

Recommended Books 2012

Fiction

The Diviners

Bray, Libba

When aspiring flapper Evie, gets into trouble in her small Ohio town, she is sent to live with her uncle who runs the Museum of American Folklore, Superstition, and the Occult in New York. But Evie has a gift: she is able to see your secrets just from holding an object belonging to you. Soon, she's called upon to defeat a frightening supernatural enemy. Teens and adults alike will enjoy this fast-paced period genre-bender.

This Is How You Lose Her

Diaz, Junot

Stories of love, betrayal, and the other constants of adult romantic relationships feature heavily in Pulitzer winner Diaz's second story collection. Yunior, the loud-mouthed authorial stand-in protagonist Diaz continues to return to, is the narrator for most of these stories, and the landscape will be familiar to anyone well-versed in Diaz's earlier work.

Astray

Donoghue, Emma

In a departure from her thriller, *Room*, Donoghue here returns to historical storytelling. Drawing inspiration from historical newspaper articles and stories, she creates a collection of short narratives that are remarkably engrossing. Using lushly detailed backdrops, she explores the themes of loss, struggle, love, grace and determination through richly drawn characters who are adrift in time and place, detached from their roots; gone astray.

Half-Blood Blues

Edugyan, Esi

This Booker Prize shortlisted novel evokes Berlin and Paris during World War II through the eyes of a rag-tag bunch of jazz musicians struggling to stay alive in a Berlin that has turned against jazz and turned against Jews, but also against half-breeds and black people of all nationalities. Cutting between 1940 and 1992, *Half-Blood Blues* is a story of race, friendship, secrets, and

betrayal that showcases a side of World War II not often written about—that is, the story of the other, non-Jewish ethnic groups persecuted by the Reich.

Gone Girl

Flynn, Gillian

When Amy Dunne goes missing on her 5th wedding anniversary, her husband Nick is plunged into a nightmare of controversy and media attention that threatens to rip open his life and expose dark secrets about his life, his marriage, and his possible involvement in Amy's disappearance—or death. Flynn's break-out hit is a fast-paced, compelling thriller.

The Fault in Our Stars

Green, John

Hazel has resigned herself to being sick for a long time and then dying; That's just what happens when you have terminal cancer. But when she meets Augustus, a survivor in remission, at her usually uneventful cancer support group, both their lives change radically. This bittersweet novel from Green is a masterpiece. Hazel and Augustus are two characters so unique and wise beyond their years that you will not forget this story for a long while.

Arcadia

Groff, Lauren

In the 1970s, a group of idealistic hippies come together with a vision of utopia, following their charismatic leader, Handy, on a cross-country trek which ends in western New York state at a decaying mansion known as Arcadia House. Bit (the littlest bit of a hippie) is the first child born to the new Arcadians and he grows up in the commune among the optimistic, romantic, and ultimately all-too-human adult founders. Bit is a thoughtful, sensitive, and entirely sympathetic narrator and it is a pleasure to grow up alongside him, watching as his perceptions and understandings change with time.

Angelmaker

Harkaway, Nick

All his life, Joe Spork has been caught between the legacy of his grandfather Daniel, a brilliant and honest clockmaker, and his father Mathew, a vivacious and larger-than-life criminal mastermind who ruled London's underground. When an old friend of Joe's brings him a client with a mysterious piece of antique clockwork needing repair, Joe's quiet life is disrupted and now he must embrace parts of himself he'd thought long in his past if he's going to not only survive, but save the world in the bargain. Impossible to categorize, the only thing one can call this novel for sure is great fun.

Libriomancer

Hines, Jim

Isaac Vainio is a libriomancer, a special kind of magician who can make objects in books manifest in reality. He's working as a librarian in small-town Michigan and doing database duty on the side for his other employers, Die Zwelf Portenaere—the Porters, an order of libriomancers.

However, the Porters are under attack, and their immortal founder, Johannes Gutenberg, is missing. Isaac and his friends are the Porters' only hope. Fast-paced, intelligent, and funny; booklovers of all stripes will be trying to master bibliomancy themselves after a visit to Hines' world.

Defending Jacob

Landay, William

When a teenage boy is murdered, DA Andy Barber believes a local pedophile is guilty. But when Barber's own teenage son, Jacob, is accused of the crime and arrested, Barber becomes more determined than ever to prove his son's innocence. A taut and haunting legal thriller in the tradition of Grisham and Turow.

Sacre Bleu

Moore, Christopher

Aspiring artist Lucien Lessard finds that his painting takes fire when Juliette, his mysterious lover, brings him a special tube of ultramarine blue paint from a strange paint dealer known only as the Colorman. Lucien joins forces with his friend "the little gentleman," the painter Toulouse-Lautrec, to discover the secret of the Colorman and the secret of the sacred blue before they end up dead like so many other painters who have used the Colorman's paint. Humorous as Moore's books always are, *Sacre Bleu*, like *Lamb and Fool*, also contains rich historical detail that is clearly the product of meticulous research and a deep passion for the material.

The Rook

O'Malley, Daniel

"The body you are wearing used to be mine." So begins the letter that Myfanwy Thomas finds after opening her eyes in the middle of a public park surrounded by dead bodies and with no memory of who she is. Now she has two choices: To begin a brand-new life under an assumed identity; or to take up the life and persona of Myfanwy Thomas and figure out who betrayed her and caused the amnesia. She chooses the latter, and soon discovers that she is a Rook, a high-ranking executive in a secret agency keeping Britain safe from supernatural threats. But whoever caused Myfanwy's amnesia won't stop there. The safety and security of all of Britain is under threat and only the new Myfanwy can stop it. Thrilling and inventive.

The Yellow Birds

Powers, Kevin

This deeply affecting novel, written by an Iraq war veteran (and recent M.F.A. graduate in poetry), is the heart-wrenching story of two young soldiers trying to stay alive, and one of the soldiers returning home only to find that the war continues on in his head. A 2012 National Book Awards finalist, this novel is an important read.

Calling Invisible Women

Ray, Jeanne

Clover, a fifty-something woman, has felt invisible for years. So when she wakes up one morning

to discover herself truly invisible, her worst fears have been realized. But soon she discovers that her busy pediatrician husband and teen children don't even notice her condition. She finds a support group with other women who have vanished as she has, and begins to exploit her condition, even thwarting a bank robbery. But will her husband ever notice? A gently witty satire; many women will empathize with Clover's plight.

Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore

Sloan, Robin

Clay Jannon, an out of work web/graphic designer, takes a job as the night clerk at Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore. He soon discovers that, in addition to the shelves of relatively normal stock up front, there are also shelves full of strange encrypted books in the back and a small group of peculiar people who come in at all hours requesting books from the back shelves. Clay builds a 3D computer-generated model of the store and begins to find strange patterns in the borrowing habits of these odd customers and finds himself caught up in a mystery dating back to the earliest days of printing. Unique, whimsical, and clever, combining new technology with old in a story sure to appeal to geeks of all stripes.

The Light Between Oceans

Stedman, M. L.

Tom Sherbourne, a lighthouse keeper on the western shores of Australia, and his wife Isabel enjoy their isolated life on Janus Rock. But Isabel becomes depressed when she is unable to have children. So when a boat washes ashore carrying a dead man and a healthy baby girl, the couple make a decision that will haunt their lives, and that of a grieving young mother, forever. A truly beautiful novel; not to be missed.

Beautiful Ruins

Walter, Jess

Set in Italy in the '60s and present-day Hollywood, this is a wonderful old-fashioned love story with a contemporary satirical edge. Intertwining through relationships and time are an American starlet who comes to a remote Italian village to die, a movie producer who made his comeback with a reality TV show, Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, an army veteran turned alcoholic writer, and a dissatisfied movie assistant. Deep but not depressing, this novel is literary but also a page turner. And it has a happy ending!

Nonfiction

Instant: the story of Polaroid

Bonanos, Christopher

Before there were Steve Jobs and Apple, there were Edwin Land and Polaroid. Land was a charismatic, inventive leader, holding over 500 patents. He took a garage start-up and turned it into a multi-national company which had a wide-ranging effect on American culture and business. A fascinating story of a fascinating man.

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: life, death, and hope in a Mumbai undercity

Boo, Katherine

Pulitzer-winning journalist Boo here depicts the lives of the inhabitants of Annawadi, a poverty-stricken slum across the street from Mumbai's Sahar International Airport and surrounding luxury hotels. The product of three years of in-depth reporting, this is an eye-opening look at the ever-widening gap between the haves and have-nots in contemporary India.

Vivian Maier: out of the shadows

Cahan, Richard and Michael Williams.

Shortly after her death in 2009, an archive of thousands of Vivian Maier's photographs and negatives was discovered. This previously unknown photographer took the world by storm with her compelling, beautiful, black and white street photography. This is the first comprehensive collection of her images in print, and serves as a portrait of the photographer and also of the woman.

Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking

Cain, Susan

Though they often fade into the background, introverts can be creative, dynamic people and in fact are responsible for many important contributions to culture and society, including but not limited to the personal computer. Cain's carefully researched portrait of the type demonstrates how outspoken contemporary culture dismisses the introverted to its own detriment.

Last Lion: the rise and fall of Ted Kennedy

Canellos, Peter S. (ed)

This respectful but balanced biography of Ted Kennedy portrays his maturation from troubled, slightly wild youth to a respected, serious politician once described by John McCain as "the last lion of the Senate." With discussions of both Kennedy's personal trials and also his political battles, this is the very readable biography of a flawed but remarkable man.

Short Nights of the Shadow Catcher: the epic life and immortal photographs of Edward Curtis

Egan, Timothy

Though not well-known today, photographer Edward Curtis (1868-1952) is best remembered for his controversial efforts to document the culture of every Native American tribe in North America before their ways of life vanished. This life's work culminated in a 20-volume set, The North American Indian. Though he is often accused of overly romanticizing his subjects, it is nevertheless true that Curtis spent 30 years fighting to preserve Native American culture in an effort which left him divorced and destitute. Egan's portrait of this polarizing figure is compelling.

Distrust That Particular Flavor

Gibson, William

Gibson's first collection of non-fiction draws from the last several decades of his writing career and features all the usual Gibsonian subjects—the rise of the Internet; the technology and culture

of Japan; Gibson's own past in small-town Virginia and early discovery of science fiction; and all the ways that human culture has already been irrevocably altered by technologies as commonplace as radio and as pervasive as cyberspace. A sly wit and a lively intelligence shine through the writing, and every article, regardless of whether its predictions have been borne out by reality, is fascinating.

End This Depression Now!

Krugman, Paul R.

Nobel-winning economist Krugman's at times humorous, educational look at the current Great Recession in America, tracing out not just how the country got to this point, but also a clear path out of the depression and back to a strong, vibrant economy. Never dry, this should appeal to anyone with an interest in economics and politics.

Let's Pretend This Never Happened: a mostly true memoir

Lawson, Jenny

Jenny Lawson, best known for her side-splittingly funny blog at thebloggess.com, delivers more of the same here, in her (mostly true) memoir. Jenny grew up poor in rural Texas, the daughter of a taxidermist father whose idea of a good joke was making puppets out of roadkill. An outsider who later struggled with eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and more recently rheumatoid arthritis, she recounts the trials and tribulations of her life in a no-holds-barred, double-barreled, profanity-laden manner. Those who share Jenny's twisted sense of humor and irreverent outlook on life will find themselves laughing out loud and garnering strange looks from those around them.

Double Cross: the true story of the D-Day spies

MacIntyre, Ben

The success of the D-Day landing at Normandy was achieved due to a complicated web of spies, many of whom were double agents who were given carefully crafted misinformation to mislead the Germans. MacIntyre here spins out the stories of the five main double agents, all quirky and fascinating figures in their own right, and how their activities intersected with wartime events. An absorbing story that reads like an espionage thriller novel but has the advantage of being completely true.

Unaccountable: what hospitals won't tell you and how transparency can revolutionize health care

Makary, Marty

Surgeon Makary provides a searing indictment of the culture of secrecy in contemporary American hospitals, arguing that greater transparency related to hospitals' success and failure rates would lead to greater accountability and thus, reduction of dangerous hospital error. Thought-provoking and eye-opening.

Thomas Jefferson: the art of power

Meacham, Jon

Pulitzer-prize winning biographer Meacham here lauds the political acumen of Thomas Jefferson.

While conversant with criticisms of Jefferson's character, including his stance on slavery, Meacham presents an overwhelmingly positive view of the third American president, focusing on those aspects of Jefferson's leadership that balanced cooperation and compromise with an often ruthless drive to advance his own authority and steer the fledgling nation in the direction of his own ideals.

Book was There: reading in electronic times

Piper, Andrew

A lover of both books and computers, Piper here both reflects upon the history of reading and bookishness and also ruminates upon the future of reading in the digital age. Showing that rumors about the death of the book have been greatly exaggerated and that reading itself is integral in our lives in ways we may not fully understand, Piper has penned not an elegy for a lost pleasure but a celebration of an evolving one.

The Signal and the Noise: why so many predictions fail?but some don't

Silver, Nate

Statistician Silver built a innovative system for predicting baseball results and has now predicted two presidential elections to within a hair's breadth of the actual results. Here he discusses the science of probability, dissecting how to pull a meaningful "signal" out of all the "noise" of raw data and just what causes so many predictions to fail. He speaks to other statisticians and prediction-makers, utilizing a series of case studies involving everything from hurricane tracking to counterterrorism to poker. Thought-provoking and interesting even for the mathematics-shy.

Darwin's Ghosts: the secret history of evolution

Stott, Rebecca

After the publication of his seminal *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin was chastised by his fellows for not discussing the many thinkers and scientists who had entertained similar evolutionary ideas and hypotheses before him. Stott here remedies that lack, providing brief but information-rich biographies of some of the great thinkers who preceded Darwin's theory of natural selection, from Aristotle to Charles Darwin's own grandfather Erasmus Darwin. Fascinating, well-researched, and never dry, *Darwin's Ghosts* is a treasure-trove for both those already interested in the topic and those coming to this history for the first time.

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