



Best books...chosen by Daisy Goodwin

Daisy Goodwin, the author of the 2011 best-seller *The American Heiress*, recommends her six favorite works of historical fiction. The British novelist's new book, *The Fortune Hunter*, reimagines the life of a 19th-century Austrian empress.

I, Claudius by Robert Graves (Vintage, \$16). The first historical novel I remember reading and still one of the finest treatments of imperial Rome. Graves is very good on pre-Judeo-Christian morality, and the women are gloriously villainous. No one in *Game of Thrones* has anything on Livia or Messalina.

The Baklava Club by Jason Goodwin (Sarah Crichton, \$26). This is the latest in a wonderful series of detective stories set in 19th-century Istanbul. Yashim may be a eunuch, but he has all the equipment he needs to unlock the mysteries of the Ottoman Empire. I have to declare an interest here, as the author is my brother, but I think non-family members will love these books as well.

Music and Silence by Rose Tremain (Washington Square, \$32). An eerily atmospheric book about intrigue at the Danish Court in the 17th century. There is no exposition here; the reader is completely immersed into the chilly world of King Christian and his adulterous queen.

The French Lieutenant's Woman by John

Fowles (Back Bay, \$16). Fowles's reputation has dimmed since his death, but *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a masterful deconstruction of a Victorian novel. His description of the hypocrisies and hysteria of a 19th-century English coastal town are wonderfully acute.

Gone With the Wind by Margaret Mitchell (Pocket Books, \$10). Some of it is offensive now (the sympathetic treatment of the Ku Klux Klan, for example), but as compelling storytelling with a splendidly amoral heroine fighting to survive the American Civil War, it still works.

My Dear I Wanted to Tell You and The Heroes' Welcome by Louisa Young (Harper Perennial, \$15 each). These two novels contain powerful imaginings of the collateral damage inflicted by World War I on a generation of young people. Their protagonist, Riley Purefoy, has half his face blown away by a shell, but the conflict also damages his friends and lovers in less visible ways. *The Heroes' Welcome*, to be released in March 2015, is very perceptive about the Great War's long legacy.

Author of the week

Scott Cheshire

Scott Cheshire had a childhood most outsiders would find incomprehensible, said **Jasmine Elist** in the *Los Angeles Times*. Born into a Jehovah's Witness family, he began delivering Rapture-heavy homilies to complete



strangers on the streets of Queens, N.Y., by age 13. "I was a child preacher, but a lot of kids were in my culture,"

he says. Though he left the church in his early 20s, *High As the Horses' Bridles*, Cheshire's new novel, about a 12-year-old evangelical minister who grows into a conflicted apostate, clearly reflects the author's own experience. The book's protagonist is "a young guy trying to run away from, but also embrace, his own religious heritage," he says. "And while writing the book, that became the experience for me."

One author in particular had a major role in persuading Cheshire to abandon his faith, said **Tobias Carroll** in *Vol1Brooklyn.com*. Once he began reading Kurt Vonnegut novels in his late teens, Cheshire says, there was no turning back. "If you're in the right mind space and you happen to be a Mormon or a Witness or a Seventh-day Adventist, that's the worst thing for you to read. *Cat's Cradle* will just destroy you." In fact, though the author maintains strong ties to his still-devout family, he's a zealous believer in the Church of Literature. "The two holiest things I can think of, aside from love and my wife, are *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson and *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy," he says. "If there's something sacred, it's those books, to me."

Also of interest...in twisting the truth

Virtual Unreality

by Charles Seife (Viking, \$27)



In this engaging tour of misinformation spread by the Internet, said Dwight Garner in *The New York Times*, Charles Seife calls Web rumors and myths "the most virulent, most contagious pathogen that humanity has ever encountered." He vividly details the scams, phony photos, and bogus conspiracy theories that have deluded and ripped off so many people. "Despite his many dire warnings," Seife can be "quite surreally funny" about the bizarre ideas people pick up online.

Masked

by Alfred Habegger (Univ. of Wisconsin, \$29)



No wonder Thailand still bans screenings of *The King and I*, said Deborah Cohen in *The Wall Street Journal*. Alfred Habegger debunks former royal governess Anna Leonowens's 1870s memoirs, the basis of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. Leonowens was no demure Victorian: She hid her half-Indian ancestry, and made up her stories of harems and bloodlust at the Siamese court. The real King Mongkut was a studious ex-monk, quite unlike the "swaggering, hypermasculine Yul Brynner."

Mike Hogan, Beowulf Sheehan

935 Lies

by Charles Lewis (PublicAffairs, \$29)



"This book should be required reading for every president, governor, lawmaker, judge and journalist," said Ron Fournier in *National Journal*. Investigative reporter Charles Lewis leaves no doubt that decades of high-level distortions and lies have undermined American democracy. The two most recent presidents receive particular scorn for valuing political expediency over honesty. Unlike Seife, Lewis believes that technology can democratize information and rebuild trust. "I hope he's right."

The Care and Management of Lies

by Jacqueline Winspear (Harper, \$27)



Amid the many books capitalizing on the World War I centennial, Jacqueline Winspear's stand-alone novel "more than holds its own," said Maureen Corrigan in *The Washington Post*. The *Maisie Dobbs* series creator has concocted "a moving tale" about an English farmwife whose husband is shipped to the front. She begins writing him morale-boosting letters, and her truth-bending missives capture the struggle to maintain Edwardian virtues in the face of war.