

# For Women’s History Month: 5 new novels that celebrate female accomplishments

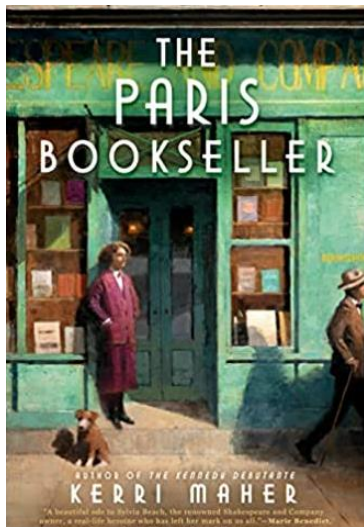
‘The Paris Bookseller’ by Kerri Maher and ‘The Diamond Eye’ by Kate Quinn are among several great new works of historical fiction

By Carol Memmott

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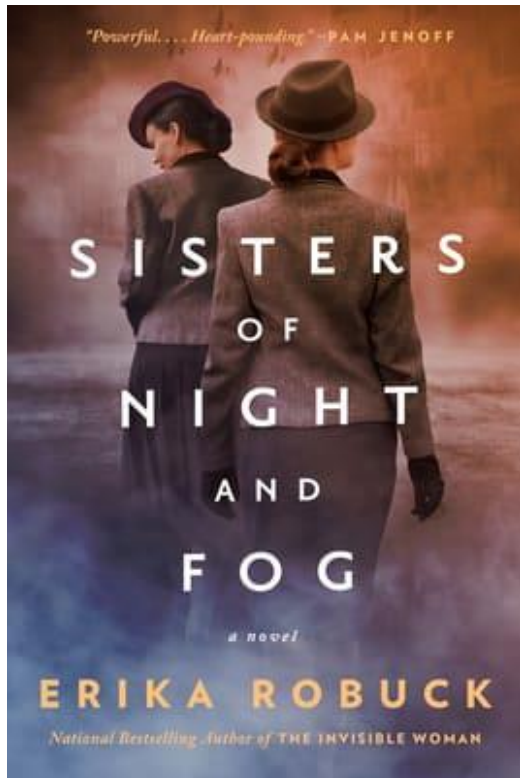
The Washington Post

**Throughout history, women’s contributions to the arts and sciences, their communities and their countries have often been glossed over or ignored. These well-researched works of historical fiction celebrate their courage, accomplishments and fighting spirit.**



## ‘The Paris Bookseller,’ by Kerri Maher

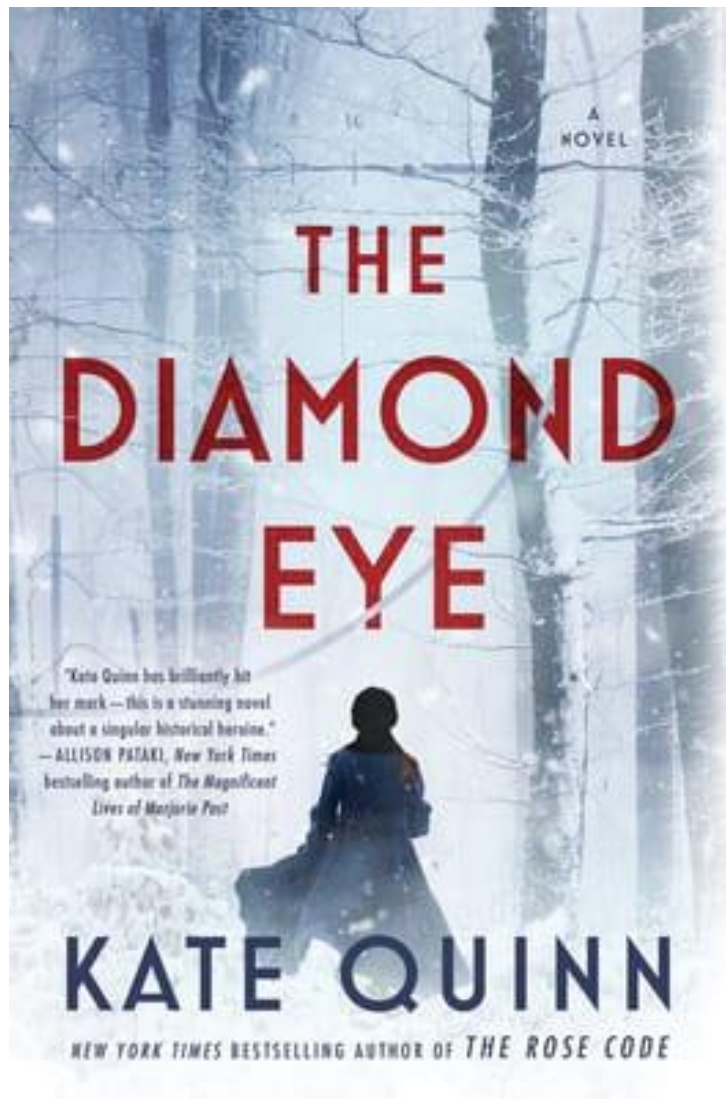
In 1919, Sylvia Beach opened Shakespeare and Company, the first English-language bookstore in Paris. She is also celebrated as the original publisher of Joyce’s “Ulysses,” the once-banned book now considered one of the 20th century’s greatest works. Maher vividly reimagines the indomitable Beach, who struggled for years to get “Ulysses” published and even found ways to smuggle it into the United States after courts deemed it to be pornography. Beach knew “Ulysses” was a work of art, and she soldiered on even while being belittled by (male) American publishers. In one poignant scene, Maher has Beach declaring: “Censorship is not commensurate with democracy. Or art,” a comment that still rings true.



### **‘Sisters of Night and Fog,’ by Erika Robuck**

This World War II novel toggles between the reimagined lives of two women who fearlessly fought with resistance groups to slow the tide of Germany’s domination of France. American Virginia d’Alberte-Lake risked her life multiple times helping to smuggle downed Allied airmen out of France. Violette Szabo, a half-French, half-English widow and mother, joined Britain’s Special Operations Executive and was trained as a saboteur and spy before parachuting into France to fight with the resistance. Although they most likely never met during their call to arms, both women eventually were arrested and held at the same German prison camps, including the infamous Ravensbrück. The essence of this heartbreaking novel applies to all the women we meet in these works of historical fiction: that there are many ways women are called to serve. “Good mothers don’t all look the same,” Violette thinks during her imprisonment, “nor do good daughters or good wives or good agents. They’re each fighting a woman’s war, the way they’re called to, on different but essential fronts.”

[Review: Kate Quinn, "The Huntress"](#)



### **'The Diamond Eye,' by Kate Quinn**

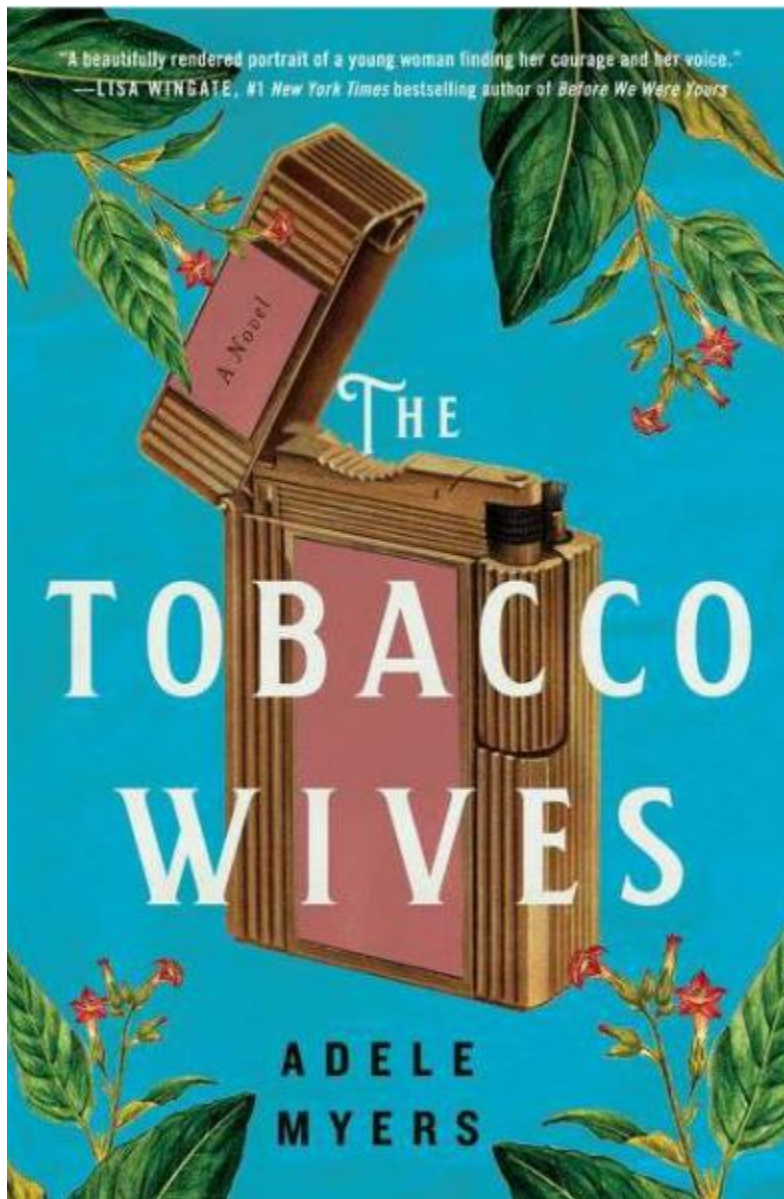
Equal parts historical fiction and riveting thriller, Quinn's latest novel celebrating heroic women is inspired by the life of Lyudmila Pavlichenko, a legendary Soviet sniper credited with killing more than 300 enemy fighters during the Soviet struggle against the Nazi invasion during World War II. Quinn's imagination and thorough research turn this account of an extraordinarily talented woman into a highly cinematic action novel that honors all women in the military. Its tension is palpable as Quinn depicts the horrific loss of life on the Russian front and the nerve-racking confrontations that pit Pavlichenko against Germany's best marksmen. Quinn's Pavlichenko is multidimensional: a patriot, a librarian, a loving mother and a woman who faced prejudice in the primarily male Soviet military. A fascinating parallel story recounts Pavlichenko's visit to the United States to plead for American war aid and the real-life friendship she shared with Eleanor Roosevelt. (Available March 29)



### **‘Her Hidden Genius,’ by Marie Benedict**

Rosalind Franklin was an extraordinary British scientist who in the 1940s discovered the double helix of DNA that helped reveal the hidden secrets of the building blocks of life. Resentful male colleagues belittled and insulted her, then stole her research partly to prevent a woman from receiving any credit. Benedict, who has written novels about Agatha Christie and Clementine Churchill, brings to life Franklin’s grit and spirit as well as the sexual harassment she faced while carrying out her meticulous work. Although the story at times drags under the weight of minutely detailed science experiments and data, its unusual focus on female scientists makes it an important contribution to the historical record.





### **The Tobacco Wives,' by Adele Myers**

This debut novel does not focus on historical figures as much as it brings to life an amalgam of activists who fought for the rights of women working in North Carolina's tobacco industry in the mid-20th century. A native North Carolinian, Myers tells her fascinating story through the eyes of 15-year-old Maddie Sykes, who accidentally finds a confidential letter that details the dangers that smoking poses to pregnant women. Her discovery coincides with the debut of a mint-flavored cigarette targeting women with promises that it will improve their health. That lie is promoted even as women in the fictional town of Bright Leaf miscarry or deliver prematurely. Myers's novel is as much a coming-of-age story as it is a lesson in the power of the working class to bring about change.