

SHERMAN LIBRARY 2018 BOOK DISCUSSIONS

March 16

MARCH by Geraldine Brooks (2005, 288 pp.) Led by Chris Keenan.

This novel, set before and during the Civil War, recasts Louisa May Alcott's *LITTLE WOMEN* from the point of view of the family's absent father. Inserting his story into the classic tale, Brooks depicts his wrenching experiences as a Union Army chaplain during the conflict. *MARCH* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2006. "Louisa May Alcott would be well pleased." --The Economist.

April 20

HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES: WHAT THEY FEEL, HOW THEY COMMUNICATE. DISCOVERIES FROM A SECRET WORLD by Peter Wohlleben (2016, 288 pp.) A collaboration with the Connecticut Audubon Society - Deer Pond Farm. Co-led by Elissa Johnson and Deirdra Wallin. Peter Wohlleben, a forester with a deep appreciation and understanding of trees, convincingly makes the case that the forest is a social network. Presenting scientific information throughout, he describes how trees communicate and support one another much like a human family. Wohlleben also shares his deep love of woods and forests, explaining the amazing processes of life, death, and regeneration he has observed.

This discussion will be followed up with an **Arbor Day Tree Walk at Deer Pond Farm on Saturday April 28, 10 a.m.** Join arborist Robert Judd and program coordinator Deidra Wallin for an enjoyable walk and talk focusing on better understanding our trees as a social network and as influenced by their environment. We will explore the concepts of the book while observing the phenological stages of various trees on this day such as our native *Amelanchier Canadensis* (Serviceberry Shadblow), *Cornus Florida* (Dogwood) and our *Malus* (apple) trees.

May 18

THE BUDDHA IN THE ATTIC by Julie Otsuka (2011, 144 pp.) Led by Marge Josephson. A prize-winning novel about Japanese "picture brides"—young women who came to San Francisco in the early 1900's to marry men they had never met. Divided into eight sections, it traces their lives, depicting their journeys by boat, their expectations, and the often grueling lives they led, including their internment during WW II. WINNER OF THE PEN/FAULKNER AWARD. FINALIST FOR THE 2011 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

June 15

MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS: THE QUEST OF DR. PAUL FARMER, A MAN WHO WOULD CURE THE WORLD by Tracy Kidder (2003, 317 pp.) Led by Lorna Barrett. In medical school, Paul Farmer found his life's calling: to diagnose and cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who most need them. Believing that "the only real nation is humanity," he worked tirelessly to achieve his goals, funding and building free clinics in Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia. Kidder's book about this extraordinary man is one of his best, and truly inspiring. "It'll fill you equally with wonder and hope."—People.

July 20

THE MARCH by E.L. Doctorow (2006, 363 pp.) Led by Stephanie Spinner.

In 1864, Union general William Tecumseh Sherman marched his sixty thousand troops through Georgia to the sea, and then up into the Carolinas, effectively ending the Civil War. The army fought off Confederate forces, demolished cities, and swept up in its wake both white refugees and thousands of freed slaves. With terse episodes and multiple narratives, Doctorow paints an unforgettable picture of this floating world, and the historic upheaval around it. "An *Iliad*-like portrait of war as a primeval human affliction . . . [welds] the personal and the mythic into a thrilling and poignant story."—New York Times.

August 17

NEWS OF THE WORLD by Paulette Jiles (2016, 225 pp.) Led by Mary Rindfleisch. Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd travels from town to town, reading newspapers and bringing the news of the world to settlements on the Texas frontier. Then he is hired to transport Johanna, captured and held for years by the Kiowa Indians—back to her relatives, 400 miles away. Ten-year-old Johanna, who now considers herself a Kiowa, has absolutely no desire to return. A National Book Award finalist, the novel's narrative voice, like its central character, is wonderfully fresh and distinctive. "Lyrical and affecting, the novel succeeds in skirting clichés through its empathy and through the depth of its major characters."—Kirkus.

September 21

WILD SWANS: THREE DAUGHTERS OF CHINA by Jung Chang (1991, 524 pp.) Led by Pat Endress. From her grandmother who was sold as a concubine, her parents who lived through the Japanese occupation and the Civil War, to her own youth during the Cultural Revolution, Chang tells the history of China through her family. A moving family tale and fascinating way to visit nearly a century of Chinese history. "Bursting with drama, heartbreak and horror, this extraordinary family portrait mirrors China's century of turbulence."— Publisher's Weekly.

October 19

FRANKENSTEIN by Mary Shelley (1718, 250-300 pp. depending on edition) Led by Joseph Keneally. Written at the age of 21, FRANKENSTEIN is the novel that kickstarted the Gothic movement in English literature, and continues to inspire facets of pop culture today. We all know what Hollywood has done with the story—dozens of films and counting—but how many have read the original, published 200 years ago this year? It's high time!

November 16

THE LITTLE RED CHAIRS by Edna O'Brien (2016, 320 pp.) Led by Diana Bristol. O'Brien's 17th novel begins with a Balkan war criminal masquerading as a holistic healer in a small Irish village. Fidelma, one of the village women, falls passionately in love with him, and is forced to flee to London when he is exposed. There, entering the world of immigrants, exiles and indentured visitors, she tries to reclaim her life. The novel's title refers to the 20year commemoration of the Serbian siege, when thousands of little red chairs, representing the dead, filled Sarajevo's square. Written when she was 85, and called "O'Brien's masterpiece" by Philip Roth, this is a harrowing, funny, timely novel.

December 21

THE TORTILLA CURTAIN by T.C. Boyle (1995, 355 pp.) Led by Cindy Whitman. Two Los Angeles couples—white liberal Haves in a gated community, and Mexican immigrant Have-Nots, living in a makeshift camp—are brought together by a freak accident, sparking a tragicomedy of error and misunderstanding. Boyle's novel, a meditation on the dispossessed and the American dream, California style, was written more than twenty years ago. It is painfully relevant today. "Succeeds in stealing the front page news and bringing it home. . . A book to appreciate as we peer at the faces of strangers outside our windows, and wall ourselves in." --The Boston Globe.

January 18

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH by Edith Wharton (1905, 304-400 pp., depending on edition.) Led by Barbara Griff. Set in the late Victorian era, Wharton's novel depicts the tragic misadventures of Lily Bart, a beautiful, intelligent, genteel young woman, whose rebellious impulses keep her from the good marriage so vital to her well-being. A mordant insider's view of Gilded Age New York society and the darkest of social satires, THE HOUSE OF MIRTH is one of Wharton's finest works.

February 15

RUSH OH! by Shirley Barrett (2016, 355 pp.) Led by Pat Corrigan. It's 1908, and Mary Davidson, tasked with supporting her father's boisterous whaling crews while caring for her five brothers and sisters after the death of their mother, must navigate through sibling rivalries and an all-consuming first love for a new crewmember. Told with humor, and brimming with the atmosphere of a rural fishing town in New South Wales, this novel offers not only romance, but also a close look at how whales were hunted from small, land-launched boats more than a century ago. "Humorous, imaginative and tender..."—The Independent.