

# In Print announces 2019-2020 season with Ta-Nehisi Coates, Colson Whitehead

By **Andrew Dansby** Published 9:06 am CDT, Monday, July 1, 2019



Photo: GABRIELLA DEMCZUK, STR



IMAGE 1 OF 4

Ta-Nehisi Coates, the Atlantic correspondent and author of "Between the World and Me," in Baltimore, July 16, 2015. Coates' meditation on the black experience in America is already being hailed as a runaway ... [more](#)

In Print Houston announced the lineup for its Margaret Root Brown Reading Series for 2019-2020 on Monday night. Authors visiting Houston to read from their latest works include Ta-Nehisi Coates, Colson Whitehead, Louise Erdrich and Colum McCann.

Whitehead will kick off the series' season on Sept. 16. He'll stop in Houston on his tour for "The Nickel Boys," his ninth novel, which is being described as a companion piece to "The Underground Railroad," his 2016 novel that won a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Whitehead began work on "The Nickel Boys" after reading about the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, an institution in Florida with a dark and dubious history. Whitehead used the reform school as inspiration for his Nickel Academy in a tale about Jim Crow-era Florida.

Coates won the National Book Award for "Between the World and Me," a letter in book form written to his son about growing up black in America. The recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant," Coates has largely worked in non-fiction prior to the forthcoming publication of "The Water Dancer," his first novel, due in late-September. He'll read here Oct. 29.

Also appearing this season:

Elizabeth Gilbert, who just published her novel "City of Girls." She sold more than a few copies of her spiritual travel memoir, "Eat Pray Love." She comes to Houston Nov. 11.

Carmen Maria Machado comes to Houston Jan. 27, 2020, with her new memoir "In the Dream House." Her collection of short stories, "Her Body and Other Parties," was a National Book Award finalist two years ago.

Louise Erdrich has published novels, short stories, poetry, children's books and essays in a distinguished career that spans 40 years. She reads here March 9.

In Print brings poets Reginald Dwayne Betts and Natalie Diaz on March 23. Canadian novelist Emily St. John Mandel is here April 27 with Irish novelist Colum McCann to close the 2019-2020 season.

Season tickets will go on sale in the next few weeks, according to In Print executive director Rich Levy. More information can be found on [the organization's site](#).



Arts & Culture > Books & Talks

## PAGE TURNER

# These Are the 2019-2020 Inprint Readers

The literary nonprofit's lineup includes big names like Ta-Nehisi Coates, Elizabeth Gilbert, and more.

By [Morgan Kinney](#) • 7/2/2019 at 2:50pm

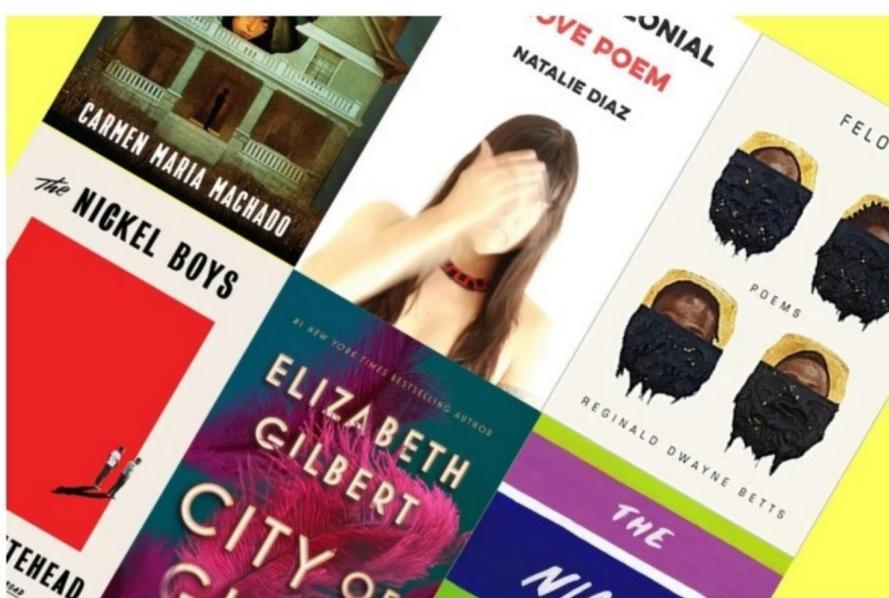


IMAGE: COURTESY OF PUBLISHERS



**WHICH AUTHORS WILL SHAPE HOUSTON'S LITERARY CONVERSATION IN THE COMING YEAR?** We have at least part of the answer as of Monday evening, when local literary nonprofit Inprint announced the 2019-2020 Margaret Root Brown Reading Series.

Although reduced from last season's dozen authors, the 10-person lineup features undeniable heavy-hitters, including Colson Whitehead, who will open the season with *The Nickel Boys*, the followup to his 2016 blockbuster, *The Underground Railroad*. Journalist and novelist Ta-Nehisi Coates will read from his new novel *The Water Dancer*. And *Eat Pray Love* author Elizabeth Gilbert will visit to promote her latest, *City of Girls*.

Rounded out by Carmen Maria Machado, Louise Erdrich, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Natalie Diaz, Emily St. John Mandel, and Colum McCann, the season is a living trophy case of winners of (or finalists for) the Pulitzer Prize, Booker Prize, National Book Award, Book Critics Circle Award, and more.

See full line-up (including dates) listed below. For more information about tickets and each reading, visit [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org).

## Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series | 2019-2020

**September 16:** Colson Whitehead

**October 29:** Ta-Nehisi Coates

**November 11:** Elizabeth Gilbert

**January 27:** Carmen Maria Machado

**March 9:** Louise Erdrich

**March 23:** Reginald Dwayne Betts and Natalie Diaz

**April 27:** Emily St. John Mandel and Colum McCann

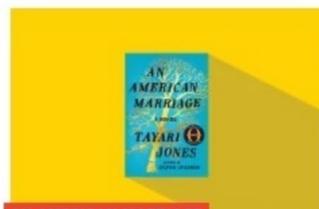
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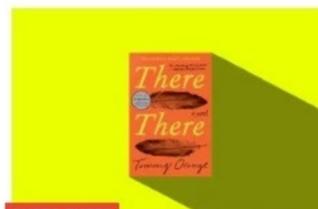
**PAWPAW POWERS**  
We Ask Author Richard Powers What It's Like to Win A Pulitzer  
04/22/2019 • By [Ryan Pait](#)



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## NOVELS, POEMS, MEMOIRS: INPRINT'S MARGARETT ROOT BROWN READING SERIES ADDRESSES OUR COMPLICATED WORLD

TARRA GAINES • JULY 29, 2019

BOOKS ROBERTSON



Rich Levy, Executive Director of Inprint. Photo courtesy of Inprint.

For the performing arts lover, one of the annual small joys in life can come from a favorite dance, theater or music organization revealing their next season. A bit like arts Christmas, a good announcement offers all the suspense of a dramatically wrapped package, followed by the fun of using that gift for the next year. Yet every summer when **Inprint**, Houston's premiere literary arts organization, announces its next **Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series** it feels a little less like a present and more like a remarkable foretelling.

For the good literary crew at Inprint have a spooky habit of putting together a season of author readings and conversations that predict those books we'll be obsessing over in the coming year, as well as some likely candidates for the next Pulitzer Prize or National Book Award. And sometimes that new season goes beyond the next must-read to give us glimpses into the coming *zeitgeist*, allowing us to meet the authors whose work foresees and examines who we are becoming, long before the rest of us begin to even question who we are.



Colson Whitehead reads on Sept. 16 at Cullen Performance Hall, University of Houston. Photo courtesy of the artist.

To get a better idea of the literary worlds we'll soon be living to explore, I sat down with director Rich Levy, shortly after Inprint unveiled their 2019-2020 season.

While in recent years, Inprint has alternated between solo reads vs. two author events, the first half of the 19/20 season tips that balance with a lineup of (bibliophiles') household-name authors reading alone, including Pulitzer Prize-winning and former University of Houston professor, Colson Whitehead (Sept. 16), National Book Award-winner Ta-Nehisi Coates (Oct. 29) and best-selling author Elizabeth Gilbert (Nov. 11). Then March 9, 2020 brings another National Book Award winner, Louise Erdrich, reading from her new novel *The Night Watchman*.

Those fans of a good duet reading event can look forward to early 2020 with a memoir night featuring Carmen Maria Machado and Caroline Forché (Jan. 27). Inprint rings in national poetry month a week early with award-winning poets Reginald Dwayne Betts and Natalie Diaz (March 23). The season ends with two genre-defying authors, Emily St. John Mandel and Colum McCann (April 27).

"It's a really diverse set of writers in a lot of different ways and brings a lot of different voices in."

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### VISIONARY VOICES



OCT. 15  
Fidencio Duran

Art in Public Places and Texas Society of Architects welcome Fidencio Duran, who will discuss his upcoming project for the City of Austin and his larger body of work.

6PM  
Texas Society of Architects,  
500 Chicon St, Austin  
FREE



SAGE Studio is a studio and gallery space for contemporary art.

describes Levy of the season.

Part of that diversity comes from within the individual authors' repertoires, with several jumping into new genres. Coates, the acclaimed journalist, essayist and *Black Panther* graphic novel author, will read from his first novel, *The Water Dancer*. Though there will likely be many *Eat, Pray, Love* fans in the audience for memoirist Elizabeth Gilbert's reading, Levy offers great praise for her fiction writing prowess and calls her latest novel, *City of Girls*, a "fun, sexy read."



Ta-Nehisi Coates reads on Oct. 29 at Cullen Performance Hall, University of Houston. Photo by Gabriella Demczuk.

Meanwhile, Machado—whose debut short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties* caused such a sensation two years ago—moves to nonfiction with *In the Dream House*, which delves into the issue of domestic abuse among same-sex partners. Forché, an acclaimed poet, also moves into memoir territory with a new work *What You Have Heard Is True*, chronicling her time in El Salvador during its most brutal contemporary history.

Several of the novels showcased this season bring memoir and nonfiction qualities to them, influenced by real life events and people. Whitehead's *Nickel Boys* is based on the horrors of a real reformatory institute in Jim Crow-era Florida. Erdrich has described *The Night Watchman* as being based on the life of her grandfather. And the early synopsis of

McCann's novel *Apeirogon*, which won't be published until February 2020, describe it as "rooted" in the real-life friendship between two men enduring loss, one Israeli the other Palestinian.

Even those writers who aren't basing their fictional worlds on real life occurrences seem greatly influenced by autobiography and historical research. Coates looked to slave narratives when writing *The Water Dancer* and Gilbert immersed herself in the columns and reviews of the 1940s New York theater world.

When I mentioned in our conversation that there seemed to be many authors in this season's lineup using history to tell story, Levy agreed perhaps several are working on putting history into context.



Carmen Machado reads on Jan. 27 at the Alley Theater. Photo by Art Steiber.

"I think one thing that's going on in this work, and I think it is kind of in the culture in general, is that people are questioning received knowledge. They're looking at history through a very different lens and trying to make us come to terms with some of the things that we have willfully or unconsciously ignored for so long." He adds, "There's a lot of fearlessness in these writers. They're not afraid to take on tough stuff."

During our talk on some of the commonalities in this season, we also mused on the differences, especially when it comes to tone, for example between Whitehead's *Nickel Boys* and Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls*.

"It makes you realize how complicated the world is," mused Levy on those specific novels, but perhaps also this season's lineup in particular and the wonder of reading all together forever. "There's a lot of suffering; there's also occasionally some joy and pleasure. I guess you can't have one without the other. You've got to have both."

—TARRA GAINES



TARRA GAINES

Tarra Gaines is a writer and teacher in Houston.



DADA presents the FALL Gallery WALK Saturday, SEPT. 7th noon to 8pm

Juan Cruz at Mary Tomas Gallery



DADA Dallas Art Dealers Association dallasartdealers.org



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# READINGS

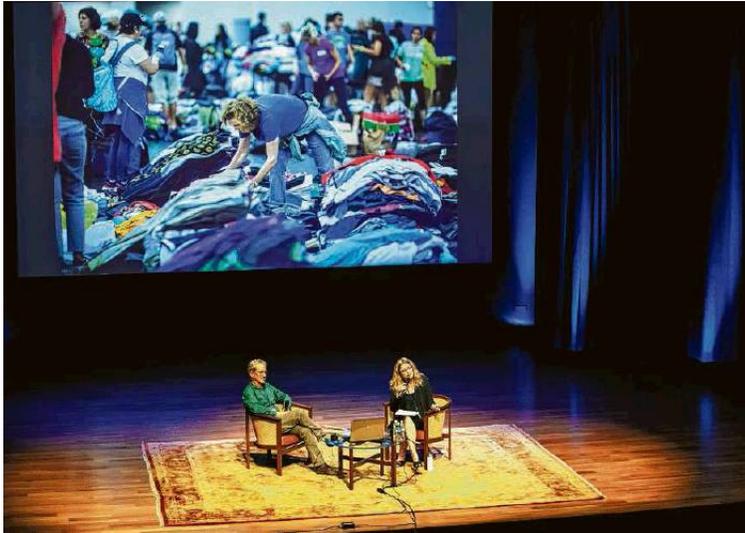
Authors and thinkers help make sense of a turbulent world, and some of the most notable of these will be visiting Houston in the coming months. Among them are Colson Whitehead, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Maika and Maritza Moulite and Carmen Maria Machado. In addition to individual authors, we also have the National Black Books Festival and the Jewish Books & Art Festival.

## AUGUST

- 19 Tamara Pizzoli:** Author will discuss "Tallulah the Tooth Fairy CEO." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**21 David Mariett:** Author will discuss "American Red." Murder By The Book.  
**22 Lisa Lutz:** Author will discuss "The Swallows." Murder By The Book.  
**22 Weijian Shan:** Author will discuss "Out of the Gobl." Asia Society Texas Center.  
**23 Billy Jensen:** Author will discuss "Chase Darkness With Me" in conversation with Kathryn Casey. Murder By The Book.  
**26 Ilona Andrews:** Author will discuss "Sapphire Flames." Murder By The Book.  
**26 Rachel Monroe:** Author will discuss "Savage Appetites." Brazos Bookstore.  
**27 Caroline Fredrickson:** Author will discuss "The Democracy Fix," presented in conjunction with the American Constitution Society. Brazos Bookstore.  
**29 Teresa Sabankaya:** Author will discuss "The Posy Book." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**31 David Lagercrantz:** Author will discuss "The Girl Who Lived Twice." Murder By The Book.

## SEPTEMBER

- 3 David Shannon:** Author will discuss "Mr. Nogginbody Gets a Hammer." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**3 Timothy Faust:** Author will discuss "Health Justice Now." Brazos Bookstore.  
**4 Ryan Higgins:** Author will discuss "Bruce's Big Storm." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**6 Caleb McDaniel:** Author will discuss "Sweet Taste of Liberty." Brazos Bookstore.  
**7 Varsha Bajaj:** Author will discuss "Count Me In." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**9 Maika and Maritza Moulite:** Authors will discuss "Dear Haiti, Love Alaine." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**10 Mac Barnett and Greg Pizzoli:** Authors will discuss "Hi, Jack!" Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**11 Asher Price:** Author will discuss "Earl Campbell." Brazos Bookstore.  
**12 Conor Brackern:** Author will discuss "Scorpionic Sun" in conversation with translation enthusiast and Brazos' own Mark



Chris Dunn

ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival and Inprint present the second annual presentation of the literature festival JLF Houston at Asia Society Texas Center.

Haber. Brazos Bookstore.  
**13 JLF Houston** Houston's second annual presentation of the world-famous literature festival that began in Jaipur, India, bringing together a collection of diverse thinkers, writers and entertainers to discuss the issues of our time. Presented in collaboration with ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival and Inprint. Asia Society Texas Center  
**13 Sarah Abigail Adelman:** Author will discuss "The Lampblack Blue of Memory." Brazos Bookstore.  
**14 Shannon Hale and LeUyen Pham:** Author and illustrator will discuss "Best

Friends." Brazos Bookstore.  
**14 Texas Poetry Calendar Reading:** Texas Poets read from and sign the 2019 Texas Poetry Calendar. Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**14 William Kent Krueger:** Author will discuss "This Tender Land." Murder By The Book.  
**16 Dina Nayeri:** Author will discuss "The Ungrateful Refugee." Brazos Bookstore.  
**16 Colson Whitehead:** "The Nickel Boys" author appears as part of Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. Cullen Performance Hall, University of Houston.

**19 An Evening of Poetry:** Featuring Joseph Campana and David Baker, authors of "The Book of Life" and "Swift." Brazos Bookstore.  
**21 Jennifer Mathieu:** Author will discuss "The Liars of Mariposa Island." Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**23 Attica Locke:** Author will discuss "Heaven, My Home." Brazos Bookstore.  
**23 Bob Shea and Zachariah O'Hara:** Author and illustrator will discuss "Who Wet My Pants?" Blue Willow Bookshop.  
**23 Marie Forleo:** Author will discuss "Everything Is

Figureoutable." Christ Church Cathedral.

**24 Trenton Lee Stewart:** Author will discuss "The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Riddle of Ages." Blue Willow Bookshop.

**25 Meg Cabot:** Author will discuss "No Judgments." Blue Willow Bookshop.

**26 Rick Riordan:** Author will discuss "The Tyrant's Tomb." Morton Ranch High School, Katy.

**27 Marion Winik:** Author will discuss "The Big Book of the Dead." Brazos Bookstore.

**28 (Home)land:** A reading and conversation with Angela So and Monica Sok that examines what it means to be the children of refugees. Brazos Bookstore.

**28 Houston SCBWI Annual Conference:** Event will feature keynote speaker Vanessa Brantley-Newton as well as agents, editors and illustrators. The Marriott Houston Westchase. Through Sept. 29.

**29 Meg Medina:** Will read "Merci Suárez Changes Gears" as part of Inprint Cool Brains! Series. Meyerland Performing and Visual Arts Middle School.

## OCTOBER

**1 Fierce Reads Tour:** Featured authors include Sara Faring, L.L. McKinney, Margaret Owen and Katie Rose Pool. Brazos Bookstore.

**3 Leslie Jamison:** Author will discuss "Make It Scream, Make It Burn." Brazos Bookstore.

**4 Mark Haber:** Author will discuss "Reinhardt's Garden." Brazos Bookstore.

**6 River Oaks Dance Presents Swan Lake:** Reading of the New York City Ballet's "Swan Lake" picture book, aspiring ballerinas of River Oaks Dance will be in attendance. Brazos Bookstore.

**7 Charlotte Nicole Davis:** Author will discuss "The Good Luck Girls" in conversation with Cora Carmack, author of the Stormheart novels. Brazos Bookstore.

**8 Malcolm Gladwell:** Author will discuss "Talking to Strangers." The Ballroom at Bayou Place.

**9 Annalee Newitz:** Author will discuss "The Future of Another Timeline." Brazos Bookstore.

**1 Houston Poetry Fest:** Readings and workshops. Welcome Center at the University

*Readings continues on H23*

## BOOKS

AUTHOR APPEARANCE

# Whitehead returns to Houston stomping grounds with 'Nickel Boys'

By Chris Vognar  
STAFF WRITER

Like most people, Colson Whitehead was shocked when he heard about the atrocities committed at the Dozier School for Boys. At Dozier, a reform school of sorts tucked away in the Florida Panhandle, students were raped, mutilated and buried in a secret graveyard for more than a century. How, Whitehead wondered, had he not

known about this?

Whitehead, whose 2016 slavery novel "The Underground Railroad" won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, turned his obsession into a new book. In "The Nickel Boys," the Dozier School has become the Nickel Academy. It's the early '60s, and an idealistic black teen, Elwood Curtis, has been railroaded into what can only be called incarceration. He keeps his optimism intact longer than you might think possible.

"He's grown up in a time

when there have been some advancements in terms of racial equality," says Whitehead, who will discuss the book Monday at the University of Houston's Cullen Performance Hall as part of the Inprint series. "He sees himself as part of a generation that is changing America. He's definitely a goody-goody. But he's not alone. There are other folks his age and older who are doing the types of things he'd like to do."

Indeed, part of the tragedy of "The Nickel Boys" lies in

the collision between high ideals and brutal reality. And part of the Dozier story's power over Whitehead lies in his certainty that there are more Nickels out there to be discovered. The Dozier atrocities took an archeological dig by University of South Florida students to unearth. What else, Whitehead wonders, might be out there?

"I was shocked at the extent of the depravity, and I felt if there was one place like this, there must be more," he says. "More reform schools or orphanages

where this kind of stuff would go on. That made it stay with me, the fact that there's this unknown tragedy that must point to other ones that we still don't know about."

Many have drawn a line between "The Underground Railroad" and "The Nickel Boys," American stories of horror inflicted upon the black body and mind. It's easy to see the two books as literary kin, even if Whitehead didn't plan it that way.

"It wasn't my intention, but if you put them back to back you have that thread of investigating institutional racism in its various forms and permutations over the decades and centuries," Whitehead says. "I didn't want to do two heavy books in a row, but I definitely felt quite compelled to do 'The Nickel Boys' next."

Sometimes, a novel is as much about the time it was



Sunny Shokrae / New York Times

Novelist Colson Whitehead, the author of the award-winning "The Underground Railroad," explores the dark history of a segregated Florida reform school in "The Nickel Boys."



## Colson Whitehead

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Monday

**Where:** Cullen Performance Hall, University of Houston, 4300 University

**Details:** \$5; [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)

written as the time in which it's set.

"It was the spring of 2017, and I was sort of adrift about where the country was going," Whitehead says. "I was wondering if we were making progress, or were the retrograde energies that have defined so much of American history too strong."

Whitehead is no stranger to Houston: He taught at the University of Houston in 2002 and 2003.

"I took taxis around because I don't drive," he says. "I didn't have children then, and it was the early part of my career. It'll be nice to go back a little older, a little fatter and sadder. It'll be nice to see Houston."

[chris.vognar@chron.com](mailto:chris.vognar@chron.com)

for Lilly Ortiz  
by Ken Fontenot

# Thirteen

He said he was a user, not a loser.  
But I saw no needle marks  
in his arm. What he may have been  
could have meant a lot of things.  
I wondered how many birds  
stayed in the nest of his beard.  
I wondered why the moon seemed  
larger some nights – basketball-big.  
Spring came late and quickly into summer.  
Mice hid. Grackles laughed. Ants marched.  
One and one was still two anywhere in the world.  
I knew nothing of what accountants did –  
all day long – swiveling in their chairs.  
I knew nothing of how bees could dance  
before other bees, resolute and meaningful.  
My father scolded me for putting  
his favorite vise grips somewhere  
he couldn't find them. (I forgot where!)  
I grew. Like a wildflower. Like sin.  
And no one had it any better.

---

*Ken Fontenot's third book of poems, "In a Kingdom of Birds," won the Texas Institute of Letters Award for best book of poems in 2013.*

*Send poems (40-line limit) to poetry editor Jim LaVilla-Havelin, San Antonio Express-News, P.O. Box 2171, San Antonio, TX 78297*

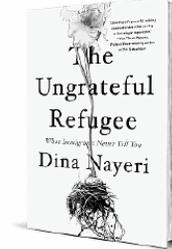
## EVENTS

### SUNDAY

**The Stories of Our Elders:** Senior citizens enrolled in the Inprint Senior Memoir Workshop at the Jewish Community Center will read from their work. 2 p.m., Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center, 5601 S. Braeswood, 713-521-2026, [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org).

### MONDAY

**Dina Nayeri:** Will sign and discuss "The Ungrateful Refugee," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore, 2421 Bissonnet; 713-523-0701, [brazosbookstore.com](http://brazosbookstore.com).  
**Colson Whitehead:** Will read "Nickel Boys," followed by an on-stage interview conducted by Houston author Bryan Washington, plus a book sale and signing. Part of Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. 7:30 p.m.; tickets \$5; Cullen Performance Hall,



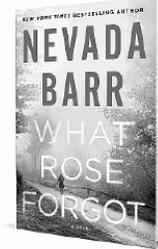
University of Houston, 4300 University; 713-521-2026, [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org).

### THURSDAY

**Joseph Campana and David Baker:** Will sign and discuss "The Book of Life" and "Swift," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

### FRIDAY

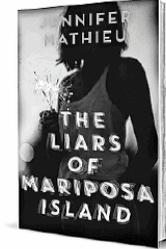
**Gretchen Hirsch:** Will sign and discuss "Gertie Sews Jiffy Dresses," 6:30 p.m.,



Brazos Bookstore. **Nevada Barr:** Will sign and discuss "What Rose Forgot," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book, 2342 Bissonnet; 713-524-8597, [murderbooks.com](http://murderbooks.com).

### SATURDAY

**Jennifer Mathieu:** Will sign "The Liars of Mariposa Island," 1 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop, 14532 Memorial; 281-497-8675, [bluewillowbookshop.com](http://bluewillowbookshop.com).  
**Nicole Flocton and Kadee McDonald:** Will sign and



discuss "Man's Best Friend Series" and "Rescuing the Single Dad," respectively. 1-3 p.m., The Book Scene, 1820 W. 43rd; 713 869-6117.  
**Carlin Barnes and Marketa Wills:** Will sign and discuss "Understanding Mental Illness," 3-5 p.m., River Oaks Bookstore, 3270 Westheimer; 713-520-0061, [riveroaksbookstore.com](http://riveroaksbookstore.com).  
**Freddy Cruz:** Will sign and discuss "When America Fell Silent," 4:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

*Ann Khan*

# OUR TEXAS

As a historic ship faces an uncertain fate, a look at its history, by the numbers:

BY DIANNA WRAY

**1914**  
 Year the U.S. Navy commissioned the Battleship *Texas*, a 573-foot, 27,000-ton technological marvel, for active service

**32**   
 Number of years the Forrest Gump-like vessel sailed the seas, present for seemingly every major American military event during that period

**1**   
 Existing U.S. battleship that went through both world wars—yup, the *Texas*, which fired the first American shots in WW1 and fought in both Iwo Jima and Okinawa during WW2

**71**   
 Number of years since the *Mighty T* was decommissioned and signed over to the state of Texas; it has sat in the Houston Ship Channel off the San Jacinto Battlefield in La Porte ever since.

**\$85 million**   
 Amount the state has spent keeping the *Texas*, the last battleship of its kind, afloat for the past 12 years

**80,000**   
 Visitors the *Texas* draws annually to its current site; adults pay \$12 a pop but that doesn't cover \$2 million in annual maintenance fees, never mind badly needed repairs.

**300,000**   
 Gallons of water officials say they must pump out of the ship daily to keep it afloat

**\$35 million**   
 Amount allocated by the Texas Legislature, per SB 1511, in May—the state's last dole-out—for the ship; the bill also leased the badly rusted vessel to the Battleship Texas Foundation for 99 years, on the condition that the foundation floats it to a shipyard, repairs it, and transports it back to Texas, although not necessarily to La Porte.

**2,900**   
 Tons of coal the *Texas* was originally outfitted to carry, before it was turned into an oil-fueled ship in the 1920s

**10**   
 Number of 14-inch, 45-caliber guns on the *Big T*, each capable of firing a 1,500-pound shell from 13 miles away

**50**   
 Number of rounds the battleship fired in 34 minutes off the coast of Omaha Beach during the Allied invasion of Europe on D-Day—June 6, 1944—before swooping over to rescue Army Rangers stranded at nearby Pointe du Hoc

**92**   
 Injured rangers evacuated to the ship that day

**1**   
 "Lucky shell" on board, a dud that was deactivated and returned to the ship after Germans fired it at the *Texas* in 1944; another did explode, killing a man—the ship's only casualty—and injuring a dozen more.



**THE PERFECT PARTY**  
 HEY-WE-MADE-VOWS EDITION

We at Perfect Party HQ don't know about you, but we always get excited when one of our own makes the *New York Times* Vows section. And now that **1 Daniel James**, music administrator and artistic media manager for Houston Grand Opera, has wedded Ian Lee Derrer, general director and chief executive of the Dallas Opera, we're obviously inviting him to our October soiree. On one side of James, we'll put Houston's own extraordinary singer, rapper, and flautist **2 Lizzo**, with whom we, and everyone else, are nothing less than obsessed (she plays Revention October 4), and on the other, **3 Judge Ruby Kless Sondock**, whose storied, decade-spanning career includes her appointment as Harris County's first female district court judge (she will be honored at the AVDA, or Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, gala on October 16). Also on the list: playwright **4 Qui Nguyen**, whose 2016 work *Vietgone*, a love story about two Vietnamese refugees, opens at the Alley on October 4; **5 Mary Tjon-Joe-Pin**, who with her husband, John Pierre, has a new HGTV show, *Going for Sold*, in which they flip houses all over the Houston area; and, finally, **6 Marc Grossberg**, who has practiced law in the Bayou City for more than half a century and who, on October 17 at Brazos Bookstore, reads from his debut novel, *The Best People*, which follows a Newstonian lawyer and a single mother through "the glitzy meritocracy that is Houston, Texas." Count us intrigued. —Catherine Matusow

USS TEXAS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION

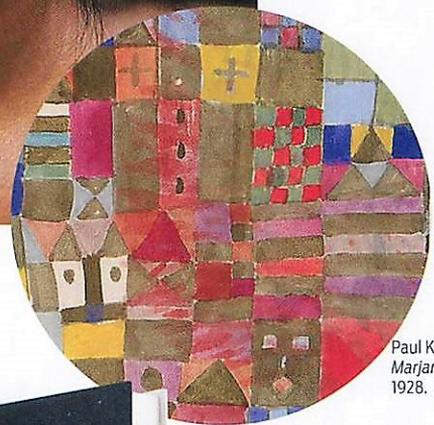
**MUSIC**  
**Lizzo**

A surprise August visit to alma mater UH was millions of fans' first clue that the freshly minted "Truth Hurts" and "Juice" star is also an ex-Houstonian. By then the singing rapper's relentless positivity had even spread to *New York Times* columnist Jennifer Weiner; despite our troubling era, she wrote, "thankfully, we have Lizzo." **Oct 4 at 8.** From \$192. *Revention Music Center, 520 Texas Ave. 713-230-1600. reventionmusiccenter.com*

TALK

**Anderson Cooper & Andy Cohen**

The urbane CNN anchor and excitable host of Bravo's *Watch What Happens*—who were once set up on a blind date—promise "Deeper Talk & More Shallow Tales" on the newest leg of their extended AC2 tour. Says Cohen, "It's like going to a bar with two old friends and hearing all their best stories." **Oct 25 at 8.** From \$70. *Smart Financial Centre, 18111 Lexington Blvd., Sugar Land. 281-207-6278. smartfinancialcentre.net*



Paul Klee, *Marjamshausen, 1928.*

# OCTOBER

## H-TOWN PICKS

DANCE

**Martha Graham Dance Company**

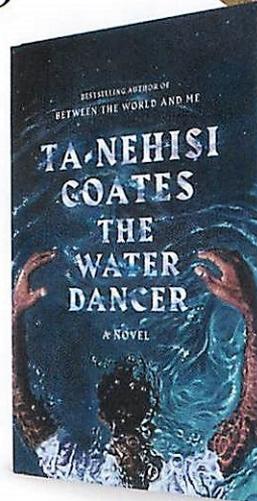
For its first visit to Houston in 15 years, the naturalistic New York-based troupe will draw its repertoire from the EVE Project, its two-year initiative of new and vintage works collectively celebrating the centennial of the constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. **Oct 18 at 8.** From \$39. *Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana St. 713-227-4772. spahouston.org*



BOOKS

**Ta-Nehisi Coates**

In *The Water Dancer*, the National Book Award-winning author of 2015's *Between the World and Me* plunges readers into the world of protagonist Hiram, an escaped Virginia slave who must reconcile his desire to return to his adopted family with his need to understand the supernatural power that appeared after he nearly drowned. **Oct 29.** *UH Cullen Performance Hall, 4300 University Dr. 713-521-2026. inprinthouston.org*



VISUAL ART

**Miss Ima Hogg & Modernism**

Featuring works by Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, José Clemente Orozco, and many others, this exhibition of some 50 prints and drawings by major early-20th-century artists commemorates the 80th anniversary of the Houston philanthropist's donation, which quickly became a cornerstone of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's permanent collection. **Thru Nov 3.** \$17 (non-members). *1001 Bissonnet St. 713-639-7300. mfa.hou.org*

THEATER

**Spring Awakening**

Winner of eight Tony awards, Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik's 2006 musical drew raves for the way its driving, emo-esque score amplifies the raw emotions and painful consequences a group of German boarding-school students experience during their rather harshly dawning adolescence. **Oct 8-20.** From \$40. *Hobby Center, 800 Bagby St. 713-315-2525. tuts.com*



# BOOKS

REVIEW



Writer Ta-Nehisi Coates worked on debut novel “Water Dancer” for a decade.

Cole Wilson / New York Times

# Coates ably picks up Toni Morrison's mantle with 'Water Dancer'

By **Craig Lindsey**  
CORRESPONDENT

**W**ith his debut novel "The Water Dancer," it appears that Ta-Nehisi Coates wants to pick up the mantle Toni Morrison left when she died earlier this year.

It can't be denied that the Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner had been a serious influence on Coates and his work. Before she passed, Coates gave her an early copy of "Dancer" to read. (She later sent an email to her Coates' book editor saying, "I'd been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died. Clearly, it's Ta-Nehisi Coates.")

Coates has already established himself as a modern-day Baldwin when he dropped that cautious firebomb "Between the World & Me" a few years back. With "Dancer," it seems he wants to continue in the tradition Morrison famously established in "Beloved" – telling harrowing, eloquent tales of 19th-century slave life, garnished with a hopeful serving of magical realism.

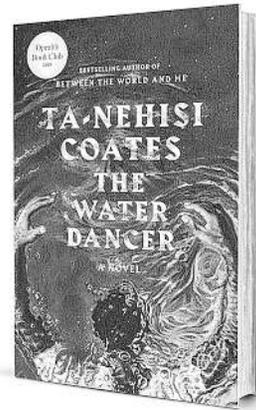
"Dancer" is told from the perspective of Hiram, a Virginia slave living on the ironically named plantation of Lockless. It's a time when there are two types of people: the Quality (aka the white people who are in charge) and the Tasked (the Black folk who aren't). The

Tasked, like Hiram, have to serve their masters. For Hiram, that master also happens to his father, who acknowledges the young man as his own. But he still has him take on slave duties, including being the errand boy/sidekick to his permanently bratty (and pale-skinned) brother Maynard.

The novel starts off with Hiram almost drowning. On a rainy night, he crosses a bridge on a carriage (carrying Maynard and a "fancy girl who held him rapt with her wiles") that eventually falls into the river Goose. Before that happens, Hiram sees someone he didn't expect to see: his mother, who was sold away long ago. This sets off a series of lost remembrances that somehow keeps him from going under.

That brush with death sets off a chain of events that has our protagonist going from tormented servant to tormented savior. Always considered a bright lad by his dear ol' dad (in one passage, he wins over a dinner party full of blue-eyed white devils by showing off his impressive memory skills), Hiram aspires to break out of Lockless when he starts hearing about the Underground. He plans on escaping with Sophia, a fellow Tasked he's sweet on, despite the objections of Thena, a hardened, older lady who's been the closest thing to a mom for Hiram.

Needless to say, things



## 'The Water Dancer'

by Ta-Nehisi Coates  
One World  
416 pages, \$28

### Author appearance

**Who:** Ta-Nehisi Coates

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

**Where:** Cullen Performance Hall, University of Houston, 4300 University

**Details:** Sold-out; Coates will not be participating in a book-signing; [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)

don't go as planned when Hiram makes his escape – in fact, things get quite brutal for our boy at one point. But that also leads to him becoming a prime agent for the Underground he was trying to find. (And, yes, he does get to hang with Harriet Tubman.) It turns out this network has been

waiting for him to show up ever since it was discovered he has the power of Conduction, which is mentally/physically transporting from one place to another – aka the thing that saved him that night when he almost died.

Always the journalist, Coates worked on this book for a decade, scouring works of literature, reading first-person accounts of slavery, visiting plantations, even checking out Civil War reenactments. Coates documents the horrors African-Americans went through during slavery in a blunt yet evocative manner. Instead of dramatizing the violent, degrading, family-destroying instances that were brought on by slavery, he appears more concerned with how slaves like Hiram would've continued to handle the psychological pain and scarring that came with it. Even as he's walking around Philadelphia, a free man among other people doing what they please, the living nightmare that was his formative years still haunts him – and makes him want to take action.

Coates, who has a reading Tuesday at the University of Houston, mostly uses "Dancer" to preach the importance of black solidarity. Once Hiram sets foot in the city of Brotherly Love, the man once wary of whom to trust learns that he got brothas and sistas ready to welcome him to the family. And if you don't have

that foundation, you're lost in the wilderness. (There's one brief scene where he notices lower-class black folk causing a ruckus in public: "I had heard stories of coloreds like this ... men and women who made no connection with society, with certain churches, and thus found freedom hard upon them.")

Coates also makes it very clear that, without black people, things can quickly fall to pieces. When he returns to Lockless in the last third of the book, in order to retrieve some folks he wants to get out of there, he finds that this once flourishing plantation is in shambles. Most of the slaves he knew as a youngin' are long gone, and his old man doesn't seem to know what to do without them.

With this, Coates expresses that African-Americans deserve more than just reparations for slavery. By melding disturbing fact with dramatic fiction, Coates uses his first novel to remind readers that we need to be acknowledged as the men and women who were literally on the ground, destroying our bodies as we worked to make this land look like a real country. White people's hands will forever be dirty for enslaving an entire race of people. But black people's hands are dirty, too – from all the years of manually building this place.

*Craig Lindsey is a Houston-based writer.*

Q&amp;A

# Elizabeth Gilbert's new novel is a valentine to New York

By Joy Sewing  
STAFF WRITER

Elizabeth Gilbert's 2006 memoir "Eat, Pray, Love" catapulted her to rock-star status in the literary world.

The book, which chronicled her solo adventure to Italy, India and Indonesia, spent nearly 200 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and was made into a film by the same name, starring Julia Roberts, in 2010.

Gilbert now has written her first novel, "City Girls," and will be in Houston on Monday for the Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. (Tickets are sold out, but Inprint will be live-streaming at [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org).)

In an interview with the Chronicle, Gilbert talked about her latest work, her romantic relationships across gender lines and her observations about life as she turned 50 this year.

**Q: In "City Girls," you write about promiscuous women who aren't destroyed by their behavior. Why?**

**A:** The book is actually a real valentine to New York City. I have had such an ongoing love story with New York my whole life. One of my great non-human loves is New York City. And as a female reader, I just always feel like there's not the slightest bit of margin for error in a girl's or a woman's life in novels. It's like, how dare she want to experience wildness or pleasure? Then once she does, it's like she's under the wheels of the train. I think actually that the lives of women are more subtle than that. ... If women couldn't survive the disastrous choices that we make around sex and love, there would be barely a woman left alive in the world. Those stories can form us and season us in ways that make us into very interesting people as we get older.

**Q: Why is it still a struggle for women to embrace and talk about their sexuality?**

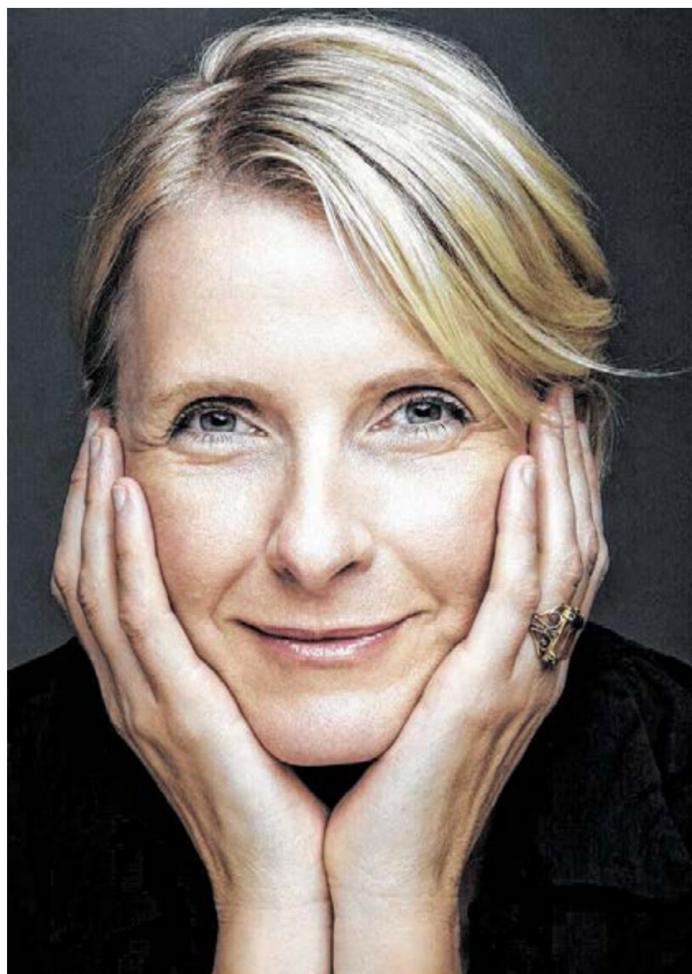
**A:** I just think that the world has never really known what to do with female sexual desire. I think even women ourselves often don't know what to do with female sexual desire. God knows a woman can still blow up her life with passionate love or with sexual desire. So I think it frightens us.

**Q: Do you ever get tired of women sharing that they are going to Bali to find their "Eat, Pray, Love" moment?**

**A:** I never get tired of it. ... The one thing I do get tired of is people telling me that I ruined Bali. I'm single-handedly held responsible for destroying a beautiful place (with tourists). That's depressing. I don't ever like to hear that. But I never get tired of hearing women say that they're having an "Eat, Pray, Love" moment because I know what it means.

**Q: For those not familiar with the book, what does having an "Eat, Pray, Love" moment mean?**

**A:** It means that she has diverted off a path that she thought was supposed to make her happy, that she had been told was going to make her happy. There was something that got busted up in her life, whether she left a relationship or a relationship left



Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

Elizabeth Gilbert is the author of "City of Girls."

her. Or she left a job, or got fired, or something happened where things didn't go as planned, and she's seizing that moment to give time to herself to go on an adventure. I think that's an amazing thing to get to be part of in any way. And no, I never get tired of hearing it.

**Q: Did you expect that you would be a self-help guru?**

**A:** Oh, hell, no. But you have to understand what a mess I was. I was a mess. I didn't go on that trip to get famous, I went on that trip because I was wrecked, and I didn't know what else to do. When I look back on it, it felt to me at the time like such a risk. It didn't feel like a good career move. I quit a really good job that I had at GQ. I'd been, up until that point, known as a woman who wrote about men for men. So to go off and do such a female-centered journey felt like a big risk for my job. I couldn't imagine getting a job back at GQ after that, and everything about it just felt very dangerous. My terror was that it was going to take me farther away from myself, rather than deeper into myself, and that I would end up just even more on the flake path. And so, no, I didn't expect this at all.

**Q: You've overcome the loss of love, losing your partner (Rayya Ellis) to cancer, and you found love again this year. What kind of advice do you have for people who are navigating loss and love?**

**A:** I'm a really great role model because actually that new relationship is over. How can I say in a non-cliché way to follow your heart? I just

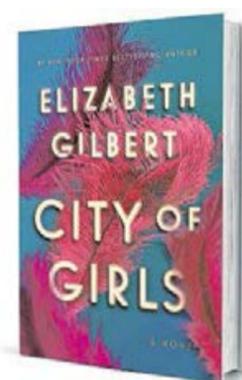
think it's so helpful if we can all try to normalize many different ways of loving as much as possible. Look, it's OK if you loved somebody and they died, and then you loved somebody else, that's OK. And it's also OK if you loved a man, and then you loved a woman, and then you loved a man. That's OK, too. It's OK to try something and have it not work out, and to get your heart broken again and to have your hopes dashed. All of that is OK. So I guess that's kind of one of my jobs in life is to just make everybody feel less crazy about their life because mine follows the path that it does.

**Q: So, love is love, right?**

**A:** Yeah, love is love. I recognize that I hold a certain place of privilege that I don't have to get too tangled up in that. I know that there are people who are fighting this battle, in the Supreme Court, for instance, right now, who don't have the luxury of saying, like, 'Oh, yeah, I get to do what I want. Doesn't matter.' Like, you might lose your job, and you might be cast out of your family, and you might be cast out of a religious institution that has been the basis or the foundation of your heart and your spirit. There are real costs that people face in their lives. And I'm in full support of those people, but generally for me, I find it confusing enough to be a human being. If I try to label what I am, I'm only going to become more confused.

**Q: Do you think it's harder to fall in love as you get older?**

**A:** No, not for me it hasn't been. It's like the weather. It's going to come,



it's going to go, and I've kind of given up trying to manage it.

**Q: What's next on your agenda?**

**A:** I'm doing a lot of traveling coming up. I'm going away for three months in the winter to India, Fiji and Australia on a trip by myself. I'm really excited about it.

**Q: So "Eat, Pray, Love" Part 2?**

**A:** I'll probably write about it as I go, but I'm going for a whole bunch of different reasons. There are some workshops and conferences and events that I'm going to be teaching. I haven't been back to India since "Eat, Pray, Love." So I'm sure I'll be talking about it on social media, but then I'll be buckling down to start writing a new novel. Things are good.

**Q: What's something surprising about you?**

**A:** How much I love to be alone. I think people might be surprised by that. I am never unhappy when I'm alone. I spend a lot of time by myself, and I really, really, really like it. And I like it even more as I get older.

**Q: Why is being alone hard for some people?**

**A:** Well, it takes a while to learn how to befriend yourself. A lot of times you can't bear to be alone because you just can't bear your shame, your pain and your fear. I certainly know all about that. But Liz and I have gotten to be pretty good friends. I like her company.

**Q: What brings you joy?**

**A:** Oh, so many things. But I would say right now I'm in this wave of reverent appreciation for my friendships. I turned 50 this year, and at my 50th birthday party I said it will appear that I'm never going to have a 40-year marriage, or a decadeslong romantic relationship. But as I looked around the room, I saw people I had been friends with for 40 years. I mean, my best friend from fourth grade was in that room. ... These are the foundational relationships of my life.

**Q: That sounds beautiful.**

**A:** And the thing that I find moving about those relationships is that without ever having exchanged vows to each other, to take care of each other through sickness and through health, through richer and for poorer, that is exactly what we've all done with each other. Our hearts have just written that contract very organically. I find it to be so beautiful that we've chosen to spend our lives together. And I have no doubt that at my 90th birthday they'll be there, too. So that is the primary source of my joy.

[joy.sewing@chron.com](mailto:joy.sewing@chron.com)

## BESTSELLERS

### Fiction

#### 1. The Night Fire

by Michael Connelly. Harry Bosch and Renée Ballard return to take up a case that held the attention of Bosch's mentor.

#### 2. The Guardians

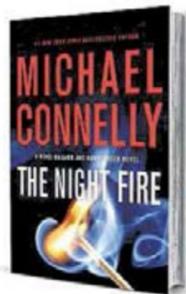
by John Grisham. Cullen Post, a lawyer and Episcopal minister, antagonizes some ruthless killers when he takes on a wrongful conviction case.

#### 3. Where the Crawdads Sing

by Delia Owens. In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a young woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.

#### 4. The Deserter

by Nelson DeMille and Alex DeMille. Two members of the Criminal Investigation Division must bring back a Delta Force soldier who disappeared.



#### 5. Agent Running in the Field

by John le Carré. A veteran of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, who is assigned to command a lesser band of spies, hatches a covert operation.

#### 6. The 19th Christmas

by James Patterson and Maxine Paetro. In the 19th installment of the "Women's Murder Club" series, detective Lindsay Boxer and company take on a fearsome criminal known only as "Loman."

#### 7. The Dutch House

by Ann Patchett. A sibling relationship is impacted when the family goes from poverty to wealth and back again over the course of many decades.

#### 8. The Water Dancer

by Ta-Nehisi Coates. A young man who was gifted with a mysterious power becomes part of a war between slavers and the enslaved.

#### 9. The Institute

by Stephen King. Children with special talents are abducted and sequestered in an institution where the sinister staff seeks to extract their gifts through harsh methods.

#### 10. The Testaments

by Margaret Atwood. In a sequel to "The Handmaid's Tale," old secrets bring three women together as the Republic of Gilead's theocratic regime shows signs of decay.

### Nonfiction

#### 1. Me

by Elton John. The multi-award-winning solo artist's first autobiography chronicles his career, relationships and private struggles.

#### 2. Catch and Kill

by Ronan Farrow. The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter details some surveillance and intimidation tactics used to pressure journalists and elude consequences by certain wealthy and connected men.

#### 3. Dumpty

by John Lithgow. The multi-award-winning actor satirizes the Trump administration with a collection of poems and illustrations.

#### 4. Blowout

by Rachel Maddow. The MSNBC host argues that the global oil and gas industry has weakened



democracies and bolstered authoritarians.

#### 5. Three Days at the Brink

by Bret Baier with Catherine Whitney. The Fox News host describes a meeting between Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin in Tehran during World War II.

#### 6. Talking to Strangers

by Malcolm Gladwell. Famous examples of miscommunication serve as the backdrop to explain

potential conflicts and misunderstandings.

#### 7. Permanent Record

by Edward Snowden. A memoir by the former National Security Agency contractor who exposed the government's mass surveillance program.

#### 8. Educated

by Tara Westover. The daughter of survivalists, who is kept out of school, educates herself enough to leave home for university.

#### 9. The Way I Heard It

by Mike Rowe. The television personality relays stories from his podcast and personal anecdotes.

#### 10. Touched by the Sun

by Carly Simon. The singer and songwriter describes her friendship with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

*New York Times*

## BOOKS

POETRY by Caryn Leigh Wideman

### A woman is empowered ...

When she knows what she has to give  
and lives to give it;  
When she exposes her abuser  
and then forgives him,  
along with the ones who allowed it;  
When she stands up to someone  
she has loved and says,  
"I've had enough, I'm leaving";  
When she suffers failure, loss, rejection  
and comes out deeper and kinder;  
When she has the courage to be her true self,  
following her highest yearnings;  
When she reaches for her dreams  
and helps others reach theirs too;  
When she is a safe haven,  
a solid rock,  
a bright beacon;  
When her compassion becomes  
a rushing waterfall.  
Then she is empowered.

ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN ART HEALS HEARTS 2019

*Caryn Leigh Wideman facilitates a quarterly gathering, Poets for Peace, for peaceCENTER, a grassroots organization in San Antonio that advocates for compassion and justice.*

### EVENTS

#### SUNDAY

**Antonette M. Danna**  
Will sign and discuss "If These Scissors Could Talk," 4:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore, 2421 Bissonnet; 713-523-0701, brazosbookstore.com.

#### MONDAY

**Carolyn Forché and Carmen Maria Machado:**  
Will sign and discuss "What You Have Heard Is True" and "In the Dream House," 7:30 p.m., tickets \$5; Alley Theatre, 615 Texas; inprinthouston.org.

#### THURSDAY

**Ralph Bivins:** Will sign and discuss "Houston 2020," 5 p.m., River Oaks Bookstore, 3270 Westheimer; 713-520-0061, riveroaksbookstore.com.

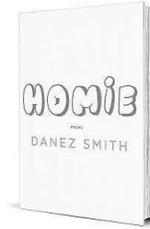
**Layla F. Saad:** Will sign



and discuss "Me and White Supremacy," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

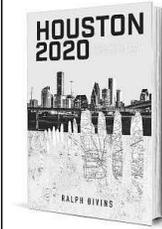
#### FRIDAY

**Danez Smith:** Will sign and discuss "Homie," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.



#### SATURDAY

**Dean "Miranda" James and Ellery Adams:** Will sign and discuss "Careless Whiskers" and "The Book of Candlelight," respectively. 4:30 p.m., Murder By The Book,



2342 Bissonnet; 713-524-8597, murderbooks.com.

**Anna Merlano:** Will sign and discuss "Love Sugar Magic 3," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

ANN KIMM

# Houstonia.

PAIN TURNED PROSE

## Carolyn Forché on Writing About Her Experience During El Salvador's Civil War

The poet and author of *What You Have Heard Is True* talks about her new memoir ahead of her InPrint reading.

By [Ryan Pait](#) 1/27/2020 at 3:26pm

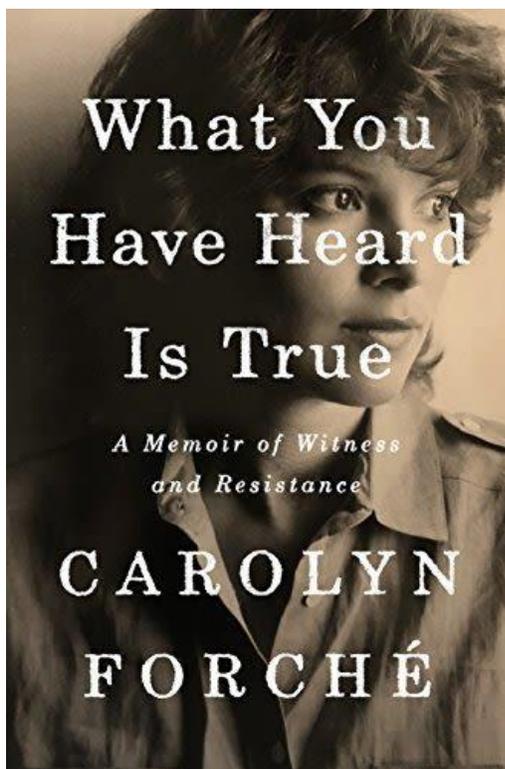


IMAGE: [COURTESY OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE](#)

**CAROLYN FORCHÉ MADE HER MARK** in literature with her poetry and translations, but her 2019 book, [\*What You Have Heard is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance\*](#),

called upon a different set of skills. It required her to dig decades into her past and fulfill a promise made to two friends. Forché was just 27 when a stranger showed up on her doorstep and asked her to join him in El Salvador to witness the political upheaval taking place there. She accepted, and her memoir, *What You Have Heard is True*, which is up for [2019 National Book Award](#), recounts her time in the Central American country during the beginnings of its civil war, which spanned from 1980–92, and how this choice changed both her life and her art forever.

On Monday, Jan 27, Forché will read from *What You Have Heard is True* as part of Inprint's 2019-2020 Margaret Root Brown Reading Series alongside Carmen Maria Machado. We caught up with Forché to talk about her memoir.

**“Witness” is a common thread across your writing in various genres. How did that idea look or feel different when writing a memoir?**

“Writing witness is writing in the aftermath of extremity. So, it’s not really something one can intend to do, and it’s not an identity. What we do is read for witness when we’re reading such work. In terms of writing the memoir, I believe there was considerable extremity involved in the experience, and that I am bearing witness to that. It’s of a piece with the rest of my work, although I haven’t really focused attention on my own work in that way—I’d rather study the work of others.”

**I think, like you said, applying that idea to your own work and your own life versus someone else’s work is very different.**

“Yeah. It took me a long time to even begin writing this memoir. Most of the events took place between 1978 and 1980, and I didn’t begin writing the memoir until 2003. I didn’t feel ready to write it either as a writer or as a person who had somehow emerged intact from those years, capable of recreating them on the page. But then I realized that I had promised that I would one day write about it, and I was running out of time. I was already in my 50s when I started it.

“It also took 15 years to finish, partly because it was my first book-length work in prose, so I had to learn how to do that; and there were skills that I hadn’t acquired or attended to as a

younger writer. I was a poet, so I knew nothing about structuring prose books. It took me quite a while to find the right structure for that book. And life intervened several times. Sometimes I procrastinated out of fear of what I was going to write next—either fear of inadequacy or fear of enduring its recreation on the page. There were lulls in the work. Sometimes I just simply didn't want to write that next scene, and I didn't know how to do it, so I'd wait and meditate on it, think about it, and finally, when I got pen to paper something would come out. It was a painful book to write."

**It must be especially tough because the topic is so complex, and then you're trying to figure out what your voice sounds like in this form you haven't worked in before.**

"Exactly. What I wanted to do was write it in such a way that the reader would never know more than what I knew at the time. So, the story unfolds the way that it unfolded for me, with all that complexity and confusion. And as I was at the time piecing together a great puzzle, I wanted the reader to feel that way, too, and to piece things together with me. I tried to preserve that uncertainty and confusion and complexity in the narrative. So, there are very few moments where the narrator steps back with hindsight or foresight of some kind.

**There are moments of great tension throughout the book that you cut through by mentioning the pop culture of the time. The one that jumped out the most to me was the appearance of Abba's "Take a Chance on Me" after a tense interaction. Was it important to remember those small moments of frivolity as you dug into your memories of such a tumultuous period of history?**

"Yes. I was trying to make the time live again. And that, of course, includes popular culture—what was on the radio, the music that was playing. I remembered all of that quite vividly. My memories of that time are very precise. And there were strange juxtapositions, like carnage and Abba songs. (*Laughs.*) I wanted to include that, because to do that was to be true to what it was like. There were odd moments when you couldn't believe you were hearing this particular song on the radio while you felt this might be the last moment of your life."

**Toward the end of the book, you mention how your second book of poems took you across the country and gave you the chance to talk to people about the war in El**

**Salvador. *What You Have Heard is True* reengages that same history, but in a completely different way. How has the experience of talking about this book been different for you?**

"I'm talking about this book in a very different environment. At the time when my poetry book was published in 1981, the United States was supporting a military dictatorship, and by extension, the death squads that were operating during those years. The United States wanted to stick to its policy of support, and Americans, by and large, didn't know very much about Central America at that time. Most of them had not yet heard of El Salvador—it was just coming into the news stories at the time when my book was published.

"But there was a considerable disinformation campaign, and some of it came from the U.S. government, which accused journalists of inventing stories. It was the early version of "fake news." To speak to American audiences and publish in the literary world at that time was very fraught. And there were many people who disbelieved what I had to say or questioned it. That, for a young woman poet, was quite painful and disorienting.

"Today, I'm a mature woman, and I'm speaking in a very different environment. Literary culture is not so naïve anymore, and American citizens seem to know a great deal more, especially about Central America, because over the decades we've acquired this knowledge. Today, of course, it's important to them because of the refugees approaching our border for asylum. People are very interested in those issues, whether they oppose open asylum granting or not. But we do bear a responsibility to the people who are today fleeing the aftermath of the war that we paid for. I don't have time to go into all the ways that that's true, but today I don't face the same credibility challenges that I faced in the past. The situation is very different now."

*Jan 27. Tickets \$5. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Ave. More info and tickets at [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)*

*[This interview has been edited for length]*

Filed under

[Memoirs](#), [Book Reading](#), [Books](#), [Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series](#)

## BOOKS

NONFICTION

## Machado memoir sees dream become nightmare



Art Streiber / Art Streiber

Author Carmen Maria Machado eventually took a nonlinear approach to “In the Dream House.”

## Work is about a relationship and a house — and both go bad

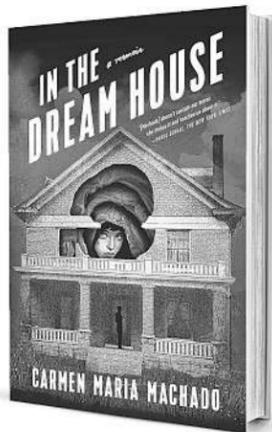
By Andrew Dansby  
STAFF WRITER

Having written a collection of short stories that was a finalist for the National Book Award, Carmen Maria Machado next turned to a long-form piece that gave her fits. She started writing a memoir about a relationship and a house, both of which she entered with excitement that swiftly steered toward claustrophobic feelings of abuse and entrapment.

“In the Dream House” was the resulting book, but the process proved more labored than she’d expected. Machado, 33, assumed a linear narrative would suffice. It would not.

“I struggled for years to write the story in a straightforward way,” she says. “And it took me a long time to realize that was not the way it was meant to exist. The story wasn’t taking. I’d read it back and think it was dreadful. I couldn’t stand it. There was too much plot in it, no levity. It needed a playfulness. So that became a structural concern. And it activated my brain.”

Machado’s activated mind steered in an entirely different direction. Instead of an A-to-Z narrative about her relationship with a woman who transformed from lover to antagonist, Machado broke the story of their broken connection into a series of micro-narratives based on tropes — some

**‘In the Dream House’**

By Carmen Maria Machado  
Graywolf Press  
264 pages, \$26

**AUTHOR APPEARANCE**

**Who:** Carmen Maria Machado and Carolyn Forché  
**When:** 7:30 p.m. Monday  
**Where:** Alley Theater, 615 Louisiana  
**Details:** \$5; [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)

literary, some pop cultural.

The darkest moments then acquired a little lightness, and the lighter moments were filled with ominous foreshadowing. Machado didn’t just deconstruct her narrative, she broke down the components of stories we have

shared for decades — maybe longer.

The effect is unnerving as the novel unfolds. Early warning signs whisper but don’t scream until it’s too late, befitting something that references various thriller, horror and gothic tropes but also those that are more modern, such as narratives sold by TV sitcoms or the Disney machine.

Machado says the format quickly commanded her attention.

“As a writer, I wasn’t just interested in the theme of domestic violence and misogyny and racism, not in the obvious ham-fisted, cartoonish ways it has appeared,” she says. “I was more interested in a subtle presentation of these ideas that are far more damaging.”

Machado describes haunted-house stories as “my wheelhouse.” So they became her point of entry. The house she inhabits in the memoir, she says, isn’t particularly notable visually — nobody would photograph it as a cover for a gothic novel. But it does become a complicated place in the narrative.

“It’s not a rambling manor,” she says. “It’s kind of boring. It’s quite unextraordinary. But that made it more interesting to me. I started thinking about the house as an active metaphor. And that became important to me as I told this story.”

Machado’s use of home and space draws great energy from the idea that places that should be most secure can become sites of unease.

She also takes care to specify that

“In the Dream House” is a memoir.

“It’s not about taking vivid notes,” she says. “It’s about the process of reconstruction. And that’s a challenge for a memoirist. Memories that seem clear one moment can seem stressful and unclear later.

“It deals with the idea that the brain inherently is weird. It remembers things vividly and jettisons things. It tries to protect you from certain things. So I had to do some research.”

But she also specifies that the book isn’t a work of journalism, and her adversary doesn’t have a voice other than what Machado attributes to her. Machado’s story is about being awash in affection by someone who knows how to establish an emotional connection. It’s a story about falling in love and thinking some of the valentines are misshapen, but not changing course until things are emotionally violent. Machado’s story uses numerous fictional constructs to tell her truth.

“If you don’t want to read that sort of personal account, there’s great journalism out there,” she says. “I never considered talking to her for this. I’m not a journalist. It’s a memoir.”

But having exorcised this person and this house, Machado is eager to move on to the next thing.

“I’m very excited,” she says, “to go back to fiction.”

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# Houstonia.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

## Carmen Maria Machado Talks Memoir Vs Fiction Ahead of Inprint Reading

We chat with the National Book Award finalist about the challenges in her writing her 2019 memoir *Dream House*.

By [Ryan Pait](#) 1/27/2020 at 3:08pm

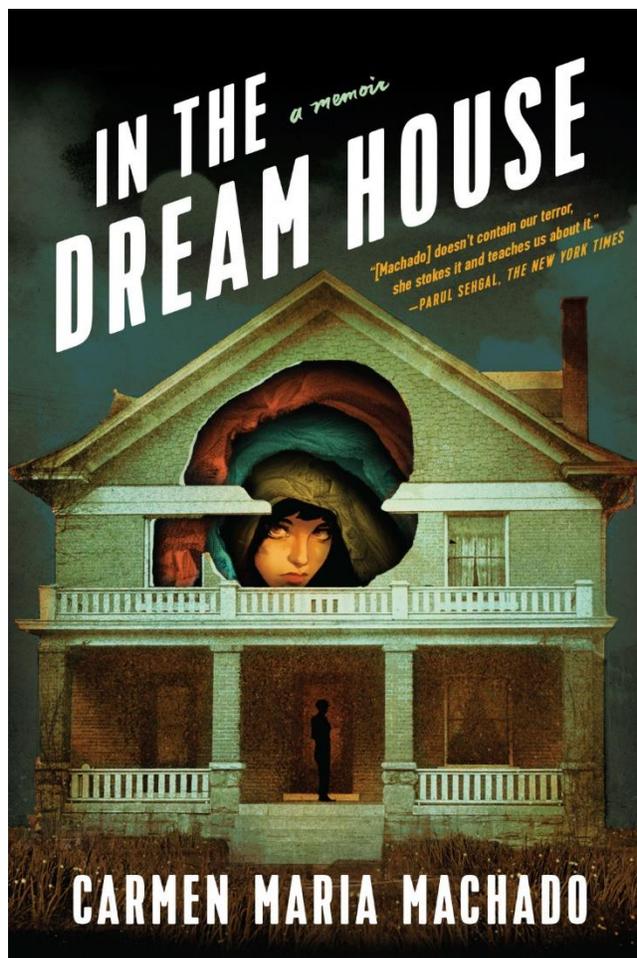


IMAGE: [COURTESY OF GRAYWOLF PRESS](#)

**CARMEN MARIA MACHADO TOOK THE LITERARY WORLD BY STORM IN 2017** with her debut book, *Her Body and Other Parties*, a gathering of haunted, wicked, and wild short stories. The book became a sensation, garnering widespread [critical acclaim](#) and going on to become a National Book Award finalist as well as a Shirley Jackson Award winner.

Two years later in 2019, Machado made another splash with the publication of her memoir, *In the Dream House*, in which she considers her relationship with a complicated and mercurial woman that began to sour into something malignant. As she reckons with her experience, Machado shifts through genres and conventions, using the “Dream House” as a way to explore variations on different themes, such as abuse, survival, release, growth, and becoming.

On Monday, Jan 27, Machado will read from *In the Dream House* as she headlines the fourth night of Inprint’s 2019-2020 Margaret Root Brown Reading Series with Carolyn Forché. We caught up with Machado to talk about her newest book.

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**As I read *In the Dream House*, I kept thinking about a line from “[The Husband Stitch](#),” which opens your collection of short stories: “There are true things in this world observed by only a single set of eyes.” Did writing something so personal—like a memoir— evoke that same sort of sensation?**

“The hardest thing about writing nonfiction is that you’re trying to explain your thoughts and experiences to people and explain it in a way that they will understand, which is basically the hardest thing to do as a person, I think. To do that and make it beautiful and interesting is a really tall order. It’s really hard to do that well. You’re trying to explain to people, ‘Here’s an experience I had. Here’s a feeling I had.’ It’s harder than fiction in that way, I feel, because at least in fiction you can kind of move things around in a way that suits you. But with nonfiction, you don’t have that luxury. So, you’re trying to explain what you think, and it’s really hard to know what you think about stuff. At least I think so. I find it

very difficult to explain what's going on in my head, and I feel like we're in this world where everyone respects a fast take or opinion. But to say that you have a lot of complicated feelings and you've been thinking about something for three years—it was a challenge on multiple levels in that way.”

**I felt an echo of that line in the chapter “*Dream House as Folklore Taxonomy*,” where you write that “the story always looks a little different, depending on who is telling it.” What was the one thing you felt like you needed to get across or have people understand when putting your version of this story into the world?**

“For me, one of the trickiest parts of writing the book was not just talking about queerness but talking about psychological and verbal abuse and the way in which those things are complicated. We want abuse to look like something specific, and yet, other people's experiences have borne out other realities. I wanted to be able to explain that in a way that made sense and explain why it's so hard to see that for what it is. That's a hard thing to wrap your mind around, even if you have studied this topic for years. To explain it to a reader and to explain it as a writer is very, very complicated. It took a lot.”

**In your overture, you undercut the idea of the prologue as “tedious” and then follow it up with a prologue, a rhetorical move that I loved. How did you go about writing your prologue and epilogue, and where did that fall in the timeline of writing the book?**

“So, they actually came fairly late. The material that I read about archival silence came to me completely by accident—I had sort of written around the idea, but without any sort of accompanying academic scaffolding because I didn't know of any. And then I just had a chance encounter with a friend of a friend—my spouse was describing my project to this person, and they said, ‘Has she done any research on archival silence?’ And Val said no, and the friend sent me all of this material on the topic. And it was weird, because I felt the hole of that existing in the book, and then the hole was filled by this stranger.

“There's this entire body of work about this, and I was reading Saidiya Hartman, and was like, *This is f\*\*\*\*g perfect; this is so perfect for everything*. So that worked out well. It was funny though, because I wrote that intro and felt really good about it and liked it, and it pleased me. And then my editor sort of commented that he loved it and it was great, but it

was a little weird that I was opening up a memoir with someone else's words. And so, I was thinking, *What could come before this?* So, I was thinking about prologues and introductions and epilogues and paratexts and how I really hate prologues and find them tedious and boring. And then I went and wrote my own fucking prologue and was like, *I'm just going to call out my s\*\*t right away.* Just so everyone knows that I know."

**Is it weird to write an epilogue to a part of your life that you've lived through and moved past?**

"It's weird. But it was a thing that came to me because the whole time I was writing the book, I was like, *How the f\*\*k am I going to end this thing?* I didn't know what the ending was. And I wrote into it for a while—where's the ending, I don't know, let me tell you how I don't know where the ending is. It's really hard to say. And I'd written these various sections in the book that were about writing the book in some form or another. I thought I could end the book on one of those notes, looking into the future, et cetera, et cetera. That ended up being what I did. It's circling the future, but I also wanted it to be fairly light on commentary because I'd already done a lot of that. I wanted it to be this meditative moment where there's a future and forwardness to it because it's set so far after the events of the book."

**It wraps it up in a good way: "Here is where my life went" versus "Here's a bunch of new ideas and commentary."**

"Exactly. You've now read all this s\*\*t about me, and here's this one peaceful moment from my own future—but actually my past—but that's going to give you some kind of idea. And then *boom*, out. You know? Ultimately, I actually really liked it, and it worked out better than I had anticipated."

*Jan 27. Tickets \$5. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Ave. More info and tickets at [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)*  
Filed under

[Books](#), [Interview](#), [Book Reading](#), [Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series](#)

ZEST

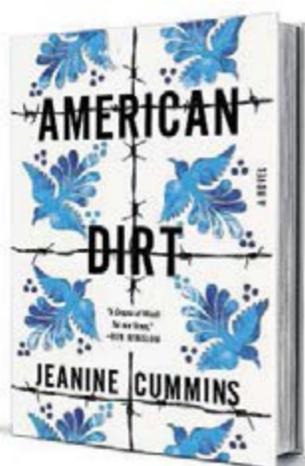
EAGERLY  
ANTICIPATED  
READSURGENT, WEIRD AND  
PROMISING TITLES TO  
GET LOST IN FOR THE  
FIRST HALF OF 2020

Alice Mollon / Getty Images | Ikon Images

By Andrew Dansby | STAFF WRITER

The wintry winds of late 2019 brought a lot of speculation about the next and penultimate novel in George R.R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire" series but nothing resembling a release date. Rather than sit around waiting on Martin, with the help of Houston booksellers I've instead assembled a book preview for 2020 that, hopefully, deals with titles that are more reliably confirmed for release.

This year starts off with a kick. Jeanine Cummins' "American Dirt" arrives with blurbs from Stephen King and several booksellers testifying to its gripping pacing. And I found it to be as billed: an on-the-pulse novel about a mother and her



son on the run from a Mexican cartel. The book opens with devastating violent outburst, and Cummins doesn't let her foot off the gas until the story is told.

"I did not breathe for the whole first chapter," says Valerie Koehler of Blue Willow Bookshop in Houston. "The run for the border is hellish, and the timeliness of the border situation makes it a must-read."

The book, out Jan. 21, is taut and timely and will likely pepper best-of-2020 lists 11 months from now.

Koehler is also keen on "Valentine" by Elizabeth Wetmore, due March 31.

"I loved every page," she says. "Set in West Texas during the oil booms and busts of the '70s, it's the women who bear the brunt of the brutality of the culture. These

characters and their intertwined stories will work a way into your heart. It's the mythic Texas that we think we know."

Another January release of note is "Long Bright River," which will be in bookstores this week. Liz Moore's fourth novel touches on the opioid epidemic in her tale of two sisters whose paths diverge greatly from childhood. It's also a gripping piece of fiction that drew a lot of buzz weeks before release.

The list below is hardly exhaustive. But it represents a few urgent, weird and promising titles for the first half of 2020. Publication dates are subject to change.

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Books continues on G3

## ZEST

## BOOKS

## 2020 reads with Houston ties

By Andrew Dansby  
STAFF WRITER

Last year proved a strong one for books with Houston ties. A slew of authors with local connections published novels: Chris Cander's "The Weight of a Piano," Mike Freedman's "The King of the Mississippi," Marc Grossberg's "The Best People" and Mark Haber's "Reinhardt's Garden" among them.

Susan Choi — an alum of Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts — won the National Book Award for her 2019 novel "Trust Exercise." Novuyo Rosa Tshuma — a doctoral student at the University of Houston — published an incredible debut novel with "House of Stone."

And Houston's Arte Público Press — the largest publisher of U.S.-based Hispanic authors in the country — won a National Book Critics Circle award. The publisher received the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award last January.

More is on the way for 2020.

One of the standout titles from last year was "Lot," an award-winning debut story collection by Houston native Bryan Washington. His short stories were connected to one another and also deeply connected to his hometown. He'll likely continue to enjoy momentum for his



Courtesy photos

**Bryan Washington's acclaimed short-story collection "Lot" comes out in paperback in March.**

work; "Lot" will be released in paperback in March. And Washington's first novel, "Memorial," is scheduled for release in the fall.

Nick Flynn — who published a poetry collection, "I Will Destroy You," last year — lives in New York but spends his springs here as a professor in the creative writing program at the University of Houston. His new memoir, "This Is the Night Our House Will Catch Fire," is due in

August. It melds memories from his troubled childhood with more recent contemplation about parenthood. Also this year Flynn offers the intriguing "Stay: threads, conversations, collaborations," a mixed-media volume described as "a self-portrait via a constellation of topics that have circled his work. Ranging from the impact of suicide and homelessness to addiction, political engagement and the vital power of artistic



**University of Houston creative writing professor Nick Flynn's memoir is due in August.**

friendships." "Stay" will be published in March. He appears Feb. 3 at Brazos Bookstore for "I Will Destroy You."

Another book likely to draw attention this year focuses on Houston native James A. Baker III — whose list of credits, accomplishments and achievements working for four U.S. presidents wouldn't fit on these pages. "The Man Who Ran Washington" is Baker's story told by Peter Baker, the New

York Times' chief White House correspondent, and Susan Glasser, a New Yorker staff writer.

Blue Willow Book Shop's Cathy Berner also alerted us to a book she's excited about: "Gravity of Us" by Phil Stamper, which is due in February. The young-adult novel, set in Houston, is about a character whose father is chosen to become an astronaut.

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## BOOKS

From page G1

## January

**"Hitting a Straight Lick With a Crooked Stick," Zora Neale Hurston:** Nothing in this new story anthology is technically "previously unpublished," but it does rescue eight stories that had been published decades ago in anthologies and then largely forgotten. The 21 stories collected represent broad thematic content mined by Hurston in Harlem in the mid-1920s.

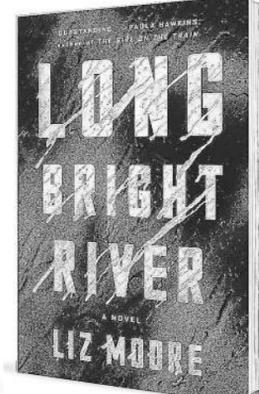
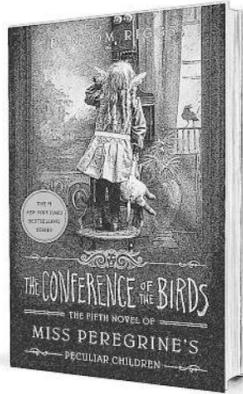
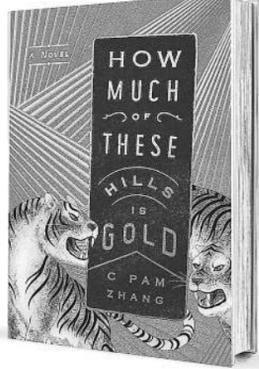
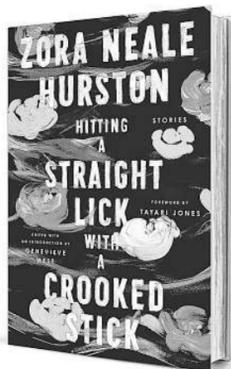
**"A Long Petal of the Sea," Isabel Allende:** This piece of historical fiction starts after the fall of the Spanish government in the 1930s and charts the journey of a widow and her spouse's brother as they try to start a new life in Chile.

**"Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope," Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn:** The Pulitzer Prize-winning husband-wife team dives into struggling small towns in America, revealing systems and programs that have failed. But true to the title, there are some optimistic glimmers here. They'll appear Jan. 16 at Congregation Emanu El with the Progressive Forum.

**"Me & Mr. Cigar," Gibby Haynes:** If you're wondering what the Dallas native and Butthole Surfers frontman has been doing lately, well, he's written a darkly funny young-adult novel about a troubled teen and his supernatural dog.

**"Zed," Joanna Kavenna:** A colossal tech corporation with tendrils in life, the economy and politics, as well as a predictive algorithm set this dystopian story into motion. What could go wrong?

**"The Conference of Birds," Ransom Riggs:** The fifth book in Riggs' "Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children" series finds hero Jacob having dispatched his enemies with a



wide open future ahead of him. The author will make an appearance Jan. 19 at the Barnes & Noble in The Woodlands.

## February

**"The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz," Erik Larson:** The subject hardly matters. Larson's storytelling gifts — his sense of pacing, his ability to convey historical detail and characters — are without peer.

**"The Big Goodbye," Sam Wasson:** The "Fosse" biographer tells the story of the making of "Chinatown," one of the greatest films of all time, and one with ageless allegorical offerings.

**"Apeirogon," Colum McCann:** The National Book Award winner for "Let the Great World Spin" tells a story of two fathers — one Palestinian, the other Israeli — both suffer familial losses that bring them together. Inprint Houston brings him on April 27 to the Alley Theatre for a reading with Emily St. John Mandel.

## March

**"The Night Watchman," Louise Erdrich:** National Book Award winner Erdrich based this novel on the life of her grandfather, whose fight for Native American lands spanned from North Dakota to Washington, D.C. Inprint Houston brings her on March 9 to the Alley Theatre for a reading.

**"Deacon King Kong," James McBride:** This novel is McBride's first since he won the National Book Award seven years ago. It is set in a Brooklyn, N.Y., housing project like the one where he was raised, as he tells the story from multiple perspectives of a bumbling old church deacon who shoots a drug dealer.

**"Death in Mud Lick: A True Story of Corporate Pill Pushers in Small Town America," Eric Eyre:** A terrific reporter, Eyre found himself at an epicenter for the opioid crisis while working at the Charleston Gazette-Mail in West Virginia. He deservedly won a Pulitzer Prize for his work, and here shares a story of a woman who moved to fight back after her brother's death.

**"The Mirror and the Light," Hilary Mantel:** Mantel's narrative about the life of Oliver Cromwell has thus far resulted in two deeply researched and gorgeously told novels. She concludes his life story and her trilogy with this volume, which — considering Cromwell's bio — won't likely end well.

**"The Glass Hotel," Emily St. John Mandel:** Two seemingly disparate stories are tied together, one involving a woman who disappears at sea, the other involving a Ponzi scheme in New York. Inprint Houston brings her on April 27 to the Alley Theatre for a reading with Colum McCann.

**"My Dark Vanessa," Kate Elizabeth Russell:** Gillian Flynn raved about this novel that jumps between 2000, when its narrator was a teen having an affair with a 40-something teacher, and 17 years later when he's been accused of sexual abuse.

## April

**"How Much of These Hills Is Gold," C Pam Zhang:** Two orphaned children of im-

migrants set out to bury their father in this bracing story about identity, home and family.

**"Afterlife," Julia Alvarez:** The first adult novel by Alvarez in 15 years tells the story of a writer and college professor who in a short span loses a husband and sister and then finds a desperate stranger on her doorstep.

**"What Is the Grass: Walt Whitman in My Life," Mark Doty:** The deep feeling and deeply expressive poet Doty braids memoir, biography and criticism into a fascinating account of his relationship to the storied poet and his work.

**"The Machine Never Blinks: A Graphic History of Spying and Surveillance," Ivan Greenberg, writer, with Everett Patterson and Joe Canlas, artists:** An unnerving history compressed and illustrated.

## May

**"Dirt: Adventures, with Family, in the Kitchens of Lyon, Looking for the Origins of French Cooking," Bill Buford:** Admittedly, the rambling title reads like a chapter. But as he proved with "Heat," Buford has a gift for describing the beauty and chaos of a kitchen.

## June

**"The Folly and the Glory: America, Russia, and Political Warfare: 1945-2020," Tim Weiner:** Check the years in the title just in case you thought the Cold War had ended. This is by the author of the authoritative CIA history "Legacy of Ashes."

## July

**"Transcendent Kingdom," Yaa Gyasi:** A neuroscience Ph.D candidate chooses her path because her family — Ghanaian immigrants living in Alabama — struggle with addiction and depression.



Benjamin Benschneider / Associated Press

**Erik Larson's "The Splendid and the Vile" is due in March.**



Courtesy photo

**Zora Neale Hurston's "Hitting a Straight Lick With a Crooked Stick" contains broad themes.**



Courtesy Lori Barra

**"In the Midst of Winter" is Isabel Allende's 19th novel.**



Hilary Abe

**Inprint Houston brings Louise Erdrich for a reading on March 9.**



Chia Messina

**"Deacon King Kong" is National Book Award winner James McBride's latest novel.**



Gioia Zloczower

**C Pam Zhang's "How Much of These Hills Is Gold" is due in April.**



Michael Cummo / Hearst Connecticut Media

**Emily St. John Mandel comes for an Inprint Houston reading on April 27.**



Courtesy photo

**Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn discuss "Tightrope" on Jan. 16 at Congregation Emanu El.**



Courtesy photo

**Ransom Riggs' latest brings him on Jan. 19 to Barnes & Noble in The Woodlands.**

## ON THE TOWN

Day more or less established the wrestler-memoir genre—brings the same goofy wit to his new one-man stage show, "Tales from Wrestling Past." **From \$25. Improv Houston, 7620 Katy Fwy. Ste. 455. 866-468-3399. improvtx.com**

**Mar 28 at 7 Fabulously Funny Comedy Festival**  
Ice Cube's foil in the *Friday* films and Eddie Murphy's pal in *Dolemite Is My Name*, Mike Epps takes top billing on this laugh-a-minute tour that also features Lavell Crawford, DC Young Fly, Karlous Miller, Kountry Wayne, and Haha Davis. **From \$59. NRG Arena, 1 NRG Park. 832-667-1400. ticketmaster.com**

## FILM

**Mar 4 at 8 Market Square Park: Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy**  
Superficially a '70s spoof starring Will Ferrell as the leader of an extremely chauvinistic news team and Christina Applegate as his blond-bombshell foil, Adam McKay's 2004 comedy has become an unparalleled catchphrase factory over the years. Trust us: It's kind of a big deal. **Free. 301 Milam St. 713-223-2003. marketssquarepark.com**

**Mar 5 at 7 Aurora Picture Show: Cry of the Third Eye**  
Nearly a decade in the making, multimedia artist Lisa E. Harris's fanciful three-part study of the Third Ward's ongoing transformation—*Cry of the Third Eye*, *The Children of the Lost*, and *The Last Resort*—will screen in full for the first time as she sings, narrates, and shows off her theremin talents. **Free. Smith Neighborhood Library, 3624 Scott St. 713-868-2101. aurorapictureshow.org**

**Mar 17–18 at 6:30 Fathom Events: I Am Patrick**  
The life of Ireland's patron saint—abducted and forced into slavery by pirates at age 16, he wound up converting much of the pagan Emerald Isle to Catholicism—is reimagined in this feature-length 2020 film starring *Lord of the Rings'* John Rhys-Davies as Old Patrick. **From \$13.53.**



**Multiple Houston-area theaters. fathomevents.com**

**Mar 26 at 5:45 Asia Society Texas: Juice**  
Touching on climate change, Bitcoin mining, and more, this 2019 documentary explores the relationship between electrical and political power through more than 50 interviews conducted in Lebanon, India, Iceland, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Producer Robert Bryce and director Tyson Culver will host a post-screening Q&A. **\$25 (non-members). 1370 Southmore Blvd. 713-496-9901. asiasociety.org/texas**

**Mar 15 at 1 and 4 Fathom Events: King Kong**  
The Big Bang for a truly monstrous franchise, RKO's 1933 screamer still casts a long shadow over its many successors, including this fall's *Kong vs. Godzilla*. But for all its ingenious special effects (for the time), *Kong's* core resides in the uncanny chemistry between "scream queen" Fay Wray and one shockingly soulful giant ape. **From \$11.37. Multiple Houston-area theaters. fathomevents.com**

## LITERARY

**Mar 23 at 7:30 Inprint: Reginald Dwayne Betts & Natalie Diaz**  
Crystalizing his time behind bars into his latest volume of poetry, *Felon*, Yale Law grad Betts previously won an NAACP Image Award for 2010 memoir *A Question of Freedom*. A member of the Gila River Indian Community, Diaz has just published *Postcolonial Love Poem*, which Graywolf Press calls "an anthem of desire against erasure." **\$5. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Ave. 713-521-2026. inprintheouston.org**

**Mar 27 at 6:30 Brazos Bookstore: Deb Olin Unferth**  
In Unferth's new novel, *Barn 8*, a team of incongruous characters

attempts to steal one million chickens from an egg farm. Currently a UT-Austin creative-writing professor, the author won a 2018 Guggenheim Fellowship following her story collection *Wait Till You See Me Dance* and graphic novel *I, Parrot*. **\$16 (book price). 2421 Bissonnet St. 713-523-0701. brazosbookstore.com**

## EVENTS

**Mar 7 at 10 Secrets of Camp Logan**  
A hastily assembled WWI army post, Camp Logan (present-day Memorial Park) became notorious after some of its African American soldiers clashed with Houston police in August 1917, with deadly results. This Houston Museum of Natural Science-sponsored tour assembles at the park's running center; expect to walk up to a mile of unpaved ground. **\$45 (non-members). 7575 N. Picnic Ln. 713-639-4629. hmns.org**

**Mar 12 at 6:30 Arthur: The Immortal King**  
The Knights of the Round Table's chivalrous deeds and daring adventures have gripped the popular imagination since before Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* was published in 1485. Win Scutt, assistant properties curator for English Heritage, will discuss what makes the Arthurian legends so alluring—and enduring. **\$15. MATCH, 3400 Main St. 713-521-4533. matchhouston.org**

**Mar 29 at 2 Barrio Dogs: A Decade of Dedication**  
The East End-based animal-services organization—which, among other things, promotes responsible pet care, sponsors adoptions, and works against animal neglect and abuse—celebrates its tenth anniversary with this afternoon fundraiser featuring an appreciative chorus

of bow wow wows and live music from actual human beings as well. **Free. Bohemeo's, 708 Telephone Rd. 713-923-4277. bohemeos.com**

## FAMILY

**Thru Apr 4 Main Street Theater: The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley**  
A bizarre bulletin-board mishap turns an average boy into a globe-trotting adventurer—when you're flat as a postcard, it's incredibly easy to travel through the mail—in Timothy Allen McDonald's song-packed adaptation of the classic children's book by Jeff Brown. **From \$16. MATCH, 3400 Main St. 713-524-6706. mainstreettheater.com**

**Mar 10–15 Main Street Theater: The Cat in the Hat**  
"The sun did not shine, it was too wet to play..." Thus begins Dr. Seuss's timeless tale of feline-induced rainy-day mayhem, adapted for the stage by Katie Mitchell in 2009—the same year the esteemed theater director was named to the Order of the British Empire. **From \$12. MATCH, 3400 Main St. 713-524-6706. mainstreettheater.com**

**Mar 13–15 PAW Patrol Live!**  
Nickelodeon's civic-minded pre-K franchise hits the stage in "Race to the Rescue," in which Ryder's loyal color-coded pups must save the Great Adventure Bay Race after Mayor Goodway's mysterious disappearance. Could her mustache-twirling rival, Mayor Humdinger, somehow be involved? **From \$27. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby St. 713-315-2525. thehobbycenter.org**

Listings Edited By  
**CHRIS GRAY**

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LIFE MEETS ART

## Louise Erdrich Talks Being Inspired by Family History Ahead of Inprint Reading

The award-winning author's new book, *The Night Watchman*, pulls from the life of her grandfather.

By [Ryan Pait](#) 3/6/2020 at 4:58pm

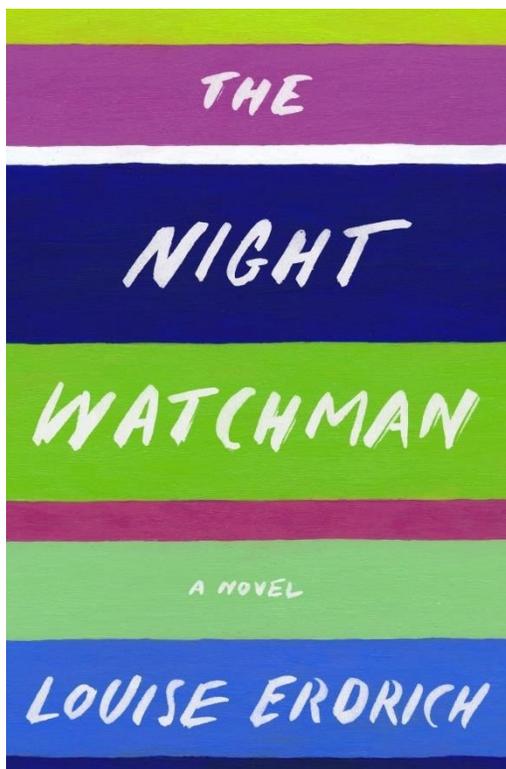


IMAGE: [COURTESY HARPER COLLINS](#)

**ACCLAIMED AUTHOR LOUISE ERDRICH** is following in her grandfather's footsteps. Literally. Erdrich's newest novel, *The Night Watchman*, takes her grandfather Patrick Gourneau's life as its inspiration.

Gourneau fought fiercely against an emancipation bill brought to Congress in 1953 that would terminate the rights of numerous Native American tribes. What began as a letter-writing campaign soon took Gourneau from North Dakota to Washington, DC to oppose the bill. Those letters served as the basis for *The Night Watchman*, in which Erdrich turns Gourneau into Thomas Wazhashk and sets him loose among a cast of characters whose way of life hangs in the balance. Reading Gourneau's letters as an adult—and as someone older than he was at the time he wrote them—gave Erdrich a new vision of her grandfather, she says, adding, "Maybe I needed to get to this place in order to understand him."

We caught up with Erdrich, a National Book Award recipient and Pulitzer Prize finalist, by phone after one of her stops on her book tour: a reading in DC. The novelist, who is included among the most significant authors of Native American literature, says it was strange being there at the exact same time of the month that her grandfather was in the capital doing his life-changing work many years ago. "And here I am," she says. "And here is this book."

On Monday, Erdrich will read from [\*The Night Watchman\*](#) as she headlines the fifth evening of Inprint's 2019-2020 Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. We talked to Erdrich about her newest book before she heads to Houston.

**When you're thinking about *The Night Watchman* alongside your other work, where does it fit? Or does it feel like a departure from what you've done before?**

It does feel like a big departure. I didn't connect it to any of the other books. But in a way, it may be where I needed to go. The fact that it is inspired by my grandfather—that it hews very closely to his letters, his truth, what he did, and the political aspects of it—it makes it feel very organic to the times we're in now.

**In your award-winning book *Love Medicine*, you wrote, "Here is what I do not understand: how instantly the course of your life can be changed." Did you witness any of those moments as you read your grandfather's letters?**

Yes. I recognized that this fight for existence—it was an existential, true fight for the existence of his people that he was suddenly engulfed in. It was very sudden; it was only a matter of months. The timeline is so short between when he found out and understood, and when he had to go to Washington, with all the information and all of the arguments he could find and put together, and the people he could cobble together. It was a short, life-changing event. And for him, I think he lost his health. That was the most painful part of writing this book: to know what it was like for him during those times. He truly did have a stroke on one of his returns from Washington, and it was the beginning of several. Just to know how hard he worked, and how little he slept, and the tremendous amount of tension there was, it's devastating. We all in our family know how much it cost.



IMAGE: [COURTESY HILARY ABE/HARPER COLLINS](#)

**You mention in your afterword that much of the book was written in a “heavy state of emotion” as you remembered the toll that this took on your family. How did you find a way to write through and capture those emotions?**

I wrote the thing that he did, and that was a way of saying, “You did something so important.” People forgot quite quickly what had happened. I talked to many people who just don’t really think about termination, and people forgot his role in it, and people forgot a lot about it because it didn’t happen. People remember when the devastation happens much more clearly than when one is able to forestall devastation and it never happens. That’s kind of the unsung hero. And that’s what he was. And people didn’t remember because termination did not happen to them. Where termination did happen, in those tribes, those people were never to be the same. It would’ve been devastating for us. I would certainly not be here as a member of the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa if he hadn’t stood up to Congress on this.

**One of the things I admire about your writing is that you treat every character as worthy of interest and consideration, even when a character might not seem worthy of it at first glance. Where do you feel that impulse comes from?**

I suppose it’s really from my parents. They treat everyone as if they’re worthy of interest, and they’re kind to people. They’re just good people. But as a writer, I feel as though I’m to tell people’s stories without judgment. And once you’re in that position of not having to judge, you can feel the characters kind of come toward you, with their stories and their flaws. I don’t know exactly where it comes from, but it is what I feel to be true. I’m here not to judge, but to write the story.

*Mar 9. Tickets \$5. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Ave. More info and tickets at [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)*  
Filed under

[Alley Theatre](#), [Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series](#), [Interview](#)

## BOOKS

FICTION

# Historical 'Night Watchman' feels especially relevant today



Hillary Abe

Louise Erdrich says she wanted to normalize the idea of American Indians working in a 9-to-5 environment rather than “feathers and tomahawks.”

## Author's grandfather serves as inspiration for novel of hope

By Andrew Dansby  
STAFF WRITER

**L**ouise Erdrich found herself stuck in the present feeling bad about the past.

Erdrich had been writing fiction for more than 35 years. But she was in a funk and unable to move forward from it. So she looked to the 1950s, a period romanticized by Americans, for obvious reasons: Those doing well in the 1950s would view it as idyllic. Her family, though, didn't quite have the same clear pane through which it could view that era. Erdrich's grandfather was the chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, at a time when termination – a governmental assimilation process – was in full force.

The termination policy started in the 1940s and ran across three decades.

Erdrich, via email, says it “hasn't been revisited in all of its abysmal morality – largely ignored in the history books. When tribes were terminated, there was enormous suffering.”

She used this nasty period of history as her way out of that writing funk, focusing on her grandfather. She read his letters, and she drew on memo-



### Louise Erdrich

**When:** 7:30 p.m. March 9

**Where:** Alley Theatre, 615 Texas

**Details:** \$5; [inprinthouston.org](http://inprinthouston.org)

ries of him. She delved into a history she hadn't probed previously.

“I always knew that my grandfather and his colleagues on the tribal council fought termination,” she says, “but I didn't know how remarkable their achievement was until I began thinking and reading about it. This book was so important to write, not only because of my personal memories of my grandfather but because it

gave me hope in regard to what a determined soul can do to confront disastrous government policies. To me, this is especially relevant at this time.”

Patrick Gourneau, her grandfather, became the inspiration for “The Night Watchman,” Erdrich's new novel. Erdrich read letters he wrote to her parents, which she refers to as composing “a portrait of a deeply humane intelligence as well as a profoundly religious patriot and family man.”

Erdrich's afterword explains more about her grandfather, and the history is fascinating and beautiful from an emotional, familial standpoint.

It's also damning. Her deep dive into family poured directly into the opening. Erdrich retreated into her memories to reconstruct the life of her grandfather.

“This did take me a long time to write,” she says. “I gathered details, remembered how my grandfather dressed, his Sears shirts, hat, work jacket, the lunchbox he carried. My grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, cherished this job. The key ring and company flashlight are emblems of his task, and I think that although with his other duties this job became increasingly difficult, he was proud of his position and fought to keep it.”

So her book is, as Erdrich says,

“partly about jobs, yes.”

But she also wanted to normalize the idea of Native people working in a 9-to-5 environment.

“I wanted to write about Native people working in a factory because this is a stereotypical,” she says. “Native people working together in a factory? How uncinematic when people think in terms of feathers and tomahawks. Yet this was a real place and still exists, though under a different name. These jobs sustained Turtle Mountain people during a very difficult time. Also, workplaces are rich in drama. Even lunch can be a drama.”

Erdrich's book closes as it opens, though its narrative has moved. It speaks to our lives: A series of cycles pushing outward gently. They feel different across years, but on a day-to-day basis, they feel repetitive.

Like the work of a watchman like Gourneau. On one hand, he held down a job built upon repetition and diligence: he's the night watchman of the title. On the other, he also did profound work that – with the passing of time – also feels diligent and too often unseen.

His granddaughter saw in that life – the simple and the grand – something worthy of a remarkable story.

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POETRY by Robin Gara

# 'Sweets'

Since cutting back  
candy luscious with layers of  
caramel, nuts, nougat  
wrapped in chocolate confec-  
tions

are too much –  
my mouth aches.  
Now one fairly traded seventy  
percent cacao is  
more than enough.  
Relationships, the same –  
where flowery courtship used  
to tickle my fancy,  
these days I'm satisfied more by  
a hug that nearly chokes the life  
out of me  
but comes  
from some place real.

*Robin Gara, a retired art teacher,  
is a member of the Bihl Haus Go!  
Arts writer's group in San  
Antonio.*

*Send poems (40-line limit) to  
poetry editor Jim LaVilla-Havelin,  
San Antonio Express-News, P.O.  
Box 2171, San Antonio, TX 78297*

## EVENTS

### SUNDAY

**Kim Yi-Deum:** Will sign and discuss "Blood Sisters," with translator Jin Yoon Lee. 4:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore, 2421 Bissonnet; 713-523-0701, brazosbookstore.com.

### MONDAY

**Alma Katsu:** Will sign and discuss "The Deep," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book, 2342 Bissonnet; 713-524-8597, murderbooks.com.

**Louise Erdlich:** Reading followed by an on-stage interview, conducted by American Book Award winner and UH Creative Writing Program faculty member Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Part of Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series. Tickets \$5; 7:30 p.m., Alley Theatre, 615 Texas, inprintheouston.org.

### TUESDAY

**Ally Carter:** Will sign and discuss "Winterborne Home for Vengeance and Valor," 5 p.m.,



Blue Willow Bookshop, 14532 Memorial; 281-497-8675, bluewillowbookshop.com.

**Grace Talusan:** Will sign and discuss "The Body Papers," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

**Phillip Margolin:** Will sign and discuss "A Reasonable Doubt," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

**Lyssa Kay Adams:** Will sign and discuss "Undercover Bro-mance," 7 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop.

### WEDNESDAY

**Gibby Haynes:** Will sign and discuss "Me & Mr. Cigar," 6:30 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

**Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen:** Will sign and discuss "You Are Not Alone," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

**Najmeh Batmangli:** In celebration of Persian New Year, author will share regional Iranian dishes and will sign and discuss "Cooking In Iran." Tickets \$25-\$35; 6:30 p.m., Asia Society Texas Center, 1370 Southmore Blvd; asiasociety.org/texas.

**Martha Hall Kelly:** Will sign and discuss "Lost Roses," 7 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop.

### THURSDAY

**Peter Swanson:** Will sign and discuss "Eight Perfect Murders," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

**Jason Reynolds:** Will sign and discuss "Stamped." Tickets \$21.50, include a copy of the book. 7 p.m., Lanier Middle School, 2600 Woodhead; Blue Willow Bookshop.

### FRIDAY

**Arlana Brown:** Will sign and discuss "Sana Sana" and be joined by Jeremy Eugene, Natasha Carrizosa and Loyce Gayo. 6 p.m., Brazos Bookstore.

**Deanna Raybourn:** Will sign and discuss "A Murderous Relation," 6:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

### SATURDAY

**Kimber Fountain:** Will sign and discuss "The Maceos and the Free State of Galveston," 2-4 p.m., Galveston Bookshop, 317 23rd, Galveston; 409-750-8200, galvestonbookshop.com.

**Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton and Rozella Haydée White:** Will sign and discuss their books including "Newsworthy," 3 p.m., Blue Willow Bookshop.

**Final Twist Anthology Signing:** Mark and Charlotte Phillips, C.J. Sweet, Natasha Storfer and Laura Elvebak will be joined by moderator Cash Anthony to sign and discuss "Menu For Mayhem," 4:30 p.m., Murder By The Book.

Ana Khan