

## **From The New York Times Top Ten of 2009**

### ***Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It* - Maile Meloy**

Meloy's calm, intelligent prose renders her stories' self-sabotaging characters — lawyers, unfaithful spouses, eccentric older women, Montanans — eminently understandable.

### **\* *Chronic City* – Jonathan Lethem**

Beneath the gaudy makeup of this dancing showgirl of a novel, set in an alternate-reality Manhattan, is the girl next door: a traditional bildungsroman with a strong moral compass.

### **\* *A Gate at the Stairs* – Lorrie Moore**

Moore's latest novel, about a Midwestern college student who hires on as a nanny for a brainy couple on the eve of adoption, brandishes some big material — war, racism — in a resolutely insouciant key.

### **\* *Half Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel* - Jeannette Walls**

Assuming her maternal grandmother's voice, Walls, the author of "The Glass Castle," recreates an adrenaline-charged existence on the rough-and-tumble Southwest frontier.

### **\* *A Short History of Women* – Kate Walbert**

The 15 lean, concentrated chapters in this exquisitely written novel alternate among the lives of a British suffragist and a handful of her Anglo-American descendants.

## **From The New York Times Top 100 List of 2009**

### ***Amateur Barbarians* – Robert Cohen**

Cohen's middle-aged protagonist heads to Africa, leaving his wife back home in New England with a younger rival.

### ***American Rust* – Philipp Meyer**

Meyer's crime novel/road novel hybrid also manages to chronicle life in a dying mill town.

### ***The Anthologist* – Nicholson Baker**

Baker's ardent novel about poetry — with its hero trying, and mostly failing, to write an anthology introduction — actually does justice to poetry.

### ***The Art Student's War* – Brad Leithauser**

In midcentury Detroit, a young woman searches for authenticity and passion in art and in love.

### **\**Await Your Reply* – Dan Chaon**

Three essentially separate story lines, with morbidly alienated main characters, link up at the end of Chaon's unremittingly dark and provocative novel.

### ***The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* – Peter Ackroyd**

This clever novel's Frankenstein hobnobs with the Shelleys.

### **\**The Confessions of Edward Day* – Valerie Martin**

An actor, saved from drowning by an unsavory rival, learns that gratitude never follows humiliation.

### ***Do Not Deny Me: Stories* – Jean Thompson**

The woes dramatized here are no less painful for being unexceptional.

### ***Don't Cry: Stories* – Mary Gaitskill**

Gaitskill implicates the reader in what feels like a violation of her own characters, whose lives are more often broken than in any way admirable.

### ***Everyman Dies Alone* – Hans Fallada**

This is the first English version of Fallada's 1947 novel, based on a real-life German couple who mounted modest but suicidal resistance against Hitler.

### ***Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned* – Wells Tower**

This polished story collection takes its sustenance from class conflict, rough men and strong women, and the intersection between hotheads and cool customers.

### ***Family Album* – Penelope Lively**

It's the slow, inexorable way everyone comes to acknowledge the suppressed event at the heart of this domestic novel that makes it quietly devastating.

### ***Follow Me* – Joanna Scott**

A heroine bent on reinvention is at the center of this densely stitched crazy quilt of a novel, which spans six decades and a wealth of genres while evoking a quintessential American mythology.

### **\**Generosity: An Enhancement* - Richard Powers**

This novel's central figure is a woman ostensibly afflicted with hyperthymia — an excess of happiness.

### **\**How It Ended: New and Collected Stories* – Jay McInerney**

This collection, from a career now reaching nearly three decades, reminds us how broad McInerney's scope has been and how confidently he has ranged across our national experience.

### **\**In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* - Daniyal Mueenuddin**

The eight linked stories here follow the scheming of a rich and powerful Pakistani family and their employees.

### **\**Invisible* – Paul Auster**

The student-hero of Auster's masterly novel learns about love from several characters, but an affair with his sister permanently defines his personality.

### **\**Jeff in Venice, Death in Varansi* – Geoff Dyer**

This haunting novel is like a rough guide to transformation: moving from scenes of erotic decadence to scenes of squalor, the death it describes is that of craving, of intention, even of self.

### ***The Lacuna* – Barbara Kingsolver**

This novel, about a boy's memorable bonds with Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and Leon Trotsky, is a call to conscience and connection.

### **\**Lark and Termite* – Jayne Anne Phillips**

Phillips's inspired novel, with its Faulknerian echoes, revolves around a loyal sister and her impaired brother, who sees what others don't.

### **\**Let the Great World Spin* – Colum McCann**

Philippe Petit's 1974 high-wire walk between the twin towers is pivotal to all the lives in this deeply affecting New York novel.

### ***The Little Stranger* – Sarah Waters**

In Waters's novel of postwar anxiety, members of a decaying upper-crust English family start to come to sticky ends in their creepy mansion.

### ***Love and Obstacles* – Aleksandar Hemon**

The worldly eccentric who narrates these tales declares a specialty in "those brainy postmodern setups" somehow tied to identity.

### **\**Love and Summer* – William Trevor**

A heartbreaking and satisfying novel about the relationship between a restless amateur photographer and a shy young Irish farm wife.

### **\**Museum of Innocence* – Orhan Pamuk**

The city of Istanbul is on exhibit in Pamuk's novel of first love painfully sustained over a lifetime.

### **\**My Father's Tears and Other Stories* – John Updike**

In his final collection of new fiction, Updike relives the matter of a lifetime and grapples with the effects of aging, disease and death.

### ***Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* – Kazuo Ishiguro**

First-person tales of human emotion in the waning hours of light.

### ***Nothing Right: Short Stories* – Antonya Nelson**

Nelson is drawn to the damage that results when strong women foolishly trust weak men.

### **\**Sag Harbor* – Colson Whitehead**

Benji, the well-off 15-year-old black hero of Whitehead's memoiristic fourth novel, lives in a world where life doesn't assault him but rather affords him the time to figure out who he wants to be.

### **\**The Song Is You* – Arthur Phillips**

Phillips turns the notion of the artistic muse on its head and gives it a spin, delineating a pas de deux between a young singer-songwriter and the older man who actively, obsessively inspires her.

### **\**Too Much Happiness* – Alice Munro**

Munro's stories take on pulp fiction's sensational subjects. But episodes of murder, suicide and adultery turn out to be just anterooms to an echo chamber filled with subtle and far-reaching thematic reverberations.

### ***Typhoon* – Charles Cumming**

British and American spies clash in the buildup to the Beijing Olympics.

### **\**Wolf Hall* – Hilary Mantel**

Tolerant, passionate and humane, Thomas Cromwell is cast as the picaresque hero of this Man Booker Prize-winning novel of Henry VIII's turbulent court.

### **\**The Year of the Flood* – Margaret Atwood**

Through other mouths, Atwood has brilliantly retold her 2003 novel "Oryx and Crake," showing how the kids Glenn and Jimmy became Crake and the Snowman.

## **Library Journal**

### ***All the Living* – C.E. Morgan**

Caught in a fraught relationship with a man trying to salvage his family's Kentucky farm, a young woman considers her choices: hard love or the freedom to be alone.

### ***The Children's Book* – A. S. Byatt**

Stories spill forth from Byatt's magisterial new work, and not just the stories told by main character Olive Wellwood, a children's writer.

# Best Fiction Books 2009



*These titles were chosen by,  
Library Journal, The New York  
Times, Publishers Weekly, The  
Washington Post, and others  
as the best fiction of 2009.*

*You can find all of them here  
at*

*The Ridgely Library*

(\*Designates books found on “best  
books” lists of more than one  
publication)

*(Annotations taken from publications)*

## ***It's Beginning to Hurt: Stories* – James Lasdun**

What happens when we break through the gauze of everydayness, and existential panic hits? We get this remarkable collection of stories, offering affecting but unsentimental truths about how we live.

## ***Short Girls* – Bich Minh Nguyen**

This lovely debut novel about Vietnamese American sisters Van and Linny Luong and their eccentric, invention-obsessed father depicts a pluralistic immigrant culture in which all of us are short people trying to measure up to America's tall ideals.

## ***\*Spoooner* – Pete Dexter**

Known for his tough-guy prose, Dexter here turns in something different: a wry and generous autobiographical tale about a wayward young man and the stepfather who stands by him, regardless.

## ***\*This Is Where I Leave You* – Jonathan Tropper**

In his best novel yet, Tropper transforms what could have been a stereotypical situation comedy—dysfunctional Jewish family sits shiva for the late patriarch—into a hilarious, testosterone-driven thrill ride that is also heartfelt and poignant.

## ***\*Tinkers* – Paul Harding**

As he lies dying, surrounded by his family, an old man recalls his life as a tinker in hardscrabble New England—and the result is quietly dazzling magic.

## **Publishers Weekly**

### ***\*The Believers* – Zoë Heller**

Heller zeroes in on a liberal Jewish Greenwich Village family whose perfect lefty household falls into some hilarious setups as the dysfunctions pile up and eventually spill over when the patriarch's feet of clay are revealed. Hilarious, readable and atmospheric.

### ***Cutting for Stone* – Abraham Verghese**

Verghese's move to fiction is sweeping and fabulous, starting in India, settling in Ethiopia and moving on to the U.S. in a magnificent epic that follows twin boys as they negotiate medical training, revolution, the search for their roots and their relationship with each other.

### ***The Little Stranger* – Sarah Waters**

A finalist for the Man Booker Prize, this subtle, creepy haunted house story chronicles the decline of an aristocratic country family after WWII as seen through the less than reliable eyes of a bachelor doctor, whose mother had once served as a maid at the family's manor.

## ***The Man in the Wooden Hat* – Jane Gardam**

Octogenarian Gardam bookends her much-lauded *Old Filth* with this witty and very British love story, taking on with aplomb loyalty, lust, ambition and longing as she excavates the holes in all our hearts.

## ***New World Monkeys* – Nancy Mauro**

An outstandingly original debut that takes the ridiculous (a couple kill a wild pig on their move to the burbs that turns out to be their new town's beloved mascot) and renders it psychological in this sendup of academia, advertising, peeping toms and young marrieds.

## ***The Vagrants* – Yiyun Li**

Wrenching and bleak are understatement for Li's magnificent gothic account of life in provincial 1979 China, centering on the execution of a counterrevolutionary.

## **The Washington Post**

### ***After You've Gone* – Jeffrey Lent**

In gorgeous prose, Lent tells the story of a middle-aged man in Amsterdam recovering from the death of his family and learning to love again.

### ***Blame* – Michelle Huneven**

How do you build lasting relationships when the world insists on crumbling around you? That's Huneven's theme here, and she does a lovely job with it.

### ***Border Songs* – James Lynch**

A severely dyslectic U.S. border patrolman thwarts drug deals along the Canadian border, but he'd rather be birdwatching.

### ***Darling Jim* – Christian Moerk**

Aglow with fairy-tale inflections, this hypnotic, neo-Gothic suspense story unfolds like a hothouse bloom, lush and pungent; it's a sprig of nightshade, all petals and poison.

### ***\*The Financial Lives of Poets* – Jess Walter**

A deliciously antic tale of an American dream gone very sour.

### ***A Friend of the Family* – Lauren Grodstein**

A devoted dad's parental concerns fester into a toxin that eventually poisons his life.

### ***Glover's Mistake* – Nick Laird**

This novel comes on all wit and chumminess, a buddy story about two London roommates in love with the same woman. But in the familiar surroundings of romantic comedy, Laird is busy plotting something far more unsettling.

## ***Handle With Care* – Jodi Picoult**

An exciting, well-researched novel about the mother of a child with osteogenesis imperfecta who sues her former friend and obstetrician for allowing her daughter to be born.

## ***Her Fearful Symmetry* – Audrey Niffenegger**

Niffenegger borrows the tropes of Victorian Gothic for a ghost story that seems, at first, more interested in whimsy than terror.

## ***How I Became a Famous Novelist* – Steve Heley**

I may have read a funnier book in the last 20 years, but at this moment I'm hard-pressed to name it. -- Elinor Lipman

## ***The Humbling* – Philip Roth**

Roth's ability to inspire, astonish and enrage his readers is undiminished.

## ***Inherent Vice* – Thomas Pynchon**

This may not be the Great American Novel, but it's certainly a Great American Read -- a terrific pastiche of California noir, wonderfully amusing throughout, and a poignant evocation of the last flowering of the '60s.

## ***\*Juliet Naked* – Nick Hornby**

Hornby's gentle satire of arrested development offers a comforting, shame-free sense of recognition.

## ***Little Bee* – Chris Cleave**

This propulsive novel about a British couple who meet a pair of panicked Nigerian girls on the beach will blow you away.

## ***The Scenic Route* – Binnie Kirshenbaum**

Spiked with wit, scrubbed free of sentimentality, these tales of love and loss, courage and cowardice, transport us back into the pages of our own lives and our own families.

## ***\*Swimming* – Nicola Keegan**

This marvelous novel about a Kansas girl who swims her way to the Seoul Olympics is ripe with adolescent wit and angst.

## ***That Old Cape Magic* – Richard Russo**

A dyspeptic romantic comedy from a Pulitzer Prize-winner who catches the bittersweet humor of our common neuroses.