

privilege—especially when it's accompanied by genius, scandal, and eventual dissolution. Born into an Anglo-Irish dynasty, Lady Caroline Blackwood took up journalism at 18, but was quickly sidetracked by her romance with reckless artist Lucian Freud. Their marriage was tumultuous and short, but it provoked Freud into some of his most lyrical early work—and officially landed Blackwood with the title of muse. Pessimistic, tongue-tied, and later a sloppy drunk who neglected her children, Blackwood was nevertheless gorgeous and smart, and she attracted geniuses (Walker Evans and *New York Review of Books* editor Robert Silvers among them) like flypaper. Blackwood went on to marry composer Israel Citkowitz and then poet Robert Lowell. Her deepening alcoholism and depression met Lowell's madness head-on, yet somehow they were good for each other's work: He wrote inspired poetry, her writing career blossomed. Blackwood apparently yearned to shrug off her reputation as "the muse of men"—she eventually wrote half a dozen books, including the Booker-nominated *Great Granny Webster*—but this biography concentrates less on the work than on Blackwood's tempestuous life and loves. —J.P.

---

### Black Lace

By Barbara Henning

*Spuyten Duyvil*, 93 pp., \$12, paper

► [Buy this book](#)

Flirting with Bataille and invoking Kristeva, Barbara Henning plunges her beleaguered protagonist Eileen into the pitch of an existential crisis. "I want to suffer and laugh," says the liquored-up mother of a teen girl, distraught wife of a humdrum man, and lover of many a stray, bruiser type. This is Detroit circa 1970, and late one night Eileen skips out, forsaking any desire she might once have had for a regular family life. Chapters alternate between first and third person, between Eileen's "desire" journals and a poetically inclined narrator's pithy observations of her downward spiral from unhappy homemaker to barfly nymphet. Melancholy dominates. Abandonment prevails. *Black Lace* is a taut slip of a book for the brooding, alienated, soul-sick type for whom summer and sun bring little fun. —L.T.

---

### The Rackets

By Thomas Kelly

*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*, 374 pp., \$24

► [Buy this book](#)

Thomas Kelly understands the literary value of a well-turned cliché or two. In his new thriller, *The Rackets*, Kelly's rat-a-tat narrative is peppered with the blustery patois of New Jersey neo-gangsterism (plenty of *Sopranos*-esque ball busters and fat fucks) and shot through with all these delicious metaphors squeezed from the general fund of classic grit fiction (one tough is described as "two hundred and fifty pounds of human fuck-you"). Cinematic and completely enthralling, the suspenseful plot revolves around a college-educated son's decision to seek vengeance for the evil done his father, a Teamster whose