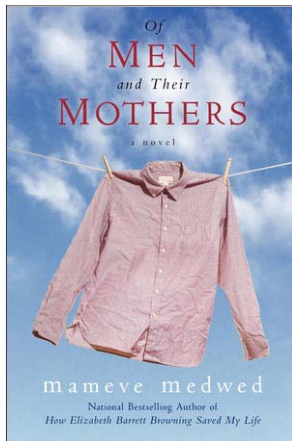


Serious about funny

'Bangor's other writer,' Mameve Medwed, embraces comic fiction as a vehicle for stories about larger issues, such as class, love, death and politics.

By TOM ATWELL, Staff Writer
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Mameve Medwed considers herself Bangor's other author. Her mother taught Stephen King's children in nursery school, and she feels a connection to him, although their books are nothing alike.

Medwed's books are funny, take place for the most part in college communities, and look at a topic she believes people are not supposed to discuss in America: class, especially as it relates to town-and-gown differences.

She has written five novels, the most recent of which is "Of Men and their Mothers," which involves a woman who has just ended her marriage but still has to deal with her mother-in-law. She also has to deal with what she believes is a mistake her son is making in the choice of a love interest.



Mameve Medwed

Medwed is married to another Bangor native, whom she first met in nursery school and met again while they were in college. They live in Cambridge, Mass., and have two grown sons.

Mameve is pronounced "May-Meeve," and she was named after the combined names of her two grandmothers, Mamie and Eva.

Q: You were born in Bangor. How old were you before you left, and do you still come back much?

A: I lived there until I went to college, all my life until I got married, until the 1960s. My parents came from there, and my whole family did.

I go back quite a bit because I have a cousin who is still there and I go a lot to Brunswick because I have a cousin who lives there. Part of my heart and my soul are in Maine.

I often call myself Bangor's other author. My mother actually taught Stephen King's children in nursery school, and I got to review his book on writing for Newsday, so I feel a connection there, although our books are nothing alike.

Q: Was it difficult to write a humorous novel on mothers-in-law without veering into the territory of an old-fashioned mother-in-law joke?

A: Yes it was, and it was very tough not to veer into caricature rather than character. This mother-in-law is not a good woman, but I had to give her her small moments of redemption. With my last book I had a contest on my Web site for

people to name their top object of desire, and I got about seven entries. This time I asked for mother-in-law stories and I got about a zillion entries. Most were for the worst mother-in-law, but some were wonderful and very touching.

Q: At least your last two novels are based in Cambridge, and the place is almost like a character itself. Has living in such an eccentric place helped you, or could you have done it anywhere?

A: I am fascinated about things that revolve around the issue of town and gown. One word you can't mention in America is class. We are supposed to be a classless society, but we are really a very class-ridden society, and I love to write about class, with all the town-and-gown academics and failed academic stars.

This current book, "Of Men and Their Mothers," involves a working-class mother whose child is at risk of being taken away, and it discusses this kind of blue-collar, white-collar dichotomy, as well as a mother who has trouble cutting apron strings and those who cut them all too early.

I love writing about Cambridge. I have one novel set in a Maine college town, probably Waterville, and when that was done I felt very lonely and wanted to go back to Cambridge. For one thing, you don't run out of restaurants.

Q: Except that the Wursthau is gone.

A: The Wursthau, and Elsie's is gone, and we have lost our independent bookstores. Harvard Square is all about franchises now, but it is still a wonderful place.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: What I have started, and I am only on page 1 of it -- it is really horrible, but I have been on this tour and it is the gift that keeps on giving, and I've had a hard time finding time to write. But it is about a woman who takes up trapeze at the age of 50. But I may have to give it up. I'm afraid I'll have to take up trapeze myself.

Q: And you have a book that has been optioned for a movie. Where is that?

A: It is my first book, "Mail," and it was optioned for a movie 10 years ago by a wonderful team with Anand Tucker. Sharon Maguire, who did "Bridget Jones's Diary," signed on as director. Wendy Wasserstein did the screenplay before she died, and the project just stopped. One good thing is that I did get to go to the premiere of "Bridget Jones's Diary," and arrive on the red carpet right after Rene Zellweger, and the lights were flashing. Then I heard the photographer say, "Who are they?" and somebody said "Nobody," and the lights went off. Which tells you pretty much where writers stand in the movies.

Q: Anything you would like to say that I haven't asked about?

A: I would like to make a pitch for comedy. Woody Allen said those of us who write comic fiction have to sit at the children's table. A lot of people dismiss our work as lite, spelled L-I-T-E. But I would like to tell all my readers that there is nothing wrong with being entertaining. We who write comedy are dealing with the same things Tolstoy wrote about: love and lust and death and politics. We cover the same territory, and I do believe that in writing about the small places, you can see the whole world.

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