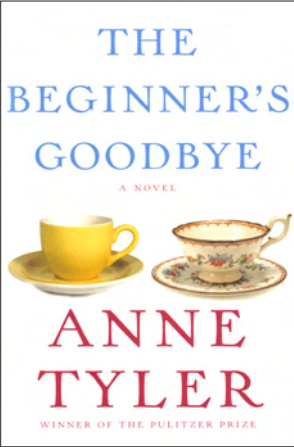


Between The Covers at the Covered Treasures Bookstore

Celebrating Female Authors

By the staff at Covered Treasures

Generations ago, female authors were obliged to use pseudonyms or initials if they wanted a chance to have their works published and read. Not so in today’s world where many best-selling authors and Pulitzer Prize winners are women. Some examples of their work are described below.



The Beginner’s Goodbye
By Anne Tyler (Alfred A. Knopf) \$24.95
Aaron, a middle-aged man, ripped apart by the death of his wife, is gradually restored by her frequent, unexpected appearances—in their house, on the roadway, in the market. The family publishing business also helps Aaron heal in this subtle exploration of loss and recovery, pierced throughout with Tyler’s humor, wisdom, and penetrating look at human foibles.

Wicked Eddies
By Beth Groundwater (Midnight Ink) \$14.95
River ranger Mandy Tanner had no idea fly-fishing could be dangerous until would-be competitor Howie Abbott is found with a hatchet in his neck, days before a huge tournament in Salida, Colo. While casting about for suspects, Mandy seeks clues from Abbott’s family members, including her best friend, bartender Cynthia Abbott. When Cynthia becomes the prime suspect, Mandy realizes that trolling for the true killer has plunged her way too deep into wicked eddies.

The Garden of Happy Endings
By Barbara O’Neal (Bantam) \$15
After tragedy shatters her small community in Seattle, the Rev. Elsa Montgomery has a crisis of faith. Returning to her hometown of Pueblo, Colo., she seeks work in a local soup kitchen, keeping her hands busy while her heart searches for understanding. Meanwhile, her sister, Tamsin, as pretty and colorful as Elsa is unadorned and steadfast, finds her perfect life shattered when she learns that her financier husband is a criminal. The woman who had everything now has nothing but the clothes on her back. A community garden becomes a lifeline for Elsa and Tamsin, and the renewing power of rich earth and sunshine helps them discover that with time and care, happy endings flourish.

Grace
By T. Greenwood (Kensington Books) \$15
For 13-year-old Trevor Kennedy, taking photographs helps make sense of his fractured world. His father struggles to keep a business going while caring for Trevor’s aging grandfather, and his mother all but ignores him and dotes on his 5-year-old sister Gracy. While Trevor knows he can count on the unconditional love of his sister and his art teacher’s encouragement, the bullying he endures at school finally sends an uncontrollable surge of anger through him. Shattering, unforeseeable consequences result when he reaches the breaking point.

Learning to Swim
By Sara J. Henry (Broadway Books) \$15
Freelance writer Troy Chance’s life changes dramatically after she dives into the frigid waters of Lake Champlain to rescue a child tumbling from the ferry. The boy’s name is Paul, he speaks only French, and no one is looking for

him. Troy’s determination to protect Paul and unravel the mystery of his abandonment takes her far from a small Adirondack town into an unfamiliar world of wealth and privilege in Canada and Vermont. The dangers that evolve force her to evaluate everything she thought true about herself.

The Lost Daughter
By Lucy Ferriss (Penguin Putnam) \$15
Brooke O’Connor has a happy marriage and family until the reappearance of her high school boyfriend, Alex, threatens the life she has so carefully constructed and fortified by denial. Only Alex knows the shameful secret Brooke has kept from everyone she loves. This haunting novel reveals the profound ways in which remorse over the past cannot only derail lives, but sometimes can also redeem them.

Caleb’s Crossing
By Geraldine Brooks (Penguin Putnam) \$16
Bethia Mayfield is a restless, curious young woman growing up in Martha’s Vineyard in the 1660s amid a small band of pioneering English Puritans. At 12, she meets Caleb, the young son of a chieftain, and the two forge a secret bond that draws each into the alien world of the other. Inspired by a true story, this novel brilliantly captures the triumphs and turmoil of two brave, openhearted spirits who risk everything in a search for knowledge at a time of superstition and ignorance.

Female authors have made immeasurable contributions to the body of literature available today. Why not try some of their offerings?

Until next month, happy reading.



Bird Watch on the Palmer Divide

Brown-headed cowbird: *Molothrus ater*



Above: Photo of a brown-headed cowbird by John Thorpe. A color version is posted at www.ocn.me/v12n6bird.htm.

By Elizabeth Hacker

Now that summer has arrived, many birds are busy attending nests, but all may not be peaceful for nesting songbirds. Parasites and predators abound and only a small percentage of hatchlings survive to migrate in the fall.

One advantage to living on the Palmer Divide is that there are very few parasitic insects. Many birds migrate to northern climates to avoid insects that often devour their young in warmer tropical climates, but mites can pose problems here. Birds, snakes, and animals that eat eggs or birds are a constant threat for nesting birds. But there is one native bird species that has contributed to the decline of the songbird population as much as any predator or parasite, and that is the brown-headed cowbird. It is classified as a brood parasite because it lays its eggs in the nests of other birds and does not care for its young but relies on other birds to do it for them.

Description

The brown-headed cowbird is a member of the blackbird family and is about the size of a red-winged blackbird, but it is stouter and has a shorter tail. It’s strong, conical black beak is well adapted to its diet of seeds, berries, and insects, and is shaped more like that of a grosbeak or sparrow than the pointed beak of most blackbirds. The male, with its coffee-colored brown head and iridescent black body, is easily identified but the drab female is a

pale brown with a grayish head and could be mistaken for any female blackbird.

Evolution

Cowbirds followed grazing animals like the bison and pronghorn that traveled many miles a day, and keeping up with these nomadic animals meant they didn’t have time to build a nest, incubate eggs, and raise a brood of chicks. To ensure their survival, cowbirds developed a unique strategy: Females lay as many as 70 eggs in a two-month cycle. A female deposits one egg in another bird’s nest and then moves on to the next hosts’ nest, relying on hosts to incubate, brood, feed, and raise all of her offspring.

Behavior

A pair of cowbirds will often feed alongside other birds or unobtrusively observe them from a nearby branch. Cowbirds are looking for nests to deposit their eggs, and when the potential host parents are not attending their nest for even a few minutes, the female cowbird will fly to it and quickly lay an egg.

There is speculation that the male may distract nesting birds, drawing them away from their nest so the female will have time to deposit an egg and rearrange the nest. If there is time, the female cowbird may dispose of one of the hosts’ eggs by dumping it on the ground, but if time is limited she will lay her egg next to the eggs already in the nest. Most often cowbirds eggs are slightly larger than the other eggs in the nest.

Host reaction

Cowbird eggs have been found in the nests of nearly 200 species of mainly songbirds, and as might be expected, various birds respond differently to finding a strange egg in their nests. Some host species immediately recognize and reject them. Birds including robins, waxwings, and jays tend to recognize cowbird eggs and dispose of them. Species including the phoebe, wren, and song sparrow don’t seem to notice foreign eggs, accept them, and tirelessly work to raise the cowbird chicks, even though the chicks are more than twice their size and look nothing like them.

Cowbirds will lay eggs in the nests of hummingbirds and house finches, even though hummingbirds are not physically capable of rearing cowbirds and house finches consume only seeds and do not supply the protein necessary for cowbird chicks to survive.

Some birds abandon a nest if they find a foreign egg in it, while others, like the prothonatary warbler, lay material on top of the cowbird egg, burying it along with their own eggs and then lay a new clutch on top. The buried eggs are insulated during incubation and don’t hatch. Some birds that abandon a nest will build a new nest on top or near the abandoned ones.

Cowbirds watch for reaction

After the cowbird deposits its egg in a hosts’ nest, it stays nearby to observe the hosts’ reaction. If the host species dumps the egg or builds a new nest, the cowbird may aggressively tear apart the hosts’ nest, destroying any eggs in the nest.

Nesting behavior

Cowbird eggs usually hatch a day or two before the hosts’ eggs, which gives them a distinct advantage. Cowbird chicks are two to three times larger than the hosts’ chicks and look like “Baby Huey” in the nest. Its large size and aggressive nature allow the cowbird to out-compete for food and space in the nest, often resulting in demise of all the hosts’ chicks.

Conservation status

Female cowbirds can live for up to 15 years and, given they deposit an average of 40 eggs each year, it’s not surprising that their numbers are increasing at an alarming rate while many songbird species are decreasing. However, the cowbird is a native species and therefore it is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This means that cowbird eggs cannot be removed (by humans) from nests without a special permit, and cowbirds cannot be hunted or trapped to reduce its population.

Elizabeth Hacker is a writer and artist. Email her at elizabethhacker@ocn.me to share bird pictures and stories.