



OCTOBER NEWSLETTER
2017-2018 NUMBER 2

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FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

www.fawchicago.org



President's Message

ROBERTA GATES, *President*

At our October meeting we'll take the time to recognize the contributions which our past presidents and our sustaining clubs have made—and continue to make—to FAW.

Since its inception in 1922, Friends of American Writers has had 51 presidents, not counting myself, and each was vital in keeping our club strong and productive over its 95-year existence. This is quite an accomplishment, considering how many clubs have fallen by the wayside during that time period, even clubs with a long and prestigious

history of service. But thanks to our past presidents, FAW has always had a strong foundation. Our mission of encouraging new and talented writers has never wavered, and our fiscal house has remained in order. So if you're a past president, please do come to the October meeting so we can recognize your contributions formally. You deserve our appreciation.

Our sustaining clubs are important, too. The Flossmoor Book Club, the Renaissance Art Club, and the Woman's Reading Club of Riverside have been longtime supporters whose loyalty we appreciate. This year, however, we have the privilege of welcoming a new club—the Bad Dog Book Club whose members come from the Glen Ellyn area. Though

the name may be unusual, it's more than apt according to club members who say that their dogs typically act up during meetings, sometimes barking during the discussion, making pests of themselves, and, in one case, actually eating the refreshments! It is a pleasure to add this new club to our roster and we hope to see their members (but not their dogs!) at upcoming meetings.

I also hope to see all of you at our October meeting, and as always, please feel free to bring a guest. Also, if you haven't paid your dues yet or picked up your yearbook, Ida Hagman, our membership chair, and Pat Adelberg, our yearbook chair, will be available in the lobby to assist you. ■

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Megan Wells Actor and storyteller of "Classic Ghost Stories"

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER

Megan Wells is, first and foremost, a storyteller. She has 186 stories in her repertoire, ranging from myths and legends to personal stories. She is perhaps best known for her ghost stories, which include Bram Stoker's "Dracula" and eerie tales from Ray Bradbury's works. Whatever story she tells, she has the ability to both charm and mesmerize her audience. Because she was trained as an actress, Megan's performances



Megan Wells

display a wonderful combination of story-telling warmth with the emotional impact of great theater.

Megan Wells has won three national awards as a solo artist, storyteller, and theater director. She has been touring with her storytelling and original performance for more than twenty years, and she has been enormously successful. That success is based, in part, on advice she was given by Rafe Martin at the National Festival in Jonesborough, "Find stories you

love and tell them." She did, and FAW members will be privileged to share that love on October 11. Do come, and prepare to be entertained, challenged, and yes, maybe a little scared. ■



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luncheon Reservations

Luncheon reservations for the October 11, 2017 meeting of the Friends of the American writers are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 8. Please note, this deadline is firm. No reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve, please contact only Lorraine Campione (773-275-5118) or Pat Adelberg (847-588-0911). If you wish a permanent reservation, please mention it to Lorraine or Pat when you call. All Board members automatically have permanent reservations. Also, a reminder that no permanent reservations are held over from last year to this year.

Luncheon will be served as 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 W. Bellevue Place. The cost is \$45 per person, payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the reservation to avoid confusion. Please note, if you make a reservation and find you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Young People's Literature Awards

Angela Gall

On Wednesday, September 20, 2017, the Young People's Committee met at the Women's Athletic Club for the first time this year. We would like to give our sincerest thanks to Kathy Katz for securing this beautiful space for us to hold our meetings. I know our monthly literary conversations will be much elevated

due to our high comfort level!

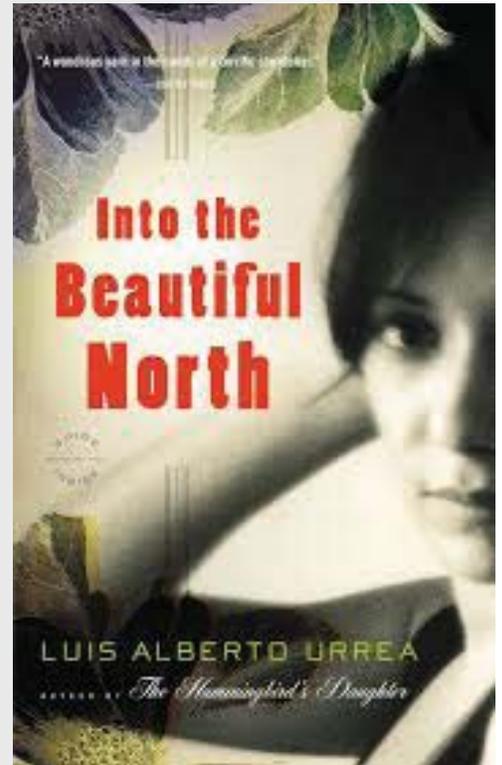
At our first meeting, we spent time getting to know each other and picking out the books that we will read and rate throughout the month until we meet again. There were 12 books to choose from, and we are all excited to find that potential winner! Our next meeting will take place on Wednesday, October 18, 2017.

Our committee also decided that at November's luncheon, we will be having a book sale of last year's collection of books. FAW members may purchase these for a mere \$2 per book. We think this will be a great opportunity to do some early holiday shopping for all those readers in our lives.

Thank You

A huge thank you to Program chair Karen Pulver for securing author Luis Urrea to speak at our September meeting. I'm sure I speak for all of us when I say we have never had a more interesting or engaging presenter. I did not want the program to end. I'm still chuckling over his reply when his father suggested he join the military. "But Dad, I'm only in third grade."

I am looking forward to his upcoming television series and purchased his book on which it is based: *Into the Beautiful North*. It is the story of nineteen year Nayeli who works at a taco shop in her Mexican village and dreams about her father, who journeyed to the US when she was young. Recently, it has dawned on her that he isn't the only man who has left town. In fact, there are almost no men in the village--they've all gone north. While watching *The Magnificent Seven*, Nayeli decides to go north herself and recruit seven men--her own "Siete Magnificos"—to repopulate her home-



town and protect it from the bandidos who plan on taking it over. Filled with unforgettable characters and prose as radiant as the Sinaloan sun, *Into the Beautiful North* is the story of an irresistible young woman's quest to find herself on both sides of the fence. Unfortunately, Norman confiscated it before I could get my hands on it—so I will have to wait until he finishes to read it.

Reminder

Our next discussion for Readers and Reviewers will be held on November 8, 2017 at 10:30 a.m. in the Board meeting room at the Fortnightly Club. Shirley Baugher will lead the discussion of Amor Towle's excellent book, *A Gentleman in Moscow* (see review in "The Reading Corner.") I do hope you will join me for what I'm sure will be a lively and informative session. ■

NEW
AMERICAN
WRITER'S
MUSEUM



by LINDA GUSTAFSON

Chicago is home to the new American Writers Museum which opened to the public on May 16, 2017 and is located on the second floor of a vintage building at 180 N. Michigan Avenue. The mission of the American Writers Museum is to engage the public in celebrating American writers and exploring their influence on our history, identity, culture, and daily lives. This is not your typical museum as it uses innovative and dynamic state-of-the-art exhibitions as well as compelling programming to educate, enrich, and inspire American writers and their admirers.

The American Writers Museum was the brainchild of Malcolm O'Hagan, a retired Irish manufacturing executive from Chevy Chase, Maryland who loves language and literature and was inspired by an Irish writers' museum that he visited in Dublin. Eight years ago, he set and recruited a board that has been able to raise nearly ten million dollars to start the museum.

Through the use of digital technology, the history of writing and writers comes alive in a vivid and memorable fashion. There is a Writers Hall of 100 American Authors on one wall and 100 American works on the other, with attention paid to both female and multi-ethnic American writers and their writing. This display is followed by a compelling video installment

is a temporary display dedicated to Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* which includes the scroll that Kerouac used to write the first draft of this work, which is on loan through October 27th. There is also a vibrant children's literary room with couches for reading, bookshelves stocked with young readers' books and displays of such well-known children's books as *Charlotte's Web*. There is also a section featuring the poetry of Langston Hughes.

A visit to the American Writers Museum provides a dynamic study of American writers and their works. It is well worth a morning or afternoon spent in exploration of its treasures. The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays. It is closed on Mondays. There is an admission cost.

In addition to the displays, the American Writers Museum hosts special events that feature the life, times, and works of American authors. ■

The Reading Corner

A Gentleman in Moscow
By Amor Towles

Reviewed by
SHIRLEY BAUGHER

The year is 1922. The Emergency Committee of the People's Commissariat For Internal Affairs has just sentenced Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov to spend the rest of his life inside the luxurious Hotel Metropol in Moscow for writing the poem "Where Is It Now?", which dared to ask the question, "where is our purpose now?" In imposing the sentence, the prosecutor pronounced that the Count had succumbed irrevocably to the corruptions of his class – and now posed a threat to the very ideals he once espoused. While the committee's inclination would have been to have Rostov blindfolded and put

before a firing squad—or more mercifully sent to Siberia, inexplicably, the Committee sentenced the Count to a lifetime of incarceration in the Metropol.

The Count is not unfamiliar with the Metropol. He has lived there in the elegant suite 317 for four years, following the confiscation of his estate by the Bolsheviks. But he is not allowed to return to his former suite. Instead, he is sent to a small attic room, 100 square feet, formerly used by servants of wealthy visitors. He is allowed a few possessions from his old life: his bed, a magnificent old clock that chimes twice a day, his father's writing desk, a stately chair on which he sits to pen his observations of the new Russia, and his father's books, one of which contains more than just words.

Each day he descends from his attic quarters to the Metropol's lobby where he reads the newspaper and watches. He mingles with a variety of Russian citizens: some denizens of the Metropol, others outsiders; and with people from the world beyond Russia who have come to witness the

transformation. In trying to adjust to his new situation, the Count tells himself that "if a man does not master his circumstances, then he is bound to be mastered by them" and that "imagining what might happen if one's circumstances were different was the only sure route to madness."

The Hotel Metropol is a grand hotel. It has a cocktail bar--the Shalyapin, one of the finest restaurants in Moscow--the Boyarsky whose chef stands at five foot five and weighs 200 pounds, a more casual restaurant--the Piazza, a barbershop, a flower shop, a full-time seamstress, and a variety of meeting rooms and ballrooms. There is a lot of life in these places.

The Count has many adjustments he must make during the more than 30 that he ultimately spends in the Hotel. It is not always easy. One night, overcome by boredom and a sense of hopelessness, Rostov decides to kill himself by jumping off the roof of the Metropol. He is stopped when the hotel's handyman, Abram, appears at his elbow and speaks his name. Abram shares some

continued ►



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honey produced by bees he has kept on the roof. The honey has the taste of the apples from the orchards where the Count grew up and, reliving those memories, Rostov finds the resolve to go on living. He takes control of his life, he uses his knowledge of proper manners and serving techniques to become the headwaiter at the Boyarksy. He develops friendships with the chef at the restaurant and the maitre di'. With the help of Marina, the hotel's seamstress, Rostov learns to sew (a necessity you will discover when reading the book.) He develops a relationship with Anna Urbanova, a famous Russian actress, and he befriends nine-year-old Nina Kulikova, who is temporarily living in the hotel with her father and who introduces the Count to all of the secrets the Hotel has to offer by virtue of a key she has managed to purloin. In return, the Count shares with Nina his wisdom and his affection. A lifelong friendship begins that enriches the Rostov's life in ways that he could never have imagined.

In the meantime, the Count's college friend Mischka shows up at the Hotel while he is visiting Moscow to help plan the inaugural Congress of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. Mischka, who is always pacing, talks to the Count of his battles he constantly faces against censorship.

He suggests that Rostov's confinement might be for the best since Russia is systematically destroying itself. He is convinced their country's great contribution to the world is destruction. He notes, "As a people, we Russians have proven unusually adept at destroying that which we have created." The arrival of Mischka causes the Count to look back at his former life and gives us some history and context for the changing political environment described during the course of the novel.

Throughout the book we learn a lot about the changes in Russian life and politics. One example involves wine and the Boyarsky. The Count, a wine and food connoisseur, dines at the Boyarsky most evenings and is very selective about his wine. One evening in 1924, the Count orders a bottle of Barolo and is told his choices are a red or a white. Asking for the restaurant manager, the Count is taken to the Hotel's wine cellar, housing more than 100,000 bottles, every one of them now without a label. Why? A complaint was filed with Comrade Teodorov, the Commissioner of Food, claiming that the existence of a wine list runs counter to the ideals of the Revolution: that it is a monument to the privilege of the nobility, the effiteness of the intelligentsia, and the predatory pricing of

speculators. And so, the labels are removed. But justice is served in 1930 when a member of the Central Committee tries unsuccessfully to order a bottle of Bordeaux for the new French ambassador. Without labels, there are only red and white. Shortly thereafter, wines with labels could once again be found in the Metropol's cellar.

Nina reappears in the Count's life late in the book when she brings her infant daughter Sofia to the hotel and asks that Rostov keep her just for a few days. Nina has married a dissident who is arrested and sent to Siberia to do hard labor. Nina plans to join him and find a job and a place to live for the family. Rostov agrees to keep the infant short term, but Nina never returns; and the Count must then raise Sofia as his own.

Sofia grows up to be a beautiful young woman and a talented pianist. She is so good she is invited to participate in an international good will concert in Paris, an opportunity Rostov uses to arrange for her to escape after the performance. Through an American friend, he gets asylum for her in America. And it is not only Sofia's escape he engineers as you will discover. The last scenes of the novel offer a fitting conclusion to the story of Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov and his time as a "gentleman in Moscow." ■■