

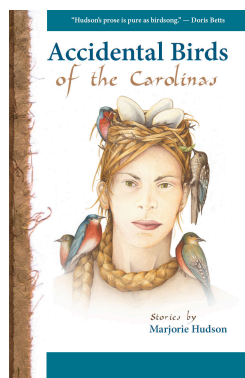
# literary **mama**

reading for the maternally inclined

Essential Reading: Nature

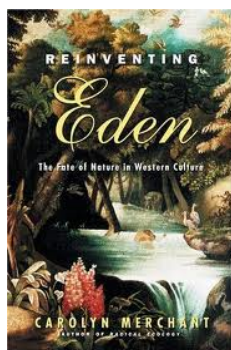
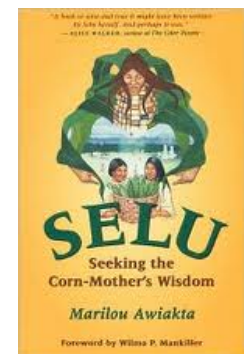
By [Rhena Tantisunthorn Refsland](#)

This month, I asked our editors and columnists to share excellent books that follow the theme of "nature." They delivered. Here, the offering of titles takes us from the migratory patterns of humans in the Carolinas to the link between our early history and the Cherokee, from a gator-wrestling theme park to Tuscany. My recommendation? Find a shady spot under a tree or next to a lake to enjoy one of these gems.



Suzanne Kamata, Fiction Co-editor writes, "I'd like to suggest *Accidental Birds of the Carolinas* by Marjorie Hudson. I was first drawn in by the intriguing title and arresting cover art and then fell in love with Hudson's lyrical writing. Preserved in jars, whole tomatoes are 'suspended like peeled human hearts in clear plasma.' A face is leathery, 'like a work boot.' There is a love of nature in these pages, evidenced by the birds that flit and fly through each story, the flora and fauna of rural North Carolina, and also a keen understanding of human nature. These stories are about humans, after all, especially those displaced from north (or in one case west) to south like the accidental birds of the title - those found outside their normal range, breeding area, or migration path, arrived through storm, wind, or unusual weather."

Cassie Premo Steele, "Birthing the Mother Writer" Columnist, shares two recommendations this month. "Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother's Wisdom" by Marilou Awiakta traces the Cherokee roots of our democracy by uncovering the history of the connections between the Founding Fathers and the Iroquois Confederacy. But underneath it all is a story of the need for balance between genders, within us humans and between nature and the human world. It is a soul book, a life-changing book, a book that heals.

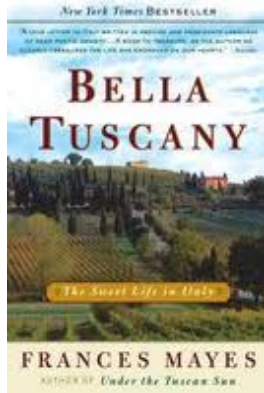


*Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* by Carolyn Merchant is a multilayered look into how America was founded upon certain philosophies about nature that continue to plague our relationship with it today. Drawing from art, literature, consumer culture and quantum physics, Merchant unravels our current confusion about nature, gender, and objectification while presenting a hopeful vision for the future."

# literary **mama**

reading for the maternally inclined

Caroline M. Grant, Editor-in-Chief, contributes, "I've just started reading Karen Russell's novel *Swamplandia!*, but am already completely engrossed in this story of a family running a gator-wrestling theme park in the Florida Everglades. The narrator's mother is the park's headliner; she takes a starlight dive each night into an alligator pit and outswims the beasts to safety. Here's a description of that scene: 'Four times a week, our mother climbed the ladder above the Gator Pit in a green two-piece bathing suit and stood on the edge of the diving board, breathing. If it was windy, her long hair flew around her face, but the rest of her stayed motionless. Nights in the swamp were dark and star-lepered... Somewhere directly below Hilola Bigtree, dozens of alligators pushed their icicle overbites and the awesome diamonds of their heads through over three hundred thousand gallons of filtered water.'"



Finally, Kristina Riggle, Fiction Co-editor, comments, "I adore *Bella Tuscany*, by Frances Mayes. This memoir and companion piece to her bestseller, *Under the Tuscan Sun*, is about battling nature's ravages against her villa, Bramasole, and its surrounding overgrown gardens. She wrestles weather, vegetation, the landscape itself, and sometimes her own groundskeeper, all the while trying to fit herself into this new Italian community and its subtle complexities."