



THE BOOK NOOK

On the paperback shelves, historical fiction (from Biblical times through the 1970s) and family histories, if only recently historical—but as in most of our own family stories, or sagas, finding more than a few traces of the deep past importantly with us in the present

Breana Clarke, *River, Cross My Heart*

Georgetown, 1925.

"This 1999 debut novel of a wonderfully gifted storyteller, an Oprah's Book Club selection, tells the story of a close-knit African American community."

"Five-year-old Clara Bynum is dead, drowned in the Potomac River in the shadow of a seemingly haunted rock outcropping known locally as the Three Sisters. The novel weighs the effect of Clara's absence on the people she has left behind: her parents, Alice and Willie Bynum, torn between the old world of their rural North Carolina home and the new world of the city, to which they have moved in search of a better life for themselves and their children; the friends and relatives of the Bynum family in the Georgetown neighborhood they now call home; and, most especially, Clara's sister, ten-year-old Johnnie Mae, who must come to terms with the powerful and confused emotions stirred by her sister's death as she struggles to decide what kind of woman she will become. This highly accomplished first novel resonates with ideas, impassioned lyricism, and poignant historical detail as it captures an essential part of the African-American experience in our century."

Tatiana de Rosnay, *The House I Loved*

France, 1860.

"In her quietly elegant 11th novel, the bestselling author of *Sarah's Key* again explores the idea of home as both sanctuary and embodiment of history... [Rose's] letters, poetic and honest, reveal a world soon to be destroyed by progress. A mesmerizing look at how the homes and neighborhoods we occupy hold not only our memories but our secrets as well." (*People*)

"Rose has spent all her married life in her home on rue Childebert, and though Napoléon's prefect now plans to tear the neighborhood down in the name of progress, she is unwilling to part with it. While she doggedly awaits the impending destruction, she writes letters to her beloved late husband, sharing memories from their past, both good and bad, and building up to a final confession that she has kept as her secret for 30 years. Set in nineteenth-century Paris during the Haussmann reconstructions of the Second Empire, this story is as much about that iconic city and its legacy as it is about the strength of its citizens. Those who enjoyed *Sarah's Key* (2007) will recognize de Rosnay's love for her native France and appreciate the poignancy and tenacity of her characters."

Pete Dexter, *Brotherly Love*

Philadelphia, 1960s.

"A first-rate novel and a masterly evocation of that undercivilized and unfree America . . . The grace and confidence of [Pete Dexter's] prose conveys absolute authenticity."

(The New York Times Book Review)

"Extraordinarily poignant . . . *Brotherly Love* is all bulletproof prose and flinty-eyed bravissimo. . . . But the quieter, sadder aspects of the novel are its strongest points."

(The Boston Globe)

"In the City of Brotherly Love, a car skids off the ice and ignites a chain of events that changes everything for eight-year-old Peter Flood. Peter's father is a powerful man, a union boss with mob connections, but all the power in the world is useless to a grieving son. Raised by his uncle, Peter tries to distance himself from the casual brutality of the family business, gravitating instead toward a small South Philly gym. Peter's cousin Michael—his 'brother'—moves in another direction: into small-time intimidation and the trappings of a union prince. Neither, however, can outrun the logic of violence as they're dragged into a world of bad blood and a chilling cycle of betrayal and retribution."

Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*

The ancient Near East, around 1750 BCE.

"In this modern classic interpretation of the biblical story of Dinah, Anita Diamant imagines the traditions and turmoils of ancient womanhood—the world of *The Red Tent*, a *New York Times* bestseller and the basis of the A&E/Lifetime mini-series."

"In the Bible, Dinah's life is only hinted at in a brief and violent detour within the more familiar chapters of the Book of Genesis that tell of her father, Jacob, and his twelve sons."

The Red Tent begins with the story of the mothers—Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah—the four wives of Jacob. They love Dinah and give her gifts that sustain her through childhood, a calling to midwifery, and a new home in a foreign land. Dinah's story reaches out from a remarkable period of early history and creates an intimate connection with the past. Deeply affecting, *The Red Tent* combines rich storytelling and the valuable achievement of presenting a new view of biblical women's lives."

Sara Donati, *Lake in the Clouds*

New York, 1802.

"Exemplary historical fiction, boasting a heroine with a real and tangible presence."
(Kirkus Reviews)

"In her extraordinary novels *Into the Wilderness* and *Dawn on a Distant Shore*, award-winning writer Sara Donati deftly captured the vast, untamed wilderness of late-18th-century New York and the trials and triumphs of the Bonner family. Now Donati takes on a new and often overlooked chapter in our nation's past—and in the life of the spirited Bonners—as their oldest daughter, the brave and beautiful Hannah, comes of age with a challenge that will change her forever. Masterfully told, this passionate story is a moving tribute to a resilient, adventurous family and a people poised at the brink of a new century."

"A doctor in training, Hannah is descended from healers on both sides—one Scots grandmother and one Mohawk—and her reputation as a skilled healer in her own right is growing. While her parents go off on a dangerous mission to help a group of runaway

slaves achieve freedom, Hannah sets off on an adventure of her own to study vaccination methods in New York City."

"Once again Ms. Donati does an excellent job of bringing the time period to life. I especially enjoyed the depiction of life in New York City and Hannah's time spent working in the almshouse hospital. Here, as everywhere else, Hannah is confronted with the prejudice and ignorance of others who cannot see past the color of her skin, but she is determined to learn as much as she can to take back to the people living on the frontier."

Sarah Dunant, *The Birth of Venus*

Renaissance Florence.

"A tour de force, the first historical novel from one of Britain's most innovative writers of literary suspense. It brings alive the history of Florence at its most dramatic period, telling a compulsively absorbing story of love, art, religion, and power through the passionate voice of Alessandra, a heroine with the same vibrancy of spirit as her beloved city."

"Alessandra Cecchi is not quite fifteen when her father, a prosperous cloth merchant, brings a young painter back from northern Europe to decorate the chapel walls in the family's Florentine palazzo. A child of the Renaissance, with a precocious mind and a talent for drawing, Alessandra is intoxicated by the painter's abilities.

But their burgeoning relationship is interrupted when Alessandra's parents arrange her marriage to a wealthy, much older man. Meanwhile, Florence is changing, increasingly subject to the growing suppression imposed by the fundamentalist monk Savonarola, who is seizing religious and political control. Alessandra and her native city are caught between the Medici state, with its love of luxury, learning, and dazzling art, and the hellfire preaching and increasing violence of Savonarola's reactionary followers. Played out against this turbulent backdrop, Alessandra's married life is a misery, except for the surprising freedom it allows her to pursue her powerful attraction to the young painter and his art."

Sarah Dunant, *In the Company of the Courtesan*

Renaissance Italy.

"My lady, Fiammetta Bianchini, was plucking her eyebrows and biting color into her lips when the unthinkable happened and the Holy Roman Emperor's army blew a hole in the wall of God's eternal city, letting in a flood of half-starved, half-crazed troops bent on pillage and punishment."

Thus begins Sarah Dunant's epic novel of life in Renaissance Italy. Escaping the sack of Rome in 1527, with their stomachs churning on the jewels they have swallowed, the courtesan Fiammetta and her dwarf companion, Bucino, head for Venice, the shimmering city born out of water to become a miracle of east-west trade: rich and rancid, pious and profitable, beautiful and squalid. With a mix of courage and cunning they infiltrate Venetian society. Together they make the perfect partnership: the sharp-tongued, sharp-witted dwarf, and his vibrant mistress, trained from birth to charm, entertain, and satisfy men who have the money to support her.

Jon Fasman, *The Geographer's Library*

Sicily, 1154, and modern day New England.

"Nine hundred years after a twelfth-century Sicilian cat burglar steals artifacts that possess the secret to eternal life and scatters them throughout the world, a young Connecticut reporter finds evidence that someone is collecting the artifacts again."

"Fasman's debut novel features one Paul Tomm, a reporter who, while poking around a quiet New England village on the obituary beat, stumbles upon clues to the demise of a local professor. Alternating with the murder-mystery story line are chapters detailing the powers of the fifteen talismans of alchemy said to have been stolen, in 1154, from the Muslim cartographer, librarian, and mystic Al-Idrisi" [a real Spanish-Muslim philosopher, linguist, and scholar who served in the court of King Roger of Sicily in Palermo].

Barbara Gowdy, *The Romantic*

Suburban Toronto, 1960s.

"Haunting and profound, *The Romantic* is a story about love in all its exquisite variations."

"Louise Kirk has loved Abel Richter since they were children, but it was his mother who drew her affection first. At 10, a year after Louise's own mother left her and her father, the Richters, an older couple with an adopted son, move in next door. Louise watches Mrs. Richter longingly from a distance, wishing she would adopt her as well. Louise befriends Abel in order to get to Mrs. Richter, but her love soon transfers to the solitary, sensitive boy. The connection between the two flourishes, and Louise never stops thinking about Abel, even when he moves away. It is his return, when they meet at a high-school party, that marks the beginning of their adult relationship—an attachment Louise thinks will be permanent, especially when she discovers she is pregnant. But her love for Abel blinds her to his failings. Moving seamlessly between Louise's childhood, her teen years, and her present, this novel is a sad, beautiful examination of a lonely woman and her attempts to find unconditional, unwavering love."

Jane Hamilton, *The Short History of a Prince*

Chicago, 1970s.

"A moving story of the torments of sexuality and the redemptive power of family and friendship, which confirms Jane Hamilton's place as a preeminent novelist of our time."

"Walter McCloud is a boy with dreams unlike most. Introduced as a child to the genius of Balanchine and the lyricism of Tchaikovsky, Walter has always aspired to be a dancer. As he grows older, it becomes clear that despite his desire, he lacks the talent, and he faces the painful knowledge that his more gifted friends have already surpassed him.

Soon, however, that pain is overshadowed when his older brother, Daniel, finds a strange lump on his neck and Walter realizes that a happy family can change overnight. The year that follows transforms the McClouds, as they try to hold together in the face of the fearful consequences of Daniel's illness, and Walter makes discoveries about himself and his friendships that will change him forever.

Decades later, after Walter has left home and returned, he must come to terms with the memories of that year, and grapple once and for all with the challenge of carving out a place for himself in this all-too-familiar world."

Helene Hanff, *The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*

London, early 1970s.

"A charmer. Will beguile an hour of your time and put you in touch with mankind."

(New York Times)

"This cult favorite is a delightful diary—think Nancy Mitford—meets—Nora Ephron. A love letter to England and its literary heritage, written by a Manhattanite who isn't afraid to speak her mind (or tell a British barman how to make a real American martini), this is an endearing account of two wildly different worlds colliding; it's an outsider's witty, vibrant portrait of idiosyncratic British culture at its best, as well as a profound commentary about the written word's power to sustain us, transport us, and unite us."

"When she's invited to London for the English publication of her wildly successful book, *84 Charing Cross Road*—in which she shares two decades of correspondence with Frank Doel, a British bookseller who became a dear friend—New York writer Helene Hanff is thrilled to realize a lifelong dream. The trip will be bittersweet, because she can't help wishing Frank was still alive, but she's determined to capture every moment of the journey.

Helene's time in London exceeds her wildest expectations. She visits landmarks like Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle; explores Shakespeare's favorite pub, Dickens's house, and the Oxford University courtyard where John Donne used to walk; and makes a host of new friends from all walks of life, who take her to the theater, introduce her to institutions like Harrod's, and share with her their favorite corners of countryside."

Melinda Haynes, *Mother of Pearl*

Mississippi, late 1950s.

"Marking the debut of a stunning literary talent, this novel (an Oprah's Book Club selection) captures the irony and beauty of life in the Deep South in exquisite prose that brings to mind Kaye Gibbons and Olive Ann Burns. But Haynes creates a wholly distinctive new style by drawing on her own Southern roots and the 'noble country' language of her youth in this remarkable first novel.

Set in a small Mississippi town in the late 1950s, *Mother of Pearl* is populated by wonderfully rich and original characters, with themes of identity and the true meaning of family interwoven throughout. The story revolves around twenty-eight-year-old Even Grade, a black man who grew up an orphan, and Valuable Korner, a fifteen-year-old white girl who is the daughter of the town whore and an unknown father. Their paths cross through Joody Two Sun, a seer, who sets up camp along the riverbank just outside of town and becomes Even's lover. Both Even and Valuable are seeking the family, love, and commitment they never had, and their search ultimately takes both of them to places they never dreamed they'd go.

Told in beautifully nuanced narrative with a staggering richness that resonates with emotional truth, *Mother of Pearl* is a haunting, bittersweet tale of the search for identity and the power of renewal."

Dara Horn, *All Other Nights*

The American South during the Civil War.

"In her eagerly awaited third novel, award-winning author Dara Horn brings us page-turning storytelling at its best."

"How is tonight different from all other nights? For Jacob Rappaport, a Jewish soldier in the Union army, it is a question his commanders have answered for him: on Passover in 1862, he is ordered to murder his own uncle, who is plotting to assassinate President Lincoln. After this harrowing mission, Jacob is recruited to pursue another enemy agent—the daughter of a Virginia family friend. But this time, his assignment isn't to murder the spy, but to marry her. Their marriage, with its riveting and horrifying consequences, reveals the deep divisions that still haunt American life today.

Based on real personalities such as Judah Benjamin, the Confederacy's Jewish secretary of state and spymaster, and on historical facts and events ranging from an African American spy network to the dramatic self-destruction of the city of Richmond, *All Other Nights* is a gripping and suspenseful story of men and women driven to the extreme limits of loyalty and betrayal. It is also a brilliant parable of the rift in America that lingers a century and a half later: between those who value family and tradition first, and those dedicated, at any cost, to social and racial justice for all."

John Irving, *Last Night in Twisted River*

United States and Canada, 1954 and after.

"Engrossing . . . Irving's sentences and paragraphs are assembled with the skill and attention to detail of a master craftsman creating a dazzling piece of jewelry from hundreds of tiny, bright stones." (*Houston Chronicle*)

"In 1954, in the cookhouse of a logging and sawmill settlement in northern New Hampshire, an anxious twelve-year-old boy mistakes the local constable's girlfriend for a bear.

Both the twelve-year-old and his father become fugitives, forced to run from Coos County—to Boston, to southern Vermont, to Toronto—pursued by the implacable constable. Their lone protector is a fiercely libertarian logger, once a river driver, who befriends them. In a story spanning five decades, *Last Night in Twisted River* depicts the recent half-century in the United States as 'a living replica of Coos County, where lethal hatreds were generally permitted to run their course.'

What further distinguishes the novel is the author's unmistakable voice—the inimitable voice of an accomplished storyteller."

Martha Hall Kelly, *Lilac Girls*

New York, Paris, Poland, and Germany, during WWII.

"Inspired by the life of a real World War II heroine, this remarkable debut novel (*New York Times* bestseller) reveals the power of unsung women to change history in their quest for love, freedom, and second chances."

"Extremely moving and memorable . . . This impressive debut should appeal strongly to historical fiction readers and to book clubs that adored Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale* and Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*." (*Library Journal*, starred review)

• New York socialite Caroline Ferriday has her hands full with her post at the French consulate and a new love on the horizon. But Caroline's world is forever changed when Hitler's army invades Poland in September 1939—and then sets its sights on France.

• An ocean away from Caroline, Kasia Kuzmerick, a Polish teenager, senses her carefree

youth disappearing as she is drawn deeper into her role as courier for the underground resistance movement. In a tense atmosphere of watchful eyes and suspecting neighbors, one false move can have dire consequences. • For the ambitious young German doctor, Herta Oberheuser, an ad for a government medical position seems her ticket out of a desolate life. Once hired, though, she finds herself trapped in a male-dominated realm of Nazi secrets and power.

The lives of these three women are set on a collision course when the unthinkable happens and Kasia is sent to Ravensbrück, the notorious Nazi concentration camp for women. Their stories cross continents—from New York to Paris, Germany, and Poland—as Caroline and Kasia strive to bring justice to those whom history has forgotten."

Thomas Keneally, *A Family Madness*

Australia, post-war; Belorussia during WWII.

"Keneally explores, in this fascinating novel, the effects of history, specifically the violent history of Belorussia during World War II, on our ahistorical present, specifically suburban Sydney."

"Terry Delaney, a rugby player in Pernith, Australia, takes a job with a security firm run by Belorussian emigre Rudi Kabbel, a man 'marred by history.' When Delaney falls in love with Rudi's daughter, he is drawn into the family's madness as they prepare to survive an apocalyptic annihilation and establish 'a true Belorussia of the spirit.' In his *History of the Kabbelski Family*, Rudi recounts his harrowing experiences as a child in World War II when the Nazis occupied his homeland; and the journal of Rudi's father, Stanislaw Kabbelski, reveals the evil done in the name of patriotism by the Belorussians fighting for their independence. These three separate narratives are skillfully combined in a complex and powerful novel by one of Australia's leading writers. (Kenealy's last book was the critically acclaimed *Schindler's List*.)

Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin*

New York City, 1970s.

"Mesmerizing . . . a Joycean look at the lives of New Yorkers changed by a single act on a single day . . . Colum McCann's marvelously rich novel [winner of the National Book Award] . . . weaves a portrait of a city and a moment, dizzyingly satisfying to read and difficult to put down." (*The Seattle Times*)

"In the dawning light of a late-summer morning, the people of lower Manhattan stand hushed, staring up in disbelief at the Twin Towers. It is August 1974, and a mysterious tightrope walker is running, dancing, leaping between the towers, suspended a quarter mile above the ground. In the streets below, a slew of ordinary lives become extraordinary in bestselling novelist Colum McCann's stunningly intricate portrait of a city and its people.

Corrigan, a radical young Irish monk, struggles with his own demons as he lives among the prostitutes in the middle of the burning Bronx. A group of mothers gather in a Park Avenue apartment to mourn their sons who died in Vietnam, only to discover just how much divides them even in grief. A young artist finds herself at the scene of a hit-and-run that sends her own life careening sideways. Tillie, a thirty-eight-year-old grandmother, turns tricks alongside her teenage daughter, determined not only to take care of her family

but to prove her own worth. Elegantly weaving together these and other seemingly disparate lives, McCann's powerful allegory comes alive in the unforgettable voices of the city's people, unexpectedly drawn together by hope, beauty, and the 'artistic crime of the century.'

A sweeping and radical social novel*, *Let the Great World Spin* captures the spirit of America in a time of transition, extraordinary promise, and, in hindsight, heartbreaking innocence. Hailed as a 'fiercely original talent' (*San Francisco Chronicle*), award-winning novelist McCann has delivered a triumphantly American masterpiece that awakens in us a sense of what the novel can achieve, confront, and even heal.

*inspired by Philippe Petit's daring high-wire stunt, which is also depicted in the film *The Walk* starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt

Ruthanne Lum McCunn, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*

Rural China and the American West, from 1871 into the early 20th century.

"The extraordinary biographical novel about a Chinese-American woman who fought for independence and dignity in the American West"—'an important contribution to the history of pioneer women' (*Ms. Magazine*)."

"Lalu Nathoy's father called his thirteen-year-old daughter his treasure, his 'thousand pieces of gold'—yet when famine strikes northern China in 1871, he is forced to sell her. Polly, as Lalu is later called, is sold to a brothel, sold again to a slave merchant bound for America, auctioned to a saloonkeeper, and offered as a prize in a poker game.

With over a quarter of a million copies sold, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is a classic of biographical historical fiction that stars an unforgettable Chinese-American heroine whose struggles put a human face on the anti-immigration policies of the past and present."