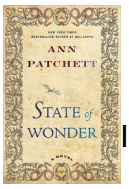
Fiction! Fiction! Fiction!



I admit to being a streaky reader and will often go through several books on the same subject over the course of a month or so. While not as exotic as reading books about bananas (What? Not exotic either? Well you get the point), I have lately been reading some excellent literary fiction.

State of Wonder **by Ann Patchett**
I have read some critiques of this book that there are plot holes and lapses of logic. Upon reflection, I would have to agree with this, however it in no way changes my reading experience. I loved this book and was completely emotionally invested in the characters and outcome of this story. I both devoured the last pages, and didn't want the book to end.

Through a series of complicated events, Marina heads to the Amazon to check on a fellow drug company researcher, Dr. Swenson. What she finds there is horrific, beautiful and completely unimagined. A modern day Heart of Darkness - this time with women!
The plot as written in the description sounds complicated and dry, and it did take me a few pages to get into this book but well worth the effort. The details and story line are interesting enough for juicy content readers, but would also appeal to character driven readers as well. Not many authors are good at both.

Cutting for Stone **by Abraham Verghese**
Marion and Shiva are twins born under unconventional circumstances to a South Indian nun at a hospital where their English father works. Raised on missionary run Mercy hospital grounds by remaining doctors Hema and Gosh, the mirror image twins come of age against a rocky political backdrop in Ethiopia. From India to Africa and ending up in America, this 550 page novel holds up to it's own weight. I was sucked in at page one and was committed right until the end. Verghese, a real life medical doctor, creates both an intriguing story of a medical family and characters you care for. Appeal factors include strong characters, interesting locations and a feel of an epic that is completely accessible.

The Imperfectionists **by Tom Rachman**
Not perfect by a long shot but still interesting and possibly worth a recommend to a fiction reader looking for something a little different. This novel reads as a series of short stories about a group of people who work at an English newspaper based in Rome. Some of the stories are stronger than others but most of them do work well enough to create an interesting set of characters that, despite many flaws, are generally appealing. In my opinion, far too many of the stories end in jaw-dropping twists that seem both highly unlikely and overdone. This is Rachman's first novel, and I would be interested in what else he writes in the future.

Wolf Hall **by Hilary Mantel**
I am only 1/3 the way through this 2009 winner of the Man Booker Prize, but it is proving to be excellent. I picked up this book several times, but the story of Thomas Cromwell, Cardinal Wosley's clerk during the tenuous days of Henry VIII's heir-less reign sounded so dry and boring.

With Mantel's original writing style and dry humor, this is so far proving to be anything but boring - and I think the good stuff is still to come. Recommended to me by a fellow coworker, we are now on a mission to conquer any Wolf Hall misconceptions and highly looking forward to a sequel to follow.
Posted by sbowman on September 1, 2011

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