

Speak Volumes Reading List, Fall 2008

September 15th

***The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak** - Synopsis from www.BarnesandNobel.com

It's just a small story really, about among other things: a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist-fighter, and quite a lot of thievery. . . .

Set during World War II in Germany, Markus Zusak's groundbreaking new novel is the story of Liesel Meminger, a foster girl living outside of Munich. Liesel scratches out a meager existence for herself by stealing when she encounters something she can't resist—books. With the help of her accordion-playing foster father, she learns to read and shares her stolen books with her neighbors during bombing raids as well as with the Jewish man hidden in her basement.

This is an unforgettable story about the ability of books to feed the soul.

October 20th

***My Name is Red* by Orhan Pamuk**, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006.

In 16th-century Istanbul, master miniaturist and illuminator of books Enishte Effendi is commissioned to illustrate a book celebrating the sultan. Soon he lies dead at the bottom of a well, and how he got there is the crux of this novel. A number of narrators give testimony to what they know about the circumstances surrounding the murder. The stories accumulate and become more detailed as the novel progresses, giving the reader not only a nontraditional murder mystery but insight into the mores and customs of the time. In addition, this is both an examination of the way figurative art is viewed within Islam and a love story that demonstrates the tricky mechanics of marriage laws. Award-winning Turkish author Pamuk (*The White Castle*) creatively casts the novel with colorful characters (including such entities as a tree and a gold coin) and provides a palpable sense of atmosphere of the Ottoman Empire that history and literary fans will appreciate. *LJ Reviews 2001 September #1 (LJ1Q)*

November 17th

***Soon, I Will Be Invincible* by Austin Grossman** - "The realm of comic book heroes and villains gets a dose of realism in this whimsical debut from game design consultant Grossman. The story shifts between the perspectives of Doctor Impossible, a brilliant scientist turned world's greatest menace, and Fatale, a lonely cyborg and the newest addition to the venerable group of heroes known as the Champions. Though he's been out of commission for a while, Doctor Impossible hatches a scheme to knock the planet out of orbit ('As the Earth grows colder, my power becomes apparent, and the nations submit,' he reasons). Meanwhile, Champions leader Corefire goes missing, and Fatale has to learn the ropes of superherodom as the conventional climactic showdown (at Doctor Impossible's secret lair) draws near. However fantastical, the characters (including a 'genetic metahuman' and 'an elite fairy guard') are thoughtfully portrayed, with Fatale — stuck in a perpetual existential crisis — bemused over the Champions' purpose, and Doctor Impossible wondering 'whether the smartest man in the world has done the smartest thing he could with his life.' Grossman dabbles in a host of themes — power, greed, fame, the pitfalls of ego — in this engrossing page-turner, broadening the appeal of an already inviting scenario. *Publishers Weekly* (Copyright Reed Business Information, Inc.)

December 15th

***Peace Like a River* by Leif Engler** - Dead for 10 minutes before his father orders him to breathe in the name of the living God, Reuben Land is living proof that the world is full of miracles. But it's the impassioned honesty of his quiet, measured narrative voice that gives weight and truth to the fantastic elements of this engrossing tale. From the vantage point of adulthood, Reuben tells how his father rescued his brother Davy's girlfriend from two attackers, how that led to Davy being jailed for murder and how, once Davy escapes and heads south for the Badlands of North Dakota, 12-year-old Reuben, his younger sister Swede and their janitor father light out after him. But the FBI is following Davy as well, and Reuben has a part to play in the finale of that chase, just as he had a part to play in his brother's trial. It's the kind of story that used to be material for ballads, and Enger twines in numerous references to the Old West, chiefly through the rhymed poetry Swede writes about a hero called Sunny Sundown. That the story is set in the early '60s in Minnesota gives it an archetypal feel, evoking a time when the possibility of getting lost in the country still existed. Enger has created a world of signs, where dead crows fall in a snowstorm and vagrants lie curled up in fields, in which everything is significant, everything has weight and comprehension is always fleeting. This is a stunning debut novel, one that sneaks up on you like a whisper and warms you like a quilt in a North Dakota winter, a novel about faith, miracles and family that is, ultimately, miraculous. *PW Reviews 2001 July #3 (P1G3)*