

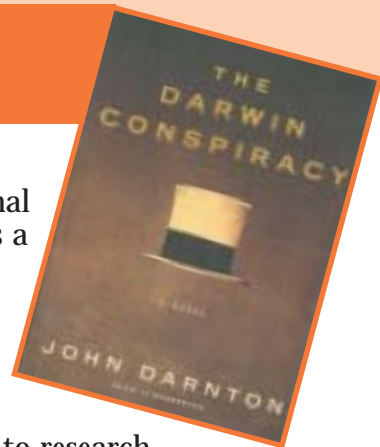
The Darwin Conspiracy
by John Darnton

Knopf, 2005

A biography, spiced with loads of fictional speculation, John Darnton's new novel is a page-turning look at the great Charles Darwin, his voyage on the *Beagle*, and the impact it had on both his personal and professional life.

Hugh Kelleam and Beth Dulcimer, both present-day Darwin scholars, join forces to research the elusive Darwin with the help of a found journal purportedly written by his daughter Lizzie. The journal questions the events in Darwin's life that caused him to delay 20 years after his tour on the *Beagle* to formulate and publish his theories on evolution and natural selection.

The story develops from three points of view: Darwin himself recounts events as he recalls them from the voyage; Lizzie attempts to understand her father thirty years later through her journal; and Hugh and Beth try to put all the pieces of the mystery together. Filled with adventure, professional jealousies, illness, and despair, Charles Darwin remained an enigma to all who knew him. A wonderful blending of historic personages and a strong plot keep the reader engaged and entertained.



Intuition by Allegra Goodman

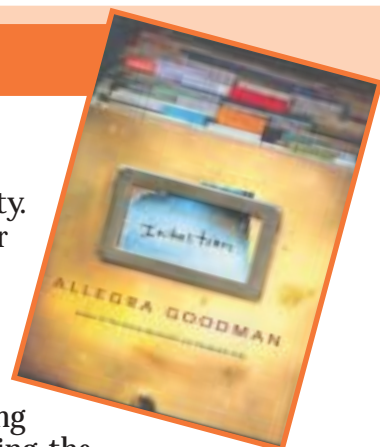
Dial Press, 2006

Scientists Cliff Bannaker and Robin Decker meet at a medical research facility. Both are working on independent cancer research projects. During their many hours together in the lab, they become friends and then lovers.

When Cliff's research begins showing positive results, other scientists, including Robin, are assigned to assist in duplicating the outcomes. Everyone knows that a significant scientific discovery could lead to publications and funding, all contributing to the reputation of the lab and the scientists.

Robin resents that her work has been delegated a lower priority and finds herself questioning and challenging Cliff's data. Should she alert authorities about her suspicions and, if she does, what will be the impact on her career?

The author exposes the jealousies, politics, and pressures that affect the scientists doing the research, and the administrators struggling to fund the research. The novel takes the reader inside the intriguing and controversial world of medicine.



"Her intuition told her that Cliff had cheated."

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Leonardo's Swans by Karen Essex

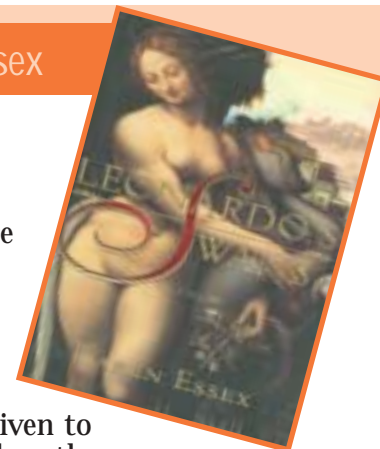
Doubleday, 2006

Essex's latest story shows the Italian Renaissance from the position of the patrons. Isabella and Beatrice d'Este are daughters of one of the ruling families. The two are married into other influential families to solidify alliances within Italy. Isabella's husband, Francesco Gonzaga, future Marquis of Mantua, is a heroic soldier. Beatrice is given to Ludovico Sforza, the future Duke of Milan, the power behind one of the wealthiest areas.

The sisters would be better suited with the other's spouse. Isabella, with her great love of art and culture, is so much more suited to be the wife of the influential Ludovico while lively Beatrice is more suited to the famed horse breeder of Mantua. Isabella uses her grace and charm to further the career of her husband and Mantua. Her fame as a muse for artists, poets, and musicians spreads throughout Europe. Naive Beatrice struggles to find her place with a man who flaunts his mistress and is overt with his interest for her sister. Her spirited personality quickly wins over her husband and the courts of Italy. Ludovico uses the vast wealth of his region to patronize the greatest artists of the day including Leonardo Da Vinci.

Much of the story shows the Sforza's struggle to direct the distracted Magistro to complete his commissions. The tale gives an interesting peek into the thought and work habits of this artistic genius. But, when Ludovico allies with the French against Milan's enemies, he sets in motion the downfall of his family and turmoil for Italy and the two sisters.

"How did I ever live without you, my darling?"



Shelf Life

Grace A. Dow Memorial Library

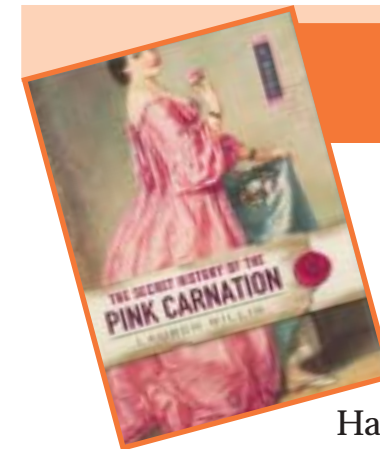
Summer 2006

Original Reviews of Recommended Books

The Secret History of the Pink Carnation by Lauren Willig

Dutton, 2005

Lauren Willig's first novel is a fun, rollicking dance through history. Modern-day graduate student Eloise Kelly is desperate to find a dissertation topic or risk being thrown out of Harvard's history department. She travels to



England in search of the identities of the Scarlet Pimpernel's successors, the Purple Gentian and the Pink Carnation who were Napoleonic-era spies. Eloise locates a trunk of letters and diaries from 1803 written by Amy Balcourt which tells the story of the Pink Carnation, the most elusive spy of all time, who single-handedly saves England from Napoleon's invasion.

The point of view then shifts to that of Amy Balcourt, following her tempestuous life as she heads to France in hopes of aiding the Purple Gentian as he tries to keep England out of Napoleon's grasp. Sparks fly as Amy, her cousin Jane, and strict chaperone, Miss Gwen, doggedly seek out the Purple Gentian, only to have Amy fall head over heels for the masked man. Miscommunications, intrigue, and danger follow the couple as they try to thwart the French plans, only to have romance rule the day.

With witty, amusing dialogue throughout, this debut is charming, wildly imaginative, and totally fun.

"Illogic had never looked quite so attractive."

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Contributors: Melissa Barnard, Ann Jarvis, Jan Kimmel, Emelia Parker, Ronald Suszek

Editor: Jan Kimmel

ShelfLife is a publication of the Adult Services Department of the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library.

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High Lonesome : Selected Stories

by Joyce Carol Oates

Ecco/HarperCollins, 2006

The thirty six stories that comprise this collection leave little doubt regarding Joyce Carol Oates's literary reputation. Twice a finalist for the Nobel Prize, Oates has been a force in contemporary fiction for nearly half a century. While known mostly for her novels, of which she has written many, it is her short fiction that will ensure her place in the literary canon.

No living author writes as intelligently or as forcefully about the underside of American life as Oates. Arranged by decade, this collection features pieces that have been heavily anthologized and stylistically imitated. In masterpieces like "Golden Gloves," and "Last Days," Oates creates a world in which characters have been so desensitized by violence that their only responses are violent ones.

The underlying origins of these acts of brutal and graphic violence, always a principal theme for Oates, seem to have reached a new intensity. The eleven new works presented here are so chilling and at times so disturbing that they can be thought of as horror stories. In Oates's masterful hands, they are examples of our finest literature.



The Minotaur by Barbara Vine

Shaye Areheart Books, 2005

Wanting to renew her relationship with her boyfriend John, Kerstin accepts a position near him, "caring" for the 39-year-old man.

Other family members living in the family estate are equally as interesting. The elderly mother and her three grown daughters are frequently at odds with one another. They are all at the mercy of John who has inherited both the estate and a trust fund from his father. A fourth daughter marries well and bestows gifts to the family at her whim, adding to the heightening animosity among the sisters.

Kerstin's nursing background makes her very suspicious of the medical treatment that John is receiving. The regimen of pills makes him lethargic and non-communicative. She is able to see a transformation when John's mother "accidentally" falls down the stairs and is unable to administer John's medication directly as she recovers. With her out of the picture, John refuses to take his pills.

One of the daughters is brutally murdered and the blame is placed on John because he has not been taking his medication, leading to uncontrollable violence. Kerstin's diary becomes a critical piece of evidence as the investigation unfolds.

Author Barbara Vine is a master of the suspense novel. This novel is a worthy addition to her other works.



"There's madness in the family."

White Ghost Girls

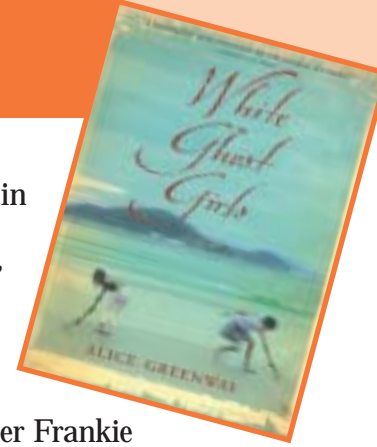
by Alice Greenway

Black Cat, 2006

This story of an American family living in Hong Kong in 1967 is told from the perspective of the younger of two sisters, Kate, as an adult looking back. Kate's father was a photographer covering the Vietnam War and Hong Kong was their home base during this assignment.

During the summer of 1967, Kate and sister Frankie are teenagers coming into their adolescence with sex, independence, and adventure on their minds. Frankie is the wild, uninhibited sister while Kate is quieter, more thoughtful. The girls are left to explore Hong Kong with their Chinese housekeeper. While on their way to church, the girls are abducted and used to further the agenda of a terrorist group. The episode not only changes the carefree lives of the girls, but impacts their relationship with each other.

This novel focuses on the effects of war on a family through the personal experiences of two young girls. Kate's innocence and growth to maturity contribute to an endearing and startling story that is hard to put down.



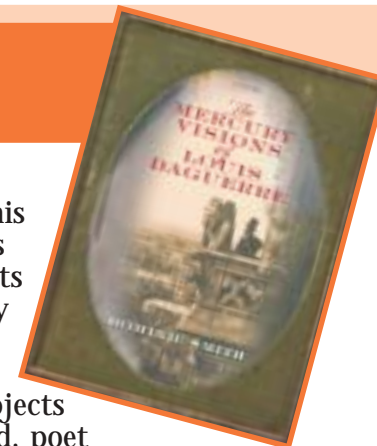
"This summer, the one I'm going to tell you about, is the only time that matters. It's the time I'll think of when I'm dying, just as another might recall a lost lover or regret a love they never had."

The Mercury Visions of Louis Daguerre by Dominic Smith

Atria, 2006

After decades of using mercury to cure his images, the father of photography, Louis Daguerre finds himself at the mercy of its vapors. Now in his last days, poisoned by the very thing that gave life to his imagination, Daguerre sets out to capture a doomsday list of ten photographic subjects before his death. Together with his friend, poet Charles Baudelaire, Daguerre begins his search for the perfect apple, a flower, the king of France, and a beautiful woman to photograph. But the most difficult item on the list is a photo of Isobel Le Fournier, his first love whom he has not seen for over fifty years.

Author Smith follows Daguerre through the streets of nineteenth-century Paris only to find him facing the end of his life at the doorstep of Isobel Le Fournier. Through the skillful interweaving of flashbacks, we learn about the transforming experiences he had as a twelve-year old when he first fell in love with Isobel and discovered the magical power of light, both of which provide unifying themes throughout the book. Imaginative and visionary, Smith captures the defining moments of a passionate life, lived in aloneness.

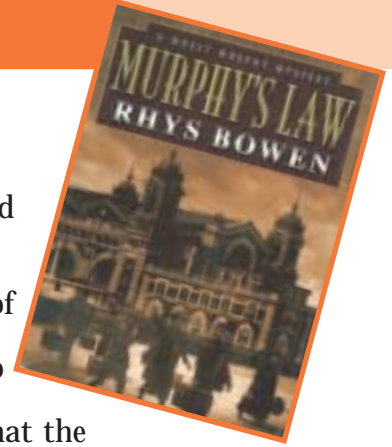


Murphy's Law by Rhys Bowen

St. Martin's Minotaur, 2001

Defending herself from the unwelcome advances of the local landowner's son, Molly Murphy accidentally kills him and flees her village in Ireland to escape hanging. She heads for London where a woman she doesn't know helps her out of a jam with the British police and then begs Molly to deliver her two children to her husband in America. Kathleen O'Connor has tuberculosis and knows that the authorities will not let her travel on board a ship bound for New York. Molly soon finds herself on the way to New York as "Mrs. O'Connor" with her two children to join their father and start a new life.

The passage to New York and the tumultuous events on Ellis Island, where another murder takes place, are vividly brought to life. Molly travels through Hell's Kitchen to find the children's father along with several unsavory relatives. Run-ins with the police and Tammany Hall are only a few of her adventures as she decides to investigate the murder on her own behalf and that of a friend. Molly, an outspoken and gutsy young woman, often finds herself in trouble, but she is also persistent and hardworking. The period detail is well researched and Molly is an interesting and remarkable character. This book is the first in a series of historical mysteries.



The Little Balloonist by Linda Donn

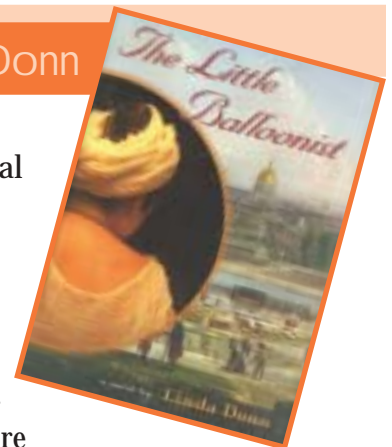
Dutton, 2006

The adventurous life of real-life historical figure Madame Sophie Blanchard is depicted in this charming tale by first-time novelist Linda Donn.

Growing up in a small village shortly after the French Revolution, Sophie has always been enamored of her playmate Andre Giroux, but is promised and later married to a much older man. Jean-Pierre Blanchard is a renowned balloonist, who eventually discloses to Sophie that he secretly fears flying. Seeing an opportunity, Sophie takes over the flights for him and finds herself taking to the sky like a bird.

Her daring flights and courageous spirit soon attract the attention of Napoleon Bonaparte who finds himself smitten with the celestial vision of the "little balloonist." He becomes so enamored that he invites her to become his "official aeronaute," while at the same time trying to disentangle himself from his marriage to Josephine. With the death of her husband and with Napoleon's interest becoming more intense, Sophie awaits Andre's return to rekindle their lost love.

The author's sweet story soars with simple, straightforward prose and compelling characters.



"Courage is the quality I most admire. It is unheard of in a woman."