

RTC LIBRARY E-NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2020

Welcome to the AUGUST 2020 issue of RTC LIBRARY E-NEWSLETTER

In this issue: Recommended Reads: Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine, The House of the Spirits, Mother Daughter Widow Wife.

Recommended Reads from the RTC community

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman

Eleanor Oliphant is a beautifully written story which revolves around Eleanor's daily life. Everything in her life is followed by a perfect timetable and schedule. As you begin reading about Eleanor everything seems fine in her life but at the same time something seems off. To find out about the odd in her life this books keep you hooked till the end.

At 29, Eleanor Oliphant lives an utterly solitary life that almost works. During the week, she lives an ordinary life working in an office and no one bothers her there as she tries her best to stay away from the office drama and rumors for almost eight years. Her boss, the hapless Bob, is a good man, if not altogether successful.

Eleanor never had a manicure or a haircut, worn high heels, had anyone visit her apartment, or even had a friend. After a mysterious event in her childhood that left half her face badly scarred, she was raised in foster care, spent her college years in an abusive relationship, and is now, as the title states, perfectly fine. Her extreme social awkwardness has made her the butt of nasty jokes among her colleagues, which don't seem to bother her much, though one of them notices she is stockpiling painkillers and becoming increasingly obsessed with an unrealistic crush on a local musician. Eleanor's life begins to change when Raymond, a goofy guy from the IT department, takes her for a potential friend. As if he were luring a feral animal from its hiding place with a bit of cheese, he gradually brings Eleanor out of her shell. Then it turns out that shell was serving a purpose.

Gail Honeyman's endearing debut is part comic novel, part emotional thriller, and part love story. Get yourself a copy of the book if you haven't read it yet.

Quotes from Eleanor Oliphant that will please any introvert.

- 1) “Some people, weak people, fear solitude. What they fail to understand is that there’s something very liberating about it; once you realize that you don’t need anyone, you can take care of yourself. That’s the thing: it’s best just to take care of yourself.”
- 2) “But, by careful observation from the sidelines, I’d worked out that social success is often built on pretending just a little. Popular people sometimes have to laugh at things they don’t find very funny, do things they don’t particularly want to, with people whose company they don’t particularly enjoy. Not me. I had decided, years ago, that if the choice was between that or flying solo, then I’d fly solo. It was safer that way.”
- 3) “I allowed my mind to wander. I’ve found this to be a very effective way of passing the time; you take a situation or a person and start to imagine nice things that might happen. You can make anything happen, anything at all, inside a daydream.”
- 4) “It never ceases to amaze me, the things they find interesting, amusing or unusual. I can only assume they’ve led very sheltered lives.”
- 5) “These days, loneliness is the new cancer—a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way. A fearful, incurable thing, so horrifying that you dare not mention it; other people don’t want to hear the word spoken aloud for fear that they might too be afflicted, or that it might tempt fate into visiting a similar horror upon them.”
- 6) “I have often noticed that people who routinely wear sportswear are the least likely sort to participate in athletic activity.”
- 7) “It turned out that if you saw the same person with some degree of regularity, then the conversation was immediately pleasant and comfortable—you could pick up where you left off, as it were, rather than having to start afresh each time.”
- 8) “People don’t like these facts, but I can’t help that. If someone asks you how you are, you are meant to say FINE. You are not meant to say that you cried yourself to sleep last night because you hadn’t spoken to another person for two consecutive days. FINE is what you say.”

- 9) “Was this how it worked, then, successful social integration? Was it really that simple? Wear some lipstick, go to the hairdressers and alternate the clothes you wear?”

- 10) “A woman who knew her own mind and scorned the conventions of polite society. We were going to get along just fine.”

**Thank You
Tashi Choden
Associate Lecturer
Social Sciences**

The House of the Spirits by Isabelle Allende

Isabel Allende's debut novel, originally written in Spanish but later translated into myriad languages (I read the English translation from RTC's library), is a sweeping saga of both family and modern Latin America. Across nearly five hundred pages, Allende unravels the beautiful and vibrant, but painfully cursed, story of four generations of the del Valle family set against the backdrop of post-colonial South America.

Allende employs two alternating narrators: Esteban Trueba, the central male character, who marries into the del Valle family and a descendent who discovers the diaries of Esteban's wife and whose identity is only revealed at the novel's end (no spoilers here!). The dual narration offers readers a robust perspective on the many charismatic members of the family, while at times using the divergent views to great, if subtle, effect—as when Esteban's physical transformations in later life are described in succession by both narrators.

The House of Spirits is a literary masterpiece as well as a commentary on the historical situation: it artfully combines magical realism with a fictionalized and anonymized account of the very real political struggles and peoples of twentieth-century Chile. Although all forms of tragedy—poverty, disease, death, and rape—permeate the novel, it nevertheless leaves the reader with deep hope, not to mention the satisfaction of having completed one of the great novels of the twentieth century!

A final note: for those who enjoy the TV show *Jane the Virgin*, this novel is a must-read if one wishes to fully understand its titular character and the show as a whole.

Thank You
Dana M. Polanichka,
Ph.D. Social Sciences
Professor (Part-time)

Mother Daughter Widow Wife by Robin Wasserman

A long-time author of young adult fiction, Robin Wasserman has just published her second novel for adult audiences and the first whose central protagonists are not teenagers.

The book centers around two main protagonists: Alice, a young college student who is seeking answers about her mother who has recently gone missing, and Elizabeth “Lizzie” Epstein, an author and former researcher who once worked with Alice’s mother. Important additional characters include Dr. Benjamin Strauss (Elizabeth’s former supervisor and husband), Gwen (Elizabeth’s best friend from childhood), and Strauss’s daughter from a first marriage.

The novel’s narrative jumps back and forth in time, a technique that further conveys the central themes of memory, identity, and the passage of time. Twenty years in the past, Lizzie has just begun work at an institution for memory research where her subject is a “Wendy Doe” who showed up on a bus with no memory of who she was—and also little desire to rediscover herself. In the present-day, Alice tracks down Elizabeth as she seeks to find her mother who she has just learned disappeared once before. That is, Alice’s mother was, prior to Alice’s birth, Wendy Doe.

Mother Daughter Widow Wife is a difficult book to put down: from the first pages, Wasserman tantalizes the reader with questions about what might have happened to Wendy and the desire to find those answers. Moreover, the individuals themselves and especially their relationships with one another are deeply compelling. It is, however, the probing questions about the malleability of memory and the connection between memory and identity that transform the novel from a gripping suspense into a thoughtful meditation on what it means to be.

Thank You
Dana M. Polanichka,
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Wanted! Book reviews from Faculty, Staff, and Students

If you have read a good book and would like to contribute a review to the Library Newsletter, we would love to receive one from you. Tell us a little about the book and why you liked it in 250-500 words. If interested, send your review to gyanupradhan@rtc.bt or come by the library and see the library staff.

Thanks!!

YOU MUST TELL YOURSELF, "NO MATTER HOW HARD IT IS, OR HOW HARD IT GETS, I AM GOING TO MAKE IT..."-Les Brown.