

LOCAL BESTSELLERS

20th Century Books

FICTION: *Gil Genius: Agatha Heterodyne and the Circus of Dreams* by Kaja & Phil Foglio
NONFICTION: *Official Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide #36* by Robert M. Overstreet

Barnes & Noble East

FICTION: *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown
NONFICTION: *Marley and Me: Life and Love With the World's Worst Dog* by John Grogan



Barnes & Noble West

FICTION: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
NONFICTION: *Madison: The Guide* by Gwen Evans

Borders East

FICTION: *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown
NONFICTION: *Cesar's Way* by Cesar Millan

Borders West

FICTION: *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown
NONFICTION: *Mayflower* by Nathaniel Philbrick

Invest In Yourself

NONFICTION: *Ask and It Is Given* by Esther & Jerry Hicks

Mimosa Community Bookstore

NONFICTION: *Angel Numbers* by Doreen Virtue

Rainbow Cooperative Bookstore

FICTION: *Firmin: Adventures of a Metropolitan Lowlife* by Sam Savage
NONFICTION: *Left Hand of God* by Michael Lerner



Room of One's Own

FICTION: *Rose of No Man's Land* by Michelle Tea
NONFICTION: *Sweet Jesus, I Hate Bill O'Reilly* by Joseph Minton Amann and Tom Breuer

Star Books

FICTION: *Please Don't Come Back From the Moon* by Dean Bakopoulos
NONFICTION: *Madison: The Guide* by Gwen Evans

University Book Store

FICTION: *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown
NONFICTION: *Two Roads to Badger Hockey Heaven* by Mike Bynum

Savage love

East-sider scores with a bittersweet rat tale

By Linda Falkenstein

Add Sam Savage's name to the list of Madison writers who've made a splash with first novels. *Firmin: Adventures of a Metropolitan Lowlife* has been selected as a Barnes & Noble "Emerging Voices" title and a featured BookSense pick for July.

Yet Savage, like his underground anti-hero, has remained under the radar here. "I don't know many people in Madison," says the author, who moved here two years ago with his wife, after getting to know the city when their son was an undergrad at UW-Madison.

Prior to that, Savage lived in a cabin in the woods — in South Carolina, in an existence that sounds like a writer's dream. But after 25 years "in the swamps, really," it was time for a change — although Savage did complete *Firmin* alone at the cabin after his wife had already moved here.

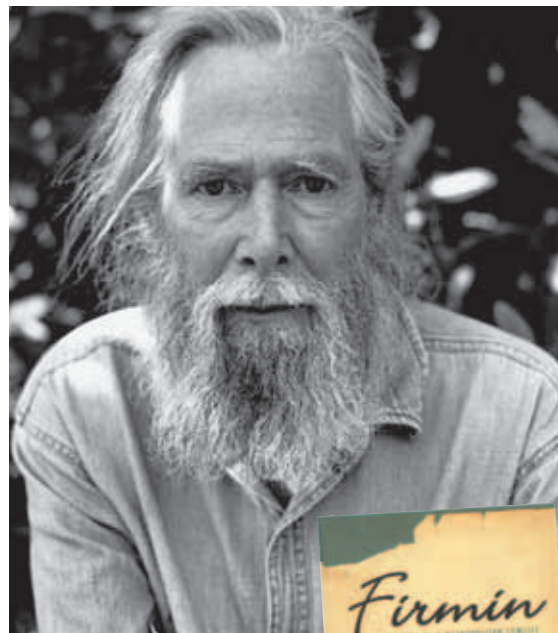
Savage doesn't fit the "emerging voices" stereotype of a freshly minted MFA, and at a recent "E.V." event at Book Expo, the other participants were young enough to be his grandchildren, he laughs.

Back when, Savage wrote and published poetry in small magazines, but became discouraged, feeling it was like "dropping it into a hole, and it vanished." (His bio as penned on his Web site, www.theoldrat.com, says he "worked as a carpenter, a commercial fisherman and a letterpress printer" but lived "mainly on a diminishing pile of inherited money and the labors of his wife, while he wrote, mostly poems, in obedience to an esthetic as wrong-headed as it was austere.")

He has used the term "writer's block" to describe his next stage, but admits it's not quite accurate: "I suppose that I had given up." He likens his experience to a moment in Zen Buddhism called the great death, in which a person truly gives up, and "that's when the insight comes." And for him, that's when the first pages of *Firmin* came tumbling out. Choosing a rat as a narrator was freeing: "I could cut through the clutter, I didn't have to say who this person was or what his family was like, or where he'd gone to school." Instead, *Firmin*'s story turns on thoughts about literature, imagination, the meaning of existence and death.

Doubt did creep in about who would publish or read a tale told by a rat, but Savage kept on. In the end, finding a publisher turned out to be easy. He sent the manuscript to four presses, one of which was Coffee House, a nonprofit literary publisher in Minneapolis. Coffee House wanted it, although the staff also had some question about how to market a novel written by a rat. (Yet "at 10,000 copies, *Firmin* is the largest first printing we've ever had," says publicist Lauren Snyder, and those copies are almost gone.)

Firmin himself objects to the genre of "rat



Sam Savage has created the '...greatest rat since Templeton.'



lit": "The only literature I cannot abide is rat literature, including mouse literature. I despise good-natured old Ratty in *The Wind in the Willows*. I piss down the throats of Mickey Mouse and Stuart Little. Affable, shuffling, cute, they stick in my craw like fish bones."

Savage admits he is uncomfortable with comparisons to another literary rat that his publisher used in his press materials: "...greatest rat since Templeton." *Firmin*'s voice and the overall tone of the book are closer to Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, who awakes one day having turned into a cockroach. *Firmin* is 100% rat, even though an outsider — even before he learns to read (through eating books).

Savage's darkish view of the state of literature is reflected in the setting — a dying bookstore in Scollay Square in Boston, before the wrecking ball does away with it all. "Some book people are reading the book as cute, and I guess if they want to they can," says Savage, "but most people aren't. The book is funny, but it's a serious book."

Who are Anita Parks, Anne Bruno, Winnie Lacy? They're among the 12 women you'll meet in *Madison Women Remember: Growing Up in Wisconsin's Capital* by Sarah White (Arcadia). White, an oral historian, wanted to give the city "a birthday present" for its sesquicentennial this year, and hit on a collection of interviews that would reflect "the changing nature of Madison over time."

The women included in *MWR* are not those who built Madison but women of Madison, not movers and shakers so much as representative citizens, with deep memories of Madison. What comes through is a vanished time and place, when what ethnic conflicts there were played out between the Germans and the Irish and the Italians. Neighborhoods had stores ("Leo Esser's butcher shop"), and homes had iceboxes. Major shopping was done on the Square, at Rennebohms and Manchesters, Barrons and the Three Sisters.

There's much to be learned from reading between the lines about the lives of women "born between 1915 and 1950 — they're a bridge between the generation that were really slaves to women's work and us, who had lives open to all opportunities."

says White. One thing that came clear to her was how labor-saving devices let women think of themselves as capable of accomplishing more: "I always thought it was marching for the vote, but it turns out it was washing machines."

Madison comes through as "a magnet to people looking to expand their lives," whether immigrants or farm families, "and for the most part, we deliver."

The photos of Madison life, mostly provided by the women who provide the book's stories, are fascinating too. "Where else do we get to see the private life, the ordinary stuff?" White asks.

The book is available at most local bookstores, including Star Books, Rainbow, Borders, Barnes & Noble and Avol's.



Rosemary McDermott recalls life on West Main in Sarah White's book.

Out loud

◆ Lots of local authors will be reading at Barnes & Noble West in the coming months. **Joan Peterson**, who pens the Eat Smart Culinary Travel Series, will be on hand June 13; writing guru **Marshall Cook**, June 27; **Linda Godfrey**, reading from *Hunting the American Werewolf*, July 13; and **Margaret George**, reading from her forthcoming novel *Helen of Troy*, Aug. 8.



◆ In conjunction with Rainbow Bookstore and that Mad City institution, the Socialist Potluck, **Paul Buhle** of Brown University will appear in support of his *Wobblies! A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Verso), July 8 at the WilMar Center.



◆ **Catherine Friend** will read from *Hit By a Farm* (Marlowe & Co.), a recounting of her life with her partner on a sheep farm in Minnesota, at A Room of One's Own on June 11. ◆

“It’s as close to a real autobiography that we’ll have” of **Dr. Jack Kevorkian**, says University of Wisconsin Press acquisitions editor **Raphael Kadushin**. The advocate of assisted suicide, currently serving 10-25 years for second-degree murder, told his story to **Neal Nicol** and **Harry Wylie**. It’s just been published by the Press as *Between the Dying and the Dead*, an authorized biography. “It’s incredibly moving, not dogmatic,” says Kadushin.

Kevorkian in prison is “getting quite sick himself. It’s ironic, and sad,” says Kadushin, who’s proud to be associated with this book that is in part about the fight over “who has a right to your body.”

Kaiso!, writings by and about African American dance great **Katherine Dunham**, is another Press title that is as close to a memoir as its subject will produce. Dunham died in late May, the day before the broadcast of “Oprah Winfrey’s Legends Ball,” a program in which she an honoree.

Sara Rath’s popular novel *Star Lake Saloon and Housekeeping Cottages* will be released in paperback this summer. Rath will tour northern Wisconsin and have a reading/signing at Borders West in Madison Aug. 30. Rath tapped into a market of older women with this bestseller for the Press, says Kadushin: “They are still the die-hard readers in this culture.” And publicity manager Benson Gardner is hoping the story of a middle-aged professor who inherits a northern resort will break through to a national market once in paperback.

Another title of local interest is a history of WHA radio, *9XM Talking: WHA radio and the Wisconsin Idea* by longtime WPR voice **Randall Davidson**, due this fall. The university was a pioneer of broadcasting, so in a sense, this is a history of radio in general in this country, as well as WHA.

Also coming in fall from the Press is *Cry Rape*, *Isthmus* news editor **Bill Lueders**’ account of the “Patty” rape case. Although some of the story was first reported in this paper, there’s much more to this case than the newspapers could cover; the whole story may shock people who would like to think such things couldn’t happen here. The book has garnered praise from *Nation* columnist **Katha Pollitt**: “Old ways of thought about women persist in surprising places. As full of twists and turns as a mystery novel, and as tightly written, *Cry Rape* lays bare the underside of one of our nation’s most liberal and attractive cities.”

The award season in New York City has shown that the University of Wisconsin Press remains a leader in the field of gay publishing. *Setting the Lawn on Fire*, a first novel by Milwaukee-born author **Mack Friedman**, nabbed the new Edmund White Award for debut fiction. *Collected Poems With Notes Toward the Memoirs* by **Djuna Barnes** and edited by **Phillip Herring** and **Osias Stutman** was nominated for the award for best lesbian poetry. The awards, from the Publishing Triangle, an association of lesbians and gay men in publishing, are “the true gay Oscars,” says Kadushin.

The latest in the Parallel Press series on “America’s Founders” treats **James Madison**, our city’s namesake and “The Father of the Constitution.” The series has already assayed George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, emphasizing the “character, mannerisms and physical appearance of the subjects as largely seen through the eye of their contemporaries.” Indeed, the notion of Madison and “Constitution” takes on new dimension as the reader learns that Madison periodically “suffered from the bilious lax, an intestinal disorder that would probably be diagnosed as irritable bowel syndrome. This chronic ailment also aggravated his serious condition of hemorrhoids.” If you can make it past Madison’s dyspepsia, this is a refreshing refresher on the Constitution.

The first anthology from Parallel Press’ poetry chapbook series, *Encore: More of Parallel Press Poets*, features one new work each, with commentary, from the 40 poets who have previously published with Parallel. **Marilyn Annucci, Harriet Brown, Charles Cantrell, Robin Chapman, Heather Dubrow, Gwen Ebert, Susan Elbe, Jean Feraca, Jim Ferris, Mary Mercier, John Niles, Andrea Potos, Eve Robillard, Shoshauna Shy, Judith Strasser, Alison Townsend, Dennis Trudell, Ron Wallace and Timothy Walsh** are Madison-area poets represented. It’s especially fun to read their statements about their poems. The most recent chapbooks from 2006 are *Short Story* by **Corey Mesler** of Memphis, Tenn., *Stilt Man* by **Doug Flaherty** of Oshkosh, and *What Wisconsin Took* by **Paul Dickey** of Omaha.

Madison native and former *Daily Cardinal* editor **J.R. Norton** has written *Saving General Washington* (Tarcher), a reclaiming of the founding fathers from the right. Oh, it’s also funny. Norton currently lives in Minneapolis and is a producer for “The Al Franken Show.” “The book’s epilogue is all about growing up in Madison,” Norton relates via e-mail. As a kid he played tag in the state Capitol, “and this is the right relationship people should have with their government — a sense of friendly familiarity and access, not fear.” And he doesn’t see that in the Bush administration. Norton also discusses Wisconsin Progressives in *SGW* — “La Follette and Feingold and Proxmire are great models for how the founding fathers’ public-spirited brand of politics can be carried into the modern era.”

As for founding father Madison, “he was paradoxically a champion of articulating individual liberty while doing some fairly despicable things vis-à-vis slavery” writes Norton. “In terms of my list of ‘favorite’ founders — which is headed by Hamilton, Washington and Franklin, in that order — Madison is near the bottom.” Maybe it had something to do with that bilious lax.



J.R. Norton seeks to restore the good relationship between the people and their government.



The UW-Madison’s **summer Writers’ Institute**, July 12-14, celebrates its 17th birthday with a keynote address by **David Maraniss**. The institute is more practical-minded about the business of writing than some other summer writers conferences, with sessions like “How to get

published in six months or less” and sessions with agents that sound like speed-dating.

Something new this year, says festival director **Christine DeSmet**, is “How to pitch to an agent,” which does not require that participants register for the whole \$215 workshop. DeSmet is also excited about Maraniss, who has a new book out (*Clemente*), “loves writers, and it’s very special to have him here.” See www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing or call 262-7942.



Trails Books has published *The Wisconsin Almanac*, a homebrew of lore, recipes, household tips, quotations, weather history and more. It’s all edited into a Badger-centric package by **Jerry Minnich**, who’s also a reviewer for *Isthmus* and author of *The Wisconsin Garden Guide*.

For the love of books



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