



MAY NEWSLETTER
2014-2015 NUMBER 9

Editor: Shirley Baugher
Designer: Norman Baugher

FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

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President's Message

CHRISTINE BERN,
President

May is Awards Month so I begin by thanking our Literary Committees, which were chaired by Tammie Bob and Tanya Klasser. This is a monumental task and our new winners join an impressive list of award recipients. Thank you also to Marion Sherlock for thoughtfully planning a lovely May Awards Luncheon that you are sure to enjoy. Please mail in your reservations to Marion by May 1.

Please look for your 2015-6 dues letter in the mail this summer and mail it in as soon as possible so you won't miss out on the exciting programs our Program Chair and Vice President, Christine Spataro, is working on this summer for next season.

Finally, it has been my honor to serve as the FAW President for the last two years. I have completely enjoyed every minute. I leave the job in the capable hands of Roberta Gates.

All the best this summer.

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FAW's Literature Awards Winners for 2014

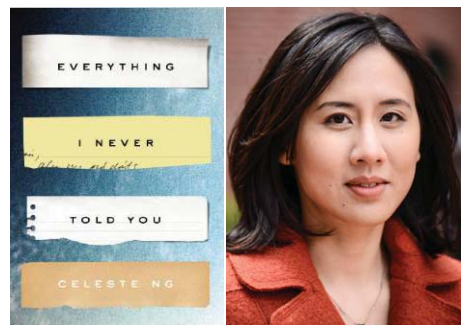
BY TAMMIE BOB

FAW's Literature Award Committee had a difficult but enviable task in selecting the 2014 prize winners: We received over 90 entries (sorting through them was a bit difficult), but we also got to read a number of excellent books we might not have found on our own. Out of an unusually strong field, three books emerged as clear favorites: the first prize winner, *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng, and a second place tie between *Last Night at the Blue Angel* by Rebecca Rotert, and *The Mathematician's Shiva* by Stuart Rojstaczer. Each of these remarkable books is the author's first novel.

Everything I Never Told You is a suspenseful page-turner, even though we are told in its first sentence that a missing girl, sixteen-year old Lydia Lee, is dead. But what happened to this beautiful straight-A student? The story unwraps in layers, like an onion, revealing the secrets and conflicts inside each member of Lydia's Chinese-American family. Searching for truth about Lydia's death forces her mother, father, and brother to confront the lies and omissions of their own lives.

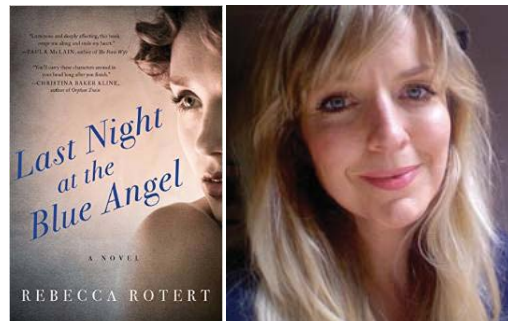
Set in a small town in Ohio during the 70's, the book exposes the complicated relations between parents and children, spouses, and siblings, as well as issues of race and gender. The Lee's individual stories emerge in unexpected ways, narrated with nuanced detail. Readers can't help sharing their grief and rooting for each one to find solace, even when they behave badly

Author Celeste Ng has published many short stories and won a Pushcart Prize. *Everything I Never Told You* is her first novel. She attended Harvard and has an MFA from the University of Michigan. She now lives in Cambridge, Mass. with her husband and son. Unfortunately, she won't be able to join us for the awards lunch May 8, but plans to create a video presentation so she can be with us in a virtual way.



▲ Celeste Ng

Last Night at the Blue Angel has two captivating narrators: the utterly seductive and complex Naomi Hill, a jazz singer struggling for stardom in mid 1960's Chicago, and her precocious 10 year old daughter Sophia. Sophia lives in the shadow of her mother and tries to make sense of Naomi's mysterious relationships and frequent poor choices. An engaging and incredibly loyal group of supporting characters include a former nun and her cross dressing brother, another brother

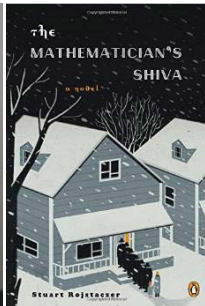


▼ Rebecca Rotert

Continued ▶

and sister who are both in love with Naomi, and the photographer whose spread in *Look* magazine has given Naomi a real shot at making it to the top.

Last Night at the Blue Angel brings to life the lives and world of people from a bygone era, when the closet was requisite, segregation was the norm and duck and cover was practiced in every school. Naomi and Sophia's voices alternate telling this tale, at once a train wreck in



▲ Stuart Rojstaczer

The Mathematician's Shiva is a literary romp through the world of the mathematically obsessed, with secret plots, geopolitical rumblings, and a remarkable parrot. The story begins as Rachela Karnokovitch,

world-famous mathematician who defected to the United States after living through Soviet hell, dies in Wisconsin, surrounded by her son, ex-husband, and brother. It is rumored, in the mathematics world, that with her last remaining brain activity she solved the elusive Navier-Stokes equation. Her geophysicist son, the book's narrator Sasha,

Please don't miss the awards lunch on May 8—these engaging writers will be speaking to us and selling and signing their books. It should definitely be the highlight of FAW's events this year.

the waiting and a heartrending story of the meaning of love and family.

Herself a singer and songwriter, Rebecca Rotert has published poetry and essays and received an Academy of American Poets Prize. A visit to her website (www.rebeccarotert.com) shows that she's a gifted painter and photographer as well. She lives in Omaha and is delighted to come to Chicago to attend FAW's Awards luncheon.

has a sense of underperformance as a human and a Karnokovitch. He is infuriated when fifteen mathematicians from around the world badger their way into his mother's shiva, ostensibly to grieve the passing of their renowned colleague, but really (and with incompetent subterfuge) to ransack Rachela's home in search of the Navier-Stokes proof on paper. Seven days of hijinks ensue.

Stuart Rojstaczer is a retired professor of geophysics at Duke University. He gained some fame as an expert on grade inflation and has been on CNN, ESPN, and NPR on the subject. He also recently won the National Jewish Book award for Outstanding Debut Fiction for *The Mathematician's Shiva*. Even though he lives in Palo Alto, Ca. he plans on coming to the awards luncheon with some of his relatives. Commenting on the name of our organization, he wrote, "It's good to have Friends!"

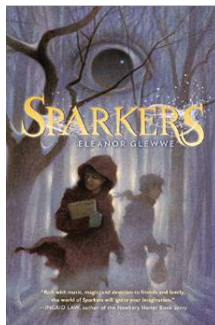
Young People's Literature Awards

By TANYA KLASSER

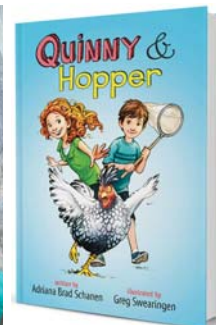
Our dedicated committee read thirty books before selecting two for FAW Awards.

Sparkers by Eleanor Glewwe is a fantasy that tells the story of a young violinist who must battle forces of evil while struggling to survive in her oppressed lower class society.

Quinny & Hopper by Adriana Brad Schanen makes us laugh as we read about two eight-year olds who become friends despite their very different backgrounds and personalities.



▲ Eleanor Glewwe



▲ Adriana Brad Schanen

We are pleased to announce that both authors will attend the Awards Luncheon. Eleanor lives in Los Angeles and Adriana resides in New Jersey.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luncheon Reservations

The 85th Annual Awards Luncheon will be held on Friday, May 8 at 11:00 A.M., at the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 Bellevue Place. Please make your reservations no later than Friday, May 1, 2015. You may use the

Awards Luncheon Reservation Form on the next page or call Marion Sherlock, 708-957-8139. The cost of the luncheon is \$45, and includes a wine aperitif, and a delicious menu that includes Caesar salad, beef tenderloin, and white chocolate mousse. Send the reservation form with your payment to Ms. Marion Sherlock, 2650 Central Drive, Flossmoor, IL 60422.

Patron's Fund The Patron's Fund is the education fund from which the FAW draws monies for Literature Awards and Young People's Literature Awards. Your contributions are essential to the maintenance of this fund. While it is too late to have your name appear in the Annual Awards Program Book as a donor, we urge you to

support this fund. Please mail your contributions to Ms. Eileen McNulty, 4450 N. Kostner, Chicago, IL 60630.

New Members FAW is pleased to welcome Patricia Ronan as a new

member to our organization. We know that she will be a valuable addition to the group and that she will enjoy her participation in the Friends of American Writers. If you know of anyone who would

like to become a member of our group, please contact Membership Chair Sandie Weiss, 161 E. Chicago Ave., Apt 35G, Chicago, IL 60611. New members will not have to pay dues until next year.



FAW AWARDS LUNCHEON RESERVATION FORM

Name _____

Address _____ phone _____

Please reserve _____ places at the Awards Luncheon at \$45 per person

Enclosed is my reservation and check payable to FAW Awards Luncheon for \$ _____ to cover lunch for the following people:

I would like to sit with _____

I would like a vegetarian lunch Yes No

Please call Marion Sherlock (708) 957-8139 if other food arrangements are needed

FEATURE **MOTHERS**

The Good, The Bad, The Memorable

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER



Sketch by Norman Baugher

In May, as we honor our mothers, I thought it would be interesting to examine history of the day, and the role of mothers in literature—the best and the worst of them—and to share a story of the most famous mother of all time, Mary, the mother of Jesus, as imagined by Irish novelist Colm Toibin.

Mother's Day: A History

The celebration of motherhood goes back to the Egyptians who held an annual festival to honor the goddess Isis. According to myth, in the 24th century BCE, the

▼ Isis and Horus



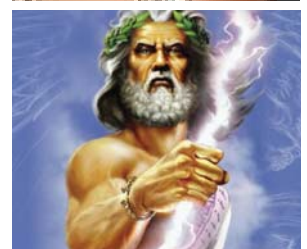
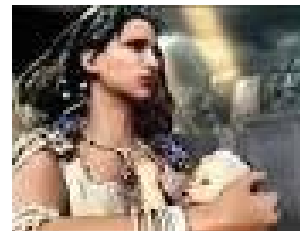
▼ Mary and Jesus



brother/husband of Isis, Osiris, was slain and dismembered into 13 pieces by her brother Seth. Isis then reassembled his body and used it to impregnate herself. Her son, whom she named Horus, grew up to defeat Seth and become the first ruler of a unified Egypt. Ever after, Isis has been remembered as the mother of the pharaohs. It is interesting that images of Isis with the baby Horus have a resemblance to those of the Virgin Mary holding the Baby Jesus.

The ancient Greeks had their own mother's day celebration to honor Rhea, a crafty, daring woman who became the mother of Zeus. The story goes that Rhea was married to Cronus, King of the Gods. Cronus was afraid that his children would grow up to replace him, so each time Rhea gave birth, he would eat the child. The children did not die, but remained trapped in Cronus' body. Finally, Rhea grew tired of losing her children, so when Zeus was born, she tricked her husband. She wrapped a stone in a blanket and presented it to

▼ Rhea and Zeus



▲ Zeus

Continued ►

Cronus—which he promptly ate, not knowing the difference. Zeus was raised in a cave on Crete, and in later years, he did indeed overthrow his father, freeing his siblings and becoming the god of gods.

A Celebration of Modern Mothers

The more recent history of Mothers Day dates to the 1600s in England. The fourth Sunday of Lent was designated “Mothering Sunday”. After a prayer service in church to honor the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, children brought gifts and flowers to honor their own mothers. Sometimes, servants and employees were given the day off to visit their mothers.

In 1872, Julia Ward Howe, author of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic”, suggested that June 2 be proclaimed Mothers Day and that the day should be dedicated to peace. While her notion was popular, the official designation of a Mothers Day did not come until Anna Jarvis lobbied hard to make it a reality.

Although Anna Jarvis never married and never had children, she is recognized as the official mother of Mother’s Day in the United States. She got the inspiration from her own mother, an activist and social worker, who often expressed the hope that one day, someone would establish a day honoring all mothers, living and dead. After Mrs. Jarvis died in 1905, Anna resolved to fulfill her mother’s wish. With the help of supporters, she wrote letters to people in positions of power lobbying for an official Mother’s Day holiday. By 1911, almost every state in the union was observing Mother’s Day. On May 8, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a Joint Resolution designating the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day. Today, in countries throughout the world advertisers encourage people to pay tribute to mothers with flowers, gifts, and cards, a practice Ms. Anna Jarvis would have deplored.

Mothers in Literature

And now, let’s consider a few mothers who live within the pages of books. Fictional mothers usually fall into two categories: the too-good-to-be-true or the too evil to be imagined. Interestingly, most critics agree on who falls into which.

The Good Mother

“**Marmee**” **March** High on everyone’s “good mother” list is “Marmee” March from *Little Women*. Marmee is a mother who has it all together. With her husband off fighting the Civil War, she raised four daughters on her own with very little money. And she did it with patience and grace. Marmee let each of her girls develop according to her own gifts and inclinations—instead of trying to fit them into a box of “proper” societal expectations. Her goals for them centered mainly on character development. She didn’t fret over who they weren’t, rather she celebrated who they were.

Marmee set a good example for her girls. She served her community and provided opportunities for her daughters

to do the same. She believed in the importance of childhood and allowed her girls to be children for as long as they could. The March sisters spent hours creating and performing plays, writing and reading aloud, and spending time outside.

If Marmee falls in the “too-good-to-be-true” category, she is a certainly model of what strong mothers can be if they walk the talk.

Molly Weasley A second mother who dominates good list is J. K. Rowling’s Molly Weasley from the *Harry Potter* series. Molly is loving, caring, and strong. While she loves her own children fiercely, her motherly love isn’t confined to her immediate family. She cares about “the odd one out”, including Harry Potter and Nymphadora Tonks.

With the family often under financial strain, Molly Weasley cheerfully makes do with what she has. She is such a good cook, her son Ron swears she can make tasty food from thin air (an impossibility even in the wizarding world). She knows when to praise and when to scold. When the children do really dumb things, like stealing dad’s flying car or getting low marks on their O.W.Ls, they get a tongue-lashing. But when they are chosen as school prefect or succeed in their careers, she sings their praises. She gives good hugs and knits her loved ones sweaters every Christmas. She constantly worries about the children’s safety, but she encourages them to do the right thing—even if it means they will be in danger, because she believes that fighting for a better world is more important than safety. After all, when you have one son who works with dragons, another who is a curse breaker, and several family members who are evil wizard fighters, you get used to anxiety. Molly Weasley is a mother who knows the real treasures in life are her children—a good mother.

Caroline Ingalls It’s hard to imagine a good mother list that does not include Caroline Ingalls, the quintessential pioneer mother. She rose before dawn to stoke the fire and boil the bathwater. She fed her family with whatever she had. She made all their clothes and linens, recycling the scraps for patchwork quilts. She baked the bread, churned the butter, blacked the stove, and restuffed the pallets that they slept on with fresh hay. Even when it was twenty below, she did the washing for six people, pressing with heavy flatirons laundry that had frozen stiff. When her husband was away trying to find work, she fetched the wood and pitched feed to the horses; then sat knitting in her rocker waiting for his return. When informed that she would have to pack up one home and start over in a new wilderness, she went along. Now that is a good mother.

“**Ma**” Finally, we come to “Ma”, the heroine of Emma Donoghue’s *Room*. Ma is the mother of five-year-old Jack, whose entire world consists of just one room containing a small kitchen, a bathtub, a wardrobe, a bed and

a TV set. Since it is all he has ever known, Jack likes living in Room and believes that it is the real world; what he sees on TV is imaginary.

Jack and Ma are “looked after” by Old Nick. He visits Room through an electronically locked door to bring food and to go to bed with Ma while Jack sleeps in the wardrobe. Ma tries her best to be a good mother, and she is. She looks after Jack’s physical and mental health. She makes him exercise. She sees to it he has a healthy diet. She limits his TV watching time. And she is strict about his body and oral hygiene.

For those unfamiliar with the story (spoiler alert) Ma had been abducted from college and impregnated by Old Nick at the age of 19. He kept her, and later Jack, in the Room. After many unsuccessful attempts to escape, Ma resolves to get out the week after Jack’s fifth birthday. She tells Old Nick that Jack is ill and must go to a hospital. When Old Nick refuses, thinking that the boy will inform the authorities about Room, Ma draws up a plan to fake Jack’s death and persuade Old Nick to take the body away. When the truck slows at a traffic light, she’ll have Jack to jump down and run for help. All goes according to plan. When Jack jumps off the truck, Old Nick tries to catch him, but a passer-by rescues the boy and calls the police. Jack manages to provide enough information for officers to locate Room, free Ma, and charge Old Nick with abduction, rape, and child endangerment.

It is not happily ever after—at first. Jack has trouble coping with the larger world and wants to return to Room. Ma suffers a mental breakdown and attempts suicide, sending Jack to live with his grandmother. Eventually, they are reunited and Jack comes to accept the changes in his life. When he makes one last visit to Room to say goodbye, he finds it small and cramped—no longer the haven he remembered. He is able to let it go.

The love Ma and Jack share shows that a strong bond between parent and child can make even the worst situation bearable.”

The Bad Mother

Joan Crawford The really bad mothers also show up on list after list. One of the worst is Joan Crawford. In her book, *Mommy Dearest*, Christina Crawford claims that she was a victim of child abuse during her mother’s battle with alcoholism and that her mother was more concerned about being an actress than the mother of her children. She cites Joan’s long list of affairs with men (whom Christina was required to call “Uncle” or “Daddy”) and women. Christina told of one time when her mother attempted to strangle her and another when Joan completely lost it after discovering Christina’s clothes hanging in a closet on wire hangers of padded ones.

Some of Joan Crawford’s friends suggested that Christina embellished her story. Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Crawford’s first husband, stated that the Joan Crawford in *Mommie Dearest* was not the Joan Crawford he knew. The two young Crawford children, Cindy and Cathy,

swore that they did not witness or experience any of the abuses described in the book. However, their brother Christopher defended Christina’s claims, and said “I never for one moment believed our mother loved any of us. It was all about publicity for her.” Actress Eve Arden sided with Christina, saying that Crawford suffered from bipolar disorder. She called her a good woman in many ways but, as an alcoholic with a violent temper, simply unfit to be a mother.

Charlotte Haze, *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov Charlotte Haze is another really bad mother. She craves the finer and more sophisticated things, but she doesn’t even know what those things are. She thinks Humbert Humbert is the epitome of all of them, and she manipulates him into marriage. She is obviously clueless about his pedophilic desire for her daughter, Lolita. Charlotte Haze pays for her ignorance with a violent death, leaving her unloved daughter subject to the lust and abuse of Humbert Humbert.

Queen Gertrude, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare Is Hamlet’s madness a result of neglect and lack of love? Queen Gertrude, his mother, certainly pays little or no attention to him. Before her husband’s corpse is cold, she rushes into marriage with Hamlet’s uncle. She does not attempt to explain her actions or comfort her son. As a result, Hamlet believes he is alone in the world until he meets Ophelia. But, given his own lack of loving care, he doesn’t know how to handle Ophelia’s love. We expect the relationship to end badly, and it does. The sins of the mother...

The Other Mother, *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman Other Mother is one of the creepiest of literature’s bad mothers. She lives in the Other World and lures unhappy, neglected children to her. She then sews buttons over their eyes and eats their lives. When Coraline Jones wanders through the door into Other World, she believes it is great: magical toys with button eyes and wonderfully attentive Other Mother and Other Father. At first, Other Mother seems sweet, well mannered, and loving. But she soon turns into a nightmarish creature with long fingers, red nails,

▼ Coraline and Other Mother



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pale-as-paper skin, and cold black buttons for eyes. Other World becomes a nightmare place.

Other Mother plans to sew buttons over Coraline's eyes and eat her life, but Coraline manages to escape. She returns home to find that her parents have disappeared, and she has to go back to Other World where they are imprisoned. The ingenious Coraline comes up with a plan to free them and the children. She challenges Other Mother to a game. If Coraline can free the eyes of the children and find her parents before the eclipse of the moon, Other Mother will have to let them all go. If Coraline fails, she will stay in Other World and let Other Mother sew buttons into her eyes. Coraline does not fail and what happens to one of fiction's worst mothers will keep you turning pages to the end.

Mrs. Bennet, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen Mrs. Bennet is described by Austen as “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.” Whenever she opens her mouth, she seems to make a fool of herself. In addition to her crass behavior, Mrs. Bennet is not very intelligent or sensible. Throughout the book, her opinions of people swing between abhorrence and admiration, as seen in her changing feelings for Mr. Collins, Wickham, Bingley, and Darcy. Of course, much of how she judges them is based on whether or not she believes they will become her sons-in-law.

She constantly embarrasses her daughters, and she is neurotic; but she has reason to be. Her family really is in crisis, with five daughters raised for upper-class idleness and no fortune to fall back on if wealthy husbands don't materialize. Mrs. Bennet schemes for Elizabeth to marry the horrid Mr. Collins. Her permissiveness with Lydia leads to her elope with Wickham before marriage. Mrs. Bennet's reaction to the elopement is to go into hysterics and hide herself in her room. She sends Jane over to the Bingley's estate on horseback instead in a carriage, because it seems likely to rain; and then she will have to stay all night. She invites Bingley to dinner and offers her husband's birds for him to shoot. She finds ways to get the two together. Still, it works. Jane and Bingley are both so passive and good-natured that, without Mrs. Bennet's scheming, it is unlikely they would have gotten together.

Mr. Bennet is no help at all. He conducts himself with dignity, but he is so passive he is useless as far as his daughters' futures are concerned. He has failed to put any money aside for them, even though he knows that he can't leave the estate to them. He seems content to let things take care of themselves.

In the end, however, Mrs. Bennet gets exactly what she wants; her three eldest daughters are married, and, while we actually have some sympathy for her, she remains a “gawking, vulgar, and foolish woman.”

The Enigmatic Mother

The Virgin Mary, *The Testament of Mary* by Colm Toibin While the Virgin Mary is extolled as the Mother of

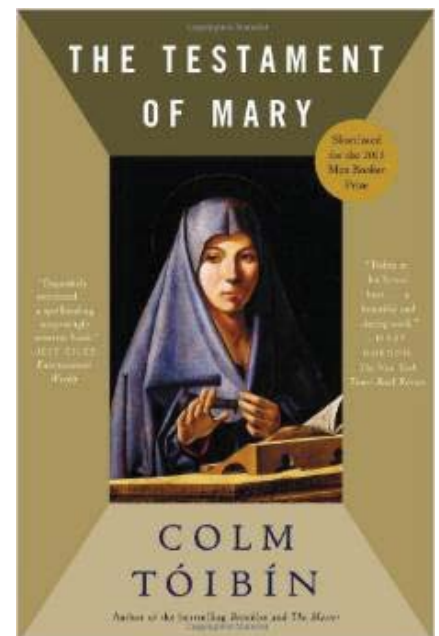
▼ Annunciations by Norman Baugher



Christ, almost nothing is known about her. She is usually portrayed as a beautiful, loving creature—shocked at first by the announcement that she has been chosen to become the Mother of the Son of God—but later accepting of the responsibility.

In his book, *The Testament of Mary*, Colm Toibin imagines a very different Mary—a Mary who did not believe that her son was the Son of God. A Mary who was angry when Jesus turned water to wine at the wedding in Cana. A Mary who left the site of the Crucifixion before her son was actually dead because she wanted to protect herself from the violence she knew would follow. While this may be unsettling, Toibin hastens to assure readers, it is only fiction.

The Testament of Mary takes place some years after the Crucifixion when John and another disciple visit Mary in Ephesus



to question her. Mary is not cooperative. She resents their questions because she knows they are trying to make her verify their version of the events of her son's life. "Just as I cannot breathe the breath of another or help the heart of someone else to beat...I cannot say more than I can say." Instead, she tells the reader the story she knows. She describes her son's followers as misfits and fools. She tells of the estrangement between her and her son (whose name she cannot even say) when he abandons his boyhood self to become someone else. She is so heartbroken at Cana when Jesus says to her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" that she leaves the wedding.

The most poignant part of Mary's "Testament", is her description of the Crucifixion: her son being made to drag the heavy cross through the crowd, the thorns pushing into his head, the nails being pounded into his hands and feet, his slow and painful death, the final moments of which she did not wait to see. She left others to wash his

body and bury him. There was no resurrection—except in her dreams. Even more heart-wrenching is Mary's lament that all she ever wanted was to grow old with her husband and son, a happy family, observing the Sabbath and the Jewish traditions. A simple life.

In the end, when the apostles tell Mary the story they have written: that her son was the Son of God, and that his life and death will change the world, she protests that he was not the Son of God. They refuse to listen. When she condemns his last agony, they say "His suffering was necessary so that mankind could be saved."

"Saved," she asked. "Who has been saved? I was there...I can tell you now, it was not worth it."

A few reviewers have called Toibin's book, "fiction at its finest." It was short listed for the Booker prize and praised for its portrayal of a Mary who tries to tell the truth in all its complexity. She emerges as a more human figure of great moral stature.

The Reading Corner

Someone A Novel
Alice McDermott

232 pages
Farrar Straus & Giroux

Review by
NORMAN BAUGHER



Alice McDermott is the author of six previous novels, including *Charming Billy*, winner of the 1998 National Book Award. Three of Alice's novels were finalists for the

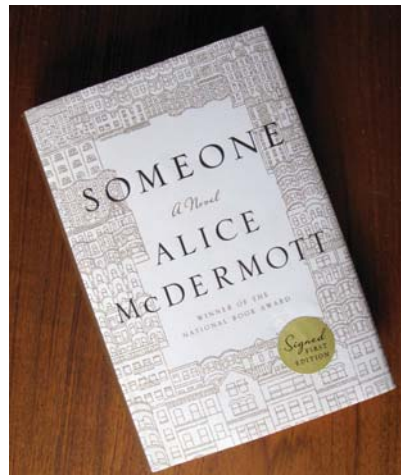
Pulitzer Prize.

This is Marie's story. She starts, in her seventh year, telling the story by introducing her neighbors from the stoop of her Brooklyn home as she waits for her father to come home from work. It's not until page seven that you learn that Marie is "a shy child, and comical-looking, with a

round flat face and black slits for eyes, thick glasses, black bangs, a strait and serious mouth—a little girl cartoon". "With my heart pinned to my father's sleeve in those days." Marie's story continues into her late middle age. The plot follows a nearly flat trajectory interrupted by occasional bumps and dips. It has some of the character of a journal, but with all the sounds, and smells, sight details and silent thoughts that transform the plot from a simple plane into something with depth, changing from two dimension to three. There are occasional breaks in the story as though Marie was too busy during some stretches, or distracted or simply uninterested in making entries in her journal. Do not be dissuaded by the negligible plot, however, because it is not the plot but the language and the unveiling of a person that drives the story. It's luxurious without being fancy.

It's well stocked with ordinary little things that makes us realize there are elements in our lives, just as in Marie's, that don't quite reach the level of consciousness but never the less have influence. It's a pleasure to have these familiar and comfortable sights, sounds, and unspoken thoughts observed and addressed. You'll want to soak it up. So, while Marie's life is rather ordinary, her awareness is extraordinary. I had no trouble believing the story was actually being told by Marie and not by an author inventing a life. There are crises and moments of inquietude that are common to most folks and families

and their friends and neighbors, but Alice McDermott has particularized the calamities of the people in this novel making the common seem personal and urgent. Some of the crises have continuing ramifications that manifest in later periods of Marie's life. Alice McDermott inhabits



Continued ►



CHRISTINE BERN
1028 S. Butternut Circle
Frankfort, IL 60423

the characters with dreams, expectations, hopes, disappointments, humor, and fears that cannot but effect the way her people lead their lives. Here, as in any life, there are deaths and fear of death, their own but particularly those they love. And, here, as in any life, people manage. People are sometimes foolish, once in awhile wise. That too is in this telling. All is kept in line with an exactness of description and details that manages to avoid distraction. It

steers clear of language that is pretty for its own sake or presented as a display of how clever the author is. Dates and ages are generally absent but one senses these and the passage of time from clothing—men wear hats, activities—stickball in the streets, customs, manners, mannerisms, and language clues. Alice uses all her storytelling skills to transform an unremarkable woman's ordinary experiences into a memorable life—makes her into Someone. 