

who's just launched his first campaign for political office. When Ned chases Anna and their six-year-old daughter from Alaska to Maine, the two go into hiding in a run-down motel on the coast. But the longer they stay, the less the guests in the dingy motel look like typical tourists—and the less Ned resembles a typical candidate. As his pursuit of Anna and their child moves from threatening to criminal, Ned begins to alter his wife's world in ways she never could have imagined.

Watson, Brad. *Miss Jane*

FIC WATSON

Brad Watson has been expanding the literary traditions of the South, in work as melancholy, witty, strange, and lovely as any in America. Now, drawing on the story of his own great-aunt, Watson explores the life of Miss Jane Chisolm, born in rural, early-twentieth-century Mississippi with a genital birth defect that would stand in the way of the central "uses" for a woman in that time and place: sex and marriage. From the highly erotic world of nature around her to the hard tactile labor of farm life, from the country doctor who befriends her to the boy who loved but was forced to leave her, Miss Jane Chisolm and her world are anything but barren.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad* **

FIC WHITEHEAD

Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhood—where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. Matters do not go as planned—Cora kills a young white boy who tries to capture her. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted. In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor—engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Another Brooklyn* **

FIC WOODSON

Running into a long-ago friend sets memory from the 1970s in motion for August, transporting her to a time and a place where friendship was everything—until it wasn't. For August and her girls, sharing confidences as they ambled through neighborhood streets, Brooklyn was a place where they believed that they were beautiful, talented, brilliant—a part of a future that belonged to them. But beneath the hopeful veneer, there was another Brooklyn, a dangerous place where grown men reached for innocent girls in dark hallways, where ghosts haunted the night, where mothers disappear

National Book Award *Longlist for Fiction*

at

Portland Library



2016

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**** Shortlist for Fiction Finalists**

October 2016 Portland Library. Annotations adapted from Amazon.

Bachelder, Chris. *The Throwback Special* **

FIC BACHELDER

Here is the absorbing story of twenty-two men who gather every fall to painstakingly reenact what ESPN called “the most shocking play in NFL history” and the Washington Redskins dubbed the “Throwback Special”: the November 1985 play in which the Redskins’ Joe Theismann had his leg horribly broken by Lawrence Taylor of the New York Giants live on *Monday Night Football*. Over the course of a weekend, the men reveal their secret hopes, fears, and passions as they choose roles, spend a long night of the soul preparing for the play, and finally enact their bizarre ritual for what may be the last time. Along the way, mishaps, misunderstandings, and grievances pile up, and the comforting traditions holding the group together threaten to give way.

Greenwell, Garth. *What Belongs to You*

FIC GREENWELL

On an unseasonably warm autumn day, an American teacher enters a public bathroom beneath Sofia’s National Palace of Culture. There he meets Mitko, a charismatic young hustler, and pays him for sex. He returns to Mitko again and again over the next few months, drawn by hunger and loneliness and risk, and finds himself ensnared in a relationship in which lust leads to mutual predation, and tenderness can transform into violence. As he struggles to reconcile his longing with the anguish it creates, he’s forced to grapple with his own fraught history, the world of his southern childhood where to be queer was to be a pariah. There are unnerving similarities between his past and the foreign country he finds himself in, a country whose geography and griefs he discovers as he learns more of Mitko’s own narrative, his private history of illness, exploitation, and want.

Haslett, Adam. *Imagine Me Gone*

FIC HASLETT

When Margaret’s fiancé, John, is hospitalized for depression in 1960s London, she faces a choice: carry on with their plans despite what she now knows of his condition, or back away from the suffering it may bring her. She decides to marry him. *Imagine Me Gone* is the unforgettable story of what unfolds from this act of love and faith. At the heart of it is their eldest son, Michael, a brilliant, anxious music fanatic who makes sense of the world through parody. Over the span of decades, his younger siblings - the savvy and responsible Celia and the ambitious and tightly controlled Alec -- struggle along with their mother to care for Michael’s increasingly troubled and precarious existence.

Jiles, Paulette. *News of the World* **

FIC JILES

In Wichita Falls, Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd is offered a \$50 gold piece to deliver a young orphan to her relatives in San Antonio. Four years earlier, a band of Kiowa raiders killed Johanna’s parents and sister; sparing the little girl, they raised her as one of their own. Recently rescued by the U.S. army, the ten-year-old has once again been torn away from the only home she knows. Their 400-mile journey south through unsettled territory and unforgiving terrain proves difficult and at times dangerous. Johanna has forgotten the English language, tries to escape at every opportunity, throws away her shoes, and refuses to act “civilized.” Yet as the miles pass, the two lonely survivors tentatively begin to trust each other, forging a bond that marks the difference between life and death in this treacherous land.

McKenzie, Elizabeth. *The Portable Veblen*

FIC MCKENZIE

Set in and around Palo Alto, amid the culture clash of new money and old (antiestablishment) values, and with the specter of our current wars looming across its pages, *The Portable Veblen* is an unforgettable look at the way we live now. A young couple on the brink of marriage—the charming Veblen and her fiancé Paul, a brilliant neurologist—find their engagement in danger of collapse. Along the way they weather everything from each other’s dysfunctional families, to the attentions of a seductive pharmaceutical heiress, to an intimate tête-à-tête with a very charismatic squirrel.

Mahajan, Karan. *The Association of Small Bombs* **

FIC MAHAJAN

When brothers Tushar and Nakul Khurana, two Delhi schoolboys, pick up their family’s television set at a repair shop with their friend Mansoor Ahmed one day in 1996, disaster strikes without warning. A bomb—one of the many “small” bombs that go off seemingly unheralded across the world—detonates in the Delhi marketplace, instantly claiming the lives of the Khurana boys, to the devastation of their parents. Mansoor survives, bearing the physical and psychological effects of the bomb. After a brief stint at university in America, Mansoor returns to Delhi, where his life becomes entangled with the mysterious and charismatic Ayub, a fearless young activist whose own allegiances and beliefs are more malleable than Mansoor could imagine.

Millet, Lydia. *Sweet Lamb of Heaven*

FIC MILLET

Lydia Millet’s chilling new novel is the first-person account of a young mother, Anna, escaping her cold and unfaithful husband, a businessman