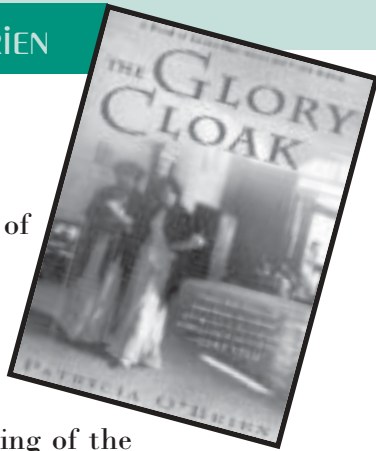


GLORY CLOAK by PATRICIA O'BRIEN

SIMON & SCHUSTER, 2004
Book cover used courtesy of Simon & Schuster
Adult Publishing Group

Spanning the time period of 1850-1888, *The Glory Cloak* examines the friendship of three women through times of love, courage, betrayal, and forgiveness. Narrator Susan Gray, a fictitious cousin of Louisa May Alcott, comes to live with the Alcott family in Concord after being orphaned as a teen. Susan becomes a confidante of Louisa's and with the coming of the Civil War, the two fast friends are off seeking adventure by becoming nurses in a Union hospital in Washington. Conditions at the hospital are so horrendous they can hardly be imagined. Susan and Louisa gain inspiration for their struggle from Clara Barton, the "Angel of the Battlefield," who becomes an integral part of the story. A mysterious soldier provides a love interest and a subsequent jealous betrayal binds the three women together. This charming book melds historical fact and fiction in such a way that they are hard to separate. Susan Gray's voice is both strong and realistic in telling the story of women caught up in the vast sweep of change brought by the war and is the perfect style for delving into the lives of the real characters in the story. Well-written and engaging, the story provides a window into women's lives during this crucial period of our nation's history.



ASTONISHING SPLASHES OF COLOUR by CLARE MORRALL

HARPERCOLLINS, 2004

Live inside Kitty's head as she spirals downward into depression. She is a young wife still mourning the loss of her unborn child three years ago. Kitty becomes preoccupied with finding out more about her mother, who died when she was three years old. She asks her five brothers, each of whom gives her a different picture of the woman. The only family members she feels truly comfortable with are her maternal grandparents, with whom she spent summer holidays when she was a child. However, she hasn't visited or spoken with them since the loss of her baby.

As her depression deepens, Kitty's behavior becomes more and more erratic. She waits at schools when the children are being let out, only to flee when a young nanny tries to befriend her. She shops at baby boutiques, follows mothers with babies, and takes her young nieces out unexpectedly when she is babysitting them. To escape her disordered thoughts, she rides the bus around and around the city. Eventually, she does find out about her mother, but this knowledge does not relieve her pain, and she takes off on a final journey, which ultimately brings her to the help she needs.

This is Clare Morrall's first novel, which was originally published by an independent press in England. After being shortlisted for the 2003 Booker Prize, it has been re-issued by HarperCollins.



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Shelf Life

Grace A. Dow Memorial Library

Winter 2005

Original Reviews
of Recommended Books

AN EVENING OF LONG GOODBYES

by PAUL MURRAY

RANDOM HOUSE, 2004

Watching the pleasures and accoutrements of an upper-class life begin to disappear in the face of deficient funds to support them, anyone with an ounce of initiative and honor would surely seek regular employment, in order to support a younger sister and an alcoholic mother in the manner to which they're accustomed. Therefore, young Charles Hythloday — possessing neither initiative nor honor — decides to fake his own death, in a desperate attempt to collect insurance money.



"I had to find some way to save Amaurot... I told myself I was doing it for her [Bel], but in my heart I knew that if she left, the jig was up for me, too."

Charles, for whom the word 'slacker' must surely have been invented, has drunk his way through every bottle of fine wine in his late father's cellar in his inherited mansion, Amaurot, and is starting in on the bad ones. His sister, Bel, lately distracted by her own pursuit of the theatrical arts, brings his attention to a drawer full of overdue and ignored bills. Charles' distaste for this subject is equaled only by his contempt for Bel's latest beau, a sinister thug who introduces Charles to the pleasures of dog racing, in neighborhoods best left unexplored.

The Bosnian housekeeper at the Hythloday mansion is behaving mysteriously, Charles agrees to submit to a hilarious interview at a temporary employment agency, and the reader discovers more about Charles' old-movie idol Gene Tierney than most fans would think to wonder. Irish author Murray's modern Wodehouseian romp was short-listed for the Whitbread First Novel Award.

THE IMPARTIAL RECORDER

by IAN SANSON

HARPERCOLLINS, 2004



Davey Quinn's return home after a twenty-year absence marks the beginning of this look at a town and its townspeople. Davey is the seventh son of a seventh son, so his return to this small Irish town is newsworthy. His desire to quietly slip home will not be realized; instead, he takes the stage and narrates the past and present of a town that has undergone many changes in the name of "progress."

The Impartial Recorder is the name of the local paper, and, as the title of this novel, chronicles the lives of ordinary citizens. The reader will meet the townspeople chapter by chapter in this humorous and touching recounting of people and events.

There's Francie, the local minister. Francie finds himself being reinvented by his girlfriend, who convinces him to advertise his sermons in *The Impartial Recorder*. The ads proclaim topics such as, "Does God Ever Say Oops?" and "Cheer Up! Someday You'll Be Dead."

The local poet, Billy Nibbs, holds a book launch party, inviting *The Impartial Recorder* to photograph the event. Unfortunately, the gathering becomes a bookless book launch. Billy had taken the name of the publishing firm from an ad in *The Impartial Recorder*, viewing this as a recommendation of the newspaper. The firm turned out to be a sham and his book was never published.

The reader will be drawn into this story of a town and its residents, enjoying the various personalities and the happenings that create the news and mold the town. The footnotes are not to be skipped.

"In The Impartial Recorder there were no big ideas, there were no ideologies, and no purely evil days."

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SHOOTING THE SUN by MAX BYRD

BANTAM, 2004

Charles Babbage, the renowned nineteenth century English mathematician and inventor, thinks he's finally got it: the Difference Engine, the first computer that can calculate the correct astronomical position of the next total eclipse of the sun. The only problem is finding the additional capital to market the invention. To prove its worth to the worldwide community, Babbage assembles an unlikely group of explorers and scientists to travel to the dangerous frontiers of the American southwest in 1840 to test the power of the Difference Engine to predict the precise latitude and longitude of the solar eclipse.

Mathematical genius and trained daguerreotypographer Selena Cott, the only woman on the journey, finds herself part of a perilous race across the country, through unmapped and hostile territory, to witness and photograph the event. Needless to say, treachery, greed, and a few Indians make for a mighty interesting journey — not merely the scientific expedition Selena had envisioned. Part travelogue and part adventure story and filled with enough history of science to add depth to the plot, this is a fascinating and fun look at the American frontier.



HORSEPLAY by JUDY REENE SINGER

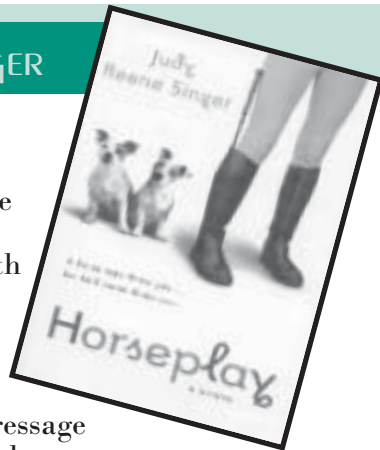
BROADWAY BOOKS, 2004

Judy Van Brunt needs a change. After finding her husband of eight years in the middle of his third affair, she has had enough. She packs up and drives to North Carolina to live as a working student for a German Olympic horsewoman.

Though her horse skills are limited to weekly riding lessons, she eases into the tiring but satisfying life at a top-level dressage barn. Among the memorable characters she meets are

Ivan, her schooling horse, which seems to get much enjoyment dumping her; Natasha, the pregnant mare, which likes to throw temper tantrums at the most inconvenient times, and Patty, her mother figure, who likes food as much as she likes horses. And then there is Speed Easton, the handsome horse farm owner who would like to get to know Judy better. Judy learns as much about riding and caring for horses as she learns how to be self-sufficient.

This breezy chick-lit tale gives the reader an interesting peek into the lives of the horse set. Author Judy Reene Singer knows her stuff well, as she's a high-level dressage rider and contributor to several equestrian magazines.



"Men are like horses. If they're even-tempered and sweet, you stay on for the ride. If they buck and run around, you get off before you get hurt."

THE CHILDREN'S WAR by MONIQUE CHARLESWORTH

ALFRED A. KNOPF, 2004

This is an engrossing story of two teenagers who live in Germany at the beginning of World War II. Both children are separated from their parents because of the war. Ilse is half Jewish, and her mother sends her to Morocco to live with her Uncle Willy. Nicolai's father must join the German army, and his mother becomes more remote as the war progresses. We see them taking on the roles of adults at a time when they should be finishing their schooling.

The story alternates between Nicolai and Ilse as they experience the deprivations and dangers of the war. Ilse is sent back to France when her uncle re-joins the French Foreign Legion. Her father joins her, and they hide in Paris until the last possible moment. Fleeing Paris as the Nazis arrive, they make it only as far as Marseilles, where Ilse becomes involved with the Resistance.

Meanwhile, as Nicolai's mother becomes more and more distant, Nicolai befriends his sister's nanny, who is coincidentally Ilse's mother. Nicolai continues to attend school as long as possible and attends the Hitler Youth meetings. He becomes very disillusioned with the Nazis and the war, and becomes involved with an underground movement.

Finally, the end comes, the allies arrive, and the war is over. But we are left with the feeling that for Ilse and Nicolai, it will always be with them.



EVERY SECRET THING by LAURA LIPPMAN

WILLIAM MORROW, 2003

Award-winning mystery writer Lippman takes a break from her popular series and explores a darker and more troubling subject. Two little girls, having been sent home early from a birthday party, take a wrong turn and find a baby momentarily left alone in her carriage. At the mercy of their youth, imaginations, and circumstances, they're compelled to secretly 'take care' of the baby, a decision which leads to disaster. Seven years later the girls, now 18 years old, return home from their incarceration, still keeping a secret: their own different versions of the event they set into motion. The event, once begun, may have been influenced — innocently? — by mysterious others. Lippman is an expert storyteller who doesn't rely on graphic, jarring details of the tragedy; there are few. What remains is an undercurrent of uneasiness and bafflement, and a psychological suspense that begins on the first page and continues to the last.



ALMOST FRENCH: LOVE AND A NEW LIFE IN PARIS by SARAH TURNBULL

GOTHAM BOOKS (PENGUIN GROUP), 2004

Sarah Turnbull, a twenty-seven-year-old Australian woman, has been traveling the world as a free-lance journalist. While in Romania she meets, through friends, the handsome, urbane Frederic, a Frenchman who'd been sent to Bucharest in his work as a lawyer. Sparks ignite between Sarah and Frederic, who invites her to visit him in Paris. A week's plan subsequently evolves into a more permanent arrangement as the two make a life together and Sarah finds work in print journalism.

This entertaining memoir is primarily the author's experiences and impressions as an expatriate living in Paris. She discovers, for example, that a "casual" meal will still include silver cutlery, linens, flowers, and wine. Her encounters with France's gigantic bureaucracy, the country's iron-clad traditions, its collective reserve (except toward pet dogs), and its social mores are wonderfully and wittily described — sometimes with frustration but always with affection. Like French food and wine, here is a book to savor.

"When the French do something, they like to be good at it — in fact, they like to be excellent."



LAST ODD DAY by LYNNE HINTON

HARPERSANFRANCISCO, 2004

The title refers to the day the book opens, November 19, 1999, the last date in the century consisting of odd numbers. Also on that day, Jean Witherspoon receives an unexpected and life-changing phone call. The call comes when her husband of fifty-five years, OT, is in a nursing home, declining in health after suffering a stroke. Jean had met and married her husband shortly before he was shipped off to fight in the Great War. While away, she lived with his family and strongly bonded with OT's brother. Though never behaving inappropriately with her brother-in-law, the experience made her wonder if she had married the wrong man. After returning from the war, OT and Jean focused on having a baby. When her only pregnancy ended with a stillborn child, Jean nursed her sorrow and OT his guilt. Although the companionable but passionless marriage might have been the result of earlier events, the phone call brings revelations that require Jean to reshape her perception of it.

Lynne Hinton, author of the bestseller *Friendship Cake*, has written a moving book of change and grace.

