

A Literary Magazine for the Maternally Inclined
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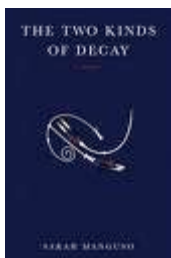
LITERARY
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Now Reading: September 2008

This month, Literary Mama editors and columnists head into fall with great fiction, memoir, and women's studies titles.



Fiction Co-Editor, Suzanne Kamata, writes "I loved **The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox** by Maggie O'Farrell, which is about a young woman who discovers that she is responsible for the crazy aunt she hadn't known existed. O'Farrell takes some familiar elements - the free-spirited daughter of a traditional family, the aunt in the attic - and weaves a beautiful, haunting story about betrayal and jealousy. This book is also very disturbing in its reminders of how supposedly hysterical women have been treated in ages past. The ending is perfect - inevitable and yet completely surprising."



Amy S. Mercer, Columnist and Blog Editor, recently finished reading **The Two Kinds Of Decay** by Sarah Manguso. The New York Times Book Review writes, "Manguso is acutely interested in these processes of renaming and remembering, the way time changes what we say about the past. Her book is not only about illness but also about the ways we use language to describe it and cope with it. The author of two books of poetry, Manguso brings the virtues of that form to the task of writing memoir." Amy adds, "Manguso's writing made me, as a woman with an auto-immune disease, aware of questions I'd been unable to ask. She says, 'I don't know if I changed because of my disease or in spite of it.'"

Kathy Moran, Literary Reflections Co-Editor, is currently reading **The Widow of the South**, Robert Hicks' debut novel. Kathy writes, "Based on a true story, the plot centers on the Civil War Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, when the Carnton plantation was used as a field hospital and where 1,500 Confederate soldiers are buried. The story unfolds through the voices of multiple narrators: Carnton's proprietress Carrie McGavock and two soldiers -- one Union, one Confederate. Using this approach broadens the story as each reveals personal struggles and challenges, not necessarily related to this fateful event. Having visited Carnton twice, I'm mesmerized to be reading about this place that captured my imagination and interest."



Creative Nonfiction Co-Editor Kate Haas just finished reading **The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders** by Kathy Davis. She writes that the book "examines both the 'myth-like' origins of *Our Bodies Ourselves* and the ways in which the text has been translated and adapted by women world-wide. Davis's narrative about these adaptations is fascinating: for example, the collective voice of the original text, which made it so empowering for American women, was scrapped by the Bulgarian translators in order to avoid alienating readers emerging from years of forced Soviet-style collectivism. Davis sets her narrative within the context of feminist theory, which can result in stretches of fairly dry, academic prose. But the overall story makes it a worthwhile read."



Finally, E-Zine Editor Merle Huerta has the following to say about her recent reading: "I found Margaret Atwood's 1985 dystopian novel **The Handmaid's Tale** a frightening yet compelling tale. Set in the Republic of Gilead, the totalitarian and theocratic society that has replaced the United States, all people in society are categorized according to function. Women, clustered into one of seven social strata, have lost both freedom and status. Offred, the narrator, journalizes her daily life as a handmaid or concubine, whose primary function as a fertile female in the new order is to birth children for her commander and his wife. Despite overtly compliant appearances, Offred is anything but dutiful to the new order. She relishes flashbacks to her old life, one shared with a husband and child. She willingly visits brothels and engages in illicit sex with her commander. And she begins a somewhat open affair with Nick, a man introduced to her by the commander's wife for the sake of impregnation. Anyone who'd like to envision Orwell's 1984 novel carried to a new level must read this book."