

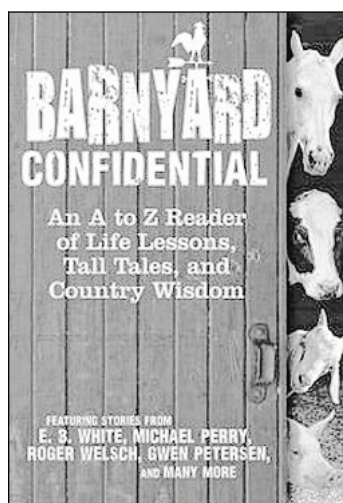
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Books

SATURDAY
 AUGUST 18, 2012 **A7**

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WHAT'S HOT



Barnyard Confidential: An A to Z Reader of Life Lessons, Tall Tales, and Country Wisdom, Edited by Melinda Keefe, Voyageur Press, 240 pp., \$21.99

A fascinating and fact-filled volume of nostalgia that blends practical wisdom about farming life with gentle reminders that life in the country is best taken with a good sense of humor. From Acre to Zinnias, there are dozens of definitions and short essays to keep you entertained after your chores are done. It would also make a great gift for farm families or for city dwellers aching to get back to the land.

The Statue of Liberty: A Transatlantic Story by Edward Berenson, Yale University Press, 248 pp., \$25

If your school textbooks covered it at all, you probably learned that Lady Liberty was a gift from the French government to ours. This endlessly fascinating read dispels that myth and many others as it follows her from idea to execution. For example, the statue stood for two years in Paris before being disassembled and shipped here, and it originally symbolized the abolition of slavery. Chapter after chapter of a history that most of us have never learned.

OUT THIS WEEK

Lincoln's Last Days by Bill O'Reilly and Dwight Jon Zimmerman

One Last Thing Before I Go by Jonathan Tropper

The Orchardist by Amanda Coplin

A Killing in the Hills by Julia Keller

LOCAL BESTSELLERS

FICTION

1. **Gone Girl** by Gillian Flynn

2. **Fifty Shades of Grey** by E. L. James

3. **The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry** by Rachel Joyce

4. **Creole Belle** by James Lee Burke

5. **The Cloud Atlas** by David Mitchell

NONFICTION

1. **Preservation Kitchen** by Paul Virant

2. **The Cornbread Mafia** by James Higdon

3. **Finding Your Gifts** by Ken Lolla

4. **The Other Wes Moore** by Wes Moore

5. **Wild** by Cheryl Strayed

NATIONAL BEST-SELLERS

FICTION

1. **Gone Girl** by Gillian Flynn

2. **Odd Apocalypse** by Dean Koontz

3. **Where We Belong** by Emily Giffin

4. **Friends Forever** by Danielle Steel

5. **Black List** by Brad Thor

NONFICTION

1. **Wild** by Cheryl Strayed

2. **Unbroken** by Laura Hillenbrand

3. **Killing Lincoln** by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard

4. **Double Cross** by Ben Macintyre

5. **The Amateur** by Edward Klein

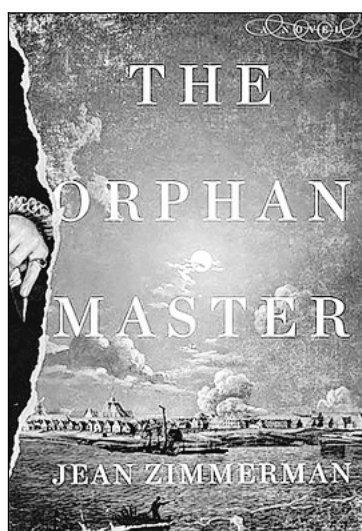
Historical mystery overambitious

Well-written romance is missing

By **Robin Fisher**
 Special to The Courier-Journal

In "The Orphanmaster," historian Jean Zimmerman's first novel, you get a little murder, a little romance and a lot of history, with varying degrees of success. It is set in 1663 New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) when the city is a Dutch colony oppressively governed by Petrus Stuyvesant. The traders talk of the overhunting of the beaver just as it reaches its peak in popularity in Europe, revolution (both from the Dutch and the English) fomented, and everyone lives in constant fear of an Indian attack. In the midst of all of this, someone or something starts killing orphans. Add to the mix a young, buxom, blonde female trader and a handsome, roguish, dark-haired Englishman for romance, and you have yourself a novel.

Zimmerman's expertise in this period of history is evident on every page. She goes into great detail about the daily life of



The Orphanmaster
 By Jean Zimmerman, Viking, 416 pp./\$27.95

the colony, Native American tribes in the area and New Amsterdam's relationship to the other colonies in the New World. In addition, she places brief synopses of concurrent European events at critical points in the books. It makes for interesting, but dense, reading. It's the murder and romance angles that are a

bit more problematic.

The novel opens with two murders. The one most important to the story is the murder of a young African orphan by what seems to be a monster. It is a graphic and horrific scene, as are most of the scenes in the book that deal with the murders. The prevailing belief in the colony is that a witika (or flesh-eating demon) is killing the orphans. Zimmerman uses her eye for detail to chilling effect when writing about the murders and the desecration of the bodies. By the end of the novel there is no mystery as to the perpetrator, but you can't look away.

Lastly, there is the romance between strong-willed Blandine van Couvering and English spy Edward Drummond. It's in the scenes between these characters that the novel almost grinds to a halt. The history in the book is fascinating, the murder angle is intriguing, but the romance is banal and feels straight out of someone's idea of a bad romance novel with passages such as "Blandine van Couvering and Edward Drummond pledged their marriage vows on a springtime day made glorious by love, bright skies and the bubbling aroma of

fresh-fried doughnuts." While the interaction of these two characters is central to the novel, romance writing is clearing not Zimmerman's strong suit.

"The Orphanmaster" also suffers from a few other flaws. It has a cast of seemingly thousands, from an African giant to a near-mythical Native American scout to a tavern owner who is an English spy to the philosopher Benedict de Spinoza. Add to this the various subplots including the execution of Charles I of England, a mute orphan of mysterious origin, and the interaction of the surrounding native tribes with the colony, and you have a somewhat messy book.

In the end, it depends on what you want from the story. If you want an interesting book of historical fiction with a gruesome murder subplot, then "The Orphanmaster" may do the trick; but if you are looking for a little well-written romance thrown in the mix, you'll want to look elsewhere.

Robin Fisher previously produced a public-affairs talk show for 89.3 FM, WFPL. She lives in Louisville.

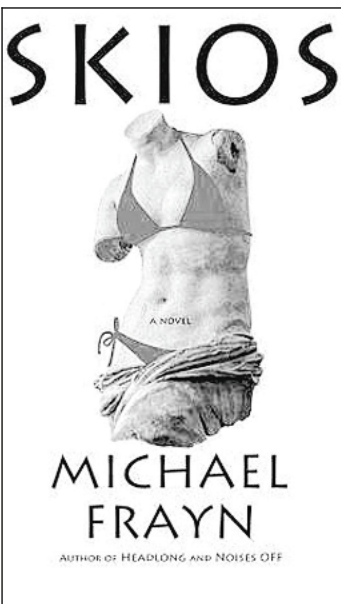
Identity is at heart of Frayn's witty novel

Intricate plot goes beyond slapstick

By **Linda Elisabeth Beattie**
 Special to The Courier-Journal

"Skios," brilliant British writer Michael Frayn's latest novel, is a wild, wonderful romp of a book — an intricately plotted satire cloaked as a simple pleasure.

Anyone familiar with Frayn's highbrow fiction ("Headlong," for example) or complex plays (think "Noises Off" and "Copenhagen") should anticipate the Shakespearean bent of his wit, and "Skios" does not disappoint. On the surface there is Dr. Norman Wilfred, an expert in the scientific organization of science. He is bound for the private Greek isle Skios to deliver an annual lecture to members of a world-renowned foundation. Oliver Fox, a wily sort — as his name would suggest — as well as a fellow passenger on the plane to Skios, sports a different agenda until he spots well-built conference organiz-



Skios
 By Michael Frayn, Metropolitan Books, 225 pp./\$25

er Nikki Hook holding a homemade sign in the airport. Although her smile beckons, she is seeking "Norman Wilfred."

In an epiphanous instant Fox realizes that he can accom-

pany Nikki by becoming Norman Wilfred, and so he does until the bitterly funny end.

The plot thickens with identity confusion that spreads from two people to a baker's dozen as well as to suitcases and their contents that are lost or tossed aside to cross purposes. Yes, it's all superlative slapstick, but it's more.

At the core of Frayn's fiction lies a philosophical question that is more difficult to answer than a reader dare think: How, indeed, do we know who we are?

When it is time for Dr. Wilfred to deliver his lecture, the foundation's president rises and states, "Our guest of honor tonight ... needs no introduction."

Just when Frayn's reader assumes that the jig must be up, new plot twists turn the tables again and cause our spiraling perceptions to shift.

Linda Elisabeth Beattie, a Louisville writer and reviewer, chairs Spalding University's Adult Accelerated Program.



Gene Smith

Biographer Gene Smith dies

Gene Smith, revered biographer of presidents, prime ministers and generals, died July 25. He was 83. Smith was perhaps best known as the author of "When the Cheering Stopped," the best-seller about Woodrow Wilson, and "The Shattered Dream: Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression." He also wrote 18 other books.

COMING UP

Steve Kemper, historian and former Louisvillian, signs his new book **A Labyrinth of Kingdoms: 10,000 Miles in Islamic Africa** at 4 p.m. Sunday Aug. 19 at Carmichael's Bookstore, 2720 Frankfort Ave.

How Kentucky enhanced midwifery

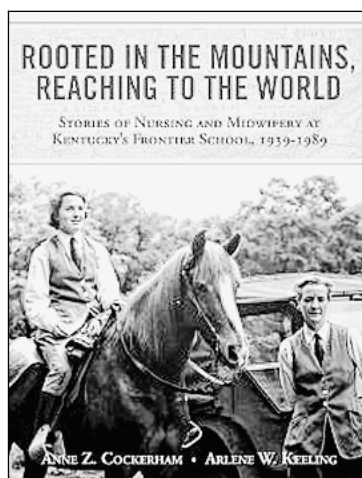
Frontier Nursing's history explored

By **Kevin Kavanagh**
 Special to The Courier-Journal

Readers of "Rooted in the Mountains, Reaching to the World" will discover an educational, entertaining and enjoyable way to spend a hot summer afternoon.

You will not find a table, graph or scientific data point. The book is more about adventures involving horses shod with ice nails and the forging of swollen streams; about the power and courage of humanity to overcome obstacles, to instill hope where none existed. The majority of the book is a collection of historical memoirs of the life and encounters of the nurse midwives from the Frontier Nursing Service, now known as the Frontier Nursing University.

The university's importance and impact on health care cannot be overstated. The first chapter describes the early and tragic life events of its founder, Mary Breckinridge, who developed a deep and driving love for children after the loss of her own. So deep was this love that she left privileged society and a politically influential American fam-



Rooted in the Mountains, Reaching to the World: Stories of Nursing and Midwifery at Kentucky's Frontier School, 1939-1989
 By Anne Z. Cockerham and Arlene W. Keeling, Butler Books, 160 pp./\$30

ily for a life of service, first in Europe and finally in the mountains of Appalachia. She is credited with transforming midwifery from what she described as a "medieval" practice in the foothills and mountains of Eastern Kentucky into a profession now accepted as a branch of modern-day medicine, performed by

trained, competent nurses.

During the agency's first decade, nurse-midwives from England played an important role in providing maternity services. But with the onset of World War II, they returned to their homeland, spurring the development of a formal training program in Hyden, Ky. Breckinridge is credited with founding the Family Nurse Practitioners Program in 1970.

These memoirs paint a detailed picture of both life in Appalachia and the cultural adjustments nurses had to make to practice successfully. At times reality seemed stranger than fiction. I remember, during the birth of our third child, fighting off a cockroach that was crawling around the floor, but that is no match for tales of coping with mice, rats, and green snakes. The book recounts animals apparently trying to help, with a cat bringing the mother-to-be a newly killed mouse and a hen laying an egg on the home's birthing room bed. Being a family nurse meant taking care of the whole family and all of the animals, domestic and otherwise.

Horses were also an intricate part of the service, and became embedded into local folklore, with children believing babies

came in nurses' saddlebags. Horses were a necessity for traversing the mountain "hollers," but had their dangers, as recalled by a nurse who was rescued while on horseback by a small boy who killed a copperhead before it spooked the horse. Standard nursing uniforms were traded for wool dresses, riding pants, boots and vests, a uniform that not only offered protection from the elements but also signified neutrality in the local feuds. The nurses were well respected in the community and knew that if any man harmed them "the others might shoot him."

Then, as today, poverty was extreme and only overcome by the compassion and charity of the people. Nurses had to deal with poor sanitation and unsafe drinking water; their tasks were not for the faint of heart.

The narrative is easy to read with many illustrations, and highlights a Kentucky innovation that has truly made a difference worldwide. It is a book I can proudly show to my visiting relatives who like to brag endlessly about their state. It belongs on top of the coffee table.

Kevin T. Kavanagh is a retired physician from Somerset, Ky.