

# **The Zookeeper's Wife**

**by Diane Ackerman**

## About the Book

The *New York Times* bestseller: a true story in which the keepers of the Warsaw zoo saved hundreds of people from Nazi hands.

When Germany invaded Poland, Stuka bombers devastated Warsaw—and the city's zoo along with it. With most of their animals dead, zookeepers Jan and Antonina Zabinski began smuggling Jews into empty cages. Another dozen "guests" hid inside the Zabinskis' villa, emerging after dark for dinner, socializing, and, during rare moments of calm, piano concerts. Jan, active in the Polish resistance, kept ammunition buried in the elephant enclosure and stashed explosives in the animal hospital. Meanwhile, Antonina kept her unusual household afloat, caring for both its human and its animal inhabitants—otters, a badger, hyena pups, lynxes.

With her exuberant prose and exquisite sensitivity to the natural world, Diane Ackerman engages us viscerally in the lives of the zoo animals, their keepers, and their hidden visitors. She shows us how Antonina refused to give in to the penetrating fear of discovery, keeping alive an atmosphere of play and innocence even as Europe crumbled around her.

## Praise for the Book

“A lovely story about the Holocaust might seem like a grotesque oxymoron. But in *The Zookeeper's Wife*, Diane Ackerman proves otherwise. Here is a true story—of human empathy and its opposite—that is simultaneously grave and exuberant, wise and playful. Ackerman has a wonderful tale to tell, and she tells it wonderfully.”

— *Washington Post Book World*

“Poet and naturalist Diane Ackerman turns her keen gifts to an absorbing true tale of war and compassion in *The Zookeeper's Wife*, a non-fiction narrative that breathes literary life into a most unusual hero....A startling and moving portrait of life during wartime.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“A fresh and compelling addition to Holocaust literature.”

— *San Francisco Chronicle*

*Courtesy of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.*

## About the Author

Title: Diane Ackerman

American Writer ( 1948 - )

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Table of Contents:AwardsCareerFurther Readings About the AuthorMedia AdaptationsPersonal InformationSidelightsWritings by the Author

### PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born October 7, 1948, in Waukegan, IL; daughter of Sam (a restaurant owner) and Marcia Fink; married Paul West (a fiction writer). Education: Attended Boston University, 1966-67; Pennsylvania State University, B.A., 1970; Cornell University, M.F.A., 1973, M.A., 1976, Ph.D., 1978. Avocational Interests: Gardening, bicycling. Addresses: Home: Ithaca, NY. Office: William Morris Agency, 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019-6047. E-mail: inkdream@hotmail.com.

### CAREER:

Writer. Social worker in New York, NY, 1967; Pennsylvania State University, University Park, government researcher, 1968; *Library Journal*, New York, NY, editorial assistant, 1970; *Epoch*, Ithaca, NY, associate editor, 1971-77; Cornell University, Ithaca, teaching assistant, 1971-78, lecturer, 1978-79; University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, assistant professor of English, 1980-83; Washington University, St. Louis, MO, director of writers program and writer-in-residence, 1984-86; *New Yorker*, New York, NY, staff writer, 1988-94. Host, *Mystery of the Senses*, Public Broadcasting System (PBS), 1995. Writer-in-residence, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, VA, 1983, Ohio University, Athens, 1983; visiting writer, Columbia University, New York, NY, 1986, New York University, New York, NY, 1986; Cornell University, visiting writer, 1987, visiting professor at Society for the Humanities, 1998-99; Atlantic Center for the Arts, New Smyrna Beach, FL, master artist-in- residence, 1988; University of Richmond, Richmond, VA, National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Professor. Member of literature panels, including New York State Council on the Arts, 1980-83; member of advisory board, Planetary Society, Pasadena, CA, 1980--. Has participated in readings, residencies, and workshops. Produced the recordings *The Naturalists*, Gang of Seven, Inc., 1992, and *A Natural History of Love*, 1994.

## AWARDS:

Poetry Prize, Academy of American Poets, Cornell University, 1972; Corson Bishop French Prize, Cornell University, 1972, 1977; Abbie Copps Prize, Olivet College, 1974; Rockefeller graduate fellowship, 1974- 76; Heermans-McCalmon Playwriting Prize, Cornell University, 1976; National Endowment for the Arts, creative writing fellowships, 1976 and 1986; Creative Artists Public Service fellowship, 1980; Poetry Prize, *Black Warrior Review*, 1981; Associated Writing Programs, member of board of directors, 1982-85; Pushcart Prize VIII, 1984; Peter I.B. Lavan Younger Poet Award, Academy of American Poets, 1985; Lowell Thomas Award, Society of American Travel Writers, 1990; National Endowment for the Arts, member of Poetry Panel, 1991; National Book Critics Circle Award nomination, 1991; Wordsmith Award, 1992; "New and Noteworthy Book of the Year," *New York Times Book Review*, for *The Moon by Whale Light*, 1992, and for *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter*, 1993; Golden Nose Award, Olfactory Research Fund, 1994; named a "Literary Lion" by the New York Public Library, 1994; Journalist-in-Space Project semifinalist; John Burroughs Nature Award, 1998; Guggenheim fellowship, Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, 2003, 2005; D. Litt., Kenyon College, 2006; *The Zookeeper's Wife* was selected as a *Booklist* Editor's Choice Top of the List Winner, 2007; Orion Book Award, 2008.

## WORKS:

## WRITINGS:

## POETRY

- (With Jody Bolz and Nancy Steele) *Poems: Ackerman, Bolz, and Steele* (chapbook), Stone Marrow Press (Cincinnati, OH), 1973.
- *The Planets: A Cosmic Pastoral*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1976.
- *Wife of Light*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1978.
- *Lady Faustus*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1983.
- *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter: New and Selected Poems*, Random House (New York, NY), 1991.
- (Editor, with Jeanne Mackin) *The Book of Love*, Norton (New York, NY), 1998.
- *I Praise My Destroyer*, Random House (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Origami Bridges: Poems of Psychoanalysis and Fire*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2002.
- *Animal Sense* (juvenile), illustrated by Peter Sís, Knopf (New York, NY), 2003.

## NONFICTION

- *Twilight of the Tenderfoot: A Western Memoir*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1980, reprinted, Fulcrum (Golden, CO), 2002.
- *On Extended Wings* (memoir), Atheneum (New York, NY), 1985, published as *On Extended Wings: An Adventure in Flight*, Scribner (New York, NY), 1987.

- *A Natural History of the Senses*, Random House (New York, NY), 1990.
- *The Moon by Whale Light, and Other Adventures among Bats, Penguins, Crocodilians, and Whales*, Random House (New York, NY), 1991.
- *A Natural History of Love*, Random House (New York, NY), 1994.
- *The Rarest of the Rare: Vanishing Animals, Timeless Worlds*, Random House (New York, NY), 1995.
- *Monk Seal Hideaway* (juvenile), Crown (New York, NY), 1995.
- *Bats: Shadows in the Night* (juvenile), photographs by Merlin Tuttle, Crown (New York, NY), 1997.
- *A Slender Thread: Crisis, Healing, and Nature*, Random House (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Deep Play*, illustrated by Peter Sís, Random House (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2001.
- *An Alchemy of Mind: The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain*, Scribner (New York, NY), 2004.
- *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story*, W.W. Norton (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Dawn Light: Dancing with Cranes and Other Ways to Start the Day*, W.W. Norton (New York, NY), 2009.

#### OTHER

- *Reverse Thunder: A Dramatic Poem* (play; produced in New Brunswick, NJ, 1982), Lumen (Cambridge, MA), 1988.
- *Ideas* (television documentary), 1990.
- *Mystery of the Senses* (television documentary), PBS, 1995.

Also author of the play *All Seasons Are Weather*, in *Texas Arts Journal* (Dallas, TX), fall, 1979. Contributor to books and anthologies, including *The Morrow Anthology of Younger Poets*, edited by Dave Smith and David Bottoms, Morrow, 1985; *Norton Introduction to Literature*, edited by Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, 4th edition, W.W. Norton, 1986; *Norton Introduction to Poetry*, edited by J. Paul Hunter, 3rd edition, W.W. Norton, 1986; *The Paris Review Anthology*, edited by George Plimpton, W.W. Norton, 1989; *Beyond the Map*, ELM Press, 1995; *Going on Faith: Writing as a Spiritual Quest*, edited by William Zinsser, Marlowe, 1999; (with others) *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*, edited by Michael Schut, 2002; *Within the Stone*, 2004; *Blue Planet Run: The Race to Provide Safe Drinking Water to the World*, 2007; and numerous other poetry and prose anthologies.

Contributor of poems and nonfiction to literary journals, periodicals, and newspapers, including *New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Life*, *Omni*, *Kenyon Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Parnassus*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Paris Review*, *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, *Discover*, *World Magazine*, and *New York Times*. Contributor of reviews to *New York Times Book Review*.

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS:

*On Extended Wings: An Adventure in Flight* was adapted for the stage in 1987 by Norma Jean Griffin.

## Sidelights

Diane Ackerman has been hailed by several critics not only for her poetry but for her prose explorations into the world of science and natural history. Her voracious appetite for knowledge and her eager appreciation of the natural world are evident in *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter: New and Selected Poems*, according to *New York Times Book Review* contributor David Kirby. He asserted: "Diane Ackerman's poems not only operate in the present but press toward the future. ... Just about everything Ms. Ackerman writes, prose or poetry, is exploratory. ... [Her] speakers push ahead; they probe, open, take off lids, peel back covers, inspect, taste, sniff." Her constant sense of wonder is the key to the appeal of her work, concluded Kirby: "Ms. Ackerman trains her telescope on the bend in the river, all but pitching over the rail as she strains toward the next surprise."

In his essay in *Parnassus*, Mark Doty compared Ackerman's work to that of another, more "metaphysical" nature poet, Mary Oliver, whose poetic quest remains a search for meaning in what she finds in the natural world. In contrast, Doty maintained, Ackerman "does not look for an overarching metaphysic, a coherence, because she fundamentally doesn't believe there is such a thing. ... Where Darwin amassed a lifetime's worth of observed detail in order to generalize and arrive at evolutionary patterns, Ackerman prefers the sensuous, puzzling, intractable particular."

Ackerman has also been praised for her skill at observing and then eloquently describing the details of the natural world, and nowhere is that more evident than in *The Moon by Whale Light, and Other Adventures among Bats, Penguins, Crocodilians, and Whales*, a collection of four essays expanded from articles previously published in the *New Yorker*. Allying herself with experts on each species, Ackerman went into the field to gain firsthand experience with these animals. She recorded her observations in detail, along with her thoughts on the folklore of each animal. Fraser Harrison noted in *New Statesman and Society* that Ackerman's depiction of habitats is poetic, "and it is this quality that makes her a considerable nature writer as well as an intrepid, sharp-eyed journalist, for she has the imaginative gift to identify with the character of her animals and the intelligence to keep them in their ecological place."

Michiko Kakutani, writing in the *New York Times*, offered similar praise, writing that Ackerman "has a gift for sparkling, resonant language, and her descriptions of various animals and their habitats are alive with verbal energy and delight. She describes bats as delicately assembled packages of 'fur and appetite' and characterizes their high-pitched cries as 'vocal Braille.'" Kakutani further praised the author for providing a great deal of "fascinating" information about the lives of each species. In addition, Franklin Burroughs, writing in the *Southern Review*, enthusiastically endorsed Ackerman's "fine eye for detail, her adventurousness, and her humor"

and noted: "When these essays first appeared in the familiar milieu of the *New Yorker*, they seemed to fall within its civilized, flexible conception of an American middle voice: informative, engaging, modest, witty, and thoroughly *professional*, not subject to the enthusiasms, large claims, and idiosyncrasies of the writer for whom writing itself remains the central, animating adventure."

Ackerman shifted her focus from the animal world to the human province of romantic love with her 1994 collection of essays *A Natural History of Love*. *Washington Post Book World* contributor Barbara Raskin characterized this volume as "an audaciously brilliant romp. ... Using an evolutionary history as her launchpad, Ackerman takes off on a space flight in which she describes, defines, theorizes, analyzes, analogizes, apologizes, generalizes, explains, philosophizes, embellishes, codifies, classifies, confesses, compares, contrasts, speculates, hypothesizes and generally carries on like a hooligan about amatory love. It's a blast." Ackerman follows a quick survey of two thousand years of love with an analysis of famous literary passages on romance, the chemistry of love, the effects of lovelessness on children and cultures, and many more subjects. Some critics believed that she included too many topics in the collection and used too many different writing styles. Chris Goodrich, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, felt that Ackerman "has found a particularly good lens through which to view her subject." He considered the book "a pleasure" and described Ackerman as "a beguiling, even seductive writer." Raskin also emphasized the author's power with words, stating: "Of all the loves Ackerman describes, none is greater than her own love of language. ... She produces hard-hitting metaphors and sweet constellations of similes that are like confectionery recipes for fresh insights."

In the mid-1990s Ackerman wrote up her observations from two research expeditions to produce her first books for children: *Monk Seal Hideaway*, about monk seals at the Hawaiian Island National Wildlife Refuge, and *Bats: Shadows in the Night*, an account of her trip to Big Bend National Park in Texas accompanied by Merlin Tuttle, a bat expert and photographer. *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* contributor Roger Sutton found the tone of *Monk Seal Hideaway* to be "amiable and engaging" and noted that "budding naturalists will appreciate the eyewitness report." *Bats* also won praise as "natural history writing at its best," in the words of Sally Estes in *Booklist*.

Ackerman once told *January* Web site contributor Linda Richards that for her the line that separates poetry from prose is blurred in many ways. Ackerman stated: "Very often I don't know the difference. I end up insinuating into the prose sometimes what I think of as unrequited poems. They're ones I've been working on for a long time and for whatever reasons I couldn't make them sort out but they're extremely relevant to what I'm writing in the prose, so they just slide in. One way or another. Or there will be lyrical times when I'm engaged in deep play--I'm feeling rapture--and it just comes out in prose." So, even as Ackerman branched out into writing children's books, she continued to write poetry. "Without the guidance and comfort of religious dogma, Ackerman asks in *I Praise My Destroyer*, how does an agnostic face up to the "horror lesson" of death? As John Taylor pointed out in his *Poetry* review, the agnostic's "only certitude is eschatological uncertainty." He praised Ackerman for the "precision and enthusiasm" with which she confronts this dilemma by "exalting the organic processes whereby entities such as

ourselves come into existence, exist, then perish." Moreover, the "gently erotic love poems" included in this collection, Taylor observed, "show that we must come to terms not only with our demise, but also sometimes--and no less intensely--with the lover who fled 'the love-brightened room.' ... We also die ... several times in the midst of life through amorous leave-takings and unrequited attractions."

Death plays an altogether different role in *A Slender Thread: Crisis, Healing, and Nature*, Ackerman's account of working the night shift of a suicide prevention hotline for one year. Antoinette Brinkman described the book in the *Library Journal* as "intensely interdisciplinary," noting that Ackerman "deftly interweaves moving stories of battered women, the lonely middle-aged, and suicidal teens with observations of nature by day and human nature in the later hours." *New York Times Book Review* critic Kate Jennings noted that the author comes across "as a thoroughly nice person," but pointed out that sentimentality can be "an occupational hazard" among those who write in the first person. In this regard, Jennings cited May Sarton, M.F.K. Fisher, and Annie Dillard, all critically acclaimed authors whose first-person writings nonetheless, like Ackerman's, "walk a fine line, risking self-regard and preciousness as well as sentimentality."

Ackerman's 1999 title *Deep Play* deals with transcendence of the daily norm through forms of "play" such as art, religion, and other human practices that lead to a heightened state of being. Winifred Gallagher observed in the *New York Times Book Review* that Ackerman "writes best when she balances her impressions with objective knowledge, like research on the functions of play in various species or the utility of color in nature." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted that Ackerman's best writing emerges when her subject is "something observable" and she "beguiles readers with fine turns of phrase." The *Publishers Weekly* reviewer was less impressed when Ackerman "indulges her weakness for abstraction," but *Booklist* contributor Donna Seaman found that "the very act of reading this original, exultant, sage, poetic, and generous meditation on the importance of enchantment is deep play."

In *Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden*, Ackerman takes the reader on a philosophical jaunt through the four seasons as observed in her own backyard landscape. This book is not a gardening manual; Ackerman's interest is not so much in how things grow as in what the natural world does for the human soul and spirit. From this perspective, "Ackerman buzzes productively from idea to revelation to insight," a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted, as she "reprises her role as an enchanting intellectual sensualist."

Ackerman's *Origami Bridges: Poems of Psychoanalysis and Fire* documents a year and a half of psychoanalysis with an analyst the poems refer to as "Dr. B." Written in free verse and loose rhyme, the poems are divided into four sections. In a review for the *Library Journal*, Barbara Hoffert commented on the book's "down to the essence" diction, writing: "Ackerman is far too witty and honest a writer to sink us with pretense." *Booklist* critic Donna Seaman, who called Ackerman "extraordinarily attuned" and considered her nature writing "beguiling ... superlatively descriptive and wonderfully present," felt that Ackerman's writing in *Origami Bridges* "is positively incandescent."

One year after *Origami Bridges* was released, Ackerman published *Animal Sense*, a collection of poetry for children. *Animal Sense* contains fifteen poems in five sections, each section focusing on a certain sense, each poem focusing on a different animal. In this collection, Ackerman intertwines her poetry with scientific facts about animals. A *Publishers Weekly* critic noted the beauty of the artwork, but had some reservations regarding the poetry, calling the book "a beautifully designed but unfortunately flawed collection." However, Lauralyn Persson, writing in the *School Library Journal*, noted that "readers who want to go beyond the obvious will savor it."

Published in 2004, *An Alchemy of Mind: The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain* employs Ackerman's flair for metaphor to explain the complex workings of the brain. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor described Ackerman's "sensuous" prose, noting that her metaphors "cascade down every page like waterfalls." The contributor also felt that even the most science-minded readers "should be won over by her uniquely personal perspective." Combining experience, history, literature, and science, Ackerman produces a new sort of study on how and why we think by infusing her trademark poetic language into scientific writing. Booklist critic Donna Seaman called the writing "agile, involving and uniquely far-ranging and insightful." Floyd Skloot, writing in *Newsday*, called Ackerman "a grand, erudite synthesizer, positioning herself at the place where knowledge ends and reporting back to us in the language of lyric."

According to Ackerman, *An Alchemy of Mind* is the natural next step following her previous work. In an interview with Ron Hogan for *Publishers Weekly*, she explained: "All of my books are an effort to discover a little better what it once was like to be alive on the planet: what the passions felt like, what it tasted like, what it smelt like, the whole experience of being alive." Ackerman's wonder at every aspect of life makes up the thread that runs through all of her work. In an interview with Barbara Adams of *Writer's Digest*, Ackerman reflected: "Sometimes people think that I write different kinds of books--some about animals and some about people. But to my mind, it's all part of the same quest, to understand the human condition and what life on Earth feels like."

Ackerman followed *An Alchemy of Mind* with the story of a couple who smuggled more than 300 Jews out of the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. Based on the diaries of Antonina Zabinski, *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story* recounts how the Warsaw Zoo was mostly destroyed by bombing and shares how the Zabinskis used the empty zoo to hide and shelter Jews to save them from the Nazis' attempted extermination. "Though it reads more extravagantly than most fictions, and features a cast worthy of a novel, the book is meticulously researched and documented," wrote Charles Foran of the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. Wilda Williams, writing in *Library Journal*, stated: "Ackerman has done an invaluable service in bringing a little-known story of heroism and compassion to light." A *Publishers Weekly* critic noted: "Ackerman's writing is viscerally evocative."

*The Zookeeper's Wife* was selected by *Booklist* as a Top of the List Winner for the Editors' Choice books of 2007. Donna Seaman, reviewing the book for that magazine, felt that "Ackerman has written many stellar works ... but this is the book she was born to write." Lynna Williams, writing in *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, stated: "Ackerman savors the recording of

precise detail that helps capture experience." Carol Memmott, writing for *USA Today*, noted the role of the animals that remained at the zoo and were allowed to run free, under Antonina's care. She concluded: "Ackerman's story is a treatise on nobility--a word that applies to some humans and all of the animals in *The Zookeeper's Wife*."

In Ackerman's next book, *Dawn Light: Dancing with Cranes and Other Ways to Start the Day*, the author muses about the earliest hours of the day. The book came about during a time when the author's husband was ill and she was not sure that he would survive the illness. Ackerman told S.J. Henchel in *Audiofile* that she would spend early morning hours pondering ideas of life and death. The author expressed that the book "is really a series of small astonishments and secular hallelujahs, a blend of the poetic, scientific, spiritual, and commonplace: a rediscovery of dawn." The pieces discuss animal and plant life, particularly focusing on birds, as well as rituals and spiritual philosophies about dawn, and the use of dawn lighting in art work. "Ackerman creates a luxuriant word garden brimming with spirited observations, stories, and musings," wrote Donna Seaman in *Booklist*. Sue O'Brien, writing for *School Library Journal*, concluded: "These pieces are accessible and lyrically written." Noting that *Dawn Light* encourages readers to stop and appreciate what goes on around them, Wendy Smith wrote in *Washington Post Book World*: "It's easy to live in the moment when you're immersed in Ackerman's glorious prose, studded with arresting phrases and breathtakingly beautiful images."

#### FURTHER READINGS:

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#### BOOKS

- Ackerman, Diane, *Twilight of the Tenderfoot: A Western Memoir*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1980.
- Ackerman, Diane, *On Extended Wings*, Atheneum (New York, NY), 1985.
- *Contemporary Poets*, 6th edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1996.
- *Contemporary Women Poets*, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1998.
- *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 120: *American Poets since World War II, Third Series*, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1992.

#### PERIODICALS

- *Affilia Journal of Women and Social Work*, summer, 1998, Catherine Hiersteiner, review of *A Slender Thread: Crisis, Healing, and Nature*, pp. 255-256.
- *America*, January 18, 2010, "Birdsong and Early Morn," p. 31.
- *American Biology Teacher*, May, 1992, Rita Hoots, *The Moon by Whale Light, and Other Adventures among Bats, Penguins, Crocodilians, and Whales*, pp. 314-315.
- *Appraisal: Science Books for Young People*, fall, 1998, review of *Bats: Shadows in the Night*, p. 5.

- *Art in America*, January, 2006, "Artist Andrea Blu, Parker's Box Gallery Owner Alun Williams, and Art Collector and Benefactor Diane Ackerman Have Been Awarded the Order of Arts and Letters," p. 150.
- *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 25, 2007, "Zookeepers' Haven: Warsaw Couple's War Story of Rescue and Death Reimagined," p. 10.
- *AudioFile*, December 1, 2009, S.J. Henchel, "Diane Ackerman," p. 50.
- *AZ Daily Star*, April 30, 2009, "Calendar."
- *Biography*, fall, 2007, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story*, p. 716; winter, 2008, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*, p. 212.
- *Book*, May, 1999, review of *Deep Play*, p. 82; November-December, 2002, Stephen Whited, review of *Origami Bridges: Poems of Psychoanalysis and Fire*, p. 89.
- *Booklist*, October 1, 1997, Sally Estes, review of *Bats*, p. 320; March 15, 1998, Donna Seaman, review of *I Praise My Destroyer*, p. 1197; March 1, 1999, Donna Seaman, review of *Deep Play*, p. 1099; September 1, 2001, Donna Seaman, review of *Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden*, p. 26; September 1, 2002, Donna Seaman, review of *Origami Bridges*, p. 48; February 15, 2003, Gillian Engberg, review of *Animal Sense*, p. 1068; April 1, 2003, review of *Animal Sense*, p. 1407; May 1, 2004, Donna Seaman, review of *An Alchemy of Mind: The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain*, p. 1533; January 1, 2005, review of *An Alchemy of Mind*, p. 768; August, 2007, Donna Seaman, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*, p. 5; January 1, 2008, "Adult Books, Editors' Choice, 2007," p. 6; June 1, 2009, Donna Seaman, review of *Dawn Light: Dancing with Cranes and Other Ways to Start the Day*, p. 4.
- *BookPage*, October, 2001, review of *Cultivating Delight*, p. 4; April, 2003, review of *Animal Sense*, p. 28.
- *Bookseller*, November 30, 2007, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*, p. 12.
- *Bookworld*, July, 18, 1999, review of *Deep Play*, p. 7; October 7, 2001, review of *Cultivating Delight*, p. 13; April 27, 2003, review of *Animal Sense*, p. 12; June 13, 2004, Carl Zimmer, review of *An Alchemy of Mind*, p. 13.
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, June, 1995, Roger Sutton, review of *Monk Seal Hideaway*, p. 337; September, 1997, review of *Bats*, p. 4.
- *California Bookwatch*, November, 2007, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*.
- *Catholic Library World*, February 23, 1998, review of *I Praise My Destroyer*, p. 70.
- *Choice*, October, 1997, review of *A Slender Thread*, p. 327.
- *Christian Science Monitor*, October 24, 2001, review of *Cultivating Delight*, p. 19.
- *Discover*, May, 2002, review of *Cultivating Delight*, p. 76; March, 2003, review of *Animal Sense*, p. 73.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, January 17, 1997, Vanessa V. Friedman, review of *A Slender Thread*, p. 58; June 11, 2004, Tina Jordan, review of *An Alchemy of Mind*, p. 128.
- *Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada), June 12, 1999, review of *Deep Play*, p. D11; December 1, 2001, review of *Cultivating Delight*, p. 1; December 15, 2007, Charles Foran, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*.
- *Good Housekeeping*, December, 1999, Kathleen Powers, "Lovers: Great Romances of Our Time through the Eyes of Legendary Writers," p. BIH8; September, 2007, "No Matter What Mood You're In, We Have a Great Book for You," p. 203.
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- *Kliatt*, March, 2008, Sue Rosenzweig, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*, p. 54.
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- *Library Journal*, January, 1997, Antoinette Brinkman, review of *A Slender Thread*, p. 125; February 1, 1998, Richard K. Burns, review of *The Book of Love*, p. 84; March 15, 1998, Ann Van Buren review of *I Praise My Destroyer*, p. 67; June 1, 1998, review of *A Slender Thread*, p. 75; September 1, 2001, Daniel Starr, review of *Cultivating Delight*, p. 215; October 15, 2002, Barbara Hoffert, review of *Origami Bridges*, p. 77; April 15, 2003, Barbara Hoffert, review of *Origami Bridges*, p. 90; March 15, 2004, Laurie Bartolini, review of *An Alchemy of Mind*, p. 103; September 1, 2007, Wilda Williams, review of *The Zookeeper's Wife*, p. 147; July 1, 2009, Sue O'Brien, review of *Dawn Light*, p. 118.
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- *New Leader*, September, 2002, review of *Origami Bridges*, p. 33.
- *Newsday*, June 27, 2004, Floyd Skloot, review of *An Alchemy of Mind*.
- *New Statesman and Society*, May 21, 1993, Fraser Harrison, review of *The Moon by Whale Light, and Other Adventures among Bats, Penguins, Crocodilians, and Whales*, p. 35.
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## Discussion Questions

1. How does Diane Ackerman's background as a naturalist and a poet inform her telling of this slice of history? Would a historian of World War II have told it differently, and, if so, what might have been left out?
2. Reviews have compared this book to *Schindler's List* and *Hotel Rwanda*. How would you compare them?
3. Did this book give you a different impression of Poland during World War II than you had before?
4. Can you imagine yourself in the same circumstances as Jan and Antonina? What would you have done?
5. How would you describe Antonina's relation to animals? To her husband? How does she navigate the various relationships in the book, given the extreme circumstances? Is her default position one of trust or distrust?
6. Do people have a "sixth sense" and how does it relate to "animal instinct"?
7. Some might judge Jan and Antonina guilty of anthropomorphizing animals and nature. Would you? Why or why not?
8. Can nature be savage or kind—or can only humans embody those qualities? As science and the study of animal behavior and communication teach us more and more about the commonalities between animals and humans, is there still any dividing line between the human and the animal world? If so, how would you describe it?
9. The Nazis had a passion for animals and the natural world. How could Nazi ideology embrace both a love of nature and the mass murder of human beings?
10. The drive to "rewrite the genetic code of the entire planet" is not distinct to Nazism. What similar efforts are alive today? Are there lessons in Jan and Antonina's story for evaluating the benefits and dangers of trying to modify or improve upon nature? Do you see any connection between this story of more than sixty years ago and contemporary environmental issues?
11. Genetic engineering of foodstuffs is highly contentious. So are various reproductive technologies that are now common, such as selecting for—or against—various characteristics when choosing from sperm or egg banks. How would various characters in this book have approached these loaded issues?

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