

2016 SHERMAN LIBRARY BOOK DISCUSSION

February 19

HOW TO LIVE, OR A LIFE OF MONTAIGNE IN ONE QUESTION AND TWENTY ATTEMPTS AT AN ANSWER by Sarah Bakewell. (2010, 416 pp.) Led by Corinne Kevorkian. How to get along with people, how to deal with violence, how to adjust to losing someone you love--these are all part of a bigger question: how do you live? The subject fascinated Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, who explored it in his writing for much of his life (he died in 1592). This charming biography captures his wry, humane, curious spirit in twenty thematic chapters, offering readers a unique portrait of a man who wrote like "a naturalist on a field trip into the human soul." It won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography in 2010.

March 18

CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT? by Roz Chast (2014, 228 pp.) Led by Stephanie Spinner. Roz Chast's cartoons, with their quivering lines and angst-ridden urban characters, have been appearing in *The New Yorker* for some twenty-odd years. In her memoir about caring for her aging parents, she portrays one of life's most stressful experiences with unflinching humor and compassion, in graphic novel form. Praised as "An achievement of dark humor that rings utterly true," by the *Washington Post*, **CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT?** was a *New York Times* #1 bestseller and a National Book Award finalist.

April 15

AGE OF AMBITION: CHASING FORTUNE, TRUTH, AND FAITH IN THE NEW CHINA by Evan Osnos (2014, 404 pp.) Led by Barbara Griff. The *New Yorker* China correspondent from 2008-2013, Osnos has both lived and studied in China and is fluent in Mandarin. "If you have time to read only one book about today's China, read this one. Woven from vignettes of Chinese life at many different levels, it provides unerring insights into what makes the Chinese the people they are while wearing its learning so lightly that the narrative never flags." Winner of a National Book Award.

May 20

LIAR, TEMPTRESS, SOLDIER, SPY: FOUR WOMEN UNDERCOVER IN THE CIVIL WAR by Karen Abbott (2014, 532 pp.) Led by Jerry Liebman. Most Civil War books focus on generals and battles. This one shows how four women influenced a conflict dominated by men. Emma Edmonds cut off her hair and joined the Union Army, fought bravely, and fell in love with one of her fellow soldiers. Belle Boyd shot and killed a Union officer in her own home when she was 17, and then became obsessed with a desire to meet and accompany General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson on his campaign. Rose Greenhow seduced a small army of Union officers and politicians, then relayed the information she gleaned from them to the Confederate command. Wealthy abolitionist Elizabeth Van Lew managed to place one of her servants into Jefferson Davis household as a spy, and was instrumental in helping many Union soldiers escape from the notorious Libby Prison in Virginia. All these women were brave, intelligent, resourceful, and fiercely loyal to their respective sides.

June 17

A SLAVE IN THE WHITE HOUSE: PAUL JENNINGS AND THE MADISONS by Elizabeth Dowling Taylor (2012, 336 pp.) Led by Janet Hopkins. Based on correspondence, legal documents and journal entries rarely seen before, this amazing portrait of the times, reveals the mores and attitudes toward slavery of the nineteenth century. It sheds new light on famous characters such as James Madison who believed that whites and blacks could not coexist as equal; French General Lafayette who was appalled by this idea; and Dolly Madison, who ruthlessly sold Paul after her husband's death.

July 15

EUPHORIA by Lily King (2014, 256 pp.) Led by Pat Corrigan. In 1933, anthropologist Margaret Mead took a field trip to New Guinea with her second husband; there they met and collaborated with the man who would become her third. King has used the known details of that event to create an exquisite novel about the rewards and disappointments of intellectual ambition and physical desire. EUPHORIA is an intelligent, sensual tale told with a suitable mix of precision and heat.

August 19

ON THE TRAIL OF GENGHIS KHAN: AN EPIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE LAND OF THE NOMADS by Tim Cope. (2013, 509 pp.) Led by Marge Josephson. In a journey of 3 years, the author rode 6,000 miles on horseback from Mongolia to the Danube, following Genghis Khans route. He traveled alone, camping in the wild, or staying with local families. The insights into the local cultures are important to our understanding of many of the conflicts in that part of the world.

September 16

MY BRILLIANT FRIEND by Elena Ferrante (2012, 336 pp.) Led by Lorna Barrett. This story of two friends, Elena and Lila, begins in the 1950s in a poor, tough neighborhood in Naples, where the two girls learn to rely on each other. As they grow, and their paths diverge, they remain best friends. Through their changing lives we learn the story of a neighborhood, a city, and a country in transition. The first in a quartet known as The Neapolitan Novels, this is a masterfully plotted page turner, generous in details and characterizations.

October 21

ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN by Mark Twain (1885, 336 pp.) Led by Joe Keneally.

November 18

THE PRIZE by Dale Russakoff (2015, 256 pp.) Led by Pat Endress. The story of Mark Zuckerberg, Chris Christie, and Cory Bookers plan to reform the Newark, New Jersey public schools, and the education they received in return, this is a fast, well-written read.

December 16

WILD ONES by Jon Mooallem (2013, 340 pp.) Led by Cynthia Osborne. A tour through our environmental moment and the eccentric cultural history of people and wild animals that inflects it, from Thomas Jefferson's celebrations of early abundance to the whale-loving hippies of the 1970s and beyond. In America, wildlife has always inhabited the terrain of our imagination as much as the actual land.

January 20, 2017

THE DOOR by Magda Szabo (1987, first English edition, 2015, 262 pp.) Led by Diana Bristol. A fierce tale of the struggles of mid-century Hungary, personified in the relationship between a middle-class academic writer and her illiterate servant. This is a work of stringent honesty and delicate subtlety, interlaced with humor.