



# LGBT Reading Group



## September/October 2007



### The Read... Around the Houses

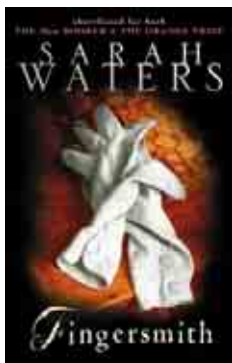
Anna is an ordinary woman in an extraordinary situation. She's having a baby, the father's gay, her lover's a woman and she still hasn't told her parents. Ruby is feckless, 40 and fondling every man she can. Her neighbours are OAPs from hell and straight Greg from across the road has been abandoned. Into all this walks student Shirley but Pearl, her mother, is coming too. Anna and her new family have to deal with the consequences of coming out; Ruby has to face up to a violent past; Shirley falls for Greg; and Pearl finds her true self at the Cosmic Café. The subject of this quirky, insightful and sharp novel, Balham will never be the same again. ISBN 978-1852426972



### The Author... Amanda Boulter

Amanda Boulter is Senior Lecturer in English & Creative Writing at the University of Winchester. After spending most her days at work talking about heavy literature, she's writing this series as a bit of light relief. This was her first novel from the series published by Serpent's Tail. She lives with her partner and their two sons in Dorset.

**Our Opinion...** It's unfortunate that this book suggests that it'll be a modern, English *Tales of the City* [see Aug/Sep review] because, disappointingly, it's nowhere near. Although the opening chapter sets the foundations for what could have been a dark and quirky comedy, the ensuing story dawdles down an unengaging, predictable path. Set around the county's most remarkable suburban cul-de-sac and a right-on vegetarian cooperative café, most readers found little depth in the main characters and even less in their situations. There are also countless introductions to indistinct extra characters, which we found distracting. To the author's credit, this book is the light read the cover suggests it might be, is unpretentious and has some brilliantly witty moments... but they are just too few and far between to recommend this book to anyone else. We wanted to enjoy it more, but just couldn't. Maybe the next volume *Back Around the Houses* pays better homage to Anna Madrigal?



### What Next? Fingersmith By Sarah Waters

Divided into three parts, the tale is narrated by two orphaned girls whose lives are inextricably linked. 17-year-old orphan Susan has been raised by Mrs Sucksby in a household of fingersmiths (pickpockets), coiners and burglars. One evening a handsome confidence man arrives with an elaborate scheme to defraud Maud Lilly, a wealthy heiress. If Sue will help him she'll get a share of the "shine". Duly installed in the Lillys' country house as a maid, Sue finds that her mistress is virtually a prisoner controlled by her uncle. Slowly an intimacy develops between the two girls and as the plan takes shape, Sue begins to have doubts. The scheme is finally hatched but as Maud commences her narrative it becomes difficult to tell quite who has double-crossed who...

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