

**Note Bene:** My work appears only in a small paragraph near the end of this entry, which appeared in the Chicago Sun-Times on Sunday 26 December 2010. It appeared online earlier.

## **2010 in Review: Our Favorite Books of the Year**

By TERESA BUDASI Books Editor Dec 23, 2010 2:15PM

Aside from the continuing onslaught of vampire and zombie tales, the most noticeable book trend of 2010 was the growing popularity of the e-reader. Whether the Kindle, Nook or iPad — or any of the other e-book readers out there — tickles your reading glasses, there were far more of you using them this year than ever before. And as more tech companies create competing versions, features become refined and prices inevitably drop, I see the trend continuing. (Don't take my word for it, however. IT research firm Gartner Inc. reports sales of e-readers doubled this year and will increase by almost 70 percent next year.)

Personally, I haven't jumped on the bandwagon — yet. I still like to hold a book, turn the pages and employ a well-worn bookmark to hold my place when I'm finished reading for the day.

I don't know how the rest of our contributing book reviewers read these days, but I do know they read a lot, and this year we've come up with as varied a list as I've ever seen when it comes to our favorite books of the year.

My choice this year was not the kind of book I typically read, but it was without question my favorite of 2010. Rebecca Skloot's "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" is chock-full of science writing but don't let that scare you. Skloot weaves the tale of one of the most important developments in the history of science — the reproduction of HeLa cells — with the human story behind it. She breaks down the science so it's easy to understand, and the story of Henrietta Lacks, whose cells are still used 60 years after her death for scientific research, will break your heart.

Here are the rest of our favorite books of the year:

For her second book, "Unbroken," Laura Hillenbrand creates the same page-turning suspense in her biography about genuine American hero Louis Zamperini that she did in her epic Seabiscuit. Apparently, it takes an awfully compelling story line to make chronic fatigue syndrome victim Hillenbrand devote her precious energies — and Unbroken is just such a story. — Jeff Johnson

Adam Langer's "Thieves of Manhattan" provoked more smiles, more raised eyebrows (in a good way) and more anticipation of the next sentence, the next paragraph, the next chapter than anything else I read all year. Game on! — Randy Michael Signor

Robin and Ruby" follows up K.M. Soehnlein's "The World of Normal Boys with an engaging adventure down the Jersey Shore. Relax: This is the mid-'80s, so Snooki hasn't been born yet. Robin pursues his younger sister through cultural landscapes, as well, almost making this a lighter American companion piece to Alan Hollinghurst's "The Line of Beauty." — Thomas Conner

The darkly hilarious tales in Paula Bomer's "Baby & Other Stories" are reminiscent of Kate Christensen, Iris Owens and Maggie Estep. Yet Bomer is more willing to investigate that uncomfortable territory between extreme behavior and insanity. In a Bomer story, you'll find perverse passages that make you ponder why the character hasn't been arrested for outright neglect. Mainstream publishers don't have the guts to publish such material anymore. Thankfully, Word Riot Press is there to cover the gap. — Edward Champion

"The Hare With Amber Eyes: A Family's Century of Art and Loss," a globetrotting, century-spanning memoir of art and political upheaval, is the work of British potter and ceramics professor Edmund de Waal, who is a descendant of a formidable European-Jewish banking family. The title refers to a netsuke — one of the 264 Japanese ivory and wood miniature sculptures used as toggles for kimono sashes that were collected by his forebears, the Ephrussi family, and that mark the trail of that family's past. — Hedy Weiss

"Secret Historian" by Justin Spring — a biography of tattoo artist/homosexual pioneer/academic Samuel Steward — illuminates early

20th century American history via the chronicle of a man who was both ahead of his time and victimized by it. A profoundly inside look at a profoundly outside figure. — Carlo Wolff

University of Chicago professor Christine Stansell shows the complexity of the women's movement, and the internal and external struggles women are still trying to overcome in her engaging "The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present." Here are not only familiar figures like Susan B. Anthony, but also African-American heroines like Maria Stewart, the first American woman to speak publicly on women's rights. If you thought you knew about the women's movement, this book is an eye-opener. — Mary Wisniewski

"Colonel Roosevelt," the concluding volume in Edmund Morris' three-volume biography of Theodore Roosevelt, captures its subject's endearing, larger-than-life personality magnificently while thoroughly explaining his extraordinary accomplishments and shows why, as Walter Lippmann said, he was the only president in American history "who could truthfully be described as lovable." — Roger K. Miller

Easily my wildest literary thrill ride of the year: Don Winslow's "Savages." Don't even try to like Winslow's characters; just revel in the uber-hip, momentum-building dialogue. — Paul Saltzman

The miscarriages of justice across the USA are astounding in their sheer numbers plus what they say about dishonesty and incompetence within too many police departments, prosecutors offices and courts. An outstanding wrongful conviction book from 2010: "Killing Time: An 18-Year Odyssey from Death Row to Freedom," by John Hollway and Ronald M. Gauthier and set in New Orleans. — Steve Weinberg

James Kaplan's Sinatra biography "Frank: The Voice" is perhaps the definitive look at the iconic entertainer's life. Incredible details punctuate the big picture of his personal and private personas, all of which add up to one of the great life stories of the 20th century. — Miriam Di Nunzio

Musician/poet Patti Smith's memoir of her years scuffling in New York City with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe is at once tough, startlingly honest and surprisingly lyrical. "Just Kids" is an inspiring portrait of about-to-be-major

artists finding their voices while struggling to find their footing, and also an elegy to New York during one of its most exciting incarnations. — John Barron

With the latest installment of his Tales of the City series, " Mary Ann in Autumn," Armistead Maupin solved a mystery that had been gestating for more than 30 years — and proved that he'd been dropping clues all along. Hey, "Lost" fans: This is how it's done. — Matt Zakosek

I can't think of a working fiction writer who has a deeper understanding of emotional and cultural disconnection than Yiyun Li. In her second collection, " Gold Boy, Emerald Girl," her understated tone slyly and brilliantly uncovers each character's losses, fears and sense of entrapment. — Mark Athitakis

Written with great heart and wit, " Chalcot Crescent" by Fay Weldon is a good read. Set in an uncomfortably recognizable dystopia of 2013, Weldon's octogenarian protagonist and her political entanglements make the bleak midwinter bearable. — M.E. Collins

Willy Vlautin's " Lean on Pete" is a rhythmic novel about a homeless 15-year-old boy who travels around the Pacific Northwest with a broken-down racehorse. Vlautin writes from the boy's point of view, with wounded vulnerability: "My thoughts got to me again ... I'd rather never see them again than let them see me the way I was." — Dave Hoekstra

" Strip," by Thomas Perry, is an amazingly entertaining crime novel about a mystery man going up against a gang of L.A. mobsters. A welcome return to form for one of the genre's best writers. — David J. Montgomery  
Patti Smith writing a memoir, the spellbinding Just Kids, wasn't out of the realm of possibility. But Keith Richards? His insanely entertaining autobiography " Life" was the surprise of the year. Smith drew a riveting portrait of Bohemian New York in the '60s and '70s. Richards, candid and self-deprecating, entertained with tales about his life — with and without the Rolling Stones. — Mary Houlihan.

**Anthony DePalma's " City of Dust" is a fascinating, impeccably researched and riveting account of the medical, environmental and political aftermath of 9/11. Best nonfiction book of the year! — Patrick McGuire**

"The Men Who Would Be King: An Almost Epic Tale of Moguls, Movies, and a Company Called DreamWorks": Nicole LaPorte smartly mixes solid reporting and the right amount of gossip (Jim Carrey needed to be helicoptered daily to the rural set of "A Series of Unfortunate Events," while Meryl Streep had a fine time hanging out with the locals) in her account of the rise and near fall of DreamWorks. An entertaining read about recent Hollywood history. — Jeffrey Westhoff

" The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate," by Jacqueline Kelly, is a coming-of-age story set at the turn of the century that showcases a spunky heroine whose intellectual curiosity is sparked by her naturalist grandfather and the father of evolution himself, Charles Darwin. — Leeann Zouras

Masked as a young-adult romance, the subtle, astonishing " Citrus County," by John Brandon, opens on a relaxing, apparently familiar note: unsociable, intelligent pre-teen girl who has lost her mother meets Florida outcast — surly

boy, just about her age. They hit it off. Then he does something positively astounding. It stands the novel on its head, leaving the reader panting to find out what comes next. — Kit Reed

In "The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine," Michael Lewis blends his expert knowledge of the financial markets, exhaustive reporting and an Everyman distrust of Wall Street to produce a bloody dissection of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. His depressing, enraging analysis lays bare the staggering levels of greed, fear and incompetence that have cost many Americans their financial peace of mind. — Alan P. Henry

The ghost stories in the compilation "Haunted Legends" (edited by Ellen Datlow and Nick Mamatas) stayed with me for weeks. Modern-day masters of horror take spooky stories from around the globe and reboot them for today. The results will have you looking behind you as you read. And if you start reading it at night, begin early — or you'll be up late. — Maureen O'Donnell

A book about life lessons imparted by female cooks could be cloying and cutesy in less capable hands. But New York Times writer Kim Severson's "Spoon Fed: How Eight Cooks Saved My Life" is both an insight into some of the country's best-known culinary figures and Severson's own tale of overcoming life's darkest periods with lessons from the kitchen. — Allecia Vermillion