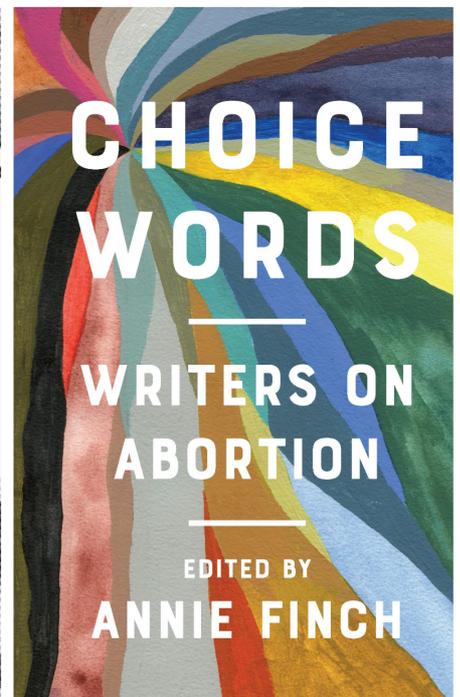
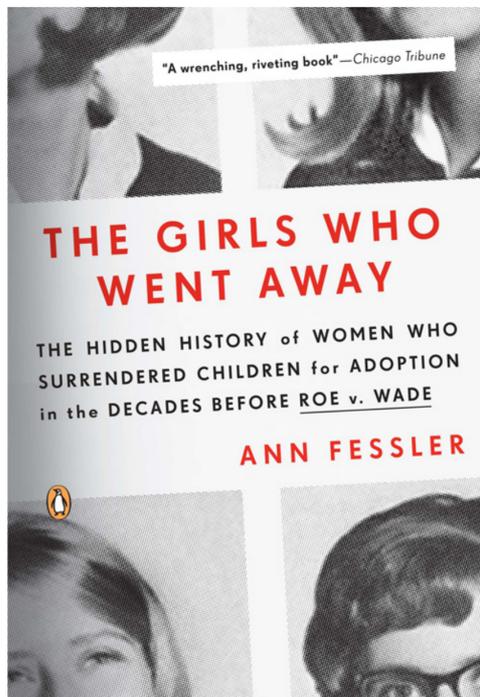
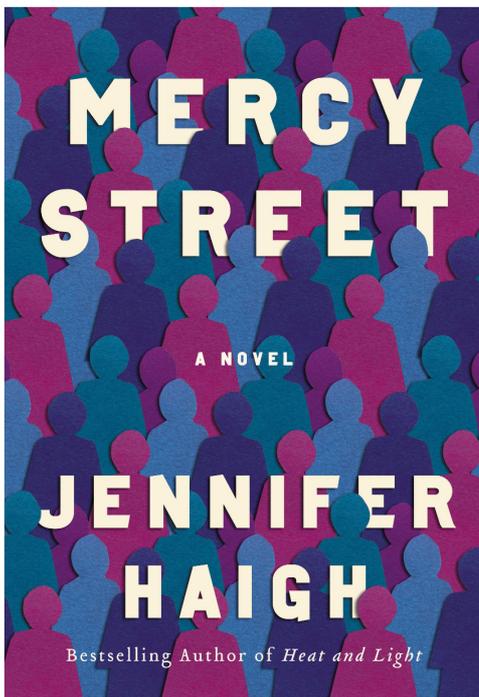


Home // Local Coverage // Arts & Culture

The WBUR Read-In: 50 years after Roe

January 25, 2023

By [Lauren Williams](#)

Arts and culture fellow Lauren Williams highlights books about the right to choose and our reality without it.. (Courtesy the book publishers)

Sunday, Jan. 22, would have been the 50th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. But on June 24, 2022, that ruling was overturned, leaving a sect of the nation's bodily autonomy up to individual states. What has happened since has caused a swirl of [confusion](#) as many new bans contain vague language and unclear exceptions. According to the Guttmacher Institute, a leading research and policy organization committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (their data [has been used](#) for publications across the political spectrum), [24 states](#) have either banned abortion or are likely to do so. In [Massachusetts](#), the right to have an abortion is guarded. However, both people in need of abortions and the physicians who perform them have been left without protection.

Caitlin McDonnell wrote a moving piece in one of this week's picks, "Choice Words: Writers on Abortion." In her essay, she describes her own experience with terminating a pregnancy and the importance of discussing it. "Every abortion is a story. It might be mundane or dramatic, involve great sacrifice or great relief. Too often these stories live only in whispers... or tucked away in journals," McDonnell writes.

Although Roe and its overturning is an emotional topic, it's important to read and share stories, as McDonnell explains, to reach a place of better understanding. In this week's Read-In, you'll find three books about the right to choose and our reality without it.

'The Girls Who Went Away'

By Ann Fessler

There's a kind of secret women's history in the years following World War II and preceding Roe v. Wade. Hundreds of thousands of young women who became pregnant outside of marriage were sent to maternity homes and eventually, forced to surrender their children through social pressure. Ann Fessler brought their stories to light by weaving together oral histories of the stories of 18 different women who went through the pain of loss and being cast out. "If you are a woman over fifty who had sex before marriage, you are a so-called bad girl... The only difference between me and the women whose stories appear here is that I didn't get caught," explains Fessler. The women's narratives are the heart of the text, but this book is also filled with sociology exploring tensions between gender, sexuality and social class.



'Choice Words: Writers on Abortion'

Edited By Annie Finch

Regardless of where you fall on the abortion debate, everyone acknowledges one fact: people end their pregnancies. The reasons for it vary, but it's happened for thousands of years and will continue to. That idea carries this collection of

poetry, essays and short stories. In the intro, Finch declares, “Abortion is always serious. As serious as birth,” and authors like Amy Tan, Sharon Olds and Mahogany L. Browne expand on this idea in their own words.

'[Mercy Street](#)'

By Jennifer Haigh

This novel takes place in 2015 at a women’s health clinic in Boston. Haigh has crafted a portrait in which readers get a glimpse into the heart of the United States’ abortion debate. A care provider named Claudia is at the center of the book, and through her, we see the importance of the care she provides and the difficulties of providing that care in peace. Haigh also provides a peek into the lives of people in the anti-choice movement who protest outside of the clinic, laying out their lives and personal misfortunes that led them to their belief systems. “[Mercy Street](#)” is a generous and apt read for the present moment.

Additional Reading:

- How Roe v. Wade became more than a legal text in [The Atlantic](#).
- The debate around “abortion pills,” explained by [Here & Now](#).
- A look at human reproduction through the [lens of design](#).

Books/Poetry

The WBUR Read-In

Related:

- Author Jennifer Haigh chronicles both sides of the abortion debate in 'Mercy Street'
- The WBUR Read-In: Time and transformation
- The WBUR Read-In: Books from the newsroom



Lauren Williams Arts Reporting Fellow
Lauren Williams is the arts reporting fellow at WBUR.
[More...](#)



Contact Us

(617) 353-0909

info@wbur.org

890 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215

[More ways to get in touch.](#)

About WBUR

Who We Are

Inside WBUR

Careers

WBUR Staff

Community Advisory Board

Board Of Directors

CPB Transparency

Diversity, Equity And Inclusion

Support WBUR

[Make A Donation](#)

[Become A Member](#)

[Member Services](#)

[Donate Your Car](#)

[Join The Murrow Society](#)

[Become A Sponsor](#)

[Volunteer](#)

Follow

 [Facebook](#)

 [Twitter](#)

 [Instagram](#)

 [YouTube](#)

 [LinkedIn](#)

Subscribe to our weekday newsletter

Add WBUR to your morning routine

Your Email Address



It's Boston local news in one concise, fun and informative email

© Copyright WBUR 2023

[Policies & Statements](#)

[FCC Public File](#)

[WBUR EEO Reports](#)

[FCC Applications](#)

[Syndication](#)