

books '16
Book Talk
AMPA Lunch
October 26, 2016



Sandy Mack

The Painted Girls

Cathy Marie Buchanon
(Fiction)

The Painted Girls tells the story of the van Goethem sisters who lived during the Belle Epoque period in Paris. When their father dies, the family, poor to start with, must find ways the girls can earn money. They turn to the Opera and the Ballet: one models for Edgar Degas and will be immortalized in paintings and a famous bronze statue. The novel is rich in details of 19th century Paris.

A Man Called Ove

Frederik Backman
(Fiction)

An international bestseller and a debut novel with the unlikely storyline of a 59-year-old widower whose life of routine is wearing him down. He misses his wife daily and lives for the day he can take his own life. But of course, events get in the way.

The Orphan Train

Christina Baker Kline
(Fiction)

From 1854-1929, over 200,000 orphaned children of immigrants to the US were put onto trains bound for the Midwest where they were taken in by families who wanted to adopt or who needed additional labor in their homes, businesses or farms. The novel tells the story of a friendship which develops between two women, 70 years apart, whose lives are very similar.

The Swans of 5th Avenue
Melanie Benjamin
(Fiction)

Based on the true story of the social lives of Truman Capote, the author, and a group of wealthy women in New York City who lunched together, shared details of their lives, and vacationed to exotic places together. When Capote publishes a chapter from a forthcoming novel in *Esquire* magazine which is a thinly disguised account of their secret lives, all hell breaks loose, and Capote pays a heavy price.

An Invisible Thread
Laura Scroff & Alex Tresniowski
(Non-Fiction)

A wonderful story about a chance encounter on the streets of New York City between an 11-year-old panhandler who asks for money for food and a 35-year-old woman who works in advertising. She passes him by, but something about his politeness makes her turn around and re-trace her steps. She takes him to a McDonald's on the corner and what develops are weekly meals and a 15+year friendship. A lovely story about an unlikely friendship which will profoundly change two lives.



Carl Silva



Fates and Furies

Lauren Groff

Fiction

Lauren Groff joins the list of authors that make us wonder how sincere or honest a narrator truly can be (think *The Girl on the Train* or *Gone Girl*). In *Fates and Furies*, we meet Lotto and Mathilda—a couple in love, supporting each other through the trial and tribulations of married life envied by all who meet them. Lotto comes from a remarkably wealthy family and pines to be a successful actor but finds a niche in playwriting. Mathilda is the supportive wife although her quiet ways seem, well...too quiet. The book tells Lotto's story first (Fate) and then switches to Mathilda's story (Fury) in the second half. What quickly becomes apparent, especially as we read Mathilda's story, is how two people sharing the same life can see the world from two very different perspectives.

The Secret Chord

Geraldine Brooks

Fiction

I have always been fascinated by the story of King David. In *The Secret Chord*, we meet King David well into his rule, and he's a bit grumpy about a recent war. Nathan, his prophet, is attempting to cheer him up and suggest they set out to record his remarkable life. David agrees and we are sent on journey back to the beginning of young David's life and his all too human rise to the throne encompassing power, greed, destruction, and fame. The novel excels at allowing a variety of characters who only appear briefly in the Old Testament to tell their full story and thus gives us a deeper understanding of King David's life.

The Underground Railroad

Colin Whitehead

Fiction

This remarkable novel follows the journey of Cora, a runaway slave seeking freedom through the underground railroad. Except in this novel, the Underground Railroad is a real construction burrowing below the South leading to freedom. Each time Cora leaves the railroad and ascends to the world above, she encounters forms of racism that are dehumanizing and shocking. She can never stay in one location long since she is being chased by Ridgeway, a slave catcher. This take on the American journey/odyssey and the struggle for survival in 1812 is stunning and unforgettable.

The Nix

Nathan Hill

Fiction

It starts off simple enough. Governor Packer is attacked in a park in 2011. Well, that's what the news reports. The attacker turns out to be a woman who threw a handful of stones at the governor. The media needing a catchy slogan call her the Packer Attacker. Her son, Professor Samuel Anderson, won't actually hear about this incident for a few weeks. That's what happens when your mother leaves you as a boy. And that is just the beginning of this rollercoaster ride about mothers and sons and love and media and education and video games and culture...and let's just add in the 1968 Chicago protests and Norway.

New American Short Stories

Ed. Ben Marcus

Fiction

Ben Marcus has curated twenty-nine plot bending short stories taking us on a tour of new voices emerging in America. These stories are united by originality and love of language. They are upsetting, funny, daring, and sometimes odd, but I promise, you will have a deeper appreciation about the current literary landscape when you finish this collection.