



# Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING  
HISTORICAL FICTION

Vol. 2, No. 38, September 18, 2020

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## From the Editor

Coronavirus is still a huge part of our lives. We're still running around with masks on, having the debate about to go back to school or to have children learn virtually from home. To visit or not to visit? Stay six feet apart. This hasn't slowed down the writers that are part of Pages of the Past. New releases are still coming out every week. Kudos to all you frantically writing away, no matter what is thrown in our path.

Next week, September 24<sup>th</sup>, *In Picardy's Fields* by Hannah Byron is scheduled for release. It's the prequel to *The Diamond Courier*, which will be following shortly behind. And three weeks ago, Malve von Hassell released *Alina: A Song for the Telling*. Details on each, along with links to the books, are on the next page. Congratulations on your new releases Hannah and Malve!

A few weeks ago, when [Christina Baker Kline](#) joined us for an author spotlight to talk about her new book, *The Exiles*, we also included information on her other books. One was *A Piece of the World*, a fictional story about Christina, who became the inspiration for one of Andrew Wyeth's greatest paintings – Christina's World. It got me to thinking about how many other books involved artists from the past. Oh, there are *so many*! More that we have room for This week I'm sharing just a few with descriptions and links. Take a peek and see if any look interesting to you.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Tiffani Angus, Edith Maxwell, Beverly Swayze, Heather Osborne, Rachel Bodner, and a lot more!

Trisha

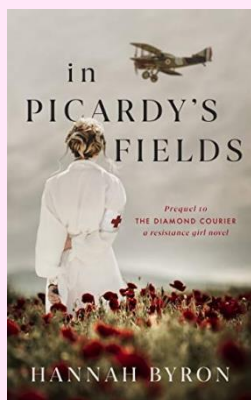
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## New Releases

### In Picardy's Fields

Hannah Byron



Baroness Agnès de Saint-Aubin is a young Parisian doctor with a mysterious past. She follows the attractive—but married—Dr. Alan Bell to the front lines at the Château de Dragoncourt in Picardy, where they help battle the horrors of the trench war. When the castle is captured by German soldiers, the war turns personal as Agnès's secret becomes both a terrible liability—and a mighty weapon. Until Alan is severely injured and her world falls apart.

Countess Madeleine, the young go-getter of the Dragoncourt family, is furious that she's been sidelined to a Swiss finishing school. Knowing her place is in the thick of the action, she runs away to join her siblings who are working as medics at the Château. Upon learning that it's fallen to the Germans, Madeleine is determined to effect a rescue of the French doctors and nurses held prisoner within. But what

can a mere teenager do against the German army?

Told from Agnès's and Madeleine's perspectives, *In Picardy's Fields* is a tribute to the brave young women of WW1. Through their work and courage, they set in motion the true liberation of 20th century women.

### Alina: A Song for the Telling

Malve von Hassell

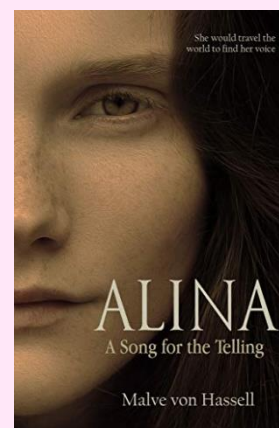
"You should be grateful, my girl. You have no dowry, and I am doing everything I can to get you settled. You are hardly any man's dream." Alina's brother, Milos, pulled his face into a perfect copy of Aunt Marci's sour expression, primly pursing his mouth. He had got her querulous tone just right.

I pinched my lips together, trying not to laugh. But it was true; Aunt Marci had already introduced me to several suitors. So far I had managed to decline their suits politely.

Maybe Alina's aunt was right. How could she possibly hope to become a musician, a trobairitz, as impoverished as she was and without the status of a good marriage?

But fourteen-year-old Alina refuses to accept the oppressing life her strict aunt wants to impose upon her. When the perfect opportunity comes along for her to escape, she and her brother embark on a journey through the Byzantine Empire all the way to Jerusalem.

Alina soon finds herself embroiled in the political intrigue of noble courts as she fights to realize her dream of becoming a female troubadour.



## Diaries as Keyholes to the Past



My fascination with historical diaries and journals began the summer of 2005. I can pinpoint the time because that's the summer I took a two-week driving vacation to see my dad, stopping at eight family cemeteries along the way. Because – antique stores, museums, and cemeteries – don't the best vacations include these elements? And driving – because in an airplane you can't spy the 'Museum next right' sign, turn on your blinker, slow down and exit.

Coming home from Arkansas, we detoured north, through a corner of Nebraska. I'd never been in Nebraska. And of course, I spied a sign for a sod house museum and came to a screeching halt in their parking lot.

Three books joined us in the car when we left. Naturally.

One book was *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford*. Mollie began her diary in Indianapolis on March 23, 1857. She wanted to record the family's journey west to Nebraska City. January 15, 1866 is the last entry and the diary, or journal, covered her courtship, her marriage, the Civil War years and gives us an in depth look at a young woman's life during this period.

On February 1, 1895, she wrote:

*"I have been very ill, and in my convalescence have determined to recopy my old journal, as the original by going through a flood while camping in the mountains is almost obliterated, and only can be deciphered by myself.*

*...It is of more value to me than it could possibly be to my children, but I desire that it be kept in the family and treasured as a relic of by-gone days, not from any especial merit it possesses, but because I do not want to be forgotten."*

Two other books I purchased were related. *Butter in the Well: A Scandinavian Woman's Tale of Life on the Prairie*, is a historical diary of the years 1868-1888. The other is *Prarieblomman: The Prairie Blossoms for an Immigrant's Daughter*, a historical diary from 1889-1900. Each of these are fictional diaries but are written from extensive family research. They each include many actual family photographs and copies of pertinent records.

I was hooked. Reading through all three books was like peeking into a keyhole that led directly to the past.

Another fascinating book I discovered more recently is *The Union: Diaries, Memoirs and Letters of the Civil War*. In one letter, Edwards writes to Father and Mother on July 29, 1863:

*"...We went to one place and they had about 10 or 12 hives of bees. One of my tent mates and myself thought we should like a little to help a hard tack down so we asked the man of the house which hive was the best one and he said that he guessed that there was not much in any of them but we were not going to give it up. So we went and got a good pile of cotton (there is plenty of cotton in this states) and set it a fire and got it to smoking then went and picked out a good hive and smoked the bees out and we had a nice mess of honey.*

*I did not have a very heavy load when I came into camp last thursday. Everything I had was my pants, shirt and cap, Gun & equipments. I lost everything else and my boots I had to throw away. They were all worn out and hurt my feet pretty bad. I came all the way from Jackson bare footed (about 60 miles). (I drew some shoes from the gov yesterday)..."*

Then, I obtained a five-year diary written by Flora Caldwell Luper, from the years 1848-1954. That was my own personal treasure and years later I'm still doing a happy dance over that one! (And still writing short stories and snippets from this diary.) But that's different story for another day.

These written accounts that survive long past the lives that lived them provide great details that we can use as we create historical fiction with realistic touches. And even if you don't need the specific research for a certain era or period that you're writing about, it's still intriguing reading that keeps me at least coming back for more.

Here are some online links with some great resources and diaries that have a lot of information.

<http://listverse.com/2015/11/23/10-extraordinary-diaries-of-relatively-ordinary-people/>

<https://www.thoughtco.com/historical-diaries-and-journals-online-1422040>

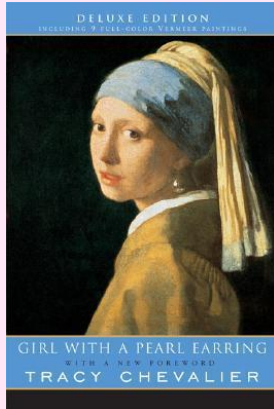
<https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0010/gwdiary.html>

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## When Artists are the Subjects



### Girl with a Pearl Earring

Tracy Chevalier

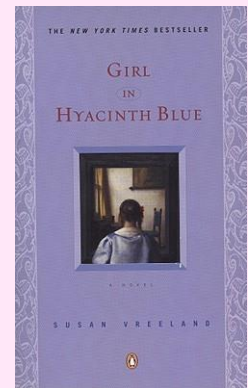
With precisely 35 canvases to his credit, the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer represents one of the great enigmas of 17th-century art. The meager facts of his biography have been gleaned from a handful of legal documents. Yet Vermeer's extraordinary paintings of domestic life, with their subtle play of light and texture, have come to define the Dutch golden age. His portrait of the anonymous Girl with a Pearl Earring has exerted a particular fascination for centuries—and it is this magnetic painting that lies at the heart of Tracy Chevalier's second novel of the same title.

Girl with a Pearl Earring centers on Vermeer's prosperous Delft household during the 1660s. When Griet, the novel's quietly perceptive heroine, is hired as a servant, turmoil follows. First, the 16-year-old narrator becomes increasingly intimate with her master. Then Vermeer employs her as his assistant—and ultimately has Griet sit for him as a model.

### Girl in Hyacinth Blue

Susan Vreeland

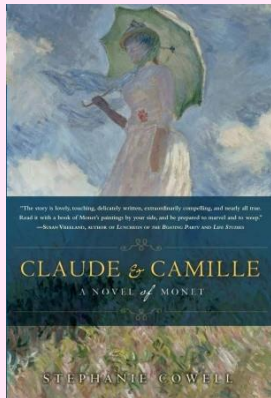
A professor invites a colleague from the art department to his home to view a painting he has kept secret for decades in Susan Vreeland's powerful historical novel, Girl in Hyacinth Blue. The professor swears it's a Vermeer -- but why exactly has he kept it hidden so long? The reasons unfold in a gripping sequence of stories that trace ownership of the work back to Amsterdam during World War II and still further to the moment of the painting's inception.



### Claude & Camille: A Novel of Monet

Stephanie Cowell

Sometimes he dreamt he held her; that he would turn in bed and she would be there. But she was gone and he was old. Nearly seventy. Only cool paint met his fingers. “Ma très chère . . .” Darkness started to fall, dimming the paintings. He felt the crumpled letter in his pocket. “I loved you so,” he said. “I never would have had it turn out as it did. You were with all of us when we began, you gave us courage. These gardens at Giverny are for you but I’m old and you’re forever young and will never see them. . . .”



In the mid-nineteenth century, a young man named Claude Monet decided that he would rather endure a difficult life painting landscapes than take over his father's nautical supplies business in a French seaside town. Against his father's will, and with nothing but a dream and an insatiable urge to create a new style of art that repudiated the Classical Realism of the time, he set off for Paris.

But once there he is confronted with obstacles: an art world that refused to validate his style, extreme poverty, and a war that led him away from his home and friends. But there were bright spots as well: his deep, enduring friendships with men named Renoir, Cézanne, Pissarro, Manet – a group that together would come to be known as the Impressionists, and that supported each other through the difficult years. But even more illuminating was his lifelong love, Camille Doncieux, a beautiful, upper-class Parisian girl who threw away her privileged life to be by the side of the defiant painter and embrace the lively Bohemian life of their time.

His muse, his best friend, his passionate lover, and the mother to his two children, Camille stayed with Monet—and believed in his work—even as they lived in wretched rooms, were sometimes kicked out of those, and often suffered the indignities of destitution. She comforted him during his frequent emotional torments, even when he would leave her for long periods to go off on his own to paint in the countryside.

But Camille had her own demons – secrets that Monet could never penetrate, including one that when eventually revealed would pain him so deeply that he would never fully recover from its impact. For though Camille never once stopped loving the painter with her entire being, she was not immune to the loneliness that often came with being his partner.

A vividly rendered portrait of both the rise of Impressionism and of the artist at the center of the movement, *Claude and Camille* is above all a love story of the highest romantic order.

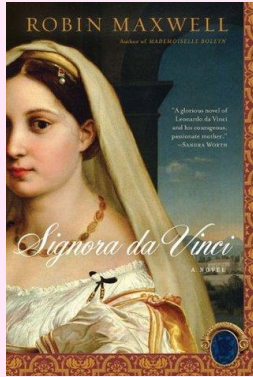
## [Dancing Through Fire](#)

Kathryn Lasky

Like the captivating bestseller *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, this exciting new series explores the stories behind some of the world's most dazzling paintings.

Welcome to 19th-century Paris and the world of Degas's dancers. 13-year-old Sylvie is one of the pupils at the Paris Opera Ballet, where tutus must always be starched and pointe shoes fresh. Sylvie dreams of being a prima ballerina, but her height is a problem—she is too little. When the Franco-Prussian war begins in 1870, Paris is soon under siege and Sylvie is thrown into turmoil and tragedy. Against the fiery backdrop of war, the beauty of the ballet sustains and strengthens Sylvie. Before long, her talent and drive allows her to achieve her goal—and she graces the stage as a star.





## Signora Da Vinci

Robin Maxwell

Novelist Robin Maxwell delves into the life of Caterina--the adventurer, alchemist, and mother of Leonardo da Vinci.

Caterina was fifteen years old in 1452 when she bore an illegitimate child in the tiny village of Vinci. His name was Leonardo, and he was destined to change the world forever.

Caterina suffered much cruelty as an unmarried mother and had no recourse when her boy was taken away from her. But no one knew the secrets of her own childhood, nor could ever have imagined the dangerous and heretical scheme she would devise to protect and watch over her remarkable son. This is her story.

## Sunflowers

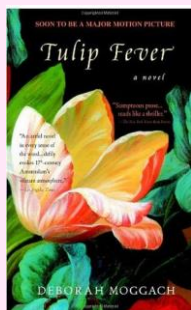
Sheramy Bundrick

"I'd heard about him but had never seen him, the foreigner with the funny name who wandered the countryside painting pictures."

From a talented new author comes a poignant and haunting novel of creation and desire, passion and madness, art and love.

A young prostitute seeking temporary refuge from the brothel, Rachel awakens in a beautiful garden in Arles to discover she is being sketched by a red-haired man in a yellow straw hat. This is no ordinary artist but the eccentric painter Vincent van Gogh—and their meeting marks the beginning of a remarkable relationship. He arrives at their first assignation at No. 1, Rue du Bout d'Arles, with a bouquet of wildflowers and a request to paint her—and before long, a deep, intense attachment grows between Rachel and the gifted, tormented soul.

But the sanctuary Rachel seeks from her own troubled past cannot be found here, for demons' war within Vincent's heart and mind. And one shocking act will expose the harsh, inescapable truth about the artist she has grown to love more than life.



## Tulip Fever

Deborah Moggach

A tale of art, beauty, lust, greed, deception and retribution -- set in a refined society ablaze with tulip fever.

In 1630s Amsterdam, tulipomania has seized the populace. Everywhere men are seduced by the fantastic exotic flower. But for wealthy merchant Cornelis Sandvoort, it is his young and beautiful wife, Sophia, who stirs his soul. She is the prize he desires, the woman he hopes will bring him the joy that not even his considerable fortune can buy.

Cornelis yearns for an heir, but so far he and Sophia have failed to produce one. In a bid for immortality, he commissions a portrait of them both by the talented young painter Jan van Loos. But as Van Loos begins to capture Sophia's likeness on canvas, a slow passion begins to burn between the beautiful young wife and the talented artist.

As the portrait unfolds, so a slow dance is begun among the household's inhabitants. Ambitions, desires, and dreams breed a grand deception--and as the lies multiply, events move toward a thrilling and tragic climax.

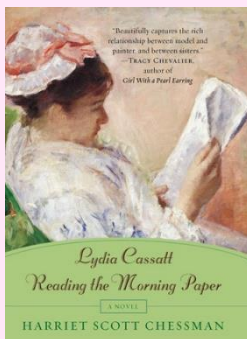
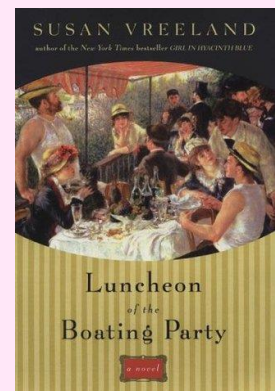
In this richly imagined international bestseller, Deborah Moggach has created the rarest of novels--a lush, lyrical work of fiction that is also compulsively readable. Seldom has a novel so vividly evoked a time, a place, and a passion.

## [Luncheon of the Boating Party](#)

Susan Vreeland

Bestselling author Susan Vreeland returns with a vivid exploration of one of the most beloved Renoir paintings in the world

Instantly recognizable, Auguste Renoir's masterpiece depicts a gathering of his real friends enjoying a summer Sunday on a café terrace along the Seine near Paris. A wealthy painter, an art collector, an Italian journalist, a war hero, a celebrated actress, and Renoir's future wife, among others, share this moment of *la vie moderne*, a time when social constraints were loosening and Paris was healing after the Franco-Prussian War. Parisians were bursting with a desire for pleasure and a yearning to create something extraordinary out of life. Renoir shared these urges and took on this most challenging project at a time of personal crises in art and love, all the while facing issues of loyalty and the diverging styles that were tearing apart the Impressionist group. Narrated by Renoir and seven of the models and using settings in Paris and on the Seine, Vreeland illuminates the gusto, hedonism, and art of the era. With a gorgeous palette of vibrant, captivating characters, she paints their lives, loves, losses, and triumphs in a brilliant portrait of her own.



## [Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper](#)

Harriet Scott Chessman

This richly imagined fiction entices us into the world of Mary Cassatt's early Impressionist paintings. The story is told by Mary's sister Lydia, as she poses for five of her sister's most unusual paintings, which are reproduced in, and form the focal point of each chapter. Ill with Bright's disease and conscious of her approaching death, Lydia contemplates her world with courageous openness, and asks important questions about love and art's capacity to remember.

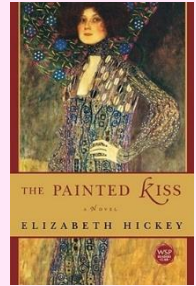


## The Painted Kiss

Elizabeth Hickey

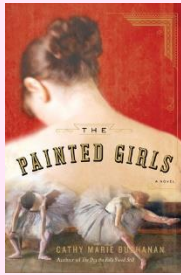
In this passionate and atmospheric debut novel, Elizabeth Hickey reimagines the tumultuous relationship between the Viennese painter Gustav Klimt and Emilie Floge, the woman who posed for Klimt's masterpiece *The Kiss* - and whose name he uttered with his dying breath.

Vienna in 1886 was a city of elegant cafés, grand opera houses, and a thriving and adventurous artistic community. It is here where the twelve-year-old Emilie meets the controversial libertine and painter. Hired by her bourgeois father for basic drawing lessons, Klimt introduces Emilie to a subculture of dissolute artists, wanton models, and decadent patrons that both terrifies and inspires her. *The Painted Kiss* follows Emilie as she blossoms from a naïve young girl to one of Europe's most exclusive couturiers—and Klimt's most beloved model and mistress. A provocative love story that brings to life Vienna's cultural milieu, *The Painted Kiss* is as compelling as a work by Klimt himself.



## The Painted Girls

Cathy Marie Buchanan



1878 Paris. Following their father's sudden death, the van Goethem sisters find their lives upended. Without his wages, and with the small amount their laundress mother earns disappearing into the absinthe bottle, eviction from their lodgings seems imminent. With few options for work, Marie is dispatched to the Paris Opéra, where for a scant seventeen francs a week, she will be trained to enter the famous ballet. Her older sister, Antoinette, finds work as an extra in a stage adaptation of Émile Zola's naturalist masterpiece *L'Assommoir*.

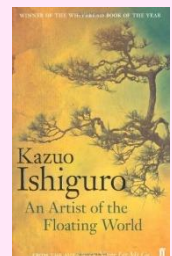
Marie throws herself into dance and is soon modeling in the studio of Edgar Degas, where her image will forever be immortalized as *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. There she meets a wealthy male patron of the ballet, but might the assistance he offers come with strings attached? Meanwhile Antoinette, derailed by her love for the dangerous Émile Abadie, must choose between honest labor and the more profitable avenues open to a young woman of the Parisian demimonde.

Set at a moment of profound artistic, cultural, and societal change, *The Painted Girls* is a tale of two remarkable sisters rendered uniquely vulnerable to the darker impulses of "civilized society." In the end, each will come to realize that her salvation, if not survival, lies with the other.

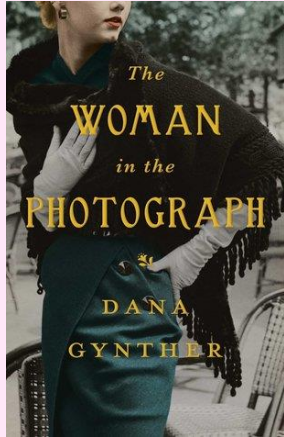
## An Artist of the Floating World

Kazuo Ishiguro

In the face of the misery in his homeland, the artist Masuji Ono was unwilling to devote his art solely to the celebration of physical beauty. Instead, he put his work in the service of the imperialist movement that led Japan into World War II.



Now, as the mature Ono struggles through the aftermath of that war, his memories of his youth and of the “floating world”—the nocturnal world of pleasure, entertainment, and drink—offer him both escape and redemption, even as they punish him for betraying his early promise. Indicted by society for its defeat and reviled for his past aesthetics, he relives the passage through his personal history that makes him both a hero and a coward but, above all, a human being.



## [The Woman in the Photograph](#)

Dana Gynther

Set in the romantic glow of 1920s Paris, a captivating novel of New York socialite and model Lee Miller, whose glamorous looks and joie de vivre caught the eye of Man Ray, one of the twentieth century's defining photographers.

1929, Montparnasse. Model and woman about town Lee Miller moves to Paris determined to make herself known amidst the giddy circle of celebrated artists, authors, and photographers currently holding court in the city. She seeks out the charming, charismatic artist Man Ray to become his assistant but soon becomes much more than that: his model, his lover, his muse.

Coming into her own more fully every day, Lee models, begins working on her own projects, and even stars in a film, provoking the jealousy of the older and possessive Man Ray. Drinking and carousing is the order of the day, but while hobnobbing with the likes of Picasso and Charlie Chaplin, she also falls in love with the art of photography and finds that her own vision can no longer come second to her mentor's.

The Woman in the Photograph is the richly drawn, tempestuous novel about a talented and fearless young woman caught up in one of the most fascinating times of the twentieth century.

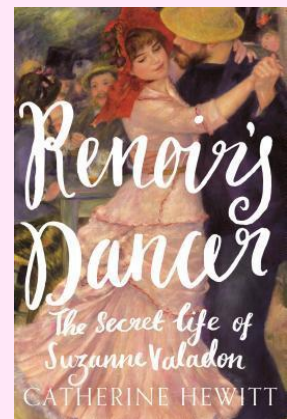
## [Renoir's Dancer: The Secret Life of Suzanne Valadon](#)

Catherine Hewitt

Catherine Hewitt's richly told biography of Suzanne Valadon, the illegitimate daughter of a provincial linen maid who became famous as a model for the Impressionists and later as a painter in her own right.

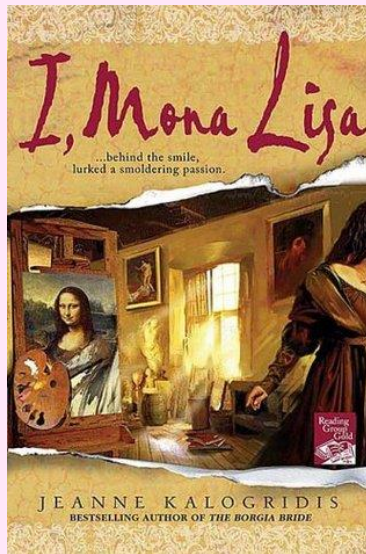
In the 1880s, Suzanne Valadon was considered the Impressionists' most beautiful model. But behind her captivating façade lay a closely guarded secret.

Suzanne was born into poverty in rural France, before her mother fled the provinces, taking her to Montmartre. There, as a teenager Suzanne began posing for—and having affairs with—some of the age's most renowned painters. Then Renoir caught her indulging in a passion she had been trying to conceal: the model was herself a talented artist.



Some found her vibrant still lifes and frank portraits as shocking as her bohemian lifestyle. At eighteen, she gave birth to an illegitimate child, future painter Maurice Utrillo. But her friends Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas could see her skill. Rebellious and opinionated, she refused to be confined by tradition or gender, and in 1894, her work was accepted to the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, an extraordinary achievement for a working-class woman with no formal art training.

Renoir's Dance tells the remarkable tale of an ambitious, headstrong woman fighting to find a professional voice in a male-dominated world.



## [I, Mona Lisa](#)

Jeanne Kalogridis

"My name is Lisa di Antonio Gherardini Giocondo, though to acquaintances, I am known simply as Madonna Lisa. My story begins not with my birth but a murder, committed the year before I was born..."

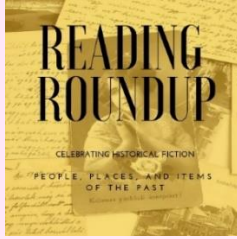
Florence, April 1478: The handsome Giuliano de' Medici is brutally assassinated in Florence's magnificent Duomo. The shock of the murder ripples throughout the great city, from the most renowned artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, to a wealthy wool merchant and his extraordinarily beautiful daughter, Madonna Lisa.

More than a decade later, Florence falls under the dark spell of the preacher Savonarola, a fanatic who burns paintings and books as easily as he sends men to their deaths. Lisa, now grown into an alluring woman, captures the heart of Giuliano's nephew and namesake. But when Giuliano, her love, meets a tragic end, Lisa must gather all her courage and cunning to untangle a sinister web of illicit love, treachery, and dangerous secrets that threatens her life.

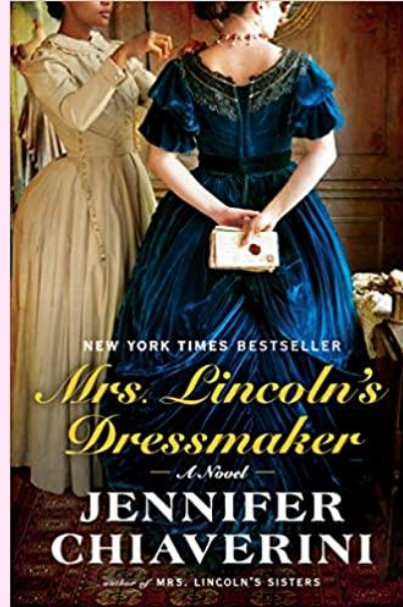
Set against the drama of 15th Century Florence, I, Mona Lisa is painted in many layers of fact and fiction, with each intricately drawn twist told through the captivating voice of Mona Lisa herself.

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## The 1800s



### Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker

Jennifer Chiaverini

The New York Times bestselling author of *Mrs. Lincoln's Sisters* unveils the private lives of President Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, through the eyes of the First Lady's most trusted confidante and friend in this compelling historical novel.

In a life that spanned nearly a century and witnessed some of the most momentous events in American history, Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley was born a slave. A gifted seamstress, she earned her freedom by the skill of her needle, and won the friendship of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln by her devotion.

A sweeping historical novel, *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker* illuminates the extraordinary relationship the two women shared, beginning in the hallowed halls of the White House during the trials of the Civil War and enduring almost, but not quite, to the end of Mrs. Lincoln's days.