

# HISTORICAL FICTION

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# HISTORICAL SAGAS AND EPICS

**Historical fiction is, at its heart, fiction consciously set in the past. (Fiction written in the past and set during its own contemporary time doesn't count.) Historical fiction is usually well-researched and often has a longer page count and a slower pace than many other genres. This is even more true for sagas, historical fiction that can span generations or centuries and follows one family or a location throughout that period, and epics, sweeping stories about major events in history.**

## **Ken Follett:**

Ken Follett's name is synonymous with grand historical sagas about multiple intertwining families, though he also writes well-regarded espionage thrillers. His historical fiction is well-researched and encompasses a range of settings and locations. Follett's books also feature compelling characters and engaging plots, told in an accessible, conversational style. He sometimes writes his historical fiction as parts of a series. Start with *Pillars of the Earth*, which chronicles the building of a cathedral in 12th century England.

Time periods: 10th-18th century England (Kingsbridge series), 20th century world history (Centuries trilogy)

If you like Ken Follett:

- Edward Rutherfurd
- Robert Harris
- Edith Pargeter
- Sharon Kay Penman
- Simon Sebag Montefiore
- Frederick Forsyth

## Barbara Taylor Bradford

Bradford is well-known as a romance and women's fiction writer, but she also wrote several historical family sagas, following changing fortunes over multiple generations. Building and maintaining retail empires is a recurring element in these books, as is pre-World War I settings. Her historical sagas are well-researched and detailed, with clever, ambitious characters. Start with *A Woman of Substance*, which traces an English family that rises to wealth via their retail empire from the early 1900s through the 1960s.

Time periods: 19th and 20th century England (House of Falconer series); 20th century England (Cavendon Hall series; *A Man of Honor*, *A Woman of Substance*; Ravenscar Trilogy)

If you like Barbara Taylor Bradford:

- John Jakes
- Belva Plain
- Barbara Cartland

## John Jakes

Jakes writes sweeping, well-researched family sagas that incorporate key moments in American history, usually juxtaposing heroes and villains from the same family. His historical fiction often features a military focus and emphasizes plot more than character, and his work includes both series and standalones. Start with *The Bastard*, the tale of Philip Kent, an illegitimate English nobleman's son who comes to the colonies and fights in the American Revolution.

Time periods: 18th and 19th century American history (Kent Family Chronicles), 19th century American history (North and South series)

If you like John Jakes:

- Winston Graham
- Colleen McCullough
- Michael and Jeff Shaara
- James Michener
- Barbara Taylor Bradford
- Dana Fuller Ross

## James Michener

Michener dominated this genre during his long career, with his lengthy historical fiction standalones about locations around the world immediately hitting bestseller status, one after the other. Michener's books are detailed and meticulously researched, often following one or more families through centuries of history to the present. Michener's books are more plot-driven than character-focused, though they usually feature likeable, relatable characters. Start with the setting that seems most interesting to you.

Time periods: prehistoric to 20th century Alaska (*Alaska*), prehistoric to 20th century Colorado (*Centennial*), 16th century to 20th century Maryland (*Chesapeake*), prehistoric to 20th century South Africa (*The Covenant*), prehistoric to 20th century Hawaii (*Hawaii*), prehistoric to 20th century Jewish history (*The Source*), 16th century to 20th century Texas (*Texas*)

If you like James Michener:

- Colleen McCullough
- Edward Rutherfurd
- Frank Delaney
- Leon Uris
- John Jakes
- James Clavell
- Larry McMurtry

## Allan W. Eckert

Eckert's historical fiction focuses on the history of the Ohio Country frontier. His immersive work is meticulously researched and historically accurate, focusing on real-life historical figures who lived, fought, and died in what is now Kentucky, Ohio, New York, Illinois, and Michigan. He equally emphasizes both the Native American tribes of the area and the white settlers. He also wrote historical nonfiction about the same region and time period. These books can be quite graphically violent, though in a historically accurate way. Start with his novel *The Frontiersmen*, the first in his Winning of America series. This book chronicles the life and times of Shawnee chief Tecumseh and Simon Kenton, an early Kentucky and Ohio pioneer who was adopted by the Shawnee.

Time periods: Black Hawk War (*Twilight of Empire*), French and Indian War (*Wilderness Empire*), 18th century Michigan/Pontiac's Rebellion (*The Conquerors*), 18th and 19th century Illinois (*Gateway to Empire*), 18th and 19th century Kentucky and Ohio (*The Frontiersmen*), 18th century New York (*The Wilderness War*)

If you like Allan W. Eckert:

- James Michener
- Terry C. Johnston
- Bernard Cornwell
- A.B. Guthrie
- Mari Sandoz
- Dee Alexander Brown
- James Alexander Thom

## W. Michael and Kathleen Gear

This husband-and-wife team of professional archaeologists writes compelling, accurate historical fiction about Native American tribes. They balance fast-paced action scenes with more measured plotlines in their historical fiction that is usually related to an actual archaeological site. The characters are relatable and likeable and contend with age-old problems. Pick the setting that seems most interesting to you to start.

Time periods: ancient Cahokia (The Morning Star series), numerous pre-contact Native American tribes, including Iroquois, Uto-Aztecan, Anasazi, and Mound Builders (North America's Forgotten Past series), 16th century Hernan de Soto expedition (Contact: The Battle for America series)

If you like W. Michael and Kathleen Gear:

- William Sarabande
- Sue Harrison
- Jean Auel
- Margaret Coel

## James Clavell

Clavell's gripping books capture pivotal moments in Asian history. His epic books feature lots of adventure, military action, and political intrigue, as well as complicated, interesting characters and well-researched details on everyday life in a range of historic settings. Start with *Shogun*, which follows the adventures of an Englishman stranded in feudal Japan following a shipwreck.

Time periods: 17th century Japan (*Shogun*), 19th century Hong Kong (*Tai-Pan*), WWII Pacific Theater (*King Rat*)

If you like James Clavell:

- James Michener
- Leon Uris
- Ken Follett
- Wilbur A. Smith
- Shusaku Endo
- Gail Tsukiyama

## **Jean Auel**

Auel's popular Earth's Children series takes reader into a detailed, well-researched prehistoric world set when the Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons lived together. Focused on the life and journeys of Ayla, a Cro-Magnon girl raised among Neanderthals who has always felt different, the books chronicle prehistoric European settings that range from Ukraine to France. The books feature lots of violence and steamy sex scenes.

Time periods: prehistoric Europe

If you like Jean Auel:

- W. Michael and Kathleen Gear
- Maggie Anton
- Sue Harrison
- William Sarabande
- Diana Gabaldon

## Edward Rutherfurd

Edward Rutherfurd skyrocketed to bestseller status in the 1980s when he adopted Michener's pattern of telling lengthy stories set in the same location. Unlike Michener, whose stories span all around the world, Rutherfurd's work usually is set fairly close to home for the Englishman. His stories follow a handful of families through centuries (and sometimes even thousands of years). These plot-driven stories may be massive, but they are never dull reads. Rutherfurd's work features an accessible style, accurate history, and likeable, engaging characters. Start with *London*.

Time periods: Ice Age to 20th century London (*London*), 11th century to 20th century New Forest, England (*The Forest*), ancient Ireland to Irish Independence (The Dublin Saga series), ancient to 20th century Paris (*Paris*), 19th and 20th century China (*China*)

Already like Rutherfurd's work?

- James Michener
- Ken Follett
- Leon Uris
- Bernard Cornwell
- William Martin
- Beverly Swerling
- Morgan Llywelyn
- Margaret George

## **Blast from the Past**

Winston Graham wrote in many genres, but he is best-known for his twelve-book series of historical fiction about Ross Poldark, an iconoclastic member of the local gentry, and his family in Cornwall, England, which was Graham's own longtime home. He published the books over a period of sixty years. Graham's stories have remained popular thanks to TV adaptations, but the atmospheric, well-researched, character-driven, leisurely paced books themselves are well worth reading. They feature complex, deeply flawed, compelling characters and a strong sense of place, as well as elegant, lyrical prose. The series can delve into dark and disturbing territory and is especially interested in the interplay between different social classes.

Time periods: 18th and 19th century England (Poldark series)

Already like Graham's work?

- Elizabeth Jane Howard
- Daphne du Maurier
- John Jakes
- Philippa Gregory

## **Branching out from Historical Sagas and Epics**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Famous Lives historical fiction (Philippa Gregory, Sarah Dunant, Irving Stone)
- Military historical fiction (Patrick O'Brian, Bernard Cornwell, Michael and Jeff Shaara, C.S. Forester, Conn Iggulden)
- Christian historical fiction (Gilbert Morris)
- Women's historical fiction (Kate Quinn, Kristin Hannah, Ariel Lawhon, Kristin Harmel, Marie Benedict, Martha Hall Kelly)
- Literary historical fiction (Hilary Mantel, Jamie Ford)
- Gothic historical fiction (Kate Morton)
- Historical romance (Diana Gabaldon)
- Literary fiction (Barbara Kingsolver, Louise Erdrich, Isabel Allende)
- Westerns (Larry McMurtry, Don Coldsmith, Will Henry)
- Classics (Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy)
- Fantasy (George R. R. Martin, J.R.R. Tolkien)
- Science fiction (Anne McCaffrey)
- Women's fiction (Jojo Moyes, Diane Chamberlain, Jodi Picoult, Amy Tan)

## FAMOUS LIVES HISTORICAL FICTION

**Historical fiction about famous lives focuses on famous historical figures. Other historical fiction may feature these characters as supporting characters with fictional characters as the protagonists, but here, these famous kings, queens, artists, and other big names from history are front and center.**

### Philippa Gregory

Gregory's compelling fiction centers on royal women of the past, usually from English Tudor history. Her work is well-researched and depicts complicated real-life characters in detailed, vivid historical settings. She frequently selects a slightly lesser-known historical figure as her protagonist who then is surrounded by other more famous characters. Often set against a backdrop of royal courts, Gregory's books feature ample political intrigue, romantic entanglements, and violent action. Start with *The Other Boleyn Girl*, which is about Mary Boleyn, who was Henry VIII's mistress before her sister Anne infamously became involved with him.

Time period: Tudor England

If you like Philippa Gregory:

- Alison Weir
- Sarah Dunant
- Tracy Chevalier
- Susan Vreeland
- Stephanie Dray
- Margaret George
- Rosalind Laker
- Robin Maxwell
- Elizabeth Chadwick

## Robert Harris

Harris writes both contemporary political thrillers and historical fiction. His historical books feature a wide range of settings, covering everything from ancient Rome to WWII, and much of his best-known work seamlessly depicts well-known historical figures. His suspenseful, fast-paced stories feature realistic, complex, colorful characters, who just so happen to be famous, with lots of well-researched historical detail. His books are packed with plenty of conspiracy, intrigue, and violence. Start with *Imperium*, the first in his Cicero trilogy, which chronicles the rise and fall of Roman writer, politician, and Caesar opponent Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Time periods: ancient Rome (Cicero trilogy), 19th century France (*An Officer and a Gentleman*)

If you like Robert Harris:

- Ken Follett
- John Maddox Roberts
- Steven Saylor
- C.J. Sansom
- Philip Kerr

## Sarah Dunant

Dunant writes about the drama and deadly political intrigue of Renaissance Italy in her well-researched, highly detailed, elegantly written novels. Her work is especially interested in exploring how politics and religion of the time affect characters' daily lives, and she often centers her novels on female characters. Start with *Blood and Beauty*, the first in her two-book series on the infamous Borgias.

Time period: Renaissance Italy

If you like Sarah Dunant:

- Tracy Chevalier
- Geraldine Brooks
- Susan Vreeland

## Susan Vreeland

Vreeland's vivid historical fiction melds elements of biography and art history seamlessly. She focuses on famous artists, with a special interest in women artists, and has depicted real-life painters ranging from Vermeer to Artemisia Gentileschi. She vividly portrays these artists and their works in an evocative, lyrical writing style.

Time periods: Dutch Renaissance ( *The Girl in Hyacinth Blue*), Gilded Age New York ( *Clara and Mr. Tiffany*), Italian Baroque ( *The Passion of Artemisia*), 20th century Canadian art history ( *The Forest Lover*)

If you like Susan Vreeland:

- Tracy Chevalier
- B.A. Shapiro
- Robin Oliveira
- Sarah Dunant
- Paula McLain
- Melanie Benjamin
- Nancy Horan
- Philippa Gregory
- Susanne Dunlap

## **Blast from the Past**

Irving Stone was an early forerunner of the Famous Lives genre, writing bestselling biographical fiction about famous writers, artists, and thinkers from the 1930s to the 1980s. His detailed, heavily researched novels vividly bring to life historical figures that Stone found important and sometimes even unfairly maligned. Start with *The Agony and The Ecstasy* about Italian Renaissance Master Michelangelo.

Time periods: Italian Renaissance (*The Agony and The Ecstasy*), 19th century archaeology (*The Greek Treasure*)

Already like Stone's work?

- Margaret George
- James Michener
- Leon Uris
- Gore Vidal

## **Branching out from Famous Lives**

Like reading about famous historical figures but interested in trying other genres?

- Historical epics and sagas that include real historical figures (John Jakes, James Michener, Allan W. Eckert)
- Military historical fiction about real-life figures (Michael and Jeff Shaara)
- Biographical historical fiction about real-life women (Paula McLain, Marie Benedict, Ariel Lawhon, Kristin Harmel)
- Literary fiction about real historical figures (Hilary Mantel, Maggie O'Farrell)
- Historical nonfiction (Doris Goodwin Kearns, David McCullough, Nathaniel Philbrick, David Grann, Erik Larson)

## MILITARY HISTORICAL FICTION

**Military historical fiction blends historical fiction with military history, so these novels feature both fictional and real-life historical figures as characters. Some focus on soldiers, while others follow sailors.**

### Patrick O'Brian

O'Brian's Aubrey and Maturin series stars a ship captain and doctor aboard a British naval ship during the Napoleonic Wars. The action-packed but character-driven books are noted for their complicated but likeable characters and their well-researched historical details. These leisurely paced books are highly immersive as they explore life aboard ship during this time, but they also include their fair share of exciting battles and adventures. Start with *Master and Commander*.

Time period: Napoleonic Wars

If you like Patrick O'Brian:

- Bernard Cornwell
- Arturo Pérez-Reverte
- C. S. Forester
- Naomi Novik

## Bernard Cornwell

Cornwell's fast-paced, historically accurate novels regale readers with key moments in history from the perspective of soldiers. Unlike many other authors in this subgenre, he covers a wide range of time periods, spanning the Middle Ages to the Napoleonic Wars. Cornwell's novels focus on characters whose sense of honor often place them in conflict with those around them. Start with *Sharpe's Tiger*, the first in his Richard Sharpe series.

Time periods: Hundred Years' War (Grail Quest series), Napoleonic Wars (Sharpe series), 9th and 10th century England (Saxon Tales)

If you like Bernard Cornwell:

- Patrick O'Brian
- Michael and Jeff Shaara
- Allan Mallinson
- C.S. Forester

## Michael and Jeff Shaara

Michael's work is best known for his thematically rich, Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Killer Angels*, which focuses on realistically complex Union and Confederate generals before and during the Battle of Gettysburg and the terrible cost of war. His son Jeff continued his father's work and expanded his focus to other American wars, with a strong focus on the real-life generals and admirals in charge. Their character-focused work features rich historical military details, though Michael is the more polished wordsmith. Start with *The Killer Angels*.

Time periods: American Civil War (Civil War series; Civil War Western Theater Tetralogy), American Revolutionary War (American Revolutionary War duology), Cuban Missile Crisis (*The Shadow of War*), Korean War (*The Frozen Hours*), World War I (*To the Last Man*), World War II (*The Eagle's Claw*, Second World War series)

If you like the Shaaras:

- Bernard Cornwell
- John Jakes
- William Martin
- John Keegan
- Bruce Catton

## C.S. Forester

Forester is best-known for his swashbuckling Horatio Hornblower novels, which follow the career of a British midshipman as he rises to admiral during the Napoleonic Wars. These action-packed, fast-paced, plot-driven books are full of authentic historical detail, daring adventure, and brave, honorable characters who still have personal flaws. Start with *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower*.

Time periods: Napoleonic Wars

If you like Forester:

- Bernard Cornwell
- Patrick O'Brian

## **Blast from the Past**

Conn Iggulden first gained fame writing military-centric historical fiction in the early 2000s. He has now pivoted more toward fantasy and children's fiction, but his earlier work remains an exciting read. Iggulden's fast-paced, plot-driven novels feature real-life historical figures and relates the story of their lives with plenty of battles, drama, political ambition, and action. His work includes a five-book series on Genghis Khan and his famous descendants and a trilogy about the Wars of the Roses in 15th century England. Start with *Genghis: Birth of an Empire*, which follows the rising fortune of a young Genghis Khan.

Time periods: Mongol Empire (Conqueror series), Wars of the Roses (Wars of the Roses series)

Already like Iggulden's work?

- Bernard Cornwell
- Steven Pressfield

## **Branching out from Military Historical Fiction?**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Famous Lives historical fiction (Philippa Gregory, Robert Harris, Sarah Dunant)
- Historical sagas and epics (John Jakes, James Michener, James Clavell, Allan W. Eckert)
- Classic adventure fiction (Jack Higgins, Alistair MacLean)
- Thrillers with historical or military or nautical elements (Alan Furst, Tom Clancy, Clive Cussler, Frederick Forsyth)
- Historical nonfiction (Doris Kearns Goodwin, David McCullough, David Grann, Nathaniel Philbrick, Erik Larson, Ben Macintyre)
- Military history (Bruce Catton)
- Fantasy with historical military emphasis (Naomi Novik)

## HISTORICAL WOMEN

**This subgenre of historical fiction blends history with women's fiction. Sometimes these books feature fictional characters who may or may not interact with real historical figures, while others are biographical and focus on real-life women, though ones who usually are not well-known to the general public. In all these books, however, the experiences of historic women are front and center. Unlike some of the other subgenres featured here, these books tend to be standalones rather than part of a series.**

### Kristin Hannah

Hannah started her career in the 1980s as a romance writer before pivoting to contemporary women's fiction in the 21st century. In the 2010s, Hannah shifted her focus again, this time to historical fiction with a special emphasis on fictional women characters. Her character-driven work emphasizes relationships and believable, relatable characters who struggle with age-old problems surrounding parenthood, marriages, and loss. The books can delve into difficult subjects but always through a lens of hopefulness. Start with *The Nightingale*, which follows two sisters in German-occupied France during the Second World War.

Time periods: Dust Bowl (*The Four Winds*), 1970s Alaska (*The Great Alone*), Vietnam (*The Women*), World War II (*The Nightingale*)

If you like Kristin Hannah:

- Kristin Harmel
- Christina Baker Kline
- Heather Morris
- Martha Hall Kelly
- Lisa Wingate
- Belva Plain

## Lisa Wingate

Like Kristin Hannah, Wingate started her career writing romances and contemporary romances before pivoting to historical fiction in the 2010s. Wingate's work focuses on realistic female characters who struggle with difficult situations, and her novels often also explore the dynamics of a larger community. Wingate's historical fiction is usually set in the South and tends to have a parallel modern story where characters discover more information about the characters featured in the historical narrative. Start with *Before We Were Yours*, which features children adopted from the infamous Tennessee Children's Home Society.

Time periods: American Civil War/Reconstruction ( *The Book of Lost Friends*), Early 20th century Oklahoma ( *Shelterwood*), 1930s Tennessee ( *Before We Were Yours*)

If you like Lisa Wingate:

- Kathryn Stockett
- Kristin Harmel
- Christina Baker Kline
- Kristin Hannah
- Martha Hall Kelly
- Jojo Moyes
- Kim Michele Richardson

## Ariel Lawhon

Lawhon's well-researched, detailed work is usually biographical fiction that focuses on a real historical figure, and there are also often elements of suspense in her work. Her novels feature strong, intelligent, independent characters caught up in dramatic or suspenseful situations. Her settings can range from 18th century Maine to 20th century Europe. Start with *Flight of Dreams*, which follows the only woman working on the Hindenburg on its fateful final flight.

Time periods: 18th century New England (*The Frozen River*), Hindenburg disaster (*Flight of Dreams*), Russian Revolution (*I Was Anastasia*)

If you like Ariel Lawhon:

- Kate Quinn
- Paule McLain
- Melanie Benjamin
- Beatriz Williams
- Martha Hall Kelly
- Susan Meissner
- Fiona Davis
- Marie Benedict
- Kristin Harmel
- Pam Jenoff

## Kristin Harmel

Harmel specializes in World War-II themed fiction, often but not always set in France, that focuses on strong female protagonists. Harmel's books usually incorporate a romantic subplot and a modern parallel narrative alongside the historic one. Harmel's heartfelt work include evocative depictions of the settings and a strong emphasis on the characters' relationships with each other. The subject matter can be dark and heartbreaking but generally maintains an ultimately hopeful tone. Start with *The Book of Lost Names* about a forger who saves lives in France during World War II.

Time period: World War II

If you like Kristin Harmel:

- Beatriz Williams
- Taylor Jenkins Reid
- Fiona Davis

## Patti Callahan Henry

As with some of the other authors listed here, Henry started as a contemporary women's fiction writer before shifting into historical fiction in the 2010s. Henry writes ultimately inspirational books, often with a Southern setting, about a wide range of historical settings in the 19th and 20th centuries, sometimes featuring real-life figures and other times emphasizing fictional characters. Her books at times feature a more recent parallel narrative. She also has a special interest in C.S. Lewis and the women in his life. Start with the setting that seems most interesting to you.

Time periods: C.S. Lewis's life (*Becoming Mrs. Lewis*, *Once Upon a Wardrobe*), 19th century luxury steamship disaster (*Surviving Savannah*), 20th century South Carolina and London (*The Story She Left Behind*), World War II (*The Secret Book of Flora Lea*)

If you like Patti Callahan Henry:

- Kristin Harmel
- Lisa Wingate

## Marie Benedict

Benedict writes biographical fiction, usually set in the 20th century, about real-life historical women, many of whom are overshadowed by more famous spouses, fathers, or employers. When she does focus on more famous figures, like writer Agatha Christie or actress Hedy Lamarr, Benedict still prefers to focus on lesser-known aspects of their lives. Her character-driven books are well-researched and depict well-known moments and figures in history from a new perspective. Benedict's characters are complex, and the novels often delve substantially into their inner lives. Start with *The Personal Librarian*, which follows the life of Belle da Costa Greene, who worked as J.P. Morgan's personal librarian while hiding the fact she was African American.

Time periods: American Civil War (*Carnegie's Maid*), Depression-era America (*The First Ladies; A Pair of Aces*), Depression-era England (*The Mitford Affair; The Queens of Crime*); 1920s Egyptology/Ancient Egypt (*Daughter of Egypt*); 1920s England (*The Mystery of Mrs. Christie*), 20th century rare book collecting (*The Personal Librarian*); 20th century England (*Clementine*), 20th century scientists (*Her Hidden Genius; The Other Einstein; The Only Woman in the Room*)

If you like Marie Benedict:

- Melanie Benjamin
- Paula McLain
- Stephanie Dray
- Kate Quinn
- Fiona Davis
- Kristin Harmel
- Martha Hall Kelly
- Kristin Hannah
- Kim Michele Richardson
- Pam Jenoff
- Lisa Wingate
- Erika Robuck
- Karen Harper

## Martha Hall Kelly

Martha Hall Kelly specializes in well-researched, women-centric, fast-paced historical fiction based on true stories. Her well-drawn protagonists are strong, principled women caught in major historical moments, like World War II, which is a recurring setting. Her books function as standalones but some feature ancestors of characters featured in other novels. Start with *Lilac Girls* about the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Time periods: American Civil War (*Sunflower Sisters*), World War I/Russian Revolution (*Lost Roses*), World War II (*The Golden Doves*, *Lilac Girls*, *The Martha's Vineyard Beach and Book Club*)

If you like Martha Hall Kelly:

- Pam Jenoff
- Kate Quinn
- Kristin Hannah
- Kristin Harmel
- Lisa Wingate
- Beatriz Williams
- Marie Benedict

## Kim Michele Richardson

Richardson skyrocketed to fame with her popular series about Depression-era packhorse libraries in Kentucky while also chronicling the Blue People of the state. Before that, she had written other gritty, emotionally resonant historical coming-of-age novels about life in her native Kentucky, with a special focus on rural poverty. Start with *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, the first book in her series about a packhorse librarian.

Time periods: Depression-era Kentucky (*The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*), 1950s-1970s Kentucky (The Book Woman sequels; *GodPretty in the Tobacco Field*; *Liar's Bench*; *The Sisters of Glass Ferry*)

If you like Kim Michele Richardson:

- Lisa Wingate
- Kristin Hannah
- Kristin Harmel
- Jojo Moyes

## Fiona Davis

Davis's work is inspired by famous historic New York City buildings, including Radio City Music Hall and the New York Met. Beyond highlighting glamorous settings, these well-researched, fast-paced books often include a dual timeline, a dash of mystery and intrigue, and interesting, engaging characters. Start with *The Lions of Fifth Avenue* about the New York Public Library.

Time periods: Depression-era New York (*The Stolen Queen*); McCarthy's Red Scare (*The Chelsea Girls*), 19th century New York (*The Address*), 1910s New York (*The Lions of New York*; *The Magnolia Palace*), Jazz Age New York (*The Masterpiece*); 1950s New York (*The Spectacular*, *The Dollhouse*)

If you like Fiona Davis:

- Kristin Harmel
- Karin Tanabe
- Beatriz Williams
- Marie Benedict
- Melanie Benjamin
- Kate Quinn
- Martha Hall Kelly
- Susan Meissner
- Jennifer Ryan
- Renee Rosen
- Jennifer Robson

## Kate Quinn

Kate Quinn's fast-paced, detailed historical fiction seamlessly blends fictional characters with real-life events and vividly depicts a range of settings, with World War II as a particular favorite, though she often delves into less popular settings, like women pilots and snipers serving on the Eastern Front. Her books often feature multiple narrators and focus on complex characters. Her work usually also has an element of suspense incorporated. Start with *The Alice Network* for an espionage tale that incorporates both World War I and World War II.

Time periods: Ancient Rome (*The Mistress of Rome*), McCarthy's Red Scare (*The Briar Club*), World War II (*The Alice Network*; *The Diamond Eye*; *The Huntress*; *The Rose Code*)

If you like Kate Quinn:

- Ariel Lawhon
- Chris Bohjalian
- Kristin Hannah
- Kristin Harmel
- Pam Jenoff

## Pam Jenoff

Jenoff writes moving, emotional, bittersweet, character-driven historical fiction, often set during World War II. She has a special interest in Holocaust stories after working in Poland for the US State Department. Her work is usually based on real people and depicts everyday people who find themselves living through momentous periods of history that they face with courage and resolve. Her evocative, detailed novels tend to have a strong sense of place and usually incorporate a romantic subplot. Start with *The Kommandant's Girl*, about a Polish Jewish woman hiding in plain sight during World War II.

Time periods: post-World War I Treaty of Paris ( *The Ambassador's Daughter*), World War II ( *Code Name Sapphire*; *The Kommandant's Girl*; *The Lost Girls of Paris*; *The Orphan's Tale*; *The Things We Cherished*; *The Woman with the Blue Star*)

If you like Pam Jenoff:

- Martha Hall Kelly
- Kristin Harmel
- Kate Quinn
- Beatriz Williams
- Jennifer Robson
- Susan Meissner
- Melanie Benjamin

## Lisa See

Lisa See's rich, evocative, haunting historical fiction focuses on Chinese and Chinese American women. Her character-driven work depicts strong, unconventional women who question their place in society and features historically accurate, vividly depicted settings and elegant prose. She is especially interested in portraying everyday life. Start with *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* about a friendship tested in 19th century China.

Time periods: 15th century China (*Lady Tan's Circle of Women*), 17th century China (*Peony in Love*), 19th century China (*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*), 19th century Chinese American history (*Daughters of the Sun and Moon*), 1930s-1950s Shanghai (*Shanghai Girls, Dreams of Joy*), 20th century China (*The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*), 20th century Chinese American history (*China Dolls*), 20th century Korea (*The Island of Sea Women*)

If you like Lisa See:

- Amy Tan
- Anchee Min
- Jamie Ford
- Gail Tsukiyama
- Abraham Verghese
- Isabel Allende
- Christina Baker Kline

## Melanie Benjamin

Benjamin's atmospheric, sensitive, leisurely paced historical fiction brings to life strong, real-life historic women, often adjacent to more famous people, or fictional characters dealing with real-life events. These engaging, detailed, historically accurate books thoughtfully delve deep into the inner lives of its realistic characters and movingly depict these women and their relationships during momentous times. Historic marriages are a common theme, and the settings can range from Paris in the midst of World War II to American circuses in the 1800s. Start with *The Aviator's Wife*, which is about Anne Morrow Lindbergh and her life within the shadow of her husband Charles Lindbergh.

Time periods: Victorian England (*Alice I Have Been*), 19th century America (*The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb; The Children's Blizzard*), 1920s Hollywood (*The Girls in the Picture*), 1950s New York (*The Swans of Fifth Avenue*), 1960s California (*California Golden*), 20th century America (*The Aviator's Wife*), World War II (*The Mistress of the Ritz*)

If you like Melanie Benjamin:

- Kate Alcott
- Marie Benedict
- Ariel Lawhon
- Fiona Davis
- Beatriz Williams
- Paula McLain
- Martha Hall Kelly
- Susan Meissner
- Christina Baker Kline

## **Blast from the Past**

Paula McLain's biographic novels about strong historical women generated a lot of buzz in the 2010s. McLain's lyrically written, character-driven historical fiction often focuses on relationships, particularly complex real-life marriages that don't always end happily. The wives of Ernest Hemingway, vibrant but overlooked in their own right, are a recurring interest. Her atmospheric settings vary widely, from Jazz Age Paris to 20th century Kenya, but she depicts all of them authentically and vividly.

Time periods: Jazz Age Paris (*The Paris Wife*), 20th century Kenya (*Circling the Sun*), World War II/17th century France dual timeline (*Skylarks*)

Already like McLain's work?

- Marie Benedict
- Ariel Lawhon
- Melanie Benjamin
- Christina Baker Kline
- Amor Towles
- Helen Simonson
- Ann Patchett
- Elizabeth Strout
- Anita Diamant
- Kristin Hannah

## **Branching out from Historical Women**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Famous Lives historical fiction (Philippa Gregory, Sarah Dunant, Susan Vreeland, Margaret George)
- Historical sagas and epics (Barbara Taylor Bradford, Winston Graham)
- Historical romance (Diana Gabaldon, Julia Quinn, Jude Deveraux, Georgette Heyer)
- Christian historical fiction (Lynn N. Austin, Tessa Afshar)
- Literary fiction with historic settings (Barbara Kingsolver, Louise Erdrich)
- Women's fiction (Amy Tan, Jojo Moyes, Taylor Jenkins Reid)

## CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL FICTION

**Christian historical fiction combines the inspirational theological messages of contemporary Christian fiction with historic settings. Biblical times and 19th century America are popular time periods. These books can sometimes feature romantic subplots, but they are not the primary focus of the story compared to the historic setting.**

### Tracie Peterson

Peterson writes in a range of Christian genres, including contemporary and romance, but she is best known for her historical work. Her fast-paced, well-researched work incorporates both interesting fictional characters and memorable real-life historical figures in well-developed 19th century American Western settings. Her books often feature romantic and adventurous elements and can have suspenseful, dramatic moments, though they always have a heartwarming ending. Start with *A Promise to Believe In*, set in a 19th century Montana hotel run by three orphaned sisters.

Time periods: 19th century American West

If you like Tracie Peterson:

- Lynn Morris
- Amanda Cabot
- Tamera Alexander
- Carol Cox
- Gilbert Morris
- Janette Oke
- Lauraine Snelling
- Lori Wick
- Beverly Lewis
- Judith Pella
- Kristen Heitzmann

## Kim Vogel Sawyer

Sawyer pens Christian historical fiction set on the American frontier. Her strong characters find their faith tested in their difficult circumstances, but they ultimately prevail. Romance and adventure are a frequent subplot. These fast-paced, accessible books are well-researched and vividly depict their settings. Start with *Courting Miss Amsel*, the story of a teacher in 1880s Nebraska who has an interest in women's suffrage.

Time periods: 19th century American West

If you like Kim Vogel Sawyer:

- Tamera Alexander
- Janette Oke
- Lynn Morris
- Carol Cox
- Tracie Peterson
- Lauraine Snelling
- Beverly Lewis
- Wanda E. Brunstetter
- Cindy Woodsmall
- Lori Wick
- Beth Wiseman
- Suzanne Woods Fisher
- Mona Gansberg Hodgson

## Francine Rivers

Rivers writes both contemporary and historical fiction. Her historical work has a range of settings, with 19th century America and Biblical characters/settings being recurrent focuses. In all her work, Rivers writes about likeable but flawed characters who deal with difficult issues with the help of their faith. Rivers's fast-paced writing can cover dark territory but is ultimately hopeful and features a strong Christian message. Start with *Redeeming Love*, which transplants the Biblical story of Hosea to Gold Rush-era California.

Time periods: Biblical times (A Lineage of Grace series; Mark of the Lion series; Sons of Encouragement series), 19th century Appalachia (*The Last Sin Eater*), 19th century California (*Redeeming Love*)

If you like Francine Rivers:

- Angela Elwell Hunt
- T. Davis Bunn
- Taylor Caldwell
- Bodie Thoene
- Beverly Lewis
- Lori Wick
- Tracie Peterson
- Janette Oke
- Lynn N. Austin
- Lauraine Snelling

## Lynn N. Austin

Austin's sensitive, thoughtful, character-driven Christian historical fiction focuses on strong women on a journey of self-discovery. She writes a mix of standalone novels and series. Her settings can range from ancient times to the 20th century, and she incorporates humor, romance, family relationships, and social issues of the day with the main storyline. Start with the historical period that seems most interesting to you.

Time periods: American Civil War/Reconstruction (*All Things New*; Refiner's Fire series), Biblical times (Chronicles of the Kings series; Restoration Chronicles series), Depression-Era Kentucky (*Wonderland Creek*), Gilded Age New York (*All My Secrets*; *Waiting for Christmas*), 19th century America (Waves of Mercy series); 19th century Egypt (*Where We Belong*); 19th and 20th century American history (*Though Waters Roar*), 20th century America (*Eve's Daughters*; *Until We Reach Home*); World War II (*A Woman's Place*; *Chasing Shadows*; *If I Were You*; *Long Way Home*; *While We're Far Apart*)

If you like Lynn N. Austin:

- Tracie Peterson
- Lauraine Snelling
- Bodie Thoene
- Francine Rivers
- Tamera Alexander
- Kristen Heitzmann
- Janette Oke
- Kim Vogel Sawyer

## Tessa Afshar

Afshar converted to Christianity as an adult and brings her own Middle Eastern background and academic work in theology to her novels, which depict Biblical characters and settings. Her work is well-researched but accessible and vividly depicts the varied settings. Romance and political intrigue are incorporated into the stories, which largely focus on strong women of faith rising above their circumstances to follow God's will. Start with *Jewel of the Nile*, which incorporates characters from the Book of Acts and is set in both ancient Rome and the Kingdom of Cush, modern-day Ethiopia.

Time period: Biblical settings

If you like Tessa Afshar:

- Lynn N. Austin
- Francine Rivers
- Roseanna M. White
- Angela Elwell Hunt
- Mesu Andrews
- Connilyn Cosette
- Jill Eileen Smith
- Diana Wallis Taylor
- Julie Klassen

## Al Lacy

Lacy made his career writing Christian historical fiction set in the American West, as well as Christian Westerns. His work is accessible but includes vivid, detailed descriptions of the setting and shows the Gospel at work in the lives of his characters. He mostly writes series and often cowrites with his wife JoAnna. Start with *A Promise for Breanna*, the first in his Angel of Mercy series about a 19th century nurse.

Time period: 19th century American West

If you like Al Lacy:

- Gilbert Morris
- Janette Oke
- Tracie Peterson
- Lori Wick
- Lauraine Snelling
- Lynn Morris
- Alan Morris
- Michael R. Phillips
- Bodie Thoene

## **Gilbert Morris**

Like Al Lacy, Morris writes both Christian historical fiction and Christian Westerns and frequently cowrites with family. In Morris's case, his coauthors are his children, Lynn and Alan. His fast-paced books depict realistic, ordinary characters in historical settings living their lives as examples of Christian teachings. His work tends to be in series and often are family sagas that trace a family through a significant moment in history. His prose style is accessible and descriptive, vividly bringing the usually American historic settings to life.

Time period: American Civil War (Appomattox Saga series; The Last Cavaliers series), Biblical times (Lions of Judah series), Depression-era America (Singing River series), 17th century-20th century American history (The House of Winslow), 19th century America (Cheney Duvall, M.D. series), 19th century American West (Wagon Wheel series; Western Justice series), 19th century New Orleans (The Creole series), 19th century steamboats (Water Wheel series), 20th century American history (An American Century series)

If you like Gilbert Morris:

- Janette Oke
- Michael R. Phillips
- Tracie Peterson
- Lori Wick
- Judith Pella
- Lauraine Snelling
- John Jakes

## **Blast from the Past**

Michael R. Phillips was one of the top-selling Christian fiction writers in the 1980s and 1990s, and his work should still appeal to fans of Christian historical fiction. His work is usually part of a series and sometimes coauthored with Judith Pella. Phillips's books feature a strong evangelical message, well-researched historical details from a variety of settings, and elements of mystery and romance. Start with the time period that sounds most interesting to you.

Time periods: 19th century American West (The Journals of Corrie Belle Hollister series), 19th-20th century Russian history (The Russians series), 19th century Welsh history (Green Hills of Caledonia series), American Civil War/Reconstruction (Shenandoah Sisters series; Carolina Cousins series), 20th century English history (Secrets of Heathersleigh Hall series), 20th century Scottish history (Stonewycke Trilogy), World War II/Cold War (The Secret of the Rose series)

Already like Phillips's work?

- Janette Oke
- Judith Pella
- Bodie Thoene
- Gilbert Morris
- Tracie Peterson
- Lori Wick
- Lynn Morris

## **Branching out from Christian Historical Fiction**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Christian historical romance (Janette Oke, Julie Klassen, Karen Witemeyer, Judith Pella)
- Amish romance (Beverly Lewis, Amy Clipston, Rachel J. Good, Marta Perry)
- Historical gentle reads (Eugenia Price)
- Christian historical nonfiction/biography/memoirs (Corrie Ten Boom)
- Classics (Jane Austen)

## LITERARY HISTORICAL FICTION

**Literary historical fiction provides the same immersive experience in a historical setting that other subgenres provide, but it usually has a greater emphasis on the writing style and the themes. These are thought-provoking, character-driven, leisurely paced books that do not always have happy endings but are guaranteed to make readers think. They have polished, eloquent, lyrical prose and insightful themes that often resonate far beyond the time period depicted. They can also have more complex and even experimental narrative structures. Most of these books are standalones.**

### Geraldine Brooks

Brooks has made a career of writing original, thoughtful, bittersweet literary historical fiction. Her character-driven, well-researched work focuses heavily on character experiences during the historical period depicted and feature evocative depictions of the settings, which vary widely between books. Her protagonists are often unlikely heroes who contend with difficult situations, and she writes with a lush, elegant prose style. Her novels sometimes include a dual timeline. Start with her Pulitzer Prize-winning *March*, which imagines the life of the father in *Little Women* as he serves in the Civil War as a Union chaplain.

Time periods: American Civil War (*March*), Biblical times (*The Secret Chord*), 15th-20th century Jewish history (*People of the Book*), 17th century Colonial America (*Caleb's Crossing*), 17th century English plague outbreak (*Year of Wonders*), 19th-20th century America (*Horse*)

If you like Geraldine Brooks:

- Nancy Horan
- Tracy Chevalier
- Hernan Diaz
- Anita Diamant
- Elizabeth Strout
- Ann Patchett
- Barbara Kingsolver
- Abraham Verghese
- Kate Atkinson
- Louise Erdrich

## Paulette Jiles

Jiles writes evocative, atmospheric, character-driven historical fiction about American history. Her work is unsentimental and realistic but still moving and emotionally resonant and focuses on interesting, unusual characters. Difficult journeys are a frequent theme, as are romantic subplots, and minor characters sometimes recur, though her books are all standalones. A published poet before she became a novelist, Jiles has a rich, lyrical writing style. Her historical fiction is detailed and well-researched and often focuses on little-known aspects of history. The American Civil War and its aftermath in Missouri, her home state, and Texas, where she lived for decades, is a common setting in her novels, which all have a strong sense of place. Start with *Enemy Women*, about the ruthless reality of life in Civil War-era Missouri, or *News of the World*, which follows a traveling news reader as he crosses Texas to bring home a former Kiowa captive in the 1870s.

Time periods: American Civil War (*Enemy Women*), Depression-era Texas (*Stormy Weather*), 19th century Texas (*Chenneville*; *The Color of Lightning*; *News of the World*; *Simon the Fiddler*)

If you like Paulette Jiles:

- Philipp Meyer
- Louise Erdrich
- Charles Frazier
- Mary Doria Russell
- Geraldine Brooks
- Kent Haruf
- Elizabeth Strout
- Ann Patchett

## Emma Donoghue

Donoghue writes both contemporary and historical literary fiction. Her dark, suspenseful, and, at times, disturbing historical work features detailed, evocative settings, as well as intriguing, complex characters and an engaging writing style. She is especially interested in exploring the psychology of female characters and tells their stories in intricately constructed narratives. Her atmospheric novels have a strong sense of place, regardless of setting. Her native Ireland is a common focus, but her settings can range across Europe and North America. Start with the time period that seems most interesting to you.

Time periods: 7th century Ireland (*Haven*), 18th century England (*Slammerkin*), 19th century France (*The Paris Express*), 19th century Ireland (*The Wonder*), 19th century San Francisco (*Frog Music*), 1918 Flu Pandemic (*The Pull of the Stars*)

If you like Emma Donoghue:

- Sarah Waters
- A.S. Byatt
- Kate Atkinson
- Betty Smith
- Hannah Kent
- Ellis Avery
- Heather O'Neill
- Elizabeth Strout
- Ann Patchett

## Charles Frazier

Frazier writes haunting, bittersweet, character-driven historical fiction that is often but not always set in his native North Carolina. His complex characters are often searching for a sense of home and belonging, and his novels chronicle their personal growth in lyrical prose alongside vividly depicting the setting. Start with *Cold Mountain*, set in Civil War-era Appalachian North Carolina.

Time periods: American Civil War (*Cold Mountain*, *Varina*), Depression-era Wyoming (*The Trackers*), 19th century North Carolina (*Thirteen Moons*), 1960s North Carolina (*Nightwoods*)

If you like Charles Frazier:

- Ron Rash
- Paulette Jiles
- Sebastian Faulks
- Ellis Avery

## Tracy Chevalier

Chevalier specializes in literary historical fiction, often about a famous work of art. She is especially interested in the domestic side of history and vividly depicts her wide-ranging historical settings in her realistic, well-researched, detailed, evocative, character-driven novels. She has an elegant, lyrical writing style and often focuses on female protagonists. Start with *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, which imagines the dramatic behind-the-scenes fallout of a famous Vermeer painting.

Time periods: Depression-era England (*A Single Thread*), Edwardian England (*Falling Angels*), Italian Renaissance (*The Glassmaker*), 15th century France (*The Lady and the Unicorn*), 16th century France (*The Virgin Blue*), 17th century Holland (*Girl with a Pearl Earring*), 18th century England (*Burning Bright*), 19th century America (*At the Edge of the Orchard*; *The Last Runaway*), 19th century England (*Remarkable Creatures*)

If you like Tracy Chevalier:

- Susan Vreeland
- Geraldine Brooks
- Sarah Dunant
- Maggie Anton
- Kate Alcott
- Barbara Kingsolver
- Philippa Gregory
- Anita Diamant
- Joanne Harris
- James Scott
- Penelope Fitzgerald
- Anita Shreve
- Ann Patchett
- Anne Tyler

## Amor Towles

Towles's fast-paced, character-driven historical fiction emphasizes likeable, engaging, witty protagonists. His books often feature high society settings or characters from upper-class backgrounds. His 20th century settings are detailed and vivid, and his work often includes a romantic subplot. Start with *Rules of Civility*, the tale of a working-class girl plunged into high society after a chance encounter in 1930s New York.

Time periods: Depression-era New York (*Rules of Civility*), 1920s USSR (*A Gentleman in Moscow*), 1950s America (*The Lincoln Highway*)

If you like Amor Towles:

- Anthony Doerr
- Colson Whitehead
- Maggie O'Farrell
- William Kent Krueger
- Ann Patchett
- Elizabeth Strout

## Hilary Mantel

Mantel skyrocketed to fame for her Cromwell trilogy in the 2000s, but she had been writing acclaimed, challenging historical literary fiction for years before then. Her darkly entertaining, leisurely paced novels focus on real-life historical figures, whom she writes about in an elegant, complex prose style. She is particularly interested in tracing how varied historical periods influence the formative development of her characters, who then, in turn, influence their historical settings. Start with *Wolf Hall*, the first in her Booker Prize-winning Cromwell Trilogy, which traces the rise and fall of Henry VIII's notorious adviser Thomas Cromwell.

Time periods: 18th century England ( *The Giant, O'Brien*) French Revolution ( *A Place of Greater Safety*), Tudor England (The Cromwell Trilogy)

If you like Hilary Mantel:

- A.S. Byatt
- Kate Atkinson
- C.J. Sansom
- Julian Barnes
- Andrew Miller
- Jane Gardam

## Colson Whitehead

Whitehead writes in many genres of literary fiction, but his historical fiction about African American history has been particularly praised. His work is often high-concept and philosophical, and he does not shy away from elements of magical realism at times. His work features elegant prose, compelling and complex characters, and insightful social commentary. His novels often have a keen sense of humor but can be quite bleak. Start with *The Nickel Boys*, set in a brutal 1960s Florida reformatory.

Time periods: 19th century America (*The Underground Railroad*), 20th century America (Harlem Trilogy; *The Nickel Boys*, *Sag Harbor*)

If you like Colson Whitehead:

- James McBride
- Ta-Nehisi Coates
- Louise Erdrich
- Jesmyn Ward
- Yaa Gyasi
- George Saunders

## Maggie O'Farrell

O'Farrell started her career writing mostly contemporary literary fiction before focusing more heavily on historical fiction, where she has won some of her greatest acclaim. Her settings vary widely, ranging from the Potato Famine in her native Ireland to Renaissance Italian courts, but she recreates them in vivid detail. Her leisurely paced, atmospheric, well-researched, character-driven novels are especially interested in complicated family and marriage dynamics and can be emotionally devastating. Her protagonists are based on real-life people, ranging from William Shakespeare to her own ancestors. Start with the time period that seems most interesting to you.

Time periods: Italian Renaissance (*The Marriage Portrait*), 19th century Ireland (*Land*), Tudor England (*Hamnet*)

If you like Maggie O'Farrell:

- Claire Keegan
- Jo Harkin
- Colm Tóibín
- Kate Atkinson
- Elizabeth Strout
- Ann Patchett
- Sarah Winman

## **Blast from the Past**

Jamie Ford skyrocketed to literary fame and acclaim with his debut novel in 2009, and he has continued to generate bestselling literary historical fiction since then, though without the same level of fame he achieved early in his career. His work is informed by his own Asian-American ancestors, and he specializes in books about the Chinese American community, especially in his hometown of Seattle. His detailed, thoughtful, bittersweet, emotionally resonant books feature complex, compelling characters and a strong sense of place. Start with *The House on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, a dual timeline novel that takes place in Seattle's Chinese community during World War II and the 1980s.

Time periods: Depression-era Seattle (*Songs of Willow Frost*), 19th and 20th century America (*The Many Daughters of Afong Moy*), World War II (*The House on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*)

Already like Ford's work?

- Amy Tan
- Lisa See
- Kathleen Grissom
- Maxine Hong Kingston
- Chang-rae Lee

## **Branching out from Literary Historical Fiction**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Literary fiction with historical themes (Barbara Kingsolver, Louise Erdrich)
- Classics (William Faulkner, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens)
- Historical sagas and epics (James Clavell, Winston Graham)
- Famous Lives historical fiction (Susan Vreeland, Sarah Dunant)
- Military historical fiction (Patrick O'Brian, Michael Shaara)
- Historical women's fiction (Marie Benedict, Pam Jenoff, Lisa See, Melanie Benjamin)
- Gothic historical fiction (Kate Morton, Sarah Perry, Elizabeth Kostova)

## GOTHIC HISTORICAL FICTION

**Gothic historical fiction blends the genre with gothic horror. These dark books are highly atmospheric and full of haunting, eerie, tense, moody vibes. The source of those disturbing vibes may be supernatural or all-too-human. They can be faster-paced than other historical fiction.**

### **Sarah Penner**

Penner's highly atmospheric historical gothic fiction feature a range of highly detailed, evocative settings. They often feature a dual timeline parallel narrative. In her books, complex, interesting characters begin to probe a mystery, uncovering secrets and danger in the process. Start with *The Lost Apothecary*, which follows both an 18th century apothecary that specializes in poisonous solutions for women in bad situations and the 21st century historian studying the infamous apothecary murders.

Time periods: 18th century England (*The Lost Apothecary*), 19th century Europe (*The London Séance Society*), 19th century Italy (*The Amalfi Curse*)

If you like Sarah Penner:

- Susanna Kearsley
- Kate Morton
- Victoria Schwab
- Alix E. Harrow
- Emilia Hart
- Simone St. James
- Taylor Jenkins Reid
- Lucy Foley
- Alice Feeney

## Kate Morton

Morton's eerie, atmospheric, detailed historical gothics specialize in moody mansions full of secrets. Her leisurely paced books feature complex women who uncover long-held family secrets, usually in a dual timeline full of ominously slow-building tension and menace. Her work is often set in her adopted home of England, though others are set in her native Australia, and she depicts the settings vividly. Morton writes in an elegant prose style, and her books heavily incorporate mystery elements as well.

Time period: Depression-era England ( *The Lake House*), 1920s England ( *The House at Riverton*), 1950s Australia ( *Homecoming*), 20th century Australia ( *The Forgotten Garden*), 20th century England ( *The Secret Keeper*), Victorian England ( *The Clockmaker's Daughter*), World War II ( *The Distant Hours*)

If you like Kate Morton:

- Daphne du Maurier
- Beatriz Williams
- Sarah Penner
- Sarah Waters
- Liane Moriarty
- Jane Harper
- Kate Quinn
- Kristin Hannah
- M.L. Stedman
- Richard Flanagan
- Joan Lindsay

## Sarah Perry

Perry's unsettling novels often feature academic settings, which is befitting for an author with a PhD in gothic literature. Her novels are full of intrigue, suspense, and secrets, and she writes a blend of contemporary and historical fiction. Perry's books feature lyrical writing and an unsettling atmospheric tone. Start with *The Essex Serpent*, which follows a young widow, who is also an amateur naturalist, as she investigates the return of a deadly legendary creature in rural 1890s England.

Time periods: 16th-20th century world history (*Melmoth*), Victorian England (*The Essex Serpent*)

If you like Sarah Perry:

- Anne Rice
- Kate Atkinson
- Diane Setterfield
- Francis Spufford
- Imogen Hermes Gower

## Blast from the Past

Elizabeth Kostova generated tremendous buzz before her debut novel *The Historian* was ever released. Publishers launched an expensive bidding war to secure the rights, and when it came out in 2005, it was a record-breaking bestselling debut. Her popularity has waned since then, but her novels remain an excellent choice for fans of literary gothic historical fiction. Kostova particularly excels at depicting rich, atmospheric settings, and her novels have a strong sense of place. Her books also feature an elegant prose style and a complex narrative structure, often relying on multiple timelines and epistolary elements. In her novels, a scholarly character usually finds themselves piecing together long-buried secrets from history. Start with *The Historian*, which follows two generations of a family investigating whether the infamous Vlad Tepes is still alive.

Time periods: 19th century France (*The Swan Thieves*), 20th century Europe (*The Historian*)

Already like Kostova's work?

- Umberto Eco
- Diane Setterfield
- Anne Rice
- Kate Morton
- Geraldine Brooks
- Katherine Howe
- Kate Mosse
- Matthew Pearl
- Sarah Dunant
- Joan Lindsay
- Ariana Franklin

## Branching out from Gothic Historical Fiction

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Atmospheric historical mysteries (Anne Perry, Ariana Franklin, Caleb Carr)
- Historical horror (Dan Simmons, Anne Rice)
- Gothic classics (Bram Stoker, Mary Shelley, the Bronte sisters, Daphne du Maurier, Joan Lindsay)
- Historic true crime (Kate Summerscale)

## Looking for more suggestions on what to read?

- Fill out our online Berryville Library's What Should I Read Next? form.  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf7VfQV7xaYIoTACTX7kX\\_TdTPHwQ1i9UnqBwVDs3gGrYcpcg/viewform?usp=sharing&oid=116325047873771509704](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf7VfQV7xaYIoTACTX7kX_TdTPHwQ1i9UnqBwVDs3gGrYcpcg/viewform?usp=sharing&oid=116325047873771509704)
- Request a reader's advisory consultation at the library. You can call, email, or stop by the library to learn more.



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