

BROWN BAG BOOKTALK RECOMMENDATIONS

AUGUST 5TH, 2021

Anderson, Alison *The Summer Guest* <2016> (Fiction Anderson) - This subtle and haunting novel from novelist and *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* translator Anderson intertwines the lives of three women whose fragile worlds are on the edge of collapse. Katya Kendall, a Russian emigre, hopes the translation of a diary by an obscure Ukrainian doctor at whose family home Anton Chekhov spent two summers will save her troubled British publishing house along with her marriage. Translator Ana Harding finds her solitude and her current worries temporarily set aside by both the beauty of the diary and the allure of possibly discovering an unpublished Chekhov novel. But the most piercing story belongs to the diary's author, Zinaida Lintvaryova, or Zina, trapped by blindness and a deepening illness at her family home of Luka, on the river Pysol, in the year 1888, who finds reprieve in her notable guest, also a doctor, on the cusp on literary stardom. Mournful and meditative, the diary's bittersweet passages on Zina's illness and darkened life are punctuated by lively exchanges with the charming and ambitious Chekhov. The novel is deeply literary in its attention to the work of writing and translation, but also political in its awareness of how Russian-Ukrainian relations have impact on the lives of Anderson's heroines (both the historical and present ones). Ardent Chekhov fans will appreciate a brief immersion in the world he must have known for two summers, while readers of any stamp can enjoy the melancholy beauty of a vanished world and the surprise twist that, at the end, offers what all three characters have been searching for-"something completely unexpected and equally precious: another way of seeing the world." -- summary from *Publisher's Weekly* review, recommended by EN

Bahn, Paul *Incredible Archaeology: Inspiring Places from Our Human Past* <2020> (Nonfiction 930.1 I379) - This stunning book is published by the Smithsonian. I hardly need to say more about it, but I will anyway. The editor has selected one hundred different archaeological sites from North America, Middle and South America, Europe and Northern Asia, Africa, Near East and Western Asia, and Far East and Oceania. There are maps showing locations, several pages of text introducing each site (after summarizing type of archaeology, architectural style, location and date of construction) and beautiful photographs. You can dip into the volume as a coffee table book, read it from cover-to-cover as I did, or use it as a guide to plan exploration of various sites in person. -- JAC

Benedict, Marie and Victoria Christopher Murray *The Personal Librarian* <2021> (Fiction Benedict) - We've recommended many of Marie Benedict's historical fiction titles before (*The Other Einstein*, *Carnegie's Maid*, *The Only Woman in the Room*, *Lady Clementine* and *The Mystery of Mrs. Christie*), but I think this is her best story yet. She is joined by collaborator Victoria Christopher Murray who has written more than thirty novels. This is the story of Belle da Costa Greene who was hired away from Princeton University in 1906 by J. P. Morgan to become the personal librarian to his private collection of art, rare books, and manuscripts. The young woman worked tirelessly to build that collection into the amazing public institution known today as the Pierpont Morgan Library. That story would be spell-binding under any circumstances, but not only was Belle a woman (and a very young one at that), but she was colored who passed as white. She hid her true identity as Belle Marion Greener, who was the daughter of Richard Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard, in order to protect herself, her family, and her legacy from the racial prejudices of the day. -- JAC

Colgan, Jenny *Sunrise by the Sea* <2021> (Fiction Colgan) - We've recommended Jenny Colgan's fiction before, and many of you have remarked how you enjoy the tales of Life on Mount Polbearne, off the coast of Cornwall, England. In this new installment Polly and Huckle are still happily married with two children (Avery and Daisy) and their pet puffin Neil. Polly is busy with her Little Beach Street Bakery and Huckle produces honey. But they are worried - about money. Living in a lighthouse that needs repairs is getting more expensive all the time. This story introduces two newcomers to the island. Marisa is living in Exeter but moves to the island as a way of escaping having to interact with other people. She continues to telecommute to her job but becomes more withdrawn all the time. In fact, she is suffering from the extreme anxiety social disorder of agoraphobia which is somehow tied to her extreme grief over the death of her grandfather in Italy. Her next-door neighbor, Alexei, is a very noisy, very large Russian piano teacher who is trying to recover from a bad love affair. Despite herself, Marisa slowly begins to recover, with the help of Polly, her next-door neighbor, her online therapist, and her Italian grandmother (via Skype). She gradually becomes part of the Mount Polbearne community. Following a hurricane, she pitches in to help save the bakery and Polly's family. The bakery has now added real delicious Italian pizza to the menu. -- JAC

Cooper, Tea *The Girl in the Painting* <2021> (Fiction Cooper) - Although she is new to me, Australian author Tea Cooper is a well-known author of historical fiction taking place in her home country. Michael and Elizabeth Quinn come to Australia as Irish immigrants in 1862. They are just children travelling alone to meet up with their parents who immigrated earlier. Eventually the siblings become very successful business owners based in Maitland. They also become philanthropists who quietly do what they can to help people in need. In 1906 they take nine-year-old orphan Jane Piper into their home. Jane is a mathematical prodigy and the Quinn's do everything they can to further her education. That mathematical genius takes Jane far and she gradually becomes a prominent part of the siblings business. But when Elizabeth reacts in terror to a simple art exhibition at a local gallery, Jane comes to realize that her unique logic may be the only way to solve the mystery of why Elizabeth has reacted in such a way. I really enjoyed this Australian historical fiction blended with mystery. -- JAC

Dev, Sonali *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors* <2019> (Fiction Dev) - DJ Caine, a multiracial British Cordon Bleu-trained chef, is dismayed to learn that the arrogant woman who invaded "his" kitchen, almost tipped over his caramel, and then referred to him as "the hired help" is Trisha Raje, the brilliant doctor he's counting on to save his sister Emma's life. No slouch in the talent department himself, DJ knows he has no choice but to tamp down his resentment and find a way to get along with Trisha, not only for Emma's sake but also for his career as a personal chef. Then the sparks that fly between them turn to attraction, confusing them both and leading to a union that is profound and totally fresh. A career-focused heroine who's unrivaled in the operating room but lost when it comes to relationships and a conflicted hero whose food is pure magic sort their way through prejudices, first impressions, -miscommunications, and family expectations in a story alight with unforgettable characters. -VERDICT With humor, insight, and culinary descriptions so rich the tantalizing aromas of curry and cilantro practically waft from the pages, Dev's latest draws readers into a tangled world of class, cultural, and

political issues in a delicious riff on *Pride and Prejudice*. Dev (*A Distant Heart*) lives in the Chicago area. -- summary from *Library Journal* review, recommended by HV

Drori, Jonathan *Around the World in 80 Plants* <2021> (Nonfiction [580 D786a](#)) - This amazing book also features incredible paintings by Lucille Clerc. They also teamed up on *Around the World in 80 Trees*. Drori is a former trustee of the royal Botanic Gardens and plants have been his life. In this volume he takes us from Northern Europe, Southern Europe, East Mediterranean and Middle East, Africa, Central and South Asia, East Asia, South East Asia, Oceania, south American, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean, North America, and the Globe. It is a measure of his greatness that every single review I've read chooses different plants to highlight in their review. Drori shows us how plants are intricately entwined with human history, culture, and folklore. This book should charm even those who are not normally entranced by our botanic partners. -- JAC

Fraser, Jackie *The Bookshop of Second Chances* <2021> (Fiction [Fraser](#)) - This is an appealing romance between two middle-aged people, and for me there is the additional allure of a bookshop in Scotland. Thea Mottram has just been let go from her office job, and her husband of nearly twenty years has decided to leave her for one of their "friends." She truly doesn't know what to do next, but a distant great-uncle in Scotland has just passed away and left her his home and antique book collection, so why not leave Sussex and travel to a small coastal Scottish town where she be anonymous. She soon falls in love with the quaint cottage and the quirky locals, but she can't seem to win over local used bookshop owner Edward Maltravers. She hopes to sell her uncle's collection to Maltravers and somehow ends up working in his shop as a stopgap. Despite their really rocky introduction, the two eventually form a closer bond than we may have believed possible. -- JAC

Gaynor, Hazel *A Memory of Violets: A Novel of London's Flower Sellers* <2015> (Fiction [Gaynor](#)) - In 1876 London, two Irish sisters struggle to survive by selling flowers and watercress. Abused by their father and eventually orphaned, the girls have a heartbreaking existence, with little food to eat and nights spent huddled in doorways. But when the girls accidentally become separated, their lives are changed forever. Fast-forward nearly 40 years, to when young Tilly Harper leaves the green hills of the Lake District to work in London as a housemother at Mr. Shaw's Home for Watercress and Flower Girls. Founded as a refuge for orphaned and disabled flower girls, the home provides food, shelter, and a livelihood for its charges. Shortly after Tilly arrives, she finds a box containing former resident Flora Flynn's diary documenting her search for her missing sister. When Tilly decides to find out what happened to Rosie, her own life is transformed. Gaynor (*The Girl Who Came Home*, 2014) once again brings history to life. With intriguing characters and a deeply absorbing story, her latest is a fascinating examination of one city's rich history and the often-forgotten people who lived in it. -- summary from *Booklist* review, recommended by EN

Hume, Virginia *Haven Point* <2021> (Fiction [Hume](#)) - This is a debut novel. It takes place in an upscale summer community on the coast of Maine. The story begins with Maren Larson meeting Dr. Oliver Demarest at Walter Reed Army hospital in 1944. She is a beautiful blond girl from Minnesota and is soon swept off her feet by the doctor. They marry and have three children and are generally pretty happy together, despite Oliver's alcoholic mother. By 1970 the country is grappling with the Vietnam conflict, and their middle child, Annie, has fallen for a disreputable young man living just beyond the

Haven Point boundaries. Then a terrible tragedy strikes the Demarests and Annie vows never to return to Haven Point. In 2008 Annie's daughter, Skye, has arrived in Haven Point to help scatter her mother's ashes. It has finally become time for Maren to explain to her granddaughter Skye, the reasons for Annie's behavior over the years. I enjoy multigenerational sagas, and this is a good one. If you like Elin Hillenbrand or Jamie Brenner you should try this novel. -- JAC

Hunger, Christina *How Stella Learned to Talk: The Groundbreaking Story of the World's First Talking Dog: Includes Tips on How to Teach Your Dog* <2021> (Nonfiction 636.7 H936h) - Christine Hunger is a speech-language pathologist. She took her experience and skills from teaching young children with language development delays and applied her techniques with her new puppy Stella. The primary tool that Christine used is called *Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)* devices. She started by programming three paw-sized buttons to say "outside," "play," and "water." It is amazing that in less than two years Stella now knows more than 45 words and can combine them into short phrases. Stella. For example Stella can now say "help, come come outside" and then "yes happy" when Christina gets her leash ready. There are tips at the ends of chapters on how to teach your own dog. As most of you know, I have a very intelligent golden retriever, Zoey, who might well learn to use buttons, even though she is far from being a puppy. All dog owners realize that dogs understand many words, but now it might be possible for them to initiate conversations with word AAC buttons. -- JAC

Marie, Annette *Three Mages and a Margarita* <2018> (Fiction [Audio e-book Hoopla] Marie) - Broke, almost homeless, and recently fired. Those are [Tori's] official reasons for answering a wanted ad for a skeezy-looking bartender gig. It went downhill the moment they asked for a trial shift instead of an interview—to see if [she'd] mesh with their "special" clientele... It turns out [the] place isn't a bar. It's a guild. And the three cocky guys [she] drenched with a margarita during [her] trial? Yeah, they were mages. Either [she's] exactly the kind of bartender this guild needs, or there's a good reason no one else wants to work [there]. So what's a broke girl to do? Take the job, of course—with a pay raise. -- summary from the publisher, recommended by **NCM**

Newman, T. J. *Falling* <2021> (Fiction Newman) - A man takes a mother and her two children hostage in their home. He offers the woman's husband an impossible choice: the lives of his family, or the lives of 149 innocent people. As if that weren't an interesting enough way to start a novel, there's this: the husband is an airline pilot, at cruising altitude en route to New York City, and the choice he's given is to crash his plane, killing everyone aboard, or save the lives of his passengers and watch his family die. The husband's response is to tell the man who holds the lives of his family in his hand that he won't crash the plane, and he won't let the man kill his family. Newman, who spent a decade as a flight attendant before switching gears to writing (she apparently wrote much of this book on a plane), gives this incredibly suspenseful thriller a great sense of verisimilitude. The cockpit dialogue sounds just right; the mechanics of flying a plane, ditto. And the story? Brilliant. You read the book and think: How has no one thought of this scenario before? And how the hell is pilot Bill Hoffman going to keep his passengers and his family alive? With abundantly human characters, natural dialogue, and a plot that unleashes one surprise after another, this could be the novel that everyone is talking about this summer. -- summary from *Booklist* review, recommended by **SCR**

O'Leary, Beth *The Road Trip* <2021> (Fiction O'Leary) - Addie and her sister Deb are heading off on a road trip to a friend's wedding when they get into a car accident. The driver of the other car? Addie's ex, Dylan. Addie and Deb take pity on Dylan and his friend Marcus--their car isn't drivable, and there's no public transportation where they're heading--and soon they're all packed into Deb's Mini, along with another guest, Rodney. Interspersed with the present-day narrative of their increasingly complicated journey are recollections from both Addie and Dylan of their initial meeting and how their relationship developed and eventually fell apart. Luckily for them, they suddenly have plenty of time in close quarters to sort through the misunderstandings and bad decisions that led to their breakup and decide whether to give it another shot. Though some readers will find it hard to have much sympathy for privileged Dylan, his character shows a lot of growth between the breakup and the reunion. Addie is a warm and vivacious heroine, and readers will root for her to recover from her emotional wounds. This sweet second-chance romance will please fans of *The Flatshare* and character-driven romances. -- summary from *Library Journal* review, recommended by SCR

Reid, Taylor Jenkins *Malibu Rising* <2021> (Fiction Reid) - Nina, Jay, Hud, and Kit Riva are household names in 1983, as much because their father is rock star Mick Riva as for their surfing talent. None of them wanted to live in the spotlight, but, despite Mick taking off long ago, they do. Then it's the night of the annual Riva party, where everybody wants to be--except maybe responsible Nina--and anything can happen. Over the course of 24 hours, the Riva siblings will have to decide if their futures will be driven by the legacies of their parents or if they'll share the secrets that might let them choose their own paths. Structuring the novel to take place over one day and night, Reid (*Daisy Jones & the Six*, 2019) asks if it's possible to keep only parts of what you get from your parents. Multiple perspectives (including flashbacks to Mick and June's courtship), intricate relationships, spot-on surf scenes, plus a wild party that could only have happened in the 1980s make for a fun summer read that challenges the idea of passing on what we inherit. Recommend to fans of Jennifer Weiner and Katherine Center. -- summary from *Booklist* review, recommended by NCM

Sidman, Joyce *The Girl Who Drew Butterflies: How Maria Merian's Art Changed Science* <2018> (Youth Nonfiction Biography 92 Merian, Maria) - This is an absolutely beautiful biography written for children, but more than suitable to be read by adults. Sidman is a well-known nature poet for children and proves herself here to be a talented biographer as well. Maria Merian lived from 1647 to 1717. You can see from her paintings of moths and butterflies that she was an amazing artist, from a time when women could not pursue art as a career. What is even more amazing was her ground-breaking work as a scientist. She was the first to see the link between caterpillars and butterflies or moths. Her meticulous observations and paintings also showed what these beautiful creatures ate as she pictured them in their native habitat. What is, perhaps, most amazing of all, she travelled to remote Surinam on a research/painting expedition. The results of that trip were published in 1705 as *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium*, which included plates of her beautiful portraits of butterflies and moths. It is important to remember that this is before John James Audubon, or Isaac Newton became famous. Enjoy this beautiful book and wonder why we have forgotten this amazing pioneer. -- JAC

Tsui, Bonnie *Why We Swim* <2020> (Nonfiction 797.21 T882w) - In this eloquent exploration of the human relationship to water, Tsui examines "the universal experience of being immersed in water," whether it's in an ocean, lake, or swimming pool. The narrative is divided into five topics: survival, well-being, community, competition, and flow. A lifelong swimmer, Tsui deftly moves from one topic to another, weaving in her personal experiences, which include embracing open-water swimming (sans wet suit) in the frigid waters of San Francisco Bay and swimming across Lake George in upstate New York, the latter to kick off her wedding celebration. Fascinating highlights include the gripping story of an Icelandic fisherman who survives a winter shipwreck, plunging into 45-degree water and enduring a 6-kilometer swim to shore, and the story of a swimming coach who gave lessons in Saddam Hussein's palace pool. Tsui travels to Japan to learn firsthand about Nihon Eiho, also known as samurai swimming (yes, you swim in a full suit of armor). Trailblazers featured include Charlotte "Eppie" Epstein, who founded the Women's Swimming Association in 1917; legendary open-water swimmer Lynne Cox; five-time Olympian Dara Torres; and the most decorated male swimmer in history, Michael Phelps. This fascinating look at the positive impact swimming has had on our lives throughout history might leave most readers eager to get back in the water as soon as possible. -- summary from *Booklist* review, recommended by EN