

From The New York Times Top Ten of 2010

***Freedom - Jonathan Franzen**

This vividly realized narrative set during the Bush years, when the creedal legacy of “personal liberties” assumed new and sometimes ominous proportions. Franzen captures this through the tribulations of a Midwestern family, the - Berglunds, whose successes, failures and appetite for self-invention reflect the larger story of millennial America.

***The New Yorker Stories*- Ann Beattie**

As these 48 stories published in The New Yorker from 1974 through 2006 demonstrate, Beattie, even as she chronicled and satirized her post-1960s generation, also became its defining voice.

***Room - Emma Donoghue**

Donoghue has created one of the pure triumphs of recent fiction: an ebullient child narrator, held captive with his mother in an 11-by-11-foot room, through whom we encounter the blurry, often complicated space between closeness and autonomy. In a narrative at once delicate and vigorous — rich in psychological, sociological and political meaning — Donoghue reveals how joy and terror often dwell side by side.

***Selected Stories- William Trevor**

Gathering work from Trevor’s previous four collections, this volume shows why his deceptively spare fiction has haunted and moved readers for generations. Set mainly in Ireland and England, Trevor’s tales are eloquent even in their silences, documenting the way the present is consumed by the past, the way ancient patterns shape the future.

***A Visit from the Goon Squad - Jennifer Egan**

Time is the “goon squad” in this virtuosic rock ’n’ roll novel about a cynical record producer and the people who intersect his world. Ranging across some 40 years and inhabiting 13 different characters, each with his own story and perspective, Egan makes these disparate parts cohere into an artful whole, irradiated by a Proustian feel for loss, regret and the ravages of love.

From The New York Times Top 100 List of 2010

Angelology - Danielle Trussoni

With a smitten art historian at her side, the young nun at the center of this rousing first novel is drawn into an ancient struggle against the Nephilim, hybrid offspring of humans and heavenly beings.

***The Ask - Sam Lipsyte**

A deeply cynical academic fund-raiser fighting for his job is the protagonist of this darkly humorous satire, a witty paean to white-collar loserdom.

Bound - Antoya Nelson

For Nelson’s complacent heroine, the death of an estranged friend elicits memories of their reckless youth.

Comedy in a Minor Key - Hans Keilson

Set in Nazi-occupied Europe, this novel, appearing only now in English, is a mid-century masterpiece by the centenarian Keilson, who served in the Dutch resistance.

Foreign Bodies- Cynthia Ozick

This nimble, entertaining homage to Henry James’s late work The Ambassadors, in which an American heads to Paris to retrieve a wayward son, brilliantly upends the theme, meaning and stylistic manner of its revered precursor.

***Great House - Nicole Krauss**

In this tragic vision of a novel, Nadia, a writer in New York, faces a wrenching parting when a girl shows up to claim an enormous desk that has been in her safekeeping for decades.

***How to Live Safely in Science Fictional Universe - Charles Yu**

Yu wraps his lonely story of a time machine repairman in layers of gorgeous meta-science-fiction.

***How to Read the Air - Dinaw Mengestu**

Mengestu’s own origins inform this tale of an Ethiopian-American tracing the uncertain road once taken by his parents.

I Curse the River of Time - Per Petterson

This novel’s lonely Scandinavian protagonist grapples with divorce, death and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

***The Imperfectionists - Tom Rachman**

This intricate novel is built around the personal stories of staff members at an improbable English-language newspaper in Rome, and of the family who founded it in the 1950s.

***The Invisible Bridge - Julie Orringer**

Orringer’s protagonist is a Jewish architecture student in late-1930s Paris forced to return home to Hungary ahead of the Nazi invasion there.

***The Long Song - Andrea Levy**

Levy’s high-spirited, ambitious heroine works on a plantation in the final days of slavery in Jamaica.

***The Lost Books of the Odyssey - Zachary Mason**

The conceit behind the multiple Odysseuses here (comic, dead, doubled, amnesiac) is that this is a translation of an ancient papyrus, a collection of variations on the myth.

The Lotus Eaters - Tatjana Soli

The photojournalist heroine of Soli’s Vietnam War novel ponders whether those who represent war merely replicate its violence.

Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War - Karl Marlantes

In this tale, 30 years in the creation, bloody folly envelops a Marine company’s construction, abandonment and retaking of a remote hilltop outpost.

Mr. Peanut - Adam Ross

In this daring first novel, a computer game designer suspected of murdering his obese wife is investigated by two marriage-savvy detectives, one of whom is Dr. Sam Sheppard.

The Nearest Exit - Olen Steinhauer

The C.I.A. spy in this thriller is sick of his trade’s duplicity, amorality and rootlessness.

One Day - David Nicholls

Nicholls’s nostalgic novel checks in year by year on the halting romance of two children of the ’80s, she an outspoken lefty, he an apolitical toff.

***The Privileges - Jonathan Dee**

In this contemporary morality tale, a family stumbles along, rich and dysfunctional, without ethical or moral responsibility.

Shadow Tag - Louise Erdrich

Erdrich’s portrait of a marriage on its way to dissolution appears to be seeded with deliberate allusions to her own relationship with the writer Michael Dorris.

Solar- Ian McEwan

In McEwan’s funniest novel yet, a self-deluding physicist cheats on his wives, sends an innocent man to jail and tries to cash in on another scientist’s plans against global warming.

Sourland: Stories - Joyce Carol Oates

Oates explores the idea that the bereaved wife is a kind of guilty party who deserves everything — most of it violent — that comes her way.

***Super Sad True Love Story - Gary Shteyngart**

Exhilarating prose illuminates the horrors of a future America in this satire.

***Surrendered - Chang-rae Lee**

As death draws near, Lee’s heroine, a Korean War orphan now living in New York, sets off for Europe to look for her estranged son.

***The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet - David Mitchell**

Mitchell’s historical novel about a young Dutchman in Edo-era Japan is an achingly romantic story of forbidden love and something of an adventurous rescue tale.

***The Three Weissmanns of Westport - Cathleen Schine**

Two Manhattan sisters, one wildly emotional, one smartly sensible, come to the aid of their beloved aging mother.

***To the End of the Land - David Grossman**

Two friends are deeply involved with the same woman in this somber, haunting novel of love and loyalty in time of conflict, set in Israel between 1967 and 2000.

Wild Child: Stories - T. Coraghessan Boyle

In these tales, Boyle continues his career-long interest in man’s vexed tussles with nature.

Library Journal

***By Nightfall - Michael Cunningham**

"What do you do when you're no longer the hero of your own story?" Nobody defines that jolting realization better than Cunningham, and he does it here with special grace.

The Irresistible Henry House - Lisa Grunwald

Henry House arrives in the world as a 1940s practice baby, earning his title of "irresistible" by learning early in life how to please eight different mothers.

The Life and Opinions of Maf the Dog, and of His Friend Marilyn Monroe. - Andrew O'Hagan

Don't let the Maltese canine narrator scare you off—"Maf," as he's affectionately known by his actress owner, comes at you with the style, grace, and urbanity of Balzac after two martinis.

***The Passage - Justin Cronin**

And a little child shall save the world—that simple premise belies the complexity of this ambitious vampire saga, which skillfully blends elements of classic horror, biotech thrillers, and post-apocalyptic fiction.

The Tower, the Zoo, and the Tortoise - Julia Stuart

Bleak times have fallen on the Tower of London's residents until a royal decree to house the Queen's menagerie may be just the thing to mend their broken hearts.

The Wake of Forgiveness - Bruce Machart

One dark night in 1895 Texas, Karel Skala must ride his family's best horse in a race against the daughter of a wealthy and powerful Spanish horse breeder; the outcome will blight the family forever.

Wench – Dolen Perkins-Valdez

Every summer, three slave mistresses vacation with their Southern white masters at a resort in the free state of Ohio.

Drawing on a forgotten piece of history for inspiration, Perkins-Valdez's memorable and engaging debut challenges readers to take a fresh look at the "peculiar institution" of slavery.

Publishers Weekly

Agaat – Marlene van Niekerk

South African van Niekerk takes readers into the muck of her homeland's complicated history of race relations via the perspective of a dying woman whose only companion is her black servant.

****Beneath the Lion's Gaze – Maaza Mengiste***

African novelists have been taking center stage, and Mengiste's debut marks her as one to watch. Ethiopia from the fall of Haile Selassie through the dark '70s of Derge rule is her setting as a family struggles to maintain its humanity.

****Faithful Place – Tana French***

Suspense blends with family demons in French's meticulous crime novel about a cop's quest for the truth behind the disappearance of the young Dublin woman he was planning to elope with 22 years earlier.

****Father of the Rain – Lily King***

King's intense family drama coincides with the demise of WASPdom and exposes the thrill and despair of an alcoholic, charismatic father who is wildly entertaining to a child but difficult to deal with as an adult.

Innocent – Scott Turow

Twenty-two years after the events in Presumed Innocent, former lawyer Rusty Sabich once again faces a murder charge in a novel that rates as a worthy successor to that memorable debut.

Invisible Boy – Cornelia Read

Acid-tongued ex-socialite Madeline Dare uncovers a child's skeleton in Queens' Prospect Cemetery in a crime novel that exposes undertones of racism and classism in New York City's justice system.

****Our Kind of Traitor – John le Carré***

Those who have found post-cold war le Carré too cerebral will welcome this Russian mafia spy thriller involving an English couple on holiday in the Caribbean.

****Parrot & Olivier in America – Peter Carey***

Olivier, a fictionalized and absolutely obnoxious riff on Alexis de Tocqueville, contends with Parrot, a cunning servant dispatched to spy on Olivier by Olivier's mother, as the two journey across early 19th-century America.

The Pregnant Widow – Martin Amis

Amis propels a very Martin Amis-like Keith Nearing through a summer of poolside torment-sexual, psychological, literary-in 1968 Italy. This dark drawing-room comedy is a showcase of Amis's ability to make the English language bend to his whims.

Sourland – Joyce Carol Oates

Here, Oates takes it to the edge, bringing her recurring themes of violence and desire to terrifying fruition. Widows figure prominently, as do children, and everyone's in trouble.

Years of Red Dust – Qiu Xiaolong

This collection of linked short stories from the author of The Mao Case and five other Inspector Chen novels charts the political changes in China under Communist rule through the eyes of the inhabitants of Shanghai's Red Dust Lane.

Time Magazine

Lord of Misrule – Jaimy Gordon

The setting is a West Virginia racetrack where there are no mint juleps and everyone is either down on their luck or headed that way. Drawn by her passion for a wayward man and his run-down horses, a young woman dumps her barely there food-writing career and mistakenly starts to think of the track as home, taking foolish pleasure in the dangerous place.

Skippy Dies – Paul Murray

They're just regular 14-year-olds — nerdy, snarky, lovelorn and stumped by the mysteries of life, death and history class. When Skippy, the quietest and most lovelorn of them all, draws his prematurely final breath in the novel's opening scene, the boys in Paul Murray's novel are pushed to crossroads of faith and reason; there's magic in the way Murray draws them through the crisis and over the threshold of adulthood.

Bookmarks

36 Arguments for the Existence of God – Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

Cass Setzer has just become a celebrity thanks to his enormously popular new book, The Varieties of Religious Experience, and its appendix, "36 Arguments for the Existence of God," which concisely and conclusively refutes each argument.

The Cookbook Collector – Allegra Goodman

In 1999, in the midst of the dot-com boom, two sisters take divergent paths to happiness. Emily, 28, is the CEO of a Silicon Valley startup; 23-year-old Jessamine is a whimsical Berkeley philosophy grad student. Then Emily entrusts her boyfriend, the founder of a Boston-based tech firm, with a company secret as proof of her long-distance love.

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky – Heidi W. Durrow

Raised mostly overseas by her Danish mother and African American father, 11-year-old Rachel Morse is the only survivor from a mysterious tragedy that resulted in the deaths of her mother and younger siblings. Shipped off to Portland, Rachel doesn't quite fit into her grandmother's predominantly black neighborhood.

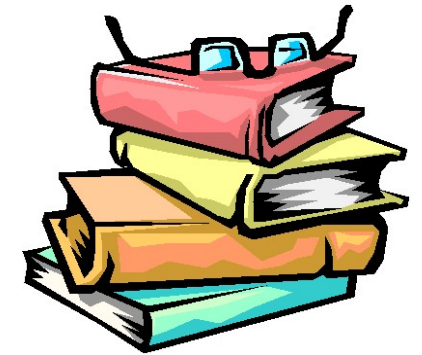
Major Pettigrew's Last Stand – Helen Simonson

Retired British army officer Major Ernest Pettigrew has just been informed of his younger brother Bertie's death when his doorbell rings. Mrs. Ali, a Pakistani shopkeeper, has come to collect the newspaper bill, but, touched by the man's shock and grief, she leads him into the living room, makes him a cup of tea, and offers gentle words of comfort. A friendship blossoms.

True Confections – Katherine Weber

In the 1970s, WASPY teenager Alice Tatnall accidentally sets fire to a friend's house and is branded "Arson Girl." She finds solace and surprising enjoyment working in a New Haven, Connecticut candy factory called Zip's, which was founded in 1924 by the Jewish Hungarian immigrant Eli Czaplinsky.

Best Fiction Books 2010



These titles were chosen by Library Journal, The New York Times, Publishers Weekly, Time Magazine, Bookmarks and others as the best fiction of 2010.

You can find all of them here at

The Ridgefield Library

(*Designates books found on "best books" lists of more than one publication)

(Annotations taken from publications)

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Enhancing Community.