

# CRASH COURSE

IN HISTORICAL  
FICTION

NoveList



# Panelists



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The logo for Library Reads features a stylized 'L' made of a blue vertical bar and an orange horizontal bar. To the right of the 'L' are five vertical bars of varying heights, colored orange. Below these elements, the words 'LIBRARY' and 'READS' are stacked in a bold, sans-serif font. 'LIBRARY' is in blue and 'READS' is in orange.

The **top ten books** published this month that librarians across the country love.

[libraryreads.org](http://libraryreads.org)



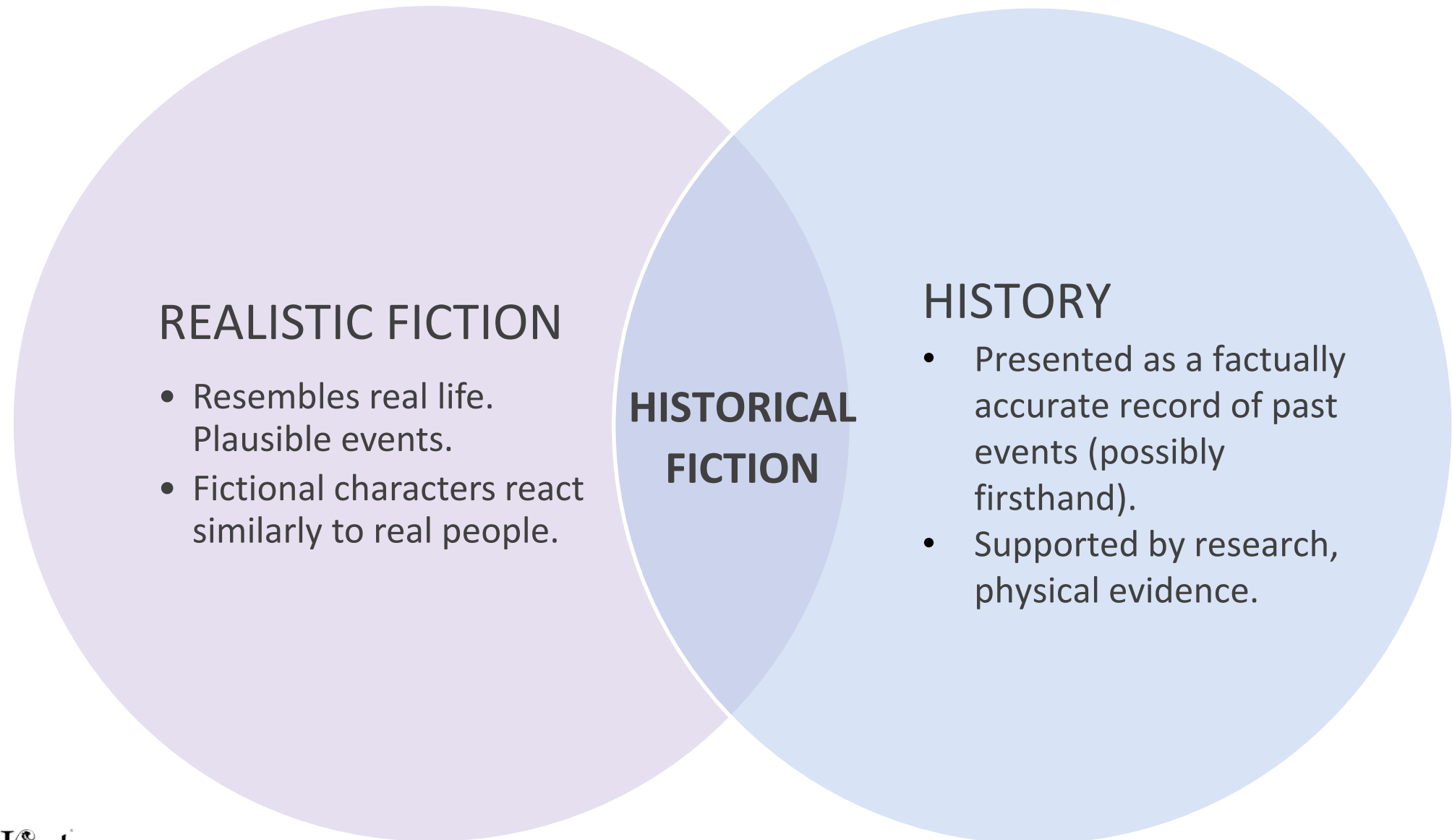
- Introduction
- Categories and subgenres
- Trends and recent titles
- Books we're excited about
- Let's talk!

# Introduction: *Ye Olden Dayes*



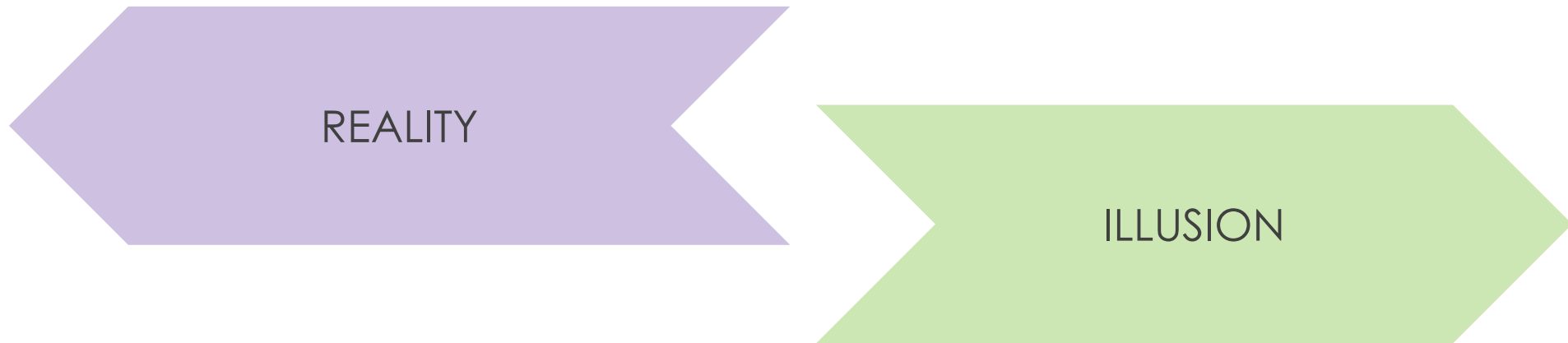
[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal\\_ms\\_19\\_c\\_viii\\_f032v](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_19_c_viii_f032v), c. 1500

# Historical fiction = Realistic fiction... set in the past



“If a historian's job is to **reconstruct and interpret the past accurately and truthfully**, the job of the historical fiction writer is to **deceive the reader**, into believing **the false world created** in a novel or a story is a **real world**.”

Bruce Holsinger, Linden Kent Memorial Professor of English  
*Plagues, Witches, and War: The Worlds of Historical Fiction – Defining the genre.*



- How much is “real” vs. “made up”?
- *Whose* story is real?  
(narratives and counter-narratives)
- How far back before “the past” =  
“historical”?





# REALISTIC fiction set in the past

Set “before the author’s lifetime or experience. Thus, novels about World War II might be considered Historical Fiction if the author were born after 1945, but Jane Austen’s comedies of manners are not Historical Fiction, as she writes about the times in which she lived.”

~ Joyce Saricks

## **Characteristics** (excerpted)

Accurate historical detail: geography, customs, beliefs, culture, society, habits, characters and events.  
Language and style → may use of archaic language -- some readers love it, others find it distracting.

p. 291-2, *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction (2nd ed.)* American Library Association: Chicago.

WAVERLEY  
OR  
'TIS SIXTY YEARS SINCE  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
VOL. I.

BY SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

With Introductory Essay and Notes

By ANDREW LANG



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON  
ESTES AND LAURIAT

1893

***Waverley or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since***  
by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)

- Published anonymously in 1814, among the first historical fiction novels in the Western tradition.
- Sets precedent for 60 years in the past = “historical.”

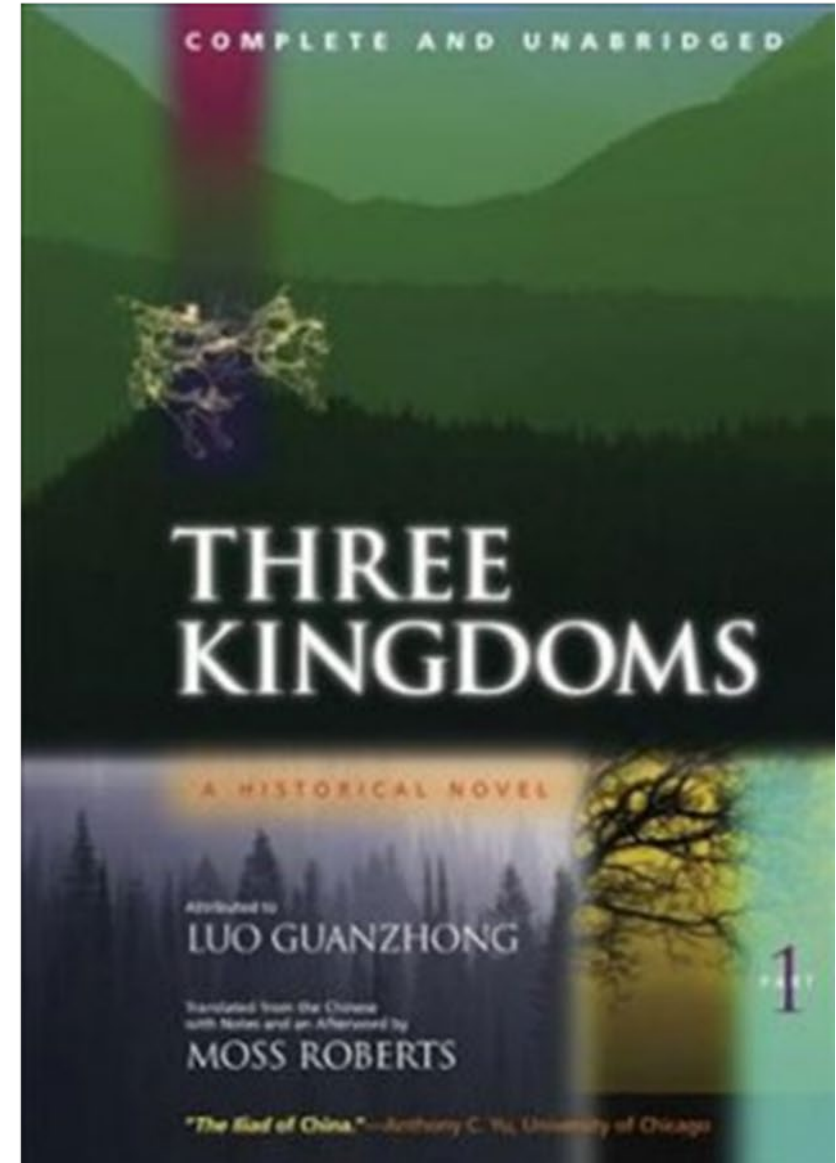
**REALISTIC** fiction set in the past  
***Romance of the Three Kingdoms***

- Written in 14<sup>th</sup>-century China
- Attributed to Luo Guanzhong
- Set in 169-280 CE, during the turbulent final years China's Han dynasty

**“In East Asia, *Romance* is on par with the works of Shakespeare... in the same way that people in Britain grow up studying *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.”**

~ Kaori Shoji

"War as wisdom and gore" (November 6, 2008). *The Japan Times*.



# Historical Fiction: What's the appeal?

## Stories woven around real people and/or events

- Biographical fiction
- Starring famous figures
- Inspired by real events

## Popular narrative structures, themes

- Epistolary novels
- Parallel narratives
- Family sagas
- Strong sense of place
- Immigrant experiences

**These are all appeal terms you can use in NoveList to refine your historical fiction searches!**



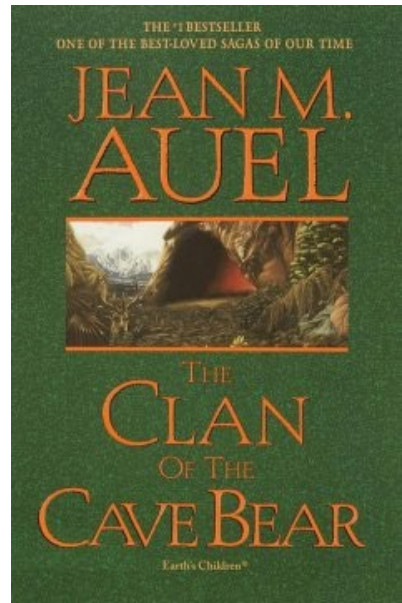
# Search by TIME PERIODS in NoveList!

- Ancient Egypt
- Tudor period
- American Civil War era
- Victorian era
- Regency period
- Georgian era

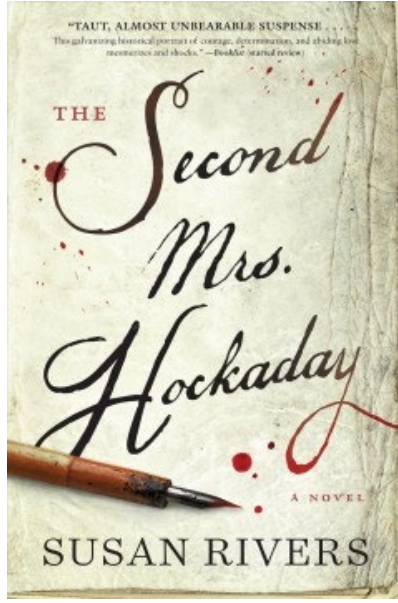
... as well as by century!



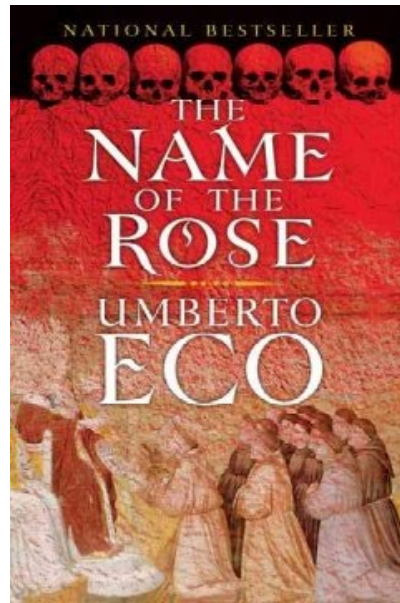
# Single-era historical fiction



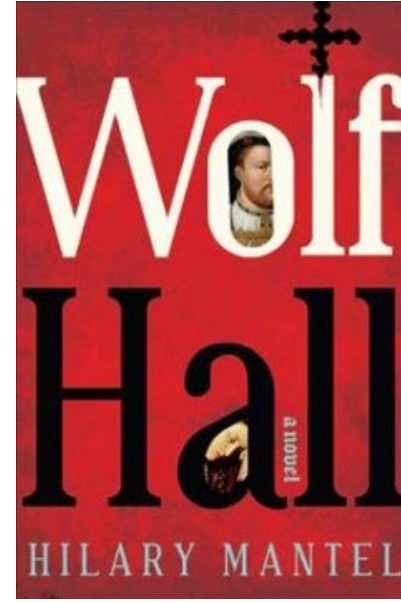
Stone Age



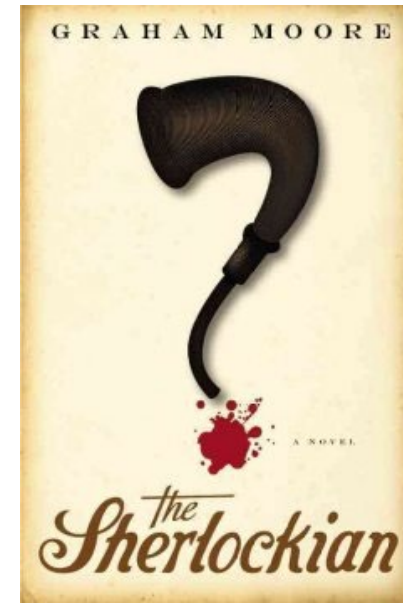
American Civil War Era



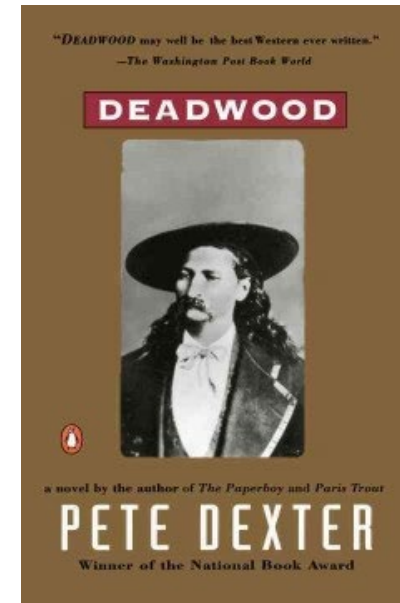
14<sup>th</sup> Century



Tudor Period

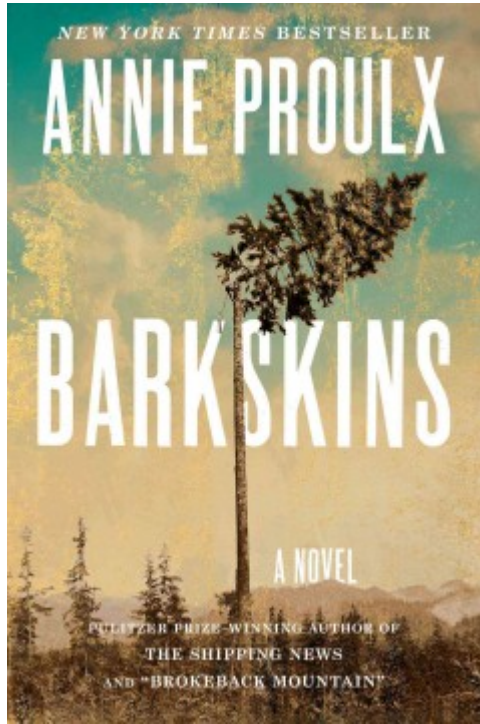


19<sup>th</sup> Century

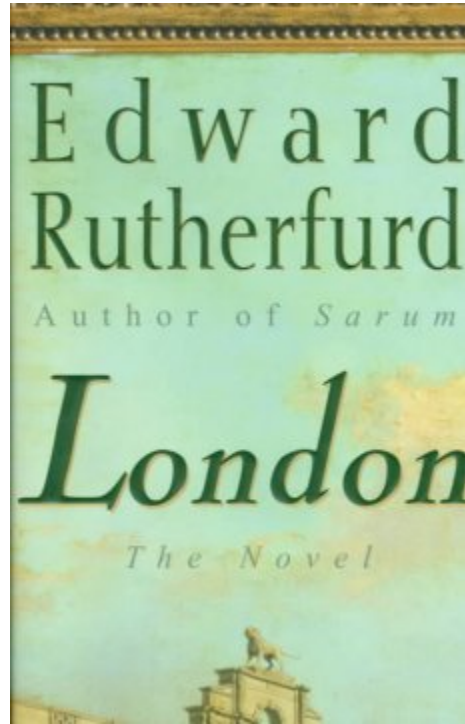


19<sup>th</sup> Century

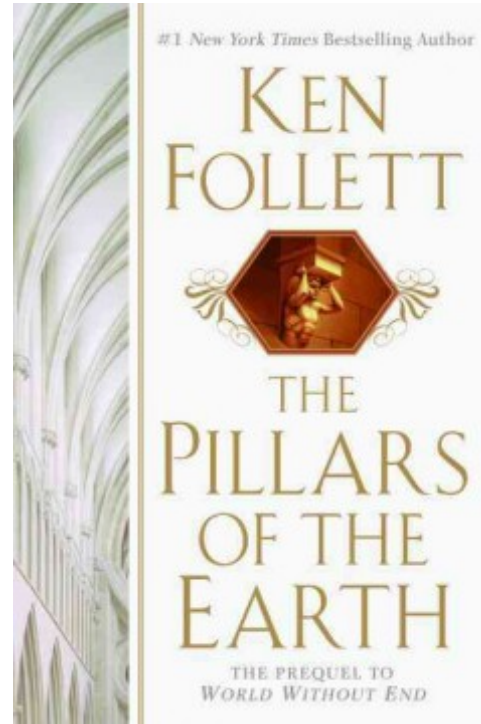
# Multi-era historical fiction



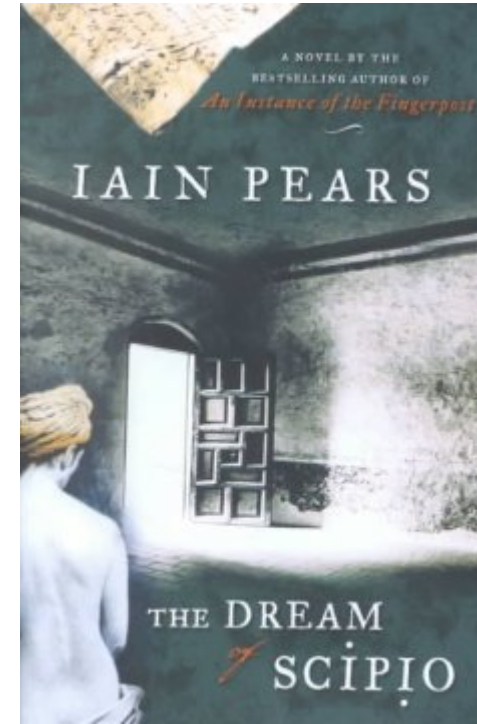
17<sup>th</sup> Century  
21<sup>st</sup> Century



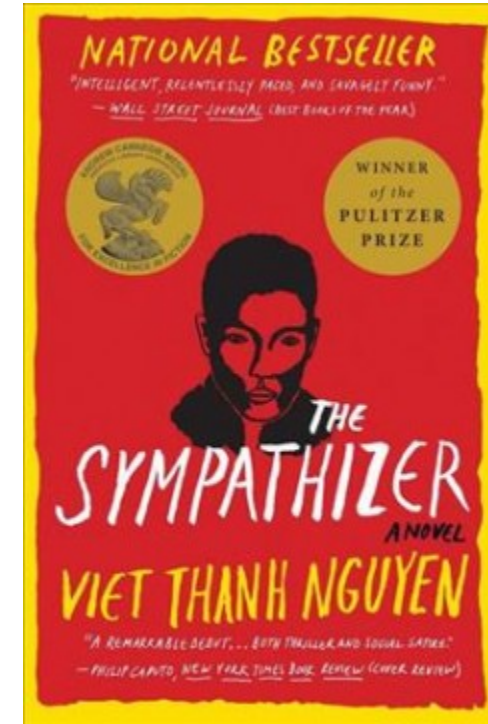
3<sup>rd</sup> Century –  
Elizabethan Era



12<sup>th</sup> Century  
Medieval Period



Medieval Period  
Roman Empire  
World War II



1970s  
20<sup>th</sup> Century

# EDI, counter-narratives, and historical fiction RA

## Finding diverse and #OwnVoices titles in NoveList!

“[A]uthors of **own voices** stories draw on their **personal experiences as part of a marginalized group to depict their fictional characters’ journeys,**” and this may provide “welcome reassurance to readers... unaccustomed to seeing people like themselves at the [narrative] center... or of seeing aspects of their own lives depicted with authenticity and nuance.” ~ Gillian Speace, NoveList

Own voices  
Culturally diverse  
Religiously diverse  
LGBTQIA diverse  
Ability diverse



# Realistic FICTION set in the past

## Historical Novel Society:

“To be deemed historical... a novel must have been written at least fifty years after the events described, or have been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events (who therefore approaches them only by research).”

## HNS also recognizes a variety of “genre blends”

- Historical fantasy, mysteries, romances
- Time-slip novels, alt-history, steampunk, weird westerns, etc.



# Genre Blends: Historical Fiction Plus...

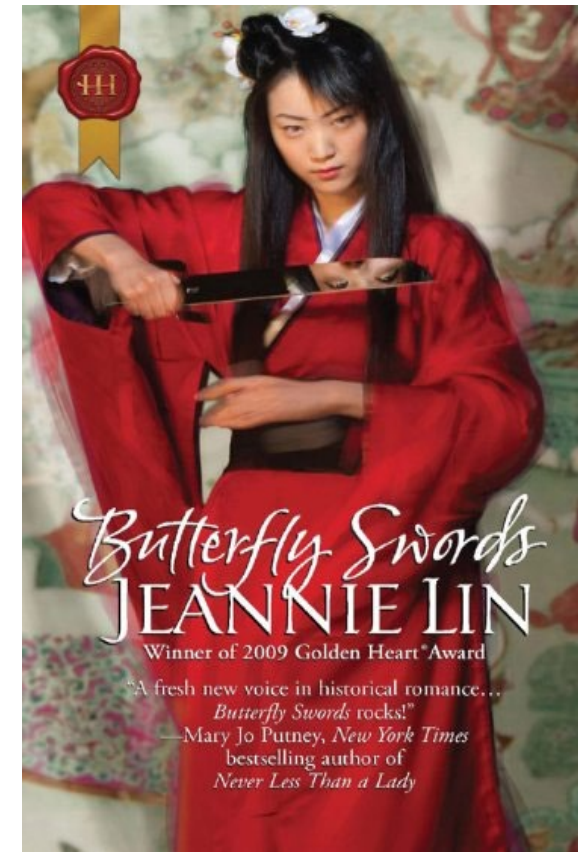
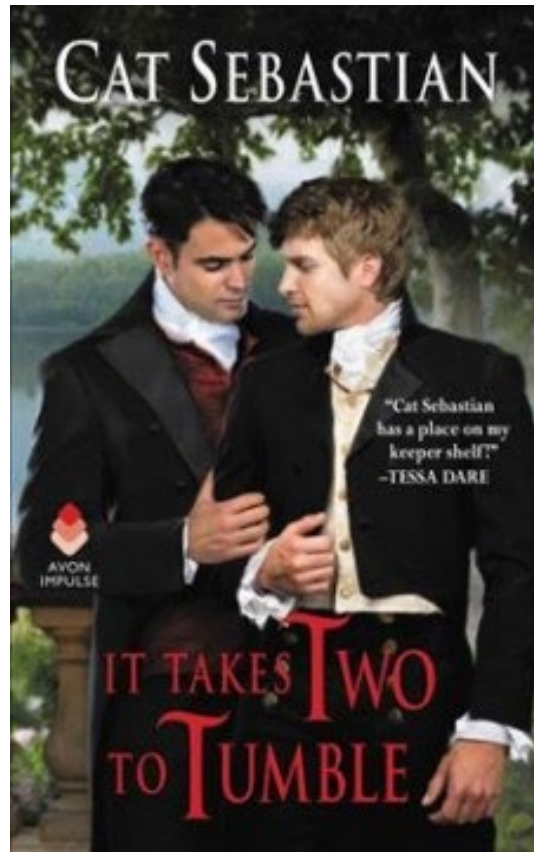
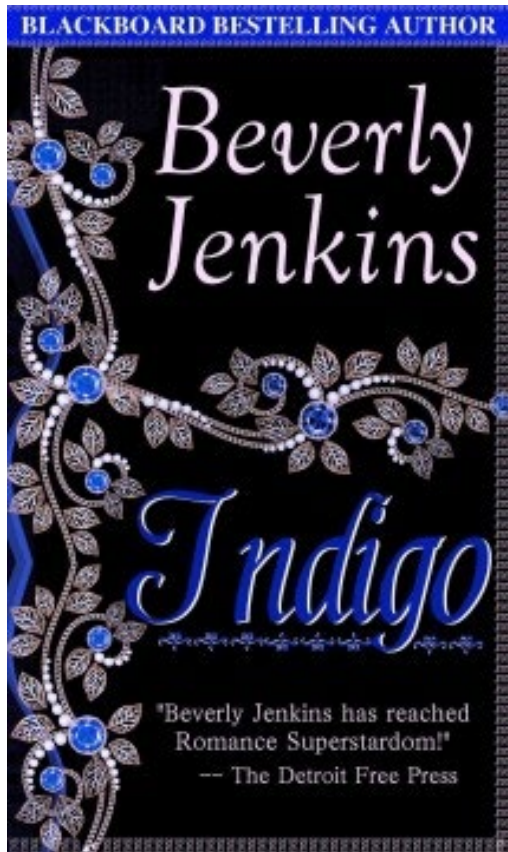
Not all historical fiction fits into the neat literary fiction or adventure fiction categories we commonly understand as historical fiction, but can mix with fantasy, science fiction, mystery, and romance.



Bowl Vectors by Vecteezy.com

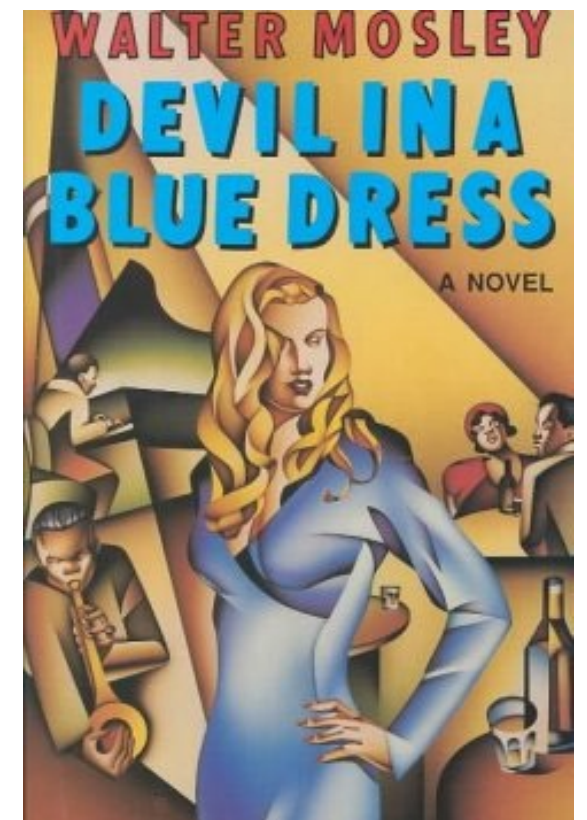
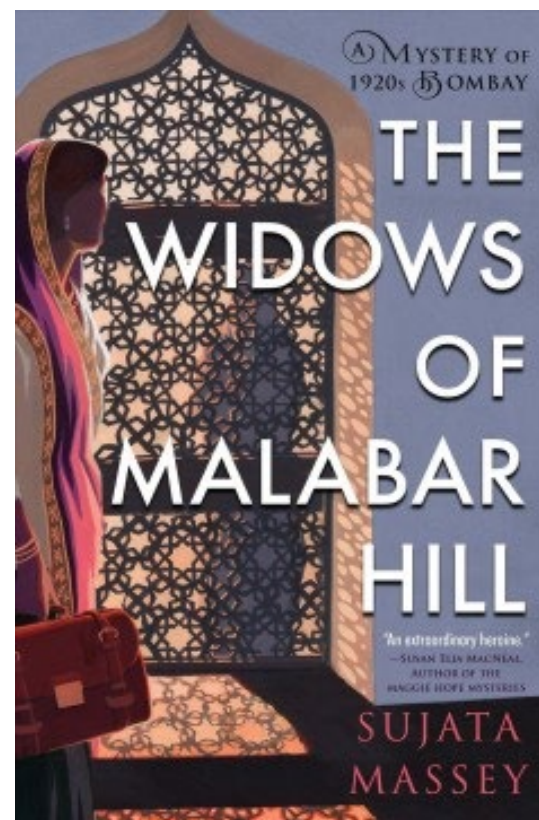
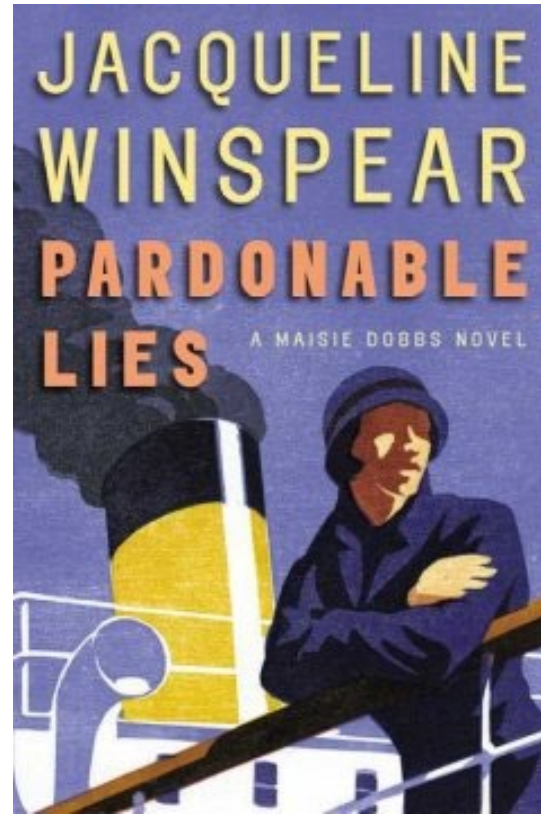
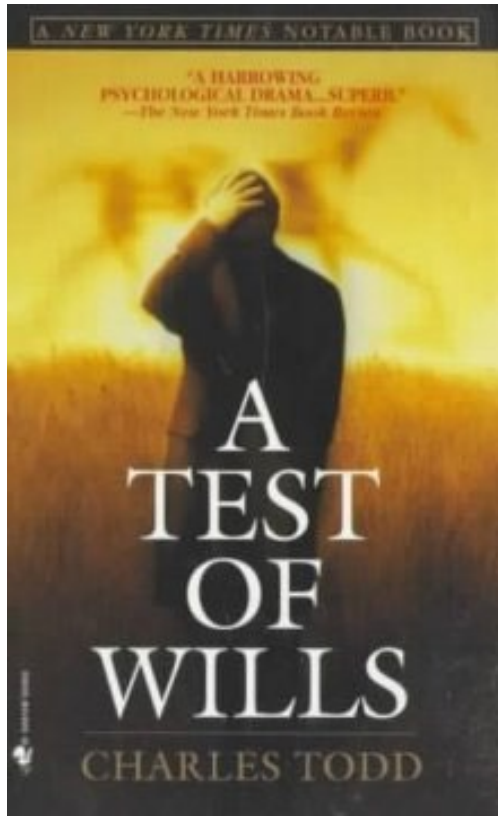
# Historical Romance

Beverly Jenkins, Cat Sebastian, and Jeannie Lin are just some of the popular authors in historical romance.



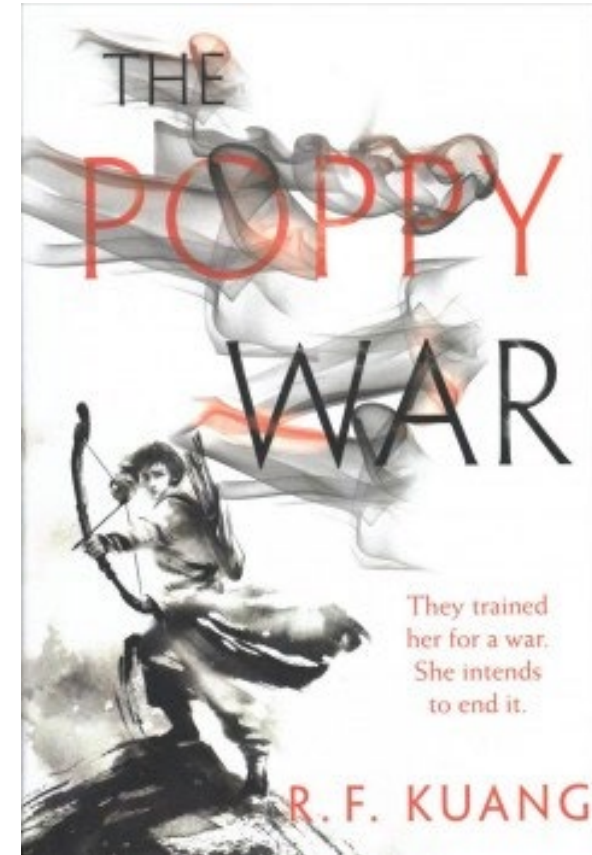
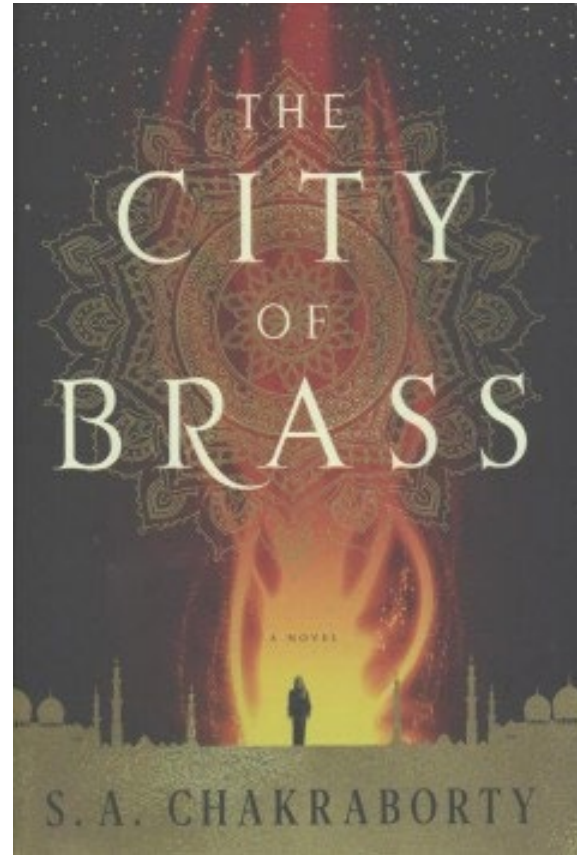
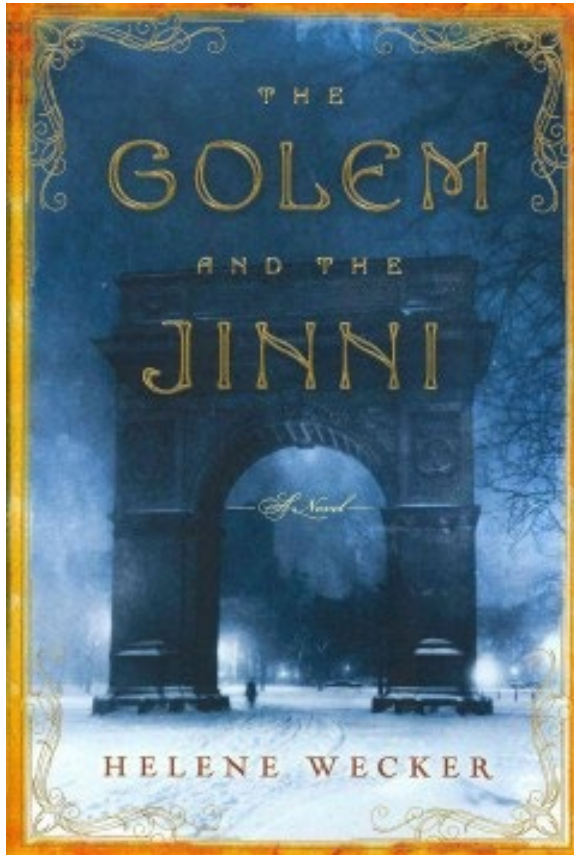
# Historical Mysteries

A whodunit set in the past that pays close attention to historical details. Popular settings can be any period from Ancient Rome to the Disco Era.



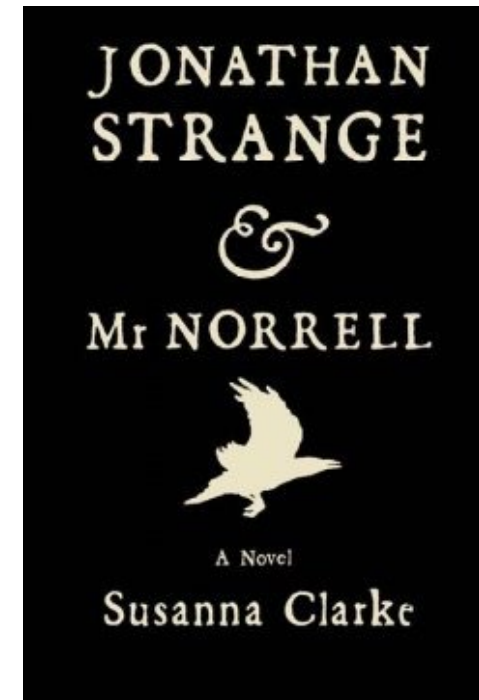
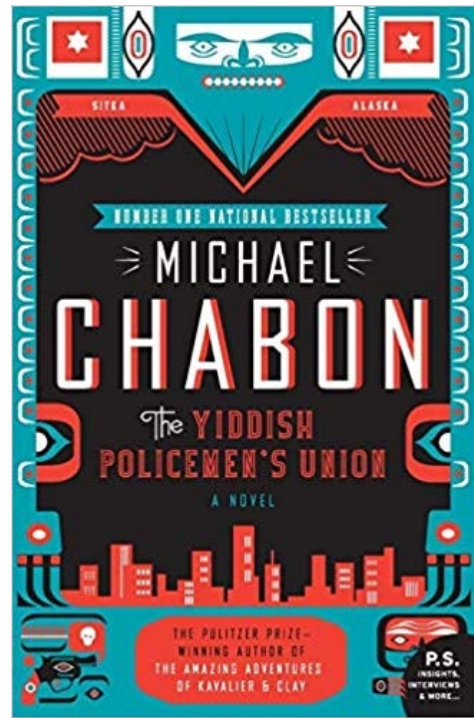
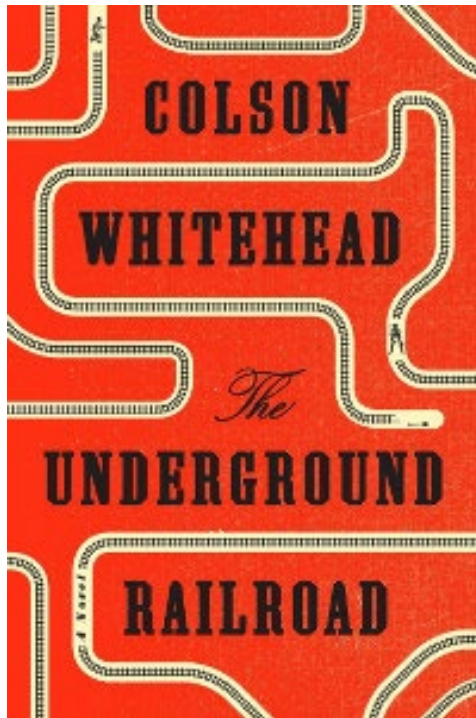
# Historical Fantasy

Most commonly one thinks of Diana Gabaldon and George R.R. Martin, but there is quite a few popular historical fantasy titles to recommend.



# Alternative Histories

Go back in time, change some outcomes, for better or worse, alternative histories explore the what if or might have been otherwise.



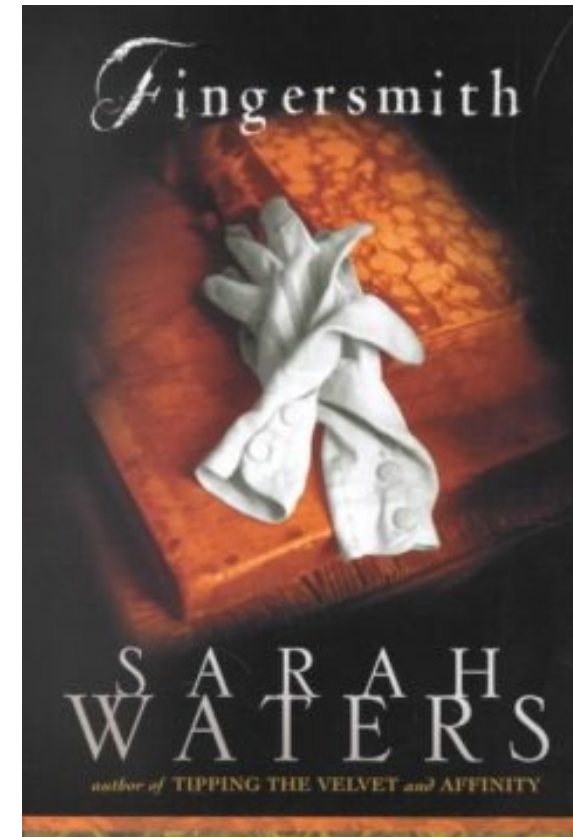
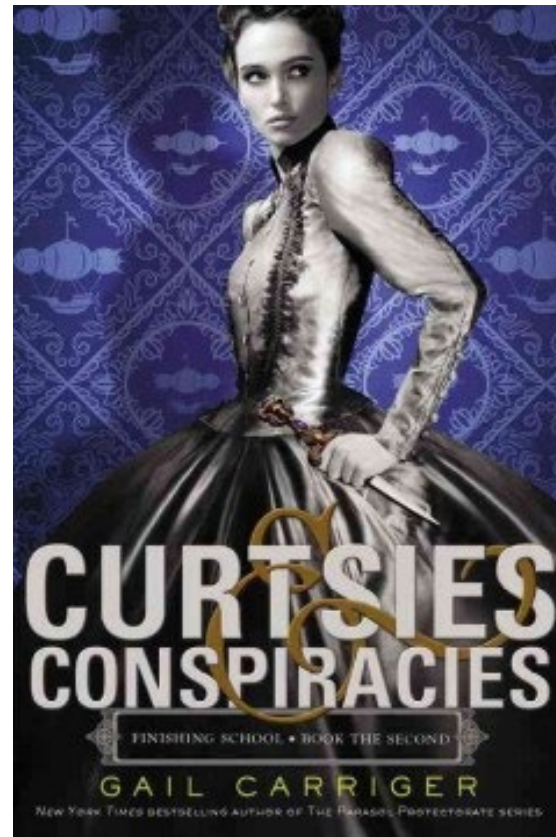
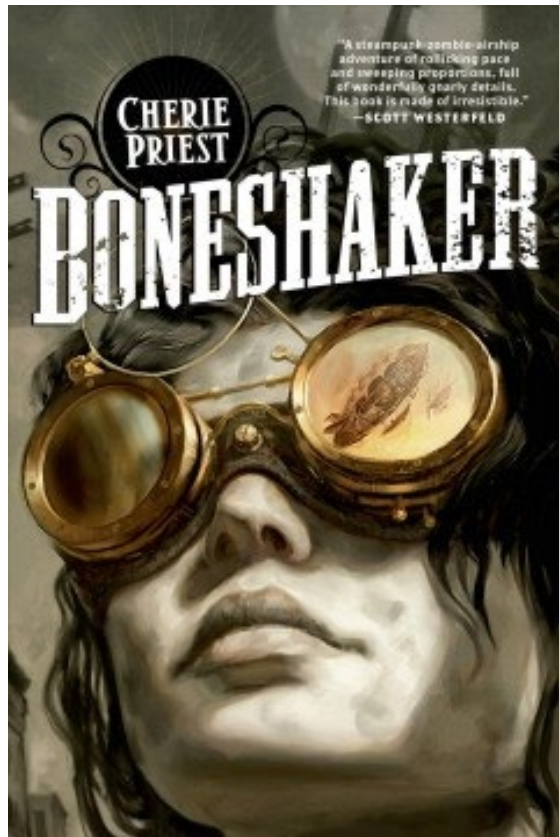
# Trends & Current Titles



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# Victoriana/Steam Punk

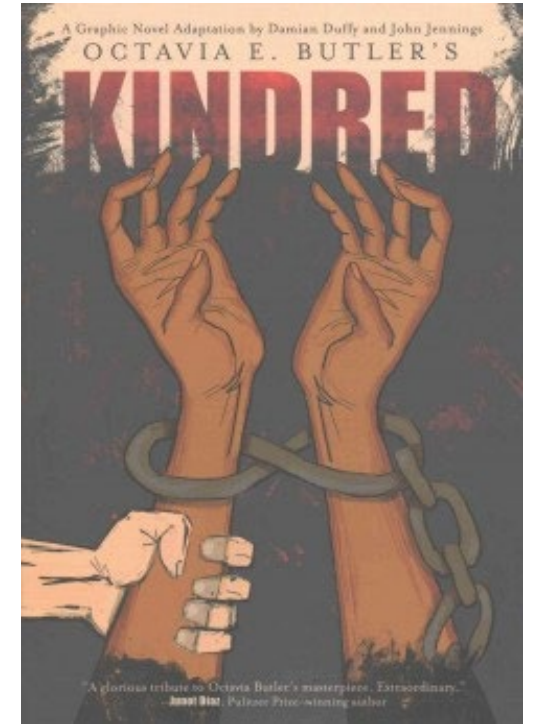
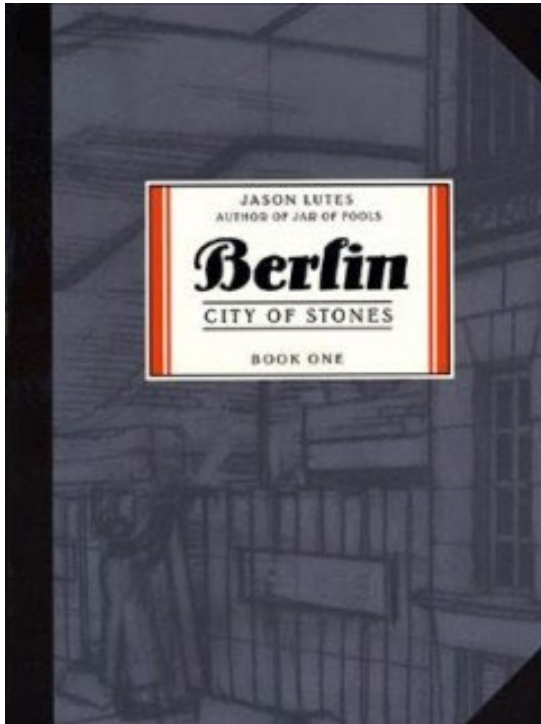
Whether fantasy or more straightforward, a Victorian era setting is a continuing trend in historical fiction.





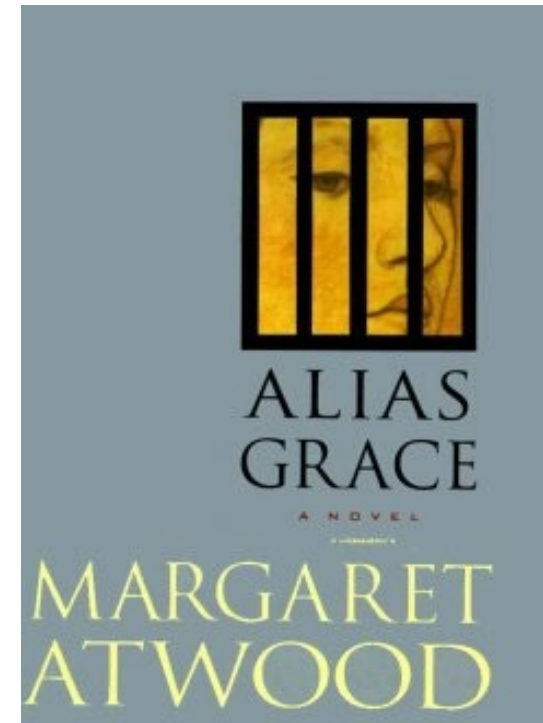
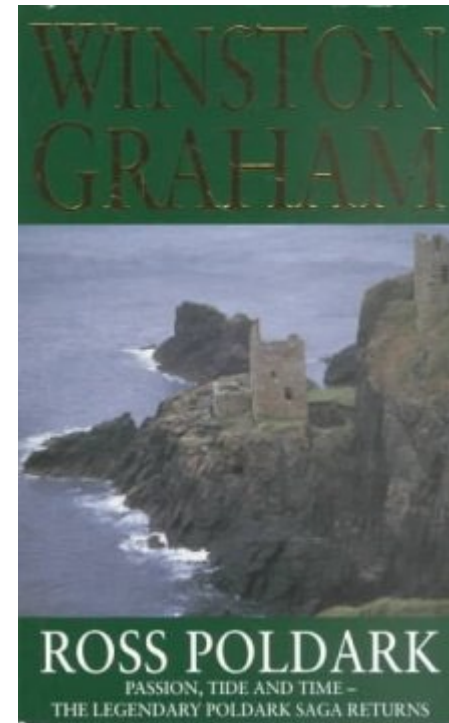
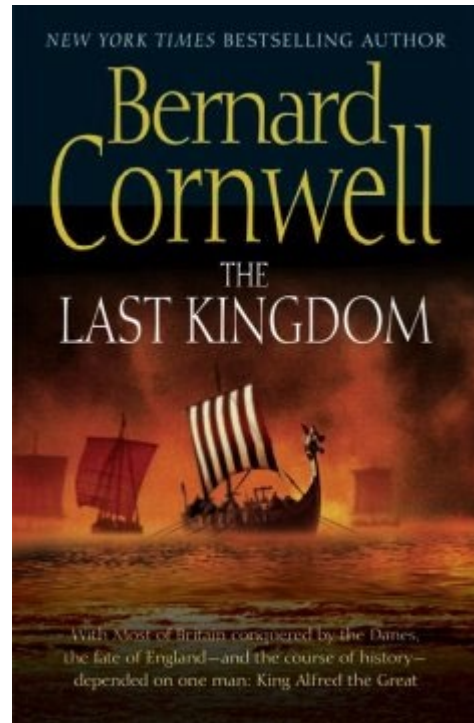
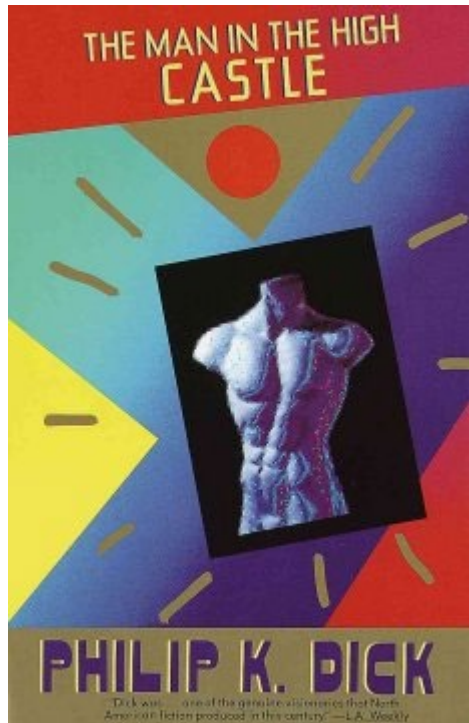
# Graphic Historical Fiction

More of a hopeful trend. While still growing as a genre blend, more and more historical fiction in graphic novel format are being produced.

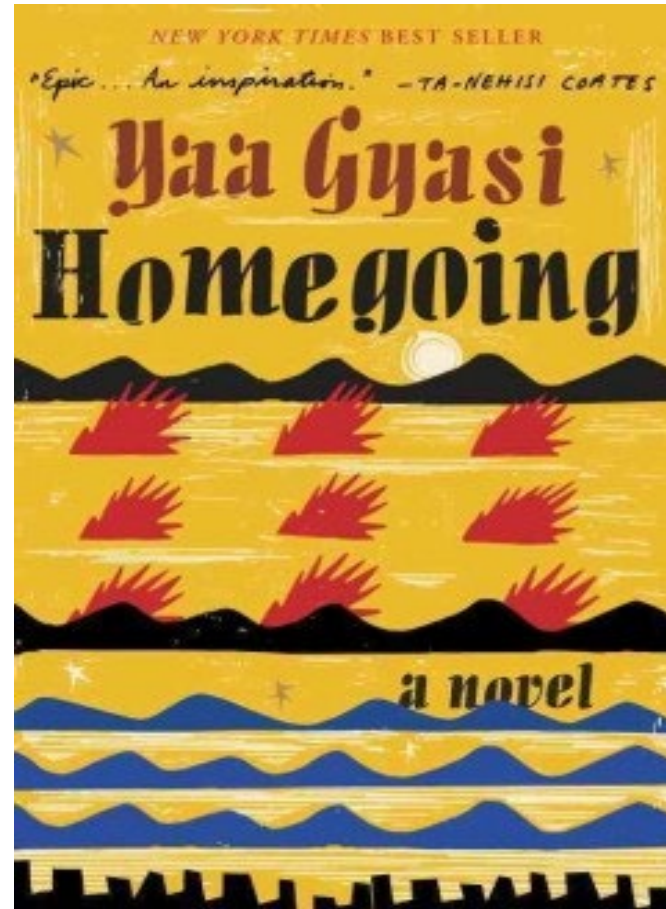
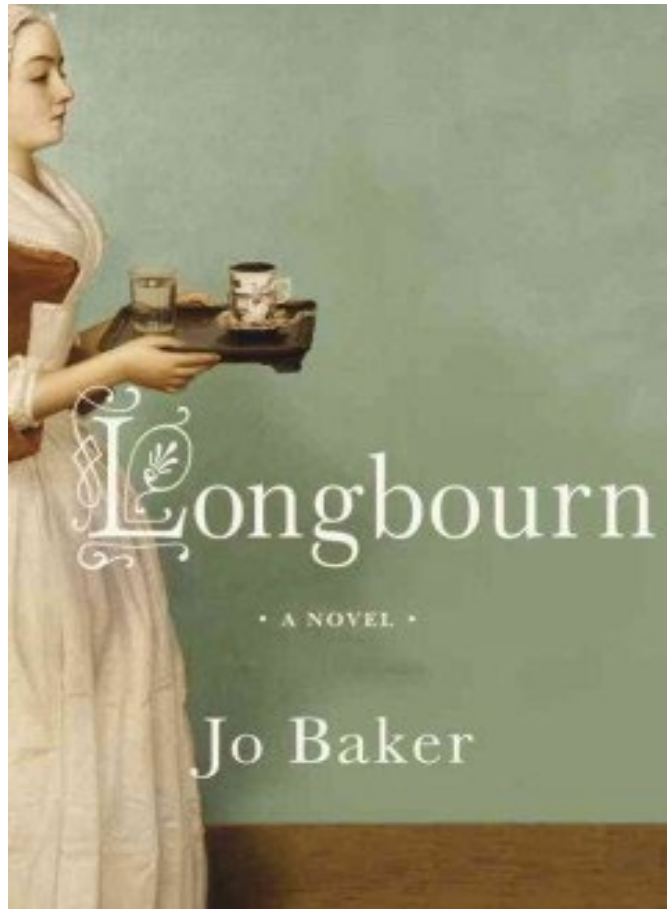


# What's streaming...

Many of our favorite historical fiction titles are making it to PBS, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, HBO, and Britbox.



# Beyond the Tudors, the Middle Ages, and the Confederacy



# World War II Historical Fiction

- Very strong focus on subversive **female protagonists** continues. Inspired by real historical women. Spy narratives.

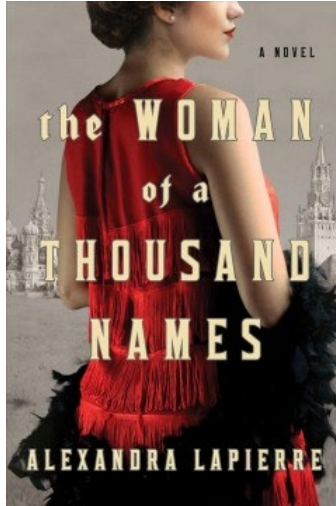


- More **religiously diverse** characters. Exploring Jewish experience in Poland and Ukraine (vs. England, France).

**NEW THEMES!\***  
Love in wartime  
Life in wartime

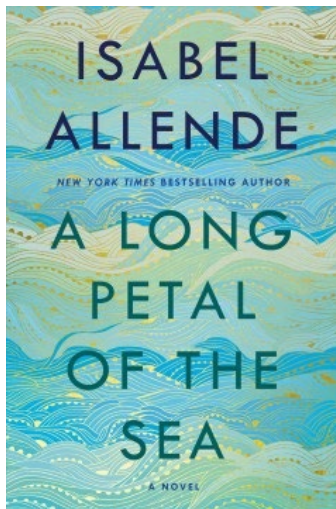
\*not exclusive to WWII historical fiction, but anticipate it will apply to many "love stories."

# Emerging settings / looking back to WW?



## Russian Revolution and Civil War (1917-1921)

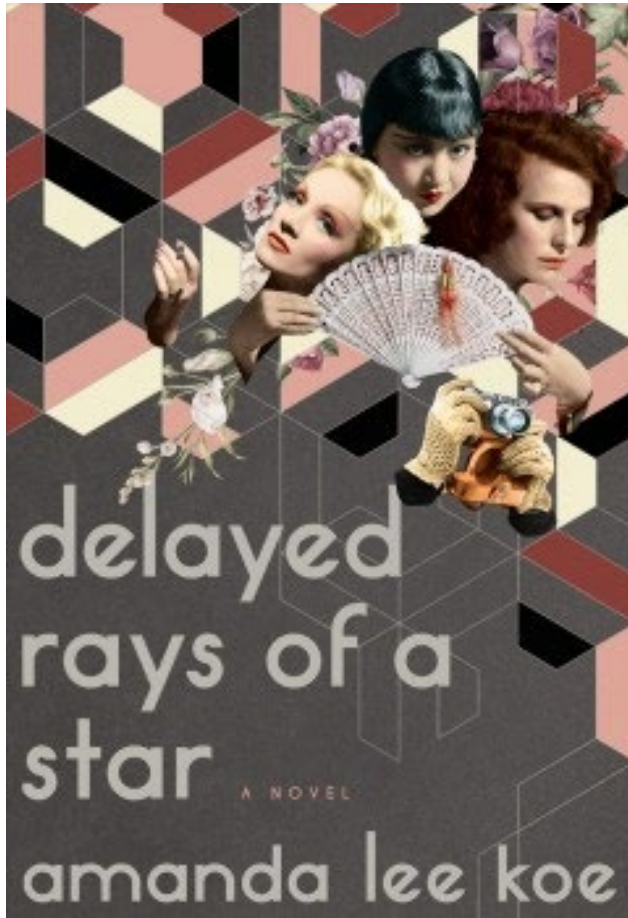
From the internationally best-selling author of *Between Love and Honor* comes a tale based on the true story of the Mata Hari of Russia, featuring a beautiful aristocrat fighting for survival during the deadly Russian Revolution.



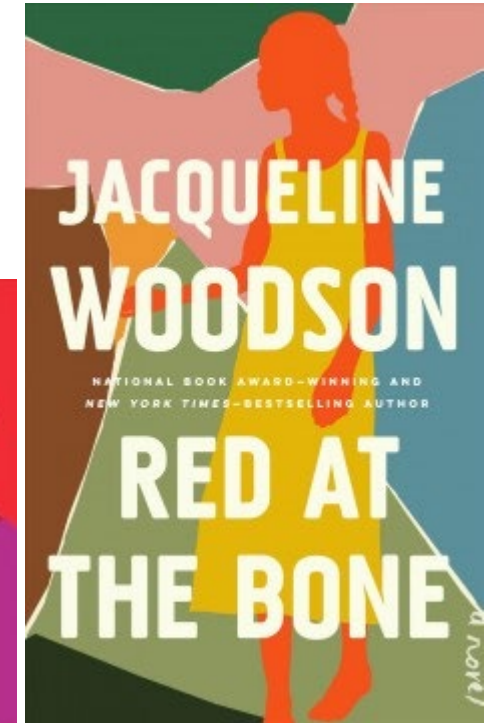
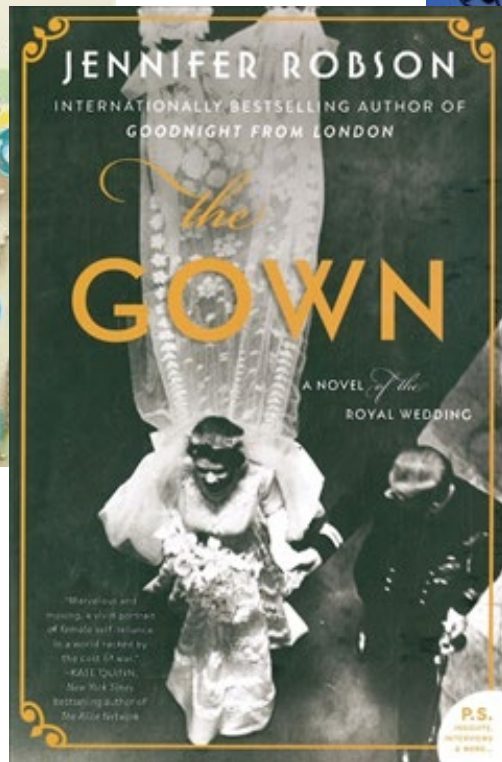
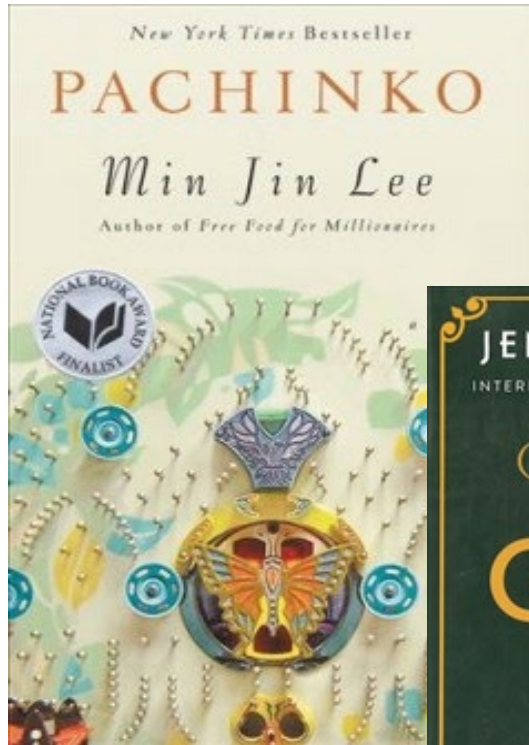
## 20<sup>th</sup> century

Sponsored by the poet Pablo Neruda to flee the violence of the Spanish Civil War, a pregnant widow and an army doctor unite in an arranged marriage, only to be swept up by the early days of World War II.

# Hollywood Glamour (1910s-1950s)



# Family sagas going strong!



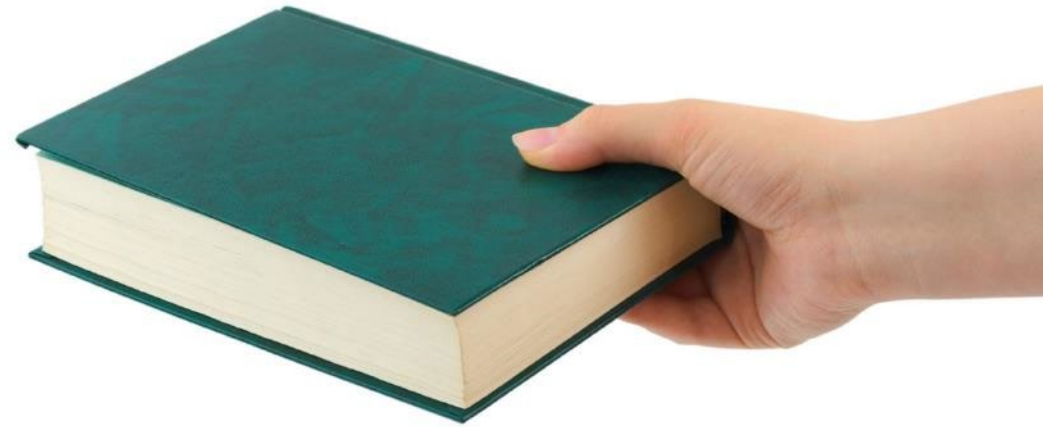
# Historical Fiction Starter Pack

Representative of genre

Well-reviewed

Wide appeal

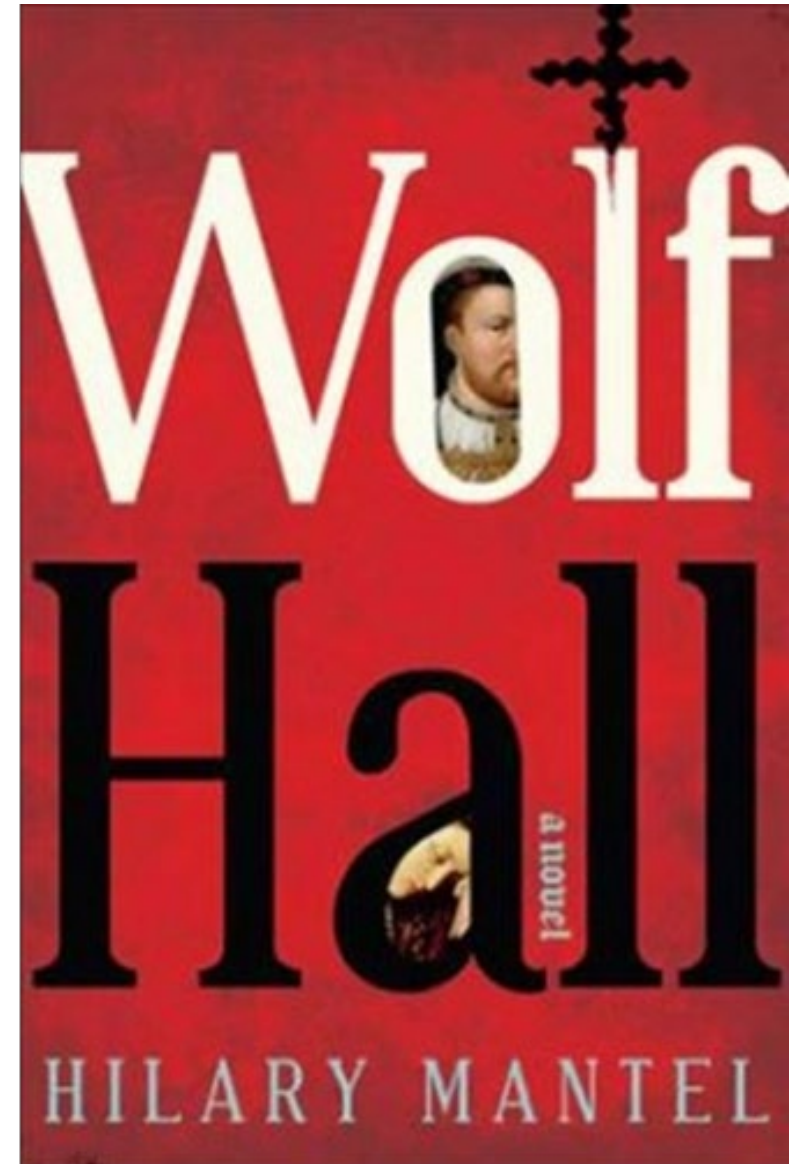
Stand-alone or series starter





# *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel

- Court intrigue
- Sympathetic characters
- Intricately plotted, sweeping
- Atmospheric; Melancholy; Reflective
- Meticulous attention to period detail



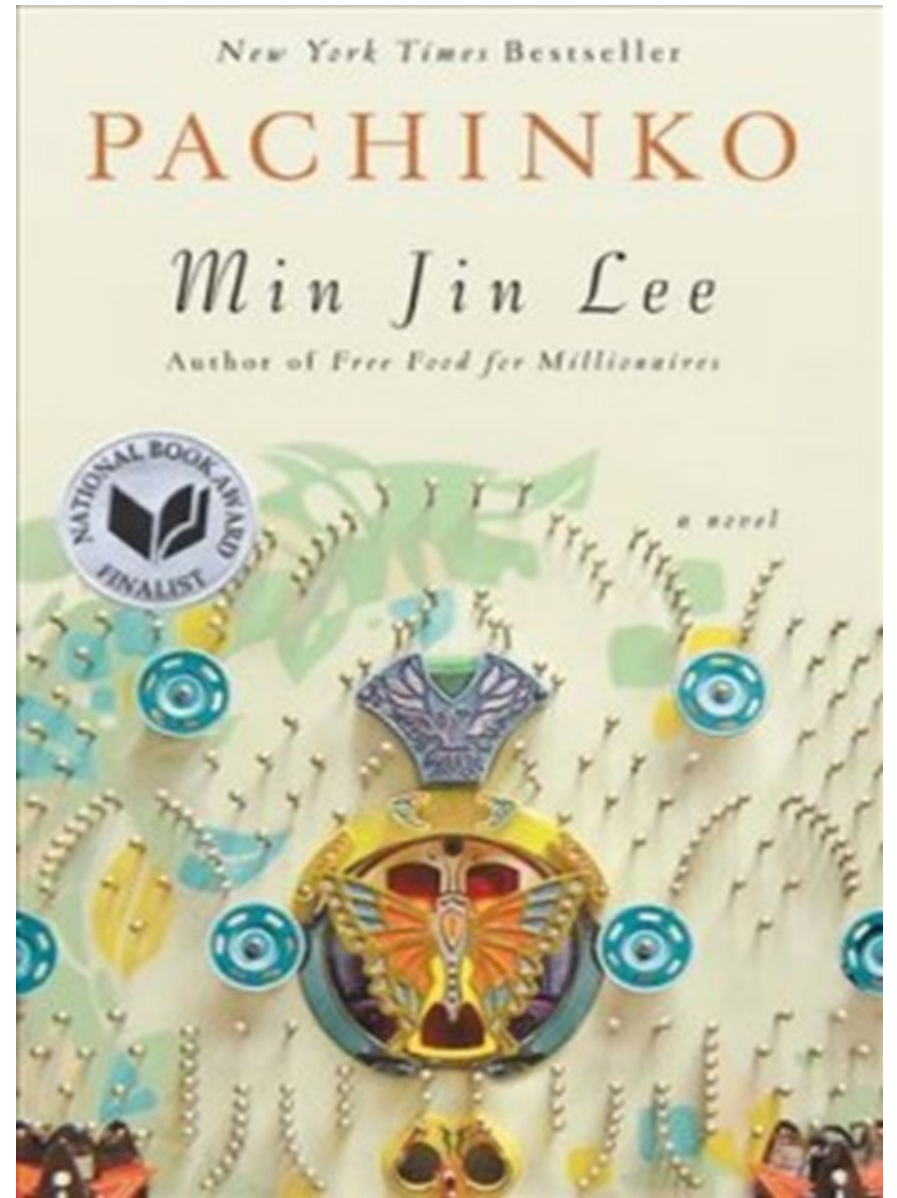
# *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (2019)

- Inspired by real events
- Complex, courageous characters
- Issue-oriented, Own voices
- Disturbing, sobering
- Gritty!
- Stylistically complex



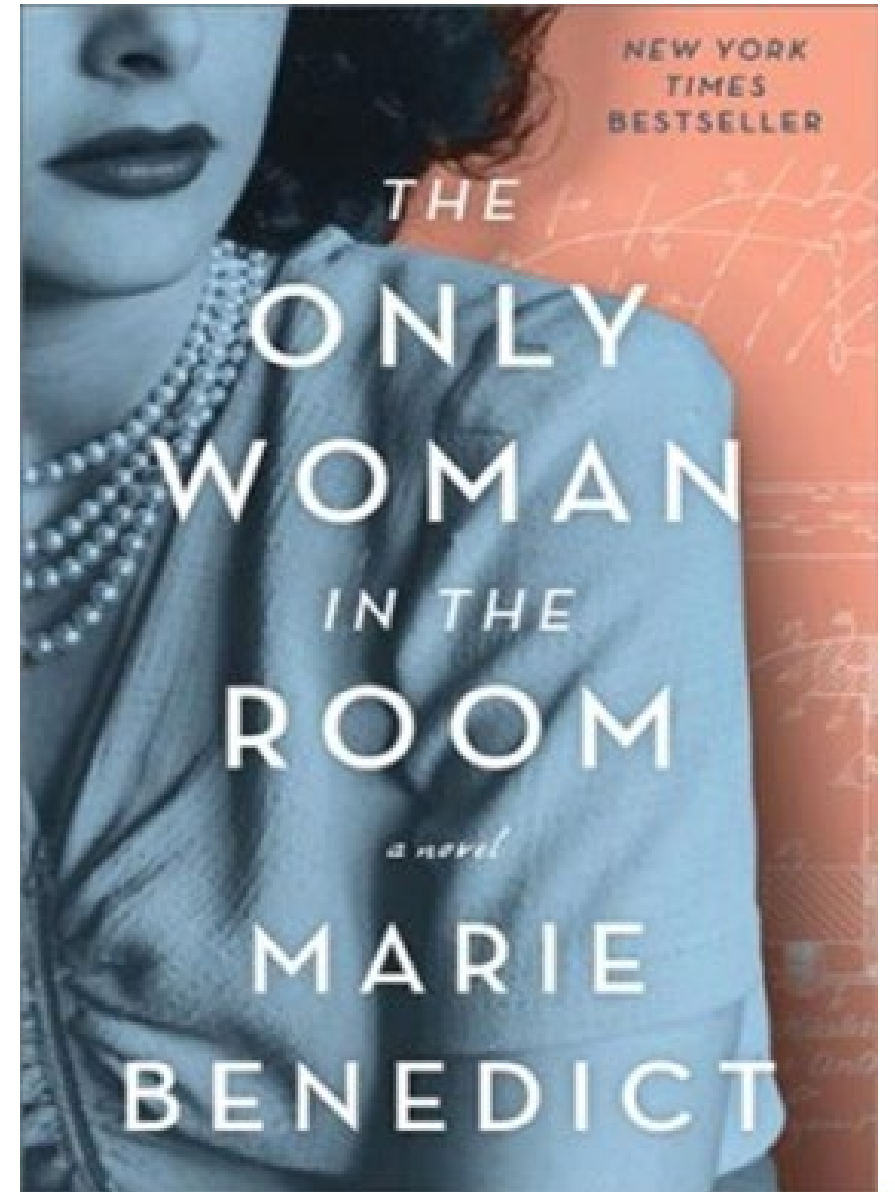
# *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee (2007)

- Family sagas
- Character-driven, large cast of characters
- Moving, reflective in tone
- Compelling
- A dense, immersive read



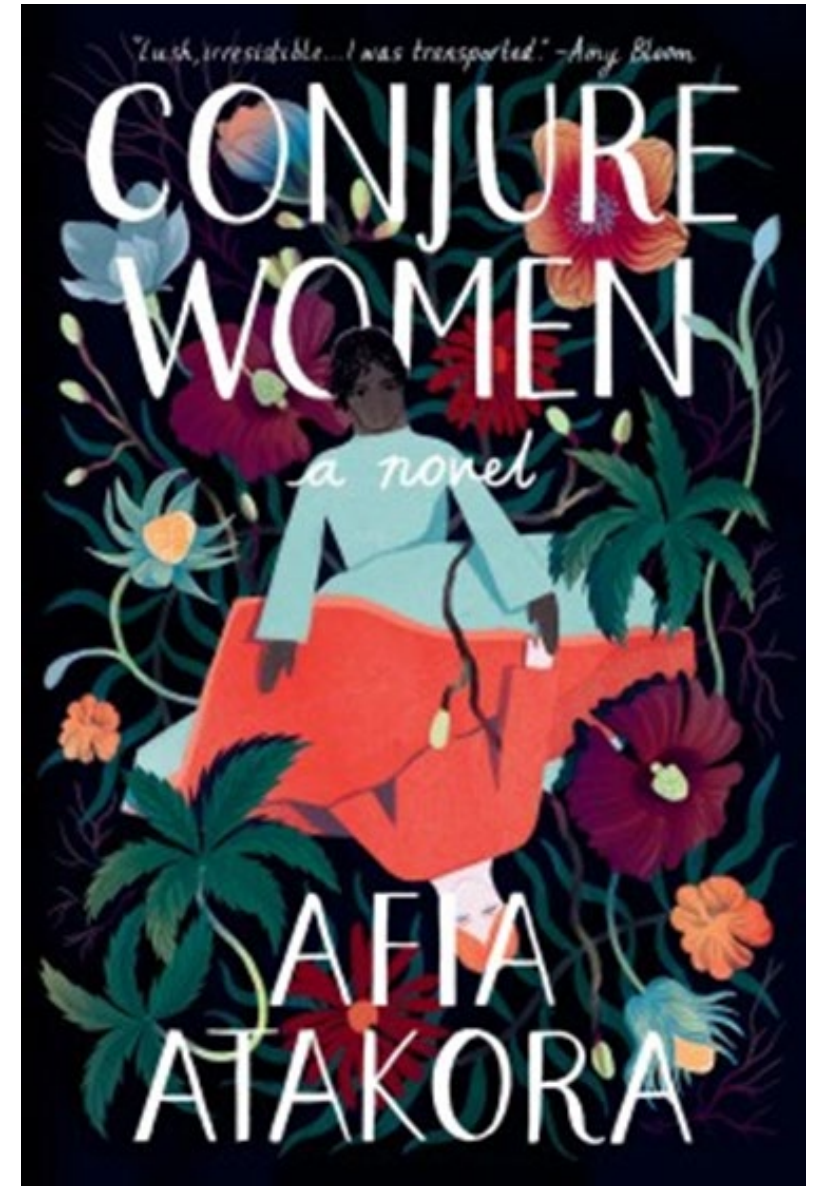
# *The Only Woman in the Room* by Marie Benedict (2010)

- Biographical fiction
- Strong female protagonist
- Dramatic storyline
- Blends all the WWII era trends!  
Hollywood glamour + spy fiction with an  
unforgettable, brilliant protagonist



# *Conjure Women* by Afia Atakora (2017)

- Character-driven
- Intricately plotted, nonlinear
- Own voices
- Heartwrenching
- Descriptive, dialect-filled

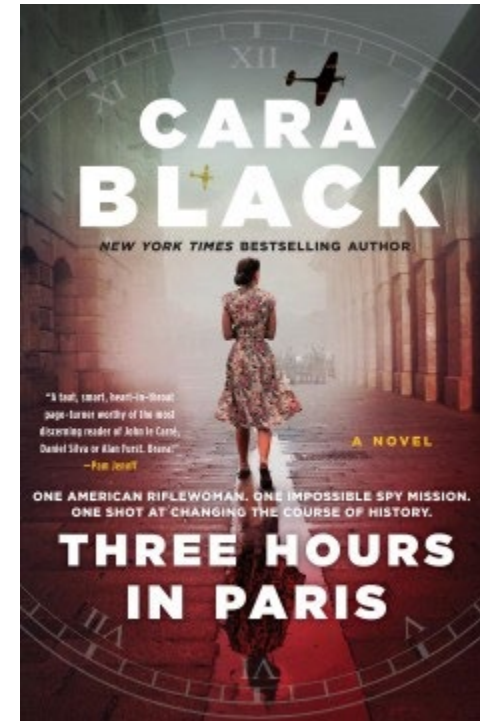
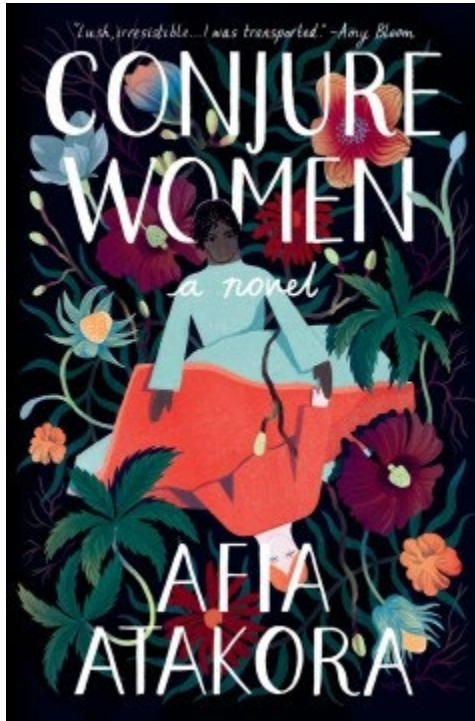


# Books we're excited about!



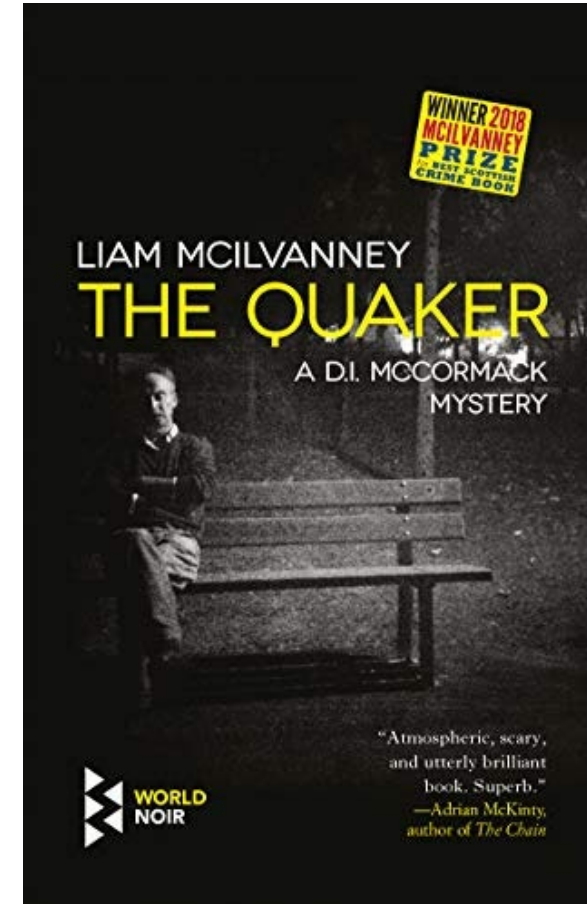
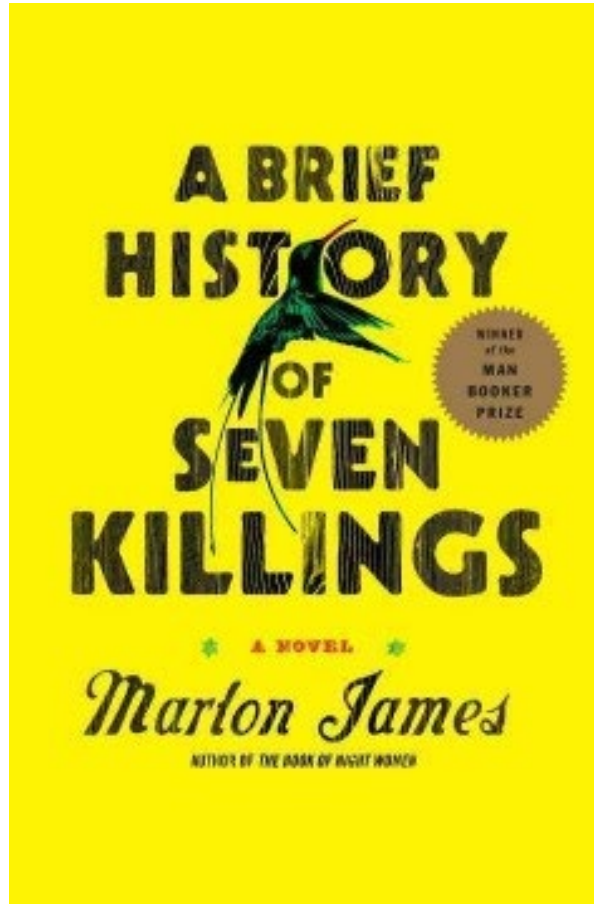
[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

# Kim – Top 5 TBR\*



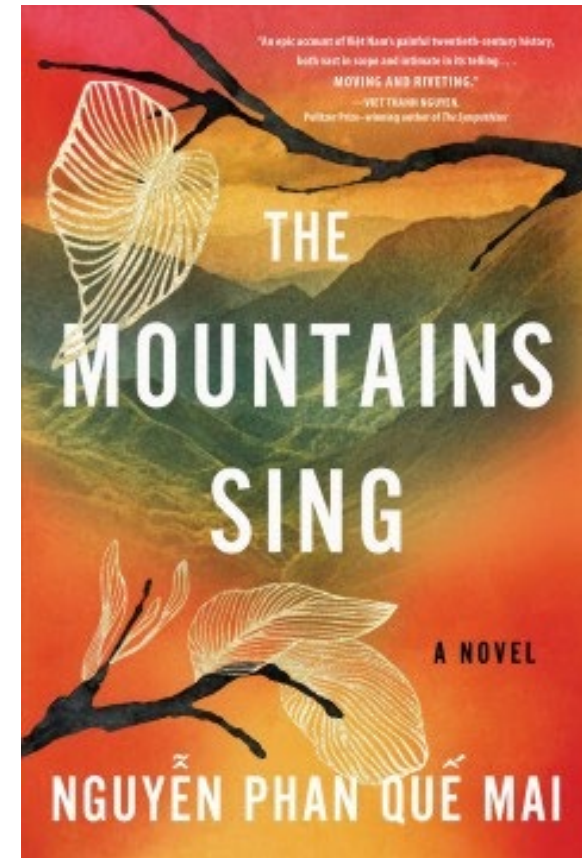
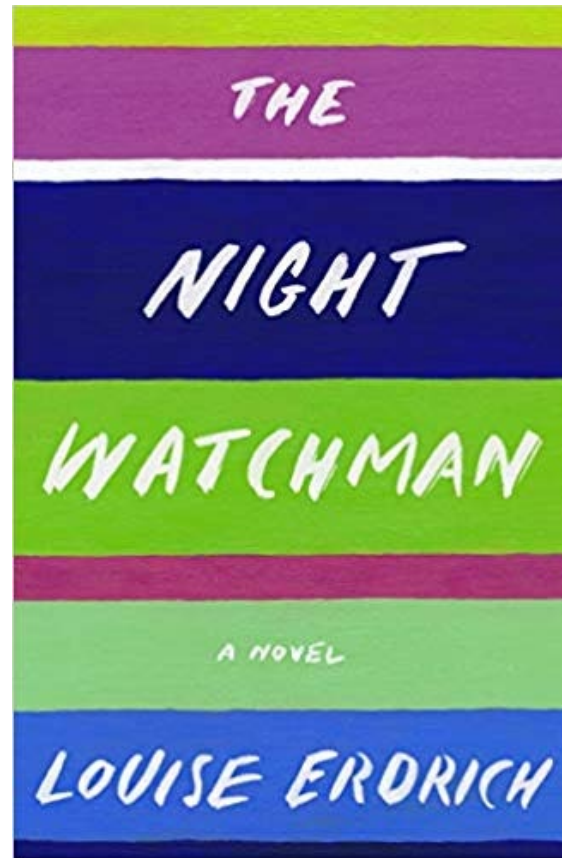
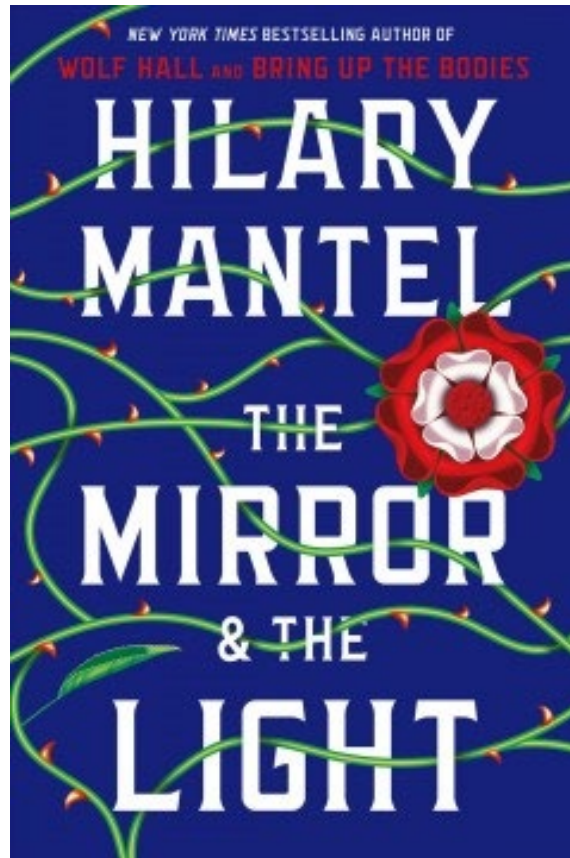
\*Plus one that's on Michael's list, too – stay tuned 😊

# Michael's Recent Favorites





# Books Michael can't wait to read



# Let's Talk! Q&A



Michael Santangelo

Deputy Director of Collection Management, BookOps, NY



Kim Burton

Readers' Advisory Librarian, NoveList



Thank you  
Learn more at  
[ebSCOhost.com/novelist](http://ebSCOhost.com/novelist) & [libraryreads.org](http://libraryreads.org)



# NoveList<sup>®</sup>

Empowering Librarians... Engaging Readers

## Finding Historical Fiction in NoveList

# NoveList Resources



# Genre outlines



## Getting Up to Speed in Historical Fiction By Bethany Latham

[Print this genre outline](#)

### What is historical fiction?

What "counts" as historical fiction can vary. At its broadest, it includes literary works, biographical fiction, alternate history, historical fantasy, historical romance, historical mysteries, time-slip novels, and multi-period offerings, whether they be multigenerational sagas or novels with at least one historical storyline that runs alongside contemporary plotting. It also includes novels about events that were contemporary to the author, but have since become historical with the passage of time. The [Historical Novel Society](#) includes all these works in its definition and delineates the "historical" aspect as anything set at least 50 years in the past.

### What happens in a historical fiction novel?

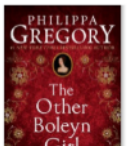
Absolutely anything can happen, as long as it happens in the past. This one amorphous genre is an umbrella for a variety of subgenres. Historical romances are distinguished by their emphasis on bringing protagonists together for fireworks; historical setting is almost an afterthought. The same can sometimes be said of historical mysteries -- historical ambiance can be pronounced or take a back seat to the crime-solving plotline. Alternate histories invariably attempt to answer the question of "what if?" with regard to foundational historical events (e.g. what if the Nazis had won WWII?) and how history would differ accordingly. Time-slip novels feature a modern-day protagonist somehow ending up in the past, surviving in an unfamiliar world. Multigenerational sagas follow a family down through the ages, often through multiple centuries and volumes. There is also the book-ended multi-period approach -- a modern-day protagonist digs into the past to solve a mystery, while a parallel historical storyline explicates the events the modern protagonist is researching. Biographical novels fictionalize the life of a real historical person.

*"Some readers seek adventure in what they identify as a more exciting age, others a respite in what they perceive to be simpler, slower times."*

### Why do people like historical fiction?

In a word: setting. Historical fiction is often judged on how faithful it is to its period, how well it evokes the past. Some readers seek adventure in what they identify as a more exciting age, others a respite in what they perceive to be simpler, slower times, while still others find perspective in the harshness and brutality of earlier periods when compared to the relative comfort of our own. All good historicals offer something important: education -- the chance to learn about earlier times and how people lived in them. To be effective, historical fiction requires careful research; authors must immerse themselves in the time and place they plan to write about, so that they can offer the same immersion to their readers. Anachronisms -- from technology to cultural missteps to character attitudes -- can pull readers out of period, and the point is to keep them absorbed in an earlier time.

### Key titles



#### *The other Boleyn girl*

Philippa Gregory

This 2001 romantic biographical novel about Anne Boleyn's lesser-known sister, Mary, provides an insider's perspective on the Tudor court of Henry VIII. It revived the genre of historical fiction, re-igniting its popularity and transforming it into what it is today.  
Series: Tudor novels (Philippa Gregory)

# Keeping up pages



### ABOUT HISTORICAL FICTION

Transporting readers back in time, this genre immerses them in timeless human stories made specific through the use of historical figures and events, as well as authentic period detail. [Novelist tone appeals](#) can help refine search results to find the perfect historical fiction read.

### GENRE ESSENTIALS

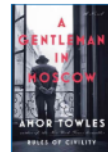
- [Getting Up to Speed in Historical Fiction](#)
- [Historical Fiction Trends](#)
- [All About Historical Fiction for Teens, Older Kids](#)

### AWARDS TO KNOW

- [Scott O'Dell Award](#)
- [W.Y. Boyd Literary Award](#)
- [Geoffrey Dillson Award](#)

### Historical fiction for your book club!

Historical fiction is a popular choice for book clubs.



Here is a title we recommend -- and a [Book Discussion Guide](#) with plot summary, discussion ideas, and further reading suggestions!

Check out our dedicated [Book Club Resources](#) page for more other titles your group may like.

### LOVE THESE LISTS!

#### Adults

- [Presidential Portraits](#)
- [Historical Women](#)
- [Royal Reads](#)
- [World War II](#)
- [Eyewitness to History](#)

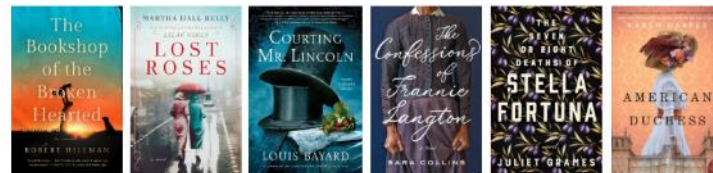
#### Teens

- [Classic Historical Fiction for Teens](#)
- [On the Front Lines](#)
- [The Late, Great 20th Century](#)

#### Older Kids

- [Historical Adventures](#)
- [WWII and the Holocaust](#)

### TRY THESE TITLES!



[Browse more Historical fiction...](#)

# Recommended reads lists

## Dear Diary



*At the edge of summer*  
(May 2016)

By: Brockmole, Jessica

Popularity: ★★☆☆☆

[Check Availability](#)



*Invitation to a bonfire*  
(Jun 2018)

By: Celt, Adrienne

Popularity: ★★☆☆☆

[Check Availability](#)



*Evergreen falls*  
(Aug 2015)

By: Freeman, Kimberley, 1970-

Popularity: ★★☆☆☆

[Check Availability](#)

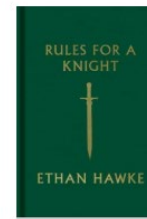


*Last Christmas in Paris*  
(Oct 2017)

By: Gaynor, Hazel

Popularity: ★★☆☆☆

[Check Availability](#)



*Rules for a knight: the last letter of Sir Thomas Lemuel Haw ...*  
(Nov 2015)

By: Hawke, Ethan, 1970-

Popularity: ★★★★★

[Check Availability](#)



*I'll be seeing you*  
(May 2013)

By: Hayes, Suzanne

Popularity: ★★☆☆☆

[Check Availability](#)

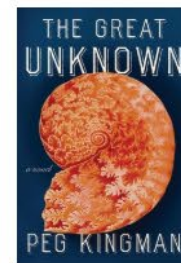
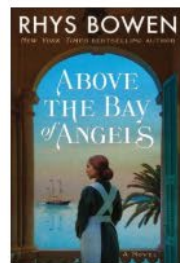
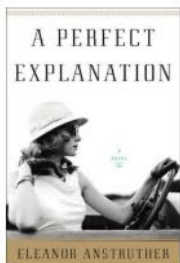
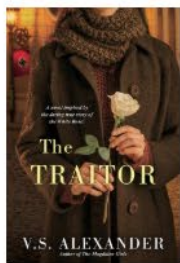
# Genre browse

Adult Teen Ages 9-12 Ages 0-8

New and Popular in...

## Forthcoming Historical Fiction [View All](#)

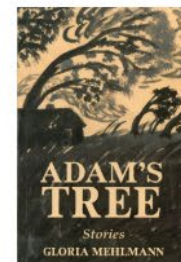
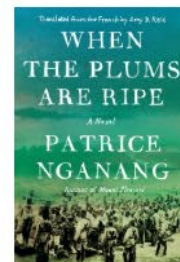
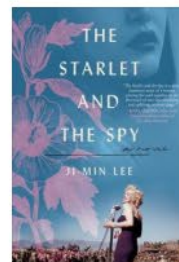
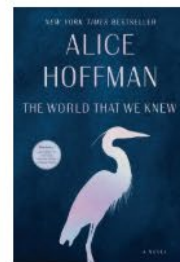
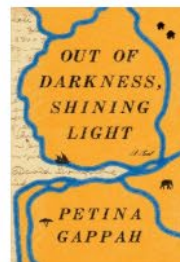
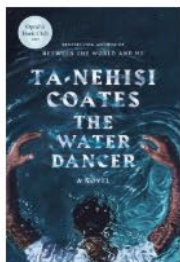
New books about old times.



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## Own Voices [View All](#)

Historical fiction in which the protagonist and the author share a marginalized identity.



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## Victorian Era [View All](#)

Featuring the button-downed citizens of the British empire.



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## Lists

- The Holocaust
- Audiobooks: Historical Fiction
- World War II
- Best Historical Fiction 2019
- The Blue and the Gray

## Helping Readers

- Keeping Up ... Genres Table of Contents
- Keeping Up ... Historical Fiction
- African American Fiction Authors
- Witchcraft and Gender in Historical Fiction
- Diverse Reading: Historical Fiction
- Summer of my German Soldier
- The Heart's Invisible Furies
- Gould's Book of Fish