

From The New York Times Top Ten of 2008

***Dangerous Laughter* - Steven Millhauser**

In his first collection in five years, a master fabulist in the tradition of Poe and Nabokov invents spookily plausible parallel universes in which the deepest human emotions and yearnings are transformed into their monstrous opposites.

*** *A Mercy* - Toni Morrison**

The fate of a slave child abandoned by her mother animates this allusive novel — part Faulknerian puzzle, part dream-song — about orphaned women who form an eccentric household in late-17th-century America.

*** *Netherland* - Joseph O'Neill**

O'Neill's seductive ode to New York — a city that even in bad times stubbornly clings to its belief “in its salvific worth” — is narrated by a Dutch financier whose privileged Manhattan existence is upended by the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

*** *2666* - Roberto Bolano**

The prodigious Chilean writer, who died in 2003, has posthumously risen, like a figure in one of his own splendid creations, to the summit of modern fiction. This latest work, first published in Spanish in 2004, is a mega- and meta-detective novel with strong hints of apocalyptic foreboding.

*** *Unaccustomed Earth* - Jhumpa Lahiri**

With quiet artistry and tender sympathy, Lahiri creates an impressive range of vivid characters — young and old, male and female, self-knowing and self-deluding — in engrossing stories that replenish the classic themes of domestic realism: loneliness, estrangement and family discord.

From The New York Times Top 100 List of 2007

***American Wife* - Curtis Sittenfeld**

The life of this novel's heroine — a first lady who comes to realize, at the height of the Iraq war, that she has compromised her youthful ideals — is conspicuously modeled on that of Laura Bush.

***Atmospheric Disturbances* - Rivka Galchen**

The psychiatrist-narrator of this brainy, whimsical first novel believes that his beautiful, much-younger Argentine wife has been replaced by an exact double.

***Beautiful Children* - Charles Bock**

This bravura first novel, set against a corruptly compelling Las Vegas landscape, revolves around the disappearance of a surly 12-year-old boy.

***Beijing Coma* - Jian Ma**

Ma's novel, an important political statement, looks at China through the life of a dissident paralyzed at Tiananmen Square.

***A Better Angel: Stories* - Chris Adrian**

For Adrian — who is both a pediatrician and a divinity student — illness and a heightened spiritual state are closely related conditions.

***The Blue Star* - Tony Earley**

The caring, thoughtful hero of Earley's engrossing first novel, “Jim the Boy,” is now 17 and confronting not only the eternal turmoil of love, but also venality and the frightening calls of duty and war.

****The Boat* - Nam Le**

In the opening story of Le's first collection, a blocked writer succumbs to the easy temptations of “ethnic lit.”

****Breath* - Tim Winton**

Surfing offers this darkly exhilarating novel's protagonist an escape from a drab Australian town.

***Dear American Airlines* - Jonathan Miles**

Miles's fine first novel takes the form of a letter from a stranded traveler, his life a compilation of regrets, who uses the time to digress on an impressive array of cultural issues, large and small.

****Diary of a Bad Year* - J. M. Coetzee**

Coetzee follows the late career of one Señor C, who, like Coetzee himself, is a South African writer transplanted to Australia.

***Dictation: A Quartet* - Cynthia Ozick**

In the title story of this expertly turned collection, Henry James and Joseph Conrad embody Ozick's polarity of art and ardor .

***The English Major* - Jim Harrison**

A 60-year-old cherry farmer and former English teacher — an inversion of the classic Harrison hero — sets out on a trip west after being dumped by his wife.

***The Finder Tells All* - Colin Harrison**

New York thriller, played out against the nasty world of global capitalism.

****The Good Thief* - Hannah Tinti**

In Tinti's first novel, set in mid-19th-century New England, a con man teaches an orphan the art of the lie.

****His Illegal Self* - Peter Carey**

In this enthralling novel, a boy goes underground with a defiant hippie indulging her maternal urge.

****Home* - Marilynne Robinson**

Revisiting the events of her novel “Gilead” from another perspective, Robinson has written an anguished pastoral, at once bitter and joyful.

****Indignation* - Philip Roth**

Marcus Messner is a sophomore at a small, conservative Ohio college at the time of the Korean War. The novel he narrates, like Roth's last two, is ruthlessly economical and relentlessly deathbound.

****The Lazarus Project* - Aleksandar Hemon**

This novel's despairing immigrant protagonist becomes intrigued with the real-life killing of a presumed anarchist in Chicago in 1908.

****Life Class* - Pat Barker**

Barker's new novel, about a group of British artists overtaken by World War I, concentrates more on the turmoil of love than on the trauma of war.

****Lush Life* - Richard Price**

Chandler — and Bellow, too — peeps out from Price's novel, in which an aspiring writer cum restaurant manager, mugged in the gentrifying Lower East Side of Manhattan, himself becomes a suspect.

***A Most Wanted Man* - John le Carré**

This powerful novel, centered on a half-Russian, half-Chechen, half-crazy fugitive in Germany, swims with operatives whose desperation to avert another 9/11 provokes a slow-burning fire in every line.

***The Other* - David Guterson**

In this novel from the author of “Snow Falling on Cedars,” a schoolteacher nourishes a friendship with a privileged recluse.

***Our Story Begins: New and Selected Stories* - Tobias Wolff**

Some of Wolff's best work is concentrated here, revealing his gift for evoking the breadth of American experience.

***The Road Home* - Rose Tremain**

A widowed Russian Emigrant, fearfully navigating the strange city of London, learns that his home village is about to be inundated.

***The School on Heart's Content Road* - Carolyn Chute**

In Chute's first novel in nearly 10 years, disparate characters cluster around an off-the-grid communal settlement.

***Telex from Cuba* - Rachel Kushner**

In this multilayered first novel, international drifters try to bury pasts that include murder, adultery and neurotic meltdown, even as the Castro brothers gather revolutionaries in the hills.

****When Will There Be Good News?* - Kate Atkinson**

Jackson Brodie, the hero of Atkinson's previous literary thrillers, takes the case of a mother and baby who suddenly disappear.

***The Widows of Eastwick* - John Updike**

In this ingenious sequel to “The Witches of Eastwick,” the three title characters, old ladies now, renew their sisterhood, return to their old hometown and contrive to atone for past crimes.

***Yesterday's Weather* - Anne Enright**

Working-class Irish characters grapple with love, marriage, confusion and yearning in Enright's varied, if somewhat disenchanting, stories.

Publishers Weekly

****The Given Day* - Dennis Lehane**

In a splendid flowering of the talent previously demonstrated in his crime fiction (*Gone, Baby, Gone; Mystic River*), Lehane combines 20th-century American history, a gripping story of a family torn by pride and the strictures of the Catholic Church, and the plot of a multifaceted thriller.

***The Likeness* - Tana French**

Fans of psychological suspense will embrace Irish author French, who blurs the boundaries between victim and cop, memory and fantasy, in this stunning sequel to her debut, *In the Woods*.

***Master of the Delta* - Thomas Cook**

Edgar-winner Cook examines the slow collapse of a prominent Southern family in this magnificent tale of suspense set in 1954.

****The Plague of Doves* - Louise Erdrich**

Erdrich's 13th novel, a multigenerational tour de force of sin, redemption, murder and vengeance, finds its roots in the 1911 slaughter of a farming family near Pluto, N. Dak.

Best Fiction Books 2008



These titles were chosen by, Library Journal, The New York Times, Publishers Weekly, The Washington Post, and others as the best fiction of 2008.

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)

***Sea of Poppies* – Amita Ghosh**

Diaspora, myth and a fascinating language mash-up propel the Rubik's cube of plots in Ghosh's picaresque epic.

****Serena* – Ron Rash**

This implacably grim tale of greed and corruption gone wild—and of eventual, well-deserved revenge—follows the dealings of a Depression-era lumber baron and his callous new wife.

****The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* – David Wroblewski**

A Wisconsin mute hides out in the woods with hyperintelligent dogs in Wroblewski's contemporary riff on *Macbeth*.

Library Journal

****Cost* – Roxana Robinson**

Art professor Julia doesn't know it, but her life is about to plummet straight to hell. And you'll plummet with her when you discover that her offbeat younger son has become a heroin addict.

***The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* – Mary Ann Shaffer & Annie Barrows**

In 1946 England, writer Juliet Ashton receives a letter from a man living on Guernsey, recently liberated from Nazi occupation. So begins a correspondence that introduces Juliet to members of a unique reading group.

***The Hakawati* – Rabih Alameddine**

Assuming the role of a *hakawati*, a Middle Eastern storyteller, Alameddine takes us on a magic-carpet ride as he weaves together five separate narratives that revolve around an extended Armenian-Druze-Lebanese family in war-weary Beirut.

***Lavinia* – Ursula Le Guin**

She was a silent minor character in *The Aeneid*, but in Le Guin's brilliant reimagining of the last six books of Virgil's epic poem, the Latin princess who marries the Trojan warrior Aeneas finds her eloquent voice.

***The Painter of Battles* – Arturo Pérez-Reverte**

As a former war photographer paints a magnificent mural, a man whose life he has ruined with a single snapshot approaches and pledges to kill him. Thus begins Pérez-Reverte's ruthlessly examined tale of moral responsibility.

****Olive Kitteridge* – Elizabeth Strout**

In 13 linked stories that delineate the life and times of fussy but sympathetic Olive Kitteredge, Strout beautifully captures the sticky little issues of small-town life.

***Say You're One of Them* – Uwem Akpan**

Forthright language, scalding scenarios: an uncle tries to sell his niece and nephew into slavery, a girl sees her family slaughtered in Rwanda.

***The Wasted Vigil* – Nadeem Aslam**

At his home in Afghanistan, English-born doctor Marcus Caldwell gathers stray souls whose interlocking stories illuminate the awful complexities of conflict in the Middle East.

***Without a Backward Glance* – Kate Veitch**

On Christmas Eve 1967 in Melbourne, Australia, a young wife and mother leaves to buy lights for the Christmas tree and never returns.

The Washington Post

***Alfred and Emily* – Doris Lessing**

A clever, moving coupling of fiction and nonfiction about Lessing's parents.

***America, America* – Ethan Canin**

A teenager from a modest family works in the home of the powerbroker behind a Kennedyesque candidate challenging President Nixon.

***Beijing Coma* – Ma Jian**

We first meet Dai Wei in his 10th year in a coma caused by an injury sustained during the Tiananmen Square massacre. Though his body is imprisoned in a society where everything is owned by the party, his mind is free.

***The Elegance of the Hedgehog* – Muriel Barbery**

Told by the dumpy, non-descript 54-year old concierge of a small and exclusive Paris apartment building. Gently satirical, exceptionally winning, and inevitably bittersweet.

***The Enchantress of Florence* – Salman Rushdie**

The Emperor Akbar the Great dreams his ideal mistress into existence, a Florentine orphan rises to become the military champion of Islam, and a black-eyed beauty casts a spell on every man who sees her.

***Enlightenment* – Maureen Freely**

A journalist learns that a left-wing filmmaker who was her lover during their student days in Istanbul has been arrested at the U.S. border by Homeland Security.

***The Flying Troutmans* – Miriam Toews**

In this funny, heartbreaking story, a collection of oddball family members go on a cross-country road trip to find Dad.

***The German Bride* – Joanna Hershon**

Eva is transformed from pampered European cosmopolite to a Wild West frontierswoman.

***Goldengrove* – Francine Prose**

A teenage girl tries to move on with her life after the drowning death of her perfect older sister.

***The House on Fortune Street* – Margot Livesey**

The most durable structure here is not a house but the novel itself, whose design unites so seamlessly with its intentions that one wants to admire it from every angle.

***The Northern Clemency* – Philip Hensher**

Two middle-class families in England try to adjust to the economic and social upheavals of the modern era.

***So Brave, Young, and Handsome* – Leif Enger**

An old-fashioned, swashbuckling, heroic Western, with pistols and ponies and señoritas and sharpshooters - an adventure of the heart and mind.

***Songs for the Missing* – Stewart O'Nan**

The disappearance of an 18-year old girl is at the heart of this novel, but its real concern is with her devastated family.

***The Story of a Marriage* – Andrew Greer**

The chronicle of a San Francisco couple, closely and elegantly examined.

***The Soul Thief* – Charles Baxter**

At a university in Buffalo, N.Y., during the 1970s, a graduate student believes his identity is being stolen.

***When We Were Romans* – Matthew Kneale**

A 9-year-old British schoolboy gives a child's-eye view of turbulent and sometimes disturbing circumstances with his loving but chaotic protector, his "mum."

***Windy City* – Scott Simon**

Simon is clearly infatuated with Chicago, and the zeal with which he celebrates the city, warts and all, is hard to resist.