

Historical Book Club Syllabus - 2021 to 2022

Coordinators: Dennis Flavin and Bob Martin

Region	Period	Book	Author
Caribbean	18th cent	All Souls' Rising	Madison Smartt Bell
Asia	19th cent	Empress Orchid	Anchee Min
USA	16th cent	I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem	Maryse Conde
South America	19th cent	Doña Barbara	Rómulo Gallegos
Caribbean	19th cent	Cecilia Valdés or El Angel Hill	Cirilo Villaverde
Asia	16th cent	The Architect's Apprentice	Elif Shafak
USA	19th cent	Redburn	Herman Melville
South America	19th cent	One Hundred Years of Solitude	Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Caribbean	19th cent	The Farming of Bones	Edwidge Danticat
Asia	19th cent	Sea of Poppies	Amitav Ghosh
USA	20th cent	The Night Watchman	Louise Erdrich
South America	20th cent	Daughter of Fortune	Isabel Allende

September

All Souls' Rising 560 pp
by Madison Smartt Bell

"A serious historical novel that reads like a dream." --*The Washington Post Book World*
"One of the most sophisticated fictional treatments of the enduring themes of class, color, and freedom." --*San Francisco Chronicle*

This first installment of the epic Haitian trilogy brings to life a decisive moment in the history of race, class, and colonialism. The slave uprising in Haiti was a momentous contribution to the tide of revolution that swept over the Western world at the end of the 1700s. A brutal rebellion that strove to overturn a vicious system of slavery, the uprising successfully transformed Haiti from a European colony to the world's first Black republic.

October

Empress Orchid 336 pp
By Anchee Min

***Empress Orchid* sweeps readers into the heart of the Forbidden City to tell the fascinating story of a young concubine who becomes China's last empress. Min introduces the beautiful Tzu Hsi, known as Orchid, and weaves an epic of the country girl who seized power through seduction, murder, and endless intrigue. When China is threatened by enemies, she alone seems capable of holding the country together.**

November

**I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem 245 pp
by Maryse Conde**

This wild and entertaining novel expands on the true story of the West Indian slave Tituba, who was accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts, arrested in 1692, and forgotten in jail until the general amnesty for witches two years later. Maryse Conde brings Tituba out of historical silence and creates for her a fictional childhood, adolescence, and old age. She turns her into what she calls "a sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary "Nanny of the maroons," who, schooled in the sorcery and magical ritual of obeah, is arrested for healing members of the family that owns her.

December

Doña Barbara 448 pp
by Rómulo Gallegos

Rómulo Gallegos is best known for being Venezuela's first democratically elected president. But in his native land he is equally famous as a writer responsible for one of Venezuela's literary treasures, the novel *Doña Barbara*. Published in 1929, *Doña Barbara* is one of the first examples of magical realism, laying the groundwork for later authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa.

Following the epic struggle between two cousins for an estate in Venezuela, *Doña Barbara* is an examination of the conflict between town and country, violence and intellect, male and female. Doña Barbara is a beautiful and mysterious woman—rumored to be a witch—with a ferocious power over men. When her cousin Santos Luzardo returns to the plains in order to reclaim his land and cattle, he reluctantly faces off against Doña Barbara, and their battle becomes simultaneously one of violence and seduction.

January

Cecilia Valdés or El Angel Hill 501 pp
by Cirilo Villaverde

"One of the best examples of 19th century realism and romanticism in Spanish and the finest evocation of Cuban customs of that era. Its characters departed the novel's pages long ago to become prototypes of what it means to be Cuban. The most beautiful and tragic love story ever written in Cuba, it also encompasses the horrors of the African slave trade and gives full literary expression to the city of Havana. It is the classic."

February

The Architect's Apprentice 434 pp
by Elif Shafak

In her latest novel, Turkey's preeminent female writer spins an epic tale spanning nearly a century in the life of the Ottoman Empire. In 1540, twelve-year-old Jahan arrives in Istanbul. As an animal tamer in the sultan's menagerie, he looks after the exceptionally smart elephant Chota and befriends (and falls for) the sultan's beautiful daughter, Princess Mihrimah. A palace education leads Jahan to Mimar Sinan, the empire's chief architect, who takes Jahan under his wing as they construct (with Chota's help) some of the most magnificent buildings in history. Yet even as they build Sinan's triumphant masterpieces—the incredible Suleymaniye and Selimiye mosques—dangerous undercurrents begin to emerge, with jealousy erupting among Sinan's four apprentices.

March

Redburn 416 Pp
By Herman Melville

Drawn from Melville's own adolescent experience aboard a merchant ship, *Redburn* charts the coming-of-age of Wellingborough Redburn, a young innocent who embarks on a crossing to Liverpool together with a roguish crew. Once in Liverpool, Redburn encounters the squalid conditions of the city and meets Harry Bolton, a bereft and damaged soul, who takes him on a tour of London that includes a scene of rococo decadence unlike anything else in Melville's fiction. In her Introduction, Elizabeth Hardwick writes, "*Redburn* is rich in masterful portraits—a gallery of wild colors, pretensions and falsehoods, fleeting associations of unexpected tenderness. . . . *Redburn* is not a document; it is a work of art by the unexpected genius of a sailor, Herman Melville."

April

One Hundred Years of Solitude 417 pp
by [Gabriel Garcia Marquez](#)

One of the most influential literary works of our time, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* tells the story of the rise and fall, birth and death of the mythical town of Macondo through the history of the Buendía family. Inventive, amusing, magnetic, sad and alive with unforgettable men and women—brimming with truth, compassion, and a lyrical magic that strikes the soul—this novel is a masterpiece in the art of fiction.

May

The Farming of Bones 336 pp
by Edwidge Danticat

It is 1937 and Amabelle Désir, a young Haitian woman living in the Dominican Republic, has built herself a life as the servant and companion of the wife of a wealthy colonel. She and Sebastien, a cane worker, are deeply in love and plan to marry. But Amabelle's world collapses when a wave of genocidal violence, driven by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, leads to the slaughter of Haitian workers. Amabelle and Sebastien are separated, and she desperately flees the tide of violence for a Haiti she barely remembers. This is an unforgettable memorial to the victims of the Parsley Massacre and a testimony to the power of human memory.

June

Sea of Poppies 560 pp
by Amitav Ghosh

At the heart of this vibrant saga is a vast ship, the *Ibis*. Its destiny is a tumultuous voyage across the Indian Ocean; its purpose, to fight China's vicious nineteenth-century Opium Wars. As for the crew, they are a motley array of sailors and stowaways, coolies and convicts. In a time of colonial upheaval, fate has thrown together a diverse cast of Indians and Westerners, from a bankrupt raja to a widowed tribeswoman, from a mulatto American freedman to a freespirited French orphan. As their old family ties are washed away, they, like their historical counterparts, come to view themselves as *jahaj-bhais*, or ship-brothers. An unlikely dynasty is born, which will span continents, races, and generations.

July

The Night Watchman 391 pp
By Louise Erdrich

Thomas Wazhashk is the night watchman at the jewel bearing plant, the first factory located near the Turtle Mountain Reservation in rural North Dakota. He is also a Chippewa Council member who is trying to understand the consequences of a new “emancipation” bill on its way to the floor of the United States Congress. It is 1953 and he and the other council members know the bill isn’t about freedom; Congress is fed up with Indians. The bill is a “termination” that threatens the rights of Native Americans to their land and their very identity.

August

Daughter of Fortune 419 pp
by [Isabel Allende](#)

Orphaned at birth, Eliza Sommers is raised in the British colony of Valparaíso, Chile, by the well-intentioned Victorian spinster Miss Rose and her more rigid brother Jeremy. Just as she meets and falls in love with the wildly inappropriate Joaquín Andieta, a lowly clerk who works for Jeremy, gold is discovered in the hills of northern California. Joaquín takes off for San Francisco to seek his fortune, and Eliza, pregnant with his child, decides to follow him. As Eliza embarks on her perilous journey north in the hold of a ship and arrives in the rough-and-tumble world of San Francisco, she must navigate a society dominated by greedy men.