

## Sherman Library Book Discussions for 2017

Third Friday of every month at 7:30 p.m.

### April 21

**Fates and Furies** by Lauren Groff (2015, 400 pp.) Led by Mariya Hurwitz. Essentially the story of a flawed marriage, this novel is written in a split narrative—husband first, wife second, giving us the full, fascinating picture of their relationship and their inner lives. NPR’s Morning Edition included it in their reading club, calling it “a master class of best lines;” President Obama said it was his favorite book of 2015.

### May 19

**The Voyage of the Beagle** by Charles Darwin (1837, 420 pp.) Led by Stephanie Spinner. Less than a year after leaving Cambridge University, Charles Darwin, then 22 years old, signed on to HMS the *Beagle* as a naturalist and companion to the ship’s captain. This book is the (slightly abridged) journal he kept during the five-year voyage, which took him first to the coastal waters of South America and then around the world. Darwin’s writing is vivid and eloquent, whether describing Galapagos volcanoes, Australasian coral reefs, or gaucho horsemanship. His journal entries are not only observant, but also imbued with a palpable sense of wonder at the beauties of the natural world. The book also includes an introduction, maps, notes, appendices, and an essay by Robert FitzRoy, the *Beagle*’s captain.

### June 16

**Just Kids** by Patti Smith (2010, 304 pp.) Led by Pat Corrigan. Patti Smith, musician, poet, and artist, came of age in the 1960’s. Photographer Robert Mapplethorpe became her friend, partner, muse, protector, and supporter. Very much a part of the sixties art and music scene, the two associated with Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, Andy Warhol, and many other creative lights of the day. Smith’s heartfelt memoir describes the ways she and Mapplethorpe helped one another achieve their dreams of success.

### July 21

**The Human Stain** by Philip Roth (2000, 362 pp.) Led by Barbara Griff. The third in a trilogy, this novel follows *AMERICAN PASTORAL* and *I MARRIED A COMMUNIST*, in which Roth explores 20th century American society. Here he examines the cutthroat, politically correct, and often petty atmosphere of academia. Roth says he wrote the trilogy to portray such recent events as the McCarthy hearings, the Vietnam War, and President Bill Clinton’s impeachment because they were “historical moments in post-war American life that have had the greatest impact on my generation.”

### August 18

**A Manual for Cleaning Women** by Lucia Berlin (2015, 432 pp.) Led by Diana Bristol. Berlin, who died in 2005, was brought up in mining camps in the US and Chile with her mining engineer father. She married young and raised four sons alone, doing menial jobs to support them. Berlin began writing in her twenties, and was first published in literary journals and magazines; her first story collection, *HOMESICK*, won a National Book Award. *A MANUAL FOR CLEANING WOMEN*--43 stories, many autobiographical—garnered universal praise. “Lucia Berlin spent her career in obscurity. Now, she is being hailed as a literary genius.” (The New York Times)

### September 15

**The Story of a New Name** by Elena Ferrante (2012, 472 pp.) Led by Lorna Barrett. The second of Ferrante’s four Neapolitan novels, this continues the saga of Lina, Elena, and the cast of characters in *My Brilliant Friend*. Set after the events of that book (when their intense, competitive childhood friendship began), *Story of a New Name* depicts their complex personal lives as they face the challenges of young womanhood against the backdrop of Italy after the Second World War.

**October 20**

**This Boy's Life: a Memoir** by Tobias Wolff (1989, 304 pp.) Discussion leader TBD. Separated by divorce from his father and brother, young Toby Wolff develops an extraordinarily close, almost telepathic relationship with his mother. Yet their closeness can't prevent his new stepfather's hostility, which forces Toby into a constant, painful struggle for identity and self-respect. Wolff's masterful portrayal of his adolescence, with its crafty, bumbling, and outrageous acts of self-invention "electrified critics," for both its finely wrought prose and its "scarifying" events.

**November 17**

**Our Souls at Night** by Kent Haruf (2015 192 pp.) Led by Marge Josephson. Haruf's final novel is set in the same fictional Colorado town as his National Book Award-nominated *Plainsong*, and portrays elderly widow Addie and her aging widower neighbor Louis as they embark on an unlikely friendship, an antidote to the loneliness they most exquisitely felt at night. As the friendship deepens, it is tested by busybodies and meddling family members, plot points that almost distract from what makes this novel such a fitting and sweet swan song: the fact that you're never too old to reinvent yourself, take risks, and find love.

**December 15**

**Homegoing** by Yaa Gyasi (2016, 305 pp.) Led by Corinne Kevorkian. An epic bridging two continents, two cultures and many generations, *Homegoing* begins with two half-sisters growing up in Fante and Asante territory (now Ghana) in the mid-18th century. One marries a British officer and leads a life of relative privilege; the other is captured and sold into slavery. Each subsequent chapter tells the story of one of their descendants, alternating between Ghana and America, and ranging from the plantations of the South to the Civil War and the Great Migration, from the coal mines of rural Alabama to the jazz clubs and dope houses of twentieth-century Harlem, right up through the present day.

**January 2018**

**Hillbilly Elegy** by J.D. Vance (2016, 264 pp.) Led by Pat Endress.

**February 2018**

**A Gentleman in Moscow** by Amor Towles (2016, 462 pp.) Led by Nana Greller.