

From The New York Times Top Ten of 2011

****The Art of Fielding - Chad Harbach***

At a small college on the Wisconsin side of Lake Michigan, the baseball team sees its fortunes rise and then rise some more with the arrival of a supremely gifted shortstop.

Harbach's expansive, allusive first novel combines the pleasures of an old-fashioned baseball story with a stately, self-reflective meditation on talent and the limits of ambition, played out on a field where every hesitation is amplified and every error judged by an exacting, bloodthirsty audience.

****11/22/63 - Stephen King***

Throughout his career, King has explored fresh ways to blend the ordinary and the supernatural. His new novel imagines a time portal in a Maine diner that lets an English teacher go back to 1958 in an effort to stop Lee Harvey Oswald and — rewardingly for readers — also allows King to reflect on questions of memory, fate and free will as he richly evokes midcentury America. The past guards its secrets, this novel reminds us, and the horror behind the quotidian is time itself.

****Swamplandia - Karen Russell***

An alligator theme park, a ghost lover, a Styx-like journey through an Everglades mangrove jungle: Russell's first novel, about a girl's bold effort to preserve her grieving family's way of life, is suffused with humor and gothic whimsy. But the real wonders here are the author's exuberantly inventive language and her vivid portrait of a heroine who is wise beyond her years.

****Ten Thousand Saints - Eleanor Henderson***

Henderson's fierce, elegiac novel, her first, follows a group of friends, lovers, parents and children through the straight-edge music scene and the early days of the AIDS epidemic. By delving deeply into the lives of her characters, tracing their long relationships not only to one another but also to various substances, Henderson catches something of the dark, apocalyptic quality of the '80s.

****The Tiger's Wife - Téa Obreht***

As war returns to the Balkans, a young doctor inflects her grandfather's folk tales with stories of her own coming of age, creating a vibrant collage of historical testimony that has neither date nor dateline. Obreht, who was born in Belgrade in 1985 but left at the age of 7, has recreated, with startling immediacy and presence, a conflict she herself did not experience.

From The New York Times Top 100 List of 2011

The Angel Esmeralda: Nine Stories - Dan DeLillo

DeLillo's first collection of short fiction, compiling stories written between 1979 and 2011, serves as a liberating reminder that terror existed long before there was a war on it.

The Barbarian Nurseries - Héctor Tobar

A big, insightful novel about social and ethnic conflict in contemporary Los Angeles.

****The Buddha in the Attic - Julie Otsuka***

Through a chorus of narrators, Otsuka unfurls the stories of Japanese women who came to America in the early 1900s to marry men they'd never met.

****The Cat's Table - Michael Ondaatje***

Ondaatje grants that this novel, about three daring Ceylonese schoolboys on a sea journey to England, sometimes uses the "coloring and locations of memoir."

****Changó's Beads and Two-Tone Shoes - William Kennedy***

In Kennedy's most musical work of fiction, a newspaperman attains a cynical old-pro objectivity as Albany's political machine pulls out the stops to head off a race riot in 1968.

The Free World - David Bezmozgis

Bezmozgis overturns clichéd expectations of immigrant idealism in his first novel, which follows a Soviet Jewish family awaiting visas in Rome in 1978.

****The Grief of Others - Leah Cohen***

Complex but fundamentally decent characters hurt one another and are hurt by forces greater than themselves, as a family sinks beneath the weight of a terrible secret.

The Last Werewolf - Glen Duncan

A wry, world-weary and hyper-articulate werewolf, morally as well as physically ambiguous, is tortured by the spirits of his victims and ready to surrender to his pursuers.

Long Last Happy - Barry Hannah

Hannah, who died last year, had a refined eye for the outrageous; this collection shows he retained full command of his powers to the end of his life.

****Lost Memory of Skin - by Russell Banks***

This novel, about a paroled sex offender, bravely tries to find humanity in people whom society often despises.

****The Marriage Plot - by Jeffrey Eugenides***

Eugenides adeptly renders the patter of college intellectuals and the sweet banter of courtship, and is particularly astute on the uncertainties awaiting after graduation.

****A Moment in the Sun - John Sayles***

Sayles's reimagining of America at the turn of the last century nods to both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Thomas Pynchon.

****Mr. Fox - Helen Oyeyemi***

This playful tale is presented in the alternating voices of a slasher novelist, his wife and his muse, the last of whom urges the writer to embrace intimacy over violence and death.

My New American Life - Francine Prose

Prose's sardonic novel of a young Albanian immigrant in New Jersey sets America in high relief, mordant and comic, light and dark.

****1Q84 - Haruki Murakami***

This voluminous novel, set in 1984, is simultaneously a mystery, a love story and a dystopian fantasy that raises questions of psychology and ethics.

****Open City - Teju Cole***

The peripatetic hero of Cole's indelible novel reflects on his adopted New York, the Africa of his youth, today's America and a Europe wary of its future.

****The Pale King - David Foster Wallace***

Unfolding on an epic scale, this coherent, if uncompleted, portrayal of our age is a grand parable of "late capitalism," set in the innards of the Internal Revenue Service.

****Say Her Name - Francisco Goldman***

Goldman's passionate, moving narrative takes as its subject his tragically short marriage to the writer Aura Estrada, who died in a bodysurfing accident in 2007, when she was 30.

****Scenes from Village Life - Amos Oz***

In these powerful linked stories of longing and disappointment, Oz returns to a spare, almost allegorical style.

****The Sense of an Ending - Julian Barnes***

In this Booker Prize winner, an unexpected bequest forces a man to re-evaluate his relationships, present and past.

****Stone Arabia - Dana Spiotta***

A faded heroine struggles with the loss of her brother, an unrecognized rock star, in this acerbic and deeply sad narrative.

****The Stranger's Child - Alan Hollinghurst***

Hollinghurst's sharply drawn novel tells the story of relatives and scholars grappling with the legacy of a Rupert Brooke-like poet killed during World War I.

****The Submission - Amy Waldman***

This resonant and darkly comic novel, by a former New York Times journalist, imagines an uproar over a proposed Sept. 11 memorial.

****The Tragedy of Arthur - Arthur Phillips***

Phillips's splendidly devious novel consists of a Shakespearean play of his own virtuosic creation and an "introduction" that devastatingly reveals the psychological life of its author.

****Train Dreams - Denis Johnson***

The taming of the American West is encompassed in Johnson's novella, whose orphaned hero is sent by train in the 1890s into the woods of the Idaho panhandle.

Bookmarks

Emily Alone - Stewart O'Nan

In this sequel to *Wish You Were Here*, an 80-year-old widow, dependent on her family, lives a quiet life in the Pittsburgh suburbs. But when her sister-in-law collapses at their favorite brunch place, Emily starts to discover a newfound independence.

****Faith - Jennifer Haigh***

Sheila McGann has long been estranged from her working-class Boston family and their devotion to Catholicism. Breaking her pledge to her older half-brother, Father Arthur Breen, to remain silent, Sheila relates the circumstances surrounding accusations that he molested a small boy.

****Maine - Courtney Sullivan***

Follows three generations of Kelleher women who descend on the family's beachfront cottage in Maine: a sharp-tongued matriarch, a recovering alcoholic daughter, and a repressed daughter-in-law, all with emotional baggage.

Please Look After Mom - Kyung-sook Shin

The South Korean's author sixth novel is the first of her books to be translated into English. An elderly country woman disappears in a crowded subway station while visiting her grown children in Seoul, and her family members struggle with guilt over their conduct towards her as they follow up on clues.

Publishers Weekly

****Cain - Jose Saramago***

In his masterful final novel, Nobel Prize-winner Saramago sends the biblical Cain on adventures through the stories of the sacred book, all the while arguing with his God. A thunder bolt, and pure Saramago.

The Hottest Dishes of the Tartar Cuisine - Alina Bronsky

Over three decades behind the Iron Curtain, a "perfect" (read powerful and relentless) Tartar matriarch narrates the hilarious and tragic story of her efforts to control her daughter and granddaughter as they attempt to flee her influence.

I Married You for Happiness - Lily Tuck

A woman looks back on a long marriage as she spends the night at the bedside of her newly dead husband. Tuck brings together the tenderness and the conflicts of love and conjoined life in a beautiful frame of memory.

****The Night Circus - Erin Morgenstern***

An enchanting, extravagantly imaginative debut with a traveling night circus as the setting for the progeny of two magicians compete and, thickening the plot, fall in love. The secret is, the magic is real.

****The Sisters Brothers - Patrick DeWitt***

The Commodore wants Hermann Kermit Warm dead. And brothers Eli and Charlie Sisters, loving, bickering, and feared, are given the job for one reason: they are very good at killing.

Best Fiction Books 2011



These titles were chosen by Library Journal, The New York Times, Publishers Weekly, The Washington Post, Bookmarks and others as the best fiction of 2011.

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)

This exciting sea tale about a boy searching for a Komodo - dragon will take you back to those great 19th-century maritime adventures.

****Last Man in Tower* – Aravind Adiga**

Adiga, a Man Booker Prize-winning novelist and former financial journalist, captures the economic and moral turmoil of modern India in his novel about real estate and the conflicting interests of community and development.

****The Leftovers* – Tom Perrotta**

Three years after a Rapture-like event in which millions of people disappeared, the surviving residents of a small town are left to figure out what it meant. Perrotta’s insightful novel, leavened with humor and tinged with creepiness, draws us into some very dark corners of the human psyche.

***Man of Parts* – David Lodge**

A mesmerizing novel-cum-biography of H.G. Wells that looks closely at how the Edwardian novelist and ideologue’s erotic life affected his career and the people close to him.

****Nightwoods* – Charles Frazier**

Frazier’s anxiously awaited third novel is a cleverly knit thriller about a tough young woman in the 1960s who has given up on the people of her small town and gone to live alone in the woods.

****Once Upon a River* – Bonnie Jo Campbell**

Campbell’s gritty but tender novel features an unforgettable heroine whose determination to carve out a life on her own in rural Michigan is challenged by nature and some very bad men.

****River of Smoke* – Amitav Ghosh**

Set amid the 19th-century opium trade, the second thrilling installment of Ghosh’s trilogy at times reads like a cross between a Horatio Hornblower tale and a Victorian epistolary novel.

****The Sojourn* – Andrew Krivak**

The heart of this novel — a sweeping tale of a young man’s journey from America back to Europe and into the maw of World War I — is a harrowing portrait of men at war, as powerful as Isaac Babel’s Red Cavalry stories.

****We Others* – Steven Millhauser**

Illusion and reality, the power of the imagination, the nature of storytelling, childhood wonders, romantic yearnings — these themes recur throughout this enchanting story collection by a master of the form.

****We the Animals* – Justin Torres**

This slender, powerful novel is narrated by a half-white, half-Puerto Rican Brooklyn boy being raised — abusively — in Upstate New York along with his two older brothers.

***When the Killings Done* – T. C. Boyle**

Boyle’s terrifically exciting story — which propels us through 60 years of tumultuous history involving the Northern Channel Islands off the coast of California — demonstrates that it’s possible to write an environmental novel that provokes discussion instead of merely thumping away on conventional wisdom.

***Tides of War* – Stella Tillyard**

Moving from the drawing rooms of Regency London to the bloody battlefields of Spain, this sweeping and assured debut novel by an acclaimed British historian reveals how war was as transformative for the women who remained at home as for the men who fought Napoléon.

***Zone One* – Colson Whitehead**

Set in a devastated lower Manhattan that eerily recalls post-9/11 New York City, Whitehead’s smart, satiric take on the postapocalyptic horror genre offers the most literary nod to zombieism since Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. These are zombies with braaains!

The Washington Post

***Atlas of Impossible Longing* – Anuradha Roy**

In this sprawling epic set in 20th-century India, a single act of pity rattles down generations to break a caste’s rules, test a family’s mettle and throw together two unlikely childhood friends who will negotiate every circuit of human love.

****Binocular Vision* – Edith Pearlman**

In this story collection, which was a National Book Award finalist, Pearlman presents her characters — widows, historians, children, musicians — in prose as spare and eloquent as that of her contemporary Joan Didion.

****Birds of Paradise* – Diana Abu-Jaber**

With exquisite patience and psychological precision, Abu-Jaber unravels the mystery of a young woman’s decision to run from her Miami home, destroy her parents’ happiness and remain at risk.

***Caribou Island* – David Vann**

Vann’s story of a family’s unraveling in southern Alaska explores emotionally raw territory — conflicted feelings of love and our friable ties to those we care for most.

***Conquistadora* – Esmeralda Santiago**

The conquistadora of this sweeping historical novel is an alluring, flawed heroine — a strong, intelligent and enigmatic woman who becomes the master of a 19th-century sugar plantation in Puerto Rico.

***Doc* – Mary Doria Russell**

Russell’s novel about Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp is a bold act of historical reclamation that scrapes off the bull and allows those American legends to walk and love and grieve in the dynamic 19th-century world that existed before Hollywood shellacked it with clichés.

***The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* – Benjamin Hale**

Swinging through this absurd tale of a talking chimpanzee, Hale wraps his prehensile wit around humanity’s deepest philosophical questions — from the magic of consciousness to the reifying function of language and the value of art and the morality of science.

***Jamrach’s Menagerie* – Carol Birch**

****State of Wonder* – Ann Patchett**

A straitlaced, sincere research scientist from Minnesota is sent to find and assess the progress of the unorthodox septuagenarian doctor who’s gone native while on a fact-finding mission to extend female fertility.

****There but for the* – Ali Smith**

One night at an unruly dinner party, a guest named Miles goes upstairs, locks himself in the spare bedroom, and refuses to come out — for months. Smith uses this absurd bit of theater to explore some serious issues, privacy and authenticity among them.

***The Wandering Falcon* – Jamil Abmad**

Born in Punjab in 1931, Ahmad wrote the pages that would become his delayed debut while working for the Pakistani Civil Service at outposts in the remote Federally Administered Tribal Areas where Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan meet. Hidden away for 30 years and unearthed by his family, the novel is a captivating wonder that illuminates the harsh difficulties of life in this region.

Library Journal

****The Empty Family: Stories* – Colm Tóibín**

Though better known on these shores as a novelist, Tóibín here proves his mastery of the too-often-dismissed short story form.

Each narrative is an all-encompassing world that will stop readers on their axis and cause them to reconsider the suddenness, ecstasy, and isolation of human connection in settings as divergent as 19th-century England and post-9/11 Spain.

****Salvage the Bones* – Jesmyn Ward**

Life is tough enough for the Batistes, a poor African American family just hanging on in Bois Sauvage, MS. But now it’s summer, summer means hurricanes, and the hurricane about to hit is Katrina. Lyrical and relentless, Ward’s narrative builds to the storm’s awful landfall and aftermath, portraying both heartbreak and the family’s extraordinary devotion.

****Silver Sparrow* – Tayari Jones**

“My father, James Witherspoon, is a bigamist.” That knockout opening sentence launches readers into a gripping family drama about two African American half sisters (only one is aware of the other) and the father who tries to keep them apart. A sensitive and beautifully written coming-of-age novel with a twist.

***The Soldier* – Grace Burrowes**

Exceptional storytelling and unforgettable characters grace the pages of Burrowes’s flawless sophomore effort, the second installment of a multivolume family saga set in post-Napoleonic Britain in which protagonists overcome pain and insecurity by putting their faith in love.

****The Soldier’s Wife* – Margaret Leroy**

Guernsey during World War II is the perfect setting for this beautifully rendered tale of those left behind during wartime and how longing for normalcy can vanquish, even briefly, mistrust and uncover common ground.