

EM Book Club

Three great new books by Oregon writers

BY ELIZABETH LOPEMAN



Clown Girl

by **Monika Drake**

(HAWTHORNE, APRIL 2007, \$14.95)

Monika Drake's first novel, *Clown Girl*, unravels with a surrealistic spin through Baloneytown. It pulls the reader into the eye of the storm with experimental prose and lyrical humor. With hipster intelligence, *Clown Girl* wiggles out of spots as tight as the twists

in balloon animals, gleaned wisdom from Buddhists, Hopis, an acupuncturist, a cop and, always, the Clown Code of Ethics. Searching for Plucky, her absconded rubber chicken-child; Rex, the Clown prince; and Chance, her little dog, she tries to perfect her Kafka-inspired act while systematically losing everything.

Sniffles—*Clown Girl*'s real name, or is it Nita?—narrowly averts disasters such as burning down her house with flaming batons, being committed to a psychiatric ward, and getting slapped with prostitution charges for hanging out with a clown fetishist, all while trying to maintain an illusive sense of balance. Feeling like a crone who has lost to life's comedic brutality, she realizes, "The only value of wasted time is knowledge."

Drake tenderly crafts a human tale through the lens of an orphaned Baloneytown clown who's just looking for herself. Drake keeps the plates spinning even when all hope for Nita seems lost. The vertiginous world of *Clown Girl* sweeps us into a literary hurricane, but then sets us down under blue skies.



Origin

by **Diana Abu-Jaber**

(W.W. NORTON, JUNE 2007, \$23.95 HARDCOVER)

Have you ever wondered about the difference between what you remember from your childhood and what you may have crafted into pseudo-memory from photographs and stories people told you? In

Diana Abu-Jaber's latest book, *Origin*, Lena, a fingerprint expert, becomes drawn into the mystery when crime-lab evidence in a series of infant deaths turns up clues to her own origins.

Subscribing to evolution puts all of our origins in a steaming rain forest, but what of that can we call upon to explain post-9/11 cases of heinous murder? For Lena, memories of jungle gorillas, lizards and butterflies help her unearth the truth in a snowy Syracuse whodunit. Is it her possessive ex-husband, a saccharine-sweet foster-care mother, a nurse, a radical Native American liberation group, or her new cop boyfriend?

Abu-Jaber lets us inside the life of Lena, a divorced and often-alienated young woman whose professional life sometimes leads her into the field where she gathers case-breaking evidence. Her olfactory prowess, combined with a gift of intuition, makes her a reluctant star in the lab. But it's her long snowy walks and trips to her favorite bakery for warm bread that reveal who Lena really is, as well as uncover the seeds of a case that only she can crack.

In *Origin*, *Abu-Jaber* sticks with the rich character developments and beautifully descriptive prose of her first three novels. Departing from her culturally rich, signature tales of the Arab-American experience, *Abu-Jaber* plunges us into a frozen winterscape of mystery and intrigue. *Origin* is both a page turner and a delicately crafted literary novel about coming to understand our pasts.



Deer Drink the Moon

edited by **Liz Nakazawa**

(OOLIGAN PRESS, APRIL 2007, \$19.95)

The only anthology of its kind, *Deer Drink the Moon* delivers the poems of 33 esteemed Oregon poets in a single regionally sorted treasure chest. Through Oregon's spongy forest floors and along its exposed, rocky shoreline, contributing poets capture the Oregon romanticized by all, near and far. Each piece reflects the poets' individual interpretations and relationships to the Oregon they know, and open windows into the heart of our phenomenal home. You will poetically travel through the diverse geographies and climates of Oregon, all within this anthology.

The poems are organized by the regions of their content. They include the Coastal Range, the Willamette Valley, the Cascades, the Eastern Cascade slopes and foothills, the Blue Mountains, the Klamath Mountains and the Northern basin and range. "Lupine," by Eugene poet Barbara LaMorticella, welcomes summer in lyrics dedicated to the beloved purple flower that "whispers that the wolf of winter is moving, toward the cave where summer lies, waiting in a skirt of sun and cherries." *Deer Drink the Moon* also includes poems from Eugenean, Paulann Peterson, as well as Oregon's world-renowned poet, William Stafford, and his son, Kim.

This will be a great read for summer. You might want to take it along to the beach, the mountains or just the shade of a leafy tree. You will be able to escape to the beauty of Oregon one mesmerizing poem at a time. *Deer Drink the Moon* is a truly rich expression of the brilliance and heritage of Oregon.