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Milkweed Editions is pleased to announce the May 2011 publication of:

The Long-Shining Waters by Danielle Sosin

Winner of the Milkweed National Fiction Prize

Lake Superior, the north country, the great fresh-water expanse. Frigid. Bountiful. Lethal. Wildly beautiful. *The Long-Shining Waters* gives us the stories of women separated by centuries and circumstance, yet connected across time by the place they inhabit.

In 1622, Grey Rabbit—an Ojibwe woman, a mother and wife—struggles to understand a dream-life that has taken on fearful dimensions. In 1902, Berit and Gunnar, a Norwegian couple, fish the great lake. Unable to conceive, Berit finds beauty in the lake that anchors her isolated life, yet those same waters ultimately test the limits of her endurance and spirit. And in 2000, Nora, a seasoned bar owner, abruptly loses her livelihood. Left facing an open-ended future, she's drawn into a reluctant road trip around the lake.

Haunting, rich in historical detail, and universal in its exploration of the human desire for meaning when faced with uncertainty, *The Long-Shining Waters* is an unforgettable and singular debut.

Praise for *The Long-Shining Waters*

"Sosin writes sensuously detailed prose and distills the emotions of her characters into a **profound and universal** need for acceptance and love."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"**Danielle Sosin constructs a truly inspiring work of fiction** near the 'big waters' of Minnesota. It is an ambitious novel, haunting in its depiction of the life of the characters. It is a wonderful book. I loved it."

—Nuruddin Farah, author of *Knots and Links*

"Danielle Sosin's beautiful, resonant prose is a joy, and her devotion to what compels us to gather on the shores of great waters distinguishes this novel that is, as well, a great story. **The intimate portrait of three women bound by their times and coming unbound in the great tidal pull of history is deeply affecting, wise and true.** *The Long-Shining Waters* is an enchantment, a challenge, a tale to fall into and carry long after it's done."

—Patricia Weaver Francisco, author of *Telling*

Danielle Sosin is the author of *Garden Primitives*, a collection of stories (Coffee House Press, 2000). Her fiction has been featured in the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and has been recorded for National Public Radio's *Selected Shorts: A Celebration of the Short Story*, and Iowa Public Radio's *Live From Prairie Lights*. *The Long-Shining Waters*, her debut novel, was awarded the Milkweed National Fiction Prize. Born in 1959, she lives in Duluth, Minnesota.

Danielle Sosin is available for interview.

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The Not So Old Woman and the Sea

BY CLAIRE KIRCH

Danielle Sosin has always been fascinated by Lake Superior. So fascinated, in fact, that she decided to leave the Twin Cities and relocate to Duluth, Minn., for a year to live next to the largest freshwater lake in the world while researching local archives for a novel that she felt compelled to write.

That was eight years ago. *The Long-Shining Waters* (Milkweed Editions) will be released this May, and Sosin, 51, still lives in Duluth.

Sosin admits that moving to Duluth to write a book isn't the first time she's been pulled along by forces beyond her control. Growing up in Minneapolis, Sosin "always hated writing in school" and never took English classes during the three years she spent at Carleton College. But after "hanging out with writers" in the late 1980s while dating a creative

writing professor, she took a writing class at Minneapolis's Loft Literary Center taught by the author Patricia Weaver Francisco. Sosin was hooked. "I thank my lucky stars I walked into [Francisco's] classroom," Sosin says. "She became my mentor. The relationship began and never ended."

Sosin, who holds a master's degree in psychology, has since worked only part-time jobs so she could write. Currently she works for a landscaping company, designing and building residential gardens.

Disclosing that, to this day, she finds writing "extremely difficult, even excruciating," she also finds it essential, "a way for me to order things so that they make sense." Her work isn't plot driven, but, rather, explorations of the inner lives of her characters and their kinship

to their natural surroundings. "I'm more interested in seekers than finders," she explains.

After Coffee House Press editor Chris Fischbach saw some of her stories, he published her collection, *Garden Primitives* (2002).

"I really needed that," she recalls. "There was a legitimacy in publishing my first book."

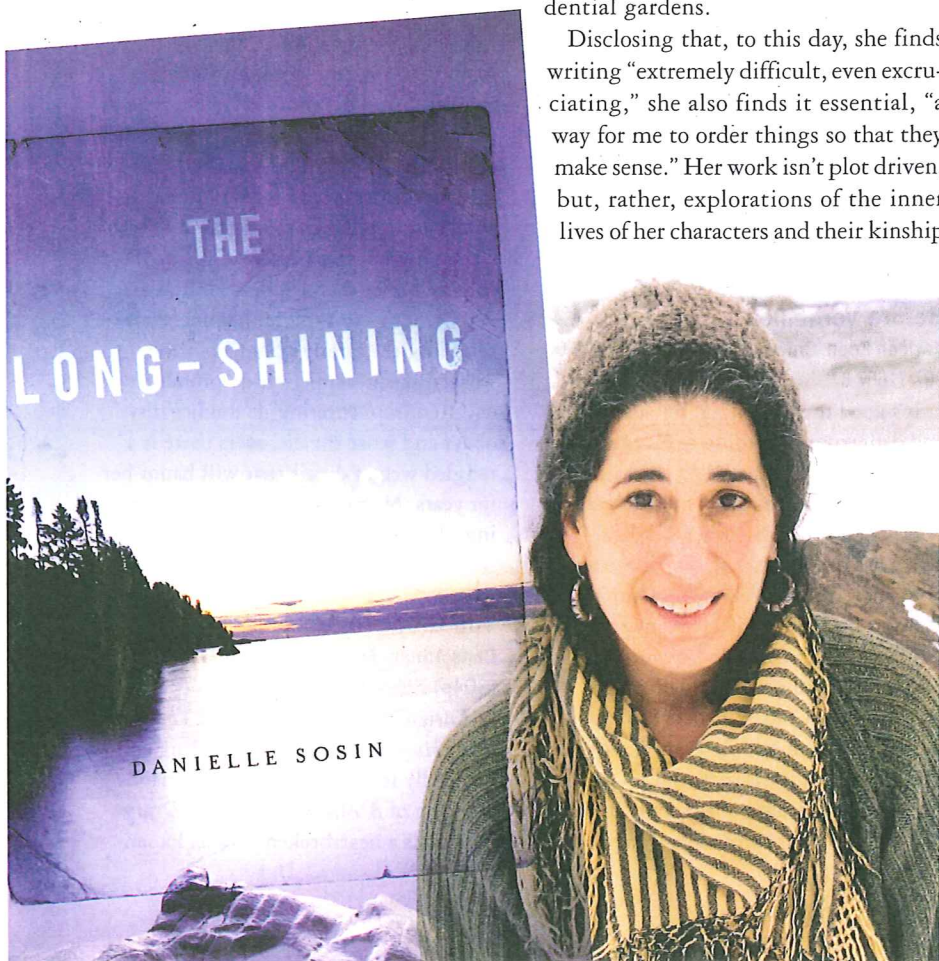
About the same time, Sosin tried to write a short story about Lake Superior. It was a failure, she says, "The topic was too big to do in short form."

Writing a novel, however, presented formidable challenges: "How do you keep a character alive for 300 pages instead of 30? How do you hold tension in a story arc for 300 pages instead of 30? How do you try to have three story arcs and a central voice?" (which was exactly what she ended up with in *The Long-Shining Waters*).

The Long-Shining Waters follows three women through the changing seasons of a pivotal year in their lives: Grey Rabbit, an Ojibwe Indian disturbed by dreams portending some unknown threat to her tribe's way of life; Berit, the Scandinavian-American wife of a fisherman who goes out on his boat one morning and never returns; and Nora, a bar owner whose life is upended when the bar burns down, prompting her to take a road trip around Lake Superior. Their lives are separated by centuries, their most obvious link a common experience of living on the shores of the huge body of water that Grey Rabbit calls "Gichigami" in 1622. Berit in 1902 and Nora in 2000 refer to that same body of water simply as "the lake."

"We're all connected to each other across time, through nature," Sosin says.

"It's so haunting, this lake. This whole book is my attempt to answer the question: what is it about this body of water? Because I've been on a lot of bodies of water." ■



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The Long-Shining Waters

Danielle Sosin. Milkweed (PGW, dist.), \$24
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Lake Superior proves to be more than a bucolic backdrop for Sosin's debut novel. It swallows fishing nets, boats, and even men, and shapes the lives of three women from different eras: Grey Rabbit, an Ojibwe woman following seasonal routes with her family in 1622 and struggling to feed her children; Berit Kleiven, who lives in a lonely cove with her husband, Gunnar, in 1902; and Nora Truneau, a Duluth bar owner who explores the lake in 2000 after a crisis. Grey Rabbit is troubled by dreams of her youngest son. After a harsh winter, even a full belly in the spring can't assuage her fears, and the arrival of goods from white civilization—the first her tribe has seen—feels ominous. Almost three centuries later, Berit and Gunnar enjoy a sexual reawakening after a miscarriage, and 100 years after that, the fire that destroys Nora's bar sends her to Superior's shores for solace. Like Grey Rabbit, she too is haunted by dreams and hopes that her journey will give her direction. Sosin writes sensuously detailed prose and distills the emotions of her characters into a profound and universal need for acceptance and love. (*May*)

Q&A with Danielle Sosin, author of *The Long-Shining Waters*

The Long-Shining Waters follows multiple characters, who are separated by centuries (sections of the book are set in the years 1622, 1902, and 2000) but who are connected in a number of different ways, not simply by the fact that they live along the shores of Lake Superior. Can you talk a little bit about how these sections and characters came to be, and how you see them relating to each other?

This is largely a novel about place. It's my attempt to answer the question: What is it about Lake Superior? It's a body of water like no other, imbued with a palpable sense of mystery, and hauntedness. I've based the book on the premise that the lake holds its history, literally as in objects in the lake, but also, and more importantly in a watery subconscious way, that affects all the people who live on its shores.

In order to try and convey the lake's powerful sense of being inhabited, I have tried to include as many fragments of the lake's history as I could. The Native American story, set in 1622, is there because Lake Superior is the heart of the Ojibwe Nation. Having a Native American storyline was essential. The choice of that story's particular date was for reasons of plot. The story set in 2000 was included to bring the novel up to modern times. Its inclusion allows for much to compare and contrast, but that is a different and rather large question. The story in 1902 was less pointedly chosen. Originally there were to be five stories that covered more physical ground around the lake. The 1902 piece is two of those stories combined—a girl growing up on the Keweenaw, and Berit, the fisherman's wife.

Lake Superior is the main connecting force between the stories. All of the characters experience the lake, and rely on it in both practical and profound ways. "The water is like that. It gets in your head," the character Tinker says to Nora in the year 2000.

Because the lake holds its history in a watery subconscious way, it affects the characters in both awake and dream states (though in Grey Rabbit's case, 1622, it is more apt to say a dream/vision state). The characters experience pieces of each other's existence. They sometimes feel each other's presence, or feel some presence held in the waters. They dream fragments of each other's lives, dream similar dreams. It's all quite mysterious, and fragmented. Currents of story may join and diverge, place may overlap.

And of course the humanity of the characters connects them. They all face issues of loss and fear, they encounter beauty, they question and grapple with fragments of knowledge and feelings of wonder. Things we as humans know only at the edges, things we intuit about the mysteries of existence.

Though the different sections of the book are clearly set in particular years across time, one gets the sense, while reading, that to some degree these distinct stories overlap in many ways, and feel like they are happening simultaneously. Could you talk about how you feel time operates in this novel? One of the things I liked was the way in which the structure of this book mimicked the movement of waves.

Well if you take to heart the premise that lake holds its history, then lake-time, if you will, is non-linear. All the stories are held in the waters at once. Though one reads each story line in a linear time sense, lake-time affects the characters as it courses through their dreams, and rises to their consciousness. The intent was to create a sense of things happening simultaneously.

Perhaps it is in the italicized voice, which appears at various points in the novel, that lake-time is most starkly realized. This voice, this character can only be truly understood in the context of the rest of the book if one understands that it speaks from lake-time.

How did you come to the title, *The Long-Shining Waters*?

The title was a struggle. I have notebook pages filled with lists of possible titles. Really, pages and pages. For a while I was convinced that the word ‘Superior’ had to be included. It’s not an easy word to work with. One working title was *Superior’s Keep*. I finally gave up on using the word ‘Superior,’ and decided it was more important that the title include both time and water. Again, a million lists. And then one morning my honey woke having dreamt the title *The Long-Shining Waters*.

In the novel, Nora, Grey Rabbit, and Berit endure, or have endured, the loss of their male companions, and face numerous challenges. Yet, it’s also clear that each of them considers their lives to be filled with small blessings. Can you talk about how that came together?

That’s life, yes? That is my experience of life. The blessings are a constant if you choose to notice them. Yet it is something much easier said than done. Even in the midst of the deepest grief Berit sees the beauty of the orange light on the water. “There are two options and neither feels like a choice, either she’ll stretch large enough to hold both, or she’ll rip in a way that will be beyond mending.” Living well, or maybe mental health is partially about being able to hold life’s contradictions.

At the end of some chapters, there is a fourth voice that offers a wholly new perspective, more poetic, and reflective. How does that voice relate to the three characters—Nora, Grey Rabbit, and Berit—we’ve already come to know?

This voice is only experienced directly by the reader. Its identity is revealed part-way through the book. The voice takes full advantage of that aspect of fiction that allows one to imagine and express the unknowable. The book’s characters can’t hear the voice, though they may experience it as they do anything else that is held in the waters, as a feeling, or a fleeting part of a dream. Readers, on the other hand, get to hear it clearly.

It is the voice of one who has joined the lake. It exists in lake-time, it reports its experience as it follows another to the depths of the lake. The voice starts out in first person, though as it journeys, its consciousness expands and its singular voice diminishes. That is until it reaches a certain point on the lakebed, where it then crosses over to mystery.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Favorite books? Other books set along Lake Superior?

I love Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*. Annie Dillard’s *For the Time Being*. And many of the works of Michael Ondaatje. Virginia Woolf’s work has been very influential. I was thrilled when I first read her and realized that that territory of inner life, observation, and minutia could be made into great art. Presently, I’m on my second read of Paul Harding’s *Tinkers*—it’s gorgeous.

As for books set along Lake Superior. I was amazed to discover how little there was. Most everything was non-fiction, though there is a great deal of poetry about the lake, and also (not surprisingly) many mysteries set on its shores. My absolute favorite, and the only book I found that was interested in the lake in the same way that I was is a book called

Superior: The Haunted Shore, photographs by Bruce Littlejohn, and a text by the late Wayland Drew. His writing focuses on human transience in the face of the wilderness. His work is wonderful. I wish I could have met Wayland Drew.

Uncertainty seems to be a shared state among these characters. Is that, to some degree, because they depend on the Lake?

I don't think so. The lake is pretty dependable. It's drinking water, it's food, transportation, livelihood. Of course it can be lethal as well. I think that the characters are uncertain because they are all experiencing loss in some way. Loss disturbs daily rhythms, it calls into question the rituals and routines one has grown accustomed to. It asks us to redefine what is important. Loss can bring with it an unbelievably beautiful and rarified state of mind of which the search for meaning and uncertainty is a part. Certainty, I fear, is largely the stance of fools.

How did you decide to become a writer?

Well, like a lot of other things in my life, it happened by default. I'd actually been dabbling in the visual arts, but I found painting to be so technically difficult, that I grew frustrated. I thought writing would be easier. Also, at the time I was dating an English professor (not mine. I was long graduated), who became the head of a creative writing program, so I was exposed to a lot of writers and their work.

I decided to give fiction a try, and signed up for a class at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. My very first instructor was a woman who now 22 years later I consider my mentor, Patricia Weaver Francisco. I took a number of classes from her, and then joined a critiqued group that she facilitated. We met religiously for over a decade.

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THE LONG-SHINING WATERS

By Danielle Sosin

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