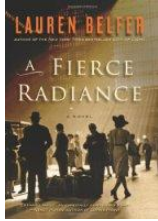


OPLA Readers' Advisory Committee 2010 Top 5 Reads

Sharron Smith's Picks

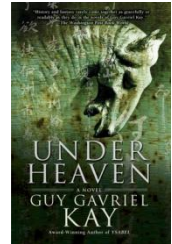


A Fierce Radiance by Lauren Belfer

Claire Shipley, a *Life* magazine photographer, documents the first human trial of Penicillin as WWII escalates and the drug becomes a priority and necessity. As the testing moves forward, Claire unwittingly becomes part of the story as drug companies vie to ensure maximum control and profit from this new “miracle” drug. Belfer beautifully captures the brilliance and heroism of the men and women involved in the development of this life-saving medication as well as the costs of war.

Under Heaven by Guy Gavriel Kay

Mourning his father, Shen Tai, the second son of one of the Empire's most illustrious military generals, has spent the last two years of his official mourning period on the isolated shores of Kuala Nor, the site of a battle that left tens of thousands dead. Here the bones of both Kitan warriors and their enemies lay mingled. To honour his father, Tai has attempted to quiet the voices of the dead by burying the fallen of both sides. Tai's work is coming to an end and the arrival of two visitors will set in motion events that will change his life forever. One brings death and the other riches beyond imagination. It is the gift of 250 prized Sardinian horses that will take Tai from his solitary existence into the heart of the intrigues of eighth-century China's court, a place where the simplest decision can mean disaster or death. This historical fantasy is a tour de force and will be enjoyed by both fantasy readers and lovers of historical fiction.

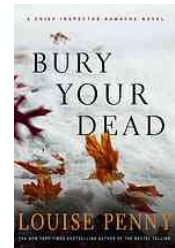


The Devil's Star by Jo Nesbø

Oslo detective Harry Hole is one drink away from being dismissed from the force; since the death of his partner, who he suspects was murdered by another cop, his determination to prove his theory correct has bordered on obsession and he hasn't been able to focus on either his work or professional life. Assigned to investigate the murders of two women, both of whom have had their fingers amputated, and forced to work with the detective he suspects of murdering his partner, Harry struggles to maintain a grip on the search and his sanity as he comes to suspect that the murders are the work of a serial killer who uses the “code” of a pentagram or “devil's star” to taunt the police. In this noir mystery, Nesbø has created a detective who is both brilliant and fractured, and the result is compelling.

Bury Your Dead by Louise Penny

Winter Carnival in Quebec City, the streets are filled with revelers for the annual celebration; however one man is there not to celebrate but to try and recover from a disastrous case. Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Sûreté du Québec seeks solace in the company of an old friend and while spending time in a small library devoted to the history of the English in Quebec and becomes embroiled in a murder case that threatens to awaken both his recent traumatic memories and the long-standing tensions between Anglos and Francophones in Quebec.



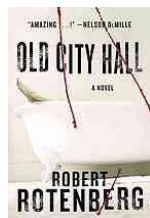
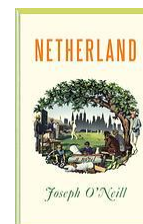
Major Pettigrew's Last Stand by Helen Simonson

Widower and retired Army major Ernest Pettigrew has just learned of his younger brother Bernie's untimely death when Mrs. Ali, the local shopkeeper, knocks at his door to collect his overdue newspaper money. As he attempts to come to terms with his brother's passing, he slowly develops a friendship with Mrs. Ali, which ultimately blossoms into much more. As the widower comes to find happiness, he finds himself out of sync with the local society of his small English village and must decide between personal happiness and social respectability.

Catherine AuYeung's Picks

Netherland by Joseph O'Neill

Dutch born Hans van den Brock developed an unlikely friendship with a Trinidadian in post 9/11 New York after his separation with his wife. Through Chuck Ramkissoon, he encounters a part of New York that is unfamiliar to him and yet very much an integral part of that amazing city. In the process of seeing the city with new eyes he comes to an understanding of himself and where he should be headed. Exquisitely written in Joseph O'Neill's elegant prose, it offers poignant insights into the reality of love, marriage, and divorce intermingled with wistful recollections of times in The Hague, London and New York, the drifting between past and present flawlessly enacted.

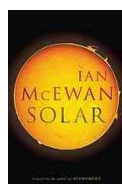


Old City Hall by Robert Rotenberg

A well-known radio personality admits to killing his wife but refuses to talk to his counsel. The detectives assigned to the case discover the reasons for this after many twists and turns in the investigation. A gripping murder mystery set in Toronto with interesting observations on many of its landmarks, particularly the Old City Hall. Well-written with engaging characterization of the key characters. Reads more like a novel than a mystery replete with ethical decisions and moral choices. A great read!

The Sea Captain's Wife by Beth Powning

Captivating read detailing life at sea from the perspective of a woman in the last days of the Age of Sail. The writer's powerful descriptions create very real experiences for the reader, taken them through storms at Cape Horn, starvation in the Doldrums, and piracy in the South China Sea, all mixed with episodes of glamour and elegance in the ports of Europe. Amidst the adventures, at stake is the relationship between Azuba and her husband the Sea Captain. Feminist issues – the woman's right to productive and meaningful work and the conflicting roles of wife and partner come to light in the story. Strong characterization and setting are high appeal factors.

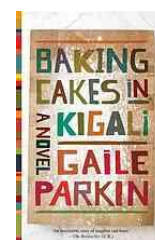


Solar by Ian McEwan

One reads Ian McEwan for his writing and this book is no exception. A darkly funny satire about an aging Nobel Laureate who cannot control his appetite for food and women. Remarkably insightful psychological observations make this an absorbing read.

Baking Cakes in Kigali by Gaile Parkin

A heart-warming, charming story of survival set in a land of poverty and bloodshed. It is a striking portrayal of people and community one would not expect in a place like Rwanda. The sensible voice of Angel, with its mix of self-deprecating humour and indignation, runs through the book. Characterization is a strong appeal factor. The wonderful descriptions of Angel's cakes and how she designs each based on the people and occasion add to the enticingly colourful descriptions of people in the community. A funny, touching story.



Shonna Froebel's Picks



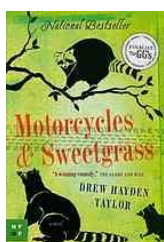
Annabel by Kathleen Winter

We start in 1968, where in a small town in Labrador, a child is born at home to Jacinta and Treadway Blake. The baby seems to be both male and female. Only the parents and a trusted neighbour, Thomasina, present at the delivery, know this. It is decided to raise the child as a boy, Wayne. Treadway works hard to teach his child all the traditional male skills present in their hunting and fishing culture. But Wayne's feminine side, Annabel, is still there, and is nurtured by the females in his life, Jacinta, Thomasina, and his friend Wally (Wallis). We follow Wayne through childhood where he never really fits in with the other

boys, no matter how much his father tries. We see what he does with the growing knowledge of his own body. As a young adult, Wayne goes away to St. John's and we see how he struggles to find a life there, how the decisions he makes influence that, and how his father and Thomasina and Wally help him find a new way forward. The characters are well-drawn and complex and we see them grow and change. Beautifully written, making the setting come alive.

Invisible by Hugues de Montalembert

This memoir is short but gripping. The author returned home to his New York City apartment on a summer night in 1978 to find two men robbing him. They turned on him and one threw paint thinner in his face. Within a few hours, he was completely blind. As a painter and a filmmaker, vision was part of his being in a deep way. Sharing his reactions and experiences, freeflowing at times, Hugues takes back control of his life, and regains his independence in a way others thought foolhardy. He talks about how being blind changed how others reacted to him and interacted with him. He talks about how he began a new life and about how his strong sense of vision allowed him to imagine his surroundings to such a strong degree that he sometimes confused them with real memories of seeing things. He writes with great insight and absolutely no self-pity as he shares his new sense of himself and his life.

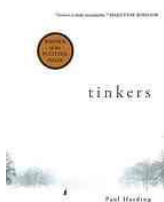
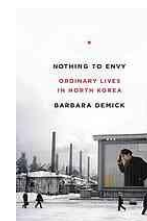


Motorcycles and Sweetgrass by Drew Hayden Taylor

This book reads like a traditional storyteller, with a wonderful flow to it. We see things from a variety of points of view, which only enhances the storyteller effect. The tale takes place (mostly) in Otter Lake, an Anishnawbe reservation community. The chief is in the final stages of negotiation to buy additional land for the reservation. Her constituents all have ideas about what to do with the property. Add to this that she is a single mother of a young teen boy. Add to this that her mother, matriarch in the community, is on her deathbed. Add to this the arrival of a mysterious stranger, and boy do you have a story. Look out for those raccoons!

Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea by Barbara Demick

This book looks at the lives of six North Koreans over a fifteen year period that covers the death of Kim Il-sung, the taking over by his son Kim Jong-il, and a devastating famine that kills up to 20 percent of the population. Demick, Beijing bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times, has done thorough research to verify as much of this information as she can. All six of her subjects now live in South Korea and she includes the tales of their escape here as well. The facts of living in North Korea are worse than I'd imagined, and each person's experiences are told with clarity but not without feeling. This book is worth reading to better understand this country, alienated from the rest of the world more than any other, yet so much in the news recently.



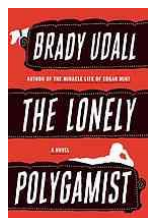
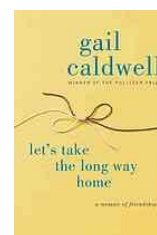
Tinkers by Paul Harding

This little gem of a book has two narrators. George Washington Crosby, an elderly man lying on his deathbed, observes the world around him as well as reminisces about the past. George was a machinist and took up clock repair after retirement, repairing all types of old clocks in his basement workshop. He is surrounded by his family: his wife, daughters, and grandchildren, as well as his sister. From a time decades in the past, we also see the world from the point of view of George's father, Howard Aaron Crosby, who was an itinerant tinker, travelling the countryside with a mule and wagon. Howard was an epileptic and married to a woman who wasn't happy with her lot in life. As we see their lives through their own lenses, we see not only how they got to where they ended up, but also how they viewed their own relationship as father and son, the commonalities between generations. The writing is lyrical.

Maureen Johnson's picks

Let's Take the Long Way Home: a memoir of friendship by Gail Caldwell

Be prepared to weep. This book is about finding a best friend and losing a best friend. And the dog dies. Gail Caldwell and Caroline Knapp, both fiercely independent, talented writers, are introduced to one another through their dog trainer. As their friendship deepens, their dog walks become their tonic, a daily cherished ritual. Caldwell shares her love and her loss with honesty, wit and clarity. A memoir for anyone who has suffered a loss of someone dear and struggled to define the reality of 'after'. Gail Caldwell supplies the words with compassion, clear-eyed humanity and love.

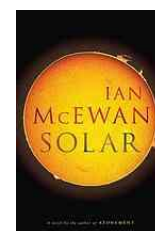


The Lonely Polygamist by Brady Udall

Udall has taken on a challenging protagonist in Golden Richards. Golden is gormless, loveable, frustrating, and entirely human. He faces the reality of four wives, 28 children, endless renovations on numerous houses and no bed to call his own with grace and dedication. Udall's excellent storytelling technique combines slapstick and heartache. He balances a narrative that would spark guffaws from the most taciturn of readers with moments of loss and redemption. This is a deft, rollicking novel that ends all too soon.

Solar by Ian McEwan

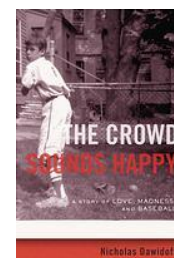
Another brilliant dark comedy from McEwan. Michael Beard is a prominent physicist, resting on the laurels of a Nobel Prize. As his fifth marriage unravels, Beard examines his life and makes an effort to be a better man. McEwan is the master at the flawed protagonist. Beard is entirely unlikable. As his personal and professional lives intersect with catastrophic consequences, the reader can almost hear McEwan rubbing his hands together with glee. Beard has attached his name and reputation to an effort to solve the energy crisis, but he is emotionally and intellectually ill-equipped for this task. McEwan is merciless.



Losing Mum and Pup - a memoir by Christopher Buckley

Christopher Buckley manages to create a small, personal memoir about titanic lives lived large. Buckley faces the story of his renowned, and sometimes reviled, parents with humour, detachment, ambivalence and awe. Names are dropped. The Buckleys moved in circles that included presidents and kings but the overriding sense is one of family. A rollicking, fiercely intelligent, raging, privileged family but a family all the same. Buckley is a marvelous storyteller working with incredible material.

The Crowd Sounds Happy: a story of love, madness and baseball by Nicholas Dawidoff
Dawidoff is entirely candid in this memoir of coming of age. As a young boy, Dawidoff turned to baseball for consolation. At the age of three, his mother moved the family away from his father to New Haven, Connecticut, where they are almost, but never quite, respectable. Dawidoff's dawning awareness of his father's descent into mental illness and his mother's toughness during tough time is genuine. As Dawidoff switches his allegiances from the Mets to the Red Sox, he turns away from his father and his rages to the hard life lessons of loss and sustaining hope.



Diana Krawczyk's Picks

All the best from the Toronto International Film Festival:



Barney's Version by Mordecai Richler

Mordecai Richler, the master of Canadian letters, gives us another larger than life character to examine in his novel, Barney's Version. This novel forces us to question the version of biography presented by Barney. Another long anticipated film screening at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival.

Brighton Rock by Graham Greene

The haunting love story of Pinkie and Rose follow his descent into the underworld of organized crime and her role as witness. The new film, directed by Rowan Joffe, changes the setting but renders the heart of Greene's novel, premiering at TIFF.

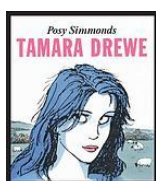


Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro

The students of Hailsham, a boarding school in the English countryside, have a secret. Ishiguro's sparse and elegant style propel this narrative that leads us to question the ethics of biomedical advances. Premiering at TIFF, this film will definitely be in Oscar contention.

Prince of Thieves by Chuck Hogan

Ben Affleck directs this adaptation of Hogan's novel about a bank robber and his hostage. Attempting to reveal the extent to which Claire can identify him as one of her hostage-takers, Doug begins to see the errors of his ways – a transformation that does not come without consequences.



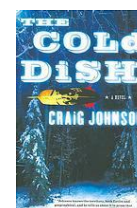
Tamara Drewe by Posy Simmonds

Tamara Drewe is the character in a beloved graphic novel who returns to her birthplace and stirs up trouble for the locals. Based on Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, this comic book has been adapted to film, premiering at TIFF.

Chris Sheehy's Picks

The Cold Dish by Craig Johnson (Walt Longmire mystery series)

The stories are told from the perspective of Walt Longmire, a Vietnam vet and the long-time sheriff of fictional Absaroka County, Wyoming. This story follows Longmire as he sets out to prevent the deaths of three boys who were involved in an incident a few years before that haunts the community. There is a strong element of Native American mysticism in this book and some of those that follow. The series is well rounded and offers something for everyone: humour, a good mystery, a little sexual tension, great character development, and a little violence. This book and series is one of my favorites of the year and I look forward to upcoming releases.

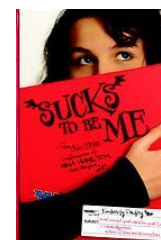


Black Light by Stephen Hunter (Bob Lee Swagger Series)

The second book in the Bob Lee Swagger series, it follows the Bob Lee and an intrepid young reporter that is hunting for the story behind the death of Earl Swagger, Bob's father. There are many buried truths behind the death and someone is working hard to keep them buried. This book and those that follow give the reader a deeper insight into the mind of a sniper, though this is not for everyone the books have a lot of action and a little intrigue to satisfy.

Sucks to Be Me: The All-True Confessions of Mina Hamilton, Teen Vampire (maybe) by Kimberly Pauley

A little different reading, but something I enjoyed immensely. This little coming of age/vampire book follows the adventures/misadventures of Mina, a girl who has to make one of the biggest decisions of her life: to become a vampire or to remain mortal. You would think that this would be an easy decision, but there is much to think about - boys, her best friend, and the drinking of blood: "gross". This teen book, tackles all the trials and tribulations of being a teen, and maybe a vampire. The book is a quick and funny read, and by the end of it, you really like all the characters.



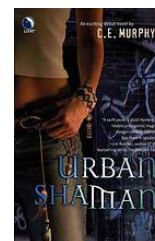


Changes by Jim Butcher (The Dresden Files)

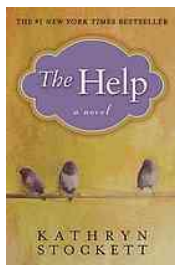
The latest book in the Dresden Files series finds Harry Dresden at a loss, he just found out that he has a child and she has been kidnapped by an enemy he did not know he had. All of his enemies and allies come out of the woodwork to aid and hamper him. Jim Butcher's writing is strong and he always creates well rounded characters you can identify with. If, like me, you have followed the series from the beginning, you have a strong relationship with Harry and hope he succeeds. This one of Butcher's best books in the series, and I highly recommend the entire series to anyone that loves urban fantasy and/or mysteries.

Urban Shaman by C.E. Murphy (Walker Papers)

This is the first book in the Walker Papers series. The book follows the trials and tribulations of Joanne Walker, who with being stabbed by the Lord of the Wild Hunt, discovers that she is a shaman, and is one of the caretakers of the world, oh and is a cop. She has many issues from her life and has a hard time accepting the mystical. This book is strong in mysticism, both Native American and Celtic. The characters in the book are well developed and interesting.



Bessie Sullivan's Picks

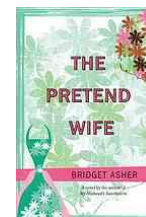


The Help by Kathryn Stockett

Twenty-two-year-old Skeeter has just returned home after graduating from Ole Miss. She may have a degree, but it is 1962, Mississippi, and her mother will not be happy until Skeeter has a ring on her finger. Aibileen is a black maid, raising her seventeenth white child. Something has shifted inside her after the loss of her own son. Minny, Aibileen's best friend, can cook but she can't hold her tongue, so she's lost yet another job. Minny finally finds a position working for someone too new to town to know her reputation. These women come together for a clandestine project that will put them all at risk, but it's the kind of risk necessary if prejudices are to ever be overcome.

The Pretend Wife by Bridget Asher

For Gwen Merchant, love has always been doled out in little packets—from her father, a marine biologist who buried himself in work after her mother's death, and from her husband, Peter, who's always been respectable and safe. But when an old college boyfriend, the irrepressible Elliot Hull, invites himself back into Gwen's life, she starts to remember a time when love was an ocean.



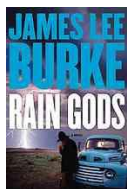
The Lottery by Patricia Wood

A developmentally delayed man wins the lottery and suddenly the family that wanted little to do with him become his best friends. How Perry Crandall copes and prevails through the onslaught of attention is what makes the book engaging.

The Girl Who Chased the Moon by Sarah Addison Allen

Seventeen-year-old Emily Benedict moves in with her grandfather after her mother dies but is disappointed to find that her grandfather doesn't want to talk about his daughter. Julia Winterson, temporarily back in town to pay down her deceased father's debt, takes a shine to Emily. Together Emily learns the truth about her mother and Julia learns the truth about herself.





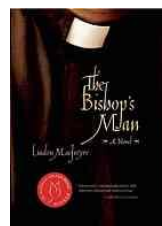
Rain Gods by James Lee Burke

The sheriff in *Rain Gods* is 74 year old Hackberry Holland who had been a practicing lawyer as well as a Korean War vet and brings to the job a flawed personality and a propensity to go it alone. With the discovery of the bodies of nine illegal aliens, machine-gunned to death and buried in a shallow grave behind a church it is soon clear that not only will he need help, he will have to decide who he can trust.

Virginia van Vliet's Picks

The Bishop's Man by Linden MacIntyre

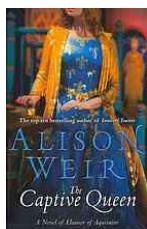
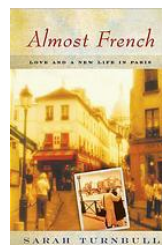
Known to fellow priests as the "Exorcist" because of his special role as clean-up man for the Bishop of Antigonish, Father Duncan MacAskill is assigned to step in and deal with priests involved in "delicate situations" while ensuring minimal fuss from victims and their families. In 1993, when lawyers and policemen begin snooping around the Bishop, Duncan is sent as a parish priest to the small Cape Breton village of Creignish, a few miles from where he grew up. Here his past catches up with him through the life of troubled 18 year old Danny Mackay, a boy who once spent time with an errant priest dispatched by Duncan himself to Port Hood. Winner of the 2009 Scotiabank Giller Prize, this is a moving study of a complex and deeply conflicted character facing a turning point in his life. A study of issues of guilt and innocence, violence and atonement.



This Book Is Overdue! How Librarians and Cybrarians Can Save Us All by Marilyn Johnson
Written by a researcher and journalist who loves libraries and librarians, this book is an passionate ode to the library as a the poor man's university and the community's living room. Johnson praises librarians both for their embrace of technology and for their desire to hold on to the past through archives. Recommended reading for librarians and those who love them.

Almost French: a new life in Paris by Sarah Turnbull

When Australian Sarah Turnbull meets Frederic on holiday in Bucharest, she little expects her week long visit to him in Paris to last a life time. This book is an amusing account of Sarah's adjustment to French life and culture, from fashion to food to dog ownership and from vegemite to vichyssoise. An entertaining read for anyone who has struggled to understand the French or who simply loves Paris.

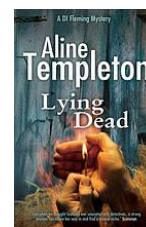


The Captive Queen by Alison Weir

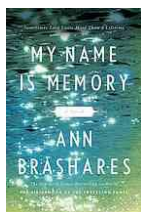
Eleanor of Aquitaine, the 12th century Queen who divorced the King of France to marry handsome, charismatic Henry II of England, is brought vividly to life in this well researched novel which focuses on the couple's love, lust and desire for each other and for power. An X-rated Lion in Winter.

Lying Dead by Aline Templeton

The ringing of a cell phone leads to the discovery of the body of a young woman hidden under a log in a Scottish forestry area. Once the young woman is identified, DI Marjory Fleming is plunged into a complex web of nasty secrets and lies centered around the rich weekenders at the local marina. A fight over a sheepdog and another murder forces DI Fleming to search for the elusive link between the cases. Complex plotting, strong characters and an appealing setting mark this third book in the Marjory Fleming series.



Alexandra Yarrow's Picks

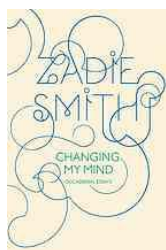


My Name is Memory by Ann Brashares

A seemingly banal premise (a man who remembers all of his past lives) belies an intriguing, complex and deeply romantic work of great emotional depth. In his earliest remembered life, Daniel committed an act of violence that haunts him, against a woman he spends every future life trying to re-connect with, and save, in various different circumstances. A surface story that seems insubstantial acts as a springboard for deeper questions about identity, memory, jealousy, and letting go.

The Way Things Look To Me by Roopa Farooki

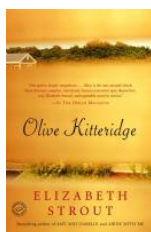
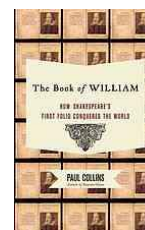
Longlisted for the Orange Prize, Farooki's novel follows 23-year old Asif, who has been thrust in the role of primary caregiver for, and protector of, his sister Yasmin after their mother's death. Asif is especially devoted to Yasmin, who has Aspergers Syndrome, and her need for routine; third sibling Lila is frustrated by the family dynamic; all three long for a change in their lives, but resent the others for preventing them from moving forward. An hauntingly beautiful novel about loyalty and bravery.



Changing My Mind: occasional essays by Zadie Smith

There are very few writers whose work, when I pick it up, feel like a reunion with an old friend; Smith is one of these writers. The essays in *Changing my mind* are a wonderful melange of the literary (defenses of E. M. Forster and George Eliot, discussions of Barthes), the philosophical (thoughts on Kafka), the personal, and the popular (a passionate discussion of Adam's Rib). The section entitled "Feeling" includes several moving essays about Smith's family, including one about her father that is, in my mind, the masterpiece within this book.

The Book of William: How Shakespeare's First Folio conquered the world by Paul Collins
Collins (best known for *McSweeney's*) has shown himself to be a master at capturing the utterly fascinating minutiae surrounding great moments in history in his three previous non-fiction books, and *The Book of William* lives up to this reputation. Did you know that the First Folio's printer, William Jaggard, was blind? Or that Shakespeare didn't like him? Did you know that the Great Fire of London, in which many copies of the Folio probably perished, booksellers stuffed their wares into the crypt at St Paul's Cathedral, certain it would not catch fire (it did)? *The Book of William* also explores the global Shakespeare: for instance, one of the first Japanese introductions to Shakespeare's work was via puppets. An engrossing, rich and satisfying read, a detective story and a love story, for book-lovers and collectors everywhere. For fiction readers, this is a great non-fiction pick for those who love the writings of Matthew Pearl or Rebecca Stott.



Olive Kitteridge by Elizabeth Strout

Linked sketches of characters in a small town, centering around the titular Olive herself, a force to be reckoned with. Using Olive, with her capacity for both selfishness and deep empathy, as an anchor for the tales gives the book a solid core from which each character, their frailties, secrets, and personal tragedies are explored. A funny, moving, self-aware, poignant book.