



2023 Reading List: Annotated

Since 2009 the goal of the Lariat Adult Fiction Reading List has been to highlight outstanding fiction that is simply “a pleasure to read.” Each year, 25 outstanding fiction titles are selected by a nine-member committee.

Black Cake: A Novel by Charmaine Wilkerson (Ballantine Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

At the heart of the story, a traditional Black Cake representing Eleanor Bennett's Caribbean roots. As her estranged children Byron and Benny grieve Eleanor, the mother whose actual history they never knew, Eleanor shares her startling story in a recording leaving them to decide how to hold their family together.

Book Lovers by Emily Henry (Berkley, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

A quintessential rom-com that inhabits the spirit of the sweetest, funniest, and most generous of the genre. Nora and Charlie follow the friend-to-lovers trope, bolstered by their quick and quippy banter. But a side plot with Nora letting go of taking care of her adult sister gives this book its heart and moral anchor.

Breathless by Amy McCulloch (Anchor Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

Cecile Wong gambles everything as the journalist chronicling mountaineer Charles McVeigh's record-breaking summit of Manaslu. However, as one climber after another dies, this may be a gamble she cannot win. She'll have to battle not just the elements, but a killer on the mountain.

The Candid Life of Meena Dave by Namrata Patel (Lake Union Publishing, 2022)

Meena Dave lives unattached as she views life through her camera lens. When she inherits an apartment that requires her to live there for a year, she discovers that it includes quite the set of characters as neighbors, as well as a handsome, charming literal boy next door. Meena does not want to get too close to anyone, but she wants to know why she inherited this apartment, which might lead to her own self-discovery.

Carrie Soto Is Back: A Novel by Taylor Jenkins Reid (Ballantine Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

A retired tennis player enlists the help of her father and a past love interest to help her return to the world of professional tennis to defend her Grand Slam title record against an up-and-coming phenom.

City on Fire: A Novel by Don Winslow (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2022)

A beautiful woman comes between two gang families, inciting an epic war that mirrors Homer's "Iliad", beat by beat, but in a setting more familiar to readers of Puzo's "The Godfather." Here characters stand in for gods, soldiers, sirens, and oracles in a riveting and punishing story that ends how you expect, but is surprising and satisfying, just the same.

The Hacienda by Isabel Cañas (Berkley, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

A gothic thriller, this novel takes place after the Mexican War for Independence where we meet Beatrice starting her young married life with the handsome, rich, and windowed Don Solarzo while learning that her new home may be haunted. While the story echoes du Maurier's "Rebecca", the ghosts in this story are very real.

Hester: A Novel by Laurie Lico Albanese (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2022)

In 1820's Salem, Massachusetts, Isobel is left alone when her husband finds work on a sailing vessel. Penniless, Isobel begins working as a seamstress and meets a young Nathaniel Hawthorne. The two are drawn together and begin a relationship that will inspire Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlett Letter." But who is the real seducer? Deeply researched, this spellbinding novel will answer the question: Who was the real Hester Prynne?

The High House: A Novel by Jessie Greengrass (Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2022)

As waters rise, and the world falters, siblings Caro and Pauly retreat to the high house, a summer home on high ground prepared for self-sufficiency by caretaker Grandy and granddaughter Sally. They build a good life together but struggle to live when there is no future in sight. A story of life and loss, beautifully told.

Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting by Clare Pooley (Pamela Dorman Books/Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

A near-death experience on a train creates connections between a group of people who frequently sat in close proximity but never spoke to one another before the incident. None

of their lives will be the same as they start to support and depend on each other. Follow Iona's wisdom and advice if you know what's good for you!

Last Summer on State Street: A Novel by Toya Wolfe (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2022)

A group of elementary school girls in Chicago live in a low-income housing development that the city has begun to demolish. Until they move, the girls must balance maintaining their circle of friendship with following the rules of survival as their community struggles against crime, poverty, systemic racism and forced relocation. However, the same community also has a strong sense of history, culture, endurance and support.

The Lincoln Highway by Amor Towles (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2021)

In 1954 eighteen-year-old Emmett Watson has just been released from a juvenile work farm and plans to head to California to start a new life with his eight-year-old brother. When two friends from the work farm show up with an entirely different plan, their trip takes them in the opposite direction to New York City. Told from multiple points of view, this story is a whirlwind of 1950's Americana following the adventures of two brothers across America.

The Maid: A Novel by Nita Prose (Ballantine Books, Penguin Random House, 2022)

A socially awkward but dedicated maid is framed for the murder of one of the hotel guests. With the help of coworkers turned friends, a *Clue*-like search for the real murdered ensues.

The Many Daughters of Afong Moy: A Novel by Jamie Ford (Atria Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2022)

In 2045, a medical discovery is made that trauma is stamped into DNA and is passed down through generations. Dorothy begins treatment and accesses the memories of her ancestors all the way back to Afong Moy, the first Chinese woman to come to America. Through these memories, the reader is witness to some of the great historical events spanning 200 years.

Mercury Pictures Presents: A Novel by Anthony Marra (Hogarth, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

Behind all the glitz, glamour, art and storytelling of 1940's Hollywood is typecasting, refugees, congressional oversight, and equal rights. A story as glamorous as it is gritty.

The Murder of Mr. Wickham by Claudia Gray (Vintage Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

In the tradition and style of Jane Austen, nearly everyone attending a month-long house party on a rural estate has a motive to murder a swindler/blackmailer who arrives unannounced. The only two young people in the group who do not have a motive (Juliet and Jonathan) must solve the crime before an innocent person is hanged.

The Paris Apartment: A Novel by Lucy Foley (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2022)

Jess arrives in Paris to find her brother Ben missing. As she begins to investigate his disappearance, she learns intimate details of the other residents of the Paris apartment building where Ben lives. As she digs deeper, she realizes they all have reasons to want her brother gone. Jess must piece together the events leading up to Ben's disappearance before it's too late.

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt (Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2022)

After the death of her husband, Tova begins working at the Aquarium on the night shift. Tova likes to keep busy after her son disappeared and her husband died. While working, she becomes acquainted with a giant pacific octopus named Marcellus. He is quite the detective and helps Tova discover the truth about her son's disappearance.

Sea of Tranquility by Emily St. John Mandel (Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

This time-traveling mystery follows Gasperry Roberts as he investigates an unexplained event that spans from the early 1900s to the 2400s. Following various, overlapping storylines, Gasperry soon finds himself at the heart of the mystery and must discover for himself the true value of human life.

This Time Tomorrow by Emma Straub (Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

Alice doesn't have a terrible life; she likes her job, her apartment, her independence, and romantic status. But her father is sick and she feels like something is missing. She awakes one morning and finds herself back in 1996. Through this she realizes a new perspective on past events in her life.

Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow by Gabrielle Zevin (Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2022)

This is a novel about friendship, found family, art, and growing up. From pre-teendom through college and then adulthood, we follow Sam and Sadie and later Marx as their lives orbit video games and each other while manifesting the hurt and redemption of

platonic and romantic love. The metaphor of video games becomes a lesson to the characters and readers, that "Game Over" isn't an ending, but an invitation to play again.

The Two Lives of Sara by Catherine Adel West (Park Row Books, 2022).

Sara King is young, pregnant, alone, and newly arrived in 1960s Memphis. She finds a home, work, and friendship in Mama Sugar's boardinghouse, but she and Mama Sugar both have secrets that will endanger their futures. Is there peace to be found in this dangerous place and time? And if so, what price must be paid?

Two Nights in Lisbon by Chris Pavone (MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022)

A newly married woman wakes up in her Lisbon hotel room to find her husband gone. Making the rounds from hotel security, local police, to the U.S. embassy she tries to piece together what happened to him. A fast-paced intricately plotted mystery that keeps you guessing until the very end.

West with Giraffes: A Novel by Lynda Rutledge (Lake Union Publishing, 2021)

105-year-old Texan Woodrow Wilson Nickel recalls his family dying during the Dust Bowl of the 1930's and then moving to the East Coast to live with a distant cousin. While there he survives a torrential hurricane, and much to his delight, finds himself a part of transporting two African Giraffes cross country for twelve days from New York to the San Diego Zoo. Inspired by true events and real-life figures (including the first female zoo director), this is a raucous coming-of-age story, full of adventure, romance, and surprises around every bend in the road.

What Moves the Dead by T. Kingfisher (Tor Nightfire/Tom Doherty Associates, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2022)

Madeline Usher is ill, possibly dying, and her brother Roderick is not coping, so ex-soldier and friend Alex Easton attends the Ushers at the siblings' ancestral home to provide help and comfort. They find stretched nerves, strange voices, sleepwalking, and a foreboding pall in the House. The grounds and gardens are no better with rabbits who watch them, and a lake that seems to be dying. An atmospheric, original, and delightfully creepy retelling of Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher."