

THE UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
2012 Recommended Book List


Looking for a good book to read in your leisure time? LLC faculty, staff and TAs have put together this list of some favorites they've recently read. Selections focus in some way on languages and cultures and vary by personal taste. We hope you enjoy!


Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet (2009, Jamie Ford) "Sentimental, heartfelt...the exploration of Henry's changing relationship with his family and with Keiko will keep most readers turning pages...A timely debut that not only reminds readers of a shameful episode in American history, but cautions us to examine the present and take heed we don't repeat those injustices."-- *Kirkus Reviews*

Interpreter of Maladies (1999, Jhumpa Lahiri) "Navigating between the Indian traditions they've inherited and the baffling new world, the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's elegant, touching stories seek love beyond the barriers of culture and generations. In "A Temporary Matter," published in *The New Yorker*, a young Indian-American couple faces the heartbreak of a stillborn birth while their Boston neighborhood copes with a nightly blackout. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession." (from Amazon.com)

Sarah's Key (2008, Tatiana De Rosnay) "Tatiana de Rosnay offers us a brilliantly subtle, compelling portrait of France under occupation and reveals the taboos and silence that surround this painful episode." (from Barnesandnoble.com)

Cubana (Contemporary Fiction by Cuban Women) (1998, Mirata Yáñez) "Until recently, the combination of a Cuban old boys' network and an ideological emphasis on "tough" writing kept fiction by Cuban women largely unknown and unread. *Cubana*, the U.S. version of a groundbreaking anthology of women's fiction published in Cuba in 1996, introduces these once-ignored writers to a new audience. Havana editor and author Mirta Yáñez has assembled an impressive group of sixteen stories that reveals the strength and variety of contemporary writing by Cuban women-and offers a glimpse inside Cuba during a time of both extreme economic difficulty and artistic renaissance." (from Amazon.com)







Caramelo (2003, Sandra Cisneros) “A multigenerational story of a Mexican-American family whose voices create a dazzling weave of humor, passion, and poignancy. It is told through the eyes of Lala Reyes, who is descended from a family of renowned *rebozo* (shawl makers). The striped *caramelo rebozo* is the most beautiful of all, and the one that makes its way, like the family history it has come to represent, into Lala’s possession. (from [Amazon.com](#))”

The History of Love (2006, Nicole Krauss) ”*The History of Love* spans of period of over 60 years and takes readers from Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe to present day Brighton Beach. At the center of each main character's psyche is the issue of loneliness, and the need to fill a void left empty by lost love. Leo Gursky is a retired locksmith who immigrates to New York after escaping SS officers in his native Poland, only to spend the last stage of his life terrified that no one will notice when he dies. (“I try to make a point of being seen. Sometimes when I'm out, I'll buy a juice even though I'm not thirsty.”) Fourteen-year-old Alma Singer vacillates between wanting to memorialize her dead father and finding a way to lift her mother's veil of depression. At the same time, she's trying to save her brother Bird, who is convinced he may be the Messiah, from becoming a 10-year-old social pariah. As the connection between Leo and Alma is slowly unmasked, the desperation, along with the potential for salvation, of this unique pair is also revealed.” (from [Amazon.com](#))

Great House (2011, Nicole Krauss) “In each of the short stories that nest like rooms in Nicole Krauss's *Great House* looms a tremendous desk. It may have belonged to Federico García Lorca, the great poet and dramatist who was one of thousands executed by Fascists in 1936, when the Spanish Civil War began. We know that the desk stood in Weisz's father's study in Budapest on a night in 1944, when the first stone shattered their window. After the war, Weisz hunts furniture looted from Jewish homes by the Nazis. He scours the world for the fragments to reassemble that study's every element, but the desk eludes him, and he and his children live at the edges of its absence. Meanwhile, it spends a few decades in an attic in England, where a woman exhumes the memories she can't speak except through violent stories. She gives the desk to the young Chilean-Jewish poet Daniel Varsky, who takes it to New York and passes it on (before he returns to Chile and disappears under Pinochet) to Nadia, who writes seven novels on it before Varsky's daughter calls to claim it. Crossing decades and continents, the stories of *Great House* narrate feeling more than fact. Krauss's characters inhabit "a state of perpetual regret and longing for a place we only know existed because we remember a keyhole, a tile, the way the threshold was worn under an open door," and a desk whose multitude of drawers becomes a mausoleum of memory. --*Mari Malcolm*” (from [Amazon.com](#))





Wise Children (2007, Angela Carter) “In their heyday on the vaudeville stages of the early twentieth century, Dora Chance and her twin sister, Nora--unacknowledged daughters of Sir Melchior Hazard, the greatest Shakespearean actor of his day--were known as the Lucky Chances, with private lives as colorful and erratic as their careers. But now, at age 75, Dora is typing up their life story, and it is a tale indeed that Angela Carter tells. A writer known for the richness of her imagination and wit as well as her feminist insights into matters large and small, she created in *Wise Children* an effervescent family saga that manages to celebrate the lore and magic of show business while also exploring the connections between parent and child, the transitory and the immortal, authenticity and falsehood.” (from Amazon.com)

Black Bazar (2012, Alain Mabanckou) “In fact, *Black Bazar* (Editions du Seuil) is set mostly in Jip's, an Afro-Cuban bar on Rue Saint Denis where Mabanckou used to hang out, and the novel is peopled with larger-than-life personalities drawn from the surrounding African community: Paul from the "big Congo", Roger the Franco-Ivorian, Willy the barman...and of course the author's alter ego and protagonist, "Fessologue" (literally "Buttologist"). This modern dandy, with a penchant for hip Italian clothes and Weston shoes, likes to guess women's temperaments according to their derrières. In the uproarious novel, Mabanckou wittily portrays the African diaspora in Paris, stressing its diversity despite the unity of color. "Black people make themselves prisoners of the image white people have of them. So they think they are united, when it really is a patchwork community with disparate interests. I can tell you dozens of differences between Caribbeans, West Africans and Central Africans! That's really what I tried to portray in this novel." (from Francetoday.com)

Previously Suggested Works

Cathedral of the Sea (2006, Idelfonso Falcones)

-**The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland** (2002, Jim DeFede)

-**The Story of French** (2006, Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow)

-**Le Livre d'Emma** (2001, Marie Célie Agnant, a Quebec writer of Haitian origin, in French)

-**Ishmael** (1992, Daniel Quinn)


-**Murder in the Latin Quarter** (Cara Black)

-**How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone** (2008, S. Stanisic)

-**The Pillars of the Earth** (1989, Ken Follett)

-**A Thousand Splendid Suns** (2007, Khaled Hosseini, author of the Kite Runner, also a





good choice)

-**Night Train to Lisbon** (2004, Pascal Mercier, a Swiss author, English translation 2008)

-**The Shadow of the Wind** (2001, Carlos Ruiz Zafon, a Spanish author, English translation 2004 Lucia Graves)

-**Foucault's Pendulum** (1988, Umberto Eco, in Italian, translation to English by William Weaver)

