

# Rockport Public Library

Suggested Fiction Reading

February 5, 2012

***The Flight of Gemma Hardy: A Novel, by Margot Livesey***

(Harper, \$26.99, 9780062064226)

“There is nothing like a good visit with old friends, and that is what it’s like to savor this novel. Even better, really, since in this retelling of Jane Eyre the characters are imbued with a more modern sensibility — and this time around Mr. Rochester is not a reprehensible misogynist! Livesey’s Gemma remains true to the spirit of Jane, and the dark settings of Scotland and the Orkney Islands are as atmospheric as they come.”

***The House at Tyneford: A Novel, by Natasha Solomons***

(Plume, \$15, 9780452297647)

“*The House at Tyneford* is a lovely, old-fashioned novel set at the beginning of World War II on a remote English country estate where Elise has come to work as a housemaid, after having fled the Jewish persecutions in Vienna. Told in retrospective, the tale details how Elise grows from a spoiled girl into an exceptionally strong and adaptable young woman who fights to save both the family she left behind as well as the family she has come to serve.”

***The Stranger’s Child: by Alan Hollinghurst***

“In the late summer of 1913, George Sawle brings his Cambridge schoolmate—a handsome, aristocratic young poet named Cecil Valance—to his family’s modest home outside London for the weekend. George is enthralled by Cecil, and soon his sixteen-year-old sister, Daphne, is equally besotted by him and the stories he tells about Corley Court, the country estate he is heir to. But what Cecil writes in Daphne’s autograph album will change their and their families’ lives forever: a poem that, after Cecil is killed in the Great War and his reputation burnished, will become a touchstone for a generation, a work recited by every schoolchild in England. Over time, a tragic love story is spun, even as other secrets lie buried—until, decades later, an ambitious biographer threatens to unearth them.” \*\*

***The Orphan Master’s Son: A Novel, by Adam Johnson***

(Random House, \$26, 9780812992793)

An epic novel and a thrilling literary discovery, *The Orphan Master’s Son* follows a young man’s journey through the icy waters, dark tunnels, and eerie spy chambers of the world’s most mysterious dictatorship, North Korea.” BB

“Sometimes we say that a book tries to be too many things. This thought-provoking novel is many things — an adventure tale, an examination of identity and the nature of the self, a meta-narrative, a political novel, a love story, a survivor story, and more — and it succeeds on all counts. Like the works of David Mitchell, *The Orphan Master’s Son* is at once a joy to read, a challenging work, and ultimately, a terrific and satisfying story.”

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***American Dervish: A Novel, by Ayad Akhtar***

(Little Brown & Company, \$26.99, 9780316204767)

“At its simplest, *American Dervish* is a coming-of-age story. At its most complex, it is a story of religious faith, marital strife, human nature, love, envy, sexual awakening, betrayal, and racism. It is impossible to leave Akhtar’s exceptional debut novel without experiencing the struggles and pain of young Hayat as he comes to terms with both his Muslim faith and his humanity.”

***Gilder, by Kathryn Kay***

(Kensington, \$15, 9780758263223)

“This is the story of a woman whose talents include the restoration and gilding of older works of art. Gilding becomes a metaphor for her inability to face the truths of her past, and she must remind herself that the process is not successful without repairing the foundation upon which the gold leaf is layered. In a tale filled with betrayal and repentance, missed opportunities and new beginnings, the layers of gold are transformed from denial of the past to real love in the present.”

***The World We Found: A Novel, by Thrity Umrigar***

(Harper, \$25.99, 9780061938344)

“Umrigar’s latest recalls the halcyon days at university in 1970s Bombay, which were characterized by intense friendships, fierce ambitions, and a determination to change the world, as remembered by four women whose lives have ended up radically different from their collegiate dreams: one, dying in America, whose last wish is to see her three friends, two living in upper middle class Mumbai, and the fourth who has been long-estranged from their circle. Painful secrets, both past and present, threaten to prevent the reunion. Blood may be thicker than water, but Umrigar proves that friendship is thicker than blood in this marvelous novel that is both fascinating and disturbing by turns.”

***Behind the Beautiful Forevers: by Katherine Boo***

“There is a lot to like about this book: the prodigious research that it is built on, distilled so expertly that we hardly notice how much we are being taught; the graceful and vivid prose that never calls attention to itself; and above all, the true and moving renderings of the people of the Mumbai slum called Annawadi. Garbage pickers and petty thieves, victims of gruesome injustice - Ms. Boo draws us into their lives, and they do not let us go. This is a superb book.” BB

***Believing the Lie: An Inspector Lynley Novel, by Elizabeth George***

(Dutton Adult, \$28.95, 9780525952589)

“Once again George has provided us with a great mystery involving favorite characters from past works, Inspector Lynley and Sgt. Havers. The subplots are as engrossing as we’ve come to expect, and this story offers some new elements as well in both the humorous descriptions of Havers’ ‘makeover’ and the choice of a remarkably beautiful and haunting setting in the Lake District of Cumbria. Yet another exciting page-turner from an accomplished master of the genre.”

***Death Comes to Pemberley: P.D. James***

"A rare meeting of literary genius: P. D. James, long among the most admired mystery writers of our time, draws the characters of Jane Austen's beloved novel *Pride and Prejudice* into a tale of murder and emotional mayhem." Amazon

***All the Flowers in Shanghai: A Novel, by Duncan Jepson***

(William Morrow Paperbacks, \$14.99, 9780062081605)

"Devotion to the first child is a thousand-year-old tradition in China. As the second child, Xiao Feng received less love and attention than her older sister. When her sister dies just prior to being married to a man who repulsed her, Feng becomes the substitute, with duty taking precedence over personal desires. Her duty now means bearing a male heir and being forced to endure painful nightly visits from her unloved husband. Feng, once an innocent, tender, dreaming young girl, is turned into a hard and cruel young woman who makes heart-rending choices that will haunt and scar her forever. A story both poignant and powerful."

***Good American: A Novel, by Alex George***

(Amy Einhorn Books/Putnam, \$25.95, 9780399157592)

"In these crazy, sad times, when fear and greed seem to be defining our responses, it was wonderful to be reminded of the irreplaceable role immigration has played in making our country great and of the various ways of being 'a good American.' Frederick and Jette flee Prussia in 1904 and make their new home in Missouri. Their story is told by their grandson, James, and like the best family stories, is filled with the coincidences, missed connections, and both the tragedy and magic of ordinary life. George breaks your heart with the quiet sacrifices and secrets of his characters but never forgets the wonder and humor of living. Carrying the reader across the generations with music and food, religion and prohibition, racism and patriotism."

***Defending Jacob: A Novel, by William Landay***

(Delacorte, \$26, 9780385344227)

"Engrossing from the first page, *Defending Jacob* will keep you on the edge of your seat and then it will break your heart. What appears to be the story of a lovely family with a teenage son becomes a nightmare of suspicions, accusations, isolation, condemnation, and ultimately tragedy when an assistant district attorney and his wife watch as their only son is arrested for the murder of a classmate. We tend to see those we love with our hearts, which is not always the same as reality, and life can come crashing down in a hurry."

***Odds: A Love Story, by Stewart O'Nan***

(Viking, \$25.95, 9780670023165)

"This is a small novel that packs an emotional wallop. Art and Marion Fowler are at the end of their rope, with their marriage, careers, and finances unraveling at an alarming rate. A last hurrah, a Valentine's Day weekend at a posh gambling resort on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls — which they can ill afford — will determine their future. Anyone in a long relationship will both nod and cringe as O'Nan subtly and brilliantly lays out Art and Marion's frailties, strengths, foibles, and deep affection. Both suspenseful and sweet." I keep waiting for a major breakthrough from this fine author.

***The Snow Child: A Novel, by Eowyn Ivey***

(Reagan Arthur Books, \$24.99, 9780316175678)

"This love story, set in Alaska, is really a love story about Alaska. Ivey describes the achingly beautiful landscape without making it seem an easy place to live. Based on an old fairy tale, this is the story of a childless couple who make a snow child one evening only to find a real little girl the next day. As the girl grows through the years, we know that this enchanting story will have the twists that we have come to expect with tales that teach us lessons about life. Friendships, marriage, parenthood, and survival — all set in an unforgiving but entrancing landscape."

***A Grown-Up Kind of Pretty: A Novel, by Joshilyn Jackson***

(Grand Central Publishing, \$24.99, 9780446582353)

"The Slocumb women have the curse of having to deal with bad men and early motherhood. Mother Liza and grandmother Jenny are doing everything in their power to make sure that 15-year-old Mosey doesn't find herself in the same predicament. Jenny unearths human bones while digging in the backyard, and with Liza too ill to explain them, Mosey decides to take it upon herself to find the answers to her family's secrets and end the curse once and for all."

***Another Woman by Penny Vincenzi***

"...Delivers her most page-turning saga yet in this novel of intrigue, sure to please her legions of fans. The night before her lavish wedding, Cressida Forrest went to bed serene and happy. By morning she had vanished--without apparent cause, and without a trace. Shocked, anxious, and uncomprehending, the two families face a long day of revelations, as a complex, fragile web of sexual, marital, and financial secrets is ripped apart by Cressida's disappearance." Amazon

## **Some of the Best of 2011**

***The Marriage Plot: A Novel, by Jeffrey Eugenides***

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$28, 9780374203054)

"Have all the great love stories already been written? What relevance do Jane Austen or George Eliot have for today's woman? In the 1980s, Madeline is wrestling with these questions both for her college thesis and as a woman fielding the attentions of two young men. Leonard is charismatic, flawed, and tragic, so Madeline is, of course, drawn to him; Mitchell is a seeker who is trying to figure out how he fits into the general scheme of the universe, and he is totally smitten by Madeline. Eugenides has brilliantly succeeded in writing a new love story for our times."

***The Night Circus: A Novel by Erin Morgenstern***

(Doubleday, \$26.95, 9780385534635)

"This elegant debut is a striking example of a nostalgic yet modern fairy tale. When two competing magicians lay a wager as to which can mold the more powerful protege, they opt to use a fantastical

traveling wonderland -- *The Night Circus* -- as the venue for the competition. What is meant to be a battle of magical skills evolves into something much deeper as apprentices Celia and Marco enchant not only the circus around them, but also each other. The real conflict arises when the two realize how the competition is meant to end and they set about trying to change their predestined fate."

***The Art of Fielding: A Novel by Chad Harbach***

(Little, Brown & Company, \$25.99, 9780316126694)

"Despite having reservations about a 'baseball book,' reading this debut novel I discovered that baseball is every bit as exciting and excruciating as any thriller, as complicated as any psychological mystery, and as heartbreaking as my favorite romance. Harbach loves his characters, and never lets them off easily. All the words I want to use to describe this book -- original, heartfelt, classic, hilarious, wise, unforgettable -- are insufficient."

***Rules of Civility: A Novel, by Amor Towles***

(Viking Adult, \$26.95, 9780670022694)

"This flawless debut novel follows two young women, boarding-house roommates, making their way in 1938 Manhattan. A chance meeting with an enigmatic young businessman launches the pair into areas of society heretofore closed to them, where they encounter a large cast of characters both charming and repellent. With echoes of Fitzgerald, Towles evokes effortlessly the era of pre-war Manhattan, from the workplace politics of a law office secretarial pool to the alcohol-fueled lawn party of the Long Island gin-and-horses set. This is an astonishing book!"

***Swamplandia!: by Karen Russell***

"The Bigtree alligator-wrestling dynasty is in decline, and Swamplandia!, their island home and gator-wrestling theme park, formerly #1 in the region, is swiftly being encroached upon by a fearsome and sophisticated competitor called the World of Darkness. Ava's mother, the park's indomitable headliner, has just died; her sister, Ossie, has fallen in love with a spooky character known as the Dredgeman, who may or may not be an actual ghost; and her brilliant big brother, Kiwi, who dreams of becoming a scholar, has just defected to the World of Darkness in a last-ditch effort to keep their family business from going under. Ava's father, affectionately known as Chief Bigtree, is AWOL; and that leaves Ava, a resourceful but terrified thirteen, to manage ninety-eight gators and the vast, inscrutable landscape of her own grief." BB

***The Empty Family: by Colm Toibin***

"In the captivating stories that make up *The Empty Family*, Colm Tóibín delineates with a tender and unique sensibility, lives of unspoken or unconscious longing, of individuals often willingly cast adrift from their history. From the young Pakistani immigrant who seeks some kind of permanence in a strange town, to the Irish woman reluctantly returning to Dublin and discovering a city that refuses to acknowledge her long absence, each of Tóibín's stories manage to contain whole worlds: stories of fleeing the past and returning home, of family threads lost and ultimately regained." BB

***A Sense of an Ending: by Julian Barnes* Booker Prize Winner**

“This intense new novel follows a middle-aged man as he contends with a past he has never much thought about - until his closest childhood friends return with a vengeance, one of them from the grave, another maddeningly present. Tony Webster thought he'd left all this behind as he built a life for himself, and by now his marriage and family and career have fallen into an amicable divorce and retirement. But he is then presented with a mysterious legacy that obliges him to reconsider a variety of things he thought he'd understood.” BB

### **On Canaan's Side by Sebastian Barry**

“Told in the first person, as a narrative of Lilly Bere's life over seventeen days, *On Canaan's Side* opens as she mourns the loss of her grandson, Bill. Lilly revisits her past, going back to the moment she was forced to flee Ireland, at the end of the First World War, and continues her tale in America, a world filled with both hope and danger. At once epic and intimate, Lilly's story unfolds as she tries to make sense of the sorrows and troubles of her life and of the people whose lives she has touched. Spanning nearly seven decades, from the Great Depression to World War II and the Vietnam War, it is the heartbreaking story of a woman whose capability to love is enormous, and whose compassion, even for those who have wronged her, is astonishing.” Amazon

### **Featured Author William Trevor**

#### **Love and Summer**

“The tragic consequences of a woman's lost honor and a family's shame haunt several generations in Trevor's masterful 14th novel. His prose precisely nuanced and restrained, Trevor depicts a society beginning to loosen itself from the Church's implacable condemnation of sexual immorality. Years ago, Miss Connulty's dragon of a mother forced her into lifelong atonement after she was abandoned by her lover. Now, in the mid-1950s, middle-aged and forever marked for spinsterhood in her small Irish town, she is intent on protecting Ellie Dillahan, the naïve young wife of an older farmer. A foundling raised by nuns, Ellie was sent to housekeep for the widowed farmer, and she is content until her dormant emotions are awakened by a charming but feckless bachelor, Florian Kilderry, who has plans to soon leave Ireland. Their affair is bittersweet, evoking Florian's regretful knowledge that he will cause heartbreak and Ellie's shy but urgent passion and culminating in a surprising resolution. Trevor renders the fictional town of Rathmoye with the precise detail of a photograph, while his portrait of its inhabitants is more subtle and painterly, suggesting their interwoven secrets, respectful traditions and stoic courtesy. Amazon

#### **The Story of Lucy Gault**

A difficult novel for any parent to read, William Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault* recounts “the tale of a young girl whose Protestant family is driven from its rural Irish home in 1921. Eight-year-old Lucy is in love with Lahardane: the old house itself, the woods, the nearby beach, the shells and fir cones and sticks that she collected like treasure. The day before her family is scheduled to flee Ireland, leaving the house and furnishings in the care of trusted servants, Lucy runs away. Her parents, finding a scrap of her clothing on the beach, assume the worst. Days later, they leave Lahardane, choosing not to settle in England, as they had planned, but to roam Europe in their grief, leaving no forwarding address. But Lucy has not killed herself; she's only broken her leg in the woods. Eventually she makes it back to the house to find her parents gone. She spends her childhood waiting to be forgiven

for her wicked act, postponing all happiness until she can be reunited with her mother and father. Revealing more of the plot will spoil this lovely novel for its many readers. It is enough to note that Trevor's characteristic depth and emotional complexity are fully realized here in the watchful reticence of his young heroine and the strange but beautiful way she finds to express her own forgiveness." Amazon

### **The Collected Stories**

"William Trevor is one of the renowned figures in contemporary literature, described as 'the greatest living writer of short stories in the English language' by the "New Yorker" and acclaimed for his haunting and profound insights into the human heart. Here is the ultimate collection of his short fiction, with dozens of tales spanning his career and ranging from the moving to the macabre, the humorous to the haunting. From the penetrating "Memories of Youghal" to the bittersweet "Bodily Secrets" and the elegiac "Two More Gallants", here are masterpieces of insight, depth, drama and humanity, acutely rendered by a modern master." Amazon

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