

Double shot of Fay Weldon

By JUDITH GROSSMAN
Los Angeles Times

"Leader of the Band" by Fay Weldon, 186 pages, Viking, \$17.95. "Polaris & Other Stories" by Fay Weldon, 237 pages, Penguin Books, \$6.95.

A double shot of wise woman Fay Weldon's Special Purge Tonic for the contemporary heart is what we get with the simultaneous publication of her latest novel and second book of short stories. The flavor of the potion has mellowed over the years since "The Life and Loves of a She-Devil," but the kick is still there.

You might find yourself looking up from Weldon's pages at an approaching mate or child and impulsively dropping the usual accommodating response for a frank confrontation. You might even take the novel's heroine, Starlady Sandra, for a role model and walk out on the whole show, especially if someone as exciting as Jack the Mad Trumpeter is available for company.

But perhaps not. For Sandra is a concoction of new and old fantasies: a distinguished astronomer who has discovered a new planet and named it Athena, who is blonde, in great shape at 42 and the star of her own TV science program. She has forgone childbearing to be a model and happens to be the daughter of an insane Gypsy mother and a German SS camp doctor. Hence, she says, "I make myself dear to the pleas of the unborn. As many as my father brought into existence, I will keep out of it. I will make things even as the whole universe craves to do. . . . Let him stand outside the wall and breathe his phony breath, and wait. I won't have his children, no I won't."

In a weak moment, she has fallen into a boring marriage with Matthew, an ambitious lawyer. But with such a destabilizing background, who can blame her for breaking out and running off to France for a summer of happy sex and music? As for Jack's own family, they ought to be dead by this escapade, since these occur every summer. That in the way artistes are, thinks Sandra cheerfully, and she wastes no pity on their women who drudge and cling.

"Women who play mother — who nurture, cosset, bite back harsh words — get left, as if they were the real thing. And the man is right to go. For the woman who lives her life through a man is truly manipulative and dangerous. She has him retired and in slippers, or pottering round the garden in no time at all."

Sandra won't live that way. She understands that the sexual arena is ruled by random affinities, competitiveness and opportunity, and makes her chances knowing there is no security or fairness in it. At the



FAY WELDON

end, pregnant by Jack, she is thinking about leaving him before he leaves her, and — in a remarkable about-face — becoming a single mother. Here the author plays the Mother Nature role, allowing her heroine to enjoy the free-lance party only for so long and then bringing her back to the procreative fold.

"Polaris & Other Stories" continues Weldon's exploration of the ways men and women invent to satisfy their complex desires. The title story is the prize piece of the collection. In it, the officers in charge of a nuclear attack submarine are shown manning to hold a difficult balance under the pressure of their dehumanizing jobs and interrupted marriages. The key to that balance turns out to be the practice of concocting exquisite international cuisine at the bottom of the ocean. It is a charming and persuasive vision, as in the scene where a lunch countdown is about to suffer an emergency interruption:

"Some of the exotic veg. air aren't on board," said Percival. "We have no submarines, no fresh chiles and no fresh ginger. The captain turned a concerned face towards his crewmen. 'Of course,' said Rating Daily, 'we have powdered chile and powdered ginger. That's stock issue. But I know how keen you are on the fresh, and it doesn't solve the submarine question.'"

One of the chief delights in these stories is the accuracy in taking on the manners of a particular institution or of a relationship. And, like the experienced dramatist that she is, Weldon makes entertaining use of conversational repartee. In an age that favors specialization among writers, Weldon has found and held her own as a smart and wickily outspoken interpreter of women's relationships.

A look behind the veil

By SUSAN DOOLEY
Newhouse News Service

"Harem: The World Behind the Veil" by Alex Lytle Crouzier, Abbeville Press, \$35.

The harem was a secret world, and because it was unknowable to men, then and now, it became a sensual fantasy in which hundreds of willing women disposed themselves in diaphanous clothes, ready to do the bidding of their master. And if a woman was to have her own fantasy about life in that cushioned kingdom, it was to dream of days spent in voluptuous ease, covered with jewels while slaves brought baskets of dates and popovers.

The women in the harem did live in such luxury, with everything available but freedom, as Alex Lytle Crouzier makes clear in her fascinating look at the world behind the veil. It is not an easy world to penetrate. There were few women who kissed and lived to tell what life was like with a passionate pasha. For many the end came when the lord tired of them and had them put into sacks and drowned, the usual way of getting rid of aging or unsatisfactory concubines.

Crouzier's story is not one of sexual excess but of numbing boredom in a world where the thing one did was to wait: wait for an opportunity to become the favored, wait for a chance to bear a son, wait in fear lest the son be killed by a rival mother; wait for

small outings, where the women, heavily veiled, were escorted to a market or to a rural spot for a picnic.

Alex Lytle Crouzier herself grew up in Turkey, a world where the harems had not been custom, but a religious one.

"One of the slips of parchment passed on to Mohammed said, 'If your wives do not obey you, chastise them. If one wife does not suffice, take four.' And, writes

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that long abolished. She tells of being befriended as a child by one of the last of the eunuchs, those unfortunate slaves who were stripped of their manhood so that they could safely serve as guards in the women's quarters. And she gives the book a depth that makes it far more than a titillating glance at an exotic custom by weaving in the stories of her own childhood, the experiences of older relatives in what was, after all, not merely a regal

women. The sons of the harem, the brothers and male relatives of the Sultan, were trapped too. Often they were murdered, rivals gotten rid of. Sometimes they were merely kept in the Golden Cage, in a luxurious isolation which matched that of the women in the harem and which occasionally drove its inhabitants into a frightened madness.

The richness of Crouzier's book lies not just in the fact that she has seen together all the little scraps of information about life in the seraglio, piecing together a whole, with the daily routines and the daily fears, but that she has also tried to give a context in which to view what seems an Eastern world of exotic cruelty.

She reminds us that in the West. "By the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus had promulgated their belief that women were capable of engaging in intercourse with Satan. On these grounds, the Inquisition identified and condemned certain women to be burned alive. Female submission was thus complete."

The secret of a harem artist and Crouzier's book is beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated with photographs, prints, and paintings from archives as diverse as Ingres and Manet, showing how each reached into fantasy to render the image of the odalisque.

Croutier. "While the wealthy lords kept opulent harems that were smaller versions of the Grand Harem, with numerous eunuchs and odalisques, the poor contented themselves with keeping two wives in one small room, a mere curtain separating them."

At the top, in the palace where the Grand Harem stood hidden behind latticed windows, the Sultan reigned supreme and it was he who was cruel, as he often was, his brutalities were not just limited

given her history, she remains a romantic.

"When Hayslip makes her return trip to Southeast Asia after a decade and a half in the U.S., she meets a Norwegian working there, describing their encounter with a wistful, helpless romanticism. Norwegian men, who live in a country run by women, are notoriously unattractive and unattractive and either I missed some subtext in this encounter, or Hayslip looks on any man as a helpmeet. Helpful about men I can understand. But romantic? I cannot quite grasp.

As autobiography, this book is beyond criticism. Who has not the right to tell her story as she experienced it? But as history, the book lacks specificity. Specificity is what makes history work. On such and such a date, in a town of so many people, at a spot x meters from the edge of town — coordinates listed from the point of view of minds and clearly the muddy whirl of events. That is Lytle Hayslip, given her age at the time and her circumstances, may be unable to recall such key details would not be important if she told us as much or better, if she could offer some reasons for her selectivity.

But she does not, and I got lost in her text trying to figure out what was happening when, I could see her standing in the rice fields, giving warnings to the Viet Cong, but I could not place that scene on a larger landscape.

Her story, "When Heaven and Earth Changed Places," is the private side of the Vietnamese war. The private side may rarely be told, and it is, supremely, the woman's side. We are used to war stories told from the point of view of the soldier, the journalist, the historian, the expert. Hayslip gives us the point of view of a woman, combining her autobiography with an eyewitness account of Vietnam's history over the last 40 years. As a memoir her story is a revealing disclosure of her female psyche. I suffered with her, to feel, to tell what it was and is like to be nothing more than the dust crawled into bed with her pain and her emotional whod after the rape. I understood why, when still a young woman, she took her employer into her bed. What I did not understand is why, she survived, when she met and how she felt as a Vietnamese woman in horrific times and circumstances.

Of course, she is an American now, a Southern Californian. She has the dual identity, a story to tell, a purpose. Her purpose is to heal, to tell what it was and is like to be nothing more than the dust crawled into bed with her pain and her emotional whod after the rape. I understood why, when still a young woman, she took her employer into her bed. What I did not understand is why, she survived, when she met and how she felt as a Vietnamese woman in horrific times and circumstances.

Q: I've always associated the word "chauvinist" with the woman's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. However, my wife insists that the concept of chauvinism goes back much farther in history. Can you settle this dispute? — H.M., Hillsboro, Ore.

A: You can end this battle of the sexes. You're both right to some extent. The first chauvinist was served out in the superiority of men over women but rather in the superiority of his nation or other. Nicolas Chauvin was a French patriot who fought under the command of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. Despite being wounded many times he never lost his patriotic spirit. He continued to idolize Napoleon even after the crushing defeat at Waterloo, and his blind devotion to a lost cause and to the glory of France made him a laughingstock among his countrymen.

Not surprisingly, Chauvin inspired the French term "chauvinism," meaning "blind or excessive patriotism," which was borrowed into English in the last third of the 19th century. This sense of the word "chauvinism" prevailed until around 1950, when the word "chauvinist" took on the

meaning of an attitude of superiority toward members of the opposite sex, most often encountered in the phrase "male chauvinist," which became a vogue word of the feminist movement during the 1960s and 1970s and continues in common use today. The older meaning is still being used.

Q: In school I am studying the plural formation of words ending in "t." One thing I can't understand is why "chiefs" is the correct plural of "chief," while the plural of "chief" is "chiefs." — G.N., Valley City, Ohio.

A: The answer to your question lies in the history of these words. This is one of the oldest words in our language (an interesting comment on human nature). It has been found in Old English writing as early as the end of the 7th century. Old English had no letter "v," but it did have a "w" sound. Whenever the letter "v" was pronounced it was pronounced like "w."

By the time Old English evolved into Middle English, the Old English plural of "chief" was "chives." The plural had come to be spelled as it is pronounced, with a "v." This spelling has come down to us in modern English in "chiefs."

The word chief, however, is not an Old English word. It was im-

Sunday Republican BOOKS

'Heaven and Earth' for everyone

This memoir of the war in Vietnam should be required reading in military colleges and in high schools and universities looking for broader, more personal interpretations of geo-politics.

At the same time her life is the stuff of a miniseries — or would be if television ever learned to view Eastern lives as fully human and not simply as a part of the scenery behind Western lives. Lytle Hayslip lives with war as a child. At puberty she is tortured, then raped. Later, she has a child out of wedlock. She carries her father. She reverts to smokes. She struggles, survives, marries one American, then another. Peasant

These are strong words about a book that has some troubling flaws. But its overarching theme — that the innocent victims are nameless people but individual human beings — is an essential message in a world that measures history by its wars and body counts. Lytle Hayslip's narrative of her life as a child in a Vietnamese village overrun by the French, the Viet Cong, the Republican Army of South Vietnam, the Americans, the Viet Cong, the Republicans, the Americans, etc., etc., etc. is painful stuff. Of course it is. It's real.

Take our word: 'Getting the bugs out'

Q: I've often wondered where we get the expression "get the bugs out." Does it have something to do with the removal of listening devices? — S.B., Huntsville, Ala.

A: While your theory regarding the origin of this expression is attractive, the real story began long before the invention of those clever listening devices known as bugs. The invention of the phonograph back in the late 19th century seems to have inspired the use of the word "bug" to mean flaw or defect, although the term may have been used this way in speech even before then.

In 1889, a local newspaper reported that Thomas Edison "had been up the bugs ironed out" by around 1855. In fact, Edison's reported use of the term also paved the way for the use of "bug" to mean anything irritating, from diseases to covert listening devices.

Nowadays, we even use the word as a verb meaning "to irritate."

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Best sellers

FICTION	This Last Week		
	Week	Week	List
The Russia House, by John Le Carré	1	1	5
Walking My Pretty Steps, by Mary Higgins Clark	2	5	9
Talking God, by Tony Hillerman	3	2	11
The Negotiator, by Frederick Forsyth	4	3	11
Red Phoenix, by Larry Bond	5	4	6
Capital Crimes, by Lawrence Sanders	6	6	6
The Joy Luck Club, by Amy Tan	7	8	14
The Temple of My Familiar, by Alice Walker	8	7	10
The Andy Warhol Diaries, edited by Pat Hackett	9	9	19
The Night the Bear Ate Coonaw, by Patrick F. McManus	10	10	2

NON-FICTION

A Woman Named Jackie, by C. David Heymann	1	3	9
It's Always Something, by Glenda Radner	2	5	5
All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten, by Robert Fulghum	3	2	36
Summer of '69, by David Halberstam	4	1	7
Love and Marriage, by Bill Cosby	5	4	11
The Good Times, by Russell Baker	6	6	5
A Brief History of Time, by Stephen W. Hawking	7	8	64
The Andy Warhol Diaries, edited by Pat Hackett	8	10	7
The Night the Bear Ate Coonaw, by Patrick F. McManus	9	9	9
Papa, My Father, by Leo Bascaglia	10	7	3

Paperbacks

FICTION	GENERAL	
	1	2
1. Sons by Doris Lessing	1. Sensational Privilege, by Leo Damico	1
2. The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger, by Stephen King	2. Talking Straight, by Leo Janeway with Sonya Dworkin	2
3. Gates of Paradise, by V.C. Andrews	3. Love, Medicine & Miracles, by Bernice S. Reiter	3
4. Alaska, by James M. McManus	4. Blood Blood by Jerry Blodgett	4
5. The 100 Most Amazing by Judith Krantz	5. The Mexican Revolution, by Steven Nathin and Gregory White	5
6. Bastards, by Craig Shaw Gardner	6. NOVICE, MICHELE LINDEN	6
7. "Trinity" by Tom Clancy	7. NOVICE, MICHELE LINDEN	7
8. The Silence of the Lambs, by Thomas Harris	8. Yuletide, by Bill Watterston	8
9. The Shell Seeker, by Rosamunde Pilcher	9. Beyond Capricorn, by Melody Beyer	9
10. Star Trek V: The Final Frontier, by J.M. DeMatteis	10. Blood Money, by David L. Robbins	10

Note: Titles in bold are based on circulation information from Nielsen BookScan. All other titles are based on sales data from Nielsen BookScan.