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FEBRUARY 2011

how they were found

JOAN JETT

máze

MERIT BADGES

what to read next in independent publishing

JUDD APATOW

I FOUND THIS FUNNY

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In the new collection I Found This Funny, Judd Apatow presents the work of some of his favorite authors and artists. The book showcases many different styles of writing, from fiction to short humor to essays to comedy sketches to poetry.

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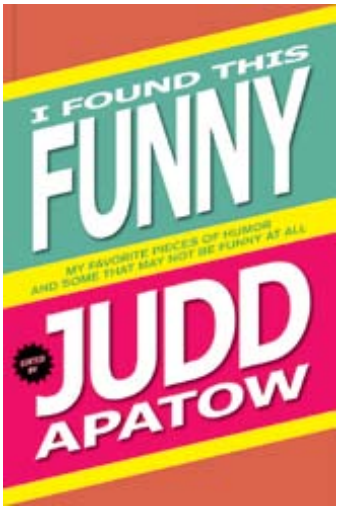

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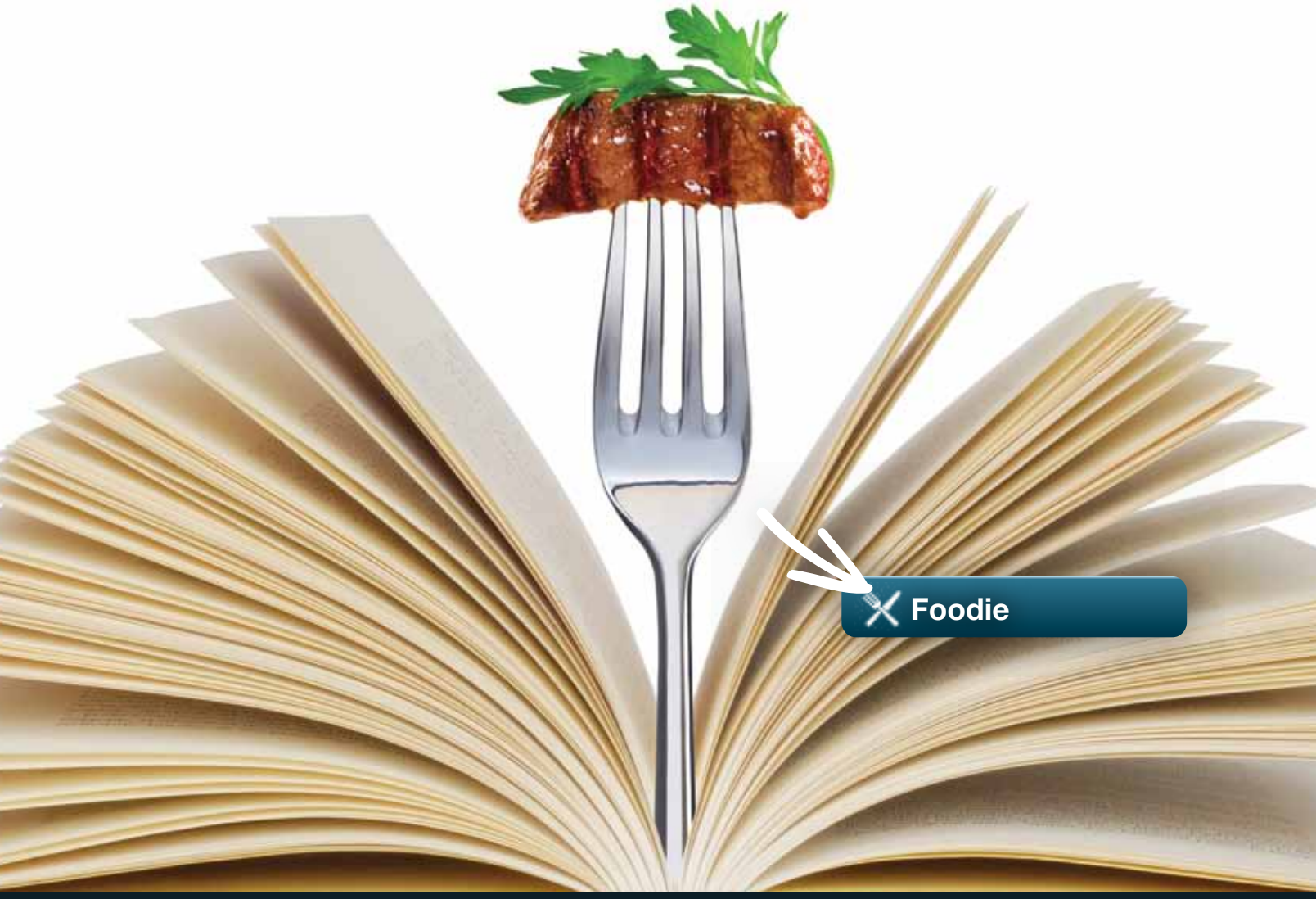

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february contents

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

DAILY IPAD AND TABLET COMPUTER BLOG FOR EVERYONE

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"TCGeeks is my daily stop for unique iPad articles and reviews. When I post questions they are quick to help. My favorite iPad blog!"

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PUT ANOTHER DIME IN THE JUKEBOX

After 23 record labels turned her down, Joan Jett formed Blackheart Records and released "I Love Rock 'n Roll" herself. "They said, '[T]his is interesting, but we don't hear a hit,'" she recalls in a new Todd Oldham-produced pictorial autobiography, *Joan Jett*, published by Ammo Books and excerpted on page 24. The song did, obviously, become a hit ("[I]t remains the number 28 record of all time, right there with 'White Christmas' and 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer'," Jett says). Jett became a rock star, and Blackheart continues to be a champion of under-the-radar indie bands. Twenty-three labels heard something new they couldn't categorize. Radio listeners heard an exciting, original voice.

Exciting, original voices are the heart of indie book publishing. Voices like those of Kira Henehan, whose Pop Noir masterpiece *Orion You Came and You Took All My Marbles* from Milkweed Editions is a delightfully inventive approach to novel writing. Or Matt Bell, whose debut collection from Keyhole Press, *How They Were Found*, includes the short story "An Index of How Our Family Was Killed," detailing events from A to Z ("Alarms that failed to go off, that have never stopped ringing in my ears. Alibis, as in, everyone's got one."). Or Kevin Fenton, who brings equal measures of humor and poignancy to his coming-of-age novel *Merit Badges* from New Issues Press. Or Mathias Énard, whose story of a French secret service agent, *Zone*, translated from French and published by Open Letter Books, is told in a single, continuous sentence spanning 517 pages.

You will likely not find these voices on the *New York Times* bestseller list. But you will find them here.

Margaret Brown
publisher

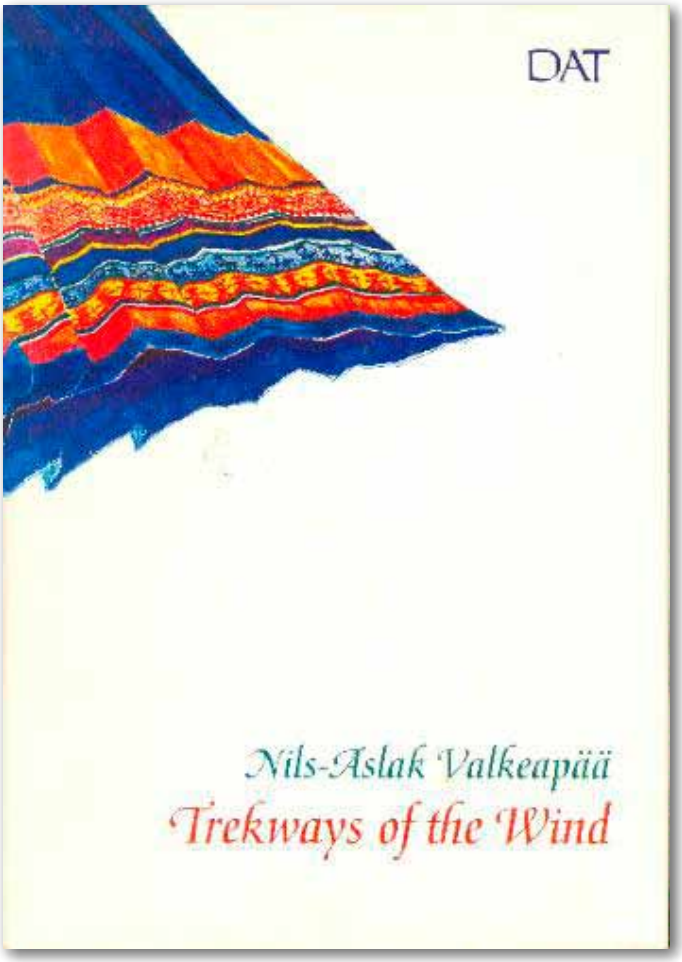
Like what you read? Click on any book cover to purchase from Powell's Books, or click on the publisher website for more information.

LAPLAND

photographs by Céline Clanet | essay by Awen Jones | **Photolucida** | www.photolucida.org

Between 2005 and 2009, French photographer Céline Clanet regularly traveled to Máze, a small Sami village far above the Arctic Circle in Norwegian Lapland. There, surrounded by snow and reindeer herds, she captured a people and a way of life that is fading fast. “To me, Máze is an ambivalent symbol of resistance and helplessness,” Clanet writes. “Pride as well as suspicion, solitude and great beauty prevail there.” Her images of snowmobiles and reindeer, elfin shoes and anoraks, provide a documentary vision of a place and time that confirms the fact that you cannot step twice onto the same snowy tundra.

—Jennifer Wichmann



TREKWAYS OF THE WIND by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää
University of Arizona Press | www.uapress.arizona.edu

Born into a Finnish reindeer herding family in 1943, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää realized early on that his future lay elsewhere than in the family business, because he found himself unable to take a life. Instead he turned to education, attending teacher's college and becoming a musician, artist, and poet. Reminiscent of e.e. cummings, his free verse poems were often designed in the shape of the reindeer or falling leaves he described. His expression of the universal indigenous belief that our future is dependent on showing respect for Mother Earth may be best summed up by his oft-cited poem:

Can you hear the sounds of life
In the roaring of the creek
In the blowing of the wind

That is all I want to say
That is all

A YEAR IN LAPLAND

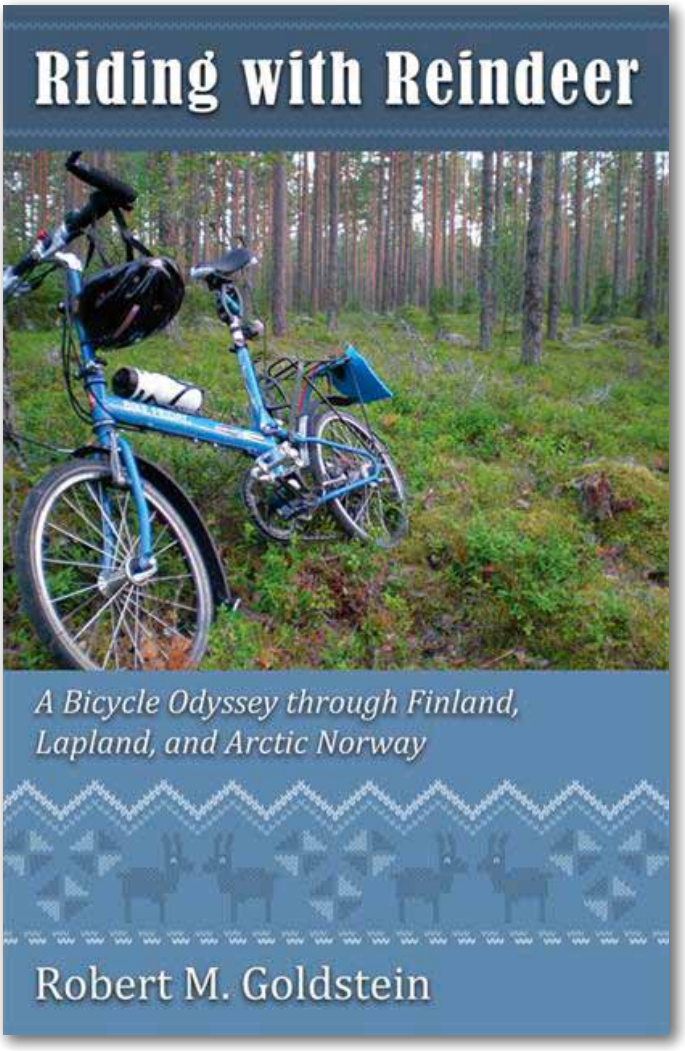
Guest of the Reindeer Herders by Hugh Beach
University of Washington | www.washington/edu/uwpress

"The people of Lapland, the Lapps, Saami, or Sapmi, as they call themselves, tell of a monstrous figure, Biegolmai, the mythical Wind Man who long ago wielded two huge shovels with which he scooped the wind and dropped the snow upon Lapland in such torrents that no living thing dared enter his realm. Lapland was a dead land of black rock and white snow. Once, however, in a raging snowstorm in the midst of his fury, one of Biegolmai's shovels broke. The wind abated, and for the first time living things were able to take a timid hold upon the land."

So writes Swedish anthropologist Hugh Beach in the introduction to his nonfiction account of life north of the Arctic Circle. In this harsh landscape, where it is a wonder that life in any form is possible, Beach discovers his own destiny, surmising that he must have been a reindeer herder in a former incarnation because nothing in his childhood on the Eastern seaboard of the United States explains his sense of realized fate when he arrived in Lapland for the first time in 1973.

Beach recounts a year spent with the Tuorpon Sami in Sweden's Jokkmokk District, living in his *goattieh*, a dome-shaped, turf-covered hut with a fireplace in the center. He participates in summer calf-marking and the dividing of the herds in the fall. He follows the annual moose hunt, learns to fish like a local, and hears tales of evil trolls and ghost reindeer herds. His love for the land, the people, and the way of life is palpable. And the reason he decided not to leave. He's now a professor of anthropology at Uppsala University in Sweden.

—Anna Nair



RIDING WITH REINDEER
A Bicycle Odyssey Through Finland, Lapland, and Arctic Norway by Robert M. Goldstein
Rivendell Publishing NW | www.rivendellpublishingnw.com

The author of *The Gentleman from Finland: Adventures on the Trans-Siberian Express*, winner of the 2006 Benjamin Franklin Award for travel writing, once again heads out on a wheeled adventure, this time by bicycle.

Robert Goldstein's plan in the summer of 2007 was to leave Helsinki on a self-supported bicycle trip north across the length of Finland. His destination? The Barents Sea, more than 775 miles away. Along the way he avoids polar bears, weathers storms, survives an accident, and discovers unlikely travel companions—curious reindeer who keep him in their sights as he slowly traverses the Arctic.

An often humorous narrative interspersed with cultural and historical anecdotes, *Riding with Reindeer* is a classic tale of solo intrepid adventure that provides insight into a culture that is anything but cold.

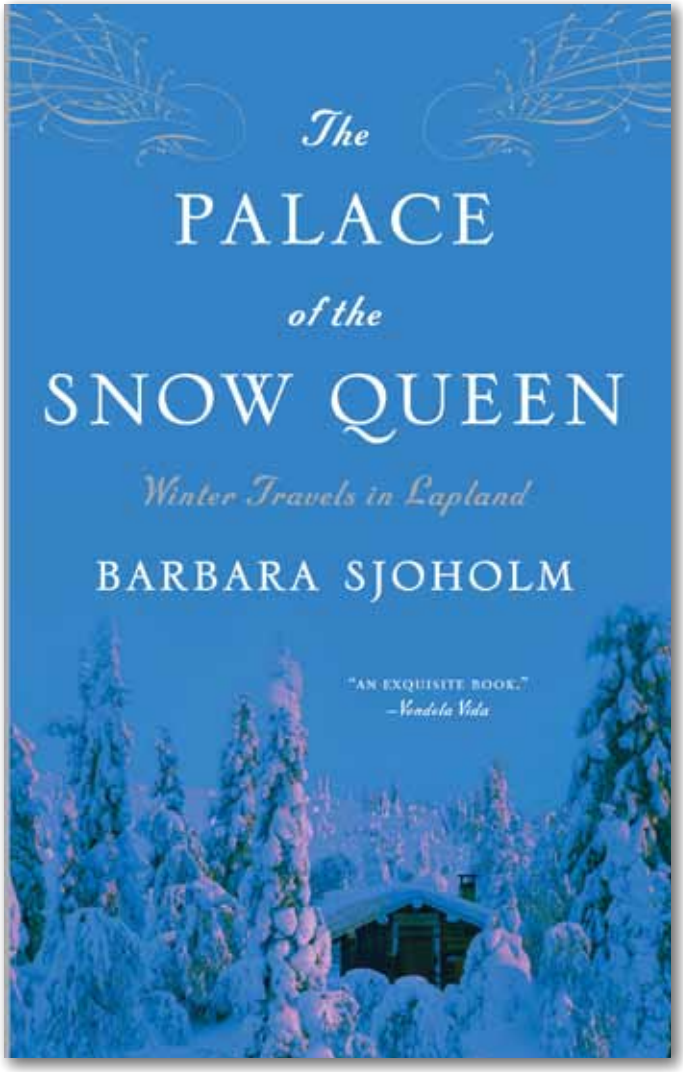
—Anna Nair

THE PALACE OF THE SNOW QUEEN

Winter Travels in Lapland by Barbara Sjoholm
Counterpoint | www.counterpointpress.com

You may know Barbara Sjoholm best for *Gaudi Afternoon*, her British Crime Writers and Lambda Literary award-winning novel that was made into a film starring Marcia Gay Harden and Judy Davis. But for her travel memoir *The Palace of the Snow Queen*, Sjoholm heads far north of Barcelona to Sweden, her paternal grandmother's home.

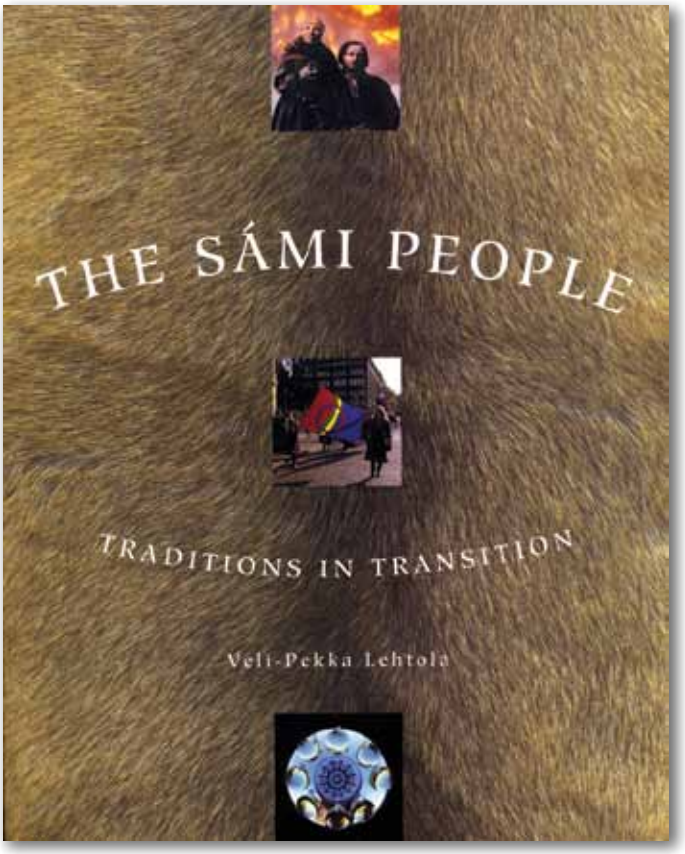
Interesting aside: Sjoholm's father was the orphan child of a Swedish mother who died in childbirth. He was subsequently adopted by tenant farmers in Wisconsin named Wilson, but he was poorly treated and never identified with the name. So when Barbara, then named Wilson, was traveling the North Atlantic doing research for her book *The Pirate Queen*, she decided to take the name Sjoholm, or "sea island" in Swedish, to reflect her heritage and fluid life journey. She also happens to be one of the cofounders of longtime women's indie publisher Seal Press. (Sea? Seal? Sweden? Sense a theme?)



But I digress.

Over the course of three winters, Sjoholm (pronounced "Shoe-holm") visits the Ice Hotel in Kiruna, Sweden; witnesses the Northern Lights over the North Cape; crosses the Finnmark Plateau by dogsled; and attends a Sami film festival featuring an outdoor ice screen. She explores the region's rich history and writes of the changes rendered by modernization, as tourism, mining, and development threaten the Sami's way of life and traditional reindeer grazing lands. In an era defined by global warming, Sjoholm thoughtfully and humorously celebrates the impact of ice and snow on an entire way of life.

—Jack Rubenstein

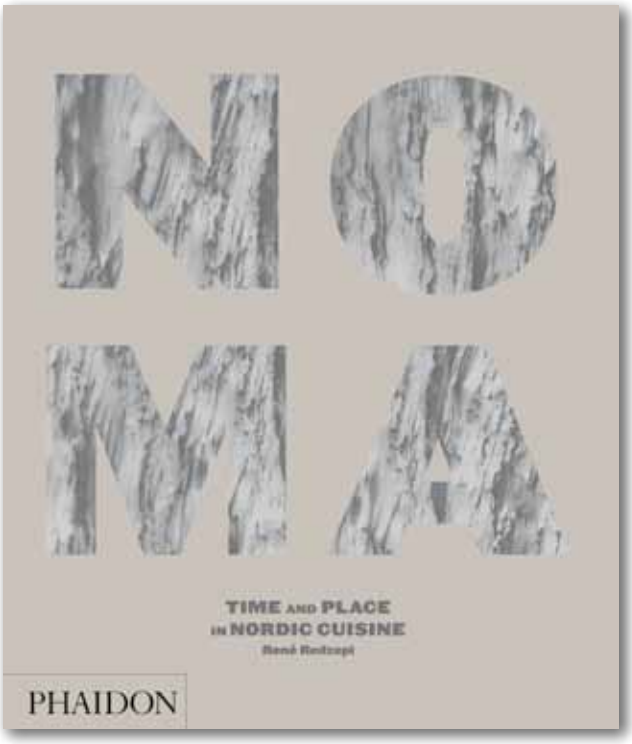


THE SAMI PEOPLE Traditions in Transition
by Veli-Pekka Lehtola
University of Alaska Press | www.alaska.edu/uapress

The indigenous Sami people of Scandinavia and European Russia are the only European ethnic group to be recognized as an aboriginal people. Divided by national borders for centuries, they are an economically and culturally diverse people who speak different dialects and languages and, in more recent years, have consistently been entering the global world as writers, artists, and political activists, leaving nomadic traditions of reindeer herding behind.

This book is one of the rare few written from the Sami perspective that is available in English. Beautifully illustrated with color photos, historic maps, and illustrations, *The Sami People* examines a population as it exists within the modern world in the context of its ancient history.

—Dean Hill



NOMA Time And Place In Nordic Cuisine
by Chef Rene Redzepi
Phaidon Press | www.phaidon.com

In 2010, Chef Rene Redzepi's tiny 12-table restaurant in Copenhagen was voted the world's best restaurant. Why? In part because he only uses food native to the Nordic region, much of which he forages himself. But more so because his incredibly complex gastronomic creations defy comprehension. Dishes require dozens of ingredients and steps such as "submerge in liquid nitrogen" and "load a spray paint gun." They can literally take days to execute. But Redzepi does not expect many people to actually recreate his masterpieces at home. Instead, his goal is to inspire. "Eat more vegetables," he says with signature Scandinavian restraint. And what kid wouldn't, when, after the paint gun and the liquid nitrogen, they come out looking like a snowman?

—Dean Hill

Pork Neck and Bulrushes, Violets and Malt

Serves 4

Warning: This recipe requires advanced techniques, accurate measurements using the metric system, specialist equipment, and professional experience to achieve good results. Adapted from *Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine* (October 4, 2010; $49.95). Phaidon Press, www.phaidon.com.

Ingredients

Pork

450g pork neck shoulder
5 sprigs thyme
30g brown butter
40g chicken glace*

Bulrushes**

8 bulrushes
40g water
40g butter

Sauce

15g malt powder
50g grapeseed oil

For Serving

60g fresh cream
1 drop violet essence
10-15 wild spring violets, to garnish

***Glace** is a strong-flavored reduced brown stock, used to supply color and body to sauces.
****Bulrushes** are a grass like-marsh plant. The bulrush used at Noma is *Typha latifolia* or "common bulrush."

Instructions

Pork

Trim the skin and excess fat off the pork neck, and wash the thyme. Vacuum-pack both with the chicken glace. Preheat a water bath to 58 degrees Celsius (135 degrees Fahrenheit) and poach the meat for 3 hours.

Bulrushes

Trim the bulrushes down to the juicy middle part of the bottom. Heat the water and whisk in the butter to make an emulsion.

Sauce

Mix the malt powder and oil and process in a Thermomix* for 3-4 minutes. Keep in a squeezy bottle, and shake every time before pouring.

To Serve

Pat the pork dry with paper towels and roast it in a pan on all sides until the center has reached 58 degrees Celsius (135 degrees Fahrenheit). Finish the pork by adding the chicken glace to coat the entire surface of the meat. Add the bulrushes to the butter emulsion and heat in a pan for 25 seconds. Cut one slice of pork per person and put on a plate next to the bulrushes. To finish the sauce, heat the cream slowly without allowing it to boil, add the oil and violet essence without emulsifying it, and pour the sauce on to the plate alongside the pork. Garnish with the violets and serve.

*A **Thermomix** is a type of food processor that can blend food at different temperatures.

Ammo Books | www.ammobooks.com

Thirty years of photographs, interviews, and Bad Reputation attitude make up *Joan Jett*, conceived and authored by designer Todd Oldham. Indie rocker and Riot Grrrl Kathleen Hanna gets the rock and roll party started in the book's introduction, excerpted here.

—Debra Pandak

EXCERPT

JOAN JETT was Born to Rock. I know that sounds like some fucked-up bumper sticker, but it is absolutely true. Joan is one of those rare people who *need* to play music.

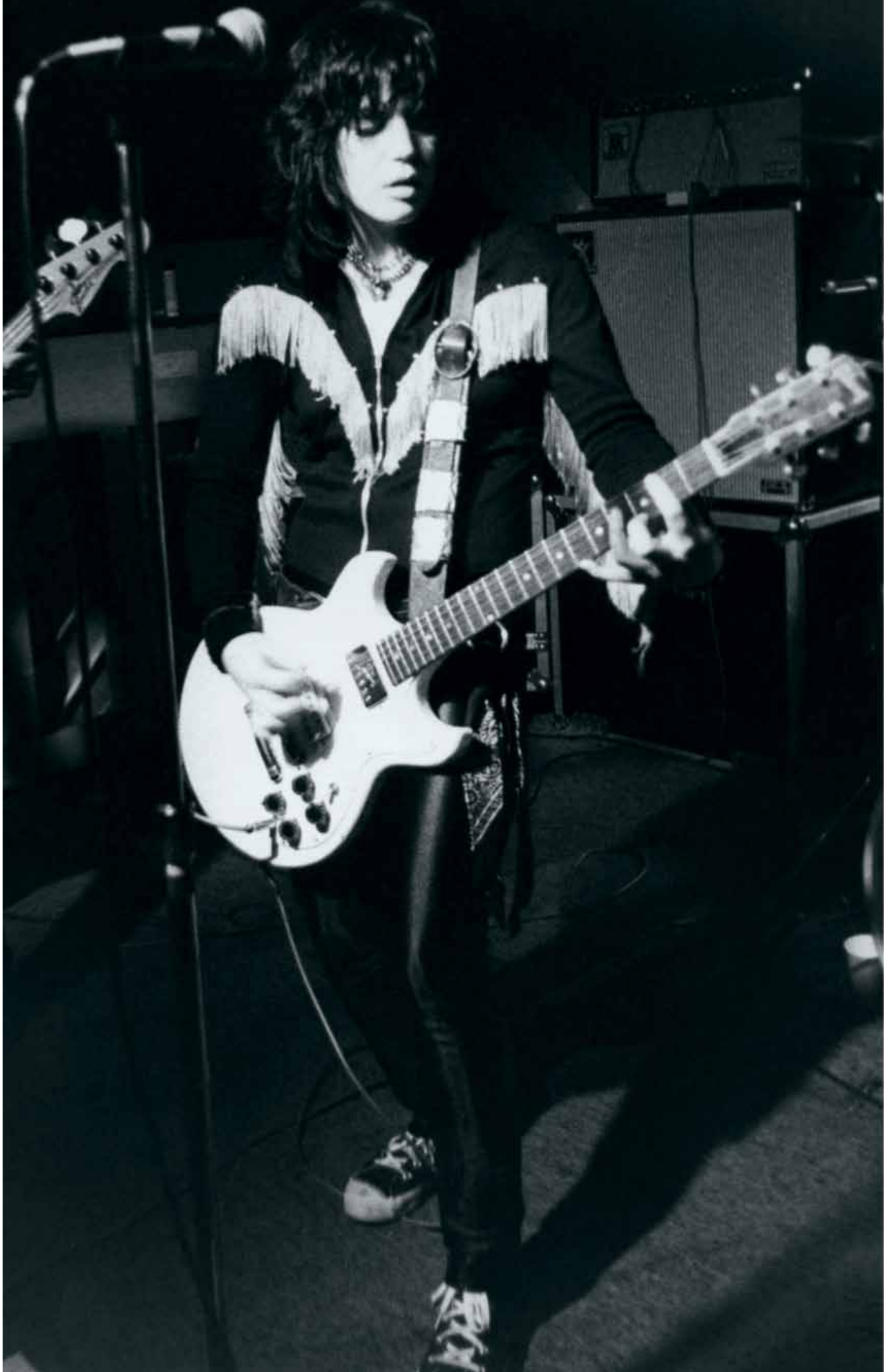
Joan was born into a world that didn't quite know what to do with a girl like her. Luckily, she never let that stop her. In 1975, at the age of 15, she started her first band, The Runaways. While they are heralded today as the band that opened the door for female rockers everywhere, they were much maligned in their own time.

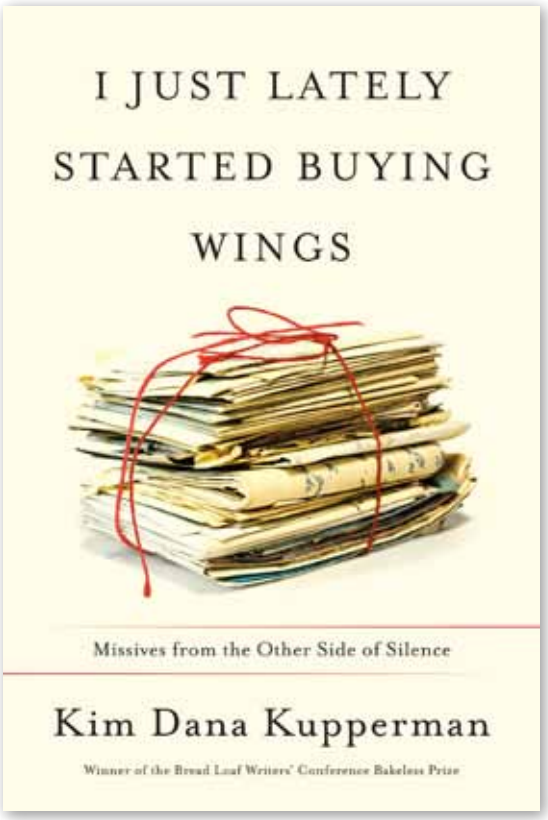
Some feminists didn't like that Cherie, the singer, wore lingerie on stage or that a man had crafted the band's jailbait image. Many male audience members felt threatened when they saw these talented girls crashing their party. At a show in London, a man threw a bottle at Joan's head and knocked her out cold. When she came to, she got up and started the next song.

After The Runaways broke up in 1979, Joan embarked on what would become a highly successful solo career. What most people don't know is that her biggest hit, "I Love Rock 'n Roll," was released on Blackheart Records, the independent label she and her manager, Kenny Laguna, created because no major label would sign her. Joan and Kenny sold records out of the back of his car the year her record came out.

The first time I heard "Crimson and Clover" was in the front seat of my mom's brown Ford Fairmont. As Joan sang, "I don't hardly know her, but I think I could love her," I felt a pleasant sense of confusion, the same way I did when I saw David Bowie on *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* and when I saw the cover of Prince's first album. As I listened, a whole new world of possibilities opened up--a world beyond tiny Laurel, Maryland, a world where sex was as gorgeous as Joan's round, smoky, perfectly pitched voice and gender could move and change like the signs along the highway.

Only Joan can do the things she does the way she does them because she was truly and irrevocably born to rock, and she will always, always, always refuse to listen to the voices that says she can't.





Graywolf Press | www.graywolfpress.org

Webster's defines a missive as a letter or other written communication, often formal or legal. Kim Dana Kupperman's collection is full of such letters: to her recently dead father, to her brother lost to AIDS, to her drug-addicted mother killed by her own hand. Letters to the child she once was, caught in a custody battle, who cannot remember the first nine years of her life. Letters to her grown self, older and wiser and still at sea. And, disconcertingly, letters to me. The collection is stunningly personal, detailed, and consciously understated. Yet it is universal in its heartbreak: Kupperman is my young cousin, with tangled waist-length hair unbrushed by my alcoholic aunt. She is a preteen me, spending nights standing against a wall at the orders of mother and doctor to straighten a twisted spine. Her box of transcripts from her parents' custody battle is my box of e-mails between my mother and my aunt, both of our torturous treasures obtained after our mothers' deaths, both of us convinced they somehow hold the secret to our indecipherable maternal relationships. Kupperman writes: "The miniature versions of who we become as adults are always available, if we pay attention. As soon as I could write, I made lists and stories. And before understanding the power of words, I drew messages." Call them what you will—essay, letter, missive, memoir—Kupperman's writing is well worth reading.

—Anna Nair

EXCERPT

see me slant: poetry considers her mother

"Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father."
—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

I am a woman who slants. Standing, I lean into my right hip. When I catch myself doing this, I realign, redistribute my weight, and establish that poise my mother would be proud of, standing as if a book were balanced on my head, my neck full of understated attitude, my eyes focused on an object across the room, hips symmetrical. My mother insisted that I practice this posture, the dictionary resting on the crown of my skull, shoulders fluid, my gait as smooth as suede. I'd cross the room several times as she watched, and this practice always occurred in silence, as if spoken words might topple all that vocabulary just above my head. Whenever we went out in public together, my mother, taller than I, would bend slightly and whisper, "Stand up straight."

My mother gave me this body, the one that slants while standing, and she worked hard to ensure that I'd have a voice of liquid amber for those words that teetered on my head, along with the common sense to pause and rearrange myself when aslant. She gave me practical advice—where to dash, how to shape my nails into commas, what style to wear, whom to date, when to use a period. And when I was older, my mother instructed me in the art of reading between the lines, and how to catch—as if they were fireflies—the words that live in the mind. She showed me how to care for my lips so they'd be useful, and how to keep my tongue clean so as not to disturb the ecology of what I tasted.

I grew up in my mother's body. On the long, wide savanna of her back, I pretended to be grass. In the fertile crescent beneath her breast, I hid like a turtle. At the twin beaches of her thighs, I invented waves. I browsed in the orchard of her hair. Found safety in the coves between her toes. She offered me these landscapes connected to her body, along with a universe beyond—the constellation of her mind and the momentum of her orbit. She could fold herself into a boat simply by wrapping her arms around me. My mother was all these dimensions at once: the place of arrival and point of departure, the act of journey, the vessel that affords passage, the North Star that guides.

As a child, I listened carefully to my mother, watching her mouth as it shaped what it uttered, imitating how she touched her lip in a coy-mistress kind of way as she hesitated to locate the perfect word, my ear against her chest as she fashioned a sentence out of thin air. She was always leaving language around the house for me to find, asking me to celebrate ordinary things like fish houses or oranges, and to consider extraordinary ideas like the design of an oyster or the curve of time or the progress of a beating heart.

My mother divided time into stanzas. Matins we sang to the breaking day and last vestiges of starlight. Before lunch, we'd wash windows and banish the dust, setting the house in order like any mother and her daughter. She showed me how to organize the bureaus into sonnets, folding fourteen articles of clothing mixed in color and utility into each drawer. How to iron out the wrinkles and sew on the buttons. Afternoons, we would paint haiku on the bathroom mirror, and look at our reflected faces webbed in the seventeen syllables of our design. At twilight we cleaned our pens, repaired the spines of books, and my mother would hum a tune for the rising darkness. It was always at this hour, the moment between day and night (the hour when a wolf might be mistaken for a dog, as they say in French) that she would rest her teacup on the table, lean toward me, and tell me things

she knew. Like the true names of the birds. Or that each person I encountered would be as full of stories as the great library rumored to have stood at Alexandria. That she named me Poetry to keep her body alive, a fleshy dialogue across the ages.

After dinner she would open all the doors and windows in the house and I would explore. She always hid something for me, in the closets or the attic, under my bed, in the medicine cabinet. A moth wing. A swatch of black velvet. A lead pencil. A bell jar. A copy of *National Geographic* from 1918. A wild iris. A blackbird feather.

I stared my exploration in the house, sometimes running from room to room, sometimes standing still and closing my eyes, focusing my entire inside self to divine where she had hidden the latest treasure. After I located and studied the gift she had secreted away, we would stand in the frame of the front door, my mother and I, until she stretched her arms out to the night.

"This is your backyard," she always said. "Play in it all you want, but comehome when you're ready."

I learned to see in the dark this way, to stand so still that I could hear a spider repair its web, smell the breath of trees, sense the dance of water murmuring beneath my feat. Sometimes I held my tongue out, trying to catch a solitary raindrop. When it snowed, I took off my shoes.

As I grew older, I yearned to hold hands with the darkness, to shape it into a person whom I could bravely face and tell my secrets. I longed to build a house of night for my secret keeper, a dwelling that smelled like moss and safety where we might lie down as lovers and tell each other stories until daybreak. There I would sit, alone in the geography of desire, summoning a human form with a human heart, remembering to choose each word as if the wrong word at the wrong time might dissolve my lover's hands. I was never ready to go home, never tired of playing this game.

My mother knew that I would not return once I wandered in the place she had invented for me. She did not want me to be nostalgic for her, for our house, for the gifts she left me.

"That was the point," she always said. "That you'd become a cartographer, that you'd know how to come home even if you didn't want to."

She was an expert at redefining and expanding desire's boundaries, pushing me against that uncomfortable edge you must navigate to reach clarity Because my mother was expansive in imagination, I was able to steer beyond the melancholic pulse and the cynical wink, and out into the land, not to be silenced as some have been silenced and who move into the world, but to make it part of memory's biography. Infuse it with images and sounds and that invisible thing in the gut that falls through the center of the body when one is alarmed or aroused, stunned or stunning.

The day she died, my mother reminded me to care for memory as if it were my child.

"No tarrying too long in the backyard," she said.

But I could see the coy-as-a-coy-mistress smile (something my father had inspired in her, I am sure) tugging once again at her lips, and I knew she was not completely serious. I believe she was telling me instead to take all that I remembered with me, as if it had a hand I could hold, a body I could love, the acuity to rename everything possessed of a beating heart.

When I lean into my right hip, it is as if I were trying to lean into another body, place my head on its chest. Sometimes I feel the heat of a torso, the bone of the hip, an arm, like the secret keeper I made of night in the topography mapped of my mother's body and mind. And often I hear its voice.

"Stand up straight," it always says.

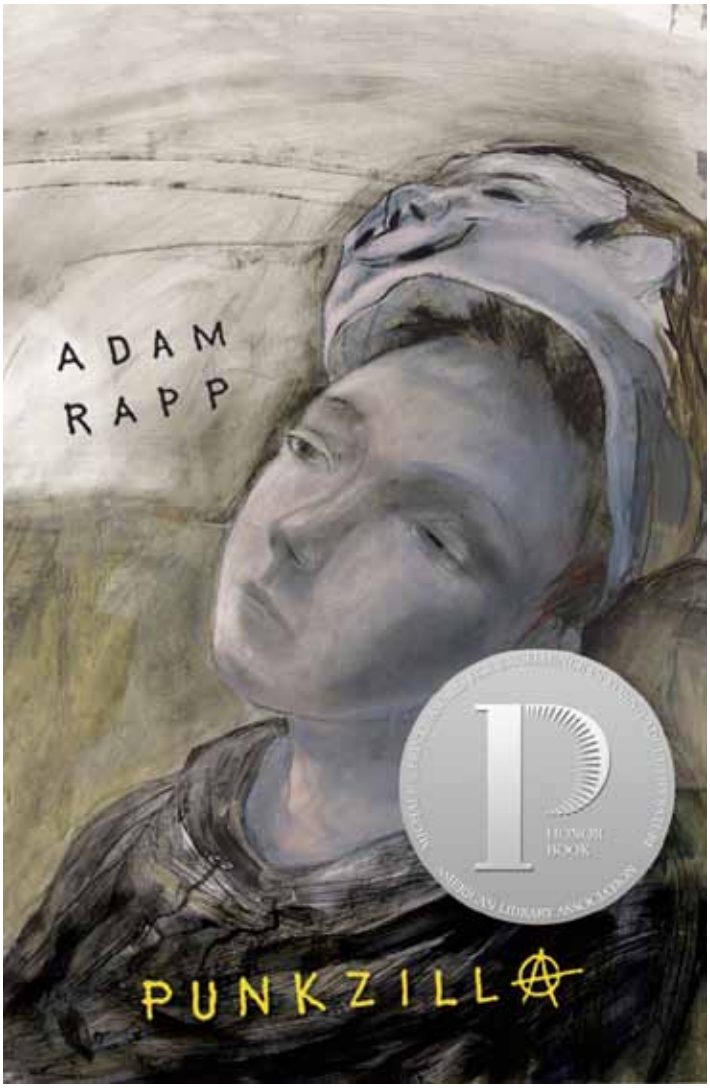
With thanks to James Baldwin, Elizabeth Bishop, Laure-Anne Bosselaar, M. Wylie Blanchet, Mark Doty, Louise Glück, Jane Kenyon, Phillip Lopate, Andrew Marvell, Frank O'Hara, Sylvia Plath, Wallace Stevens, and Virginia Woolf.

COMING FROM A FAMILY WITH A HIGHLY conservative and judgmental father and a mother who does not stand up for her or her son's beliefs, 14-year-old Jamie (nicknamed Punkzilla) runs away from military school to live on his own with some friends in Portland, Oregon. Jamie's new crew is the epitome of a parent's worst nightmare: They are drug addicts, thieves, and good friends of prostitutes. Fortunately for Jamie, though, his parents have no clue where he is.

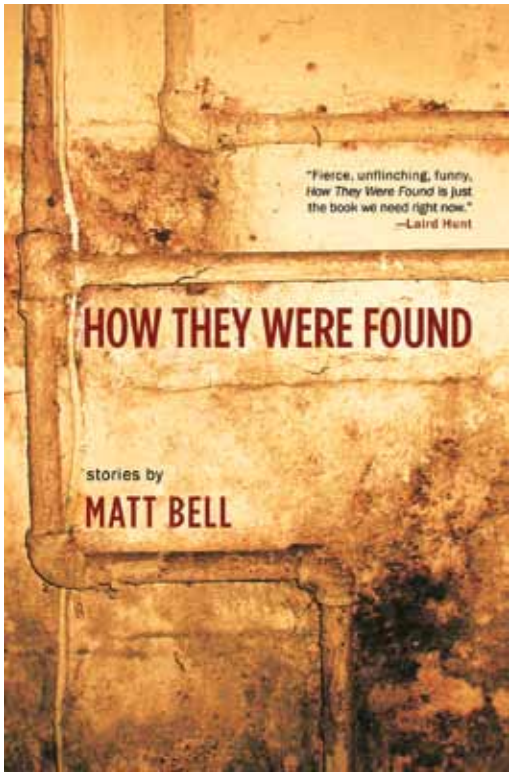
Jamie's older brother, Peter, is no better off in the eyes of his father than Jamie. Peter is openly gay and writes political plays criticizing George Bush. When Jamie finds out that Peter has cancer, he decides to travel from Portland to Memphis, Tennessee, to visit him before he dies. On his journey, he meets a wide variety of people, each one representing a shunned and scorned face of society. And while Jamie himself bluntly acknowledges their strangeness, he always finds it in himself to accept them for who they are. In this, Jamie represents a side of society that is, unfortunately, often missing: acceptance and open-mindedness.

Punkzilla offers a view of American society that few people see and truly understand—what most would consider to be the dark and appalling side of America. But through a refreshing mix of childlike innocence and worldly cynicism, Jamie provides a truly beautiful and unprejudiced look at the people who are often oppressed and ignored. As Jamie records his journey to Memphis, you will constantly worry about Peter's ailing health. Will Jamie reach him in time to say goodbye? You'll have to read and find out.

— Charlotte Newell, age 16, www.theipadkids.com



Candlewick Press
www.candlewick.com



Keyhole Press
www.keyholepress.com

A futuristic army futilely waits out the apocalypse stranded on a satellite tower. A survivor catalogs the murder of his family alphabetically, from "A brother, a father, a mother, a sister" to "Zero: What will remain." The characters are doomed. The stories are bleak. Yet they are written so beautifully that they become something else: an exuberant example of the power of language to transport and transform.

Matt Bell says of the title, "There are a lot of characters in the book who are searching for something, and their searches often lead to their own separation, or loneliness, or ruin. Plus there's the characters' attempts to find something, and also us as readers finding them." In the following excerpt, a cartographer searches in vain for his vanished girlfriend.

–Margaret Brown

EXCERPT

The Cartographer's Girl

To begin, a key: ○ is the place where they first meet. • is the place where they kissed for the first time. ⊙ is any place he told her he loved her, anywhere she once said it back.

The cartographer wanders the city streets, crosses the invisible boundaries that lie between neighborhoods. He takes notes, studies the geography of streets and sewers, of subway lines and telephone wires. His bag holds nothing of value beyond the tools of his trade: his pens and papers, his sextant, his rules and stencils, plus his dozens of compasses, some worth a month's rent and others bought in bulk at dollar stores and pawn shops. The compasses are disappointingly true, pointing north over and over, when all he wants is for one to dissent, to demur, to show him the new direction he cannot find on his own.

Even the compasses that break, that learn some new way, none ever point him to her. At least not yet. It is not their fault, but his. He is making the wrong kind of map, knows he is, but can't stop himself. All the maps he's made since she left have been wrong, but the cartographer does not know the kind of map he needs.

Different maps have different requirements, and trying to make the wrong kind of map in the wrong way is an obvious mistake.

Less obvious is how making the right map in the wrong way will also fail completely, with no indication of how close he is to his goal. There is no partial success to hope for. He will either find his way to her or else he won't.

When she started sleepwalking, neither of them knew where she was trying to go or why she was going there. She was an expert at slipping out of bed without him noticing, at opening the bedroom door and then the apartment door without making a noise. He'd awaken and find her missing, and then it would be a mad scramble down the stairs, down the street, trying to figure out where she went.

Sometimes he found her right away, sitting in the lobby of their building, or on a bench a block or two away. On other nights, he'd search for hours, only to return home and find her asleep in their bed, her nightgown streaked with mud.

During her worst episodes, she would be gone for days, days in which he didn't sleep or eat or work, instead wandering the city with someone

else's map in his hand, some official version of the city drawn by a company or a commission, as agreed upon fiction with which he hoped to guess where she might have gone.

Afterward, she could never explain where she'd gone or what she'd been feeling while sleepwalking. After the first months, the cartographer realized he wasn't supposed to ask anymore, that she couldn't or wouldn't answer his questions no matter how insistently he pried.

All she'd ever say was, Let's just enjoy the time we have together, and then she'd cling to his body like the mast of a sinking ship, like she had lashed herself to him. One time, near the end, the cartographer found her in the Broad Street subway station, sitting beside the train tracks, crying into the red scarf she always wore wrapped around her neck. When he asked her why she was crying, she told him she had just missed it, that she'd been so close this time. She said the word "skinny" over and over, but he didn't ask what she meant. He'd stopped asking long ago, when she'd begged him to.

Besides, she herself was skinny now, had lost so much weight in the previous months. How was he supposed to know it meant something else entirely?

He'd looked down the empty tracks, into the open mouth of the subway tunnel, then worried she'd hurt herself, that if he didn't stop her she'd do something terrible. Now she was gone, and it was he who was hurt: by her absence, by not knowing where she went, by not knowing a sure way to follow.

❖ is any place where he believed he saw her after her disappearance. It is any place he circles back to, week after week.

The cartographer compulsively maps everywhere he visits, drawing on any surface he can find. At the bar down the street from his house, he draws topological renditions of the layout of the tables, of the path from his stool to the bathroom, of the distribution of smoke or waitresses or couples. There are many kinds of maps, but none of these get him any closer to where he needs to be. He keeps drawing anyway, keeps drinking too, until he feels his head begin to nod. If he gets home fast enough, he'll be able to fall asleep without dreaming of her.

It is never enough to assume that the reader of the map will approach it with the same mindset as the cartographer does. Even omitting something as simple as a north arrow can render a map useless, can cast doubts on all it's trying to communicate. Other markings are just as necessary. There must be a measurement of scale, and there must be a key so that annotations and markings can be deciphered, made useful.

Even though the map is for only himself, it must still be as perfect as possible.

! is any place she woke up after sleepwalking, any place he found her, disoriented and scared. He makes this mark over and over and over and over.

Her sleepwalking: It wasn't the only thing wrong with her.

It wasn't until after she disappeared that he got the first medical bills in the mail, from hospitals all over the city. She'd been hiding them from him, keeping him safe from how sick she was.

Opening each envelope, he saw the names of procedures she'd undergone, the dollar amounts owed after the insurance paid its share: Blood tests, X-rays, EEGs, EKGs, acronyms on top of acronyms. Prescriptions for anti-seizure medications, for sleeping pills in increasingly powerful dosages.

He read *electric shock treatments*, the very phrase bringing him near tears the first time he read it, wracking him with gasping cries when he began to see it over and over and over.

The cartographer received dozens of these letters in the months after she left, and it was only then that he realized the full scope of her problems.

Sleepwalking, sure, but this too: She was sick, possibly dying, and had been for some time, almost as long as he'd known her. And she hadn't wanted him to know.

One of their last dates before her disappearance was to see a show at the planetarium near the park. Hand in hand, they watched black holes bend light, obscuring everything nearby in their greed for photons. They watched supernovas, the death of one star, and they watched a recreation of the Big Bang, the birth of many. He remembers how she leaned in close and whispered that in a universe as mysterious as theirs, anything might be possible, and that it was therefore reasonable to believe in miracles.

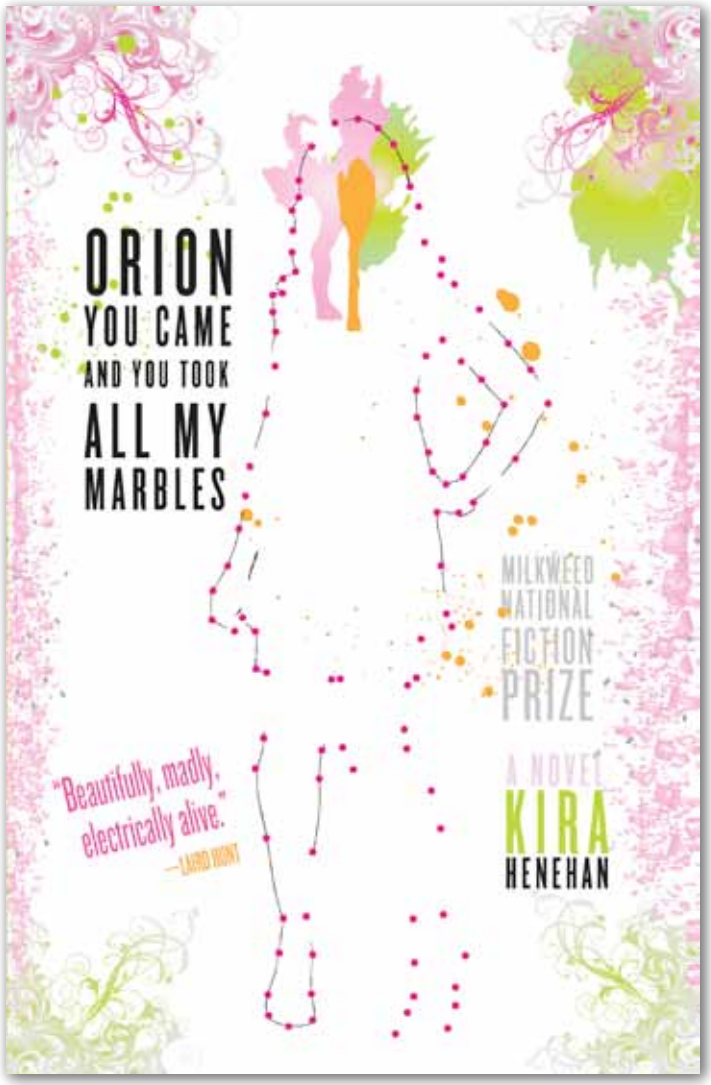
⌘ is somewhere he thought he'd find her using his map. ⌘ is false hope, easily crushed.

The cartographer smells her sometimes in the morning, all her scents at once: vanilla perfume, hazelnut coffee, apple shampoo. Here, she is only a breeze of memory. As soon as he opens his eyes, as soon as he moves his head, she will be gone.

⬩ is anywhere they had a minor fight. ◆ anywhere they had a major one. These are the spots where he regrets, where he goes to say he's sorry when each new map ends in failure.

No matter how hard he tries, the cartographer cannot keep to ground truth, cannot render the streets and landmarks in precise relation to each other. No cartographer can. Rendering a three-dimensional world in a two-dimensional space means the purposeful errors are necessary to complete the drawing. Even worse than the change in perspective, there are lines that must be shifted, moved out of the way so that names can be affixed to symbols, so that this ■ can be distinguished from this one: ■. So that these identical markings can become specific places instead of generalized symbols. Denoting one (basement apartment E5, where she lived when they met) from another (the third floor walkup 312, her last apartment before they moved in together) requires space on the map, requires the physical world be made to accommodate the twin realms of information and emotion, the layers of symbols and abstractions necessary to represent the inhabitants of these parallel universes.

In even the best maps, all these short distances add up over time, until the city depicted is hundreds of meters wider than it should be. This is the second way he loses her, the way he feels her slipping away. He fights for accuracy by creating new symbols and more complex keys, trying to end his reliance on language, on descriptions now unnecessary, obsolete. He saves his words, stockpiles for the day he and his girl will be reunited, when his map will lead him to another skinny, another crack like the one she fell through, where he might follow her to the place she has gone.



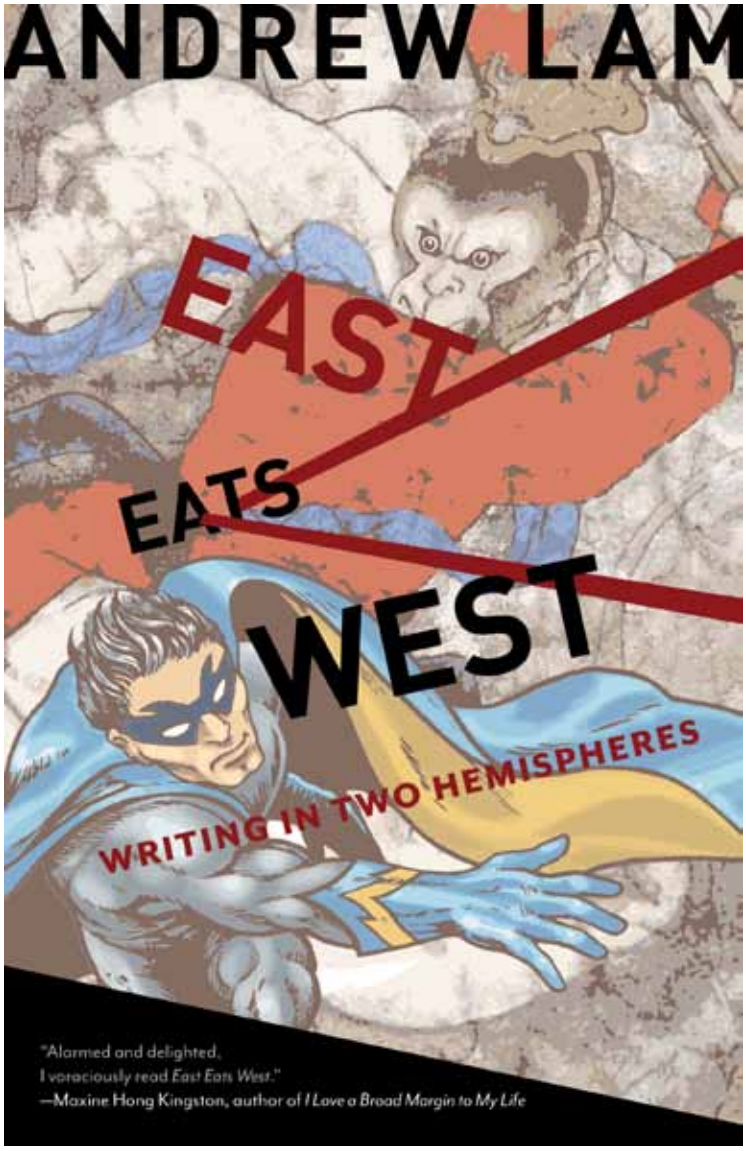
Orion You Came and You Took All My Marbles

by Kira Henehan
Milkweed Editions
www.milkweed.org

This is a book about Finley, a red-haired, yellow-eyed detective. Or perhaps she is not a detective. It involves copious amounts of gravel: "This gravel seemed to be covering nothing so much as more gravel. I don't know a) how deep it went or b) what was below it, but my guesses would be a) deep and b) as already noted, gravel." It details the frequent consumption of shrimp: "I met the waitstaff's forearms in my grasp and we shared a wonderful moment of salient appreciation, in which I thought of how I would one day pen a treatise on the healing powers of shrimp, and how it would be titled *The Leveling of the Lands—How a Shrimp Saved the World!* and how I would recognize the waitstaff on the acknowledgments page, and for that matter *all* the daily shrimp vendors, toiling in obscurity save for the acknowledging eye of those patrons who recognize that nestled within those simple exchanges lies the undiluted and indisputable Divine." Puppets, marbles, bowling. I could go on—or, as Finley says, "I perhaps should, but do in fact not. Care. Enough or to."

This book is also, quite possibly, about identity, self-determination, perception, despair, and other elements of the existential canon, all of which slyly seep in amid debut novelist Kira Henehan's laugh-out-loud linguistic idiosyncrasies. It is the rare book that you will want to re-read as soon as you finish it, both to pick up on what you missed the first time and to revel, again, in its originality and verve. Milkweed Editions honored *Orion* as the Milkweed National Fiction Prize Winner. *Shelf Unbound*'s editors named it a top 10 book of 2010, calling it a Pop Noir masterpiece filled with inventive, ingenious intrigue. I read *Orion* after having just read Grace Krilanovich's *The Orange Eats Creeps*, another brilliant enigmatic existential novel, and while the two books are otherwise dissimilar, I was bowled over by the bravery and confidence of both young authors. Neither novel is probably going to make Oprah's Book Club list, but they are right at the top of mine.

—Margaret Brown



Heyday
www.heydaybooks.com

Whenever I hear the word *chua*, Vietnamese for 'sour,' I think of tamarind, the sticky brown fruit that grew in abundance on shading trees in my old schoolyard back in Saigon, and its intense sour-sweet memories inevitably cause my molars to vibrate and my mouth to water. I hear 'sour' in English and I don't feel a thing." So begins the introduction to journalist Andrew Lam's collection of essays about life lived on the border where East meets West. Part of a '90s era peer group that includes first- and second-generation Asian Americans who achieved elite educations and discovered new levels of acceptance and wealth in the process, Lam insightfully and artfully examines the underpinnings of our immigrant nation that keep certain cultural divides untranslatable, all while pointing out the dichotomies in his own beautiful words.

—Anna Nair

EXCERPT

One Asian Writer's Lesson: Love Your Immigrant Parents, Follow Your Bliss

One summer midafternoon many years ago I came home to rob my parents of their American dream. I had graduated from Berkeley with a degree in biochemistry and spent two years in a cancer research lab while preparing myself for med school. But despite friends' coaxing and my parents' ardent expectations, my heart wasn't in it. More important, it had found refuge in literature.

Unbeknownst to them, I had taken several UC extension courses in creative writing and was, to my own surprise, excelling. After reading one of my short stories, Helen, my first creative writing teacher, decided that I was to be a writer. "Andrew, you are *not* going to medical school," she declared in her regal voice, with its clear and precise diction. "You are going to creative writing school!" To which I stammered, "But—but my mom is going to kill me!" Yet I applied anyway and was accepted in the graduate program in creative writing at San Francisco State University.

When I broke the news to my parents the air went out of the living room, and a pall settled in. Mother covered her mouth and cried; Father muttered a few curses in French. My older brother, a civil engineer, shook his head in disgust and left the room. I sat silent but defiant, though inside I was trembling. Here was a nearly irresolvable conflict: I had decided to follow my passion instead of obeying my family's dictum. Though we'd adapted and changed in America, the concept of filial piety, the idea that the collective assigns and directs the destiny of the individual, was still the overarching impetus that operated within our fold.

Pragmatism, besides, defined all of us newcomers who still struggled toward America's middle class. At Berkeley more than half of the Vietnamese Student Association, to which I belonged, majored in computer science and electrical engineering. A few told me they didn't want to become engineers. These fields were highly competitive and difficult. Some wanted to become artists or architects, and a couple of them had ample talents to do so, but their parents were steadfast against it—or worse yet, their families were living still in impoverished Vietnam and were in dire need of their financial support. One in particular was an "anchor kid," someone whose family had sold practically everything they owned to buy him a passage on an escaping boat. Now alone in the U.S., he had the burden of having to support his family back home while going to school full-time. If he didn't succeed, well, it could very well mean life and death for his starving family back home.

In Vietnam, indeed, an army of hungry, ambitious, and capable young men and women were dying to take his place, and for him, who had barely survived his perilous journey across the South China Sea, "dying to" was no mere idiomatic expression.

Many of my friends were driven by an iron will to achieve academic success. While our dorm-mates put up posters of movie stars and sports heroes, another Vietnamese friend put up his own drawing of a Mandarin in silk brocade and hat. Flanked by soldiers carrying banners, the young mandarin sat on an ornate carriage while peasants stood on the side and cheered. It was a visual sutra that would help my friend focus on his studies.

We had just met then, and when he saw me looking at his painting he said, "*Do trang nguyen ve lang*"—Vietnamese for "Mandarin returns home after passing the Imperial exam." But he didn't need to explain. Like many Asian students from Confucian-bound countries—Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, Japan, and of course, China—I could easily decipher the image. In some ways, for us scholarship boys, it is the equivalent of Michael Jordan flying in the air like a god doing a slam-dunk—a dream of glorious academic achievements.

Then there was me. My parents found jobs when I was barely in my teens and by the

time I was about to graduate from high school, they had moved us to a five-bedroom home with a pool at the northern edge of Silicon Valley. Through extraordinary discipline, Father had gotten an MBA while working full-time at the Bank of America and was moving steadily up its ladder. My older brother was working for the city of San Jose and my sister was getting into accounting work just like my mother. I, the youngest, didn't have to make money to send home to some impoverished relatives in Vietnam. In fact, my family had to support me when I went to Berkeley. There were no financial demands on me, no material burdens.

But there were such things as familial honor and debt; and no matter how removed I was from my roots, part of me felt like I was betraying all my family's hard work and expectations by veering toward an unknown path that could very well lead to dismal failure and collective shame.

Filial piety is an ethos that was ingrained long before I set foot on the American shore. It is in essence the opposite of individualism. "Father's benefaction is like Mount Everest, Mother's love like the water from the purest source" is the first adage we Vietnamese children sang in first grade. If American teenagers long to leave home, to turn eighteen to be free and to find themselves, Vietnamese children are taught to fulfill and honor their filial obligations, and on top of that list is education.

As Mother wept, Father issued a challenge: "I wanted to write too, you know, when I was young. I studied French poetry and philosophy. But do you think I could feed our family on poems? Can you name a Vietnamese who's making a living as an American writer? What makes you think *you* can do it?"

I wasn't prepared for his slew of questions. I wracked my brain, trying to come up with one name—and couldn't. This was the late eighties, barely fifteen years into our expulsion from Vietnam, and the vast majority in our community were first-generation immigrants. Many were boat people who had come long after the war ended and had subsisted for years in various camps in Southeast Asia. They were still trying to learn English and make ends meet, and to overcome the horrors they had experienced—no one, as far as I knew, was making a living writing in English.

"I can't name one," I answered. "There may be none right now. So, I'll be the first."

If I felt trapped in a modern Confucian drama, my answer nevertheless came off as defiant and cocksure. Father looked at me—I mean *looked*. It was not an answer he'd expected: it was not how I talked in the family, which is to say, respectful and vaguely compliant for the most part. Perhaps for the first time, he was assessing me anew.

Something was changing inside me: I matched his gaze. At once thrilled and terrified, I had just taken a major step toward some mystery that was going to be The Rest of My Life. I had articulated myself past a significant threshold. If I didn't put all my effort into making it as a writer, I knew then, my own integrity and character would be at stake. Going back to studying for the MCAT and the wretched albino mice, to the petri dishes and the constant buzz of the ventilator in the sterile cancer research lab

where hunchbacked scientists in stained lab coats toiled away under desultory fluorescent lights—all that was no longer an option unless I accepted defeat.

But why is education so deeply ingrained in the Confucian culture?

Long before America existed, something of the American dream already had taken root in East Asia through the scholarship and examination system of Imperial China, which determined who among the population would be permitted to enter the state's bureaucracy. Villages and towns pooled resources and sent their best and brightest to compete at the Imperial court, hoping that one of their own would make it to the center of power.

Mandarins of various ranks were selected by how well they fared on extremely rigorous examination that occurred every four years. The brilliant few who passed ran the day-to-day operations of Imperial China. Vietnam, since it was ruled by China and considered to be one of its tributary states, fell under the same system. A mandarin could become a governor or a judge, or he could even marry into the royal family, depending on his prospects. A brilliant peasant with indomitable determination could rise far above his station, elevating the status of his entire clan in the process and bringing honors to the spirits of his ancestors. And it all hinged on his ability to pass the difficult exams. The Imperial exam was an egalitarian vision with national appeal, and education became a universal passion.

Of all the temples in Hanoi, Vietnam's capital, the most beautiful is Van Mieu, the Temple of Literature, dedicated to all those laureates who passed the extremely rigorous Imperial exams of centuries past and became mandarins, their names etched on stone steles that went back nearly eight hundred years. It was Vietnam's first university, known as the Imperial Academy, and eventually it became a temple, a befitting trajectory in a region where education is literally worshipped.

Under French colonial rule not much changed, except females were allowed to move up the scholastic ladder and the examinations were more frequent. Yet to acquire the baccalaureate (equivalent to a BA) in the forties and fifties in pastoral Vietnam was something so rare that one's name was forever connected to one's title, as was the case with my paternal grandmother's closest friend, Ong Tu Tai Quoc—"Mr. Baccalaureate Quoc." Since so few made it to high school, to have a baccalaureate was to be assured of a bright future, and to be marked as very special, and rich families would offer their daughters' hands in marriage to the lucky laureate.

My paternal grandfather, who went to Faculty of Law in Bordeaux, came back and married my grandmother, daughter of one of the wealthiest men in the Mekong Delta. Father's three uncles on his mother's side were all French-educated. Our high family status back home, in many ways, was due to the level of education the men in Father's clan had achieved.

Over time, trudging toward higher education seemed to become embedded in the Vietnamese genes, a cultural value that lasted through war and peace and migration. For the Vietnamese immigrant to America, even if the insular world of family and clan has eroded by dispersion, the old penchant for learning remains intact. So far from home, we

nevertheless worship at the temple of education.

America especially entices. The newcomers to this country find an array of colleges and universities to attract their scholastic souls. And if the competition is fierce, America, despite the naysayers and a shaky economy, remains the golden land of opportunities, especially compared to being stuck back home with little chance to advance.

For someone who was lucky enough to escape the horrors of Vietnam and be given ample opportunities in America to then abandon his potential seemed, therefore, something akin to a Confucian sin. By dislodging myself from my expected role within the family, I was, in a sense, being dishonorable. Or in a few relatives' description of me at the time: "selfish."

But such is the seduction of America. It summons betrayal of the parochial. America demands serious examination of the soul for children growing up between two conflicting cultures, two seeming antipodes, two opposed hemispheres. Asia will tell you to obey and honor parents' wishes, but America will tell you to look out for number one, to think for yourself. It whispers words of rebellion against the communal: Follow your dream… Take care of yourself first… You cannot make anyone else happy if you don't love yourself.

For children of Asian immigrants, to learn to negotiate between the "I" and the "We," between seemingly opposed ideas and flagrant contradictions, is in some way the most important lesson to learn, a skill much needed in order to appease and survive in both cultures.

This, then, was my secret desire: to stake a place in the world of literature. I was an inveterate bookworm. Until I left Vietnam I read French comic books and martial arts epics (translated from Chinese to Vietnamese) and even my mother's romance novels. Then, as if no major disruption had occurred despite my exile to America, I continued, reading American novels in my teen years, with a special affection for science fiction and fantasy and Buddhist texts. I spent my free time in the public libraries, devouring book after book each summer. When not studying, I could read a good novel in a single sleepless night.

I seriously doubt, were we still in Vietnam, even if the South had won the war and communism were in retreat, even if my family had retained our upper-class status, that I would have veered toward a self-directed path. If I mourned the loss of my homeland, I was also glad that I became an American. Here, perhaps like nowhere else, I was given the opportunity—as the mythologist Joseph Camp Bell would encourage you—to follow my bliss.

Back in my parents' living room, however, the argument went on. My parents wanted to know, if they could provide me with $12,000 a year, would I consider perhaps, if med school was too difficult, dental school? My answer: No. This haggling went on for some time.

In the end I said good-bye to the old expectations, to familial demands, to the mice and the dreary labs, and off I went to creative writing school, and soon thereafter, a life in journalism, traveling and writing. Though there would be serious bouts of self-doubt, the quotidian aches and angst of the writing life, the insecurities, I'm happy to report that I haven't ever regretted my decision.

And yet that is not the whole story. The whole story belongs to romance, and the end of it, and the beginning of my writing life—which is to say, if I broke my parents' hearts all those years ago, I did so with a broken heart of my own.

In my freshman year at Berkeley I fell hopelessly in love; in the year after I graduated my heart shattered. While working at the cancer research laboratory on campus I took to writing, in part, in order to grieve. Daytime and I bombarded the mammary tissues of mice with various carcinogens to see how they grew; nights and I gave myself to memories, to heartbreak. I typed and typed. I got good at writing, bored with science, so I dropped the test tube and kept the proverbial pen.

Berkeley had indeed radicalized me. But I do not mean that in a political sense. No, the quiet, bookish, apolitical, obedient boy who didn't date in high school left his Vietnamese household and found sexual liberation in college, found carnal pleasure.

More important: I fell in love with "M." In "M's" embrace and kisses, what I had thought important until then turned out to be trivial. My desire to please my chronically unhappy mother was trivial, good grades were trivial, the path toward medical school, too, was trivial. "M," whose smile made me tremble, who was all there was, stole me away from my familial sense of duty. I found a new country, a new home.

What I remember, too, was an incident during my freshman year that, over time, marked me. A studious Chinese student tried to jump from the Campanile. He was from my dorm unit. He wanted to kill himself because, well, so went the gossip, he had never gotten a B before, until chemistry or some such difficult class overwhelmed him. I remember the entire dorm talking about it. I might have been momentarily horrified. But I was too busy being in love to let it really register. I do, however, remember thinking, and not without a certain vanity, that he *wouldn't* have considered jumping had he discovered love instead.

Other bubbles are coming up randomly now from under the deep dark waters of my college life: Professor Noyce in organic chemistry dragging on his thin cigarette, the smoke twirling in the air as he draws the nicotine molecules. "Don't ever smoke," he admonishes his audience. "It's bad for you." My roommate, Tony, who plays trumpet in the band, coming home from the big game, '82, crying with happiness. The Bears have just trampled the Stanford Band to score that spectacular and bizarre turnaround in the last seconds. I am walking down Telegraph Avenue at two in the morning and the street cleaner is spinning like some lazy grazing animal and the mist is rising at my feet. The bells of the Campanile ring out one humid afternoon and for no reason at all, I drop my backpack and, while spectators look on, dance.

Above all, though, the salty scent of "M."

Then "M" was gone. And my heart was broken.

Wasn't it then that I began to write? Wasn't it then that I began to bleed myself into words?

Yet it was not the larger world, nor my Vietnamese refugee experience, nor the Vietnam War that I wanted to address. I wrote about my unhappiness. I tried to capture what it was like to lose someone who had been my preoccupation throughout my college life; who was,

in fact, my life then. Yet I was too close to the subject, too hurt to do the story justice. But the raw emotions unearthed another set of older memories simmering underneath. When one loses something one loves, with whom one shares a private life, a private language, a private world, one loses an entire country, one becomes an exile.

But hadn't I been exiled before?

I had. The brokenhearted adult slowly found himself going back further, recalling the undressed wounds of the distraught child who stood alone on the beach of Guam, the camp with its khaki-green tents flapping in the wind, the child missing his friends, his dogs, fretting about his father, whose fate he had no way of knowing, and wondering if he'd ever see his homeland again.

My sadness opened a trapdoor to the past. A child forced to flee. The long line for food under a punishing sun. People weeping themselves to sleep. The family altar, where faded photographs of the dead stared out forlornly, the incense still burning but the living gone. A way of life stolen, a people scattered. I yearned for all my memories. I wrote some more. I began to go back.

Some years passed…

"These are Andrew Lam's awards," said my mother one afternoon to her friends when I was visiting and eavesdropping from upstairs. Sometimes my parents wouldn't say my Vietnamese name to their guests. "Andrew Lam" became someone else—related but somewhat remote, and yet important. For visitors, especially if it was their first visit, there would be an obligatory walk by the bookcase before sitting down for tea. On it were the various trophies and awards and diplomas, but chief among them, Andrew Lam's journalism awards.

"My son the Berkeley radical" became my father's favorite phrase when he introduced me to his friends. "Parents give birth to children, God gives birth to their personalities" became my mother's oft-repeated phrase, as a way to explain her youngest son. I don't take offense. I take it that this was their way of accepting how things can turn out in America, which is to say, unpredictable and heartbreaking.

I can't remember for sure how long he stood up there, or how he was talked down, that studious Chinese boy from the dorm. I do remember that around that time they put up metal bars on the Campanile so that no one else could jump.

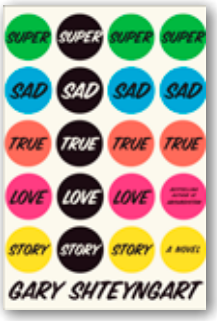
Last year, after having revisited the Berkeley campus, where I was invited to give a talk about my writing life and my various travels as a journalist, I had a dream. In it, it is me who finds himself atop the Campanile alone at sunset. I hesitate but I am not entirely afraid. I am not gripped by fear. Below, people are gathering. Before me: a beatific horizon. I leap. And soar high over the campus before heading out to where sky kisses sea.

I haven't landed yet.

Friday Reads.

The Social Media Book Club

Each Friday, thousands of avid readers join in FridayReads, a literary dialog on Twitter and Facebook. The question: What are you reading? The answers are posted by book lovers around the world on Facebook and in 140 characters or less and using the searchable hash tag #fridayreads on Twitter. We're sampling some of the top trending FridayReads titles here -- post your own and discover more great books every Friday.



Super Sad True Love Story: A Novel by Gary Shteyngart

"A hilarious must-read."

Life by Keith Richards

"Irresistible breakdowns of beats and chords."

The Windup Girl by Paolo Bacigalupi

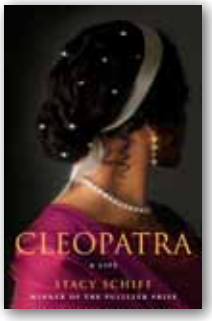
"I recommend it to anyone who likes good sci-fi."

One Day by David Nicholls

"Good book. Not surprised to see a movie's in the works."

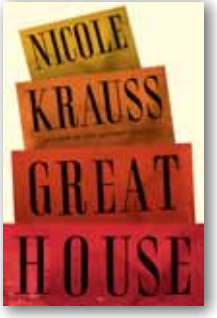
Freedom by Jonathan Franzen

"Is there a contemporary social issue he DOESN'T cover in this book?"



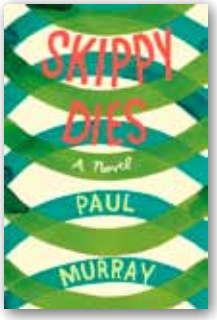
Cleopatra: A Life by Stacy Schiff

"Fascinating biography."



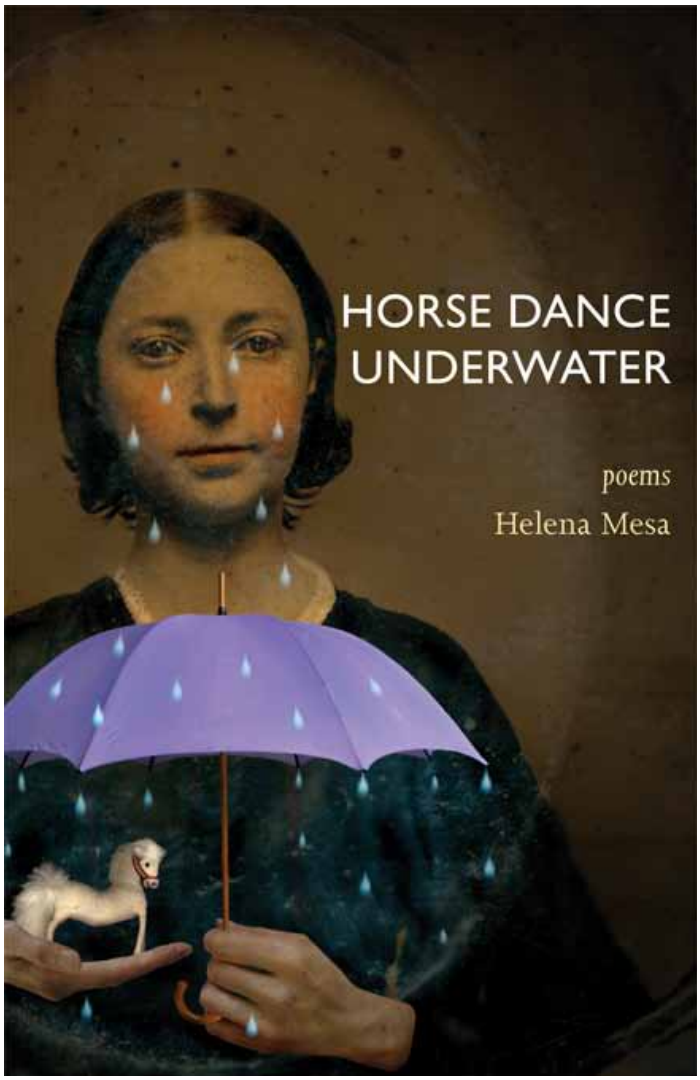
Great House: A Novel by Nicole Krauss

"Should have won the National Book Award."



Skippy Dies by Paul Murray

"I cannot recommend this book highly enough."



Sway This Night

by Helena Mesa

It reminds me of departure, this town
gutted with rails and passing trains whose horns
insist we waste our nights. At four, darkness
numbs our hands, hollows the streets
except for those trains, and after, a stillness
no one wants. My first autumn, then winter,
I began to believe I knew each train
by sound—silver bullet with a dining car,
freight of longhorns, and second to last, hogs.
It went this way. Each named by the drag of steel
on steel that says, *This night belongs to no one
but me*, named in the boredom that comes without
love, and the belief that the conductor speeds home
to something, until my chemist friend explained
that every few years in these boxed-up towns,
someone lies across the tracks after last call
before the sky melts like beeswax, the stillness
a wisp of air like madness in fear. No more,
no more. Even the wind pressed off the sides
pushes back, its metal cold, like the loss of breath
after a blow. The body stands, sways, in wait.

Gnaw

by Rachel Contreni Flynn

So many photos:

the pretty tow-head with her fist
twisted in her mouth, gnawing.

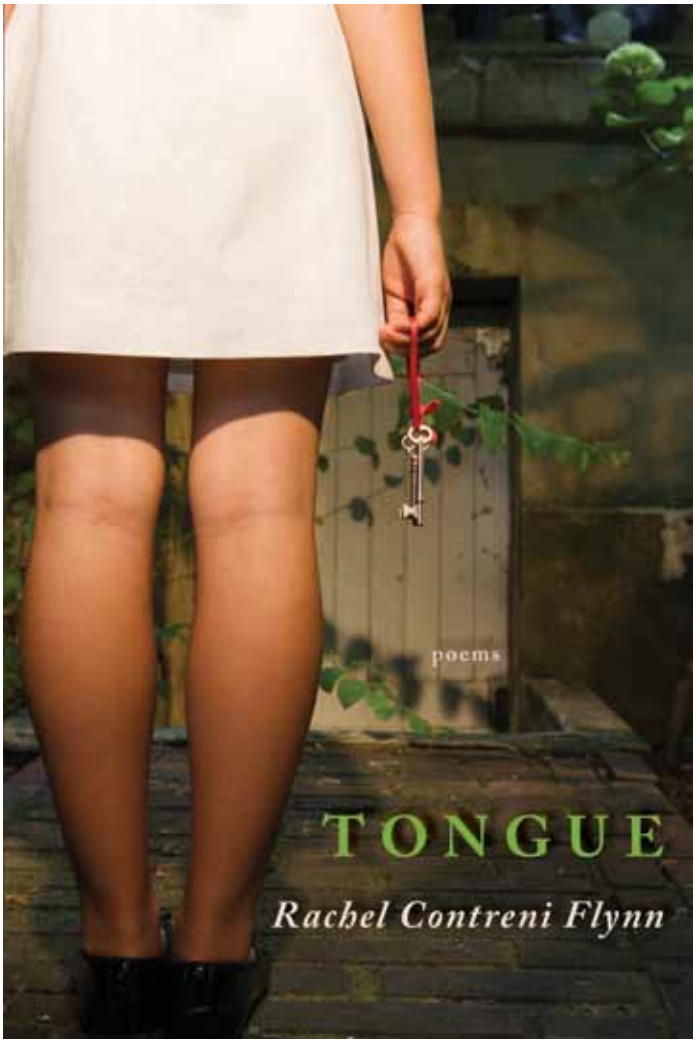
Our mother shellacked my sister's nails
with noxious liquid and begged.

But it was like a weed-tree growing
alongside a fence, helpless,

striving for light and release
finding instead the bite

of metal bending, imbedding
in pulpy green flesh.

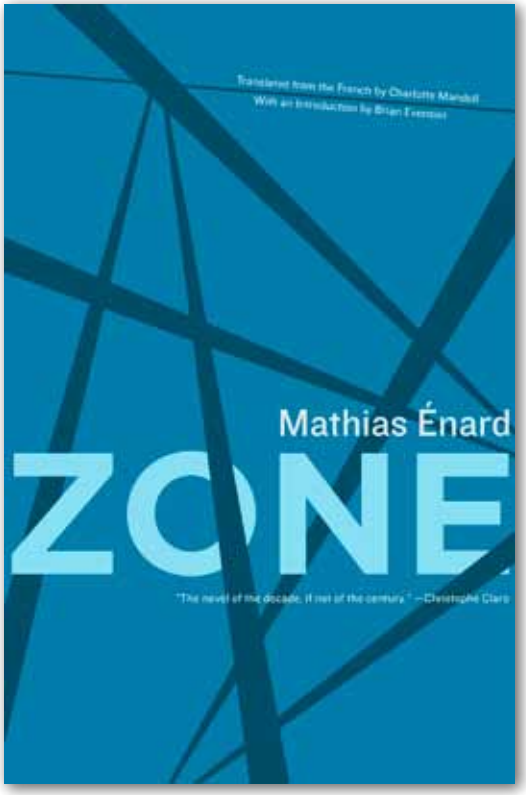
The tree and the fence, both
damaged, neither happy.



Zone
by Mathias Énard

Open Letter Books
www.openletterbooks.org

Mathias Énard's *Zone* tells the story of a day in the life of Francis Servain Mirkovic, a French secret service agent of Croatian heritage, who is travelling by train through Italy; Mirkovic's journey is no simple holiday, however. He is carrying a briefcase filled with secret documents that he intends to turn over to a man in Rome in exchange for enough money to retire from his life as a spy. Despite this set-up—which may sound worthy of an Alfred Hitchcock movie—*Zone* is no page-turning thriller, or at least not one in any conventional sense. Indeed, this novel, which has been translated from the French, is best-known for its unusual formal qualities: Its 517 pages are composed of one continuously running sentence.



Technically, there are few full-stops in the book (at a few points Mirkovic reads chapters of an imaginary novel with standard punctuation and formatting), but by and large the book is written in a stream-of-consciousness style that catalogues Mirkovic's freely associating thoughts while he is riding on the train. The use of this mode has led some reviewers to compare *Zone* to some of the monumental works of 20th-Century Modernism, like James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time.* With its political themes, pulp-fiction conceit, and more modern setting though, *Zone* is considerably more accessible than either of those two books. *Zone* is, nonetheless, a highly allusive and intentionally literary book, which references such writers as Ezra Pound, Jean Genet, Robert Walser, Proust, Hemmingway, Ferdinand Celine, Homer, William S. Burroughs and Malcolm Lowry, among many others.

But more than anything, *Zone* is a book about the history of European wars and genocides (with a particular emphasis on the eastern end of the continent where it elides into the Middle East). Indeed, the spies that Mirkovic works with simply refer to Europe as the "zone," and Énard shows an incredibly vivid and interesting familiarity with this material cataloguing the Trojan War, Napolean, World War II, the Balkan Wars, and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, in which Mirkovic served as a soldier. Mirkovic also spends a great deal of time ruminating on the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, and the "ethnic cleansing"of the Yugoslav Wars. All of which is to say that *Zone* isn't exactly light reading, and Énard does nothing to spare his readers from the gritty details of life in a warzone.

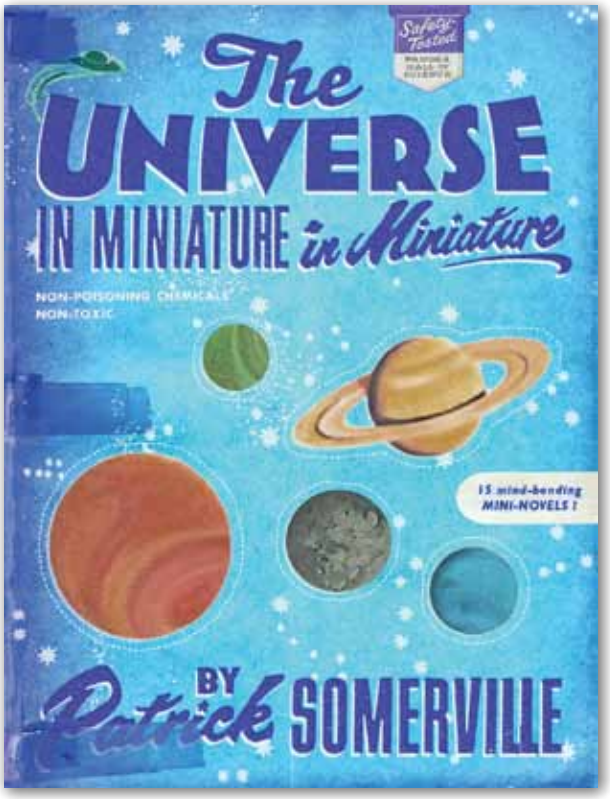
But for all of this ugliness, *Zone* itself is a beautifully written book, and Énard demonstrates incredibly precise control over his prose, which moves easily between Mirkovic's present ride on the train and his often-harrowing memories. I'll be honest—readers who are put off by difficult books (and don't like stream-of-consciousness works by writers like Virginia Woofe and William Faulkner), probably won't be converted by *Zone,* but for any reader willing to give something a little bit more challenging a go, *Zone* is an absolute must-read, and would certainly appeal to readers who have enjoyed Roberto Bolaño's longer books like *2666* and *The Savage Detectives*. *Zone* was perhaps the most important literary work to be translated into English in 2010, and it's absolutely essential reading for anyone with an interest in world literature.

—Emmett Stinson, www.emmettstinson.blogspot.com

The Universe in Miniature in Miniature
by Patrick Somerville

Featherproof Books
www.featherproof.com

There's been a lot of anxiety in recent years about "the future of the book." Lately, that anxiety has focused on e-books and whether they'll supplant traditional books as our preferred literary medium. Maybe they will, and maybe they won't. But one thing's certain: e-books can't do the kinds of things that titles from Chicago-based Featherproof do. *Scorch Atlas*, for example, has the look of a book that's been through hell and back. *Daddy's* looks, at first glance, like a fishing tackle box. And Patrick Somerville's *The Universe in Miniature in Miniature* can, if the reader is ready, willing, and able, be converted into a working model of the solar system. You just can't do that with an e-book no matter how hard you try. Yes, these titles are available in e-formats, but half the fun of owning them is just plain looking at them—or "accidentally" leaving them out on your coffee table for your guests to admire and enjoy. To put it another way, *these books are cool.*



The other half of the fun inherent in Featherproof's titles, needless to say, is reading them. *The Universe in Miniature in Miniature* is a mind-bending roller coaster ride of a read. Indeed, the works in Somerville's collection display a colossal range of imagination and emotional depth. He is an author who is as comfortable depicting the end of the world (as in the apocalyptic "No Sun," which sees the Earth stop in its tracks without cause or explanation) as he is following the burgeoning passions of a teenage girl (as in the coming-of-age tale "The Wildlife Biologist").

Significantly, Somerville is also funny, as initially evidenced by the book's dedication to Slartibartfast (of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* fame) and borne out through subsequent tales of wayward incompetent aliens, grad students in unaccredited MFA programs, and a balding man desperately seeking matriculation into an overseas institution known only as Hair University. The humor in all of these situations is, of course, balanced with pathos, underscoring the exquisite ambivalence of the human condition in ways reminiscent of both Kurt Vonnegut and Woody Allen. Our struggle for happiness, these stories suggest, will always be undercut by our tendency to screw things up, yet it's our tendency to screw things up which, ironically, makes us keep trying (and failing, and trying again) and, not coincidentally, also makes us human. We are flawed, and we are beautiful, and we are funny. Patrick Somerville sees all of it (and then some), and reports lovingly on our shared humanity throughout *The Universe in Miniature in Miniature.* It is, in short, an amazing collection of stories.

Most likely, we'll be debating the future of the book until the Earth does, in fact, stop in its tracks, but as long as small presses like Featherproof—which is to say, people who care deeply not only about storytelling but about books themselves, the very experience of reading a book, the thrill of regarding a book as more than a medium for conveying information but as a work of art in and of itself—have anything to say about it, the printed word will continue to thrive. If you or someone you know is a book lover, do yourself a favor and check out this wonderful press.

—Marc Schuster, www.smallpressreviews.wordpress.com

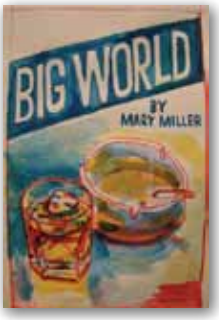
SQUARE BOOKS IN MISSISSIPPI

It's not uncommon for a shopper in Oxford, Mississippi's Square Books to ask a staffer for one book—just one—that describes the American South. The reason for the impossible request has to do with the frequent assortment of out-of-state tourists who visit Oxford and its hometown university, Ole Miss, and are immediately inspired to know more about the place and its culture. And Square Books is happy to oblige: With three storefronts on two sides of Oxford's historic town square, the local institution has become a de facto hub of information and entertainment for visitors, students, and residents alike.

The roster of visiting authors over the years is impressive: Allen Ginsberg, Alex Haley, Gloria Steinem, Richard Ford, and William Styron all have frequented the shop on the square. But co-owner Richard Howorth doesn't find Square Books' celeb pull surprising: "A lot of writers connect with Mississippi both because of its literary heritage and because, let's admit it, it's a state that's kind of on the bottom of the heap in terms of so many statistics. So I think as kind of an act of citizenship a lot of writers feel like they should be here [in Mississippi], or they come here to Oxford specifically because of Faulkner. What self-respecting American writer doesn't want to touch base with Yoknapatawpha at some point?" —*Yvonne Parrish*

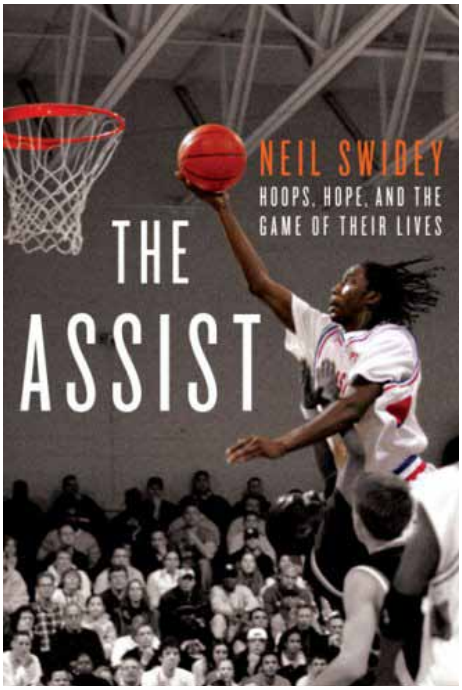
what's on their shelf

In January 1954, a young black man named Eddie Noel shot and killed his wife's boss, a white honky-tonk operator named Willie Ramon Dickard. In *The Time of Eddie Noel*, author Allie Povall tells the story of how Noel managed to evade what might be the largest posse in Mississippi history and disappear "like a whippoorwill," never to be caught or tried. Comfort Publishing, www.comfortpublishing.com.



A popular staff pick, Mary Miller's debut short story collection *Big World* has been likened to the works of Mary Gaitskill and Courtney Eldridge, if those authors were from further South and reeked of cigarettes and booze. Hobart, www.hobartpulp.com.

Written by T.R. Pearson and with stunning images by Langdon Clay, *Year of Our Lord: Faith, Hope, and Harmony in the Mississippi Delta* explores one of the poorest parts of the American South, and the spiritual riches it holds in abundance. Mockingbird Publishing, www.mockinbirdpublishing.com.



SLAM DUNK

Author Neil Swidey follows the path of the Charlestown High School girls' basketball team through its 2004-2005 season, but although this is ostensibly a book about basketball, the real story here lies in the bare-knuckled fight between Jack O'Brien, the team's colorful, dedicated coach, and Boston's gang- and gun-laden streets for the time and attention of the young players. Swidey immersed himself with the team members and their families, emerging with intimate details that reveal the stacked deck dealt to even the smartest and most talented kids born into challenged school systems. **The Assist** is at once an inspiring, entertaining drama and an education in what it takes to succeed in urban schools today.

—Jennifer Wichmann

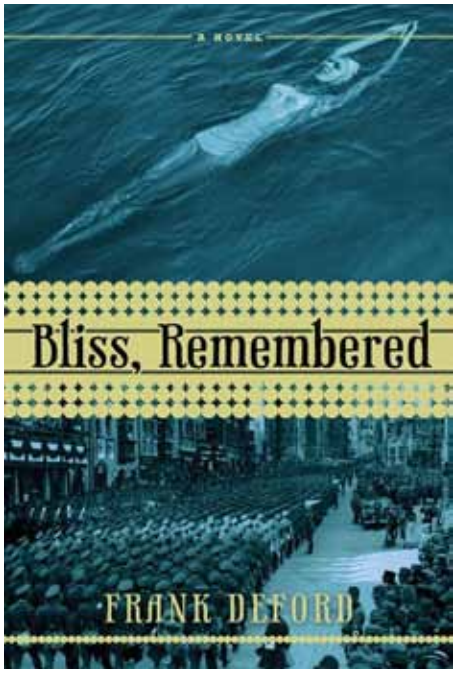
The Assist by Neil Swidey, Public Affairs 2008, www.publicaffairsbooks.com.

LOOKING BACK

I admit to having done a double-take when I saw the name of **Bliss, Remembered**'s author—Frank DeFord, as in *Sports Illustrated* Frank DeFord? Thankfully I didn't let my limited perspective get in the way of my enjoyment of this sweet tale of a mother's shared remembrance with, and eventual confession to, her son as she ends her battle with cancer. But to expect a tear-filled, maudlin story would be a mistake: Sidney "Trixie" Branch's cancer is a minor player in this novel, giving way to her experience as a young swimmer on the U.S. Olympic team at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Alongside a compelling love story is an equally fascinating view of Berlin under a rising Nazi party, before Hitler became synonymous with all that is evil.

—Dean Hill

Bliss, Remembered by Frank DeFord, Overlook Press 2010, www.overlookpress.com.



THE GAME'S AFOOT

Arthur Conan Doyle famously killed off detective Sherlock Holmes in 1893, only to bring him back to life several years later. In **The Sherlockian**, debut novelist Graham Moore weaves together the drama of Conan Doyle's life during the post-Holmes years with that of a modern-day scholar-cum-detective attempting to solve a murder and find the celebrated author's missing diary. One of the most entertaining mysteries I have read in years—witty and gripping and full of enough Sherlock Holmes detail to satisfy the faithful while not confounding the uninitiated—the novel is so well-plotted and -executed that it is hard to believe it is Moore's first. Here's hoping it is the start of a long-running series.

—Ben Minton

The Sherlockian by Graham Moore, Twelve/Hatchette Book Group 2010, www.hatchettebookgroup.com.

with

kevin FENTON

Merit Badges

by Kevin Fenton
New Issues Press
www.wmich.edu/newissues

evin Fenton has a diverse resume: advertising writer, attorney, poet, and former Boy Scout. And to this lengthy list he now adds AWP Award-winning author of *Merit Badges*, his new novel about a group of friends growing up, apart, and back together in small town Minnisapa, Minnesota. It's a coming of age story with such smart writing and endearing characters that you'll find yourself, in turns, rooting for or chastising them as the story of their lives unfolds. We talked with Fenton about the addictive nature of list-making, what lawyers can teach you about writing, and the small-town appeal of "Be Nice To" days.

—Dean Hill

Shelf Unbound: ***You use the Boy Scouts merit badge system to form the chapter structure of the novel. Please brag: What merit badges, if any, have you earned? Any you tried for and didn't secure for your sash?***
Kevin Fenton: I earned about 10 merit badges. I was most proud of the ones that ran against type: Hiking, which required five 10-mile hikes and a 20-miler, and Biking, which required 25-mile and 50-mile bike rides. I failed at failure: I now wish I would have tried to earn Swimming, although swimming for me has always been the serial avoidance of drowning.

Shelf: Merit Badges ***is narrated by four protagonists: Quint, Slow, Chimes, and Barb. How did you settle on this quartet?***
Fenton: There were originally seven or eight narrators, but people kept telling me they wouldn't publish the book if I didn't lose some of them, which got my attention. I made the cuts by feel: The ones I kept had a sort of obsessive clarity and distinct voices and, I realized later, interesting tension with another narrator. Quint reacts to the loss of a father one way; Slow, another. Chimes is at the center of the group; Barb, at its edges.

Shelf: ***The merit badges themselves are representative of the characters' lost childhoods. Slow says, "What I couldn't tell Chimes without seeming like a dube is that I love Merit Badges. Every night before I go to bed, after I go through each of my twenty lists, I pull out my sash and look at each badge and sometimes feel the embroidery like I'm holding a rosary bead. I remember how cool it was to be a kid." Why do you think so many of us romanticize and are nostalgic for childhood when, at the time, it is often incredibly difficult?***

Fenton: Because we survived them. I romanticize the early '60s—which I picture as an amusement park of Stan Getz tunes and Grant/Hepburn movies. It's impossible to fear the past so, with the fear gone, the radiance of those times comes through.

Shelf: ***When Quint gets the call during a business meeting that his mom has had a stroke, you write: "putting the phone to my ear felt like stepping to the edge of a cliff." I think we've all had that call. Were you thinking of a specific time in your own life when you wrote that line?***

Fenton: My Mom is 87 and has had a by-pass and a stroke. Unexpected calls from Winona are never allowed to go to voice mail.

Shelf: ***I absolutely loved the book. I laughed out loud, reminisced about my own childhood and misspent youth, and occasionally cried. My favorite chapter is "Backpacking," which includes the list of Things That Are Very Minnisapa. I giggled maniacally when I read the ninth item on the list:***

> The daily "Be Nice To" promotions on the radio station, where the announcers would encourage Minnisapaens to be especially nice to someone that day. Pooch got one when he got some scholarship. Pooch skipped sixth grade, which the Jaycees think gives him supernatural powers.

Do you have a favorite chapter?

Fenton: I do love that one ("Backpacking"), because it's an ode to Minnisapa, which is the fifth protagonist. My favorite, though, is probably "Climbing." Along with "Skating," it was one of the last written and I wrote those chapters because I wanted to write about happiness. The characters are actually pretty happy people but, because the structure of the book takes them from crisis to crisis, that isn't always clear.

Shelf: ***How much of the characters and events are drawn from your own childhood in Winona, Minnesota?***

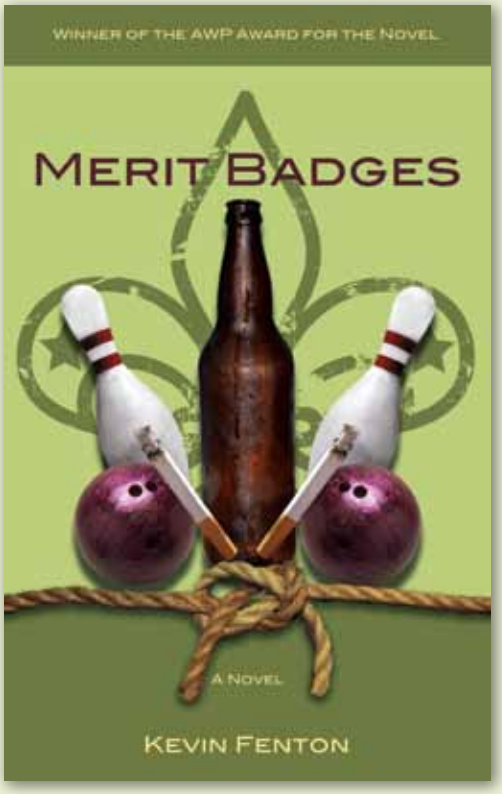
Fenton: The spiritual DNA of the people I grew up with is all over the book. And obviously some of the public stuff is true. KWNO Radio really did have "Be Nice To" days and they really did broadcast fireworks on the radio.

Shelf: ***You weren't always a published author. You once were in advertising and practiced law. Has your experience in the flim flam arts influenced your work in literature?***

Fenton: Yes. And yes. I used to insist on the boundary between advertising and literature, but I love the quotable and the energetic and I got that from advertising. That, and, I hope, a good visual sense and an understanding of business.

Going to law school is like being a Jesuit. Even if you lose the faith, the intellectual training is great. Professors such as the constitutional scholar Carl Auerbach at Minnesota showed me a kind of rigor I'd never experienced before. Every word matters, no footnote is irrelevant, every fact shapes one's conclusions. Law and fiction both proceed by narratives toward tangly abstractions.

In tribute to Slow Slocum, one of *Merit Badges*' narrators and a habitual list-maker, here's a list of favorite lines from the book (ironically none of which were voiced by Slow himself):



- "The world was in a bad mood that summer: The sky was sad, but that's because it's the only thing in the world that's as moody as we are…." —*Quint*
- ". . . I will leave the house when I have no more whiskey and I will walk and walk and walk. Unlike God, I will make an unambiguous gesture. You will know that I exist and you will deal with me." —*Quint*
- "She laughed. Our hands touched and I almost held hers but pulled back. But she looked at me and said, "What do you feel right now?" and that broke through all the shyness and silliness and we kissed there for a long time, and then she snuggled in close under my arm and stayed there for like the next four months. We knew that we just needed that one moment to get through the bullshit and we got it." —*Quint*
- ". . . [I]f there is anything better than sex with a girl you love in a secret motel room when you're 18 years old, I don't want to know about it because I'll get addicted to it." —*Quint*
- ". . . I feel that all those people—including me, most of the time—who say that traveling is not the point of Christmas are dead wrong. Traveling is exactly the point of Christmas. The wise men were probably exhausted; half-lost; bitching at each other about when they should stop, where they should go; they were probably totally fed-up; those ancient priests were pulled by a star that felt like the purest love they had ever know. And so, totally pissed off, bareley talking to each other, slapping their stupid camels, they trudged on." —*Barb*
- "For one summer, our lives were a beach movie. How often in life can you say, "Everybody I give a shit about is within ten feet of me?" I think we knew that things would never be this cool again." —*Chimes*
- "Then I get dressed and walk out into the cold air and really feel it and breathe it deeply and scrape the frost from my windshield and notice the hatchings of clear window and watch my breath appear and dissipate and listen to the car's engine idle and the smoke stream from the muffler and notice all the other shit that only a recovering alcoholic would consider a spiritual experience." —*Quint*
- "My ankle throbs. The metaphor for love should not be the heart, but tendons. They are vaguely gristlely, like love. They connect us to the world. They are easily strained." —*Barb*
- "We have such a lame sense of what constitutes a miracle. Everything is a damn miracle." —*Barb*
- "Death meant picking up the phone and getting shit done. It was another day at the office except that sometimes you felt like an abandoned house in December and sometimes you felt the tears swelling up in your eyes and you could see the light twirl in them so you had to take a little I'm-not-going-to-cry break." —*Chimes*

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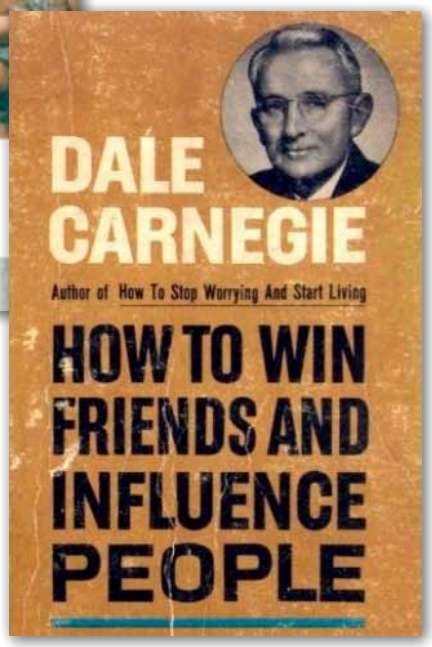

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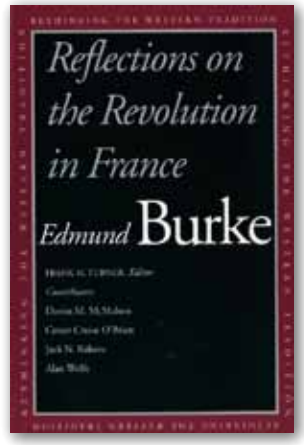

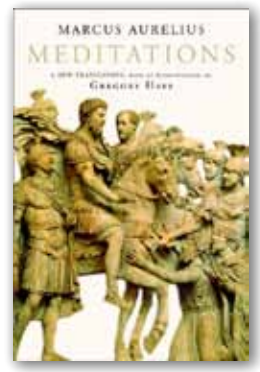

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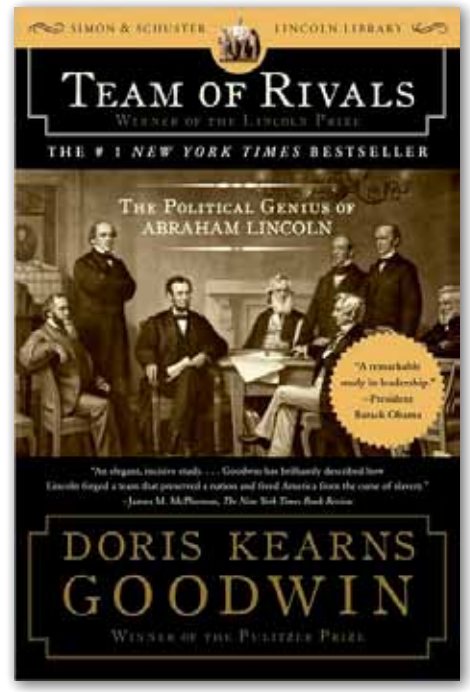

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Shelf: ***What should there be a merit badge for that is not currently offered?***
Fenton: I just read that it costs $75,000 to introduce a Merit Badge, so the bar's pretty high. I think a Silence merit badge might be a good idea. Kids are overwhelmed with chatter. They've got this electronic umbilical connection to their parents that just creeps me out. Requirements might include:

- Walk through your neighborhood without a cell phone. What do you notice?
- Sit down with nothing but a book, printed on paper. Describe your experience.

I think kids might embrace this. A few years back, I judged some high school speech tournaments for a friend of mine. Most of the best original oratory performances were kids critiquing the pervasiveness of digital distraction.

Shelf: ***Narrator Slow Slocum is a serial list-maker: The Most Level-Headed People I Know, Top 25 Babes In Each Class, People Most Likely To Become Serial Killers After Graduation, Things That Are very Minnisapa. If Slow were to make a list of the 10 books a person should read before they die, what would be on it?***
Fenton: Oddly, fictional characters almost never read. But Slow's list might look something like this:

1. The Bible. Slow's a Catholic, so this is a part of the air he breathes. His is the somewhat interpreted, triangulated Bible of Catholicism.
2. How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie. Slow shares my concern that the title doesn't do the book any favors. How to Win Allies would be more accurate. But underneath the schmaltz is surprisingly good life advice.
3. Reflections on the French Revolution by Edmund Burke. Slow is all kinds of conservative, including this rare philosophical variety. Plus, he thinks the French are dubes.
4. *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. I think the snide remarks about Christians would

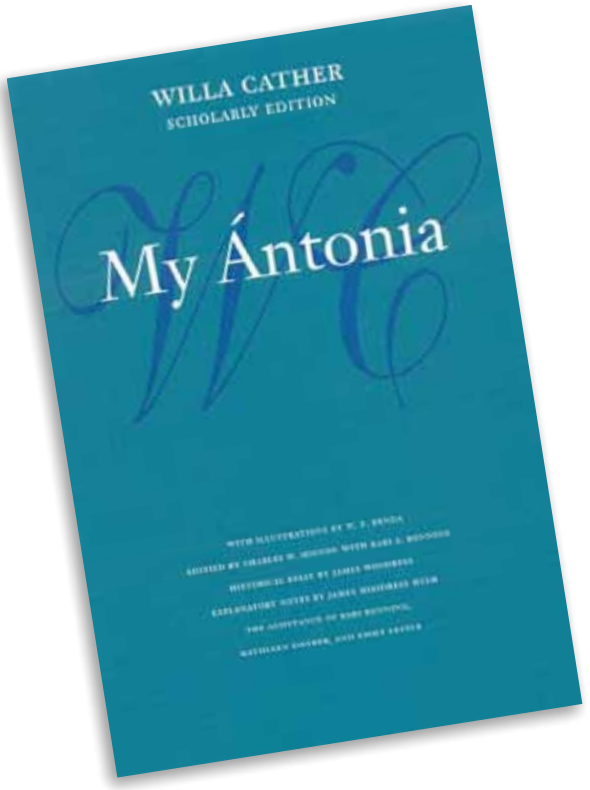
bother Slow but not enough to put him off Aurelius, whom he would respect as the ultimate grown-up.

5. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by Doris Kearns Godwin. Speaking of grown-ups.
6. *Extraordinary, Ordinary People* by Condoleezza Rice. I suspect that Slow might have a Conde crush.
7. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. People who think Huck was carefree weren't paying attention. Slow would notice that Huck was trying to do the right thing even when the adults weren't.
8. *Born Modern: The Life and Design of Alvin Lustig* by Steven Heller. Slow dreamed of "undoing the design missteps of the Seventies, and designing the Home of the Future, stuff with unexpected push-button capabilities and teardrop-shaped touch screens and colors from the 50s and grilles like smiles and sans-serif Swiss fonts that make you feel like you've been scrubbed clean." Lustig is a mid-century modern saint.
9. *The Spandau Diaries* by Albert Speer. Slow would have been disturbed by Speer's normalcy, especially since both men share a love of system and detail.
10. *The Experience of Place* by Tony Hiss. Hiss brilliantly explains what's behind those places you remember forever, such as the Quarry in Minnisapa.

Shelf: ***In the acknowledgments to the book you write, "And I owe a special debt to you the reader. The French are right. You are the real author of this book." Would you care to elaborate?***

Fenton: When I heard I'd won the AWP Award, I thought: Finally, the book is done. But, no, I won't be happy until *Merit Badges* bounces around in the heads of some people and makes them happy or whatever it is that literature makes us. That probably tramples the French theory, but that's what I meant.

LAST WORDS



My Ántonia
by Willa Cather
University of Nebraska Press
www.nebraskapress.unl.edu

*t*he feelings of that night were so near that I could reach out and touch them with my hand. I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man's experience is. For Ántonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.

february contributors

MATT BELL is the author of three chapbooks, *Wolf Parts* (Keyhole Press), *The Collectors* (Caketrain Press), and *How the Broken Lead the Blind* (Willows Wept Press). His fiction has appeared in numerous publications and has been selected for inclusion in such anthologies as *Best American Mystery Stories 2010* and *Best American Fantasy 2*. He is the editor of *The Collagist* and of Dzanc's *Best of the Web* anthology series.

CÉLINE CLANET is a French photographer and graphic designer based in Paris. Her first book, *Máze*, was the winner of Photolucida's 2008 Critical Mass book award.

KEVIN FENTON lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and works as an advertising writer and creative director. He has published stories in the *Laurel Review*, the *Northwest Review*, and *Emprise Review*; poetry in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and reviews and essays in *Rain Taxi*, the design quarterlies *Émigré* and *Eye* (London), and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. An essay was anthologized in *Looking Closer 2: Critical Writing On Graphic Design*. He serves on the board of *Rain Taxi Review of Books* and the Innocence Project of Minnesota.

RACHEL CONTRENI FLYNN was born in Paris in 1969 and raised in a small farming town in Indiana. Her second full-length collection of poetry, *Tongue*, won the Benjamin Saltman Award and was published in 2010 by Red Hen Press. Her chapbook *Haywire* was published by Bright Hill Press in 2009, and her first book, *Ice, Mouth, Song*, was published in 2005 by Tupelo Press, after winning the Dorset Prize. She is an instructor in poetry at Northwestern University and lives north of Chicago with her husband and their two children.

KIM DANA KUPPERMAN is the recipient of the 2009 Katharine Bakeless Nason Prize in Nonfiction. Her work has appeared in literary periodicals including *Best American Essays*, *Fourth Genre*, *Hotel Amerika*, and *River Teeth*. She is the founder of Welcome Table Press, a nonprofit independent press dedicated to publishing and celebrating the essay.

ANDREW LAM is an editor and cofounder of New American Media, an association of more than 2,000 ethnic media outlets in America. He was featured in the PBS documentary *My Journey Home*, in which a film crew followed him back to his homeland, Vietnam, and he has been a regular contributor on NPR's *All Things Considered*. His book *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora* won a PEN American Beyond Margins Award in 2006 and was a finalist for the Asian American Literary Award. Lam's first short story collection, *Birds of Paradise*, is due in 2011.

HELENA MESA was born and raised in Pittsburgh to Cuban parents. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Barrow Street, Bat City Review, Indiana Review, Poet Lore,* and *Third Coast*. She is currently co-editing a collection of essays, *Mentor & Muse: From Poets to Poets*. She lives in Ann Arbor and is an assistant professor of English at Albion College.

TODD OLDHAM has become one of the most diverse designers working today, from film and photography to furniture and graphic art. Originally a couture fashion designer with several stores in New York City and a former commentator on MTV's *House of Style*, Oldham has gone on to design furniture lines for Target and La-Z-Boy. He is a contributing editor to *ReadyMade* magazine.

RENÉ REDZEPI is head chef and owner of Noma restaurant in Copenhagen, where he creates his inventive take on Nordic cuisine with a distinctive emphasis on regional specialties. He is widely recognized as one of the world's most influential chefs.

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