

August 2021 Staff Picks

Author: Lauren Groff **Title: Fates and Furies**

Fates and Furies is a portrait of a marriage—as viewed in turn by both participants. The novel is a tragic love story with complex characters who are pretentious—flawed, yet interesting. Lawrence Satterwaite, an unlikely artist, is the creative force in the marriage. As a dramatist, Lotto takes people and events from his life and uses them as creative fodder. His wife is the “saint” who remains childless and suffers for his art. She is his siren, his Antigone, until it all goes terrible wrong. Mathilde has made Lotto’s life run smoothly. She has taken care of all the bills and menial details, and she has grown to resent Lotto’s fame. Mathilde also hides a staggering quantity of secrets. The things Lotto didn’t know about his wife “could sink an ocean liner.”

Author: Karen Jay Fowler **Title: We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves**

Tragic and compelling, this novel explores many tantalizing subjects such as the fallibility of memory, the notion of humanity, and the debilitating effect of family secrets. Rosemary is a well-educated, unreliable narrator. She tells readers she is in mourning because her sister disappeared seventeen years ago and her brother disappeared ten years ago. In no way is *We Are Completely Beside Ourselves*, however, a typical missing person story. Rosemary’s brother is a domestic terrorist and Rosemary’s sister is a chimpanzee for starters. Her father is a psychologist who is keen on treating his children like the psychological subjects he is studying.

Author: Helen MacDonald **Title: H is for Hawk**

Though she is an expert who has trained many raptors, MacDonald feels compelled to train a goshawk after her father’s death. Known to be the most difficult of all to train, the goshawk is a suitable challenge that allows her to grieve and escape from the world. MacDonald is an academic so much of the writing comes across as a beautifully-written academic essay. She is also a poet which explains the work’s formidable imagery: “The hawk was a fire that burned my hurts away.” MacDonald often engages in interesting asides, like her discussion of the Pastoral movement that occurred in Britain in the 1930s. Mostly, though, she shares her triumphs and failures. What I liked best about this memoir is the honest description of a tense human-animal relationship. The literary analyses, the historical asides, and Macdonald’s astute discussion of the grieving process make this work even more significant.

Author: Kate Moore **Title: Radium Girls**

Kate Moore carefully documents many of the dial workers’ stories who worked in Orange, NJ and Ottawa, IL. In doing so, she preserves an important part of women’s history, industrial history, and American history. Though other works on this topic focus on the physicians and scientists, Moore’s work puts a human face to this tragedy by focusing on the women themselves. Lured by the glamour and high pay, these girls enjoyed their jobs until, one by one, they began getting sick. When glowing watch dials for the military were in hot demand, not much was known about the dangers of working with radium. However by the late 1920’s, the

companies knew radium was harmful but still did nothing to protect its dial workers. Radium's effects were devastating. Some women died quickly but some suffered a slow and painful death. The dial worker's cases led to the formation of OSHA.

Author: John Elder Robison Title: Look Me in the Eye

This is an intimate portrait of one man's journey with autism and how it affected his professional life and personal life. Robison grew up feeling different and not knowing why or how to label it. He was frequently told he needed to look people in the eye. He learned to love machines and could visualize complex equations in his head. Eventually, he created a guitar that appeared to explode on stage, which the band KISS became famous for. Several chapters in *Look Me in the Eye* are devoted to adventures he had while working as a sound engineer for KISS. Robison eventually explored a career in the corporate world. Despite not having an electrical engineering degree, Robison found working at Milton Bradley an easy fit. He could designing electronic toys as well if not better than any of the engineers with degrees. A friend who was also a therapist helps him making a discovery about himself that changes his outlook on life. The chapter, "A Diagnosis at Forty" focuses on his coming to terms with his diagnosis. Robison not only comes to terms with his autism, he also makes peace with his parents who were at times indifferent and abusive while he was growing up.

Author: Carter Wilson Title: Mister Tender's Girl

This is a taut, psychological thriller graphic novel that was inspired by two true life events—the Slenderman stabbings and the Theo Van Gogh killing in Amsterdam. Quite possibly there's no worst feeling than be watched, scrutinized or stalked. Mr. Tender's Girl captures the nightmare of being observed by a group of online "fans." At fourteen, Alice Hill is a victim of a horrible crime. Her father's creation, Mr. Tender, the devious hero of the eponymous graphic novel, has inspired two of her friends to stab her. To escape the media and the sensationalism of the crime, Alice, who is British, changes her name and goes to America. She thinks this is enough to protect her anonymity until a strange package arrives—the last book in the Mr. Tender series. Her father, who died in London, never finished the Mr. Tender series. In fact, he never penned another drawing after the vicious attack on his daughter occurred. So, where did the package, postmarked from England, come from?

Author: Reed Hastings Title: No Rules Rules: Netflix and the Culture of Reinvention

This book offers valuable insight into one of the world's most successful companies - Netflix. Although its tenants are not appropriate for every company, *No Rules Rules* should generate thoughtful discussion about trust, innovation, and management. Instead of rules, Hastings believes in building an organization out of top performers. In his view, workplace rules deter innovation and experimentation. Consequently, Hastings based his entire company on F&R (Freedom and Responsibility). This meant he had to employ and keep only the most talented employees—the keeper test—and he had to create an atmosphere that fostered candid evaluations. Feedback should aim to assist and should be actionable. In his view, the workforce is not a family: it's a team. Captains of departments should be able to make decisions, even multi-million dollar decisions, without approval of their boss. Hastings freely

admits his viewpoint works for creative companies and would not work for companies where error prevention and safety is paramount e.g. a health care company.

Author: Soniah Kamal Title: Unmarriageable

Pride & Prejudice in Pakistan. It was great to read a familiar story transformed into something new, fresh, & different. It gives readers a thought-provoking glimpse into Pakistani culture and the double standards women face when navigating sex, love, and marriage. The characters were modernized, relatable, and I loved the descriptions of a days-long wedding ceremony with its high fashion-pageantry and higher social stakes.

Author: David Wolman Title: A Left-Hand Turn Around the World

In celebration of Left-Handers Day (August 13), this book is for those who have a rare disposition of being left-handed. The author travels all over the world to find what handedness means and why it happens. Amusing and lively tales follow.

Author: Josh Clark & Chuck Bryant Title: Stuff You Should Know

Really interesting, random bits of trivia. I like that there is history on these topics. The footnotes were great additions. This book makes me interested in following their podcast.