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Review. Johnson, Sarah Anne, Conversations with American Women Writers

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ARTS & HUMANITIES

Spain, Turkey, and Greece and Shelley's through Ireland. Highly recommended for its insight into English politics, mores, and literature just after the American and French revolutions.—*Scott Hightower, Fordham Univ., NY*

Hendin, Josephine G. **Heartbreakers: Violent Women in Modern American Literature and Culture.**

Palgrave: St. Martin's, Jan. 2004. c.320p. index. ISBN 0-312-23700-6. \$29.95. LIT
Hendin (English, NYU) keenly depicts the relationship between violent women acting in real life and violent women portrayed in literature. Novelists don't simply absorb the stories of violent women incidentally through their casual exposure to the media, she argues. Instead, they often seek it out, going so far as to attend trials in person to gather ideas for their latest thrillers. The inspiration and adaptation of real-life events make the novels Hendin references more compelling than not; the reader will be driven to delve into these works of fiction, which range from classics like *Medea* to contemporary best sellers like Janet Fitch's *White Oleander*. The expressions of violence Hendin here captures redefine women in ways that break with both traditional and progressive expectations of women. Most of them are chilling examples, casting women in extreme lights. The effect is nearly the same as reading a very edgy novel; you want to do it with the lights on and the doors locked. Recommended for all academic libraries.—*Maria Kochis, California State Univ. Lib., Sacramento*

Howe, Fanny. **The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life.**

Univ. of California, 2003. 172p. bibliog. ISBN 0-520-23625-4. \$34.95: **pap.** ISBN 0-520-23840-0. \$16.95. LIT

This essay collection of meditations and thoughts by novelist and poet Howe (*Gone: Poems*) is an extraordinary joining of political, literary, religious, and personal ideas about imagination and the role of the artist. Howe's concepts of the future as time moving toward the present and emptiness as inward space and outward solitude illuminate many of the essays. "Catholic" and "After 'Prologue'" discuss her Catholic faith, her deep personal emotions, and her difficult and harsh life in Boston in an interracial marriage; "Bewilderment" describes the artistic process as spiritual path; "Immanence" discusses the philosophic and religious writings of Edith Stein; "The Contemporary Logos" works through the modern search for religion. Some essays focus on a particular place, such as Ireland, Hardy's Wessex, Boston, and Los Angeles, while others are devoted to Edith Stein, Ilona Karmel, Thomas Hardy, and Simone Weil. Authors like Aquinas, Samuel Beckett, and William Blake and Jewish, Muslim, and Indian mystics are used as guideposts through

out the selections. Profound and finely written, this is highly recommended for most literature collections.—*Gene Shaw, NYPL*

Johnson, Sarah Anne. **Conversations with American Women Writers.**

Univ. Pr. of New England, Jan. 2004. c.256p. bibliog. ISBN 1-58465-300-0. \$55: **pap.** ISBN 1-58465-348-5. \$19.95. LIT

Frustrated by her attempts to locate collections of interviews with contemporary women authors (the notable exception being *Women Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*), Johnson decided to put together one of her own. An experienced author interviewer and workshop instructor, she has recorded conversations (many previously published in *The Writer's Chronicle*) with 17 contemporary women writers—among them Ann Patchett, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, and Sena Jeter Naslund—offering the reader an opportunity to participate in intimate and often illuminating dialog. She pulls out discussions from Patchett's crash course in opera to develop her structure for *Bel Canto* and Nora Okja Keller's concern about the lack of Korean representation in Asian American literature. The emphasis that writing is hard work that can take its toll emotionally serves as a common thread among the conversations as many of these women struggle to balance their writing with work and family obligations. As Elizabeth McCracken (*The Giant's House*) warns, "You must be prepared to break your own heart." Recommended for public and academic libraries.—*Robin Imhof, Univ. of the Pacific Lib., Stockton, CA*

Keyes, Marian. **Under the Duvet: Shoes, Reviews, Having the Blues, Babies, Families and Other Calamities.**

Perennial: HarperCollins, Jan. 2004. c.304p. ISBN 0-06-056208-0. **pap.** \$12.95. LIT

Read these essays in any order you please, encourages Irish novelist Keyes (*Sushi for Beginners*) in her introduction to this entertaining collection of essays addressing a variety of topics, such as moving to a new country, getting married, sustaining long-term friendships, experiencing childbirth, buying a new home, dealing with sluggish contractors, celebrating the New Year, and living in London. Other subjects include the author's travels to places like Los Angeles, Prague, Greece, and Vietnam. Organized into seven categories, the pieces are culled primarily from magazine and newspaper publications, but a few have not been published previously. Keyes takes on her subjects with humor and candor and often provides useful introductory comments to establish background. The strongest piece is the one on Keyes's struggle with alcoholism. Its raw and honest tone alone makes the book worth a purchase. Highly recommended for all public libraries and larger academi-

ic libraries.—*Erica Swenson Danowitz, American Univ. Lib., Washington, DC*

Kudrova, Irma. **The Death of a Poet: The Last Days of Marina Tsvetaeva.**

Overlook, dist. by Penguin Putnam, Feb. 2004. c.240p. tr. from Russian by Mary Ann Szporluk. photogs. index. ISBN 1-58567-522-9. \$29.95. LIT

Marina Tsvetaeva (*Earthly Signs: Moscow Diaries, 1917-1922*) is considered one of the four greatest 20th-century Russian poets, along with Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Boris Pasternak. Her poetry and letters give life to the Stalinist era, where political and personal upheaval reigned supreme. From her promising beginnings in intellectual Muscovite surroundings to her spiral into despair and finally suicide, Tsvetaeva's story is here skillfully sketched through interspersed anecdotes of key conversations and interactions with family and friends. Kudrova, a leading Tsvetaeva scholar, captures the rhythm of Russian storytelling and intertwines it with facts she has carefully gathered from archival and oral accounts. Although her style is at times overly dramatic, the reader gets a clearer understanding of the poet's desperation than if the facts were merely flatly stated. Recommended as a companion to any of the more general accounts of the poet's life, such as Viktoria Schweitzer's *Tsvetaeva*; for upper-level academic libraries and collections focusing on character, culture studies, and Russian literature. [This book was originally published to great acclaim in Russia in 1995.—Ed.]—*Kim Harris, Rochester P.L., NY*

Lewis, C.S. **A Year with C.S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works.**

HarperSanFrancisco: HarperCollins, 2003. c.384p. ed. by Patricia S. Klein. ISBN 0-06-056616-7. \$19.95. LIT

One of the greatest 20th-century writers, C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) has written everything from literary criticism to Christian apologetics to children's and fantasy literary works. During his lifetime, he not only wrote over 30 books but also held prestigious positions at both Oxford and Cambridge. Edited by Klein (*Worship Without Words*), this compendium of daily readings is a sampler of Lewis's major works and includes selections from such classics as *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Weight of Glory*, and *The Abolition of Man*. The book also provides biographical information that neatly corresponds with the daily selections. Lewis's writing takes on a life of its own, as the more it is read, the more insight the reader gains into a mind unhampered by either style or doctrine. In his uniquely dynamic way, Lewis experiments with looking at the universe, people, and God from a variety of angles. There is a sense that, though Lewis is presenting his true inner self, he is in no way