

War reporter

Russell Banks travels to Liberia for a new novel

Best known for depicting working-class men in New Hampshire, Russell Banks lately has been turning to history and race for inspiration. His next novel, *The Darling*, is the first-person account of Hannah Musgrave, a '70s radical who marries a government official in Liberia and witnesses that country's hellish descent into two civil wars. Here, the 64-year-old author talks about his new book and his lifelong interest in race.

Time Out New York: I was surprised to read that you were involved with *Students for a Democratic Society* in the '60s.

Russell Banks: Well, I was never full-time, because I was a student, and married with a child, and trying to be a writer. Other people went further on, into the Weather Underground, and I've always been intrigued by that—the road not taken.

TONY: You've written about race in *Continental Drift* and *Cloudsplitter*. How does a guy from New Hampshire, one of the country's whitest states, become fascinated with race?

RB: I hit the road when I was 18 and ended up in the South and in Florida. And I was in college at the height of the civil-rights

movement, and that cemented it for me. As my work has gone on, it sensitized me to the whole narrative of race in American history, to the point where I've come to believe that it's central.

TONY: What kind of research did you do for *The Darling*?

RB: I tried to get into Liberia at exactly the wrong time—last July—when the bodies were piling up in Monrovia. I got to the border and decided that it was too risky to go in. But I did do a lot of research in Ghana and Sierra Leone. I even managed to talk to a CIA agent who had been in charge of that area during the period I was writing about.

TONY: You take an active role in your books' film adaptations.

RB: Most of what I do is solitary, so collaborating on a movie is a nice corrective. I learned throughout the making of *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Affliction* that you can make a good movie if you work with the right people. If you try hard to make a serious work of cinematic art, it can actually happen.—*David Cote*

The Darling is out October 1 from HarperCollins.

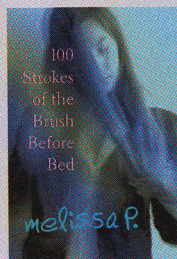
Clit lit

Rejoice, you porn lovers behind the literary label! This fall promises a win of fictional memoirs detail salacious appetites of around the globe. The controversial books have raised tempers—and temperatures—in their native countries. But are they hot enough to fire up American audiences? —*Beth Greenfield*

9/2004

Time out

☼ = sex toys
\$ = prostitutes
↑ = incest



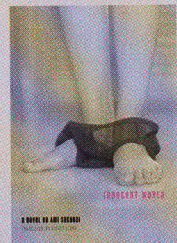
100 Strokes of the Brush Before Bed (Grove, Oct 10)

Author: "Melissa P.," a.k.a. 18-year-old Melissa Panarello from Sicily, whose debut has sold 700,000 copies in Italy alone since its European release in July 2003

Story: A 14-year-old schoolgirl named Melissa confesses in her diary to a series of sexual encounters involving older men, a woman and an S&M orgy.

Most shocking scene: Melissa screws her math teacher with a strap-on, calling him a "disgusting brute."

Term used for vagina: "my Secret"



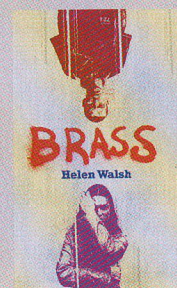
Innocent World (Vertical, Sept 25)

Author: Investigative journalist Ami Sakurai, who has reported for CNN on teen prostitution in Japan

Story: Ami, 17, lives in Tokyo and works as a prostitute so she can afford to visit her mentally retarded older brother, with whom she is having an affair.

Most shocking scene: Tough choice: either the first time she has sex with her brother or the first time she has sex with her father

Term used for vagina: "my most naive aperture"



Brass (Canongate, Nov 9)

Author: Helen Walsh, 26, British cryptofeminist with genuine talent

Story: In the raciest and best-written of the lot, Millie, a 19-year-old Liverpool college student, drifts into a seedy underworld as she overindulges in drugs, booze and young female prostitutes; meanwhile, her best friend—an older man—stifles his crush on the lascivious lass.

Most shocking scene: A toss-up between (a) Millie getting high and having sex with a pubescent-girl prostitute in a cemetery, and (b) Millie raping a drunk, puking 14-year-old girl in a bathroom.

Term used for vagina: "my cunt"

NOVEMBER

Case Histories by Kate Atkinson: Soft-boiled, sensitive detective Jackson Brodie investigates three cold cases of missing girls in this stylish triptych. *Little, Brown*

Oh, Play That Thing by Roddy Doyle: Irish thug Henry Smart (*A Star Called Henry*) returns, now on the lam in 1920s New York and Chicago, where he crosses paths with a trumpet player named Armstrong. *Viking*

Counterculture Through the Ages by Ken

Goffman (a.k.a. RU Sirius): *The Mondo 2000* guru explores 13 antiauthoritarian cultural movements, from Socratic philosophy and Zen Buddhism to punk rock and 21st-century cyberculture. *Random*

Gilead by Marilyn Robinson: Robinson's long-awaited second book (her first was 1981's *Housekeeping*), about an Iowa preacher, really is a Great American Novel. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux*

I Am Charlotte Simmons by Tom Wolfe:



The white-suited author's wide-eyed, book-smart protagonist is shocked—simply shocked!—to find college full of hard-drinking, sex-crazed philistines. *FSG*

We Are All the Same by Jim Wooten: This powerful biography shows how one precocious, determined young boy, born with AIDS in South Africa, made his life count. *Penguin Press*

HIGHLIGHTS

PHOTOGRAPH: (TOP LEFT) ROBERT SARGENT FAY