# KCLL Summer Lit Picks: Staff Suggestions for Your Recreational Reads

By Barbara Engstrom, Executive Director

As the rest of the world discovers the joy that is summer in Seattle, we locals can find refuge from the World Cup crowds in fun summer reads. In this month's column get a leg up on what to read for your Book Bingo card with a peek into what the law library and foundation staff are currently reading. https://www.spl.org/programs-and-services/authors-and-books/book-bingo

***Sky Full of Elephants* by Cebo Campbell**

This book was chosen by **Tamara Hayes, Technical Services Librarian**. Tamara is responsible for every aspect of the collection including acquisitions, circulation, collection development, cataloging, and processing. Tamara also manages the subscriber program, conference room reservations, and invoicing. She is the glue that holds the library together.

> I recently read *Sky Full of Elephants* by Cebo Campbell. I wouldn't say this is a light summer read, but it is worth it. The premise is that one day all the white people in America walk into the nearest body of water and drown themselves. No one seems to know how this happened nor why. The book starts a year after the incident, and we get a glimpse into how society is working.
>
> The main character, Charlie, is teaching at Howard University after he was wrongfully convicted. Charlie is contacted by his biracial daughter, Sidney, whom he's never met and wasn't sure was even alive, for help. Charlie makes his way to Wisconsin to pick Sidney up and they make their way South. We witness the growth of their relationship and their awareness of themselves.
>
> Eventually, it's revealed what caused the "event" and I think the readers alongside Charlie question the ethics of what happened and what moving forward looks like for everyone. This was an interesting read that made me think about community and relationship building as well as how a person chooses to (or is made to) move through the world.

***The Serviceberry* by Robin Wall Kimmerer**

This is former Outreach Services Attorney, **Sarah deQuay's** pick. Sarah has moved on to greener pastures at DFI but will always remain a beloved member of the KCLL family.

> My usual reading preferences lean more toward true crime and emotionally devastating memoirs, so *The Serviceberry* by Robin Wall Kimmerer was a bit outside my normal rotation. My aunt gave this book to me after the loss of a dear friend, and it ended up being a gentle, hopeful read I needed during a hard time. In a short and thoughtful way, Kimmerer uses the serviceberry tree to symbolize the importance of generosity, community, and the healing power of taking care of others and the world around us. Turns out not every book has to emotionally destroy me to leave an impact!

***The Historian by Elizabeth Kostova***

If you've been to KCLL within the last 40 years then you know **Rick Stroup, our Assistant Director** and recommender of the next pick. Rick would be forgiven for being resistant to change after almost 40

years on the job, yet surprisingly, he's always the one to quickly embrace new technology, programs, initiatives, and recipes.

> Elizabeth Kostova is probably best-known for her debut novel, *The Historian,* which was by all accounts a home run for a new author, particularly considering its central theme, Dracula.
>
> Given all that has been written, and sometimes even well-written, in the vampire genre, it is monumentally difficult today to arrive at a story which both honors the meticulous tropes vampire-novel fans expect (and will bitterly complain about if left out) and adds plot twists, turns, and fresh-takes that help make a well-worn literary path worth traveling again.
>
> The tropes Kostova pays homage to include the preventative powers of garlic and crucifixes, Gothic ruins and crypts, complex Eastern European historical intrigues, well-meaning academics in over their heads, and epistolary plot presentation. Serious Ann Rice fans beware: Kostova treads a bit more lightly on other genre favorites, like spiritual degradation, sexual obsession, and out-right gore. What Kostova adds, or rather weaves into, these elements are well-thought-out explorations of the connections to the historical underpinnings of the Dracula myth, the varied "histories" describing the life of Vlad the Impaler, and a real-world-like (and therefore muddy) trail unraveled by the protagonists as they try to divine, across independent timelines, the connections between Vlad the Impaler and the mythical vampire Dracula. Of particular interest to librarians and history fanatics, the librarians in *The Historian* are anything but mild-mannered protectors of the arcane, and though Dracula himself may indeed be a right nasty piece of work, he is also both amateur historian and bibliophile!
>
> To keep better track of the myriad plot twists and turns, it's probably best to first read *The Historian* in print or on a tablet. That done, give the Audible version a try as well. It isn't always true that an audio version works, but in this instance it does. The voice talents of Justine Eyre and Paul Michael adds a layer of dimension to the original work.

***Lost Lambs* by Madeline Cash; *London Falling* by Radden Keefe; *Collected Stories of Shirley Hazzard***

Our next pick comes from **Kristie Thompson, Executive Director of the KCLL Foundation**. Kristie somehow finds time to keep the foundation running like a Swiss watch on top of multiple other volunteer activities, and fostering a very active toddler. And… she reads more books than anyone I know.

> I just finished *Lost Lambs* by Madeline Cash. It's a funny, quirky novel, and a quick read. *Lost Lambs* relates the story of a dysfunctional family in which each member is facing a personal crisis, while also becoming increasingly entangled in the shady business of the town's reclusive billionaire.
>
> I'm currently reading *London Falling* by Patrick Radden Keefe after seeing him speak at Town Hall. *London Falling* is an investigation into the mysterious death of a London teenager in 2019. It's a compelling tale that reads like a novel as Radden Keefe explores the themes of identity and family, while delving into the London underworld and the events surrounding this particular case.

I'm also listening to an audiobook version of the *Collected Stories of Shirley Hazzard*. Hazzard was an Australian short story writer and novelist who died in 2016 at 85 years old. I happened upon her work by accident and am surprised to not have heard of her before. Her stories are full of thoughtful observations on life and relationships and I'm enjoying their contrasting pace and content as compared to my other recent reads.

***What the River Knows & Where the Library Hides by Isabel Ibañez***

Our next round of picks come from **Catherine Davenport, our Outreach Services Librarian**. Catherine is very busy running our Family Law Drafting Lab, designing and teaching workshops for our pro se patrons, and producing our newsletter. Be sure to check out the delightful "Cate's Bites" column to get the scoop on eateries around the courthouse.

When her parents go missing on an archaeology expedition in Egypt, Inez decides to take matters into her own hands to get to the bottom of the disappearance. With the help of her uncle and his aide-de-camp she treks through Egypt unraveling the secrets of the Nile and old-world magic imbued objects. Ibanez expertly uses her historical research skills to build a captivating world in which magic, adventure, found family, and history collide to tell a breathtaking story of finding oneself. This is a great summer porch read for when you want a little bit of romance mixed with a lot of mystery and intrigue set under the backdrop of Egypt in the 1880s.

***The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas and *The Forsyte Saga* by John Galsworthy**

The final pick are books that I, **Barbara Engstrom, Chief Cook and Bottle Washer**, recently read and really enjoyed.

When I heard that PBS was going to release new adaptations of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Forsyte Saga*, I promised myself not to watch until I'd read both books first. I'm a sucker for a PBS costume drama and really wanted to immerse myself in the experience. Lately I've been enjoying audio books and found great, unabridged versions of each at the Seattle Public Library. I've read the *Count of Monte Cristo* before, but I never tire of following Edmund Dantes' journey from naïve, happy young sailor to fabulously wealthy polymath plotting a sophisticated path of revenge. When I was listening to the book over the stereo one day, I got the comment "wow, people don't really write like that anymore" in response to how detailed the descriptions are. That is exactly what I love about the *Count of Monte Cristo,* it sweeps you into the historical intrigues of Bonapartism and the Restoration and all the tentacles extending. Dumas also takes time to develop wonderful character portraits, my favorite being the Count's prison cellmate, teacher, and benefactor Abbe Faria. In the PBS version it beggars belief that absolutely no one would make the connection that Edmund Dantes is the Count when he looks exactly the same. In the book, young Edmund has a warm, handsome face and happy countenance while the Count's skin is often described as so white as to be almost translucent against his black hair, giving him an unsmiling, vampiric quality, albeit impeccably mannered and richly dressed. That said, I thoroughly enjoyed the PBS series and loved the exchange where Abbe Faria counsels Edmund, "When planning revenge, dig your own grave first" Wise words not found in the book.

The *Forsyte Saga* is the cumulative name for the series of novels by John Galsworthy following the socially and financially ascendant Forsyte family's travails from the 1880s to the 1920s. The story primarily centers around the troubled marriage of Soames Forsyte and his wife Irenie and the ensuing drama over the years. What I just loved about listening to the entire series was the luxury of watching generations of Forsytes interact over time. I also appreciated the ambiguity in the character exposition. On the surface, Soames is painted as a thoroughly detestable person, yet by the end, he also comes across a bit more sympathetically – a man out of step with his time and place in the world. The PBS version is interesting in that it creates new backstories for some of the characters, rendering a bit of the complexity and ambiguity that Galsworthy creates over the very dense series, but in a much different way.

I highly recommend immersing yourself in a "big book" of your own this summer. I'm currently loving rereading *Middlemarch*.

**Come Visit Us at KCLL**

While we don't have a fiction collection at KCLL we do have law book collection that we've lovingly curated and maintained. To find out more about our collection in print and eBook format, visit us at www.kcll.org.