



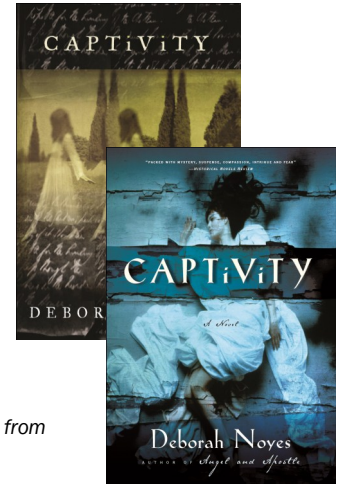
# Must-Read Fiction 2011-2012

from the Massachusetts Book Awards

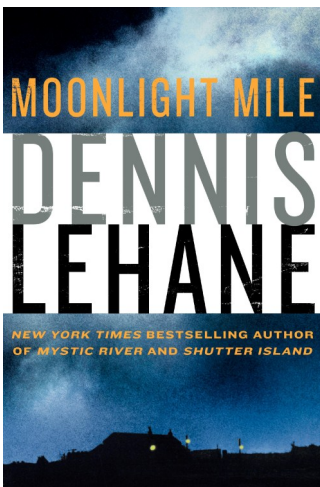
Weird in all the best possible ways, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God* (Random House), by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, is certainly thought-provoking, and possibly even challenging, but it's darn funny, too. This MacArthur-award winning author tears away every rough-edged argument on religion, cuts through the hoopla and posturing, and zeroes in on the basic human struggle: to live and to love. Simply.



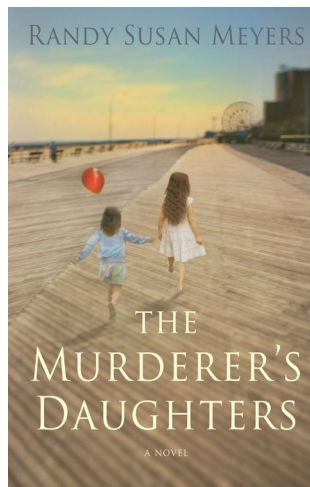
A remarkable novel about the real-life Fox Sisters, 19th century girls who claimed they could communicate with the dead, *Captivity* (Unbridled Books), by Deborah Noyes, so successfully evokes the period and setting that readers will find themselves fully immersed in this elegant work of historical fiction.



Both titles now in trade paperback editions from Vintage and Unbridled respectively.

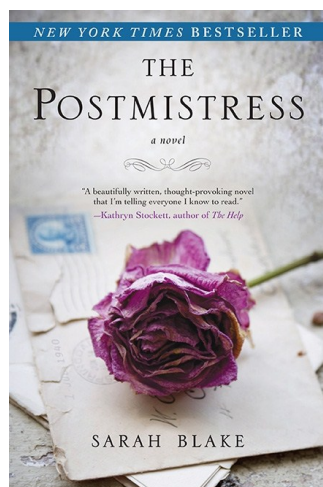


Patrick and Angie are back in *Moonlight Mile* (William Morrow), Dennis Lehane's fast-paced follow-up to *Gone Baby Gone*. The writing is smart, fresh and funny. Without sentimentality but with plenty of heart, Lehane captures the roughness and vulnerability of hard-knock lives.



From the very first page and straight on until the last, the clear and distinctive voice of Randy Susan Meyers's *The Murderer's Daughters* (St. Martin's) will have you enraptured and wanting more—even though self-preservation may curl you into a ball to shield yourself from the painful circumstances of the two sisters. This is a heart-breaking and powerful novel.

Sarah Blake's *The Postmistress* (Amy Einhorn/Putnam) transports the reader to a 1940s Cape Cod village and to a time when handwritten letters held power. The postmistress has a letter which she may (or may not) deliver. Across the ocean, during the London bombings, another letter is carried by a female reporter. How these women are connected and what they experience are beautifully told here.

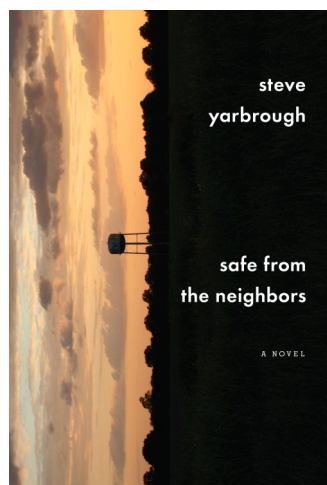


A tale of two women coming to terms with their lives on neighboring farms in the Midwest in the early 1900s, *The Quickenings* (Other Press), by Michelle Hoover, skillfully explores the complicated relationships between the women and between the women and the land. This is a novel that helps us understand what is essential.

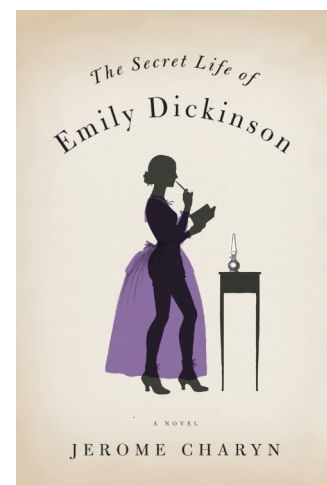


The Massachusetts Book Awards are a program of the Massachusetts Center for the Book, the Commonwealth Affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, on the web at [www.massbook.org](http://www.massbook.org).

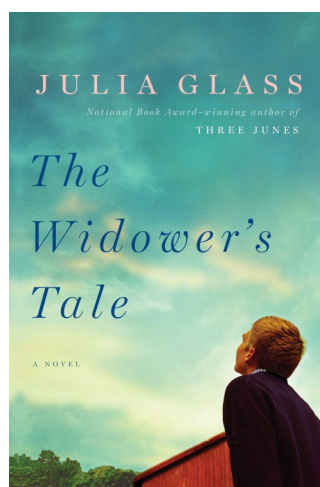
In a small town in the Mississippi Delta, a middle aged history teacher wrestles with his marriage, with his children leaving home, and with secrets from his childhood, including a death in his town on the night James Meredith enrolled at Ole Miss in 1962. In *Safe from the Neighbors* (Knopf), Steve Yarbrough evokes the voice of struggles internal and external in an honest and skillful story.



Impeccably researched, but also wonderfully re-imagined, *The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson* (Norton), by Jerome Charyn, takes an entertaining look at what might have been, or could have been, and allows readers to see behind the lace curtain of one of America's most celebrated authors. Sure, liberties may have been taken, but the result is plausible and satisfying.

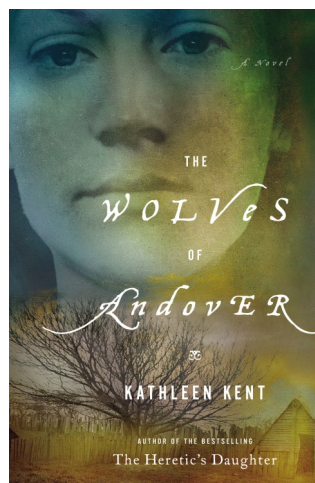


The sudden death of his young wife sends broken-hearted Arthur Rook on a journey to discover the reason a 16-year-old postcard went unmailed and who the people are that it was intended to reach. From Hollywood to a boarding house in rural New York, quirky characters and their relationships are beautifully explored in *This Must Be the Place* (Holt), Kate Racculia's accomplished first novel.



Julia Glass is a master at portraying the deeply moving and complicated relationships between family and friends. In *The Widower's Tale* (Pantheon), she continually confounds expectations and keeps reaching for more. Characters are laid bare without pretense in a voice that commands the page. It is an emotional and intellectual thrill to read *The Widower's Tale*.

For Martha Carrier the Massachusetts landscape brings neither beauty nor comfort, but it provides the perfect backdrop for Kathleen Kent's exquisite novel. *The Wolves of Andover* (Reagan Arthur/Hachette) combines rich historical detail with suspense, romance, and superb storytelling.



Gish Jen's *World and Town* (Knopf) is an elegant weaving of words, characters, and places that forms a rich and detailed tapestry of strong but broken people in a small contemporary New England town.



Beginning in May you can access an online discussion of the books from the Massachusetts Center for the Book Facebook page. Here's a google-shortened version of the page URL: <http://goo.gl/nnRLS>. Be sure to "like" the page so you can stay tuned as we shall announce the award winner in fiction there at summer's end.

**Fiction Judges 2011:** Carter Hasegawa, Porter Square Books; Theresa Parise, Boston Public Library; Owen Smith Shuman, Groton Public Library