

STAR

HOUSTON CHRONICLE | HoustonChronicle.com and chron.com | Monday, July 29, 2013 | Section D ***  Houston Chronicle



Jhumpa Lahiri



Robert Boswell



George Saunders



James McBride



Khaled Hosseini



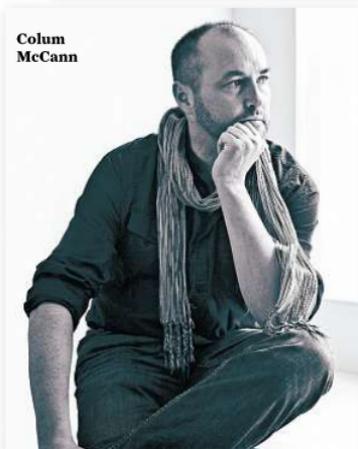
Daniel Alarcón



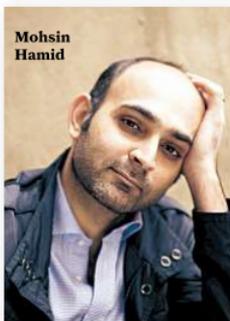
Elizabeth Strout



Anne Carson



Colum McCann



Mohsin Hamid



Chimamanda Adichie

Courtesy photos

BOOKISH

Heavy-hitting authors

Pulitzer Prize winners among writers at Margaret Root Brown Reading Series

By Maggie Galehouse

Racism. Displacement. Trans-Atlantic crossings. Relationships forged — and undone — by war and politics.

These are shared threads among the works of 11 acclaimed writers, appearing in Houston as part of the Margaret Root Brown Reading Series.

Inprint, the city's leading literary nonprofit, hosts the series, which launches its 33rd season Aug. 26. It's a global guest list, with authors from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Peru, the United States and elsewhere. Most have lived on more than one continent.

"So few places are homogeneous anymore," notes Marilyn Jones, Inprint's

associate director. "This is what the world looks like, and this is the world writers want to talk about."

The authors will sit for candid, onstage interviews after their readings, which gives the audience a chance to see what they're really like. (Funny? Dour? Guarded? Shy?) And perhaps most incredibly, the price for individual tickets — \$5 — hasn't changed since 1980.

Among the big names this year is **Khaled Hosseini**, appearing Sept. 23. Best known for "The Kite Runner," Hosseini will read from his third novel, "And the Mountains Echoed," now ranked No. 3 on the New York Times best-seller list. It's a sprawling, poignant story — Hosseini's books make

General admission tickets

\$5 general admission tickets are sold in advance online and at the door; free student and senior rush tickets are available at the door if a reading isn't sold out. Readings begin at 7:30 p.m.; doors open 6:45 p.m. Information: inprinthouston.org. More information on Page D3.

everyone cry — that follows a young Afghan boy separated from his sister.

Two more heavy hitters: Pulitzer Prize winners **Jhumpa Lahiri** on Oct. 13 and **Elizabeth Strout**, Feb. 24.

Lahiri won the Pulitzer in 2000 for her debut story collection, "Interpreter of Maladies." Her first novel, "The

Series continues on D3

Series features authors from across the globe

Series from page D1

Namesake," was made into a film. In Houston, she'll read from "The Lowland," her forthcoming novel about two Indian brothers.

"Olive Kitteridge," a novel in 13 stories, earned Strout her Pulitzer in 2009. She followed that with "The Burgess Boys" this spring, a book about coming home. Brothers Jim and Bob Burgess are called back to Maine by their sister, whose son is involved in a racially charged incident.

As in seasons past, there are "weird lovely echoes" between some of the featured books, says Rich Levy, Inprint's executive director.

Both "The Good Lord Bird" by **James McBride** (appearing Aug. 26) and "TransAtlantic" by **Colum McCann** (Nov. 18) feature 19th-century abolitionist and social reformer Frederick Douglass.

McBride's satire follows a young boy who joins John Brown's crusade against slavery. To stay alive the boy must pass — as a girl.

McCann's novel features three distinct story arcs, one of which follows Douglass on his 1845 tour of Britain.

For McCann, an Irish writer who won the National Book Award for "Let the Great World Spin," appearing in Texas is a bit of a homecoming. Decades ago, he taught wilderness survival in Brenham and finished his B.A. in English and history at the University of Texas at Austin.

Race also plays a major role in "Americanah," by **Chimamanda Adichie**, a Nigerian-born writer who now divides her time between the U.S. and Africa. "Americanah" depicts Nigerian lovers — a woman who has made a life for herself in the U.S. and a man who has become wealthy in a democratic Nigeria — who must decide if and how they'll be together.

"Her narrator talks about race through the eyes of an African living in the U.S.," Levy explains.

Adichie appears in Houston with McCann on Nov. 18.

Local authors are part of Inprint's lineup each year. On Aug. 26, novelist and University of Houston professor **Robert Boswell** will read from "Tumbledown," his new novel about a therapist and some patients in his program. A tantalizing passage from page 2 speaks to the title: "On this particular day — the day James Candler would come unhinged — he was

Margarett Root Brown Reading Series 2013-14

Aug. 26: Robert Boswell and James McBride, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby

Sept. 23: Khaled Hosseini, Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas

Oct. 13: Jhumpa Lahiri, Wortham Theater Center

Nov. 18: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie & Colum McCann, Alley Theatre, 615 Texas

Jan. 27: George Saunders, Alley Theatre

Feb. 24: Elizabeth Strout, Wortham Theater Center

March 24: Daniel Alarcón and Mohsin Hamid, Stude Concert Hall, Rice University

April 28: Anne Carson, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

Season tickets

The Margarett Root Brown Reading Series is named for one of the founding directors of the Brown Foundation, the lead underwriter. With \$175 season tickets, available at inprinthouston.org, ticket holders receive:

- » Reserved seating at each venue
- » Books signed first in the book-signing line
- » A signed copy of Jhumpa Lahiri's forthcoming novel, "The Lowland"
- » Two reserved-section guest passes
- » Free parking at the Alley Theatre for two readings

up earlier than usual, his morning beginning with the smell of brownies in the oven, a dripping spatula in his mouth, and an uncertain feeling in his gut that he was about to do something devastatingly stupid."

George Saunders, master of the short story, will appear Jan. 27. Saunders writes howlingly odd, funny satire with occasional tender spots. He earned national acclaim and a place on best-seller lists for his latest collection, "Tenth of December," thanks in part to a well-timed profile in the New York Times Magazine. Saunders has long been admired in literary circles and long ignored outside them.

On March 24, Inprint welcomes Peruvian-born **Daniel Alarcón**, who'll read from his forthcoming novel, "At Night We Walk in Circles," and Pakistan-born **Mohsin Hamid**, who'll read from "How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia."

Alarcón is also a journalist and translator who co-founded Radio Ambulante, a storytelling podcast in Spanish. His new novel circles a man cast in the lead role of a play written by the leader of a famous guerrilla theater troupe.

Hamid has lived in Lahore, London, New York and California. His novel, "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize and made into a film directed by Mira Nair. His new book, a fictional story presented as a manual, offers 12 steps to achieve

fantastic wealth in Asia.

The final author of the season is poet **Anne Carson**, who'll read April 28 from her recent collection, "red doc."

According to Levy, Carson breaks all the rules. Trained as a classicist, she doesn't write traditional narrative poetry. Instead, "she takes classical references and brings them into contemporary times," he says.

"G" is the main character of "red doc," short for Geryon, a mythical creature. Here is Carson describing the landscape "G" sees:

CROWS AS BIG as barns/ rave overhead. Still/ driving north. Night is a/ slit all day is white./ Panels of torn planet loom/ and line up one behind the/ other to the far edge of/ what eyes can see.

maggie.galehouse@chron.com

CINE

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TOP OF THE NEWS

Nation | World

» **Mideast:** Israel's decision to release 104 Palestinian prisoners opens door to direct peace talks after years of stalemates. **A5**

» **Detroit:** Cash-strapped city looks to push some employees out of city-run health coverage into new insurance markets. **A4**

City & State

» **Spain train crash:** Clear Lake's Myrta Fariza dies from injuries sustained in last week's tragedy. **B1**



Star

Renowned authors in town

Annual reading series brings Pulitzer-winning writers to Houston. **D1**

» **TV:** Local chef is Vegas-bound after "Hell's Kitchen" win. **D1**



Business

» **Power hungry:** World energy consumption is expected to rise more than 50 percent by 2040. **B6**

» **Startups:** San Antonio student has plans to expand beer yeast testing company. **B6**

Sports

» **Texans:** With others hurt, Ryan Harris impresses early in camp at right tackle. **C1**

» **Astros:** Another solid outing by rookie Jarred Cosart wasn't enough this time. **C1**

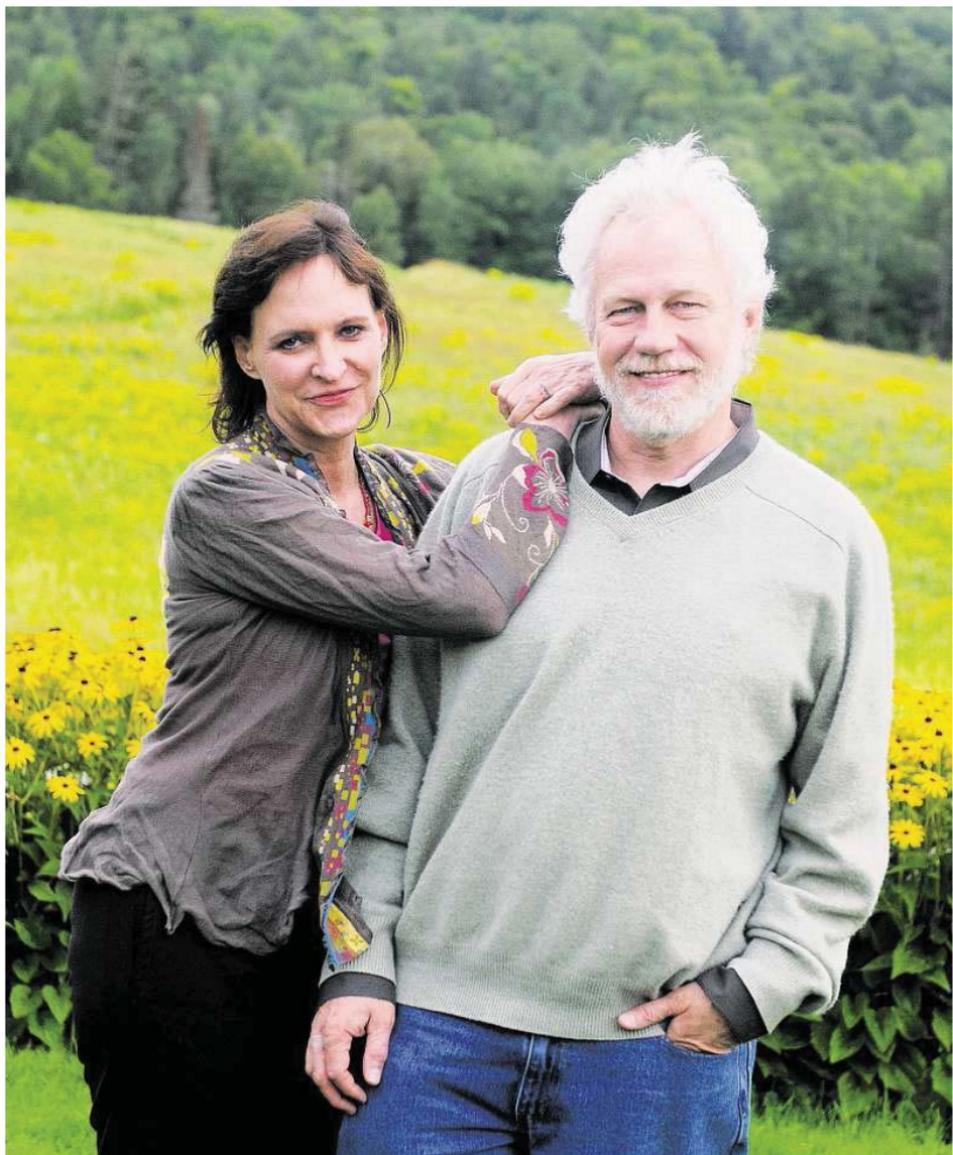
Online

» **Chat with the mayor:** Chat with Mayor Annise Parker at 12:30 p.m. Monday in the Houston Politics blog. Leave questions in advance at chron.com/mayoralchat.

HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

STAR

HOUSTON CHRONICLE | HoustonChronicle.com and chron.com | Monday, August 19, 2013 | Section D *** Houston Chronicle Life &



Edward Brown

Antonya Nelson and Robert Boswell are on the faculty of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Ripton, Vt., this summer. The married couple are writers and professors who share the Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Houston.

BOOKISH

Author, professor revisits his past for latest book

Author appearance

Robert Boswell will appear with James McBride at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 26 at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby, as part of Inprint's Brown Reading Series. Boswell will read from "Tumbledown" and McBride will read from his new novel, "The Good Lord Bird." \$5. Information: inprinthouston.org

Back in the day — before he came to Houston, before he called himself a writer — Robert Boswell was a counselor.

"It was a tumultuous time in my life," says Boswell, 59, on the phone from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont, where he and his wife, writer Antonya Nelson, are on the faculty this summer. "I was a counselor for two years in my 20s in an odd kind of place near San Diego."

He evaluated clients, giving



MAGGIE GALEHOUSE

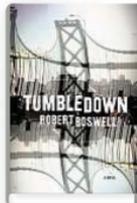
tests and writing reports for other counselors who'd be working with the clients long term.

It was a job where the worst-case scenario never really left the room.

"When you're dealing with people who are seeing you because they attempted suicide or something of that nature, you know you will eventually have a client who can't pull through," he says. "And when it happens, it's devastating."

Boswell, who teaches creative writing at the University of Houston, always knew he'd write about

Bookish continues on D4



'Tumbledown'

By Robert Boswell
Greywolf Press,
448 pp., \$26

Bookish: Therapist, his patients center of 'Tumbledown'

Bookish from page D1

that piece of his life.

"Tumbledown," his 12th book, was released this month by Greywolf Press. A moving and often darkly hilarious meditation on sanity, it follows "an interesting bunch of misfits" — the counselors and clients at a California treatment facility called Onyx Springs.

James Candler, a 33-year-old therapist at the center, is on track for a promotion, but he's not a therapist who leads by example. He cheats on his fiancée, drives a dumb, expensive car he can't afford and so on. Over the course of a few weeks, his life veers off course.

The lives of Candler's clients have already veered off course — some temporarily, some irrevocably. Mick is a bright schizophrenic who falls for Karly, a hottie with an IQ of 65. Vex lives in an attic and pours his toxic, violent tendencies into fixing things. Alonso, a manic masturbator, repeats the same phrase: "Not but hell no."

There are others. The characters in the novel come with their own creation stories — formative, no-turning-back incidents that shook and altered their lives in "this tumbledown world."

Q: Your novel looks at some painful scenarios: a big brother's

sudden and permanent and inexplicable disappearance; a son's baffling descent onto madness; a husband who one day cannot lift his coffee cup; a mishap in a neighbor's pool that leaves a child's ability to function in the world forever diminished; and more. There are strains of Ken Kesey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" here, but wouldn't you say "Tumbledown" borrows also from an earlier era, one with an appetite for big books and a large cast?

A: This is a book that had to be about a lot of characters. I wanted to write about when I was a counselor and include the clients' points of view. It's also true I love those big novels. George Eliot. Tolstoy. "Anna Karenina" is maybe my favorite novel. But it seems like in the here and now there is a contemporary resistance to that kind of story. I wanted to find some way to embrace the big novel while acknowledging that these days we have trouble buying into omniscient narrators.

Q: Did the point of view grow organically from the content?

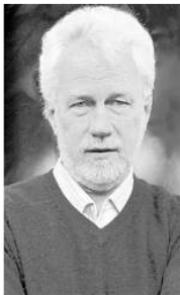
A: When I was a counselor, I'd evaluate clients. I'd give them all these tests, and then I'd write up reports. Sometimes the tests and reports were

viewed as if they were omniscient, as if after a few weeks I knew everything there was to know. The tests were good, but not foolproof. So I came to think of my reports as forms of unreliable omniscience. "Tumbledown" took me 10 years to write. Eight years in, I decided to make unreliable omniscience the point of view of the book.

Q: Candler puts Billy Atlas, his oldest and best friend, in charge of his signature "sheltered workshop," an assembly line where Mick, Karly and other clients work against the clock, packaging party-hose in boxes that look like tarantulas. Billy has a jangly Curious George quality — he's an endearingly predictable and unpredictable screw-up. Where did he come from?

A: He's based on a friend I grew up with. He was one of the hardest characters to let go at the end because I liked being with him. I ultimately came to think that his humanity shows through in maybe the most surprising ways. A novel is such an ordeal and especially this novel, with so many points of view. When you happen upon a character who entertains you and keeps the narrative lively, it feels like such a gift.

Q: What's at stake



Courtesy photo

Author Robert Boswell shares with his wife the Cullen Chair in creative writing at the University of Houston.

in the book? What's the big assumption teetering under your story?

A: There are people who believe that there is such a thing as normality. For some of them it's a state of being they take for granted. For others, it's an aspirational state, a thing they wish to achieve. When I was a counselor, one of the things I would think about a lot is, if you're dealing with someone who has a mental or psychological problem, there is this explicit or implicit desire to become more normal. So you're always questioning, what does that mean?

Q: "Tumbledown" has a lot of language

play. Candler collects phrases from his clients. ("I know your name, I just don't know the word for it.") Mick free associates when he's off his meds. ("It's just this wrinkling in the words going from here to 'ternity in their cable cars...") Even the simple Karly has her moments. ("Once paid a time ...") Is this always a part of your work?

A: When I was a kid, my maternal grandmother came down with a disease something like ALS. By the time I knew her, she could no longer walk. She could speak but didn't make sense to anyone except her daughters. It seemed magical to me. It seemed like the women in the family had a secret language, and I believe that's why I became so fascinated with odd language. It shows up in many of my novels and stories. I have a great time writing sentences one can understand even though they don't make sense. It's one of my obsessions.

Q: You take a formal risk near the ending of "Tumbledown." Still happy you did it?

A: Ultimately, I really had to stick my neck out. I had to try and see if it would work. I wasn't really happy until I came up with that ending.

Q: You share the

Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at UH with your wife. How does that work?

A: It sounds like we're sitting on the same crowded cushion, but it's great for all kinds of reasons. One is that we have wonderful colleagues. We all get along and respect each other's work, which is very rare. We also have a great director, J. Kastely, and amazing students. The "chair" Toni and I share just means we each teach two classes over the course of the year.

Q: You write novels, nonfiction and short stories, including, most recently, "The Heyday of the Inensitive Bastards" and "The Half-Known World: On Writing Fiction." Have you always wanted to be a writer?

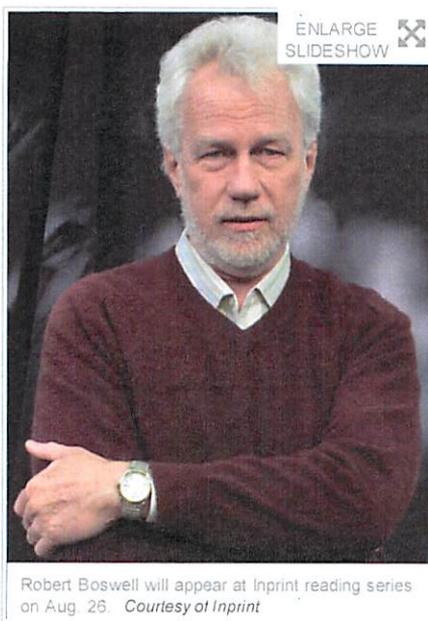
A: Yes. I was raised in a hardworking family. My parents grew up during the Great Depression. They encouraged me to write but also believed I should find some way to make a living. So I got a grad degree in counseling and got a good job in San Diego. ... But when you're evaluating people and trying to decide how they should spend their lives you can't help but think about your own life. I counseled myself right out of that job.

maggie.galehouse@chron.com

BOOK TALK

Inprint's literary world tour begins at home: UH novelist Robert Boswell explores *Tumbledown* lives

BY [TARRA GAINES](#) 8.24.13 | 3:20 pm



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There's been no summer rest for [Inprint](#), Houston's wickedly good literary arts organization. It seems like it only just ended the 30th anniversary season of the Margaret Root Brown Reading Series a few months ago, probably because it just did, with a [special party](#) and reading by James Salter in May.

Yet, Inprint is already beginning its 31st season this month in order to accommodate an author schedule bursting at the bookbinding seams.

With award winning novelists Khaled Hosseini, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Colum McCann, on the roster — and that's just for the first half of the season — it's no wonder the full 2013-2014 season subscriptions have already sold out. McCann and Lahiri's books are contenders for the next [Booker Prize](#), so book lovers without season tickets might want to plan ahead to purchase general admission early. The first reading, featuring [James McBride](#) and [Robert Boswell](#), sold out a week ago.

[Hobby Center for the Performing Arts](#)
[Get Directions - 800 Bagby St. Houston](#)

The season is set to be a kind of literary world tour with books and authors taking readers

kind of literary world tour with books and authors taking readers to Afghanistan, Ireland, India, Peru, Pakistan, and Nigeria.

Who should readers trust?

One aspect of Boswell's novel that is getting critical attention is his literary experimentation with an "unreliable omniscient" third-person narrator. As readers, we sometimes expect that we might not be able to believe that a first person "I" narrator will always tell us the objective truth. He or she just might have something to hide from us. But we've been trained since our first "Once upon a time" that the godlike, all-seeing narrator is ever trustworthy.

Boswell wants to put an end our blind trust.

One aspect of Boswell's novel that is getting critical attention is his literary experimentation with an "unreliable omniscient" third-person narrator.

Pakistan, and Nigeria while introducing them to a multitude of voices over many generations. Before the global flight takes off however, Inprint begins much closer to home with celebrated author and University of Houston professor Boswell. Yet, this seasonal theme of many voices/many stories is also apparent in his new book, *Tumbledown*.

The novel is set in and around a California rehabilitation and therapeutic center, focusing especially on one therapist James Candler, whose career rise disguises a personal life that is falling into chaos, and the lives of his patients who participate in a therapeutic work program together.

"I think there's all kinds of unreliable omniscience in our lives," he explained to me recently in an interview about the book. "We treat all kinds of technological devices as if they were omniscient even though we know they're not. We treat various things in the media as if they were absolutely reliable sources of news. The truth, and we know it, is they're not omniscient and all kinds of biases are built in."

Boswell's ideas about whether we should trust the authority of the omniscient narrator came from personal experience in his twenties when he worked as a counselor, much like his character James Candler. These questions about omniscience "grew out of the reports" he was writing as an evaluator.

"I felt they (the client evaluations) were often treated as if they were omniscient when I knew they were far from all knowing," he says.

Therapy vs. Writing

Besides being a former counselor himself, a novelist and nonfiction author, Boswell is a respected teacher who, along with his wife and fellow author [Antonya Nelson](#), spends the spring semester at UH and has led workshops at many writing programs around the country.

"I think that anytime people are together in some kind of forced intimacy that certain kinds of human behavior emerge and they have things in common."

Some of the most humorous and lively scenes in the book take place in a sheltered workshop where some of Candler's patients gain assembly line experience folding and packaging pantyhose for a local business. These scenes as well as Boswell's own experience as a both a counselor and teacher made me wonder if there's any similarities between teaching writers and evaluating and counseling patients.

"I think that anytime people are together in some kind of forced intimacy that certain kinds of human behavior emerge and they have things in common," he says and notes that for workshops in general. "Even though everyone is doing more or less the same thing, personality emerges and the way personality emerges is fascinating."

However, in any creative process, intent is what matters. "Anytime you have people together, talking seriously, there's some overlap. I believe writing can be therapeutic, but its intent is always to try to create a work of art," he explains.

And what of those writers whose intent it is to create art in Houston? Boswell thinks they and a faculty where everyone pretty much likes each other is what makes the UH program distinctive.

"We get absolutely amazing writers," he says. "We're also pretty careful to get people who are good eggs. They're great people to work with. They're generous and despite their talent they're not egomaniacs." He also observes many of those writers also surprise themselves by their reaction to Houston.

"It's a big, lively, diverse, progressive city and people fall in love with it. I've fallen in love with it." And for Boswell the wealth of arts help to fuel more art.

"There are great visual arts, wonderful museum, a great theater scene. I go to plays almost every weekend down there. I think it's

a great place to be a writer.”

Robert Boswell and James McBride open The Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series on Monday (Aug. 26) at 7:30 p.m. in The Hobby Center's Zilkha Hall.

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BOOKS

Author makes distant land quite familiar

By Maggie Galehouse

In all three of his best-selling novels, Khaled Hosseini brings readers to an Afghanistan few Westerners have seen with their own eyes.

The Afghanistan of "And the Mountains Echoed," "A Thousand Splendid Suns" and "The Kite Runner" is a place of extreme poverty and extreme wealth; a place where lives are lost to childbirth and cold; a place of violence and political oppression. At the same time it is a place like any other, rich in culture and tradition, beloved home to those who live there and beloved homeland to those who fled.

Born in Kabul in 1965, Hosseini left Afghanistan with his family at age 11 and landed in California, where he attended high school, medical school and practiced medicine from 1996 to 2004. He spoke to the Chronicle by phone from his home in Northern California.

Q: "And the Mountains Echoed," released in May, contains multitudes. It is anchored by the separation of Abdullah, 10, from his beloved 3-year-old sister, Pari, in 1952. Their father, a poor laborer named Saboor, sells Pari to a wealthy woman in Kabul who cannot have her own children, thereby providing for the rest of his family and giving Pari a better chance in the world. From this painful act, the plot unfolds across several decades,



Courtesy photo

Khaled Hosseini

countries and points of view. Did you set out to write such a big story?

A: It wasn't until halfway through the writing that I began to realize the size and number of voices and perspectives and the large span of time I was covering. But I just focused on one person, one voice and finding the connective tissue. What intrigued me was the notion that our first impression of a character is rarely correct or complete. We meet the characters a number of times, and each time we meet them, we are granted a different view. I think the stepmother, Parwana, is a good example. We

first meet her as a distant stepmother. But when we're given a chance to see more of her, we learn that she lived in the shadow of a beautiful sister. That she was neglected. That she had her own hopes and dreams. That there is a person inside her — not an archetype.

Q: The book begins with a fable about a father who must forfeit one of his children to a monster to spare the death of other children in his village. Saboor tells the story to his children before they know they will be separated. Why start with the fable?

A: The fable sets up the whole novel and many of

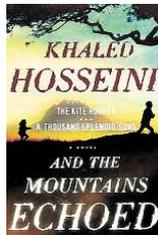
the themes and motifs: the theme of family, of losing someone you love, of self-sacrifice for a greater good. I see it as a peek into Saboor's mind. How he views the thing he's about to do and whether it's a concession.

Q: Was this book born, in part, from an impulse to tidy up or make sense of things individuals can't control — such as war or death?

A: Quite the contrary. I was very interested in this book in looking at how messy people are and how unpredictable they are, how often they surprise and startle themselves with their own behavior. Virtually none of these characters commits the acts they do in full acknowledgement of doing bad things. No matter how we wince at their decisions, there's something in them we recognize as human. Even the warlord who is a thug and a criminal believes that he serves a greater good.

Q: How are your novels received in Afghanistan?

A: Urban youth are becoming increasingly media and tech savvy, and among them, I think there's a significant awareness of my books. My first book ("The Kite Runner") was quite divisive in Afghanistan because of the tension it described among different ethnic groups. If you have lived outside your homeland for three-plus decades and decide to write a book about it, people who live there are



Author appearance

Khaled Hosseini will read from "And the Mountains Echoed," 7:30 p.m., Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas. Ticket are sold out. Inprint's Brown Reading Series: inprintthouston.org or 713-521-2026.

going to have an opinion about who you are and what you write.

Q: Why did you start your nonprofit, the Khaled Hosseini Foundation?

A: I've been to Kabul several times with the U.N.'s refugee agency, and I began the foundation because of all the things I saw. I saw people returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan and other countries after the Taliban without food, water, schools. The foundation attempts to address some of these things.

Q: You are 48. "And the Mountains Echoed" strikes me as the work of a writer in middle age, looking back to youth, perhaps consumed in the

present with the care of both children and parents, and looking ahead to the end of life. Would you agree?

A: Well, I write about things that feel urgent and immediate and important to me. And yes, I don't know that I would have written this book 10 or 12 years ago. I lost my dad in 2009. I helped nurse him for two years and watched his decline. I've had family members who have become incapacitated, and I've begun to see the toll time takes.

Q: Do you ever feel burdened by the fact that, for many readers, you are the voice of Afghanistan — an educator?

A: It is complicated. I have no intention of educating anyone. My job is to write as truthful and authentic and moving a book as I can. That said, I have always been very pleased that my books introduced people to Afghanistan from a different perspective and did challenge the stereotypical depictions of life there. When I get letters in that vein, I feel like this has been a worthwhile thing. But if you take on that mantle and begin to see yourself as a voice for a country, that inevitably will seep into your writing and make it agenda-driven because then you *have* to write from that perspective. And I may very well write a number of other books that have nothing to do with Afghanistan.

maggie.galehouse@chron.com

BOOKISH

Daniel Woodrell's stories hit home

Daniel Woodrell's stories are set in small towns where old habits die hard, grudges are codded and poverty won't stop knocking on the door.

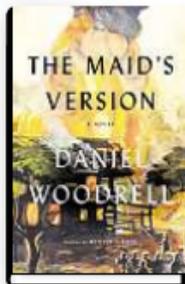
His characters have been known to drink, get arrested, hunt, be hunted, grow marijuana, get kicked out and found out. Sadness and missed connections abound.



MAGGIE
GALEHOUSE

had the subtitle removed from later editions when it threatened *Bookish continues on D2*

There are bright moments, sure. "Give Us a Kiss: A Country Noir" (1996) is a rollicking bit of comic genius — though Woodrell



Author appearance

Daniel Woodrell will appear with Haitian author Edwidge Danticat as part of Inprint's Brown Reading Series, 7:30 p.m. Oct. 13, Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas. Doors open at 6:45 p.m. \$5; inprintheouston.org. (Woodrell and Danticat replace Jhumpa Lahiri, who canceled.)



AFP / GettyImages

Daniel Woodrell also wrote "Winter's Bone," which was made into a film.

STAR



Celebrity baby photos

»Say cheese! Beyoncé,

Hilary Duff, Jim Parsons and more share their favorite pics at chron.com/CelebBabyPics

STAR

How to reach us: **Melissa Aguilar, Senior Editor**, melissa.aguilar@chron.com | **Twitter:** @MelissaAguilar/twittter.com
Phone: 713-362-7100 | **Like us on Facebook:** Houston Chronicle Life & Entertainment

BOOK EVENTS

MONDAY

John Billheimer: Author will discuss and sign "A Player to Be Maimed Later," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book, 2342 Bissonet; 713-524-8597, or toll free 888-424-2842 or murderbooks.com.

Cinda Williams Chima: Author will discuss and sign "The Enchanter Heir," 7 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop, 1432 Memorial; 281-8675 or bluewillowbookshop.com.

Ben Stroud and Brian Russell: Stroud will discuss and sign "Byzantium: Stories" and Russell will discuss and sign "The Year of What Now: Poems," 7 p.m., Brazos Bookstore, 2421 Bissonet; 713-523-0701 or brazosbookstore.com.

TUESDAY

Jedness Benn and Martin Limon: Benn will discuss and sign "A Blind Godless" and Limon will discuss and

sign "The Nightmare Range," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

WEDNESDAY

Jefferson Bass: Author Jon Jefferson will be in store to sign and discuss "Cut to the Bone," co-author Bill Bass will join via Skype, 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

Orville Schell: Co-author of "Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century" will discuss China and sign his book, 7 p.m., Asia Society Texas Center, 1370 Southmore, 110; 956 members; 713-496-9901 or asiasociety.org/texas.



THURSDAY

Michael Sells: Author will discuss

and sign "Mortal Bonds," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

Simone Elkeles: Author will discuss and sign "Wild Cards," 7 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop.

Margo Berdeshevsky and Cyrus Casselle: Award-winning poets will read from their works, 7:30 p.m., Kaboom Books, 3116 Houston; 713-869-7600 or kaboombooks.com.

FRIDAY

Children's Book Sale: Hosted by Friends of the Houston Public Library, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, 2025 West 11th at T. C. Jester; 832-393-1387 or friendsofhpl.org.

J.A. Jance: Author will discuss and sign "Second Watch," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

Henry Radloff: Author will discuss and sign "Talking Chancey," 7 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

SATURDAY

Children's Book Sale: Hosted by Friends of the Houston Public Library, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, 2025 West 11th at T. C. Jester; 832-393-1387 or friendsofhpl.org.

LibroFEST: Books and arts festival showcasing local Hispanic authors, including Gwendolyn Swartz, Sarah Cortez, Guadalupe Garcia McCall, Manuel Ramos, and René Saldaña Jr., with storytelling, writing workshops, book giveaways, mariachi, performances for children and adults, 1-5 p.m., Houston Public Library, Ideson Building, 550 McKinney; 832-393-1313 or houstonlibrary.org.

James Hannibal: Author will discuss and sign debut thriller, "Shadow

Catcher," 4:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

SUNDAY

Diane Cowen: Author will discuss and sign her cookbook, "Sunday Dinners: Food, Family, and Faith From Our Favorite Pastors," noon, Barnes & Noble, The Woodlands Mall, 1201 Lake Woodlands, The Woodlands; 281-645-8744.

The Works of Mexican Poet Homero Aridjis: Bilingual reading by Lorena B. Fernandez & Julietta Parra Ducote, presented by the Flamenco Poets Society, 3 p.m., Brazilian Arts Foundation, 1133 E. 11th. 515; 713-520-9364 or theflamencopoetsociety.org.

Lester Brown: A pioneer in creating models for sustainable economies discusses his autobiography, "Breaking New Ground: A Personal History," 7:30 p.m., Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas; 519-579; 832-251-0706 or progressiveforumhouston.org.

Maggie Galehouse

Bookish: Aftermath of explosion in 'Maid's Version'

Bookish from page D1

to become a catch-all for every reviewer and interviewer intent on defining his work. Still, it's a mostly dark slice of Americana that writes to life in his lyrical prose, where characters named Buster, Shot, Smoke, Thump, Tear-drop and the like amble around in service of big, bold themes. Like justice, redemption or grace.

Woodrell, 60, is not a household name, but after nine novels and a handful of awards he's gaining the recognition he deserves. Some of this is due to "Winter's Bone," the 2010 film based on his mostly 2005 novel of the same name. It earned four Oscar nominations and made actress Jennifer Lawrence a star.

"The Maid's Version," published earlier this month, is classic Woodrell. A slim, dense book, it circles the biggest tragedy ever to rock a small fictional town: a 1929 dance hall explosion that killed 42 people. "Throughout that summer," he writes, "human scraps and remains were discovered in gardens two streets, three streets, four streets away, kicked

up in the creek by kids chasing crawdads, in deep muck at the stockyards halfway up the hill. That fall, when roof gutters were cleaned, so many horrid bits were come across that gutters became fearsome, hallowed, and homeowners laid a few respectful leaks develop that winter rather than disturb the dead."

Q: Your stories are set in the Ozarks, a region you've come to own in your fiction the same way Georgia O'Keeffe owns the Southwest or John Waters owns Baltimore. Can you describe the area?

A: Historically, it's pretty isolated. Major highways went around this region for a long, long time. You had to be more or less coming here to get here. It's a plateau rather than an uplifted mountain range; the highest aren't tall, but deep and steep. Dirt is thin, not great growing there. The whole region was timbered off — all of the trees cut down, all the pine and good stuff — and that left the ground naked to the elements. It was subsistence living for most people. Even in my place, I had to truck in dirt



Sebastian Milwardski

Author Daniel Woodrell says Jennifer Lawrence was perfect to star in "Winter's Bone."

to have a garden.

Q: How long have you people lived in the Ozarks?

A: My family has been from this general area since the 1830s. Once my eyes were opened to writing about the place, stories just kept coming and coming. So many things I had heard or suspected became elements of novels. I didn't see any reason to set them elsewhere.

Q: Many of your novels are set in the fictional town of West Table, Mo. In "The Maid's Version," you

write: "Trains have haunted the nights in West Table since 1903 and disrupt sleep and taunt those awakened. The trains beating past toward the fabled beyond, the sound of each wheel-thump singing, You're going nowhere, you're going nowhere, and these wheels are, they are, they are going far from where you lie listening in your smallness..." Is West Table a stand-in for a real town?

A: I live in a town named West Plains, and West Plains has several things in common with West Table.

Q: The central figure in "The Maid's Version" is Alma, a maid who loses a sister in the explosion and spends her life sorting through the mystery and silence around the tragedy. But the plot, which involves dozens of characters, unfolds across several decades in a piecemeal, almost haphazard fashion. What's the rationale behind this structure?

A: I wanted it to have more of the logic of a poem or a song: You only do the parts that matter at the

moment. It's like when you're talking and you mention something from 20 years ago and then something from two weeks ago. Things come to mind. It's the maid's version of events, but I wanted to mention other elements and I wanted them to come in like snapshots to support the main thread.

Q: Why this book now?

A: I'm just not as hostile about everybody as I used to be. Had I written this when I was 35 it would have been: These people — bad. These people — good, or, pretty good most of the time. (Laughs) There came a time when I realized the humanity of everyone involved. The breakthrough here was that it may be *not generous* to all the characters, but at least it was fair.

Q: You've had two books made into films: "Winter's Bone" and "Woe to Live On," your second novel that became the movie "Ride With the Devil." How was that experience?

A: Ang Lee directed "Ride With the Devil"

in 1999. It was scarcely released. I was good with "Winter's Bone." I liked Jennifer. She was fresh-faced to most of us; it helped that we hadn't seen her in any other movie. A lot of names were in position to take that role. They ended up with the right person, ultimately. It's one of those crazy things — the long road that accidentally ended up at the right place.

Q: Any new novels percolating?

A: Well, I know I'm going to be distracted till at least the end of October with the new book and touring. And I'm not a guy who can write in hotel rooms and airports. But there's a good chance whatever I do next will leave the Ozarks and this milieu I've been in. I'm feeling an itch to try other things and see how they could fly. (Laughs) My wife always asks me why I think setting a story in Barlow could be better. And I say, "Because people are interested in Barlow." But who knows? I may very well end up still here.

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STAR



Dome's future?

» Long gone: Many Houston landmarks and well-known buildings have been demolished over the years. See photos of the city's past at chron.com/landmarks.

HOUSTON CHRONICLE | HoustonChronicle.com and chron.com | Monday, November 11, 2013 | Section D *** | [Houston Chronicle Life & Entertainment](#) | [Houston Chronicle](#)



Kenzo Tribouillard / AFP | Getty Images

Colum McCann, an Irish writer and winner of a National Book Award, will appear at an Inprint event at the Alley Theatre in Houston Nov. 18.

BOOKISH

Writing his own history

Although he has lived in America more than half his life, Colum McCann's soft brogue still carries listeners to Ireland, where he spent his early years — and



MAGGIE GALEHOUSE

I quote — “causin’ all sorts of eruptions and fuss.”

McCann, 48, is the sort of writer who shimmies into history and shapes it to his will, teasing out enough truth to craft a story that feels like life, with all its aches and surprises, tragedies and whims.

The author of eight books, including the National Book Award-winning “Let the Great World Spin” (2009), McCann returns to Ireland in his latest novel, “TransAtlantic,” an alternative Irish history that places

Author Colum McCann writes ‘from the gut’ in his latest, ‘TransAtlantic’

big, historical moments alongside smaller moments no less significant to the characters who survive them.

The idea, McCann says, was “acknowledging that they both knit into each other, that they fabric — if that’s a word — themselves into some sort of intimate garment. That the anonymous matter.”

John Alcock and Arthur Whitten Brown’s historic 1919 flight from Newfoundland to Ireland on a modified bomber, Frederick Douglass’ 1845 tour of Ireland, George Mitchell’s success in brokering the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland in 1998 are

Author appearance

Colum McCann appears with

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in Houston

When: 7:30 p.m. Nov. 18

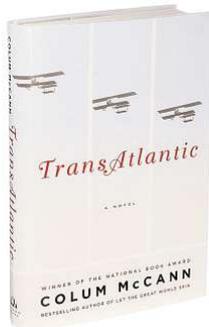
Where: Alley Theatre, 615 Texas

Information: Tickets for this Inprint event are \$5; doors open 6:45 p.m. inprintheouston.org.

juxtaposed with private moments. A mother finding her only son among a pile of dead during the Civil War. A mother mourning a son shot on the Irish coast more than a century later.

McCann lives in New York with

Bookish continues on D2



Patricia Wall / New York Times

STAR

How to reach us: Melissa Aguilar, Senior Editor, melissa.aguilar@chron.com | **Twitter:** @MelissaAguilar/twitter.com
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Bookish: McCann toured Texas by bike

Bookish from page D1

his wife and three children but spent several years in Texas. He appears in Houston on Nov. 18 as a guest of Inprint.

Q: What is "TransAtlantic" about?

A: It's about going home and the ability to go home. To find and expand a family. To recover who you are and where you come from.

Q: As the father of young children, did you set out to write a novel about family — in this case one family that spans three centuries and focuses on four generations of women?

A: There are times in your life when you take certain things on but you're not conscious of them because, if you're too conscious, you can write yourself into a little jail. It's a response from an emotional place. Writing from the gut. I teach writing at Hunter College in New York. I teach graduate students, and it's very competitive to get in. The first day I say, "I'm not going to be able to teach you anything." I want to give them the environment

in which they reach into themselves and find that gut feeling. I tell them they need to develop stamina and desire and perseverance to be a great writer.

Q: You are both a U.S. and Irish citizen, and "TransAtlantic" moves back and forth between these two countries. Why compare the African-American experience with the working-class Irish experience?

A: I wanted to confront what it means to emigrate and be away from home and how you create a new sort of home. A lot of it is about finding dignity and peace and the process of peace. People are moving toward moments of grace and redemption.

Q: After two big books — "Let the Great World Spin" was the novel before "TransAtlantic" — what are you up to now?

A: A collection of short stories. Those were big books. I think if I kept going my heart would have exploded. It was time to bring the music down.

Q: How does your life change after

winning a National Book Award?

A: The National Book Award gives you money. It gives you time, although in some cases it can take time. But, you know, literature is not an Olympics. Nobody truly gets the gold medal. ... All books have a lot of short, because, otherwise, why go on if you've written the exact book you felt you had to write. Then give it up. Become a carpenter.

Q: Can you tell me about your 12,000-mile bike ride through America?

A: In 1986, I went across the country on an 18-speed Schwinn. I had my tent, sleeping bag, camping stuff and slept out until I met people. I came to Texas through Corpus Christi and then up to Houston and across toward Austin. I ended up in Independence, and I went to church there one Sunday morning. Churches were great places to get free barbecue. After church, I met a guy in charge of a children's home called Miracle Farm, for kids who came out of broken homes or juvenile detention. ... I finished my bike journey and then came back to Brenham and worked with those

kids for a year and a half. After that, I went and got my B.A. at the University of Texas.

Q: You're the "curator" of a new book called "The Book of Men: Eighty Writers on How to Be a Man." What's the story behind this?

A: The book is in aid of a charity I co-founded with a group of writers called Narrative 4. We got a chance to launch it through Esquire magazine. Friends of mine worked there, and it was the magazine's 80th anniversary. They said, as a joke, we should get 80 writers to do a piece of fiction for us. And I said, "I can do that."

Q: So what's the answer? How does one go about being a man?

A: Oh. (Laughs.) I was one of the few people who wrote from the voice of a woman, so ... well ... I have no idea. There's some things you could say. Be a good father. Be honest. Take it like a man — but what does that mean? Maybe a man looks after the women in his life. I don't know. That could be one answer. Maybe.

maggie.galehouse@chron.com

BOOK EVENTS

MONDAY

Bill Minutaglio and Steven Davis: Authors will discuss and sign "Dallas 1963: 7 p.m., Brazos Bookstore, 2421 Bissonnet; 7:30-8:00 p.m. at brazosbookstore.com.

Elizabeth Stone: Author will discuss and sign cookbook, "An Invitation to Entertain: Recipes for Gracious Parties," 7 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop, 14532 Memorial; 281-497-8675 or bluewillowbookshop.com.

TUESDAY

Julia Spencer-Fleming: Author will discuss and sign "Through the Evil Days," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book, 2342 Bissonnet; 713-524-8597, or toll-free 888-424-2842 or murderbooks.com.

Hector Ruiz: Author and Rice alum will discuss "Slingshot: AMD's Fight to Free an Industry from the Ruthless Grip of Intel," 6:30 p.m., Rice University, Fondren Library, 6100 Main; 713-348-0000.

Peter Hyland and Jacob White: Hyland, a poet, will discuss and

sign "Out Loud," and White will discuss his book of stories, "Being Dead in South Carolina," 7 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

WEDNESDAY

Virginia Bernhard: Author will discuss the unpublished letters of the Hogg family, 5-7 p.m., River Oaks Bookstore, 3270 Westheimer; 713-520-0061 or riveroaksbookstore.com.

Ann Lamott: Author will discuss and sign "Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope

will discuss and sign

"Playing St. Barbara," 7 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop.

A Celebration of Writers:

Story in the schools event honors Anita Kruse, of Purple Songs Can Fly, which celebrates children's stories through song, 7:30 p.m. dinner and stories (6 p.m. is registration and silent auction), Junior League of Houston, 1811 Briar Oaks Lane. Individual tickets start at \$250. Information: 713-523-3877 or withouston.org.

FRIDAY

Dorothy Griffith: Author will discuss and sign new edition of "Texas Holiday Cookbook," 5-7 p.m., River Oaks Bookstore.

Sara C. Rolater, Claire Fuqua Anderson and Martin Rock: Writers share selected works as part of Gulf Coast Reading Series, 7 p.m., Ruddyard's British Pub, 2010 Waugh; gulfcoastmag.org.

Peter Turchi: Author will discuss and sign, "Where You Are: A Collection of Maps That Will Leave You Feeling Completely Lost," 7 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

SATURDAY

Kirk Leywis: Author and Pasadena ISD superintendent will sign "Put Away Childish Things," Barnes & Noble, 5655 Fairmont Parkway, Pasadena; 281-991-8011.

Carol Aebersold: Author will sign "Elf on the Shelf: A Birthday Tradition," 2 p.m., Barnes & Noble, 1201 Lake Woodlands Drive, The Woodlands; 281-465-8744.

Susan Krulovansky and



STAR

FICTION

Characters cross time, paths in 'Transatlantic'

By Mike Snyder

A writer who deals haphazardly with time, bouncing around wildly among days and months and years, risks confusing and antagonizing readers. Flashbacks and flash-forwards are common literary devices, of course, but readers are most comfortable with stories where today follows yesterday and precedes tomorrow. Alternatives to this form must be handled carefully.

None of this is a problem for Colum McCann. In his new novel, "Transatlantic," McCann moves seamlessly among centuries and generations, helpfully providing time references at appropriate chapter headings. But these reminders are scarcely necessary because the author integrates his characters' disparate stories, times and places with astonishing skill. Indeed, our admiration for this feat of literary legerdemain almost causes us to overlook the novel's other virtues —

the depth of McCann's characters, the beauty of his prose and the sheer power of his story.

Consider his introduction, in the second chapter, of Lily, a maid employed in a home in Dublin in the 1840s. The home belongs to a man named Webb, the Irish publisher of the books of Frederick Douglass, the American escaped slave, orator and abolitionist. Douglass has crossed the sea to spread his message among sympathetic Irish aristocrats who will help fund his efforts in America.

"He glanced around to see Lily, the maid, pouring him a cup of tea," McCann writes, a perfectly reasonable introduction of what we assume is a minor character. We have no clue that Lily will resurface as the matriarch of a family that binds the strands of the novel together. When we



McCann



'Transatlantic'

By Colum McCann
Random House, 262 pp., \$27

encounter her again, 20 years and 90 pages later in America, it takes a while to realize that this is the same girl who served tea to Frederick Douglass in Dublin.

To explain how Lily and her descendants figure into the book's interlocking stories would be a grave disservice to the author. But it's perhaps permissible to advise the reader of my close attention to former U.S. Sen.

Authors to appear

Colum McCann and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie will appear at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 18 at the Alley Theatre as part of Inprint's Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. Tickets \$5; on sale at inprint.houston.org on Oct. 14.

George Mitchell's chance encounter with an elderly woman in a wheelchair on an Irish tennis court. You'll hear more from her later.

In his National Book Award-winning 2009 novel, "Let the Great World Spin," McCann used a single event — a French acrobat's daring tightrope walk between the twin towers of the World Trade Center in 1974 — as his central motif. In his new book he adapts this conceit to focus on a solitary idea: crossing the Atlantic Ocean, moving from Old World to New World and New to Old.

Three transatlantic crossings, all of them

made by real people, establish this theme. In 1919, two World War I veterans patch together a modified bomber on a field in Newfoundland, load up with tea and sandwiches and coax the makeshift aircraft across the ocean to Ireland, winning a prize offered by a British newspaper and a prize in aviation history. In 1845, Frederick Douglass travels to Dublin by ship — a voyage that echoes his ancestors' journey from Africa in the opposite direction, chained like dogs in the holds of slave vessels — and encounters poverty so appalling that it almost distracts him from his single-minded goal of ending slavery. And in 1998, George Mitchell shuttles back and forth across the pond as he brokers the historic Northern Ireland peace agreement known as the Good Friday Accord.

Few writers can get more punch out of a simple, declarative sentence than McCann. "Europe was a crucible

of bones," he writes of the First World War. And here is Mitchell's young wife, brooding about his controversial mission: "What she worries about most of all is that he will become the flesh at the end of an assassin's bullet."

Longer passages, too, leap off the page with explosive power. Mitchell, in 1845, Frederick Douglass travels to Dublin by ship — a voyage that echoes his ancestors' journey from Africa in the opposite direction, chained like dogs in the holds of slave vessels — and encounters poverty so appalling that it almost distracts him from his single-minded goal of ending slavery.

And in 1998, George Mitchell shuttles back and forth across the pond as he brokers the historic Northern Ireland peace agreement known as the Good Friday Accord. Few writers can get more punch out of a simple, declarative sentence than McCann. "Europe was a crucible

Mike Snyder is an assistant city editor at the Houston Chronicle.

SOCIAL ISSUES

'Americanah' a thought-provoking tale

By Catherine Chung

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's dazzling and thought-provoking new novel, "Americanah," is a wonder: It begins with a Nigerian immigrant waiting to board a train from Princeton to Trenton to have her hair braided, and opens into a much larger story that ranges over decades, continents and a multitude of social issues with breathtaking grace.

Ifemelu is an immigrant who is giving up what seems like the embodiment of the American dream: She has finished a prestigious fellowship and has decided to leave her work as the author of a successful anonymous blog called Racecethoré or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known

as Negroes) by a Non-American Black. She has also just left her partner and is planning to leave America itself.

At first, it is unclear why she would do such a thing: She is not so much unhappy as discontent. She misses Nigeria, though she is estranged from nearly everything she left behind there, including Obinze, "the love of her life," who has since married and had a child. And so as Ifemelu gets her hair braided, we are launched into a series of flashbacks and stories within stories that take us back to Ifemelu's childhood, her initiation into adulthood and entrance to America, up to her current decision to return to Nigeria: a place where, we learn, her "natural" hair will pose a different kind of problem, a place where

in a neat reversal, she will live now as another kind of outsider, one labeled "Americanah."

In a book where so much is shown to be difficult — where both wealth and poverty leave characters shackled to lives they don't want, and the path to adulthood is fraught with betrayal, disillusionment and loss of identity — one of the great joys is the charm of Ifemelu's romance with Obinze. The delight with which they discover each other in high school, the surprise of "self-affection" that he inspires in her is a relief given how much we know later events will conspire against that self-liking.

"He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size." This dynamic is in stark contrast to the rela-

tionship between Ifemelu's parents, and in her own later relationships with other friends and lovers. When circumstances and Ifemelu's own actions conspire against her relationship with Obinze, the importance of this mutual regard becomes apparent: Its loss is devastating.

With great technical dexterity, Adichie weaves the love story in and out of the other stories the characters make of their lives. For the most part, these multiple narratives are seamlessly intertwined, and the book moves easily from Nigeria to America and England and back again.

These separate pieces feel both self-contained and in conversation with one another, most notably the excerpts from Ifemelu's blog. The blog posts are by turns knowing and

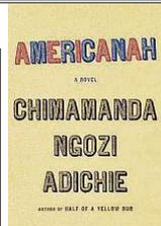
witty and filled with outrage, and add a surprising layer of depth by contextualizing Ifemelu's experiences within a larger framework of the immigrant and minority experience.

It is a rare pleasure to be guided through this dangerous territory by a narrator of such fierce intelligence as she deconstructs America's rules of race and class, and exposes the kinds of constraints that often remain invisible and unacknowledged.

"He would have to choose what he was, or rather, what he was would be chosen for him," thinks Ifemelu of her cousin Dike. And so we come to see her departure from America as a kind of triumph — both the writing of her blog and her decision to leave it behind,



Adichie



'Americanah'

By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Knopf, 477 pages, \$26.95

the decision to embrace her natural hair, and even her decision to reach out to an old love become acts of resistance against that terrible choicelessness.

Adichie is so smart about so many things that I found myself quoting her book over the past several weeks in a wide range of conversations with friends about everything from love and family, to power and beauty and hair. She is so funny and defiant, and simultaneously so wise, that "Americanah" is an exhilarating, mind-expanding pleasure of a read. It is a brilliant treatise on race, class and globalization, and also a deep, clear-eyed story about love — and how it can both demand and make possible the struggle to become our most authentic selves.

Catherine Chung is the author of the novel "Forgotten Country." She wrote this review for the San Francisco Chronicle.

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BOOK *EXCERPT*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the author of a handful of works, including the novel "Half of a Yellow Sun," which won the Orange Prize, and the recent novel, "Americanah." Adichie appears in Houston with writer Colum McCann, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 18, at the Alley Theatre, 615 Texas. Tickets for this Inprint event are \$5. Information: inprintheouston.org.



“The gods, the hovering deities who gave and took teenage loves, had decided that Obinze would go out with Ginika. Obinze was the new boy, a fine boy even if he was short. He had transferred from the university secondary school in Nsukka, and only days after, everyone knew of the swirling rumors about his mother. She had fought with a man, another professor at Nsukka, a real fight, punching and hitting, and she had won, too, even tearing his clothes, and so she was suspended for two years and had moved to Lagos until she could go back.

It was an unusual story; market women fought, mad women fought, but not women who were professors. Obinze, with his air of calm and inwardness, made it even more intriguing.”

from "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



Courtesy photo

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

COMING *MONDAY*

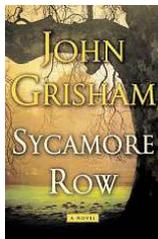
In Monday's Bookish column, Maggie Galehouse interviews Colum McCann, a National Book Award winner who appears in Houston on Nov. 18.



BEST-SELLERS

Fiction

- 1. Sycamore Row:** By John Grisham. A sequel, about race and inheritance, to "A Time to Kill."
- 2. The Goldfinch:** By Donna Tartt. A painting smuggled out of the Metropolitan Museum of Art after a bombing becomes a boy's prize, guilt and burden.
- 3. Doctor Sleep:** By Stephen King. Now grown up, Dan, the boy with psychointuitive powers in "The Shining," helps another threatened child with a gift.
- 4. We Are Water:** By Wally Lamb. About to marry the woman who is her gallery owner, a divorced artist and mother must confront secrets from her past.
- 5. The Longest Ride:** By



Nicholas Sparks. The lives of two couples converge unexpectedly.

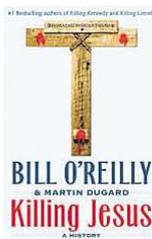
6. Identical: By Scott Turow. Paul Gianni, running for mayor of Kindle County, is accused of having played a role in the murder of his identical twin brother's

girlfriend.

- 7. Storm Front:** By John Sandford. Minnesota investigator Virgil Flowers beamed into the hunt for an ancient inscribed stone smuggled out of the Middle East.
- 8. Gone:** By James Patterson and Michael Ledwith. Detective Michael Bennett is pursued by the head of a Mexican drug cartel he once put in jail.
- 9. Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy:** By Helen Fielding. Bridget, now 51 and a mother and widow, is once again looking for love.
- 10. Just One Evil Act:** By Elizabeth George. In the 18th Inspector Lynley novel, Lynley's partner, Barbara Havers, searches for a friend's kidnapped child in Italy.

Nonfiction

- 1. Killing Jesus:** By Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. The host of "The O'Reilly Factor" recounts the events leading up to Jesus' execution.
- 2. David and Goliath:** By Malcolm Gladwell. How disadvantages can work in our favor; from the author of "The Tipping Point" and "Outliers."
- 3. I Am Malala:** By Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb. The experience of the Pakistani girl who advocated for women's education and was shot by the Taliban.
- 4. Things That Matter:** By Charles Krauthammer. Three decades' worth of essays from the conservative columnist.



- 5. 40 Chances:** By Howard G. Buffett with Howard W. Buffett. What Warren Buffett's son and grandson have learned in their efforts to feed the hungry.
- 6. The Reason I Jump:** By Naoki Higashida.

A 13-year-old boy with autism answers questions.

- 7. Johnny Carson:** By Henry Bushkin. A recollection by Carson's lawyer and confidant for 18 years.
- 8. Extortion:** By Peter Schweizer. A Hoover Institution fellow argues that politicians shape legislation in order to extract donations.
- 9. My Story:** By Elizabeth Smart with Chris Stewart. A woman kidnapped from her Utah home in 2002 at age 14 describes her captivity and rescue.
- 10. Humans of New York:** By Brandon Stanton. Four hundred color photos of New Yorkers, with brief commentary by Stanton.

New York Times

BOOK REVIEW

George Saunders takes fame in stride

By Maggie Galehouse

A year ago, the New York Times Sunday Magazine ran a cover story about George Saunders, then set to release his fourth collection of stories, "Tenth of December." The headline, in that first week of 2013, was actually a prediction: "George Saunders Has Written the Best Book You'll Read This Year." To which many readers likely wondered, "Who on earth is George Saunders?"

People who read literary fiction have known Saunders for decades. His stories have been published in the New Yorker since 1992. The term "genius" is thrown around. During the past decade, he has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur Fellowship and an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

But the Times piece cracked up his fame in a big-time, bold-face way.

"It was huge, strangely huge," said Saunders, from his home in the Catskills, where he's nursing a cold after a few days on the road. "It was like if you were jogging along and a big hand comes along and throws you four miles ahead. Like being shot out of a cannon. All along, everybody at the Times is saying, 'We can't guarantee the piece will run.' We [Saunders and his wife, Paula] were here with our daughters for Christmas. About a week before the story came out

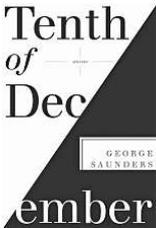


George Saunders

Courtesy photo

they said, 'We're running it.' And then it was, 'Oh, by the way it looks like it's going to be the cover.' And then it's out of your hands. So we're up here, sledding, and suddenly the emails start coming in. And something is happening to you that has an uncertain relationship to the work that spawned it."

Then in July, a convocation speech Saunders delivered at Syracuse University, where he teaches creative writing, went viral. In it, he confessed that his biggest regrets in life are "failures of kindness" and implored the new graduates to do "those things that incline you toward the big questions,



'Tenth of December'

By George Saunders
Random House,
288 pp., \$17.28

and avoid the things that would reduce you and make you trivial."

All of which is to say that Saunders, who'll appear at the Alley Theatre on Monday for a sold-out Imprint event, gets a lot more attention than he used to.

Saunders grew up in Chicago but was born in Amarillo.

"Emotionally as a kid I always identified as a Texan," Saunders said. "My mom's from Amarillo. My dad was in the Air Force. They met at a dance in Amarillo or something. I think we left there when I was 1, but every summer there was this big ritual of the 25-hour drive to Amarillo. My grandpa was a salesman who sold beauty products in those Panhandle towns. ... I

remember my grandpa giving me a Texas-shaped paperweight. When I went around with him, I could really feel that 1940s, 1950s Texas."

While Saunders was in college at Colorado School of Mines in Golden, his parents moved back to Amarillo and the city became a kind of home for him during his 20s.

"I played guitar in a country-and-western band at a huge dance palace where you could two-step for hours," he said.

It was in Amarillo that Saunders stumbled upon a copy of People Magazine in which Jay McInerney and Raymond Carver were profiled. At

the time, he had never heard of an master's of fine arts program, but he applied to Syracuse and got in.

Now 55, Saunders has published four story collections — "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline" (1996), "Pastoralia" (2001), "In Persuasion Nation" (2006) and "Tenth of December" — as well as a novella, a children's book and a collection of nonfiction. (His GQ travel story on Dubai, published in 2005, is every bit as chatty and far-reaching and unforgettable as his fiction.)

Most of Saunders' stories are strange and some are vaguely futuristic. "The Semplica Girl Diaries," for example, features young girls from impoverished countries who agree, for a fee, to be strung together by their temples (a surgical procedure), outfitted in long white dresses and hung together a few feet off the ground in the yards of affluent Americans — a sort of living, breathing installation.

Other stories are more traditional in terms of voice and plot. The title story from "Tenth of December," for example, involves a chubby boy with an overactive imagination and an old man dying of cancer who save each other in a frozen landscape.

For Saunders, stories should be urgent, tight and complex.

"Trying to give a story the maximum amount Saunders continues on H18

Saunders from page H14

of energy — sometimes that salvages your initial idea,” he explained. “The *Smplifica Girl Diaries* is about political oppression, but it had to be more than that or else it’s a lecture. You’re trying to start readers

on a certain path and complicate it. You want readers to be surprised in a nonrandom way — it can’t be a spaceship that comes in and kills everyone — but you also want some kind of expectation realized in a way that you didn’t see coming.”

Canada’s great short-story writer Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize in Literature last fall. Does Saunders anticipate a renaissance of the short form?

“My honest answer is that it makes me feel really happy that someone that good got rewarded fairly,” Saunders said. “Ever since ‘Tenth of December’

came out, people have been asking me if it’s now OK to write short stories. I never really thought about it. You do whatever you can — with power. I have a feeling the question about the short-story form is a bit like, you know how in Vogue they’ll say, ‘*Short skirts are back!*’ Well, I never felt the story was out of fashion.”

As for Munro’s work, which is less overtly political than that of many previous Nobel winners, Saunders said: “With Munro, the difference between the personal and political disappears. You feel human suffering, the loss of power, all those things that, write large, make up politics. To me, that’s the best kind of political writing.”

In his creative writing classes, Saunders teaches short stories to show students the “tricks” that writer use. On his go-to list of authors: Pushkin, Babel, de Maupassant, Tolstoy, Joyce, Hemingway, Flannery O’Connor.

He doesn’t teach his own stories. “That would be weird,” Saunders said. “Especially if you make them buy the book.”

Occasionally, though, he’ll give students a peek at his own editing process.

“Two years ago, I had just completed the edits of the title story from ‘Tenth of December,’” Saunders said. “I had sold the story to the *New Yorker* at 13,000 words, and when I sent it, I had

been working on it for almost a year. But we cut it to 9,000 words. The editor found a way to cut it and make it better. I’m always advocating cutting and extreme edits with my students, so I brought in versions of my story to class, and that was useful.”

Saunders has worked with three editors at the *New Yorker*: Daniel Menaker, Bill Buford and Deborah Treisman. Of Treisman, his current editor, he said:

“She’s incredible. She’s, like, in my mind and she just *knows*. She sees what the story is doing and she says, ‘Let’s get to work and make that better.’ Even stories that are pretty much ready to go, we do eight, nine, 10 passes on. You get into that mode where you’re in the piece so much you know where the commas are. You can feel every little thing.”

But the *New Yorker* doesn’t accept everything he submits.

“I just got something rejected three weeks ago,” he said. “Deborah works with some of the best writers. She considers it part of her responsibility to make sure the writer is doing their best work, that the story represents a meaningful advance in that person’s work.”

Even Saunders’ darkest stories have many moments of comedy. What, in the real world, makes him laugh?

Jack Handey — who does the “Deep Thoughts” bit on “Saturday Night Live” — makes him laugh. Also, *Monty Python*, “Parks & Recreation,” Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, George Carlin, and early recordings of Bill Cosby, which he’d “chain-listen to.”

“Around the time of ‘The Jerk,’” Saunders said, “there was something in his comic persona, a class element that got under my skin. I had uncles with the same kind of self-deprecating humor. Sweet and naive.”

And, of course, the Marx Brothers.

“We watch the Marx Brothers when the family gets together,” Saunders said. “My daughters are grown up but we do this thing — you know, the bad guys in old movies, how they always get the worst actors? There’s a gangster in one of the Marx Brothers movies who says ‘We’re big SHOTS now baby’ [instead of the expected ‘BIG shots.']. That’s a catch phrase around our house.”

Saunders likes absurd humor. It lays in wait in his stories.

He also hopes that his stories encourage readers to abide in a state of uncertainty.

“I think when I get it — there are two or three times when I feel I’ve gotten to the upper registers of what I can do — I have four or five possibly doing complementary views all sitting there resonating very well,” Saunders said. “I like it when I can walk out of a story and say, ‘Yep, all those things are true.’ The truth is different things, and they’re all correct. If a person isn’t called upon to act — which mostly they’re not — the highest form of truth is the various contradictorily opinions existing. Chekhov says, ‘It’s this way and this way and *this way*, isn’t it?’”

Maggie Galehouse is book editor at the Houston Chronicle.

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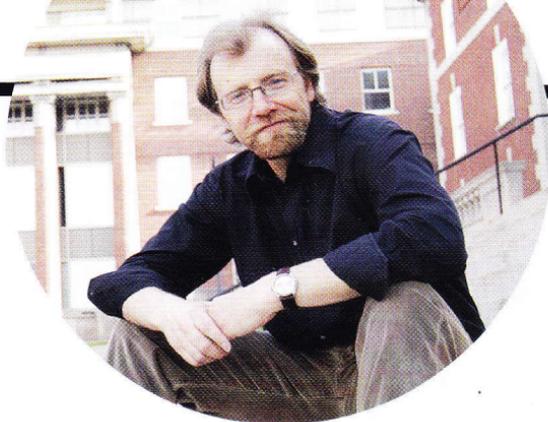
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ON THE TOWN

SHORT ON STORIES, LONG ON TALENT

A literary master discusses his craft.

GEORGE SAUNDERS'S latest collection of short stories, *Tenth of December*, was nominated for a National Book Award, and dubbed "the best book you'll read this year" by the New York Times. In advance of his Inprint Reading Series visit this month, we talked with Saunders about his life and art.

You have a very Houston background! You were trained as a geophysical engineer and worked in the energy industry before moving into fiction. How has that experience influenced your work?

Well, four years of barely hanging in at engineering school gave me a pretty good work ethic, which is useful for a writer. If, as an engineering student, three hours a night of study gets you a D in Complex Variables (which it did), well then, you buck up and study four hours a night. If, as a writer, draft #56 is still crummy, you get going on draft #57. Both things require the same kind of tank-like energy. Secondly, and more importantly, engineering got me out of America for the first time. My first job was with a company called GSI, in Sumatra, Indonesia—and that travel opportunity remade my whole worldview.

It seems you used to be a bit of a libertarian. What happened?

Going to Asia happened. I'd been an Ayn Rand fan in college, but seeing the brutality of Asian poverty, and the rampaging rude imperialism we young Americans brought down on the local people, made me think differently about power and privilege.

Many of your stories present a darkly satirical picture of American consumerism and militarism. They're hilarious, but also unsettling, and often bleak. Yet you seem personally very calm, happy, and well-adjusted. How do you do it?

The relation of a person's art to his

personality is pretty complicated and non-linear, I think. I feel really glad to be alive and very aware of how conditional everything is—health, and sanity, and good luck, life itself. My stories are ways of reminding myself of this conditionality. Chekhov once wrote, "Every happy man should have an unhappy man, in his closet, to remind him, by his constant tapping, that not everyone is happy, and that, sooner or later, life will show him its claws." So in this sense, when I'm writing a story, the happy man—me—is creating his own unhappy man, in an imaginary closet, to remind myself of certain truths: good luck is conditional, not everyone is happy, my luck may change, good luck is not simply the result of virtue, etc., etc. In other words, stories can serve as little training exercises in empathy and sympathy.

You're famous for nailing casual, vernacular American voices in your fiction. Yet two stories in your new collection feature protagonists who are given drugs that make them talk with rather fancier diction. Are you getting tired of your trademark voice and looking to branch out?

Yes, actually—or at least that was true when I was writing those stories. I think a writer is always looking for ways to extend his range. Otherwise, it's stagnation. The drugs seemed like a good way to justify a higher register in the diction. (That sounds like something you might have heard in a paddy wagon circa 1976.)

You're best known as a master of the short story, which a lot of people take less seriously than the novel. Why do you think that is?

I think it's because they've never tried writing one. —Will Wilkinson

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GEORGE SAUNDERS will read at the Alley Theatre as part of the Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series on Jan 27. \$5. 615 Texas Ave. 713-521-2026. inprinthouston.org



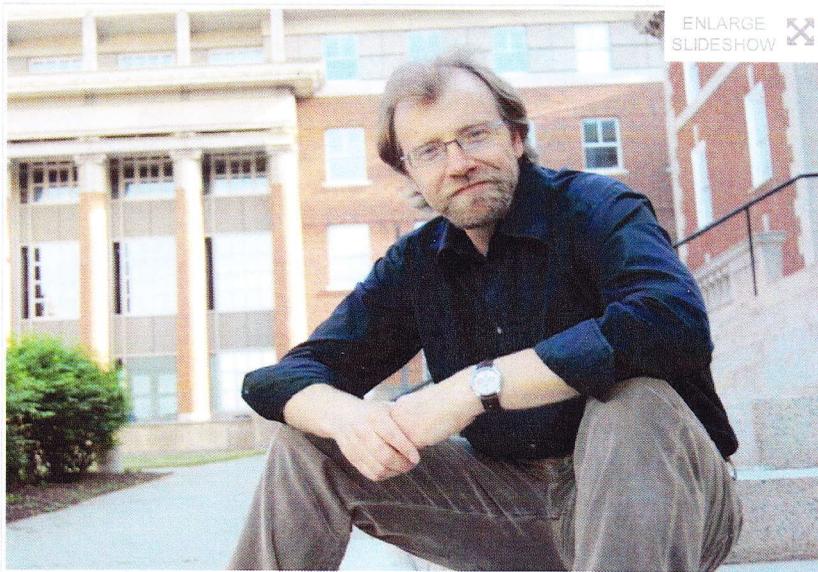
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YEAR OF THE SHORT STORY

Author of best book of the year reveals how he survived the Colbert Report

BY [TARRA GAINES](#) 1.26.14 | 2:01 pm



ENLARGE SLIDESHOW

Author George Saunders Courtesy photo

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With the myriad of things 2013 was the year of, we might also add the year of the short story, in no small part thanks to author [George Saunders](#). The award-winning writer has been considered one of American's great short story writers for decades, but the literary fan favorite became a best-selling author and bit of a media darling in 2013 with the publication of his short story collection, *Tenth of December*.

I recently spoke to Saunders before his visit to Houston for the [Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series](#) to ask him how he put together a collection that the [New York Times Magazine](#) called the best book we would read last year.

CultureMap: While your previous books have certainly been successes, the publication of *Tenth of December* made 2013 a particularly good year for you.

George Saunders: At times it was like being shot out of a cannon. I loved it. It was a great year. You always worry about the opposite happening, your book

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University of Houston

will come out and nothing will occur and you'll be on a downward spiral, so it was really great.

"You'll hear the short story is in decline, but if you go through and look at it, it seems like every year there's some great book of short stories or four or five. It's like Cosmo when they say "Green is back." Green was always around."

CM: There were several really good short stories collections out and of course Canadian short story writer [Alice Munro](#) won the Nobel Prize for literature, so it seems like 2013 was also a year when the short story earned some much deserved respect.

GS: It's funny how the storyline kind of ebbs and flows. You'll hear the short story is in decline, but if you go through and look at it, it seems like every year there's some great book of short stories or four or five. It's like Cosmo when they say "Green is back." Green was always around.

CM: So the short story is the new black that never really went out of style?

GS: Yeah that's right. It must be partly also that the MFA programs are so powerful now. There're so many people interested in them, and you can teach the novel in an MFA program but short story is easier to teach. I'm guessing there are a whole generation of MFA students who really understand the story.

CM: When I look at a story collection, I wonder how important the order of the stories are within the book. Is that something you craft as much as the individual stories themselves?

GS: This was a seven year project. You get somewhere around 200 pages, and also more importantly it feels like the aesthetic assumption that I've been making throughout is coming to a close. You're done with a phase. At some point you finish all those and you feel you have the right players. What I do is take a bunch of index cards, put the title of the story the first and last lines on them, and I get down on the floor and start moving things around, almost like a Rubik's Cube. . . The goal is very simple that when someone starts it they'll be powered through to the end of it.

CM: I have a question about an analogy you made when you were on the [Colbert Report](#) last year, but before I ask, I have to know, how do you prepare to be interviewed by the "Stephen Colbert" persona?

GS: You don't. You tremble and shake.

There's no pre-show prep, except they give you a little coaching about how to conceptualize the rhetoric of the show. They say you should have two or three points you want to make and then come in and continue to try to make them, in spite of the fact you're getting your butt kicked. He's a master improviser. You can't beat him. He's so quick, you can't believe it.

"I remember thinking it was like being put in a cage with a tiger and you think: Oh my god, I'm still alive. I must be pretty good. Then you look at the tiger and know: Oh, I'm alive because he let me live."

The second time I was on there — both times I had a really good time — but the second time I thought it went better. I remember thinking it was like being put in a cage with a tiger and you think: Oh my god, I'm still alive. I must be pretty good. Then you look at the tiger and know: Oh, I'm alive because he let me live.

They did give me one bit of advice that made sense. You have to imagine that he's a drunk uncle who you really love that you're trying to explain it to him and he's not getting it.

CM: When that "drunk uncle" asked you to defend the short story over the novel, you made the point that the short story was "genetically related to a joke." Taking that analogy further does that make *Tenth of December*, or any story collection, something like a stand up set?

GS: Yeah. I think that's absolutely right. For me that's a really great way to think of it. What you're trying to do — just like in really great stand up like Carlin or Pryor or Louie

C.K. — within the framework of a comedy routine you're trying to hit all kinds of highs and lows, depths and shallowness. When you step away from a short story collection, I think you could have a scale model of the universe. . . You might have some real slap stick and you might have some deep pathos. So when the person steps away they might say, "Oh yeah, the universe feels kind of like that." It's various and it's got highs and lows. It's got tragedy and schtick, so I think that's a pretty good analogy.

CM: One of the aspects of your stories I love is the inner thoughts of the characters. It feels like you have very authentically mapped the cadence and language of our thoughts, especially of the interior life of people living in the 21st century. But this made me wonder if you believe that we think differently than people did in the past, say even a 100 years ago.

GS: That's an interesting one because I'm working on something now that's set in the 1800s kind of in a silly way. But I have to say no, because I think it's the same as it ever was, in a certain way. I think people's basic thought patterns are always going to be informed by a person's notion of his own centrality. So somebody walking through a 14th century market place is still kind of

2/5/2014

Author of best book of the year tells how he survived Colbert Report - CultureMap Houston

thinking: Me, Me, Me, I would imagine. A lot of our thought patterns comes from that basic human dilemma that we're the only real person in the world, that everyone else is in our show.

I would imagine though, contradicting myself, that from time to time that would change. I think we live in an intensely narcissistic culture, but I can imagine a culture that was maybe more communal where those thoughts would be softened. But basically I guess my premise is no. . . I think we've always been what we are.

The George Saunders [Inprint reading](#) at the Alley Theatre on Jan. 27 is sold out. He will give a craft talk that is free and open to the public at 2:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 27, at the UH Honors College Commons in the M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Central Campus.

Q&A With Elizabeth Strout

Bringing out the inner lives of characters

By Maggie Galehouse

Set mostly in small, fictional Maine towns, Elizabeth Strout's novels mine extraordinary moments in otherwise ordinary lives.

Her characters keep secrets. They worry about their kids. They fret about money. They lose loved ones. And occasionally, they find their way home.

Strout won a Pulitzer for "Olive Kitteridge," a novel whose bracing titular character was revealed in 13 short stories. An HBO miniseries based on the book is in the works, starring Frances McDormand, Richard Jenkins and Bill Murray.

Strout, 58, will appear in Houston on Feb. 24 as part of Inprint's Margaret Root Brown Reading Series.

Q: You've written four novels: "Amy and Isabelle" (1998), "Abide With Me" (2006), "Olive Kitteridge" (2008) and "The Burgess Boys" (2013). What is the constant in your body of work?

A: I've always been interested in interiority, in the inner lives of people juxtaposed with the outer world they live in. As a young person, that was always intriguing. From a young age I lived in my head. I think children do. I recognized that the world in my head is different than the world outside.

Q: You won a Pulitzer for "Olive Kitteridge." Does that sort of attention ever affect your work?

A: What bothered me was an added sense of responsibility, even more than I usually have. I have a great sense of responsibility to my reader. I want to make sure I deliver something worthwhile. Now I've got a lot more readers because so many people liked "Olive Kitteridge." It's a great problem to have. But



Elizabeth Strout

Courtesy photo

Author appearance

Elizabeth Strout appears 7:30 p.m. Feb. 24 at the Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas, as part of Inprint's Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. General admission tickets are \$5; doors open at 6:45 p.m. Information: inprinthouston.org.

it's like anything. My next book will be a book for them — or it won't.

Q: Compared to "The Burgess Boys," which at times feels full to overflowing with characters, "Amy and Isabelle" is less crowded and more intense. What were you after in that first novel?

A: I had been circling that story for many years in many ways, taking the leap from be-

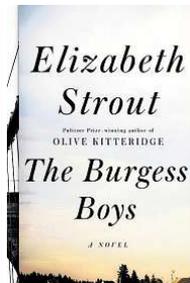
ing a short-story writer to realizing that I wanted and needed to write a novel. What was intriguing to me was the claustrophobic nature of the mother and daughter, their relationship. Of being stuck inside each other's heads. The horror and deep love. Also, Isabelle was dealing with class. She thought she belonged to a different class and for her to accept the woman she loved that, that cracked the shell that encased her.

Q: Why does "The Burgess Boys" open with a prologue? We meet two characters, a middle-aged daughter and her mother, remembering the Burgess boys, but we never hear from them again. Why open with them?

A: That probably occurred halfway through the writing of the book. I never write

beginning to end. I was up to my elbows in a big old mess. I thought, "Oh man, what am I going to do?" I've never liked prologues. I used to tell my students be careful if you write a prologue. But we all get back together with friends or relatives later in life and say, remember that woman? ... And that appealed to me. It's like saying to the reader: *I'm going to tell you this story.* In Maine, where I grew up, people don't talk about things that happen to them. One high school reunion I went to, to the things people said about what they lived through were astonishing. I thought, that's New England, for you. In the book, the town knows this tragedy occurs but the town absorbed it — didn't talk about it.

Q: Let's talk about endings. How would you char-



'The Burgess Boys'

By Elizabeth Strout
Random House, 335 pp., \$26;
\$15 paperback

acterize the endings of your books?

A: I consider myself a very happy ender. And it's something I've worried about, that maybe I have cheapened my work. But I've realized it's OK because it's not false. The endings come organically; I don't just stick a happy ending on. As much as I see the darkness in life, I'm a real believer in (life). I'm a celebratory person. I do believe there is always hope and that people can provide things for each other.

Q: You mean like Olive, ending up — maybe — with a boyfriend?

A: Olive earned it. She took her hits. She deserves it, or a chance at it. And the Burgess siblings, they really slipped around a bit. But they did all eventually come together, taking care of each other at the end.

Q: In your introduction to "The Best American Short Stories 2013," you write Strout continues on H19

Strout from page H13

about the authority of a successful narrator. Can you expand on that?

A. Every writer has a sound or a voice and that voice is going to be modulated to some degree according to the story he or she is writing. You have to learn what your voice is because we're taught at such a young age to use false

voices. How often are we told, "That's not nice!" or, "Don't say that!" Now, that's not all bad or we'd all be Olive. But it's a writer's job to go back and find the voice that says what they and only they can see.

Q: Olive Kitteridge seems like such a quintessential New Englander. She is brisk, determined, capable, righteous and

impatient. She loves hard and suffers no fools. Did you worry about how she would play in other parts of the country? If readers in the South or West would get her?

A: She's very much a New Englander — but she's also a human. On steroids. I didn't think about how she would play. Actually, my instinct was to protect her, but then I'd think, no, don't

protect her. Let her go. Don't hold back. My job was to let her be an outrageous person.

I have been amazed how many people have said, "I'm Olive" or "I really relate to her." One man told me his wife was Olive Kitteridge and my mother asked me, "Is that a compliment?"

Maggie Galehouse is the Houston Chronicle books editor.

"I believe in freedom of speech. Your freedom of speech means that you can joke about anything you want. My freedom of speech means that I don't have to laugh at it. Everyone was so upset about being censored, about losing their freedom of speech. Forget freedom of speech; they lost their minds." 8:30 p.m. Station Theater, 1230 Houston Avenue. For information, visit jamiakilstein.com. \$18. OLIVIA FLORES ALVAREZ

MON

2/24

LITERARY EVENTS

A MAINE EVENT

Pulitzer Prize-winning author **Elizabeth Strout**, appearing at the Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series, set her latest book, *The Burgess Boys*, in New York and Maine. The family drama is about two adult brothers who live in New York and their sister, who lives in Maine. The



Elizabeth Strout

woman's teenage son is accused of throwing a bloody pig head into a local mosque, and the brothers, both of whom are in the legal profession, come home to help with his defense. Strout has been touted as crafting a vivid portrayal of life in a small town in Maine, both the good and the bad. Not everyone has been exactly appreciative of her efforts.

"I went to this book club up in Maine, some church book club had me visit," Strout tells us. "And they asked me, 'Do you even like Maine? We're not like this.' I felt like saying, '[This character] is your sister. Don't blame me.' Oh, well, they weren't my audience," Strout laughs.

"I don't want to offend people, but at the same time, that doesn't mean that places aren't grim, and where [this character] lives, it's grim. If you're freezing cold all the time and you really can't afford to heat your house, it affects you. Just to go outside means that you have to shovel off the car and de-ice everything. Your energy is going to become more focused on just trying to survive. That's very real. Economic differences are something that we don't talk about a lot in this country. We don't really talk about the differences in your reality when you don't have

enough money to heat your house, as opposed to going to dinner parties in New York where there are Picassos on the wall."

Strout's reading is followed by an onstage interview with Houston novelist Katherine Center and a book sale and signing. 7:30 p.m. Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas. For information, call 713-521-2026 or visit inprintheouston.org. \$5. OLIVIA FLORES ALVAREZ

THEATER

A LEGACY OF WAR

A World War II foot soldier comes home to a working-class town in Pennsylvania and doesn't feel like he belongs anymore. That's the premise of *Odyssey's End*, a special reading being staged by Stark Naked Theatre Company (and sponsored in part by the *Houston Press*). A group of actors will read the play, written 25 years ago by professor William S.E. Coleman. Coleman fought under Patton in World War II and came home to Pennsylvania, where he went on to become a theater professor. In *Odyssey's End*, the

main character is named Jim Martin, who gets a hero's welcome on his return, Stark Naked co-founder Phillip Lehl says. "He's a hero who doesn't feel he deserves to be a hero. It looks at post-traumatic stress disorder before it had a name. It is a semi-autobiographical work," he says.

"We decided to do it because it is a play that was written by [Bill Coleman], Phillip's mentor at Drake University. They have a long relationship. He saw it done at the university and wanted to remount it after it had a rewrite," says Kim Tobin-Lehl, co-founder of Stark Naked. Directed by Leslie Sinclair, the actors at the reading will be Phillip Lehl, Kim Tobin-Lehl, Joanna Hubbard, Matt Hune, James Belcher and Joe Kirkendahl. 7:30 p.m. Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring. For information, call 832-866-6514 or visit starknakedtheatre.com. \$5.

MARGARET DOWNING

TUE

2/25

LITERARY EVENTS

HAPPY ENDINGS

In *Evening Stars*, the final book in best-selling romance novelist **Susan Mallery's** *Blackberry Island* trilogy, published by Harlequin, one character sees the island off the West Coast as a place of retreat, while another feels trapped by it. Mallery, whose first two books in the series have sold more than 400,000 copies, will appear at Katy Budget Books on her publication date of February 25 for an afternoon luncheon, as well as for an evening book club event, which is open to all. Lots of her fans are expected to attend.

Mallery, who lived in Houston in the early '90s and is now based in Seattle, says she was in line to become a CPA, even had a job offer with benefits while still in college, but she decided to try writing romance novels first (because she'd always really liked reading them) and gave herself two years to get going. She sold her first book

within three months of graduation. "By the two-year mark, I had sold seven books," she says. She says she promises "a happy ending," but her plots take a lot of different routes to get there. Unlike some other authors, Mallery, who maintains a Facebook page, says she welcomes the social media aspects of being a successful author. "Writing is really isolating. This way I get to be friends with 50,000 people and I don't have to put on makeup," she says. "After all these years of being by myself all day working, I finally get to be social, and I really like it a lot."

In fact, she's already got fans doing the "heavy lifting" by helping her name businesses around town in her upcoming series entitled *Mischief Bay* — "It's much bigger [than *Blackberry Island*], so I'd be able to stay there a long time." 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. discussion, signing and lunch, 6 to 7 p.m. meet-and-greet with the author, 7 p.m. reading and signing. 2450 Fry Road. For information, call 281-578-7770 or visit katybooks.com. Free.

MARGARET DOWNING

WED

2/26

THEATER

FOOL'S GOLD

In playwright and Pulitzer Prize-nominee Theresa Rebeck's latest work, *Fool*, now headed for the Alley Theatre, the setting is a medieval kitchen in which she pits two court jesters against each other with potentially disastrous consequences for one of them (the loser will be beheaded). According to Alley Artistic Director Gregory Boyd: "One of the things the play is, is a 'comedy about comedy,' as Theresa says. And the situation allows her to put the characters in a desperate situation, which I think is a way of making vivid the fears and anxieties of any performer, or artist — it's always life and death for an artist, even if it's not literal for most. Alongside that is an idea she is fascinated with in the play — how comedy can speak truth to power. There's something anarchic and wickedly spirited about comedy, and some rulers don't always find that amusing." Alley company members Jeffrey Bean (King) and Elizabeth Bunch (Joss) join with Joey Collins (in *The Glass Menagerie* with Jessica Lange on Broadway) and others in this world premiere. 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays. Through March 16. 615 Texas. For information, call 713-220-5700 or visit alleytheatre.org. \$26 to \$65.

MARGARET DOWNING

Night+Day listings are offered as a free service to *Houston Press* readers and are subject to space restrictions. Submissions should be addressed to Night+Day Editor Olivia Flores Alvarez by e-mail (calendar@houstonpress.com), phone (713-280-2483), fax (713-280-2496) or mail (*Houston Press*, 2603 La Branch, Houston TX 77004). Please include ZIP code with address. Continuing items must be resubmitted monthly. Items must be received 21 days prior to each issue date. Search our complete listings online.

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Q&A With Mohsin Hamid

Author seeks to connect with universal ideas

By Maggie Galehouse

This book is a self-help book. Its objective, as it says on the cover, is to show you how to get filthy rich in rising Asia. And to do that it has to find you, huddled, shivering, on the packed earth under your mother's cot one cold, dewy morning. Your anguish is the anguish of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen. This is all the more remarkable since you've never in your life seen any of these things.

from "How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia," by Mohsin Hamid

Mohsin Hamid's third novel, just out in paperback, is a scalding, hilarious and tender satire of self-help books. "How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia" follows the arc of one life — through odd jobs and education, businesses above-board and below, marriage and fatherhood and divorce, health and then sickness and death.

This brisk 220-page march through a life reminds readers, on the one hand, of how brief and globally insignificant any life can be. On the other hand, the featured "you" represents each and every one of us, and so it could not be more precious.

Hamid's first novel, "Moth Smoke," features a downwardly mobile ex-banker who falls for his best friend's wife. "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," his second, a monologue told by a Pakistani man who chased success on Wall Street, was made into a film by Mira Nair in 2012.

A regular contributor to Time, the New York Times and other publications, Hamid appears in Houston on March 24.

Q: You were born in Pakistan, lived in California



Courtesy photos

Mohsin Hamid

as a child, attended college and law school in the U.S., took up residence for awhile in London, and now you're back living in Lahore, Pakistan. Does this give you writing a certain point of view?

A: I think now my point of

view is that I can fit in in lots of places and yet, inside myself, feel like a bit of a foreigner everywhere... When you've lived out of the country for so long, you can't help but look at a place as a foreigner. What I find myself doing is trying to remind people that the ideas we have

that Americans are like *this* or Pakistanis are like *that*, aren't really true. When you look at any group closely, it starts breaking apart into individuals. In Pakistan, people will ask, "How do Americans respond to your books?" There's no such thing as how Americans respond. There are more than 300 million Americans, and they all read in a different way.

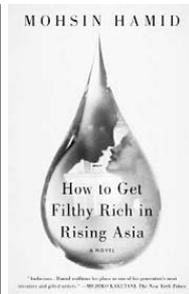
Q: Do you find it easier to write about a place when you're living somewhere else?

A: That's what happened with my first two novels. I was living in America on the East Coast when I wrote "Moth Smoke," a novel about Pakistan. My second novel, "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," is about a Pakistani guy in America. It was written while living in the UK and Pakistan. But "How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia," which I wrote in Pakistan, doesn't say where it is. Sometimes, I think distance can be helpful when writing about a place, so I defamiliarized Pakistan. It allowed me to look at the place with fresh eyes, to be kind of an expat while living at home. Not having names for the cities or the characters is, for me, a way to touch on universal ideas. In the novel there is the "you" character and the "you" reading the book and the writer, who is "me." In the end, all three of those people start to appear on the page.

Q: Is this a comment on the writing process or on reading?

A: I really feel that novels aren't entirely written by writers. They're a series of prompts for readers to enter their own land of make believe.

Q: You made a bold formal decision in "How to



'How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia'

By Mohsin Hamid.
Penguin Group, 240 pp., \$16 paperback.

Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia, modeling the text after self-help books, with chapter titles such as "Move to the City" and "Work for Yourself." Why?

A: I guess the idea began with the question, "Why do I write novels?" I'm a 42-year-old man who sits by himself in a room and writes. To do this for hours and days and weeks upon years, it must be doing something for me. So maybe the novel is self-help for the writer. And then I thought maybe fiction can help readers. So it started off as kind of a joke but, as I wrote, it became more and more sincere and earnest. It's interesting that so many of our spiritual, religious and mystical texts have been stories. Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam. So often, the way spiritual ideas are conveyed is through storytelling. That's a kind of

Hamid continues on H16

Hamid from page H14

self-help also. So I wanted to write a novel that wasn't religious per se but is trying to address these spiritual themes. Part of the reason I think that's important is that all over the world, instead of

traditional ways of coping with change, people are getting more and more uncomfortable. It's a global spiritual crisis if you're religious and a global mental health crisis if you're not. A young Pakistani kid puts on a vest and blows himself

up in a shopping mall or a young American kid picks up a gun and shoots kids in a school.

Q: In Pakistan, do you live with your extended family?

A: Yes. Downstairs in the same house are

my parents. Upstairs, my wife and I and our two children. My daughter turned 5 this past summer, and my son turns 2 next month. So there are three generations, two of each. I grew up in a tri-generational mode and there's a time in life when it works really well. Living tri-generationally again and seeing the full arc of life was a big part of why I wrote this book.

Q: You have a law degree from Harvard. What's up with that? Was law your Plan B?

A: It wasn't Plan B. It was Plan A and writing was Plan B. I didn't know anybody who made a living writing books. In Pakistan, in particular, there are so many groups that don't have adequate legal protection. I thought

getting into constitutional law would be a good idea. Then I discovered I didn't really love the law. I didn't like the adversarial system of arguing two positions. So I never practiced, but I did graduate with \$100,000 of debt!

Q: You enjoy television, I've read. What do you watch?

A: My wife and I watch TV together. We're huge fans of "Game of Thrones" and "Girls." And "Mad Men" and "Breaking Bad." We're pretty omnivorous.

Q: In a recent New York Times column, you wrote: "... to read a novel is to engage in probably the second-largest single act of pleasure-based data transfer that can take place between two human beings,

exceeded only by sex." Can you elaborate a bit?

A: A novel is the only time a human being will take another human's thoughts into the place where they keep their own thoughts. You sit in solitude and allow others to sit inside you for hours. That's a remarkably intimate encounter. You have cinema, of course, but that's a visual product that represents many people's efforts.

Q: When you read, what is it you hope to get from a book?

A: I want to encounter another consciousness, another person's way of thinking. And I want it to provoke me. In telling the story I want writers to reveal themselves... The nicest thing I've had any filmmaker say to me is, "Your books are almost impossible to adapt for the screen." Yes. Exactly. Because they're books.

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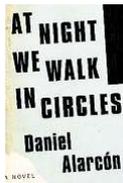
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BOOK *EXCERPT*

Daniel Alarcón will discuss “At Night We Walk in Circles,” and Mohsin Hamid will discuss “How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia,” followed by an on-stage interview and book-signing, as part of the Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. Event begins 7:30 p.m. Monday, Stude Concert Hall, Rice University, entrance 18 off of Rice Boulevard. \$5. Doors open 6:45 p.m. Information: inprintheouston.org.

“During the war — which Nelson’s father called *the anxious years* — a few radical students at the Conservatory founded a theater company. They read the French surrealists, and improvised adaptations of Quechua myths; they smoked cheap tobacco, and sang protest songs with vulgar lyrics. They laughed in public as if it were a political act, baring their teeth and frightening children. Their ranks were drawn, broadly speaking, from the following overlapping circles of youth: the longhairs, the working class, the sex-crazed, the poseurs, the provincials, the alcoholics, the emotionally needy, the rabble-rousers, the opportunists, the punks, the hangers-on, and the obsessed.”



from “At Night We Walk in Circles,” by Daniel Alarcón



Courtesy photo

Daniel Alarcón

COMING TUESDAY

In *Bookish*, Maggie Galehouse talks to the author behind ABC’s new series, “Resurrection.”



BEST-SELLERS

Fiction

1. **Words of Radiance:**

By Brandon Sanderson. The second book of the Stormlight Archive fantasy epic, set in the world of Roshar.

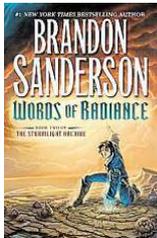
2. **The Bootlegger:**

By Clive Cussler and Justin Scott. Early-20th-century detective Isaac Bell tracks a wide-ranging international criminal enterprise.

3. **The Goldfinch:**

By Donna Tartt. A painting smuggled out of the Metropolitan Museum of Art after a bombing becomes a boy’s prize, guilt and burden.

4. The Invention of Wings: By Sue Monk Kidd. A wealthy Charleston, S.C., girl, Sarah Grimké, who will grow up to become a prominent abolitionist, is given a slave for her 11th



birthday.

5. Private L.A.: By James Patterson and Mark Sullivan. Jack Morgan and Justine Smith search for a celebrity couple who disappear from their luxurious ranch.

6. The Chase: By Janet Evanovich and Lee Goldberg. Nicolas Fox

and Kate O’Hare team up to steal back a Chinese artifact taken from the Smithsonian.

7. Bone Deep: By Randy Wayne White. Doc Ford and his friend Tomlinson search for stolen Indian relics.

8. **Concealed in Death:**

By J.D. Robb. Lt. Eve Dallas is on the case when the demolition of a building that once sheltered troubled teenagers reveals skeletons hidden in the walls; by Nora Roberts, writing pseudonymously.

9. **Still Life With Bread Crumbs:**

By Anna Quindlen. An aging photographer rents a rural cottage and discovers sparks of creativity and desire.

10. **Sycamore Row:**

By John Grisham. A sequel, about race and inheritance, to “A Time to Kill.”

Nonfiction

1. **Uganda Be Kidding Me:**

By Chelsea Handler. Humorous travel stories.

2. **The Future of the Mind:**

By Michio Kaku. A theoretical physicist examines research at the intersection of neuroscience and physics that points to the day when science has a complete map of the brain, making telepathy, mind-controlled robots and uploading memories possible.

3. **Killing Jesus:**

By Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard. The host of “The O’Reilly Factor” recounts the events leading up to Jesus’ execution.

4. **Unbroken:**

By Laura Hillenbrand. An Olympic runner’s story of survival as a prisoner of the Japanese in World War II when his plane goes down over the



Pacific.

5. **David and Goliath:**

By Malcolm Gladwell. How disadvantages can work in our favor; from the author of “The Tipping Point” and “Outliers.”

6. **Things That Matter:**

By Charles Krauthammer. Three decades’ worth of essays from the conserva-

tive columnist.

7. Lean In: By Sheryl Sandberg with Nell Scovell. The chief operating officer of Facebook urges women to pursue their careers without ambivalence.

8. Duty: By Robert M. Gates. The former defense secretary recounts his experience serving Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

9. The Sixth Extinction: By Elizabeth Kolbert. The New Yorker writer examines the role of man-made influences in causing the planet’s current spasm of plant and animal loss.

10. I Am Malala: By Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb. A Pakistani girl who advocated for women’s education was shot by the Taliban.

New York Times



Home » Arts

INPRINT READING SERIES

TV's OK, but best-selling writer Mohsin Hamid contends there's still nothing like a novel

BY [TARRA GAINES](#) 3.23.14 | 12 pm



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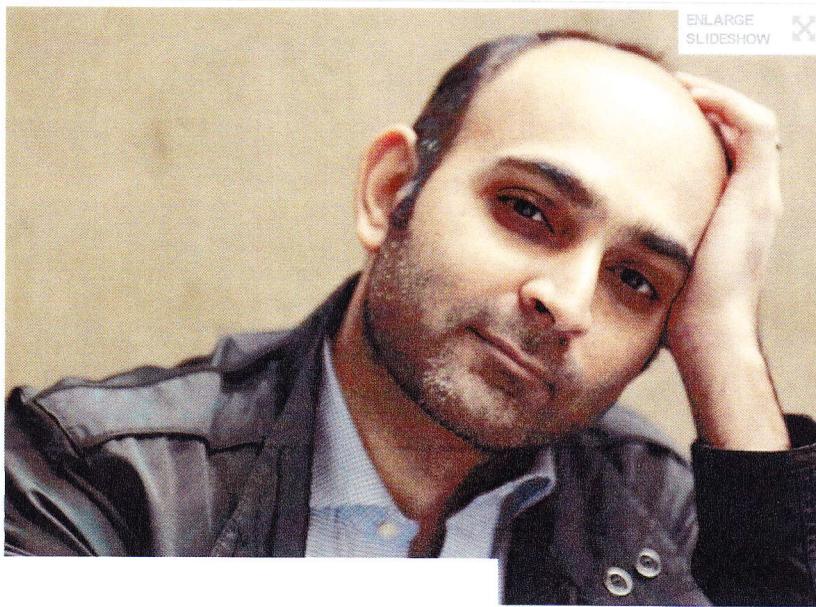
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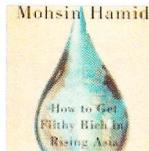


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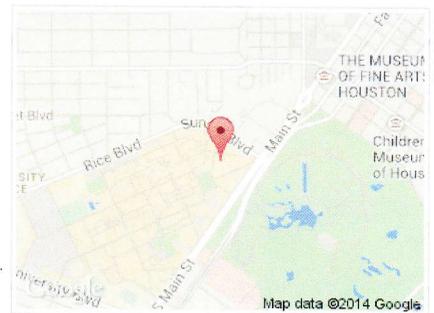
ENLARGE SLIDESHOW

Author Mohsin Hamid Photo by © Jimmi Eisenstein



Three weeks ago, the award-winning and best-selling novelist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, [Mohsin Hamid](#) made a very embarrassing and perhaps even taboo confession in the *New York Times* on behalf of contemporary novelists. Some of them (maybe the honest ones) are spending as much time watching television — like the rest of us binge viewing *Mad Men* and *Game of Thrones* — as reading their fellow writers' fiction.

As someone who reads an awful lot of books but at the time of that the Times article's publication had fallen deep into the Louisiana literary swamp of HBO's *True Detective*, I knew one question I had to ask Hamid when I had a chance to speak to him before his trip to Houston for his appearance at the [Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series](#) Monday night.



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If television has the time to tell expansive stories and the quality of that storytelling has

If television has the time to tell expansive stories and the quality of that storytelling has surged in the past decade, does the novel still have its own unique qualities to give to readers?

surged in the past decade, does the novel still have its own unique qualities to give to readers?

For Hamid the answer is a definite yes, and it all comes from the one-on-one, very intimate relationship between writer and reader.

"I think the fundamental difference (between the novel and television) is that the novel operates at the level of thought," explained Mohsin. "Those words are thought; therefore, the novel remains a way for one human being to contain the thoughts of another human being. That connection and the need for that connection will always be there."

Mohsin gives tribute to our new golden age of television, not just in the U.S but across the globe, as a very powerful form of storytelling, but for him the novel goes beyond storytelling.

"There's value when one human being encounters another human is this incredibly intimate form. I think that's what the novel can do better than any other form and will continue to do," he said.

The relationship between you and the author

This intimacy between the writer and reader is obviously something that Hamid was thinking much on during the creation of his latest acclaimed novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. The book is framed as a self-help book where an authoritative narrator advises and observes a nameless "You" throughout the book in You's quest to go from a sickly child shivering under his mother's bed in a nameless village to becoming the multi-millionaire king of bottled water in a nameless rising Asian country.

This intimacy between the writer and reader is obviously something that Hamid was thinking much on during the creation of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.

As the book progresses, something strange happens within the relationship between narrator, author, character and reader, as it becomes difficult to know where one ends and the other begins.

"There are times in the novel where the book actually speaks from me the person actually writing the book, not a narrator, not a character, but a human being writing the book," described Hamid when I asked about the relationship between the You character, the narrator, and the reader. "That kind of moment for me is at the heart of what the book is about. Trying to create that sort of bridge between writer and reader, between reader and character, between writer and character, that kind of blurring was very important to me."

As the reader becomes submerged in You's struggles, failures, loves and losses, the distinctions between character, reader, and narrator become less certain. Yet for Hamid, this is what novels should do, "blur" that line between the living writer and reader and the imagined characters.

A nameless city, a timeless present

Hamid continues that blurring intimacy in two other ways in the book. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* contains almost no names of people or places and 70 years pass in the life of You while the reader remains always "in the present moment" and in the technology of the first two decades of this century. Consequently, the novel seems to always be set in the reader's city and present.

Hamid's current hometown of Lahore, Pakistan (at times in his life he's also called California, London, and New York home) serves as the template for the novel's setting, and there are certain qualities it possess that seem specifically Asian. However by giving the city no name even as it pulses, grows and changes throughout the novel, Hamid makes any and every real sprawling city in the world into You's city, again bringing the reader closer into the novel which could easily be set in their city, whether Mexico City or Shanghai.

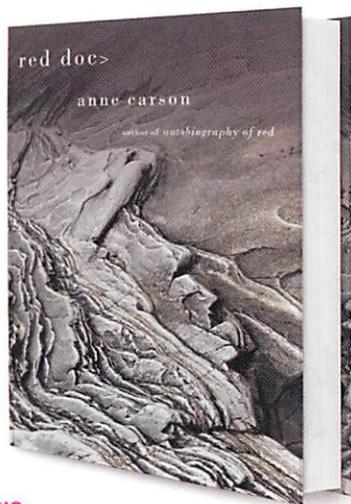
"I wanted to assert the view that any place can be central," Hamid explained. And even the advice the book dispenses to become filthy rich could almost work anywhere where capitalism reigns. "It very easily could be set in Africa or Latin America and possibly in parts of the United States."

The city could almost even be Houston. Though he's traveled to Texas in the past, Hamid has never been here, but is looking forward to the visit because old friends have settled here and because "Houston symbolized — at least to somebody coming from abroad — symbolizes a certain vision of what an American city can be."

Mohsin Hamid shares the Stude Concert Hall stage at Rice University with novelist Daniel Alarcón on Monday, March 24 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$5 for general admission.

H-TOWN PICKS

APRIL



READING

ANNE CARSON

A poet, essayist, translator, classicist, and scholar, Carson made her reputation in the 1990s with two volumes of achingly sharp verse: *Plainwater* and *Glass, Irony, and God*. Since then, she has published translations of Sappho, Euripides, and other ancients, burnishing her credentials as one of the most erudite writers of her generation, as well as one of the most inventive.

April 28 at 7:30. \$5. Zilkha Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby St. 713-521-2026. inprinthouston.org

FESTIVAL

Japan Festival

For the past 20 years, the Japan-America Society of Houston has hosted a festival in Hermann Park celebrating all things Japanese. Taking place near the park's Japanese Garden, the festival features the country's cuisine, taiko drums, ikebana flower arrangements, tea ceremonies, martial arts demonstrations, and children's activities. With 20,000 annual attendees, the festival can hardly be considered a hidden gem, yet many Houstonians still don't know about it. This is the perfect year to change that.

April 12-10-7. Free. Japanese Garden at Hermann Park, 6000 Fannin St. 713-963-0121. japan-fest.info



POP

Arcade Fire

Undeniably the greatest band to ever emerge from The Woodlands, Arcade Fire was founded by Josh Deu and Win Butler—the grandson of swing-era bandleader Alvino Rey, whose 2004 death helped inspire the band's breakthrough album, *Funeral*. Although now based in Montreal, Win and his brother Will (who's also in the band) haven't forgotten their Houston roots—their 2010 album

Suburbs was based on memories of their Woodlands childhood. They return to their old stomping grounds this month behind their latest album, *Reflektor*, featuring the band's most ambitious, eclectic music to date.

April 9 at 7:30. \$30.50–60.50. Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, 2005 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands. 281-364-3024. woodlandscenter.org



DANCE

#WOMENFORDANCE

Though the choreography trade has long been dominated by men, the other sex has recently made major strides. MET Dance celebrates these pioneering women in a two-night program, featuring a dance by Andrea Dawn Shelley about Frida Kahlo's painting "The Broken Column," a work by MET Dance resident choreographer Kiki Lucas, and additional pieces by Sida Bell, Kate Skarpetowska, and the Rhode Island-based Island Moving Company.

April 11–12. \$15–45. Cullen Theater, Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas Ave. 832-487-7041. metdance.org

CLASSICAL

ROCO Celebrates France

The River Oaks Chamber Orchestra pays homage to France by performing the world premiere of their commission from composer Carter Pann, *Le Tombeau d'Henri Cartier-Bresson*, inspired by the legendary Parisian photographer, as well as Jacques Ibert's *Divertissement* and Debussy's *Petite Suite*.

But the program's most intriguing piece is a little-known bassoon concerto by Classical composer François Devienne, the partial score to which was discovered by orchestra principal bassoonist Kristin Wolfe Jensen and reconstructed by ROCO's dedicated librarian, Jason Stephens.

April 5 at 5. \$10–25. St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, 2450 River Oaks Blvd. April 6 at 5. \$10–20. Grace Presbyterian Church, 10221 Ella Lee Ln. 713-665-2700. rocohouston.org