

Listserv Recommended Books

A Fierce Radiance by Lauren Belfer It is not a new book and is in paperback . It was about the development of penicillin around the time of WWI - it is also a mystery and a love story, along with the historical aspects.

Agent Zigzag by Ben MacIntyre. A true story of Nazi espionage, love and betrayal is really fascinating.

All That Heaven Bears by Mengestu, winner of a McArthur genius grant.

All the King's Men by Robert Penn Warren should be on everyone's list of books to read before you die. It's fiction taken from the story of larger than life Louisiana politician Huey Long. I read it in high school and loved it and read it again with my book club and appreciated it even more. In addition to absorbing characters and story line, the writing and language is so very wonderful.

!A Suitable Boy by Vikram Seth. It's a hefty novel, with poetry interspersed throughout, set in India/Pakistan during partition. Amazon's description:

Vikram Seth's novel is, at its core, a love story: Lata and her mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra, are both trying to find -- through love or through exacting maternal appraisal -- a suitable boy for Lata to marry. Set in the early 1950s, in an India newly independent and struggling through a time of crisis, *A Suitable Boy* takes us into the richly imagined world of four large extended families and spins a compulsively readable tale of their lives and loves. A sweeping panoramic portrait of a complex, multiethnic society in flux, *A Suitable Boy* remains the story of ordinary people caught up in a web of love and ambition, humor and sadness, prejudice and reconciliation, the most delicate social etiquette and the most appalling violence

!A Visit from the Goon Squad, by Jennifer Egan

Beach Music by Pat Conroy

Beautiful Ruins by Jess Walters

!Behind the Beautiful Forevers , by Katherine Boo --- An incredibly well written account of people living in Mumbai slum. Not easy reads because of the subject

matter, but well worth it and they really stick with you.

Bel Canto, by Ann Patchett, about the seizure of an A-list party at an embassy in a South American country and the ensuing months of captivity for the guests

!*CALEB'S CROSSING by Geraldine Brooks, a short and seemingly modest historical work — told by an equally modest narrator Bethia Mayfield. Her given name means “servant of Jehovah,” and Bethia means to abide by the rules of her family and her Puritan religious affiliation. But even as she begins writing her confession on precious scraps of scavenged paper, she is transgressing the boundaries her father and older brother consider appropriate for a woman — and they have God’s word on this.

Canada by Richard Ford

Catfish and Mandala, a memoir by a young Vietnamese-American whose family fled to the U.S. in 1977 (after the fall of Saigon) and who returns to Vietnam for a visit almost two decades later. The book our book club liked most this year.

Citizens: A chronicle of the French Revolution by Simon Schama.
One of the best in depth account of the players in the French Revolution.

!Cloud Atlas, by David Mitchell -- A loose conglomeration of short stories that tie together - movie coming out soon.

Confederacy of Dunces by J O'Toole

**Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese

Defending Jacob by Landay (psychological thriller and portrait of a family in crisis)

Don Quixote by Miguel De Cervantes (a new translation by Edith Grossman)

11-22-63 by Stephen King

First Contact by Bob Connolly & Robin Anderson.. From the Publishers Weekly review:

In the early 1930s, a team of Australians ventured into the unexplored highlands of New Guinea looking for gold. They found more than a million tribespeople who never had experienced contact with the outside world. One of the prospectors, Michael Leahy, recorded the confrontation between 20th century and Stone Age cultures in photographs and film footage. This documentary evidence was forgotten for 50 years, until filmmakers Connolly and Anderson stumbled across it. Fascinated, they tracked down both the surviving prospectors and tribespeople for a series of interviews that produced an extraordinary portrait of the two sides of "first contact." Village elders tell how they reacted when white men and their weapons appeared: "We thought the gun was just for shooting pigs and that it couldn't hurt men." The Leahy brothers saw the contact from a different perspective; they never attempted to learn about native culture or to regard the people other than as objects to be exploited. The opposing viewpoints presented here interact to create a classic story of colonialism and its aftereffects.

Flying Cloud by David Shaw. A fascinating true story account of a sailing vessel. It is a story about a sailing ship build in the 1850s to transport goods from the east to SF for use by the gold miners. It set speed records while undergoing a rigorous journey and the most amazing aspect was that it was navigated by a woman, highly unusual for the time. A good read.

Freedom, by Jonathan Franzen

Gideon by Marilyn Robinson. This is such a beautiful and engaging read. Also, won the Pulitzer.

Gone Girl by

Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898 by Edwin G. Burrows. If you've ever lived in New York, this one is a must read.

Heft by Liz Moore

****Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet***, by Jamie Ford

!Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson's, is also beautifully written/poetry. Housekeeping won the PEN/Hemingway award for best first novel (and the Guardian named it among the 100 greatest novels of all time!). In the late 1980s it was adapted for the screen, directed by Bill Forsyth, starring Christine Lahti.

Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine by Jasper Becker. Another hard to put down book (also not new and not a novel) about the Great Leap Forward. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Chinese people suffered what may have been the worst famine in history. Over thirty million perished in a grain shortage brought on not by flood, drought, or infestation, but by the insanely irresponsible dictates of Chairman Mao Ze-dong's "Great Leap Forward," an attempt at utopian engineering gone horribly wrong. Amazon's description:

Journalist Jasper Becker conducted hundreds of interviews and spent years immersed in painstaking detective work to produce *Hungry Ghosts*, the first full account of this dark chapter in Chinese history. In this horrific story of state-sponsored terror, cannibalism, torture, and murder, China's communist leadership boasted of record harvests and actually increased grain exports, while refusing imports and international assistance. With China's reclamation of Hong Kong now a fait accompli, removing the historical blinders is more timely than ever. As reviewer Richard Bernstein wrote in the *New York Times*, "Mr. Becker's remarkable book...strikes a heavy blow against willful ignorance of what took place."

In the Garden of Beasts by Erik Larson

In the Sea There are Crocodiles by

Just Kids by Patti Smith

!*Let the Great World Spin, a novel by Colum McCann

Liar's Poker by Michael Lewis is about Wall Street culture a decade earlier than the 2008 meltdown about complicated situations, but easy and fun to read.

Lost City of Z by

!*Major Pettigrew's Last Stand by Helen Simonson. A great cheerer-upper.

Master of the Senate by Robert A. Caro

Midnight in Peking by Paul French

Nice Work by David Lodge

Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich is a short book, and not new, but it really wakes you up to the other side of undercover boss.

No Promises in the Wind by Irene Hunt. It's a very touching story about some boys who leave home during the Great Depression. (40 years old)

On China by Henry Kissinger, now in paperback. It is written for a general audience, fascinating and very timely.

One Amazing Thing by Chitra Divakaruni.

Operation Mincemeat by Ben Macintyre. "In February of 1943, a cast of colorful oddballs developed and carried out one of the most elaborate deceptions of World War II, a plan to disguise the impending Allied invasion of Sicily, framed around the body of a dead man. The deceased, who would wash up on the Spanish coast, was a complete fraud, but the lies he would carry from Room 13 of the British Admiralty all the way to Hitler's desk would help win the war. "The defining feature of this spy would be his falsity," Ben Macintyre writes in "Operation Mincemeat." "He was a pure figment of imagination, a weapon in a war far removed from the traditional battle of bombs and bullets."

Outlander, by Diana Gablton followed by **Dragonfly in Amber** and 7 other books in the series.

Outlaw Album, by Daniel Woodrell -- More short stories by man considered the next Faulkner (author of Winter's Bone.)

Overdiagnosed by Welch

Post Captain by Patrick O'Brian. There was an excellent movie made based on this story called "The Man Who Never Was." I remember being gripped by it years ago.

Presumed Innocent by Scott Thurow

Prince of Tides by Pat Conroy

Pure by Andrew Miller set in Pre-revolutionary Paris - unusual fiction

Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh about the cultivation of opium poppies in India under the Raj and the people involved in growing, processing and shipping the opium to China.

Shades of Grey by Jasper Fforde about our world but future populated by a colorocracy in which society hierarchy is determined by color perception.

Shantaram, by Gregory David Roberts- a book about India semi-autobiographical that spans 900 pages!

!Spies of the Balkans, by [Alan Furst](#) is my favorite novel in the author's spy series set in Europe at the onset of WWII. Furst weaves his stories around ordinary people in extraordinary times--and his research is terrific.

State of Wonder by Anne Paggett

!Super Sad True Love Story by Gary Shteyngart. It's set in the future, which the author describes as possibly next Tuesday. A dystopian but very funny and disturbingly resonant novel that my whole family has been caught up in.

The Art of Fielding by Chad Harbach

The Bad Girl, by Mario Vargas Llosa (translated by Edith Grossman), a highly inventive story about a Peruvian girl of modest background who cuts quite a swatch across Europe and Asia, and the Peruvian man she bewitches.

The Believers by Zoe Heller. The **New Yorker** has the best description: "Set in New York City in 2002, with the terror of September 11th still fresh and the confrontation with Iraq starting to take shape, this searing comic novel takes on hypocrisy of all kinds. Joel Litvinoff, a noted radical lawyer, suffers a stroke while in court defending a Muslim man accused of terrorist activity. His hospital room becomes the center of an orbit of women: his wife, Audrey, who clings to the diminishing hope that he will emerge from his coma; his daughters, Rosa and Karla; and Berenice, a photographer with whom he secretly had a child. As with Heller's previous novel, "What Was She Thinking?," no one is entirely likable. Audrey is angry and cruel; Rosa priggish; Karla slovenly and timid; Berenice self-satisfied. Heller's talent lies in the way she illuminates her characters, often with dazzling insight, without making excuses or offering redemption."

The Big Short by Michael Lewis is about the 2008 meltdown.

The Buddha in the Attic by Julie Otsuka

Finalist for the 2011 National Book Award. Story of a group of young women brought over from Japan to San Francisco as 'picture brides' nearly a century ago. In eight incantatory sections, *The Buddha in the Attic* traces their extraordinary lives, from their arduous journey by boat, where they exchange photographs of their husbands, imagining uncertain futures in an unknown land; to their arrival in San Francisco and their tremulous first nights as new wives; to their backbreaking work picking fruit in the fields and scrubbing the floors of white women; to their struggles to master a new language and a new culture; to their experiences in childbirth, and then as mothers, raising children who will ultimately reject their heritage and their history; to the deracinating arrival of war. (Review above from Google.) Especially intriguing was the author's use of first-person plural.

The Cat's Table by Michael Ondaatje

The Chaperone by Laura Moriarty

The Dream of the Celt by Mario Vargas Llosa

The Dressmaker, Kate Alcott

The Fixer, by Bernard Malamud, a 1965 novel, set in Ukraine/Russia in 1910-12, about a Jew who is falsely accused and imprisoned, and about the difficult situation of the Jews in Russia at that time

The Flight of Gemma Hardy, by Margot Livesey

The Glass Castle by Jeannette Wall ... particularly good for a discussion group - true story about her childhood.

The Great Divergence, by Tim Noah -- Highly informative (if wonky) book about income disparity in the US by AU Park neighbor

The Hangman's Daughter by Oliver Potzsch. Set in Bavaria in 1660. Witches, hysteria, historical novel centering on life in a village when the Devil runs wild. Potzsch's ancestor really was a hangman in Germany.

The Hare With Amber Eyes by Edmund de Waal--an extraordinary book about about the the wealthy Ephrussi family who, like the Rothchilds, were Jewish and suffered during WW2, but one lost one of the world's largest fortune while one did not. Edmund de Waal is the heir of the Ephrussi family--its traditions, but not its fortune which was lost--and he explores the family against the backdrop of the late 19th and early 20th century.

**The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Sklo about cancer cells taken from this indigent black woman and cultured for cancer research without permission or acknowledgement

The Invisible Bridge by Julie Orringer. It is fiction about Hungary during WWII and a wonderful love story as well.

The Kitchen House by Grissom (black/white relations - fiction)

The Light in the Film by Jordan Smith, for poetry.

The Litigators by John Grisham

The Marriage Plot, by Jeffery Eugenides

The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore about 2 teens/men growing up in Baltimore with the same name but not related and the different paths they took in life--one became a Rhodes scholar, the other is in prison.

**The Paris Wife* by Paula McLain, novel about Hemingway's number one---a first novel, written in first person and Hem-ish style. (We followed up with *A Moveable Feast*, which added an interesting perspective).

!*The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant

The Return by Hislop

The Revenge of Geography by Robert Kaplan

!**The Sense of an Ending*, by Julian Barnes

The Signal and the Noise by Nate Silver. This is a book about interpreting information -- extremely important to all of us in this information age. I should confess that I am a statistician, but I believe that the author makes his subject both accessible and interesting throughout. I do not think I have seen a similarly informative and entertaining explanation in any book or article.

The Sister Queens by Sophie Perinot - a local author--historical fiction.

The Swerve by Stephen Greenblatt. It's an intriguing account of how the world became modern. It won the Pulitzer Prize.

!**The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* by David Mitchell

The Tiger's Wife by

!*The Unlikely Pilgrimage* of Harold Fry. It's about a just-retired man who, after receiving a note from a long lost friend who is dying in a hospice on the other side of England, decides at the spur of the moment to walk all the way to see her again. A tale of marriage, loss, friendship, work, and walking.

!*The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabelle Wilkerson. Its long but a great read and a great story -the great migration of African-Americans from the south to the north in the 20th Century. No matter how much people think they know about race

relations in the U.S. during their lifetime, they'll find out how little they know. Isabelle Wilkerson grew up in DC--attended John Eaton ES from K-6 grade. She spoke at the Centennial Celebration at Eaton last year--named every one of her teachers from each grade, and talked about all she learned there. Her bio is fascinating--the Pulitzer when she was quite young.

The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers, a beautifully written book by a young poet and former infantryman in Iraq.

To the End of the Land, by David Grossman, a haunting story set in Israel

Unaccustomed Earth, By Jhumpa Lahiri -- More short stories. If you liked Interpreter of Maladies, you'll like this book

!Unbroken, Laura Hillenbrand, non-fiction account from WWII that makes you think about faith, fate, optimism, forgiveness, redemption, perseverance and above all, survival. The author - who also wrote Seabiscuit - just has a remarkable ability to tell a story.

Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots by Deborah Feldman. It's written by a brilliant young Hasidic Jewish woman who felt trapped in the Satmar community in Williamsburg (Brooklyn NY), and wanted to reach out of that community and learn more than she was allowed to as a young Satmar female. Once I started reading this book, I just couldn't stop, so I finished it in one sitting. Then, I read it all over again. There aren't many books that I enjoy reading more than once, but this book was one of those rare exceptions.

War of Giants by Ken Follett, which is historical fiction, based on WWI from a wide range of perspectives: a British aristocrat, peasant, Bolshevik, revolutionary, young American staffer for Woodrow Wilson, German and Australian diplomat. It was the first in a trilogy

What Was She Thinking? By Heller was published here (Heller is British) as "Notes on a Scandal" and was the source for the movie of the same name.

!Wild, by Cheryl Strayed -- Excellent autobiography about a woman who had a traumatic life and decided to walk the Pacific Crest Trail (from California to Washington State) by herself, unprepared. It's a story about what she encountered, learned, and felt along the way. It's had many excellent write ups and is on the

NYT top book list, and was recommended by Oprah. This book is very well written, too, which makes it a joy to read. Everyone in my book club loved it.

Winter's Tale by Mark Helprin. A magic Lake, the gangs of the Five points in New York, Athansor the horse, Pearly the gangster, and the best snow storm.

Wolf Hall - by Mantel (2009) and its sequel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012)

You and Me by Padgett Powell, a contemporary southern writer who writes beautifully, creatively, hilariously. In fact, I so enjoyed him that I went and read two others by him including "**Edisto**" his break-out novel, and "**The Interrogative Mood**" an experimental piece that is written entirely in questions -- and it worked for me.

*Represents books our book club has read.

!Represents books recommended many times.

Additional Non-specific recommendations:

Any John Lescroart mystery

Anything by Sue Grafton or Elizabeth George

Alan Furst--all of his books. And for those mystery lovers who like "place" stories--Frank Tallis. Mysteries set in 1890s Vienna--include music and food as part of the plot.

The "Bruno" mysteries--Martin Walker. Set in contemporary small-town France--also food!

Cambridge Scholars Publishing “ Book of the Month (Language and Literature)”