

The Front Page

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New Lesbian Novels from Naiad Press. . .

TOOTHPICK HOUSE, a novel by Lee Lynch; Naiad Press (P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, Florida 32302); 256p. quality paperback; \$7.95.

Naiad Press is well-known for publishing excellent lesbian/feminist books (as the following reviews attest), but they really seem to have cornered the market on fine lesbian romances. While many of these novels are not masterpieces, they nevertheless consistently provide hours of lively reading. Each contains an interesting plot, even more interesting characters, and positive outlook on lesbian life and love.

Toothpick House, one of the most recent releases from Naiad, is a first novel for author Lee Lynch. Previously, she has had a modest but growing reputation, in feminist circles, as a short story writer. (In fact, a collection of her short stories, entitled *Old Dyke Tales*, is scheduled for publication by Naiad in April '84 and a second novel, *The Swashbuckler*, will follow later next year.)

Toothpick House is set in the 1970's, in the midst of a new wave of the feminist movement. Those years witnessed a new development in feminism: the "lesbian/feminist" or "political lesbian," who discovered her woman-loving urge through her involvement with the women's movement. Unlike some of her predecessors, the lesbian/feminist does not center her life around bars or butch-femme relationships, but around feminist institutions and lifestyles.

In *Toothpick House*, the bar dyke and political lesbian meet and fall in love. Annie Heaphy is a cab-driving "baby butch," who lives a life of freedom in a "toothpick house" on the coast of Connecticut. Long aware of her lesbianism, Heaphy centers her life around bars and a series of love affairs. Victoria Locke, on the other hand, is a Yale student who does not come to terms with her own lesbianism until she becomes involved with a campus feminist group.

Annie's dislike of "Yalies" and all they represent extends to the beautiful, self-possessed Victoria Locke at first. They meet almost by accident, and fall in love at first sight. Can two opposites live happily ever after? (Read the book and find out.)

Toothpick House is the story of Annie and Victoria, but it is also the story of the burgeoning women's movement, the changes it brings to traditional lesbian lives, and the ways in which it affected all of the young

women of the past decade. The conflicts and compromises between the bar dykes and the lesbian feminists make for some of the most interesting scenes in the book. *Toothpick House* is a fascinating fictional look at a critical period in lesbian "herstory." And, of course, it's a good love story.

MADAME AURORA, a novel by Sarah Aldridge; The Naiad Press; 248p. quality paperback; \$7.95.

THE NESTING PLACE, by Sarah Aldridge; The Naiad Press; 218p. quality paperback, \$6.95

Sarah Aldridge is the leading writer of lesbian romance novels. Her first three novels, *The Latecomer*, *Tottie* and *Cytherea's Breath*, were the first three books published by the Naiad Press when Barbara Grier and Donna J. McBride founded the lesbian/feminist publishing house in 1975.

These first three novels were well-received, and Aldridge bettered herself in 1978 with the publication of her fourth novel. Entitled *All True Lovers*, it's an (autobiographical?) account of two adolescent girls in the early thirties. This book helped confirm Aldridge as one of Naiad's greatest discoveries.

The Nesting Place, published last year, continues her romantic tradition. It is the love story of Dr. Sabina Hill, a middle-aged physician who finds herself romantically and otherwise involved with Claire Duane, an heiress conveniently married to her gay cousin Phillip, and later, to the Duanes' musical protegee Letty.

In Dr. Hill, Aldridge realistically depicts a lesbian professional, one who has had to struggle to win recognition in what some still consider "a man's job." The other characters, though not as well-developed, are also still interesting, and the plot is suspenseful enough to keep the reader's interest up.

A step down from *All True Lovers*, *The Nesting Place* is not a great book. Perhaps it's

"Put Lee on the cover," wrote the women of Naiad Press. "Give the girls a thrill."

So we did.

Referring to the rings visible in the photo, Lee offers the following remarks: "In the years since I've been out, I've worn many women's rings. . . I still wear a pinkie ring as a connection to my old gay past, a signal to other lesbians, a part of our language. My lover and I have worn the plain silver bands that signify our commitment to each other for eleven years now. Last year I added Kady's ring. One she made, heavy with silver, its Labrys like a shining stamp of courage resting on a background dark with soldering anger. I 'traded-up' to it from a smaller, less potent ring — as she predicted I would. The ring is so loud it took me months to wear all the time. I call it my power ring and wear it on the index finger of my right hand. A finger I use in writing, pointing, making love, accusing, guiding tools, beckoning and admonishing. The finger I use now to display my ring so it stands out like a statement."

TOOTHPICK HOUSE

A NOVEL BY

LEE LYNCH



not meant to be. It is, however, a good, entertaining lesbian love story.

Madame Aurora, Aldridge's sixth and most recent novel, is set in Washington, D.C. in 1897. The 19th century had seen great advances for women; by 1897, women had the right to own property, and to various professions. There was even talk of giving women the vote, as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other feminists worked to gain suffrage for themselves and their sisters.

Within this setting, we meet Hannah Morgan and Elizabeth Beaufort, elderly feminists and lovers for many years. The two met while teaching at a small women's college in the 1860's. Elizabeth made her living as a teacher until deafness and an academic scandal (concerning a book she authored on

love) intervened. Hannah, an ex-Army nurse and a teacher of domestic skills, learned as a young child on the farm that she had "powers" — that she could "see" the future in ways others could not.

As the novel begins, the two women are both in their seventies and in financial straits. In order to make ends meet, Elizabeth makes use of her "psychic powers" and as "Madame Aurora" becomes the spiritual counselor to Washington's best and brightest.

Though *Madame Aurora* has an interesting subplot involving a dying steel baron and his money, it is the romance that captures the reader's attention. In addition to Hannah and Elizabeth, *Madame Aurora* features a young couple — the baron's niece, Daisy Rawles, and one of the first female librarians in the new Library of Congress, Nell Purcell.

Aldridge contrasts the older couple and the younger, whose relationship is aided and abetted by the new status of women. The characters are interesting and the setting the first fifty years of the women's movement, the silver scandals of the late nineteenth century, and the political and social turmoil of the years following the Civil War especially intriguing. And, of course, once again true love triumphs in an Aldridge novel.

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BOOKS

Reviewed by Jesse Monteagudo

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