

An Independent Woman

A classic 19th-century novel reimagined for the age of feminism and rock 'n' roll.

JANE EYRE deserves her reputation as a plucky protofeminist for her determination to make a life for herself against steep odds. But Charlotte Brontë's heroine is also decidedly Victorian, believing marriage is her destiny and assuming a finely tuned moral propriety that requires abandoning her lover until he is properly widowed (and maimed as punishment for his ethical lapse). In her cunning adaptation, **The Flight of Gemma Hardy** (Harper), Margot Livesey turns Jane into Gemma, the 20th-century version. Initially Gemma's story closely follows Jane's in tone and structure: Growing up in the 1950s and '60s, orphaned Gemma is mistreated by her aunt and exploited at the boarding school to which she's sent as a charity case; she becomes a nanny to a wayward child on an isolated Scottish estate, only to fall in love with the child's dashing guardian;

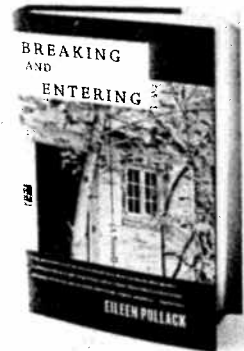


and when she learns a dark secret from his past, she runs away in principled horror. But here Gemma and Jane's paths diverge. By the mid-1960s, right and wrong are not as clear-cut as they once seemed. Expect no madwoman in the attic, and no pure villains. Instead,

Livesey offers up characters who make crazy, often hurtful decisions based on pain and loss. Self-righteous Gemma matures when she eventually realizes that "I too was capable of lying to get what I wanted, or to avoid what I dreaded." But what does she want? Happy endings become more complicated once the politics of feminism and rock 'n' roll begin to challenge women to rethink their goals. As Gemma explains to the man she loves but may or may not marry, "I don't want a promise to govern my feelings; I want my feelings to lead to a promise. And there are other things I want, too." —LIZA NELSON

Blowup

Grief, politics, and violence—all in the family.



In her novel **Breaking and Entering (Four Way)**, Eileen Pollack delves beneath the surface of blue state/red state stereotypes and brilliantly portrays an America made up of "smaller countries" with polarizing politics and alienated citizens. Richard Shapiro, a therapist, and his wife, Louise, leave Northern California and move to southwest Michigan in 1995, several months before Timothy McVeigh blows up the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The Shapiros have fled to Michigan to start over following the suicide of one of Richard's patients, a woman he secretly loved. Richard begins working at the local prison, a breeding ground for racism among guards and inmates. Louise becomes a social worker at the high school, where a janitor broadcasts vitriol as "Michigan Mike, the Voice of the Militia." The Shapiros' neighbors, also proud members of the paramilitary group, host an annual Tax Blast, using 1040 forms as shooting targets. When, in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, news surfaces that McVeigh had attended a militia meeting at the neighbors' farm, it becomes increasingly difficult to know who's harmless and who's not. Louise tells herself that she "can distinguish among the scents of her enemies and her friends, of safety and disaster, of passion, hate, and love," even as the lines of loyalty blur—in her community and her marriage. —JUDY BOLTON-FASMAN