

## BOOKS

# The woman warrior

Kate Braverman wryly redefines the female protagonist in novel 'Wonders of the West'

**A**S A POET, novelist and short story writer, Kate Braverman doesn't mince words.

Asked recently what she thought about contemporary women writers, she baldly stated that "anyone who is still writing about professors' wives having lunch should have their kneecaps shot off."

Harsh words considering that, according to Braverman, most American women are still writing and living in the shadow of men.

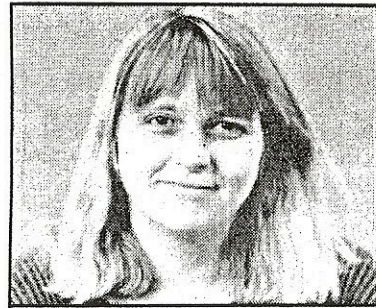
"There's a double standard that self-destructive males are mythic and lyrical," Braverman said, "but a woman who tries to kill herself, like Sylvia Plath, is just dismissed as sick, as a victim, as someone who couldn't cope."

At 7:30 p.m. Monday, Braverman will be at the Capitola Book Cafe,

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— Kate Braverman

### Bookends



Chris Watson

1475 41st Ave., to promote her newest novel, "Wonders of the West," which — like its predecessors ("Lithium for Medea" and "Palm Latitudes") — pinpoints women on

the edge, women who, like 17-year-old Jordan Lerner in "Wonders", aren't satisfied with their limited roles in society.

Early in the new novel, Jordan, who refuses to learn to sew or type, has been called once again into the principal's office.

*'You didn't sew again,' he realizes*

*'I can't learn,' I tell him.*

*'You have an I.Q. of 157,' Mr. Gordon says. 'Of course you can learn.'*

*'If I learned, it would be a bridge to a place I never want to go. If I go there, I'll die,' I say.*

Musing on the exchange later, Jordan thinks:

*There are bridges you can't just burn behind you. You cannot let these constructions into your world at all. You cannot permit them to become players. There are some bridges you must dynamite before they exist. You must eradicate the structures themselves, their materials and even the concept of what they do. That's how lethal they are.*

In a recent phone interview, Braverman profiled the extreme difficulties of the modern woman warrior by adding that "Women aren't allowed to be bad girls on the page. If a woman is too dangerous, if she fails to fit the female stereotype — if she's Latina or 240



Writer Kate Braverman challenges sexist double standards in her new novel 'Wonders of the West.'

pounds or sexually ambiguous — the male editors on the eastern seaboard will shut them out."

Which is why Braverman is currently at work on a story that features a blond, blue-eyed beauty.

"The protagonist is Christian, eastern, beautiful and in the third paragraph, I subvert the entire model. Perhaps, this way, the editors won't be too scared of what I'm going to say."

Braverman, who grew up in Los Angeles and still calls it home, is satisfied to live in a land where nature is life-affirming and female, where things are still being experimented with, in a region that is "still being born."

"I'd like to be remembered as someone who attacked the borders

of language, who feminized it and tropicalized it and proved that it is fluid.

"I'm not impressed where men have set the borders of the novel and the short story — codifying, repeating and bowing to the forms. I would like to be remembered as someone who assaulted the borders, as someone who muddied the borders with her high heels."

Nominated twice for a Pulitzer Prize and winner of a 1992 O'Henry Award, Braverman is also an associate professor at California State University, Los Angeles, the author of three novels, a book of short stories and several books of poetry.

Chris Watson is a Sentinel staff writer.