and humanity. He highlights the genius that existed and demonstrates the strength and frailty of that genius.

Faust in Copenhagen brilliantly captures the last days of innocence for physics, before the heralding of a new and terrifying era of nuclear weaponry. Emphasis is firmly on the human element – these were real people, living real lives, performing extraordinary experiments and Segré is as interested in the people as he is in the science. A clever touch is the introduction of his own family history, which serves as a reminder that history is as much about the personal as it is about the political.

Sara Wilson

MAGNIFICO: The Brilliant Life and Violent Times of Lorenzo De’Medici

Miles J. Unger, Simon & Schuster, 2008, \$32.00/C\$37.00, hb, 513pp, 9780743254342

Few time periods in the European past are as captivating as the Renaissance, and few characters from this world are as fascinating as Lorenzo De’Medici. Lorenzo, known to history as Lorenzo the Magnificent, served as the leader of the Medici family’s banking interests and played a pivotal role both Florence’s politics and Renaissance culture. Lorenzo’s lasting contribution lay in his support for the arts. The young Michelangelo rose to fame largely owing to Lorenzo’s financial and emotional support. Lorenzo numbered Leonardo da Vinci and Sandro Botticelli among artists whose talents he recognized and whose careers he advanced. Miles Unger, a contributing writer for *The New York Times*, brings Florentine politics, the Medici family, Renaissance art and culture, and the “Magnifico” to life. Historical novelists searching for time periods and people to write about will find few more exciting topics than the Florence of the Medicis.

John R. Valley

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF GHOSTS

Jennifer Westwood & Jacqueline Simpson, Allen Lane, 2008, £14.99, hb, 455pp, 9781846141010

The study of history and its less serious but much prettier sister, the creation of historical fiction, is on one level always a conversation with ghosts. Some ghosts we have to spend a lot of time and effort digging up; some are more than happy to make themselves available.

Westwood and Simpson’s compendium of English ghostly legends is an invaluable guide to our ghosts, to when and where they appear

and speculations as to why. An excellent introduction classifies the various kinds of spectral apparitions and their variations and reflects, in a scholarly but accessible way on the interpretation of their strange behaviour and manner of appearance.

A useful source for authors in search of a plot and an entertaining and fascinating read. My own county of Suffolk is clearly so packed with black dogs, headless horsemen and ghostly carriages it’s a wonder there is any room for the rest of us.

Sarah Bower

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BOOK GIVEAWAY CONTEST

open to British HNS members

Michael Joseph/Penguin UK has provided the HNS with five copies apiece of two historical novels:

Warrior of Rome: Fire in the East by Harry Sidebottom

Called “a bold, dramatic and unforgettable tale of honour, bravery and bloodthirsty battle in the best-selling historical adventure tradition,” *Fire in the East* is the first instalment in an immense, grand narrative – the Warrior of Rome series.

The Minutes of the Lazarus Club by Tony Pollard

Called a “rip-roaring Victorian thriller,” Pollard’s debut is set in 1858 London and centres on a clandestine brotherhood to which the finest, most unconventional minds of the time belong: Brunel, Nightingale, Darwin, Bazalgette.

To enter either or both contests provide your name, mailing address, and your correct answer(s) to the following questions.

For *Fire in the East*: What does a frumentarius do?

For *Minutes of the Lazarus Club*: What was the original name of Brunel’s ship *The Great Eastern*?

Email your response(s) to contest@historicalnovelsociety.org by **31 August 2008**. Five winners will be randomly selected from among the correct entries for each. This contest is open to current HNS members from the United Kingdom.

