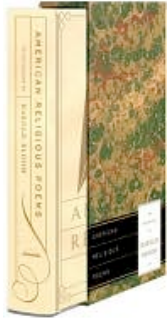


## New Fiction January 2009



### *American Religious Poems: An Anthology*

By Harold Bloom

Moonlighting as a critic of religion, literary critic Bloom theorized that the U.S. has produced a unique blend of Gnostic mysteriousness, regenerative Orphic magic, and enthusiasm that he calls, in the title of his book tracing its development, *The American Religion* (1992). This anthology complements that study in the bias of its contents and magnificently in Bloom's introduction, where he announces the American poetic gospel, as it were, of Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson, with Hart Crane as their principal twentieth-century apostle. Regardless of what one thinks of Bloom's conception--and traditional adherents to any Western faith must deplore it--the poems of his nineteenth--century trinity attest to its viability, and since the three still exert the greatest influence on readers and other poets, so do a great many of the other selections. There are many poems of more orthodox character (colonial Calvinist poetry, hymns, and the occasional wrestling with a Christian or Jewish doctrine), of course, and coeditor Zuba's foreword nicely points up the selection's diversity. Most important, there are hundreds of fine poems here. (*Booklist*)



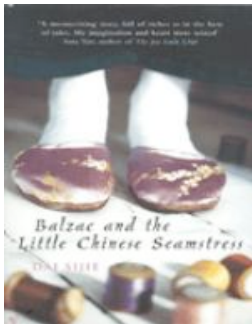
### *Arrival*

By Shaun Tan

Recipient of numerous awards and nominations in Australia, *The Arrival* proves a beautiful, compelling piece of art, in both content and form. Tan (*The Lost Thing*, 2004) has previously produced a small body of off-kilter, frequently haunting stories of children trapped in surreal industrial

landscapes. Here, he has distilled his themes and aesthetic into a silent, fantastical masterpiece. A lone immigrant leaves his family and journeys to a new world, both bizarre and awesome, finding struggle and dehumanizing industry but also friendship and a new life. Tan infuses this simple, universal narrative with vibrant, resonating life through confident mastery of sequential art forms and conventions. Strong visual metaphors convey personal longing, political suppression, and totalitarian control; imaginative use of panel size and shape powerfully depicts sensations and ideas as diverse as interminable waiting, awe-inspiring majesty, and forlorn memories; delicate alterations in light and color saturate the pages with a sense of time and place. Soft brushstrokes and grand Art Deco-style architecture evoke a time long ago, but the story's immediacy and fantasy elements will appeal even to readers younger than the target audience, though they may miss many of the complexities. Filled with subtlety and grandeur, the book is a unique work that not only fulfills but also expands the potential of its form.

*(Booklist)*

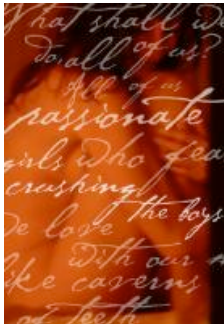


*Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

By Dai Sijie

This beautifully presented novella tracks the lives of two teens, childhood friends who have been sent to a small Chinese village for "re-education" during Mao's Cultural Revolution. Sons of doctors and dentists, their days are now spent muscling buckets of excrement up the mountainside and mining coal. But the boys—Luo and the unnamed narrator—receive a bit of a reprieve when the villagers discover their talents as storytellers; they are sent on monthly treks to town, tasked with watching a movie and relating it in detail on their return. It is here that they encounter the little seamstress of the title, whom Luo falls for instantly. When, through a series of comic and clever tricks and favors, the boys acquire a suitcase full of forbidden Western literature, Luo decides to "re-educate" the ignorant girl whom he hopes will become his intellectual match. That a bit of Balzac can have an aphrodisiac effect is a happy bonus. Ultimately, the book is a simple, lovely telling of a classic boy-meets-girl scenario with a folktale's smart, surprising bite at the finish. The story movingly captures Maoism's attempts to imprison one's mind and heart (with the threat of the same for one's body), the shock of the sudden cultural shift

for "bourgeois" Chinese, and the sheer delight that books can offer a downtrodden spirit. Though these moments are fewer after the love story is introduced, teens will enjoy them at least as much as the comic and romantic strands. (*School Library Journal*)



*Blood Roses*

By Francesca Lia Block

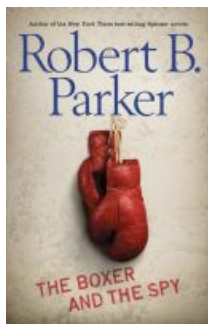
Block is known for her fantastical, edgy, and highly feminized stories of young women, and this book fits neatly into that mold. *Blood Roses* consists of nine loosely connected short selections focusing on elemental and magical changes in each character. In "Skin Art," straitlaced Elodie Sweet finds tattoos mysteriously appearing on her body as romantic tension—and obsession—builds between herself and an older tattoo artist. With each new tattoo, her perception of herself grows and changes, but she ultimately finds that the tattoos are only superficial and disappear as she realizes that she is not in love with the man. In "Wounds and Wings," Audrey finds a fairy whose wings have been cruelly torn off. She takes him home to nurse him to health and learns to see the similarity between his injuries and insecurities and her own. The characters walk a fine line between the mundane and magical. It is impossible to decide if they are sane or not, or if it even matters. *Blood Roses*, like Block's other books, brims with sexual suggestion that is meant for more mature teens. This short book will appeal to reluctant readers, though Block's fans will find it on their own. (*School Library Journal*)



### *Book of Getting Even*

By Benjamin Taylor

Even as a teenager, mathematics prodigy Gabriel Geismar finds ways to cope with life; he distracts himself from what is base (such as seeking sex in a men's bathhouse) by thinking of numbers, and he finds a new family after a hateful standoff with his rabbi father. As a 16-year-old freshman at Swarthmore in 1970, Gabriel is approached by fraternal twins Danny and Marghie Hundert; both fall in love with him, and he reciprocates these feelings physically with Danny. An unexpected bonus is the twins' father, the renowned physicist Dr. Gregor Hundert, who, along with his wife, envelopes Gabriel in familial love, then guides his budding career. Tragedy ensues, as the Vietnam War causes Danny to follow his principles to extremes, while his father suffers dementia. Losses aside, Gabriel with a doctorate and associate professorship in astrophysics finds solace in his concept of the universe, from multiple galaxies to the smallest insect. A beautifully written and keenly intelligent novel, set in a context of cosmology, this is in turn humorous, almost unbearably moving, and comforting, as it points the way to Gabriel's perfect freedom (*Booklist*).



### *Boxer and the Spy*

By Robert B. Parker

Parker's second foray into the YA mystery field (after *Edenville Owls*, 2007), finds 15-year-old Terry Novak learning the ropes of boxing from a wizened ex-fighter, who is classic Parker gruff but keenly understanding. At the same time, Terry's best friend, Abby, is dizzyingly becoming something closer to a girlfriend, though neither really know what to make of the evolving relationship. When a quiet, nerdy kid is

found dead of an apparent suicide, murkily involving steroids, the duo make it their business to figure out what really happened. Although Parker leans on the boxing-as-life metaphor pretty heavily, it works; and witnessing a tough-but-sensitive guy on the make figure out when to play nice and when to get mean is classic coming-of-age stuff. What drives the story home, however, is how well Parker is able to demonstrate adolescent uncertainty about the world and then capture those moments when uncertainty shifts seamlessly into confidence. Add Parker's deft touch with dialogue and quick action scenes, and you've got a lean, welterweight contender of a mystery. (*Booklist*)

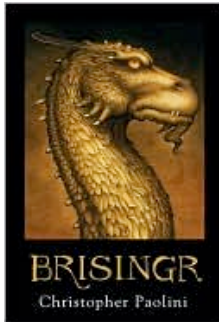


### *Breaking Dawn*

By Stephanie Meyer

As the concluding book of the *Twilight* saga begins, readers find a happy Bella Swan getting ready to marry the love of her life, vampire Edward Cullen. Soon she will become a vampire, too, but first Bella wants to experience sexual love with Edward. It's a honeymoon night like no other, and it leads to a momentous event that becomes the catalyst for the rest of the story. It's odd to think of a 700-plus page book moving briskly, but except for some character-laden drag toward the end, that happens here, thanks to Meyer's fevered determination to tie up loose ends. Most pressing, of course, is the need to resolve the love triangle between Bella, Edward, and the werewolf Jacob. This is accomplished in a way that is consistent with what's happened previously, though some will find what takes place to be distasteful. Other plot points are checked off as well. For instance, Charlie is kept in the loop about his daughter's situation as long as he adheres to a don't ask-don't tell policy, and questions surrounding the wolf pack are answered, if rather surprisingly. Also problematic is the introduction of a major new character (to reveal who it is would be a spoiler). Everyone in the book finds Bella lovable, but many readers may have the opposite view. The most dismaying new story element, however, is the way domesticity replaces the heightened emotionality of Bella and Edward's love, even though there's now sex and plenty of it. (While the sex scenes aren't graphic, a birth scene is quite unsettling, and both may not be suitable for preteens.) For those who find it hard to say farewell to Bella and company, take heart: it may not be

good-bye. Astute readers will see the potential for a series spin-off, complete with another love triangle, on the horizon. *(Booklist)*



### *Brisings*

By Christopher Paolini

In most respects, this third chapter in Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* feels like the calm before the storm; the majority of the more than 700 pages are dominated by storytelling, plotting, and preparations for battle. If there is a complaint from readers, it will be that Paolini revels too much in long conversations between his characters while action takes a backseat, but fans of the genre will bask in his generosity: the arcana of dwarf election rules, the manhood customs of the Kull, and the finer points on forging a Dragon Rider's sword are all part of what makes the world of Alagaësia so encompassing. The plot picks up as Eragon assists his cousin Roran in rescuing his beloved from the Ra'zac, but ultimately the story settles on the Varden's preparations for advancing upon the evil Galbatorix, their attempts to obtain the help of the dwarves, and the continued magic training of Eragon and the dragon Saphira. Most of the combat and its brutal, gory stuff belongs to Roran as he becomes a legendary warrior; Eragon's struggles are more cerebral and involve magic, a difficult thing to dramatize but something Paolini pulls off admirably. In fact, clarity is the author's best asset: few could make such a Tolkienesque universe so manageable. Anyone who couldn't wait for this volume will be just as excited when the upcoming fourth and final chapter appears. *(Booklist)*



*Down to the Bone*

By Mayra L. Dole

When a nun at her Catholic school confiscates and reads aloud in class a note to Laura Amores from another girl, declaring her love, the teen is kicked out of her school and her home. Soon after, Laura's devoted girlfriend yields to family pressure and accepts a marriage proposal. Abandoned, heartbroken, and confused, Laura takes refuge with another friend and struggles to find a home and identity in both the straight and the gay world. Her story isn't uncommon in the queer-teen-lit canon, but Dole's infusion of lively, spicy Cuban-American culture set against a hot Miami setting makes it rise above many other titles in the genre. While some of the action occasionally feels blunt and forced, Laura's unique, spunky attitude fleshes out the more dramatic bits and keeps the pages turning. Readers will relish the teen's descriptions of the food, fury, and passion that make up her life. Dole captivantly colors Laura and her entourage with a rainbow of multicultural dialects, bits of Spanish, and slang. Teens will cheer for Laura in her struggle to find herself and a family. (*School Library Journal*)



*Duma Key*

By Stephen King

A job-site accident almost kills Twin Cities building contractor Edgar Freemantle. He loses his right arm and the ability to recall readily the names of common things and old acquaintances. And he is prone to rage, so frightening his wife of 25 years that she divorces him. His shrink recommends an avocation and seconds Edgar's decision to get away by renting a vintage beach house on Duma Key off Florida's Gulf Coast.

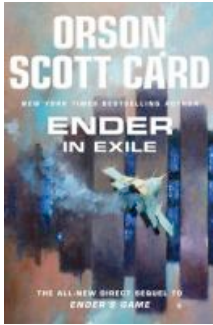
There Edgar is seized by the passion to draw and paint his phantom right arm itches unmercifully until he picks up pencil or brush walks every day to get strong and steady enough to ditch his crutch, and strives to stifle the rage. He befriends a neighbor, Wireman, who is the full-time attendant of wealthy old Elizabeth Eastlake, who owns Duma Key and has lived there for decades but not always. Her widowed father whisked the family away in the middle 1920s, when Elizabeth was three, after the sudden and never explained disappearances of three of his six daughters, not to mention a brand-new son-in-law all on Duma Key. Of course, Edgar and readers find out about those disappearances as King's masterfully plotted new novel, rife with vital characters, unfolds. Perhaps the book is the stuff of old grade-B movie chillers and not one of King's masterpieces, but it's grade-A writing and solid craftsmanship all the way. *(Booklist)*



### *Eclipse*

By Stephanie Meyer

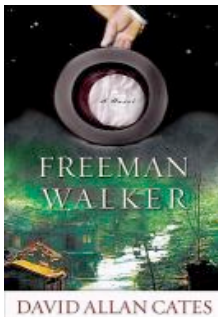
It began as a simple vampire series and quickly became a megaselling publishing phenomenon; now, in the third installment, decisions about college, marriage, and, oh yeah, immortality are pressing in on heroine Bella Swan. Werewolf Jacob's declaration of love for Bella adds even more pressure (his violent kisses may trouble some readers). Acerbic humor remains a strength of Meyer's storytelling, but despite the multitude of concerns, there isn't much action. The plot, which ultimately evolves into another war with the evil vampires, unfolds at a leisurely pace, slowed even more by flashbacks from prominent secondary characters. Readers familiar with Bella's favorite book, *Wuthering Heights*, will enjoy allusions to the classic, and the sexual tension in the previous books continues here. Bella begs to consummate her relationship with handsome vampire Edward while she is still human, but he refuses to give in until they are married; their passion remains at the kissing level. With Bella's fate still hanging in the balance as fans await the fourth and final volume, we can expect the prepub clamor over the next year to reach Harry Potter-like intensity. *(Booklist)*



### *Ender in Exile*

By Orson Scott Card

Card's latest addition to the Ender Wiggins canon nicely dovetails with *Ender's Game* (1977) and *Ender's Shadow* (1999), which it parallels by looking at the same events from another viewpoint. The war against the Buggers is over; all the Formic hive queens are dead so now what is Ender to do? Returning to Earth seems problematic, since he's viewed as both war hero and villainous murderer of children. Ender, wracked with guilt over the destruction of the Formics, tenaciously struggles with the question of why the queens let him kill them and begins his long pursuit of atonement. His exile sends him, at age 13, with a large group of new colonists, including his sister, Valentine, to an established human colony on a former Formic world, of which he will be governor. Meanwhile, his brother, Peter, back on Earth, is surreptitiously manipulating politics in order to become the Hegemon. Threads from all the other books in the series flow through this narrative, which fills gaps, fleshes out familiar characterizations, and introduces well-limned new ones. Ender's angst, combined with his handling of the intrigue swirling around him, ensures the depth for which the series is famous. (*Booklist*)

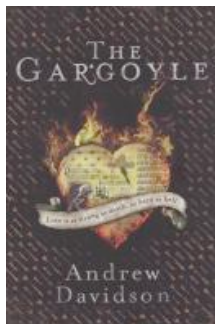


### *Freeman Walker*

By David Allan Cates

Son of a female slave and her master, Jimmy Gates was born with one brown eye and one green. His owner-father frees him by sending him to an English boarding school with a copy of the Declaration of Independence and these truths: we all suffer, we are all going to die, we are not in control, we are all free, we do not live for ourselves. Jimmy, who eventually renames himself Freeman Walker, will spend the rest of

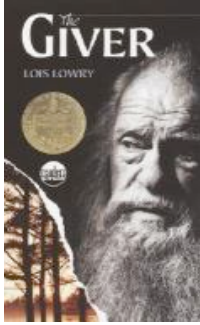
his life pondering those words. His appearance and his uncanny ability at imitation give him options on how to identify himself and access to information on both sides of the racial divide. He is oddly detached and experiences multiple lives: slavery in Virginia, freedom in an English boarding school, poverty in a saddlery on the busy streets of London after his father dies, an enslaved wanderer in the war fields of the American South, and a freeman journeying westward to the gold mines of California. Cates, author of *X Out of Wonderland* (2005), offers incredibly finely drawn characters, in even the swiftest of encounters, revealing their vulnerabilities as well as Freeman Walker's. (*Booklist*)



### *Gargoyle*

By Andrew Davidson

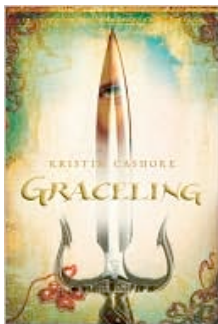
Davidson's stunning debut opens with a hedonistic porn star drinking bourbon as he drives, until a vision of burning arrows rushing at his car causes him to crash through a guardrail and careen down a ravine. He awakens in a hospital, burns covering most of his body. Friendless, he loathes the doctors who are working so hard to heal him and plots his suicide. Into this husk of a life walks Marianne Engel, a beautiful sculptress whose first words to him are, You've been burned. Again. Over time she tells him the story of how they first met and fell in love 700 years ago at a German monastery. His initial skepticism over the improbability of her tale, given the fact that she's been in the psych ward, gives way to curiosity and eventually love. He still isn't sure he believes her, but her tale and her presence in his life give him something to live for. There's pure magic here, a classic redemption story with a hero so cynical, so damaged that it seems so unlikely that he'll ever reach for or even believe in salvation. When he does, the reward is immeasurable. Davidson's *Gargoyle* is a rare gem: completely engrossing, wholly unforgettable, and utterly transcendent. (*Booklist*)



### *Giver*

By Lois Lowry

In a complete departure from her other novels, Lowry has written an intriguing story set in a society that is uniformly run by a Committee of Elders. Twelve-year-old Jonas's confidence in his comfortable "normal" existence as a member of this well-ordered community is shaken when he is assigned his life's work as the Receiver. The Giver, who passes on to Jonas the burden of being the holder for the community of all memory "back and back and back," teaches him the cost of living in an environment that is "without color, pain, or past." The tension leading up to the Ceremony, in which children are promoted not to another grade but to another stage in their life, and the drama and responsibility of the sessions with The Giver are gripping. The final flight for survival is as riveting as it is inevitable. The author makes real abstract concepts, such as the meaning of a life in which there are virtually no choices to be made and no experiences with deep feelings. This tightly plotted story and its believable characters will stay with readers for a long time. (*School Library Journal*)



### *Graceling*

By Kristin Cashore

In this debut fantasy novel, Cashore treats readers to compelling and eminently likable characters and a story that draws them in from the first paragraph. In Katsa's world, the "Graced," those gifted in a particular way, are marked by eyes that are different colors. Katsa's Grace is that she is a gifted fighter, and, as such, she is virtually invincible. She is in the service of her tyrannical uncle, king of one of the seven kingdoms, and she is forced to torture people for infractions against him. She has secretly

formed the Council, which acts in the service of justice and fairness for those who have been accused and abused. Readers meet her as she is rescuing the father of the Lienid king, who has been abducted. The reasons for his capture are part of a tightening plot that Katsa unravels and resolves, with the help of Prince Po, the captive's grandson. He has his own particular Grace, and he becomes Katsa's lover and partner in what becomes a mortally dangerous mission. Cashore's style is exemplary: while each detail helps to paint a picture, the description is always in the service of the story, always helping readers to a greater understanding of what is happening and why. This is gorgeous storytelling: exciting, stirring, and accessible. Fantasy and romance readers will be thrilled. (*School Library Journal*)

### *Gravity*

By Leanne Lieberman

Fifteen-year-old Ellie comes from an Orthodox Jewish family that is straining at the edges. Her older sister is planning her escape; her mother's commitment is frayed by her need for self-expression. Ellie herself discovers a different world when she spends the summer with her liberal Bubbe learning to swim and developing a crush on a neighbor, Lindsay. When Ellie returns to Toronto, she tries to contact Lindsay, who ignores her at first, but soon their afternoons together turn sexual. Lieberman's involving story would have plenty of plot even without the lesbian angle (the sexuality is more than suggestive, though hardly graphic). The individual characters are so interesting that more about each would be welcome. But Ellie's strong first-person narration, authentic in its wondering, carries the day as she struggles to fit this new piece of herself into a religion that doesn't accept who she is at her core. One caveat: the girl on the cover in the sexy school uniform is apparently Lindsay, but those not reading closely will assume it's what Orthodox students wear. Hardly. (*Booklist*)



### *Julius Caesar: Manga Shakespeare*

Illustrated by Mustashrik

Abrams' generally high-quality Manga Shakespeare line reaches its pinnacle thus far with Julius Caesar, the bard's tragedy of conspiracy, warfare, and bloody revenge. Abridged text is spread out to render it less

intimidating, and the most dramatic scenes are given plenty of room to breathe. Rome itself is portrayed as a YA-friendly mixture of classical architecture and modern weapons of war, the citizens dressed in Flash Gordon fashion and Judge Dredd headgear. What truly shines in this work, though, is the superlative visualization by newcomer Mustashrik. Working in stark white and inky black, he has created a spare but intense landscape that mirrors the emotions of the characters, and combines a sense of dreamlike isolation with a minimal backdrop that suggests a stage on which the drama is normally enacted. Using shadow, he has managed to make the assassination simultaneously graphic yet subtle, and by alternating tight focus and long shots, and using a thick brush to exemplify expressions, he has fittingly crafted a visual tour de force of Mark Antony's speech. Especially for the more artistically minded, this is a raw, striking, and powerful introduction to Shakespeare. (*Booklist*)



### *New Moon*

By Stephanie Meyer

Which is tempting you more, my blood or my body? Things are heating up between Bella Swan and her vampire boyfriend, Edward Cullen, in this sequel to the immensely popular *Twilight* (2005). Then Bella is injured at her birthday party, and the Cullens' reaction to her blood sends Edward's family packing. Bella is inconsolable until she discovers that reckless behavior allows her to hear Edward's warning voice in her head. To keep him close, she decides to live as dangerously as possible, acquiring two motorcycles and developing a close friendship with Jacob, who helps her rebuild them. Romantics will miss Edward's presence, but the suspense created by a pack of werewolves bent on protecting Bella from a vindictive vampire will keep them occupied until the lovers can be reunited. The writing is a bit melodramatic, but readers won't care. Bella's dismay at being ordinary (after all, she's only human) will strike a chord even among girls who have no desire to be immortal, and like the vampires who watch Bella bleed with fevered eyes, teens will relish this new adventure and hunger for more. (*Booklist*)



## *Ravenhill*

By Timothy Hillmer

Ravenhill is the story of one fateful day in an American high school in 1997. As told from multiple points of view, the novel unfolds a few hours after an act of violence leaves five people dead and shocks the community.

Leonard, a ninth grade student, has a secret so horrific he hides it beneath his bullying and a tough-guy attitude. Lara, one of Leonard's targets, is trying to show no fear of his persecution but is prepared if Leonard carries through with his threats. S.A.M. Bond is his own superhero with a secret he must guard at all costs. Mr. Hardin, the English teacher, has his own personal demons, including the death of his young daughter. Paul, the custodian and former priest, is fighting alcoholism. All these personal problems, attitudes, and anxieties erupt the day before the winter holiday break.

Without flinching, Ravenhill attempts to answer the question of who might be responsible when a sudden violent act explodes and a quiet town is changed forever. (*Product Description, Amazon.com*)

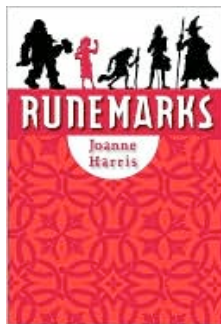


## *Red Necklace: A Story of the French Revolution*

By Sally Gardner

A Gypsy boy, Yann, and the dwarf who has raised him are caught up in drama on and off the stage, where they work with a magician and his automaton. Outside their Parisian theater, revolution is beginning to boil. Inside, the magician is murdered by the villainous Count Kallovski, who has Yann in his sights as well. So begins a finely crafted tale that crosses years and crisscrosses countries, as Yann becomes a young man with a

mission: to save the lovely Sido from her heartless father, even as he struggles with the extraordinary gifts bestowed upon him by his Gypsy heritage. If the success of historical fiction depends on how well setting and story mesh, this is a very successful book, indeed. Gardner sweeps readers into a turbulent time, dissecting eighteenth-century French society and the evolution of the revolution, from a yearning for liberty to a chaotic bloodbath. The history becomes personal when seen through the eyes of an astoundingly rich, carefully drawn cast, whose lives are interwoven like pieces of string in an elaborate cat's cradle. Scores are waiting to be settled on every page; this is a heart-stopper. (*Booklist*)



### *Runemarks*

By Joanne Harris

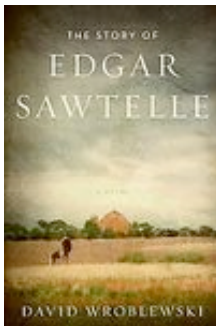
Versatile has been one of the most common adjectives used to describe Harris, a best-selling author for adults whose genre-hopscoching books include the romantic *Chocolat* (1999) and *Gentlemen and Players* (2006), a literary thriller. Her latest finds her not just switching genres, this time to fantasy, but also shifting to an entirely new audience, young adults. Reminiscent of Nancy Farmer's *The Sea of Trolls* (2004) in its Norse-myth-steeped fundamentals, this novel, set in a kind of rustic Old World Europe, will hook readers in the initial chapters, where 12-year-old Maddy discovers that her rune-casting mentor is actually a decommissioned Odin. Sensing the next great clash between Chaos and Order (here represented by a rigid, witch-hunting church), Odin sends his charge on a mission that awakens ancient rivalries among the world's scattered, discarded gods and goddesses. It's in the subtle, sometimes biology-defying relationships among the immortals that Harris may lose her audience, despite attempts to incorporate explanations. Even more basic, the premise lacks clarity: it's hard to feel concerned about deities' loss of a war when the stakes are so fuzzy (do they become a little less immortal if they lose?). And while Maddy's fate is more likely to matter to readers, her presence in the narrative often feels overshadowed by the increasingly prominent roles of gods and grown-ups. What will appeal is Harris' down-to-earth portrayal of the deities, whose peevish squabbling and casual, sometimes profane language could have been lifted straight from a high-school cafeteria. Even so, the publisher's major marketing campaign may not be enough to give this dense epic legs. (*Booklist*)



### *Shopaholic & Baby*

By Sophie Kinsella

Kinsella's follow-up to *Shopaholic & Sister* (2004) finds the irrepressible Becky expecting her first child with her dashing husband, Luke. Naturally, there's shopping to be done: Becky is determined that her child will be as stylish as a baby can be. That includes having the best obstetrician, so when Becky learns about Venetia Carter, who caters to models and movie stars, she's determined to get herself into Venetia's practice. She succeeds, only to discover to her dismay that the stunning Venetia dated Luke in college and may still be carrying a torch for him. Becky will go to any length to keep her husband, whether it be intercepting text messages from Venetia in Latin or hiring a private detective to trail Luke and learn whether or not he has actually been unfaithful to her, rendering marriage over before it has really begun. Through it all, Becky never loses her spark, making this fifth entry in the Shopaholic series every bit as delightful and hilarious as its predecessors. (*Booklist*)



### *Story of Edgar Sawtelle*

By David Wroblewski

Born without the ability to speak, Edgar Sawtelle grows up on a Wisconsin farm turned dog breeding and training kennel with his parents, using sign and gesture to aid the pursuit of perfecting canine companionship. Then, in an injection of Hamlet that one can almost map out point for point, the Sawtelle dream is poisoned. There is the murderous uncle who woos the widowed mother, a ghostly apparition of Edgar's father warning the boy of something rotten, and, most cleverly, a canine reenactment of the deadly deed before Edgar sets out into the wilderness with a trio of

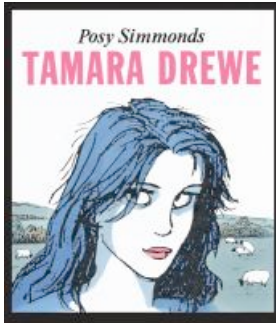
young pups. Wroblewski's debut novel is most revelatory in navigating the wordless avenues of communication running between man and animal, and in the thrilling, heartbreaking interiors of the Sawtelle dogs as they experience the world through differently tuned senses. Though the pacing is set somewhere between languorous and ponderous, more than just dog lovers will find themselves deeply immersed in Wroblewski's assured prose and broad swatches of carefully rendered imagery. High literary art from a talent that bears watching. *(Booklist)*



### *Talk*

By Kathe Koja

Closeted high schooler Kit Webster hopes to take a vacation from reality by accepting one of the leads in a school play called *Talk*. Opposite Kit is popular drama queen Lindsay Walsh, who falls for him while they're onstage and dumps her meathead boyfriend. He blames Kit and homophobic epithets ensue. At the same time, the town turns upside down over the play's strong content, and soon nearly everyone is in an uproar. Told in Kit's and Lindsay's alternating voices, and with portions of the script inserted throughout, this novel breaks no new ground literarily or thematically. Readers will find the uncertain chemistry between the protagonists intriguing, but the vague controversy surrounding the play and free-speech rallies quickly become didactic and tiresome. Koja's stream-of-conscious style enhances the story's sense of realism, but the characterizations seem flat and polarized compared to other straight/gay romantic muddles like Alex Sanchez's *So Hard to Say* (2004) or Ellen Wittlinger's *Hard Love* (1999, both S & S). Still, reluctant readers may be tempted enough by the volume's slim size and simplistic themes to see it through to the end. *(School Library Journal)*



### *Tamara Drewe*

By Posy Simmonds

In a variety of narrative manners sequential art, traditional prose narrative, and newspaper columns and headlines Simmonds (Gemma Boverly, 1999) tells a satisfying and complex story from the self-revealing perspectives of a middle-aged academic striving to write a literary novel, a schoolgirl with a crush-crazed best friend, the stoic wife of a professional philanderer, and a practiced femme fatale. Set in the idyllic English countryside, where a middle-class writers' retreat stands cheek by jowl with the only available hangout for working-class village teens, the plot unwinds with more eloquence than writers, let alone cartoonists, usually provide when telling of deadly cows, has-been rock stars, and lovesick gardeners. Simmonds' artwork, well-shadowed with clear grays, invokes and sustains the moods of longing, jealousy, self-satisfaction, and fear as the characters dance a multilayered but unconfusing reel of lust, repentance, forgiveness, bereavement, and distrust. Solidly realistic, Simmonds uses her unique medium to full advantage, showing what would take paragraphs to tell and expressing in a paragraph or two thoughts that wouldn't communicate as directly with images. Hers is storytelling that mimics cognition by overlapping verbal explanation and sensory input. (*Booklist*)

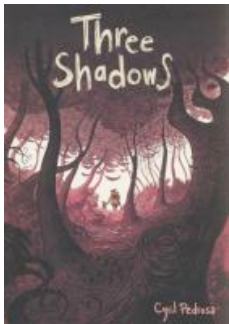


### *Testimony*

By Anita Shreve

Shreve, consummate craftsman and frequent provocateur, is on fire in her latest novel, a mesmerizing read centering on a sex scandal at a prestigious Vermont prep school. The story is laid out in short, dramatic chapters narrated by a chorus of participants and bystanders, from the

beleaguered headmaster to the heartbroken parents to the vacuous girl at the center of the scandal. Three star basketball players were videotaped having sex with a freshman, and the tape was then posted on the Internet. The reaction is immediate and the results devastating, destroying marriages, ruining futures, and, most horrifying of all, resulting in a death. Part of what makes the novel so riveting is its graphic rehashing of a scandal familiar from newspaper headlines, but most of this affecting novel's appeal lies in the way it so carefully fills in the nuances often missing from the headlines. One of the boys, the son of local farmers who was attending the elite school on scholarship, had learned a shocking secret about his mother just prior to the incident and, uncharacteristically, had too much to drink. Conversely, the girl ultimately calls the cops, thereby alerting the media, and accuses the boys of rape because it's easier than having to face the wrath of her father. Shreve views all of the characters, even the most flawed, with a good deal of compassion, revealing the heartbreaking consequences of a single reckless act. (*Booklist*)



*Three Shadows*  
By Cyril Pedrosa

Country life is simple and sweet for young Joachim and his parents, Louis and Lise filled with cozy winter nights, lazy summer days, and, always, the chores associated with running the orchards. One day three Shadows appear on the horizon, and everything changes. Louis and Lise know that these shadowy fates have come for Joachim. Determined to save the boy, Louis flees with Joachim, desperate to stay one step ahead of the deathly Shadows. Pedrosa's intriguing, poignant fable unfolds beautifully in both words and pictures. The fluidity of the art reflects Pedrosa's roots in animation, and the high-contrast shading effectively underscores the tension and emotion of the narrative. One brief instance of nonsexualized nudity should be noted, but that detracts not at all from this dark, well-crafted tale. (*Booklist*)



*Tonoharu*

By Lars Martinson

Xeric Award-winner Martinson gives us a fully realized, engaging tale of international alienation. Ivy League grad Dan Wells has arrived in Japan to take his first job ever, assisting in English instruction classes at a small-town junior-high school. In his first months on the job, he faces boredom between classes (not all the Japanese teachers want his assistance, but he has made a contractual agreement to be on site at the school all day, every day), homesickness, the reality that he doesn't readily become a glib Japanese conversationalist, and the rebuffs of other Westerners, who are either better prepared for the foreign experience or so quick to dismiss Japanese culture that they don't engage the existential truth that alienation is more about the foreigner than about the host. Martinson's daintily shaded and cross-hatched panels fit both the setting and Dan's mood. Sly visual puns, particularly surrounding Dan's inability to understand spoken Japanese but clarity about the temperaments of the speakers, spice the otherwise reportorial account. Martinson's highly autobiographical fictional graphic novel conveys the feel as well as the facts of his hero's experience of romanticism confronted by reality.

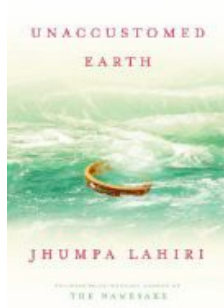
*(Booklist)*

*Traitor Game*

By B.R. Collins

Michael, 15, was bullied unmercifully in his old school and expects the same treatment in his new one. Unable to voice his fears, he retreats into an imaginary medieval world called Evgard, which he has created down to the last meticulous detail. When he meets fellow student Francis, he can't believe the boy is equally fascinated by Evgard and wants to participate in the fantasy game. But when Michael thinks that Francis has betrayed him and exposed their secret world to ridicule, he retaliates with catastrophic results. Unaware of the truth of his accusation, Michael accuses Francis of being gay to the worst of the school bullies. Echoes of Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (Random, 1974) resonate throughout the novel as the Evgard narrative mimics the powerful themes of friendships gone awry, betrayal, and treachery, and characters in both the real and imaginary worlds are faced with impossible moral choices. While the book contains many criticisms, the pace of the story keeps the pages turning, and the

details—especially of the carefully constructed Evgard—are brilliant. The horrors of bullying in a British public school are emphasized by the acts of the sadistic Duke in the Evgard story. The device of parallel narratives that only intertwine symbolically is intriguing. The language is raw and events are painfully graphic in parts. A grim but ultimately satisfying novel for an older audience. (*School Library Journal*)

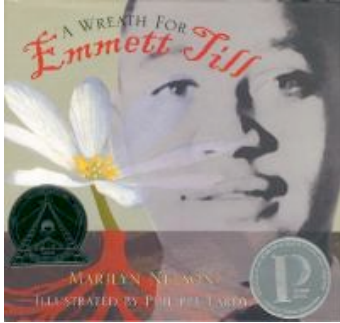


### *Unaccustomed Earth*

By Jhumpa Lahiri

Following her thoughtful first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), which has been made into a meditative film, Lahiri returns to the short story, the form that earned her the Pulitzer Prize for her debut, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). The tight arc of a story is perfect for Lahiri's keen sense of life's abrupt and painful changes, and her avid eye for telling details. This collection's five powerful stories and haunting triptych of tales about the fates of two Bengali families in America map the perplexing hidden forces that pull families asunder and undermine marriages.

*Unaccustomed Earth*, the title story, dramatizes the divide between immigrant parents and their American-raised children, and is the first of several scathing inquiries into the lack of deep-down understanding and trust in a marriage between a Bengali and non-Bengali. An inspired miniaturist, Lahiri creates a lexicon of loaded images. A hole burned in a dressy skirt suggests vulnerability and the need to accept imperfection. Van Eyck's famous painting, *The Arnolfini Marriage*, is a template for a tale contrasting marital expectations with the reality of familial relationships. A collapsed balloon is emblematic of failure. A lost bangle is shorthand for disaster. Lahiri's emotionally and culturally astute short stories (ideal for people with limited time for pleasure reading and a hunger for serious literature) are surprising, aesthetically marvelous, and shaped by a sure and provocative sense of inevitability. (*Booklist*)



### *A Wreath for Emmett Till*

By Marilyn Nelson

I was nine years old when Emmett Till was lynched in 1955. His name and history have been a part of most of my life, writes the creator of award-winning *Carver* (2001) in the introduction to this offering--a searing poetry collection about Till's brutal, racially motivated murder. The poems form a heroic crown of sonnets--a sequence in which the last line of one poem becomes the first line of the next. The strict form became a kind of insulation, a way of protecting myself from the intense pain of the subject matter, writes Nelson. The rigid form distills the words' overwhelming emotion into potent, heart-stopping lines that speak from changing perspectives, including that of a tree. Closing notes offer context to the sophisticated allusions to literature and history, but the raw power of many lines needs no translation. Nelson speaks of human history's deep contradictions: My country, 'tis both / thy nightmare history and thy grand dream. But there's also the hope that comes from facing the past and moving forward: In my house, there is still something called grace, / which melts ice shards of hate and makes hearts whole. When matched with Lardy's gripping, spare, symbolic paintings of tree trunks, blood-red roots, and wreaths of thorns, these poems are a powerful achievement that teens and adults will want to discuss together. *(Booklist)*