

Fireside Book Chats: Winter 2019



Karen's List: Under 300: Short Books that Pack a Punch

Adjei-Brenyah, Nana Kwame. *Friday Black*, (2018). On too many must-read lists to count, these unputdownable stories burst off the page in a voice that will make you think of Joseph Heller, Vonnegut, and Saunders, and then realize it's all his own. Adjei-Brenyah's dark humor and tweaked realities never weigh you down as he comments brilliantly on societal ills from racism to consumerism. Prepare to be shocked and amazed!

Desarthe, Agnès. *The Hunting Party*, (2018). Shy, disconnected Tristan joins a woodland hunting party and forms a philosophical connection with a rabbit, his would-be prey, when disaster strikes. With a light touch, Desarthe looks at what it means to live courageously. For fans of *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*.

DeWitt, Patrick. *French Exit*, (2018). When scandal and bankruptcy strike, a New York society family runs for Paris in a "tragedy of manners," which is both a sendup of wealth and privilege and "a moving mother/son caper." A hilarious cast of characters, an unusual cat, and biting comedy for fans of Carl Hiaason's books and Wes Anderson's movies.

Hobson, Brandon. *Where the Dead Sit Talking*, (2018). Plainspoken and lyrical language draws you into 15-yr-old Sequoyah's world, where he seeks connection with Rosemary who shares his Native American heritage and his experience of the foster system. A compelling story punctuated by beautiful meditations on nature and peopled with relatable, if troubled, characters. Shortlisted for National Book Award. A Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2018.

McDonald, Ian. *Time Was*, (2018). An atmospheric slim volume full of mystery, history, love, and quantum physics. Two men become lovers in a time when their love is not acceptable and then are pulled apart by something much bigger than 1940s social mores. Our narrator, obsessed with the story of Tom and Ben, tracks them down through time. Revel in the beautiful windswept English landscapes and seascapes.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Warlight*, (2018). Like Ondaatje's famous *English Patient*, this is an atmospheric tale set in London post WWII. Part (fictional) memoir, part mystery, *Warlight* is a beautiful slow-burn, about memory, identity and reinvention, and the narrator's rediscovery of a parent lost to him in his teenage years.

Shah, Bina. *Before She Sleeps*, (2018). With a premise that moves beyond *The Handmaid's Tale* this modern-day parable examines what happens when women are forced to be nothing more than child-bearing machines, and intimacy without sex is an underground commodity of the highest value. Engaging characters and intelligent writing in a well-drawn speculative world.



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Youngson, Anne. *Meet Me At the Museum*, (2018). A gentle epistolary debut novel about Tina an English farmer's wife and Anders, a Danish professor, who find themselves unexpectedly and deeply connected by recent grief and shared interests, despite being 700 miles apart and only "meeting" in their letters. Reviewers call it "charming, yet well-written" and "insightful" with "well-defined idiosyncratic" characters.

