

the field of speculative fiction, where the prose tends to lack elegance, and often the world-building contains many obvious holes. Jones has a good hand with the evocative turn of phrase, and a gift for precise, telling description. I have something of a weakness for those things. Barbara and Margarit—and the other, minor characters—have distinct personalities and feel appropriately like the products of their contexts. The relationship between them seems entirely appropriate and natural, even inevitable—and as a matter of personal bias, I'm really happy to see a woman in a historic context whose ambitions are primarily scholarly. It's something that gives me a great deal of pleasure.

For the most part, Jones's choice to keep the pacing measured and entrust the greater part of the tension to interpersonal relationships and conflicts of manners works very well. But that pacing grows uneven

when it comes to integrating Barbara's investigations into her past with Margarit's involvement in the mystery guild, and in the combined resolution of the secret and the treason-plot storylines. That resolution seems to come a touch too easily. It's followed by an extended dénouement, in which it appears that political matters and their respective stations will interfere with Barbara and Margarit's happy ending. This tension is maintained by the fact that neither of the women are communicating with each other very well, and is eventually resolved without a great deal of fuss.

The brief epilogue is entirely unnecessary.

These flaws aside, however, *Daughter of Mystery* is a very promising debut. An intriguing romance, with interesting world-building and strong characterization: I look forward to seeing Jones mature as a writer.

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Liz Bourke writes the Sleeps With Monsters column at Tor.com. In 2014, she was nominated for the BSFA Award for Best Non-Fiction. She is nominated for a 2014 Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer.

☼ Cauldrons and Gratuitous Botany

The Memory Garden, by Mary Rickert, Sourcebooks Landmark, 2014, 304 pp., \$14.99.

reviewed by Caren Gussoff

For those of us familiar with Mary Rickert's horror (written, usually, under the slightly altered nom-de-plume M. Rickert), *The Memory Garden* is a startling departure. It's a tender, sentimental magical realist story of the Alice Hoffman and Sarah Addison Allen flavor: witchy and a little predictable, with a veil-thin mystery, garden ghosts, and gratuitous botany. Though this reader takes umbrage with the clichéd kitchen witchery, the language soars, and Rickert creates a poignant and exceptionally well-drawn teenage co-protagonist.

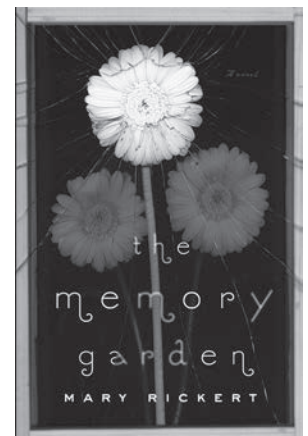
Bay Singer is sixteen, and her awkward code-switching between girl and woman is as real as flesh: a rare treat in adult fiction. These days, we've entered a great young adult fiction renaissance, and more and more authentic teenaged characters pepper our cultural vocabulary. But a solid teenager in a non-YA novel is such a delight that I was more patient than my personality would otherwise dictate with the stereotypical chick-littiness of the wise-woman-witch trope.

Sixteen is a difficult age for anyone, but Bay has some definite obstacles to the invisibility and acceptability desper-

ately desired by those between thirteen and seventeen. She lives with her adoptive mother, Nan, a witch (having been left as an infant in a shoebox upon her doorstep, and so invoking the appropriate magical changeling story). The two inhabit a house littered with planters made from the shoes townies have tossed at them, hemmed in by dangerous woods, which Bay has been warned again and again to avoid after dark.

Bay isn't entirely convinced her mother is, indeed, a witch rather than just eccentric, and while we spend more time with Nan, it is Bay whose presence drives the action, even as the pair's tiny world is temporarily widened with the visit of two of Nan's childhood friends.

Nan, Ruthie, and Mavis have long been estranged from one another, and they reunite prompted by Nan's apparent overreaction to a seemingly innocent gift of honey from the local sheriff. Ruthie and Mavis accept Nan's invitation, perhaps for no other reason than that they have been bound together and kept apart by shared secrets. And honestly, if the novel had a third protagonist, it would be these secrets, whose palpable presence is hinted at, suggested,



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Coming of Age with Gratuitous Botany

(cont. from p. 21)

Those of us hungry for a believable and complex teenager for adult readers will fall in love with Bay Singer. And those who admire Rickert's love affair with language will find images of great beauty throughout.

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ignored, talked around, and worried over for most of the book.

There are secrets Nan has kept from Bay—some she shares with her friends and some she has borne alone—and there are secrets Bay herself has kept from her mother. Astute readers, particularly those well-versed in genre, will quickly unravel the gist of these long before the reveals.

When Ruthie and Mavis arrive we're treated to a long and somewhat tortured (and tortuous) reunion. Barbs and insults fly, old wounds are picked open, and guilt rains down on the remorseful Nan, tormented Ruthie, and cancer-stricken Mavis, as well as the hormone- and angst-ridden Bay. The book's plot gets temporarily ridiculous, however, when a fifth woman, the grandniece of Eve (another childhood friend of the adults), arrives to research her family history. Then the actual reveals proceed, and while there's nothing,

as I mentioned, that will shock a reader, we glimpse some of the truly dark worlds where Rickert (as M.) flourishes. The secrets of the three women, of how Bay came to be on Nan's step, and Bay's own mysteries (beyond those normal to any boiling cauldron of adolescence) are laid bare.

The darkness is not enough to turn the book from its witchy romanticisms, but it is a lovely way to tie up the story. Just as lilacs are described in the novel as "used to surround the dead when they lie in state, to mask the odor of decaying flesh," the moodiness at the novel's end does much to sweeten its unremarkable secrets.

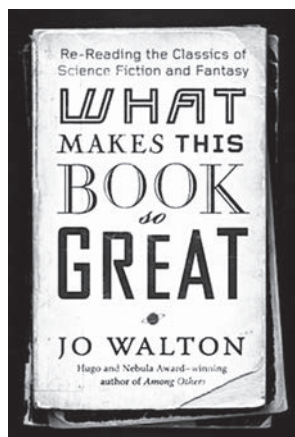
Ultimately, Rickert's book is worth reading. Those readers enthusiastic about the unsurprising portrayal of the magic of women will be richly rewarded. Those of us hungry for a believable and complex teenager for adult readers will fall in love with Bay Singer. And those who admire Rickert's love affair with language will find images of great beauty throughout.

Joys of Reading: Fictional, Non-Fictional, and Meta-Fictional Modes

What Makes This Book So Great, by Jo Walton, Tor Books, January 2014, 448 pp., \$26.99.

© *My Real Children*, by Jo Walton, Tor Books, May 2014, 320 pp., \$25.99.

22 reviewed by Cat Rambo



Walton loves books deeply, and she knows that there are many kinds of reading. One is the joy of devouring the fresh page, hot off the press and stuffed with new words, new worlds, new whirls of character and plot. And then there's rereading, coming back to a book you love....

For those of us who love books—and I suspect that readers of book reviews are likely to fit into that group—there's a line in Jo Walton's *Among Others* that resonates: "If you love books enough, they will love you back." Walton loves books deeply, and she knows that there are many kinds of reading. One is the joy of devouring the fresh page, hot off the press and stuffed with new words, new worlds, new whirls of character and plot.

And then there's rereading, coming back to a book you love, finding perhaps a few new things, but mainly loving what's familiar, like a funhouse ride repeated: here we are lifted, here we are spun about, here we are plunged to the depths of despair before rising triumphantly once again.

In *What Makes This Book So Great* Walton says: "My ideal relationship with a book is that I will read it for the first time entirely unspoiled. I won't know anything whatsoever about it, it will be wonderful, it will be exciting and layered and complex and I will be excited by it, and I will re-

read it every year or so for the rest of my life, discovering more about it every time and every time remembering the circumstances in which I first read it" (19).

This book will itself be a reread for some: it's a compilation of Walton's Tor.com blog posts from July 2008 to February 2011, and if you want to read the book in an alternate, larger form, you could read those posts there with all the comments, as well as those not reprinted in the book.

I found myself doing two things while reading *What Makes This Book So Great*: the first I do sometimes, the second fairly infrequently. I wrote down a lengthy list of books, dividing it into categories: books new to me; old favorites I wanted to go back and reread in light of Walton's comments; books I wanted to try again based on her analysis (*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, Stephenson's *Anathem*). I agreed with so many of her assessments, of books like Tanith Lee's *Don't Bite the Sun*, Susan Palwick's *Shelter*, and Samuel

