

BROWN BAG BOOKTALK RECOMMENDATIONS

AUGUST 3RD, 2023

Azoulay, Karen *Flowers and Their Meanings: The Secret Language and History of Over 600 Blooms* <2023> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction 398.3682 A996f) -- I have always been fascinated by floriography or the language of flowers. This beautiful and affordable book is delightful in so many ways. The author begins with a history of flower dictionaries and the traditions that they encompassed. I had no idea that their history goes back to ancient times and virtually all centuries before the Victorian era. Flower dictionaries are mentioned innumerable times in fiction about the Victorian era. They were especially popular in England, France, other European countries, and the United States. Following the introduction, the author gets to the flower dictionary itself. The pictures combine nineteenth century botanical drawings with electric photography of several model's faces. Over 600 hundred flowers, herbs and trees are included. The book ends with a unique mood index of plants you might want to use when creating your own bouquet or tussy-mussy. If you want friendship, for example, you might choose blue periwinkle, acacia, double violets and oak-leaved geranium. -- recommended by JAC

Bauermeister, Erica *No Two Persons* <2023> {fiction} (Fiction Bauermeister) -- Alice has always aspired to be an author, but it is not until she loses her brother that she writes the novel of a lifetime. *No Two Persons* is the story of 9 separate readers and how their lives are affected by the novel. Some of the most interesting characters are a homeless teen name Nola who is left the book by a kind school janitor, and the bookseller that ends up with Alice. -- recommended by SCR

Buck, Pearl S. *The Good Earth* <1931> {fiction} (Fiction Buck) -- Occasionally I like to re-read and recommend an old classic. Pearl Sydenstricker Buck was the daughter of Southern Presbyterian missionaries who spent most of their career in China. Pearl was brought up in China and was fluent in both English and classical Chinese. She left China to attend college in the United States. In 1917 she married the agricultural economist missionary John Lossing Buck, and they moved to Suzhou in the Anhui Province of China. This is the region she described in *The Good Earth*. From 1920 to 1933 the Bucks made their home in Nanjing, where she wrote her first novels. The story of *The Good Earth* told the story of an early twentieth century farming family. It follows the rise and fall of the fortunes of Wang Lung and his wife O-Lan. They work hard and slowly save enough money to buy one plot of land at a time. There are famines and wars, and the family suffers. Eventually their fortunes improve again and they return to the land. Wang Lung becomes more and more prosperous, and we see the dynamics of his extended family change. *The Good Earth* was the best-selling novel in the United States in both 1931 and 1932. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1932, the William Dean Howells Medal in 1935, and was influential in Buck's winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938. -- recommended by JAC

Cass, Laurie *The Crime That Binds* <2022> {mystery fiction} (Paperback fiction Cass) -- When I want to read something really enjoyable (and almost mindless) I turn to cozy mysteries. Yes, I like the puzzles, but I enjoy learning about the life path of others and an appealing location. For me this series really fits the bill. It takes place in my home state of Michigan on a lake in the northwest corner of the lower peninsula. The main character is a librarian who also drives the bookmobile. Her primary companion is a cat who always travels with her on the bookmobile. There is a great cast of other characters whom I would like to have as friends. In this installment, which is number nine in the

continuing series *The Bookmobile Cat*, there is a missing sculpture, a murder and an innocent suspect hiding out from the police. If you like magnificent outdoor settings, warm and comforting characters, and intriguing puzzles with an unexpected ending this is the book for you. -- recommended by JAC

Dave, Laura *The Last Thing He Told Me* <2021> {thriller fiction} (Fiction Dave) -- Your husband isn't who you think he is. His teenage daughter, Bailey (who doesn't want anything to do with you), has now been put in your protection, after her father disappears. This is Hannah's plight. Hannah and Bailey set off to discover the truth, but each discovery leads down a more complicated path. This is a good read with a lot of twists and turns and an unexpected ending. -- recommended by CC

Dexter, Colin *Last Bus to Woodstock* <1975> {mystery fiction} (Paperback mystery Dexter) -- If you follow the PBS television show, *Endeavor*, you will enjoy this series that follows the detective's later career. The first mystery, which was actually written prior to the 10 seasons of the popular Masterpiece creation, follows the death of a young girl, Sylvia Kane. Kane is abducted after she is waiting for her bus to return home. Morse must track various shady characters to solve the crime. -- recommended by SCR

Enerson Wood, Tracey *The War Nurse* <2021> {historical fiction} (available from both Hoopla and the Greater Phoenix Digital Library Enerson Wood) -- Julia Stimson, a nursing superintendent, is charged with recruiting 64 nurses to relieve the British nurses in a base hospital in France. The American troops have been deployed to fight in World War I. When she arrives she is unprepared for the conditions she finds, but pushes forward to do her best to help the wounded and dying. Her own medical issues as well as the resistance from the military doctors only prove to make her work more difficult. She fights for her authority within her practice and she gets support from one physician with whom she becomes very close. The Spanish flu further complicates her work, but with her persistence she is able to decrease its rapid spread. Based on a true story, this is about a woman making a difference in the outcome of the war effort as well as finding her own way in the battles of a man's world. -- recommended by CC

Kingsolver, Barbara *Demon Copperhead* <2022> {fiction} (Fiction Kingsolver) -- Kingsolver was the co-winner of the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for this poignant novel set in her rural home of Appalachia. Written on Charles Dickens's actual desk, Kingsolver has fashioned her main character after *David Copperfield*. Damon Fields, AKA Demon Copperhead, is the red-headed son of a young, drug addicted mother who overdoses when he is in middle school. Becoming a ward of the state, Copperhead lands on a tobacco farm with other young kids as cheap child labor. When he is finally rescued from the farm, he becomes the ward of the local football coach. Suddenly on a winning path, Copperhead becomes the star of his high school team. But all comes crashing down after he succumbs to a devastating knee injury, and then becomes addicted to Oxycodone. Copperhead eventually overcomes his addictions and finds hope with past acquaintances. For a better understanding of the impact of the opioid epidemic in the Appalachian area, read *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty*, by Patrick Radden Keefe. -- recommended by SCR

Lundberg, Sofia and Richman, Alyson and Rose, M. J. *The Friday Night Club: A Novel of Artist Hilma af Klint and Her Creative Circle* <2023> {historical fiction} (Fiction Lundberg) -- You are about to find out who Hilma af Klint is. Today I have three interconnected books about her. This novel has two

separate timelines. In the first timeline we meet the artist Hilma af Klint 1862-1944), and her artist friend Anna Cassel, sketcher Cornelia Cederberg, medium Sigrid Hedman and believer in séances Matilda Nilsson. They get together to explore paranormal spiritistic séances every week on Friday night. They called themselves de Fem (which means The Five). Eventually Hilma began to receive paranormal mystic painting instructions from the High Master Gregor at these séances. At the time she was a very successful landscape and portrait painter. She, Anna, and Cornelia had attended the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. When she began painting with the instructions from Gregor she said "the pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawing, and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict; nevertheless I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brush stroke." Af Klint became very prolific in her chosen style. She realized that her works might only be understood in the future. Therefore, she left everything to her nephew with the proviso that they not be shown until twenty years after her death. These works are truly stunning and groundbreaking. They were created before Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, even though until recently these three male artists were credited with inventing abstract art. The second storyline features a fictional art curator Eben Elliot, who wants to bring the art of af Klint to the Guggenheim Museum. Although Eben is fictional, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum did in fact have a hugely successful exhibition in 2018 called Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future. That exhibit had over 600,000 visitors, the most-visited exhibition in the museum's history. -- recommended by JAC

Deines, Philipp *The Five Lives of Hilma af Klint* <2022> {nonfiction} (Graphic Novel Nonfiction Biography 92 Klint, Hilma) -- I discovered this graphic novel by accident when I was looking for books about af Klint. I rarely, if ever, read graphic novels but the subject really lends itself to this treatment. Deines divides his graphic novel biography into five chapters: 1) The Search Begins, 2) The Sea and the School of Seeing, 3) The Path to Abstraction, 4) The Suitcase Museum, and 5) The Temple. -- recommended by JAC

[**Voss, Julia** (Anne Posten, translator from the original German into English) *Hilma af Klint, a Biography* <2022> {nonfiction biography}] The library does not yet own this, and I have not finished reading it. This is a companion to the Lundberg and Deines books listed above.] Voss is a German art historian who became fascinated with the life and art of Hilma af Klint. She resigned from her job as art editor for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and has devoted her life to creating this biography. She first learned Swedish and then began delving into the thousands of pages of diaries, journals, and letters. By the way, Deines and Voss are married, and their books are both fascinating and exquisitely produced. -- recommended by JAC

McNeil, Kelley *A Day Like This* <2021> {fiction} (available from Amazon Kindle Unlimited) -- I got this book a while ago from an Amazon \$1 sale, and finally got around to reading it. It was so good! It was fascinating, kept me intrigued, and wondering how it would resolve. It's not a crime mystery, but I think all stories are actually mysteries - they keep us turning the pages to find out what happens next. This one is about Annie, a woman who's in an auto accident with her five-year-old daughter. When she wakes up and asks after her daughter, it becomes clear that, not only is her daughter not there, she has never even existed! Most of the rest of the story is about Annie coming to grips with and navigating a living reality that is not at all what is in her memory. The writing was perfectly descriptive, the emotions real and bittersweet. The ending was surprising, but very satisfying for me. I highly recommend this novel !! -- recommended by MW

Miranda, Megan *The Last House Guest* <2019> {thriller fiction} (Fiction Miranda) -- An unlikely friendship develops between two girls who spend six summers together in Littleport, Maine. This idyllic vacation retreat usually separates the rich vacationers from the year-around residents. Avery a vacationer and Sadie a full-time resident become the closest of friends, sharing their summer lives, until Sadie dies as an apparent suicide. Avery feels she is suspect and must uncover the truth in order to clear her name. As the story progresses, we find many twists and turns, as well as some shocking truths. This twisty story was a fun and quick read. -- recommended by CC

Perry, Anne *Death in Focus* <2019> {historical mystery fiction} (Fiction Perry) -- The amazingly prolific bestselling Anne Perry has two long-running historical mystery series set in Victorian England. These are the *William Monk* novels and the *Charlotte and Thomas Pitt* books. *Death in Focus* is the first book in her new historical thriller series *Elena Standish*. Standish is an intrepid young photographer who unhesitatingly goes into the heart of Berlin as Hitler begins his ascent to power. Her sister lost her husband in World War I and they also lost their brother during the conflict. Their father is a diplomat, and their grandfather was once the unknown head of MI6. So, we have a thriller with compelling family dynamics and political intrigue and an appealing new heroine. If you enjoy the *Maisie Dobbs* series by Jacqueline Winspear and the novels of Charles Todd give this series a try. There are currently five books in the series. -- recommended by JAC

Quinn, Kate *The Alice Network* <2017> {historical fiction} (Fiction Quinn) -- (The book is definitely gritty, at times a bit graphic). This was an excellent book! I bought it back in September on sale for Kindle. It is almost 500 pages, which is why it took me so long to start it. I hesitate at books that are more than 300 pages, because I'm always afraid I'll lose interest. But once I started this one, I was hooked. It's a spy thriller, historical fiction based on the real Alice Network, a group of mostly women who were WWI spies in France. The action bounces between 1925 and 1947, and real-life happenings provide some of the background/settings. There is a fairly extensive bibliography of related material at the end. -- recommended by MW

Van Pelt, Shelby *Remarkably Bright Creatures* <2022> {fiction} (Fiction Van Pelt) -- Tova Sullivan, a recent elderly widow, begins working the night shift at Sowell Bay Aquarium as the cleaning lady. She likes to keep busy as it helps her to cope with the loss of her husband and her son Eric. Eric disappeared over thirty years ago while working on a boat in the Puget Sound. At the Aquarium she becomes acquainted with a giant Pacific Octopus named Marcellus, and they develop a mutual friendship. Marcellus deduces what happened to Tova's son and tries to pass the information on to Tova. With the help of Cameron, a young, misguided assistant, a growing bond develops and an interesting story is revealed. This novel deals with loneliness, and the bonds between people and animals. Surprises are in order -- recommended by CC

Willig, Lauren *Two Wars and a Wedding* <2023> {historical fiction} (Fiction Willig) -- I assumed from the title that this would be about the time between World War I and World War II. I found, however, that the two wars were ones I knew little or nothing about. In 1896 the main character, Betsy Hayes, arrives in Athens. She is an aspiring archaeologist who has just graduated from Smith College. She unfortunately discovers that the male dominated field of excavation is not open to her. The only man

who takes her seriously is Charles, Baron de Robecourt. When war erupts between Greece and Turkey, Betsy puts aside her archeologic ambition and enlists as a nurse. By 1898 Betsy turns away from nursing. But when her best friend, Ava, heads to Cuba with Clara Barton and the Red Cross to patch up the wounded in the Spanish-American War, Betsy once again allows her impetuous nature to surface. She enlists once again as a nurse. Betsy follows Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders straight into the heart of the fighting. As you can imagine from the title, this story has it all: romance, friendship, adventure, and intrigue. I also really enjoyed learning more about the two wars. -- recommended by JAC