

The Reader



at Literary Leftovers Bookstore

Issue 5

March/April 2025

BOOKSELLER'S COLUMN

Sowing Seeds

Heather Erwin, proprietress

This time of year invigorates me, sitting on the precipice of spring, a new year stretching its arms and rising out of a long winter slumber, its mood matching nature's season. As I write this, we've just had several days of 50+ degree weather, clear skies and sunshine, providing ample opportunity to open wide the windows and allow sounds of crickets and creatures into our homes again. Here at the bookstore, we are also on the precipice of something new; while there's nothing concrete to announce, yet, I want to begin to share our vision with you. I think of this sweet shop as a community center. I feel like a shepherd whose flock belongs to all of us, and with this in mind, my role is simply to expand the ways this space can benefit and support our shared community. The older I get, the more I recognize the importance of community and participation. I'm so grateful to those of you who participate in our community at large, our bookstore specifically; by donating books and other items, by purchasing here first when possible, volunteering your time and your talents to our many programs and special events, offering our newsletter in your own small businesses, or telling others they should visit and familiarize themselves with all we have to offer (Lucy, first and foremost, of course).

We want to grow into a space three times as large, with classroom-size rooms for teaching and tutoring; an outdoor space, fenced and turned into an additional "room" to educate young minds or simply to enjoy; a much larger space for our children's books and special events; and more spaces for all genres.

I may be sharing too much too soon, but I believe that sharing this vision among family, this community, allows all of us to dream into these ideas and begin to shape them. We keep dreaming bigger and bigger, and we hope you will join us as we build upon this foundation of ideas. *Réver en grand!*

COMMUNITY REVIEW



*By the
Orchid &
the Owl*
by Mariah
Montoya
reviewed by
Christina Snailum

*On the island of Eshol, a ruling council gifts magic to all its citizens
whether they want it or not.*

If you had told me a year ago that my favorite read of 2024 would be this absolute gem written by an indie author, I wouldn't have believed you for a second. I'm not a huge indie fan; not because the books aren't good, but because there are *so many* to choose from, and I'm absurdly indecisive. From the moment I saw the cover reveal in January, I became obsessed. I even signed up to be an ARC reader for the first time because I couldn't wait to read it. I was expecting the book to be similar to *Vampire Academy*, but it reminded me more of *Fourth Wing*, with a dash of *Harry Potter*. Mariah had me hooked from the beginning to the end with her excellent world building and countless twists! I've been not-so-patiently waiting for *By the Moonbeam & the Mist* to be released, so what am I doing in the meantime? Rereading *By the Orchid & the Owl*, of course. I still can't decide if I'd rather be a Wild Whisperer like Rayna or a Mind Manipulator like Coen. If you're a romantasy fan who likes magic academia, found family, high stakes, and a bit of spice, this book (and series) is a must read!

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Nicole M. Miller



Nicole Miller is the debut author of Until Our Time Comes (2024), an historical novel about an American horse trainer working in a renowned Polish stable during the German occupation. She took part in one of our previous local author panels just after the release of her book, and we caught up with her again here to talk about writing and publishing.

How did you begin writing? How old were you?

When I turned 12 and started babysitting as a "real job," one of the families I babysat for had a huge bookshelf of books that I devoured. When I ran out of books, I started to wonder if I could write a story that I'd want to read. So, in the 6th grade, I started hand-writing the story of a female trainer taming the untamable Arabian stallion. From then on, I continued to study history, daydream, and write books.

Describe your writing routine.

I often rely on the intense writing challenge called "NaNoWriMo" (National Novel Writing Month) each November. That deep focus helps me crank out a really messy first draft, and I edit year-round. I meet monthly with a group of other writers. I prefer some noise in the background, either music or a TV show. Juggling a new family member—our third child—I'm often writing in my head and jotting notes on my phone.

You worked on your debut novel for over ten years. How did you know it was finished?

This story has evolved at least a dozen times in the past 20+ years, from handwritten drafts to typed manuscripts to proposals at writer's conferences. Often, I received very helpful rejections. I'd set the manuscript aside and work on other stories. On my last go-round in 2021, it felt like the book had truly come together. We pitched it to five publishers it would fit with best. Four of those five rejected it. The fifth publisher found the perfect home, with an editor who loved Poland and its history and advocated passionately for my manuscript. It felt like just where this story needed to be.

How has traditional publishing treated you?

I'm so grateful to have landed with Revell, a division of Baker Books. Going through the publication process personally felt surreal. And when that box of the books landed on my porch—even holding them in my hands, it still didn't feel real. The publishing team was super kind and supportive. My publicist shared a photo of her reading my manuscript on vacation by the beach, well before it was published. The network of bloggers and reviewers was vast, and the release day tidal wave of promotion was incredible. I never could have rallied so much support on my own.

What about horses inspires you?

When I was 12, my parents bought me my first horse (I started writing about horses in the same year.) As a teen, I read all the "horse girl" books I could get my hands on, and I guess I just never grew out of that phase. Now, I like to think I write books for grown-up horse girls. I love the power and tranquility of these beasts, and the way that they require you to be truly in the moment. I also love history, and horses are so intertwined with our past.

What can you say about what you're working on now?

I'm working on a few ideas right now that all have horses (of course) but also unique historical adventures with courageous heroines and handsome heroes. I enjoy finding little-known stories and highlighting what it is about horses that resonate so much with me in my life.

BOOKSELLER'S COLUMN

Reading Poetry

Eily McIlvain, bookseller

My interest in poetry was very slight until university, and then I took to it with almost singular focus. Poetry is different from fiction, it has a more abstract relationship to narrative, it relies more on the reader to make something of it. We don't inherently see poetry—stories or writings of any kind—as our own, not if they're written by someone else. We're taught in school to discover the Author's Intent. But our discussions in class were not about discovering why the poems were written by the writer, but what they actively meant to us. It was a bit like scrying. As long as you could support your interpretation in the text, anything was permissible. Early school tries to prepare you for this, but mostly fails, and turns people off of literature in the process. So during this time at university I read a lot of poetry, disregarding most of it, struggling over some towards eventual satisfaction, genuinely adoring a handful of poems, which gave me the strength to keep going with the experiment.

Here are a few straightforward recommendations from your local bookseller: Philip Larkin; W.H. Auden; Mary Oliver; Wendell Berry; Walt Whitman. The strength of these writers is their sincere reflection, humor, and simple but absolutely elegant and engaging language. If you are on the internet, take a look at @poetryisnotluxury and @poetrywillchangeyou on Instagram. These accounts supply a wide range of writers, poems and excerpts, so you can test your taste.

I had a good mentor, who could put poems into my hands he thought I would enjoy, but you can be your own good mentor. Read poetry with your friends, read poetry *to* your friends, and if you don't have friends who will take up with you, read poetry to yourself, and talk to yourself about it. When it comes to literature, no eccentricity is too far. Enjoy the language, and watch for what images arise, what emotions touch down as you read.

And join us in April for our first **Poetry Night, April 17th, 6-7:30pm**. This is an open reading for anyone who's written a poem, and we don't care if it's good or bad. This is a safe space, but not a sacred space. Come with a less serious attitude. Come ready to share something and enjoy.

POETRY

A theater of light,

Elaine Fawkes

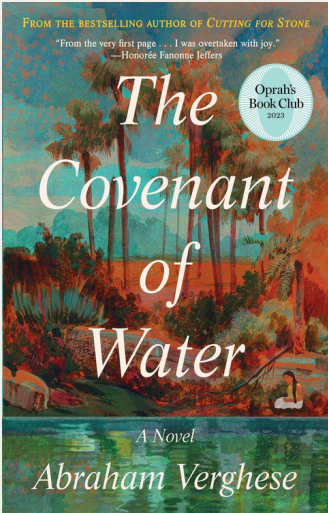
and a stilt-legged, darkened
dagger-beaked bird, made of cloud and
full of white, emerging
into this sky window, burning,
the size of a titan, into the place
beyond the storm, overhead of traffic.

But if the bird is my imagination, well,
his majesty is real.

The flourish of cirrus
wisp in his wing. The thrust
of his narrow jaws, smeared
with darker mist and
suggesting some depth to
the picture. The blazing stage
lights of the sun sear him
but cannot kill him.

He wings upwards;
he threatens to pierce
the empyrean.
He is a flaming arrow.
He races home.





Abraham Verghese is the author of the bestseller *Cutting for Stone*, and the memoir *The Tennis Partner*. He was born in Ethiopia, where he began his medical education, and emigrated to America in the 1970s. He is a physician and current professor at Stanford University. *The Covenant of Water*, Verghese's most recent novel, takes place in Parambil, a village in the Indian state of Kerala, where his parents were born and raised, and is based partly on stories from his mother's childhood and

The Covenant of Water

by Abraham Verghese

reviewed by
Eily McIlvain,
bookseller

early life. The novel tells the story of Parambil's growth and the generations of one particular family within it, who are mysteriously cursed with drowning. *Covenant* was our Overstacked Book Club pick in January of this year, and went down as one of the best-received books that we've read together. It's epic in length and scope, but the story is propulsive and very well-paced. Verghese prevents a constant barrage of names and places and faces by frequently conducting brief, quieter moments for the reader to dwell in, observing character and setting without compromising tension; even the sweetest moment can give way to something urgent or frightful, which is life-like. Verghese's medical expertise and sensitive understanding of the relationship between physicians and their patients, and the relationship between humans and their health, comes through extremely clearly. It is one of the most interesting and moving aspects of the novel. The subject of the novel is not India, or medicine, or religion, or family, but all of it together: human life. In case that sounds lofty, let me just say that Verghese accomplishes it by nothing more than simple, trustworthy story-telling. He adapts a writing style that will be familiar to readers of books like Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth*: because it has to sustain itself

over a long haul, the writing is straight-forward and not excessive (but is very intentional) with detail. If you've been putting this read off, like we were, because of the heft, then don't wait any further. If you've already read and enjoyed this book, then try *The Pillars of the Earth*, or Gail Tsukiyama's modern classic, *The Samurai's Garden*.

“The normally voluble Rune has managed—by his silence, by his touch, by his presence, to convey a message: Before we treat the flesh, we must acknowledge the greater wound, the one to the spirit.”

*To find out what we are reading for book clubs, and how to join us, visit us online at literaryleftoversbookstore.com



The Little Reader

Our job is not to tell children what to be, but to show them the possibilities of being.
Horatio Clare

LETTER FROM THE CHILDREN’S EDITOR Nothing Gold Can Stay

Corrie Albertson, children’s program manager

As I was driving home from helping a friend move, the last line of a Robert Frost poem popped into my head: *Nothing gold can stay*. I’ve probably read that poem dozens of times, but I don’t think I ever understood it until this moment. While packing her boxes, we talked about my son getting married, our daughters graduating from high school, and my friend possibly moving across the country—all good things. Still, there was a sense as I closed and taped up boxes that I was also packing up one season of my life and moving into the next. It was bittersweet. I’m not sure when I went from being the young mother struggling to make it out of the grocery store with three small children and cheerios stuck in her hair, to the mom watching those same children start their own lives. I vividly remember an old woman approaching me on one of those store trips and telling me to appreciate my children while they were young because it would go fast. I assured her I would, thinking I understood. I didn’t. Just like I didn’t understand the poem before now. Why tell you all of this? First, I’m now the older woman who wants to tell you to enjoy your children while they’re young. You’ll miss the mess. You’ll miss the noise. You’ll miss the cuddles. I even found myself wishing the other day that I’d left one of those little dirty handprints on the front window instead of wiping it away. Additionally, because April is National Poetry Month. I know some of you love poetry and others hate it. Usually the people who hate it say it’s because they don’t understand it. I just want to encourage you to read it anyway; sometimes its meaning will be tucked away and saved for another day. Poetry can give us a voice when we are unable to find our own words.

Finally, to thank you—again—for sharing your children with me. I love reading, building Legos, and making crafts with them. Getting hugs from your kids and pictures to hang on my fridge has reminded me that each season carries its own joy.

CAREER INVESTIGATIONS Stacey Alyssa, Seamstress

interviewed by Grayson S., age 9

Every Tuesday, Miss Corrie leads *Storytime with Corrie* from 11-11:30am, right after Lego Club. Once a month, Storytime hosts a special guest; a local professional or experienced enthusiast to talk to the children about their work and read a related story. In the past, this has included firefighters, floral designers, pilots, and more. In this issue, we present an interview with February’s special guest, Stacey Alyssa, a seamstress, who was interviewed by Grayson, age 9.

What is your career, hobby or skill?
Sewing/seamstress/homemaker
Did you have to go to school or have some kind of training?
No, I learned from my mom and years of practice.
What made you want to pursue this?
I was really tall as a kid so I had to make my own pants.
Do you have any recommendations for someone my age wanting to pursue this career path or hobby?
Start small and get an old machine.
What has been the biggest challenge?
Teaching myself how to use and make patterns, putting in zippers, and finding the time to be able to sew.
Are there different paths you can take with this particular skill set?
You can start at home, teach classes, or become a designer.
What are you most proud of?
Being able to make my own clothes.
What skills come in handy?
Math, hand eye coordination, creativity, and patience.

YOUTH FICTION A Haunted Night

Iris Prewitt, age 6



Once upon a time, there was a house called Old Granny's Knuckle, a house that no one ever dared to go. Some people went there and never returned, so for now they seem to never go there. One time, there was a boy, about ten years old, and he decided to go to the house. This made people worry about him, but he decided to go anyway. When he arrived at the house, he heard a voice say something like...like...like, "I'm going to get you, little boy!" The lights were twickering and the witch was up to an evil plan for every kid in the town. The boy ran as fast as he could out the door! He hid in the shed, hoping the witch wouldn't find him. The witch came outside and the boy was as quiet as he could be. Then he saw a secret slide that led to a secret door. He slid to the secret door, hoping the witch wouldn't follow him. When he got to the door he saw emeralds and rubies. He opened the door and saw a beautiful place. It was like your dreams. It looked like a garden. In the middle of it was a magical tree that protected all that was living. The tree was very old, living for many generations. The tree was expecting the boy to come. It said to the boy, "I will protect you from the wicked witch and save all the children." The boy left to gather the children of the town. He brought them to the tree and they were all protected under its shade. The children were saved!

YOUTH POETRY K-12 Art & Poetry Calendar 2025

Jonah Rhoades, age 6, grade 1

The rain is slow
The sun peeks out
In the sky, a rainbow
Kids run about
It’s a beautiful sight



YOUNG READER’S NOTES
Fancy Nancy
by Jane O’Connor
Adeline, age 7, enjoys this book’s beautiful colors and funny story. She likes to read because it is fun.



Schedule LEGO CLUB at 10am Tuesdays & 4pm Thursdays. STORYTIME WITH CORRIE at 11am Tuesdays, right after Lego Club. DR. SEUSS' BIRTHDAY PARTY at 11-12pm Tuesday, March 4th.

All children's programs are free.

Upcoming POETRY NIGHT April 17th, 6-7:30pm BOTTLED BOOK CLUB at EMANAR CELLARS March.13th, 6pm, \$5 April 10th, 6pm, \$5 OVERSTACKED BOOK CLUB March 27th, 6pm at the shop, \$5 April 24th, 6pm at the shop, \$5

Accepting submissions!
Tues.-Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-5
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