

REVIEWS

appear to have looked the other way. Not so in northern France, says McDougall. “They were in the wake of the Hundred Years’ War, between England and France, and they were trying to make God happy with them,” she says. So officials were on the lookout for moral wrongdoing to prosecute.

A century later, bigamy prosecutions were commonplace throughout Europe. In fact, McDougall argues that illegal remarriage eventually became such a great concern to the Church that it was responsible for radical changes in marriage law, including the requirements that marriages be publicized in advance and presided over by a priest.

Earlier in the Middle Ages, the Church had permitted a practice known as “clandestine marriage.” This meant that “if two people, even young people without their parents’ consent, say, ‘I marry you,’ that’s it. You’re married forever,” McDougall says.

But it was the popular practice of bigamy, and not clandestine marriage, that concerned the courts in northern France, she argues. As her book shows, people often went to great lengths to remarry: Bertrand, a barrelmaker, pretended his first wife had died from the plague. Antoine Bonnard changed his name. Barthélèmy Bouvier bribed chaplains with cheese, wine, and a gold coin. Then, when confronted by the wife he’d abandoned, he tried to bribe her to pretend she was actually his maid.

They did it because “marriage mattered to them,” McDougall says. By the 15th century, married saints were venerated in sermons and marriage was being embraced as a way to become a good Christian. “So if you had been unhappily married the first time, or if a spouse vanished and you didn’t know if they were alive or dead, it was a way to find the kind of companionship that I think almost all of us prefer to have in life,” she says. It was “also a way to reintegrate into society.”

For her next book McDougall is lingering in medieval France, this time to investigate how society handled adultery.

Fiction

Men Beware Women

Gwen Thompson (GRS’99)
Miami University Press

DOES YOUNG LOVE ignite the study of literature or sabotage it? Written with a light, deftly comic touch, this novella follows a pivotal year in the life of native New Yorker and rower Malcolm Forrester, who arrives at Oxford to study Shakespeare and learns as much about himself as he does about the Bard. As he navigates a strange new habitat of warm beer, dodgy plumbing, blood pudding, and HP sauce, the witty, personable Malcolm charms nearly everyone in his path. But he is unable to wrangle the ambitious actress Emma, who adores him, but refuses to have her ambitions hijacked. When Emma, leaving only a breezy note, abruptly heads to New York for an off-off-Broadway stage role, Malcolm hops on a plane to track her down.

It doesn’t go well. But whatever the earnest Malcolm endures, from Emma’s elusiveness to his parents’ bitter divorce to breaking a few ribs in a rowing mishap, we know he’ll be fine. In Thompson’s world, from Osney Town to the East Village, if people hurt each other, it’s more out of clumsiness or preoccupation than malicious intent. It’s a sweet world, populated by characters we’d like to sit with over a pint. And for its younger inhabitants, it is a universe of possibility, this being one of those novels that leaves the reader with a faint pang of hunger to know what will become of its characters.

Susan Seligson

The Schmutzy Family

Madelyn Rosenberg
(GRS’02)

Holiday House, Inc.

BE FOREWARNED, OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE parents, Rosenberg’s *The Schmutzy Family* may be more

than you can handle. This Jewish family with six adventurous children lives up to its name, which—according to the book’s convenient glossary—derives from the Yiddish

word *shmutsik*, meaning “dirty.” But dirty doesn’t do justice to the level of filth the Schmutzy children enjoy most days of the week, all while Mama Schmutzy completely ignores, or even facilitates, her little ones’ messy business.

The book, and the family’s week, begins on Sunday, when the entire Schmutzy brood treks barefoot through the “malodorous Feldman Swamp” in search of turtles, frogs, and cattails, some of which find their way back home.

Monday means mud pies in the kitchen, and the week continues until Friday morning, when the children play Leap over the Cow Pie in a neighbor’s pasture and Mama Schmutzy awakes from her apparent stupor. She stares in amazement at her five elder, mud-caked children, and cries, “Oy! Look at this dirt! You’re FARSHTUNKEN, all of you! And it’s nearly SHABBOS. We can’t bring in the Sabbath smelling like COWS!”

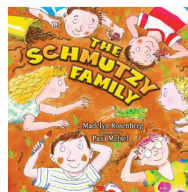
All clean breaks loose. The children scrub the house, relocate amphibians outside, and soap themselves squeaky clean for Friday night’s dinner, prayers, and songs welcoming the Sabbath. The next day they parade in their finest to the synagogue, where no one would have guessed they’d been mud-splattered a mere 24 hours earlier.

While life in the Schmutzy household seems to violate every parental rule ever established, Mama knows

her priorities. Dirt isn’t a big deal; family, faith, and tradition are.

And that’s a lesson we could all learn, Schmutzy or not.

Leslie Friday



Visiting Hours

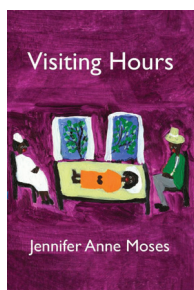
Jennifer Anne Moses
(GRS'83)

Fomite

MOSES' NOVEL IS a folksy tapestry of life, loss, love, and faith that unfolds almost completely within the modest confines of Hope House, a Baton Rouge home for people dying of AIDS. The daily dramas at Hope House are played out by a group of characters of all races, ages, and circumstances. There's young Lucy, the "skinny little white girl" wrestling with a heroin habit. There's Gordon, wise, battered, born-again, and a little in love with Lucy. We meet Bunny, the still beautiful, but dying drag queen, and Veronica, who'd been dumped outside Hope House four years earlier "like a sack of dog food" and left to die. We are privy to their deathbed reveries, regrets, and bursts of self-awareness.

Not everyone at Hope House is likeable. But in Moses' hands, all are blameless, redeemed in death if not in life. Hope House is a refuge of sorts, not just for the sick, but for those who keep the place going. There is volunteer Suzette, atoning for her Southern belle mother's sense of entitlement, and custodian James, who is "one of the people who understands." Like the fictional microcosms of country manors or ships at sea, Hope House embraces the whole bittersweet human pageant. Its stories are mostly quiet, not earth-shattering, but strung together by a compelling, perhaps the most compelling, force: imminent death. And although many of Hope House's bedridden have been abandoned by their parents, partners, and children, the ties they form here have an intimacy that can be inspiring.

Annie, the aide, tough on the outside and tender within, who "has seen them come and go," delivers one of the book's most pointed descriptions of Hope House, and by extension, of humans at large: "The ones who are all belligerent, wanting you to be their



personal nursemaid, ordering you around, complaining all the time....The ones who don't even know they're sick....The junkies—both those who want to live right, those who say, okay, Jesus, take me...the ones who lie around in bed all day refusing to get up...the ones who look around and decide

that Hope House isn't so bad..." Annie sees herself as the one whose job it is to teach them that no matter what, "God is good. Once they understood that...they were able to pass quietly, and at peace." SS

Nonfiction

Between the Lines: Finding the Truth in Medical Literature

Marya Zilberberg (MED'92)

EviMed Research Press

FOR MANY OF us, rarely a day goes by without hearing casual mention of a "new study showing—" (fill in the blank). When we or our loved ones become gravely ill, we plod forth into the alternative universe of Google in a desperate search for answers in the form of studies, and more studies. But those untrained as scientists set off on

these missions unarmed and vulnerable, and are not much better served by the reporters who do the plodding for us.

Zilberberg has written a guide to remedy the problem, which she sees as a public health crisis. An epidemiologist with degrees in medicine and public health, she believes that the public's

increasingly adversarial relationship with the medical establishment is a result in large part of the bending, misunderstanding, exaggeration, or outright false representation of science in the lay media. Preconceived notions also taint the lens through which we assimilate and interpret data, a big problem she illustrates by examining consumers' conclusions about, for

example, the value of mammography screening or the possible risks of hormone replacement therapy. "We are simply more likely to poke holes in and to reject anything that disagrees with what we think we know," writes Zilberberg, who is on the editorial board of several medical journals.

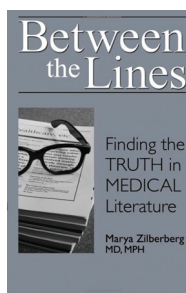
Zilberberg has divided her book into two parts, "Context" and "Evaluation." The first part introduces the scientific method as it applies to clinical research in medicine and opens readers' minds to the notion that "uncertainty is the only certain feature of science." The second section offers readers a set of tools to examine research statistics the media cite, day in and day out, to numbing effect. Zilberberg doesn't patronize the novice reader, and she doesn't gloss over the more demanding fundamentals of statistics and experimental design. Written in a warm, conversational tone, with generous use of anecdotes and specific examples, the book remains accessible throughout. In an age of dumbing-down and rampant headline-grabbing hyperbole, the book is a call to embrace nuance, to be aware of all the subjective and logistical factors involved in presenting and reporting research. "Self-determination is predicated upon knowledge and understanding," she writes. "Don't be a puppet. We are all born scientists. Embrace your curiosity." SS

Dirty Yiddish: Everyday Slang from "What's Up?" to "F*%# Off!" (Dirty Everyday Slang)

Adrienne Gusoff (DGE'73, COM'75)
Ulysses Press

BEFORE WORLD WAR II, Yiddish was the daily language of more than 11 million European Jews. These days, although still spoken among some orthodox sects, Yiddish is mined mainly for its ability to inject a dose of soul, irony, and/or onomatopoeia when our native tongue fails us.

You don't have to be Jewish to love *Dirty Yiddish*, a guide to Yiddish slang that is far broader than its title implies. The transliterated words and phrases are grouped in chapters, including "Howdy Yiddish," "Snappy Yiddish," and *kayna hora*, "Hungry Yiddish."



WEB EXTRA Through March, Marya Zilberberg will answer your questions about medical studies that appear in the press at bu.edu/bostonia.

Gusoff offers a concise grammar and pronunciation guide, and there's even a *bistle* Yiddish for the new millennium—those who tweet, for example, are dubbed *twitniks*. Whether you're a *schlemiel*, a *shlimazel*, an *umglick*, or God forbid, a *schmuck*, you'll still navigate the verbal universe with an extra bounce in your step, *zayn gezunt*, so to speak, armed with the following: Chill out, man! (*Zorg dikh nish!*) or Crazy bastard! (*Meshuggeneh momzer!*). The 171-page guide, peppered with cartoonish illustrations, is at its most inspired when it offers a string of Yiddish curses, which, clunky as they seem in translation, are the stuff of poetry when yelled, say, out



the window at the driver who just cut you off. How about letting loose with *Zoltz verrum praven a khassanah in deyn boykh un aynlaydn alle zayereh kroyvim—fun Yehupetz biz Slabodka!* Which translates to: “Worms should make a wedding in your stomach and invite

all their relatives—from Yehupetz to Slabodka!” And thanks to the irrepressible Gusoff, there's plenty more where that came from. *SS*

The Young and Restless Life of William J. Bell: Creator of *The Young and the Restless* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*
Michael Maloney (COM'84), with Lee Phillip Bell
Sourcebooks

FANS OF DAYTIME soap opera will enjoy this biography of William Bell, an innovator in the beloved, fading genre.

Bell grew up listening to radio soap operas during the 1930s and '40s. He began his career writing for an early local television show in Chicago before decamping to an advertising agency during the *Mad Men* era. But his real ambition, Maloney notes, was to write for daytime serials. He convinced medium pioneer Irna Phillips to take him on as a writer in 1956. Phillips, creator of *As the World Turns*, proved an exacting mentor. Together the two created the popular soap *Another World* before Bell broke out on his own to become head writer on *Days of Our Lives*.

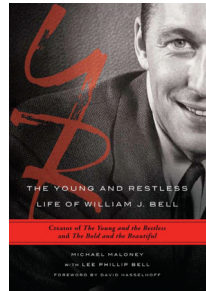
Maloney makes clear that Bell's real contribution to daytime television was the creation, with his wife, Lee Phillip Bell, of two of the most successful soaps of all time—*The Young and the Restless* (Y&R), in 1973, and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, in 1987. The author recounts the couple famously sketching out the story line and characters for Y&R on cocktail napkins in the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Bell had an unerring sense of what audiences wanted. He assiduously read fan-mail reports summarizing viewers' reaction to story lines and characters, and he showed extraordinary dexterity in developing new characters and plotlines when an actor wanted out of his contract. He knew how to keep an audience on the edge of their sofas: by keeping lovers apart as long as possible. He also introduced provocative sex scenes before many of his competitors and was among the first soap producers to tackle social issues like rape, HIV, and alcoholism.

One wonders what Bell would have made of the current state of the genre he helped pioneer. Where once there were more than 20 soaps competing for viewers' attention each afternoon, today there are only 4. It is a testament to Bell's considerable talent and vision that two of the survivors are the shows he created. Y&R remains the number-one rated daytime soap; *The Bold and the Beautiful* is second. *John O'Rourke*

With Robert Lowell and His Circle: Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Elizabeth Bishop, Stanley Kunitz & Others
Kathleen Spivack (CAS'65)
Northeastern University Press/University Press of New England

SPIVACK WAS JUST 20 and a senior at Oberlin College when she was awarded a fellowship to study with the renowned poet and teacher Robert Lowell at BU. Their first encounter, in January 1959, was a disaster. After



days of unsuccessfully trying to reach Lowell, Spivack finally cornered him in his office, where he told her he had “no recollection of having agreed to work with her.” Worse still, he said he never took on any student under the age of 30. Spivack would learn much later that Lowell was in the midst of recovering from one of his numerous nervous breakdowns.

Fortunately for Spivack, Lowell grudgingly agreed to let her audit his poetry class. Thus began a friendship that would endure until his death, at age 60, in 1977. Later a poet and teacher, Spivack found

herself among such literary superstars as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Elizabeth Bishop. She draws on her recollections and observations of those years in her book.

Some of the most fascinating anecdotes are of Bishop, who arrived at Harvard in the mid 1960s at the urging of Lowell, who was teaching there by that time. He asked Spivack to befriend Bishop, who “had a soft, endearing quality.” She was also a chain-smoking asthmatic, who drank heavily and had a preference for leather pants.

Presiding over this cast of characters is Lowell himself. In Spivack's telling, he is a man heavy on contradictions: on the one hand, a generous teacher who would do everything in his power to get a student's poem published if he liked it; on the other, someone who could be “almost unintelligible.” And he was sexist

in a way almost unimaginable today. At Harvard, he would accept male students into his classes on the strength of their written work. He confessed to Spivack that the women he selected were accepted “primarily on looks.”

There is an elegiac tone to Spivack's memoir. Alcoholism, mental illness, and suicide were endemic to these poets' lives. Despite this, the book brilliantly captures the sense of excitement and possibility that marked Boston's literary scene in the 1950s and '60s. *JO* ■

