Books

10 Great Books Written at the Hungarian Pastry Shop

By
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For sixty years, the Hungarian Pastry Shop, in New York's Morningside Heights, has been a hub for the neighborhood literati — a place to gather, to think, and most importantly, to write. Across from the cash register is the café's "literary wall," where book covers, lovingly framed, attest to the creative energy fueled by a diet of lattes and linzer torte. On our last visit, we took note of just a few of the acclaimed books written, at least in part, at the shop's cramped tables.

Between the World and Me

By Ta-Nehisi Coates

Ta-Nehisi Coates, who lived for many years in Morningside Heights, is known for his incisive journalism and three best-selling works of nonfiction. *Between the World and Me*, a Pulitzer Prize finalist that Toni Morrison ’84HON called “required reading,” is a probing look at race in America, written in the form of a letter to Coates’s adolescent son.

Atmospheric Disturbances

By Rivka Galchen ’06SOA

In Rivka Galchen’s 2009 novel, a woman disappears only to be replaced by a doppelgänger, confounding her psychiatrist husband. Galchen, a professor at Columbia’s School of the Arts, not only frequented the Hungarian Pastry Shop while writing her first novel, but she also set a crucial scene there: the original meet-cute between the psychiatrist and his wife.

The Buddha in the Attic

By Julie Otsuka ’99SOA

Julie Otsuka’s brilliant second novel, the winner of the 2012 PEN/Faulkner Award, tells the story of eight “picture brides” — women sent by matchmakers from Japan to San Francisco to marry immigrant laborers. Told in the collective first person, it’s a nuanced portrait of life during the early twentieth-century for this diverse, fascinating group.

The Real American Dream

By Andrew Delbanco

“American dream” is a phrase casually tossed around all the time. But what does it actually mean? In his celebrated work of intellectual history, Columbia American studies professor Andrew Delbanco delves into the history of American yearning — from Puritan religious rituals to the wellness movements of the present day. Delbanco, who usually orders an almond-horn pastry, has been a loyal customer for decades, telling the *New York Times* that in the 1980s and ’90s “the Hungarian became a sort of writing studio for me — a place where one could somehow be sociable and focused on work at the same time.”

The Perfect Storm

By Sebastian Junger

Sebastian Junger’s gripping tale of a commercial fishing boat lost off the coast of Nova Scotia during an epic storm in October 1991 became a major bestseller and inspired a hit movie starring George Clooney.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank

By Nathan Englander

Nathan Englander was a Pulitzer finalist for this 2012 collection of short fiction. Like his first story collection and three novels, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* is an inventive, often darkly comic look at modern Jewish identity.

Sudden Death

By Álvaro Enrigue

Álvaro Enrigue’s wildly original 2016 novel imagines a sixteenth-century tennis match between Italian artist Caravaggio and Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo, using a ball made of Anne Boleyn’s hair, and played in front of an audience including Galileo and Mary Magdalene. Enrigue — a resident of Hamilton Heights and husband

of the writer Valeria Luiselli ’15GSAS, was a visiting lecturer at Columbia while writing his novel.

One of the Boys

By Daniel Magariel ’08GS

Daniel Magariel’s debut novel tells the story of two teenage boys who, in the aftermath of a divorce, move from Kansas to New Mexico with their charismatic, abusive father. Narrated by the twelve-year-old younger son, it’s a tender look at a childhood unraveling at the hands of a parent. Magariel is now an adjunct professor in Columbia’s writing program.

The Story of a Brief Marriage

By Anuk Arudpragasam ’19GSAS

Anuk Arudpragasam, an enviable multitasker, wrote and published his first novel while completing his dissertation in philosophy at Columbia. The novel, a story of two strangers thrust into an arranged marriage while living in a makeshift refugee camp during the Sri Lankan civil war, is an intimate portrait of life during unthinkable circumstances.

The Ruined House

By Ruby Namdar

In Ruby Namdar’s acclaimed novel, a respected New York professor’s seemingly perfect life starts to crumble when he starts having visions of an ancient religious ritual. *The Ruined House*, the winner of Israel’s highest literary honor, is a haunting portrait of a secular man’s descent into spiritual madness.

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