

LLC Historical Novel Book Club

Syllabus for 2024-2025

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(Descriptions of novels are taken from Amazon.com. with minor edits)

Classes will meet on Zoom on the last Monday of the month from 1:00 to 3:00 pm. (Adjustments to the schedule may be needed in some months due to holidays.)

Historical Book Club Schedule - 2024 to 2025					
Class	Book	Period	Region	Author	Pages
September	An Officer and a Spy	20th cent	France	Robert Harris	429
October	Private Life of an Indian Prince	20th cent	India	Mulk Raj Anand	424
November	The Death of Artemis Cruz	20th cent	Mexico	Carlos Fuentes	324
December	Tidelands	16th cent	England	Philippa Gregory	480
January	The Moor's Account	16th cent	Mexico	Laila Lalami	336
February	River Spirit	19th cent	Sudan	Lella Aboulela	320
March	The Narrow Road to the Deep North	20th cent	Japan/Australia	Richard Flanagan	416
April	March	19th cent	USA	Geraldine Brooks	320
May	The House of Doors	20th cent	Malaya	Tan Twan Eng	320
June	English Passengers	19th cent	Tasmania	Matthew Kneale	446
July	The Fraud	20th cent	England	Zadie Smith	453
August	Mater 2-10	20th cent	Korea	Hwang Sok-yong	486

September

An Officer and a Spy

429 pp

By Robert Harris

In 1890s Paris Alfred Dreyfus has been convicted of treason, sentenced to life imprisonment on a far-off island, and publicly stripped of his rank. Among the witnesses to his humiliation is Georges Picquart, an ambitious military officer who believes in Dreyfus's guilt as staunchly as any member of the public. But when he is promoted to head of the French counter-espionage agency, Picquart finds evidence that a spy still remains at large in the military—indicating that Dreyfus is innocent. As evidence of the most

malignant deceit mounts and spirals inexorably toward the uppermost levels of government, Picquart is compelled to question not only the case against Dreyfus but also his most deeply held beliefs about his country, and about himself.

October

Private Life of an Indian Prince

424 pp

Mulk Raj Anand

Anand's study of human nature is at the same time a historical novel showing the demise of the traditional princely states with the birth of a free India. The fictional Maharaja Ashok Kumar of Sham Pur asserts complete independence for his small hill-state rather than join the Indian Union. A romantic who has inherited more of the vices than the virtues of his ancestors, he is encouraged by his mistress Ganga Dasi, a powerful and illiterate hill-woman whom he has installed in his palace to the exclusion of his three legitimate maharanis. His extortion of large sums of money from his starving peasantry provokes a revolt in Sham Pur which in turn incurs the extreme displeasure of the government in Delhi.

November

324 pp

The Death of Artemio Cruz

Philippa Gregory

Meet Artemio Cruz, a powerful newspaper magnate and land baron, as he navigates the blurred boundaries between dreams, memories, and reality. On his deathbed, Cruz's thoughts flit among pivotal moments crafted by renowned author Carlos Fuentes, offering glimpses into a world of magical realism.

Fuentes manipulates the ensuing kaleidoscope of images with dazzling inventiveness, layering memory upon memory, from Cruz's heroic campaigns during the Mexican Revolution, through his relentless climb from poverty to wealth, to his uneasy death. Perhaps Fuentes's masterpiece, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* is a haunting voyage into the soul of modern Mexico.

December

Tidelands

480 pp

Philippa Gregory

England is in the grip of a bloody civil war. On Midsummer's Eve, Alinor waits in a church graveyard, hoping to encounter the ghost of her missing husband and thus confirm his death. Until she can, she is neither maiden nor wife nor widow, living in a perilous limbo. Instead she meets James, a young man on the run. She shows him the secret ways across the treacherous marshy landscape of the Tidelands, not knowing she is leading a spy and an enemy into her life. Alinor's suspicious neighbors have always whispered about the sinister power of Alinor's beauty, but the secrets they don't know about her and James are far more damning.

January

The Moor's Account

336 pp

Laila Lalami

The slave of a Spanish conquistador, Estebanico sails for the Americas with his master as part of a danger-laden expedition to Florida. Within a year, Estebanico is one of only four crew members to survive. As he journeys across America with his Spanish companions, the Old World roles of slave and master fall away, and Estebanico remakes himself as an equal, a healer, and a remarkable storyteller. His tale illuminates the ways in which our narratives can transmigrate into history—and how storytelling can offer a chance at redemption and survival.

February

River Spirit

320 pp

by Leila Aboulela

Caine Prize winner Leila Aboulela's novel is about an embattled young woman's coming of age during the Mahdist War in the years leading up to the British conquest of Sudan in 1898. Through the voices of seven men and women whose fates grow inextricably linked, Aboulela's novel illuminates a fraught and bloody reckoning with the history of a people caught in the crosshairs of imperialism.

March

The Narrow Road to the Deep North

416 pp

Richard Flanagan

In *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Richard Flanagan displays the gifts that have made him one of the most acclaimed writers of contemporary fiction. Moving deftly from a Japanese POW camp to present-day Australia, from the experiences of Dorrigo Evans and his fellow prisoners to that of the Japanese guards, this novel tells a story of the many forms of love and death, of war and truth, as one man comes of age, prospers, only to discover all that he has lost.

April

March

320 pp

by Geraldine Brooks

A Pulitzer Prize novel set against the backdrop of the Civil War. From Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women*, Geraldine Brooks has animated the character of the absent father, March, and crafted a story "filled with the ache of love and marriage and with the power of war upon the mind and heart of one unforgettable man." Brooks follows March as he leaves behind his family to aid the Union cause in the Civil War. His experiences will utterly change his marriage and challenge his most ardently held beliefs. historical fiction.

May

The House of Doors

320 pp

Tan Twan Eng

In 1921 Lesley Hamlyn and her husband, Robert, a lawyer and war veteran, are living at Cassowary House on the Straits Settlement of Penang. When Somerset Maugham, a famed writer and old friend of Robert's, arrives for an extended visit with his secretary Gerald, the pair threatens a rift that could alter more lives than one.

Maugham, one of the great novelists of his day, is beleaguered: Having long hidden his homosexuality, his unhappy and expensive marriage of convenience becomes unbearable after he loses his savings-and the freedom to travel with Gerald. Based on real events, *The House of Doors* traces the fault

lines of race, gender, sexuality, and power under empire, and dives deep into the complicated nature of love and friendship in its shadow.

June

English Passengers

446 pp

by Matthew Kneale

In 1857 when Captain Illiam Quillian Kewley and his band of rum smugglers from the Isle of Man have their contraband confiscated by British Customs, they are forced to put their ship up for charter. The only takers are two eccentric Englishmen who want to embark for the other side of the globe. The Reverend Geoffrey Wilson believes the Garden of Eden was on the island of Tasmania. Meanwhile, an aboriginal in Tasmania named Peevay recounts his people's struggles against the invading British, a story that begins in 1824, moves with approach of the English passengers into 1857, and extends into the future in 1870.

July

The Fraud

453 pp

by **Zadie Smith**

In One of NPR's Best Books of the Year , Zadie Smith transports the reader to Victorian England for the real-life trial of the Tichborne Claimant, in which a cockney butcher, recently returned from Australia, lays claim to the Tichborne baronetcy, with his former slave Andrew Bogle as the star witness. Watching the proceedings, and with her own story to tell, is Eliza Touchet—cousin, housekeeper, and perhaps more to failing novelist William Harrison Ainsworth. From literary London to Jamaica's sugarcane plantations, Zadie Smith weaves an enthralling story linking the rich and the poor, the free and the enslaved, and the comic and the tragic.

August

Mater 2-10

486 pp

by Hwang Sok-yong

International Booker–nominated Sok-yong is back with another powerful story — an epic, multi-generational tale that threads together a century of Korean history. Centered on three generations of a family of rail workers and a laid-off factory worker staging a high-altitude sit-in, *Mater 2-10* vividly

depicts the lives of ordinary working Koreans, starting from the Japanese colonial era, continuing through Liberation, and right up to the twenty-first century.