

DAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHING HILL

MARY SHARRATT

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

REVIEW BY ALICE LAWLOR

Daughters of the Witching Hill is an epic tale of cunning women and the society that persecuted them. Inspired by real documents from the 1612 witch trials in Lancashire, England, the story spans three generations of a single family. The first is Bess Southern, a poverty-stricken widow who has a knack for telling the future and healing the sick. Her charms become a means of survival, and the community trusts in her particular brand of good magic.

Those powers are inherited by both her daughter, Liza, and granddaughter, Alizon—an unwilling recipient who craves a normal life. But the power they wield has a dark side. Unmastered, Alizon's gift comes to threaten both her own family and the community that has sheltered them for so long.

Daughters of the Witching Hill is an expertly woven tale that rings with historical accuracy. From dialogue to description, every detail feels and sounds real. Witchcraft isn't painted as a fantastical invention; it's just a part of the characters' everyday lives. And what's most refreshing about this period piece is that women are front and centre. Men disappear, die or prove unfaithful, while the most powerful bonds that endure—for better or worse—are female ones. Bess's most significant misstep is caused by blind loyalty—not to a man, but to her best friend and kindred spirit, Chattox. Together, they "had to do things [their] own way, no matter what folk said."

Author Mary Sharratt draws on the politics of the day to create a vivid backdrop for her characters. This cultural milieu—in which religion is unstable and no one can be trusted—provides a fitting context for the shocking events that unfold. After all, Sharratt seems to be saying, the witch trials didn't happen in a historical vacuum.

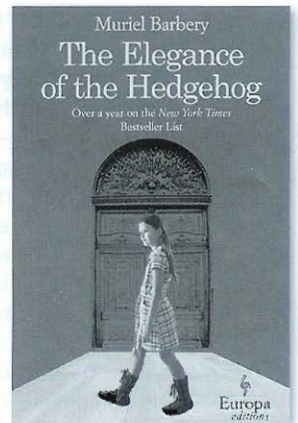
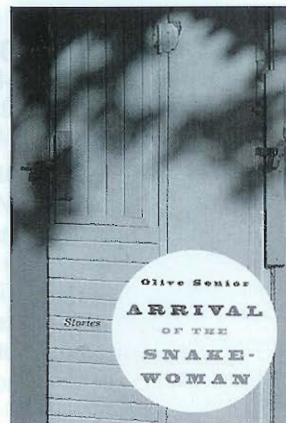
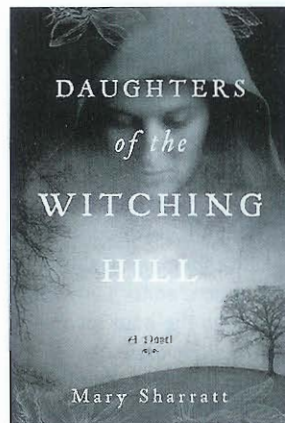
ARRIVAL OF THE SNAKE-WOMAN

OLIVE SENIOR

TSAR Publications

REVIEW BY EVELYN C. WHITE

First published more than 20 years ago in England, *Arrival of the Snake-Woman's* Canadian release marks a major moment for



scholars of Afro-Caribbean literature and general readers alike. An exquisitely crafted collection of stories by Jamaica-born Toronto author Olive Senior, the volume shimmers with rhythm, colour and a deep intelligence that opens a window into the complex world of people colonized by dominant white culture.

Two novella-length works, the title story and "Lily-Lily," bracket the collection. Narrated by a young boy, the former details the impact of an Indian woman in a tight-knit Jamaican village, itself under the religious sway of white missionaries.

As the story unfolds, Senior offers an artful meditation on desire, difference, identity and power: "I was frightened by what Parson would say when they brought her into the district wearing ... gold bangles all the way up her arms and ankles ... and—a sure sign of heathenness—a gold ring in her nose."

"Lily-Lily" turns on the themes of skin colour, caste and status, issues that continue to resonate throughout the African Diaspora. "For the first time in her life [Lily] realized that there were other, superior, attributes which resided in white skin, straight hair," Senior writes. "In belonging, not to a poverty-stricken colony, but to Mother England."

In "The Tenantry of Birds," an emotionally abused woman rebels against the cage of a loveless marriage. "The View from the Terrace" chronicles the life of a civil servant whose "success" has narrowed his humanity. "He felt smug now when he thought of his own large, roomy shipshape dwelling and the foolish, crazily built shack on the hillside," the author writes.

Other stories probe lonely children, trou-

bled family relations and the solace that can be found amidst sand and seashells.

In an insightful afterword, Senior notes: "I grew up in two worlds. It's true that I received a classical colonial education, but I had another life; there was another Jamaica out there that I was part of." Let a cavalcade of Caribbean steel drums welcome Senior's salute to heritage, heart and liberating truths.

Evelyn C. White is the author of Alice Walker: A Life and Every Goodbye Ain't Gone: A Photo Narrative of Black Heritage on Salt Spring Island with photographs by Joanne Bealy.

THE ELEGANCE OF THE HEDGEHOG

MURIEL BARBERY

TRANSLATION BY ALISON ANDERSON

Europa Editions

REVIEW BY SOOK C. KONG

One gets the sensation that Muriel Barbery had lots of fun writing her Parisian epic that pokes at and explodes the facades of contemporary existence. It is about time someone, a woman in particular, is having vats of pleasure pounding out her creativity. Satire is a (semi-)wild beast, not easy to write. The wrong tone, and one sounds mean. Another wrong feather-move, and the knowledgeable reader is not impressed. A writer who has Barbery's skills knows the skid of the banana peel.

Barbery is a fine satirist. She has the insights of an astute insider as well as the acute observations of a detached onlooker. Homing in on the owners and inhabitants of eight luxury apartments, Barbery lands witty arrows at a number of related topics such as giving trivial orders to the underlings when you are cranky; paying more attention to your shrink than to your chil-