



## Backcast

*Ann McMan*

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"I love Ann McMan."—Dorothy Allison, National Book Award finalist for *Bastard Out of Carolina*

When sculptor and author Barb Davis is given an NEA grant to pair original feminist sculptures with searing first-person essays on transitions in women's lives, she organizes a two week writing retreat with twelve of the best, brightest, and most notorious lesbian authors in the business. But in between regularly scheduled happy hours and writing sessions, the women enter a tournament bass fishing competition, receive life coaching from a wise-cracking fish named Phoebe, and uncover a subterranean world of secrets and desires that is as varied and elusive as the fish that swim in the waters of Lake Champlain.

Set on the beautiful shores of Vermont's Lake Champlain, *Backcast* is richly populated with an expansive cast of endearing and outrageous characters who battle writer's block, quirky locals, personal demons, unexpected attractions, and even each other during their two-week residency. For Barb and each of her twelve writers, the stakes in this fast-moving story are high, but its emotional and romantic payoffs are slow and sweet.

Filled with equal parts laugh-out-loud humor and breathtaking pathos, *Backcast* serves up a sometimes irreverent, sometimes sobering look at the hidden lives of women, and how they laugh, love, lose, and blunder through their own search for meaning.

**Ann McMan** is the author of five novels, including *Jericho* and *Aftermath*, and two short story collections. She has won two Golden Crown Literary Awards and her novel, *Hoosier Daddy*, was a Lambda Literary Award Finalist.

## Backcast Details

Date : Published December 8th 2015 by Bywater Books

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Author : Ann McMan

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## From Reader Review Backcast for online ebook

### Les Read says

I didn't think it would be possible to beat Jericho, but it looks like Jeri Cho will be sharing her pedestal. Honestly, I was floored by the storytelling in Backcast. What an unexpected surprise this book turned out to be. Ever watch a movie at the theater, then end up turning the plot over in your mind days after seeing it? This is that type of story. And what's even better is that it's the kind of story in which the readers can gain a new perspective with every reread. I've read through this once and I feel like I've barely scratched the surface on what Ann McMan is trying to convey within its pages.

Reading the book jacket, you might feel a little overwhelmed with the number of narratives contained in Backcast (13 in total). I wondered if there were too many cooks in that kitchen, and whether or not the dinner would end up palatable. Lets just say that Backcast is the equivalent of a 12-course meal served at a Chinese wedding. Party. In. Your. Mouth. Or rather, party in your brain. Between chapters are the personal essays that the characters have written for the project. In the beginning, I was racking my brain trying to figure out which of the characters wrote each of the essays. I felt like I was playing a game of Clue, and losing... badly. It seemed like the essays could've been written by anyone. Hell, it could've even been written by Phoebe, the giant fish in the lake.

It wasn't until I was about halfway in that I realized that identifying the source was only secondary to what these stories meant collectively. These stories are our stories. These are our painful experiences and transitions. It can happen to you, it can happen to me, and we've all experienced (directly or indirectly) it's aftermath. Backcast illustrates how interconnected we are as women and as human beings, and your heart will fill with compassion for all of its characters. There were two stories in particular that made me tear up at the end. When it was revealed who the authors were in the appendix, I was a mess.

If there's only one novel you're going to read this year, make it this one.

[http://lesreadoutloud.com/2015/12/07/...](http://lesreadoutloud.com/2015/12/07/)

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### Kay Dennis says

I always look forward to Ann McMan's books. Her debut novel, JERICHO, captured me with its timeless story, rich characters and the humor that underscored it all. I promised myself I wouldn't miss anything she wrote subsequently, and I haven't. DUST, SIDECAR, AFTERMATH, THREE, HOOSIER DADDY, FESTIVAL NURSE...all were snapped up and devoured. Terrific stories, excellent writing, and I highly recommend them all.

And then there's BACKCAST.

As wonderful as the other McMan books are (and they are), BACKCAST is in a class of its own. Reuniting us with characters introduced in SIDECAR, BACKCAST is a novel about a baker's dozen of women brought together for a two week workshop on Vermont's Lake Champlain with a side foray into tournament fishing. There's even a 200 year old smart alec of a talking fish named Phoebe. An odd juxtaposition of characters and events...and yet. It works beautifully.

The narrative portion of the novel depicts the "here and now" of the characters while the individual essays written by each character recount defining moments in their lives. How Ann McMan meshes the two together is nothing short of amazing. I not only CARED about the characters, but I felt downright voyeuristic in reading their deeply personal essays. I think every woman can relate to at least one of the essays. Most of us can relate to more than one. Their experiences? Yes, but ours too.

To sum it up: GET THIS BOOK. Read it. Ponder it. It's set a new bar for lesbian literature.

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### **Ty says**

This was interesting. The reviews I read about it all talked about how funny it was. And while I found it entertaining, and it did illicit a fair number of smiles from me, funny is not the first thought that comes to me about this story. This is, I believe, a feminist piece. It's a group of women talking and writing about what it means to be a woman, both the beauty and the pain. There were a few instances where I was a tad uncomfortable because it seemed that some of the characters weren't inclusive of any experience that didn't fall under the umbrella of cisgender lesbian, but as I read on that impression lessened.

This had some unexpected plot twists, some I appreciated and some I really didn't, but overall I enjoyed reading this.

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### **Carol says**

I heard about Backcast before I ever read it, and my first reaction was jealousy. A woman named Ann McMan had written a book that featured a talking fish--a bass. And although I'd never even imagined such a concept, I wanted to have written a book with a talking bass. But after I read Backcast, I realized that I never could have written the character of Phoebe; only Ann McMan could have created her and made her believable. When I met Phoebe on the page, I fell in love immediately.

Maybe, reading this, you're thinking that you're not interested in a talking bass. No problem--Backcast has thirteen people with stories to tell you. Sculptor Barbara Davis has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to create a "touring exhibit of twelve sculptures that chronicle the female metamorphosis." Barb gathers eleven writers from the CLIT-con lesbian writers conference as well as her friend Mavis and brings them all to her cousins inn on Lake Champlain in Clifstock, VT for two weeks. Barb will work on the sculptures while the women write their stories. The stories appear throughout the book, numbered and in a different typeface. You might try to guess, as I did, which story goes with each character.

There's a lot of humor in Backcast, which is to be expected from Ann McMan. But there's so much more. Some of the stories will break your heart.

I can be a very judgmental person, making assumptions about what other people's lives are like. But Backcast reminded me that we never really know what other people have endured. To use a water metaphor, when we see people we are seeing the surface of the water. But beautiful worlds await those who dare to go deeper,

Backcast is a rare and wonderful book. Don't miss it.

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### **Sunaki says**

So something big happened to me, i fell in love, not with one, three or five, but 13 (12) ladies... i know i know, you are thinking hooow on earth, right?... i'll tell ya what, i'll share the simple steps so you can achieve this amazeballs feeling yourself.

Step 1: Buy this book

Step 2: read, read, read ..dont like even put it down - devour it

Step 3: Swoon here right next to me

ok? ready, set GO ..and cya in a bit ;)

No but seriously, this was one emotional rollercoaster ride, one minute you are laughing out loud, next awwww-ing and giggling and then POW! -misty eyes and blurry sight and a major craving for chocolate when those essays come up and u feel those stories tugging at your heartstrings making these characters dig their way into your heart, hyperspeed mode!

... Ann McMan, i really heart your book..thank you!

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### **Heidi says**

I think I missed something! I really enjoyed the book, but I think it's a book you need to read more than once to get all the details. I have questions, and maybe that's on purpose. Maybe I just didn't pick up on all the dynamics. I will read this book again.. Probably more than just one time. It makes you think. It's serious then humorous. Too many great things to say. Read it.

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### **Cheri says**

Most people think Ann McMan is great at writing humor but, for me, her biggest strength is the way she strips characters bare and exposes their souls. That's what I love about Backcast the most.

I wrote a longer review on my site (C-Spot Reviews) but it pretty much says what I wrote above.

(I went 4.5 on Booklikes but rounded up here)

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### **Loek Krancher says**

#### **Yes, it was marvelous!**

I don't know how to start this review, I can't find the right words. That's why I keep it simple for myself. I just loved it, it was a marvelous story. There was dynamic between the 13 women and of course plenty of drama. Each woman had her peculiarities and that made each of them so extraordinary. I have laughed at the strange dialogues (but meaningful) between Quinn and Phoebe. Ann did such a great job the way she described the fishing tournament, both the "training" as the competition itself. It felt like I was part of the

contest myself. The style of writing was very different but I enjoyed it very much.

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## **Velvet Lounger says**

It is so much harder to review a great book than it is to review a good book. With a good book you can slam dunk that it's a good story with good characters, say you liked it and you are done. When you read remarkable books, you have to think about it so much more – how to express why a book is significant without sounding sycophantic or fantastic.

So Ann McMan's *Backcast* is a great book. It is not just an excellent read, but an important book in a line of notable publications we are seeing from our really good lesbian authors. Lesbian writers who are moving the lesfic genre on; who make us think, challenge us, entertain us. Authors who want to write – can write – amazing books, who happen to be lesbians and don't sell out their personal story line to make their books mainstream – despite having the obvious ability to be lauded mainstream writers.

Before people start shouting, I am not criticising everybody else, or downing other authors. I love all sorts of lesfic from romance and erotica to fantasy and crime, and we need it all. But I also want us to have literary lesfic, modern lesfic that will stand up with Woolf and May-Brown, Miller and Forrest. Lesfic that shows off our great writers, that promotes good writing, that showcases the breadth and depth of our genre which has moved way beyond the 'penny dreadfuls' of the early days.

*Backcast* is one of those books. On the surface it is a fairly straightforward tale of 13 women who come together for two weeks at a writers workshop, from which the organising artist will create an exhibition. This simple plotline gives Ann McMan the platform to create 13 strong, individual, extremely powerful and eccentric characters. Out of such a seemingly modest beginning we have drama, romance, history – except it really is herstory this time – and a deeply personal glance into what makes these women who they are.

As always, McMan's books are elegantly and cohesively put together. Her words flow and the balance between the elements is so perfect you forget you are reading. Her characterisation and dialogue are immaculate presentations of real people, they must be real for her descriptions to be so tangible and the characters to be so authentic. And to add flavour we have 13 shorts in the voices of our 13 women, again realistic, authentic, the expressions of genuine women's lives.

It made me laugh, a lot – McMan's books have a deep-seated humour running through their veins. It made me cry – I defy any of our friends and family of choice to read 'Heal Thyself' after recent events and not weep. But most of all it made me feel like I was there, sitting on the lawn chairs, drinking the cocktails, hating the aspic, enjoying these women.

There is a flavour of the women's scene from yesteryear for me personally. Maybe it has survived in the conferences and festivals in the US, but I haven't been in that atmosphere of exciting, creative, challenging women since the 90's. I think it no accident that most of these women are not spring chickens, and many have literally been around the block.

You see it has me enthralled. I have to read it again. I don't have a choice. One reading simply isn't enough to garner even a part of the richness and depth of these women and their interactions – let alone know all I need to know about competitive bass fishing.

I rarely give books 5 stars anymore because if I give out too many 5's what's left? Needless to say this is a 6. Read it.

(publisher review copy received)

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### **Agirlcandream says**

I loved the essays written by the thirteen participants of the art installation and enjoyed trying to match the characters at the retreat with their back stories. I will reread this novel again just to see if I have any better success. I also enjoyed and appreciated the inclusion and representation of many facets of the LGBTQ spectrum.

What didn't work for me was the slapstick comedy, the predictable stereotypical lesbian humour, and the familiarity between such a large cast of characters.

There is nothing wrong with humour in a good story. I loved all the scenes involving Quinn, Montana , Junior and their "bass boat". Quinn's voyage of discovery was a highlight for me. The many conversations and silly debates between characters at the retreat detracted from what could have been a powerful book about the lives and resiliency of the women involved.

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### **Eel says**

I thoroughly enjoyed the book. Ms McMan has a wicked sense of humour. Phoebe was a blast; and I enjoyed the complexities, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies exhibited by the members of the group of 13.

In fact, it took me a bit to recognize the characters as being from another of her stories, but I can be a tad dense at times.

I thought Quinn's side trip would have no bearing on the authors' gathering. It was an Aha! moment when it all came together.

Pfft! Clearly I was not in tune with Ms McMan. Which is why she is the writer and I but a humble reader.

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### **G Ratcliff says**

Hope... That is the overriding emotion this book left me with. Don't misunderstand, I ran the gamut of the emotional spectrum as I read, but Hope won out.

This story is as layered and intricate as a Tibetan sand painting, exhibiting such beauty, focus and care with each character as to make them familiar. I 'knew' these women. I've met them, socialized with them, loved them, been them. Woven throughout are the 'project essays', initially with character author unknown, standing as sentinels of survival, of courage, and strength in the face of those many challenges one faces in life.

The setting, the characters and their individual foibles, the purpose for this unusual gathering of writers, and those essays all combine to produce an emotionally breathtaking masterpiece. If you're like me, you will try to match the essay to the character and if you're really paying attention you may get a few right. In the end, when you discover the owner of each essay, there are 'aha moments' in abundance.

Ann McMan has written a story that stands in a literary class occupied by few and should not be missed. If it's not in your 'to be read' pile, it should be.

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### **Beckie says**

I read this with anticipation I had listened to the Author talk about it on the Cocktail Hour, I was hoping they were right that this was a great book. They were, it was smart and funny, the characters were treated with respect I find it fascinating that so many voices could be shared in such a small place yet I did not feel that any one got short changed each encounter revealed something about them each and every time they made an appearance and I felt that I like them all, not because they had something spectacular about them but because they like the rest of us were on a journey through this life and are trying to do the best that they can to be the best that they are. I love the book one of the best that I have read.

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### **Tara says**

This book left me wrecked for days. I loved it so much, now I'm recommending it to anyone who will listen.

Full review here: <http://www.thelesbianreview.com/backc...>

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### **Anne says**

LOVED, LOVED, LOVED this book! Loved the story, the characters and the symbolism. Apparently you can judge a book by its cover. In this case they are both fantastic! Thank you, Ann McMan.

Now I'm ready for a cold Backcast Pale Ale.

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