

## **Marblehead League Book Discussion Group 12/30/2022**

League members (7) offered analysis of the following books at our December 2022 book group.

1. **“Road to San Donato: Fathers, Sons, and Cycling Across Italy”** (2019) by Roberto Cocuzzo A son details a 400 mile bicycle trip he takes with his 60 year old father across Italy, to find a small town buried in the mountains from which his family had emigrated. They discover unknown relatives and unexpected stories.
2. **“The Last Kings of Shanghai: The Rival Jewish Dynasties That Helped Create Modern China”** (2021) by Jonathan Kaufman This is the story of two remarkable Jewish families, the Sassoons and the Kadoories who at one time lived in Bagdad, Iraq, and who emigrated to China. The families settled in different places. The Sassoons were very successful, having profited from the opium trade. But their fortune fell. Both paid key roles in modernizing cities in which they lived in China.
3. **“The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin”** (2013) by Masha Gessen The author traces the rise of Putin after the dissolution of the Soviet Union- his past as a bureaucrat, how he ingratiated himself with Yeltsin and found a path to power.
4. **“The Women They Could Not Silence”** (2021) by Kate Moore The author traces the life of a remarkable women, of the 1860’s, whose work has been largely forgotten. Elizabeth Packard, housewife and mother of six, was married to a minister who didn’t support her efforts for women ‘s rights. The final straw for him was the humiliation when she left his church and chose another. He utilized the power of males of the day and had her committed to an insane asylum. In 1860, husbands could commit their wives for basically any reason- hysteria, sunstroke, reading novels, overexertion and . more. But Packard was not cowed, organizing others in the asylum. After several years, she was released for being a trouble maker and spent the rest of her life working on behalf of the rights of mentally disabled. She deserves to be remembered.
5. **“Graceland at Last” Graceland, At Last: Notes on Hope and Heartache From the American South”** (2021) by Margaret Renkl A columnist for the New York Times, Renkl writes about the South, living as a liberal in a Red state. Her beautiful writing captures and embodies a southern perspective on a myriad of topics from butterflies to politics.
6. **“We Own This City: A True Story of Crime, Cops, and Corruption”** (2022) by Justin Fenton This is the story of the narcotics trade in Baltimore, the crisis in the streets and a group of bad cops- corruption taking root.

7. **"The Sweetness of Water" (2021)** Nathan Harris The story of two slaves freed by the civil war, thrown into the world without resources and farmers who find a place for them. Details the harsh world for slaves in the deep South are brought to life in this historical fiction.
8. **"Sooley: A Novel" (2022)** by John Grisham Novel about a basketball player from South Sudan, who against all odds, makes it the NBA. But his naivete about the world of the rich and powerful leads to his downfall.
9. **"Twilight of Democracy: the seductive lure of authoritarianism" (2021)** Anne Applebaum. The author, a historian and journalist, chronicles the creeping dangers to democracies around the world. Applebaum discusses the various telltale signs by profiling key democracies and chronicles nationalist inroads Don't miss it!
10. **"I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (2009)** by Maya Angelou Angelou's autobiographical book chronicling her early years in a poor black south. A truly remarkable and riveting story.
11. **"The Oppermanns" (2001)** by Lion Feuchtwanger. Although historical fiction, the author is writing in real time fictionalizes his Jewish family's experience in Nazi Germany in the 1930s Berlin. Protagonists include a highly accomplished physician/researcher who runs an institute, a successful head of a multigenerational family business, a nephew at high school age who refuses to mouth the Nazi historical view to a professor, violence, fear, and a search for truth of what was happening to Jews in Germany. Written to be a cautionary tale first as a play and then turned into a book published in 1954, it is a frightening portrayal of authoritarian society.
12. **"Dinner with Ruth: a memoir on the power of friendships" (2022)** by Nina Totenberg The journalist describes her start in Washington, the support of fellow women journalists and her friend Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Poignant, insightful and a reminder of the role of friendship in getting through life's vicissitudes.
13. Additional books some are currently reading: **"A Man Called Ove", "Anxious People", "The Word is Murder"**