



## Book Club Staff Recommendation Night 2015

April 28<sup>th</sup> and May 6<sup>th</sup> 2015

### ***2 A.M. at the Cat's Pajamas* by Marie-Helene Bertino**

Fiction – Hardcover \$29.95 (paperback expected October 2015)

Madeline, at nine, is a loner, foul-mouthed, and an aspiring jazz singer. Her mother has recently died; her father is shattered by grief. The Cat's Pajamas, legendary jazz club, has fallen on hard times. Sarina, Madeline's teacher, dreads and anticipates seeing the ex-boyfriend at a party. The multiple storylines weave together in the wee hours before Christmas. (Cynthia)

### ***The Almost Nearly Perfect People* by Martin Booth**

Current Affairs – Hardcover \$29.99 (paperback expected February 2016)

Are Scandinavians the happiest people on earth? Should we be envious of the Nordic models of society? Through an intriguing blend of anecdotes and research, Booth helps us examine what makes people and cultures work. Great discussion can be held based on each chapter. (Susan)

### ***The Art of Asking: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help* by Amanda Palmer**

Personal Growth / Biography – Hardcover \$30.00

It's been said that if you want someone to like you, you should ask them for a favour. But asking can be hard: it's intimate, it's revealing and it leaves us open to rejection. Musician and author Amanda Palmer received over a million dollars from her fans in a Kickstarter campaign to fund an album and tour, but still couldn't accept financial help from her husband when resources were stretched thin. We might feel we have little in common with crowd-surfing, couch-surfing, punk-rock Amanda, but we face the same human problems that she does: how do we ask for help, and how to we let ourselves feel we deserve it? (Judith)

### ***The Back of the Turtle* by Thomas King**

Fiction – Paperback \$24.99

A gifted scientist, Gabriel Quinn works for big business and his discoveries inadvertently lead to an environmental disaster with unexpected consequences. Part morality play, part creation myth, this is the story of finding your way home, no matter the difficulties. (Michelle)

### ***The Bees* by Laline Paul**

Fiction -- Paperback \$21.99

A look at the world of bees through the eyes of a misfit worker bee. Great understanding of the roles we are all expected to play, and what happens if we don't. Adapting to environmental catastrophe makes *The Bees* a timely story. (Susan)

### ***Beautiful Ruins* by Jess Walter**

Fiction – Paperback \$19.99

Italy 1962. Pasquali Tursi dreams of turning his decrepit hotel into an enviable resort. Producer Michael Deane escorts convalescing actress Dee Moray to Porto Vergogna. Veteran Alvis Bender tries to write his war memoirs in Porto Vergogna. Actor Richard Burton makes a surprise appearance in Porto Vergogna. All come together with far reaching consequences. Wonderful characters, particularly Richard Burton. (Cynthia)

***The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles* by Bruce H. Lipton, PH.D.**

Personal Growth / Biology – Paperback \$14.99

This book has the potential to change your life—if you believe. Stem-cell-biologist Bruce Lipton presents his fascinating discovery that genes and DNA do not control our biology. Instead, Lipton demonstrates that our DNA is controlled by signals outside our cells, including the energy of our beliefs, and our positive and negative thoughts. He provides a wonderful view of our individual human consciousness, behavior, and how to most effectively make change. The book will promote fascinating book club discussions. (Eileen)

***Birds in Fall* by Brad Kessler**

Fiction – Paperback \$19.99

In the aftermath of an airline disaster off the coast of Nova Scotia, some of the victims' families visit a small tourist island close to the crash scene. As the innkeeper and the guests grieve, they grow together. A wonderfully written story that links life and death, grief and renewal through the lens of the natural world. (Michelle)

***The Book of Strange New Things* by Michel Faber**

Fiction – Hardcover \$34.99 (paperback expected November 2015)

A pastor in the UK is recruited by a multinational corporation to act as a missionary to a group of indigenous people -- on another planet. This “near” science fiction story is grounded in the struggles of Peter and Bea to maintain their marriage. She is coping with natural catastrophes and infrastructure breakdown on earth while he is venturing on an exciting adventure on another world ministering to unfamiliar “aliens” eager to receive him. (Irene)

***The Canterbury Sisters* by Kim Wright**

Fiction – Paperback (expected release May 19, 2015)

Against her better judgement, American wine writer Che Milan finds herself walking the 60-mile pilgrimage route from London to Canterbury. Fulfilling her dead mother's wish to visit Canterbury she joins a “Broads Abroad” tour. As done in Chaucer's time, the “pilgrims” tell stories to entertain themselves as they walk. A heartwarming lighter read. (Michelle)

***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* by Roz Chast**

Biography – Hardcover \$33.00

A graphic memoir by an only child who grew up in Brooklyn that documents her parents aging and her role in supporting them as they approach the end of their lives. Chast is an award-winning New Yorker cartoonist who uses her skills to enliven this very personal story with cartoons, hand-written text and photos. (Irene)

***The Children Act* by Ian McEwan**

Fiction – Hardcover \$29.95 (paperback expected May 2015)

Not since *On Chesil Beach* has McEwan written such a compelling novella perfectly capturing the ebb and flow of human emotions under stress. Fiona is a Family Court judge in London England whose husband has just informed her of his decision to have a one last ‘wee fling’ before finally settling in with her. Meanwhile, she is faced with ruling on a highly complex legal matter involving the life or death of Adam, a seventeen year old Jehovah's Witness who is in a late stage of leukemia. Full disclosure: I am a huge fan of Ian McEwan, but still, one has to admire the perfection of every word in *The Children Act*. (Michael)

***Dogtripping: 25 Rescues, 11 Volunteers and 3 RVs on Our Canine Cross-Country Adventure* by David Rosenfelt**

Biography – Paperback \$18.50

Mystery writer David Rosenfelt lets us into his life as a dog rescuer and his insane decision to move himself, his wife and 25 rescue dogs from Southern California to Maine. Both humorous and thought provoking, this would provide great discussion about getting involved in solving problems. Especially good for young adults looking for a way to make a difference. (Susan)

***Drums, Girls and Dangerous Pie* by Jordan Sonnenblick**

Young Adult Fiction – Paperback \$10.99

Steven loves playing the drums. He has the biggest crush on Renee. The most annoying thing in his life is little brother Jeffrey. Steven is a normal thirteen year old. Everything changes with the nosebleed that sends Jeffrey to the hospital. Suddenly cancer is in their lives, and Steven feels abandoned. Senior Owlets rated this book 9.5 out of 10. They loved the dialogue, and Steven's relationships with others. (Cynthia)

***Etta and Otto and Russell and James* by Emma Hooper**

Fiction – Hardcover \$30.00 (paperback expected January 2016)

Reminiscent of *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, but a more memorable and haunting story, Etta chronicles the journey of a woman in her eighties, from a modern day farm in Saskatchewan to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Her husband Otto is left behind. So too, is their best friend Russell. James the coyote accompanies Etta on her trek. There is a taut, sparseness of phrasing as we begin to make sense of Etta's 'story' and the motivation for her unusual behaviour. One of the best books I've read in a very long time, I delayed finishing because of a yearning to stay with the characters. (Michael)

***Flower for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes**

Fiction – Paperback \$11.50

Algernon is a mouse. Algernon is a very smart mouse. Because he has been experimented on by the white-coated researchers. These white coats decide they are ready for a human trial. They pick as their subject Charlie. Charlie becomes very smart, smarter even than the researchers. Then Algernon begins to lose his intelligence. (Sandy)

***Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco**

Fiction – Paperback \$21.50

Renowned scholar, semiotician, and literary theorist Umberto Eco confirmed himself also as novelist of the highest order with the terrifying *Foucault's Pendulum*. Equal parts captivating mystery thriller and illuminating excursus on the power of conspiracy, *Foucault's Pendulum* offers a grand tour of every masonic ritual, Templar mystery, and grizzly Rosicrucian rite. Eco's first novel, *The Name of the Rose* was listed at #14 in *Le Monde's* 100 Books of the Century, and *Foucault's Pendulum* is a fine heir to this pedigree. Eco matches his encyclopaedic knowledge of Europe's dark subterranean vaults with excellent pacing and sympathetic characterization. Invigorating and truly scary, this novel is a life experience. (Justin)

***Gemini* by Carol Cassella**

Fiction – Paperback \$18.99

An unknown "Jane Doe" patient appears in an emergency trauma centre, starting a search for her identity. Emotional complexities abound, but revolve around the moral issues of family, life, and even death. Lots of book club talking points, but a great emotional read as well. (Susan)

***The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins**

Fiction – Paperback \$24.95

Somewhere in England, Rachel travels twice daily on a commuter train, pretending to depart and arrive home from work. Recently divorced, her rapidly unravelling life catapults her into the middle of the mystery of a woman's disappearance, and Rachel's wild speculation as to her whereabouts. As the primary narrator of this seemingly mundane story, Rachel is just one of three terribly unreliable 'story tellers'. Paula Hawkins first novel has been favorably compared to *Gone Girl*. I was taken in by the feeling of uneasiness while reading this very intense and captivating psychological thriller. (Michael)

***The Gravity of Birds* by Tracy Guzeman**

Fiction – Paperback \$18.99

When the brilliant but reclusive painter Thomas Bayber unveils a work he calls the Kessler Sisters—a work he did some thirty years previously—he asks an art historian and an art authenticator to sell it. But the task becomes complicated for the two men when they find out that the subjects of the painting Natalie and Alice Kessler have disappeared. As they try and track down the mysterious sisters, they discover a complex history of lies, love and loss. This story is equal parts mystery, tragedy, art history and love story, and it will keep you turning the pages. (Eileen)

***H Is For Hawk* by Helen MacDonald**

Biography – Hardcover \$32.00

A memoir by a daughter grieving the death of a much-loved father that skillfully interweaves biography of T.H. White, (author of *The Sword in the Stone* and *The Once and Future King*) as each, albeit at different times and places, attempt to train their respective goshawks. Through lyrical prose she not only describes the relationship between woman and bird but also captures the essential wildness of a beautiful creature. (Irene)

***In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* by Nathaniel Philbrick**

History – Paperback \$19.00

You already know about the Essex: it's the real ocean disaster that inspired the ending of Melville's *Moby Dick*. The Essex was attacked and sunk by a sperm whale in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, but that was just the beginning of the story for the twenty men on board, left adrift in three small whaling boats with limited resources of food and water. Three months at sea would leave only eight of them alive. Part real-life survival story, part examination of what ambition, prejudice and desperation can make us do, the Essex story deserves to be remembered. (Judith)

***The Jaguar's Children* by John Vaillant**

Fiction – Hardcover \$29.95 (paperback expected December 2015)

The author of the award winning books *The Golden Spruce* and *The Tiger* has penned a first novel portraying the horror connected to Mexican immigrants trying desperately to get across the border into the United States. Hector, his friend, and a dozen others have paid smugglers who seal them into a water truck and begin the transport to the Arizona border. But the truck breaks down. The desperation and tension is palpable, but offset by Hector's backstory which is the portrayal of so many Mexican families trying to find a better world to live in. (Michael)

***Laughing All the Way to the Mosque* by Zarqa Nawaz**

Biography – Hardcover \$29.95 (paperback expected April 2016)

A hilarious but ultimately poignant memoir of growing up Muslim in Canada. Zarqa Nawaz visited the Owl's Nest last year and the staff immediately fell in love with her storytelling and sense of humour. The creator of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, Zarqa continues to educate and entertain by turns in a world where extremism dominates the news. (Judith)

***The Moment of Everything* by Shelly King**

Fiction – Paperback \$17.00

Maggie has come to a turning point in her life. Made redundant by her Silicon Valley start-up, she spends her days in a used book store while trying to decide what comes next. Through a series of events, she comes across an old copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with notes in the margins between two lovers. She embarks on a quest to find out who these lovers are, as the notes are dated 1961. Legitimate search? Or invasion of privacy? (Sandy)

***Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* by Robin Sloan**

Fiction – Paperback \$16.99

Google; ancient texts, codes and puzzles; the search for the meaning of life; all are wrapped together in contemporary San Francisco. A recently laid-off web designer takes a job working night shift in the fantastical 24-hour bookstore and nothing is ever the same again. Very interesting glimpse into the workings of Google. (Michelle)

***The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* by Robert MacFarlane**

Recreation/Nature – Paperback \$16.00

This book is a journey through time and space over ancient land and sea routes. Set primarily in the United Kingdom but also touching on Palestine and Spain, it is a walking meditation. MacFarlane's language is beautiful and his style brings each step to life. (Michelle)

***Pie Face Boy: In Search of Soul* by Brian E. Pearson**

Personal Growth / Memoir – Paperback \$20.00

This unique and captivating collection of essays is written by a Calgarian who just happens to be an Anglican priest. I am often asked: how much religion is in this book? Or, is it too religious? In a word, the answer is no. If you are searching for an ecumenical definition of soul, you best look elsewhere. Brian's intensely personal stories are about all of us: our search for who we are, who we are destined to become and how we get there. His lifetime of memories have meaning for each and every one of us. (Michael)

***Republic of Dirt* by Susan Juby**

Fiction – Paperback \$22.99

A return to Woefield Farm. Whereby we find Prudence finally growing something other than weeds. Seth perhaps finally losing his virginity? Earl as irascible as ever. And young Sara in trouble. The sequel to *The Woefield Poultry Collective*, this book is just as witty, warm and poignant as the original. (Sandy)

***The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* by Tom Rachman**

Fiction – Hardcover \$29.95 (paperback expected July 2015)

Tooly Zylberberg lives a quiet life in her isolated bookshop in Wales. Her days are spent reading, and ignoring her assistant Fogg's "pronouncements on grand issues". Life is simple and uncomplicated. The message on FaceBook from Duncan, someone she hasn't thought about for years, changes all that. Now ghosts from Tooly's past clamour to be recognized, and she needs answers to her own questions. (Cynthia)

***Spoiled Brats* by Simon Rich**

Short Stories – Hardcover \$28.00 (paperback expected May 2015)

Simon Rich's stories take a step away from reality, if only to get a better view. A family of primates scoff at their son's ambitions of learning human sign language. The literary establishment conspires to keep a brilliant author unpublished. A college student spending her inter-planetary semester abroad longs for a text from her boyfriend, even as war breaks out around her. Always witty and often irreverent, the stories in *Spoiled Brats* effectively skewer both the young people of the title and the society that made them that way. (Judith)

***Stone Mattress* by Margaret Atwood**

Short Stores – Hardcover \$29.95 (paperback expected June 2015)

Margaret Atwood's 55th book - a sharp and insightful collection of nine "tales" about memory and aging which one reviewer described as "boomer nostalgia". Several of the tales are linked and the title story begins with the intriguing sentence..."At the outset, Verna had not intended to kill anyone". (Irene)

***The Storied Life of A J Fikry* by Gabrielle Zevin**

Fiction – Paperback \$19.95

Bookstore owners unite! Alright, I admit to some small bias towards a fondness for a novel about books and the cantankerous owner of Island Books (somewhere near Cape Cod) who is grappling with the persistent decline in sales at his small quirky bookstore. Not to mention the fact that his wife has just died, a new publishers' rep is infuriating, and a baby has been abandoned in his store. There is humor, romance, some suspense, but mostly *The Storied Life of A J Fikry* is a fun and entertaining novel to spend your time with. In defense of my liking this book, it has also been highly recommended by a leader of the Banff Book Discussion Weekend. (Michael)

***A Street Cat Named Bob* by James Bowen**

Biography – Paperback \$16.99

At its heart this book is a love story. It is the true story of the love and dedication shared between a broken young man and a very clever tomcat. James Bowen is a struggling drug addict with a life that is going nowhere. But when an injured little cat shows up and refuses to leave Bowen's side, both lives are changed forever. Bowen's innocent prose make the story all the more believable. This is a book for everyone, and it will change the way you view street people and street cats. It is a beautiful, never maudlin, story about second chances and a poignant testimony to how caring for another being can create miracles. (Eileen)

***Sweetland* by Michael Crummey**

Fiction – Hardcover \$32.00 (paperback expected in June 2015)

A Newfoundland bachelor has to make a decision, whether or not to accept the government's buy-out offer and leave his island home. It is an all or none decision for the community. Will Moses be the only hold out? A poignant story of family, friends, home and survival. (Irene)

***The Table of Less Valued Knights* by Marie Phillips**

Fiction – Hardcover \$29.05 (paperback expected August 2015)

Were there any knights in Camelot that you haven't heard about? Marie Phillips thinks so – they sat at the rectangular table, and were the washed out and not quite good enough. A comic read with mistaken identities, unusual quests, and brave knights that will have you rethinking all you thought you knew about the Knights of the Round Table. Particularly good for contrasting with other Arthurian tales such as *Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley, and *The Once and Future King* by T. B. White. (Susan)

***This Is Where I Leave You* by Jonathan Tropper**

Fiction – Paperback \$18.00

Jude Foxman, his three siblings and their significant others are home to honour their father by sitting shiva. For the next seven days the family will juggle the mourners paying their respects while trying to come to terms with their own dysfunctional history, personal lives and issues. Edgy, hilarious and heartbreaking, it reminds the reader that nothing is ever going to be perfect. (Cynthia)

***They Left Us Everything* by Plum Johnson**

Biography – Paperback \$22.00

A memoir by a daughter, the oldest of five children, who has returned to her childhood home after her mother's death to clear a 23-room house - a daunting undertaking. However, it provided Johnson and her brothers with surprising insights into just who their parents really were. (Irene)

***A Time of Gifts* by Patrick Leigh Fermor**

Travel – Paperback \$16.99

Recounting the first leg of Fermor's 1933 journey from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople, *A Time of Gifts* is a woefully under-appreciated treasure. The book sparkles with the naive, fresh-faced curiosity of an 18 year-old setting out on his first adventure; but part of the beauty of this book emerges in hindsight. Offering a detailed account of a journey on foot through pre-war Europe, much of what Fermor encounters is destined for destruction a few years later. He is frequently shown hospitality by the sort of petit-aristocracy that was soon to be murderously swept aside by the forces of totalitarianism, and this knowledge lends his eager tale a note of tragedy. *A Time of Gifts* has become a classic of travel literature, and is a hoard of central European charm and miscellanea the likes of which we might never have access to again. It is a fragment of a lost world. (Justin)

***An Untamed State* by Roxane Gay**

Fiction – Paperback \$19.95

A searing portrayal of post-traumatic stress disorder that has stayed with me months after reading the book. Vacationing at her parents' home in Haiti, Mireille Duval Jameson is violently abducted just outside their gated community. When her father, fearing that negotiation will only encourage more kidnappings, refuses to pay the ransom, Mireille's kidnappers take their revenge out on her for thirteen days. Finally home again, she struggles to find a new way to live after her experience. (Judith)

***Us Conductors* by Sean Michaels**

Fiction – Hardcover (paperback expected August 2015)

2014 Giller Prize Winner. A story of unrequited love between Lev (Leon) Sergeyevich Termen (Theremin) inventor of the ethereal electrical instrument the Theremin and Clara Rockmore (nee Rosen) who became the most acclaimed Theremin player in the world. A brilliant scientist, Termen and his handler are sent to the United States in 1927 to gain markets for his inventions and to spy for the Soviet Union. He soon meets the much younger Lithuanian-American violinist Clara Rosen. The book is a letter from Leon to Clara and Michaels' has a beautifully lyrical writing style and wonderful sense of place. (Michelle)

***War of the Whales* by Joshua Horowitz**

Current Affairs – Hardcover \$34.00 (paperback expected July 2015)

The Bahamas in March 2000 witnessed a mass stranding of whales, particularly the elusive beaked whales. Local marine biologist Ken Balcomb suspected the US Navy of engaging in military sonar games. Fast-paced non-fiction that almost reads like a mystery exploring the ecological side effects of national security. (Cynthia)

***When Everything Feels Like the Movies* by Raziel Reid**

Young Adult Fiction – Paperback \$15.95

2014 GG YA winner. Jude sees school as a giant movie set. Everybody is either a Movie Star, Crew or Extra, except for Jude. He is too flamboyant, too much on the edge, and too much a victim of his own celebrity. He is a typical teenager; self-centred and in your face. But underneath the facade, he is just a boy looking to be loved for who he truly is. (Cynthia)

***Wolf Winter* by Cecilia Ekbäck**

Fiction – Paperback \$21.99

This haunting story set in 1717 Lapland Sweden has evocative scenery, great characters, and an intriguing story. Recent immigrants discover a body on the mountain the first week they arrive, and are determined to prove it was not an accident. The characters and beliefs of the time are slowly revealed, but the writing

keeps you intrigued no matter the pace. People as disparate as Lee Child and Hilary Mantel have raved about this book – keep an eye out for possible literary award nominations! (Susan)

***The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming An Individual In An Age of Distraction* by Matthew B. Crawford**

Current Affairs – Hardcover \$32.00 (paperback expected April 2016)

How is technology impacting our ability to focus, concentrate and quite simply, just pay attention to the external world for ‘a time’? Crawford is an intellectual. He is a professor who received widespread critical acclaim for an earlier work entitled *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. With language that is sometimes academic but offset by personal storytelling, he endeavours to help us understand why the virtual world should never supersede the real one. (Michael)

***A Year in a B&B in Banff* by Jamie MacVicar**

Biography – Paperback \$20.00

True story of an American man, formerly an advance man for Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey circuses, meeting and falling for a Canadian woman who is a teacher and the owner of a B&B in Banff. With all his worldly experience, nothing has quite prepared Jamie MacVicar for what life is like living with Canadians in a small town in the Rockies. (Cynthia)

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