

terrifying, abusive patriarch Dicky wants to humiliate him; beautiful 21-year-old Tamsin possesses an insidious coquettishness; and patient, innocent Kit—not quite 16 years old—confounds him with her youthful affection. Mutual distrust between Lewis and the locals grows, but Kit may be able to save Lewis.

Let the Great World Spin

by Colum McCann

Set on August 7, 1974, when Philippe Petit walked between the towers of the World Trade Center, the story emerges of two Irish brothers: Corrigan, a radical monk, and Ciaran, who follows him to the blasted Bronx. The resilient prostitute Tillie and her spirited daughter Jazzlyn then enter the frame. Gloria, also from their housing project, befriends Claire of Park Avenue as they mourn the deaths of their sons in Vietnam. This diverse cast is interwoven with McCann's edgy descriptions of a great city besmirched with graffiti, blood, and drugs. In the midst of a financial freefall we see how quickly civilization can unravel. Here, too, are portals onto war, the justice system, and the dawning of the cyber age. Each of the finely drawn, unexpectedly connected characters balances above an abyss, evincing great courage with every step.

Inside the Whale

by Jenny Rooney

In the summer of 1939, Stevie (a woman) and Michael are lovers until Michael joins the Royal Signals, disappears to Africa and doesn't return. A half century later, Stevie cannot mourn the recent death of her husband or reveal a lifetime's secret to her daughter and granddaughter. At the same time, Michael lies in a south London hospital. Unable to speak, he writes down his story for a sympathetic nursing assistant. Rooney confidently moves between two narrators and shifting times, vividly recreating Blitz-torn London and the Africa of the same period. A deeply affecting story of thwarted circumstances and belated wisdom.

A Pigeon and A Boy

by Meir Shalev

Intertwining a powerful present-day love story with an equally memorable one taking place during Israel's fight for independence, Shalev offers a compelling portrait of Israel's period before statehood to the present day. With homing pigeons as a recurring motif, he explores themes of home, memory, and survival—for the birds, a people, and a nation.

*With thanks and acknowledgement to reviews adapted from **Booklist**, **Bookmarks**, and **The Guardian**.*



Director's Faves

*Books worth reading.
Summer, 2009.*

Geraldine S. Mahoney, Director
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The Behaviour of Moths

by Poppy Adams

(Also published in the US as **The Sister**)

In a crumbling mansion, two elderly sisters reunite after a long separation. Virginia, the older one, stayed and carried on the family tradition of lepidopterology while the free-spirited Vivien left to lead a cosmopolitan life in London. The story is told from Virginia's perspective and recounts the strange lives of their parents as well as the accident in Vivien's youth that left her unable to have children and the solution she devises to create a family. Some gothic twists and turns leave the reader wondering where the line between truth and fiction exists for the protagonist.

The Thing Around Your Neck

by Ngozi Adichie

The title refers to a feeling of constriction of one of the characters who is adjusting to life in America as a recent immigrant from Nigeria. For her, falling in love releases the feeling of *that thing around your neck*. Each of these short stories is an emotionally told tale of the human experience, whether set in Nigeria or America, or travelling between the two. Although experiences and values at times differ from country to country, Adichie gives us a sense of the characters' pain as they cope with prejudice, corruption, and violence.

Epicure's Lament

by Kate Christenson

Hugo Whittier is a 40-year-old misanthrope who lives alone at Waverly, his family estate. Intent upon committing a protracted suicide by smoking, his plans are disrupted when his older brother Dennis arrives, fleeing his failed marriage to wife, Marie. Both of the brothers develop feelings for Marie's best friend Stephanie, and Hugo is not above dirty tricks in the competition for her affections. Then Hugo's estranged wife, Sonia, announces that she and their daughter are coming to live at Waverly as well. What's a curmudgeon to do? Hugo reluctantly begins to plan a grand Christmas dinner for this unlikely assembly as he also makes his plan to escape life. Hugo is an utterly unforgettable character, one I loved to hate and hated to love.

The Clothes on their Backs

by Linda Grant

Vivien Kovacs, a sensitive, bookish girl grows up protected from the world by her timid Hungarian refugee parents. They conceal the details of their history and shy away from any encounter with the outside world. Vivien learns how to navigate British society from an eccentric cast of neighbors -- including a fading ballerina, a cartoonist, and a sad woman who wanders the city and teaches her to be beautiful. She loses herself in books and reinvents herself according to her favorite characters, but it

is through clothes that she ultimately defines herself. Against her father's wishes, she forges a relationship with her uncle, a notorious slum landlord, who, in his old age, wants to share his life story. As he exposes the truth about her family's past Vivien learns how to be comfortable in her own skin and how to be alive in the world.

The Outcast

by Sadie Jones

Set in post WWII suburban London, this debut novel charts the downward spiral and tortured redemption of a young man shattered by loss. The war is over, and Lewis Aldridge is getting used to having his father, Gilbert, back in the house. Things hum along until Lewis's mother drowns, casting the 10-year-old into deep isolation. Ignored by his grief-stricken father, who remarries a year after the death, Lewis' sadness festers during his adolescence until he boils over. After serving two years in prison, he returns home seeking redemption and forgiveness, only to find himself ostracized. The town's most prominent family, the Carmichaels, poses particular danger:

