

International House Book Club Selections for 2023

Date	Title	Description
16-Jan	The Years by Annie Ernaux, 240 pgs, 2008, France	<p>The Years (Les Années) marks a departure for the French Nobel prize-winning author (2022) and memoirist, Annie Ernaux, who writes her personal story as if she were writing for entire generations: "From a common fund of hunger and fear, everything was told in the 'we' and 'impersonal pronouns'."</p> <p>The Years is a personal narrative of post-war France told through the lens of memory, impressions past and present—even projections into the future—photos, books, songs, radio, television and decades of advertising, headlines, contrasted with intimate conflicts and writing notes from sixty years of diaries.</p> <p>Local dialect, words of the times, slogans, brands and names for the ever-proliferating objects of modernity, are given voice here. The voice we recognize as the author's continually dissolves and re-emerges. Ernaux makes the passage of time palpable. Time itself, inexorable, follows its own course, consigning all other narrators to anonymity. A new kind of autobiography emerges, at once subjective and impersonal, private and collective. (Amazon)</p>
20-Feb	Running The Rift by Naomi Benaron, 400 pgs, 2012, Rwanda	<p>Running the Rift follows the progress of Jean Patrick Nkuba from the day he knows that running will be his life to the moment he must run to save his life. A naturally gifted athlete, he sprints over the thousand hills of Rwanda and dreams of becoming his country's first Olympic medal winner in track. But Jean Patrick is a Tutsi in a world that has become increasingly restrictive and violent for his people. As tensions mount between the Hutu and Tutsi, he holds fast to his dream that running might deliver him, and his people, from the brutality around them. Winner of the Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction.</p>
20-Mar	The Crusades Through Arab Eyes by Amin Maalouf, 293 pgs, 1989, Middle East	<p>The Crusades, a series of medieval military expeditions made by Europeans to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, is expertly portrayed from an Islamic perspective by a renowned Islamic academic. In the narrative style of a novel, the author explores the unexpected twists of fate, spy craft, betrayals, assassinations, battlefield ingenuity, and unlikely alliances that make up the various kingdoms and city-states of the Middle East during Europe's Middle Ages. The reader soon becomes genuinely invested in these "characters" of history. You'll find yourself holding out hope that this time they'll stop the mysterious Frankish hordes, or rooting for Damascus over Aleppo or Acre over Jerusalem, only to suddenly have that hope smashed against the wall by a marauding Turkish prince or a hashish-smoking Assassin from Iran. At the same time, Maalouf keeps his story completely based in hard research into *Arabic* primary sources of the time period, He maintains his credibility as a historian. Eurocentricity never once makes an appearance, keeping true to the title of the book by keeping you as informed or in-the-dark about the Europe of this period as the Muslims were then. An enchanting and enlightening read.</p>
17-Apr	Nives by Sacha Naspini, 131 pgs, 2020, Italy	<p>One of the most exciting new voices in Italian literature brings to life a hauntingly beautiful story of undying love, loss, and resilience, and a fierce, unforgettable new heroine</p> <p>Nives can't seem to be able to shed a tear for her husband's death. She didn't cry when she found the body, she didn't cry at the funeral. Even the fog of her loneliness evaporates quickly when she decides to keep her favorite chicken Giacomina with her in the bedroom. She suddenly feels relieved, almost happy, but also guilty: how can the company of a chicken replace her dead husband?</p> <p>Then one day, Giacomina becomes paralyzed in front of the tv. Unable to wake her up, Nives has no choice but to call the town's veterinarian, Lorian Bottai, an old acquaintance of hers. What follows is a phone call that seems to last a lifetime. The conversation veers from the chicken to the past—to the life they once shared, the secrets they never had the courage to reveal, wounds that never healed.</p>

15-May	The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by Shehan Karunatilaka, 368 pgs, 2022, Sri Lanka	A searing rip-roaring epic, full of mordant wit and disturbing truths set amid the murderous mayhem of Sri Lanka beset by civil war Colombo, 1990. Maali Almeida, war photographer, gambler and closet gay, has woken up dead in what seems like a celestial visa office. His dismembered body is sinking in the serene Beira lake and he has no idea who killed him. At a time where scores are settled by death squads, suicide bombers and hired goons, the list of suspects is depressingly long, as the ghouls and ghosts with grudges who cluster round can attest. But even in the afterlife, time is running out for Maali. He has seven moons to try and contact the man and woman he loves most and lead them to a hidden cache of photos that will rock Sri Lanka.
19-Jun	After Lives by Abdulrazak Gurnah, 288 pgs, 2020, Tanzania	After Lives by the winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature is a celebration of a place and time when people held onto their own ways, and basked in ordinary joys even as outside forces conspired to take them away. When he was just a boy, Ilyas was stolen from his parents on the coast of east Africa by German colonial troops. After years away, fighting against his own people, he returns home to find his parents gone and his sister, Afiya, abandoned into de facto slavery. Hamza, too, returns home from the war, scarred in body and soul and with nothing but the clothes on his back--until he meets the beautiful, undaunted Afiya. As these young people live and work and fall in love, their fates knotted ever more tightly together, the shadow of a new war on another continent falls over them, threatening once again to carry them away. Gurnah is a master novelist who understands human failings in conflicts both political and intimate, and how these shortcomings create afflictions from which nations and individuals continue to suffer, needlessly, generation after generation.
18-Sep	The Arsonists' City by Hala Alyan, 443 pgs, 2021, Lebanon	The Nasr family, Syrian mother and Lebanese father and 3 American children, is spread across the globe. Still, they've always had the ancestral home in Beirut. Following his father's recent death, Idris has decided to sell. The family gathers in Beirut united in fighting against Idris. They all have secrets...lost loves, bitter jealousies, abandoned passions... that distance has helped smother. But in a city smoldering with a legacy of war, changing landscape of refugees, religious tension, political protest, their secrets ignite and imperil the fragile ties that hold this family together. Teeming with wisdom, warmth and characters born of remarkable human insight.
16-Oct	Native Country of the Heart by Cherríe Moraga, 256 pgs, 2019, Mexico/U.S.	The memoir about the author's mother, Elvira Moraga, a working class mestiza Mexican, illustrates the fluid borders and is a tribute to an ordinary life. Born in 1914, Elvira picked cotton north of the border at 11 years old, sold cigarettes south of the border at 14, and then worked as a hotel manager and maid in California while raising her children. In her late 80s, she suffered from Alzheimer's, her daughter both archives her mother's lost memories, but gives voice to an indigenous history.
20-Nov	Perestroika in Paris by Jane Smiley, 288 pgs, 2020, France	This is a life affirming, grown up fable. Paras, short for "Perestroika," is a spirited racehorse. One afternoon at dusk, she finds the door of her stall open and wanders all the way to Paris . She's dazzled and often mystified by the sights, sounds, and smells around her, but she isn't afraid. Soon she meets an elegant dog, a German shorthaired pointer named Frida, who knows how to get by without attracting the attention of suspicious Parisians. Paras and Frida coexist for a time in the city's lush green spaces, nourished by Frida's strategic trips to the vegetable market. They keep company with two irrepressible ducks and an opinionated raven. But then Paras meets a human boy, Etienne, and discovers a new, otherworldly part of Paris: the ivy-walled house where the boy and his nearly-one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother live in seclusion. As the cold weather nears, the unlikeliest of friendships bloom. But how long can a runaway horse stay undiscovered in Paris? How long can a boy keep her hidden and all to himself? Jane Smiley's beguiling new novel is itself an adventure that celebrates curiosity, ingenuity, and the desire of all creatures for true love and freedom.