

January 2022 Wayne Reader's Blog

FICTION

Murder in Chianti by Camille Trinchieri (Mystery)

The prospect of a new mystery series set in an interesting place with talk of food, wine and friends is always exciting. When Janet showed me "The Bitter Taste of Murder" set in Tuscany, I took it home with me. When I discovered that it is the second book in the series (only 2 books so far), I obtained the first book and read it first. Then almost immediately started the second which I am still reading and enjoying.

When former New York City homicide detective Nico Doyle's wife Rita died; he moved to her hometown, Gravigna, Italy which he and Rita had first visited together on their honeymoon and periodically during their marriage. Among the residents are Rita's only remaining relatives, her cousin Tilde and Tilde's daughter, Stella. Being near them keeps him feeling close to Rita. He makes friends including Dante quoting Gogol.

Besides helping the local maresciallo (marshal) solve a murder in the first book he helps Tilde and her husband Enzo at their restaurant a few days a week (he insists on not being paid; that would take the fun away) and he creates recipes for the restaurant. And then there is OneWag, the stray dog he took in whom the locals insist on calling Rocco; OneWag is not a name for an Italian dog and too difficult to pronounce they say.

A very good read.

Reviewed by Cynthia Pelliccia

Fear No Evil by James Patterson (Thriller)

The most thrilling and fast-paced Alex Cross ever! Not for the timid!

Reviewed by Steve Dodge

The Spymistress by Jennifer Chiaverni (Historical Fiction)

Born to aristocracy in Richmond, Virginia and educated by northern Quakers, Elizabeth Van Lew was a paradox of her Civil War era. When Virginia seceded from the Union, her convictions compelled her to defy the new Confederate government and she pledged her loyalty to the Union. This historical novel, published in 2013, tells of her exploits in helping to feed and clothe captured imprisoned Union soldiers held in Richmond and to gather military intelligence for the northern leaders. The astonishing scope of Elizabeth Van Lew's achievements have apparently not been widely known until recently.

Reviewed by Connie Locashio, Granite Hill Estates, Augusta

The Overstory by Richard Powers (Fiction)

A strong recommendation: I continued last summer's trees-and-forests reading with *The Overstory*, a novel by Richard Powers (who is also the winner of a 2019 Pulitzer for fiction.)

I was puzzled at first that *The Overstory* was characterized as a novel, as it's full of trees and science and a save-the-forest movement in the American West.

But there's a cast of human characters, marvelously rich and diverse, and each person, including those recently from Chinese and Indian backgrounds, has his or her own special relationship to certain tree species. Read to find out how individual trees become "characters" in the narrative. Really! I'm not telling you how the save-the-forests movement turns out. In my experience, this book is one of a kind. I certainly had never read anything like it. I recommend you read it too!

Reviewed by Joyce Weaver Johnson

Catching Fire by Susan Collins (YA Fiction)

I've been taking a class at UMA called *Girls on Fire* which uses young adult dystopian literature as a platform to discuss modern day girls and their lives. This is part of a post I shared about one of our first readings, *Catching Fire*, Book 2 of the *Hunger Games* series, by Susan Collins.

Katniss is literally a girl on fire in the costumes which Cinna designed for her. The wedding gown's fiery transformation into a mockingjay is so vivid and in-your-face that no one can ignore its true meaning. Once again, Katniss is the symbol for a revolution which has been simmering just below the surface for years. Although she is often a pawn, she remains true to herself and puts provision for and protection of her family first.

In popular culture, Katniss is the heroine girls (and women) have been looking for. She is brave and self-sufficient. She keeps her family fed after her father dies. When she and Gale join forces to hunt, they do so as equals and both are better for it. Katniss is unsure of herself and faces her fears and the uncertainty of her life. She expresses many of the anxieties modern girls/women have. When is the best time to lay low? Is now the right time to stand my ground?

Reviewed by Elaine Briggs

The Children's Train: A Novel by Viola Ardone (Historical Fiction)

Set in post WWII Italy, this story is based on true events of a young boy named Amerigo who lives in Naples. At that point in time, southern Italy had been devastated by war and selected poor children were sent to the northern part of Italy to live with loving families allowing them to escape for a few months from the war. The story is told through 7 year old Amerigo's eyes as he travels across Italy with thousands of other children to spend the winter with a new family after only knowing poverty and a cold mother. After returning to Naples, he makes the wrenching decision to go live permanently with his new adoptive northern family where he finds his calling in life becoming an accomplished musician. A moving true story. The Cary Library has this 2021 book on order,

Reviewed by Connie Locashio, Granite Hill Estates, Augusta

The Kashmir Shawl by Rosie Thomas (Historical Fiction)

The best book I read in 2021 was THE KASHMIR SHAWL by Rosie Thomas. The Daily Mail reports: "A superbly researched and vivid evocation of wartime Kashmir & Ladakh". "An epic tale...a complicated entanglement of family secrets, love during wartime and dangerous liaisons of relationships presented with warmth and clarity." I did not want the book to end. EPIC describes it well. Good winter read for the armchair traveler in Maine in winter! This book has 500 pages and a Q & A with the author at the end. I have a paperback copy that I will share with the Cary.

Reviewed by Jill Howes

Pendennis by William Makepeace Thackeray (Fiction)

NOT a recommendation: My #1 Dud is *Pendennis* by William Makepeace Thackeray. Copyright 1898. Seven hundred-plus pages, printed in what must be 4-point type, or even smaller. Reeks of a stifling, multi-layered class system in London and countryside. Seeing that era from a 2021 perspective, one suspects Thackeray's readers were desperately bored and/or lonesome. Or, if the story truly reflected their culture at the time, perhaps those readers loved it! Despite my negative attitude toward *Pendennis*, I feel duty-bound to finish it here in Alaska, and return it to my family's North Wayne bookshelf for future generations to . . . well, enjoy?

Reviewed by Joyce Weaver Johnson

Never by Ken Follett (Fiction)

Could the leaders of the world make logical, moderate decisions and still bring us to a nuclear war? This could be right out of the evening news. Undercover agents tracking jihadist funding, unrest in North Korea, China providing weapons to terrorists and a Presidential candidate that thinks nuclear war is the answer to every conflict.

A powerful read!

Reviewed by Steve Dodge

The Personal Librarian by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray (Historical Fiction)

I'm writing another blog for an historical fiction book because it IS my favorite genre and this one is another winner worth highlighting.

Marie Benedict has collaborated with author Victoria Christopher Murray to write a well-researched book, *THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN*. Set in the early 1900s, the subject is Belle da Costa Greene, J. P. Morgan's personal librarian.

Greene is an extraordinary person who breaks barriers as a young, intelligent, black woman of fair skin, who hides her black heritage.

If you've read and enjoyed other books by Marie Benedict...*The Other Einstein*, *Carnegie's Maid*, *Lady Clementine*, to name a few...you will not be disappointed with this latest.

Reviewed by Bev Petell

The Heiress: The Revelations of Anne de Bourgh (A Pride and Prejudice Novel) by Molly Greeley (Historical Fiction)

Greeley re-imagines the life of Anne de Bourgh, portrayed in Austen's novel as the sickly young woman whose mother was determined she should marry Mr. Darcy. Here is a whole new take on this minor character. Lady Catherine de Bourgh wins no parenting awards by dosing the colicky baby with laudanum...oh wait, up through age 20. As crazy as it sounds this was true to the era, and aided and abetted by a quack "doctor." Anne's escape from this life lived in a perpetual haze makes for great reading. Credit to the governess for opening the crack of possibilities and planting the seed in Anne's mind. So satisfying to see Anne come into her own and blossom. The tone and tenor of the book is Jane Austen to a T. – certain to be a treat for Jane Austen fans. Rosings Park and the haughty Lady Catherine will never be the same.

Reviewed by Janet Adelberg

Non-Fiction

The Library Book by Susan Orleans (Non-Fiction)

You don't have to be a librarian to appreciate *The Library Book* but I have not met one that does not. Susan Orlean's book revolves around the catastrophic fire that hit the LA Central Library in 1986. The fire consumed hundreds of thousands of the books and other items from the library's collection. The fire was labeled as arson and the search for the culprit is detailed.

Orleans goes beyond the fire to show her love of all libraries and how they have adapted to society's needs. The author describes how some of the most unlikely leaders of the LA libraries dealt with the issues of that era and modernized the library's functions and purpose. From allowing the homeless to use the library to establishing help programs for all of the city's issues, the LA librarians ensured that their libraries were more than just buildings with books. We have only to look at our Cary Library to see how it is the center of what happens in Wayne.

In the end you see that Orlean's love of libraries was a deep-seated affection.

Reviewed by Jim DiRenzo

Cokie Roberts: A Life well Lived by Steven Roberts (Biography)

Steven Roberts has written a great short read about his spouse Cokie. I loved her spontaneity, caring about others and ability to adapt to a variety of circumstances. She used all her personal and family and financial resources to advance her many interests, and was always there for her friends and family. She was passionate about advancing good journalism and women's place in that process, and helped pave the way for many other women.

Reviewed by Judy Danielson

Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century by Jessica Bruder (Non-Fiction)

What does the American Family include? Nuclear families living in Suburbia, multi-generational families spread out over several Acres, single parents in high-rise apartments, or maybe a group of unrelated people in a group home? How does a single person with no resources make a life in America? Jessica Bruder follows Linda May, a woman who can't afford to stop working even in her older years. How does she manage, where she claimed her home? What is home? This harrowing tale with a flip of a coin could be any of us. Take note.

Reviewed by MJ Cowing

Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat by Katherine May (Non-Fiction)

This book reminded me of the many times that I have said or done something, then I find out someone has written a book about it (a full length book!), and named it and made a thing of it. I have proclaimed many times that I feel I was a bear in my former life for in winter, all I want to do is hibernate. Sleep a lot, revel in the darkness, and slow way down. And this year, I can do that whole-heartedly, knowing that I have planned for this down time and can really enjoy it.

I liked the first part of the book. She really does write beautifully. But it went off in personal reminiscences —canning random vegetables, how bees organize their lives, seaside swimming in February—all somehow related to winter. Preparing for winter, surviving winter. I think this could have been a longer essay instead of a book because what I think she is trying to do is give permission for us to take a break from life in general, if that is what we need, without the cultural opprobrium. The author often writes about not being wealthy or coming from a poor background, but doesn't acknowledge her privilege to be able to take off this time, after a health issue her husband suffered, who is called "H" in the book. She takes leave from her job, has a health issue of her own, has a young child and realizes that she is not handling it all well.

I remember hearing that at one time when women (mostly) couldn't cope anymore they were sent to places like Poland Spring for several weeks to breathe clean air and drink pure water. Any one who gets a break for a long time from daily domestic chores would certainly welcome a break like that. And with all the tsuris in our world right now, most of us need a break. I'm especially thinking of teachers, health care providers, parents who work, and those who take care of others. Having the permission and means to Winter would help us all.

Reviewed by Hildie Lipson

The Bomber Mafia: A Dream, a Temptation, and the Longest Night of the Second World War by Malcolm Gladwell (Non-Fiction)

Which is more successful or more moral-strategic bombing or incendiary bombs with napalm carpeting non military targets? What is the justification for how war is played out? Gladwell goes into some depth into the developing era of the Air Force through the contrasting views of Haywood Hansell and Curtis LeMay. His storytelling gifts are on full display and we have a small glimpse into World War II. This short book was a lesson in history.

Reviewed by MJ Cowing

Go By Boat: Stories of a Maine Island Doctor by Dr. Chuck Radis (Maine/ Non-Fiction)

This was a terrific read. Dr. Chuck Radis repaid his medical school obligations by making a proposal to open a medical practice serving four under-served islands, the largest and most populous being Peaks. I was struck by the tremendous dedication it takes to travel around providing services—with high tech services far away on the mainland. It is not a life of glamor. Dr. Radis writes well and is a born storyteller. Sometimes the stories are heartwarming and sometimes heartbreaking. The year-round islanders, especially on some of the truly remote islands (with fewer than 100 people in winter), can be “characters” and a stubborn lot. A fascinating and inspiring glimpse at the island way of life and the hard work it takes on the part of medical folks to provide a safety net.

Reviewed by Janet Adelberg