

# WOMONSCAPE TIMES

~A monthly publication by the Womonscape Center Inc.~



## W O M O N S C A P E C E N T E R

### Table of Contents

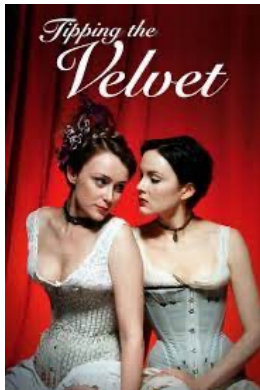
NRBG Reviews	1-5
Ginsburg Stamp	6
Have you heard?	6-7
Quotes	7-8
Next Meeting Date	1, 8

### NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)

The *No Rules Book Group* (NRBG) met as usual in September, to talk about what we've been reading, watching, and thinking about. Take a look below for a summary.

Our next *No-Rules Book Group* Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 19 at 10:30 a.m. We'll meet at the Richland County Courthouse, near the lower lobby elevators, and walk to our meeting room. If we've already started, just look for us in Conference Room #1.

### SEPTEMBER BOOK SELECTIONS



#### TIPPING THE VELVET by Sarah Waters

*Tipping the Velvet* is the first of six novels written by Welsh writer Sarah Waters. Set in a historically accurate 1870s London, the book is a coming-of-age story. Eighteen-year-old Nan is working at her family's oyster restaurant in the small English city of Kent when she falls in love with Kitty, a male impersonator in a traveling theatrical troupe. Nan follows Kitty to London in search of an exciting new life. For a while all goes well, but then.....The book received wide critical acclaim and was turned into a BBC television series.

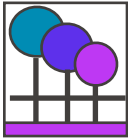
#### ZERO-SUM STORIES by Joyce Carol Oates

*Zero-Sum* is the latest book by Joyce Carol Oates. This is a collection of short stories, all with a dark twist. While Ms. Oates has written many horror short story collections, this one is different. It is a mixture of sad, interesting, futuristic, and profound stories about parental relationships, the mistreatment of women, poor choices, academia, and the differences between the sexes. A prolific writer, Ms. Oates has written over seventy books, including novels, short stories, and poetry. She has also won many awards, including the National Book Award and the National Humanities Medal. She also earned a graduate degree right here in Wisconsin. Ms. Oates is currently a writer-in-residence at New York University.



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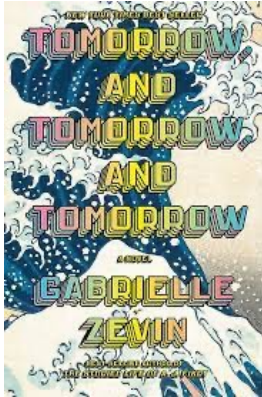
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**NO-RULES BOOK GROUP**

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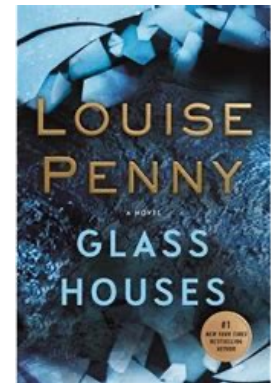


**TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW**  
by Gabrielle Zevin

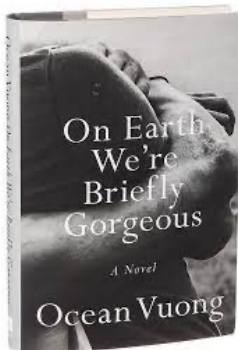
Winner of the 2022 Best Fiction Award, this novel spans thirty years in the lives of Sam and Sadie, creative partners in the video game industry. Along the way they become rich and famous, but also struggle with love, relationships, creative ambition, and betrayals. Themes in the novel are universal, so that it appeals to both those who enjoy the world of video games and those who do not.

**GLASS HOUSES**  
by Louise Penny

Our reviewer has struggled for a long time to be truly interested in the work of popular mystery writer Louise Penny. But when a friend recommended Ms. Penny's *Glass Houses*, our reviewer decided to give the author one more try. In this novel, protagonist Armand Gamache decides to "burn all ships" by perjuring himself on the witness stand in order to stop an international crime syndicate. Fans of Ms. Penny's work will no doubt enjoy this story and, indeed, it became a N.Y. Times bestseller and 2017 LibraryPick. As for our reviewer: well, she made it to the end of the novel, liked some of the characters and admires Penny's dedication to her readers, and to the mythical Canadian town of Three Pines. Will she read another Louise Penny mystery? Well, maybe.

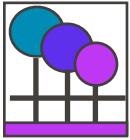


**ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS**  
by Ocean Vuong



Officially described as a work of fiction, much of this book is actually autobiographical. Mr. Vuong was born in Vietnam and immigrated to Connecticut with his family, where he was raised by his mother and grandmother. The novel is a long letter to the narrator's mother, describing his coming out as gay, his relationships with friends and lovers, and his feelings about being the son of a working-class immigrant. Vuong's writing is direct, lyrical, honest, graphic, and yet gentle. Fortunately, he was able to share the book with his mother before her death in 2019. It was nominated for Best Debut Novel.

(Continued on page 3)



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**NO-RULES BOOK GROUP**

(Continued from page 2)



**VIDEOS TO STREAM OR WATCH**

**BARBIE**

Streaming on *Amazon Prime* and *Apple TV*



So, we, your editors, saw the *Barbie* movie. At an actual theater, just like the pre-covid, pre-streaming days. And here's what we thought.

The first part of the film was tongue-in-cheek fun, watching the Barbie doll family come to life as constantly cheerful characters in a spotless, perfect world. We loved the way Barbie was able to take a shower without water, eat and drink without visibly consuming anything, and float down from the second floor of her Dreamhouse without needing to use the stairs. As women, it was wonderful to hear Stereotypical Barbie explain to Ken that "every

night is girls' night" in Barbieland. In addition, the cast of Barbies was refreshingly diverse, a far cry from the 1959 version that we remembered from our childhoods.

In the second part of the film Barbie enters the real world where, naturally, she is in for a series of rude awakenings. In our minds, Ken and the other men get a little too much attention in this part of the film. After all, this is the *Barbie* movie. Why can't Ken find his own movie? And the ending felt a little bit flat. We guessed that it's probably hard to figure out exactly how to conclude a story like this one, where fantasy and reality are merged.

However, we felt the movie was worth the price of the ticket because it was directed by the fabulous Greta Gerwig, and because America Ferrera's speech toward the end of the film was, well, perfect.

So, if you haven't already done so, we think you should see it. Find out for yourself what all the fun is about. And let us know what you think!

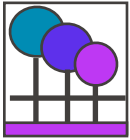
**AUDACITY**

Four part mini-series streaming on *Netflix*



Set in the 1820-60s, this mini-series explores the life of Czech poet, writer and feminist, Božena Němcová. Although she was a rebellious and outspoken adolescent, she was forced into marriage at age 17. Her parents, servants to a lower level royal family, wanted their barely literate daughter to have access to a middle class life. The series follows Němcová's experiences learning to read and write in both German and Czech, surviving an abusive marriage, and raising four children, while maintaining great personal strength and a passionate writing career. The four parts cover her brief but impressive life from age 17 to 41. Božena is widely recognized as a hero and role model in the modern day Czech Republic.

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## VIDEOS TO STREAM OR WATCH

(Continued from page 3)

### **PAINKILLER**

Mini-series streaming on *Netflix*

*Painkiller* is the excruciating but important story of the origins of our current national opioid crisis. It traces the beginnings of the Sackler family's involvement with Purdue Pharma, including the development of the drug oxycontin and the marketing strategies that made billions of dollars for the Sackler family while it began the systematic destruction of the lives of many millions of Americans.

Watching *Painkiller* is difficult. We know much of how the story will end (even as it is not yet over in any sense of the word), so seeing one set of based-on-real-life characters make choices based on greed while another set unwittingly makes choices based on lies and misplaced trust is very hard. This is particularly so since at this point most of us know someone whose life has been touched by the opioid epidemic.

But watching *Painkiller* is also essential if we are to avoid the type of purposeful manipulation and misinformation that led us to this sad and continuing chapter in our collective history. Fortunately, *Painkiller* is a series, so viewers can watch it in more emotionally manageable segments. The acting, which features impressive performances by Uzo Aduba, Matthew Broderick, and Dina Shihabi, is disturbingly realistic; but each episode is complimented by introductory testimonies that are even more haunting—family members of those who have died after using prescription opioids.



### **ANOTHER LISTENING OPTION: ON POINT, WBUR (BOSTON)**

What does it mean to have your actions *decriminalized*?

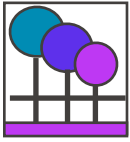
Here in rural Wisconsin we are very fortunate to have access to several public radio stations, bringing news and ideas of the world to our little quiet corner of the planet. In particular, a recent episode of the public radio series *On Point* from WBUR in Boston made us mentally stop in our tracks.

*On Point* features a host named Meghna Chakrabarti who interviews people on various sides of issues involving the economy, health care, politics, the environment, and society in general.



The episode that caught our attention here at the *Womonscape Times* involves the decriminalization of the sex trade. For those who want to hear the entire episode, you can find it on the internet under the August 29 broadcast date.

(Continued on page 5)



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## **ANOTHER LISTENING OPTION: ON POINT, WBUR (BOSTON)**

(Continued from page 4)

Living as we do in an area not far from the Wisconsin Dells, we are aware that sex trafficking is not limited to big cities or far-away locations. But a recent article from Spectrum News (4/29/23) indicated that trafficking occurs in every county in Wisconsin, and that, “when factoring in criminal provisions, identification of and response to victims, continuum of care, access to justice for trafficking survivors, tools for a victim-centered criminal justice response and prevention and training, most states received an ‘F’ when it comes to child sex trafficking.” Wisconsin is among the ‘F’ states; indeed, all but four states currently receive a ‘D’ or ‘F’ rating.

So what is the solution?

According to the *On Point* program, among advocates for adult sex workers, there is currently a move to decriminalize the trade in one of two ways. This particular episode of the program featured two female guests, one advocating partial decriminalization and the other full decriminalization.

Under the “partial” decriminalization strategy, only sex workers would have their activities decriminalized. The thought behind this strategy is that if their work was decriminalized, sex workers would be more likely to admit what they were doing, identify those employing and selling their bodies, and leave prostitution for safer employment.

Under the “full” decriminalization strategy, all people involved with the sex trade would have their activities decriminalized: those who sell the bodies of others, those who buy these bodies, and the sex workers whose bodies are being sold. According to this argument, having only the activities of sex workers decriminalized would put the workers at risk of violence if they tried to leave. Furthermore, advocates of this strategy are convinced that some sex workers are perfectly happy with a career in the sex trade, and want their work to be legally accepted and legitimized.

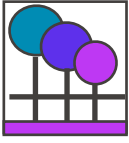
As is so often the case with controversial topics, contradictory survey and research data were quoted by the show’s guests that supported both sides of this argument. One particularly interesting study of sex workers currently involved in the trade quoted these workers as reporting satisfaction in this choice of career. Another study reported the opposite for those who had left the trade. The difference? Those still involved in sex work were overwhelmingly afraid to tell the truth for fear of repercussions from those who were buying and selling their bodies.



Yasmin Vafa, Rights4Girls

But the most telling part of the program came when Chakrabarti commented on the background of her two main guests. One guest had been kidnapped at the age of twelve and forced into prostitution. Although the experience only lasted a few weeks, it left significant, longterm emotional scars. When Chakrabarti asked the other guest “out of fairness...have you ever participated in any manner in the sex trade?” the answer was “no.”

What was each guest’s stand on decriminalization of the sex trade? Listen to or read the transcript of the program to find out. Check out Yasmin Vafa and [www.worldwithoutexploitation.org](http://www.worldwithoutexploitation.org) website.



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**A RUTH BADER GINSBURG US STAMP IS APPROVED  
FOR USE STARTING NOW!**

Those of you who receive this newsletter by U.S. Mail may have noticed that we try to use stamps featuring women for all of our mailings. This is not always easy to do: many visits to our local post office in search of “women stamps” have been disappointing, as there have been no such stamps available. So when we heard about the new Ruth Bader Ginsburg stamp, well, we stocked up!



The post office chose Ginsburg because of her status as “a passionate proponent of equal justice and an icon of American culture.” The stamp shows Ginsburg wearing one of the many decorative collars she wore over her judge’s robe during her time as a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. Sometimes Ginsburg chose her collars to signify a special meaning, such as the dark, sharp-edged collar she wore when she was opposed to a key issue, known as her “dissent collar.” The particular collar shown on this stamp is made of small white beads, and came from Cape Town, South Africa. It did not have any important meaning; it was simply purported to be her favorite.

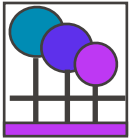
The stamp was designed by Ethel Kessler, an art director for the U.S. Postal Service. It was officially released on October 2nd.

## **HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN? KRITI BHARTI (b. 1987)**

Dr. Kriti Bharti is a child marriage activist. Her mission: to prevent and annul the illegal marriages of Indian girls and boys.

According to 2018 Unicef data, approximately 650 million girls and women alive today were married before the age of 18. Indian law prevents child marriage, recognizing that such unions contribute to sexual abuse, unsafe pregnancies, lower education rates and greater poverty. Still, particularly in rural areas, the practice remains entrenched throughout South Asia: as of May 2022, Unicef reported that 27 percent of Indian women ages 20 to 24 were married before their 18th birthday. However, thanks to the work of Dr. Bharti, some of these marriages are being prevented or annulled.

Although she is only thirty-six years old, Kriti Bharti has quite a history of facing very difficult life challenges. Her father abandoned her mother before Bharti was born. This was considered a disgrace, and relatives pressured Bharti’s mother to either abort the pregnancy or to remarry. Bharti’s mother did neither, choosing instead to raise her daughter as a single parent. As a result of her mother’s decisions, Bharti’s extended family considered the young girl to be cursed, and physically and verbally tortured her throughout her childhood. One relative went so far as to give Bharti a slow poison when the girl was ten years old. Bharti survived, but became bedridden and paralyzed. Eventually she was able to recover after two years of therapy, particularly Reiki therapy. Upon recovering, Bharti changed her last name from the one she was born with, Chopra, in an attempt to distance herself from her relatives, as well as from the caste system and organized religion.



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**KRITI BHARTI**

(Continued from page 6)



The name “Bharti” means “daughter of India.”

Because of her paralysis, Bharti was unable to complete fourth grade. However, she studied on her own, and taught herself enough to return to school at the tenth grade level. She eventually graduated from high school and went on to college, earning a doctorate in psychology. While in college, she



became interested in working with street children, and discovered that they suffered from child labor, poverty, and child marriage. She found that her hometown, Rajasthan, has been considered the center of child marriage world-wide. As a result of these experiences, Bharti came to the conclusion that counseling such children was pointless: the root of the suffering was child marriage. Still in her mid-twenties, Bharti founded the Saarthi Trust in 2011, working to ensure the rehabilitation and welfare of child marriage victims after rescue. The Saarthi Trust provides education, vocational training, and employment opportunities

to these young people, and works to have their marriages annulled in the court system.

*“We try to give the victims a new life by freeing them from heinous exploitation through our rehabilitation program to help them lead successful, independent lives and speak out against child marriage. We’ve realized that annulling a marriage isn’t enough as many girls are banished from their families or communities following the dissolution of marriage. Vocational training and financial and legal support helps them enormously,”* Dr. Bharti says. *“In India, every time a child marriage is stopped, instead of sympathy the girl child faces animosity and ostracism. That’s why it’s not just enough to protect such victims, but also help them get integrated back into society.”*

In 2012 Bharti was able to successfully help oversee the first case of a child marriage annulment. Since then, the Bharti team has annulled more than 44 child marriages and halted more than 1500 from happening. They have rehabilitated more than 6000 children and 5500 women. Still, not everyone approves of her work. Bharti continues to receive death threats and rape threats. One group of Hindu leaders who approve of the practice of child marriage have threatened to chop off her nose and gang-rape her.

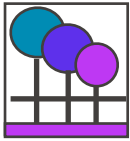
Bharti remains undeterred.

*“Despite the risk it poses, my work means the world to me,”* she says.

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### **DONATIONS WELCOMED**

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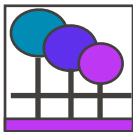
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OCTOBER 19 — is  
our next scheduled  
*No-Rules Book Group*  
in Richland Center.  
See Page 1 for details.

**Womonscape  
Times**

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**QUOTES BY WOMEN**

~She Throws Herself into It~  
as though she wants to perish in the wild swirl,  
as though she wanted to escape from herself.  
— Božena Němcová,(from Čtyry doby)

In the first eight days of my marriage  
I cried my first bitter tears!  
How beautiful I had imagined  
life at the side of a man I loved.  
I saw very early that our natures  
were not suited for each other.  
— Božena Němcová, to her sister Adéla,  
November 21, 1856.

There's something about this industry  
where it's like liberals have completely  
lost their minds. And are somehow  
arguing that complete deregulation will  
save the day. And it's just—it's wild.  
I just—I've never understood it. I've  
absolutely never understood it. And the  
only thing I can come up with—it's  
misogyny. It's like, when it comes to  
women's bodies, you know, they let the  
free market roam.  
—Yasmin Vafa, Cofounder and Director of  
Rights4Girls, Maine

Child marriage annulment is a curative  
approach which removes girls from the 'dark  
room' of early marriage. Child marriage can  
result in sexual assault, human rights  
violations, and a lack of education and  
healthcare. We are protecting and  
rehabilitating girls, whilst at the same time  
changing the mind-sets of communities. This  
enables girls to lead blissful lives—  
Kriti Bharti (see pp 6-7 of this newsletter)