

(BOOKS)

TRUST US

A MOTHER'S LOVES

Anya Ulinich's bold new graphic novel, *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel* (Penguin Books), is about a 37-year-old divorced Brooklyn-by-way-of-Moscow (and Arizona) mom whose two teenage daughters serve as a Greek chorus for her online-dating adventures. Lena's match-ups range from promising to disastrous, exposing the sexy sensibility and bookish panache of her darkly delightful Russian-American soul.

OUR FOOD FETISHES

In *The Culinary Imagination: From Myth to Modernity*

(Norton), feminist scholar and poet **Sandra M. Gilbert** dishes with gusto on our romance with food, digging into the politics of eating, the philosophy of the food chain, culinary memoirs, hunger artists, and the current glamorization of all things gastronomic in literature, art, television, movies, cookbooks, and blogs.

A SMALL BITE OF THE BIG APPLE

Mark Chiusano's debut collection, *Marine Park* (Penguin Books), homes in on the Brooklyn neighborhood of the title, where the 23-year-old author grew up, offering sparkling and concise linked stories about coming of age hard by some salt marshes, where backyards are boat docks and ball fields are showcases.—L.S.

(FICTION)

A RIDDLE TO HIMSELF

A literary giant of our time pens an indelible portrait of the long-term consequences of being ostracized as a youth

By Lisa Shea

Early in his new novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (Knopf), Haruki Murakami describes his unlikely hero: "Though he lacked a striking personality, or any qualities that made him stand out, and despite always aiming for what was average, the middle of the road, there was (or *seemed* to be) something about him that wasn't exactly normal, something that set him apart. And this contradiction continued to perplex and confuse him, from his boyhood all the way to the present, when he was 36 years old."

That Tazaki emerges as one of Murakami's more memorable protagonists is a testament to the mystery, magic, and mastery of this much-revered Japanese writer's imaginative powers. Murakami's moxie is characterized by a brilliant detective-story-like blend of intuition, hard-nosed logic, impeccable pacing, and poetic revelations.

In college, Tazaki was cruelly exiled from the intimate circle of four friends he had known since high school, and he becomes haunted by the rejection. Yet he finishes college, finds satisfying work in design for a railway company, goes on dates, and otherwise establishes his



Murakami

postcollege life in Tokyo; his memory of being cast out, however, never really goes away. After some years, and with the help of a girlfriend, he begins to investigate his past, to find out how and why he became the group's scapegoat. Murakami reveals Tazaki's pilgrimage through stunning psychologically and philosophically charged passages that are alternately all too real and almost hallucinatory.

Seated on a park bench, Tazaki notices that "the branches of a nearby willow tree were laden with lush foliage and drooping heavily, almost to the ground, though they were still, as if lost in deep thought. Occasionally a small bird landed unsteadily on a branch, but soon gave up and fluttered away. Like a distraught mind, the branch quivered slightly, then returned to stillness."

Tazaki's quest restores him to the cycle of love, loss, and resurrection that is time's eternal flow in surprising, delightful, and sometimes frightening ways, none of which will be lost on lucky readers of this new masterpiece. ●



(NONFICTION)

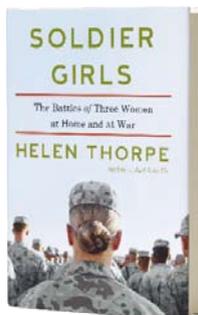
WHEN JANE CAME MARCHING HOME

A reporter digs deep into the lives of National Guard women during and after their service in Afghanistan and Iraq

By Elyse Moody

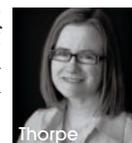
By the point in *Soldier Girls* (Scribner) when Helen Thorpe mentions early Iraq-war casualty Jessica Lynch, she seems not an anomaly but just one more in a multitude of soldier women. Before 9/11, signing up for the National Guard had meant serving part-time, receiving tuition money, and banking an extra paycheck; it didn't involve multiple war-zone deployments. But the wars of the early '00s changed that.

Tracking a trio in an Indiana battalion, Thorpe movingly captures how unexpected deployments rocked women's lives. When the Twin Towers collapsed, 18-year-old Michelle Fischer was in weapons training, hoping to flee "abject hopelessness" for college; Desma Brooks, 25, was juggling jobs, drills, and three kids; and



Debbie Helton, 49, a salon manager, was itching for action. Overseas, they flock together, not unlike the pink plastic flamingos Brooks stakes in their Afghan "lawn," to weather blasts and other dangers. Thorpe charts statistics for sexual trauma that skyrocket like those for IED attacks, dubbing it "another kind of friendly fire." And, given access to diaries, letters, and even

Facebook messages, she unravels the women's complex relations—and how they sustain one another. Of Fischer, she writes: "As wrong as they were, those days of sand and sun and bleached friendships and whistling rockets, they were sacred to her." ●



Thorpe

Murakami: Elena Seibert; Thorpe: Andrew Clark; still lifes (3): Phillip Friedman/Studio D