

# Hidden Treasures

**These are some titles you may not have read as chosen by the staff of the Novi Public Library .**

## *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov

Suppressed in the Soviet Union for twenty-six years, Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece is an ironic parable of power and its corruption, good and evil, and human frailty and the strength of love. Featuring Satan, accompanied by a retinue that includes the large, fast-talking, vodka drinking black tom cat Behemoth, the beautiful Margarita, her beloved - a distraught writer known only as the Master - Pontius Pilate, and Jesus Christ, *The Master and Margarita* combines fable, fantasy, political satire, and slapstick comedy into a wildly entertaining and unforgettable tale that is commonly considered one of the greatest novels ever to come out of the Soviet Union.

## *Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Dorris

Starting in the present day and moving backward, the novel is told in the voices of the three women: fifteen-year-old part-black Rayona; her American Indian mother, Christine, consumed by tenderness and resentment toward those she loves; and the fierce and mysterious Ida, mother and grandmother whose haunting secrets, betrayals, and dreams echo through the years, braiding together the strands of the shared past.

## *I, Lucifer* by Glen Duncan

The End is nigh, and the Prince of Darkness has been given one last shot at redemption, if he can manage to live out a reasonably blameless life on earth. As a trial run, he negotiates a month of "trying without buying" in the body of struggling writer Declan Gunn. Luce seizes the opportunity to binge on earthly delights, to straighten the biblical record (Adam, it's hinted, was a misguided variation on the Eve design), to celebrate his favorite achievements (Elton John, for one), and to try to get his screenplay sold, but the experience of walking among us isn't what His Majesty expected: instead of teaching us what it's like to be him, Lucifer finds himself understanding what it's like to be human.

## *Geek Love* by Katherine Dunn

Those entering the world of carnival freaks described by narrator Olympia Binewski, a bald, humpbacked albino dwarf, will find no escape from a story at once engrossing and repellent. Art and Lily, owners of a traveling carnival, decide to breed their own freak show by creating genetically altered children through the use of experimental drugs. Eventually their family consists of Arty, aka Arturo the Aqua Boy, born with flippers instead of limbs; Electra and Iphigenia, Siamese twins and pianists; the narrator, Oly; and Fortunato, also called the Chick. A spellbinding orator, Arty uses his ability to establish a religious cult, in which he preaches redemption through the sacrifice of body parts, digits and limbs.

### *Atmospheric Disturbances* by Rivka Galchen

When Dr. Leo Liebenstein's wife disappears, she leaves behind a single confounding clue: a woman who looks, talks, and behaves exactly like her. A simulacrum. But Leo is not fooled, and he knows better than to trust his senses in matters of the heart. Certain that the real Rema is alive and in hiding, he embarks on a quixotic journey to reclaim her. With the help of his psychiatric patient Harvey--who believes himself to be a secret agent able to control the weather--his investigation leads him from the streets of New York City to the southernmost reaches of Patagonia in search of the woman he loves.

### *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville

William Thornhill, a Thames bargeman, is deported to the New South Wales colony in what would become Australia in 1806. In this new world of convicts and charlatans, Thornhill tries to pull his family into a position of power and comfort. When he rounds a bend in the Hawkesbury River and sees a gentle slope of land, he becomes determined to make the place his own. But, as uninhabited as the island appears, Australia is full of native people, and they do not take kindly to Thornhill's theft of their home. *The Secret River* is the tale of Thornhill's deep love for his small corner of the new world, and his slow realization that if he wants to settle there, he must ally himself with the most despicable of the white settlers, and to keep his family safe, he must permit terrifying cruelty to come to innocent people.

### *Italian for Beginners* by Kristin Harmel

Thirty-four-year-old Manhattan accountant Cat Connelly has always lived life on the safe side. But after her little sister gets married, Cat wonders if she has condemned herself to a life of boredom. She decides to take a chance and accepts an invitation to spend a month with an old flame in Italy. But her reunion with the gorgeous Francesco is short-lived, and she finds herself alone in Rome. Now, she must see if she has the courage to live outside the lines for the first time - and to face a past she never understood.

### *Mister Pip* by Lloyd Jones

In a novel that is at once intense, beautiful, and fablelike, Lloyd Jones weaves a transcendent story that celebrates the resilience of the human spirit and the power of narrative to transform our lives.

On a copper-rich tropical island shattered by war, where the teachers have fled with most everyone else, only one white man chooses to stay behind: the eccentric Mr. Watts, object of much curiosity and scorn, who sweeps out the ruined schoolhouse and begins to read to the children each day from Charles Dickens's classic **Great Expectations**.

So begins this rare, original story about the abiding strength that imagination, once ignited, can provide. As artillery echoes in the mountains, thirteen-year-old Matilda and her peers are riveted by the adventures of a young orphan named Pip in a city called London, a city whose contours soon become more real than their own blighted landscape. As Mr. Watts says, "A person entranced by a book simply forgets to breathe." Soon come the rest of the villagers, initially threatened, finally inspired to share tales of their own that bring alive the rich mythology of their past. But in a ravaged place where even children are forced to live by their wits and daily survival is the only objective, imagination can be a dangerous thing.

### *Life is Elsewhere* by Milan Kundera

The author initially intended to call this novel, *The Lyrical Age*. The lyrical age, according to Kundera, is youth, and this novel, above all, is an epic of adolescence; an ironic epic that tenderly erodes sacrosanct values: childhood, motherhood, revolution, and even poetry. Jaromil is in fact a poet. His mother made him a poet and accompanies him (figuratively) to his love bed and (literally) to his deathbed. A ridiculous and touching character, horrifying and totally innocent ("innocence with its bloody smile!"), Jaromil is at the same time a true poet. He's no creep, he's Rimbaud. Rimbaud entrapped by the communist revolution, entrapped in a somber farce.

### *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov

In *Pale Fire* Nabokov offers a cornucopia of deceptive pleasures: a 999-line poem by the reclusive genius John Shade; an adoring foreword and commentary by Shade's self-styled Boswell, Dr. Charles Kinbote; a darkly comic novel of suspense, literary idolatry and one-upmanship, and political intrigue. Published in 1962, *Pale Fire* is an experimental synthesis of poetry and prose that displays Nabokov's mastery of unorthodox structure. The novel is a 999-line poem in heroic couplets plus commentary. Both were composed -- according to Nabokov's fiction -- by an insane pedant, John Francis Shade, during the last 20 days of his life.

### *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien

The author of *The Things They Carried* offers a riveting novel of love and mystery. When long-hidden secrets about the atrocities he committed in Vietnam come to light, a candidate for the U.S. Senate retreats with his wife to a lakeside cabin in northern Minnesota. Within days of their arrival, his wife mysteriously vanishes into the watery wilderness.

### *Wise Blood* by Flannery O'Connor

*Wise Blood* is the story of Hazel Motes of Eastrod, Tennessee. He returns from World War II and back at home falls under the spell of street preacher Asa Hawks and his daughter, Lily Sabbath Hawks. Motes sets about preaching his own 'word': a new religion called The Church Without Christ. Of course he runs into conflict with Hawks. The beauty and power of the book come out of O'Connor's brutal depiction of the characters you love to hate who turn up unexpectedly.

### *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* by Maggie O'Farrell

In the middle of tending to the everyday business at her vintage clothing shop and sidestepping her married boyfriend's attempts at commitment, Iris Lockhart receives a stunning phone call: Her great-aunt Esme, whom she never knew existed, is being released from Cauldstone Hospital—where she has been locked away for over sixty years. Iris's grandmother Kitty always claimed to be an only child. But Esme's papers prove she is Kitty's sister, and Iris can see the shadow of her dead father in Esme's face. Esme has been labeled harmless—sane enough to coexist with the rest of the world. But Esme's still basically a stranger, a family member never mentioned by the family, and one who is sure to bring life-altering secrets with her when she leaves the ward. If Iris takes her in, what dangerous truths might she inherit?

### *Swann's Way* by Marcel Proust

*Swann's Way* is the first novel of Marcel Proust's seven-volume magnum opus *À la recherche du temps perdu*, or *Remembrance of Things Past*. Following the narrator's opening ruminations about the nature of sleep is one of twentieth-century literature's most famous scenes: the eating of the madeleine soaked in a "decoction of lime-flowers," the associative act from which the remainder of the narrative unfurls. After elaborate reminiscences about his childhood with relatives in rural Combray and in urban Paris, Proust's narrator recalls a story regarding Charles Swann, a major figure in his Combray childhood, and his escapades in nineteenth-century privileged Parisian society, revolving around his obsessive love for young socialite Odette de Crécy. Filled with searing, insightful, and humorous criticisms of French society, this novel showcases Proust's innovative prose style, characterized by lengthy, intricate sentences that elongate, stop, and reverse time.

### *Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth

Both an outrageous capstone to America's sexual revolution and an expose of Jewish-American angst, *Portnoy's Complaint* inspired readers to vitriol and ecstasy upon its publication in 1969. Alexander Portnoy's struggle to balance intellectual well-meaning and a wide-ranging libido against Jewish upbringing in a gentile nation is captured in a series of psychoanalytic sessions with an off-stage Dr. Spielvogel. Lauded for its narrative technique, its insight into psychoanalysis, and the sheer audaciousness of its author, *Portnoy's Complaint* became an embattled classic, whose stature is still debated today.

### *S.* by John Updike

The eponymous *S.* is Sarah Worth, Boston bred, upper-class WASP, and when we meet her in this epistolary narrative, she is on an airplane, writing to tell her doctor husband she is leaving him to join her guru on an Arizona religious commune. Through letters to members of her family, her hairdresser and dentist, and through tapes sent to her best friend Midge, Sarah relates the circumstances that prompted her to leave domineering, philandering Charles and to seek communion with the Arhat and his band of sannyasins (pilgrims) on the ashram. Willfully blind to the totalitarian methods of the Arhat's flunkies, Sarah reports her spiritual rebirth at the same time she records abysmal living conditions and brutal physical and financial exploitation. She mimes the Arhat's preachy nonsense that frees her ego for "nothingness" and her body for love affairs both heterosexual and lesbian. Eventually she is "chosen" by the Arhat himself; bitter disillusionment follows. Like all of Updike's work, the narrative is a commentary on our culture. Sometimes bordering on farce, it is often wickedly funny, especially when Sarah employs her sharp tongue to lecture her mother and daughter or write mendacious letters to the desperate people the Arhat has cheated. Updike is in his most playful mode here.

### *Montana, 1948* by Larry Watson

The events of a cataclysmic summer permanently alter twelve-year-old David's understanding of his family: his father, a small-town sheriff; his remarkably strong mother; David's uncle Frank, a war hero and respected doctor; and the Haydens' Sioux housekeeper, Marie Little Soldier, whose revelations turn the family's life upside down as she relates how Frank has been molesting his female Indian patients. As their story unravels around David, he learns that truth is not what one believes it to be, that power is abused, and that sometimes one has to choose between family loyalty and justice.

