

JANUARY 2021 BOOKLIST

CONFESSIONS OF AN UGLY STEPSISTER

by Gregory Maguire
(author of *Wicked*)

The story of Cinderella told from the perspective of an ugly stepsister. Set in the 17th century in Holland. — *Deborah Camp*

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING

by Delia Owens

A story of a young girl abandoned by her family in the marshlands of the south. — *Lois Clyde, also recommended by Lois Emmerson and Sharon Muzzin*

AMERICAN DIRT

by Jeanine Cummins

Forced to flee Mexico, Lydia and eight-year-old Luca soon find themselves miles and worlds away from their comfortable middle-class existence. Instantly transformed into migrants, Lydia and Luca ride *la bestia*—trains that make their way north toward the United States. Lydia soon sees that everyone is running from something. But what exactly are they running to?

— *Sharon Muzzin, also recommended by Sharon Emmerson*

THE PULL OF THE STARS

by Emma Donoghue

Set in Dublin during the post WWI influenza pandemic, this story follows the challenges facing a young maternity nurse as she works to protect and care for those to whom she is responsible. Engrossing and topical, the novel offers insight into both the social fabric of Ireland and reality of managing

a deadly disease which ultimately claimed millions of lives. — *Lesley Bird*

A GENTLEMAN IN MOSCOW

by Amor Towles

In 1922, Count Alexander Rostov is deemed an unrepentant aristocrat by a Bolshevik tribunal, and is sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol, a grand hotel across the street from the Kremlin. Rostov, an indomitable man of erudition and wit, has never worked a day in his life, and must now live in an attic room while some of the most tumultuous decades in Russian history are unfolding outside the hotel's doors. — *Sharon Muzzin*

DAISY JONES AND THE SIX

by Taylor Jenkins Reid

This is the fictional story of a rock and roll band that rose to fame in the 1970's and then inexplicably broke up. It is written as a series of interviews of the former band members, manager and record producer of the band. The interviewer sets out to write the history of the band, it's formation and ultimately what caused the band to break up. It is very cleverly written and the format makes you forget that it is a work of fiction and wonder if you shouldn't try and google some of their songs.

— *Sharon Muzzin*

WHERE THE LOST WANDER

by Amy Harmon

This a wonderful historical story. It is set in the 1800's and based on the May family who join a wagon train on their trek to California via the Or-

egon Trail. The author has developed great characters and is very descriptive of the hardships and heartbreak involved in such a journey. The main characters are a young widow and a half-Pawnee man. They develop a relationship. Great author. Great story. (This story reminded me of *Dances With Wolves*) — *Cynthia Barnes*

GREENWOOD

by Michael Christie

This epic historical novel features five generations of the Greenwood family and spans more than 100 years. It is rich with evocative descriptions of West Coast wilderness. It speaks to the beauty of trees, the tragedy of their destruction, and the complex relationship between human greed and nature's defiance. It is beautifully written and brilliantly structured like the nested growth rings of a tree. A mesmerizing page turner of dark secrets, loves, losses and an accident that is still felt four generations later. — *Barb Staton*

THE JAGUAR'S CHILDREN

by John Vaillant

A distressing, but probably accurate, account of Mexicans crossing the border into the USA.

— *Doranne Demontigny* *

MOONFLOWER MURDERS and MAGPIE MURDERS

by Anthony Horowitz

(who also wrote *Foyle's War* and *Midsomer Murders*)

Both great murder mysteries. — *Doranne Demontigny* *

A MATTER OF MALICE

by Thomas King

One of his Thumps Dreadfulwater mysteries set near Kananaskis country. — *Doranne Demontigny* *

* *The aforementioned three books recommended by Doranne are available for borrowing. dorway@hotmail.com or 250-218-6263*

INDIANS ON VACATION

by Thomas King

(also wrote *The Inconvenient Indian*, available at VIRL)

Humorous but serious. — *Doranne Demontigny*

COLD SKIES

by Thomas King

(available at VIRL)

One of his Thumps Dreadfulwater mysteries set near Kananaskis country. — *Doranne Demontigny*

ONE MADDER WOMAN

by Dede Crane

This is a wonderful fictional account of Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot's development as an artist and her (speculated) clandestine love affair with Édouard Manet. — *Elaine Prodor*



Thank you, everyone, who submitted to The Seaview Road Bookline this month. I hope to send the Booklist out monthly; the next submission deadline is February 15th. seaviewbreezenews@gmail.com

The following page is a special review of several books by the same author.

Jane Austen, Literary Intoxicator

One day last year the realization struck that I had become a Janeite, the term for those in awe of Jane Austen. Knowing that being exposed to Austen only through movies was just skimming the surface, I had decided to read **Pride and Prejudice** at long last. Then I devoured her other five novels in succession, delved into analyses and criticism, accepted that I may have to reread everything multiple times to grasp all that she intended, and acknowledged that I'm happily lost in Austen land.

Austen is generally considered to be among the greatest writers in the English language and remarkably innovative as a novelist. And she is the foundation of an entertainment industry. Although the four novels published anonymously while she lived brought only modest earnings, enormous wealth has flowed to others. Austen — like no one else save Shakespeare — inspired a vast universe of spin-off books, movies, countless academic studies, periodicals, member societies, and a multitude of devotees who know all of the plots, themes, and characters.

She's easy to appreciate. Austen's deep understanding of human nature and relationships resonates two centuries after her untimely death at 41. She dazzles readers with rich language, irony, and satire. Characters live and breathe. Plots brilliantly weave to satisfying conclusions. With all of her gifts on display, Austen induces literary intoxication. It's easy to get caught up in the narrative flow and miss the densely layered information that reveals a more nuanced story.

To crack open the door to Austen land, I recommend starting with the delightfully humorous **Pride and Prejudice**, her most popular and accessible novel that charts the fate of the Bennet family with five sisters in need of husbands to survive the impending economic storm. In all of Austen's books, romantic — and starkly unromantic — relationships help to drive the plot. But instead of writing romance novels in the modern sense, she created powerful studies in human interactions.

Throughout her work she deftly sliced and diced the failings of the British society heavily dominated by men and wealth, but her critical eye did not spare anyone because of gender or economic status.

You won't find murder, mayhem, or war in any Austen novel. But while being transported into a tidy world revolving around a few families, you will see some familiar modern values and behaviours in the characters. Austen examines how people treat others badly for such reasons as gender, pride, prejudice, ambition, upbringing, class structure, societal pressure, economics, and self-serving callousness.

Many consider **Emma** to be Austen's masterpiece. However, arguments regarding highest merit can be made about any of the novels. The others are **Sense and Sensibility**, **Mansfield Park**, **Persuasion**, and **Northanger Abbey**. The latter two, written many years apart, were published together posthumously and revealed the author's name in a biographical notice. All of the books are distinctively different but form a consistent body of work that reflects the mind of a genius and the spirit of a woman who fearlessly challenged social and literary norms.

The library has all of Austen's novels. If you prefer to use an e-reader, Gutenberg.org offers free download in various formats.

If you discover that you're a Janeite, consider joining the Jane Austen Society of North America (jasna.org). The society offers resources for deeper study, and its many branches, including in Vancouver and Victoria, schedule educational and entertaining events accessible via Zoom. Until interrupted by the pandemic last year, the Central Island sub-branch held an annual Jane Austen festival in Port Alberni complete with Regency period costume ball.

— *By a Gentleman (Since Austen used 'By a Lady' on the covers of her first four books, the name seems appropriate.)*