

# the reader's shelf

Edited by Nancy Pearl

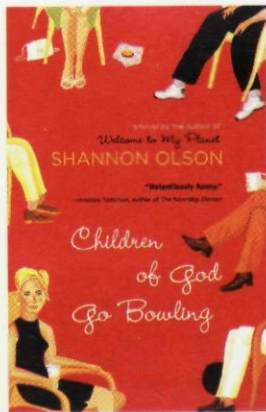
## Minnesota: Land of 10,000 Different Stories

Long known as the "Land of 10,000 Lakes," Minnesota is also home to 10,000 wildly different authors. Their artistic abilities range all over the spectrum, from poetry and chick lit to Native American children's stories and photography books. Quicker than you can say "Ya sure, you betcha," Minnesota writers have something that will interest everyone.

In **WELCOME TO MY PLANET: WHERE ENGLISH IS SOMETIMES SPOKEN** (Penguin. 2001. ISBN 0-14-100177-1. pap. \$14) and **CHILDREN OF GOD GO BOWLING** (Viking. 2004. ISBN 0-670-03281-6. \$24.95; pap. Penguin. 2005. ISBN 0-14-303456-1. \$14), Shannon Olson writes with hilarity and freshness about a young, almost-30-year-old named Shannon who lives in Minnesota, shops at Target, has a crazy mother and credit-card debt, and wonders what to do with her life. You don't have to be from Minnesota to find that Shannon's quest for truth, love, and a good job adds up to a wonderful story.

Bill Holm is one of Minnesota's funniest and most thought-provoking essayists and poets. Whether he's writing about islands, books, or music, he always has an amusing anecdote to share. Plus, how can you not love a man who owns too many books and runs a writers' retreat in Iceland? In **PLAYING THE BLACK PIANO** (Milkweed. 2004. ISBN 1-57131-417-2. pap. \$14.95), Holm's poems address death, laughter, good friends, and even a dancing cat. He proves his strengths as an essayist as he recounts his travels around the globe visiting islands from Minnesota to Madagascar in **ECCENTRIC ISLANDS: TRAVELS REAL AND IMAGINARY** (Milkweed. 2001. ISBN 1-57131-259-5. pap. \$14.95).

Robert Bly has been Minnesota's rebel poet for over 50 years. While some may remember him for his role as an early spokesperson for the rise of the men's movement in the 1990s, he is also well known as the voice of the public conscience with his books, poems, and essays against various American wars. In **THE INSANITY OF EMPIRE: A BOOK OF POEMS AGAINST THE IRAQ WAR** (Ally Pr. 2004.



Great state, great writers: you betcha!

ISBN 0-915408-57-0. \$10), Bly tries to find meaning in and make sense of the latest American conflict. He is also a well-respected translator; in **THE WINGED ENERGY OF DELIGHT: SELECTED TRANSLATIONS** (HarperCollins. 2004. ISBN 0-06-057582-4. \$29.95; pap. Perennial. 2005. ISBN 0-06-057586-7. \$15.95), Bly translates some of the most wonderful foreign poets you probably never heard of, from places like Spain, India, and Persia.

One has to wonder when prolific author, mother, and bookstore owner Louise Erdrich, the Minnesota-born member of North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Chippewa, finds time to sleep. Her wonderfully written, scintillating novel **THE LAST REPORT ON THE MIRACLES AT LITTLE NO HORSE** (Perennial: HarperCollins. 2002. ISBN 0-06-093122-1. pap. \$12.95) is the fascinating tale of a nun and a priest and their relationship to a Native American community. For children, or the child in all of us, Erdrich's heartwarming first novel for children, **THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE** (Hyperion. 2002. ISBN 0-7868-1454-3. pap. \$6.99), set in the 1840s, recounts a year in the life of Omakayas, a young Ojibwa girl who lives with her family on an island in Lake Superior. Readers will also enjoy Erdrich's lovely illustrations.

Imagine if Jane Austen had read Harry Potter. Do you think Elizabeth Bennett would have been dabbling in magic as well as sparring with Mr. Darcy? **SORCERY &**



**CECELIA; OR, THE ENCHANTED CHOCOLATE POT** (Harcourt Children's Bks. 2003. ISBN 0-15-204615-1. \$17; pap. 2004. ISBN 0-15-205300-X. \$6.95) gives us an idea of what such an amazing combination might have been like. Minnesota-based Patricia C. Wrede and Caroline Stevermer write a fantastic (and fantastical) tale of two English cousins (Kate in London for the Season, and Cecelia in the country) writing to each other in 1817. While their thoughts turn to matchmaking and potential

husbands, they also become involved with the not-quite-socially-acceptable world of witches and wizards.

Minnesota's natural beauty is best experienced in person, but if you don't want to battle the state's infamous mosquitoes, then viewing photographer Craig Blacklock's nature books is the next best thing. His best-known and most beautiful collection of photographs, **THE LAKE SUPERIOR IMAGES** (Blacklock Nature Photography. 1998. ISBN 1-892472-00-7. \$49.95; pap. ISBN 0-963499-18-1. \$29.95), presents Minnesota's glorious sunsets, fall foliage in blazing reds and oranges, and the icy blue of the winter snow in and around the Great Lake. In **HORIZONS** (Blacklock Nature Photography. 2002. ISBN 1-892472-11-2. \$19.95), the viewer is lost in the many different shades of blue, white, pink, and golden views of the horizon. In some photos one cannot tell where the water ends and the sky begins. These images are of places so remote that Blacklock found them via sea kayak and cliff tops.

*This column was contributed by Melissa Aho, a Reference Librarian at Metropolitan State University, St. Paul*

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